Surviving and Thriving: The Challenges and Emotional Coping Strategies of

Black-African University Students in the Netherlands.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research paper to my late Dad. I miss you greatly and have felt your

presence throughout this process.

Acknowledgements

       I would like to thank my Mom and siblings for their love and immense support during this time. I would also like to thank my Supervisor for her guidance through this process. Your suggestions for improvements and encouragement really helped me. Additionally, I would like to thank my wonderful friends who provided me with so much support to keep going and not give up. Lastly, I would like to thank all the people who participated in the interviews. I appreciate you trusting me with your stories. This period of my life was very difficult, filled with ups and downs and working on this thesis helped me greatly.

Abstract

There has been limited research on the challenges faced by black-African students in the Netherlands as well as how they regulate their emotions to address these challenges and improve their general well-being. This study thus aimed to explore the challenges experienced by black-African students, the impact of these challenges on their well-being and the emotional regulation strategies they utilize to cope. A qualitative study design using semi-structured interviews was employed. A final sample of 9 students participated in sharing their experiences. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes in the data. The analysis revealed that African students experienced challenges related to discrimination, stereotypes and microaggressions, social and cultural integration, their learning environment and systemic and structural issues. Together these challenges affected students' well-being with students expressing struggling emotionally with feelings of loneliness, homesickness, sadness, anxiety and frustration. In order to cope with these challenges students made use of a variety of emotional regulation strategies such as; situation modification, situation selection, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. These findings provide unique insight into the experiences of black-African students and the impact various emotion regulation strategies have had on their well-being. It assists in providing strategies and interventions for improving the well-being of this student group as well as highlights the need for creating a more inclusive and supportive campus environment for ethnic minority students.

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 "I wasn't expecting things to be easy, but I wasn't expecting it to be as hard as it was." (Makena)

These words were spoken by "Makena" on her experiences studying in the Netherlands, a sentiment shared by many students. For many African students Western higher education is highly valued as they are associated with better quality and improved life outcomes in contrast to the alternatives in their home country (Hayes & Lin, 1994). An international degree is often seen as the epitome of success and the guarantee of a better life (Marcketti, Mhango & Gregoire, 2006). However, the transition to a new country is often met with a number of significant challenges (Wass et al., 2023). Various studies show that ethnic minority students from Asia, Africa, and Latin America often experience more difficulty when adjusting to their host country (Araujo, 2011; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). These challenges have been shown to negatively influence their experience and affect academic outcomes, subsequently resulting in unequal opportunities in the working world (Wass et al., 2023). Students can utilize a number of strategies to cope with the challenges they face and adjust to life abroad (Busher, Lewis & Comber, 2016). These strategies include participation in social activities, engagement with on-campus support services and forming close social ties (Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010). However, few studies have explored the internally-driven coping skills such as emotion regulation strategies which have been shown to be important in helping students cope in a new environment and improve well-being (Zilioli, Imami & Slatcher, 2017; Wu & hammond, 2011). In addition, while there is much research on the experiences of various international student groups, literature on the experiences of black-African students in the Netherlands is still limited.

This paper thus aims to explore the challenges experienced by black-African students, the

impact of these challenges on their well-being and the emotional regulation strategies they utilize to cope and improve their well-being. This research holds significant importance as it can help identify the factors that have hampered adjustment to life abroad. Moreover, by understanding their challenges, it can assist universities in developing more efficient policies and strategies that are more inclusive and supportive to their exact needs. It will also help to bridge the cultural gap in our understanding of how students from different ethnic backgrounds regulate their emotions in the face of challenges as well as the impact of these emotions on their well-being. The rich cultural and ethnic diversity of the Netherlands together with the increasing internationalization of the student population in Dutch Universities makes it vital that the difficult emotions experienced by the diverse student population as well as how they manage these difficult emotions is understood.

The following research questions will facilitate the achievement of the study aims:

1. What challenges did black-African students' face while studying in the Netherlands?
2. How did these challenges affect their well-being?
3. What emotional regulation strategies did they adopt in response to cope with the challenges?

This paper will specifically use the term black-African to refer to the study sample. This term will refer to students from African countries who racially identify themselves as black. Distinguishing between black-African and African students is important as not all students from African countries may identify as black. The difficulties experienced by black-Africans abroad are often different to those experienced by other racial groups from Africa, especially white Africans (Lee & Opio, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007). Additionally, there have been a number of studies that have criticized the use of the term "African" considering the rich cultural and

linguistic diversity in each of the countries (Beoku-Betts, 2004; Maringe & Carter, 2007).

According to certain authors this may perpetuate certain stereotypes and misconceptions.

However, people from African countries often refer to themselves as African, particularly when

abroad and often make connections and relationships on the basis of being "African"

(Beoku-Betts, 2004). Moreover, the postcolonial context of economic and political marginality

that exists in many African countries provides a compelling argument for further research

exploring the commonalities between their experiences studying abroad (Beoku-Betts, 2004).

Challenges Faced by Black-African International Students

Social and cultural integration, discrimination, stereotyping and microaggressions as well

as financial difficulty are issues that have been shown to be of particular concern to many

black-African international students (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). While some of these challenges also

affect other international student groups, there are a number of factors that make these challenges

especially unique to black-African students.

Black-African students often experience challenges due to the negative perceptions of

African cultures. African countries are often seen as "backward" as a result of their colonial

history and position of marginality within the global economic system (Beoku-Betts, 2004; Lee

& Rice, 2007). These negative perceptions lead to students' experiencing discrimination,

stereotyping and microaggressions (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). Microaggressions are subtle, hidden

and unintentional forms of bias and prejudice (Williams, et al., 2020). Due to these negative

perceptions, black-African students studying in America have reported having their ability to

manage university work questioned and expressed being pushed into taking remedial or "easier"

classes (Lee & Opio, 2011). Foreign accents have also been shown to perpetuate negative stereotypes especially for black or racial minority students. This is in contrast to white-African and European students with foreign accents, who were found to not report experiencing prejudice or discrimination related to their accents (Lee & Opio, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007). White-Africans often reported blending in more easily to American culture with few issues compared to black-African students (Lee & Opio, 2011). Challenges related to social and cultural adjustment have also been noted as significant issues to black-African students.

Black-African students' views of societal norms and expectations as well as interpersonal relationships can often lead to stress and struggles with adjusting to their new environment (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). African students come from collectivist cultures that have an interdependent worldview where social harmony is emphasized and can thus often struggle with more individualistic cultures that offer a more independent way of life, which is often seen in many Western European cultures (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). Black-African students studying in America were found to experience difficulty with being away from their home country and found it difficult to form relationships with people in their host country due to these differences in worldview and communication styles (Beoku-Betts, 2004). These social and cultural challenges also extend to their learning environment. Black-African students have been found to experience challenges navigating the education system due to differences in academic requirements, classroom culture, and the faculty- student relationship (Boafo-Arthur, 2014).

