Supporting student transition to Higher Education: engagement with student support services in a private Higher Education Institution in Singapore

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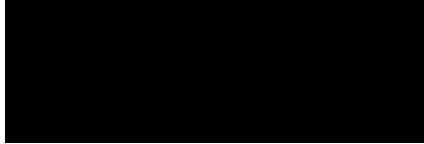
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Declaration

I, Charles Tee, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed:

Abstract

With the massification of higher education opening up more options for students seeking to obtain a university degree in Singapore, the entry of private education institutes (PEIs) in Singapore in partnerships with overseas universities have grown exponentially.

This study highlights the challenges in transitions in a PEI in Singapore and the participation of these students in social support provisions based on the differences in student demographics and characteristics that PEIs attract. A significant number of students come from the local polytechnics and they seek to 'upgrade' their status from a diploma to a degree and so many PEIs working with foreign university partners offer lower entry requirements, shorter study durations, flexible assessment methods, along with options for full and part-time studies to attract them and these have an impact on transitions.

Using Gale and Parker's (2014) framework on student transitions, the study examines the demographic profiles of PEI students and their engagement with social support provisions, including student life and clubs, learning support programs, and student care services across the three stages of transitions in the framework namely : T1 - Transition as Induction, T2 - Transition as Development and T3 - Transition as Becoming.

An online survey with an original population size of 17,542 students from a single PEI was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. This allowed me to analyse participation in three elements of student support; 1) Student Life and Clubs (SLC), 2) Learning Support Programmes (LSP) and 3) Student Care

Services (SCS) . SPSS software was used to generate descriptive statistics for different demographic groups.

The study found major differences in participation among international and Singaporean students, students with different prior qualifications, ages, sex, duration of courses, and types of provisions. PEI students were found to be most engaged with Student Life and Clubs (SLC) and Learning Support Programmes (LSP), with low engagement with Student Care Services (SCS). Reasons for non-participation from the qualitative data included lack of time, unawareness of provisions, lack of perceived need, and disinterest.

The study suggests that PEIs should always consider the unique and specific demographic and characteristics of their students and their needs during their transitions into higher education when planning the social support provisions. The findings show that the present social support provisions for SLC, LSP and SCS at SPEP have not always met the needs of the students and so more can be done to assist students in their transitions. This study will be most beneficial to the institutions similar to that of the PEI studied to allow them to reconsider their current social support provisions.

Thesis Impact Statement

The findings from this thesis have important implications for both private education institutions, public universities, and other institutions of Higher Education as it reinforces the view that the benefits of social support are only realised when a student engages or participates in the provision. From my survey findings I was able to provide reasons for why the students did not engage and participate and to show the current participation rates as mentioned below.

The literature that was reviewed provided supporting evidence that many universities have not accounted for the diverse needs of the different types of students entering into universities now and that this presents additional challenges and pressures on the students to make the transition. In the research I had provided a detailed breakdown of the student demographic composition at my institution and showed the participation rates in the different categories of social support provisions. With the detailed breakdown I was able to show that there were only 6% participation rates in the Student Care Services provision when participation rates in the Student Life and Clubs and Learning Support programmes were at 24% and 22% respectively. I had expected that with the stress of student transitions and having to adjust to university studies that the participation rate would be the highest of all the three provisions and be around 30%. I was also able to provide data to show that the lack of awareness of the provisions was a major reason for the students not participating in the provisions.

As an adjunct lecturer I am able to do more in my present role to be a student advocate and address the present lack of awareness of the social support

provisions available by communicating and encouraging students to participate and to get the benefits from it.

I found that the institution has not done enough to involve the teaching faculty members in supporting the students during their transition and that more work can be done to involve the faculty members by making them aware of the social support provisions and to garner their support to communicate this to the students and encourage greater participation.

Other institutions of Higher Education in Singapore and globally can conduct research on students who do not enter into university through the conventional pathways (i.e., directly from their pre-university courses) to determine the different needs that the students may have and adapt the provision of social support to them.

I will share the findings of the research with my institution and enter into discussions with the team in charge of student services to encourage the further study of the present social support provisions to see what changes may now need to be made considering the changing Higher Education landscape in Singapore.

Acknowledgements

At age 15, my mathematics teacher hauled me up to the front of the class for failing his test and he made me stand on a chair and said to me "People like you will amount to nothing". Today, I acknowledge that teacher as I say, "Thank you Mr Chen, for allowing me to prove you wrong ".

The completion of this thesis brings with it my deepest gratitude and appreciation to those who had supported, guided and challenged me throughout my doctoral journey.

Firstly, I am especially grateful to my primary supervisor, Dr Christine Han for her patience and continuous support, advice, guidance and ever readiness to provide me with her insights and shared experiences that had benefitted me greatly in my preparation of the thesis. I am also extremely grateful to Dr Holly Smith who had kindly agreed to take on my supervision at short notice after Dr Han had to be replaced due to her medical condition. Dr Smith had patiently taken the time to help me reorganise my work and rework on my analysis to ensure that it would be aligned to the goals I had set for the thesis. My thanks and appreciation also to Professor Claire Callender for her invaluable advice, and her clear direction in helping me set out my research methodology, data collection and analysis of the information gathered in the thesis.

I am greatly indebted to my institution SPEP and to my ever-supportive colleagues (who will remain anonymous), for allowing me access to students to conduct my survey and who had made available the survey tools for my use.

My deepest appreciation and thanks go out also to my wife Angie and my son Nicholas for allowing me time away from them to pursue my doctorate and for their unwavering support for me throughout the process.

Finally, I would like to thank the team at the IOE doctoral school who had been supporting me with my various requests for advice, materials and other support.

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Abbreviations

A-level	Advanced level (equivalent of Form 6 in the UK)
ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council
CCA	Co-curricular Activities
CPE	Committee for Private Education
CPF	Central Provident Fund
ECA	Extra Curricular Activities
EdD	Doctor in Education
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GP	General Paper
GS	Global Schoolhouse
IB	International Baccalaureate
IFS	Institution Focused Study
IOE	Institute of Education
IPSS	Institution Provided Social Support
ITE	Institute of Technical Education
JC	Junior College
MOE	Ministry of Education
NS	National Service (conscripted military service)
NUS	National University of Singapore
NTU	Nanyang Technological Institute
O-level	Ordinary Level (equivalent of Form 4 in the UK)
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAL	Peer Assisted Learning

PEI   Private Education Institution

Poly   Polytechnic

RA   Research Assistant

SIT   Singapore Institute of Technology

SMU   Singapore Management University

SQC   Singapore Quality Class

SSG   Skills Future Singapore

SPEP [1]   Singapore Private Education Provider

SUSS   Singapore University of Social Studies

SUTD   Singapore University of Technology and Design

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[1] SPEP is the acronym used to anonymise the identity of the subject institution

The 2000-word statement

At the start of my return to academic studies in 2012 for the Doctor in Education (EdD) programme, after a gap of 18 years from the completion of my Master of Arts degree in 1996, it was a mentally and emotionally challenging experience. As an international student travelling further than most of the other students in my cohort to the UK for my classes, I had to cope not only with time changes but also the weather and the teaching style at the Institute of Education (IOE). My challenge was compounded by the fact that unlike many of my peers, most of my career was spent in the commercial and business sector, with my venture into academia as an adjunct lecturer only starting at a later stage of my life.

On acceptance into the EdD I embarked on three taught courses in my 2012/13 academic year and I had to complete three 5,000-word assignments in the following areas:

1) Foundations of Professionalism - *Adjunct Lecturing: Professionalism and what it means to be an adjunct lecturer in Singapore*

2) Methods of Enquiry 1 (MOE 1) - *A proposal for a study on the views of Singaporean graduates on the attainment of a university degree*

3) Methods of Enquiry 2 (MOE 2) - *A qualitative study on the views of Singaporean graduates on the attainment of a university degree.*

Following the successful completion of the taught modules, I embarked on an Institution Focused Study (IFS) in 2014 and this was submitted in February 2015. The IFS, titled 'A case study of the mission and scope of a private education

provider in Singapore', was guided by the findings in my MOE 2 study that showed that there was a set of objectives, goals and expectations established by every institution for higher learning for their students. In my study of the mission and scope of the subject institution, I was interested to see if the mission and scope that my organisation had established were clear, and whether these were aligned to those of other similar institutions of higher learning (public and private) offering similar programmes in Singapore and globally.

Throughout my doctoral studies, my research focus has been on students in Higher Education and on private education institutions (PEI) offering such programmes in Singapore. This is because of my own Higher Education experience as a student of private education providers and now as an adjunct faculty member at a PEI.

Each of the taught modules contributed to the formulation of my thesis topic, as each had led me to interrogate different aspects of my participation in this area of private education provision and the roles that such institutions play.

In the *Foundation of Professionalism* module, I looked at my role as an adjunct lecturer at a private education provider and what it meant to be a professional in that context, where my association with the institution was not that of a staff member and was limited to short periods of engagement for teaching. In this capacity, I defined my role as that of an educator rather than an academic, and this led me to take a different perspective of my role and function. Drawing on literature from Millerson (1964) and Whitty (2008), I looked at the attributes of a professional and measured myself against the roles I perform as an adjunct lecturer. I explored the differences in theoretical knowledge and professional knowledge as expounded by Eraut (1994). I also reviewed my membership in a

Community of Practice, and what was required as a practitioner and a professional. I concluded my study by considering how the changes in society placed different levels of expectations on me and had allowed for different types of my participation in a community of educators. This study led me to better understand the link between an educator and a professional, and it made me seek answers to how students viewed the attainment of a university degree, which was the focus of my second module.

In the second module, *Methods of Enquiry 1*, I was introduced to the different forms and function of academic enquiry. At the end of the taught course, I was required to prepare a proposal for research. I established the rationale and the context for the study and supported it with justification for the research. No actual research was done, as the module only required me to introduce a topic for a later study and cover all aspects of how I will undertake the research process in completing that study. For this assignment I proposed a topic for study of the views of students on the attainment of a university degree. I explained that my interest in this area came from discussions with students in my institution and that some of them were undertaking a degree not for themselves, but to fulfil their parents' wishes. These same students had also expressed the view that completing a degree was extremely important in Singapore as many employers and our society placed a high emphasis on educational qualifications. A degree therefore represented an entry point to good jobs and careers. For the assignment, I proposed research questions, suggested theories and concepts, and reviewed literature relevant to the proposed study. As my proposed study was on students in Singapore, I introduced literature on topics related to ideologies such as meritocracy and policies surrounding student selection and admission and other related literature.

These topics were reviewed along with studies by the OECD (2012) on student expectations on completing university, compared across different regions and countries. I then proceeded to propose an outline for research design and methodology and a timeline for the completion of the research and specific ethical considerations related to this proposed study. In summary, this module allowed me to prepare a framework for enquiry and undertake a disciplined process and understand key considerations for undertaking future research. The knowledge gained helped me greatly as I advanced into my *Methods of Enquiry 2* module. In this module, I conducted a qualitative study of students from Singapore who had graduated from undergraduate programmes from different universities. My primary research question was: *What are the views of Singaporean university graduates with respect to the attaining of a university degree?* Other sub-questions posed included: *Did the attainment of the degree satisfy the expectations of these Singaporean graduates in terms of their social, economic, or political outcomes? Did they have a different view of the value and the benefits of the degree they obtained from studying at a local government university in Singapore and a degree obtained from their study abroad or in Singapore with an overseas university?*

I developed these research questions as there were no similar previous studies available in Singapore on this topic. Studies from Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Education 1995), Malaysia (Pyvis and Chapman 2007) and Hong Kong (Kelly and Tak 1998) were used to help determine if there were similarities across these countries and Singapore. For this research, I reached out to my past students and I used a snowball sampling technique that generated 51 valid survey responses for analysis. The findings were organised to measure students' views before attaining the degree, during the time they were studying and after the

degree attainment. This was done in order to determine if their views changed over the different periods. Interestingly, the results showed that most students (76%) were seeking employment prospects, social status and recognition prior to starting their study. During their course of study 11% of the students expressed their doubts (about the usefulness and relevance) of their courses of study and another 11% of the students shared that they would do their best to get good results as they had spent much time and money on their studies. Surprisingly, after attaining their degrees, 35% of the graduates had still expressed their doubts about the usefulness or relevance of their degree. Finally, 53% of the graduates acknowledged that they gained economic benefits from attaining their degrees, 24% confirmed that they had gained new knowledge and 23% cited a growth in their social status and recognition. The feedback received from my tutors for this research was very positive and I was encouraged by their comments to consider even greater study in this area for my IFS.

For both the *Method of Enquiry* modules, I kept to the same area of study, and this helped me to develop a focus on students in Higher Education. For my *Institution Focused Study (IFS)*, I decided that it would be helpful to explore the perspective of the institutions instead, and I researched the *Mission and Scope of a Private University Provider in Singapore*.

In the IFS, I was able to draw out the objectives, mission, goals and scope of various universities and Higher Education institutions internationally and locally. In many instances, the institutions had set out objectives that presented their contributions to society and for the greater good of the world. From my content analysis, it was difficult to establish whether many of these institutions had clear

objectives in terms of what they aimed to provide to their students. From my IFS, I had found that my subject institution did not have specific and clear objectives on what was expected of their students. The Vision and Mission that they had set out for the organisation was based on their original mission which was that of a professional management association. Although the institution did not develop specific objectives and a mission for the educational arm of the business, there was communication through newsletters, brochures, speeches, graduation talks, corporate videos and other online media on what they hoped their students will become. The findings from the IFS, suggested to me that there could be a different view from the students on what they receive and are supported with, and what the institution communicates. This prompted me to consider a study on student perceptions of the support provided by institutions. This study is relevant, to determine if the institution's mission and scope was aligned with what their students sought. I wanted to establish if the support the students received matched with what they expected from the institution.

I considered a qualitative study where I could interview students in focus groups or individually. A qualitative study would allow me to collect good in-depth views and opinions, however, the time it would take to reach many students to obtain a good number of perspectives and opinions would be untenable due to the size of the cohorts. I was also concerned that the selection process would be challenging as I would need to conduct these interviews and discussions across various types of courses, across different periods of their study and it would be difficult to obtain permission from my organisation for such an extensive study. I weighed the value of a qualitative study against that of a quantitative study. I could see the value of a quantitative study that would allow me to receive input from a larger number of

students and provide me with better understanding of their perspectives from measuring different factors that motivate them and that affect their perception. A quantitative study would allow me a faster way to collect data, and with the use of statistical software it will allow me to explore different hypotheses for testing that may not be as clearly determinable from a qualitative study. The decision to conduct a quantitative analysis required me to take up statistics and business analysis courses to fully comprehend what types of analysis and tools could be useful to conduct my research. It was an additional challenge for me to have to study statistics, as I had no previous knowledge or training in this area. The courses I took provided me with a good basic understanding of the subject, which proved useful.

Professional outcomes and impact

I chose a professional doctorate in order to benefit from the focus and application to my practice that would make me a better educator. The foundations of a professional educator include acquiring knowledge and skills that orientates oneself toward a public good. From the taught courses, I have been able to apply my new knowledge and skills to improve my performance as a lecturer in delivering better content in my lectures, and to help students who I supervise for their master's dissertations in their research. I have also contributed to my Community of Practice by sharing my knowledge and findings at education forums and conferences from the research done in my MOE 2.

Another aspect of being a professional includes training and assisting my peers and colleagues in their development to be better educators. After completing the taught modules, I was able to assist new lecturers through a peer instruction

programme at my institution where they were able to come to my classes to see how my lectures are delivered, after which I then assess their teaching in their classes. With this we gained from an exchange of experiences and shared knowledge. My status as a professional educator is also enhanced through my understanding and consideration of the ethical code of conduct for research and the need to continually protect the rights and respect them as my subjects.

The discipline of building and demonstrating 'doctorateness' that was acquired through the taught courses has led me also to applying research process and techniques into my thesis and have made me more conscious of the required rigour.

Contribution to learning and my community of practice

With the knowledge, and from the confidence gained from the modules and research work undertaken during my doctoral studies, I was able to share what I learned with fellow research students. I gave two presentations at the IOE's Summer Doctoral Conferences (2016 and 2018) and the Hong Kong University's Annual Doctoral Conference in Hong Kong in 2016 when I represented IOE on a student exchange programme. Here are details of my contributions:

1. I represented the Institute of Education / University College London in a doctoral exchange programme with the University of Hong Kong (HKU) from 8 May to 9 July 2016. I presented a research paper at the HKU Postgraduate Research Conference on 20 May 2016 and participated in the Higher Education Research Association (HERA) Conference from 27 – 28 May 2016.

2. I participated as a guest facilitator at the HKU Summer Institute from 30 May to 10 June 2016 with participants attending from Mongolia, Cambodia, Laos, Argentina, Macau, Nigeria and Ethiopia. At the Summer Institute I was able to lead and present topics for discussion as I moderated group activity and interaction. I had also taken conference notes and summarised sessions for the participants.

3. I presented a research paper (remotely from Hong Kong) at the Institute of Education's Summer Doctoral Conference held in London on 16 June 2016. At the presentation I was able to share with my audience the results from my MOE 2 research, and to explain the results, one of which was the influence of Singaporean parents on their children's decision to attain a degree. I learned from my discussions with some members of the audience that this parental influence differed greatly from that of students who entered university in the UK

4. I presented a research paper at the Institute of Education's Summer Doctoral Conference in London on 21 June 2018. At the presentation I was able to share my thoughts regarding my thesis topic on Institutional Social Support. I also discussed the decision to undertake a quantitative research method and what I expected to gain from it. I shared some of the key research questions for my research and entered a discussion on why this was done.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

a)   1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Demand for Higher Education

In recent years the demand for Higher Education has seen tremendous growth with an anticipated global average growth rate of 4.2% per year to last until 2040 (Calderon, 2018). The number of students in Higher Education is expected to reach 594 million in 2040 from an estimate of 216 million in 2016 (Calderon, 2018). Asia has similarly experienced a growth in Higher Education in the last 20 years; this has been driven by higher birth rates and an increase in school participation, as well as a view that Higher Education will improve life opportunities (Calderon 2018, p 6). To accommodate this increase in demand, Higher Education systems have expanded to include the private Higher Education providers (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014) and three new forms of Higher Education provision have emerged globally and in Asia, namely:

1. overseas universities operating offshore campuses in host countries

2. 'in university' collaboration for specific disciplines (medicine, liberal arts, hospitality, engineering and others) within current universities in the host country

3. overseas universities partnering private education providers in the host countries to deliver their university courses

1.2 New forms of Higher Education provision and Private Education Institutes (PEIs)

The three new forms of Higher Education provision have now been introduced in Asia, and these now include universities with offshore campuses in host countries, e.g. Malaysia (Monash University, Nottingham University, Swinburne University of Technology), Singapore (James Cook University, Curtin University, INSEAD), and China (Nottingham University, University of Surrey, University of Manchester). The host countries see the need for these universities to supplement the existing supply of university places to meet domestic, and sometimes regional, demand (Marginson, 2016). These offshore university campuses are usually staffed by senior full time academics from the home university and supplemented with local hires of lecturers and tutors and other operational support staff for administration and student management functions (Asian Development Bank, 2011, Salt and Wood, 2014).

The next form of collaboration is that between overseas and local universities where there is 'in-university' collaboration for specific disciplines locally. In Singapore, for example, there are collaborations such as that between Cornell University and the Nanyang Technological University (Cornell-Nanyang Institute of Hospitality Management, n.d.) to offer a course in hospitality management.

There is a third type of arrangement where the overseas universities do not set up a fully-fledged offshore campus nor collaborate on 'in-university', course specific arrangements. Instead, they enter into partnerships with Private Educational Institutions (PEIs) to offer their programmes in the host country

(Antony and Nicola, 2020, University of Northampton, n.d.). Examples of such partnerships in Singapore include those of Murdoch University and University College Dublin with the Kaplan Institute of Higher Learning, the University of Sunderland and Southern Cross University with the Management Development Institute of Singapore, and the University of Newcastle Australia and Coventry University with the PSB Academy. In these partnership arrangements, the PEI provides the premises for the courses to be conducted, and market and administer the programmes. The role of the PEI includes student recruitment and administration, hiring of local academic staff to deliver the programmes, and facilitation of course delivery. In some partnerships, the overseas university provides their own academics and teaching staff who travel to deliver the courses in Singapore, and local tutors are hired to support the students (Digital Senior, n.d.-a). PEIs often operate as for profit commercial entities and they are either organisation owned or privately owned (Kaplan Higher Education Institute 2021, Amity Global Institute 2021). There are also PEIs that are set up as a private entity but operate on a not-for-profit basis (Management Development Institute of Singapore 2021, Singapore Institute of Management). SPEP[2] where I work, and which is the focus of my research, is one of these. It is an institution that works in partnerships with overseas universities from Australia, Europe, the UK and the US. It is one of the largest private education institutes in Singapore.

In the next section, I will introduce the role of private education institutions and their contribution to Higher Education. This will provide the setting for a

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[2] To anonymise the institution, I will refer to it as Singapore Private Education Provider, or SPEP, in this thesis.

discussion on the different types of students they serve and the challenges that this presents.

1.3   Private Education Institutions and their role in Higher Education

Private Education Institutions (PEI) are private academic schools or institutions that provide courses that award certificates, diplomas and degrees in their name or in partnership with international institutions such as colleges, technical schools and universities (Guide Me Singapore Business Guide, 2022). In Singapore, these PEIs are governed under the Private Education Act (2009) that deals with the regulation and accreditation of PEIs to ensure the quality of education provision (Singapore Statutes Online, 2020 revised). The PEIs operate alongside conventional[3] universities and provide education options to Singaporeans and nationals from other countries who choose to study in Singapore. PEIs provide a range of courses that include those for workplace development but also in Higher Education where they offer an alternative route to the conventional university (Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2018). It is estimated that the private education sector in Singapore is worth S$3 billion (GBP 1.85 billion) and that 121,000 students enrolled in PEIs in 2020 (SkillsFuture Singapore, 2021). It is difficult to obtain data on private education providers in more detail as this information is not collected by any government agency and where information is collected very often it is not made publicly available as the government agencies regard the information as confidential and for use in policy decisions internally. Therefore references made to growth and numbers are often sourced from newspaper reports and articles printed in business and other general

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[3] The term conventional university is used throughout the thesis to refer to public funded universities that offer comprehensive facilities such as lecture theatres, study rooms, on-campus recreational facilities like football fields and basketball courts, on-campus residential accommodation, and a suite of other services that include academic support centres, clinics, counselling services, etc.

media such as magazines and websites. Other specific information such as breakdown of demographics, family incomes and other such information are also not made publicly available.

The growth in private education in Singapore is linked to the 2002 Global Schoolhouse project where the Singapore government set out to carve out a slice of the then US$2.2.trillion global education market to establish Singapore as an education hub. The policy makers sought then to attract a mix of world-class institutions to set up collaborations and partnerships in Singapore to conduct research and knowledge transfer and, in the process, attract international students to study in Singapore (Faizal, 2017, Mok, 2008). Following the introduction of the Private Education Act (2019), there was a drop in the number of PEIs and, as of March 2022, there are 309 PEIs operating in Singapore (Training Partners Gateway, n.d.)

1.4   Differences in the profiles and composition of students in PEIs

Students who take up programmes at PEIs differ in demographics, socio-economic characteristics from those at conventional universities (Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2018, Chong et al., 2017). The major differences are in these areas:

Age   Students in conventional universities enter university between the ages of 18 to 25 years as most of them continue their studies in Higher Education immediately after their pre-university studies whether this be in the junior colleges or the polytechnics. In comparison, students at PEIs sometimes defer their studies and enter university much later for a myriad of reasons. These include wanting to gain work experience, or earning income to support their studies; in some cases, they return to enter part-time study with full-time jobs. Many are known as 'upgraders' in the local parlance, i.e. mature adult learners who return as adults to 'top up' their studies and get a degree to help them self-actualise or to improve their career prospects (Chong et al., 2017, Cupp, 1991).

Family income   Citing a report from the *Straits Times*, Guan (2019) highlighted that two thirds of the dental and medical graduates at conventional universities in Singapore had family incomes of S$9,000 (GBP 5,525) per month which puts them close to the national median tier of family income of S$9,520 (GBP 5,835) per household in 2021 (Guan, 2019, Singapore Department of Statistics, 2021). There are no available statistics on the distribution of family incomes for students in both the PEIs and the conventional universities, but it is known anecdotally that many, if not most, PEI students come from middle income and lower income families.

Admission standards Compared to PEIs, conventional universities have Higher Educational criteria for admission, At the same time, polytechnic diplomas are not generally accepted as equivalent to the 'A' Levels. This means that students coming through the polytechnic pathway are required to secure the highest grades to be accepted into the conventional universities as compared to students on the A-level pathway (JobsCentral Learning, 2016, Singapore Management University, 1999). This difference in admission standards is one main reason for many polytechnic students gravitating towards PEIs for their degrees. According to a Singapore Management University press release, only 800 out of 17,000 students from the polytechnics get admitted to conventional universities per year compared to 9,200 A-level students' (Singapore Management University, 1999)

Fees Students at the conventional universities receive greater funding from the government and, with the Ministry of Education (MOE) Tuition Grants, a student can save up to S$20,000 (GBP 12,285) per year (Yong, 2021). Aside from these large subsidies, students at the conventional universities can utilise their parent's Central Provident Fund (CPF – a mandatory government superannuation fund) to pay for their course fees. Students in PEIs do not receive such grants, and are not allowed to access their parent's CPF for such use and so they bear the burden of having to pay higher fees (Digital Senior, n.d.-b, Yong, 2021). This difference in costs has implications that will be discussed in the context for Higher Education in Singapore in Chapter 2.

Course duration The conventional universities require students to enter into three or four year degree courses with no exemptions given for past subjects taken

or studied. Most PEIs however offer their students 'fast tracked' courses where they are able to accelerate and complete their studies up to a year or a year and a half earlier from exemptions granted (Ngee Ann Academy, n.d., Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2018).

Student mix   The conventional universities have no more than 15% of overseas students in their student enrolment yearly (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2017). While there are no similar statistics available from the MOE for PEIs, the *Business Times* reported that at the Singapore campus of James Cook University, there is an overseas (i.e. non-Singaporean) student population of 79% (Ho, 2022). In the same report, other overseas universities operating in Singapore reported that they expected increases in their overseas student intakes in the coming months. Anecdotally, it is known among the private Higher Education community that the percentage of overseas students studying in PEIs is much higher than that of conventional universities. At SPEP, the overseas student population is estimated to be around 30% (private communication with SPEP senior management, October 2017). The student mix in PEIs, while adding social and cultural diversity and enriching the study environment and contributing to the economy from the fees paid and other expenditure, also mean challenges for the overseas students who have to adapt to their new environments, and the PEI who have to cater for their needs.

Even without the diversity in the student mix, students starting a degree programme encounter challenges in transition to Higher Education. Students with diverse backgrounds may face even more challenges. With the entry to Higher Education expanding from a small elite to a larger proportion of the population.

