# How can Spanish speakers from South America prepare for success in Universities of the Anglophone Europe:

# the case of Trinity College Dublin

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy (Ph.D.)

by

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# Declaration

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Date:

# Dedicatory

To my beloved parents:
Héctor Napoleón Salvador Álava & Aura María Cisneros Carrasco
*Your love and teachings contributed to build me up.*

To my beloved children:
Katty Alejandra García Salvador & Arturo Andrés García Salvador
*You are still my inspiration and my strength. I hope this piece of work make you feel proud of me. I hope I contributed a bit to make of this world a better place for you and the forthcoming generations.*

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To my brother in law: Emilio,
and my nephews and niece: Diego, Martín, & Micaela.

To my students in Ecuador who dream of undertaking their studies abroad.
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And finally, but not the least, to God my Lord,
to Him alone all the honour and the glory
forever and ever.
Amen

# Summary

The purpose of this interpretive qualitative study was to explore the views on the nature of success of Spanish-speaking students of South America [SSoSA] enrolled in an Anglophone European university and who self-reported being 'successful'. I employed three inter-connected studies: a) a study of the nature of success for Ecuadorian students in SA, b) a study of the experiences of success for SSoSA in Trinity College Dublin, and c) an analysis by gender across Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3.

In Study 1 surveys and online interviews were used primarily as data collection methods. Study 2 was a cross-multiple case study based on the experiences of four SSoSA successful students. Data were primarily collected through surveys, in-depth interviews, and commentaries from the participants. Descriptive data in Study 1 and Study 2 were sex-disaggregated which served for the analysis by gender in Study 3.

The study resulted in a description of the roots of 3success for Ecuadorian and South American and Spanish speakers who contributed in a critical reflective dialogue through the different data collection instruments. The study valued a participatory and cross-cultural approach which was reflected in the collection and presentation of the data along the study. The findings suggest various resources than can be applied to replicate success and inform forthcoming generations of students prior to embarking on their undergraduate studies in English speaking countries. Finally, some implications for research and implications for practice are suggested at the end of this dissertation.

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# List of Abbreviations

CAO: Central Applications Office

CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference

CT: Critical Theory

DES: Department of Education and Skills

EC: European Commission

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

EQF: European Qualifications Framework

ERC: European Research Council

ESL: English as a Second Language

EU: European Union

EUA: European University Association

HE: Higher Education

HEA: Higher Education Authority

HEI: Higher Education Institution

INEC: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos

loT: Institute of Technology

LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean

NFQ: National Framework of Qualifications

NUIG: National University of Ireland Galway

NUIM: National University of Ireland, Maynooth

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PhD: Doctorate in Philosophy

QQI: Quality and Qualifications Ireland

SACQ: Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

TL: Transformative Learning

TCD: Trinity College Dublin

UCC: University College Cork

UCD: University College Dublin

UK: United Kingdom

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

USA: United States of America

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# 1 Chapter one: Introduction

## 1.1 Background: Origins of the study

The 2007-2012 Ecuadorian presidential report listed 100 achievements including increased investment in education, in the belief that education was a way to bring about better living conditions (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo, 2012, pp. 21-42). Later in 2014, a further report specified 35 achievements in higher education, science, technology and innovation (Secretaría de Educación Superior de Ciencia Tecnología e Innovación, 2014) including an increase in the number of students enrolled in higher education, improvements in the number of students pursuing their undergraduate studies in universities abroad through state scholarships and, increased levels of state intervention in universities to foster improvement in research and innovation. These changes in the Ecuadorian higher education system were supplemented by a national plan designed to attract academic and scientific talent from recognised international universities to raise the standards in educational institutions and research centres (Else, 2014). These policies were described as the 'Ecuadorian miracle' in the Colombian newspaper *Dinero* ("El milagro," 2013).

The so-called knowledge explosion that formed part of this 'miracle' was noticeable in the World Economic Forum [WEF] 2013-2014 report which put Ecuador in seventy-first place among 148 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index (World Economic Forum, 2013, p. 15), fifteen places above its position in 2012-2013. The report's analysis claimed that investment in infrastructure and improvements in education and innovation had contributed to this dramatic move in the index. Based on statistics from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], a government report in 2010 claimed that Ecuador had the highest public expenditure on higher education as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product [GDP] in South America (Secretaría de Educación Superior de Ciencia Tecnología e Innovación, 2014, p. 2). Thanks to this increase in the scale of investment in education, highly performing secondary school leavers began to receive offers of scholarships to third level institutions abroad. This had the intention to develop human talent and to contribute to the progress of the country.

My first visits to Spain and Ireland to present at conferences strongly influenced my choice of thesis topic. While standing at the doors of a university in Europe I noticed the

wide variety of cultures and nations. Later, my attention was drawn to the international students going in and out. I started reflecting on the government's efforts to invest in preparing Ecuadorians for admission to top ranked-universities in English speaking countries and the question that came to my mind was, are these students really prepared, not only for entering these universities but to be successful when they get there? By then, I was only thinking of academic success yet I came across other interpretations of success along this study.

When I arrived in Ireland to pursue my doctoral degree, I learned that other South American countries had similar programmes that fund students to undertake their undergraduate and postgraduate studies overseas. I also learned that South American are mostly represented by the Brazilian student population who come to Ireland through programmes like Science without Borders[1] reflecting its membership of the informal BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa] group[2]. However, Spanish speakers from South America were, in 2013-2017, an underrepresented group in the enrolment of universities in Ireland, with far fewer attending undergraduate programmes than their Brazilian counterparts. Therefore, my interest in studying the experiences of South American students in higher education increased.

## 1.2 Challenges for education in Latin America

> *'Ha llegado el tiempo de enseñar a las gentes a vivir.'*
>
> *Simón Rodríguez*
>
> *(The time has come to teach the peoples how to live)*
> *[translation mine]*

### 1.2.1 Education in the colonial and post-colonial Latin America

Education in Latin America in its modern form was influenced by the countries that colonised the region, the history of colonisation and the different directions that the new

[1] Science Without Borders [*Ciência sem Fronteiras*] is a mobility programme that enables Brazilian students of science and technology to enter partner universities overseas (usually six months to one year for undergraduate and four years for postgraduate students).

[2] BRICS is a cooperative group of emerging developing countries.

nations took after their independence. Some accounts document the existence of ancient traditions of knowledge before the conquest which was ignored by the colonisers (Herring, 1959; Socolow, 2000). The colonisers brought education system from their home countries and decided who were to be educated and for what purpose. Joao Paulo Paulo Pimenta (2010) claims that there is not enough information about the history of education during the colonial period to make a 'proper articulation of education and independence' (p.434). However, accounts of the history of Latin America after the independence movement of the mid-nineteenth century acknowledges the influence of people who had access education due to their privileged economic and social status during the colonial period (c1490s-1830s). Most of these people were *criollos*[3] and *mestizos*[4] who, after being exposed to the ideas and developments of the Enlightenment in Europe, started hoping for a free and progressive Latin America (Herring, 1959; Pimenta, 2010; Socolow, 2000). Simón Rodríguez, Simón Bolívar, Andrés Bello, Antonio José de Sucre, José de San Martín, José Artigas, Manuela Sánz de Santamaría, and Mariano Moreno, were among the group of *criollos* and *mestizos* most often recognised for their participation in winning the independence of Latin American countries. Although accounts of women's participation in public life during the colonial period are scarce, because it was not a norm, some feminists have documented the participation of women in the independence movements (Socolow, 2000). Reflection on the biographies of various *criollos* and *mestizos* who participated in the independence movement suggests a common factor: they were privileged and had been able to gain access to education. Education during the colonised America took different forms: private tuition, the Lancasterian method of peer tutoring, universities in the colonised Ibero-America countries, universities overseas, and opportunities to interact with North American and European educators, scientist and philosophers during visits to other countries (Pimenta, 2010; Socolow, 2000). Exposure to other ideas and school of thought may have been a factor in causing these *criollos* and *mestizos* take an active role in pursuing the independence of their nations, however, the connection between education and the independence of Latin America is still unclear.

That education can be a mechanism for achieving national progress has been recognised in Latin America since the nineteenth century (Arias, 2002; Eslava, 2015). Simón Rodríguez, tutor and mentor to Simón Bolívar, the Venezuelan Liberator of the

[3] *Criollos* (often rendered as 'creoles' in English) refers to the descendants of settlers from Spain or Portugal, born in their American colonies.

[4] The term *mestizos* (mixed in English) refers here to those descended from Spanish and native parents.

America[5], is thought to be amongst the first to suggest this. Tatiana Calderón and Juan Manuel Fierro (2013) analyse the connection between Rodríguez, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile,* and the fictional character created by Daniel Defoe, in the novel known in Spanish as La Isla de Robinson. Rodríguez, known as Samuel Robinson in Europe for the 26 years during which he lived there in exile, would have been influenced by Rousseau's work *Emile,* leading him to read *Robinson Crusoe*. It may have been these works that lead him to '*entrever un futuro distinto para Latinoamérica*[6]*'*. [visualise a different future for Latin America (translation mine)] (Calderón & Fierro, 2013, p. 15). Although Rodríguez may never have intended to copy a European model of education, he wanted to take its best and adapt it to the Latin American context (Calderón & Fierro, 2013, p. 27). Francisco Ortega (2011) agrees that Rodríguez found things to learn from Europe and the United States, as he quotes: '*Tomen lo bueno-dejen lo malo - imiten con juicio - y por los que le falte INVENTEN*' [take the good, leave the bad, imitate with judgement, and INVENT the rest (translation mine original emphasis)] (Ortega, 2011, p. 38), however, Rodríguez also made clear that not everything would be fully applicable to the Latin American context when he said: '*la sabiduría de la Europa y la prosperidad de los Estados Unidos son dos enemigos de la libertad de pensamiento ... en América*[7]...' [the wisdom of Europe and the prosperity of the US are two enemies of the freedom of thought...in (Colonised) America... (translation mine)] (Ortega 2011, p. 39). Rodríguez believed in preparing people to be critical (discerning), active and creative (Ortega, 2011, p. 34) and thus able to learn from reflection on their actions (Calderón & Fierro, 2013, p. 27). He also insisted that if something was to be imitated, it should be done with originality (Ortega, 2011, p. 40).

Simón Bolívar, inspired by his tutor's ideas, was intent on finding Latin America's own identity. As the Portuguese colonies and other nations made their own way to their independence, Bolívar aimed for the freedom and unification of Hispanic America[8]. His tutor's influence and his military training caused him to commit himself and to swear to his tutor that he would not rest until he achieved what he believed to be the deliverance of South America from the yoke that saw it, *'oprimen por voluntad del poder español*!'

[5] Simón Bolívar is acknowledged for his contribution to the independence of various countries in the region, specifically: Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Panama.

[6] Here Rodríguez refers to the colonised Ibero-America who speak any language that originates in Latin (specifically: Spanish, Portuguese, and French). This makes for the compound word '*Latinoamérica*'.

[7] Rodriguez refers to the then still colonised American countries when he says '*América*'.

[8] Here Hispanic America refers to Spanish speaking America.

[oppressed by the will of the Spanish power! (translation mine)] (Bolívar, 2009, p. 4). After the Independence and acting as the governor of the *Gran Colombia*[9], Bolívar reflected his tutor's influence by giving importance to the adaptation of foreign laws to local circumstances and to providing education suited to the realities of the newly independent (Bolivar, 2009, pp. 127, 248). Bolívar had plans for the emerging new nation to reforms and to set up good relations with the British empire and the rest of Europe (Bolivar, 2009, pp.261). However, his vision of a unified and strong *Gran Colombia* failed as nations started separating and accusing him of authoritarianism. Separate nations had limited power and lacked the resources necessary to recover from the effects of colonisation and the independence struggle. Some countries continued to operate according to the Spanish legal system with no reform in a way that did not reflect their independence. Others rebelled against any type of governance, while others again submitted to forceful leaders and experienced long periods of oppression. In the midst of this collapse of his dream and before he succumbed to disease, Bolivar referred to the new Americas as being 'ungovernable' (Herring, 1959, p. 286).

All these events in the history of Latin America left tendencies towards authoritarian governance reflected on dictatorships, civil conflicts and military intervention which are similarly part of the history of many Latin American countries until they obtained democracy. The former dictatorships in Argentina, Chile and Ecuador and the existence of *guerrillas* in Colombia and El Salvador are examples of the result of authoritarian, corrupt and oppressive governance while the cases of Cuba and Venezuela reflects the civil conflicts and poverty caused by militarism. The former democratically elected president of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias, reflects about the unstable democracy in Latin America which chases away foreign and domestic investment entrenching great economic inequality compared to the rest of the world (2002). Social inequalities are also a reality in most Latin American countries that lack of a sustainable social welfare compared to most developed countries. Arias concludes, it may only be through the education of the younger generations, transparent and accountable governments and recognition of human rights that progress comes (Arias, 2002).

[9] Gran Colombia [literally, Greater Colombia] was the name Bolivar gave to the group of nations and territories that included present-day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Panama, northern Peru, western Guyana and northwest Brazil.

### 1.2.2 Paulo Freire and education

*I cannot be a teacher without exposing who I am.*

*Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom*

The historical and cultural context of the South American educator Paulo Freire and his involvement in adult education, led him to reflect on various forms of education, the process of becoming a teacher and the educational practice that favours the autonomy of the students (Freire, 1998). Freire challenged what he called the 'banking model of education' which positions learners as passive receivers of knowledge without considering their prior knowledge, backgrounds, needs and interests. For Freire, teaching is an 'art' which would be developed with vocation, hope, love, humbleness and optimism. For Freire, learning is a process where teachers and learners would interact in an egalitarian manner with respect, curiosity and openness. Some aspects that are consistent in Freire's work are the importance of reflection, critical thinking and awareness that would empower learners (and teachers) to be lifelong learners, autonomous and the owners of their reality.

Freire's work is often said to lie at the roots of major movements in critical pedagogy, critical theory, adult education, and popular education and his ideas have influenced research, theory, and practice in fields other than education, including social work, community work, postcolonial theory, participatory studies, grounded theory and multiculturalism, to name only some (McLaren & Leonard, 1993). Freire's work has been both praised and criticised; many of his critics refer in particular to his book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, published in his native language Portuguese in 1968 and for the first time in English in 1970 (Freire, 1993). In some cases, Freire himself responded to critical views through face-to-face conversations and in others through his later written works. This section summarises some of the arguments that have been most often presented against him.

- His language is sexist, elitist and arrogant. Many feminist theorists and researchers referred to their unhappiness at the patriarchal and sexist language in Freire's work (Luke & Gore, 1992; McLaren & Leonard, 1993; Schugurensky, 1998). Freire responded through the Foreword to Paulo Freire: A critical encounter (1993) that he was a feminist, adding:

> Pedagogy of liberation must be structured as a partnership among groups of women and men devoid of hierarchical control and free of patriarchal assumptions (p. x)

Following the comments of others, Freire corrected subsequent editions (Schugurensky, 1998) and thanked feminist authors for encouraging him to do so.

- His language is unclear, ambiguous, and difficult to understand. After reading Freire's work or interacting with him in conferences and interviews, some practitioners and researchers coincided in perceiving a lack of direction, and clarity in his words. They have attributed this to his frequent use of questions and the recurrent dualisms (i.e. oppressor-oppressed, leftists-rightist), suggesting that these can have the effect of making his work difficult to grasp (Facundo, 1984; Murphy Anderson, 1994; Schugurensky, 1998). Henry Giroux has conceded that the use of binary oppositions makes Freire's work 'vulnerable to criticism' and suggests that Freire employs 'a metalanguage that generates a set of categories and social practices that have to be critically meditated' (Giroux, 1985, p. xiii). But he has stressed the importance of considering Freire's historical position as a post-colonial man, a third world, exile, and a so-called 'border crosser' (Giroux, 1992) in understanding why he may have needed to use such language.

- His method was ineffective in teaching illiterate adults. Freire's experiences of teaching illiterate adults from the rural area in his home country, Brazil, and in Chile, are mostly presented in two works: *Pedagogy of the oppressed* and *Education for critical consciousness* (Freire, 1993, 2005). Later, Freire applied his experience in a programme to teach illiterates in the new Republic of Guinea-Bissau (Freire, 1978) and their effectiveness in Africa have been particularly questioned (Facundo, 1984; Grabowski, 1972; Harasim, 1983). Some critics remark that Freire does not propose a specific method with clear guidelines to be applied in adult literacy and that his experiences in teaching illiterate and marginalised adults were at odds with what others would come to develop into the 'Paulo Freire Method' (Facundo, 1984; Harasim, 1983; Murphy Anderson, 1994; Schugurensky, 1998). John Elias admits that the method was successful for some time in Brazil and suggests the 'Paulo Freirean Literacy Method' comes in four stages:

1. the study of the context,
2. the selection of generative words,
3. *critical conscious* literacy training, and
4. the raising of critical consciousness among the ones who are already literate (Elias, 1975, pp. 208,209).

However, Elias concludes that Freire's educational philosophy is more applicable than the method *per se* due to several problems which:

> …it [is] difficult to transfer the method to situations in other cultures and groups which have attempted to work with it have already come face to face with these difficulties which exist both at the theoretical and methodological levels (Elias, 1975. p. 216)

Griffith observes that Freire did not consider the existing literature on adult education before authorising his *Pedagogy of the oppressed*[10] and that his work was 'neither new nor revolutionary' (1972, p. 68). Nevertheless, others argue that Freire's intention was not to propose a method or a technique for adult literacy but to develop a philosophy of liberating education through a critical pedagogy that challenged traditional approaches to education (Aronowitz, 1993; Roberts, 1996).

And contrary to the claim made by Griffith, if Freire made a truly original contribution it was in the following way. The 'banking model' was one of Freire's most consistent themes as was the supposed need to change to a more egalitarian, dialogical, and democratic relationship between the teacher and the learner (Roberts, 1996). To challenge the banking model, Freire proposed a problem-posing model which focused on continuous identification of problems (or struggles), critical reflection, and action (Freire, 1974, 1993, 1998, 2005). Freire initially called this approach as *conscientization*[11] and subsequently referred to it as critical consciousness or critical awareness. The development of critical awareness is said to empower the person in a process of transformation to

[10] Pedagogy of the oppressed resulted from Freire's experience as an educator of adult illiterates in a marginalised area of Brazil. It involves awareness and critical reflection to enhance empowerment and transformation of a perceived reality. He further explained his work (not a theory) in his subsequent books.

[11] As translated from the original *conscientização* (Brazilian Portuguese)

becoming the subject of her/his own education and reality (Aronowitz, 1993; hooks, 1994; Roberts, 1996; Schugurensky, 1998; Zacharakis-Jutz, 1988).

The debate as to the effectiveness and originality of his ideas continues (Benadé, 2009; Darder, 2017; Elias, 1994; Facundo, 1984; Grabowski, 1972; Harasim, 1983; Luke & Gore, 1992; McLaren & Leonard, 1993; Roberts, 1996; Schugurensky, 1998), whereas others corner his work as a Theology of Liberation (Elias, 1994; Darren Webb, 2010).

- His pedagogy is impractical and not transferable. It has claimed that Freire's method is difficult to transfer as it lacks clear description of the method[12] and empirical evidence is limited as to increased levels of adult literacy and liberation of "the oppressed" (Elias, 1975, 1994). Some community workers and educationalists have reportedly failed in their attempts to apply it in teaching illiterate and in other contexts. Blanca Facundo is known for her critical piece on Freire and his pedagogy of liberation (1984). Facundo brings to light certain contradictions found in Freire's work, the vagueness of his literacy method, and her experience when trying to apply that method in her community work. Her critical work has been both welcomed and criticised and it has recommended as a text to read in parallel with *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Zacharakis-Jutz, 1988). The difficulty in applying Freire's pedagogy most often referred to by his critics is context, but even when Freirean methods have been used in Brazil (where the method was firstly applied by Freire himself) their success has sometimes been limited. Lesly Bartlett reports on an ethnography study with popular educators in Brazil based on Freire's pedagogy (Bartlett, 2005). Bartlett observed an exaggeration of supposed potential of the 'pedagogy of love' in the student-teacher relationship to have 'the potential to contribute to social change' and she suggests the need for a deeper examination of Freirean theory, especially in the formation of community workers and popular educationalists (p. 345).

  However, the impracticalities of adapting Freire's method (or pedagogy) to other contexts referred to by some does not seem to be universal, as the case of adult literacy in Tanzania suggests (Kiwia, 1990). One study conducted there suggested that, although Freire's method can have limitations in its applicability

[12] Or pedagogy of the oppressed

to other contexts, it can be successful if transferred to contexts as close as possible to that for which it was originally meant.

Schugurensky suggests that the openness to interpretation and critique[13] of Freire's pedagogy is one of its strengths and his ideas need to be rethought, adapted, challenged, and re-invented (Schugurensky, 1998). It is this very openness to adaptation that has seen the principles in Freire's work successfully applied in contexts other than adult literacy, including educational gerontoly[14] (Findsen, 2007; Zacharakis-Jutz, 1988), ethical teacher professionality in New Zealand (Benadé, 2009, 2010); informal education in Latin America (Torres, 1992); feminist research (hooks, 1994; Luke & Gore, 1992); language teaching (Wallace, 2003) and utopian Education (Roberts, 2015), among others. Peter Roberts reflects on the generative nature and scope of Freire's work thus:

> [a] founding figure of critical pedagogy, his writings have also been engaged by scholars in sociology, anthropology, political science, psychology, philosophy, theology, women's studies, counselling, social work, prison and rehabilitation studies, cultural studies, indigenous studies, peace studies, ecology, and other fields.
>
> (2015, p. 376)

### 1.2.3 Connecting Rodríguez and Freire

Rodríguez had significant ambitions for the education of Latin America. He proposed critical reflection and discernment on the application and innovation of suitable practices as the best way to find what suited Latin America but his ideals and intentions have been described as a failed and *utopic* project (T. Calderón & Fierro, 2013, p. 27; Ortega, 2011, p. 37). The misunderstanding of his vision led to an emancipatory revolution which, while perhaps necessary in itself, had no significant effect on the socio-economic conditions of the newly independent nations.

Similarly, more than a century later, Freire challenged educators to reinvent and adapt the existing system, critically and creatively, according to their context (Schugurensky,

[13] For details of other issues raised by Freire's critics, see: Roberts (2015).

[14] Older adult learning.

1998). Nonetheless, many were disappointed when they came to apply Freire's philosophy and pedagogy and did not immediately achieve the expected liberation.

Rodríguez and Freire have in common a view as to the importance on reflection and creativity as a continuous practice rather than uncritical activism (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1992; Griffith, 1972; Roberts, 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on the needs of Latin America if it is to be empowered through better and more democratic (dialogical) practices and policies towards the development of citizens and the improvement of their economic and social experiences (Arias, 2002). The main challenge for Latin America is to find a unique identity and work out the education system that best suits that identity in such a way as to achieve progress in the region, rather than copying educational programmes and policies that are foreign (Eslava, 2015). Freire's work and ideas derived from it may offer a way to reconcile Latin American countries with democratic ideals and achieve progress without a corresponding loss of regional identity in the process.

### 1.2.4 Rodríguez, Freire and this study

> *I make shoes, said one, and now I see that I am worth as much as the Ph.D. who writes books.*
>
> *-one of Freire's adult students-*

The quote that opens this section is an extract from one of Freire's work which offers some results of his experience with rural illiterate farmers[15] in Brazil who learned to read and write with his method (Freire, 2005, p. 42) but my first encounter with Freire was during my Master's studies through a thinking out-loud exercise based on the reading of *Pedagogy of freedom* [English version]. *Pedagogy of freedom* is considered to express 'the fullness of his wide-ranging thought and work' (Benadé, 2010, p. 13) and this may be the reason why I did not struggle with his ideas as many other readers do who have had to grasp the older *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (which I read only for doctoral study), or perhaps I had an affinity with him as a South American 'postcolonial' woman. Pedagogy of freedom came to my attention at a difficult moment in my life when I was

[15] In many South American countries people that work the field are still illiterate, marginalised and exploded [I make this point because in countries like Ireland the translation of 'agricultor' as 'farmer' have a totally different contextual connotation in terms of socio-economic status.

struggling to reconstruct my identity after a period of personal difficulty and feeling of powerless. It challenged me in many ways, not just as an educator but as a human being, as is reflected in my work 'Revisited Philosophy of Education'. I became more critical, aware, and determined to be the subject of my reality and to transform it. Therefore, the continuous act of reflecting and doing motivated me to study the experiences of South American students in their struggles,[16] to succeed in higher education is a setting which is alien to their original context.

Before starting my doctoral study, *Pedagogy of freedom* was the only book I had read from Freire. As Facundo notes, books (either original or translated versions) are not accessible to everybody in some countries because of their availability and cost (Facundo, 1984)[17]. To my surprise, *Pedagogy of freedom* was not available in the college Library, and it was barely mentioned in the literature, so I started reading Freire's other works.

*'You have the Third World inside you': conversation with Paulo Freire* (Costigan, 1983) is a light but powerful work that provoked me to think more critically about the realities of South American students in a so-called First World country, although very rarely mentioned among Freire's work. In particular, it influenced my intention to empower the participants of this study by valuing them as the experts in the field of narrating their own experiences and views. Despite none of Freire's works being central to the theme of my thesis, the study of success,[18] certain themes in Pedagogy of freedom, in particular those around critical awareness, vocation or calling, democratic participation, dialogue, transformation, empowerment, hope, love, respect, and freedom have relevance for this study on to the extent that they concern approaches to decision making, critical analysis, ethical considerations, and dialogical writing style. In Facundo's critique of Freire's liberation theory in adult illiteracy she remarks that he 'has inspired many educationalists and researchers' including herself. And I count myself amongst that number.

## 1.3 Challenges for higher education in Latin America

[16] Freire uses the terms 'oppressions', 'struggles' and 'limitations' at various points and they seem effectively interchangeable.

[17] Unfortunately, in my home country, books are scarce and costly, even more if they are in English.

[18] Critical pedagogy is not within the scope of this study, only learners' experiences of success.

Latin America, according to the UNESCO, refers to ‘those countries where the Spanish and the Portuguese languages prevail and is normally identified by the countries that span from Mexico all the way to Argentina, including Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Latin America and the Caribbean are, therefore, one big region composed of nearly 8,910 institutions of higher education, of those, only 1,231 (13.81%) are universities’ (Jaramillo & de Wit, 2011, pp. 129-130).

Knobel and Bernasconi analysed the current state of and challenges for Latin American higher education in the early twenty-first century. They observed the paramount potential of higher education to contribute to social, political, cultural, and economic progress in these countries during the twentieth century, yet they suggest that the impact on the development of the region has been minimal (Knobel & Bernasconi, 2017). They present an overview of the provision of higher education in Latin America. In 2017 there were:

- 6,000 public and private postsecondary institutions,
- 15% qualified as universities,
- 70% of the region’s tertiary enrolment being provided by those institution,
- which serve almost 500 million inhabitants in 19 countries, and an increasing population (Knobel & Bernasconi, 2017, p.27).

The challenges experienced by higher education in Latin America in the early twenty-first century reflected the challenges for higher education worldwide. An article in *The Economist*, a well-known neoliberal magazine in the 1990, discussed the role of higher education ‘as a creator of knowledge, trainer of young minds and transmitter of culture’ and ‘as a major agent of economic growth: the knowledge factory, as it were, at the centre of the knowledge economy’ ("Inside the knowledge factory," 1997). This statement summed up a certain view of the proper nature of higher education but provoked at least as many questions as it seemed, or attempted, to answer.

- Is higher education the best way for an individual to ensure a good job? Or for a country to develop human capital so it can compete in the global economy?
- Is one of the main challenges for higher education having open access policies without sacrificing quality?
- Are secondary school leavers ready to face the demands of higher education?

Even for developed countries[19], the meaning of higher education was still in question by the early twenty-first century and the challenges faced were no fewer in developing countries[20] than found elsewhere (López Segrera, Brock, & Dias Sobrinho, 2009). Debates about the role, meaning and challenges of higher education are complex. On the one hand, according to the neoliberal view represented by *The Economist*, the fact that only 40% of students in France completed their degrees, despite an increasing number of student enrolments was highly problematic, amounting to a waste of human capital. This, in that view, could be attributed to the fact that the French highly selective school system did not operate in such a way as to guarantee the success of undergraduate students, who often seemed to be unprepared for university ("All must have degrees," 1997). On the other hand, the same article remarked on a different experience in the United States, which was apparently more efficient in managing widespread access without lowering quality. Thus, a neoliberal view would seem to be economistic rather than culturally or personally inclined, taking cost/benefit analysis to be the only grounds on which to judge a system's effectiveness. By the early twenty-first century, it had come to be almost universally accepted that higher education plays (and should play) an important role in the growth of a country and its competitiveness. Therefore, it may be suggested that the challenge for higher education in Latin America is: preparing people to be able to contribute to the growth and the progress of their countries while being competitive at global levels enhancing the promotion of cultural diversity, political democracy and trade (Didriksson, 2008; Gazzola, 2008; Marginson, 2010). But to do so might beg the question (assume something as yet not shown): did those who did not complete their studies in France fail or did they gain something, but something intangible and something not directly related to personal financial gain or general economic benefit?

Knight's definition of globalisation[21] may help us in understanding the role of higher education, not only for Latin America but for the rest of the world in the twenty-first century. According to Knight, globalisation: 'is the flow of technology, knowledge, people, values, ideas, capital, goods, and services across national borders, and affects each country in a different way due to the nation's individual history, traditions, culture, and priorities' (Knight, 2004 quoted in Gürüz, 2011, p. 1). If this is so, nations have to be

[19] Hereafter the term 'developed countries' refers to countries of the so-called first world and the terms are effectively synonymous.

[20] Hereafter the term 'developing countries' refers to countries of the so-called third world or global south and variants thereon.

[21] This study acknowledges the existence of other definitions of 'globalisation'

effective in permitting a smooth flow of these elements of economic life while avoiding globalisation's negative effects, including social alienation (López Segrera et al., 2009; Zago & Machado-Neto, 2016) The alienation at issue might be of certain countries (markets working in such a way as to cause some countries [or regions] to be left behind) or it might work within countries by causing some populations to be excluded (Knobel & Bernasconi, 2017; Zarur Miranda, 2008). UNESCO's report on the Latin American and Caribbean [LAC] region notes that no LAC universities were in the list of the most attractive destinations for foreign students in 2004 (López Segrera et al., 2009, p. 19); but the World Reputation Ranking in 2016 reported that, for the first time, certain universities in South and Central America, based on scholars' perception of teaching and research, were beginning to be recognised. The 2016 report was compiled by the Times Higher Education and noted the presence of five leading countries in the region, with Brazil at the top (Minsky, 2016; see also Knobel & Bernasconi, 2017). Such ranking may be dubious indicators of best practice in teaching, research, and policy but they indicated an increasing awareness of LAC universities abroad, while also reflecting certain important disparities and inequalities within the region.

By the early twenty-first century nations were being asked to be better prepared to face the challenges of globalisation by assigning higher education a new, broader role, that of moving from industrial society to the knowledge society. The industrial society might be said to concentrate on training people to perform jobs effectively, while the knowledge society can be defined as one that values 'knowledge, both know-how and information, and [has] a well-trained workforce that not only can apply know-how, but also is capable of analysis and decision making based on information' (Gürüz, 2011, pp. 6–7). Responding to the challenges of the early twenty-first century, Latin American countries have understood the role of higher education as a: 'strategic actor for development of the countries of the region as well as a factor for social mobility' (Zarur Miranda, 2008, p. 175). This has resulted in more effort being put into the reform of higher education to the end of achieving the goals of increased creativity, innovation and internationalisation (Didriksson, 2008, pp. 21-24; Zarur Miranda, 2008, p. 181). By 2017 many agreed that Latin American higher education needed to awaken, transform and evolve and to design and implement plans intended to meet these new objectives (Knobel & Bernasconi, 2017; López Segrera et al., 2009; Marginson, 2010; Scott, 2000; Zago & Machado-Neto, 2016). However, some universities were reluctant to change their traditional and authoritarian systems (Knobel & Bernasconi, 2017; Liz, 2017).

Internationalisation is claimed to be the inevitable and irreversible result of globalisation and neoliberal proponents of the knowledge based society have challenged higher education institutions to be more competitive worldwide (Altbach & Teichler, 2001; López Segrera et al., 2009). There can be various forms of internationalisation of higher education institutions: cross-national education, transnational education, and multinational education (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Knight, 2003, 2010, 2011). All aim at increasing higher education institutions' presence worldwide, the establishment of cooperative networks and the strengthening of human talent development. However, unequal conditions in one country/region as opposed to another may affect any of these forms of internationalisation, including: national policies and disparities between countries because of their different educational environments, policies, and language (Altbach, 2004). What is more, it is important to be aware of these unequal conditions that may lead to the 'neo colonialism of the 21st century', affecting mostly developing countries (Altbach, 2004, p. 24).

Mobility of scholars (students and academics) is one of the strategies available to LAC universities to contribute to the twin goals of enhancing global standing: promoting internationalisation and increasing networking (López Segrera et al., 2009, pp. 22,24). Increased mobility on the part of Latin American students and academics may result in the formation of new alliances and the development of human talent, with the intention of preparing Latin American universities to enter the twenty-first century environment without the risk of being left behind in the global knowledge economy (Didriksson, 2008; Gazzola, 2008; Gürüz, 2011; Zarur Miranda, 2008).

## 1.4 Latin American students' mobility

The movement of students to study in foreign countries, known as student mobility, is not a new phenomenon. In medieval Europe students crossed borders, mainly for lack of universities in their local areas (Gürüz, 2011, p. 2). By the early twenty-first century, besides increasing human capital, student mobility was being used by Latin American and Caribbean countries to promote the creation of networks of academics so as to contribute towards internationalisation (Didriksson, 2008, p. 32). In an analysis of the effect of international cooperation (especially the development of alliances and international scholarly groups) and the readiness of LAC countries to face the challenges of globalisation, it was argued that the competitive nature of globalisation may leave less developed countries behind (Zarur Miranda, 2008, p. 180). Therefore, student mobility is

a form of international cooperation involving universities that can, at its best, help to resolve such deficiencies (Jaramillo & de Wit, 2011; Knight, 2003; Knobel & Bernasconi, 2017; Reisz, 2016).

The Census and Statistics National Institute of Ecuador [INEC] has long documented the fact that student migration has tended to be to North American and Spanish speaking countries, but from 2012 to 2013 European countries generally and primarily those where Spanish was not the language of instruction increasingly attracted Ecuadorian students (2012, pp. 114-127; 2013, pp. 114-127). This increasing student mobility had already been forecast and expected by higher education institutions and organisations of Anglophone countries (Altbach, 2004; Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Böhm et al., 2004). By 2012-2013 it was evident that Anglophone countries of Europe had started to appear in the sights of third and fourth level Latin American students, particularly in the form of exchange and cooperation programmes such as Erasmus[22], the cooperation programme between the EU and Latin America [ALFA][23], and the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean programme [EULAC][24] (Didriksson, 2008, p. 31; Zarur Miranda, 2008, p. 183). Exchange and cooperation programmes contributed to the internationalisation of Latin American higher education institutions and their curriculum by allowing international degree recognition and student mobility (Zarur Miranda, 2008, p. 210). The effect was the provision of opportunities for countries of this region to increase the quality of their higher education and to promote international cooperation allowing them more of a presence in the global knowledge economy.

[22] Erasmus, is a programme established by the EU in 1987. This programme funds more than 100,000 mobile students annually in Europe, as well as a substantial number of academic staff (Altbach & Teichler, 2001, p. 9). Although it was originally meant only for EU member countries, due to the development of alliances with LAC countries, some of its programmes were available to Latin Americans by 2017. Length of the Erasmus experience depends on the programme, ranging from two months to the completion of a language course or a degree.

[23] ALFA is a cooperative funding programme involving the European Union Commission and Latin America established on March 10, 1994 (Didriksson, 2008, p. 31). The programmes ALFA (1994-1999), ALFA II (2000-2005) and ALFA III (2007-2013) and their sub-programmes finance initiatives aimed at the improvement of quality of and access to Latin American higher education.

[24] EULAC is a foundation created in 2010 that seeks bi-regional cooperation between members of the EU and the LAC community (Zarur Miranda, 2008, p. 183). The EULAC programme involves discussion, dissemination of research, and networking opportunities.

## 1.5 Rationale for the study

> *...ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war.*
>
> *– Preamble to the UNESCO Constitution, adopted in 1945 -*

As discussed earlier, one of the challenges of Latin American higher education by the early twenty-first century was to build an education system that could contribute to the development of its peoples and nations by increasing the latter's global economic competitiveness levels, without simply copying successful foreign educational programmes, policies and systems, an approach likely to be ineffective. Reform in higher education requires a translation of effective practices from more successful countries to others in a way that is 'endogenous and [ensures] an authentic perspective' (Didriksson, 2008, p. 35).

This study was meant to be a first step to achieving that goal by considering the experiences of South American students who perceived themselves to be successful in dealing with the challenges of Anglophone universities in developed countries in Europe, and through their stories of success and overcoming, informing others who may undertake studies overseas. These pioneers, the Rodríguez figures of the twenty-first century, should be able to construct an educative system with the quality of the first world adapted to Latin American cultures, beliefs and realities and this should not be a merely utopian project. Additionally, this study was intended to inform the academic community on the experiences of this underrepresented group so that they might be considered in future policy/practice.

## 1.6 Research questions

The research questions of this study were as follows:

1. What are the different meanings of success in higher education and the views of the requirements to succeed on the part of Ecuadorian students?

2. How Spanish speakers of South America who are successful in their undergraduate studies in European universities where English is the

language of instruction define success in higher education and what where their ways to obtain it?