Structural and systemic issues regarding government regulations about studying abroad have also been noted as being a major concern for many black-African students (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; Constantine et al., 2005). These issues have mainly been in

relation to financial concerns. A study by Maringe and Carter (2007) on international students' motivations to study in the UK, found that African students experienced most anxieties about their finances and over 90% had concerns over payment of their fees. In this study Maringe and Carter (2007), also noted that the financial strain of studying abroad also extends to the parents and families of the students creating further anxieties and a negative impact on their wellbeing. Moreover, African students are also expected to send money back to their families which adds a further burden on the well-being of students (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). These challenges may negatively influence their emotional state and wellbeing making it difficult to adjust in their host country.

The current studies on challenges faced by black-African students have centered on experiences of African students studying in the United States (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Lee & Opio, 2011; Maringe & Carter, 2007) with few examining the experiences of African students in Europe and in the Netherlands specifically. Even though research indicates they experience different challenges when studying abroad compared to more commonly studied countries such as Asia and Europe (Lee & Opio, 2011; Boafo-Arthur, 2014). Moreover, research has shown generalizing studies on international student experiences has proven to be difficult and not representative of the experiences of the different cultures and racial groups as well the contexts in which they are studying (Pasura, 2008). This study thus aims to contribute to existing research on the experience of black-African students by gaining an in-depth perspective of the challenges they face while studying in the Netherlands.

The Effect of Challenges on Well-being

Well-being encompasses the psychological, physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellness of a student (Hossain, O'Neill & Strnadová, 2023). It refers to a students' subjective

feeling about a positive or negative affect in relation to their student life (Keyes & Annas, 2009).

A positive affect is associated with feelings of joy and negative affect with feelings of anxiety,

stress and overall unhappiness (Hossain, O'Neill & Strnadová, 2023). According to Li and

Gasser (2005), dealing with a new culture and coping with academic demands places

international students in a challenging and stressful position which has a significant impact on

their well-being. The social, cultural, academic, and financial areas highlighted as being

significant challenges for black-African students have been shown to result in feelings of

alienation, social exclusion, and homesickness for loved ones and cultural aspects. These

challenges have been shown to cause performance anxiety, depression, as well as various other

psychosomatic issues such as the inability to sleep, eating problems, and headaches (Evivie,

2009). There are a variety of strategies that black-African students may utilize to cope with these

challenges and improve their well-being as they adjust to life in their host country (Morosanu,

Handley & O'Donovan, 2010). Previous studies have indicated that social support structures are

critical in the adjustment and well-being of international students as a whole (Kift, Nelson &

Clarke, 2010). For example, student induction programs have been shown to assist students in

adjusting to the university culture and life abroad (Hultberg et al. 2009). However, much of the

literature has focused on external support strategies with very few looking into the internally

driven coping strategies and competencies that can improve student well-being and enhance the

experience of adjusting to a new culture and learning environment (Wu & Hammond, 2011).

This study thus aims to contribute to this gap by exploring the role of emotion regulation

in helping improve the well-being of students as they navigate the challenges of studying in the

Netherlands. Individuals who are able to effectively manage their emotions have been shown to

have improved wellbeing and emotional outcomes (Zilioli, Imami & Slatcher, 2017). Emotional

regulation strategies have also been shown to inform how a student engages with various external support structures (Wu & Hammond, 2011). Additionally, there is an absence of research specifically focused on the lived experiences of black-African students in the Netherlands and the impact of these challenges on well-being (Anjorin et al., 2023). This is especially evident in academic institutions in the Netherlands where there is a notable lack of understanding of how race and ethnicity interact and affect the well-being of students (Anjorin et al., 2023). This study thus aimed to contribute to research in this field by exploring the different emotions students experienced as they went through their challenges and the impact this had on their well-being and the role that emotion regulation played in helping to improve their well-being.

The Role of Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation involves the extrinsic and intrinsic processes an individual utilizes to control, maintain, or modify their emotional reactions to achieve social outcomes (Gross, 1988). When there is a discrepancy between what an individual wants to achieve and what they are currently experiencing, it causes the emotion regulation system to activate (Juang et al., 2016). This subsequently prompts the individual towards their desired goals. Research has shown that a major determinant of effective adjustment in a new culture is how well a person is able to manage their emotions during the transition period (Garnefski et al., 2002). There are a number of different theories that are used to make sense of various ways people regulate their emotions; however the process model of emotion regulation has received considerable support in the literature (Gross, 2015). This research aims to use the process model of emotion regulation strategies as a framework to explore the emotion regulation strategies used by black-African students. The process model is relevant for this study as it allows for a comprehensive look at the

strategies utilized by students as well as which emotion strategies have been most effective for students to cope with the challenges of studying abroad.

The process model distinguishes between two emotion regulation strategies: antecedent and response-focused. Antecedent refers to strategies that are utilized prior to the emotional response becoming activated and influencing our behavior and physiological reaction (Gross & John, 2003). Antecedent-focused strategies have been grouped in four categories: situation modification, situation selection, attentional deployment, and cognitive change (Gross, 1998). Situation modification involves regulating one's emotions by changing or modifying one's situation, situation selection involves regulating one's emotions by making a decision to either approach or avoid certain situations, attentional deployment involves directing your attention towards or away from certain aspects of the situation in order to regulate one's emotions and cognitive change involves altering the emotion response by changing the cognitive evaluation (Gross, 1998). Response modulation strategies on the other hand, are utilized after the emotional responses are generated affecting the physiological, experiential, or behavioral responses (Gross & Thompson 2007). Expressive suppression is a response-focused strategy and it diminishes expressive emotional behavior (Gross & Thompson 2007). Expressive suppression is considered a maladaptive strategy as it involves prevention of the emotional responses (Goldin et al., 2008). Maladaptive strategies can lead to poor mental health and poor well-being (Goldin et al., 2008).

Existing literature has shown there to be evidence of cultural variation in emotion regulation (Ford & Mauss, 2015). According to Matsumoto and colleagues (2008), individuals' perceptions of the world, their beliefs, and understanding of themselves often vary across racial and ethnic groups. These differences can influence how various ethnic groups assess and interpret emotional stimuli (Matsumoto et al., 2008). In addition, cultural values have been

shown to play a crucial part in the norms and practices of emotion regulation (Ford & Mauss, 2015). Many of these cultural differences have been found to be related to the dichotomy between individualistic cultures often in Western countries and collectivist cultures often found in Asian and African countries (Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012; Minkov et al., 2017). People from collectivistic cultures have been shown to express fewer emotions during an elicitation task and showed more regular use of expressive suppression (Mauss & Butler, 2010). A possible reason for this is that expressing emotions freely, especially negative emotions, may impact group harmony which is something that is highly valued in collectivist cultures (Mauss & Butler, 2010). However, despite evidence that different cultural groups have distinct ideologies and belief systems that shape how they interpret emotional cues in their environment, racial and ethnic variation in emotion regulation is still often overlooked (Weiss, et al., 2022).