Hussey and Smith (2010) discuss the challenge in transition with reference to student demographics e.g. their ethnicity, social status, educational backgrounds, etc., as well as their diverse needs, hopes and aspiration (Hussey and Smith, 2010). McMillan (2013) discusses the role that emotions play in the student's transition and how, by understanding this role, the provision of student support mechanisms could be improved (McMillan, 2013). Both sets of authors stress that transition is not a precise matter, and that there are positive and negative aspects of this, and need to cover areas like autonomy, approaches to learning, gaining knowledge, understanding and skills, social and cultural integrations, as well as self-concept (Hussey and Smith, 2010).

With their demographic differences, PEI students may therefore experience particular challenges in relation to transition to Higher Education, e.g. adjusting to the curriculum and teaching approach, coping with the rigour of university studies, adapting to new social and physical environments, building networks, making adjustments to their personal lives and relationships, etc. Like conventional universities, PEIs try to help students make the transition from pre-university education - whether this be the polytechnics, private diploma programmes or the A-level route - by providing social support in different forms. This can take the form of student clubs, student care and counselling, academic learning support, and other pastoral support provisions.

The thesis will study the demographic characteristics of PEI students at SPEP, and the challenges that apply to them, as well as the implications for social support provision by SPEP. In the next section, I will reflect on my experience as a former student at a Private Education Institute, and my current role as an adjunct

faculty member at SPEP. I will then explain why I am interested in conducting

research on this topic.

1.5   My background and role in Higher Education

With regard to my positionality, my interest in the topic is motivated in part by my role as an adjunct lecturer at SPEP as well as my own education journey. Like some of the students at SPEP, my education journey was not a conventional one. Unlike contemporaries who went to university after their 'O'[4] and 'A'[5] Levels, I entered the workforce following my 'O' Levels in 1976 and pursued my post-secondary education as an adult learner. I completed a part-time diploma course with the Chartered Institute of Marketing (UK) and then did a 'top up' postgraduate degree at an Australian university. I subsequently took on adjunct teaching roles at various Private Education Institutions (PEIs) and have done so for more than 25 years.

Since 2006, I have worked as an adjunct lecturer at SPEP, the site of the current study. In this role, I interact regularly with students who come from a cross section of Singapore society as well as international students. These students come from a range of ages and social and cultural backgrounds. I have come across cases where students have difficulty coping with their transition to university studies and adapting to the demands of Higher Education. I have also had students who come to me seeking support and advice for their academic and non-academic matters. I have witnessed the strong bonds of friendships and relationships among students that I believe were fostered by their participation in social support activities. In some cases, however, students have been overly involved in social support provisions - like student life and club activities - to the point of being

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[4] GCE 'O' (Ordinary) Level

[5] GCE 'A' (Advanced) Level

distracted from their studies. On the other hand, some students do not avail themselves to learning support programmes and student care services that could help them with the challenges they face. Indeed, I have observed cases of students who struggled alone through their course and subsequently dropped out. I have often thought it would be helpful to understand the reasons why students participate or do not participate in such provisions.

I recognise that the capacity or the willingness of the PEIs to offer social support provisions may also vary when compared to conventional universities. This is because PEIs are often limited by the availability of space on their premises which may be rented, and by financial resources.

In my current role, I have also had occasion to provide informal feedback to staff and management of SPEP through channels such as the lecturer's forum, and discussions with the senior managers in charge of supporting students in different roles such as learning support and student care. As a member of staff, I am aware that SPEP has limited resources allocated for social support and sometimes needs to make difficult decisions as to what provisions to offer. A better understanding of the reasons for student participation in social support provisions would benefit the organisation and, with the findings from my research, I will be able to provide useful insights and perspectives that can make a positive contribution to SPEP for policy decisions with respect to the provision of social support services.

1.6   Theorising Higher Education transition

There are many theorists - e.g. Böke et al. (2019), Briggs et al. (2012b), Cage et al. (2021), Daniel et al. (1995), Gale and Parker (2014), Hussey and Smith (2010), McMillan (2013), Wingate (2007) - who have studied transitions in Higher Education. They offer different perspectives on areas like student outcome and attrition, managing emotions, navigating change, among others. As entry into Higher Education is associated with changes to the learning environment (e.g. pedagogy, curriculum, teaching styles, academic traditions, etc.),and in other physical and personal changes (e.g. living away from home, forging new friendships, building networks, adapting to different cultures and lifestyles, etc.), it is inevitable that many students deal with transitions differently. Some students suffer stress and negative emotions whilst others may enjoy the transition journey and the changes they go through (Cage et al., 2021).

To understand the theories of student transition better, I will explore this subject further in my literature review in Chapter 3 where I will review different conceptual frameworks for transition, and discuss how these affect students at university.

1.7   Aims for my planned research

As an educator at a PEI, and as a former student who pursued my Higher Education through PEIs, I have relevant knowledge and experience that will allow me to have insight into my area of study. With my research I hope to contribute to the development of PEIs with regard to social support and its role in student transition to Higher Education. I hope to identify the reasons for participation in social support, and the implications for social support provision, and – in so doing – contribute to the body of knowledge in this area.

The focus of my research will be on the students at my institution, but the results will be relevant to a greater audience of researchers, policy makers, and managers, academic staff and administrators at PEIs. I will start by exploring the different theories relating to student transition so as to adopt a conceptual framework to guide my research. I will discuss my methodology and research approach, and provide the rationale for selecting the survey as my research instrument. I will also provide details of my analytical process to draw out findings from my survey. I will then conduct a survey of students to gather their views and perspectives on institution provided social support (IPSS) at SPEP. I will analyse that data and make recommendations.

1.8 Summary

In this introductory chapter, I highlighted the growth in demand for Higher Education globally and the range of provisions that have arisen to meet this demand, including partnerships and collaborations between local and overseas universities, as well as the types of such arrangements in Singapore. In discussing the provisions of these new forms of Higher Education options, I outlined the role of the Private Education Institutes, and looked at how these PEIs fit into the education landscape and what had prompted their development. I then compared the students profiles at PEIs with those attending conventional universities, and highlighted key differences. Following that, I reflected on experience as an adjunct lecturer at SPEP, the PEI I will be using as the site for my research. I then briefly outlined how transition to university has been theorised. I ended with the aims of my research.

In the next chapter, I will present the background on Higher Education in Singapore, starting with the development of a national Higher Education system and its historical particularities in the context of regional and global developments in Higher Education. I will examine how Singapore moved from an elite to a mass participation system, and the policies, statutory instruments, and funding streams that brought about this change. I will then provide the background for SPEP, and how it progressed from a management institute to become a provider of private Higher Education. This chapter will therefore provide an understanding of the Higher Education landscape in which the research is located.

CHAPTER 2 HIGHER EDUCATION IN SINGAPORE

b) 2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the background to the development of Higher Education in Singapore, and show how the education system was set up for students to progress to university. I start with the development of a national Higher Education system, and trace the development of Higher Education, including its massification to meet the changing needs of the country and the aspirations of Singaporeans. I also look at the policy decision to expand the capacity of Higher Education with the entry of overseas university campuses and partnerships. I then present the education pathways, and examine the different types of post-secondary Higher Education available to students. The differences between the public universities and the PEIs are then discussed. SPEP, the PEI which is the site of my study, is then introduced.

2.2   The history of Higher Education in Singapore

2.2.1 The early years of Singapore's Higher Education

Singapore was colonised by the British in 1819, and much of the education system was influenced by the British colonisers. Initially, Higher Education catered for the elite with the purpose of training professionals to support the colonial administration (Lee, 1997). During this period, two significant educational institutes were established: these were the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States Government Medical School (later renamed the King Edward Medical College) and the Raffles College of Arts and Science, in 1905 and 1928 respectively (Goh and Tan, 2008). Following the establishment of these institutions, the Singapore Polytechnic was set up in 1954, followed by the Nanyang University a year later, and the University of Singapore in 1962 (Lee, 2008).

In the decades following Singapore's independence in 1965, , the government saw education – including Higher Education – as a tool for human capital development, to make the country more competitive and to sustain future economic growth in a globalised economy (Lee, 1997). As the middle class expanded, this was accompanied by an increase in the demand for Higher Education. In recent decades, with the expansion of the Higher Education globally, there was also a move towards making Higher Education institutions in Singapore more global, and ideas like privatisation and being market-oriented became influential (Yonezawa, 2007).

In the next section, I discuss how the Higher Education landscape in Singapore changed from catering to an elite pool of high performing students to becoming more inclusive and catering for a wider and broader student base.

c) 2.3. The massification of Higher Education in Singapore

In the late 1990s, the Singapore government devised a policy to internationalise the education sector and reposition the country as a regional education hub. In 2002, it embarked on the development of the 'Global Schoolhouse' (GS) project (Sidhu et al., 2011). The GS was envisaged to support Singapore's ambition of a knowledge economy. Financial incentives were provided to world-class universities to establish campuses in Singapore. The aims were to help education institutions at all levels develop creativity, entrepreneurship and risk-taking, and to attract 150,000 overseas students to both private education and public universities (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2007). With this ambition in mind, the Ministry of Education introduced a new Higher Education governance model that allowed the publicly funded universities to be better resourced. The universities were given more flexibility in management and finance, and allowed for a wider sources of student by allowing collaborations with reputable private universities; this was the start of transnational education in Singapore (Mok, 2008). Local universities were also exhorted to adopt an entrepreneurial model to meet the changing needs of the population (Wong et al., 2007). There were two forms of transnational education, and these included distance learning programmes, and foreign university branch campuses and collaborations. This arrangement allowed the government to increase the capacity for Higher Education enrolment. Under this arrangement, two reputable overseas universities, INSEAD and the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, set up overseas campuses in Singapore in 2000.

Marginson (2016) (p.414) highlighted the growth in worldwide participation in Higher Education from 1971 to 2013 and the spread to middle income and low

income countries; this was driven not only by economic growth but by the ambition of families to advance or maintain their social position. In Singapore, strong economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s drove similar demand, and opened up opportunities for growth in Higher Education. Together with the entry of overseas universities in the early 1980s, this led the massification of Higher Education with the result that more students had a chance to access Higher Education (Lee and Gopinathan, 2008) . The drivers of massification of Higher Education in Singapore included:

i)   the growth in demand for university graduates due to economic expansion,

ii) high-income employment and socioeconomic mobility from Higher Education qualifications, and

iii) growth in primary and secondary school enrolments thus increasing the pool of eligible candidates for university (Tan, 2016). (p.547-560)

With the entry of overseas universities and the beginnings of transitional Higher Education, the Ministry of Education allowed the PEIs to develop partnerships and enter into collaboration with qualified foreign universities as part of the expansion and diversification in the local Higher Education landscape (Chan and Ng, 2008, Gopinathan and Lee, 2011, Ng and Tan, 2010). The challenge faced by the government was to maintain a balance between quantity and quality of the education providers (Gopinathan and Lee, 2011). To ensure that the Higher Education provision by private education institutions (PEIs) was of an acceptable standard, the government introduced the Singapore Quality Class (SQC) quality assurance scheme in 1997 to formalise the recognition of PEIs and safeguard the

quality of programme quality as well as the interests of students (Lim, 2010, Kan, 2019). Since then the provision of private Higher Education has come under the overview of the Committee for Private Education (CPE), an agency of SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) which is a statutory board under the Ministry of Education; the CPE has powers relating to private education under the Private Education Act (SSG 2022).

To understand how young people progress from one stage of education to another, I will now look at the education pathways available to them. Education pathways are designed with the intention of providing every young person with the opportunity to gain the relevant educational qualifications so as to become economically productive. To this end, different education pathways are available to students with different interests and capabilities.

2.4. Pathways to Higher Education in Singapore

Secondary education is divided into three main tracks and, according to their academic ability, students advance to different forms of post-secondary education.
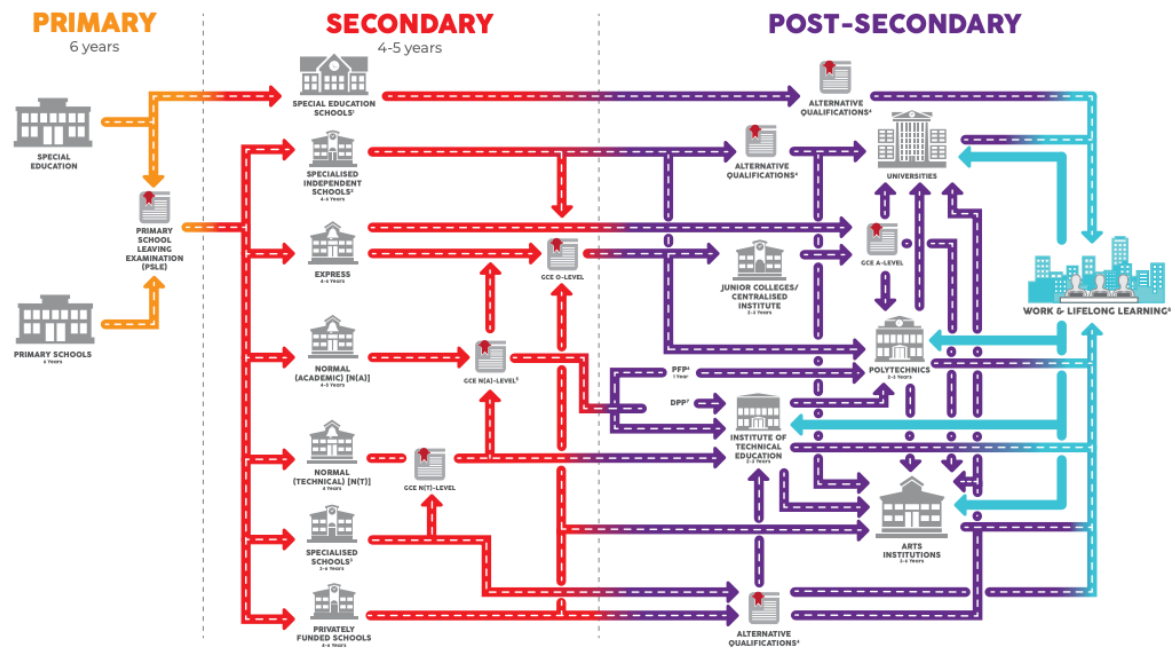
Figure 1 : Singapore's Education System Flowchart (Ministry of Education 2021)

In post-secondary education, students are able to advance according to the results of their General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary (O level) Level Examinations.   On the successful completion of their secondary education, students have the option to pursue the GCE Advanced 'A' Level (A level) in junior college[6] or to enter polytechnics (polys) where they can obtain a diploma, and where the focus is on applied and project based learning. The lowest achieving students have the option to continue to Institute of Technical Education (ITE)

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[6]These are equivalent to Sixth Form colleges in England.

colleges where they are offered a vocation-based curriculum leading to trade certification that prepares them for employment.

Students who complete the A level and polytechnic studies may then apply for entry into an undergraduate course at a university. Those applying for the public funded autonomous universities[7] are mainly drawn from the junior colleges - as the A levels are generally considered a better preparation for Higher Education – and these represented 75% of the public university cohort in 2020 (LearningPointSG, 2021). The admission criteria for the public universities are very demanding. The complex criteria set out by the Ministry of Education are based on grades achieved for a combination of subjects taken at A levels: these include passes at 'H2 – higher levels' for at least two subjects, an attempt at the General Paper (GP), and a sub-pass grade in the mother tongue language. Polytechnic students seeking admission to the public universities are also required to have good results. Other admission criteria include their O Level results and possibly interviews, aptitude tests and participation in Co-Curricular Activities (CCA). Most young students who are eligible apply for the autonomous (conventional) public universities for reasons of prestige, convenience, and the generous subsidy (from 50 to 80% of course fees). Students applying to the public universities need to meet rigorous admission criteria, so only the highest achieving students gain admission to them (Goh and Tan, 2008).

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[7] There are six government funded public universities in Singapore and these include the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore Management University (SMU), Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and Singapore University of Social Studies (SUSS). The first three NUS, NTU and SMU offer up to 79% of all university places with the remaining offering the balance of the 21% provision (Education Statistics Digest 2021).

2.5. Enrolments in Higher Education in Singapore

In 2021, 78,945 students enrolled at the six government-funded public universities [8]. Figure 2 below provides a breakdown of enrolments in the public universities from the time they first started in 1960 to 2021.

Year	Sex	Universities[1]							
		NUS	Nanyang University	NTU	SMU	SIT	SUTD	SUSS	Total
1960	MF	1,641	1,861	-	-	-	-	-	3,502
	F	426	378	-	-	-	-	-	804
1970	MF	4,751	2,310	-	-	-	-	-	7,061
	F	1,531	918	-	-	-	-	-	2,449
1980	MF	8,634	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,634
	F	3,926	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,926
1990	MF	15,193	-	6,812	-	-	-	-	22,005
	F	8,107	-	2,689	-	-	-	-	10,796
2000	MF	21,233	-	14,583	305	-	-	-	36,121
	F	11,341	-	6,223	212	-	-	-	17,776
2010	MF	25,189	-	22,862	6,721	523	-	-	55,295
	F	13,067	-	11,389	3,525	275	-	-	28,256
2012	MF	25,979	-	22,862	7,108	2,587	327	-	58,863
	F	13,295	-	11,386	3,684	1,246	149	-	29,760
2013	MF	26,156	-	22,777	7,297	3,051	583	-	59,864
	F	13,532	-	11,517	3,789	1,317	249	-	30,404
2014	MF	26,797	-	23,021	7,515	3,557	886	217	61,993
	F	14,042	-	11,623	3,883	1,482	363	145	31,538
2015	MF	27,288	-	23,512	7,740	4,039	1,235	489	64,303
	F	14,423	-	11,860	4,062	1,693	522	330	32,890
2016	MF	27,702	-	23,495	7,827	5,230	1,381	896	66,531
	F	14,617	-	11,633	4,047	2,306	551	609	33,763
2017	MF	28,134	-	22,934	7,979	6,138	1,545	1,451	68,181
	F	14,600	-	11,079	4,193	2,626	603	1,011	34,112
2018	MF	29,037	-	22,813	8,182	6,951	1,658	2,049	70,690
	F	14,981	-	10,896	4,486	2,905	626	1,399	35,293
2019	MF	30,033	-	23,063	8,656	7,714	1,730	2,601	73,797
	F	15,440	-	11,120	4,855	3,128	624	1,683	36,850
2020	MF	30,420	-	23,758	9,144	8,201	1,406	3,153	76,082
	F	15,262	-	11,499	5,276	3,423	518	2,014	37,992
2021	MF	31,191	-	24,074	9,580	9,015	1,429	3,656	78,945
	F	15,693	-	11,352	5,512	3,725	534	2,312	39,128

Note: 1) University figures are for full-time first degree only.

Figure 2 – Public university enrolments from 1960 to 2021

(Education Statistics Digest 2022)

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[8] There are six government funded public universities in Singapore and these include the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore Management University (SMU), Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and Singapore University of Social Studies (SUSS). The first three NUS, NTU and SMU offer up to 79% of all university places with the remaining offering the balance of the 21% provision (Education Statistics Digest 2021).

Figure 3 shows the enrolments graphically over the years. It demonstrates the growth in enrolment year on year.
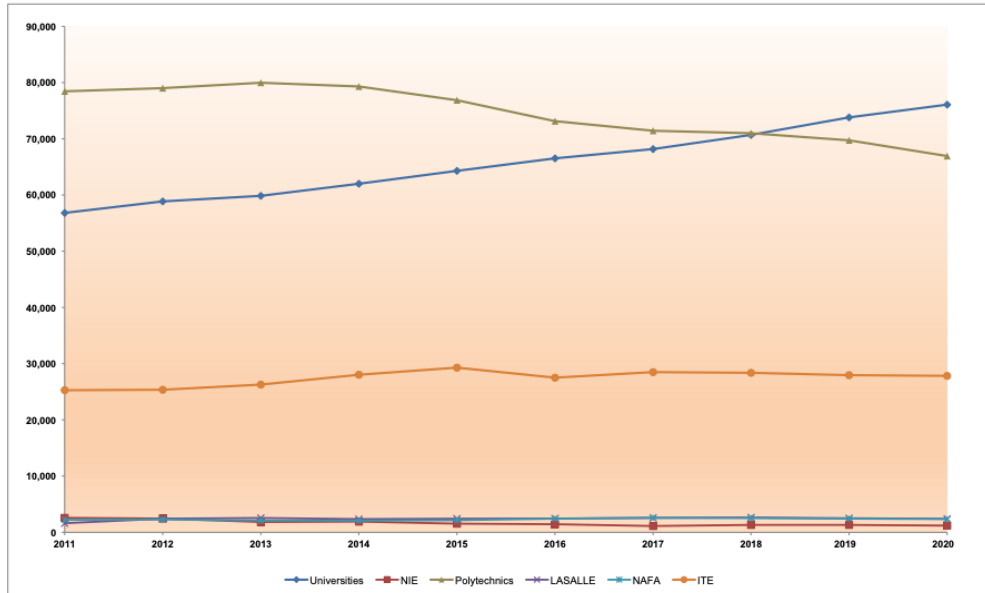
Figure 3 - Full-time university enrolment in Singapore from 2011 to 2021

(Education Statistics Digest 2022)

There are no similar statistics available for enrolment figures in PEIs. The only available report was published in 2012 when the then Committee for Private Education[9] (CPE) reported that 47,500 self-financed students enrolled in PEIs in 2011 (Ministry of Education 2012). A subsequent 2014 CPE Annual Report stated there were 70,000 self-financed local students and 29,000 international students enrolled in private education providers in 2013 (Davie 2015). The only available recent figures are those in Figure 3 that show a drop in enrolment numbers at PEIs from 2008 to 2020. This was due to tighter controls following the enactment of the

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[9] There are no current figures available on private education enrolment in Singapore due to the changes made to the Council of Private Education, the statutory board that is responsible for controlling private education. In 2016, this organisation was restructured together with the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) to form SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) to be a new statutory board under the Ministry of Education. In the new structure the Council of Private Education has been renamed the Committee for Private Education (CPE).

Private Education Act (2009) that forced many PEIs which did not meet the new requirements to close down . Another contributing factor was the effect of closed borders as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic (Go, 2021).

Figure 4 - **Singapore-based students vs. international students enrolment**

in tertiary and Higher Education courses in Singapore from 2008 to 2020 (**LinkedIn 2021**)

Whatever the case may be, there remains a high demand for university education that is not met by the public universities (Davie 2015, Ministry of Education 2012). For those who can afford it, studying overseas is an option. Others have the option to pursue a degree through PEIs that offer courses in partnership with overseas universities. Studying at a PEI is a feasible option for some because it costs less compared to studying overseas, and also because PEIs generally accept students with lower grades than the public universities; in addition, unlike public universities, PEIs treat polytechnic grades as equivalent to A Level grades(Cheng, 2017, Tan, 2020, Guan, 2019).

From publicly available data, the enrolment at PEIs and public universities can be seen in Figure 5 below:

Year	Private Education Institutions	Public Universities
2008	189,000	52,598
2011*	47,500	56,822
2014	99,000	61,993
2021	121,000	78,945

* This number does not include international students
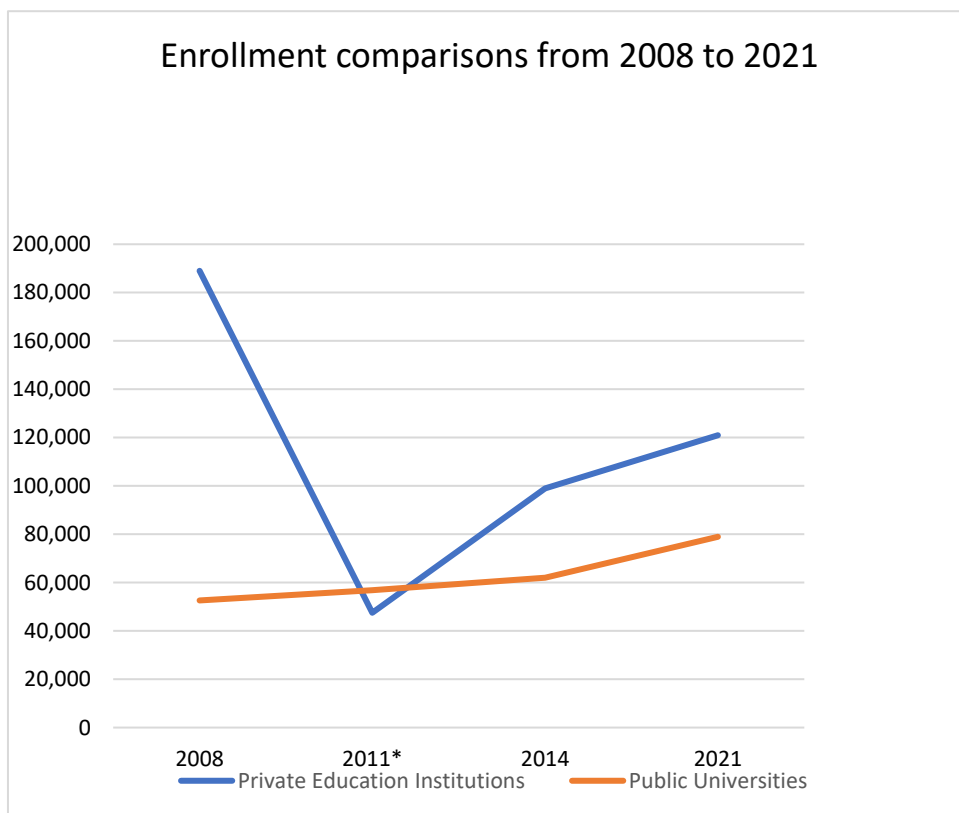
Figure 5 - Enrolment numbers for PEIs vs public universities 2008 to 2021 (ADBI 2012, CPE 2014, Singapore Education Digest 2015, Davie 2015, Education Statistics Digest 2021, LinkedIn 2022)

In the next section, I will examine the institutional differences between the public universities and PEIs.

2.6. Public universities and Private Education Institutions (PEIs) in Singapore

At the public universities, there are strong academic traditions that developed since their formation (NUS in 1980 and NTU in 1991), and these traditions are often focused on university history, ranking, research, state funding and esteemed alumni. The public universities are well set up with physical, social and environmental provisions in place to support students during their programme of study (NUS 2016, NTU 2016). Public universities receive government grants, and are also funded by donations from corporations, philanthropists, alumni, as well as endowment funds. The government provides funds to match contributions from donors and sponsors and, in the case for the longer established universities such as NUS, NTU and SMU, it is a 'dollar-for-dollar" matching fund. The funding for the newer universities Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) is even more generous: they receive twice the funding for all donations received (Teng 2019). With regard to the provision of support to students at public universities, the National University of Singapore (NUS) has, for example, a dedicated Office of Student Affairs. This office is staffed by a dedicated team who support and provide facilities and services for recreation, sports and leisure activities, on-campus accommodation in the form of residence halls, social clubs with permanent facilities for interaction and events, learning development programmes, welfare services, career counselling, funding for student group activities, etc. This office operates and provide opportunities for students to interact and bond, and also provides training in the development of skills and competencies, as well as counselling, wellness and mental health support (NUS 2016).