3. What features of English language programmes could better prepare Spanish speakers of South America to succeed in their undergraduate studies in English speaking countries?

4. Are there any consistent differences in the results by gender?

## 1.7 Overview of the study

The design and specific methodologies of this study were developed to address the above research questions. Therefore, the focus of this enquiry was the experience of success of Spanish-speaking students of South America[25] [SSoSA] enrolled in universities in Ireland, with a view to understanding the roots of their success and how to replicate it, to inform future generations of students prior to their embarking on undergraduate studies in English-speaking countries. The rationale for the decision to study the experience of this particular group was its limited representation in the enrolment in higher education in Ireland. The rationale for the exclusion of Brazilians from the study was the overrepresentation of this group in that enrolment (and in relevant research literature), primarily as visiting students. The rationale for the selection of the particular sample is explained at length in the methodology chapter.

This study follows an interpretive (constructivist) paradigm (Burton, Brundrett, & Jones, 2014) which aims to describe (construct) the nature of success in the views of Spanish speakers students from South America in universities of the Anglophone European countries. The study employed a cross-cultural and participatory (hermeneutical)[26] epistemological approach reflecting on the literature review (English and Spanish sources), the value of the participants as experts in the data collection process and their contribution on the interpretation of the data, the methodology and data collection

[25] The term Spanish Speaking Students of South America is employed in this study as opposed to such terms as 'Hispanic students' (which has a strong connotation of the colonial period), 'Latino/a students' (which primarily refers in the research literature to Mexicans or Spanish speakers in the USA), 'Latin American students' (which can include those other than Spanish speakers such as the Portuguese speakers of Brazil and French speakers in French Guiana).

[26] The hermeneutical approach allows researcher and participants to contribute cooperatively to an agreed understanding of the interpretation through an iterative process of dialogue, analysis, and feedback (P. Lyons, 2010, p. 101; Simons, 2009, p. 118)

instruments (English/Spanish data collection instruments), and the researcher's interpretation from a bicultural position (a Spanish speaker from South America speaking English as a second language and an international student in an English-speaking country). This interpretive empirical study has a qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2013; Denzin, 2009; Jensen & Laurie, 2016) that employed qualitative survey and case studies as the primary research method, and qualitative thematic data analysis (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007; Jansen, 2010; Jensen & Laurie, 2016; Silverman, 2014; Simons, 2009).

There has been extensive research on the views of students in higher education who have experienced failure, drop-out, and non-completion. However, it has been suggested that there is value in the understanding of students' successes (Merrill & Johnston, 2011; O. Webb, Wyness, & Cotton, 2017). Therefore, this study focused on the positive views of successful students during the college experiences of a group not traditionally found in higher education in Ireland.

The initial conceptual and theoretical framework that influences this study arose from the literature review of each section of the study. The literature review process was informed mainly by Jensen (2016), Lyons (2010), and Glatthorn (2005); the review of the existing literature went from broader topics to the specific research questions and included historical sources, empirical studies and relevant theoretical literature. The primary themes used in Library search engines were: 'success in higher education', 'identity construction', 'transformative learning', 'students' engagement', 'Tinto's model of retention in HE', 'gender in HE', 'critical theory', 'social construction', 'others than Tinto's model', 'others' complementing Tinto's model', 'coeducation in HE', 'student experience in HE', 'multicultural studies in HE', 'bilingualism'. Some of the themes which emerged from the initial findings of the study were later revised and extended in the discussion section of the study.

This study recognises my (the researcher's) personal and ideological aspects that were consciously 'bracketed' to 'mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process' (Tufford & Newman, 2012, p. 80). Similarly, the acknowledgement of my position as a researcher is defined as 'reflexivity' which is considered among good research practice (Creswell, 2013; Hesse-Biber, 2014). The decisions that were made considering 'bracketing' (as in phenomenological research) and 'reflexivity' are further explained in section 1.7.2.

### 1.7.1 Structure of the study

This study was organised in a sequential way (Thomson,1999 cited in Paltridge, 2002, pp. 131–132). The decision to employ sequential organisation in the conduct of the study was based on the nature of the research questions and the study's epistemological and research approaches. A sequential study entails the findings of each sub-study being used to inform the subsequent stages. Therefore, this study comprised three inter-connected studies or sub-studies that contributed to refining the research questions and that related to the main purpose of the study, which was to construct a description of the roots of success. Each study included a literature review section, a methodology section, results, discussion and conclusions (Paltridge, 2002, p. 135, Table 4).

The first study (Research question 1) was a preliminary examination of the different views of the definition of success in a group of Ecuadorian students. The second study (Research questions 2 and 3) was a study of the views of success based on the experiences of SSoSA in Trinity College Dublin, and the third study (Research question 4) reported an analysis by gender. The following diagram describes the organisation of the study.

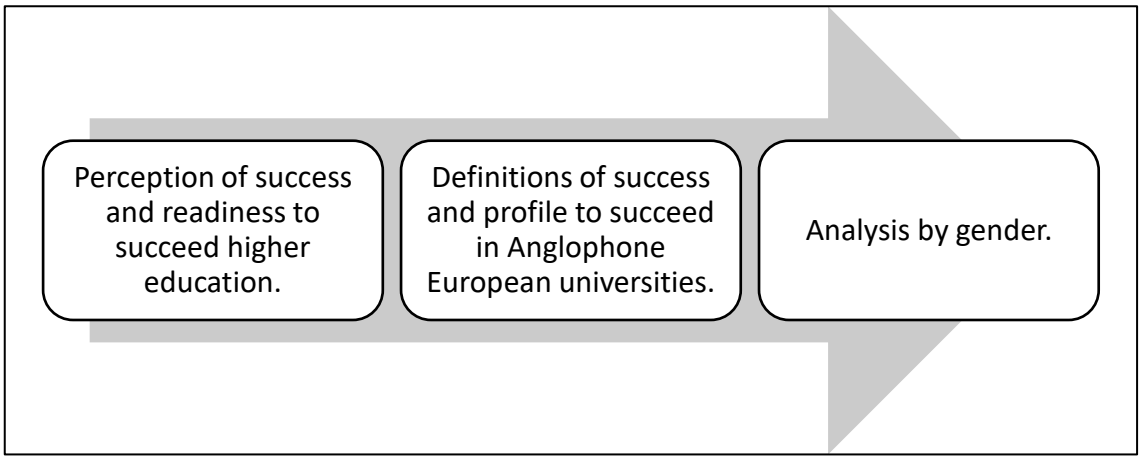


**Figure 1. Structure of the study.**

Study 1: Perception of success and readiness to succeed higher education was a qualitative survey study of views of the requirements for success in higher education. The literature review of this study took into account various meanings of success in higher education and empirical studies of such success. The findings as to the views on the meaning of success amongst selected secondary students and undergraduates in a

South American country served to inform Study 2. It also compared students' perceptions of the nature of success before and after they entered higher education.

Study 2: Involved exploring the definitions of success as expressed by the participants to later construct a profile of what it might take to succeed in Anglophone European universities. This was a multiple case study of the nature of success in Anglophone universities for non-native speakers of English. The literature review in this study emphasised empirical research on the various experiences of success on the part of students in Anglophone European universities, and, in particular, for non-native English speakers. The findings of this study were used to describe and understand the nature of success for SSoSA and the routes they might take to overcoming language barriers. Some of the findings of this study were employed to inform the gender analysis in the third study.

Study 3: This was an analysis by gender. After describing the nature of success for SSoSA in study 1 and 2, and through observations on the variations in the responses disaggregated by gender, I sought to establish differences (if any) in the participants' views on success and how to be successful. I mostly aimed to explore if the participants perceived any differential provision of the instruction that responded to their being a male of a female student. The literature review in this section concentrated on coeducation in higher education and empirical studies of female in higher education. The findings permitted me to establish if levels of participation and success in higher education were influenced by the existence of equal rights and opportunities for female and male students, or if they depended on characteristics trasditionally attributed to their gender. Data collected in Study 1 and 2 were sex-segregated to explore if there were consistent variations in the responses between female and male participants.

### 1.7.2 The researcher and reflexivity (and bracketing)

The researcher is considered a paramount element in empirical studies as he/she acts as a mediator of the existing theoretical framework, the source of new knowledge, and the understanding of that knowledge through a critical reflective analysis. Scholars in qualitative research routinely incorporate awareness of the position of the researcher during the study and in the writing process. Therefore, reflexivity, defined as the acknowledgment of the position of the researcher in the study, is required to enhance

the quality of the research by stating one's awareness of possible biases, values, and experiences (Creswell, 2013; Hesse-Biber, 2014).

Creswell recommends including a section in the thesis to explicitly state the position of the researcher (2013, p. 216). In this study, awareness of reflexivity was achieved through recurrent readings of my revised philosophy of education (Appendix 1), an analysis of personal strengths, weaknesses, and needs that might influence the research (Appendix 2), and keeping reflective field notes.

These are some of the key elements that resulted from the reflectivity reflective process.

- My identity as an international Ph.D. student from South America in Ireland.
- My identity as a female parenting alone.
- My identity as a feminist (one seeking equality and social justice for women and men).
- My identity as a Spanish native speaker and an English non-native speaker.
- My identity as a teacher of English as a foreign language [EFL] in South America.
- My identity as a theist and a Christian.
- My identity as being influenced by Paulo Freire's work Pedagogy of freedom.

Awareness of my position during the planning, conduct, analysis, and writing of the study, helped me to 'dis-identify' and avoid telling my story instead of valuing the voice of my participants (Simons, 2009, pp. 81,83,91). Similarly, 'bracketing' personal and ideological aspects led me to make decisions that influenced the design of this study (Tufford & Newman, 2012). To mention some of them.

- I acknowledged that undertaking undergraduate studies as an international student differed from my personal experiences as an international Ph.D. student in Ireland. Therefore, I expected we would differ in the way we define success in higher education and I decided to attend various definitions of success as perceived and expressed by the participants.

- I acknowledged the challenges I faced when parenting alone while undertaking studies in higher education in my home country. I also acknowledged the financial struggles of getting my two college age children in Irish higher education while conducting my doctoral study. However, I resolved to focus on the experiences of the participants of this study in the context of their own lived realities.

- I acknowledged my preconceptions of women having more internal resources (i.e. strength, resilience, strong will) than men to overcome obstacles towards success. Therefore, I avoided bringing in those preconceptions during the selection of literature, the questionnaire design, the interviews, and the analysis of the data. I intended to give equal value to the experiences of success of women and men that took part in this study.

- I acknowledged my background as an EFL teacher and avoided using technical terms during the interviews when exploring the participants' ways to overcome language barriers. I also refrained from correcting their written or oral responses so they would not feel I was aiming to test their domain in English.

- I acknowledged my experiences and attitude regarding challenges based on my Christian beliefs (i.e. I witness God's work, leading and providence in my life throughout difficult times). However, I did not expect similar experiences in the participants of this study. Neither I purposefully searched theological nor Christian literature. I included some Bible references as some are also present in Freire's and other scholars' work.

- I acknowledged part of my intellectual debt to Paulo Freire and his influence on my understanding of critical thinking, vocation/calling, reflective practice and critical pedagogy which I valued important in my formation as a researcher. However, as it was not the aim of this study, I did not intend to prove right of wrong any of his statements (or methods).

### 1.7.3 Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into five chapters, as follows.

Chapter 1 is an introduction that includes the antecedents to and context of the study, the rationale for the study, and the research questions. Additionally, it presents an overview of the structure of the study, the background of the researcher and acknowledgment of reflexivity (and bracketing), the structure of the thesis, methodology, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 2 (Study 1) opens with a literature review on success in higher education and later describes the methodology, findings on, and discussion of the nature of success in the eyes of selected Ecuadorian secondary school and undergraduate students.

Chapter 3 (Study 2) opens with a literature review on experiences of success in higher education and later describes the methodology employed to study the cases of four South American students in Trinity College Dublin. Findings, and discussion follow the methodology section.

Chapter 4 (Study 3) opens with a literature review on coeducation in higher education and a description of the situation at Trinity College Dublin regarding coeducation. The chapter continues with the description of the methodology, findings and conclusions of an analysis by gender.

Chapter 5 serves for the purposes of an epilogue or post script. It brings together the findings from the three inter-connected studies, discusses the strengths and limitations of the research overall, and suggests implications of the work in policy making, pedagogy and further research in higher education in Ecuador and in other countries or regions. This chapter also includes some of my final personal unbracketed reflections and my new understanding of success in higher education.

References and a list of the bibliography that was revised during this study are displayed in the APA 6$^{th}$ edition style. (Pears, 2010). Zotero [free-license] and Endnote [purchased licensed] were employed as electronic reference management tools.

Footnotes are suggested to provide supplementary information to the text (Oliver, 2004, p. 73). In this thesis, they are employed in a dialogical and cross-cultural way with three purposes: to supplement information to the main text, to bridge European Anglo-universities and South American culture, and for purposes of reflexivity awareness.

## 1.8 Overview of the methodology

Aspects of Freire's work influenced various of the decisions I made on the methodology of this study (Freire, 1974, 1993, 1998). The idea of empowering people to transform their worlds through critical reflection within a dialogical and egalitarian context led me to an interest in hearing from students who perceived themselves to be successful. Therefore, the voices of Spanish-speaking students from South America had an important part to play in this study. This involved valuing them as experts on their own lives and experiences (Sarantakos, 1988 cited in Banks, Byrne, McCoy, & Smyth, 2014,

p. 369) and treating them as people who had the potential to offer views not explored hitherto.

Methodology of Study 1: *Perception of success and readiness to succeed higher education*, is an interpretive qualitative research which employed a qualitative survey approach (Jansen, 2010) as a primary source of data collection. Data were collected through a carefully designed survey with questions concerning the meanings of success in the minds of secondary school leavers before they entered college. The questionnaire was piloted in one secondary school in Ireland, and administered to secondary students in Ecuador. A second questionnaire was adapted from this to explore the meanings of success on the part of first year college students. Questionnaires were translated into Spanish and revised by two bilingual teachers (one English native speaker and one Spanish native speaker). Both surveys were administered online (Jensen & Laurie, 2016, p. 162). Additionally, online interviews to six undergraduate students in Ecuador were conducted to collect views on transition from secondary school to college. Data were analysed using the thematic analysis method (Jansen, 2010; Silverman, 2014). Findings were presented as narratives and tabulated (Oliver, 2011). Conclusions were drawn, particularly taking into account what could be used in the second study.

Methodology of Study 2: *Definitions of success in HE and* p*rofile to succeed in Anglophone European universities*, was an interpretive qualitative exercise which employed a multiple case study approach (Simons, 2009). The case studies were those of four South American and Spanish-speaking students in Trinity College. The methodology was designed to collect data through using official reports on the students population in Trinity College Dublin, an online recruiting survey, unstructured pre-interviews, in-depth semi-structured retrospective interviews, and email correspondence, ultimately seeking to distinguish between recurrent findings and deviant cases following a thematic analysis of the data (G. Thomas, 2011). Findings are presented with a description of the cases employing a narrative (story-telling) approach (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Shyam Akula, 2016; Simons, 2009). Conclusions were drawn comparing the four cases.

Methodology of Study 3: An analysis by gender, is an off-shoot of Study 2, therefore also an instance of interpretive qualitative research. The case study employed a mixed methods approach for data collection. It complemented the data collected from Study 2 (emphasising especially questions 21–26 of the interview) with the historical development of Trinity College towards coeducation. A thematic analysis and with

emphasis on gender was applied to the collected data. The gender analysis employed various tools to determine the relationships, inequalities and power differences between men and women in a systematic way (Leach, 2003, p. 19). Findings are presented below using narratives and the themes that emerged from the analysis.

## 1.9 Overview of ethical considerations

Attention to ethical issues had come to be considered central to good research by the early twenty-first century (Burton et al., 2014; Glatthorn, 2005; Jensen & Laurie, 2016; Silverman, 2014; Simons, 2009). Creswell observes that good research practice requires that concern for ethics be built into the process before, during and after the conduct of the research (Creswell, 2013, pp. 58,59). The range of ethical issues to consider is wide. They include proper procedures in the use and dissemination of information, protection of the participants, voluntary participation, origins of the funding of the study and transparency, among many others. The participatory nature of this study and the inclusion of some students under 18 required that I took steps to comply with the following legal and moral considerations and constraints.

- Adhere to the ethical guidelines of Trinity College Dublin and the School of Education[27].

- Obtain Garda vetting from the Republic of Ireland as as required by college policies.

- Protect the anonymity and privacy of the participants through the use of pseudonyms and avoid providing information that could disclose their identities.

- Obtain informed consent from the participants through a form with clear and full information on the study, the nature of their participation, arrangements for dissemination of the results, the purpose of the research and information on contacts to whom to address any enquiries.

- Be sensitive during my interactions with the participants, especially during the interviews, placing the wellbeing of the participants over the purposes of the study.

[27] https://www.tcd.ie/Education/ethics/

- Protect the data collected with appropriate procedure for storage and disposal of material used that would obscure the identities of the participants.

- Ensure that participation was always voluntary and that participants understood their right to withdraw at any point in the study.

- Respect the voices of the participants in the interpretation of the data.

- Maintain an egalitarian, dialogical participant-researcher relationship to avoid conflicts of power.

- Be alert to any emerging situations that could threaten ethical considerations set out above.

# 2 Chapter two: Study 1

## Perception of success and readiness to succeed HE

This first study attempts to respond research question 1:

*What are the different meanings of success in higher education and the views of the requirements to succeed on the part of Ecuadorian students?*

This chapter starts with a brief discussion of the meaning of success and failure in higher education and reported or perceived factors influencing success, mostly derived from the review of empirical studies. Second, it presents an empirical study conducted in Ecuador in 2015 which explored Ecuadorian students' views on the nature of success in higher education, their motives for entering higher education, a description of challenges they often face, and their strategies for dealing with those challenges. Finally, it explores the gap between select second and third level students' beliefs of what constitutes success and factors contributing to it.

The reason for basing this study in Ecuador was due to the lack of reported studies on success in higher education in Ecuador hitherto, and to enable me to make connections with secondary schools and students, the intended future audiences for this research. This sub-study is connected to sub-study 2 in a fashion that lays a background to start exploring a range of views on the nature of success considering the context of the target population: SSoSA.

## 2.1 Introduction to literature review

This literature review starts with a summation of various definitions of success and failure in higher education, perceived factors that contribute to success, and an examination of the gap between second and third level education. The literature review made use of official reports, books, and empirical studies located using terms including: 'success', 'failure', 'dropout', 'retention', 'access', 'higher education', 'college', 'university', '*deserción escolar' [drop-out]*, '*universidad*' [university], '*educación superior [higher education]'*, '*bachillerato*' [baccalaureate], '*retos*' [challenges] and '*desafíos*' [challenges]. Peer-reviewed articles and official documents were preferred and newspaper articles were considered, when relevant, as supplementary sources.

### 2.1.1 Defining success in higher education

In 2013 the Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training [NESET] reported to the European Commission [the administrative branch of the European Community (EU)] on the importance of success in higher education for jobs, productivity, social justice and also stressed the need to have more graduates in the European Union [EU] by 2020 (Quinn, 2013, p. 7). The same report advocated research on success in higher education and suggested shared definitions of dropping-out and completion in the EU (p.10). Some researchers have commented on a lack of standardised and clear definitions of what it means to drop-out and what completion and retention mean across the countries of the EU, this can pose a problem for comparative study (R. Jones, 2008; Merrill et al., 2009; Quinn et al., 2005; L. Thomas & Quinn, 2007; van Stolk, Tiessen, Clift, & Levitt, 2007).

Additionally, NESET noted that more attention has historically been given to access to higher education than to what happens to students once they enter academic life. Also lacking was research into what could be done to ensure students complete their studies successfully (Quinn, 2013, p. 63). Due to the absence of universal definitions it was of paramount importance to find a definition of success in higher education for the purpose of this study so that it would be possible to have a better understanding of the factors influencing it.

#### Success or failure: The debate

Terms such as drop-out, attrition, non-completion, wastage and non-achievement have negative connotations (Longden 2003 cited in Quinn et al., 2005, p. 14) because they are seen as a failure which, as Peelo states, is not a popular subject in higher education (2002, p. 2). However, failure can refer to various things: students who fail to meet acceptable academic standards; students failing to meet their own, personal standards and ambitions; students who do not complete their studies; institutions failing students by providing insufficient support and poor quality of education (Brown, 2002, pp. 2,3) and various combinations of these states of affairs.

In the debate on success and failure, there are many things to be considered. If failure is defined as not meeting academic standards we might think the lack of preparedness of the student was the main reason for his/her failure, but it could also be evidence of unwise career choice or result from the fact that the institution's entry requirements did

not reflect what was needed for this particular student to succeed. By contrast, if failure is measured against the student's own standards and ambitions we may think he/she failed only in the sense of having made a wrong career choice. This could be the result of poor research into a future career on the student's part, but it could be the result of inappropriate information delivered by the institution.

If failing is defined as non-completion of studies, many reasons may explain this, e.g. lack of finance, personal issues or poor intrinsic motivation. If the student comes back to education or finishes his/her career in another institution then for the student the experience as a whole was *not* a failure, though for the institution it would be perceived as such. Institutions failing to meet students' expectations or not providing enough support could be perceived as leaving responsibility to students but it can be that a student has made a wrong college or career choice. Who is then to blame?

The feeling of having failed is not comfortable but it does not always have to be negative for the student as he/she can learn from it and redirect his/her career as a result (Quinn et al., 2005). On the other hand, failure is always negative for the institution as it is perceived as a waste of money or resources. When referring to failure, it is more common to try to find ways to *justify* than *avoid* it and this is understandable as it is difficult for students to deal with or talk about failure (Quinn, 2013, p. 64 Therefore, it has been suggested that the incorporation of a more positive approach might result in a more nuanced view of facts. Thus, the inclusion of success, retention, progression, and completion as valuable measures of worth have been also considered (Merrill & Johnston, 2011; Merrill & Tett, 2013; Quinn, 2013; O. Webb et al., 2017).

**History of success and failure in higher education**

Historical review of policies in higher education show that more attention given to failure than to students' success in the earlier years (Parry, 2002; see also Yorke, 2002). Gareth Parry notes that interest in failure did not feature in policies concerning higher education in England until the 1990s and it was then usually referred to as non-completion. He describes five moments in the history of modern English higher education, which I summarise below as follows.

1. In the 1960s, failure, which was initially defined as 'wastage', was the subject of interest in an attempt to understand relationships between entry standards and

wastage rates. Studies from this period assumed a relationship between students' entry and exit performances but did not allow for other factors that might have influenced success/failure (Parry, 2002).

2. The second moment came after some 30 years when there had been no major reports on institutions' graduation rates but in a period when more attention was being given to the effectiveness of institutions. During the 1990s, increasingly easy access to university resulted in the appearance of research on non-completion, enrolment and graduation rates as indicators of institutional efficiency. However, this research did not assume a correlation between entry and exit performance and paid more attention to defining success and failure (Parry, 2002).

3. The third moment occurred in the late 1990s when increasing intakes of undergraduate students from different backgrounds led to concern about quality and standards. This caused institutions to undertake enquiries into non-completion. This research, for the first time, took into account perceptions of what constituted non-completion, in an attempt to explain its causes (Parry, 2002; see also Yorke, 1999).

4. For Parry the fourth moment of interest in failure came when institutions had to face the implications of the Dearing Inquiry of 1996-1997. The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education [NCIHE], known popularly as the Dearing Inquiry, discussed ways to improve learning and teaching while proposing seemingly a more efficient system for providing financial support and monitoring equity and quality. The major result of this was the introduction of a system to track students' progress, analysed in conjunction with programme specifications to detect common points of dropping-out (NCIHE, 1997).

5. The final moment came after the Dearing Inquiry, when there was more attention paid to retention and how to design policies for the recruitment and retention of pupils/students from the disadvantaged sectors of society (Parry, 2002). Due to devolution of power in the management of higher education funding policies, Scotland and Wales had their own inquiries into higher education. As a result, in Scotland, performance indicators were first reported in 2000 (Callender & Kemp, 2000) and attention was paid to retention rates as a performance indicator in England only in 2001 when the Parliamentary Select Committee on Education

and Employment [SCEE] began to do so. However, it is important to note that, in 1999, the Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE] had encouraged institutions to establish and improve structures to help disadvantage students succeed (HEFCE, 1999b, p. 3; SCEE, 2001). By then, terms including drop-outs, non- completion, completion and retention had replaced the former name, wastage, as measures of success and failure when considering access policies, performance indicators and universities' cultures and practices.

**Concluding the debate: Interest in the study of success**

Due to the negative perception of expressions such as failure, drop-out, non-achievement and wastage (Longden 2003 cited in Quinn et al., 2005, p. 14) there was increasing interest in research into students' successes as the twenty-first century progressed (Merrill et al., 2009, p. 24) and less emphasis on the pejorative term *drop-out* (Yorke & Longden, 2008, p. 43). It has been claimed that giving emphasis to the roots of success can even encourage retention (Yorke & Longden, 2008, p. 52). Hence, it is essential to clarify that this is a study of *success* and not *failure*.

### 2.1.2 Understanding success in higher education

In 2008 HEFCE concluded, 'success is more than retention; and retention is not the only kind of success' (cited in Merrill et al., 2009, p. 25). Jones defines retention as the extent to which a learner remains within a higher education institution and completes a programme of study in a pre-determined time (R. Jones, 2008, p. 1) which places emphasis on the institution's role in retaining students to their completion of studies (p.14). Therefore, despite the fact that there are many definitions of success that need to be compared (Thomas & Quinn, 2007; R. Jones, 2008) and explored (Quinn, 2013, p. 10) definitions since the early 2000s have often reflected students' perspective. For example, a student who decided not to stay in a certain institution might still have had success in the sense of having gained knowledge, ability or experience which could somehow be of benefit at other stages of his/her personal, academic or professional life. Some see success as performing well, by their own or external standards. For others, it is measured only by getting a degree in the required time or getting a degree no matter the length of time required in the same or a different institution/career.

Success for students in higher education hereafter refers to: completion of studies to the extent of completing a degree, meeting academic standards and others emergent definitions of the nature of success including those of students, institutions and the society generally. Therefore, to give a more complete meaning to this definition of success we must also consider the time required to get the degree. Parry indicates that in 1988 the length of time spent acquiring a degree was introduced as an indicator of success in higher education shifting emphasis away from conventional wastage and drop-outs rates (Parry, 2002; see also Yorke, 2002, p. 20). Similarly, for some students, a career change or transfer to another institution may sometimes be a right and positive decision (Quinn, 2013) and, therefore, not perceived as a failure but as a successful step towards the realisation of the individuals' goals.

Due to the wide range of definitions of success available, Hixenbaugh, Dewart and Towell claim there is a need for research into the factors that contribute to students' successes (Hixenbaugh, Dewart, & Towell, 2012, p. 290). It has been suggested that this requires the use of more participatory methods (Quinn et al., 2005; Thomas & Quinn, 2007). Consequently, this study explores these and other definitions of success that are informed by the participants: students in secondary schools and undergraduate students.

### 2.1.3 Factors influencing success in higher education

In this section research on factors influencing success in higher education is reviewed. The factors concerned are first described generally and then in greater detail, in an attempt to understand how they contribute to: completion and non-completion, academic success and failure and perceptions of success and failure.

Until the early twenty-first century, 'non- completion' was under-researched in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, though in the United States it had been extensively explored (Yorke, 1999, p. 2). Tinto's model of institutional departure in the North American context has been the base of many studies into causes of drop-outs, completion and retention in other countries but has also been criticised for not considering external factors leading to withdrawals (Yorke, 1999, p. 9).

Several factors influencing success in higher education have been suggested. Some factors are attributed to the environments institutions provide and their influence on students' successes (Beard & Hartley, 1984; Cowan, 2006; Mann, 2001; Ramsden,

2003). Since the early to mid-twentieth century, academic success has been perceived as something that 'can be influenced and developed by education and teaching' (Brown, 2002, p. 5) implying that anybody who is provided with the right learning environment can have success which does not depend on any kind of innate ability. In that sense, the institution assumes most responsibility for a student's success or failure. As Blythman and Orr put it: 'we recognize student failure as an institutional responsibility and examine drop-out as an indication of institutional failure' (2002, p. 45). Other authors have outlined in more detail their views of institutional environments as having significant influence on students' successes and failures. The American psychologist and humanist Carl Rogers challenged institutions by stating that success can be reached only when a meaningful and experiential learning environment is provided, one favouring the acquisition of 'lifelong skills in self-discovery, self-direction and self-actualization' (Rogers, 1983, p. 19). Here, responsibility for success or failure is shared equally. In this view, students are as responsible for their own success as institutions while the importance of having proper access to institutional resources (for example, approachable lecturers, support centres and library facilities) is recognised.

For Tinto, the roots of success (described as retention) lie primarily in the integration of the student into an academic community so that his/her social and intellectual growth can occur (Tinto, 1993, 2007). In this view, both the university and the student's own capacity to engage with the university community play important roles in obtaining success. Therefore, there is a widespread agreement on the paramount importance of an easy transition into college life (Gibney, Moore, Murphy, & O'Sullivan, 2011; Pineda-Báez et al., 2014; Smith, 2004; Smyth & Hannan, 2007; Taylor & Bedford, 2004; Woodfield, 2014). This awareness caused Irish higher education institutions to include policies specifically aimed at helping students to adapt to college life in the early twenty-first century (Murphy, 2014), ), with some studies having focused on the effectiveness of such policies on those identified as disadvantaged or non-traditional students (Fleming & Finnegan, 2011b). However, the issues involved may not simply be technical and may go deeper than being shown round the library or how to use the college's facilities, as there are other considerations that may contribute to the student's transition to college life (including being told where to get affordable meals and accommodation) which are not directly related to institutional factors but to a student's socio-economic and cultural background (Zepke, Leach, & Butler, 2011).

In the case of Trinity College Dublin, some of these factors have been observed and incorporated into official policies and practices before 2011 through programmes that

helped students in their transitions to college. Relevant programmes/services included the Trinity Access Programme [TAP] [28] and the Student Counselling Service [SCS] [29] besides the existence of students' groups like the Students Union [TCDSU] and the college clubs and societies.

Freire declared *critical awareness* to be a key component of success in education (Freire, 1993). Based on some of the ideas expressed in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* we may be moved to ask the following key questions:

- What are students' definitions of success? And are they different from those of the institutions and the society?

- What are the students' beliefs of their personal challenges and the resources they need to become successful?

- Are undergraduate students aware of their needs and weaknesses to an extent that allows them to appreciate the efforts of institutions to provide the resources required to supplement or complement their skills, allowing them to accomplish their studies successfully?

- Are staff in universities aware of students' perceptions of success, their needs and abilities?

It seems to be, as Brown notes, that some degree of failure is often taken for granted (as in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, some seed fall on the rocks and amongst the weeds) and while effort is given to reducing wastage, such efforts do not often involve examining deeply the phenomenon of failure (Brown, 2002, p. 6). Perhaps the lack of critical awareness on the part of students causes large numbers to fail in universities, despite those universities' efforts to provide what is assumed to be required for students to succeed?

[28] TAP runs foundation courses for young adults (since 1999) and Mature students (since 1997) https://www.tcd.ie/Trinity_Access/

[29] SCS: offer various resources including counselling, student to student [S2S] support, and peer mentoring http://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/

Yorke (1999) offers a different view based on factors for non-completion. In a study of the views of 2151 full-time and sandwich[30] students in England who did not complete their higher education. Yorke found the six most often self-reported factors influencing non-completion to be as follows:

1. poor quality of student experience;
2. inability to cope with the demands of the programme;
3. unhappiness with the social environment;
4. wrong choice of programme;
5. matters related to financial need; and
6. dissatisfaction with aspects of university provision. (Yorke, 1999, p. 53)

Some of Yorke's factors coincide with the results of extensive research on non-completion in higher education in the United States (Yorke, 2002, p. 35). These are some of the common factors:

- students' wrong programme choice;
- students' lack of commitment or interest;
- students' expectations not being met;
- students coming from working-class backgrounds;
- students being mature entrants;
- students entering with low academic qualifications;
- the quality of teaching was poor;
- unsupportive (or hostile) academic culture;
- students having financial difficulties; and
- students having other commitments.

A deeper analysis of these and other factors may help to define variables relevant to this study with more emphasis given to views of unpreparedness. Studies examining institutions' plans to provide facilities intended to assure the success of their undergraduates (Quinn et al., 2005) might be valuable but, nevertheless, institutional policies will not be discussed in depth here as the main concern of this study lies in *students*' perceptions of success. Therefore, the main interest of the study concerns

[30] Sandwich students in England refers to those students who undertake a year in a workplace or abroad as part of the degree programme, for example students of engineering who might work in a factory.

non-institutional factors for success based on the model given by Zepke, Leach and Buttler (Zepke et al., 2011).

Although this work concerns only on non-institutional factors following the model given by Zepke, Leach and Butler (2011), no order of importance can be given to such factors as they cannot be studied in isolation because they depend on, or influence, each other (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016; Martinez, 2001). They can, however, be examined one by one, and that is what I proceed to attempt below, beginning with the question: does success come from innate ability or can one learn how to be successful? I then turn to the related issue: why do we have entrance examinations?

#### 2.1.3.1 Is success innate or can be learned? The rationale for entry exams

The literature is divided on the correlation between success and intelligence and the debate on this has often been febrile, without always being very productive. For example, in 2014 the then Major of London, Boris Johnson, caused controversy by stating that success depended on Intelligence Quotient [IQ] (cited in Bond, 2014).

This intervention in an often-angry debate by a prominent politician seemed a surprising development, given that many – both in the academic and general communities – might have thought that the debate was effectively over, with the concept of IQ being discredited. To understand why this might be so it may be useful to review the history of that debate. Between the 1920s and the late 1950s, Lewis Term conducted a longitudinal study in which children classed as having high IQ were followed for up to 30 years to explore the correlation between their intelligence and their success. He reported that intelligence related more closely to success in aspects of life other than academic achievement (Bond, 2014; Mehrabian, 2000). Although many agree on the role of intelligence as a good predictor of success, it has been claimed that without a clear definition on what kind of intelligence is required to succeed such predictions are dubious (Scherbaum, Goldstein, Yusko, Ryan, & Hanges, 2012). Some research claims that the ability to learn is innate and heritable and leads to educational achievement. However, such achievement is not exclusively the result of intelligence but a group of traits involving intelligence (De Cruz & De Smedt, 2010; Krapohl et al., 2014; Scherbaum et al., 2012). On the other hand, others insist that a capacity for successful learning can be acquired through experience of prior academic achievement and a combination of different variables including metacognition, effort and motivation (Bond, 2014; Chan, 2011; El-Alayli & Baumgardner, 2003; Service, 2005; Stump, Husman, & Corby, 2014).

The IQ nature vs. nurture debate and aspects of power relationships that appear from the possibility of accurately measure individuals' IQ through tests are similarly politicised (Gould, 1996; Hanscombe et al., 2012; Holzinger, 1929; Montagu, 2002). In an attempt to find a description of intelligence, the American psychologist Scott Barry Kaufman in his book *Ungifted: Intelligence Redefined*, proposed a definition comprised of general intelligence, emotional intelligence and creativity in pursuing the fulfilment of goals. Under this definition of intelligence it is neither simply natural nor the product of nurture but a complicated interaction of both (Stark, 2013) which would explain why studies have not been able to determine if intelligence is a predictor of success the matter simply being too complex to be so reduced. A more recent concept of emotional intelligence [EI] or emotional quotient [EQ], which itself may be innate or acquired, was first studied in younger learners and later in adolescents and young adults. Despite EQ has neither being properly standardised, nor is stable, it has been proposed by its advocates as a factor to predict success. EQ, the argument goes, represents the capacity for proper management of one's learning potential and allows learners to learn from their failures (Downey, Mountstephen, Lloyd, Hansen, & Stough, 2008; Humphrey, Curran, Morris, Farrell, & Woods, 2007; J. Parker et al., 2004; Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004; Pope, Roper, & Qualter, 2012; Qualter, Whiteley, Morley, & Dudiak, 2009; Service, 2005). If this were the case, then EQ could be nurtured and developed even if intelligence in the conventional sense proved to be innate.

However, regardless of the nature of intelligence, if we take the position that some people are more able to learn than others, then it would seem to follow that learning and the ability to learn can be measured by tests or the observation of behaviours. Based on such knowledge some organisations may be willing to invest only in the higher education of those students who, according to them, are more likely to succeed and complete their higher education work. Such an argument is often used to justify the existence of entrance examinations for higher education (Bourn, 2007; Johnes & McNabb, 2004; Martinez & Munday, 1998). However, such examinations are arguably not good predictors of success or completion. A study in Ireland reported that students with good qualifications were at risk of dropping out for reasons other than lack of innate ability (Fleming & Finnegan, 2011). Another report noted that entry scores were influenced by context, socio-economic situation and quality of previous education (Quinn, 2013, p. 73).

The matter of intelligence is complicated, prone to being discussed in ways that may be unhelpfully emotive, can be politicised (as the politician's comments noted above might

seem to suggest) and, all told, unlikely to be resolved in one section of a thesis, having already been the subject of many theses. However, in this section, there are five empirical studies of most immediate relevance I would like to discuss. The first two concerned the correlation between EQ or EI and secondary school achievement in adolescents in Canada and Australia (Downey et al., 2008; J. Parker et al., 2004). The findings coincided in suggesting that higher levels of several aspects of EI affected achievement, with no major differences between male and female students. The other three studies were conducted with undergraduate students in Canada and the UK (J. D. A. Parker et al., 2004; Pope et al., 2012; Qualter et al., 2009). These concerned the effect of several components of EI on students' capacity for adaptation and persistence and levels of retention and achievement. Again, they did not report major differences by gender; however, stress management, adaptability, consciousness, empathy, organisational awareness, intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies (all dimensions of EI) had effects on achievement, retention, and persistence. What is more, Parker et al. noted that EI variables were better predictors of first-year university scores than high school scores (J. D. A. Parker et al., 2004). These studies were quantitative and based on statistical measures that may not always give the best picture of how entry into, and success in, higher education can operate independently of the apparently 'obvious' measure of entry qualifications, or any type of intelligence whatsoever, but they are relevant here.