Specifically, there has been little research examining how different ethnic minority students emotionally regulate to cope with challenges. Previous research on emotion regulation has largely focused on white participants within the American and European context (Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012; Weiss, et al., 2022). Additionally, studies focused on cultural differences have been limited and largely focused on Asian and African-American communities (Sun & Nolan, 2021; Wilson & Gentzler, 2021). Moreover, the existing research on emotion regulation relies mostly on quantitative research methods which limits its ability to fully capture the lived experiences of individuals' emotional experiences (Wojnicka & Nowicka, 2023). Therefore, this study will contribute to research on emotion regulation by using qualitative methods to explore how black-African students regulate their emotions when faced with challenges as well as which strategies used by black-African students have been successful in improving their well-being and helping them manage the challenges of studying abroad.

Methods

Study Design

The present study made use of qualitative methods using interviews. Qualitative research is focused on understanding and explaining underexplored phenomena in an in-depth manner (Sandelowski, 2010). This method aims to interpret and understand phenomena in terms of the meanings and perspectives people attribute to them (Sandelowski, 2010). This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of black-African students by examining the challenges they face, the impact of these challenges on their well-being and the emotional regulation strategies they utilize to deal with these challenges. As information was gathered based on the personal lived experiences of those participating, qualitative research was deemed the most appropriate approach for this study.

The study conducted semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are in-depth interviews that are guided by a predetermined set of questions. This approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for open-ended responses which provide deeper insight into participants' experiences (Adams, 2015). Furthermore, this approach allows the interviewer to explore relevant topics that arise during the interview that offer unexpected insight while still being guided by the pre-set questions (Adams, 2015; Given, 2008). The interview guide can be found in appendix A.

Participants

In order to recruit participants, the present study made use of purposeful and snowball sampling. Purposeful sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals that are most knowledgeable and familiar with the phenomenon of interest (Ritchie et al., 2009). The initial

group of participants were recruited through purposeful sampling and in order to participate in the study, needed to adhere to the following criteria:

1. Be over the age of 18

2. Be a student that was born and raised in an African country.

3. Be currently studying or recently studied at a Dutch university at either undergraduate or postgraduate level.

4. Identify as black

The remaining participants were recruited using Snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves recruitment of additional participants through referrals from currently enrolled research participants' (Everitt & Skrondal, 2010). The students who initially responded to the invitation to participate in the study were asked to refer other students who met the research criteria. In the end, a total of 9 students (8 female and 1 male) participated in the study. According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), this sample size is sufficient for phenomenological studies of this nature, given the study's narrow focus and use of selection criteria in order to gain a nuanced understanding of students' experiences. Moreover, data saturation was achieved meaning that no new themes or information would be discovered from further interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The students were from the following African countries: Cameroon, Liberia, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Students attended the following institutions: 5 students were from Tilburg University, 2 from Avans University of Applied Sciences, 1 from Fontys University of Applied Sciences and 1 from Erasmus University. A table is provided below with the demographic details of the students' interviewed.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants.

Interview Pseudonym	Gender	Age
"Ada"	Female	23
"Chebet"	Female	24
"Naila"	Female	22
"Imani"	Female	27
"Lindiwe"	Female	31
"Kendi"	Female	20
"Makena"	Female	24
"Issa"	Female	22

"Omari"   Male   26

Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Tilburg University [TSB_RP1490]. This study carefully considered ethical aspects due to the sensitive nature of the interview questions and the small number of African students that make them easily identifiable. Participants were fully informed of the ethical measures through an information letter and informed consent form that contained the details of the study, its voluntary nature, the option to withdraw from the interview at any time as well as ensured that their anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed. The information letter asking for permission to interview students is provided in appendix B and the Informed consent form is provided in appendix C. The researchers' contact details were also shared with participants in case they had any additional questions or concerns. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants' throughout the reporting of the findings and no identifiable information was used to link data to specific participants. Confidentiality of interview data (audio and transcripts) was ensured by securely storing the data on SurfDrive which only the principal investigator and supervisor have access to. In line with ethical guidelines, the interview data will be stored for 10 years on SurfDrive. Moreover, interview data will not be made publicly available to ensure student confidentiality.

Procedure

The researcher approached potential participants by sending out invitations via Instagram and LinkedIn, the invitation contained all the details of the study. The invitation encouraged those who met the inclusion criteria and were willing to participate to respond to the invitation. Once participants showed interest in participating in the study, an email with details about the interview and an informed consent form was sent to participants. The interviews were conducted by the researcher and occurred either in-person or online via Zoom. The interview duration ranged from roughly 30 - 90 minutes long. The interviews were conducted in English and took place during the months of May and June of 2024. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using an online transcription service, GoTranscipt. If any errors were present in the GoTranscipt transcriptions, they were corrected ensuring they reflected the original contents of the audio recordings. The audio recordings and transcripts were stored in SurfDrive and deleted from the recording device upon storing.

Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis to analyze the themes that emerged from the data. Thematic analysis is a process of identifying themes embedded in the data through an iterative process specified by Braun & Clarke (2006). Once the interviews were transcribed they were analyzed using a qualitative software tool, NVivo14. NVivo was chosen as it is an efficient, reliable and popular analysis tool within the qualitative research field (Zamawe, 2015). The analysis involved several steps. First, each transcript was read and reread to gain a general familiarity with the data. Secondly, the data was coded which is a process of identifying themes within the data. Each sentence of text was scanned and a label assigned to it. Third, the codes were then reviewed and sorted into new categories to answer the research question. These sub

codes were then further reviewed and categorized into the major overarching themes. These themes were then reviewed to ensure there was no overlap and any overlap was incorporated to an existing theme to ensure clarity of the data. Examples of the identified themes can be found in appendix D.

Reflexivity and Positionality

Reflexivity and Positionality is a practice that allows a researcher to employ self-scrutiny and reflect on how their prior experiences, assumptions and beliefs can influence the research process (McGraw, Zvonkovic & Walker, 2000). It is an important process that employs researchers to be as open as possible about the ethical dilemmas of their role in the research as it has an impact on their approach to research encounters, method selection, and interpretation of outcomes, that can influence the interview data (McGraw, Zvonkovic & Walker, 2000; Holmes, 2020). As my research deals with student experiences, I felt it appropriate to reflect on my own positionality as a researcher. The following paragraph will provide a reflection of how my identity as a black female international student from Kenya could have been perceived by the participants and possibly influence their answers during the interviews.