Private education institutes are not supported by government funding and so depend solely on their own capital and financing for their set up and operations. This requires the PEIs to secure their own premises and provide facilities to the students depending on the space available and the costs they can assume. For example, SPEP started as a management institute. It subsequently ventured into the Higher Education sector focussing on business and management courses because these were what were needed by the organisations who formed a large part of their corporate membership at that time. With this association with the organisations, SPEP have managed to secure some donations and funding over the years, but this is limited in comparison with the grants and donations given to the public universities by the government and donors.

At the same time, PEIs generally offer a high volume and a non-campus-based form of Higher Education with a commercial or, in the case of SPEP, not-for-profit focus. This is marked by lower entry requirements as noted earlier. Unlike the public universities, PEIs offer the flexibility of part-time courses of study – e.g. in subjects like business and management - and shorter periods of study for the completion of a degree: an undergraduate degree at a PEI ranges from 12 to 30 months, with an average of 24 months, compared to the 36 to 48 months at the public universities (NUS 2016, NTU 2016, SMU 2016, Kaplan Singapore 2016, Management Development Institute of Singapore 2016 and Singapore Institute of Management - Global Education 2016).

In comparison to public universities, a PEI is not set up with the full spectrum of resources and capacity of a public university as it has limited space and limited access to funding, and most PEIs operates on a commercial basis with a tight focus

on costs. Facilities at a PEI often comprise a few lecture theatres and classrooms, either on the PEIs own premises or in a rented space in a commercial building. There is often modest provision for recreation and limited social space for student interaction (Kaplan Singapore 2016, Management Development Institute of Singapore 2016 and Singapore Institute of Management - Global Education 2016). With the focus very much on students entering and completing their courses within a shorter duration, there is also a question as to whether the PEIs see the need to provide students with a wide range of support provisions as each support provision bears a cost in terms of space, time, and actual expenses.

In the next section, I will provide the background of my institution, SPEP. This provides the context for a better understanding as to why and how its students differ from those at the conventional universities and other PEIs.

2.7. Background on SPEP and its reasons for moving into Higher Education

SPEP was founded in 1964 as a management institute to offer training to build up management talent in the early years of Singapore's economic development. Over the years, the institute progressed from delivering an average of 50 courses and seminars a year in the 1960s to introducing its own diploma course in management studies in 1973 in collaboration with the National University of Singapore and two local polytechnics. With the success of its diploma courses, SPEP entered into partnerships with several overseas universities to offer degree level courses. The first partnership with a UK university in 1986 and, with its success, SPEP entered into another partnership with an Australian university in 1988. Since then, SPEP has formed partnerships with more universities from more countries, including the US, France and Scotland and presently has more than 20,000 students a year on various courses across more partner universities. The partnerships with UK and Australian universities started in the 1980s and remain the most successful partnerships: they attract large student numbers, and in combination, represent between 75% to 80% of the total enrolment (SPEP 2021, Singapore Infopedia 2021).

2.8. Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the development and the evolution of the Higher Education system in Singapore. Over the years, the drivers for Higher Education moved from the need to have a well-educated workforce to support economic development, to meeting the growing demand of a burgeoning middle class, to the government's push to attract talented academics and international students and establish Singapore as an education hub for the region. Young Singaporeans had various educational pathways to Higher Education with many using the GCE 'A' Level or junior college route. The students who do not qualify to enter public universities may opt to study overseas or locally at private education institutes, many of which have entered into partnerships with overseas universities to offer courses in Singapore.   However, there are differences in the way the public universities and PEIs are funded, with implications for facilities and support services for students.   In particular, PEIs are limited in their ability to provide support services for their students because of the constraints of space, resources, and funds.

I then provided a brief background to SPEP, the site for the present study. In the next Chapter, I will present the literature review and discuss, among other things, transition into Higher Education and the role of social support in in this.

CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will review literature with a focus on student transition to Higher Education and the role that institution social support plays in helping students through the transition. I start by looking at a theoretical framework that outlines the different stages of a student's transition into Higher Education and consider different student needs.

In the review of the literature, I will focus on the contributory problems associated with transition including the stressors (physical, psychological and emotional), the challenges that students face, and other critical factors that help or impede a student managing a successful transition. I then look at the different types of support provisions (social support, psychological support, on and off campus activities, extracurricular activities, etc.) offered by universities and Higher Education Institutions to see how these may impact the student during transition.

As it is important also to know how students engage or disengage with the support provision, I will examine the concept of engagement and, in particular, students' engagement with or failure to engage, and the implications of this. I will look at the barriers to participation and engagement and explore the motivation of students to engage in social support provision. I then introduce literature on the role that institutions play in the provision of social support. I will also look at the type of survey instruments and tools used by researchers who have done work on social support and will refer to this literature in Chapter 4 where I will discuss my research methods.

3.2   Theorising the transition to Higher Education

In their study, Gale and Parker (2014) examined 24 articles, journals, and research studies. This study was commissioned by the former Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC). Their conclusion was that theorists and researchers have introduced various concepts and theories related to supporting transitions. As a result, different ideas have emerged on this topic. The report highlights that the concept of 'transition' is frequently discussed without critical examination. Furthermore, the concept lacks in-depth analysis and thorough interrogation. Gale and Parker (2014) emphasized this point on page 734 of their research.

Indeed, a number of studies – including a few not included in Gale and Parker's review e.g. - Worsley et al. (2021), Briggs et al. (2012b), Thompson et al. (2021) - were conducted with transition as a central theme but they did not come to a common understanding of what transition is. On their part, Gale and Parker (2014), p.737 define the term as 'the capability to navigate change'. They also include in their discussion of transition the resources needed to engage with change (Sen 1985) and access to support (Tinto 2008).

From their review of the research, Gale and Parker (2014, p.735) conclude that the literature presents three distinct accounts which lead to accordingly distinct approaches to discussions on policy, research, and practice in Higher Education. While the three accounts and the approaches identified may not always fit neatly into the categories, the framework provides a helpful way to understand the stages of transition, viz. T1 or induction, T2 or development, and T3 or becoming. Each of the three transition stages has a different focus.

Gale and Parker (2014) conceptual framework
Typology of student transition in higher education

Transition as Induction (T1)

Transition as Development (T2)

Transition as Becoming (T3)

• Orientation/familiarisation with campus (facilities etc.) and significant staff
• 'Just-in-time' information re procedures, curriculum content, assessment requirements
• First-year experience
• Institution transition practices

• Mentoring programs
• Service learning and field placements
• Career and research culture development activities/emphasis
• Championing narratives of student and career trajectories by successful students and staff
• Individualist transition pedagogy

• Flexible student study modes, including removal of distinction between full-time and part-time study and min./max. course loads
• Flexible student study pathways, including multiple opportunities to change course and enter, withdraw and return to study throughout life
• Curriculum that reflects and affirms marginalised student histories and subjectivities
• Connectionist transition pedagogy (Hockings et al. 2010)

An advantage of applying a conceptual framework to my research is that it allows me to have a point of reference when studying the different stages of transition in a student's Higher Education journey. My thesis, while focused on transitions, covers the advancement of the student throughout their higher education journey and goes beyond the coverage from this conceptual framework as some of the issues discussed elements of academic and social integration and will lead to discussions beyond just the transition.

The Gale and Parker (2014) framework for transitions focuses on understanding and addressing the challenges individuals face during major life transitions, such as the transition from high school to higher education. The reason why I chose to adopt this framework is because it provides a comprehensive understanding of transitions, emphasizing that they are complex and multifaceted processes involving psychological, social, and emotional adjustments. This is crucial in the context of students entering higher education from different

educational pathways like the polytechnics and diploma courses, especially when in a private education institute like SPEP where they undertake 'fast track' programmes to complete their degrees quickly and where they do not always have the access to the full support facilities that are offered in a conventional public university.

The framework covers different phases of transition, such as anticipation, participation, disillusionment, and adaptation. For students entering higher education in a private institute with limited resources, the anticipation phase might involve concerns about the lack of social, study or mental health support. During the participation phase, students could experience challenges due to the limited resources or access available at the institute. The disillusionment phase might encompass feelings of frustration when they have to contend with curriculum and pedagogy that is not specifically designed for students in Singapore and when their past education in the polytechnics or diploma programmes have not adequately or relevantly prepared them for university studies. Finally, the adaptation phase could involve finding ways to cope with the situation. By categorising these phases, the framework helps identify specific points where social support can be most effective.

While the framework assumes linearity and movement through a structured transition and other factors, the reality is that this is not always the case, and in the following section when discussing the framework this matter is addressed.

i. 3.2.1 Transition as Induction (T1)

For the Transition as Induction (T1) stage, the studies reviewed by Gale and Parker (2014) focused on articles and accounts of the different programme and activities designed to help students especially in their first year of transition to Higher Education, e.g. Heirdsfield et al. (2008), Hultberg et al. (2008), Kift (2015), Tinto and Engstrom (2008). The research was based on students transitioning to Higher Education from institutions like high school and junior colleges, and other education pathways such as bridging courses. The research covered themes like social integration and academic performance and the issue of students fitting in with the institution (Thomas 2002).

At the **induction** stage, students are seen to be navigating norms and procedures, and structures and systems; they are moving consecutively through periods of adjustment across the different disciplines and contexts. This often involved their participation in and engagement with orientation and familiarisation programmes, briefings on administrative matters such as course structures, assessments and procedures and other familiarisation processes related to their first-year experience (Gale and Parker, 2014 p.738). The transition to the induction stage is critical as this stage deals with factors that affect students' adjustment to university life, including preparation and understanding the type of learning required, along with other factors such as social integration and choice of courses or subjects (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998).

3.2.2 Transition as Development (T2)

At the **development** stage, the studies reviewed by Gale and Parker (2014) focused on topics relating to the developmental stages of a student, dealing with internal issues like a sense of self, and making friends. It also included other social aspects of student life to do with their transformation and development, as well as their developing identities, as they traverse from one stage to the next (Hillman (2005), Craig et al. (1995), and Krause and Coates (2008).

This stage is considered the path where transformation takes place between transitions in developing an identity as students navigate through sociocultural norms and expectations and form discrete singular or consecutive identities. During this stage, students may be helped by mentoring, and service learning and internships; they may also be helped by guidance from peer and staff with regard to study and career planning, particularly when attention is given to their development as a person for them and readiness for life after graduation. This stage of development focuses on giving the student confidence and a new identity as they advance their knowledge, understanding and skills, and enjoy increasingly levels of autonomy alongside acceptance of new approaches to learning as well as social and cultural integration (Hussey and Smith, 2010).

3.2.3 Transition as Becoming (T3)

The studies reviewed by Gale and Parker (2014) on the **becoming** stage focused on transitions beyond the formal education sphere and covered transitions through life (Colley (2007), Ecclestone (2009), Quinn (2010), Worth (2009). At this stage, the student's learning journey is not always neat and does not flow linearly. There are experiences and complexities in life that may lead them to make

decisions and choices that affect their outcomes and transformation. The student journey is therefore dynamic, and the stage of becoming involves a degree of subjectivity in that they acquire different types of knowledge and form diverse views in response to the ongoing changes experienced in the transition (Gale 2011, 2012). This stage involves a lot of adaptation, and this presents the most opportunity for the student to explore various areas of their Higher Education journey in great depth depending on the factors that guide them as they navigate through multiple movements, subjectivities, narratives, and systems (Gale and Parker 2014, p.738). What this means is that students start to inject their personalities and identities into their Higher Education journey as they bring their beliefs, new knowledge, and experiences together to develop in their studies in a way that is most relevant to them personally. The stage of becoming may involve students adopting flexible study modes, adjusting to new course loads, movement between full and part-time study, flexibility in changing courses or pathways to complete the course of study, withdrawal and later return to study, etc. It is at this stage that students explore beyond their academic lives, and may choose to involve themselves in programmes and activities of their own preference, and make choices for their future careers and lives (Gale and Parker, 2014).

Wingate (2007 p.403) suggests, at this stage, universities often provide outdated models of support because they fail to recognise that the student's need to 'learn to learn'; a complex issue that requires a fundamental change in beliefs as well as support structures that go beyond just basic or ad hoc provisions. For (Gale and Parker, 2014), T3 is a stage where universities must spend time to update, change and provide innovative and relevant provisions.

The Gale and Parker (2014) framework does not cover all aspects of my investigation into students' support provisions and engagement in such provisions. As transition alone is one element of the broader concept of student integration, I will adapt and include other studies covered in Sections 3.4, 3.9 and 3.10 to further enrich the framework with my research and discussions as I expand into investigating different circumstances and trajectories of PEI students at SPEP, in Singapore and globally. The framework assumes in most part that students transition through their higher education linearly and predictably which is often not the case for PEI students who often disrupt their entry into university after their tertiary education due to financial resources and other personal reasons such as not qualifying for entry into the university of their choice. In the case of Singaporean males they would be obliged to serve 22 months of conscripted military service (National Service) before entry into universities of any kind as required by law. While my study is in Singapore where circumstances may be unique and different, I do recognise the differences in Higher Education provision in other countries, I will consider the similarities or differences where applicable in the student profiles and composition of private education students that I had earlier mentioned in Sections 1.4 in and the relevance that they may have in my investigation and this will lead to a better understanding in the broader sense when applying this framework.

It was earlier seen that Gale and Parker (2014) set out a conceptual framework for the different stages of transitions. As the framework does not take into account the intersectionality of the demographics, student's backgrounds and experiences I will account for these in my later discussions as these factors can affect their mental health, and access to academic and social support services.

Before addressing the other aspect of mental health that is not addressed or covered in the Gale and Parker (2014) framework I referenced the work of Vincent Tinto (1975,1987,1997 and 2006).

Tinto's extensive research on student attrition, persistence, and retention has provided valuable insights into the factors influencing student success in higher education. By adapting and enriching the framework proposed by Gale and Parker (2014), with Tinto's work I was able to explore the multifaceted challenges of student engagement, social and academic integration, and support within the context of private education institutions in Singapore and Asia. This broader perspective takes into account the unique characteristics of these institutions, their student populations, and the implications for student outcomes.

Tinto's research emphasises that student transition into university is not just about the first year; it extends throughout the academic journey. This notion is especially relevant in private education institutes where diverse student aspirations, trajectories, and backgrounds contribute to unique challenges. Addressing students' changing needs and expectations beyond initial entry becomes crucial for sustained engagement and success. Tinto's concept of integration highlights that both social and academic aspects are integral to student persistence.

In the context of private education institutes in Singapore, where cultural diversity and international students are common, fostering a sense of belonging and community is vital. Understanding cultural nuances, language barriers, and unique aspirations will enable universities to provide effective support that resonates with the student body. Additionally, academic integration needs to

consider the balance between challenging coursework and adequate support to prevent attrition due to academic stress.

As mental health is a very important aspect of managing student transitions successfully, and this is an area that is not covered in their conceptual framework and so I have added this into the discussion. The importance of mental health during transition is recognised by Cage et al. (2021) who conducted research on the perspectives of students into three stages of transition, viz. into, during, and out of university. As both Cage et al. (2021) and Gale and Parker (2014) look at different stages 'into'/induction, 'during'/development, and 'out of university'/becoming, I will integrate Cage et al.'s (2021) three stages with Gale and Parker's (2014) framework. This will bring about a more complete coverage to the three stages of transition. Among other things, because Cage et al. (2021) proposed a set of actions that can be applied to help students through each transitionary stage to lessen the potential adverse impact of mental health (Cage et al., 2021).

At the first, 'into' stage (Gale and Parker's (2014) T1 – transition as induction), it is suggested that universities equip students with academic and life skills to help them cope with the early challenges of the transition. These can include completing practical tasks like operating a washing machine in their dormitory, or getting academic support and skills to write a basic report or essay for their coursework. In short, these activities are to help build self-sufficiency so that a student is able to function within the new living and studying environment, and indirectly boost their confidence (Cage et al., 2021, p.1080).

In the second stage, the 'during' stage (Gale and Parker's (2014) T2 – transition in development), it is suggested that universities encourage and enable students to develop a stable support network with peers, faculty, staff and other forms of student-led support. This can include mentorship and peer-learning programmes, student activities, community action groups, etc. It is at this stage that students are encouraged to form a more inclusive support structure across diverse cultures and communities 'where inspiration, not competition exists' (Cage et al., 2021, p.1080). This form of support can help improve the student's mental health as it bolsters their self-esteem and motivates them through the encouragement of their newly formed support networks.

In the third stage, 'out of university' (Gale and Parker's (2014) T3 – transition in becoming), it is suggested that universities lengthen the transition period so that students leaving the university retain some form of relationship with the university and do not feel abandoned after graduating. This can include career counselling, helping students get employment and transition into the workplace while retaining links with their institution (Cage et al., 202, p.1080).

3.3 Understanding terminology relating to social support

According to the American Psychological Association (2020), 'social support' is a term that refers to a set of provisions that can help individuals cope with biological, psychological or social stressors; it comprises a set of networks and structures that can support the forming of relationships with family members, friends, colleagues, neighbours, institutions or support group ('social support' APA.org, 2020). Depending on individual need, the practical aspects of social support include financial support, assistance with chores, and advice or emotional support that makes one feel valued, welcomed, accepted and understood.

Some theorists e.g. Durkheim (1966), Weiss (1969) have used the term 'social integration' to describe how individuals are integrated into society. In their view, social integration refers to an outcome of social support, one that is concerned with bonding, inclusion, and belonging. House et al. (1988) introduce the idea of structures and processes of social support and found two distinguishable elements of these structures, viz. 1) social integration, that is described as the existence or the quantity of social relationships and 2) social network structure, that refers to the structural properties that characterises a set of relationships (House et al., 1988 p.302). In introducing these structures and processes, these theorists suggest that more work could be conducted to better understand how social relationships affect the health and wellbeing of an individual.

3.4   Challenges associated with transition into Higher Education

Hussey and Smith (2010) highlighted that, with massification of Higher Education, the larger number of students now pursuing degrees brings with it additional challenges for students.

In their review of the research on challenges relating to transition into Higher Education (e.g. Ecclestone (2009), Gorard et al. (2007), Hayward et al. (2006), Ottewill and Macfarlane (2003), Crabtree et al. (2007) identified the following:

a)   increased students numbers

b)   increased diversity

c)   mixed ability groups of students with different backgrounds

d)   the lack of time and resources for student support activities

       (for institutions to provide it and for students to engage with it)

e)   students' attitudes and motivation

f)   the mismatch between student's expectations and experiences

g)   lack of appropriate academic study skills

h)   failure to effectively engage with the process

       (for institutions and students)

i)   lack of an awareness of the need for independent learning

Some of these challenges are institution related but many are personal factors that add to the challenges faced in the transition (Crabtree et al., 2007). A number of these challenges were anticipated as far back in 1973 when the Carnegie Commission for Education released a report on the *Problems in the Transition from Elite to Mass Higher Education* (Trow, 1973). In the report, Trow

(1973) raised the concern about the rate of growth for Higher Education that would lead to systems and the structures being unable to cope and to support that growth. Trow (1973) also raised concerns relating to access to Higher Education that feeds to this growth as governments attempt to widen entry into university for political and other reasons. This opening up of access allowed for a greater mix of groups with different backgrounds, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, religion, and other factors that add to the problems of transition. With the combined pressures of high growth and increased access, there was also a need for the transformation of elite universities to accommodate the increase in enrolment. This led to tensions between faculty and administrators who differed in their views about the function of universities, and surrounding these were differences like the curriculum, forms of instruction, and areas of responsibility. In addition to the tensions relating to these changes for the institution, the opening up of access to a wider and more diverse student population also led to personal transition factors for a different type of student who may, among other things, now come from a different socioeconomic background and who may not fit well into institutional characteristics. There was the institutional conundrum of the lowering of academic standards while having to negotiate with university tradition and values. From the student's perspective, there was also the student's personal challenge of having to commute to the institutions instead of taking up residences on campus, and having to work to pay for their studies because of their socio economic status, etc (Trow, 1973).

Although it has been almost 50 years since *the Carnegie Commission for Education* report was published, and some Higher Education institutions have transformed, adapted and accommodated the changes, there are still problems with transition that exist today as new forms of Higher Education provision - e.g.

overseas partnerships, collaboration and others mentioned in Chapter 1 – have brought about new transition factors.

While there have been no specific studies to identify transition challenges associated with PEIs, it is expected that the students in PEIs do undergo similar challenges and tensions. Indeed, some students in PEIs may experience even more challenges than students at conventional universities because of their distinctive personal factors, e.g. age, family background, ethnicity, culture, etc as mentioned in Chapter 1. In the next section I look at social support and how it helps students in their transition.

3.5. The role of social support

For students entering university, social support helps alleviate anxiety and tensions arising from the adjustments that need to be made (Daniel et al., 1995). The positive outcomes of social support include a sense of well-being, coping skills and – in the long run - a longer and healthier life (Mayo Clinic, 2021). They also include a reduction in stress and depression because social support acts as a buffer against stressful life events (Steese et al., 2006). As students' progress through their degree programme, there is usually a significant reduction in the level of psychological distress as they become better adjusted and learn how to cope (Bewick et al., 2010b). Students who receive social support are observed to benefit from building self-esteem leading to self-worth and confidence (Harris and Orth, 2020).

Social support is therefore an important factor for a student's well-being, and a well-supported social support programme can make a considerable difference to students (Awang et al., 2014). Studies in social support suggest that students who receive social support benefit academically and in a personal capacity. For example, Awang et al. (2014) note that, aside from parental and family support, the social relationships at university within the student community and with seniors (or older students) are important to a student's well-being, and add to social adjustment, academic support, and friendships that helped students in their transition (Awang et al., 2014). Studies by Eggens et al. (2008) on the influence of personal networks and social support in universities conclude that academic success or failure at university may be linked to the amount of social support received from the networks they formed (Eggens et al., 2008). Another study by Li et al. (2018) conducted at a university in China, found that social

support helps mitigate a student's emotional exhaustion from their university studies (Li et al., 2018). There are many other studies e.g. Mai et al. (2021), Mayo Clinic (2021), Vaux (1985), Wang and Eccles (2012), Wilcox et al. (2005), Williams et al. (2017) that discuss the importance or the contribution of social support to the student at different stages of their transition and educational journey. A key component that affects the student getting the benefits of social support is their engagement and participation, and this will be discussed in the next section.

Chuah and Singh (2016) p.137-138 studied international undergraduate students at four research universities in Malaysia, and found that there were four types of social support identified by students seeking social support. These were:

a) emotional support (e.g., sharing happiness, sadness, encouragement, or a listening ear)

b) practical support (e.g., help with preparing assignments, presentations, loaning equipment or lecture notes, etc.)

c) informational support (e.g., receiving advice about rules and regulations, financial advice, advice on courses, etc.) and

d) social companionship (e.g., playing games, shopping,, sightseeing, watching movies, etc.)

In their studies, Abdullah et al. (2009), Clinciu (2013), Enochs and Roland (2006), Weckwerth and Flynn (2006) suggest that male and female students experience different challenges in their transitions, and that females students are academically better adjusted but are less adaptable to emotional and social adjustments.

The literature confirms the value of social support with regard to the benefits it affords a student not only at the stage of their transition into university but also throughout their university journey.

3.6. Types of social support

Recent studies of social support have mainly focused on student transition, attrition, academic performance, and other outcomes. McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) and Pritchard and Wilson (2003) discuss the factors that predict academic performance and student success; Tinto (1975) highlights the dropout factors and, in subsequent work (Tinto (1987) suggests the need to rethink the causes of student attrition; Tinto (1997) also study student persistence and retention (Tinto (2006), (Thomas, 2002). Li et al. (2018), McLean et al. (2022), Md Yasin and Dzulkifli (2011) have also undertaken studies that link the provision of social support to student outcomes.

Other studies on student transitions (e.g., Bowles et al. (2009), Briggs et al. (2012a), Dalziel and Peat (1998), Nel et al. (2009), Woosley and Miller (2009) focus on social support for student transitions before entry into university or during the first year of transition. Most of the studies involve conventional universities such as a large Russell Group university (Bewick et al., 2010a), Kingston University (Morgan, 2013), the Iowa State University (Evans et al., 2009), and Syracuse University (Tinto, 1975). These studies conclusively signal the importance of institutional social support for students.

I found that there are generally three areas of social support provided by universities. These take the form of student life and clubs (recreational / personal development), learning support (academic), and student care support (health and wellbeing / emotional support) (McInnis, 2004). At some universities, there are provisions for professional services like course counselling that are designed to attract and recruit students. The provision of these professional services can help

students develop their knowledge of their courses, help them make informed choices about their courses and subjects, and assist them to set realistic expectations of their university studies (Thomas, 2012).

Student life and clubs facilitate social engagement and help students interact and bond with each other. This allows students to develop a sense of belonging and association with the university and other students as they develop friendships and build relationships and networks that can help them feel that they are part of the community. For some students, this social interaction helps them overcome isolation and the loneliness arising from being away from their family and friends, particularly if they live away from home. Thomas (2012) highlights how belonging can be achieved through peer relations and from interaction with other students and staff. She notes that the benefit of belonging to a social group or club includes a growth in knowledge as a learner, and confidence, as well as a sense of identity that comes from feelings of connectedness and relatedness (Thomas, 2012). Student life and clubs therefore help students in the T2 transition as development stage (Gale and Parker 2014) as they embrace their self-concept as a student and develop their identity.

Learning support, sometimes termed as academic support, is provided by universities to help students develop their academic ability or specific academic skills and is often available through services like an academic writing centre, peer learning programmes, subject matter expert talks, seminars, and tutoring. It has long been recognised that activities supplementing student course instruction help students complete their degree successfully (Balzer Carr and London, 2019). Studies by Balzer Carr and London (2019), Arendale (2002), Blanc et al. (1983),

Martin and Arendale (1992), Ogden et al. (2003) report that students who participate in Learning Support Programmes have received benefits from their participation in the learning related activities as they improve in the academic performance. The reason for participating in a learning support programme is usually a desire on the part of the student to address areas of weakness or to improve specific skills or areas of knowledge in order to improve academic performance. There are also students who are referred to learning support programmes as part of academic intervention when they are deemed to be performing poorly. Being in learning support programmes also helps build up the student's confidence and, for the students providing peer support to other students, it helps them gain confidence and sharpen their skills (Fink, 2020). McInnis (2004) stresses that, aside from gaining confidence, learning support services helps – or should help - students meet their personal academic development (Ciobanu, 2013). With regard to Gale and Parker's (2014) framework, learning support programmes help student transitions through the T1 Induction and the T2 Development stages as it helps them grow in confidence and ability.