Anecdote and autobiography can give examples of success *against the odds* or not predicted by high exams scores. For example, the American neurosurgeon Ben Carson records in his autobiography (Carson & Murphey, 1990) that, despite not being a good student in his early years in school, he found motivation and discovered how to nurture his own potential. He entered the prestigious Yale University in the US and completed his degree in neurosurgery, despite belonging to what we might call a disadvantaged group, coming from a dysfunctional family and being a first-generation entrant into third level education. The life of the Scottish author Ralph Glasser, narrated in his autobiography, could be another example of a person whose potential and hard work helped him to succeed despite the circumstances of his earlier years (Glasser, 2001 see also Freire, 1996).

Drawing from such as examples as those of Carson, Glasser, and Freire (and many more might also be given), it can be argued that socio-economic factors are restrictions to success, yet they can also be good drivers in causing some to overcome difficulties, a quality/tendency called *resilience*. Admittedly there can be a degree of mythologizing

around such an idea as in the case of Winston Churchill, the British statesman, Prime Minister and Nobel Prize winner in Literature *(Nicholas, 2015)*, A certain standard narrative of his life, which he was himself keen to promote, stresses the fact that he began a military career after twice failing the entrance examination to the Royal Military College. But to see his case as being simply comparable to the cases of Carson, Glasser, and Freire is to ignore the socio-economic advantages he enjoyed. Furthermore, his autobiographical writings have sometimes been challenged as to their accuracy, so that the standard narrative where he is concerned may well be a mix of myth and reality. But even taking account of these facts it is clear that he did not follow a regular route into higher education, yet is considered a successful leader with a remarkably persistent character. This could suggest that exam scores are not the only predictors of success in later life and that other types of ability, and values such as motivation, resilience and effort, should be taken into account in making decisions about admission to higher education. Might it be that a combination of intrinsic considerations (personal and private to the individuals concerned) and extrinsic considerations (environment, the nature of university life, and so on) aid or impede success in higher education? Some of these issues are discussed below.

#### 2.1.3.2 Demographic and psychological considerations

Demographic variables including parental background, socio-economic status, gender and age all play their parts as factors influencing success in higher education. In 1999, HEFCE expressed concern for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, mostly meaning those from low socio-economic groups, whom they reported as having higher levels of non-completion (HEFCE, 1999a, p. 3 see also Harrison & Hatt, 2010). This finding has been confirmed in other research (Quinn, 2013; Vignoles & Powdthavee, 2009). Other studies suggest that the background, education and occupation of the students' parents, can also affect the former's levels of success or, at least persistence in higher education (Johnes & McNabb, 2004; Quinn, 2013, p. 55; Russell, 1957; L. Thomas & Quinn, 2007) while parental education has been reported as a strong predictor for access to higher education, attitudes, and career choice (Smyth, McCoy, & Kingston, 2015; L. Thomas & Quinn, 2007). Further evidence from the UK's National Audit Office has suggested a strong tendency for drop-outs to come from white working-class communities in rural parts of the UK (Bourn, 2007). This is confirmed by a review of HEA publications from 2009 to 2016, which reported some research evidence on the influence of socio-demographic factors on success (access, retention, progression, and

attainment) in higher education (O. Webb et al., 2017). Gender is one of the variables that is studied as affecting the definitions and experiences of success in higher education, therefore, I feature it more strongly in the literature review of the final study (Study 3) which concerns a gender analysis.

Similarly, psychological measures, such as degree of maturity, are reported factors influencing preparedness (Conley, 2007; Fischetti, MacKain, & Smith, 2011). However, at some point there is an overlap of demographic and psychological factors. There is evidence from Yorke to the effect that low social class and lack of maturity on entry are strong predictors of non-completion (Yorke, 2001a), while Brown notes a close link between academic performance and the emotional lives of students (Brown, 2002). She claims that counselling only concerns students' perception of failure which are mostly related to the pressure that results from public exposure of exams results, economic issues and, for overseas students, the idea of representing their groups or cultures.

Finally, other socio-demographic factors that may influence the psychology of the students have also been observed. One study researched the influence of health and weight on academic achievement (Deliens, Clarys, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Deforche, 2013; Hixenbaugh et al., 2012), while other research have stressed the significance of having supportive or unsupportive family and friends in deciding to withdraw or stay (Fleming & Finnegan, 2011b; Wray, Aspland, & Barrett, 2014; Xuereb, 2014; Zepke et al., 2011). The influence of family and friends' support, especially on non-traditional students has similarly been explored (Merrill et al., 2009).

#### 2.1.3.3 Financial issues and success

From her experience in counselling, Brown argues that 'financial pressure is more likely to be a real issue for students today [in the twenty-first century] than it was in the 1970's (Brown, 2002, p. 144). But Callender and Kemp have claimed that 'students in 1998/9 [in the UK] had more money at their disposal (in real terms) than ten years ago' by means of loans, earnings, maintenance grants, allowances, and parental/family contributions (Callender & Kemp, 2000). Thus, financial issues are clearly complex and can be difficult to disentangle from other factors when assessing their influence on students' successes of failures (Yorke, 1999, 2002).

In 1997, NCIHE reported high rates of non-completion among students affected by economic factors as most full-time students had to get paid employment due to lack of funding (NCIHE, 1997, p. 26). It might seem plausible that their economic struggles were due to college fees. However, college fees were introduced in the UK and Ireland in 1999 and 1997 respectively with fees waived or reduced for students on low incomes (Vignoles & Powdthavee, 2009; Walsh, 2014).

By 2012, a college fee in a form of a 'modest' student contribution of €2,250 was required from Irish students, with some maintenance grants and fee reductions available to low-income students (Limond, 2014; Walsh, 2014). In 2013, a report for the European Commission referred to financial problems as a common cause of non- completion of one's studies (Quinn, 2013, p. 55). This was confirmed by research conducted in 10 countries (Thomas & Quinn, 2007). A separate study along similar lines in Scotland have indicated likewise (Forsyth & Furlong, 2003). In a survey in a college preparing nursery workers in the North of England, it emerged that more than half the respondents (52.3%) had considered leaving, financial difficulties being one of the most common reasons for thinking of doing so (Wray et al., 2014).

It can be argued that financial issues result in poor academic preparation for college and can be related to other factors influencing success. Therefore, governments and institutions offer financial support to some undergraduate students, especially those considered disadvantaged or who belong to underrepresented groups, as such support can influence students' decisions to stay/leave (HEFCE, 1999a, 1999b; Yorke & Longden, 2008; Hixenbaugh et al., 2012). A study undertaken by Callender and Kemp in the UK (in 1998/99) suggested that students who reported financial problems affecting their academic performance, were more likely to express an intention to drop out (Callender & Kemp, 2000). However, when financial factors were studied in depth, it emerged that the nature of the financial problems that caused full-time and part-time students seek loans during the course of their studies differed somewhat. They reported interesting findings based on face-to-face interviews with 2,054 full-time [FT] and 747 part-time [PT] home students studying at 87 higher education institutions followed by a statistical analysis of the collected data. In this study, 87% of FT and 76% PT students reported financial problems, while lone parents were far more likely than any other student group to experience financial problems (Callender & Kemp, 2000, p.vi). Another finding concerned the distribution of students according to the college fees they paid:

- 42% paid nothing towards their fees;
- 21% had their fees partially remitted;
- 35% had to pay the full £1,000 towards their fees; and
- for 2% the situation was unknown. (Callender & Kemp, 2000, p. iv)

What is more, observing the distribution of their expenses, Callender and Kemp reported that:

- less than 22% of students' income was spent on housing costs;
- around 63% of students' income was spent on living costs (food, household goods; personal items, entertainment, and non-university related travel); and
- around 12% of students' income was for participation costs (included college fees [p.vii]).

Regarding loans, they reported that, higher values of the loans were taken out by lone parents, and by students with the largest maintenance grants 'the larger size of the grant the more likely students were to take out a loan because they said *they needed the money*' (Callender & Kemp, 2000, p. ix) [original emphasis]. Finally, it was observed that 86% of the FT and 60% of the PT students in this study expected to receive an economic return from their studies. According to the study's authors it would be wrong to conclude that assistance-based approaches are the best way to ensure the success of students with financial hardship because of the existence of other factors such as motivation and how financial hardship is handled.

Most of the studies on financial issues affecting success in higher education have been conducted in what are referred to in various countries as federal, state-funded or public institutions. Greater attention paid to financial hardship in private for-profit or not-for-profit colleges may cast another light on the nature of financial factors affecting success. Private for-profit universities have become far more common and visible in higher education since the first decade of the twenty-first century (Limond, 2014; Watkins & Seidelman, 2017), despite the fact that some disagree with what is often said to be their neoliberal ideology. But they were evidently meeting a demand for higher education by 2017, hence their growth. Additionally, private institutions bring diversity when it comes to career and training options for many people with their less stringent entry policies than public/federal/state-funded universities. Research suggests that the latter are primarily attended by students with high income or higher socio-economic status and in the USA,

where the state is funding, through loans or grants, marginalised students to enter private for-profit universities, concern has been expressed that for-profit private universities are failing to educate their students (Watkins & Seidelman, 2017) while others are succeeding and getting recognition (Labi, 2010).

Finally, one study of working class college students may help to explain the relationship between financial issues affecting success and social class. This study collected data through an online self-reported survey from two non-elite public universities in the US and Australia. Both universities were primarily attended by working class and middle class students (Rubin & Wright, 2017). The study found that time and money explained social class differences in students' social integration at university. The authors reported that working-class students were less integrated at Australian and US universities and they were dissatisfied with their financial circumstances because they lacked both the time and the money to engage in social activities. The study suggested also conducting similar research in private universities.

Ultimately, we should not dismiss financial issues as a factor affecting success in higher education, nonetheless, it is important to know what kind of financial issues are the ones influencing decisions. Are they related to college fees? Are they related to socio-economic and family factors? Are they related to the struggles with the cost of living? Are they related with the lack of skills necessary to deal with financial hardship?

#### 2.1.3.4 Academic achievement

Academic achievement (sometimes referred to as academic performance) is usually measured through examinations in universities with scores or grades used to make decisions on students' progress and awards (O. Webb et al., 2017). Students' levels of academic achievement may be forecast by cognitive predictors such as intelligence tests, aptitude tests and entrance examinations (Bourn, 2007; Conley, 2007; Downey et al., 2008; Johnes & McNabb, 2004; Krapohl et al., 2014; Service, 2005) but non-cognitive predictors, such as levels of motivation, self-discipline and personality type (García-Almeida, Hernández-López, Ballesteros, & De Saá-Pérez, 2012; Kurtz, Puher, & Cross, 2012; Rivas-Drake, 2008) may be equally important. One study in The Netherlands noted that secondary school exams points in Natural Sciences and Mathematics were the strongest predictor of high first-year grade point average [GPAs] and completion of a degree in Engineering. However, results of examinations in Liberal Arts (based on verbal

and communication skills) made for weak but significant predictors, and native language had no predictive value. This led the authors to argue for the consideration of differentiated entrance examinations (de Winter & Dodou, 2011). It emerges that the reliability of such predictors of students' academic achievement can vary according to discipline and the nature of the institution or programme.

Empirical studies report the influence of different factors on students' academic achievement such as socio-economic factors, financial distress, and ethnicity (Hixenbaugh et al., 2012; Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012; L. Thomas & Quinn, 2007; Triventi, 2014) and gender (Booth, Cardona Sosa, & Nolen, 2014; Clark, 2004; Martinez & Munday, 1998). Other factors that affect academic achievement are more psychological such as the management of emotions, anxiety, levels of motivation, and social skill (Gibney et al., 2011; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Martinez, 2001), or a mix of socio-economic considerations that affect students psychologically (Merrill & Johnston, 2011). Finally, other studies have found correlations between self-regulation of learning behaviour (Ning & Downing, 2015) and the view that institutional factors affect student experience and engagement (S. Hu & Kuh, 2003; Murphy, 2014; Pineda-Báez et al., 2014; Rodríguez González, Tinajero Vacas, Guisande Couñago, & Fernández Páramo, 2012).

How can academic achievements affect students' successes? One study in Belgium reported that the primary reason for psychology students dropping-out during the first year related to poor examination scores (Beyers & Goossens, 2002, p. 553). Students with low levels of achievement may need remedial courses (perhaps especially in Mathematics and languages) and although such extra teaching can contribute to completion, it can become a problem in itself and actually contribute to non-completion or, at the least, postponement of graduation (Conley, 2007). Having more to learn, besides an already heavy academic workload, may worsen the situation for such weak students.

#### 2.1.3.5 Mathematical skills

A review of literature in the United States concerning readiness to use Mathematics after secondary school life consistently showed that Mathematics had a very important role to play in getting a college degree, having better job opportunities and a wide range of career choices (McCormick & Lucas, 2011). A version of Conley's operational definition

of college readiness (Conley, 2007, p. 5) can help to define what college readiness in Mathematics consists in. Thus, it can be said to involve counting with knowledge and skill enough to go through the computational demands made in a specific career without the need for remedial support (McCormick & Lucas, 2011; see also Murphy, 2014). Despite maths being measured by standardised local, national and internationally recognised secondary level leaving exams or college entrance exams (McCormick & Lucas, 2011, p. 5) Mathematics is largely used to predict success in higher education in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics [STEM] disciplines (de Winter & Dodou, 2011; van Wyk, Hofman, & Louw, 2013). What is more, student-centred teaching/learning and assessment approaches have been suggested to enhance motivation to learn, and success on the part of students in STEM (Pinela & Seo, 2015).

Although this study is not concerned with assessment in higher education, it is important to note that students' beliefs of their intellectual abilities and skills influence their motivations and selection of learning strategies. Additionally, the value and validity of assessment methods may be involved in affecting students' approaches to learning (Barrio, Escamilla, García, Fernández, & García, 2015). A quantitative study on the influence of two different forms of assessment on Education students in Australia reported that the type of assessment influenced the students' perceptions of their intellectual abilities and, as a result, their learning approaches (Scouller, 1998). Another quantitative study in the UK reported on students' perceptions of Mathematics assessment methods, from traditional methods (closed book examinations) to more innovative methods such as projects and presentations. Methods influenced students' motivation to learn (Iannone & Simpson, 2013; see also Pinela & Seo, 2015). Therefore, the perception of mathematics and other STEM related abilities, forms of instruction, and assessment methods influence students' motivation to learn, their learning strategies, and as a result, their performance.

#### 2.1.3.6 Language skills

Having good language skills is recognised as of paramount importance in students' success as language is the doorway to learn and to provide evidence of the acquired learning (Bourn, 2007; Fleming & Finnegan, 2011a; Martinez & Munday, 1998; Smith, 2004; O. Webb et al., 2017). Therefore, at college level, students are expected to make proper use of the language of instruction. This requires having the knowledge and abilities necessary 'to engage [with] texts critically and create well written, organized,

and supported work products in both oral and written formats' (Conley, 2007, p. 15). Similarly, students are expected to exhibit writing skills employing analytical and critical thinking in most of their college assignment and examinations, however, lecturers notice that many of them lack this readiness (Smith, 2004). For overseas students, language difficulties are a frequent cause of the decision to drop-out (Johnes & McNabb, 2004, p. 36). But even native English speakers may struggle to cope with the *academic* language used in higher education. This may be especially so for disadvantaged students (B. Jones, Coetzee, Bailey, & Wickham, 2008).

English is the language most used and learned in the world as a second language. The influence of *globalisation* and the *knowledge-based economy* have reinforced the use of English as the language of instruction in universities, however, this may cause difficulties, especially for international students who come from developing countries which are not historically English–speaking (Altbach, 2004; R. Harris & Chonaill, 2016; Read & von Randow, 2013). The demands posed by language for students who are non-English native speakers are reviewed in more detail in Chapter 3.

#### 2.1.3.7 Library use and information literacy

The widespread use of technology in the early twenty-first century and the emergence of a so-called information society raised awareness of the importance of information literacy skills in higher education (Flaspohler, 2012). However, a pilot study on the impact of secondary school library and learning resource centres in schools in the UK noted that the ability to conduct research in libraries has not been studied in depth hitherto (Gildersleeves, 2012).

In an attempt to relate library use to progress in higher education another study reported the need to explore more qualitative methods in understanding students' relationships to libraries (Goodall & Pattern, 2011). Most research on this issue is quantitative, attempting to establish any correlation[s] between academic progress and achievement and the frequency of somebody's library use, be it physical library loans or use of electronic resources (Haddow, 2013; Haddow & Joseph, 2010; Wong & Webb, 2011). Alternatively, some have tried to find positive correlations between institutional library expenditure and student retention rates (Mezick, 2007). However, such studies provide no information on the reasons why students use or do not use the library, their perceptions of its influence on their performance and the quality of their information literacy skills. Attempts have been made to provide more information on the situation research in the USA by

considering more variables and providing greater detail on these issues. Yet, there was still a need for more qualitative research into these questions by 2014/2015 (Soria, Fransen, & Nackerud, 2014).

One limitation for those hoping to conduct quantitative studies may be that physical library use declined from 1995 to 2006 as increasingly, many people turned to virtual libraries (Martell, 2008). However, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods could be an effective way to explore the effects of library use and information literacy on students' levels of success.

#### 2.1.3.8 Study skills

Learning in a new context and the transition from the more controlled secondary education environment to the freer milieu of third education is, *per se*, a major change which, if not faced properly, can end in discouragement and failure (Conley, 2007; Yorke, 2001b). Therefore, and due to a number of considerations, the first year in college can be challenging and decisive in determining students' progress towards completion (Gibney et al., 2011; McInnis, James, & McNaught, 1995; Yorke & Longden, 2008). Specialists college advisors regard developing academic skills (concerning studying, planning and examination preparation) to be of paramount importance for college success (Smale & Fowlie, 2009).

One study on disadvantaged students reported different factors that may contribute to non-completion of studies such as lack of study habits, good time management and other academic skills (B. Jones et al., 2008, p. 43). Another study explored the views of university staff who generally agreed on the importance of having good study habits in achieving success (Taylor & Bedford, 2004). Furthermore, Robert Feldman lists different considerations that may influence study and which are good ways of attaining success in higher education, including management of both one's time and money, learning, self-concept and values awareness, course selection, technological competence, decision-making skills, levels of stress, standards of health, and what is called, wellness management (Feldman, 2011).

Metacognition and student self-regulated learning strategies were studied in an attempt to understand the complex range of processes students employ (Ning & Downing, 2015). Academic skills (be they acquired before college or learned during those years) emerged from this as good predictor of academic success.

#### 2.1.3.9 Engagement in university life

As stated before, the ability of the student to engage with the academic and social life of the university can also affect his/her level of success in higher education. It has been reported that poor engagement can lead to withdrawal or intention to leave college (Hixenbaugh et al., 2012; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014). For this reason, by 2011, many institutions in Wales, were actively working on strategies to ensure students engaged in different aspects of college life as reported in a compilation of cases portraying good institutional practices (L. Thomas & Jamieson-Ball, 2011).

Different factors can affect students' degrees of engagement, such as the modality of studies (i.e. full-time/part-time/sandwich/online), a student's social skills, and the college environment (S. Hu & Kuh, 2003; Murphy, 2014; O'Keeffe, 2013).

Student engagement may be influenced by the time the students spent in the college physical environment. While one study in the UK reported significantly higher non-completion rates in part-time students (Watson, 1998), other research suggests that completion is more likely when students are able to integrate socially and academically, ensuring the highest levels of engagement (Quinn, 2013, p. 59).

Students' personalities, levels of social skills, and backgrounds are suggested to predict their levels of engagement or the alienation that may affect their success, especially at the start of a period attending a college (Hoffnung, 2011; Mann, 2001; RANLHE, 2010). Many institutions had observed these factors and designed policies and practices to facilitate a suitable college environment to enhance student engagement.

Such had become the awareness of the importance of students' levels of engagement by the early twenty-first century that many institutions were routinely administering various questionnaires and surveys to obtain information about the levels of self-reported students' engagement and participation. This practice emerged first in the US and Canada and later spread to Australia, Britain, Europe and other parts of the world (Murphy, 2014). One of these questionnaires is the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire [SACQ] which determines student adaptation based on the student's apparent levels of academic, personal-emotional and social adjustment to college and his/her ability to attach to the institution. The SACQ have been applied, translated and adapted to predict college adjustment and to study its influence on student attrition, academic achievement, and progress (Beyers & Goossens, 2002; Krotseng, 1992;

Rienties et al., 2012; Rodríguez González et al., 2012). Another questionnaire used is the National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE] that links students' expectations and motivations for entering college, thus their effort and experience in accessing the resources provided by the institutions. The NSSE has been used to understand first year students' experiences and inform institutional effectiveness. It is as widely used as the SACQ (Kuh, 2007; Pineda-Báez et al., 2014; Xuereb, 2014). For example, students of seven universities in Colombia took the Spanish version of the NSSE in 2014, revealing that students there were often not actively engaged in college life and suggesting things that needed to change is institutions were to prevent withdrawals (Pineda-Báez et al., 2014). However, the College Student Experiences Questionnaire [CSEQ] is more concerned with the student's effort to make use of the institutional resources and how this influences engagement. One study in the USA applied the CSEQ and reported how perceptions of the campus environment influenced students to learn productivity or not (S. Hu & Kuh, 2003). Despite the CSEQ having progressively been replaced by the NSSE (both originated in the University of Indiana) versions of it are still used in empirical research.

It has been argued that the terms student experience and engagement are interchangeably used by the twenty-first century (Murphy, 2014) as in the case of Ireland where a version of the NSSE called 'Irish Survey of Student Engagement revised 2016 version'[31] served the purpose of measuring students' experiences nationwide, concentrating on first year students. However, the outcomes of such national surveys have been said not to be representative of the experience of non-traditional, disadvantage and international students (Fleming & Finnegan, 2011b, 2014; Merrill et al., 2009; Quinn, 2013; RANLHE, 2010).

Finally, Cannon makes the case that being neglected by the academic community can add to a sense of not belonging to it and this can end in failure (Cannon, 2002). Some research confirms that the institutional environment, academic staff in particular, greatly influence student experience (El-Alayli & Baumgardner, 2003; Fleming & Finnegan, 2011a; Hixenbaugh et al., 2012; Martinez & Munday, 1998).

Several factors related to college engagement and experience affecting student success have been noted in the literature, however it has often been claimed that more extensive

[31] Since 2013, Ireland has invited college students to participate in national surveys with attempt to inform institutions on best (or needed) policies and practice http://studentsurvey.ie/.

studies of less traditional factors, such as motivation, are called for and such a discussion now follows.

#### 2.1.3.10 Motivation

Two views of the nature of motivation and success are considered below. The first concerns motivation of students to enter and persist in post-secondary education and the secondly touches on factors that influence students' levels of motivation.

Students' high levels of motivation and determination to enter careers have been reported to be crucial in helping them overcome difficulties during their studies (Doménech-Betoret, Gómez-Artiga, & Lloret-Segura, 2014; Robbins, Allen, Casillas, Peterson, & Le, 2006; Wray et al., 2014; Xuereb, 2014). Evidently, having low expectations and not having precise motivation or clear reasons for entering a career may affect students *negatively* (Martinez & Munday, 1998; Stolk et al., 2007; Yorke & Longden, 2008) or positively (Pinxten et al., 2015) on their success.

According to many university counsellors from the 1960s to the 1970s, entry to third level education was usually perceived as a way of obtaining independence and engaging in individual exploration but from the 1990s it became, for many, a route to obtaining qualifications so as for entering the work force as soon as possible (Bell, 1996, p. 39; Brown, 2002, p. 143; Freire, 1998, p. 6). Other factors influencing students' motives to enter and succeed higher education are: a sense of vocation (Merrill & Johnston, 2011; Wray et al., 2014), family (Xuereb, 2014), a desire for social recognition (Fleming & Finnegan, 2011), and various personal reasons (Kennett, Reed, & Stuart, 2013). But it is also important to consider factors that are perceived by students as influencing their levels of motivation to complete their studies.

Several attempts have been made to understand what motivates students to persist and succeed. Some of these explore the students' views of factors that influence their motivation such as the quality of teaching and institutional factors, students' beliefs regarding their own abilities, and academic achievement.

Quality of teaching was reported to be significant in a large-scale study of student experience in further education[32] (Martinez & Munday, 1998). Other studies in higher education have similarly reported that good academic experience with positive and appropriate feedback affected students' levels of motivation (Stump et al., 2014). Similarly, students in private, public, presence and distance higher education institutions coincide in saying that institutions and their staff should provide as much support as possible to improve students' experiences and thus increase their chances of success (Bourn, 2007; Cotton, Kneale, & Nash, 2013; Halawah, 2011; Merrill et al., 2009; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014; Wray et al., 2014).

Beliefs about ability affect students' levels of motivation to study (Chan, 2011). For example, the outcome of one study on engineering students in the USA suggested that if students think ability is innate they often do not see the point of effort (Stump et al., 2014). Despite this, Dweck (Dweck, 1999) argues *entity* and *incremental* theories of personality do not affect levels of motivation to succeed. Entity theory assumes that ability is innate and not acquired while incremental theory states that it can be developed if not entirely existent. One study has, however, suggested that entity theory led to increased effort after failure, whereas an incremental theory resulted in decreased effort by the influence of certain type of assessment commentary (El-Alayli & Baumgardner, 2003). What is more, a study in a public university in the USA interviewed Latinos and reported ethnic identity beliefs influencing students' motivations in various ways (Rivas-Drake, 2008). This result suggests that motivation is also influenced by the students' cultural backgrounds informing their beliefs. As one study with pre-service teachers in Hong Kong reported a reciprocal effect between academic achievement and motivation influenced by culturally-informed epistemological beliefs about learning (Chan, 2011)

The correlation between academic achievement and motivation have also been studied. One study reported that students' levels of performance were influenced by the motivation to improve after they had compared their scores with those of lower scoring peers (Lane & Gibbons, 2007) while other research has suggested that academic

[32] Futher Education [FE] in the Republic of Ireland and the UK corresponds to continuing education in the USA [community colleges] and some European technical institutions. FE refers to a basic skills training or vocational qualification [FETAC Level 5 or 6] completed after compulsory second level and while not being an undergraduate study [HETAC level 7 or up] was normalised by the Further Education and Higher Education Training Awards Council and the National Framework of Qualifications in 2011. Therefore, FE could be an intermediate level between second and third level education (Limond, 2012; 2014, p. 112).

difficulties, such as poor performance reflected in tests and assignments, is one of the main reasons students give for considering leaving university (Wray et al., 2014).

Other interrelated factors that influence students to have success have been reported: engagement in college life and sense of belonging have been described as important factors motivating students to continue their academic careers (Kuh, 2007; Merrill et al., 2009; O'Keeffe, 2013) as is the involvement of students' parents (Martinez, 2001). It is often claimed that it behoves institutions to provide the best environments possible for students so they will adapt and stay (Halawah, 2011; Baxter, 2012; Wray et al., 2014). This may be especially so for students belonging to disadvantaged group or having any type of disability (Pineda-Báez et al., 2014). However, a study in Australia reported that university staff members perceived students' levels of engagement to college as mostly depending on the students' levels of willing/ability to adapt (Taylor & Bedford, 2004).

There is no doubt as to the effect of motivation on students' levels of success. Several studies have used or adapted questionnaires and surveys such as SACQ, CSEQ and NSSE to predict students' chances of success based on their motivations. Instruments of this kind include motivation as a factor affecting students' levels of engagement and achievement and their chances of continuation (Krotseng, 1992; Beyers & Goossens, 2002; Fischetti et al., 2011; Kurtz, Puher, & Cross, 2012). The Learning and Study Strategies Inventory [LASSI] is among those instruments. One empirical quantitative study in Hong Kong applied LASSI and correlated different factors and students' GPAs. This study reported a strong correlation between students motivation, self-efficacy and success (Ning & Downing, 2010). Similarly, in another study, staff members have been found to describe motivation as among the characteristics that will often help students to succeed (Taylor & Bedford, 2004).

It can be hard to separate motivation itself from factors that can *lead* to motivation and, therefore, to success, thus many reports suggest motivation should not be considered as an isolated contributor to success (El-Alayli & Baumgardner, 2003; Forsyth & Furlong, 2003; Quinn et al., 2005; Quinn, 2013).

Over time, we can see that the nature of the motivation to enter and succeed in higher education has changed for students. Therefore, it seemed important for this study to explore what motivates students to enter third level and to succeed. Although factors implicitly related to motivation, and thus to progress may be important, only the students'

self-reported levels of motivation for entering and succeed in higher education are explored as influences on actual success.

### 2.1.4 Students' awareness of their perception of success or failure

Cannon has argued that that the key to success in higher education is 'to convince others that you are clever and intelligent' (Cannon, 2002, p. 74). He claims that if the academic community believes a student is not, that student may be left aside, ultimately dropping out or being asked to leave. For Cannon, the self-perceptions of students can affect their self-confidence so much that they drive themselves toward failure. As no child comes into the world with a concept of failure this must be acquired from others. Cannon states that it results from individual childhood experiences of punishment for certain behaviours and experiences in family and academic life. There is thus a range of descriptions of what constitutes failure, depending on background and early experiences (Cannon, 2002).

One insight that emerges from Brown's observations is that the perception of failure on the part of the institution is not always the same as the perception of failure on the part of the student (Brown, 2002). Yet, due to there being a strong emphasis on measurable indicators of success and failure in academic institutions by the early twenty-first century, some students were influenced by external measurement of failure. These include:

- low marks,
- late submission of work, and
- absence from class (Brown, 2002, p. 146).

De Geus states that people can learn how to succeed in higher education just as they learnt from things that worked out and things that did not while playing when they were young children with no pre-conceived concepts of failure or fears about failing (De Geus, 1988). Freire suggests that self-awareness of progress and growth of the person through a process of doing and reflecting on doing can lead to one's personal development (Freire, 1993). Therefore, this reflection can also help students to understand failure and success and take actions calculated to enhance success and make the best of failure by learning from every situation.

### 2.1.5 Summary of the literature review

**Closing the gap between second and third level education and the nature of success**

In this literature review, I have discussed different meanings of success in higher education, the debate about and history of success and failure, the nature of success in terms of the factors that influence it, and finally the way students are aware (or not) of those factors and their own success. It would be argued that most of the meanings are related to academic success as defined by the institutions. For institutions, academic success is generally confined to the completion of academic programmes within certain academic standards and certain timeframe. This may be also the meaning of success for those funding their own or someone's higher level education. In the literature review there is a clear overlapping of definitions and factors for success which makes it difficult to agree on a single definition of success that is not at some point related to academic success. However, it has also been explored other definitions that have been presented as either factors for success or motivations or both but that may constitute a fair and valid success for some students. I further proceed to recall some of them:

- Being able to enter higher education.
- Being able to obtain independence.
- Being able to engage in individual exploration.
- Being able to become mature.
- Being able to obtain qualifications for entering the work force/ a career/ a profession.
- Being able to follow/find a vocation/calling.
- Being able to please their family/relatives/friends.
- Being able to obtain social recognition.
- Being able to engage in college life.
- Being able to acquire social skills.
- Being able to acquire study skills.
- Being able to network.
- Being able to make a career (occupation) move.
- Being able to improve language and communication skills.
- Being able to enjoy college life plentifully.

This, next section concerns the extent to these factors are perceived by the protagonists (the students) as affecting or not affecting various successes. By, 2015 much work on this theme was either antiquated or did not relate directly to Ireland. For example, Zepke, Leach and Butler considered perceptions of success in higher education in New Zealand (Zepke et al., 2011) while Martinez and Munday reported for the Further Education Development Agency [FEDA] on factors influencing persistence and drop-out in a large scale study from the voice of students in further education in UK from the late 1990s (Martinez & Munday, 1998). The former was thus current in 2015 but of limited relevance because of socio-political and other differences between North Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and the latter was almost 20 years old at the time of my writing.
Various authors have remarked the importance of preparedness for and adaptation to the first year of higher education, when most drop-outs occur (Hixenbaugh et al., 2012; Kuh, 2007; McInnis et al., 1995; Mentkowski, 2000; Smith, 2004; Westlake, 2008; Yorke, 1999; Yorke & Longden, 2008; Zepke et al., 2011), but what are the views of the nature of preparedness amongst *potential* undergraduates and do they agree with what undergraduates think *after* entering higher education?

By 2015, there were some academic and commercial instruments (or derivates of them) such as the Dundee Ready Education Environment Measure [DREEM], SACQ, NSSE, the Engage College Readiness Survey [ECRS], and the Widening Participation Survey. They were widely used in various countries to determine preparedness to do well in higher education. Most of these have been informed by research into the factors affecting success in higher education discussed in this literature review. The SACQ has been used in, and adapted for, different countries to measure whether levels of adaptation can predict completion of studies (Krotseng, 1992; Beyers & Goossens, 2002; Fischetti et al., 2011; Kurtz et al., 2012) while the NSSE has served to measure students' levels of engagement in college life and it influence on their levels of college readiness and performance (Kuh, 2007; Pineda-Báez et al., 2014).

Some of the inventories or questionnaires mentioned above helped to inform my design of the survey/questionnaire applied to selected students of both secondary and higher education institutions. One such was the DREEM, an instrument used to measure students' perception of the requirements for success in health professional education programs such as Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry, Physiotherapy and the so. DREEM has been validated and recognised for its transferability across cultures and its easy plain language in the English and Spanish versions and has been used in countries such as Spain, Malaysia, Ghana, and India (Maxie Andrade, Shekh, & M.S., 2015; Mogre &

Amalba, 2016; Tomás et al., 2014; Vaughan, Mulcahy, & McLaughlin, 2014; Yusoff, 2012). Other inventories or questionnaires that helped me to design my own data collection instrument included the SAQC by Baker and Syrik, the ECRS, the College Reading Survey and the Widening Participation Survey. All these informed my thinking on the things that needed to be considered in my survey/questionnaire. However, the purpose of this study was not to measure readiness, but to survey *perception* of the meaning of success and factors affecting preparedness to succeed in higher education.

## 2.2 Methodology

This first study was design to respond research question 1. It was a preliminary examination of the different views of the definition of success in a group of Ecuadorian students.

The specific research questions that led the design of the study and specific methodologies were:

1) How demographics affect various definitions of success?
2) What are the Ecuadorian students' main motivation to enter higher education? Are they mostly intrinsic or extrinsic?
3) How is readiness to access higher education perceived?
4) How is readiness to succeed in higher education perceived?
5) What are the most common factors attributed as affecting success in higher education?
6) What personal challenges are more likely to expect to face in higher education?
7) What are those personal strengths necessary to succeed in higher education?

This preliminary empirical study was primarily qualitative interpretive research of the kind described by Jansen (2010), with the use of qualitative survey research as the principal method for data collection (Jensen & Laurie, 2016). This study was required due to the lack of such research in the Ecuadorian context. The purpose was to explore the diversity of participants' responses in an attempt to understand perceptions of success in higher education and readiness to succeed at that level on the part of Ecuadorian students. Because the purpose of this study was to explore a diverse range of views on the nature of success through the voice of the students without an attempt to make generalisations

I opted for qualitative over quantitative methods (Burton et al., 2014; Creswell, 2013; Creswell et al., 2007; Denzin, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Silverman, 2014).

The method of collecting information was adapted from the work of Zepke, Leach and Butler (2011) due to there being some similarities between their objectives and mine in exploring non-institutional factors and students' views on the nature of success. However, our studies differed in various ways. Their study was based on first time enrolled full time [FT] and part time [PT] students (mine considered secondary school leavers, university students, and so-called 'freshers' all of whom were FT) in New Zealand (my subjects were mostly Ecuadorian students) and theirs was a quantitative study (mine was qualitative). In both cases we likewise recognised the complexity of the nature of success, therefore, we used different lens to study the students' views on the nature of success and more than one method for data collection, however, the application of the lenses and the means used to collect and analyse data did differ. Zepke, Leach and Butler made use of 12 Likert-type items in a forced choice questionnaire with two subscales: based on level of 'agreement' and the level of perceived 'effect' on the subject's success. My study included Likert-type items and additional open-ended questions which were also coded and tabulated. The Likert-type scale applied in Zepke, Leach and Butler's questionnaire ranged from 1 to 4 (ie. strongly agree to strongly disagree) while in my study I included ranges from 1 to 5 giving the option for neutral responses as well. Finally, their study analysed the collected data using statistical tools. They applied a t-test seeking out significant differences between 'agreement' and 'effect' in response to each of their 12 items, this made for a one-way ANOVA allowing them to seek significant differences among three identified subgroups determined by ethnicity. In my study I applied descriptive statistics to the closed-question (forced choice) questions, allowing a thematic analysis approach to be adopted regarding the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and the interviews with open coding, tabulation and an account of frequency of those codes. In a nutshell, the main difference between our studies was that theirs was quantitative and mine qualitative but both studied non-institutional factors deemed necessary for success.

This exploratory or preliminary study (Study 1) was informed by secondary school leavers[33] and university students' responses to a web-based qualitative survey, and first year university students' (freshers) responses to a semi-structured online interview to

[33] Secondary school leavers in Ecuador are known as in tercero de bachillerato [third Baccalaureate] year students.

examine the perceptions of success in higher education, motivations for entering higher education, description of challenges and strategies to overtake them. The rationale for selecting these varied data collection methods (surveying different groups and conducting semi-structured interviews) was my desire to *triangulate* the information for greater validity (Burton et al., 2014; Creswell, 2013; Jansen, 2010) and in an attempt to have more than enough data (saturation). Logistical reasons (i.e. travel costs, time difference, and unreliability of internet connection in Ecuador) influenced the selection of the data collection instruments (web-based survey and online interviews), their administration and collection procedures (Burton et al., 2014; Fink, 1995; Jensen & Laurie, 2016).