My gender identity as well as race proved to have a largely positive impact when conducting the interviews. The fact that I am not Dutch allowed me to take a neutral stance when it came to the participants' views and feelings towards the Netherlands as well as make the students feel more comfortable in sharing their experiences. As a female I was part of the largest gender group that took part in this study which made it easier to create common ground with the female participants and allowed them to freely share their experiences and be more willing to participate in the study. On the other hand, my gender identity might have affected recruitment of male participants. My experience as a fellow black-African international student allowed me to

be sensitive to and have a deeper understanding of the various challenges that black-African students face. However, I am also aware of how my background and closeness to the research topic can create certain biases in the interpretation of the data.

In recognizing that complete objectivity is not possible and how my bias can influence the research process I employed certain strategies to mitigate this. Through discussion with my supervisor we critically reflected on my themes and analytical approach to ensure they were objective and in line with my research focus. I also critically reflected throughout the research process on how my identity and perspectives shaped and influenced the research. Recruitment of participants was also based on specific criteria which further enhanced the relevance of the data. I am thus well positioned to conduct this research as I am aware and acknowledge the biases that exist.

Results

Through thematic analysis of the interview transcripts it emerged that African students experienced a number of challenges studying in the Netherlands and utilized different types of emotional regulation strategies in order to cope with these challenges. These challenges and emotional regulation strategies that were used will be discussed in this section using 3 overarching themes:

1. Challenges Experienced by Students
2. The Effect of Challenges on Well-being
3. Emotional Regulation Strategies Utilized By Students

The following sections will discuss the themes with reference to the interview data.

Challenges Experienced by Students

Participants described experiencing a number of challenges that hindered their well-being while studying in the Netherlands. These challenges were most notably related to discrimination, stereotypes and microaggressions, social and cultural integration, learning environment and systemic and structural issues.

Discrimination, Stereotypes and Microaggressions

While overt instances of discrimination were rare with only two students having experienced that in an off campus setting, most students described experiencing stereotyping and microaggressions. Microaggressions refers to subtle and unintentional instances of discrimination and bias that students reported experiencing on campus (Williams, Skinta, Kanter, 2020). Most of these experiences were in relation to interactions with their peers however two students reported instances with their lecturer/ professor. These interactions often left students feeling undervalued and not wanting to share their opinions. For example, "Ada" described how while doing group work with her peers she often felt her opinions were disregarded and felt it was due to various perceptions of black people:

> …A lot of people have the stereotype that black people are dumb. Black people, we live
>
> in the worst conditions. We are not knowledgeable about certain things. When we bring
>
> up ideas or propositions, they just put it under the table because they don't think it's that
>
> relevant. (Ada)

"Issa" described an experience where her classmate made a comment implying that she should be familiar with ISIS due to her being muslim which left her feeling uncomfortable:

> I am an obvious Muslim person. Someone was making a reference to ISIS. They were
>
> like, "Issa" [the student called her name], and they said something about ISIS… I'm like,

yes? "Issa, you'd know", I was like… Oh, my goodness. Sometimes it's very like, it

comes so naturally without people [thinking] twice. They just say stuff. (Issa)

"Chebet" on the other hand shared an experience with her Supervisor. She expressed feeling like

her supervisor did not believe in her abilities and had a certain perception about her that affected

their work together, "I felt like she just had a serious preconceived notion about me…she just

had a bias that just didn't go away…Maybe it's just her or maybe it's the fact that I'm an African

student.".

Social and Cultural Integration

Social and cultural integration refers to the challenges students faced with adapting and

adjusting to the social and cultural fabric of living in the Netherlands. Students expressed how

their blackness and African background made social and cultural integration harder. These

challenges included struggling to form interpersonal relationships, language and linguistic

barriers as well as struggling to assimilate and feeling like an outsider. For example, "Naila"

shared how she had never struggled making friends in her home country but here in the

Netherlands it proved much more difficult, "When I got here, I was like, it's so difficult. Because

Dutch people…they're not the most open people. They tend to just stick to being friends with

other Dutch people.". "Kendi" on the other hand, spoke of various linguistic barriers that made

them struggle with adapting in the Netherlands. For example, "Kendi" spoke of how she has to

change her accent in order to fit in and be taken more seriously, "I had to train myself to develop

a universal accent that everyone understands…it makes people take you a bit more seriously than

if I had to speak the way I speak normally.". She further described it as exhaustive and felt like

having to put on a mask every time she leaves her house, "it's exhausting…even right now…It's

hard, you wake up in the morning, you wear your jacket and your accent, and you walk out the door.".

Learning Environment

This refers to challenges students faced in navigating their academic and campus environment. These challenges included various struggles around adjusting to the new and different campus culture, struggling with the lack of racial diversity among the teaching staff, students and course content, and struggling to cope with the academic work. For example, "Kendi" expressed having challenges with the academic work and attributed this to the more independent learning that was in contrast to her home country of Zambia: "It was very difficult for me to grasp the information because I'm used to the teacher coming to you, really helping you and guiding you through what you're doing…". Students also expressed struggling with the lack of diversity in their program. For example, "Issa" described being disappointed with the lack of diversity in the course content, "The curriculum itself is very Eurocentric. Maybe making the course itself, like the content [more diverse]. It helps you learn better. Because it's more relatable.". While "Kendi" described how she would like to have more diversity in the teaching staff due to the more positive and supportive experiences she has had, "if they could have more black teachers at school, that would be helpful. All the teachers that we've had good experiences with…are all international teachers, from Brazil, from Peru…". "Lindiwe" spoke about finding it hard to share her opinion due to being the only black or African student,"I was the only Black person in the whole master's program. It was very uncomfortable to answer some questions.".