The third form of social support concerns student care and welfare. Theseira (2022) raises concerns about the increase in mental health issues in current times. At universities, the negative effects of stress on students is well documented, and Mahmoud et al. (2012) believe that stress may result in mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety (Mahmoud et al., 2012). The effect of stress also leads to a lower student satisfaction with their university experience (Lee et al., 2016). Universities therefore provide student care support to help students in their wellbeing, cope with psychological and emotional stress, and deal with the transitions and adjustments they need to make. Student care

includes mental health services, and are provided in the form of support for health, wellness, and personal safety, as well as general advice and counselling. To help mitigate the effects of stress on students, universities also organise programmes on mindfulness and coping strategies such as meditation and yoga. Some universities take proactive steps to provide resilience training and online texting support to students experiencing mental health problems (Eva, 2019). Counsellors may also be made available to provide counselling and therapy sessions to support students as needed. As discussed in the Chapter 3 above, Cage et al. (2021) propose that student transition support be incorporated into the three stages of transition they identified – viz. into, during and outside of university - in order to mitigate the effects of student mental health issues. These support provisions should follow after all the three stages of transitions in the Gale and Parker (2010) framework where the students journeys through T1 'induction', T2 'development' and T3 'becoming' and progress into their post-university life.

In my review of literature (Cage et al. (2021), Daniel et al. (1995), Dvořáková et al. (2019), Gale and Parker (2014), Gibson et al. (2019), Hussey and Smith (2010), McMillan (2013), Uddin (2021), Wingate (2007), Worsley et al. (2021) on social support provision at Higher Education institutions, there was a large emphasis on mental health related provisions such as managing stressors in the process of transitions, coping with life changes, adjusting to new academic regimes, and building networks and bonds.

While social support, social integration, and other types of provisions may be available in varying degrees depending on the institutions and their willingness

or ability to provide these, the question of engagement discussed in the next section is important and the institutions' role in this is critical.

3.7.   Student transition and engagement[10] in social support

Student engagement as a concept is used in the literature with reference to student involvement in, among other things, the development of curricula, institutional governance, and quality assurance, etc. (Ashwin and McVitty (2015) p.384). An example would be students helping develop the course that they study. A second meaning and way in which engagement is used in the literature is synonymous with participation in the activities or services: these studies focus on student participation in sports activities, social networks, academic writing workshops, supplementary academic courses, or counselling services. Within this literature, a study by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) discusses the cooperative learning experiences of students, and advocates that institutions should encourage student participation by focusing on ways that can shape their academic, interpersonal and extracurricular outcomes. Wimpenny and Savin-Baden (2013) are of the view that the current literature on student engagement covers the academic, non-academic, and social aspects of the student's experience. Their synthesis includes the works of Trowler (2010) who discussed student engagement in general using a quantitative approach, and Kuh (2007) and Krause and Coates (2008) who focus on student engagement in activities that lead to a high quality outcome.

On her part, Thomas (2013) stresses the importance of student engagement and belonging as part of the transition process (this affects stages T1 and T2 in the Gale and Parker (2014) framework), and introduced the 'What

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[10] For the purpose of making references to engagement with social support, the coverage will include social support of extracurricular activities, out of campus activities, recreational widely and other terms used for similar type activities

Works?' three year programme involving seven projects and 22 Higher Education institutions (Thomas, 2013). The 'What Works' programme was designed to study what can be done to improve student retention and completion. The primary purpose of the programme was to generate evidence-based analysis and evaluation about the most effective practices to ensure high continuation and completion rates. (Thomas, 2013 p.6). The 'What Works?' programme developed a 'What Works?' model that embodied Thomas' findings for early engagement, engagement in the academic sphere, developing capacity for staff and students to engage, and institutional engagement and coordination (Thomas (2013 p.8-9). The 'What Works?' programme works across the three stages of transition in the Gale and Parker (2014) framework: it can be said that, at the T1 (transition as induction) stage, activities and programmes such as orientation and campus familiarisation programmes give the student a sense of welcome and belonging; and, at the T2 (transition as development) stage, mentoring programmes and service learning and field placements allow the student to have a sense of relatedness and to feel connected. There is perhaps less in the 'What Works' programme for the T3 (transition as becoming) stage, but it is possible that some of the benefits in the programme would be retained by the student for the future.

As social support would not bring about any benefits if students do not participate or engage, it is necessary when providing social support to include the promotion of different forms of engagement, whether this is participation in extra-curricular activities or participation in a learning community (Boud, 2001).

While many of the studies discuss the importance of engagement and the purpose of making available support services and activities to encourage student's

engagement, Kuh et al. (2000), Hu and Kuh (2002) look at student disengagement in educationally purposeful activities. They cite studies (e.g. Flacks and Thomas (1998), Kuh et al. (2000) that claim that, in recent times, students are less academically and socially engaged, and that little is known about the characteristics of the students who are disengaged. If participation in social support is useful and beneficial, and if it helps students in their transitions, we must also understand why students do not engage or participate.

Garner (2012), who researched Hispanic students in the US and their reasons for their non-participation in ECAs, found that the reasons for the non-participation included factors such as a lower socio-economic backgrounds requiring students to take on work or to fulfil family commitments during their studies (Garner, 2012). Hence for such students there is an opportunity cost to participating in ECAs.

In another study, Logvinova and Ivanova (2017 p.7435-7436) researched students at a modern Russian university and found several reasons some students (14.7% of bachelor degree students) did not participate in extra-curricular activities. Some cited the need to combine work with their studies and, hence, not having time as a reason for non-participation. Another reason was the lack of information about events and activities. Students said that they did not always know about events in a timely manner. When asked about what would interest them to participate, a reason the students gave for participation was to do with whether the activity was directly related to their area of study, i.e. if they could obtain a benefit or value from it (Logvinova and Ivanova, 2017). These studies on participation focussed on ECA activities similar to some university social support

provisions, and the findings raises questions for social support provision. While Garner's study links to personal needs and circumstances, like lower economic status and the need to work, the work of Logvinova and Ivanova (2017) surfaces institutional issues, e.g. insufficient publicity or information leading to lack of awareness of the provision, as well as a lack of perceived relevance of the provision to students' academic work. .

3.8.   Student motivation for engagement in social support

Hence, an understanding of what motivates students to engage with social support would help institutions better align the provisions of social support services to student needs and preferences. The basic motivation for a student to participate in activities and programmes is to receive support from other students and peers in order to cope with and overcome the challenges encountered in the course of their studies (Tezci et al., 2015). Other factors that motivate a student to participate is the perception that the social relationships that are developed in Higher Education would help them find success, as well as the belief that support gained from participation builds up their self-efficacy (Zumbrunn et al., 2014). These motivational factors feed into the T1 stage where, during induction, students may seek out activities to obtain support from their peers or help them attain a sense of belonging. At the T2 stage, students may find the social relationships to be helpful to build the confidence and self-efficacy required for success.

In addition, students in Higher Education often have career goals after graduation. As a result, a key motivational factor when choosing to participate in activities at university is to do with the benefits and value that they expect to gain with respect to their future careers (Kinash et al., 2017). For example, taking on leadership roles in the student's council, or representing the university in competitions or sport, may increase the student's profile among the student community and with prospective employers and make them more employable. The seeking of such benefits from participation falls into the Gale and Parker (2014) T3 – transition as "becoming' stage - as student prepare to progress in their transition after completing their studies.

d) 3.9 Institutional role in providing social support

In his study of the effect of institutions on student performance and student success, Tinto (2005) suggests that institutions need to fulfil key conditions to help students succeed. He stresses the need for institutions to take seriously the commitment to integrate students into formal and informal academic and social systems as he believes that it is institutional conditions rather than student attributes that help students succeed at university (Tinto, 2006). This is a very strong claim by Tinto, and it is something I would like to explore in this thesis. In his analysis of student drop out in Higher Education, Tinto (1975) drew from a study of suicide by Durkheim (1967) that stated that suicides often occurred due to a person's insufficient integration into society. Tinto surmised that, similarly for students, a lack of social integration leads to a low commitment to the system which in turn leads to their failure at university (Tinto, 1975). It is possible that Tinto did not consider the willingness of students to engage with the provisions, and what would motivate them to engage with, or become more engaged, with these provisions. Understanding the perspectives of students with different backgrounds, cultures, academic abilities, and personal characteristics, may provide insight for planners and policy makers in making social support provisions.

Tinto (1975) recognises that institutions can find it difficult to identify students within the university who may require specific forms of assistance. This is why universities need to provide students with a range of social support provisions that can help them according to their need. Thomas (2012, p.20) supports this view, and posits that students needs will differ from each other and over time. The effect of appropriate support can also help students beyond university to their future career and personal life (Thomas, 2012).

In their review of the social support literature, Wimpenny and Savin-Baden (2013) report that many institutions focus their studies on outcomes like student retention and success rates, and there is a view that the responsibility for engagement is shared by the institution and students. Porter (2006) claims in his study that institutional structures have little or no impact on student engagement or development, choosing instead to focus the impact of peer groups on student engagement (Porter, 2006). This view from Porter (2006) is in contrast to that of Tinto (2006) and is worth closer examination.

e) 3.10. Institutional role in supporting engagement

Thus far I have discussed the issues with student transition and adjustment to university, but not the role of the institution with regard to student engagement with social support provision. Thomas (2012 p.18) raises the concern that students may not always recognise the value of participation. She cites a survey respondent who did not see the value of the social aspects of participation, and signalled this with the comment "not needing more friends" (Thomas 2012). Thomas (2012) therefore stresses the need for students to be educated about the value of participation, and that they should be encouraged and facilitated to participate and be equipped with the necessary skills to do so. She also stresses the need for students to participate on their own terms as each may prefer to participate in different ways and in different forms. Thomas also believed that institutions should take responsibility for managing and promoting student participation. When it comes to participation; Case (2007) also believes that the student and the institution shares responsibility for participation and that this must be in a manner that a student desires.

At the T3, 'transition as becoming' stage of the Gale and Parker (2014) framework, students start to adapt to the institution and academic life and develop their own beliefs and apply their new knowledge and assert the new identities they have developed. At this stage of transition, students may have other needs such as exploring future career options, pursuing internships, participating in student exchange programmes, etc., and it is therefore important for universities to change, update and innovate so to remain relevant in their social support provision. Trowler (2010) suggests that any complete holistic review of student engagement should include student feedback, student representation, student approaches to learning, institutional organisation, learning spaces, architectural design, and

learning development, and that student engagement is more than mere involvement or participation as it requires feelings, sense-making, and activity (Trowler, 2010).

In addition, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) advocate that institutions should encourage student participation in social support activities although they did not elaborate on how this could be achieved (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). It is important therefore that, when looking into student transition, universities look beyond just providing the social support but consider also how to get students to be engaged and to participate.

f) 3.11. Benefits to be gained from engagement

From the literature discussed in Section 7, there are clear benefits to be gained from participation in activities relating to social support. Kuh (2003) proffered the view that when, students participate in social support provision, they form a habit that helps them expand their capacity for continuous learning and development (Kuh, 2003). Similarly, Pace (1990) finds that, when students invest time and effort in studying and interacting with their peers, they gain more from their studies; this is because they acquire knowledge and skills, and a better understanding of people, all of which enhances their college experience (Pace, 1990). These views support the idea that, when students participated in activities associated with social support, they gain benefits from it. Unsurprisingly, many, if not most, universities see student participation in such activities as key to helping them succeed by providing opportunities to make friends, have fun, learn life skills, improve their grades, develop interpersonal skills and leadership, and enhance their university experience.

In a study conducted in the UK, Thompson et al. (2013) found that students who participated in ECAs had a sense of belonging to the group or community, and that these ECAs also helped them cope with stress. The students reported that ECAs allowed them to do something useful for the community, and that they also developed skills and gained experience that would be useful to them later in life. Another benefit gained from participation in ECAs includes increased resilience. Resilience helps a student cope better with disappointment, learn from failure, cope with loss, and adapt to change (Price-Mitchell, 2022). Anzivino and Rostan (2017) found that students who participate in ECA in a learning community

received social support from other students, and that this support was associated with positive student outcomes and more satisfaction with the university experience (Anzivino and Rostan, 2017). Boud (2001) also found that student participation in a learning community helped them work better with others, developed critical enquiry and reflection, improved communication, developed understanding and skills, and managed learning and themselves, and that this led to successful student outcomes (Boud, 2001). All these benefits align with the three transitionary stages in the Gale and Parker (2014) framework. For example, in T1 (transition as induction), benefits include being part of a community and thus having sense of belonging and a common purpose; in T2 (transition as development) the student forms a habit of learning, acquire knowledge and skills, and learn to deal with people. In T3 (transition as becoming), the student benefits by building up resilience as well as critical enquiry which helps them with making decisions and choices more confidently.

There is therefore strong evidence to support the view that engagement in social support provision brings with it benefits of different forms (physical, psychological, and emotional). However, social support provision alone will not bring about any benefits as students must engage with these provisions to gain any benefit. Understanding students' motivation to engage will help institutions support and encourage this, and this is an important responsibility that the institution shares with the student.

g) 3.12. Measuring Social Support

In the various studies involving social support that were reviewed, the researchers used survey tools and questionnaires derived from areas study like psychology or social studies. There were no specific tools that were used in all the studies. Barrera et al. (1981) believed that there was a critical need to develop reliable and valid instruments to measure social support and, having evaluated the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviours (ISSB), were of the view that this inventory was a promising tool to help understand natural helping processes i.e. helping measure the voluntary intentions of those who wished to help others (Barrera et al., 1981). At the same time, a major critique of existing tools is that researchers have neglected to evaluate or report the psychometric properties of their measures (Sarason, 1983). There are various approaches to measure social support that are used with different theories and concepts. For example, Eaton (1978), Sandler (1980) measured social ties, while others like Moos (1976), Procidano and Heller (1983) studied the supportiveness of social relationships.

For the purposes of the current thesis, it is important to understand student transitions and to quantify the participation rates and engagement. I therefore looked at scales and measures that might be relevant. I started by reviewing a study by Gottlieb and Bergen (2010) who conducted a comparison of three social support self-report measures with the Index of Sojourner Social Support (ISSS), the Social Provisions Scale (SPS), and the ENRICHD Social Support Inventory (ESSI).Gottlieb and Bergen (2010) found that these scales were developed for general use across a large survey population and I concluded that the scales were too complex, and the terms of reference and were not fitting to my area of study. For the purposes of the thesis, I wanted to quantify the types of provisions offered

to the students at my institution as well as how students viewed and engaged with these provisions. As I could not identify any specific scale that was immediately relevant and that could be applied to my study, I decided to design my own scale for my survey. I looked to the social support literature to develop such a scale.

h) 3.13. Summary

A review of the literature yielded studies that focused on support for students in their transition to university life, and their adjustment to the new environment, as well as provisions that could help with academic completion or success. Most of these studies were based on students at conventional campus-based universities that were publicly funded and supported, with some emphasis on minorities or socially disadvantaged communities, e.g., Bender et al. (2019), Eggens et al. (2008), Wilcox et al. (2005), Williams et al. (2017). The literature suggested that there was a general acceptance that students faced challenges and experienced anxiety during transition that required universities to provide intervention or support that could help them navigate these transitions and succeed in their studies. Much of the literature focused on the institutions and the benefits that could be obtained from the provision of such support. There was less emphasis on the students' perspectives and the need for their engagement. This is where I intend to help fill the gap in literature. The questions and statements that will be used in my survey will be drawn from the literature that was reviewed.

The literature review provided a conceptual framework that theorised the transition to Higher Education and set out the three stages of the transition. I then reviewed the literature that discussed challenges that students faced with transition, and the role that social support played, as well as students' motivation for engagement with social support. I also reviewed the literature relating to the types of social support provided at Higher Education institutions. I then discussed the role of the institution in providing social support and supporting engagement, along with the benefits that comes from engaging with social support. I also looked at ways to quantify the types of social support the types of provisions as well as

how students viewed and engaged with these provisions. This will lead to the next chapter on methodology.

From the literature review, there appears to be gaps in the current research. First, there is a gap in the research relating to students' perceptions of social support provision and their motivation for engaging in these, as well as the role of the institution in encouraging engagement. Second, the literature largely focusses on social support in supporting transitions for students in conventional university settings. There were very few studies conducted on students in PEIs, including their needs and motivation for engagement with social support provisions. There were also very few studies that focused on the role of institutions in supporting the engagement of students in these provisions. Furthermore, few studies went into any depth with respect to student demographic characteristics as well as the reasons for not engaging with social support provisions.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

i) 4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology for this study. It sets out the research questions, methodological approach, describes the methods of data collection - gaining access to students, the sampling strategy - the tools and procedures, the methods of analysis, the evaluation of methods considered, and choices made, and ethical considerations.

Robson (2011) strongly suggests that there is no need for complex analysis when a simple analysis using methods such as descriptive analysis, tables and visuals will suffice (Robson, 2011). To support this view Robson cited the work of Rosnow and Rosenthal (1989), Cohen (1990) and Gorard (2006), who have argued for 'everyday numbers' to be used in research in place of complex statistical techniques (Rosnow and Rosenthal 1989, Cohen 1990 and Gorard 2006, cited in Robson 2011). Sharing this view, I presented findings in a simple yet meaningful way that would be helpful to SPEP for policy considerations and adaptation as necessary.

4.2   Types of social support provisions at SPEP

Social support provisions at SPEP are focused on three categories of support - Student Life and Clubs that are mainly social settings for recreational, special interest and social activities like music, dancing and singing; Learning Support Programmes catering to the academic needs and development of study skills and techniques to help students in their courses; and Student Care Services which includes general wellness events and activities, talks and seminars as well as counselling services for students having to cope with the stress and tensions from their studies (SPEP 2021.)

j) 4.3 SPEP's objectives for providing social support

As there was no published information from SPEP on the key objectives in the provision of IPSS, I conducted an email interview with a senior staff member and he communicated the following objectives (SPEP Senior Management Staff (2018) 'Objectives of social support provisions', interview by Charles Tee) [11]:

Question: What are the key objectives of SPEP in providing students with various forms of social support? Response extracted directly from the email reply.

a) Student Life (including clubs and student care) activities aim to foster skills such as leadership, teamwork, communication and problem solving – skills that may be more challenging to foster in day-to-day classroom learning activities. These out-of-classroom learning activities are seen to complement academic programmes, and to provide an all-rounded education to prepare our students for life and work. Through these activities, students also get to interact and foster bonds with peers outside of their usual course-mates. The aim is that students learn to socialise cross-culturally, and support one another emotionally and socially, among other benefits.

b) Student Learning Support activities aim to bolster our students' learning strategies and skills so that they can cope better with the demands of their courses and give them a good chance for academic success thus helping to increase progression rates and graduation rates. For students, this in turn could foster self-confidence, strengthen their self-

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[11]

esteem, essentially helping them to gain a positive conception of learning that would see them through their learning for life.

c)   The respondent combined Student Care Services in his answer on Student Life. When queried through a follow-up phone call for more specific details of this, he mentioned that Student Care Services were offered to provide emotional and mental health support to students to cope better during their transition to university and during their studies.

From the response to my email interview, it was clear that SPEP has very specific objectives that they wish to achieve from the social support that they are providing to their students. The management at SPEP are keen to learn whether their objectives are being met from the current provisions, and that was a strong reason for them to collaborate with me on this research study. Although my respondent was unable to provide me with specific sums for expenditure in the provision of social support, he did hint that it was a substantial amount of their operating budget.

4.4   Research questions

The research will answer these questions:

1. How do students who participate and who do not participate in Institution-Provided Social Support (IPSS) compare in terms of their demographics?

2. For students who did not participate in Institution-Provided Social Support Provisions, what are their reasons?

3. What responses do the students have towards statements made about participation in the IPSS provisions?

4.5   Methodological approach

I studied the demographic characteristics of students who participated in Institution Provided Social Support; why students did not participate and their reasons for non-participation; and the responses of students towards a set of statements in each category of provision regarding their participation. The study was conducted for three different categories of provisions according to classifications in use at SPEP which are Student Life and Clubs, Learning Support Programmes and Student Care Services.

4.6   Research methods

Robson (2011) suggests that surveys have been used for research as far back as in the seventeenth century and that they are now a ubiquitous tool used by researchers (Robson, 2011). He surmises that surveys are advantageous as they are simple and straightforward when conducting studies on attitudes, values, beliefs, and motive (Robson 2011, p.241). As my survey is to measure student responses and views and as surveys are a common method of collecting data and is a tool familiar to the students, I decided to apply this method for my study, using online survey questionnaires as my means. A key advantage for adopting an online survey for my study is the flexibility it provided to reach a larger sampling population and for faster access to the students with technology like emails to reach them and to collate their responses (Robson, 2016). An online survey allowed the students the choice of whether and when to respond, and what questions they chose to respond to with no undue pressure on them. As the success of a survey is dependent on the involvement of the respondents, it was critical that the survey was designed in a manner where questions could be answered quickly and expediently to encourage participation and response. The disadvantage of a survey was that respondents may misunderstand the questions posed, or that they may not treat the survey seriously and the researcher may not be able to know this (Robson, 2011). This disadvantage however is outweighed by the other benefits mentioned that an online survey allowed and so I decided to proceed with the survey.

With the decision to proceed with a survey I designed a questionnaire that collected both quantitative and qualitative data to enable me to get numerical data and subjective comments. The quantitative data would allow me to measure

respondent's participation using numerical data and generalize it across the different demographics of participants in the different categories of provisions to explain a phenomenon (Babbie, 2010). Together with the qualitative data gathered in the comments boxes I could add context to the analysis to have a better understanding of what the result could mean. Working mainly with quantitative data allowed me to have greater levels of objectivity compared to working with only qualitative data where the results are subjected to more interpretation (Mander, 2017). My combined approach of using both forms of data allowed me to get a more nuanced outcome.

I designed a questionnaire to gather general information about the types of participation in different categories of social support provisions and student views on related statements, such as Student Life and Clubs, Learning Support Programmes, and Student Care Services and only this data was used in my analysis. I added questions about activity participation to gather more detailed information for future analysis. Although I had collected more data than necessary for my thesis, such as the specific types of activities within a social support provisions and the length of time spent in that activity and other such information, I later decided not to use this as it would be too detailed for the purpose of my study and it may add unnecessary complexity to the study without contributing to a more meaningful outcome. This information is available for further research from the institute if so desired but as the data was collected in 2017 it may not represent current views of the student population and thus may have limited application and use today.

4.7   Questionnaire considerations

The key consideration in the design of the questionnaire was to make strategic choices on the questions to ask in a limited time to obtain a reasonable response rate (Ornstein, 2014). My main concern in designing the questionnaire was to ensure that the questions would be easy to understand with little likelihood of a wrong interpretation. Sansoni (2011) suggested that the best approach to questionnaire design was to refer to existing questionnaires or survey forms available from other studies and consider if these could be modified for use (Sansoni, 2011). In my literature review I looked at social support studies including the use of the (MPSSS) used in some studies and the Perceived Support Scale (PSS) used by the American Psychological Association (APA) but none of these questionnaires were relevant or useful to the specific area of my study as the questions posed were centred on the respondent's personal circumstances and the adequacy of social support from friends, family and significant others while my focus was on support from an institution. In developing questions for my research, I looked at literature on studies on institutions and the role they play in helping students. While many of these studies were focused on student outcomes, they were still relevant to providing me with questions that I could frame for my survey (Alsubaie et al., 2019, Friedlander et al., 2007, House, 1987, Tinto, 1975, Tinto, 1987, Tinto, 1997, Tinto, 2006, Wilcox et al., 2005)

I then decided to construct my own questionnaire guided by advice by Foddy (9913), Dillman (1993) and Fink (2003) who had all suggested that questions and statements should be kept short to increase the respondent's comprehension (Foddy, 1993, Dillman, 2014, Fink, 2003). I was also conscious of the need to present questions in a proper order (Schaeffer and Dykema, 2011). I designed a

set of questions that were grouped in the same categories of provisions offered at SPEP, namely Student Life and Clubs, Learning Support Programmes and Student Care Services. This allowed respondents to better identify with what was offered at SPEP and made it easier for them to respond to the survey.

4.8   Questionnaire design

I started my questionnaire (Appendix 1), by collecting demographic details of the respondents across seven demographic factors. As the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents were critical to the overall analysis, it was important that each demographic characteristic was carefully considered to see what value they would bring to the analyses. The seven characteristics and their purpose are listed and explained below:

  i.   Nationality – Yan and Gaier (1994) who studied the causal attributions of college success or failure had alluded to the effects of culture when comparing Asian and American students. While there was no direct mention of participation, there was a clear reference to effort that could relate to participation (Yan and Gaier, 1994). Choosing nationality as a demographic would allow me to determine the effect of a respondent's nationality on their participation. As Singaporeans are not allowed to have dual citizenship, the issue of dual nationality does not apply to them. The international students who are not Singaporeans or Singapore Permanent Residents are classified as Others.

  ii.   Ethnicity – Similar to the effects of culture on performance, several studies on ethnicity and race on performance in colleges have guided me in my selection of this demographic as they discussed the impact of ethnicity on college performance and student success (Haq et al., 2005, Jost et al., 2012, Young, 1994), In the survey form the term 'race' was used as this was the official term used by government

statisticians in Singapore and is a term familiar to the respondents. The categories used for ethnicity are the same as that of national statistics where the classifications are across four ethnicities; Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others. The respondent's ethnicity would allow me to determine if a respondent's ethnicity affected their decision on participation.

iii. Age - A study by Abdullah (2011) on the student's age in pursuing studies at an Arab Open University and studies by Jost et al. (2012) suggests that age plays a role in the student's performance and my view is that indirectly it may have an effect on their participation in IPSS (Abdullah, 2011, Jost et al., 2012). In my survey age bands were used, as this was based on the age groups common to the respondent's pursuing their studies at SPEP. Those in the younger age band of 18 to 20 years were often the students who entered their courses immediately after their last course of study without taking a break from study and was made up mostly of international students and female students who were not required to serve in the compulsory conscripted military service (National Service - NS) or of males who were exempted from serving. The NS requirement is for all male citizens and permanent residents to serve 22 months of conscripted military service before they can continue in Higher Education studies. The next age band of 21 to 24 years covered male respondents who had completed their National Service or who had taken a break from studies before continuing on with their Higher Education. This also included some female students who deferred

their entry into full-time Higher Education to get some work experience or to earn some income to support their studies. Similarly the other age bands were used to locate respondents with different age profiles such as working adults who were studying part-time.

iv. Sex – The selection of sex or gender as a demographic stems from several studies on social support that suggests that gender differences play a key role in the use of social support globally (Turner, 1994, Vaux, 1985, Wang and Eccles, 2012). Including sex as a demographic allows me to see what effect it has on participation and on the categories of participation. In surveys at SPEP only two choices are made available for sex with no option to show "prefer not to say". The term Gender is used in Singapore to have the same meaning as differentiation in sex although in many parts of the world this now has opened up more choices for selection and disclosure.

v. Highest qualification before entry into SPEP – this demographic allows for later analyses to see if there are specific needs prevalent to students who come through from the different educational pathways. The past academic qualifications have different bearing on the student as those who hold a prior degree would be considered to have the highest qualification and may be better prepared for university studies. Students who come from the 'A' level / junior college route (the equivalent of Form 6 in the UK) would have had two years of pre-university studies that may better prepare them for the demands of a university course. The polytechnic students undertake three years of study where they would have acquired

some good knowledge of a subject area although often the academic regime is not as strongly emphasised in their studies because polytechnics take a more practical approach in their pedagogy. Some of the international students would matriculate through a SPEP Diploma course where they undertake 15 months of study to prepare them for their university course.

vi.   University course – as the university courses have different entry requirements, pedagogy, duration and other factors, this demographic allowed for a better understanding of the needs of respondents who come through the different university course. The UK University course is perceived to be more demanding due to the longer duration and the requirement for students to pass final exams yearly to progress.

vii. Duration in the course – As students are at different stages of their courses when taking the survey with some just starting and transitioning into Higher Education and others completing or having completed their studies, the effect of duration in the course will be a useful demographic. The duration is banded into different time periods (less than six months, 7 to 12 months, etc.) to determine if students at different duration in their courses may have different participation rates based on their needs at that point in their course. Across the two university programmes there are different policies regarding the minimum registration period and the granting of exemptions for subjects taken in a course of previous study in the junior colleges where they study for their 'A' level qualifications or in

the Polytechnic or SPEP Diploma programmes. The students who come through the different pathways will start their courses at different times of the year and so that has an effect on their participation in IPSS. Some of the students are also allowed to vary their courses to fast-track and take the maximum number of modules in a semester to complete their courses earlier or to take a minimum number of modules to study at a slower pace. These may have an effect on the decisions that they make for participation. In general the UK course requires the student to complete the course in 36 months and the Australian course is usually completed in 24 months.