The analysis of the data collected in this study sought to explore the participants' understandings of success, therefore a qualitative survey analysis and thematic analysis were used (Fink, 1995; Jansen, 2010; Silverman, 2014). I employed open and closed coding on open-ended responses to the questionnaires. After coding I used labels to group codes under common themes related to meanings of success, factors, challenges, and strengths. Finally, descriptive methods were employed to present the findings.

In the following sections I now explain the data collection instruments development, the criteria for selecting participants, the process of data collection, analysis and presentation of results, and ethical considerations.

### 2.2.1 Development of data collection instruments

The purpose of this study was to explore the diverse views on the nature of success among Ecuadorian students within a qualitative interpretive paradigm. The selection of instruments (methods) for data collection for qualitative research is based on the purpose and depth of the study: to respond general and specific research questions. Also, access and availability of the participants (ethical issues), and other logistic considerations such as time, budget and distance influenced the selection on specific methodologies (Burton et al., 2014; Creswell, 2013; Fink, 1995). The data collection methods selected for this study were qualitative survey and semi-structured interviews. Other methods were considered such as observations, and documentary analysis, however, these would have imposed my interpretations on the students' views and tests would not address my research question (my purpose was not to measure their motivation or readiness to enter university but their views on the nature of success). The instruments developed were: a) secondary school leavers' survey, b) university students' survey, and c) semi-structured

interviews for fresher students. Surveys were developed considering criteria observed in other instruments such as the SAQC, the ECRS, the College Reading Survey and the Widening Participation Survey. The schedule for the semi-structured interviews considered guidelines for qualitative research (Burton et al., 2014; see also Jensen & Laurie, 2016).

a. Secondary school leaver's questionnaire/survey:

I reviewed relevant literature as a necessary first step in preparing a mixed, structured (deductive/inductive) qualitative survey. Some characteristics of interest (lenses) were defined beforehand and assessed through a combination of closed (forced choice) questions and open-ended questions (Jansen, 2010; see also Jensen & Laurie, 2016). The first question in the questionnaire asked for consent to participant in the survey; questions 2 – 8 included demographic information: school name, gender, age, country of origin, native language and parental academic backgrounds. Questions 9, 10 and 15 included a closed (forced choice) question that preceded open-ended questions where other items could be mentioned and explained by the respondents. These questions were meant to collect information on the students' definitions of success in higher education, their motivations for entering university and their views on the characteristics needed to succeed in higher education. Questions 11-14 were answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (i.e. Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) (Fink, 1995; Vagias, 2006). These questions asked about the students' beliefs of the importance of higher education, their degrees of motivation to enter college and their perceived readiness to enter and succeed there. Questions 16 and 17 were open-ended, asking about perceived challenges to, and strengths needed for, success in higher education. The questionnaire was developed in English and piloted to check clarity in the questions, and adjusted to make it more precise in addressing the research question (Burton et al., 2014; Fink, 1995). The pilot study relied on a *convenience sampling approach and* the openness of the school gatekeeper (Burton et al., 2014, p. 96). The paper-based survey was piloted in an Irish secondary school to produce 36 responses from Leaving Certificate Year 1 (n=18) and Year 2 (n=18) students. The Spanish version of the questionnaire used is reproduced below, in Appendix 3.

b. University student's questionnaire/survey:

The instrument used for university students was adapted from the secondary school leavers' questionnaire with few and insignificant variations. For example, questions were asked about degree of motivation to *continue* in college instead of motivation for *entering* college[34]. The English version of the questionnaire used is in Appendix 4.

c. Fresher's semi-structure interview protocol:

The interviews were conducted in the light of recommendations made by the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement [NCPI], headquartered at the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research (NCPI, 2003; see also Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007; Burton, Brundrett, & Jones, 2014, pp. 130–147). The protocols included a heading explaining the purpose of the study and notes on anonymity, confidentiality and freedom to withdraw at any point of the interview or the study as a whole and a question intended to gain consent from the participant. The first four questions asked about issues of demographics: age, career, university and year. All other questions were open-ended asking about the students' perceptions of success in higher education, motivations for entering university, perceived characteristics and readiness to succeed, exploration of obstacles and strengths and the last question asked for a telling of an anecdote related to the key questions. The questions explored any changes in the respondents' perceptions of themselves *before* and *after* entering university. The interview protocol is shown below, in Appendix 5.

The data collection instruments were developed in English and then translated into Spanish (the respondents' first language). The protocol for translating the questions from the surveys and interviews into Spanish was adapted from a study where SACQ was translated before administering it to Spanish speaking students (Rodríguez González et al., 2012) therefore I (as a bilingual and EFL/ESOL teacher) translated[35] the questions

[34] In this study university and college are used interchangeably, however, I acknowledge these terms are not always interchangeable in some countries.

[35] Besides a language translation, a contextual translation was required, i.e. in Ireland the progression from secondary school to university was through a system of Leaving Certificate Points and in Ecuador it was through the *Examen Nacional de Educación Superior* [ENES] by 2014-2015. These changes were made in the English/Spanish version of the survey.

were proof-read by two bilingual colleagues by whom they were revised to produce a final Spanish version.

### 2.2.2 Sampling and data collection process

In the section below, I explain the context of the participants of this study, the rationale for my decisions on selection of participants and sampling based on national demographics, the administration of data collection instruments, and give a description of participants.

#### 2.2.2.1 The context

The primarily source of data collection for this study took the form of secondary school leavers. Therefore, I explain below the context in which decisions were made regarding the participants' selection.

In Ecuador, the primary and secondary level school systems are essentially divided into two groups: private and public schools[36], both of these overseen by the Ministry of Education. Most public schools are coeducational while private schools are either single-sex or coeducational. The main reason for many working class and middle-class parents opting for private schooling is its being deemed better educationally [37] for their children than that offered in public schools, which, although fully funded by the state, often lack resources. In 2012, the Ministry of Education launched a plan called Reordenamiento de la Oferta Educativa [reorganisation of the educational system] resulting in the closure of around 2,800 educational institutions (private and public) in hopes of promoting academic excellence (Chacua, 2015, p. 5). The closure of educational institutions, the economic crisis and government offers to enhance the quality in public school, led many working class and middle-class parents to enrol their children in public schools. This table compares the number of schools in two periods.

[36] There are also schools that are partly state-funded mission school, and some funded by local municipalities. These represent 3% of the educational institutions and are also overseen by the Ministry of Education.

[37] Most Ecuadorians do not take education for granted and it is seen as an excellent way to enhance one's life.

| Period | Public schools | Private schools | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2009-2010 | 18,578 | 6,150 | 24,728 |
| 2013-2014 | 17,311 | 4,559 | 21,870 |

**Table 1. Number of public and private schools in Ecuador from 2009 to 2014**

By 2013-2014, according to the Ministry of Education, 21% of the country's educational institutions were private and 75% were public institutions with the largest group of these (around 40%) relocated in the provinces of Guayas, Manabi, and Pichincha due to these being the most populated provinces. The plan to reorganise the educational system aimed at distributing the schooling population among institutions with improved facilities (laboratories, playing fields, and better educational spaces) and involved the [re]establishment of the Unidades Educativas del Milenio [UEM: Millennium Educational Units] in strategic places to reach a wider population (Chacua, 2015, p. 6). The Ministry of Education reported that, by 2013-2014, the student population (around 3'700,000 primary and secondary level students) was primarily located in public institutions (74%) and private institutions (20%). Many curricular reforms changed the Ecuadorian school system between 1996 and 2015, mainly due to political instability[38] (Araujo & Bramwell, 2015). By 2014-2015, the Ecuadorian school system offered ten years of basic/elementary education (preschool and primary school [Year 1-7] and three years of secondary school [Year 8-10]) and three years of secondary school called Bachillerato General Unificado [Unified General Baccalaureate]. The UGB was intended to ensure students were better prepared for higher education and, among other changes, the Ministry of Education incorporated the International Baccalaureate [IB] Diploma programme[39] in some public secondary schools (Chacua, 2015). Hitherto the IB had been present in very few private schools for upper-class students only. The IB was adopted in some public schools and made available to selected students in an attempt to get them access to the best universities abroad (Chacua, 2015, p. 16).

[38] The Ministry of Education board is appointed by the President. Ecuador had five different presidents from 1996-2007. According to the constitution, a presidency lasts four years, however the last president, Rafael Correa, was in office for 10 years (2007-2017).

[39] The IB programme is offered by a non-profit based in Switzerland for students aged three to 19. The programmes can be offered individually or as a continuum. The IB Diploma Programme adopted for the UGB and by some private secondary schools in Ecuador had been offered since 1968. For further details, see: http://www.ibo.org/en/programmes/.

#### 2.2.2.2 Rationale for the decision on selection of participants and sampling

Jensen and Laurie suggest limiting the scope of the research to be good research practice (Jensen & Laurie, 2016). Due to the various changes in the Ecuadorian school system and the ample and diverse secondary school student population, I decided to use a non-probability sampling method (Burton et al., 2014, p. 97). Of non-probability sampling methods, I chose *purposive sampling* as suited to the purpose of the research, logistics, and ethical issues. Because the rationale for having students attend classes offering IB Diploma programmes was that they would have access to overseas universities and because there is a major fault line in the Ecuadorian school system (public/private) I attempted to gain access to students in IB Diploma programmes attending private and public secondary schools in one of the most populous provinces, Guayas. I deem important to clarify that I based my decisions on national demographics and official reports that were available. By 2013-2014, according to the Ministry of Education, Guayas province was among the most populated regions where students attending public schools (70%) outnumbered those attending private institutions (20%). In addition, I estimated that the average size of public school classes was between 40 to 50 students while the average size of private school classes rounded 20 to 30 students. I also took into account that in private schools all the students are supposed to enter the IB programme while in public schools, students entering the IB programme go through a selection process. I did not know, by then, how many students were undertaking the IB programme as this information was not disclosed in the official reports. However, by targeting more public schools than private schools, I expected to count on a good representation of the population who are seeking to undertake their postsecondary studies overseas.

Study 1 was conducted between May 2014 and December 2015. Ecuador had been part of the IB system since 1981 with around 263 participating schools by 2017 (less than 2% of educational institutions). The following table shows the distribution of IB schools in Ecuador in 2014 and 2015 by type (private and public) and by language of instruction used there: Spanish, English or both. I noted that despite an increase in the number of schools in the IB Diploma programme was evident, very few schools were following it in English in both private and public schools.

| | 2014 | | | | 2015 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Language of Instruction** | *Spanish* | *English* | *Both* | **Total** | *Spanish* | *English* | *Both* | **Total** |
| *Private IB DP schools* | 26 | 4 | 10 | **40** | 31 | 6 | 10 | **47** |
| *Public IB DP schools* | 135 | 0 | 1 | **136** | 197 | 0 | 2 | **199** |
| **Total** | 151 | 4 | 11 | **176** | 228 | 6 | 12 | **246** |

**Table 2. Distribution of IB DP private and public schools in 2014 and 2015[40]**

By 2014-2015, around 15 public secondary schools were located in Guayas province and there were 19 private secondary schools in the same area in those years. By this time, I was based in Ireland so I decided to contact private schools due to having contacts with certain schools' gatekeepers, therefore I sent letters and emails to the principals of six private secondary schools asking for permission to conduct the survey with their IB DP students. Only three principals responded to emails stating that they would allow me to survey the students. Considering the low response from these gatekeepers I deemed it vital to travel to Ecuador to contact gatekeepers from the public secondary schools. I got their email and address contact from the IB programme website and chose the schools that were in my hometown and its environs for logistic reasons. I emailed and sent letters to eight school principals and I visited four of them to explain my research and the purpose of the study. Only three public schools responded expressing any willingness to participate. As my rationale for sampling my population was not to seek statistical representativeness but diversity in that population (saturation) (Burton et al., 2014; Jansen, 2010), and due to the limited time that I could stay in Ecuador, I decided to administer the survey to the three private schools and the three public schools that agreed to participate. My knowledge of the zone where these schools were located, especially public schools, gave me assurance that it was mostly attended by working class and underprivileged groups.

University students were also required for my research survey. Due to the contacts I had with some of students attending public and private universities in Ecuador, I decided to use a mixed sampling approach: *purposive* and *convenience,* trying to keep an

[40] Based on the information on the IB official website: http://www.ibo.org/programmes/find-an-ib-school/

egalitarian gender balance of males and female students (Burton et al., 2014; Jansen, 2010). One of the reasons for selecting this group of undergraduate students was because I considered them knowledgeable and open to sharing their views on success during their college experience. My knowledge of the entry requirements to their college which is indistinctively of their economic or social status but on merits, permitted me to expect a good representation of the population. I contacted 36 undergraduate students through a social media network and 21 responded by agreeing to participate.

Finally, I contacted six students from one of the private schools whose gatekeeper had initially refused to participate. By the next year, they were already over 18, thus adults, and in first year of either public or private universities. I contacted them through a social network and all of them agreed to participate in the interviews. Purpose and convenience sampling were again the main approaches, using *quota sampling* to maintain equal number of male and female students to have parity in the voices heard.

It is important that I note here some adjustments I made to the research design. Initially, I was addressing only private school students taking IB Diplomas but after collecting the first set of data from private school students and after analysing these it seemed to me vital to having the views of students going to public schools to add depth to the study. Then I started searching for public schools in the IB Diploma programme. I had also considered interviewing 5-10 secondary school IB programme teachers and 5-10 secondary university lecturers. I emailed and sent printed letters to a selection of members of both groups asking for their views through a written questionnaire. However, only four secondary school teachers responded back and two university lecturers (one of whom said he would not answer the questionnaire so that only one lecturer agreed to participate), therefore, I decided to deal only with students. I had developed, piloted and translated separate questionnaires and interview protocols which I only used in the pilot study in a rural secondary school in Ireland. I also realised that emailing and sending letters was not enough to gain access to the students so I decided to seek access by going to Ecuador and starting to 'knock on doors'. I found that public schools were less open than private schools and that the students in their IB programmes were a select number of pupils. While generally in Ecuador one would expect to have around 40 students in a class, some of the classes had 15-20 students. On the other hand, in private schools, all the students are in the IB programme were in classes ranging from 20 to 30 students. I expected greater numbers of students in IB programmes in public schools. Despite my efforts to gain more access to students, this was not possible. Therefore, I

decided to work with what I had. Those practical considerations made me modify my initial research design to what I have presented here.

#### 2.2.2.3 Administration of data collection instruments

I considered various ways to contact gatekeepers, deliver the surveys and conduct the interviews. I did this primarily through emails and letters. The emails and letters sent to them contained details of the study, a consent form, contact information, and a copy of the questionnaire. Based on the pilot study using paper-based surveys, I learned that students took long to respond and that teachers needed to take some hours from their lessons for this. Also, it took me one week to distribute the consent forms and to get the parents' signature and another week to arrange a time to deliver the survey to the students. Some of them decided to take the questionnaires home and returned them after a week or two. Therefore, I started looking for a more student-friendly way to deliver the questionnaire. In addition to this, I reasoned that carrying paper-based surveys were going to require more baggage and printing costs and an extended time in Ecuador, besides the difficulties of transporting all the responded questionnaires to Ireland for their analysis and storage.

Similarly, problems arose regarding face-to-face interviews and the possibility participants would not feel at ease as interviews are not familiar to most young people, but they are very used to interacting through social networking services, i.e. Facebook and Twitter (Jensen & Laurie, 2016). Skype was also considered but emerged as being impractical due to poor internet reception in many parts of Ecuador (and Ireland), thus for logistic reasons, especially time, distance and cost, the administration of the data collection instruments took an online (web-based) approach. The reason for choosing the web-based chatroom of Facebook was the fact of my holding an account and among my contacts there being university students (my own former university students) and secondary school students (my children's former classmates).

For the surveys I had to choose between Survey Monkey and other options, including Google Docs, Qualtrics.com, and Lime survey (Burton et al., 2014; Jensen & Laurie, 2016). Jensen and Laurie recommend assessing the pros/cons of using either web-based surveying systems. I made my decision based on this matrix.

| Web based survey systems | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|---|
| Google Docs | Easy to use and free for up to 10 questions in the survey. | I had more than 10 questions and little access to ways of handling the data. |
| Qualtrics.com | Widely used among university researchers and would make my work look more academic. | I had never used it nor had I had training in how to use it. |
| Lime Survey | Very resourceful in the options to handle the data. | Very technical and required training. |
| Survey Monkey | I received training in a workshop from the college IT department. I had experience and held an active licence which allowed more than 10 questions and different options for collecting the data through web links that could be placed on a website, emailed, or shared through a text. | Not as professional looking as Qualtrics.com.<br>I needed to cover the cost of the license for a year and renew it every year. |

**Table 3. Decision matrix for choosing a web-based survey system.**

Having decided the format of the questionnaires and interviews I planned how I would deliver the data collection tools to the participants.

a. After getting the consent of the parents and the students (because most of them were under 18 years old) I circulated details of a customised link to the web-based survey on a paper slip to secondary school leavers of the three public schools and another for the students of the three private institutions. For students of the private schools, the gatekeepers (my contacts) were the ones who handed details to the students. For the students of public schools, I gave the instructions myself with the paper slips containing the link to the web-based survey. This web-based survey was available for private school students from May 26 to June 26, 2014 and the public school survey was conducted from November 8 to December 8, 2015. The reason I waited about a year to collect data from the public schools was my need travel to Ecuador, to have time to contact the school gatekeepers, and get their response. Most of the students completed the survey on the same day that paper slips were handed out.

b. All the undergraduate students were over 18 years old, therefore, the link for their survey was sent through email and Facebook group chat rooms. The survey for undergraduate students was available from May 25 to June 25 in 2014. Most of the students responded within five days of the day on which the link to the survey was circulated.

c. I conducted real-time online interviews, via a chatroom on Facebook, with students who were in their first year of university, to explore their experiences and perceptions. All of them were 18 years or older, therefore I did not require to ask their parents' consent for them to participate. Interviews were conducted based on their availability and considering the time difference between Ireland and Ecuador (5 hours). Within a week I had finished the six interviews.

#### 2.2.2.4 Description of the participants

Having more than one source of information from the students helped to add depth to the study, whereas including both the views of public and private school students added diversity. Also having school teachers and university lecturers' views would have been desirable however, the initial interest was the views of the students, so this was not a mandatory requirement. As noted before, emailing and other web-based systems were used to deliver the data collection instruments and to contact gatekeepers and participants. I invited a total of 14 secondary schools using the IB to participate in this study. Nonetheless, only six school principals (three public and three private school) gave permission for their students to participate. I proceed below to describe the characteristics of the various groups: IB diploma school leavers from private schools, IB school leavers from public schools, undergraduate students, and first year university students.

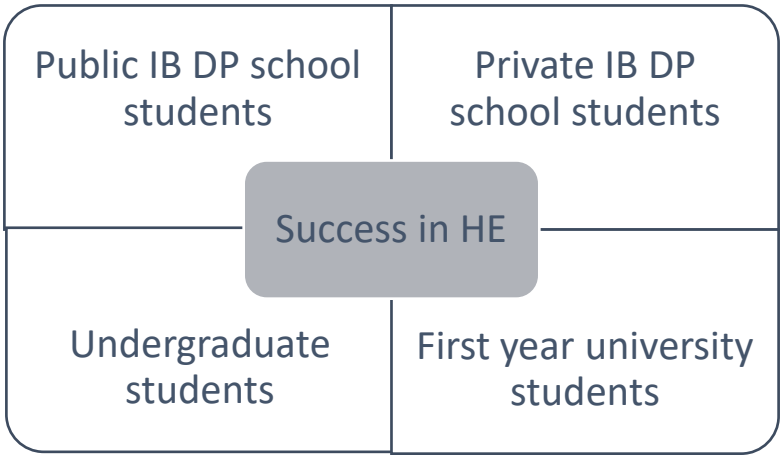


**Figure 2. Participants in Study 1: Views of success in HE**

a. School leavers from the IB Diploma programme in private schools

Sixty-nine of 110 students completed the survey, yielding a 62.7% response rate. It is generally accepted that a response rate above 30% is acceptable (Burton et al., 2014). Of the 69 respondents: 37 were female (53.62%) and 32 (46.38%) male. Their ages ranged from 15 to 18 with a mean age of 16.5. Most of the students were 16 (n=32) or 17 (n=29), few of them were 15 (n= 7) and only one was 18. Most of the students were Ecuadorian (n= 66), there was one Colombian, one Spaniard and one Mexican. All the participants were Spanish native speakers. The respondents' parental backgrounds are shown in table 4. This indicates that most of the respondents' parents had post-primary/third (n= 64, 46.37%) or fourth level qualifications (n=39, 28.26%).

| **Education** | **Father** | | **Mother** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **n = 69** | **%** | **n = 69** | **%** |
| Primary school | 3 | 4.35 % | 1 | 1.45 % |
| Post-primary school | 14 | 20.29 % | 13 | 18.84 % |
| Post-secondary level[41] | 30 | 43.48 % | 34 | 49.28 % |
| Postgraduate/Fourth level | 20 | 29.99 % | 19 | 27.54 % |
| Unknown | 2 | 2.90 % | 2 | 2.90 % |

**Table 4. Private secondary school respondents' parental education.**

b. School leavers from IB Diploma programmes in public schools

Eighty-six responses were collected, however, while the students were completing the web-based survey I noticed they were experiencing problems with the Internet connection in the laboratory. I checked all the responses and found that 46 had only answered Question 1 (the consent question). Therefore, I eliminated these 46 responses and ended-up with 40 responses from some 75 students, yielding a 53% response rate, within the accepted response rate range. Of the 40 respondents: 25

[41] Post-secondary level in this case included degrees at Technical/Technological level or a university degree (Third level)

were female (62.50%) and 15 (37.50%) male. Their ages ranged from 16 to 18 with a mean age of 16.88. Most of the students were 17 (n=29) with fewer aged 16 (n=8) or 18 (n=3). All the respondents were Ecuadorian and Spanish was their first language (n=40). Details of the respondents' parental backgrounds are shown in table 5. This indicates that most of the respondents' parents had post-primary (n= 34, 42.50%) or post-secondary/third level qualifications (n=39, 48.75%).

| **Education** | **Father** | | **Mother** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **n = 40** | **%** | **n = 40** | **%** |
| Primary school | 3 | 7.50 % | 0 | - |
| Post-primary school | 18 | 45.00 % | 16 | 40.00 % |
| Post-secondary level | 19 | 47.50 % | 20 | 50.00 % |
| Postgraduate/Fourth level | 0 | - | 4 | 10.00 % |
| Unknown | 0 | - | 0 | - |

**Table 5. Public secondary school respondents' parental education.**

c. Undergraduate students

Thirty-five students in an Ecuadorian public university enrolled in an English module were invited to participate via email. Twenty-one undergraduates responded to the online survey, yielding a 60% response rate (an acceptable response rate). Of the 21 consenting respondents, six were in year one (28.57%), six in year two (28.57%), six in year three (28.57%), and three in year four or beyond (14.29%). There were 11 females (52.38%) and 10 males (47.62%). Their ages were distributed in the following way: most of the respondents were 18 – 20 (n=11, 52.38%), five were 21 – 23 (23.81%), three under 18 (14.29%) and two over 24 (9.52%). All the respondents were Ecuadorian and native Spanish speakers. The undergraduate students' parental backgrounds are shown in table 6. This indicates that most of the respondents' parents had third level degrees (n=20, 47.61%).

| Education | Father | | Mother | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n = 21 | % | n = 21 | % |
| Primary school | 2 | 9.52 % | 2 | 9.52 % |
| Post-primary school | 7 | 33.33 % | 8 | 38.10 % |
| Post-secondary level | 9 | 42.86 % | 11 | 52.38 % |
| Postgraduate/Fourth level | 2 | 9.52 % | 0 | - |
| Unknown | 1 | 4.76 % | 0 | - |

**Table 6. Undergraduate survey respondents' parental education.**

d. First year undergraduate students [Freshers]

Six first year students from one of the schools who did not agree to participate were contacted and invited to participate in online interviews through a chat engine because use of Skype or video conferencing was not possible due to problems with internet connections in Ecuador (and in Ireland). All the interviewees were then over 18. Gender was specifically considered: three of the subjects were male and three females. These six students were in university for the first time and had just moved from secondary school. They were enrolled in three different universities, two public (n=5) and one private university (n=1), undertaking studies in: Architecture (n=1, male), Engineering (n=2, female; n=2, male), and Psychology (n=1, female).

### 2.2.3 Process for data analysis and presentation of findings

The questionnaires for secondary school leavers and the interview protocol for principals and teachers of secondary schools were piloted in a rural school in Ireland. The process of obtaining access to the school and the students, and the delivery and collection of consent forms were also piloted. Additionally, the semi-structure interviews with four teachers from the same school were audio-recorded, and analysed. The interviews lasted around 12 to 20 minutes and gave clear evidence of the need for a better audio recorder and more precision in the protocols and the way I addressed questions to my interviewees. I went on with the data collection (36 completed surveys and four audio recorded interviews) through the tabulation and analysis phases. I presented initial

conclusions at the *40th ESAI Annual Conference: Educational Research and Practice in Times of Transition: Looking to the Future* (9-11, April 2015) in Maynooth. My decision to present the results of the pilot study[42] was made in the hope of receiving opinions and questions from colleagues and academics. Based on the comments received I made some adjustments to the interview protocol, and the methods of tabulation and analysis of the data.

The analysis of this study sought to explore the participants' understandings of success, therefore a qualitative survey analysis and thematic analysis were used (Fink, 1995; Jansen, 2010; Silverman, 2014). The data treatment I employed was of open and closed coding on open-ended responses to the questionnaires in the surveys and the interviews. After coding the responses line-by-line, I used labels of different colours to later group codes under common themes related to meanings of success, factors, challenges, and strengths. Both codes and labels served in the data analysis to subsequently be interpreted and presented using descriptive methods. As the purpose of this study was to explore diverse meanings of success I did not limit my interpretations to the most common mentioned items yet listed all of them from the most common to the least mentioned.

### 2.2.4 Ethical considerations

An overview of ethical considerations in this study follows in Section 2.1. However, I will refer more specifically to the considerations taken in the study in comments below.

It has been argued that web-based surveys and online interviewing require adherence to the same ethical standards as observed in face-to-face data collection methods (Burton et al., 2014; Creswell, 2013; Jensen & Laurie, 2016). My processes of data collection always complied with the Ethics Code of the School of Education of Trinity College Dublin which was revised and approved by its Ethics Committee in February 2014 following to the college's ethical policies. Therefore, I was concerned above all to have these in mind at the moment of preparing the Informed Consent Forms, when gaining access to participants, when handling the information, when storing paper-based

[42] My presentation titled: *'All they want is a good job!': Perception of success in higher education in a rural Irish post-primary school* was accepted by the selection committee and presented on April, 11th, 2015.

surveys that served for the piloting, and when providing information to the gatekeepers and prospective respondents in the clearest and most transparent way.

Paper-based and online surveys for respondents under 18 were administered after gatekeepers, parents, and the participants signed the consent forms in all the schools I contacted. All the forms were collected back and stored in my office. Despite my best efforts, I noticed after I had collected the responses to online surveys addressed to university students, that three of them were under 18. I had assumed that all university students were +18 (as is normalised in the university system), however, when I noticed this, I made sure none of my interviewees were under 18. Therefore, I had to wait a couple of weeks for one of them to turn 18 to be interviewed. Surveys and interviews involving adults were conducted after they gave consent to take part in this study with an expressed consent statement incorporated as the first question in all the surveys, and explained to the interviewees.

The anonymous status of all the participants, freedom to participate/withdraw and assurance of confidentiality were explained in advanced as well as the aims of the study.

## 2.3 Findings

The presentation of findings in a descriptive way below is intended to reflect the diversity of students' views. In this section I present separately the views of the IB diploma programme students attending the private secondary schools and those attending the public secondary schools. Secondly, I present the views of undergraduate students enrolled in a public university in different career programmes. Finally, I present the views of interviewees who were first year undergraduate students. I display the data collected from closed questions in tables, with descriptive statistics based on the frequency with which certain items were mentioned. Data from open-ended questions are presented according to the emerging themes and the frequency with which certain items were mentioned. I follow a sex-disaggregated data approach in the presentation of the results which will serve for the analysis in study 3 (Analysis by gender).

### 2.3.1 IB diploma students' views in private secondary schools

Data were collected from 69 students attending three different private secondary schools, 37 female (53.62%) and 32 (46.38%) male respondents.

#### 2.3.1.1 Views on success in HE

The views of female and male students on definitions of success in higher education are listed in table 7, from the most to less commonly selected responses.

| What is success in HE | Female n = 37 | | Male n = 32 | | Total n = 69 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Times | % | Times | % | Times | % |
| Being able to get a good job/do further studies after university | 17 | 45.9% | 12 | 37.5% | 29 | 42.0% |
| Being able to enter a profession | 15 | 40.5% | 10 | 31.3% | 25 | 36.2% |
| Getting top grades in university | 3 | 8.1% | 1 | 3.1% | 4 | 5.8% |
| Getting a degree in a short time | 0 | - | 2 | 6.3% | 2 | 2.9% |
| Getting a degree in the normal time | 0 | - | 2 | 6.3% | 2 | 2.9% |
| Finishing studies in the same university | 0 | - | 1 | 3.1% | 1 | 1.5% |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Others (specify – open-ended) | 2 | 5.4% | 4 | 12.5% | 6 | 8.7% |

**Table 7. Private school students' perceptions of success in HE**

Responses as to the meanings of success primarily centred around readiness to get a job, undertake further study or enter a career. The following chart best illustrates the diversity in the responses.

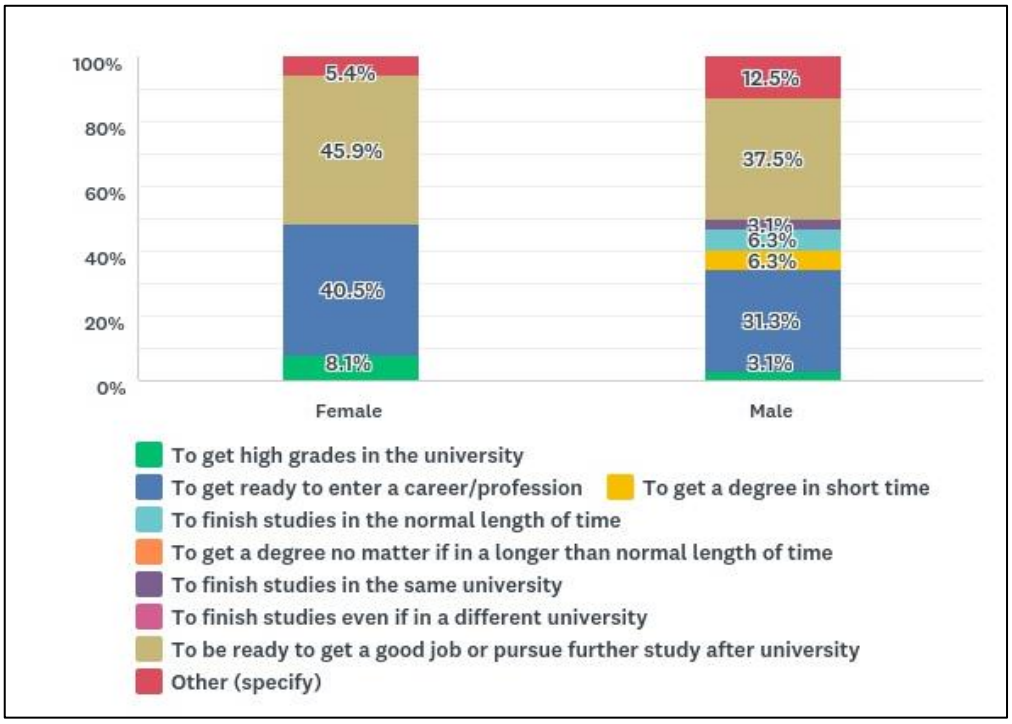


**Chart 1. Private school students' perceptions of success in HE by gender**

Six students opted to give responses that were not displayed in the questionnaire. Two of them (both from male respondents) related to becoming knowledgeable in a particular field of interest, while the others mentioned performing well in university (but not necessarily scores highly; n=1, female), getting ready to become self-employed or become a professional (n=2, male and female), and one (male) mentioned finding out what one wanted to do and the motives for this.

#### 2.3.1.2 Readiness to succeed in HE

Students were asked about their perceived readiness for entering and succeed in university. Thirty-nine (n=20, female; n=29, male) said they felt ready to enter university, eight did not feel ready (n=4, female; n=4, male), and twenty-two (n=13, female; n=9, male) were neutral, seemingly not knowing whether they were ready or not. Responses regarding students' self-reported readiness to succeed varied slightly. Forty-six responded by saying that they were ready to succeed (n=23, female; n=23, male), seven

did not feel ready to succeed (n=4, female; n=3, male), and sixteen (n=10, female; n=6, male) were neutral. Therefore, it seems that overall belief that one is ready to succeed in university is not necessarily dependent on considering oneself ready to enter university. Students' responses to questions about their perceptions of the three most relevant traits needed to succeed in university are listed in table 8, from the most to least commonly given responses.

| What is needed to succeed in HE | Female n = 37 | | Male n = 32 | | Total n = 69 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Times | % | Times | % | Times | % |
| Good time management | 21 | 57% | 16 | 43% | 37 | 17.8% |
| Being independent enough to adapt to college life | 16 | 64% | 9 | 36% | 25 | 12.0% |
| Proper career/university choice | 12 | 57% | 9 | 43% | 21 | 10.1% |
| Good communication with others (oral skills) | 6 | 38% | 10 | 63% | 16 | 7.7% |
| Good anxiety and stress management | 6 | 55% | 5 | 45% | 11 | 5.3% |
| High motivation | 7 | 64% | 4 | 36% | 11 | 5.3% |
| Being able to take notes and make good use of them | 5 | 50% | 5 | 50% | 10 | 4.8% |
| Getting good grades in exams/quizzes/tests | 7 | 70% | 3 | 30% | 10 | 4.8% |
| Good listening comprehension skills | 3 | 33% | 6 | 67% | 9 | 4.3% |
| High ENES score | 7 | 78% | 2 | 22% | 9 | 4.3% |
| Good reading comprehension skills | 3 | 38% | 5 | 63% | 8 | 3.8% |
| Good writing skills | 3 | 43% | 4 | 57% | 7 | 3.3% |
| Enough financial support/money | 2 | 33% | 4 | 67% | 6 | 2.8% |
| Family support | 1 | 17% | 5 | 83% | 6 | 2.8% |
| Being good at Mathematics | 2 | 40% | 3 | 60% | 5 | 2.4% |
| Being able to concentrate | 3 | 60% | 2 | 40% | 5 | 2.4% |
| Good online research and library management skills | 3 | 75% | 1 | 25% | 4 | 1.9% |
| Ability to recall information (good memory) | 3 | 75% | 1 | 25% | 4 | 1.9% |
| Being able to study in groups | 0 | - | 1 | 100% | 1 | 0.4% |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Others (Specify – open ended) | 1 | 50% | 1 | 50% | 2 | 0.9% |

**Table 8. Private school students' perceptions of traits needed to succeed in HE**

Of the two responses marked as 'others', one was eliminated for not addressing the question whereas the second one mentioned 'getting good scores' yet it was vague. Chart 2 best illustrates the distribution of responses by gender.

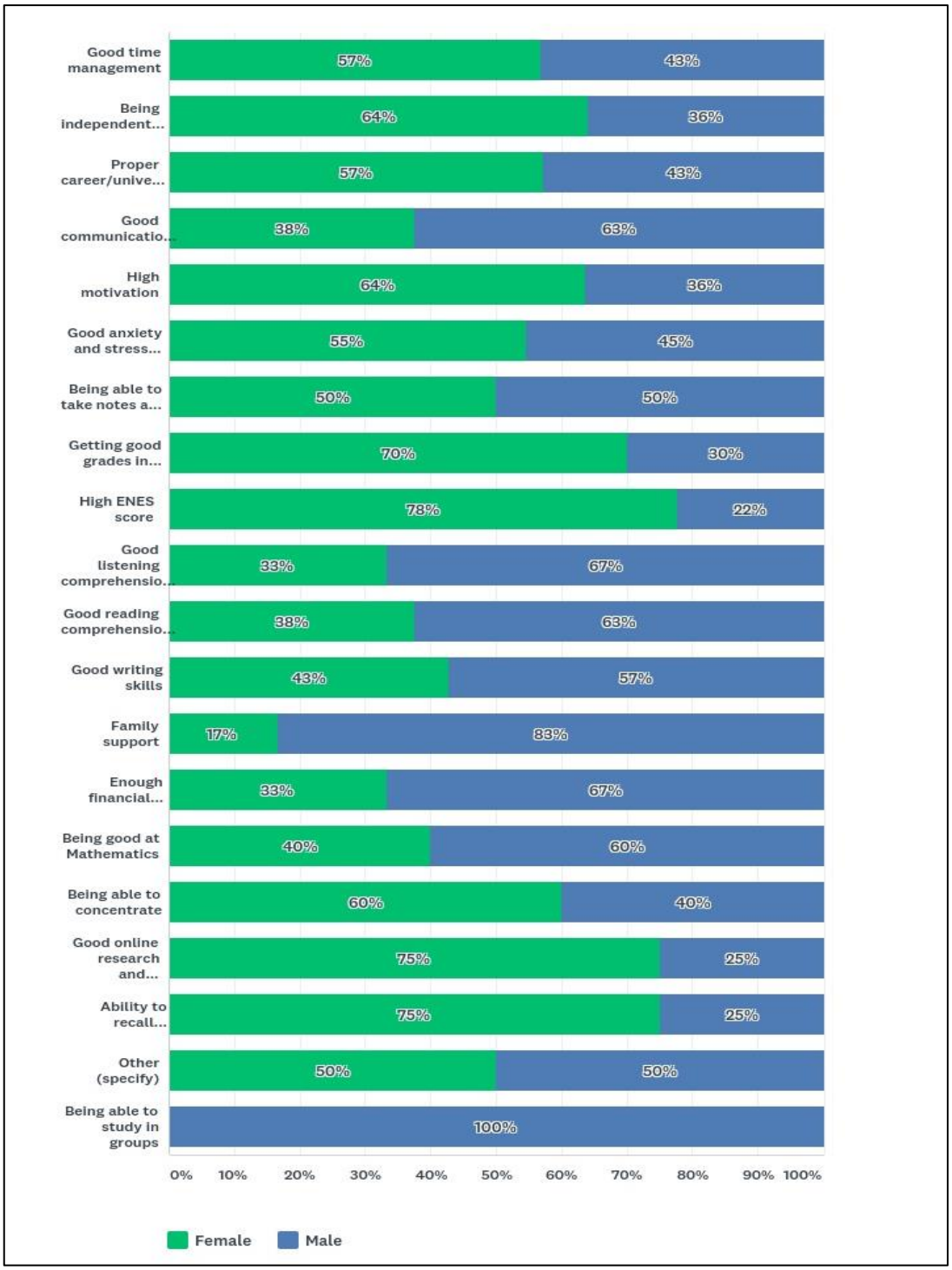


**Chart 2. Private school students' perceptions of traits needed to succeed in HE by gender**

As shown in the chart, family support and being able to study in groups (social skills) were primarily mentioned by male students while females made reference to scores (academic results), ability to do online research and manage libraries, and ability to remember facts reliably.