Systemic and Structural Issues

This theme referred to the challenges students expressed having with the strict regulations that limit non-eu students. These included issues around the working policies for non-eu

students, accommodation issues and financial challenges. Many of these issues had students experiencing a lot of pressure and feeling unwelcome due to the strict regulations which made their time as a student quite difficult. For example, "Imani" described her struggles with understanding why the fees for international students are extremely high compared to the local fees, "International students, they pay as much as 15,000 euros… I don't get the basis for the justification of that much difference…". For many African students even finding a job to help finance their living expenses proved challenging. For example, "Imani" who needed a part-time job described the challenges she faced due to the work restrictions for certain non-eu students, "Here in the Netherlands, your study visa doesn't come with a work permit. That means that you need to find an employer who is willing to apply". According to "Imani", it was hard getting an employer willing to do that. The high tuition fees and working restrictions similarly affected "Makena". She faced hardships when it came to how to finance her studies after losing part of her scholarship which have affected her studies, "given the restrictions that we have on student working, it has not been that easy because I'm not working…that was one of the reasons why it was more challenging for the course than it would have been normally". For some students the financial challenges ended up being too overwhelming as "Ada" shares. She described the heavy burden a fellow black-African student experienced in trying to balance being a student and working part time and he eventually dropped out:

He stopped the program because he was footing his bills and it was practically impossible to pay your tuition, pay your rent, pay everything and still study and go to school. It's almost impossible. He had to quit. Even when he was still in the program, I could see it a lot. (Ada)

The Effect of Challenges on Well-being

Students reported experiencing a number of negative emotions as a result of the challenges they faced which had a negative effect on their well-being. These emotions included loneliness, homesickness, sadness, anxiety and frustration. Many of the negative emotions were due to the social and cultural differences between the Netherlands and their home country which made adjustment difficult. Students spoke about how struggling to fit in and find a community was much harder. For example, "Chebet" described feelings of loneliness, sadness and depression as she struggled to make friends and find a community:

> I felt loneliness, sadness. I was depressed for a while as well. Wasn't really eating. I can't even say I was stressed. I think you need energy to be stressed. I was just trying to like, just get through the day. (Chebet)

"Imani" experienced challenges with struggling to adjust to the climate and new culture causing her to become withdrawn and very anxious, "I was just a bit withdrawn, struggling with feelings of anxiety at the same time, trying to navigate through the entire process. It took a toll on me emotionally.". "Lindiwe" described being homesick often which resulted in feelings of sadness and loneliness: "...That longing for belonging or having someone around to share experiences with…Not being able to be a part of it [family and friend get togethers].". She also expressed experiencing a lot of pressure to succeed which further affected her emotionally:

> …Then feeling overwhelmed as well because of all the studies and the pressures of having to study and also having to work. There is a lot of pressure riding on you to complete what you've gone there to do. (Lindiwe)

Similarly, "Omari" also expressed feeling a lot of pressure about what the future holds and in trying to not only complete his studies but also find a job in the Netherlands. This caused

feelings of anxiety in him, "I was feeling very anxious about what the future is going to look like, that's something that weighed heavily on me when I was studying.". While many students shared feelings of sadness, loneliness and anxiety some felt more frustrated at the struggles as they did not expect to struggle as much as they did, "I felt really frustrated because I did not anticipate anything like this. I was feeling bad, given the fact that I don't have my family around.".

Emotional Regulation Strategies Utilized By Students

In order to cope with the challenges they experienced and the difficult emotions these challenges caused which affected their well-being, participants reported making use of different types of strategies. These strategies will be classified according to Gross' (1998) five categories of emotion regulation strategies. These categories are: situation modification, situation selection, attentional deployment, cognitive change and expressive suppression.

Situation Modification

This involves regulating one's emotions by changing or modifying one's situation or environment (Gross, 1998). Students described modifying their interactions with people as well as changing their behavior in order to reduce the intensity of difficult emotions. In this way students were modifying their environment to create a more emotionally supportive context. For example, "Kendi" described talking to her parents whenever she was feeling sad which helped to generate more positive emotions, "I talked to my parents a lot because they are very much like my emotional support system. Talking to them helped me quite a lot because those are the only people that I could talk to.". Another example of situation modification involved students regulating emotions associated with speaking in class. For example, "Kendi" expressed

preferring not to ask questions in class and rather asking after class as she often felt judged and uncomfortable due to being black:

> Sometimes when you try to ask questions in class they take it like oh my god you're black you don't come from a good educational background so they make it very prominent, even if you're asking a very valid question. They make it look like you're the one who is lagging behind in class. I would rather not answer questions in class and then after class ask my questions or email them the questions or send a message via Teams. (Kendi)

Situation Selection

Situation selection involves regulating one's emotions by making a decision to either approach or avoid certain situations, people or places (Gross, 1998). Students often described regulating their emotions by seeking out various social situations. For example, "Omari" shared that going to the gym and actively seeking out situations that made him happy is often what helped him generate more positive feelings, "going to the gym, exercising. I think that was a big part of regulating my mental health…so I think actively trying to find things I liked to do made me feel better.". Omari also described seeking out social situations where he could make friends in order to generate more pleasant feelings. For example, "Omari" described reaching out to the African Student Association to make some friends and how those events would bring him joy and gave him a sense of community:

> I met some friends there, who I still have up until now but it also really did help me feel [better], like I said earlier, when you have people who look like you sound like you do feel a lot more welcome, you feel a lot more comfortable in the country. It was the one society I was part of and that also helped with my social life and like meeting other people who I have similarities with. (Omari)

Attentional Deployment

Attentional deployment is another strategy often used by students. This involves directing your attention towards or away from certain aspects of the situation in order to regulate one's emotions and promote positive well-being (Gross, 1998). This can involve distraction, concentration or rumination (Gross, 1998). For example, "Ada" described having a negative experience with a student where they undervalued her opinion which left her hurt. She described how she did not address the issue and instead focused on her studies, "I don't address it. Because I don't want to fight… I don't want to navigate that because it's going to get me worked up. I just want to do my study and just understand what I have to understand.". "Issa" also expressed a similar way of dealing with uncomfortable interactions. "Issa" after a misunderstanding with a student about her being Muslim also expressed ignoring the situation and choosing not to give it attention, "I ignored it. Because, I was a first year. Also because there are lecturers. If you don't address it, I'm like, okay, who am I to address it?".

Cognitive Change

Cognitive change was another strategy students employed which involves altering the emotion response by changing the cognitive evaluation. For students cognitive change often involved techniques such as cognitive reappraisal and reframing. They described changing their appraisal of the situation in order to generate different emotions. Examples of cognitive change strategies African students employed included praying, spirituality and positive self-talk. For example, "Makena" described placing a positive perspective on her situation by thinking about how much of an inspiration she is to people in her home country of Liberia. This often helped to generate positive emotions that helped her cope through the difficult times, "When you just look at people from where I come from, how much they're struggling…you feel encouraged, to do

everything you can to succeed…that is something that has been really inspiring and keeps me going.". However, the majority of the students made use of prayer and spirituality in order to place a more positive perspective on their situation. For example "Chebet" shared how she would pray and talk to God which would help her, "I make time to pray even if it's like right in the middle of it. I'm just like oh god like I feel bad I don't know what's going on [Why is] this is happening, help me.". "Naila" on the other hand, described invoking the support of her ancestors in order to modify her perception of the difficulty she was facing. By talking to her Ancestors she was able to feel better about her situation, "Also just like my ancestors because I am Xhosa. We have a lot of that in my culture and in my family. Whenever I leave the house, okay. Ancestors, let's go."