This information would allow me to compare the students across different demographics in the different categories of IPSS provisions as arranged by SPEP to measure students' participation rates.

The questions for the survey were drawn from the journals and articles on social support and the role it had in institutions of higher learning (universities, colleges, academies, etc.) globally. The questions focused on social support provisions, types of provisions, participation or non-participation, outcomes or benefits sought and other considerations. Literature reviewed in Chapter 2 drew from topics covering stress and social support (Choenarom et al., 2005), psychological health (Cherry, 2020), friendships, health and well-being (Mayo Clinic, 2021) and others.

In each category of provision, the questions flowed with a similar sequence starting with the key question on whether a respondent had participated in the provision, followed by a list of activities or programmes that the respondent could

select from and select. Should a respondent answer 'No' to participation, the respondent was directed to a comments box where the respondent could type in free text form the reason for the non-participation. The reason why the respondent was directed to a comments box instead of another set of questions, was to allow for their reasons to be given freely without being restricted to just a fixed set of questions. This allowed for me to be able to collate and classify their reasons to come up with more granulated analysis for their non-participation. If the respondent had participated and had answered 'Yes' then further questions were asked such as to how much time they spent on the programmes or activities after which they were asked to rank which of these were most important to them, and finally they had to select the programme or activity considered to be the most important to them.

A set of statements that I had crafted drawn from the literature I had reviewed that was relevant for that category of provision (Student Life and Clubs, Learning Support Programmes or Student Care Services) were introduced in the survey to gauge the responses of the students to the different IPSS provisions using a rating scale with five items to measure their responses to the given statements. I provided a bipolar rating scale with one end measuring agreement and the other disagreement with the centre having a neutral position (neither agree or disagree). Each item across a five point rating scale (definitely disagree, mostly disagree, etc.) in increments of one for each interval is given a corresponding numerical value with one being the lowest value and five being the highest value.

The set of statements were developed when I explored what were responses that the authors from my literature review had researched in the area of

social support that was provided to the students in their researched institutions in areas of social, bonding, and recreational activities, learning and academic support provisions and student care, health, and wellness support that I then set out as statements (Anzivino and Rostan, 2017, Ashwin and McVitty, 2015, Awang et al., 2014, Balzer Carr and London, 2017, Bartkus, 2012, Buckley and Lee, 2021, Ciobanu, 2013, Garner, 2012, Kuh, 2003, Logvinova and Ivanova, 2017). As the literature was limited in some areas and more available in others, I was able to draw out nine statements for the Student Life and Clubs provision, seven statements for the Learning Support Programmes and four statements for the Student Care Services for use in the survey. The statements are shown in Table 1 below.

No.	Survey statements for Student Life and Clubs
15a	Gives me a sense of belonging
15b	Helps me build my networks
15c	Helps me develop friendships with my peers
15d	Helps me relieve stress
15e	Helps me manage the pressure from my studies
15f	Helps provide me with a healthy balance between my studies and other interests
15g	Helps me develop confidence
15h	Helps me improve my ability to communicate
15i	Helps me improve my self-esteem / self-worth
No.	Survey statements for Learning Support Programmes

No.	
22 a	Helps me develop learning skills
22 b	Helps me gain confidence
22 c	Helps improve my knowledge
22 d	Helps me better understand what is required of me
22 e	Helps me with useful advice and guidance
22f	Helps me progress with my course
22 g	Helps improve my self-esteem / self-worth
No .	**Survey statements for Student Care Services**
29 a	Has helped me cope better with my transition to University
29 b	Has helped me improve my general health
29 c	Has helped improve my well-being
29 d	Has helped improve my academic capabilities

Table 1 Survey statements for the institution provided social support provisions

With the data collected from the statements for each IPSS provision I then used descriptive statistics to measure the responses of the students for each statement in the category of provision of IPSS. To assess the mean as a measure I applied a traditional method where my data is analysed as ordinal data and the length of the cells is as follows:

- From 0.1 to 1.0 represents (definitely disagree).
- From 1.01 until 2.0 represents (mostly disagree).
- From 2.01 until 3.0 represents (neither agree or disagree).

- From 3.01 until 4.0 represents (mostly agree).
- From 4.01 until 5.0 represents (definitely agree)

The reason each statement was given a score was to allow for the strength of the response to be used later in the analysis. This allowed me to rank the degree of the responses that students had about the statement that was presented in the survey for the specific IPSS provision and to determine which of the statements ranked above others for that category of IPSS.

4.9   Data collection

4.9.1   Gaining access to students

As my access to students for the survey was through SPEP, I was given permission through a gatekeeper who held the position of Director of Teaching and Learning (DTL) to conduct the survey. The gatekeeper who agreed to allow me access to the students had instructed his research assistant (RA) to provide me with information on the number of students to be included in the study. The RA acted as the liaison with the other departments within SPEP that needed to facilitate the research process. To ensure that the confidentiality of the students were maintained, SPEP only referred to their student identification numbers throughout the survey and the RA played a role in facilitating the access.

4.9.2   Participant selection

As SPEP had more than 22,000 students across the 12 partner universities that they worked with at the time of the survey, it would pose a challenge for me to analyse students across so many university partners and courses especially as the university partners came from different countries and so the differences in pedagogy, curriculum, course duration and other considerations like costs may add to even more differences when analysing the data collected. To reduce the effect of so many differences in factors, I chose to prioritise my research to reach only students who were in the programmes with the larger intakes as any policy would have the most effect on them due to their larger numbers. As the rationale for my study aims to understand the experience of students at SPEP, I chose to survey the students from the two largest partner universities from the UK and Australia that SPEP had partnered with for more than 30 years each. Choosing the two major and long standing university partners from the UK and Australia allowed

me to reach more than 70% of the total student population and after datamining the student database I was given access to 17,542 students. To allow me a wider range of input and perspectives, I included the students who were presently in their courses at the time of the survey and students who had completed their courses and were awaiting graduation.

k) 4.10 Survey tools

As the student database was maintained by SPEP and as access to data was authorised only through their staff, I worked with the RA to assist me with the dissemination of the survey to the targeted survey population. As the questionnaires were designed to be interactive, I used the LimeSurvey Easy Online Survey tool (*a survey tool developed in Hamburg in 2006*) as it was the only authorised survey tool adopted by SPEP for use in all their surveys. This survey tool was efficient and easy to use and as it was used previously by SPEP, the students who received the survey were very familiar with the styling and the look and feel of the survey form. With this tool the students received an introductory email with information on the purpose and the objectives of the survey (Appendix 1) with an invitation to take the survey through an URL link that connected them to the survey.

4.11 Survey testing and implementation

I piloted the survey for a week in September 2017 with 1,000 randomly selected students from the target population two weeks before the commencement of the full survey. I did this to ensure that the questions were clear to the respondents and to confirm that respondents would take the time to respond. The survey was sent out as an email and 93 students clicked on the survey but only 75 valid responses were completed and returned. Although I had a response rate of 7.5% in the pilot test I chose not to send an email reminder to prompt for more responses as I had a limited time to undertake the survey and any additional time spent on the pilot test would impinge on the time I would have available for the full survey. I reviewed the 75 responses individually to see that respondents were able to provide answers that would allow me to later analyse the results once I proceeded with the full survey. The 75 responses were not analysed in detail for the breakdown of distribution in demographics but it served to confirm that the respondents were able to provide both quantitative and qualitative responses where needed. As the respondents did not have any difficulty with the questions in the survey I decided to proceed with the questions with no changes after the pilot test. After completing the review of the returned responses, the details of the 1,000 selected students invited to the pilot test were removed and these students were not invited or included in the full survey as it would have been difficult to identify and remove them from the total population otherwise.

I) 4.12 Full survey implementation

The full survey was conducted with the target population of students from the two selected university courses and was drawn out from SPEP's database and this totalled 17,542 students. As the students who were included for the pilot test were removed from the database only 16,542 students remained to be invited to the full survey conducted from 1 – 24 November 2017. Upon receipt of the email inviting the student to participate in the survey, each student was given information on the survey's objectives and was given the option on whether to participate. If the student agreed to participate, the student would then click onto a link that directed them into the LimeSurvey Online survey tool where they could commence the questionnaire. During the survey period three reminders were sent to the targeted population to remind them to participate with the final reminder in the week of 20 November 2017 before the survey closed. The schedule of reminders sent were in line with SPEP's operational policy for surveys. On completion of the survey on 24 November 2017, the responses were captured in the database and collated as an Excel file and I received the password secured Excel file from the RA for further analysis after which she was no longer involved in my study.

From the total targeted population (n=16,542 students), a total of 2,733 students (17%) completed the questionnaires. On checking with the RA on the response rate, she confirmed that this response rate was comparable to that of other surveys conducted by SPEP on different subject areas (personal communication with SPEP Research Assistant, November 2017).

m) 4.13 Breakdown of targeted survey population and survey respondents

In my survey, the size of the target population surveyed (n=16,542) is considered large, as it represented 70% of the entire student population at SPEP in that period of study (SPEP Facts and Figures 2018). My main concern for the survey responses was for the effect of a non-response bias, as not everyone invited to take the survey would respond and so there could be an imbalance of responses among the different student types. To determine how response rates were treated in different studies, I reviewed literature from different authors and I found that most studies did not report on the actual response rates to their surveys or interviews and that authors stated only the number of participants who had taken part in their studies (Ayan and Garcia, 2008, de la Iglesia et al., 2014, Wintre et al., 2009). I found a study conducted in a public university in Malaysia that was administered in the class where they reported a survey response rate of 65% (Awang et al., 2014) but that was done in a very controlled environment where students may have been pressured and obligated to take the survey. Groves (2006) states that response rates may not be valid or reliable to be used as a proxy to measure non-response bias and so I took effort to send out reminders to non-respondents to encourage their participation and response. His reason is that response rates lack validity as there is not even a moderate correlation with non-response bias (Groves, 2006). Groves' analysis showed that there is a significant

amount of variability in non-response bias from one estimate to another within the same survey with the same response rate.

In my analysis I reviewed the percentage of breakdown of the survey responses against the total number of students invited to the survey (total targeted student population) in order to account for a potential non-response bias.

Table 2 Demographic breakdown of the total student population and the survey responses

Demographic	% of targeted total student population	% of survey responses
Nationality:		
Singaporean	94.7	81.3
Singapore Permanent Resident	5.3	5.0
Others		13.6
Ethnicity:		
Chinese	No breakdown	83.1
Indian	available from	7.1
Malay	SPEP	5.3
Others		4.5
Age:		
18 – 20 years	7.5	14.6
21 – 24 years	64.8	67.6
25 – 29 years	26.6	16.6
Above 30 years	1.2	1.2
Sex:		
Male	44.5	35.2
Female	55.5	55.8
Did not indicate.		9.0
Highest educational qualifications before admission:		
GCE 'O' levels	No breakdown	1.7
SIM Diploma	available from	8.0
Polytechnic Diploma	SPEP	56.6
GCE 'A' levels		27.8
Degree		5.9
University Programme:		
Australia	49.4	41.6
United Kingdom	50.6	58.4
Duration in course:		
Less than 6 months		25.5
7 – 12 months	No breakdown	8.5
13 – 18 months	available from	24.0
19 – 24 months	SPEP	8.0
More than 25 months		17.4
Completed		16.5

n) 4.14 Treatment of non-response bias in survey

From the comparison of differences in the breakdown of respondents from the target population, there was an overrepresentation of 13.4% in response rate from Singaporean students against the total Singaporean student population surveyed. As the database provided by SPEP only provided the breakdown of Singaporeans and Permanent Residents, and as there was no further breakdown of other nationalities that included Indians, Malaysians, Indonesians, Myanmar Nationals and others the comparison here may not be as accurate.

The response rate among students in the various age groups showed that there were less younger students aged 18-20 years who had participated in the survey (7.5% over 14.6% of total student population). Another key difference was that of sex where it showed an underrepresentation from male students with 35.2 % of responses when the sex breakdown for males was 44.5% of the total survey population. This sex breakdown could be higher as in the survey 9% of the respondents did not identify their sex. Although this difference is quite high with the 9% of responses who were unidentified in their sex selection it is difficult to determine if introducing a weightage for this demographic would be useful.

There was a difference in the response rates among students in the different university courses. The UK University students were overrepresented with 58.4% of the survey responses against that of the Australian course of 41.6% although both courses had almost the same number of students. Although this difference may suggest that a weightage could be introduced to have a more balanced representative sample, my view was that the difference in course structure may make an introduction of a weightage unnecessary as it may not add any added benefit to the analysis.

As I recognise that there was a percentage of non-response that may have affected the results (Toepoel and Schonlau, 2017), I looked at the methods to treat a non-response bias. One method to mitigate non-response bias was to add design weightage to the sections deemed to be under-represented, however there are challenges to design compensation with weightages, and these include the increase of standard errors if the estimates are incorrectly applied. Toepoel and Schonlau (2017) hold the view that there is too little documentation on nonresponse bias to make clear adjustments (Toepoel and Schonlau, 2017). Gelman (2007) surmised that It is not common practice in data analysis for weights to be introduced (Gelman, 2007). Data Analyst Inc. cautions that the cost of weighting data is reduced accuracy with the sampling variance, standard deviation and the standard error likely to increase (Thomas, 2017). The National Research Council (2013, p.41) in their paper on nonresponse in social science surveys had expressed the view that 'response rates can be misleading as measures of survey representativeness" and that although nonresponse rates have fallen, it does not mean necessarily that nonresponse bias has become more of a problem (National Research Council, 2013).   As there were several similar views from various journals that suggested that nonresponse bias may not be a major concern, I chose not to introduce weightages and proceeded to work with the unweighted data with the responses as received. For transparency and clarity, I will indicate on my data tables that the responses are unweighted.

o) 4.15 Data analysis

4.15.1 Approach to data analysis

For my first question I wanted to know more about my survey respondents and so I made a comparison of students who participated and who did not participate in the Institution-Provided Social Support provisions in terms of demographic variables. I then proceeded to conduct a set of descriptive statistics on the data. A chi-square and an independent t-test were conducted on the demographic data to compare the observed results from the expected results (chi-square) and to compare the means of the two independent groups (participants and non-participants) to determine if there were statistical evidence that the survey population means were significantly different (independent t-test). These two statistical tests were conducted to test hypotheses on the researched data as follows:

Chi-square test hypothesis

H0 – there is no link between the demographic and participation

H1 – there is a link between the demographic and participation

Independent t-test hypothesis

H0 – the difference in group means is zero

H1 – the difference in group means is different from zero

A high value of the t-score in the t-test, indicated that a large difference exists between the two sample sets of participants and non-participants in the survey. The smaller the t-value, the more similarity exists between the two sample sets.

With these two simple statistical tests I will then draw some inferences for my findings in the next Chapter.

As my second research question was to determine the reasons for non-participation in IPSS, I looked at how to quantify the qualitative responses in a meaningful way to allow me to analyse the results. As respondents would have many different reasons that would be difficult to analyse I reviewed the comments to find common reasons given for non-participation so that I could group them into common themes that would allow me to count the number of times a specific reason was given. From this review I devised 10 descriptive labels and used these across all the three IPSS categories so that there was a common standard to compare between the categories. The descriptive labels acting as codes will help me describe the meaning behind the reason given and help me later reflect in the findings the data as it makes it easier for me to identify connections between reasons given (Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, 2017). The 10 descriptive labels that I had identified included these reasons:

i. No time

ii. Unaware

iii. No need

iv. Focused on study

v. Part-time

vi. Other commitments

vii. Undecided

viii. Not easy to access

ix. Have to work

x. No interest

I will explain each reason when they are discussed in the next analysis and findings Chapter. As respondents do not all participate in the three categories of IPSS, I had counted the reasons for each category separately to analyse the differences in reasons if any for non-participation in each category of provision. As some respondents had more than one reason for non-participation I placed them in more than one descriptive label and counted them more than once for the reasons cited in that specific category. For example if a respondent cited that he had 'no time' and 'no interest' his reasons would be included in both those descriptive labels.

In the third question where I determine the responses of the respondents to the statements given for each IPSS category in the survey, I presented descriptive statistics that helped me measure the means for each given statement based on the results from the rating scale that the respondent had applied to each statement. The rating scale provides some guidance as to the importance of some statements over the others that would be useful when discussing the findings. As this method is used to rank statements in a given provision it will allow me to later suggest areas where improvements to the current provisions can be prioritised.

4.15.2 Conducting descriptive analyses

As the research questions and the theoretical framework drives the research methods (Cai et al., 2019), I performed a set of descriptive statistical analyses and applied this across all three research questions and across the three categories of institution-provided social support provisions to be able to make comparisons or identify differences in participation. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software I performed a series of tests using descriptive statistics as it allowed me to quantify, organise, simplify and summarise large data sets of the survey sample (Allen, 2017). With the use of descriptive analyses I was able to present key aspects of the set of data numerically, and highlight the potential relationships between the variables (Robson, 2016) to present key findings for later discussion. The use of descriptive analyses is deemed appropriate for my study as my goal is to present the respondent's responses to the survey and provide answers to my research questions. These tests included frequencies and percentages from the data set that identified how many respondents were in a demographic group and what that number represented in percentage of the sample. The size of a group of respondents enabled me to show participation status and summarise data in a constructive way. For example, if it showed that more males than females participated in a given activity, it may suggest that there were reasons for the participation that may need to be further investigated or reviewed. The descriptive analyses also enabled me to identify similarities among variables – for example, if participation rates among females for Student Life and Clubs were similar to their participation in Learning Support programmes, that could be useful for further statistical analyses. Other tests conducted in the descriptive analyses included cross tabulation where the

categories of demographics provided data to examine the relationships between the categories. This allowed me to determine if there were any possible associations present in the data. With the cross-tabulation I was able to perform a chi-square test that could help me determine if the demographics of respondents were associated. Another test that was used was the independent T-tests and this helped me to determine the differences between the means (the average of a dataset) of two groups and this was useful when considering differences between the demographics.

4.16 Ethical considerations

4.16.1 Ethical challenges

Prior to the start of the research, an ethics review was conducted and approval was given by the Institute of Education (IOE) on 31st July 2017 to undertake the research (Ethics approval form attached in Appendix 2). In designing the research I considered the ethical issues that could arise with my role as an Adjunct Lecturer at SPEP and the possibility that I may indirectly exert some influence on students who may know me or who may have taken my classes.

4.16.2 Gatekeeper access

As I was granted access to the students through a gatekeeper who assigned his research assistant to facilitate the access to the database and to help me disseminate the survey online through the institute's LimeSurvey online survey tool, I had to ensure that all data collected and provided to me were kept confidential and secured with passwords to prevent unauthorised access. To ensure that the files sent to me were secured, the files were saved onto my personal computer and password protected with access only by me.

4.16.3 Anonymity

I was determined to ensure the anonymity of the students invited to the survey as I wanted to avoid a situation where students contacted to participate in my study would feel pressured to take part or to disclose information that they may not be comfortable with. It was also important that I anonymised the identity of the respondents to allow them to express their views openly about their courses, the institution-provided social support provisions and any other information that they may wish to share without any fear of repercussion. I was also concerned about

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the students' privacy: questions about IPSS provisions like student care services could touch on personal matters like whether the student had sought counselling which may be sensitive to some students. Given this concern, I decided against conducting face-to-face interviews as they would require direct contact with students.

4.16.4 Voluntary participation

All students who were invited to take the survey were informed of the purpose of the study and were given a choice to participate in the survey, ignore participation or choose to be removed from future survey invitations. Respondents were informed that if they chose to continue to the survey and clicked on a link that took them to the survey questionnaire that this would be deemed as them having given their informed consent to participate. Once the respondent arrived at the questionnaire, the information on the purpose of the survey was repeated and they were assured of the confidentiality of the survey, advised that the completion of the questionnaire assumes their informed consent, and that they retained the right to refuse to answer any of the questions, and that they could withdraw from the survey at any time, even after they had made their submission.

4.17 Summary

To summarise, the chapter introduced my research questions, the methodological approach and the research methods and it provided the reasons for the adoption of a survey. I explained why I decided on the use of an online survey and the use of a questionnaire to collect both quantitative and qualitative data and how the analysis of the data would allow me to explain my findings. I proceeded to discuss the questionnaire design and considerations and why I chose to measure the different demographic characteristics of the respondents. This was followed by an explanation on how the data was collected and how I gained access through a gatekeeper to the students who were my target population for the survey. I continued with a discussion on my participant selection and how I settled on surveying students from two university courses from the UK and Australia. I explained the use of the LimeSurvey Online survey tool and the support I received from the research assistant who was assigned by the gatekeeper to provide me with access to the database. I then discussed how I proceeded to test my survey with a pilot test and that the results of the test gave me assurance that no changes were needed to the questionnaire for me to proceed with the full survey. In the implementation of the full survey I covered the process of sending out reminders and how the RA facilitated the process.

With the responses received from the survey, I proceeded to provide a breakdown of the responses received compared to the targeted student population for the survey. In that discussion I addressed concerns about a nonresponse bias and my literature review concerning the introduction of weightages and my decision to work with the unweighted data. I progressed to the data analysis with an explanation of my approach to data analysis followed by a discussion on the

use of descriptive analyses of my data and the type of tests conducted. The limitations to my study will be discussed in my concluding Chapter at the end of the thesis.

The chapter was closed off with a discussion on the ethical considerations adopted in the conduct of the research to provide assurance that every effort was taken to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents were taken and protected.

I later explained how I had covered the ethical considerations and the steps taken to ensure that the identities and the privacy of students were protected and how I had to manage this while working with the research assistant from SPEP and within the survey tools and IT systems of the institute.

In the next chapter I will discuss my findings for each research question and for each category of provision as appropriate. I will start with providing the breakdown of the demographics of participants and non-participants and then address non-participation and the reasons. This will then be followed up with the analysis of the given statements provided in the different category of provisions that students had participated in to determine the responses that students have for the different provisions.

CHAPTER 5 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1   Introduction

My research focuses on the demographic characteristics of students at my institution, SPEP, who participated in Institution-Provided Social Support provisions; the reasons why students do not participate; and the responses that students have towards the categories of IPSS provisions based on a set of statements related to the provision.

In this chapter I present the results of my analysis of the students who had responded to the survey. I present the findings across the three Research Questions in the three categories of IPSS – Student Life and Clubs, Learning Support Programme and Student Care Services and provide some elaboration on the findings and on the results.

5.2   Research findings

5.2.1 Research Question 1

How do students who participate and who do not participate in Institution-Provided Social Support (IPSS) compare in terms of their demographics?

There was a total of 2,733 students who responded to the survey, and this represented 17% of the total population of students (16,542 students) invited to participate in the survey. As the reasons for students' participation were varied across the different student demographics and for the three different categories of provisions, I show the participation status and the breakdown of the demographic characteristics in the different provisions of the IPSS in percentages in Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5 and explain the demographic differences in participation across the different demographics of respondents. The participation status of the students who did not participate are included in the tables as a point of reference and these will be used to discuss statistical differences. This information is useful to SPEP as it provides them with information for decisions or changes to be made in a category of provision as may be necessary.

5.3 Student Life and Clubs participation status across different demographics

Student Life and Club provisions include activities like sports, singing, music, dancing, martial arts, and other social activities; as well as clubs that are founded around special interests such as the economics club, toastmasters club and around religion such as the Christian Students Club or nationality such as the Myanmar Students club and others. This provision supports all three Gale and Parker (2014) transition stages for T1 (induction), T2 (development) and T3 (becoming).

In Table 3 I compare the demographic characteristics of those who participated, those who did not participate and those who did not respond to their participation status in Student Life and Clubs. In the tables that follow, P = Participated, NP = Non-Participated and NR = No Response. The focus of the analysis is on the participants to see how they compare in the sub-groups within the different demographic segments. There are minor differences in the number of returned surveys for some demographic variables as some students did not indicate their demographic details in some of the survey forms.