#### 2.3.1.3 Motives for entering HE

Most of the respondents agreed on the importance of going to university (n=34, female; n=25, male), two (one female, one male) were in total disagreement with the majority response, and eight were undecided (n=2, female; n=6 male). Similarly, most of the students reported they were motivated to go to university (n=30, female; n=26, male), three said they were not motivated to go to university (n=1, female; n=2, male) and ten were unsure (n=6, female; n=4, male). Student responses to questions about personal motive for entering university centred around the desirability of entering a profession and getting a good job. Table 9 lists students' motives from the most to least commonly reported.

| Motives for entering university | Female n = 37 | | Male n = 32 | | Total n = 69 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Times | % | Times | % | Times | % |
| To join a profession I'd like and enjoy | 17 | 40.6% | 20 | 62.5% | 37 | 53.6% |
| To get a better chance of a good job | 15 | 40.5% | 9 | 28.1% | 24 | 34.8% |
| I've always wanted to go to college | 2 | 5.4% | 0 | - | 2 | 2.9% |
| Because my friends and classmates will do so | 1 | 2.7% | 0 | - | 1 | 1.5% |
| Others (specify – open-ended) | 2 | 5.4% | 3 | 9.4% | 5 | 7.3% |

**Table 9. Private school students' motives for entering HE**

Female students' motives were equally distributed between joining a profession one enjoyed and having a better chance of finding a good job, while male students differed widely with more emphasis on entering a profession than simply getting a good job. The diversity of the responses is displayed in Chart 3.

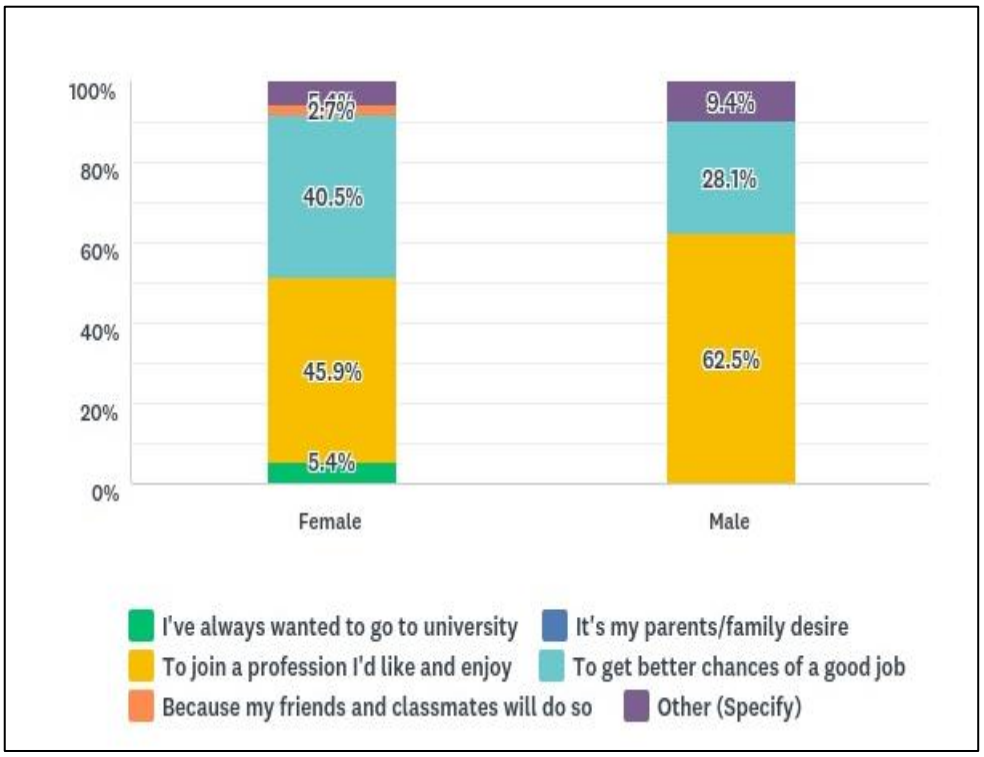


**Chart 3. Private school students' motives for entering HE by gender**

Five respondents decided to offer options that were not given in describing their motives for entering university. One of them said he lacked the motivation to go to university, while two responses (1 female, 1 male) made reference to acquiring more knowledge, one female said her motive was to develop as a person, and the male related his motives to becoming successful and thus repaying his parents for their efforts in providing for his education.

### 2.3.1.4 Challenges in HE

Sixty-six respondents answer questions about their views of the challenges they foresaw to succees in higher education. Responses were coded and then arranged by themes, as listed in table 10 from the most to least often reported.

| Female (n=37) | Times cited | Male (n=29) | Times cited |
|---|---|---|---|
| Needs to change personality/traits required (effort, responsible, independent, mature, punctual, persistent) | 17 | Needs to change personality/traits required (work harder, focus, independent, overcoming laziness, mature, accomplishing tasks, punctual) | 16 |
| Time related challenges - time management (to accomplish college work demands/work and study/college and other extra-curricular activities) | 13 | Required abilities/can dos (comprehension, coping with new language/new content, accomplishing tasks) | 10 |
| Adaptation to a new environment (being far from home, different life/people/lecturers in university, new country, new culture) | 12 | Adaptation to a new environment (place/content/subjects in university, new country, being naive) | 8 |
| Required abilities/skills (comprehension, communication skills, accomplishment of course demands, getting good grades) | 8 | Time related challenges - time management (organisation with timetables/accomplishing assignment/social life) | 6 |
| Psychological/Emotional challenges (loneliness, anxiety, stress, motivation, dealing with peers pressure, ability to overcome difficulties) | 5 | Workload: (amount of assignment/content to cover, complexity, new contents) | 6 |
| Good career choice (one that will be liked and enjoyed and in which one will do well in the future) | 3 | Financial issues (cost, need to work, family income not enough) | 3 |
| Financial issues (keep/get scholarship, work and study, self-fund their studies) | 3 | Psychological/Emotional challenges (overcoming difficulties) | 2 |
| Homesickness/Being away from family and friends (loneliness, having to become independent from parents) | 3 | Need of good social skills (making new friends to support him) | 1 |
| Need of good social skills (making new friends, networking, dealing with big groups) | 3 | | |

**Table 10. Perceived challenges to succeeding in HE in private secondary students**

#### 2.3.1.5 Strengths needed to overcome challenges in HE

Students' responses to being asked about their perceptions of the three most important strengths required to succeed in higher education were very varied and are listed in table 11, from the most to least often reported.

| Female (n=37) | Times cited | Male (n=29) | Times cited |
|---|---|---|---|
| Good personality traits (responsible, organised, self-control, easy to adapt, hardworking, focused, determination, independent, perseverant) | 26 | Good personality traits (being kind, responsible, organised, dedicated, proactive, easy to adapt, independent, focused, effort) | 12 |
| Motivation (like the career/course, self-motivation, willingness to be a professional/independent) | 11 | Motivation (like and interest in the chosen career/subject/profession, good chance to get a job, self-motivation/enthusiasm) | 10 |
| Good language skills (communicative, good writing and reading skills) | 5 | Good academic/study skills (being attentive, organised, accomplish tasks, inquiring) | 7 |
| Positive attitude (optimistic, objective, willing to make it) | 4 | Positive attitude (think ahead, enthusiastic, willing to overcome challenges, trying hard) | 7 |
| Good academic/study skills (taking notes, used to studying hard) | 3 | Good trait-cognitive and thinking skills (fast learner, good reasoning, good memory) | 6 |
| Good social skills (able to relate with the right people/lecturers, sociable) | 3 | Good academic achievement & recognition (good scores in school) | 5 |
| Good traits/cognitive skills (analytical, intelligent) | 2 | Good social skills (easy to socialise, network, adapt) | 3 |
| Good academic achievement & recognition (good scores in school, good student) | 2 | Good language skills (good communicator, good reader) | 3 |
| Good family support (parents) | 2 | Good mathematical skills (good with numbers) | 3 |
| Awareness of the environment/strengths/weaknesses | 2 | Good family support | 1 |
| Good emotion management (dealing with stress) | 1 | | |
| Good readiness (good teaching in school) | 1 | | |
| Good friend support (friends to study with) | 1 | | |

**Table 11. Perceived strengths in private secondary students**

### 2.3.2 IB diploma students' views in public secondary schools

Data were collected from 40 students attending three different public secondary schools, 25 female (62.50%) and 15 male respondents (37.50%). I follow a sex-disaggregated data approach in the presentation of the results which will serve for the interpretation and discussion in study 3 (Analysis by gender).

#### 2.3.2.1 Views on success in HE

Twenty-five responses (n=14, female; n=11, male) were collected to questions about definitions of success in higher education. They are listed in table 12, from the most to less often selected responses.

| What is success in HE | Female n = 14 | | Male n = 11 | | Total n = 25 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Times | % | Times | % | Times | % |
| Being able to get a good job/undertake further study after university | 11 | 78.6% | 7 | 63.6% | 18 | 72.0% |
| Being able to enter a profession | 0 | - | 4 | 36.4% | 4 | 16.0% |
| Others (specify – open-ended) | 3 | 21.4% | 0 | - | 3 | 12.0% |

**Table 12. Public school students' perceptions of success in HE**

Responses as to the meanings of success entirely centred on readiness to obtain a job, undertake further study or enter a career. Chart 4 best illustrates the diversity of the responses.

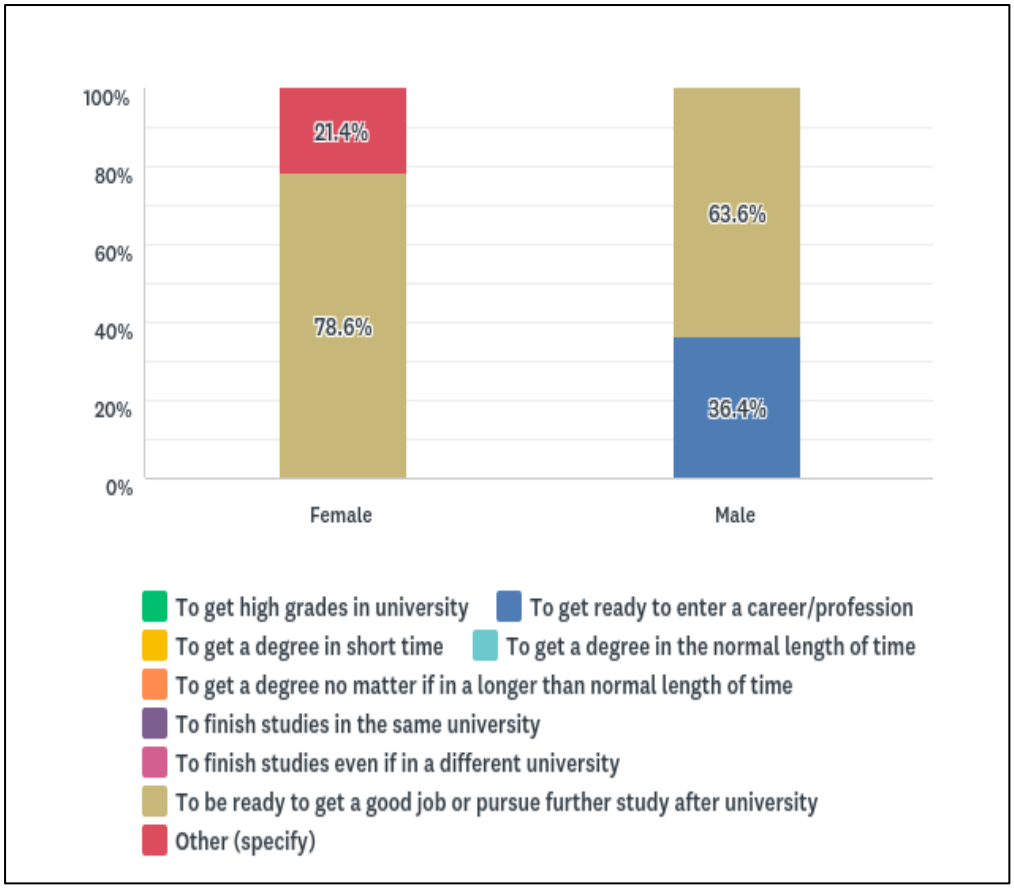


**Chart 4. Public school students' perceptions of success in HE by gender**

Three female students opted to give responses that were not offered in the questionnaire. These responses related to getting ready to start one's own business (become self-employed), to love what one chooses for a career, and to doing one's best and not worrying much about academic results.

#### 2.3.2.2 Readiness to succeed in HE

Twenty-five responses were collected to questions about students' perceived readiness for entering and succeed in university. Twenty-four (n=14, female; n=10, male) said they felt ready for *entering* university and one was neutral, seemingly not knowing whether he was ready or not. Responses regarding students' self-reported readiness to succeed did not vary. Twenty-four (n=14, female; n=10, male) said they felt ready to be successful in university and one (male) was undecided. Overall, sense of being likely to succeed in university was closely related to sense of being ready to enter university. Students' responses to questions about their perceptions of the three most relevant traits needed to succeed in university are listed in table 13, from the most to least often reported responses.

| What is needed to succeed in HE | Female n = 14 | | Male n = 11 | | Total n = 25 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Times | % | Times | % | Times | % |
| Good communication with others (oral skills) | 6 | 50% | 6 | 50% | 12 | 16% |
| Being independent enough to adapt to college life | 4 | 40% | 6 | 60% | 10 | 13.3% |
| High motivation | 7 | 70% | 3 | 30% | 10 | 13.3% |
| Good time management | 4 | 44% | 5 | 56% | 9 | 12% |
| Proper career/university choice | 6 | 75% | 2 | 25% | 8 | 10.6% |
| Enough financial support/money | 1 | 20% | 4 | 80% | 5 | 6.6% |
| Good writing skills | 2 | 50% | 2 | 50% | 4 | 5.3% |
| Good listening comprehension skills | 3 | 75% | 1 | 25% | 4 | 5.3% |
| Good online research and library management skills | 1 | 33% | 2 | 67% | 3 | 4.0% |
| Getting good grades in exams/quizzes/tests | 3 | 100% | 0 | - | 3 | 4.0% |
| Good anxiety and stress management | 3 | 100% | 0 | - | 3 | 4.0% |
| Being good at Mathematics | 0 | - | 1 | 100% | 1 | 1.3% |
| High ENES score | 1 | 100% | 0 | - | 1 | 1.3% |
| Being able to take notes and make good use of them | 0 | - | 1 | 100% | 1 | 1.3% |
| Others (specify – open-ended) | 1 | 100% | 0 | - | 1 | 1.3% |

**Table 13. Public school students' perceptions of traits needed to succeed in HE**

One female chose to give a reason other than any of those listed. She mentioned that factors making for success are related to the abilities to read, write, listen and speak in addition to having the right motivation, perseverance and the applicability of what is learned. Chart 5 best illustrates the distribution of responses by gender.

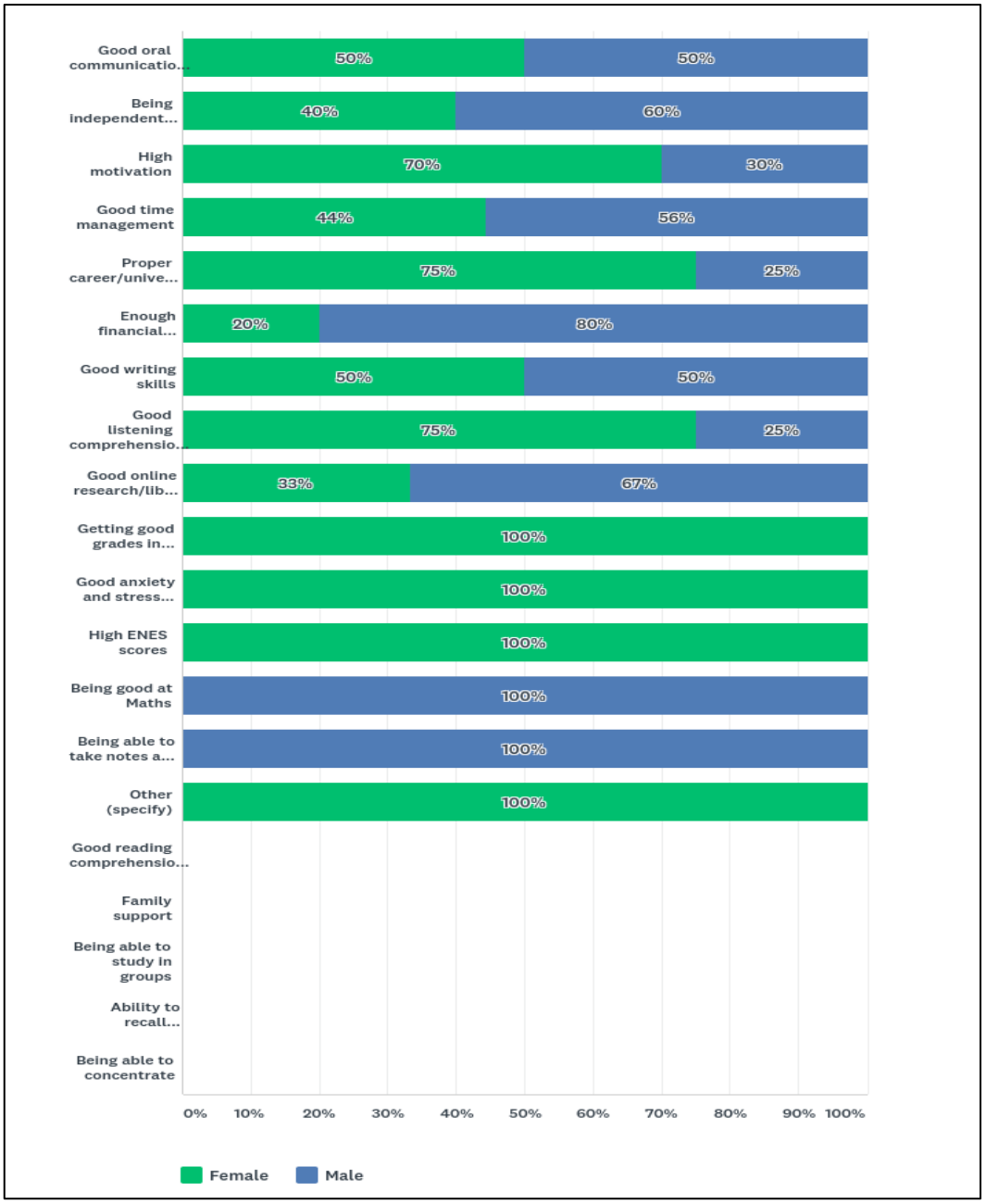


**Chart 5. Public school students' perceptions of traits needed to succeed in HE by gender**

### 2.3.2.3 Motives for entering HE

Most of the respondents agreed on the importance of going to university (n=13, female; n=11, male) but one (female) dissented from this view. However, all the students described themselves as motivated to go to university (n=14, female; n=11, male). Students' responses to questions about their motives for entering university centred on desire to enter a profession and secure a good job. Table 14 lists their motives from the most to least commonly given responses.

| Motives for entering university | Female n = 14 | | Male n = 11 | | Total n = 25 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Times | % | Times | % | Times | % |
| To get a better chance of a good job | 4 | 29% | 10 | 91% | 14 | 56% |
| To join a profession I'd like and enjoy | 8 | 57% | 1 | 9% | 9 | 36% |
| Others (specify – open-ended) | 2 | 14% | 0 | - | 2 | 8% |

**Table 14. Public school students' motives for entering HE**

Male and female responses were divided as to the importance of having a better chance of a good job and entering a profession one enjoyed. Male motives differed more than female motives within each group.

The diversity of the responses is displayed in Chart 6.

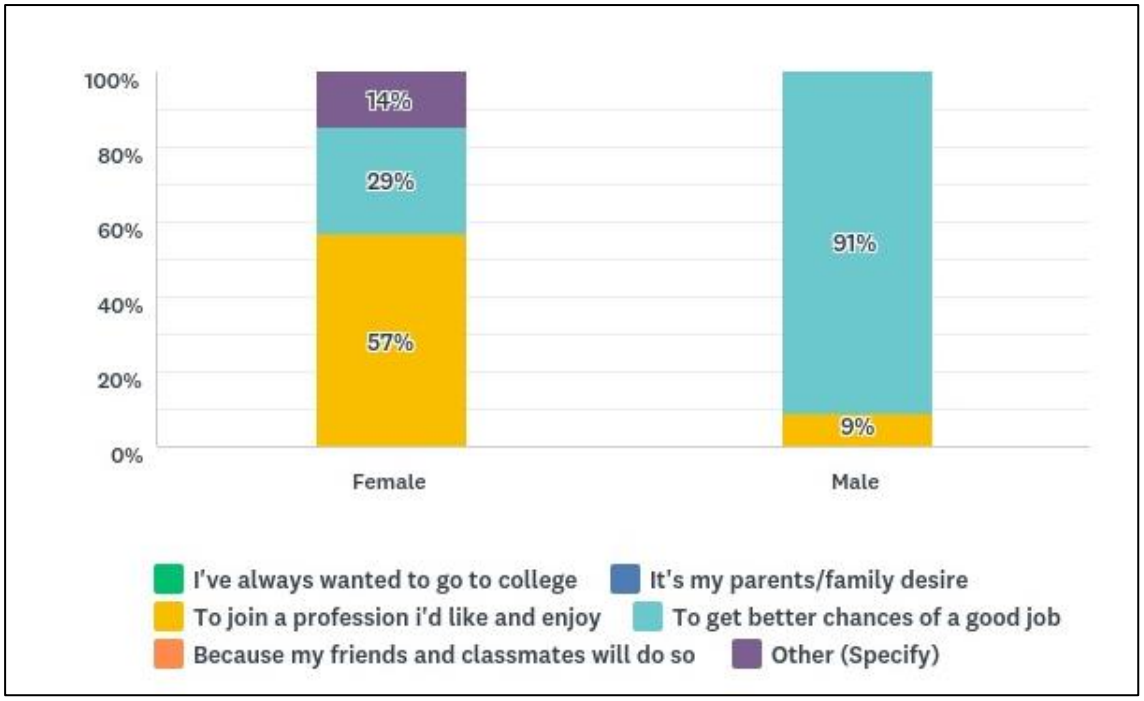


**Chart 6. Public school students' motives for entering HE by gender**

Two female respondents offered responses that were not given for their motives in seeking university entrance. One of them said her motivation was to start her own business and the other female claimed that she wanted to help people in need.

#### 2.3.2.4 Challenges in HE

Sixteen respondents (n=10, female; n=6 male) answered questions about their views of the challenges they thought they might have to overcome to succeed in higher education. Responses were coded and then arranged by themes and listed in table 15 from the most to least often reported.

| Female (n=10) | Times cited | Male (n=6) | Times cited |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adaptation to a new environment (new university system, getting to know how things work) | 5 | Need for good social skills (integrating with peers, sharing in class, overcoming peers who are individualists) | 3 |
| Time related challenges – time management (schedule, organising time) | 4 | Developing good teacher-student relationship (openness, welcoming, communication) | 3 |
| Coping with the workload | 2 | Coping with the workload (difficulties of the programme, strictness of its demands) | 2 |
| Psychological/Emotional challenges (overcoming lack of confidence due to family background, becoming confident) | 2 | Time related challenges - time management (organising time) | 1 |
| Getting family support | 1 | Needs to change/personality traits as required by circumstances (becoming an adult) | 1 |
| Needs to change/personality traits as required by circumstances (becoming an adult) | 1 | | |

**Table 15. Perceived challenges to succeeding in HE for public secondary school students**

#### 2.3.2.5 Strengths to overcome challenges in HE

The responses from sixteen students (n=10, female; n=6, male) being asked about their perceptions of the three most important strengths required to succeed in higher education are listed in table 16, from the most to least commonly reported.

| Female (n=10) | Times cited | Male (n=6) | Times cited |
|---|---|---|---|
| Good personality traits (perseverance, patience, hardworking, dedication, easily adaptable) | 6 | Good personality traits (responsible, reflective, confident, decisive, efficient) | 6 |
| Preparedness (IB, contents similar to college) | 4 | Positive attitude (open minded, cross-national attitude) | 4 |
| Good language skills (good communicator) | 3 | Preparedness (IB prepares well, better preparation than their peers) | 3 |
| Motivation (willingness to succeed) | 3 | Good academic/study skills (inquisitive, good study habits) | 2 |
| Good traits/cognitive skills (fast learner, knowledgeable) | 3 | Good cognitive and thinking skills (good memory, critical thinking) | 2 |
| Good values (humanitarian) | 2 | Good mathematical skills (good with numbers) | 1 |
| Good academically (study skills) | 1 | Good social skills (socialising) | 1 |
| Good academic achievement & recognition (good scores in school) | 1 | Good academic achievement & recognition (good scores in school) | 1 |

**Table 16. Perceived strengths needed to succeed in HE for public secondary school students**

### 2.3.3 Undergraduate students' views

Twenty-one undergraduates responded to the online survey (n=11, female; n= 10 male). Their views on the nature of success in HE, preparedness for entering it and succeeding there, motives, strengths and challenges encountered in university are presented below, shown with a sex-disaggregated approach which will serve for further analysis and discussion in study 3 (Analysis by gender).

### 2.3.3.1 Views on success in HE

The views of 21 surveyed undergraduate students (n=11, female; n=10, male) enrolled in a public university are listed in table 7, from the most to least commonly selected responses.

| What is success in HE | Female n = 11 | | Male n = 10 | | Total n = 21 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Times | % | Times | % | Times | % |
| Being able to get a good job/undertake further study after university | 5 | 45.5% | 8 | 80.0% | 13 | 61.9% |
| Being able to enter a profession | 3 | 27.3% | 0 | - | 3 | 14.3% |
| Getting a degree in a short time | 0 | - | 1 | 10.0% | 1 | 4.8% |
| Finishing studies in the same university | 1 | 9.1% | 0 | - | 1 | 4.8% |
| Others (specify – open-ended) | 2 | 18.2% | 1 | 10.0% | 3 | 14.3% |

**Table 17. Undergraduate students' perceptions of success in HE**

Responses as to the meanings of success were varied. For males it primarily centred on readiness for entering a job and progressing to further study, while for female it involved either securing a job or entering a career. The following chart best illustrates the diversity of the responses.

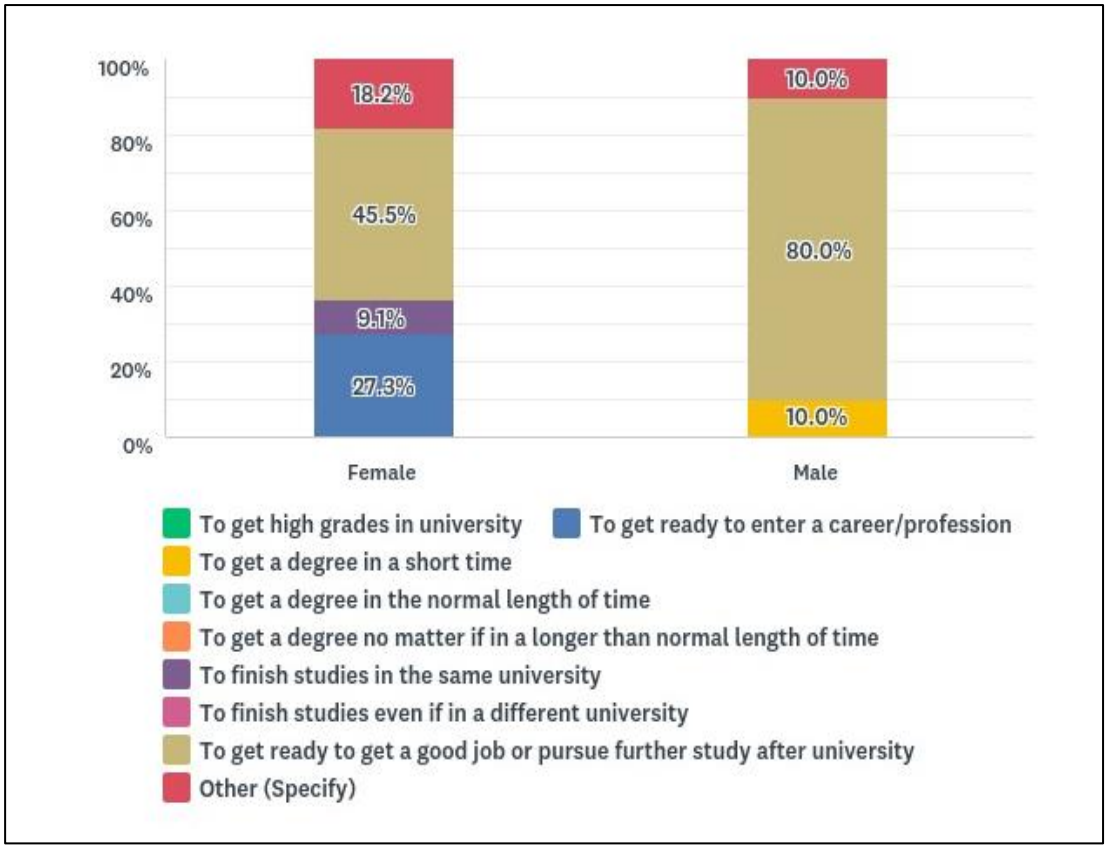


**Chart 7. Undergraduate students' perceptions of success in HE by gender**

Three respondents (n=2, female; n=1, male) opted to give other responses than those on offer in the questionnaire. Two (one male and one female) mentioned getting ready for life. The male student said it must involve finding a career and a good job, while one female said that getting high scores in university, finishing in a short time and acquiring knowledge was going to get her ready for life. The second female pointed out that she wanted to be a role model for others.

#### 2.3.3.2 Readiness to succeed in HE

Twenty-one responses were collected to questions asking about students' readiness before entering university. All the students had had to get ENES scores high enough to be accepted to university after finishing school. Fourteen (n=9, female; n=5, male) said that, after secondary school, they were prepared for *entering* university, three (n=1, female; n=3, male) said they were not ready, and three (n=1, female; n=2, male) were unclear seemingly not knowing whether they were ready or not. However, the responses varied a little when referring to the readiness to *succeed*. Seventeen (n=9, female; n=8, male) said they were ready to succeed in university, while one male said he was not ready, and three others (n=2, female; n=1, male) gave only noncommittal responses. It

could be argued that the student who felt himself unready to succeed in university was in his first year, but after disaggregating the results by year of study, I found out that he was starting the first term of Year 2, while the others who gave such responses were in Year 1 (n=2) and Year 3 (n=1). Therefore, overall one's sense of being ready to succeed in university was neither related to sense of being ready before entering university nor progress in university, however, the three students in Year 4 (n=1, female; n=2, male) felt ready to succeed. Students' responses to questions about their perceptions of the three most relevant traits needed to succeed in university are listed in table 18, from the most to least common.

| What is needed to succeed in HE | Female n = 11 | | Male n = 10 | | Total n = 21 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Times | % | Times | % | Times | % |
| Good time management | 7 | 64% | 4 | 36% | 11 | 17.5% |
| High motivation | 4 | 50% | 4 | 50% | 8 | 12.7% |
| Being independent enough to adapt to college life | 4 | 57% | 3 | 43% | 7 | 11.1% |
| Good listening comprehension skills | 5 | 71% | 2 | 29% | 7 | 11.1% |
| Good (oral) communication skills | 5 | 83% | 1 | 17% | 6 | 9.5% |
| Being good at Mathematics | 1 | 20% | 4 | 80% | 5 | 7.9% |
| Enough financial support/money | 1 | 25% | 3 | 75% | 4 | 6.3% |
| Good anxiety and stress management | 2 | 50% | 2 | 50% | 4 | 6.3% |
| Good online research and library management skills | 1 | 33% | 2 | 67% | 3 | 4.7% |
| Proper career/university choice | 1 | 50% | 1 | 50% | 2 | 3.1% |
| Getting good grades in exams/quizzes/tests | 1 | 50% | 1 | 50% | 2 | 3.1% |
| Being able to concentrate (focus) | 0 | - | 2 | 100% | 2 | 3.1% |
| High ENES score | 0 | - | 1 | 100% | 1 | 1.6% |
| Being able to take notes and make good use of them | 1 | 100% | 0 | - | 1 | 1.6% |

**Table 18. Undergraduate students' perceptions of traits needed to succeed in HE**

Chart 8 best illustrates the variations in the distribution of responses by gender.

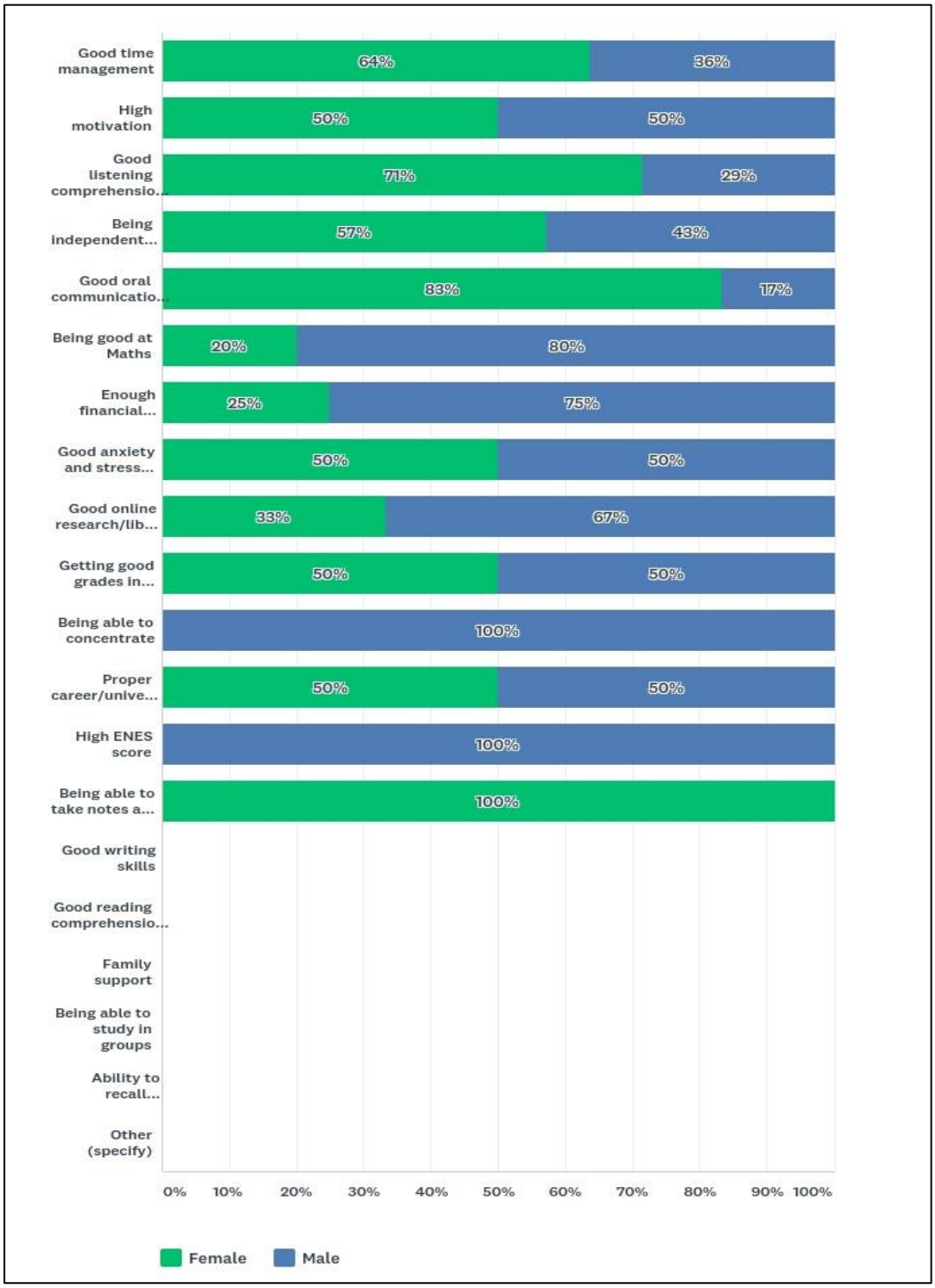


**Chart 8. Undergraduate students' perceptions of traits needed to succeed in HE by gender**

### 2.3.3.3 Motives for entering HE

Most of the undergraduate respondents agreed on the importance of going to university (n=10, female; n=9, male) but two females were neutral. Similarly, most of them reported they were motivated to enter university (n=10, female; n=9, male), only two female students remaining neutral.