Response Modulation

Response modulation are strategies utilized after the emotional response has been generated affecting the physiological, experiential, or behavioral responses. In this study, this involved expressive suppression as it inhibits expressive emotional behavior. For example, "Imani" described how she would often suppress her emotions rather than seeking help or expressing them outwardly, "that's very much attributable to my personality. I'm an introvert. I'm not someone that, I'm not exactly open. I would rather just bottle things up and find a way to deal with it myself.".

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by black-African students in the Netherlands and how they emotionally regulate to manage their well-being and cope with these challenges. A qualitative study design using semi-structured interviews was employed to

investigate this with 9 students participating in sharing their experiences. The study was guided

by the following research questions:

1. What challenges did African students' face while studying in the Netherlands?

2. How did these challenges affect their well-being?

3. What emotional regulation strategies did they adopt in response to these challenges?

Overall these findings revealed that there were 4 main challenges that students struggled

with that were related to discrimination, stereotypes and microaggressions, social and cultural

integration, struggles with coping with their learning environment and systemic and structural

issues. These challenges negatively affected students' well-being with students expressing

struggling emotionally with feelings of loneliness, homesickness, sadness, frustration and

anxiety. Their race and African background played a major role in the challenges they faced.

Students made use of a wide range of strategies to cope with these challenges and to help

minimize negative emotions. These findings contribute to our understanding of the lived

experiences of black-African students and underlies the profound impact these challenges have

had on their well-being. Moreover, this study contributes to our understanding of the difficult

emotions experienced by this group as they navigate these challenges and how they utilize

different strategies to improve their well-being.

The experiences of students are very much consistent with current literature on the

challenges faced by black-African students (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Lee & Opio, 2011; Irungu,

2013). Social networks and community support are highly valued in many African countries and

thus it can be disorientating for students to adjust to countries where individualism and

independence are more highly valued such as within the US and Dutch context (Fischer, 2011).

This sense of individualism and independence within Dutch culture also proved to be an issue

within the academic setting with students struggling with independent learning. This was also noted by Beoku-Betts (2004) who found that African international students studying in the US experienced challenges with independent learning. In many African countries there is often more of a reliance on teaching and learning that is more collaborative and structured (Irungu, 2013). There is a lot more reliance on support from the professor but also support from other learners (Irungu, 2013). Many students in this study felt distant from other students and professors and felt learning was less collaborative and an isolating experience. Additionally, many highlighted the lack of racial diversity particularly within the academic and campus environment with many expressing wanting more diversity in this regard due to positive experiences. Many of the students were often the only black students in their program or even in their department which further added to the experiences of social exclusion. According to Anjorin and colleagues (2023), a lack of representation on campus often limits the integration between ethnic minority students and Dutch-born students which then reinforces stereotypes and perpetuates discrimination. As black students are a minority group on campus, experiences with microaggressions continue to be an issue for many students on campus. This finding also contributes to our understanding on the impact that a lack of representation in Dutch universities can have on the experiences of black students. This demonstrates the crucial role that racial and cultural diversity plays in contributing to students' well-being. Moreover, covert and unintentional instances of discrimination and bias were quite common with students reporting having their capabilities questioned and opinions overlooked by both professors and fellow students. This finding contributes to our understanding of the prevalence of stereotyping and microaggressions in Dutch Universities and the impact it has on student experiences.

These challenges left students struggling with a number of difficult emotions that had a

significant impact on their well-being. The most significant emotions experienced by students were loneliness, homesickness, sadness, anxiety and frustration. The feelings of loneliness, homesickness and sadness were often in relation to the challenges they faced with social and cultural integration. While feelings of anxiety, frustration and sadness were often due to challenges faced adapting to the learning environment, the systemic and structural issues. Challenges of stereotyping and microaggressions were often met with feelings of frustration as well as loneliness as a result of feeling singled out due to their race or African background. These findings contribute to our understanding of the impact that the challenges of studying abroad can have on the well-being of students. These findings are consistent with literature showing that the challenges faced by black-African students studying abroad have a negative impact on their experiences studying abroad (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Evivie, 2009). However, these findings delved further by offering qualitative insights that highlight the nuanced and difficult emotions experienced by these students and how they navigate these emotions.

Students utilized a variety of strategies in order to help manage their emotions as a result of the challenges they faced. The strategies of situation modification, situation selection, attentional deployment and cognitive change were used most by students while expressive suppression was one of the least utilized strategies that students used to cope. This was a notable finding as it was in contrast to research that shows that those from collectivist cultures tend to utilize expressive suppression more often. According to Weiss, and colleagues (2022), Asians, Blacks and Hispanics were found to be more likely to inhibit emotional response and report more use of expressive suppression. While there is often a strong emphasis in social support from collectivist cultures there is also a tradition of not wanting to burden others and enduring hardships quietly (Irungu, 2013). As a result, people from collectivist cultures often inhibit

emotional response. According to Mauss and Butler (2010) people from collectivist cultures have been found to suppress their emotions due to group harmony being more highly valued in these societies. However, in this current study students rarely reported inhibiting their emotional expression. A possible reason for this contrast might be due to the context of the students in this study being in a foreign country. Much of the studies done on this topic have been conducted on people in their country of origin and not out of their familiar environment. Thus, in this context, it might be useful for African students studying outside of their home countries and in Western universities to become familiar with different strategies so that they can reap the behavioral benefits. This finding enriches our understanding of how emotional regulation strategies utilized can differ depending on the context. Another notable finding was that many of the emotion regulation strategies utilized by students often relied on reaching out to others in order to regulate their emotions. For example, much of the situation modification and situation selection strategies had students regulating their emotions through social support and seeking out social situations in order to improve their well-being. This finding contributes to recent research on emotion regulation that has addressed the role of interpersonal emotional regulation (Gökdağ, 2021). This concept involves regulating your emotions through social interactions which is what was frequently seen in the strategies students employed. Emotion regulation is not only an intrapersonal process but functions interpersonally as well as people often use others when regulating their own emotions (Gökdağ, 2021). The findings in this study thus further highlight the impact that social support structures play in helping us regulate our emotions. This is also in line with studies that show that cultural values are important in emotion regulation strategies as they have been shown to shape the norms and the expression of emotion regulation strategies (Mauss & Butler, 2010). In many African cultural contexts people are encouraged to find

meaningful social networks with emphasis placed on social adjustment and accommodating others (Mauss & Butler, 2010). Cognitive change also proved to be an important adaptive emotion regulation strategy. Many students utilized this strategy through the use of prayer and spirituality as well as personal motivation that helped them reframe their situation into a positive perspective. Religion, prayer and spirituality in particular was an important coping mechanism for all the students. According to (Gross & John, 2003), prayer and spiritual connection helps people regulate their emotions by promoting cognitive reappraisal. It helps people view their experiences (both positive and negative) as part of a larger meaning system. In this way they are able to reinterpret their emotional environment in a way that aligns it with cognitive change. So through prayer people are able to reframe the meaning of an emotional event and thus they are able to look at a negative experience and interpret it in a way that they can see the positive in the situation. This finding highlights the importance of spirituality and religion in the well-being of African students. Overall, these findings contribute to our understanding of which emotion regulation strategies had a positive impact on student well-being thus helping to inform prevention and intervention strategies.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