Table 3 Demographic breakdown for Student Life and Clubs

	Sub Groups										
Nationality	**Singaporean**			**Singapore Permanent Resident**			**Other**			**Total**	
Number of survey respondents	2222			138			373			2733	
% in the sub-group	81%			5%			14%			100%	
Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	484	1603	135	31	103	4	138	203	32	653	1909	171	2733
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	74%	84%	79%	5%	5%	2%	21%	11%	19%	24%	70%	6%	100%

Ethnicity	**Chinese**			**Malay**			**Indian**			**Others**			**Total**			
Number of survey respondents	2267			195			145			122			2729			
% in the sub-group	**83%**			**7%**			**5%**			**4%**			**100%**			
Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	514	1622	131	66	111	18	33	105	7	40	71	11	653	1909	167	2729
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	79%	85%	78%	10%	6%	11%	5%	6%	4%	6%	4%	7%	24%	70%	6%	100%

Age	**18-20 years**	**21-24 years**	**25-29 years**	**Above 30 years**	**Total**
Number of survey respondents	398	1843	453	32	2726
% in the sub-group	15%	68%	17%	1%	100%

Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	115	249	34	449	1285	109	89	343	21	0	32	0	653	1909	164	2726
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	18%	13%	21%	69%	67%	66%	14%	18%	13%	0%	2%	0%	24%	70%	6%	100%

Sex	Male		Female		Total		
Number of survey respondents	1055		1672		2727		
% in the sub-group	39%		61%		100%		

Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	265	723	67	388	1186	98	653	1909	165	2727
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	41%	38%	41%	59%	62%	59%	24%	70%	6%	100%

Highest qualification before entry	GCE 'O' Levels		SPEP Diploma		Polytechnic Diploma		GCE 'A' Levels/ Junior College		Degree		Total	
Number of survey respondents	45		218		1544		758		161		2726	
% in the sub-group	2%		8%		57%		28%		6%		100%	

Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	13	28	4	63	144	11	290	1169	85	245	455	58	42	113	6	653	1909	164	2726
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	2%	1%	2%	10%	8%	7%	44%	61%	52%	38%	24%	35%	6%	6%	4%	24%	70%	6%	100%

University course	UK University		Australian University		Total		
Number of survey respondents	1592		1135		2727		
% in the sub-group	58%		42%		100%		

Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	452	1016	124	201	893	41	653	1909	165	2727
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	69%	53%	75%	31%	47%	25%	24%	70%	6%	100%

Duration in course	Less than 6 months			7-12 months			13-18 months			19-24 months			Above 25 months			Completed			Total			
Number of survey respondents	696			233			655			218			475			449			2726			
% in the sub-group	26%			9%			24%			8%			17%			16%			100%			
Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	145	500	51	51	174	8	150	459	46	55	154	9	144	304	27	108	318	23	653	1909	164	2726
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	22%	26%	31%	8%	9%	5%	23%	24%	28%	8%	8%	5%	22%	16%	16%	17%	17%	14%	24%	70%	6%	100%

P = Participant , NP = Non-participant NR = No response

Source: SPEP Survey 2017, The total numbers (n) have slight differences

as some respondents did not indicate for some factors (unweighted)

The following findings relate to the participation of the students in the Student Life and Clubs category where 24 % of the respondents participated.

With regard to nationality, Singaporeans who made up 81% of the survey respondents represented 74% of the participants while Singapore Permanent Residents who made up 5% of the survey respondents represented 5% of the participants. There was an overrepresentation of participants of other nationalities who represented 21% of the participants although they made up only 14% of the valid survey respondents. The students of other nationalities are international students from Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and other countries who have elected to pursue their studies in Singapore.

With regard to ethnicity, the students from the international student population and their ethnicities were not broken down in the survey as there would be too many ethnicities and so they were reflected as 'Others'. The ethnicity of the Singaporean students and Singapore Permanent Residents were tracked according to their ethnicity in their National Registration Identity Card (NRIC) issued by the Singapore government. The participants of other nationalities recorded as Others were overrepresented at 6% of the participants and those of Malay ethnicity were overrepresented at 10% of the participants and this was above the percentage that each of these demographic segments had represented in their sub-groups - 4% Others and 7% Malay respondents.

With regard to age, the students from the younger age groups 18-20 years who had started their university studies immediately after their matriculation or tertiary studies were overrepresented at 18% of the participants although they made up 15% of the survey respondents. The students aged 21-24 years who made up 68% of all

survey respondents were marginally overrepresented making up 69% of the participants. The students aged 25-29 years (often part-time students who returned to study after a few years of work experience or from starting up their families) represented 14% of the participants and they were underrepresented as they made up 17% of the survey respondents. There was no participation from students aged 30 years and above.

With regard to sex[12], female participants represented 59% of all participants against male participants who represented 41% of participants. Female participants were marginally underrepresented in their participation as the breakdown of survey respondents showed that female students made up 61% of survey respondents.

With regard to the highest qualification before entry into the degree course there was an overrepresentation from participants who came through from the 'A' levels and junior college route (38% of participants) even though they made up only 28% of the survey respondents. This is in contrast to the students coming from the Polytechnics where the number of participants represented only 44% although they made up 57% of the survey respondents. There was overrepresentation of participants who came through the SPEP Diploma as they represented 10% of the participants although they made up 8% of the survey respondents. For the "O' level and the degree students the number of participants equalled that of the percentage they represented in the survey respondents.

With regard to the students across the two different university courses, the students from the UK University course were strongly overrepresented in their

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[12] In the survey the term Gender was used as it is commonly understood in Singapore to mean of Male or Female sex unlike in other countries where there are varied choices for gender.

participation and they represented 69% of all participants although they made up 58% of the survey respondents.

   With regard to the duration in the course, the students who had spent more than 25 months in their course were overrepresented as they made up 22% of all participants although they made up only 17% of the survey respondents. On the other hand the students who were less than 6 months into their courses were underrepresented and they made up 22% of participants although they made up 26% of all survey respondents.

5.4 Summary of key findings for participation in Student Life and Clubs

From the demographics of respondents who participated in the Student Life and Clubs provision we can see that students of Other nationalities who are from many mixed ethnicities participated more in Student Life and Clubs. These international students are often in the younger age group of 18 to 20 year olds and they were active participants in that age group also. Other students aged 21–24 years had the highest number of participants but the students in the older age groups (25–29 years and above 30 years) had hardly participated.

There was less participation from female students and there was a difference in the number of participants from the students coming through with different qualifications prior to joining SPEP with the students coming through the 'A' level route participating more while students coming from the polytechnics had fewer participants.

The students from the UK university participated more in Student Life and Clubs and students who were more than 25 months in their course were also participating more while those who had less than 6 months in the studies participated less.

While there were different demographics that affected the student's participation in this category, the Student Life and Clubs provision is still an important part of the IPSS provisions.

5.5   Learning Support Programmes participation rates across different demographics

Learning Support provisions include activities like talks and seminars on how to improve learning and research skills, referencing or academic writing as well as Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) sessions where senior students tutor the newer students in various subjects and topics that they need help for. Learning Support helps support students in the Gale and Parker (2014) T1 and T2 stages of transition.

In Table 4 I provide the findings of the analysis of the demographic breakdown of the students who participate in the Learning Support Programmes.

Table 4 Demographic breakdown for Learning Support Programmes

	Sub Groups														
Nationality	**Singaporean**			**Singapore Permanent Resident**			**Other**			**Total**					
Number of survey respondents	2222			138			373			2733					
% in the sub-group	81%			5%			14%			100%					
Participation status	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**Total**		
Number in participation status	462	1563	197	31	97	10	95	230	48	588	1890	255	2733		
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	79%	83%	77%	5%	5%	4%	16%	12%	19%	22%	69%	9%	100%		

Ethnicity	**Chinese**			**Malay**			**Indian**			**Others**			**Total**		
Number of survey respondents	2267			145			195			122			2729		
% in the sub-group	83%			5%			7%			4%			100%		
Participation status	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**Total**
Number in participation status	466	1601	200	35	97	13	57	115	23	30	77	15	588	1890	251	2729
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	79%	85%	80%	6%	5%	5%	10%	6%	9%	5%	4%	6%	22%	69%	9%	100%

Age	**18-20 years**		**21-24 years**		**25-29 years**	**Above 30 years**	**Total**
Number of survey respondents	398		1843		453	32	2726
% in the sub-group	15%		68%		17%	1%	100%

Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	116	235	47	392	1286	165	78	340	35	2	29	1	588	1890	248	2726
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	20%	12%	19%	67%	68%	67%	13%	18%	14%	0%	2%	0%	22%	69%	9%	100%

Sex	Male		Female		Total	
Number of survey respondents	1055		1672		2727	
% in the sub-group	39%		61%		100%	

Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	194	761	100	394	1129	149	588	1890	249	2727
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	33%	40%	40%	67%	60%	60%	22%	69%	9%	100%

Highest qualification before entry	GCE 'O' Levels		SPEP Diploma		Polytechnic Diploma		GCE 'A' Levels/ Junior College		Degree		Total	
Number of survey responses	45		218		1544		758		161		2726	
% of survey responses	2%		8%		57%		28%		6%		100%	

Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	28	10	7	46	151	21	272	1146	126	236	437	85	24	128	9	606	1872	248	2726
% of participation status in the sub-group / total of survey responses for the demographic segment	5%	1%	3%	8%	8%	8%	45%	61%	51%	39%	23%	34%	4%	7%	4%	22%	69%	9%	100%

University course	UK University		Australian University		Total	
Number of survey respondents	1592		1135		2727	

% in the sub-group	58%			42%			100%			
Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	428	972	192	160	918	57	588	1890	249	2727
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	73%	51%	77%	27%	49%	23%	22%	69%	9%	100%

Duration in course	Less than 6 months			7-12 months			13-18 months			19-24 months			Above 25 months			Completed			Total			
Number of survey respondents	696			233			655			218			475			449			2726			
% in the sub-group	26%			9%			24%			8%			17%			16%			100%			
Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	143	483	70	34	187	12	139	444	72	43	158	17	141	297	37	88	321	40	588	1890	248	2726
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	24%	26%	28%	6%	10%	5%	24%	23%	29%	7%	8%	7%	24%	16%	15%	15%	17%	16%	22%	69%	9%	100%

P = Participant , NP = Non-participant NR = No response

Source: SPEP Survey 2017, The total numbers (n) have slight differences

as some respondents did not indicate for some factors (unweighted)

The following findings relate to the participation of the students in the Learning Support Programmes where 22% of the respondents participated.

With regard to nationality, there was an overrepresentation of participants (16%) from the students of Other nationalities although they represented 14% of the survey respondents, and an underrepresentation of participants from Singaporeans (79%) although they made up 81% of the survey respondents. For the Singapore Permanent Residents the representation in the number of participants was equal to their representation as survey respondents.

With regard to ethnicity, there was an overrepresentation of participants among Indian students (10%) from their representation of 7% of the survey respondents. The Malay students and the students of Other nationalities had a marginal overrepresentation of participants (6% over 5% for Malay students and 5% over 4% for Other ethnicity) from their representation in the survey respondents.

With regard to age, there were more participants aged 18-20 years and they were overrepresented at 20% although they represented 15% of the survey respondents. There were less participants aged 25–29 years and they were underrepresented at 13% over the 17% of the survey respondents.

With regard to sex, there was an overrepresentation with female student participants making up 67% although the female students represented 61% of all the survey respondents.

With regard to the highest qualifications before entry into the course, there was a strong overrepresentation of participants from the 'A' level and junior college students with 39% although this sub-group only represented 28% of all survey respondents. This is a significant overrepresentation compared to the Polytechnic students where the number of participants made up 45% and were significantly

underrepresented as this sub-group of Polytechnic students represented 57% of the survey responses.

With regard to the University course, there was a strong overrepresentation of participants from the students from the UK University course of 73% although they made up only 58% of the survey respondents.

With regard to duration in the course, there was strong overrepresentation of participants from students who were in their course for more than 25 months who made up 24% although they were only 17% of the survey respondents.

5.6   Summary of key findings for participation in Learning Support Programmes

The demographics of respondents who participated in the Learning Support Programmes mirrored some of the demographics of participants in the Student Life and Clubs category with a higher number of participants from Other nationalities that came mostly from the international student respondents. The students from the 18-20 years age group had a high number of participants in the Learning Support Programme while the students in the 25– 29 years age group had the lowest number of participants (13%) as a percentage of the survey respondents for their sub-group.

There were a larger number of female students who participated (67%) over the male students and there were more participants coming from the 'A' level / Junior college pathway prior to entering SPEP. Students from the UK university course had a high number of participants of 73%. Similar to participation in Student Life and Clubs the higher number of participants for Learning Support Programmes were from the students who were more than 25 months in their courses.

From the key findings, there were more participants for the Learning Support

Programmes provision from international students and students from the UK university

course.

5.7   Student Care Services participation rates across different demographics

Student Care Services include services such as counselling and advice on mental health and wellness and it includes activities like talks and seminars on how to cope at university and with life in general. Some of these services involve students acting as peer mentors who provide a listening ear and who help new students transition into university life. Some students also act as Wellness Advocates to encourage their peers to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Student Care Services support students in the Gale and Parker (2014) transition stages T1 and T2.

In Table 5 I provide the findings of the analysis of the demographic breakdown of the students who participate in the Student Care Services

Table 5 Demographic breakdown for Student Care Services

	Sub Groups														
Nationality	**Singaporean**			**Singapore Permanent Resident**			**Other**			**Total**					
Number of survey respondents	2222			138			373			2733					
% in the sub-group	81%			5%			14%			100%					
Participation status	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**Total**		
Number in participation status	86	1911	225	7	119	12	68	248	57	161	2278	294	2733		
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	53%	84%	77%	4%	5%	4%	42%	11%	19%	6%	83%	11%	100%		

Ethnicity	**Chinese**			**Malay**			**Indian**			**Others**			**Total**		
Number of survey respondents	2267			145			195			122			2729		
% in the sub-group	83%			5%			7%			4%			100%		
Participation status	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**P**	**NP**	**NR**	**Total**
Number in participation status	118	1920	229	6	123	16	21	146	28	16	89	17	161	2278	290	2729
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	73%	84%	79%	4%	5%	6%	13%	6%	10%	10%	4%	6%	6%	83%	11%	100%

Age	**18-20 years**	**21-24 years**	**25-29 years**	**Above 30 years**	**Total**	
Number of survey respondents	398	1843	453	32	2726	
% in the sub-group	15%	68%	17%	1%	100%	

Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	28	314	56	112	1541	190	20	394	39	1	29	2	161	2278	287	2726
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	17%	14%	20%	70%	68%	66%	12%	17%	14%	1%	1%	1%	6%	84%	11%	100%

Sex	Male		Female		Total	
Number of survey respondents	1055		1672		2727	
% in the sub-group	39%		61%		100%	

Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	54	887	114	107	1391	174	161	2278	288	2727
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	34%	39%	40%	66%	61%	60%	6%	84%	11%	100%

Highest qualification before entry	GCE 'O' Levels		SPEP Diploma		Polytechnic Diploma		GCE 'A' Levels/ Junior College		Degree		Total	
Number of survey respondents	45		218		1544		758		161		2726	
% in the sub-group	2%		8%		57%		28%		6%		100%	

Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	7	29	9	31	165	22	58	1346	140	52	602	104	13	136	12	161	2278	287	2726
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	4%	1%	3%	19%	7%	8%	36%	59%	49%	32%	26%	36%	8%	6%	4%	6%	84%	11%	100%

University course	UK University		Australian University		Total	
Number of survey respondents	1592		1135		2727	
% in the sub-group	58%		42%		100%	

Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	102	1269	221	59	1009	67	161	2278	288	2727
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	63%	56%	77%	37%	44%	23%	6%	84%	11%	100%

Duration in course	Less than 6 months			7-12 months			13-18 months			19-24 months			Above 25 months			Completed			Total			
Number of survey respondents	696			233			655			218			475			449			2726			
% in the sub-group	26%			9%			24%			8%			17%			16%			100%			
Participation status	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	22	587	87	15	204	14	38	540	77	10	190	18	40	392	43	36	365	48	161	2278	287	2726
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	14%	26%	30%	9%	9%	5%	24%	24%	27%	6%	8%	6%	25%	17%	15%	22%	16%	17%	6%	84%	11%	100%

P = Participant , NP = Non-participant NR = No response

Source: SPEP Survey 2017, The total numbers (n) have slight differences

as some respondents did not indicate for some factors (unweighted)

The following findings relate to the participation of the students in the Student Care Services category where 6% of the respondents participated.

With regard to the nationality for participation in Student Care Services there were more students of Other nationalities who participated, and this demographic was very strongly overrepresented at 42% although this sub-group represented only 14% of the survey respondents. The number of Singaporean students were strongly underrepresented at 53% although they made up 81% of the survey respondents.

With regard to the ethnicity of students, the highest number of participants were from students of Indian ethnicity who were overrepresented at 13% although they made up 7% of the survey respondents. For the students of Other ethnicities who participated they were also overrepresented at 10% over the 4% that they represented of all survey respondents.

With regard to the age groups of participants, there was a higher number of students aged 18–20 years and they were overrepresented at 17% over the 15% they represented as survey respondents and of participants aged 21-24 years who were overrepresented at 70% over the 68% that they represented as survey respondents. There was an underrepresentation of participants in the older age group 25–29 years as they made up only 12% although they represented 17% of all survey respondents.

With regard to sex, the number of female student participants were overrepresented in Student Care Services at 66% although they represented only 61% of the survey respondents.

With regard to the highest qualification before admission, the students from the SPEP Diploma had the highest number of participants and overrepresentation at 19% over the 8% that they represented of the survey respondents. The polytechnic

students were strongly underrepresented as they made up 36% of all participants although they represented 57% of all survey respondents. The students from the 'A' level / junior college route were overrepresented as they made up 32% of the participants although they represented 28% of all survey respondents.

With regard to the university course, there were more participants and overrepresentation from students from the UK university course at 63% although they represented 59% of all survey respondents.

With regard to duration in the course, there were more participants and overrepresentation from students who were in their course for more than 25 months at 25% although they made up 17% of all survey respondents. There was strong underrepresentation of participants who were in their courses for less than six months as they made up 14% although they represented 26% of all survey respondents. The number of participants who were in their courses for 19-24 months was also underrepresented at 6% although they made up 8% of all survey respondents.

5.8   Summary of key findings for participation in Student Care Services

The findings of respondents who participated in the Student Care Services showed a high number of participants from students of other nationality (42% over 14% of survey respondents) and underrepresentation of the Singaporean student participants at 53% although they made up 81% of the survey respondents. The number of participants of Indian ethnicity who were overrepresented (13% over 7% of survey respondents) was also an interesting finding. As with the other IPSS provisions there were more participants and overrepresentation in the younger age groups 18–20 years (17% over 15% of survey respondents) and from the 21–24 years age group (70% over 68% of survey respondents)

There were more female students who participated in the Student Care Services and they were overrepresented at 66% over 61% of survey respondents. This is close to the finding for the Learning Support Programme. One significant finding was that of the number of participants from the students who came through the SPEP Diploma at 19% over 8% of survey respondents. Other significant findings include the number of participants from students in the UK course at 63% against the 58% that they represented of all survey respondents and the number of participants from students who were in their courses for longer periods of more than 25 months (overrepresented by 25% over 17% of survey respondents).

5.9 Statistical analysis and comparison across IPSS provisions

As the earlier findings present only the comparisons and differences in the demographic variables, it did not allow for the data to be tested to confirm a set of hypotheses. In order to test statistically the data collected on the demographic breakdown for participation in all three categories of the IPSS provisions, a set of hypotheses were developed and a Chi-Square Test and an Independent sample T-test were conducted with all the seven demographic factors. The Chi square test results are shown in Table 6 and the independent t-test results are shown in Table 7.

Table 6 Chi square test results for all three IPSS provisions

Demographic	Participation in Student Life and Clubs				Participation in Learning Support Programmes				Participation in Student Care Services			
	Value	df	Critical stat	Hypothesis	Value	df	Critical stat	Hypothesis	Value	df	Critical stat	Hypothesis
Nationality	10.382[a]	2	0.006	H1	3.621[a]	2	0.164	H0	79.901[a]	2	0	H1
Ethnicity	3.223[a]	3	0.358	H0	.598[a]	3	0.897	H0	11.685[a]	3	0.009	H1
Age	4.295[a]	3	0.231	H0	3.778[a]	3	0.286	H0	2.116[a]	3	0.549	H0
Sex	6.962[a]	1	0.008	H1	11.366[a]	1	0.001	H1	1.108[a]	1	0.293	H0
Highest Qualification before entry	8.815[a]	4	0.066	H0	8.817[a]	4	0.066	H0	39.628[a]	4	0	H1
University course	.085[a]	1	0.77	H0	10.823[a]	1	0.001	H1	2.716[a]	1	0.099	H0
Duration in course	6.420[a]	5	0.267	H0	7.562[a]	5	0.182	H0	16.992[a]	5	0.005	H1

Hypothesis

H0: There is no link between the demographic and participation.

H1: There is a link between the demographic and participation.

5.9.1 Chi square test

With regard to the Chi square test, the test result is significant if the value is equal to or less than the designated level I had set where the p-value is equal to or >0.05. As the p-value was less than 0.05 for two demographic factors – nationality (p- value = 0.008, >0.005) and sex (p-value = 0.008, >0.005) in the Student Life and Clubs category in the IPSS provision

in the Chi-Square test, I rejected the null hypothesis that there is no difference between the means and concluded that a significant difference does exist between the factors. For the Learning Support Programme provision in the Chi Square test I had two demographic factors with p-value less than the designated level of less than 0.05; p-value for sex (p-value = 0.001, >0.005) and university course (p-value = 0.001, >0.005) and so I rejected the null hypothesis. For the Student Care Services provision there were four p-values that were less than 0.05; nationality (p-value = 0.001, >0.005), ethnicity (p-value = 0.009, >0.005), highest qualification before entry (p-value = 0.000, >0.005) and duration in course (p-value = 0.005, = or >0.005) and so I rejected the null hypothesis for these four demographic factors. Rejecting the null hypothesis, the data suggests that the variables are associated and that there is a link between these demographic factors and student participation (H1). For all other demographic factors, the hypothesis H0 is not rejected and assumes that there is no link between the demographic factor and participation.

5.9.2 Independent T-test

As the Chi square test had only allowed me to explore statistical differences in demographics between those who participated in the programmes, I proceeded to explore further differences on participation on whether or not the respondents did or did not participate by conducting an independent samples t-test where the t-test compared the means of two independent groups (participants and non-participants) in order to determine if there was statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different. The results of the t-tests are shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Comparison of the independent t-tests across the three IPSS provisions

		Independent Samples Test for Student Life and Clubs					Independent Samples Test for Learning Support Programmes					Independent Samples Test for Student Care Services				
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper				Lower	Upper				Lower	Upper
Nationality	Equal variances assumed	6.51	2560.00	0.00	0.14	0.27	2.49	2476.00	0.01	0.02	0.15	11.30	2437.00	0.00	0.51	0.73
	Equal variances not assumed	5.77	937.09	0.00	0.13	0.27	2.35	901.57	0.02	0.01	0.15	7.93	170.02	0.00	0.46	0.77
Ethnicity	Equal variances assumed	3.08	2560.00	0.00	0.04	0.17	2.32	2476.00	0.02	0.01	0.15	3.46	2437.00	0.00	0.09	0.34
	Equal variances not assumed	2.88	1010.21	0.00	0.03	0.18	2.22	913.12	0.03	0.01	0.16	2.76	173.64	0.01	0.06	0.37
Age	Equal variances assumed	-4.54	2560.00	0.00	-0.18	-0.07	-5.13	2476.00	0.00	-0.20	-0.09	-2.01	2437.00	0.04	-0.19	0.00
	Equal variances not assumed	-4.73	1221.76	0.00	-0.17	-0.07	-5.20	1000.64	0.00	-0.20	-0.09	-2.10	185.93	0.04	-0.19	-0.01
Sex	Equal variances assumed	-1.23	2560.00	0.22	-0.07	0.02	3.17	2476.00	0.00	0.03	0.12	1.36	2437.00	0.17	-0.02	0.13

	Equal variances not assumed	-1.22	1116.88	0.22	-0.07	0.02	3.24	1014.95	0.00	0.03	0.12	1.40	184.81	0.17	-0.02	0.13
Highest Qualification before entry	Equal variances assumed	3.35	2560.00	0.00	0.05	0.18	3.17	2476.00	0.00	0.04	0.18	-1.31	2437.00	0.19	-0.20	0.04
	Equal variances not assumed	3.18	1035.92	0.00	0.04	0.19	3.17	980.34	0.00	0.04	0.18	-1.02	172.85	0.31	-0.24	0.08
University course	Equal variances assumed	-7.20	2560.00	0.00	-0.20	-0.12	-9.28	2476.00	0.00	-0.26	-0.17	-1.89	2437.00	0.06	-0.16	0.00
	Equal variances not assumed	-7.48	1210.67	0.00	-0.20	-0.12	-9.86	1085.45	0.00	-0.26	-0.17	-1.94	184.72	0.05	-0.15	0.00
Duration in course	Equal variances assumed	2.63	2560.00	0.01	0.06	0.38	1.88	2476.00	0.06	-0.01	0.33	3.82	2437.00	0.00	0.27	0.85
	Equal variances not assumed	2.65	1144.57	0.01	0.06	0.37	1.89	988.40	0.06	-0.01	0.33	3.97	185.48	0.00	0.28	0.84

If $p <$ or $= .05$, the variances are significantly different and we interpret the bottom row results of t.

If $p > .05$, the variances are not significantly different and we interpret the top row results of t.

The independent variable I applied was the participation status (whether participant or non-participant) and the dependent variable was the demographic factor. In the t-test if the p-value was less than my chosen significance level of 0.05, I rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that the demographics factor for the participants and the non-participants is significantly different. The two hypotheses I had determined were:

H0 – the difference in group means is significantly different and

H1 – the difference in group means is not significantly different.

Based on the t-test results there was a significant difference in group means in demographics between participants and non-participants for sex in Student Life and Clubs (p=0.22, > 0.05), there was no significant differences for Learning Support Programmes and there was a significant difference in group means for Student Care Services in demographics for sex (p=0.174, > 0.05), highest qualification before entry (p=0.191, > 0.05) and university course (p=0.059, > 0.05). There were no significant differences for the other demographics.

5.10   Research Question 2

For students who did not participate in Institution-Provided Social Support Provisions, what are their reasons?

Of the total of 2,536 survey respondents[13], 1,536 respondents (59.9%) did not participate in the Institution Provided Social Support provisions at SPEP. As these non-participants may have had many different reasons for non-participation, it would have been a challenge to list a whole list of reasons for them to choose from and so I designed my questionnaire to allow them to provide free text comments for the reasons why they did not participate. While this posed a greater challenge for the analysis, it had the benefit of allowing me to capture reasons that may not have been obvious to me from the literature review, and it allowed for some nuances to be captured such as the veracity of their comment which was expressed in some cases with the comments typed in upper case capital letters or with sarcasm.

To better understand the comments given for non-participation and to interpret these into findings, I proceeded to undertake a qualitative content analysis drawn from the reasons given by the respondents.