Responses to questions about motives for entering university centred around desirability of getting a job and entering a profession. Table 19 lists students' motives from the most to least often responses given.

| Motives for entering university | Female n = 11 | | Male n = 10 | | Total n = 21 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Times | % | Times | % | Times | % |
| To get a better chance of a good job | 7 | 64% | 6 | 60% | 13 | 61.9% |
| To join a profession I'd like and enjoy | 4 | 36% | 3 | 30% | 7 | 33.3% |
| I've always wanted to go to college | 0 | - | 1 | 10% | 1 | 4.8% |

**Table 19. Undergraduate students' motives for entering HE**

Male and female responses alike centred on having better chances of finding a good job and joining a profession. Similarities in the responses are displayed in Chart 9.

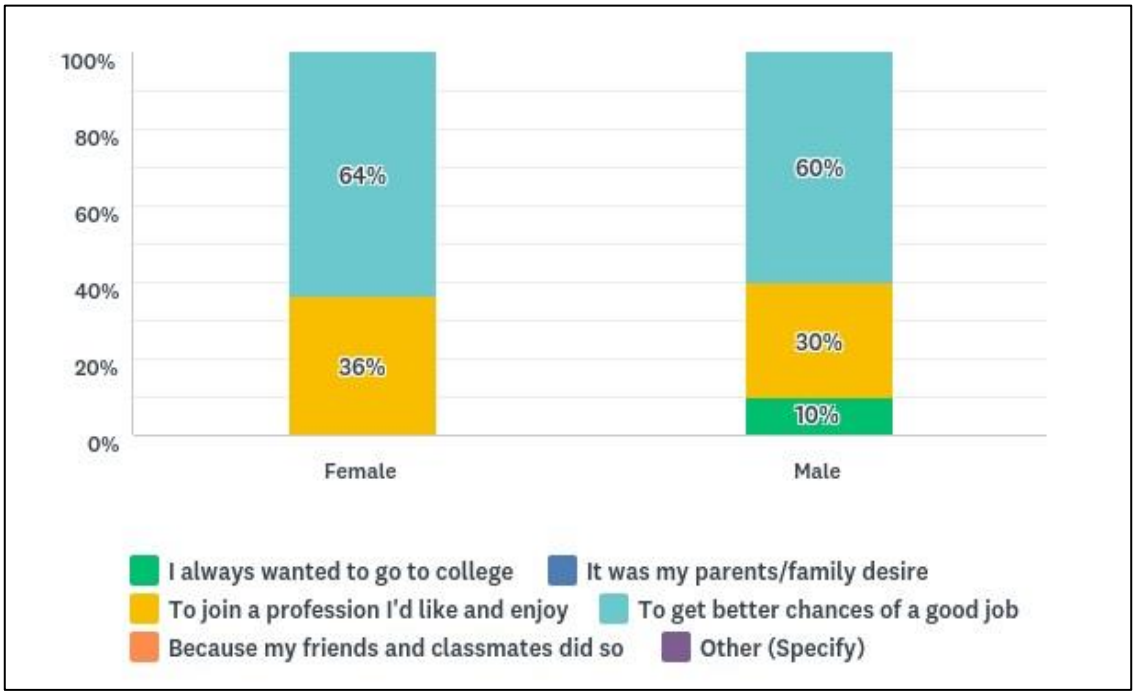


**Chart 9. Undergraduate students' motives for entering HE by gender**

#### 2.3.3.4 Challenges in HE

Undergraduate students' responses to questions about their perceived/and lived challenges to succeeding in university are listed in table 20 from the most to least often reported responses by themes.

| Female (n=11) | Times cited | Male (n=10) | Times cited |
|---|---|---|---|
| Needs to change personality/traits required (respectful, consistent, persevering, self-controlled, independent, hardworking, being grounded, confident) | 8 | Needs to change/personality traits required (autonomous learner, responsible, self-controlled, independent, focused, proactive) | 7 |
| Adaptation to a new environment (new teachers and system, new challenges) | 4 | Psychological/emotional challenges (handling stress/failure, staying calm, overcoming personal/mental problems) | 4 |
| Good career choice (doing something you like, makes you overcome challenge even if it is hard) | 3 | Staying motivated stay influences performance | 2 |
| Required abilities/skills (learn contents that were not learned in secondary school/weak subjects) | 2 | Required abilities/skills (for study and research) | 2 |
| Psychological/emotional challenges (working under pressure/overcoming fears) | 2 | Good career choice (finding one likes) | 1 |
| Awareness (of changes of motivation) | 2 | Developing good teacher-student relationship (finding solutions collectively) | 1 |
| Financial issues (having to work and study) | 2 | Adaptation to a new environment (getting used to college) | 1 |
| Time related challenges - time management (time to study) | 1 | Time related challenges - time management (good planning) | 1 |
| Need for good social skills (dealing with competitiveness on the part of others) | 1 | Need for social skills (relating to one's lecturers/peers) | 1 |

**Table 20. Perceived challenges to succeeding in HE for undergraduate students**

#### 2.3.3.5 Strengths to overcome challenges in HE

Undergraduate students' responses to being asked about their perceptions of the most important strengths required to succeed in higher education were very varied and are listed in table 21 below, from the most to least commonly given response.

| Female (n=11) | Times cited | Male (n=10) | Times cited |
|---|---|---|---|
| Good personality traits (persevering, self-confident, having self-belief, responsible, hardworking, consistent, self-controlled) | 14 | Good personality traits (persevering, patient, hardworking, confident, being an autonomous learner) | 7 |
| Motivation (intrinsic, clear goals, willingness to be a professional/progress/learn) | 6 | Motivation (having clear goals, family wellbeing) | 3 |
| Positive attitude (overcoming difficulties) | 2 | Positive attitude | 2 |
| God (trusting God, God's help) | 2 | Good academic/study skills (clarifying doubts quickly) | 2 |
| Good traits/cognitive skills (fast learner) | 1 | Good retention of information and intelligence) | 2 |
| Good English level | 1 | Good mathematical skills (mathematical logic) | 1 |
| Good family support (parents) | 1 | Good friends support (to motivate and get stress out) | 1 |
| Good social skills (easily relating to others) | 1 | Good language (communication skills) | 1 |
| | | Trusting God | 1 |

**Table 21. Perceived strengths needed to succeed in HE for undergraduate students**

### 2.3.4 Interviewed first year undergraduate students' views

Six student interviewees (n=3 female, n=3 male) who were nearly finishing their first year contributed more in-depth insights, based on the first year of their college experiences. Findings are presented following the themes used above: the interviewees' views of

success in higher education, their views of traits that are needed to succeed in university, and their motives for entering.

#### 2.3.4.1 Views on success in higher education

Most of the themes mentioned in the surveys involving undergraduate students' different understandings of success were present mentioned in the interviews. These including:

- progress in a career they liked and enjoy,
- getting high scores,
- getting recognition for effort and hard work,
- gaining more knowledge.

However, new insights were obtained from the interviews. These first-year students also referred to:

- gaining experiences,
- getting passionate about a chosen career,
- achieving support from family (family recognition),
- becoming aware of the importance of the career for one's own future,
- achievement of one's own goals,
- achieving a balance in life between studies and family/friends,
- making the best of the college experience and teaching so it could later be applied in one's profession/career.

And some of the student interviewees reported different reasons for their career choices. These included:

- not getting sufficient points for a first career choice in the ENES[43] which drew them to other careers they ended up liking, but sometimes found challenging,
- not liking the options that ENES gave them and having to enter private universities to pursue careers they ended up liking,

[43] ENES stands for *Examen Nacional de Educación Superior* [Higher Education National Exam]. Since 2012 passing this has been necessary to gain access to Ecuadorian state-funded universities. Students can opt for public universities if they get enough points and if there are spaces available in their chosen fields, otherwise the system places them in whichever university and field that has availability. Therefore, some students opt to enrol in private universities.

- influence of secondary schools (staff members and student advisors) in suggesting that they applied for courses leading to careers taught in prestigious universities, according to national and international rankings[44],
- choosing careers they liked, enjoyed and found to be important in helping other people (serving the common good).

One of the six interviewed students referred to not being sure about his career choice as it was not what he had expected and he was then considering changing career. This student reported struggling with studies and blamed this on his lack of preparation before entering college.

Five of the six students agreed that university was different to secondary school but their definitions of success had not changed after entering college. The student who reported not finding it hard to make the transition said he got a lot of information beforehand from the institution's website at his own initiative.

#### 2.3.4.2 The traits needed to succeed in university

During the interviews, the first-year students gave different characteristics they perceived were important for success in higher education. Those that coincided with finding from the survey were motivation (self-motivation) and having parents' support.

In addition, mentioned in interviews but not in the survey, were:

- perseverance,
- discipline,
- effort,
- willingness to learn and improve,
- having clear goals in life/determination to overcome difficulties and making an effort to be prepared before entering (in one case the student had had to

[44] Some universities in Ecuador have a good reputation for their quality and rigour (being preferred when recruiting for jobs) and based on national and international rankings, see: http://www.webometrics.info/en/Latin_America/Ecuador.

undertake long hours in a pre-entry course which helped her to pass the entrance examination needed for college)[45].

#### 2.3.4.3 Motives for entering university

First year students who were interviewed referred to the following points/themes when asked about their motives for entering university:

- Desire to enter and be recognised in his/her career/profession,
- being able to get a good job (through getting a third level degree), and
- desire for more knowledge in something that interested them.

These themes did not appear in the undergraduate students' survey responses:

- their parents' support to go on with their studies,
- their willingness to get on the challenge of study,
- their will to progress in studies,
- the will to do something for enjoyment,
- being able to help other people (through a profession).

Five of the six interviewed first year students agreed that there had not been changes in their motives before and after entering college, despite reporting difficulties in adapting to it. The only student who reported poor motivation was the student who was not sure about his career choice before entering college and he had made a wrong choice, despite his motivation being to learn more.

#### 2.3.4.4 Challenges to succeeding in university

Students whom I interviewed mentioned several challenges they or their classmates had experienced in the transition to college, sometimes giving anecdotes. The recurrent themes were as follows:

[45] In Ecuador, many students go to private pre-college courses in order to pass the entry examination required for public and private universities (the ENES is used in all public and some public universities). Certain universities offer these foundation courses themselves. They have to be passed before entering those colleges. Foundation courses are called *curso pre-universitario* [precollege course] in Spanish.

- Having lecturers whom they did not understand and having to audit other courses,
- Mistakes in their ENES results or they were not allowed to use calculators they had brought, therefore their ENES score were low and they could not attend their preferred course.
- Failing a foundation course and having to repeat it.
- Leaving friends or seeing them less regularly.
- Not having high enough ENES scores to enter the fields they wanted.
- New subjects/courses being out of their range of skills/knowledge.
- Adapting to the new context and teachers' approaches to marking.
- Particular dietary habits (one student was vegetarian and could not find suitable food in the college food-court/food halls).

During the interviews the participants sometimes said they had some fears of failure, so I asked more especially about those fears. The most frequently reported fears were:

- lecturers and their methods,
- not feeling confident enough about themselves and their abilities,
- disappointing their parents or themselves by not accomplishing their goals,
- not being able to enter higher education,
- being assigned a university and field/career they did not like (because of the ENES system),
- regretting their career choices,
- finding subjects too hard or realising they did not like them,
- failing a course, and
- uncertainty about the new experience, lecturers and friends.

#### 2.3.4.5 Strengths to overcome challenges in university

During the interviews the participants were asked how they overcame the challenges reported. The most commonly mentioned ways were:

- the determination to prove one can,
- their parents' support,
- their motivation and willingness to be successful,
- trying to adapt step by step,
- facing the new reality,

- making the best effort possible in the foundation course,
- having a positive attitude (i.e. not seeing poor ENES results as tantamount to failure)
- overcoming fears of new experiences,
- looking for professionals in the chosen (or prospective) career in the college for advice and doing thorough research into the career/field in question.

Some of these students who had insufficient points for their preferred careers and universities considered themselves failures at the outset but ended by feeling satisfied at having encountered careers they liked. For example, one response to my questions was as follows:

> I: Y lo de los puntos del ENES cómo lo superaste? [And what about the ENES points? How did you overcome that?]
>
> S2: Eso fue porque me sentí bien de haber encontrado la carrera que quería, y ya no necesitaba sentirme mal por los puntos de ENES. [That's because I felt good at finding the career I wanted, and I didn't need to feel bad about the ENES points (translation mine);S2]. [46]

## 2.4 Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this preliminary study (Study 1) was to explore diversity in the views of the students on the nature of success in higher education. Due to the constructivist (interpretive) approach of this study, it was not aimed at offering evidence to make generalisations, however, it is important to note the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study. The participants in the target group were either enrolled in a private or a public educational institution, however, it is not necessarily a determinant of the socio-economic status of the participants. As I mentioned in section 2.2.2, the closure of educational institutions, the economic crisis and government offers to enhance the quality in public schools, led many working class and middle-class parents to enrol their children in public schools, similarly many working class and middle-class parents decided to maintain their children in private schools and some of them would access scholarships offered by some private schools to students of underprivileged background.

[46] S2: Male, aged 18, first year of architecture, private university.

The same principle applies to students attending private or public higher education institutions. The various backgrounds were analysed based on the types of secondary schools they had attended (public/private) to cover two segments of the student population as reported by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education. Also, age, gender, and parental education were considered and are further discussed below. Table 22 best illustrates the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study. I would like to note here that the parental education level may seem high and lacking representativeness of the population but, as I discuss in section 2.4.3, considering the context by the time this study was undertaken, it makes perfect sense. Ecuadorian population is under the pressure of obtaining a job to make a living, in order to get a job (professional or manual) holding a degree is deemed necessary not precisely meaning that a better paid job is guaranteed by holding a third or fourth level degree.

| **Demographical factors** | **Private School students n=69** | **Public School students n=40** | **University students n=21** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 16.5 [Mean] | 16.88 [Mean] | 18-24 76.1% |
| Gender | 53.62 % female<br>46.38 % male | 62.50 % female<br>37.50 % male | 52.38 % female<br>47.62 % male |
| Parental education [at least one parent with third level degree or more] | 74.63 % | 53.75 %[47] | 52.31%[48] |

**Table 22. Demographic distribution in the participants of this study**

The literature review element of this study provided me empirical evidence that suggested socio-economic and demographic factors (age and parental education) were strong predictors of likelihood of seeking access to, attitudes towards, career choices access and retention in higher education (Smyth, McCoy, & Kingston, 2015; L. Thomas & Quinn, 2007; O. Webb et al., 2017). Additionally, other studies offered evidence (taking a positivist/scientific approach) on the influence of these factors on the students' views on higher education, their willingness to go to university and their motives for choosing to do so (McInnis et al., 1995; Zepke et al., 2011). Therefore, in this study, besides the

[47] Some parents did not complete primary school

[48] Similar found in the six interviewed first year university students

type of the institution the students were attending (private/public university), I employed age, gender, and parental education as lenses for the all subsequent discussion on the findings.

The age of the subjects in this study did not seem to be directly related to the nature of their various views on the meaning of success. For example, some young students in secondary schools had clearer views about their expectations, motives and readiness for entering and succeeding in university than some older students who were in university, some among the latter having come to doubting their suitability for college and their career choices. Such diversity in age and maturity is consistent with various authors who argue the influence of age (as a measure of maturity) has a complicated relationship with a student's sense of preparedness for university, and, as a consequence, for success. On the one hand, some have claimed that older students are more likely to withdraw (van Stolk et al., 2007) and offer evidence of younger students who do better in coping with college life's academic demands (Fischetti et al., 2011). On the other hand, some report that younger students (perhaps because of immaturity) have difficulties in adapting to college life and its demands (Yorke & Longden, 2008) while others report that older students may have higher levels of motivation than their younger peers (Fleming & Finnegan, 2014; McInnis et al., 1995). It is certainly the case that maturity is not necessarily strictly related to age, therefore, it may be possible to find some young students seriously committed to their college work and having serious and significant motives for going to college that help them stick to their courses while we can similarly find older students who take their college studies and course for granted. However, older students in this study who were in university had clear views as to what was required for succeeding and overcoming the challenges encountered in university. Their views were based on their university experiences, rather than resulting from their chronological ages *per se*.

The disaggregation of the responses by gender displayed in tables and charts permitted me to observe the diversity present in views and the things that female and male participants, as a whole, considered of major importance. However, there was not a gender-determined pattern evident in all students' views. For example, male responses to the possible definitions of success were more disperse in private school students but not in public schools and undergraduates (see Chart 1, 4, and 7). Female participants of private and public schools valued more highly entering a profession than simply obtaining a job and gave the former as one of their principal motives for entering university while female undergraduates valued simply getting a job over entering a profession (see Chart

3, 6, and 9). Another example of the differences displayed in the responses by gender is shown in charts 2, 5, and 8, from which it emerges that females valued more highly certain traits needed for succeeding in university than did male students, and vice versa. Without over-generalising, I think it possible to make the following few, tentative points. Firstly, males in all three groups agreed in valuing more the prospect of a job over other possible forms of success and motives for entering university, while females generally valued more entering a profession over getting a job. Secondly, there were few who considered mathematical knowledge or skill a necessary trait or strength when it came to succeeding in university among female participants, but this was more often mentioned as being necessary by males. This may be for two reasons, one because the female participants thought their mathematical skills were not of paramount importance for succeeding in university or because they were confident of their mathematical skills while their male peers showed more concern about this. The lack of overt concern about maths among these students (considering most of the undergraduate students in the study were in careers in the STEM) bears being referred to because some research has commented on the importance of having good mathematical skills as a precursor to [academic] success (Conley, 2007; McCormick & Lucas, 2011; van Wyk et al., 2013) and having a high level of confidence in one's performance in maths can be important (Cole & Espinoza, 2008), especially in female students (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999). Also, it is important to mention that the IB Diploma programme has a very demanding Mathematics curriculum and the subjects from private and public schools reported being confident they were prepared for work at university because of the IB programme. Finally, in general, both female and male respondents agreed on the nature of success in higher education, the traits and motives required for such success, the challenges likely to be experienced along the way and the strengths needed to overcome these, with no significant gendered differences in their responses. They were similarly concerned about the academic and the social aspects of college life and the demands of adapting to these and succeeding in college as a result. This contradicts the results of some research where women were more likely to withdraw for social and voluntary reasons than men, who were more likely to withdraw due to academic failure (Johnes & McNabb, 2004).

Parental education of the participants in this study was also varied, however, some trends could be found. For example, parents of students in private schools were likely to have been formally educated to higher levels than parents of those in public schools and university (see Table 22). Subjects with parents who were less well educated (only to primary/secondary school level) were more labour-market oriented in their views on the

meaning of and motives for succeeding in higher education than those subjects with any university degree[s] (third/fourth level), with only few exceptions (see Charts 9,14, and 19). This confirms results from a large-scale study in Australia where students with parents possessing a university degree were less preoccupied about their children entering the labour market than those who did not (McInnis et al., 1995). No significant differences were found when considering either mother's or father's formal education. The circumstances of the families (whether subjects living with one of the parents or both) were out outside the scope of this study, therefore, no generalisations on this point are possible. Nonetheless, some researchers have pointed out that having parents with higher education positively influences likelihood of seeking access to higher education, retention when admitted and career choice after university (Smyth et al., 2015; L. Thomas & Quinn, 2007; Woodfield, 2014). This was not the case in my study. Higher levels of motivation were found in students whose parents had less formal education or none, which was also observed in another study in which subjects neither of whose parents had university degrees reported having more of a sense of purpose and academic enthusiasm (how consistent and energetic they were in their studies) than those with at least one parent with university education (McInnis et al., 1995). Moreover, most of the participants, regardless of background and parental education, referred to the importance of family support when it came to describing their views on and motives for entering and attempting to succeed in university. This fact was consistent with other studies (Fleming & Finnegan, 2011b; Wray, Aspland, & Barrett, 2014; Xuereb, 2014; Zepke et al., 2011). Combining the results noted above it is clear that for Ecuadorian students going to university is not something to be taken for granted, no matter the extent of one's parents' education, socio-economic background, gender or age.

### 2.4.1 What are students' motives for entering and succeeding in higher education?

For the participants in this preliminary study the causes of success in, and motives for entering higher education in the first place, were most often securing jobs, careers and professions. This was so for secondary school leavers and university students. This is consistent with other studies (Baxter, 2012; Fleming & Finnegan, 2011b; Gasser, 2013) and many organisations in the early twenty-first century were increasingly coming to recognise the role of higher education in the formation of human capital in enhancing the development of countries by getting school leavers/students ready to enter the labour market (Else, 2014; Gürüz, 2011; Quinn, 2013; World Economic Forum, 2013; Zarur Miranda, 2008). However, much of such research focuses on underrepresented or

disadvantaged students and their motives to succeed (Fleming & Finnegan, 2014; B. Jones et al., 2008; Merrill et al., 2009; Smyth et al., 2015; Vignoles & Powdthavee, 2009; Watkins & Seidelman, 2017). Therefore, this study involved students from different backgrounds and a gender-disaggregated analysis found that the pursuit of a good job, career, and professional status were likewise present in the views of both female and male secondary students and undergraduates attending to public/private institutions.
There are other views on the role of university and an increasing interest in developing lifelong learners, which is explicitly assumed as valuable in many studies on any type of success in higher education (McInnis et al., 1995; Schuetze & Slowey, 2000; Sheridan & Dunne, 2012; Watson, 1998). Some people might see this as the historic, traditional, moral or proper function of universities and colleges (Fleming & Finnegan, 2011a; McInnis et al., 1995; Taylor & Bedford, 2004). However, it was not mentioned among the priorities in the participants surveyed/interviewed. It was evident that secondary school students' views of the aims of higher education barely went further than their finding jobs, entering professions and adopting roles in society or meeting the expectations of their communities. Yet, interestingly, when they responded to questions about their views on why they would succeed and what their motives were for succeeding, doing something they enjoyed or found themselves interested in, starting up their own businesses, and contributing to their communities were mentioned. This was also evident in the responses from surveyed and interviewed undergraduate students who elaborated on this point by stressing that they wanted to find professions that would enable them to help those in need and serve their communities.

Participants with clearer sense of purpose about going to university also reported higher levels of motivation, and more positive views of the likelihood of their having success and attitudes towards overcoming the likely challenges of higher education. This had already been noted elsewhere in the research literature (McInnis et al., 1995; Yorke & Longden, 2008). Similarly, feeling one was in a field one liked (even if not necessarily in one's preferred university) increased the sense of having a purpose, providing motivation and a positive attitude. For this reason, the interviewed fresher students who found themselves more confident about having the ability to succeed were those who were happiest with their careers even if these were not the first choices of some of them.

### 2.4.2 What are their non-institutional influences on success in higher education?

It may be suggested that the survey's design, concerned as it was with non-institutional considerations in what makes for success in the closed questions, somehow influenced the responses of students despite their having the option to give their own responses. However, the interviews served the purpose of corroborating the information collected in the survey and allowed subjects to give responses concerning various (non-institutional) factors related to successful students' characteristics and how these helped them in making their transitions to college. The influence of a proper career choice was among them. For example, one participant, on her own initiative, searched for information about her prospective career by interviewing lecturers and relevant professionals. She said this had helped her make the transition to university. Another participant reported voluntarily attending, with other peers, additional courses in college as the assigned lecturers were not clear enough for them to follow. These students were driven by their motivation to do well in their careers. A third participant was not sure about his career choice as he had been influenced by his school's tendency to emphasise the importance of certain careers and university. However, when he entered university this proved unwise. He was motivated enough to take remedial actions to attain the standard necessary to progress in his course. A fourth participant was not convinced the career he chose was the right one for him and was considering moving to another field. As shown in these cases, the students with clearest objectives and most information about their prospective careers and universities were quicker to claim readiness than those who had no clear goals and who feared entering college and succeeding there. This is consistent with other studies that suggest proper guidance about career choice can increase probability of success in university (McCormick & Lucas, 2011; Pinxten et al., 2015; Smyth, Banks, & Calvert, 2011; Yorke & Longden, 2008). Many researchers argue that career choice is often influenced by gender (Ceci, Williams, Sumner, & DeFraine, 2011; Ceci, Williams, & Thompson, 2011; Pinxten et al., 2015), nonetheless, in this study, both male and female participants were equally free to choose the careers that best suited them. The pursuit of a career or a profession were important factors reported by the participants in this study. In Freire's words, through following a 'calling' (vocation) it is possible to find completeness and a sense of purpose which makes seeking and finding success easier (Freire, 1993, 1998; Darren Webb, 2010).

The only restriction that the subjects in this study reported (both female and male) when it came to selecting a career/course was the availability of spaces in the public

universities under the ENES system which in some cases caused students to opt for private universities. Entry point requirements are commonly found in countries such as Ireland and the UK. Such systems allocate students depending on a points-based system without necessarily taking account of the readiness of students to enter university and to embark on certain careers (Banks, Byrne, McCoy, & Smyth, 2014; Limond, 2010; Smyth et al., 2011; Yorke & Longden, 2008). Some researchers have suggested requiring high levels of entry points as being a way to ensure readiness to succeed in higher education (de Winter & Dodou, 2011; McCormick & Lucas, 2011) but others find this restrictive and unfair for some disadvantaged and underrepresented groups and advocate allowing a reduction in entry points (or requirements), other access routes, and remedial intervention (Deer, 2003; Fleming & Finnegan, 2011a; Merrill et al., 2009; O. Webb et al., 2017). But in this study, it emerged that students viewed entry points as something that should not limit one's of accessing university and as unimportant for success. What is more, the *ability* to adapt emerged as being perceived as most likely to helping one in the transition between secondary school and third level. Being adaptable was viewed as being more important than getting higher numbers of points in the ENES or knowledge of one's participant[s].

Some attributes that could help in adapting and making the transition to university were said to be: academic application, being willing to learn, being able to manage anxiety and stress, having a positive attitude and having strong motivation. These were perceived as helping the transition, especially for those who were believed not to have good foundations in certain subjects. Good social and communication skills so as to be able to achieve positive and productive relationships with lecturers and peers were thought to help the transition, especially at times of challenge, for example when it might be necessary to ask for help, but communication was also thought important for studying in groups and participating in class. Good time management and organisation skills, focus, and developing a capacity for autonomy (becoming independent) were among attributes that the subjects in this study mentioned frequently, especially those who had experience of studying/working abroad. These findings are aligned with other research that suggests best institutional and student practices for success, primarily informed by empirical research on the views of experienced staff members and students (Bron & Thunborg, 2011; Gibney et al., 2011; Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016; Kuh, 2007; Pineda-Báez et al., 2014; RANLHE, 2010; Sheridan & Dunne, 2012; Taylor & Bedford, 2004; Woodfield, 2014; Yorke, 2001b).

### 2.4.3 What about financial issues?

Despite several researchers exploring economic barriers to success in higher education (Martinez & Munday, 1998; Forsyth & Furlong, 2003; Quinn et al., 2005; Quinn, 2013; O'Keeffe, 2013; Wray, Aspland, & Barrett, 2014), financial issues were not reported as a major obstacle in this study and on the few occasions they were mentioned this was primarily by students attending private institutions. Financial problems are not unique to most Ecuador's population, therefore, a brief explanation of the situation in Ecuador is necessary.

According to a report for IESALC-UNESCO, by 1973 most Ecuadorian universities (such as the university where most of the students in this study were enrolled) were state-funded. Since then Ecuador has enjoyed economic growth due to the discovery of oil there but this caused an increase of interest in the population in attaining college degrees. Due to that increased demand for higher education private institutions started to open (some of them partly state-funded). Their numbers increased from a very few in 1970 to around 41 by 2009 in addition to existing public universities (29) so that there were 70 HE institutions admitting about 312,000 students by 2008 (nearly 18 times the capacity of Trinity College Dublin in 2017). By then, higher education institution (both public and private) had autonomy in their admissions policies and could charge students contribution on self-financing courses to compensate for their budget deficits (the state funded 95% of that budget). By 2000, the private sector received 30% of the student population while public universities educated the remaining 70%. The state funded HE to a value of 1% of GDP (López Segrera et al., 2009). With the election of a government in 2007 a reorganisation of the higher education system started, similar to the reforms of primary and second level education (Araujo & Bramwell, 2015). The government intervened in HE (public and private) and simplified the system, with a significant reduction in the number of HE providers (14 universities were closed, four new universities were created) and control of entry to university came to be through the ENES system, though this has been changed significantly since 2007 (Secretaría de Educación Superior de Ciencia Tecnología e Innovación, 2014). In addition, HE institutions no longer had independence to augment their budgets through fees and depended only on public funds. Private universities were regulated by the government; however, they were still able to manage their own funds, supervised by the government's HE board. This situation caused public HE institutions to reduce the number of students admitted and more opted for private universities or abandoned the dream of entering college.

According to a country report from the IHS global Inc.,[49] Ecuador's GDP has been in deficit since 2012 with an increase in unemployment rates from 4.9% in 2012 to 5.1% in 2014 (IHS Global Inc., 2016). It is important to note that Ecuador does not have a welfare system that supports unemployed or poorly-paid people to meet their basic needs comparable to Ireland[50]. Therefore, getting a job is extremely important. However, the economic situation was also critical for working people by the time of this study. In 2014, following a presidential decree, the basic salary for full time (40 hours/week) employment was established at $ 340 (US) monthly[51]. The Ecuadorian Census and Statistics Board (*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos* [INEC]) estimated that, by 2015, 50% of the working population in Ecuador received more than the basic salary.[52] Public appointments at a certain level depended on having a degree to get commensurate positions. For example, a university professor in a public university who had acquired the minimum master's degree received roughly $1,676 (US) monthly, according to a report from the HE board (2014). However, getting a full-time job was increasingly difficult in Ecuador because, simply, those people with degree-level education were preferred to people without a degree, whether being recruited for either manual or non-manual jobs. Thus, getting a job was important for a family's welfare and to get a job, a degree was needed. To get a degree going to college was deemed necessary.

After setting the context, I now explain why most students in this study who were enrolled in private institutions (66 secondary school students and one university student) reported

[49] IHS Global Inc. is a partner company of HIS Markit. They count on economics and country risk experts that elaborates research and reports based on the worldwide tendencies https://www.ihs.com/index.html.

[50] A study in 2007-2014 established that social welfare payment (called *bono de desarollo humano [human development bonus]* of $50 (US) monthly were given to roughly 440,000 people in extreme poverty (in a population of 15.9 million of roughly inhabitants). There were mostly elderly unemployed people. For details see: http://www.expreso.ec/actualidad/asi-estan-los-beneficiarios-del-bono-de-desar-GPGR_8321964.

[51] Every year the Ecuadorian president decrees an increase in the basic salary minimum wage called *salario mínimo unificado* after seeking agreement with the private sector and workers' representatives. According to the president, in 2014, the basic needs of family with five members (estimated in $ 600 [US] monthly, allowing for living costs, rent, children attending public institutions, utilities, clothing, and food) could be covered by 1.6 salaries (that is, if two people in the household are working). See: http://www.andes.info.ec/es/noticias/salario-basico-usd-340-2014-cubre-totalidad-canasta-basica-ecuador.html.

[52] However, in 2015 a local newspaper reported, based on the information obtained from the INEC, that there had been an increase in the number of working people getting less than the basic salary. See: http://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2015/04/16/nota/4775566/sube-numero-personas-que-ganan-menos-que-salario-minimo-segun-inec.

concerns about financial issues. That parents value education as a means to improve their childrens' quality of life was discussed above in the analysis of parental education and socio-economic factors. Essentially, the findings provide evidence that students recognised the importance of having family or parental support as one of the factors contributing to potential success. If the students did not get enough points in the ENES to enter any public HE institutions this would mean that they then had to attend a private HE institution, relying heavily on their parents' support and perhaps a full- or part-time job. Some students mentioned the possibility of getting a scholarship which is also related to one's ENES scores. On the other hand, all the students from the public schools in the IB programme were state-funded after undergoing a selection process (around 25 students of the typical 180 in the final year of a medium sized secondary school will obtain IB diploma places). These selected students were able to receive an allowance equivalent to half of the basic salary during their year of preparation for the IB diploma and a full basic salary during their third level studies in Ecuador or overseas if they got the IB award. In conclusion, subjects enrolled in private institutions had significant financial pressure besides their other concerns regarding accessing and succeeding in higher education compared to those enrolled in public institutions (by 2014 students in public universities paid no fees while the average fees in a private institution were around $200-500 [US] monthly).

### 2.4.4 Concluding and closing the gap:

The intent of this study was to describe the views of the nature of success on the part of Ecuadorian students through non-institutional lenses. Information was collected from students enrolled in IB diploma programmes in public and private schools and universities. This study concurs with the literature in noting the complexity of the study of success (or failure) in higher education and the multidimensional factors that can come between a student and success in higher education (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016). I attempt below to summarise the findings that I consider most relevant at this point and which will contribute to the second study in this thesis.

a) Students' views on the nature of success, traits needed to succeed, and perceptions of challenges in higher education were diverse but due to the nature of the research (interpretive) it was not possible to determine any consistent influence of gender, age, socio-economic status or parental education on the subjects' responses. However, there was an agreement in perceiving success in higher education as based on readiness to enter employability and a

career/profession. This was also evident in the self-reported motives for entering HE. These facts make sense when the needs of Ecuadorian students are considered, noting their cultural, economic, social and political context.

b) Other definitions of success were explored in this study as informed by the participants. Those were not related to employability or academic success *per se*. These are:

- becoming knowledgeable in a particular field of interest,
- getting ready to become self-employed,
- being able to become a professional,
- finding out what one wanted to do and the motives for this,
- to do one's best and not worrying much about academic results,
- getting ready for life,
- to become a role model for others,
- gaining experiences,
- getting passionate about a chosen career,
- achieving family recognition,
- achievement of one's own goals,
- achieving a balance in life between studies and family/friends,
- making the best of the college experience.

c) Perceptions of the nature of success, sense of readiness, and motivation were interconnected. Higher levels of motivation gave students a sense of purpose that led to behaviours producing success, i.e. trying harder in their studies, finding out information on their prospective careers, and having positive attitudes towards threats of failure.

d) Ecuadorian students in this study were aware of the challenges and changes needed for entering, adapting to and succeeding in higher education. What is more, they were aware of the value of HE in enabling them to have better opportunities in life, usually interpreted as better chances of a job/career/profession. Most frequently mentioned attributes involved in construction of student identity likely to be conducive to success were academic application, having family/parental support for their efforts and the right attitude

for success in HE. The figure below illustrates the most frequently mentioned factors that were apparently likely to contribute to success.

**Figure 3. Non-institutional factors for succeeding in HE for Ecuadorian students**

e) The design of the survey instrument and interview protocols was useful in avoiding answers about institutional policies and keeping the study focused on non-institutional and self-perceived factors influencing success. Giving importance to the students' voice is, for me, one of the greatest assets of this study. However, the low levels of participation, primarily due to institutional gatekeepers' unhelpfulness, did not allow more student participation.

f) Based on the findings of this study, it can be suggested the provision of more explicit information to secondary school leavers about college life, challenges, and expectations could help their transition by reducing any sense of uncertainty and fears about college. Furthermore, greater emphasis on guidance in students'

career choices may serve to give them more sense of purpose before going to college and increase preparedness for entering and succeeding there. Likewise, interacting with university students already successfully adapted to college would give insider views based on personal experience and help to close gaps between expectations and the reality of college life.

Finally, there were attributes that were not mentioned that I consider of paramount importance. These are discussed in the next section, which deals with the acquisition of English as a second language. An Ecuadorian newspaper reported low levels of English in Ecuador compared to other non-native English speaking countries worldwide (*El Universo*, 2015). This is a result of Ecuador's unstable approach to English teaching in public schools and some private schools and the absence of a standard and continuous way of assessing English teachers working in the public and private sectors, a state of affairs which began to be reformed in 2012 (Araujo & Bramwell, 2015). For example, one of the curricular reforms of 2012, to be applied in both public and private primary schools, assigned five hours a week to English as a foreign language [EFL] teaching (there having been no such requirement in those school before 2012) with a reduction of hours of EFL at secondary level. Most private and bilingual schools usually provided 10-12 hours of EFL a week at primary and secondary levels, however, the standard of English teaching was not regulated. In the particular case of schools offering the IB diploma very few programmes had English as the language of instruction (see table 2). Therefore, it was evident that little attention could be paid to the use of English in the writing of essays or its reading as a foreign language, both very necessary for those who might experience it as a language of instruction in HE. These considerations are discussed in Study 2.