This study makes use of a sample of 9 students, while this was sufficient for saturation, the sample is not representative of the entire African student population and thus can not be used to generalize. Instead these findings offer an in-depth perspective into the different student experiences. The composition of the sample was largely determined by the availability and willingness of respondents to participate as well as the time constraints. This created limitations in the gender diversity of the sample which was predominantly female students. As a result, the experiences shared are mainly skewed towards female perspectives. Certain experiences that

might be unique to male African students studying in the Netherlands may thus have been underexplored. For example, there are a lot of societal and cultural norms around masculinity, particularly in the African context, where men are seen as providers (Ezeugwu & Ojedokun, 2020). Moreover, due to norms about masculinity men are often less likely to express their emotions and experience less emotional awareness and thus may utilize expressive suppression more than women (Gross & John, 1998; Mendes et al., 2003). Women have also been shown to rely on social support networks more than men which was evident in the findings of this study (Lee et al., 2020). Thus, future research could endeavor to gain a more gender diverse sample in order to explore how these gender differences affect the challenges, the expression of emotions and the strategies used to regulate emotions. This study aimed to capture a more comprehensive picture of the challenges faced by students and how they emotionally regulate to cope with these challenges. As a result, it does not clearly measure how well the emotion regulation strategies utilized by students worked to reduce the intensity of negative emotions. Future studies could thus endeavor to explore this in more detail.

Practical Implications

An important practical application of the findings on the challenges faced by students and the impact it had on their well-being, would be to enhance efforts to increase the cultural and racial diversity of the teaching staff. This was highlighted as an aspect that would help to improve students' experiences with their academic and campus environment. Efforts should also be made to diversify the curricula by incorporating course content and tutorials that are inclusive and culturally and racially diverse. Additionally, this study also highlights the importance of ensuring support systems with an awareness of racial dynamics are available on Campus to ensure students have a safe space where they can share and report race-related experiences.

These efforts can help create an inclusive environment where not only African students but also ethnic minority international students can better adjust. In terms of the findings on emotion regulation, an important practical application would be to incorporate coaching programs on emotion regulation strategies. These coaching programs can be included as part of the African student association as well as the international student orientation programmes and designed for their specific needs. Research has shown that coaching on emotion regulation can help reduce social exclusion and improve mental health (Gross & John, 2003). Moreover, considering the significant role interpersonal relationships played in the emotional regulation strategies students utilized, strengthening awareness and accessibility of social support systems on Campus for black-African students as well as ensuring a social element is incorporated in the coaching on emotional regulation strategies is important.

Conclusion

Black-African students are a growing minority group in the Netherlands however, their experiences studying in the Netherlands and how they regulate their emotions to improve their well-being and cope is not well known. To address these gaps in emotion regulation research and black-African student experiences studying in the Netherlands, this paper conducted a qualitative study interviewing students on the challenges of being a black-African student in the Netherlands and how emotional regulation strategies helped them improve their well-being and cope with the challenges. This study made use of Gross (1998) five families of emotion regulation strategies as a framework to explore students; emotional experience, as well as the types of emotion regulation strategies they used. By exploring the challenges experienced by black-African students and the impact of this on their well-being this paper highlighted the importance of creating a more inclusive space for ethnic minority students on Campus. Moreover, it showed the

value of effective emotion regulation strategies in helping students improve their well-being and successfully cope with the challenges they faced. The study highlighted the range of ways black-African students regulated their emotions in order to cope with difficulty as well as the importance of social support in how students manage their emotions. The findings from this study can be used by university stakeholders to promote effective emotion regulation strategies to improve well-being of black-African students. This can be achieved through emotion regulation coaching as well as optimizing existing resources offered to students and tailoring them to the different international student groups.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guideline

Warm-up Questions

- What is your Gender?
- What is your Age?
- What is your country of origin?
- What is your racial identity?
- Are you currently an undergraduate or postgraduate student?
- If not, when did you graduate?
- What is/was your program of study?
- Why did you choose to come to the Netherlands?
- What did you expect when you came to the Netherlands?

Please think of your experiences as a student here in the Netherlands and answer the following questions in as much detail as possible.

1. What has been your general experience as a student in the Netherlands?
2. What major challenges did you face during your time as a student?
   Prompt:
   Academic? Cultural? Financial? Discrimination? Alienation? Homesickness?
3. How did you feel when these challenges happened?
4. How did these challenges affect your experience in the Netherlands?
5. What did you do to cope with those difficult challenges?
   Prompt: Reaching out to a professor? Talking to friends? Ignore it and just move on?
   Change your perspective of the situation?
6. How did those strategies you used to cope make you feel?

Closing questions

7. What advice would you give to an African international student coming to the Netherlands?
8. Do you have anything else you would like to add to what we discussed today?

Appendix B: Information Letter

Study title: The Challenges and Emotional Coping Strategies of Black-African University Students in the Netherlands.

Researchers
Principal Researcher: Stacy Ngetich, School: Social and Behavioral Sciences, Tilburg University
Supervisor: Judit Kende, School: Social and Behavioural Sciences, Tilburg University

Introduction
This information letter contains important information about this study and corresponding rules. Please read this letter carefully and ask any questions, before agreeing upon participation.

WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT?

Purpose and nature of the study
This research is part of a thesis project that aims to explore the challenges experienced by black African international students and how they emotionally regulate in response to the challenges they face as a student. This thesis project began on 1 May 2024 and will last until 1 August 2024. The data from this study will be used for research purposes and will add knowledge to research on how black African students regulate their emotions in the face of challenges. We aim to explore this by interviewing students on their experiences in order to gain a more nuanced and personal understanding of their experiences that takes into consideration their individual contexts thus providing an important step forward in improving the experiences of black students in the Netherlands.

Background
For many African students western higher education is highly valued as they are associated with better quality and improved life outcomes in contrast to the alternatives in their home country However, the transition to life in a new country is often met with a number of challenges for many African students. These challenges have been shown to negatively influence their emotional state, affect academic outcomes and general well-being. Effective emotion regulation has been shown to be an important coping strategy that influences wellbeing and emotional outcomes. This study thus sought to explore the challenges experienced by black African international students and how they regulate their emotions in response to the challenges they faced.