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[13] 266 respondents did not indicate their participation status

5.11 Classification of reasons for non-participation in IPSS

To capture the reasons given for non-participation, I conducted a qualitative content analysis where I reviewed each of the three categories of IPSS provisions and I studied the comments given by each non-participant to determine if there were common threads in the comments to allow me to group them into a set of common reasons. In effect the qualitative content analysis allowed me the flexibility to undertake the subjective interpretation of the content where I was able to develop a systematic classification process to identify common themes of comments from my survey respondents (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In some comments the respondents provided more than one reason for non-participation and so it became clear that there was a need to count these different reasons more than once after I had established the set of reasons in common. In choosing to categorise the set of reasons I chose to work on reasons that would provide SPEP with useful information that they could act on if desired or necessary. With this plan in mind, I developed ten sets of reasons as below:

a) No time – while some students had simply stated that they had no time without any elaboration, some went as far as to cite a heavy study load, travel time required to participate in IPSS, being a part-time student, the need to work to help support themselves or families or other family and out-of-study commitments.

b) No interest – this comment was often not given any elaboration although there were some respondents who cited that the provisions did not meet with their own personal interests.

c) Must work – this comment came from both full-time and part-time students and some respondents added that they needed to support themselves or to pay towards their cost of studies. On occasion this comment had also crossed into the 'No time' reason.

d) Focus on study – this was an unexpected finding. I had thought that IPSS provisions such as the Learning Support Programmes were designed to help students improve on their studies, but this came up several times and mostly in the Student Life and Clubs category where some students may consider participation to be unnecessary. This reason could also be related to having 'No time' to participate and so students who stated that they had to focus on studies and had no time to participate were counted twice, once in each set of reasons.

e) Not easy to access – Respondents who provided this reason include those who cited the inconvenient timing or days when activities or programmes were run, the period when they started their course that may not have allowed them to join a provision as some of these had already started or were mid-way through, the location where the provisions were offered which was often at the institute's premises, or the course schedules that they have.

f) Part-time student – as I could not separate the part-time students from the full-time students when inviting students to the survey, a few of these part-time students cited their status as part-time students that prevented them from participating in IPSS. Some had stated that as part-time

students they had 'No time' and others cited difficulty with access but most just stated the reason as being a part-time student.

g) Unaware – Several respondents commented that they were unaware of the IPSS provisions. Most of these comments were for the Student Care Services category where some respondents expressed their surprise that such a provision exists. Other similar comments related to Learning Support Programmes with some stating that they did not know that a Learning Centre was available on campus and that there were academic support programmes offered.

h) Other commitments – this set of reasons may have some overlap with other sets of reasons such as having to work but it was separately coded as some reasons given for non-participation included out-of-study activities such as commitments to volunteering, family or religious activities such as church work and others.

i) No need – This is an interesting comment as it is a different comment from that of students who expressed that they had no interests. The 'No need' is a Singaporean expression to mean that the respondent does not see a reason or purpose in doing something. In the case of IPSS the respondent may consider that she may not need to participate. Several reasons given include comments such as "I am coping well with my studies", "I have many friends already", "I have things I enjoy doing outside of study", "I do not have any problems", etc.

j) Undecided – I included this as a reason as there were respondents who expressed a view that they were undecided if there was a need, or there was an interest or whether they had time to participate.

With the 10 sets of reasons, I had developed I proceeded to classify each comment from the survey respondents to see where they would fit and include them in the count for that set. To provide some context to the non-participation rates for each IPSS provision I have appended Table 8 to show the breakdown across the IPSS categories and I have included tables with the reasons given for non-participation in each of the categories for comparison.

Table 8 Breakdown of participation rates across three IPSS provisions

IPSS provision	Student Life & Clubs				Learning Support Programmes				Student Care Services			
Participation status	P	NP	NR	Total	P	NP	NR	Total	P	NP	NR	Total
Number in participation status	653	1909	171	2733	588	1890	255	2733	161	2278	294	2733
% of no. in participation status / total in the participation status	24%	70%	6%	100%	22%	69%	9%	100%	6%	83%	11%	100%

Source: SPEP Survey 2017, The total numbers (n) have slight differences
as some respondents did not indicate for some factors (unweighted)

From the breakdown in the Table 8, the number of non-participants in the Student Care Services were the highest (2,278 non-participants) representing 83% against that for 1,909 non-participants for Student Life and Clubs representing 70% and 1,890 non-participants for Learning Support Programmes representing 69%. As not all the non-participants provided reasons for non-participation the breakdown of the reasons given will not add up to the number of non-participants.

To better understand the reasons for non-participation for each category of provision, the following Table 9 will show the percentage of non-participants and the reasons cited for their non-participation.

5.12 Findings of reasons for non-participation in all three IPSS provisions

Table 9 Reasons for non-participation in IPSS provisions

Reasons	Why did you not participate in Student Life and Clubs?		Why did you not participate in Learning Support Programmes?		Why did you not participate in Student Care Services?	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
No time	378	21%	333	21%	296	15%
No interests	315	18%	210	13%	245	12%
Must work	231	13%	89	6%	75	4%
Focus on study	170	10%	114	7%	28	1%
Not easy to access	169	10%	143	9%	70	3%
Part-time student	134	8%	66	4%	64	3%
Unaware	134	8%	329	20%	573	28%
Other commitments	106	6%	35	2%	41	2%
No need	70	4%	262	16%	598	30%
Undecided	59	3%	42	2%	40	2%
Total	1766	100%	1623	100%	2030	100%

Source: SPEP Survey 2017, The total numbers (n) have slight differences
as some respondents did not indicate for some factors (unweighted)

The reasons most cited for the non-participation in Student Life and Clubs were that of having 'no time' (21.4%) followed by having 'no interest' (17.8%) and 'must work' (13.1%). Although the percentage of respondents who had provided other reasons for non-participation were much lower, it is still useful to consider possible factors that may contribute to their non-participation and so these will be included in the discussions in Chapter 6.

The top reasons cited for the non-participation in Learning Support Programmes were that of having 'no time' (20.5%) followed by being 'unaware' (20.3%) and 'no need' (16.1%). While the reasons given for non-participation such as having 'no time' are similar to that for the Student Life and Clubs, the high

number of non-participants who were 'unaware' of the provision and who did not participate was significant.

The top reasons cited for the non-participation in Student Care Services were that of having 'no need' (29.5%) followed by being 'unaware' (28.2%) and 'no time' (14.6%). While the reasons given for non-participation such as having 'no time' is similar to that for the other two provisions, the high percentage of respondents who have commented that they saw 'no need' for the provision is significant. The high number of non-participants who were 'unaware' of the provision is also a significant finding.

5.13   Summary of key findings for non-participation in IPSS

The analysis of the comments that were drawn out from the survey had provided some good findings into the reasons for non-participation in IPSS. The findings revealed that there were key differences that existed between reasons for the non-participation for each IPSS provision. With the Student Life and Club provision that was viewed by some students as being mostly social and non-academic in nature the effect of having 'no time', 'no interest' and 'have to work' were cited as top reasons. For Learning Support Programmes and Student Care Services having 'no time' was still a top reason but being 'unaware' of the provision and seeing 'no need 'for it were findings that may need to be addressed.

5.14   Research Question 3

What responses do the students have towards statements made about participation in the IPSS provisions?

In the survey questionnaire, a set of statements were given for each category of IPSS (Student Life and Clubs, Learning Support Programmes and Student Care Services), and respondents were asked to rank these statements on a rating scale based on how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement applied to them. The statements were drawn from the literature review in Chapter 2 and from studies on social support in universities and colleges. From analysing the data collated from the rating scale I would be determining the direction and the intensity of the judgement made of the statements that will reflect the response. To assess the mean as a measure I applied a traditional method where my data is analysed and the length of the cells is as follows:

- From 0.1 to 1.0 represents (definitely disagree).
- From 1.01 until 2.0 represents (mostly disagree).
- From 2.01 until 3.0 represents (neither agree or disagree).
- From 3.01 until 4.0 represents (mostly agree).
- From 4.01 until 5.0 represents (definitely agree)

From the respondent's responses towards the given statements, I undertook a set of descriptive statistics to rank the respondent's responses on the given statements to determine if some statements were more important than the others and how these statements in turn reflect their response towards the IPSS provision.

Although it would be ideal and consistent to have the same number of statements for each IPSS provision, the statements applied to each category of

the IPSS provision depended largely on what available literature was relevant to the provision and for which the statement was then crafted. The participants were asked to rank the statements on a rating scale, and I assigned each statement to an IPSS category as appropriate for the survey. Table 10 shows the means of each of the statements for the three different categories of provision.

Table 10 The mean value for the statements in the three categories of IPSS

	Descriptive Statistics for Student Life and Clubs					
No.	Statement	No. of participants	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
15a	Gives me a sense of belonging	650	1	5	4.02	0.792
15b	Helps me build my networks	650	1	5	4.24	0.696
15c	Helps me develop friendships with my peers	650	1	5	4.24	0.645
15d	Helps me relieve stress	650	1	5	3.77	0.944
15e	Helps me manage the pressure from my studies	650	1	5	3.6	0.947
15f	Helps provide me with a healthy balance between my studies and other interests	650	1	5	3.92	0.834
15g	Helps me develop confidence	650	1	5	4.08	0.733
15h	Helps me improve my ability to communicate	650	1	5	4.16	0.702
15i	Helps me improve my self-esteem / self-worth	650	1	5	4.04	0.748
	Descriptive Statistics for Learning Support Programmes					
No.	Statement	No. of participants	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
22a	Helps me develop learning skills	585	1	5	4.03	0.713
22b	Helps me gain confidence	585	1	5	3.80	0.775
22c	Helps improve my knowledge	585	1	5	4.17	0.655
22d	Helps me better understand what is required of me	585	1	5	4.14	0.704
22e	Helps me with useful advice and guidance	585	1	5	4.15	0.678
22f	Helps me progress with my course	585	1	5	4.03	0.737
22g	Helps improve my self-esteem / self-worth	585	1	5	3.67	0.835
	Descriptive Statistics for Student Care Services					
No.	Statement	No. of participants	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
29a	Has helped me cope better with my transition to University	161	1	5	3.78	0.908
29b	Has helped me improve my general health	161	1	5	3.92	0.894
29c	Has helped improve my well-being	161	1	5	3.96	0.883
29d	Has helped improve my academic capabilities	161	1	5	3.55	0.974

5.15   Summary of key findings for mean values in each IPSS provision

For the Student Life and Clubs, the highest mean values for the participation came from three statements namely 'Helps me build my networks (4.24), 'Helps me develop friendships with my peers (4.24), and 'Helps me improve my ability to communicate (4.16). These higher mean values suggest that the students participating in the Student Life and Club provisions were specific about their response toward what they perceive to have received from their participation in this provision. The average mean value for all the nine statements for Student Life and Clubs was 4.01 which represents the 'definitely agree' selection. Some key comments from students who participated in the Student Life and Clubs provision include '*Being able to meet new people and expand my social network* (Student 657), and '*helps make more friends, widen social network, keeps you fit and learn new skills* (Student 845), and '*I have a <sic> opportunity to meet more people and make friends who come from different countries* (Student 2203).

For the Learning Support Programmes, the highest mean values were from three statements; 'Helps improve my knowledge (4.17), 'Helps me with useful advice and guidance (4.15), and 'Helps me understand what is required of me (4.14). The average mean value for all the seven statements was 4.00 which represents the 'mostly agree' selection. These responses are not unexpected as many participants would expect to that Learning Support Programmes will provide these benefits. The following are some of the comments from respondents on the Learning Support Programmes, '*Ability to clarify doubts outside of class, and learning from different types of people helped to deepen my understanding* (Student 130), '*Supplemented my understanding of lessons by allowing me to*

discuss lessons with like-minded others I met in clubs and '*Instead of helping academically, I learned more skills and knowledge that aren't in syllabus* (Student 868).

For the Student Care Services, the highest mean values were from these statements; "Has helped improve my well-being (3.96), 'Has helped improve my general health (3.92), and 'Has helped me cope better with my transition to university (3.78). The average mean value for the four statements was 3.88 which represents the 'mostly agree' selection. The following are some of the comments from respondents on Student Care Services; '*- LEARN HOW TO HANDLE STRESS SO THAT WE WILL NOT BURN OURSELVES OUT ….. (original emphasis, presumably expressing strength of view,* Student 1735), '*It release [sic] my stress and I have motivation [to seek] emotionally support [sic] as I know there's someone there to help ..* (Student 592).

In summary, the descriptive analysis allowed me to measure the respondents' responses towards the different IPSS provisions from a set of statements assigned to that provision. Measuring the mean values allows SPEP to better understand the responses towards the provision and allows for later decisions to be taken regarding which provisions to focus on for future development of the provisions.

5.16   Conclusion

The findings drawn out from the data collected from the survey will allow me to explain some of the possible reasons why students in the different demographic categories at SPEP may respond to the Institution-Provided Social Support provisions differently. There may be contributing factors that could include physical, cultural, psychological or emotional factors that may affect their choices to participate and these will be important to evaluate and discuss in the next chapter where I provide some explanations and provide insights. I will also discuss areas where there could be specific differences that affect the students because of their university choice and the duration in their courses.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1   Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings reported in Chapter 5 in relation to the literature reviewed earlier in Chapter 3. I then review the Gale and Parker (2014) framework to ruminate if the three stages of student transitions have matched with the findings of my data on the transition of the students at SPEP, and if there were differences or gaps present. My discussion will consider areas where I can enrich and extend the framework or to address the weaknesses to make it more relevant and applicable to students in PEIs.   With this focus I will consider the implications for my personal practice as an adjunct lecturer, as well as for policy and practice at SPEP, other similar PEIs, and for educational researchers.

Although there is quite a lot of literature on student transition to Higher Education and engagement with social support provision, most of the studies were conducted at conventional universities, and there were thus differences between the students studying in such a setting and the students studying at a Private Education Institute (PEI). I acknowledge also that the Gale and Parker (2014) framework for transitions alone will not be able to address the particular characteristics of the students at SPEP because of the differences in demographics with the students coming from different non-traditional academic backgrounds (diplomas and polytechnics), different socio-economic settings that will require many of them to support themselves in their studies, their different ages and having to commute to their institutions to attend classes and other factors.I will bear in mind these areas of differences or similarities, and identify my

contribution to the research. I will then conclude the thesis by highlighting the limitations of my research, and suggesting areas for further research.

6.2 Challenges associated with transition into Higher Education

In Chapter 1, I highlighted the different characteristics of the students who entered Higher Education through Private Education institutes (PEIs) and those at conventional public universities. These differences present challenges for students who transition into Higher Educational from non-traditional pathways and demographics and in my review of the literature in Chapter 3, I discussed how, with the massification of Higher Education, a more diverse student population experienced not only the challenges faced by many students in their transition into Higher Education but also certain distinctive challenges as well. These challenges were related to increased diversity among the student population, mixed abilities, attitudes and motivation, differences in social class, possibly a lowering of admission standards etc. As seen in Chapter 1, many students in Singapore have, in recent years, entered Higher Education through Private Education Institutions, and many of these would not have qualified for the conventional public universities. Students entering Higher Education through a PEI face distinct types of challenges in their transitions.

With respect to my first research question, 'How do students who participate and who do not participate in Institution-Provided Social Support (IPSS) compare in terms of their demographics', in the survey, I found that there were some key differences in the demographic characteristics in the students at SPEP as compared to those at the conventional public universities that may present distinct challenges during their transition. These demographic differences were (Chapter 5, Tables 3, 4 and 5):

(a)   14% of SPEP students were of 'Other' nationalities (mostly made up of international students) compared to 10% at the public universities (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2018 #467), These international students participated more in IPSS when compared to the Singaporean and Singapore Permanent Residents.

(b)   The students at SPEP were on average, about three years older than those in the public universities and 86% were aged 21 years and above. A reason why they were older was that they might have had to work to afford Higher Education. Although no figures for comparison were available for the public universities, it is known anecdotally that these have more students entering university directly after their last course of study and are therefore younger. For the female students who enter public universities, most are below 20 years of age as they enter directly from the A-level / junior college or polytechnics pathways when they are 18 or 19 years old. Being away from an academic setting for a few years could mean that SPEP students may need academic support to transition back to education. Also, because they did not enter Higher Education the same time as their peers, they may have particular social needs and student care (counselling) needs to help them manage and cope with the stresses and challenges of the transition.

(c)   The majority (67%) of SPEP students entered Higher Education through matriculation programmes, SPEP's diploma or local polytechnic diplomas. In contrast, 70% of students at the public universities enter via the A-level / junior college pathways (Zainal, 2016). There is a belief among SPEP lecturers that the A level route, being more academic, may prepare students better for the rigour of

degree study. If so, this has implications for the academic support that SPEP students need.

(d)   SPEP students who were studying for longer duration in their courses; because they chose the UK course, or because they chose to take less subjects in each semester were more likely to participate in social support.

(e)   Finally, the majority of SPEP students completed their UK course degree within 36 months, or 24 months in the case of the Australian university. In some cases, this can take a year or two less than the time taken to complete a degree at the public universities. There are therefore pressures with this truncated time frame that has implications for the academic, social, and other kinds of support that SPEP students will need.

Given the above (i.e., points (a) – (e)), it was clear that the demographic characteristics of the students at SPEP had distinct differences from those at public universities. Although I do not have access to the demographic characteristics of the students in the public universities for comparison (as this is not publicly available), it would be useful to study these differences in demographics in future research to understand how these affect the students in the different settings (PEIs vs. public universities) during their transition.

6.3   Student transition and engagement[14] in social support

A number of studies in the literature review (Chapter 3) stressed the importance of student engagement with the social support provisions, with two of these (Kuh, 2003, Krause and Coates, 2008) linking engagement to student outcomes. There was also evidence in the literature review that students entering Higher Education require different types of support to help them in their transitions. However, the students themselves may not fully understand and appreciate this.

In Chapter 5, students who did not participate in social support had different reasons for non-participation. These included not having time, having to work, not seeing a need for participation, and being unaware of social support provision.

Of most concern is the reason that the students were unaware of the provisions. The literature linked participation in provisions such as Learning Support Programmes to students' success at university, and found that the participation in Student Support Services also improved students' mental health and ability to cope. The fact that students in my survey were unaware of social support provisions is therefore very concerning.

Another reason students gave for non-participation was that they saw no need to participate. In this, literature suggests that students may not fully comprehend the value that they can get from their participation.

With regard to students not participating because they have no time, this may be because they have to work or other conflicting demands on their time. This

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[14] For the purpose of making references to engagement with social support, the coverage will include social support of extracurricular activities, out of campus activities, recreational widely and other terms used for similar type activities

is not something SPEP can do anything about, although convincing students of the value of participation may motivate them to find time. A strategy SPEP could consider is to provide social support in ways that reduce the impact of time. This could include providing online support, for example.

In the Gale and Parker (2014) framework I had introduced earlier where the stages of transition were propagated, the subject of engagement was not considered in their discussion. While it may not have been the intention of these authors to consider engagement, it is clear from my findings that unless students engage in social support provisions the impacts or effects that were intended to achieve may never be achieved, and so students may not pass through each stage of transition and advance to the next. The framework as such provides guidance on the direction a student should progress to at different stages but in the PEI setting, more often than not the students may skip or in some cases regress through the stages instead of progressing linearly. This is because a student who does not engage at an earlier stage may be brought back to that stage of transition voluntarily (after realisation of the importance or need for it) or in some cases under duress (mandated by the university), to be allowed to continue in their study journey. The framework therefore serves only as a guideline of what would be a sensible approach to transition and may not be as useful to curating the social support for PEIs.

In the next section, I will discuss the question of supporting student engagement, and who has responsibility for this.

Supporting engagement with social support provision – the role of the institution

There is evidence in the literature of the benefits to students to participate in social support. At SPEP, however, 70% of students did not participate in Student Life and Clubs, 69 % did not participate in Learning Support Programmes and 83 % did not participate in Student Care Services. The low levels of participation are very concerning. Both Tinto (1975) and Thomas (2002) suggest that institutions have a role, not only in ensuring social support provisions, but also in supporting and encouraging students to participate. While Tinto (1975) studied student attrition and dropout from Higher Education extensively, he strongly suggested that it was important to know the 'institutional manifestation' (p. 93). What he referred to was the student's expectations meeting up with the institutional components that predisposes him or her to an institution, meaning 'is there a match between the student and the institution?'. In the case of SPEP and other PEIs who accept students from a non-traditional academic pathway, this could be one of those factors where the match is not always as fitting and that is why a simple framework of transitions into university would not be as straight forward. Similarly Thomas (2012) discussed and investigated what is termed as 'habitus' at a modern university committed to diversity with wider student participation and looked at student retention in relation to university support services. One factor that played a part in student dropout was the lack of finances and this had an impact on the student performance as a 'habitus' described as a disposition to act, or habit forming behaviours that affected the student's choices. In the case of SPEP where the socio-economic backgrounds of the students are varied and where some students have to engage in part-time work to support them

to pay for their studies, this also affects participation in social support. The question therefore arises as to how institutions like SPEP can support or encourage students to engage with what is provided with consideration of their personal circumstances and unique characteristics that differs from a stereotypical student in a conventional public university in Singapore.

With regard to the students who had participated in social support provision, the survey showed that they did so to build their networks, forge friendships, improve communication skills, seek advice and guidance, improve their knowledge, understand better what was required of them in their academic journey, improve their health and well-being and ultimately to assist them in their transition to university. My survey showed:

a)   International students and younger students (18-20 years) were the most participative in all three categories of the provisions,

b)   Female students participated more in Learning Support Programmes and in Student Care Services

c)   The students in the UK university course participated more in Learning Support Programmes and Student Care Services.

Hence, there were specific groups of students who engaged in social support provision and others who did not, and this has implications for SPEP with regard to the kinds of social support provisions they funded or might consider in future.

Further research to establish in-depth and specific benefits from students who had engaged, and who had participated in social support provisions would be

able to provide even greater insights and allow for more directed actions to be taken to further promote engagement and participation. The research data can then be used to position social support provisions to align better to what students expect to gain from their participation. Examples of such insights can be drawn from student reviews and recommendations and student testimonies. SPEP and other PEIs can then consider new ways to innovate and allow students to study without the additional tensions on their personal circumstances and this can include work and study curated modules that accommodates the students' needs to work and earn income or by offering more flexible class times even at night or over the weekends if necessary.

6.4   Implications for practice

As an adjunct lecturer and a member of the faculty at SPEP, I have realised the importance of informing students about social support provision, as well as encouraging them to participate. As this is an area that is often overlooked by my teaching colleagues and me, the institution SPEP should include us in their plans to improve the communication of such social support provisions in our roles as faculty members and provide us with information on these provisions.

For SPEP, the findings from my study provide useful perspectives and insights for student service administrators when it comes to determining how to use a limited number of resources for social support provision. Given the number of students in my survey who were unaware of social support provisions, the first recommendation would be that SPEP should investigate the reasons for this and explore strategies to increase awareness of provisions. Alongside this could be an emphasis on publicising provisions at the induction and at relevant, critical periods during students' study (e.g., study skills in the lead up to examinations).

Another recommendation to SPEP is to look into communicating better the benefits of social support provision to students and convince them of the value of participating in this. I had earlier suggested student testimonials, and the use of a student application (app) that students use for their attendance taking and other administrative functions as the app can be used as a tool to notify students of events and activities in a more personal and timely manner, and it could be designed to allow the students to book their participation in an event directly.

With regard to students not participating because they have no time, this may be because they have to work or other conflicting demands on their time. While students' time is not something SPEP can do anything about, convincing

students of the value of participation may motivate them to find time. In addition, a strategy SPEP could consider is to provide social support in ways that reduce the impact of time. For example, providing online counselling services could, for example, reduce the amount of travel time to SPEP and could make these services more appealing. Other strategies SPEP could consider might include making available provision during out of office hours. This would mean that students who work during office hours will be able to participate in this.

For the above to happen SPEP may wish to conduct a comprehensive review of existing provisions to determine if these are meeting the needs or the expectations of their students.

For other PEIs and the other universities, it is timely to consider how the changing demographics of their student population and the changes in pedagogy and curriculum development, the use of technology and digital platforms and other new Higher Educational initiatives affect student transitions and how they should address these changes.

In summary, my study found that a significant number of students did not participate because they were unaware of provisions or had no time and no interest. In this, the demographics of SPEP students are similar to the disadvantaged students in Garner (2012). In addition to being unaware of activities, these students could not participate because of time pressure due to having to work similar to the study in (Logvinova and Ivanova, 2017). Therefore, my study confirms those studies and, in addition, established that there was a group of students who did not perceive the need to participate.

This has implications for adjunct lecturers like me and SPEP as an institution. In my role, I should make it a point to communicate information about

social support provision so that they are aware of these; I should also explain to them the benefits of participation so they understand what they can get out of this. I would recommend to SPEP that it do the same with respect to its communication on social provision to students and involve my fellow teaching colleagues to support them.

In addition, the findings in my study separated student participation in terms of whether they were local or international, and by their age, gender, course type and duration, etc. This is a contribution to the literature because previous research did not break down the demographic characteristics of students studied with reference to social support provision. My findings suggest that students with different demographic characteristics had different prior experiences, needs, and preferences, and therefore different requirements when it came to student support. For example, international students who were younger and living away from their families and friends, sought support from all three forms of provision - social, academic and student care. Female students, tended to prefer learning programmes and student care, while those on the more demanding UK programme used more learning support and student care. What this suggests for institution policy and practice is the need to cater for the different needs of different groups and, ideally, to target provision accordingly. Among other things, institutions might need to conduct outreach to those who tended to participate less in certain provisions, e.g., older students, and male students and students on shorter programmes.

6.5   Contributions to the research

Private Education Institutions are a growing area of Higher Education provision in some parts of the world. To date, there are limited studies conducted in the area of social support in PEIs like SPEP and current studies available are usually conducted at conventional universities and with students of different demographic characteristics. The findings in this thesis show that PEI students have particular needs – academic and social as well as transition needs - and I have argued given the literature that social support can help them in their transition and help them cope better with Higher Education demands.

I have found that current literature is concentrated on introducing the types of social support that students can benefit from to be successful in their courses without discussing how to get them to engage and participate. Thus, the use of a single framework like that of Gale and Parker (2014) alone will not suffice to cover the differences of student characteristics and the institutional characteristics of PEIs and so a new framework or an integrated framework or model that incorporates both engagement and participation and the different stages of transition would be very useful. In my research I was able to show the participation rates that were separated into the different categories of provisions and the demographic characteristics of students who participated. This allowed me to identify areas where participation rates are specific to a demographic or a combination of demographics. These findings will allow policy makers and student support administrators to better understand and plan for the differences in the demographics to better serve the needs of particular types of students.

Current literature is deficient in providing reasons for non-participation in social support, and where this is covered, the categories of the provisions are not

broken down and neither are the student's demographic characteristics to show specific reasons for the non-participation. Here again more research can be done like mine where I was able with my data to provide a breakdown of 10 different reasons for why students do not participate, and I was able to support this with comments from some students who provided explanations with their reasons. This allowed me to provide the nuances that were missing from some of the current literature. If similar research is done across the different PEIs and the information is then collated and compared, a pattern unique or specific to the PEI Higher Education setting could be set up as a model for understanding student non-participation and it would be an invaluable tool for administrators, planners and policy makers.

6.6   Limitations of the research

As with all research, there are limitations to the current thesis. I was also constrained by having to fit my survey into a period when students were between semesters and so there was quite a rush to have to send out questionnaires and to prompt and follow up with the students for the responses. It would have been beneficial, had circumstances allowed, to have expanded data collection to follow up on the survey data with interviews with students who did not participate to understand in greater depth the reason for this. I was not able to do this because I had limited access to the students surveyed and, by the time the survey results were collated and analysed, all the respondents had completed or graduated from their course. Among other things, I could have asked the non-participants for their thoughts and ideas on the type of provisions could be better serve their needs. Also, future research could include additional questions and so that more details could be drawn out from students to help guide social support provision and justify policy change.