# 3 Chapter three: Study 2

## Attaining success in Anglophone European universities

This second study attempts to respond research question 2 and 3:

*How Spanish speakers of South America who are successful in their undergraduate studies in European universities where English is the language of instruction define success in higher education and what where their ways to obtain it?*

*What features of English language programmes could better prepare Spanish speakers of South America to succeed in their undergraduate studies in English speaking countries?*

This chapter starts with a review of literature related to students' levels of mobility in higher education and mobility's relationship to the global knowledge economy. It also provides a review of empirical studies on the experiences of overseas students in higher education in European countries where English is the language of instruction, and experiences of students from Latin American countries (Latino/a) succeeding, or struggling to succeed, in universities of the Anglophone world. Due to there having been few studies undertaken in Europe on Latino/a students, I refer below primarily to research on Latino/a in the USA. Additionally, the literature review includes other empirical studies related to the experiences of non-English native speakers in higher education, their perceived challenges and experiences of resilience and persistence towards becoming bilingual. After an examination of the literature I reframed the conceptual framework of this study around identity construction by university students and identity negotiations towards second language acquisition (becoming bilingual/bicultural), through the lens of critical theory and in the same vein, transformative learning. I continue this chapter with a description of this empirical study which aims to provide evidence on the experiences of South American students in a university of the European Anglophone world and the pathway they took towards success.

This case study was conducted in Trinity College Dublin and to be able to undertake it I searched statistical reports of international student enrolment over five years, from 2010 to 2015, to justify the selection of participants for this study. I describe and analyse the experiences of four South American students in Trinity College Dublin in search of perceived challenges and ways of dealing with those challenges. The rationale for setting

this study in Trinity College Dublin was the lack of studies available on South American students' success in higher education in Ireland. That setting, I hope, would allow me to explore the need for full language and culture immersion in a country with few Spanish speaking people (benefitting bilingualism) while avoiding variations in the institutional factors influencing success: other colleges may have had different policies to enhance students' engagement and adaptation. Further, I had myself had experienced of being an international South American student in this college which made gaining access to the participants easier than might have been the case elsewhere.

## 3.1 Introduction to literature review

This literature review starts with an exploration of issues concerning student mobility in higher education, experiences of international students in English speaking countries, experiences of non-English speakers in English speaking countries, and experiences of successful non-English speakers in universities of the Anglophone world. The literature available is vast, therefore, I refined it primarily to peer-reviewed articles in journals concerning Hispanic studies, Latinos/as in Education, international studies in HE, bilingualism, multiculturalism, and social psychology in HE. I also refer to institutional official reports, books, and newspapers as necessary. I searched relevant databases using key terms including: 'success', 'higher education', 'Latino/a', 'identity', 'experiences', 'university', 'college', 'higher education', 'EFL', 'ESL', 'second language acquisition', 'international students', 'multilingualism', 'Spanish speakers', 'retention', and 'bilingualism'.

### 3.1.1 Student mobility and the global knowledge economy

As shown in the previous chapters, higher education has an important role in the production of knowledge and preparation of people for life and work and in enabling countries to improve their citizens' quality of life through their becoming more competitive in the global knowledge economy (Marginson, 2010; Gürüz, 2008, 2011; Knight, 2004; *"Inside the knowledge factory," 1997*). Due to the limited influence of the university as an institution before the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Gürüz, 2008), the Enlightenment that preceded it was not characterised by mass higher education. Not until after the Industrial Revolution did the university come to be central to the development of the knowledge economy (Mokyr, 2002, pp. 37-41). Yet, knowledge is not the only requirement for a global knowledge economy as there are

other factors involved, including the ability to apply knowledge and skills, a common language, the understanding of values and other cultures, and ways of using information and communications technology and networks to transfer knowledge.

Higher education institutions were given the challenge of satisfying some of the demands that the global knowledge economy brought to the twentieth century through continuous acquisition of, and upgrading of skills on the part, of those students/workers entering the labour market, resulting in increases in levels of international student mobility as home countries were sometimes unable to meet the demands of their industry for workers with tertiary education (Gürüz, 2008, 2011; F. Ramirez & Riddle, 1991; Scott, 1998, 2000). Student mobility, and in particular international student mobility, can be defined as measures of the 'students studying in a foreign country' (Gürüz, 2008, p. 16) encouraging such mobility can be a way 'to break with [the] traditional, reproductive, and technical-functional tradition' of universities (Didriksson, 2008, p. 30) while also enriching the academic cultures of both countries sending students and their host countries.

#### 3.1.1.1 A brief history of student mobility

Mobility is not a phenomenon that emerged with the university of the twentieth century. There were forms of mobility on the part of students and scholars in the universities of medieval Europe and in other places at earlier times (Gürüz, 2008, 2011; Nakayama, 1984; Welch, 1997).[53] When Latin was a common language in academia/scholarship in Europe, and before the Reformation and wars of religion and resultant rise of nation-states, there were fewer restrictions on movement for both scholars and students, conditions may have favoured the natural flow of knowledge but as higher education in anything like the form we understand it today did not exist before the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century we can begin the story by considering only the movement of students occurring in more or less systematic ways since there. By the early twenty-first century, academic mobility was studied and promoted, among other policies and practices aimed at the internationalisation of higher education, as a way of achieving the interchange of scholars and students with the object of learning from other

[53] Examples of mobility for the purpose of gaining or exchanging knowledge include: the story of the Queen of Sheba [970-931 BC], the *shi* (gentlemen-scholars) in ancient China, the Sophists in Greece [400-500 BC], Marcus Tullius Cicero and other Roman orators [106-43 BC], Desiderius Erasmus [1465-1536], Nicolaus Copernicus [1473-1543], Galileo Galilei [1564-1642], and Simón Rodríguez [1769-1854].

cultures and the establishment of networks (Marginson, 2010; Gürüz, 2008; Knight, 2004). Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], founded in 1948, encouraged academic and student mobility[54] among other strategies to increase the internationalisation of higher education, also referred to as transnational higher education or cross-border postsecondary education (Knight, 2003, 2010, 2011; OECD, 2004, pp. 19–25).

#### 3.1.1.2 Student mobility and higher education

According to longitudinal studies, despite the expansion of higher education during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there is no clear evidence of its direct or positive effect on economic growth, equality or inequality (Ramirez & Riddle, 1991) but it is certain that in order to benefit from the global knowledge economy a country has to be able to generate, get access to and share knowledge as circumstances require (Gürüz, 2008). Nonetheless, the capability of a country to participate in the global knowledge economy depends on its wealth, meaning that some countries as less able to be active in this field, most especially the already economically marginalised countries (Altbach, 2004). Therefore, certain developed countries such as the USA, Japan, UK, Germany and France, led the field as 'knowledge producers' by 2017 and were preferred destinations for international students seeking to become 'knowledge users'. By contrast, the rest of the world (generally those developing countries formerly called third world countries) become 'passive users' of knowledge and 'technologically disconnected' (Gürüz, 2008). This unequal access to participation in the global knowledge economy thus caused what is called the 'neo-colonisation of the twenty-first century' (Altbach, 2004; Altbach & Teichler, 2001).

An emerging interest into international student mobility in the twenty-first century showed that there were many reasons for recruiting international students by higher education institutions. Some valued it in a very altruistic way as aiding developing or less privileged countries; others sought to get revenue to balance deficits and others found it beneficial as a way of learning from foreign cultures and sharing theirs. The British Council in the United Kingdom, the Fulbright scholarships and the Institute of International Education in North America, and the *Deutscher Akademisher Austausch Dienst* [The German

[54] The distinction drawn here is that academic mobility refers to staff mobility for training and cooperative purposes (such as jointly undertaking research), and student mobility refers to admitting overseas students.

Academic Exchange Service; DAAD] and the Erasmus Programme in Europe are some of the organisations/mechanisms involved in the promotion of culture and language through exchange programmes for scholars and students (Gürüz, 2008; Altbach, 2004). Yet, sometimes there are changes in the approach to admitting foreign students as in the case of Australia which, before 1985, was oriented towards providing aid to developing countries with a free fees scheme and favourable visas procedures but after 1985, treated overseas students as a source of revenue for institutions through the charging of fees (Gürüz, 2008; see also Gamage & Mininberg, 2003; Marginson, 2002). Similar changes have been seen in other 'knowledge producer' countries of the Anglophone world such as the USA, the UK, and Ireland, however, 'knowledge users' countries remained willing to mobilise their peoples to develop their human capital, aiming at preparedness to participate in the global knowledge economy.

In 2015, the OECD noted several drivers that influenced the decision making on the selection of the host country for student mobility:

- language of instruction,
- quality of the programme [seeking top ranked institutions],
- tuition fees [differentiated according to the countries but sometimes not fairly, ie. Brazil and Colombian charges equally to national and non-national students while they pay Non-EU fees in Ireland while Chile charges differentiated fees for international student fees]
- immigration policies [work permit for students, extension of visas after studies]
- others factors: credits/degree recognition (OECD, 2015, p. 358).

The OECD also observed that China, India and other Asian countries contributed with the 53% of the overseas student population in 2013 with preference of English speaking countries as their host countries (OECD, 2015, p.356).

#### 3.1.1.3 Student mobility and the universities of the Anglophone world

In order to understand why student mobility is primarily involved movement towards English speaking countries, it is important to understand how English became the *Lingua Franca* of higher education, academic life, and the global knowledge economy.

By the thirteenth century, Latin was the *Lingua Franca* of the emerging international scholarly world (Gürüz, 2008; Altbach, 2004; Altbach & Teichler, 2001). After the Protestant Reformation universities started teaching in vernacular languages linked to emerging nation-states becoming autonomous in their governance (Gürüz, 2008, pp. 53–54). By the seventeenth century mobility was limited by religious conflicts. The universities of Paris and Bologna had long been attractive to foreign students but universities in the component parts of what was to become the UK (such as Oxford and Cambridge) had little involvement in international student mobility. At the turn of the nineteenth century, following the French Revolution, the European university began to undergo a process of reform (Rüegg, 2004, p. 4). The influence of Wilhelm von Humboldt's [1767-1835] changed dominant views on the role of the university, with more emphasis on research as a function of the university positioning the German universities primarily as research institutions. By the nineteenth century nation-states had emerged (each typically organised around and official, dominant languages) and Germany became the academic centre of the world (Gürüz, 2008). German, and to some extent French, institutions were seen as models for regions in the Eastern and Southern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Far East, Latin America, and the Oceania (Perkin, 2007). The movement of American scholars and students (such as Benjamin Franklin [1706-1790]) to universities in Germany underscored the development of the modern American university in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, providing a model for other countries that combined the influence of the British university, and the German research university. These developments contributed to the away from industrialisation to the so-called knowledge-based economy after the Second World War (Altbach, 2004). Therefore, as a view began to emerge that the American University was the best model of higher education and the influence of universities in the Anglophone world grew, English became the global language of communication in science and the Lingua Franca of higher education (Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Altbach, 2004; Gürüz, 2008; Marginson, 2010), leaving non-English speaking countries in some disadvantage in the academic world not only reducing them largely to the status of knowledge users, but as they were now much less likely to be host countries attracting foreign students.

The flow of students favours English speaking countries as it is these that students prefer. According to a report for the British Council the most preferred major English speaking destination countries [MESDCs], those that are sought by foreign students are: the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (Altbach, 2004; Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Böhm et al., 2004; Gürüz, 2008, 2011). By 2017, some host universities in non-English speaking countries, in their attempts to attract foreign

students, were translating their programmes and offering degrees and courses in English as the language of instruction (Dittrich, 2016; Elmes, 2016), however, the statistical trend by the early twenty-first century suggested an increasing interest in universities *located* in English speaking countries (Böhm et al., 2004).

#### 3.1.1.4 Student Mobility in Latin America and South America

When describing the characteristics of higher education in Latin America, the IESAL and the UNESCO in 2008 referred to that region as:

> those countries where the Spanish and the Portuguese languages prevail and [which] is normally identified by the countries that span from Mexico all the way to Argentina, including Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Latin America and the Caribbean are, therefore, one big region composed of nearly 8,910 institutions of higher education, of those, only 1,231 (13.81 percent) are universities (cited in Jaramillo & de Wit, 2011, pp. 129-130).

As discussed in section 1.4, it has been claimed that Latin American higher education needs to take action to enter the global knowledge economy if it is not to suffer the disadvantages of isolation and lack of preparedness for the challenges of the new millennium (Gazzola & Didriksson, 2008; Reisz, 2016; Vargas-Vergara, Bas-Peña, & Esteban-Ibáñez, 2015; Zago & Machado-Neto, 2016). Therefore, the mobility of scholars and students has been in the sights of many Latin American governments, as has the internationalisation of their HE institutions (Didriksson, 2008; Gazzola, 2008; Jaramillo & de Wit, 2011). Similarly, alongside economic, geographical, cultural, and political barriers to integrating into the academia in the host country, there are other, quite specific, challenges for Latin American. Faced with the global trend towards seeking to study in English-speaking countries, Latin American students also face linguistic and cultural barriers (Altbach, 2004; Altbach & Teichler, 2001). Usually products of their traditionalistic education systems, they may have little experience of audio-visual learning, limited abilities in reading and comprehending English and a tendency to be less critical in their reading (Didriksson, 2008).

Studies on higher education in Latin America and Latin American people as a group, are often complex because of their various diverse regional, ethnic, cultural and linguistic difference (Gazzola & Didriksson, 2008). Therefore, I decided to frame this study in such a way that it would focus only on the experiences of undergraduate students from the

regions of Spanish-speaking countries. By 2015-2017, the majority of Latin American students in Ireland, where this study took place, were Brazilian, having come here through programmes including Science without Borders, and the Brazilian government had its own problems in attempting to retain students, but I do not discuss them here (Havergal, 2016).

### 3.1.2 International students and higher education in the Anglophone Europe

When referring to international students it is important to be clear just what an international student is. The Institute of Statistics of the UNESCO defines 'internationally mobile students' as those 'who have physically crossed an international border between two countries to participate in educational activities in the country of destination, where the country of destination of a given student is different from their country of origin' (UNESCO, 2016b). In 2013 the UNESCO and the OECD agreed in their operational definitions of internationally mobile students, basing it on: prior education, usual residency and citizenship status. However, the nature of international students is more complex as some students find themselves embarking on higher education abroad for reasons such as the consequence of accompanying their migrating parents, getting a job in the host country, migrating to learn a foreign language, and escaping socio-economic and political problems in their home countries. Therefore, many institutions and researchers find difficult to determine who is an international student and who is not.

The Anglophone countries in Europe considered in this study are the UK and Ireland. If the UK is taken to include the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands (which is not strictly legally correct but can be allowed to stand for present purposes), the only part of Europe other than the UK and Ireland where English is a first language is Gibraltar. However, until 2015 (when this study was already underway) Gibraltar had no university and its constitutional and legal status is complicated, being a matter of dispute between the UK and Spain. In one sense, it perhaps is a country; in another way, it is not. Thus, it suffices for all practical purposes to say that the English-speaking countries of Europe are Ireland and the UK. Legally, the first national language of Ireland from 1937 has been Irish but by 2017 it was patently the case that Ireland was largely an English-speaking country.

#### 3.1.2.1 Experiences of international students in the UK and Ireland

By the early twentieth century, there was an emerging interest in the studies of overseas students in the UK (Kinnell, 1990) and in the early twenty-first century in Ireland (Schlepper, 2004). Findings from research on experiences of international students in British and Irish universities suggest other reasons to value international students than the fact of fees they brought to the country such as their potential to enhance diversity in the student population. However, this group of students is sometimes neglected and their particular needs are not considered (Gürüz, 2008, 2011; Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016; Kinnell, 1990; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Schlepper, 2004). A study in an Irish Institute of Technology among international students reported the challenges they encountered in attempting to achieve success in higher education besides those already mentioned above in Study 1. Schlepper's study (2004) found that overseas students faced challenges such as migration issues, discrimination, financial restrictions on accessing higher education, and cultural and language barriers, also observed in studies of international students in other countries (Calder et al., 2016; Kanno & Varghese, 2010). These factors may explain the under-representation of certain minority groups in universities in Anglophone countries.

#### 3.1.2.2 Flow of international students in Ireland from 2010-2015

According to the Institute for Statistics of the UNESCO, the global flow of tertiary level student mobility in Ireland in 2015, reflected an outbound mobility ratio of 7.3 (15,628 Irish studying abroad) and an inbound mobility rate of 7.4 (15,815 overseas students in Ireland). The six most common destination countries were the UK, US, France, Germany, Netherlands, and Australia; whereas overseas students were primarily from China, UK, Malaysia, US, Saudi Arabia, Canada, and India (UNESCO, 2016a). However, the UNESCO does not differentiate undergraduate students from postgraduate students and also included students from the North of Ireland [NI] in their data for the UK[55]. Table 23 shows the variation reported for 2014 and 2015 with an increasing tendency of Asian countries to send students.

[55] Reports from the HEA exclude international students from NI as they are considered Irish.

| Country of Origin | 2014 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|
| UK | 2,106 | 1,579 |
| China | 1,619 | 1,670 |
| Malaysia | 1,258 | 1,468 |
| USA | 1,158 | 1,253 |
| Canada | 961 | 1,070 |
| India | 536 | 934 |
| Germany | 519 | 555 |
| Saudi Arabia | 502 | 1,071 |
| Total of overseas students in Ireland | 12,861 | 15,815 |

**Table 23. Inbound flow of international students in Ireland [2014-2015]**

Based on the reports of the Higher Education Authority from 2010 to 2015[56], I devised tables presenting the number of overseas students enrolled in HEA funded institutions. The HEA reports for 2010 and 2011 disaggregated overseas students by their country of origin whereas reports since 2012 presented the number of full time enrolled students by region of origin (Higher Education Authority, 2012, 2013a). Table 24 presents the countries with most numbers of overseas students in Irish HEA funded institutions (full time students in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes).

| Country of Origin | 2010 | 2011 |
|---|---|---|
| United States | 2,594 | 2,255 |
| Great Britain (excluding NI) | 1,364 | 1,162 |
| China | 1,221 | 1,412 |
| Malaysia | 702 | 791 |
| Canada | 660 | 714 |
| Germany | 554 | 448 |
| France | 502 | 451 |
| Italy | 313 | 229 |
| India | 289 | 285 |
| Spain | 231 | Not reported |
| Saudi Arabia | Not reported | 267 |
| Total of overseas students in Ireland | 11,466 | 10,571 |

**Table 24. Full-time overseas students in HEA funded institutions for 2010-2011**

[56] I reviewed reports from 2005 to 2015 but present the data from 2010 to 2015 only as being most relevant for present purposes.

From 2012 to 2015, the HEA reported full time student enrolment by region of origin (Higher Education Authority, 2014, 2015b, 2015c, 2016). Only reports of 2012 and 2013 contained data of overseas students by region, whereas reports for 2014 and 2015 considered students from Ireland (and NI) and the rest of EU in the same region. From table 25 it is evident that there were increasing number of overseas students from Asia. This is consistent with the reports of the UNESCO for 2014 and 2015 shown above in table 23. Similarly, table 25 reveals the increasing participation of South American countries.

| Region of origin | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Asia | 5,224 | 6,392 | 7,087 | 7,604 |
| North America | 3,426 | 4,299 | 4,632 | 5,683 |
| Europe [EU] | 3,421 | 3,800 | 158,919 | 263,185 |
| Africa | 489 | 526 | 619 | 676 |
| Europe Non-EU | 228 | 263 | 355 | 373 |
| Oceania | 80 | 109 | 101 | 116 |
| South America | 71 | 872 | 1,078 | 1,148 |
| Total | 12,939 | 16,261 | 172,791 | 278,785 |

**Table 25. Full time students in HEA funded institutions by region for 2012 to 2015**

I consider important to note out that the flow of mobile students in Ireland (as to the rest of Europe) will be affected by the exit of Britain from the EU. However, it is not the concern of my study to discuss this further.

#### 3.1.2.3 Experiences of international students in Ireland

Due to increasing demand for higher education worldwide, by 2016, Ireland had emerged as what the United Nations Development Programme calls a ‘global hub of innovation’ (cited in Gürüz, 2008, p. 13) and was one of the MESDCs group (Böhm et al., 2004) making it attractive to potential foreign students. Enterprise Ireland estimated a direct economic benefit of €345 m resulting from expenditure by international students in higher education in 2012, with a further €120m coming from related friends and family visiting as tourists. International students are important not only for intercultural and academic

exchanges and the establishment of networks but also for the revenue they bring to a country (Higher Education Authority, 2015d).

In 2013, Ireland launched a pilot survey to measure levels of student engagement in HE. This survey was implemented in 2014, *but* despite efforts to enhance higher levels of participation in the survey they have only reached responses rates of 5 to 7% (Higher Education Authority, 2013b, 2015a). Similarly, other surveys such as the Eurostudent Survey and the report on Student Accommodation Demands and Supply had 10% of overseas students responding (Harmon & Foubert, 2011, 2014; Higher Education Authority, 2015d). Therefore, these surveys and reports barely reflected the situation of international students and their experiences in Irish HE. Nonetheless, they coincided in several points:

- Overseas students usually come from families of high professional backgrounds, however, their annual income is lower than average domestic students'.
- Overseas students primarily fund their studies from their own family sources and part-time employment in Ireland, while nearly 50% of domestic students are funded by grants and benefit from reduced or exempted fees schemes.
- Overseas students are mostly part-time students due to their working commitments.
- Overseas students are usually less content with accommodation and cost of living in Ireland than domestic students.
- Overseas students go through financial problems.
- Overseas students reported higher levels of academic engagement with learning environments and higher levels of satisfaction with the outcomes than domestic students.
- Overseas students were less satisfied with college social engagement than domestic students.
- Overseas students reported higher levels in the WHO-5 Index. This means that they had fewer health-related problems, drink less alcohol and were less likely to smoke than were Irish domestic students.

The emerging attraction of Ireland for overseas students provoked some research with particular emphasis on exploring the experiences of international students. One study in an institute of technology in Ireland was among these. This study reported several difficulties experienced by overseas students. These included:

- difficulties with language,

- differences in academic culture,
- separation from Irish students,
- discrimination and racism,
- financial difficulties,
- little time to socialise due to working commitments, and
- feelings of being ignored and neglected (Schlepper, 2004).

Interestingly, the academic staff in the same institution valued the participation of international students as an asset, believing Irish students had few opportunities to interact with people of other cultures. Moreover, Schlepper recommended actions to enhance more interaction between Irish students and their counterparts. Schlepper's findings coincided with results from surveys conducted in Ireland and other research on experiences of international students and reported language and cultural barriers, anxiety and other factors added to the already complex and multidimensional process of transitioning to higher education (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Wertsch & Sarai, 2017). These findings concur with studies in other countries that report the challenges international students often face and the need for supportive policies (Calder et al., 2016; Kanno & Varghese, 2010). Therefore, Jindal-Snape and Rienties suggest the importance of policies to assist overseas students when they face the challenges of moving to a new country and dealing with a different higher educational system there (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016).

These and other studies on the experiences of international students in Ireland and the UK primarily concern only overseas students coming from the United States, Europe and Asia and not those coming from the Spanish-speaking countries of South America (Ginsburg & Gorostiaga, 2003; Higher Education Authority, 2013b, 2015a, 2015d; Kinnell, 1990; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Schlepper, 2004). Further, most of the available research on the experiences of international students in Ireland from South America refers to Brazilian students and research concerning Hispanic students largely reflected the experiences of populations coming from Spain and Mexico. Having said that, I discuss experiences of non-native English speakers in the next section.

### 3.1.3 Non-native English speakers in universities of the Anglophone world

Undoubtedly, English has become the preferred language of instruction in many higher education institutions in countries where English is the first language and in countries

where it is the second most spoken language (Altbach, 2004; Böhm et al., 2004; Dittrich, 2016; Elmes, 2016; Gürüz, 2011; OECD, 2015). However, David Crystal, a linguistics expert, argues that there were about 60 to 70 different types of 'Englishes' that have emerged since the 1960s. It has been claimed that the English language is adapted to the speakers' context (Ives-Keeler, 2014). Therefore, the challenges that non-native English speakers became more complicated as they not only have to learn a foreign language adequately to progress in their studies but also to adapt to the *type of English* that is spoken in their host countries. Some examples of these different types of Englishes are: the Hiberno-English or Irish English that is used in Ireland (J. Harris, Little, & Singleton, 1986; Migge & Ní Chiosáin, 2012), the [un]acceptable use of Spanglish in Anglophone countries that are largely populated by Latino/a (Bravo García, 2010; Vélez-Rendón, 2014), and the challenges of the Australian English accent (Koch, Everett, Phillips, & Davidson, 2014).

#### 3.1.3.1 Experiences of non-native English speakers in universities of the Anglophone world

Although the study of students of English as a Foreign and Second language [EFL and ESL] is vast, primarily, and not surprisingly, conducted in countries with large numbers of non-native English speaking international students or immigrants, by 2016, there was little research in Ireland that focused on the experiences of non-native English speakers [NNS] as international students in HE and their pathways to success. Therefore, I discuss below empirical studies of international students in universities of the Anglophone world under two headings: those coming from non-native English-speaking countries and those coming from Spanish speaking countries.

##### *NNS international students in Irish HE*

I noted above the existence of various types of *Englishes,* which is another challenge faced by NNS international students when entering Irish HE. These students are exposed to Irish English/Hiberno – English, various accents[57], and Gaeilge (the official language in Ireland which is used in bilingual signs, official emails and letters, public transport[58] and in some media (J. Harris et al., 1986; Migge & Ní Chiosáin, 2012). The

[57] There is a saying to the effect that the north of Dublin accent and south of Dublin accent are so different that people from the two sides of the Liffey might as well be using separate languages.
[58] During my first weeks in Ireland I heard *Gaeilge* announcements on the train and I thought my English was getting worse until I realised it was another language.

difficulties it can cause, especially for international students [NS and NNS] have been noted by universities such as Trinity College Dublin, which has incorporated a helpful section on slang and common Irish college jargon into its online portal for new students[59] giving explanations of expressions such as 'there will be plenty of *craic*' as meaning 'there will be plenty of fun'. Additionally, Trinity College Dublin encourages students to enrol in free *Gaeilge* courses to promote the use of its official language[60]. The point is, international NNS face more challenges than passing standard examinations to prove their English proficiency, examinations usually tested based on standard British English and the descriptors of the Common European Framework of Languages [CEFL] (Little, 2007a, 2013).

Having said this, two studies in Ireland conducted in Irish institutes of technology are worthy of note. The first study reported language issues as one of the factors influencing success on the part of international students in Irish HE (Schlepper, 2004) whereas the second specifically studied the influence of language competency on academic performance (R. Harris & Chonaill, 2016). Schlepper's study was referred to in a former section, but that conducted by Harris and Chonaill bears closer examination. This study explored the influence of language competency on the academic performance of migrant NNS enrolled in an institute of technology employing the case study approach (R. Harris & Chonaill, 2016). The study discussed the influence of second language [L2] competency as a determinant in getting access to, performance on and progression in higher education of this minority ethnic group. Harris and Chonaill claimed that difficulties regarding language barriers on the part of migrants had already been detected, but had yet not particularly been attended to by the Irish education system. Harris and Chonaill recognised diversity in the language competence of migrant NNS even after fulfilling the entry requirements of various routes into FE and HE (completion of CAO points[61], entering as mature students[62], and progression through further education routes[63]) while NNS international students would necessarily have to prove a minimum 6.0 IELTS score (B2 English level of the CEF) to enter college. Harris and Chonaill claimed this difference

[59] https://www.tcd.ie/students/orientation/jargon/ .

[60] https://www.tcd.ie/gaeloifig/en/international.php I personally took some Irish lessons to avoid a repeat of the confusion referred to in an earlier footnote (see above).

[61] School leavers (Irish and non-Irish) can pass the English requirement with an Ordinary Pass level (A2 CEF)

[62] Mature students in Ireland are those of 23 and above who enter FE or HE after a selection process which consists of a submission of an application and an interview.

[63] FE routes involve progressing to a Post-Leaving Certificate course and being able to enter FE and HE after completion of modules.

in the entry routes resulted on migrant students primarily entering IoTs, rather than universities. The NNS migrant students' L2 oral competence was sufficient to enter, adapt to and participate in the college environment (and presumably to be interviewed in English as there is no signs of interviews being translated) which was corroborated by their lecturers who said that these NNS and other international students participated well in their classes and in giving oral presentations. However, NNS migrant students reported difficulties that were evident at the end of the academic term (with consequences for progression) such as proper comprehension of written material and writing of essays and in examinations to the required standard (the primarily forms of assessment in the Irish education system). In particular, Harris and Chonaill's (2016) study described specific problems such as in the ordering of information, paragraph construction, linking of ideas, comparing and contrasting information, establishing cause and effect, excessive quoting, and avoidance of plagiarism which are considered higher order levels of writing competence but which not necessarily reflect what learners actually *know* or not*,* as which has been noted in other research (Z. Lyons & Little, 2009). Moreover, Harris and Chonaill (2016) suggest that other international students (i.e. those who demonstrate their English competence through examinations such as the IELTS) may not face the same difficulties in regard to their language competence levels due to their previous educational experience and further L2 preparation.

Despite there being evidence of a positive correlation between English language test scores and good writing skills and reports of Irish students outperforming non-Irish students (Higher Education Authority, 2012, 2013a) is has been acknowledged that other factors besides language difficulties affect international students' success in Irish HE.

### *NNS international students in Anglophone universities*

As noted above, research on NNS in Anglophone universities is vast, therefore, I refer below to the most salient factors that constitute language related barriers and bridges to success, adapting the approach of Mary Angela Olson who conducted a comprehensive literature review on ESL and nursing students based on the language barriers they experienced (Olson, 2012). I summarise below how those barriers affect students' successes and present strategies based on EFL/ESL research in Table 26.

| Language Barriers | Affecting | Bridges/Intervention |
|---|---|---|
| **ESL/EFL Reading:** | | Extensive reading |
| Reading speed | Time spent on college work | Self-selected reading |
| Reading comprehension | Misunderstanding of tasks, instructions, content | Change in reading approach<br>Explicit teaching of reading strategies for speed reading and improve comprehension |
| (Akkakoson, 2013; Anderson, 1999; Burns, Solomon, & Hood, 1996; Chang, 2012; Hashemi & Bagheri, 2014; Stephen Krashen, 2009, 2013; S. D. Krashen, 2004, 2007; Lixia, 2014; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Mikulecky & Jeffries, 1998; Salvador Cisneros., 2010, 2015; Selami, 2011) | | |
| **ESL/EFL writing:** | | Awareness of differences in styles/culture/tradition |
| Technical vocabulary | College grades | Frequent constructive feedback (modelling and drafting) |
| Grammar | Unfair assessment | Engage on academic style reading (journal articles, opinion papers) |
| Syntax | Change of academic status | |
| Style | | |
| Critical writing | | |
| (M. Hu, 2014; Johnson & VanBrackle, 2012; Stephen Krashen, 2008; Stephen Krashen, 2013; Olson, 2012; Pinar, 2016; Sasaki, 2007, 2009; Tran, 2013) | | |
| **Speaking proficiency:** | | |
| Accent | Self-confidence | Interaction with NS |
| Pronunciation, | Feelings of isolation | Exposure to L2 in the host country |
| Fluency, | Discrimination and bullying | |
| Differentiating academic language and everyday language | Low presentation performance | |
| **Listening proficiency:** | | |
| Comprehension | Misunderstanding of instructions/lectures | Provision of lecture slides, class notes, allowing audio-recording |
| Speed | Feeling of not belonging | More levels of exposure to L2 (TV, radio, peers, NS) |
| Accents | | |
| Colloquial language, slangs, college/academic jargon | | |
| (R. Harris & Chonaill, 2016; Koch et al., 2014; López, 2014; Olson, 2012; Pinar, 2016; Vélez-Rendón, 2014) | | |

**Table 26. NNS language barriers, effect, and intervention**

Other factors that are related to L2 language competence are the type and frequency of examination/assessment. For example, the use of multiple-choice questions and essay-style assignments and examinations to assess performance is often challenging for NNS students. This may result in poor reflections of levels of knowledge/competency/critical thinking, stress and anxiety and a sense that the assessment was not fair. Therefore, it has been suggested that there be training in test taking skills with explicit teaching about and awareness of the purposes of different types of tests (Johnson & VanBrackle, 2012; Lakin, Elliott, & Liu, 2012; Lee, 2015; Olson, 2012; Read & von Randow, 2013; Tran, 2013).

Although the process of recruiting NNS international students employs recognised examinations to prove their English proficiency as sufficiently high to enable progress in HE, primarily based on the CEFR at higher levels than the majority of Irish school leavers (Little, 2007a, 2007b, 2013; Z. Lyons & Little, 2009), the acquisition of academic writing is frequently reported as a challenge for both Irish and non-Irish students affecting their access and progression in higher education (R. Harris & Chonaill, 2016; Schlepper, 2004; Sheridan & Dunne, 2012; Smyth & Hannan, 2007). Second language acquisition [SLA] and L2 academic writing have, therefore, been the subject of some research. Among that research have been studies that have examined the improvement of writing in L2 during periods of study abroad, compared to those studying in their home countries (Sasaki, 2007, 2009). These studies were conducted with Japanese learners of EFL in short and long stays in England, with the evidence being of benefit in the acquisition of writing competence being greater if the period spent abroad was longer. Researchers, in their attempts to understand difficulties in acquiring appropriate competence in academic L2, have further studied cultural differences in writing styles. It had been proposed that L1 interferes in L2 acquisition. These findings are consistent in reporting how L1 culture can cause struggles in L2 academic writing and suggesting actions to rectify this. Ly Thi Tran based her study on case studies with Chinese and Vietnamese international students in Australia, producing in interesting insights into the influence of L1 culture on L2 academic writing (Tran, 2013). She challenges the 'deficit model' that problematizes NNS international students and suggests four different patterns of international students' adaptation:

> a) surface adaptation (recognition of the difference between personal beliefs and the conventions of academic writing with steps taken to accommodate these demand without a sense of comfort);

b) committed adaptation (willingness to shift to a new way of knowledge construction and comfort in doing so);
c) reverse adaptation (internalising newly acquired L2 writing styles in the L1), and
d) hybrid adaptation (integration of L1 writing styles that are perceived as meaningful into L2 academic writing) (Tran, 2013, p. 4).

Within this framework, Tran further explains the pathways NNS students can take towards the acquisition of proper academic writing skills by recognising differences between their L1 cultures and the L2 (dominant) culture. For instance, she specifically refers to the writing of essays and notes the differences between Asian culture (talk around text, use of metaphors, tendency to avoid criticising others' work, preferring to refer to the context than to the author's position, perception of being 'critical' as 'attacking' someone else's work) and Anglophone/Western culture. Tran observes the need to enter into a dialogical understanding of the differences between L1 culture and L2 culture and suggests the mutual adaptation of lecturers and students. She also suggests practice as a good way of improving one's academic writing competence to meet the L2 academic demands (Tran, 2013, p.147).

#### 3.1.3.2 Experiences of Spanish speakers in universities in the Anglophone world

Spanish is a language that has been associated with conquest, oppression, revolution, liberation and the expansion of the Hispanic nations (Herring, 1959; Socolow, 2000). It is also a language that has played an important part in the arts. Culturally it is known for its literature and songs; in academia for its use in research in medicine, technology and education among other things (Marginson, 2010). Spanish is typically described as the second most common language of native speakers in the world and widely used as a second language (López, 2014; Marginson, 2010). However, due to the predominance of English as a common language in science, technology and academia and its position as the new Latin in the academic culture of the twenty-first century, some of the contributions in the Spanish language are unknown (Altbach, 2004; Gazzola & Didriksson, 2008; Gürüz, 2008, 2011; Marginson, 2010).

The main reason for the spread of Spanish as a first spoken language was colonisation. The countries of the Hispanic world are those that were subjects to the Spanish empire

from the late fifteenth to late nineteenth centuries.[64] But regardless of the glories that might once have been Spain's one of the reasons for student movement from Hispanic countries to universities in the Anglophone world is the view that by the twenty-first century *prestige* could be gained by studying there because the most highly ranked universities were in English speaking countries, especially the United States and the United Kingdom (Böhm et al., 2004; Gürüz, 2008; Jaramillo & de Wit, 2011). Another reason was the opportunity to acquire a language that is considered the language of the global knowledge economy. Although some countries are not kin to learn a second language, that is not the case of Spanish speakers who invest time and resources in learning English as a second language (Herbert, 2015).

It is claimed that language immersion benefits second language acquisition (Davidson, 2007; Pinar, 2016). One quantitative study reported the impact of studying abroad in an English speaking university in the UK. The subjects were a group of Spanish Erasmus students that improved their English oral competence significantly after their one-semester experience overseas gauging less impact on listening and writing abilities (Llanes, Tragant, & Serrano, 2012). The study concluded that the subjects' characteristics, positive attitudes and contact with native speakers of English influenced their improvement and that improvement in reading skills is reflected in improvement of writing skills. This concurred with Sasaki's studies on the benefits of language immersion with particular emphasis on the improvement of writing skills, which emerged as being directly proportional to the length of exposure to the target language in the host country (Sasaki, 2007, 2009). However, these studies measured writing competence based on composition-style writing tasks which is different to the essay-style required in most universities of the Anglophone world.

It is undeniable that the largest Spanish-speaking community in an Anglophone country is the case of Latino/a people in the US. However, most research on Latino/a people in US American higher education has concentrated on other matters than their language

[64] Those countries are: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela. However, it is important to note that there are also countries where Spanish is widely spoken such as parts of the United States of America (regions that were formerly Spanish/Mexican), the Philippines, Belize, and Brazil and the Spanish empire (which had been reduced to trivially small remnants by 2017) did, at one time or another, include territories in Europe and Africa in which Spanish did not take root as a dominant language.

competences. That may be a result of their having more exposure to the target language and such studies are primarily concerned with other factors besides their academic preparedness in English, such as inequalities, racism, cultural capital, community cultural wealth, and psychosocial factors which I discuss below (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009; Peralta, Caspary, & Boothe, 2013; Raphael, Pressley, & Kane, 2003; Vásquez, 2007).