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY ENTAIL?
This study will involve an interview session with participants. Once you have read this email and are still willing to participate, please reply confirming your participation. We will then organize an interview session at your convenience. Once an interview date has been confirmed you will receive a confirmation email with details regarding the interview date, time, location and duration of the interview. An informed consent form will also be provided to you in the email. The actual interviews will take approximately 45-60 minutes and all interviews will be conducted by the researcher, Stacy Ngetich. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Please note you are welcome to request a study report with some general findings from the study.

Potential negative consequences of participation
You will be answering sensitive questions about experiences during your studies here in the Netherlands. If you feel like you want to talk with someone about how you felt during the study or afterwards, please contact the researcher Stacy Ngetich (███████████████████).

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION
Voluntariness of participation
We ask your consent to participate in this study, which applies for the length of this study. Participating in this research is voluntary. You have the right not to take part in this study. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from this study at any time, without any negative consequences, and without giving any reason. You are free to only answer questions that you want to reply to.

The researchers can terminate the study if necessary. The decision to terminate the study can be made to protect your health and safety, or because the research plan stipulates that individuals who do not meet certain conditions or do not strictly follow the instructions, cannot participate.

[For personal data] What rights do I have?
You have the right, in principle, to request access to and rectify, erase, restrict or object to the processing of your personal data. For more information: www.tilburguniversity.edu/privacy

Confidentiality
All information collected during this study will be stored confidentially. Your research data will be anonymized with a code name or number. No personal information will be released without your written permission.

Research Data Management Policy
All data obtained from participants will be treated in a confidential manner and will be pseudonymized upon completion. Pseudonymised data will be stored in a password-protected file and only the researcher - Stacy Ngetich - and supervisor - Judit Kende - will have access to it. The pseudonymised research data will be stored safely for a period of 10 years. Any information collected which has your identifiable information will be deleted once data collection for both study parts is completed. When the results of this study are published or presented at conferences, no information will be presented that can reveal your personal identity.

Ethical approval
This study has been approved by the Ethics Review Board of Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences [TSB_RP1490].

Participation
If you decide to participate in this study, you can sign the attached informed consent form.

Contact
Any questions about this study can be directed to:
Stacy Ngetich: ███████████████████████
Judit Kende: ██████████████████

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Study title: The Challenges and Emotional Coping Strategies of Black-African University Students in the Netherlands.

Researchers
Principal Researcher: Stacy Ngetich, School: Social and Behavioral Sciences, Tilburg University
Supervisor: Judit Kende, School: Social and Behavioural Sciences, Tilburg University

Signature
By signing this informed consent form, you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. Signing this form does not interfere with your right to withdraw from this study at any time without an explanation.

By signing this informed consent form, I (fill in your full name and surname) confirm that I have read and understood the entire information letter and confirm that:

☐ I have read and understood the entire information letter that belongs to this study.

☐ I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and that these questions were answered to my complete satisfaction.

☐ I had sufficient time to decide whether I would participate or not.

☐ I know that participation is completely voluntary.

☐ I know that the duration of the study is .

☐ I know I can decide to withdraw from the study at any time, without any negative consequences and without providing any explanation.

☐ [For personal data] I know I have the right, in principle, to request access to and rectify, erase, restrict or object to the processing of my personal data.

☐ I know that my research data will be processed as described in the information letter and only the researcher team have access to this data.

☐ I give permission to use my research data for the purposes that are mentioned in the information letter that belongs to this study.

☐ I give permission to store my research data for the period of 10 years

I hereby voluntarily agree to participate in the study:

The challenges of African students' studying in the Netherlands and the emotion regulation strategies that have helped them cope.

Name participant:

_____

Signature: Date   :_____/_____/ _____

_____

To be completed by the researcher:

I hereby declare that I have fully informed the above-mentioned participant about this study.

Name researcher:

_____

Signature: Date   :_____/_____/ _____

_____

Appendix D: Themes, Sub-Themes, and Example Quotations

Theme	Sub-Theme 1	Example Quotation
Challenges Experienced by Students	Social and Cultural Integration	"I think probably the most difficult thing I faced was forming those new relationships I spoke about with people. I found it hard to connect with the Dutch people or the language and the culture. I mostly made friends with people from other countries who weren't from the Netherlands."(Lindiwe)
	Discrimination, Stereotypes and Microaggressions	"It's things like your accent, [people commenting] that your accent sounds so good for someone who's from Africa."(Naila)
	Learning Environment	"It's very different from where I come from. It's not even close. They are very impersonal. It's just the professor who comes and teaches. If you have questions, you have to send it to the person's email and if the person sends the email back, that's it. If you have further questions, you have to go on YouTube." (Makena)
	Systemic and Structural Issues	"As an African student, I wish we got the benefits that the other international students get…For example, I know here if you want to get help in funding you have to

		work a specific amount of hours. Not everyone [can] do that. It feels just like some provision [should be made]. They don't help with school fees or accommodation or anything."(Kendi)
The Effect of Challenges on Well-being	Loneliness	"Not some loneliness, a lot of loneliness, like overwhelming loneliness." (Chebet)
	Homesickness	"The homesickness, and I think it's something I still battle with. I think in the beginning, like I said, it was worse, and over time it's gone better." (Omari)
	Sadness	"A lot of sadness.I think that was the overwhelming feeling. Then feeling overwhelmed as well because of all the studies and the pressures of, having to study and having to work. There's a lot of pressure riding on you to complete what you've gone there to do."(Lindiwe)
	Anxiety	"a lot of times I was feeling very anxious about what the future is going to look like, what the next step is going to be. I think that's something that weighed heavily on me when I was studying." (Omari)
	Frustration	"I felt really frustrated because I did not anticipate anything like this. I expected

		things to be challenging. This was certainly not the challenge that I expected. Especially not for a single course. Yes, I was frustrated." (Makena)
Emotional Regulation Strategies Utilized by Students	Situation Modification	"I could express my feelings of frustration to her and she was there all along. Encourage me and cheer me on. we're on the journey together. We're there for each other at our down times, but she was really, she was very helpful when I struggled with my emotions and feelings of inadequacy." (Imani)
	Situation Selection	"…going to the gym, exercising. I think that was a big part of regulating my mental health, having more variety in my schedule…so I think actively trying to find things I liked to do made me feel better." (Omari)
	Attentional Deployment	"I don't address it. You don't address it. Because I don't want to fight… I don't want to navigate that because it's going to get me worked up. I just want to do my study and just understand what I have to understand." (Ada)
	Cognitive Change	"I make time to pray even if it's like right in the middle of it. I'm just like oh god like I feel bad I don't know what's going on [Why is] this is

		happening, help me." (Chebet)
	Response Modulation	"That's very much attributable to my personality. I'm an introvert. I'm not someone that, I'm not exactly open. I would rather just bottle things up and find a way to deal with it myself." (Imani)