6.7   Conclusion

As universities and PEIs compete to deliver not only good academic outcomes but also to ensure student satisfaction, institutions providing social support will continue to be an important component of the strategies available to them. And, as they pursue academic excellence and build their reputation on the success of their students, it is important that they customise and curate the social support provision to meet the needs of the students they serve to help them achieve these goals.

To ensure that the social support provisions benefit the students the universities and PEIs should consider the different breakdown of student's demographic characteristics when providing the different forms of social support and ensure that these meet their needs and expectations and encourage the students to engage and participate as just applying frameworks such as Gale and Parker (2014) or similar will not allow for a comprehensive enough study to benefit the PEIs.

The institutions must actively engage students to participate and continually measure the student experiences to better tailor and modify existing provisions and they must consider being more flexible such as offering provisions online, outside of the campus or even outside of campus operating hours to be able to serve the expectations and the needs of the students that do not follow a typical scheduled arrangement or setting. The students must be involved in decisions that affect the provisions and their ideas and suggestions must be considered when planning social support for them. The non-academic benefits of social support in transition and beyond student transitions into university must also be factored in

the discussions considering that many of the PEIs offer courses with shorter durations for completion.

Finally, the literature available now on studying transitions and social support in PEIs is limited and so more research and studies should be undertaken to provide better understanding and insights into this area. This is even more important now after the post-Covid period as student dynamics have changed even further with some institutions introducing more online teaching arrangements and others moving away from having exam-based curriculum to assess student completion outcomes.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Cover letter for the survey and survey form

As part of SPEP's efforts to provide relevant and meaningful institutional social support to our students, we are undertaking some research. This research aims to give us a better understanding of your participation in the various social support activities provided by SPEP and how these services can be improved in the future.

To help us with this research, please complete the short survey using this link:

[SPEP Institution Provided Social Support Survey](#)

The survey will only take about 15 minutes to complete. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. Your answers will be treated in the strictest confidence, will not be attributed to you, and will only be used for the purpose of this study. With your participation in the survey, it is deemed that you have provided informed consent for your participation. If you choose to opt out of this research, you can unsubscribe from the database..

If you have any questions or concerns about this study you may reach the research team at ctee001@mymail.SPEP.edu.sg

Thank you for your kind attention to this request and your participation will allow us to improve the future social support provisions to our students at SPEP.

Research team

Charles Tee -Lead investigator Email: ctee001@mymail.SPEP.edu.sg

Dr. Aaron Tan – Sponsor

Ms Suriani Binte Jamil – Research Assistant

SPEP STUDENT'S PERCEPTION
OF INSTITUTION SOCIAL SUPPORT AND OUTCOMES

RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHICS *Please check only one box per question*		
1. NATIONALITY	Singaporean	
	Singapore Permanent Resident	
	Others	
2. ETHNICITY / RACE	Chinese	
	Indian	
	Malay	
	Others	
3. AGE	18 – 20 years	
	21 – 24 years	
	25 – 29 years	
	Above 30 years	
4. SEX / GENDER	Male	
	Female	
5. HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS BEFORE ADMISSION TO SPEP GLOBAL EDUCATION UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMME	GCE 'O' levels	
	SPEP Diploma	
	Polytechnic Diploma (in Singapore)	
	GCE 'A' levels / Junior College	
	Degree	
	Overseas Qualification. Please state:	
6. UNIVERSITY PROGRAMME ENROLLED IN?	UK University (UKU)	
	Australian University (AUU)	
7. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR COURSE?	Less than 6 months	
	7 to 12 months	
	13 – 18 months	
	19 – 24 months	
	More than 25 months	
	Completed	
8. EXPECTED DATE OF COMPLETION?	**Please fill in the date.**	

PARTICIPATION IN SPEP INSTITUTION PROVIDED SOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

9. WHICH STUDENT LIFE PROGRAMMES AND STUDENT CLUBS DO / DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN DURING YOUR TIME AT SPEP?
Please check all boxes that apply.

Arts and Culture Clubs (e.g. Anime & gaming, Dance sport, Dream Werkz, Dance art, etc.)	
International Student Clubs (e.g. Chinese Nationals Network, Myanmar Club, Vietnamese Community, etc)	
Leadership and Development Programmes (e.g. UKU Student Council, AUU Student Council)	
Special Interest Clubs (Accounting, Economics, Religious, Young Entrepreneurs, etc.)	
Sports and Fitness Clubs (Aikido, Canoeing, Muay Thai, Badminton, Golf, etc)	
Others. Please list:	
I do not / did not participate in any of these and these are my reasons:	
	If you did not participate, go to Q 14

10. IN TOTAL, HOW MUCH TIME DO / DID YOU SPEND PARTICIPATING IN THESE PROGRAMMES AND CLUBS EACH WEEK?

1 – 10 hours per week	
11 – 20 hours per week	
More than 21 hours per week	

11. HOW IMPORTANT TO YOU WERE THE STUDENT LIFE PROGRAMMES AND STUDENT CLUBS?
Check one box on each line

	Very important (5)	Quite important (4)	Neither important nor unimportant (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)	Not applicable. I did not participate (0)
Arts and Culture Clubs (e.g. Anime & gaming, Dance sport, Dream Werkz, Dance art, etc.)						

International Student Clubs (e.g. Chinese Nationals Network, Myanmar Club, Vietnamese Community, etc)					
Leadership and Development Programmes (e.g. UKU Student Council, AUU Student Council)					
Special Interest Clubs (Accounting, Economics, Religious, Young Entrepreneurs, etc.)					
Sports and Fitness Clubs (Aikido, Canoeing, Muay Thai, Badminton, Golf, etc)					
Others . Please list:					

12. WHICH STUDENT LIFE PROGRAMME AND STUDENTS CLUB WAS THE *MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?*

Check one box only

Arts and Culture Clubs (e.g. Anime & gaming, Dance sport, Dream Werkz, Dance art, etc.)	
International Student Clubs (e.g. Chinese Nationals Network, Myanmar Club, Vietnamese Community, etc)	
Leadership and Development Programmes (e.g. UKU Student Council, AUU Student Council)	
Special Interest Clubs (Accounting, Economics, Religious, Young Entrepreneurs, etc.)	
Sports and Fitness Clubs (Aikido, Canoeing, Muay Thai, Badminton, Golf, etc)	
Others. Please list:	

13. THINKING ABOUT THE PROGRAMME OR CLUB *MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU*, TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THESE STATEMENTS ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN THAT PROGRAMME OR CLUB?

Check one box on each line

Participating in the programmes and clubs	**Definitely Agree (5)**	**Mostly Agree (4)**	**Neither Agree or Disagree (3)**	**Mostly Disagree (2)**	**Definitely Disagree (1)**

a) gives me a sense of belong					
b) helps me build my networks					
c) helps me develop friendships with my peers					
d) helps me relieve stress					
e) helps me manage the pressure from my studies					
f) helps provides me with a healthy balance between my studies and my other interests					
g) helps me develop confidence					
h) helps me improve my ability to communicate					
i) helps me improve my self-esteem / self-worth					

14. WHICH LEARNING SUPPORT PROGRAMMES DO / DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN DURING YOUR TIME AT SPEP?

Please check all boxes that apply

Student Learning Centre (e.g. Drop-in sessions, discussion sessions, etc.)	
Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) programme	
Academic Writing and other professional skills workshops	
Others. Please list:	
I do not/ did not participate in these and these are my reasons:	
	If you did not participate, go to Q 19

15. IN TOTAL, HOW MUCH TIME DO / DID YOU SPEND PARTICIPATING IN THESE PROGRAMMES EACH WEEK?	**1 – 10 hours per week**	
	11 – 20 hours per week	
	More than 21 hours per week	

16. HOW HELPFUL WERE THE LEARNING SUPPORT PROGRAMMES?

Check one box on each line

	Very helpful (5)	Helpful (4)	Neither helpful nor unhelpful (3)	Not helpful (2)	Not helpful at all (1)	Not applicable as I did not participate (0)
Student Learning Centre (e.g. Drop-in sessions, discussion sessions, etc.)						
Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) programme						
Academic Writing and other professional skills workshops						
Others . Please list:						

17. WHICH PROGRAMME WAS THE *MOST HELPFUL?*

Check one box only

Student Learning Centre (e.g. Drop-in sessions, discussion sessions, etc.)	
Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) programme	
Academic Writing and other professional skills workshops	
Others. Please list:	

18. THINKING ABOUT THE LEARNING SUPPORT PROGRAMME YOU FOUND *MOST HELPFUL*, TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THESE STATEMENTS ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN THAT LEARNING SUPPORT PROGRAMMES?

Check one box on each line

Participating in the learning support programmes	Definitely Agree (5)	Mostly Agree (4)	Neither Agree or Disagree (3)	Mostly Disagree (2)	Definitely Disagree (1)
b) helps me develop learning skills					
c) helps me gain confidence					
d) helps improve my knowledge					
e) helps me better understand what is required of me					

f) **helps me with useful advice and guidance**					
g) **helps me progress with my course**					
h) **helps improve my self-esteem / self-worth**					

19. WHICH STUDENT CARE SERVICES DO / DID YOU USE DURING YOUR TIME AT SPEP?

Please check all boxes that apply

Student Wellness Centre	
Counselling Services	
SPEP Peer Support	
SPEP Wellness Advocate	
Others. Please list:	
I do not / did not use these services and these are my reasons:	
	If you did not use, Go to Q 24

20. IN TOTAL, HOW MUCH TIME DO / DID YOU SPENDING USING STUDENT CARE SERVICES EACH WEEK?	**1 – 10 hours per week**	
	11 – 20 hours per week	
	More than 21 hours per week	

21. HOW USEFUL WERE THE STUDENT CARE SERVICES?

Check one box on each line

	Very useful (5)	Quite useful (4)	Neither useful nor un-useful (3)	Not very useful (2)	Not at useful at all (1)	Not applicable. I did not use this service. (0)
Student Wellness Centre						
Counselling Services						
SPEP Peer Support						
SPEP Wellness Advocate						
Others. Please list:						

22. WHICH SERVICE WAS THE *MOST USEFUL*?

Check one box only

Student Wellness Centre	
Counselling Services	
SPEP Peer Support	
SPEP Wellness Advocate	
Others. Please list:	

23. . THINKING ABOUT THE STUDENT CARE SERVICE YOU FOUND *MOST USEFUL,* TO YOU.
WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THESE STATEMENTS ABOUT USING THAT STUDENT CARE SERVICE?
Check one box on each line

Using Student Care Services	Definitely Agree (5)	Mostly Agree (4)	Neither Agree or Disagree (3)	Mostly Disagree (2)	Definitely Disagree (1)
p) has helped me cope better with my transition to University					
q) has helped improve my general health					
r) has helped improve my well-being					
s) has helped improve my academic capabilities					

24. OVERALL, THINKING ABOUT YOUR PARTICIPATION IN SPEP SOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES, PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- **WHAT DIFFERENCE, IF ANY, HAS IT MADE TO YOUR STUDENT LIFE?**
  Write in

- **WHAT DID YOU GAIN MOST ACADEMICALLY FROM YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN SPEP SOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES?**
  Write in

t)   Appendix 2 Research Permission Form

Institute of Education

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Ethics Application Form: Student Research

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

For further support and guidance please see accompanying guidelines and the Ethics Review Procedures for Student Research http://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/research-ethics-committee/ioe or contact your supervisor or IOE.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk.

Before completing this form you will need to discuss your proposal fully with your supervisor(s). Please attach all supporting documents and letters.

For all Psychology students, this form should be completed with reference to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics and Code of Ethics and Conduct.

Section 1 Project details					
a.	Project title			Students' perception and use of institution-provided social support: a case study of students at a private higher education provider in Singapore.	
b.	Student name			Charles Tee	
c.	Supervisor/Personal Tutor			Dr. Christine Han / Prof. Claire Callender	
d.	Department			Department of Education, Practice & Society	
e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD/MPhil	☐	EdD	X
		MRes	☐	DEdPsy	☐
		MTeach	☐	MA/MSc	☐
		ITE	☐		
		Diploma (state which)	☐		
		Other (state which)	☐		
f.	Course/module title			EdD (International)	
g.	If applicable, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.				
h.	Intended research start date			1 August 2017	
i.	Intended research end date			31 October 2017	

j.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in		Singapore

k.	Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?	
	Yes ☐	External Committee Name:
	No X ⇨ *go to Section 2*	Date of Approval:

If yes:
- Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.
- Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 Project summary

Research methods (tick all that apply)

Please attach questionnaires, visual methods and schedules for interviews (even in draft form).

X Interviews
☐ Focus groups
X Questionnaires
☐ Action research
☐ Observation
☐ Literature review

☐ Controlled trial/other intervention study
☐ Use of personal records
☐ Systematic review ⇨ *if only method used go to Section 5.*
☐ Secondary data analysis ⇨ *if secondary analysis used go to Section 6.*
☐ Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups
☐ Other, give details:

Please provide an overview of your research. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, your method of data collection (e.g., observations, interviews, questionnaires, etc.) and kind of questions that will be asked, reporting and dissemination (typically 300-500 words).

My study will involve an exploration into students' perceptions and use of current institution-provided social support at the Singapore Institute of Management Global Education (SIMGE) where I work. SIMGE is a private higher education provider in Singapore. SIMGE hosts degrees overseen by their overseas university partners with the bulk of the students studying in their programmes with the University of London (UOL) and the Royal Melbourne University of Technology University (RMIT). I will focus my study on students on business degrees from these two universities and this will include 12,000 undergraduate students and 4,500 graduates. This represents all the students presently enrolled in the programmes at the time that this study is conducted and the students who graduated in 2016 who are still contactable through their SIMGE student email addresses. From past student surveys, we expect no more than 20% response rate over the planned six-week survey period.

In the study, I will gather information on students, their perceptions and use of the institution-provided social support, to determine if they view the current provisions as adequate, meaningful and useful to them to successfully complete their university degree. I will study the different types of institution-provided social support at SIMGE. These include the physical and the non-physical support provisions that contribute to the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of the student. The emotional and psychological forms of social support include counselling and mentoring, structures that allow relationships to be forged amongst students, and with faculty and teaching staff.

The study will begin with a thorough review of the available literature on social support, institution support provisions,

student outcomes, and beneficial relationships in institutional settings. The data collection will involve a student survey and interviews.

I propose the following research questions: -

1. *How do students who pursue business courses at SIMGE perceive and use institution-provided social support provisions?*

2. *What are the social support provisions that students consider important for the successful completion of their university studies at SIMGE? How, and to what extent, do such provisions contribute to their completion of their degree?*

The research employs a mixed method approach (Robson 2011). It starts with a survey of the entire cohort of students who are now pursuing business courses from two major university partners at SIMGE. Students in these business programmes will be surveyed to determine their perspectives and use of institution-provided social support at SIMGE.

SIMGE has granted approval for me to undertake this survey, and will provide me access to these students through its proprietary databases. Students will be contacted through their SIMGE email accounts that was assigned to them on their enrolment in the programme. All data provided by SIMGE comply with the Singapore Government's Personal Data Protection Act 2012, the students who are contacted will have the right to be unsubscribed from the survey on request. Selected students who are willing to contribute further will be invited to participate in follow-up interviews following the completion of the survey.

The number of follow-up interviews scheduled, will depend on the willingness of surveyed participants to participate further. In past surveys conducted by SIMGE, there are less than 2 % of participants who are willing to participate in interviews. Therefore, an incentive is always provided to encourage participation. The interviews will adopt a semi-structured format where a checklist of topics to be covered and a default wording and order will be used (Robson 2011). The interview will be conducted in a meeting room on campus and each interview will take one hour. The purpose of the interview is to gain deeper insights from students from the preliminary findings that are analysed from the survey.

At the end of the study, the data collected will be analysed and used for my EdD thesis. The data collected will be retained for the period of my EdD studies and up to two years after the completion of my EdD in the event that I decide to undertake a further study to deepen my research into this subject after which all data will be destroyed.

Section 3   Participants

Please answer the following questions giving full details where necessary. Text boxes will expand for your responses.

a.	Will your research involve human participants?	Yes X	No ☐ ⇨ *go to Section 4*

b.	Who are the participants (i.e. what sorts of people will be involved)? Tick all that apply.

☐ Early years/pre-school	☐ Unknown – specify below
☐ Ages 5-11	X Adults *please specify below*
☐ Ages 12-16	☐ Other – specify below
☐ Young people aged 17-18	

NB: Ensure that you check the **guidelines** (Section 1) carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES).

Participants are undergraduate and graduate students at a private higher education institute aged 19

	years and above.
c.	If participants are under the responsibility of others (such as parents, teachers or medical staff) how do you intend to obtain permission to approach the participants to take part in the study? **(Please attach approach letters or details of permission procedures – see Section 9 Attachments.)**
d.	How will participants be recruited (identified and approached)? Participants will be contacted through the institute's email system, and invited to participate on a voluntary basis.
e.	Describe the process you will use to inform participants about what you are doing. I will contact participants through email contact via the institute using a cover letter to advise them of the objectives of the research, and to seek their informed consent to voluntarily participate in the study, either in the survey only, or in both the survey and the follow-up interviews.
f.	How will you obtain the consent of participants? Will this be written? How will it be made clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate at any time? *See the guidelines for information on opt-in and opt-out procedures. Please note that the method of consent should be appropriate to the research and fully explained.* Once contacted, participants who agree to participate will complete an online survey. They will be advised then that their participation in the survey would be considered as having given their informed consent. Participants will be informed that they can choose to withdraw their consent at any time. Participants who do not wish to be included in the survey can also unsubscribe from the database and their data will then be removed.
g.	Studies involving questionnaires: Will participants be given the option of omitting questions they do not wish to answer? Yes X No ☐ If NO please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
h.	Studies involving observation: Confirm whether participants will be asked for their informed consent to be observed. Not applicable. If NO read the guidelines (Ethical Issues section) and explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
i.	Might participants experience anxiety, discomfort or embarrassment as a result of your study? Yes ☐ No X If yes what steps will you take to explain and minimise this? If not, explain how you can be sure that no discomfort or embarrassment will arise?
j.	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants (deception) in any way? Yes ☐ No X If YES please provide further details below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this

	in section 8.
k.	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)? Yes ☐ No X
	If NO please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8. The study is not likely to be of interest to individual participants and thus a debrief does not seem necessary. However, if participants would like a debrief and request, I would be happy to provide this.
l.	Will participants be given information about the findings of your study? (This could be a brief summary of your findings in general; it is not the same as an individual debriefing.) Yes ☐ No X
	If no, why not? The study is not likely to be of interest to individual participants and thus a debrief does not seem necessary. However, if participants would like a debrief and request, I would be happy to provide this.

Section 4 Security-sensitive material
Only complete if applicable

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

a.	Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?	Yes ☐ *	No X
b.	Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?	Yes ☐ *	No X
c.	Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?	Yes ☐ *	No X

* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues

Section 5 Systematic review of research
Only complete if applicable

a.	Will you be collecting any new data from participants?	Yes ☐ *	No X
b.	Will you be analysing any secondary data?	Yes ☐ *	No X

* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues

If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) and if you have answered No to both questions, please go to Section 10 Attachments.

Section 6 Secondary data analysis Complete for all secondary analysis

b.	Owner of dataset/s		
	Are the data in the public domain?	Yes ☐	No ☐

c.		If no, do you have the owner's permission/license? Yes ☐ No* ☐			
d.	Are the data anonymised?	Yes ☐ No ☐			
		Do you plan to anonymise the data?	Yes ☐	No* ☐
		Do you plan to use individual level data? Yes* ☐	No ☐
		Will you be linking data to individuals? Yes* ☐	No ☐
e.	Are the data sensitive (DPA 1998 definition)?		Yes* ☐	No ☐
f.	Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?		Yes ☐	No* ☐
g.	If no, was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?		Yes ☐	No* ☐
h.	If no, was data collected prior to ethics approval process?		Yes ☐	No* ☐

* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues

If secondary analysis is only method used and no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to Section 9 Attachments.

Section 7 Data Storage and Security
Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

a.	Confirm that all personal data will be stored and processed in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA 1998). *(See the Guidelines and the Institute's Data Protection & Records Management Policy for more detail.)*	Yes X
b.	Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area?	Yes *

* If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with the DPA 1998 and state what these arrangements are below.

    The data collected will be stored and processed in compliance with the DPA 1998 and Singapore's Data Protection Act 2012 and only the research team members will have access to the data and files which will be password protected at all times during transmission between members of the research team.

c.	Who will have access to the data and personal information, including advisory/consultation groups and during transcription? Only the research team members

During the research

d.	Where will the data be stored? In the researcher's laptop and SIMGE's online survey system

Will mobile devices such as USB storage and laptops be used?   Yes X * No ☐

* If yes, state what mobile devices: USB storage as a back-up

e.	* If yes, will they be encrypted?: This is not sensitive data and so it will not be encrypted but all files will be password protected.

After the research

f.	Where will the data be stored? In the researcher's laptop and on a USB storage as a back-up.

g.	How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format? It will be kept for the duration of the researcher's EdD study and for two years after that in the event that more studies may be conducted as a follow-up.	
h.	Will data be archived for use by other researchers? * If yes, please provide details.	Yes ☐ * No X

Section 8 Ethical issues

Are there particular features of the proposed work which may raise ethical concerns or add to the complexity of ethical decision making? If so, please outline how you will deal with these.

It is important that you demonstrate your awareness of potential risks or harm that may arise as a result of your research. You should then demonstrate that you have considered ways to minimise the likelihood and impact of each potential harm that you have identified. Please be as specific as possible in describing the ethical issues you will have to address. Please consider / address ALL issues that may apply.
Ethical concerns may include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

- Methods - Sampling - Recruitment - Gatekeepers - Informed consent - Potentially vulnerable participants - Safeguarding/child protection - Sensitive topics	- International research - Risks to participants and/or researchers - Confidentiality/Anonymity - Disclosures/limits to confidentiality - Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection) - Reporting - Dissemination and use of findings

The study adopts a mixed method / multi strategy approach (Johnson et al 2007) where participants will be surveyed online and it will be followed up with face to face interviews with willing participants. All participants are invited to participate on a voluntary basis. A purposive sampling method (Daniel 2012) will be employed where students and graduates who meet the criteria for the study, as mentioned in the purpose of the study, will be selected and will be invited to participate.

SIMGE as the authorised and legal owner of the proprietary database will act as gatekeepers, and will maintain the confidentiality of all participants by not revealing any personal details of participants. Each qualified participant will be identified only by a student number and their identity remain confidential at all times unless they choose to reveal their contact email address for participation in the follow-up interview. Due to the anonymity of the process (Grinyer 2002), I as an adjunct lecturer at SIMGE will not be able to contact any student until they have chosen to participate in the survey. Even then, I will not be able to identify the student until permission is given through their willingness to participate further in an interview. All students who participate in the interviews will not be identified directly and each student will be assigned a code that will only identify them with an assigned number, their university programme and their expected completion date of study. I acknowledge two possible situations that can arise from the disparity in power relationships (Elliott and Stern 1997) that could be present during the interview. This can arise from an interviewee who is an ex-student of mine. In that situation, I will give the student a choice whether to continue withdraw from or continue with the interview. I will not be able to assign a second interviewer to conduct the interview as I have only myself conducting all interviews. The second situation may arise from a student who is interviewed taking a class I teach in future semesters. I do not see this as a problem, but should the student feel uncomfortable to attend my class, I will arrange for the student to be assigned to another class.

SIMGE has requested not be identified in my thesis and so I will anonymise all information related to their partner universities and their institution.

Informed consent (Boynton 2005) will be obtained from all participants in both the survey and the interviews. Each participant will be fully informed of the purpose of the study and their right to refuse to answer any of the questions posed. If they wish, they can withdraw from the study at any time and they can have their names removed from the database for the study. The identity of all participants will be anonymised and kept confidential.

The survey will not cover sensitive topics and no potentially vulnerable participants will be included in the study. The interviewer will be prepared to address any difficult issues should these arise and will refer a participant to seek help if necessary from the student wellness section. The qualitative data from the interviews will be password protected.

The survey findings will be analysed using a computer programme that will be written specifically to draw out patterns, trends and co-relations between the different data collected from the survey. A professional programmer will be engaged to write the programme. The programmer will not have access to specific information on a specific student and will receive only digital inputs of the information for the data analysis.

The findings from the survey and the interviews will be used for the thesis and SIMGE as the sponsor will receive a copy of the report once the thesis has been submitted. An undertaking has been given to SIMGE that no part of the report or the thesis will be published without their agreement and consent.

Section 9 Further information

Outline any other information you feel relevant to this submission, using a separate sheet or attachments if necessary.

Section 10 Attachments Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached

a.	Information sheets and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research, including approach letters	Yes X	
b.	Consent form	No	
	If applicable:		
c.	The proposal for the project	Yes ☐	No ☐

d.	Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee	Yes ☐	No ☐
e.	Full risk assessment	Yes ☐	No ☐

Section 11 Declaration

	Yes	No
I have read, understood and will abide by the following set of guidelines.	X	☐

BPS ☐	BERA X	BSA ☐	Other (please state) ☐

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.	X	☐
I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.	X	☐

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:

The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.

Name	Charles Tee
Date	17 July 2017

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor.

Notes and references

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Departmental use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, you may refer the application to the Research Ethics and Governance Administrator (via IOE.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk) so that it can be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A Research Ethics Committee Chair, ethics representatives in your department and the research ethics coordinator can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the Research Ethics Committee.

Reviewer 1	
Supervisor name	Dr. Christine Han / Prof Claire Callender
Supervisor comments	Charles has given due consideration to the ethical issues of the research.
Supervisor signature	███████████████████

Reviewer 2	
Advisory committee/course team member name	Avril Keating
Advisory committee/course team member comments	1) Section 7b: the data will be collected and processed in Singapore, which is outside of the EEA, so this question needs to be answered correctly. 2) The questionnaire does include some potentially sensitive information – namely students' use of health and counselling services. If you cannot identify students, this should be ok from a data protection perspective, but you may want to password protect files (and expect under-reporting). 3) This could also mean that the data that is collected in interviews is sensitive. The interviewer should be prepared for difficult issues (e.g. about mental health) to potentially emerge, and consider how he will respond to these 4) In addition, and as a result, all qualitative data files should be password protected as well as anonymised.
Advisory committee/course team member signature	███████████

Decision		
Date decision was made	31 Jul 2017	
Decision	Approved	☐
	Referred back to applicant and supervisor	☐
	Referred to REC for review	☐

Recording	Recorded in the student information system	☐

Once completed and approved, please send this form and associated documents to the relevant programme administrator to record on the student information system and to securely store.

Further guidance on ethical issues can be found on the IOE website at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/research-ethics-committee/ioe and www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk

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