### *Studies on Latino/a in US American HE*

> We are a bilingual, bicultural, and international community that could be a great help to the nation in remaining competitive in the global economy. – Antonio Flores[65]-

The increasing Latino/a population in the USA, their reportedly lower levels of participation and progress in and completion of higher education, and recognition of the importance of Latino/a communities in the US American having progress began to be in the subject of research from the late nineteenth century (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2006; Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2014; Leon & Nevarez, 2007; Miller, 2005; Oliva, 2004; Pedraza, 2002; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Vásquez, 2007). But little positive evidence emerged of greater numbers of Latino/a students achieving college degrees[66] and progressing to further studies (Crisp et al., 2014; Healey, 2016; Jimenez-Silva, Hernandez, Luevanos, Jimenez, & Jimenez, 2009; Pedraza, 2002; Peralta et al., 2013; E. Ramirez, 2011). The acknowledgement of inequalities and racial related discrimination drew the attention of researchers, politicians, policy makers, and practitioners to studies on Latino/a students and the barriers/challenges to their success and the factors affecting their involvement and success in HE. Some research supported Tinto's model of retention (discussed in Study 1) (Boden, 2011; Crisp et al., 2014). Other research challenged Tinto's model and proposed other models to better suit the realities of Latino/a in the 'white' US American HE system (Oseguera et al., 2009; Peralta et al., 2013; E. Ramirez, 2011; Raphael et al., 2003; Santos & Reigadas, 2002). Some of the latter models were related to feminist theories, and aspects of critical theory such as Critical Race Theory [CRT], Latino/a Critical Race Theory [LatinCRT], Bourdieau's social and cultural capital theory, the

[65] Antonio Flores is the President and CEO of HACU [Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities] in the USA (Healey, 2016)

[66] In the US American higher education system there are two-year college degrees and four-year college degrees. To be consistent, for the purpose of this study it was primarily research into the latter that I considered in the review of the literature.

Bicultural Orientation Model [BOM], Social Network Theory, and Community Cultural Wealth [CCW] (Oseguera et al., 2009). Nonetheless, researchers faced limitations in conducting studies on Latino/a people in US American HE due to there being different definitions of success in HE (retention, progression, attainment and completion) (Oseguera et al., 2009; E. Ramirez, 2011; Crisp et al., 2014), changes in government policies that saw some states not allow references to racial and ethnic issues (Oliva, 2004; Oseguera et al., 2009), and the migration status of some undocumented Latino/a people (Bohon et al., 2005; Chapa & De La Rosa, 2006; Crisp et al., 2014; Oseguera et al., 2009; Peralta et al., 2013; Zell, 2010) that made them counting then hard, so that researchers had to rely on volunteers who self-identified as Latino/a to participate in their studies.

Despite some studies on experiences of Latino/a students in US American concluded that they have good experiences (Jimenez-Silva et al., 2009; Raphael et al., 2003), other research primarily refers to the challenges/barriers they face. In order to summarise the reported challenges/barriers faced by Latino/a to any type of success in US American HE (Bohon et al., 2005; Chapa & De La Rosa, 2006; Jimenez-Silva et al., 2009; Leon & Nevarez, 2007; Miller, 2005; Peralta et al., 2013; E. Ramirez, 2011; Raphael et al., 2003; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Vásquez, 2007), I further group and list the most frequently mentioned challenges/barriers, although some of them are overlapped and interconnected.

- Several forms of racism and discrimination: subtle discrimination, stereotype threat, stigmatising, reverse stereotyping, inequalities in access to a good quality of education, and unsupportive college environments.
- Cultural factors: difficulties asking for assistance/guidance/support from the college staff and from their family/friends, heavy reliance on the lecturer as the sole source of knowledge/information, families' 'enmeshed' culture, limited role models in mono-cultural college environments, conflicts over ethnic identity, physical separation from family/familiar community, and juggling family/church commitments and college work.
- Academic demands.
- Unpreparedness: low entrance examination scores and limited pre-college academic experience.
- L2 difficulties: accent, vocabulary, terminology, feelings of inadequateness, difficulty in transferring from thinking in L1 to writing in L2.

- Misunderstanding/ignorance of the US American system: especially ways of getting support/funds/assistance.
- Financial problems: having to work, family responsibilities, and inequality in accessing funds/grants.
- Migration status: being undocumented or having temporary visas.
- Gender: stereotypes, discrimination.
- Academic, social and cultural shock.
- Misunderstanding of cultural differences by peers/faculty members.
- Psychological factors: fears of failure, anxiety, disillusionment about education as a result of perceived barriers, loneliness, and sense of not belonging, isolation.
- Medical conditions.
- Mono-cultural and mono-lingual institutional climate.

Factors that contribute to Latino/a students' successes in US American HE also inform policy makers, institutions and practitioners (Boden, 2011; Chapa & De La Rosa, 2006; Crisp et al., 2014; Healey, 2016; Jimenez-Silva et al., 2009; Leon & Nevarez, 2007; Miller, 2005; Oseguera et al., 2009; Peralta et al., 2013; E. Ramirez, 2011; Raphael et al., 2003; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Vásquez, 2007). I list below the most frequently reported factors.

- Cultural/familial capital: family / relatives encouragement /expectations / support, parents' survival experiences, strong familial ties, unity, understanding.
- Beliefs and values: hard work, importance of education, persistence, resilience, spiritual support.
- Driving forces: willingness to help family and set a role model, to challenge stereotypes/stigmas and prove them wrong, career aspirations, family/community commitment.
- Academic preparedness.
- Proper academic feedback.
- Respectful and fair treatment.
- Good study habits.
- Mentoring/counselling support: frequent, supportive, and understanding.
- Appropriateness in the delivery of information: understandable and simple.
- Psychological/emotional factors: high self-efficacy, positive attitude, academic self-confidence, sense of belonging.

- Positive role models from the same ethnicity: mentors, lecturers, leaders, friends, college peers, parents, and older siblings.
- Financial support: grants, funds, and loans.
- Cultural capital: strong cultural/linguistic identity.
- Awareness of the need to adapt and cross language and sociocultural borders.
- Proactive involvement in the college environment academically, socially, culturally, and occupationally.
- Perceptions of benefits of becoming bilingual/bicultural.
- Perceptions of the college climate/environment: sense of belonging, diversity, multiculturalism, pluriculturalism, fair assessment.
- Remedial actions: on time and appropriate interventions.
- Provision of bicultural/bilingual college environment: cultural awareness, valuing other cultures, opportunities to integrate in multicultural projects/events, pluriculturally trained college staff.

Having reviewed selected literature on the experiences of Latino/a students in US American HE, there are several points to which I now draw attention. Interestingly, L2 difficulties were not reported as the main barriers/challenges to success perhaps due to the diversity in the Latino/a population, some coming from bilingual backgrounds (ie, Puerto Rico and English-speaking Guyana), some being first/second/third generation Latino/a in the USA, some being born in the USA and being bilingual before entering college (Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Bohon et al., 2005; Raphael et al., 2003; Vásquez, 2007; Pérez, 2008; Bravo García, 2010). Some Latino/a students go to college with family support while some access college with grants (Boden, 2011; Crisp et al., 2014; Pérez, 2008; Raphael et al., 2003; Vásquez, 2007) creating additional divisions as difference of social class add to cultural differences. It has been claimed there is a need for further and deeper qualitative research on the experiences of Latino/a students in HE to better understand the interaction of cultural capital and the likelihood of success (Crisp et al., 2014; Oseguera et al., 2009) such as the study of the five siblings of the same family succeeding in college and becoming professionals, challenging stereotypes and barriers (Jimenez-Silva et al., 2009). It has also been suggested there is a need for further and more extensive quantitative research to prove emerging findings from studies of LatCRT (Crisp et al., 2014) such as the study of Latino/a persistence in STEM careers using the lens of Community Cultural Wealth [CCW] in a mixed method study (Peralta et al., 2013). Additionally, most of the studies of Latino/a students in US higher education

refer to Chicano/a people – those of Mexican descent - therefore, there is a need for more research on Latino/a students coming from South American countries.

### *Latino/a students in US American HE and identity construction*

Although there is widespread recognition of the diversity of the Latino/a population and their experiences in navigating studies in the USA's HE system (Crisp et al., 2014; Jimenez-Silva et al., 2009; Oseguera et al., 2009), there is evidence of commonalities that emerge from their shared cultural capital and ethnic identity such as the value placed on language, familial bonds, education, culture, sense of community, persistence, and resilience (Bravo García, 2010; Kersffeld, 2010; Moraña, 2017; Peralta et al., 2013; E. Ramirez, 2011; Rivera Lersundi, 2016; Vélez-Rendón, 2014).

One study of 20 (n=10 male, n=10 female) second generation Latino/a students in a public university in the US resulted in a description of three profiles seen through the lens of ethnic identity (Rivas-Drake, 2008). The first profile was of those whom the researchers called 'justifiers'. They were characterised by individualistic drives, feelings of exemption from social barriers, and alienation from 'other' Latino/a people. Most of these had one non-Latino/a parent and pre-college experience in a 'white' school. Justifiers perceived intelligence, hard work and high socio-economic status as being their strengths and reported no stereotyping due to phenotype, education and accent (i.e. they were told they did not look/sound like a Latino/a). The second profile, called the 'consciouses' had strong bonds to their Latino/a identity, believed they experienced social barriers, and sought of social justice which gave them drive to do well in their studies. Most of them had uneducated parents, a strong sense of 'Latino/a pride', and willingness to contribute to social equality. The third profile, the 'accommodators' were connected to members of the Latino/a community yet were not motivated by perceived inequities. Their main drives were individualistic (like the justifiers) however, being a Latino/a was meaningful, respectable, and self-empowering. Their parental backgrounds were an even mix of educated and uneducated parents. These three profiles are applicable to most of the students participating in the research that is included in this section, however, the study observed perceptions of threats/challenges and opportunities but not their effects on success. On the other hand, there is evidence of Latino/a students succeeding in US HE and their pathways toward celebrating ethnic identity, self-discovery, realisation, and 'giving back' to the community (Jimenez-Silva et al., 2009; Pérez, 2008; Vélez-Rendón, 2014).

### 3.1.4 International and domestic student persistence and resilience in HE

As described previously, international students face challenges in addition to those normally reported in studies of success in HE such as loneliness, migration issues, separation from their home countries, and cultural and language barriers. Studies of international students describe persistence and resilience as being among the factors necessary to succeed in HE. Despite the cultural capital of Latino/a people including a tendency to be persistent and resilient, other research describe similar attributes in other international students and domestic students.

In studies of retention in HE, persistence is defined as the outcome of student behaviour and the decision to stay in HE while retention is defined as the outcome of institutional effort and actions to retain a student population (Oseguera et al., 2009, p. 4), whereas earlier studies employed the term *persistence* as the opposite of withdrawal (Martinez & Munday, 1998). However, those studies rarely explained the mechanisms that drove students' decision to persist and primarily predicted success based on self-reported levels of persistence (Krotseng, 1992; Mamiseishvili, 2012). Therefore, in this study, persistence is defined as in RCT and LatinRCT as the tendency to persevere in spite of any difficulties and challenges (Peralta et al., 2013). If persistence is understood and explained in this way (Maureen Andrade, 2008; Cardoza, 1991) then it challenges traditional and dominant concepts of persistence. For example, research on socio-economic factors that influenced college achievement such as Martinez and Munday's study (1998) suggested success could be influenced by such socio-economic considerations, whereas Cardoza (1991) reported that Hispanic women's socio-economic status was not a predictor of college achievement, unlike aspirations, drives and encouragement. Similarly, another study on NNS international students' persistence observed that students coming from the Pacific islands and Asia exhibited persistence behaviours which responded to their vision of the future, home and educational background, spirituality, supportive family/friends/mentors, attitudes and abilities (social and academic), and institutional engagement (Maureen Andrade, 2008).

Resilience or resiliency is another reported factor influencing success in HE. As defined by many positive psychologists, resiliency is the ability to "bounce back" successfully to adapt to the effects of adversity, stress, crisis, traumas and disappointments. A resilient person, recovers quickly from difficulties and is flexible and tough (Benard, 2004; Meyer,

Licklider, & Wiersema, 2009; Werner & Smith, 2001). Studies on resilience primarily rely on narrative inquiry approaches that observe patterns through the accounts of the participants' stories, collected through autobiographical discourse, journaling, and interviewing. One of the findings of a cross-cultural study in Europe on drop-out and completion in HE in underrepresented groups observed that there were students who 'triumph against the odds' and advocated 'more research on resilience and success' to better understand various resources that students employ to resist adversity (Quinn, 2013, p. 10). Studies on underrepresented students and non-traditional students (mature and disadvantaged students) similarly reported resilient behaviour in accessing and progressing in HE expressed as cultural capital, a process of transformation, and lifelong learning (Fleming & Finnegan, 2011a, 2011b, 2014; Merrill et al., 2009; West, Fleming, & Finnegan, 2013). One empirical study on ESL students' academic resilience concluded that there were factors contributing to resilient behaviour such as need to 'survive', love, strength, determination, courage, spirituality, and bravery (Sylvain, 2010) whereas another study using a phenomenology approach evidenced the ability to learn resilience through the use of narrative methods such as story-telling (Meyer et al., 2009). These two studies, suggested resilience could be learned and fostered being consistent with other studies on children and youth at risk belonging to disadvantage groups (Benard, 2004; Werner & Smith, 2001). Similarly, other studies that are based on the narratives of parents and their struggles with children with special learning needs and of the struggles of the students in distance learning education, discovered resilient behaviour (Baxter, 2012; Kenny, Shevlin, Walsh, & McNeela, 2005).

It is argued that persistence and resilience are characteristics that are either part of the identity of the person, part of his/her cultural capital, or developed through moments of difficulty thus are consistent factors in the stories of success.

### 3.1.5 International students and transformative learning

By the start of the twenty-first century, many institutions, organisations, policy makers, researchers and educationalists had congruent opinions on the role of higher education on the transformation of the individuals towards a critical reflective process of self-discovery of their identity, to become more complete, and prepared to be a lifelong learner and to relate to the world around them (Mezirow, Taylor, & Associates, 2009). Similarly, the influence of the global knowledge economy had caused countries and HE institutions to become cross-cultural, intercultural, multicultural and pluricultural.

Bilingualism and multilingualism are both the reason for and the consequence of various types of student mobility and are valued for the cultural and linguistic diversity that they brings to the HE community and the host country (Cal Garet, 2016; Dawson, Charman, & Kilpatrick, 2013; Gazzola, 2008; Marginson, 2002; Moraña, 2017; UNESCO, 2010; Wertsch & Sarai, 2016, 2017). Nonetheless, the nature of this diversity brings challenges for HE and host countries (Langan, Sheese, & Davidson, 2009, p. 54). In this section I discuss the transformation process of HE students through the lens of transformative learning, their pathways to identity self-discovery, and lifelong learning (Mezirow et al., 2009).

Studies that observe the transition from secondary to post-secondary level in international students agree on the need for a suitable climate that bridges the transition to reduce the impact of culture and academic shock (Intolubbe-Chmil, Spreen, & Swap, 2012; Xu, 2015). This suitable environment is embedded in pluricultural approaches where diversity and cultural differences are appreciated and valued resulting in the successful transition of students. However, these experiences are not exclusive to international student experiences as these 'turning points' have been similarly found in research on domestic non-traditional students in the fields of adult education and in educational gerontology (Findsen, 2007; Langan et al., 2009; West et al., 2013). The reason for transformative learning being more noticeable in international students or non-traditional students may be to the multidimensional factors that influence their success in HE.

The transformation process that is expected to occur in HE has also been observed in terms of identity construction (or deconstruction) in different scenarios, such as the case of international students who are acquiring a second language besides intercultural and cross-cultural competences that result from the experience of full language and culture immersion (Henry & Goddard, 2015; Vélez-Rendón, 2014; Weigl, 2009; Wielgosz & Molyneux, 2015). Similarly, those entering HE in contexts that are alien to their own cultures are challenged to engage in processes of self-discovery or negotiation of their ethnic identities (Bhopal, 2008; Hoffnung, 2011; Parmegiani, 2014; Pérez, 2008; Rivas-Drake, 2008; Vélez-Rendón, 2014). These processes are observed in students who face discriminatory struggles due to their race, gender, socio-economic status, and disabilities such as the cases of female students entering 'non-traditional' careers, students of low income families who enter education through grants and government assistance, and those challenged by stereotypes; their transformation results in their 'empowerment' to change their reality (I. Calderón, Calderón, & Rascón Gómez, 2016; Datnow & Hubbard,

2002; Hoffnung, 2011; Muñoz, 2016; Rosenthal, London, Levy, & Lobel, 2011; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). The cases of non-traditional domestic students have been important in investigating the turning points that encouraged and drove those students to access and persist in HE such as mature students and students of low income families for whom it represents a 'second chance' or a 'once-in-a-life opportunity' to change their reality (Bron & Thunborg, 2011; Rivera Lersundi, 2016; Thunborg, Bron, & Edström, 2013). Some research on domestic students concluded on the benefits of transformative learning which is sought as an ideal goal of HE students (Lairio, Puukari, & Kouvo, 2013; Merrill, 2015). However, is not restrictive to individual experiences as it has also been argued that HE institutions and regions have been moved to transitioning through processes of self-discovery, definition, or redefinition of their identity (Bravo García, 2010; Eslava, 2015; Kersffeld, 2010; Lawler, 2008; Marginson, 2002, 2010; Maturo, 2013; Sadovnik & Semel, 2002).

The final point I discuss here is related to the transformation towards lifelong and autonomous learning which is claimed to be the new role of higher education and a challenge to neo-liberalism. This new role of HE has been expressed through policies that encourage HE to assume the role of preparing individuals to be lifelong and autonomous learners to better respond to a society's communal needs (Loxley, Seery, & Walsh, 2014; Quinn et al., 2005; Watson, 1998). These policies have been translated into practices that challenge authority and empower HE to engage in learner-centred and critical approaches considering individual differences, needs, and aspirations (Loxley et al., 2014; McInnis et al., 1995; Schuetze & Slowey, 2000; Sheridan & Dunne, 2012) despite the resistance of neo-liberalism to such ideas and practices (Lolich, 2011; Metcalf, 2017).

Transformative learning, a branch of Critical Theory and adult education, seeks to promote:

- individual experience (own and/or shared),
- critical reflection (giving priority to experience and identifying what is meaningful for learning - awareness of conflicting thoughts, feelings, actions that may lead to a transformation),
- dialogue with the self and others (promoting and developing transformation),
- holistic orientation (ways of knowing that are affective and relational),
- awareness of context (personal and socio-cultural factors), and
- authentic practice and positive relationships (Mezirow et al., 2009, pp. 4-13)

In the same vein, transformative learning welcomes the appreciation of cultural differences if this involves criticising one's own assumptions and beliefs through a critical reflective process. As Jones puts it:

> our education system is based on the western desire for coherence, authorization, and control. This desire fuels the calls for democratic dialogue, or hearing the voices of the marginalized. These are in effect calls for access to the other, and to the knowledge and experiences of the other (cited in Langan et al., 2009, p. 53)

Therefore, transformative learning offers a way of seeing things that is aligned with the multidimensional and complex realities of international students.

### 3.1.6 Summary of the literature review

**Identifying gaps and reconsidering a lens**

I began this literature review with a discussion on student mobility and its position in the knowledge global economy. I discussed the position and experiences of international students and the multidimensional and complex realities and factors for success in HE with emphasis on the NNS in Anglophone universities. I also noted research that challenged traditional models that are rooted in Tinto's model of retention in HE and then discussed other research based on Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital, Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Latino/a Critical Race Theory. Finally, I proposed the core elements of transformative learning as a lens to understand the multidimensional and complex realities of international students and the construction of their identities through processes of critical reflection and self-discovery towards becoming multilingual lifelong and successful autonomous learners.

Qualitative research employing narrative discourse and story-telling have been found to better reflect the experiences and various realities of international students than quantitative research. That is the case of the accounts of success, persistence and resilience in the story of the Jimenez siblings which seems to contrast Tinto's model with those of LatCRT and Bourdieu (Jimenez-Silva et al., 2009). On the other hand, quantitative studies have been said to outnumber qualitative studies on success in higher education but without their producing evidence on the processes that contribute to students succeeding or failing (de Winter & Dodou, 2011; Downey et al., 2008; El-Alayli

& Baumgardner, 2003; Forsyth & Furlong, 2003; Haddow, 2013; McInnis et al., 1995; Ning & Downing, 2010; J. Parker et al., 2004; J. D. A. Parker et al., 2004; Pinxten et al., 2015; Yorke & Longden, 2008). Thus, quantitative studies on Latino/a students in HE primarily rely on relatively small samples that do not reflect the diversity of the Latino/a population (Crisp et al., 2014) and studies employing mixed methods approaches are scarce (Peralta et al., 2013).

The gaps I identified in the literature are related to the lack of studies that consider students' understandings of success rather than those stated by institutions and researchers. Likewise, most research on the experiences of Latino/a in the US do not reflect the challenges of NNS due to their considering second and third Latino/a generation Latino/a people and those born in the US who were largely exposed to English before they entered Anglophone HE. Moreover, studies that employed LatCRT, CRT, and ethnographic approaches were successful in challenging traditional 'white' models of retention yet were more oriented to achieving changes in policies and stating inequalities than connecting students' views to success in HE (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Oseguera et al., 2009; Peralta et al., 2013; E. Ramirez, 2011). Research in the field of ESL/EFL have been productive in providing intervention strategies that NSS international students may employ to cope with the academic demands of HE and the challenges of social and culture shock, however they do not specifically consider Spanish speakers (Chang, 2012; Hashemi & Bagheri, 2014; M. Hu, 2014; Lee, 2015; Lixia, 2014; Sasaki, 2007).

Transformative learning advocates multiple theoretical orientations that can be grouped into two categories:

1) a focus on personal transformation and growth (individual centred, self-critique, awareness in relationship to others and little consideration of the context and social change) and,
2) fostering transformative learning (social change and personal transformation) (Mezirow et al., 2009, p. 5).

It has also been claimed that transformative learning theory has been primarily applied to foster transformative learning especially in projects of empowerment and social change. Therefore, this study (Study 2) employs concepts of identity construction towards success in HE and second language acquisition as lens, aiming to observe and

describe the transformation and growth of the individuals (successful SSoSA) through their studies in an Anglophone university.
After consideration of the literature there are some assumptions I intend to avoid in this study.

- That Tinto's model of retention is the only and best lens to examine success in HE.
- That resilience and persistence are exclusive and inherited characteristics of Latino/a cultural capital.
- That ethnic identity determines the individual's identity construction.
- That all Latino/a respond to similar characteristics and there are not variations in their realities, ways of coping with difficulties.
- That the focus of this study is to detect [in]equalities in HE instead of being attentive to the aim of the study (describe behaviours leading to success).
- That all NNS acquire L2 in the same way.
- That strategies for L2 acquisition have to be explicitly taught.

However, I am aware of the existence of factors that have resulted from LatinCRT and CRT (discrimination, stereotype, inequalities, and reverse discrimination) that may influence success in HE. Similarly, I welcome contributions from theories on retention, social and cultural capital, resilience, persistence, and second language acquisition in the discussion of the findings.

## 3.2 Methodology

This second study was design to respond research questions 2 and 3. This is at the core of this dissertation and attempts to explore definitions of success from the participants and their pathways towards it.

The specific research questions that led the design of the study and specific methodologies were:

1) How do SSoSA in TCD define success in HE?
2) What were the factors attributed as affecting their success in higher education?
3) What barriers did they encounter and how did they overcome them?
4) How did they cope with language difficulties as non-English native speakers?

Study 2 is an interpretive qualitative study that employed a case study approach (Creswell, 2013; Simons, 2009; G. Thomas, 2013) and multiple methods of data collection. The rationale for the selection of the methodology responded to the gaps detected in the literature review, there being fewer studies of success of Latino/a students in HE of a qualitative kind. A multiple or collective case study permits one to examine various perspectives which suits the study of very diverse groups, allowing one to find commonalities and deviant cases (Simons, 2009). This case study was built around four SSoSA students who self-reported as being successful in their HE studies and volunteered to participate. Data were primarily collected from an online survey, pre-interviews, in-depth audio recorded semi-structured and retrospective interviews, and email correspondence with the participants. Additional information on the context of the participants was obtained from the college website and official reports. The rationale for not employing focus groups was their limited relevance for the purpose of this study which was to investigate individual accounts of success, rather than collective and consensual views. Collected information was cross-case analysed following a thematic analysis approach with open coding (G. Thomas, 2011; Silverman, 2014). After the interviews were transcribed, I proceeded to code them employing a line-by-line approach. Commonalities were observed among the codes and grouped using labels. Codes were regrouped again under the emerged common themes to serve the analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

An egalitarian approach (avoiding conflicts of power between the researcher and the participant) and valuing the participants' voices were vital in this study. Therefore, I employed 'member checking', asking the participants to comment and propose change of language, critical comments, and observations on my interpretations and representation of their cases (Creswell, 2013). Narrative and story-telling have been found to be of paramount importance in a case study in bringing a lively coherence to the cases, therefore, I employed a narrative (story-telling) approach to present each case (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Shyam Akula, 2016; Simons, 2009, G. Thomas, 2011). This study observed a bilingual/cross-cultural approach, therefore, respondents to the survey and interviewees were invited to decide the language of their choice to answer the questions in the surveys and the interviews. This implied translation of the data collection instruments and the responses for the presentation of the findings which I did observing recommendations for open-ended survey questions and narrative translation giving primary value to keeping the respondents' and participants' meanings in their preferred language (Behr, 2015; Piazzoli, 2015a, 2015b). I explain below the data

collection instruments' development, the criteria for selecting participants, the process of data collection, analysis and presentation of results, and ethical considerations.

### 3.2.1 Development of data collection instruments

The purpose of this study [Study 2] was to describe a profile of self-perceived successful SSoSA in an Anglophone university through a case study approach. The instruments developed to collect data were: a) an online survey to recruit participants and explore views on the nature of success in HE, b) a semi-structure retrospective interview protocol. The survey was adapted from the instrument developed for study 1 [English/Spanish version] and the interview protocol followed recommendations for qualitative and more in particular for case studies (National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, 2003; Simons, 2009). The rationale for employing an online survey was to reach international undergraduate students, seeking prospective participants and was already explained in the previous chapter (Table 3).

a) Undergraduate international student survey/questionnaire:

An online survey/questionnaire was developed, informed by other studies on the experiences of international students and adapted from the survey/questionnaire developed for the preliminary study (Study 1) in the previous chapter. The survey was developed using Survey Monkey which allowed me to have tools that permitted unlimited numbers of surveys, unlimited numbers of questions and responses in each survey and more survey design and analysis tools than the free version employed in study 1. The first question in the questionnaire asked the respondent for his/her preferred language (English/Spanish) with a link to the version of his or her choice. The second question asked for informed consent to participate in the survey; the purpose of question 3 was eliminate postgraduate students, referring them to the end of the survey; questions 2-5 sought demographic information: age, gender, faculty/school, year/graduated. Questions 6-10 involved Likert scales ranging from 1 to 5 (i.e. from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) (Fink, 1995; Vagias, 2006). These questions asked about the students' views of success based on the findings of Study 1 (Vagias, 2006). Questions 11 and 12 asked the respondents' views as to why they were successful students with an open-ended question asking for the reason of the response. Question 13–15 were two or multiple-choice questions for participants to select country of origin and express willingness to participate further in in-depth interviews. Question 16 asked for contact information in case they decided to

participate in the interviews. The survey was written in English and later translated into Spanish and revised by Spanish/English bilingual colleagues. Both versions were available for respondents, as they preferred. Additionally, an introductory note for email distribution with a link to the survey was designed (see Appendix 6). In order to provide more information about the study and locate potential participants for the in-depth interviews, two videos and a poster were prepared: one video displayed information through a comic strip and the second one had live narration and pictures. Both videos and the poster were presented in local and international conferences seeking out comments and suggestions for corrections and improvements. The online survey was piloted on five people (n=2 English speakers; n=3 English/Spanish bilingual) selected through a convenience sampling approach to make corrections on the survey before its launch.

b) Retrospective interview protocol:

A semi-structured questionnaire and protocol for the interview were prepared following recommendation from the literature (National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, 2003; Simons, 2009; Burton et al., 2014). Simons points at the central importance of the interview for the construction of a case considering purposeful interaction to uncover unobserved feelings and events (Simons, 2009, p. 43). The introduction to the interview included information to serve the analysis of the data: date, start/finish time, place of the interview, participant's name, demographic information, and assigned code. The heading of the interview protocol included a section for the participant to read so he/she could give informed consent observing ethical policies of the School. Questions for the in-depth interview explored themes that emerged from the literature review and the preliminary online survey. Questions were mostly open-ended with a few prompts in case the respondent was not providing information related to the subject of the study (see Appendix 7). Questions sought to have participants retrospectively and critically reflect on their stories of success during their undergraduate studies by employing higher levels of thinking and introspection similar to those employed in transformative learning (Mezirow et al., 2009).

The questions for both data collection instruments were produced in English. The process of translation was similar to that followed in Study 1, but incorporated observations from the reviewed literature. Back translation and performance translation were primarily employed (Behr, 2015; Sinaiko & Brislin, 1973). I translated the questions

which were proof-read by two bilingual colleagues which whom I revised and agreed the final Spanish version.

### 3.2.2 Sampling and data collection process

In this section I explain the context and rational for the selection of the participants of this study, the purposeful participant recruitment process and the administration of data collection instruments, and a description of the participants.

#### 3.2.2.1 The context and the rational for the selection of participants

The purpose of this study was to collect stories of successful SSoSA who were pursuing their degrees in Anglophone universities in Europe. This study focused on undergraduate students coming from the Spanish speaking countries of South America; these being: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. After selecting the case study approach and the cases I wanted to examine, I followed a purposeful sampling method to find my participants (Creswell, 2013).

The rationale for selecting Ireland was its being the place of my residence during my doctoral study and the restriction of my student visa which did not allow me to travel to the UK or any other European country. Therefore, my first step was to find out numbers of students from my selected countries in Irish HE institutions. The Institute for Statistics of the UNESCO (2016) provides annual reports of the global flow of tertiary level student mobility for all the countries in the world with information on the countries of origin of international students who are enrolled in third level education. I show in Table 27 information of the numbers of international students who came from my selected countries in 2014 and 2015.

| Country of Origin | 2014 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|
| Chile | 11 | 14 |
| Colombia | 10 | 11 |
| Venezuela | 7 | 7 |
| Peru | <5 | 3 |
| Ecuador | <5 | 2 |
| Bolivia | <5 | 0 |
| Argentina | <5 | 7 |
| Paraguay | <5 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Uruguay | <5 | 3 |
| Total of overseas students in Ireland | 12,861 | 15,815 |

**Table 27. Numbers of selected South American students in Irish Tertiary education for 2014 and 2015**

Although the report does not discriminate between undergraduate and postgraduate students and part time students, it gives evidence of the small population of students coming from those countries that were the subject of this study into Irish tertiary education.

I further investigated documents that were available on the HEA website and that reported on international students in Irish HE institutions by gender, type of study (full/part time students), and country of origin. Table 28 contains information drawn from these reports for 2010/11 to 2014/15. Only the report for 2013/14 distinguished between undergraduate from postgraduate students.

| Country of Origin | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14* | 2014/15 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Argentina | 5 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| Bolivia | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Chile | 1 | 5 | 10 | 5 | 18 |
| Colombia | 3 | 5 | 9 | 2 | 10 |
| Ecuador | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Paraguay | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Peru | 2 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| Uruguay | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Venezuela | 1 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 5 |
| Total of FT students | 13 | 20 | 32 | 10 | 51 |

**Table 28. Enrolment of selected countries in HEA funded HE institutions (universities)**

This case study was based on Trinity College Dublin [TCD]. TCD is highly ranked among universities in Europe and according to Knight's classification of providers of cross-border HE is in the category of traditional providers with a focus on transnational education (Gürüz, 2011; Knight, 2005). The rationale for selecting TCD for this case study was explained in the introduction of this chapter: theoretical and logistic reasons. Another reason for selecting TCD was because it has a history of academic excellence and research that positions it as a leader and a model in HE in Ireland and worldwide

(McGurk, 1992; O'Gorman, 2017; Parkes, 2004; David Webb & McDowell, 1982). Its reputation is recognised in official documents that report students' reasons for choosing TCD. The most frequent reasons can be listed as follows.

- The quality of teaching.
- The reputation of course at Trinity.
- International reputation.
- Employment prospects.
- The content of the courses at Trinity.
- Its research reputation.
- Its city location.
- Social life, sports and societies offered there (Geoghegan, 2012, p. 16)

Reports by the HEA informed me of the universities that were preferred for international full-time students from my selected countries. The five most preferred in 2014/15 were: University College Dublin [UCD] (n= 13 students), National University of Ireland, Galway [NUIG] (n=12), University College Cork [UCC] (n= 9 students), Trinity College Dublin (n=10), and National University of Ireland, Maynooth [NUIM] (n=4 students). Although the reports did not discriminate undergraduate from postgraduate students, I decided to start seeking participants in TCD. In the event that I got no participants in TCD, my next option would be UCD due to its also being in Dublin.

I further located numbers of prospective participants for my study. I examined the Senior Lecturer's Annual Reports for the years 2010 to 2014 which included data on new entrant full time students distinguished by nationality or country of origin (Geoghegan, 2012, 2013, 2014; Martin, 2015, 2016) though some South American students have dual nationality. For example, some Ecuadorians born in Spain may have Spanish passport but may self-identify as an Ecuadorian. Similarly, Ecuadorians may get an EU passport for being married to someone from the EU and would identify as being EU students to be exempted from non-EU tuition fees and pay EU fees. Therefore, these reports may not reflect the exact numbers of enrolled students and their nationalities. However, these data were sufficient for my purposes. Table 29 shows the number of new entrants in my selected countries from 2010 to 2014.

| Nationality | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Argentina | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chile | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Peru | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Venezuela | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 |

**Table 29. Undergraduate new entrant data by nationality in TCD**

#### 3.2.2.2 Participants recruitment and data collection

After noticing that empirical studies on success in HE primarily examined first year students who were moving to third level education and because I wanted to get deep views on the journey towards success, I decided to observe those students who were about to graduate or recently graduated. According to the reports of the Senior Lecturers for 2014/2015, there would be at least four relevant undergraduate students in TCD nearly finishing their course.

Gaining access to research participants relies heavily on the stakeholders (Burton et al., 2014) and getting access to research sites. I contacted the Academic Registry and the International Student Office and provided information about my study and my need for information on the students, however due to TCD's duty of care to the privacy of its students and under the Data Protection Act 1988, the locations and details of prospective participants could not be released to me. Therefore, I relied on the information in the annual reports and started actively seeking SSoSA in TCD. Listed below are some of the steps I took to find and recruit my participants.

- I developed and launched an online survey whose purpose was twofold: collecting information on international students' views of success in HE and recruiting (locating) prospective participants. The online survey was available from 24/11/2015 to 24/07/2017.

- I integrated into societies and groups in the college that would give me access to the participants (this was a useful piece of advice from one of my fellow students). I joined the International Student Society, the Student Parent Society, and the Mature Students' Society.

- I produced two videos (one of them resulted from one of the modules of the Innovation Academy Programme) and two posters (one presented as part of one of the modules of the School's research programme). In one of the videos and

the posters I employed a non-traditional way to communicate research in the humanities, comic strips[67]. In the posters and videos, I introduced my research, presented early findings and invited prospective participants to contact me or people they knew who would meet the requirements for participation in my study (snowball sampling).

- I gave presentations on my research and its purpose in the School's conferences (i.e. Thesis-in-Three, PGR Conference of the School of Education, Discovery Research Night Dublin). In some of these I presented my videos and posters.

- I uploaded the videos on my YouTube channel and included a link to them in the online survey, and emails.

- I contacted the International Student Officer and the SU Communication Officer asking then to send massive emails with information on my study and invitations to participate with a link to the online survey, and videos. Similarly, I posted an invitation to participate on the college's online notice board. Appendix 8 shows the invitation email.

Due to there being few responses to my survey I relaunched it several times. I noticed that students responded within a week after each launch. Therefore, I collected data in April/2016 (n=8), May/2016 (n=9)[68], March/2017 (n=7), July/2017 (n=2). In total 26 students responded the online survey[69]. Some preferred the English version (n=24), and fewer the Spanish version (n=2). One student decided not to give consent to participate and three did not fulfil the requirement of being undergraduate or recently graduated. Therefore, I got 22 respondents who were eligible and gave consent to take part in the

[67] The comic strip followed the guidelines of Selina Lock, one of the speakers at the first Applied Comics Network event in London in May, 2015. As part of her presentation, she introduced my comic strip and posted it on the Applied Comics Network's website (Lock, 2013, 2014, 2015). The comic strip was proofread by a NS and I designed a survey to collect information and commentaries on the comic strip. The comments frequently mentioned its being: clear, engaging, clever, attractive, humorous, original, creative, and effective.

[68] By May 2016, I had contacted two eligible respondents who expressed interest in participating (one male, one female). I decided to keep trying to get at least two more, therefore I left the survey open.

[69] Some of the respondents who eventually became the participants in the interviews, were firstly contacted through other ways than the online survey (for example, through a mutual friend). After contacting them (personally or through email), I invited them to complete the online survey.

online survey. Only 21 respondents progressed to providing demographic information (n=15, female, n=6, male), only 20 respondents gave their Faculty/School. Seventeen respondents progressed to answer questions 6-12. Only five were from my selected countries, and four showed interest in taking part in the interview (n=2, female; n=2, male). Students who chose to respond in Spanish (question 1) decided to go back to the English version and completed the survey in English.

I contacted the respondents who provided their contact information and arranged a pre-interview to further explain the purpose of my study and time/place for the audio recorded interview. One respondent did not provide contact information to be contacted for the interview despite expressing his willingness to participate. Therefore, I employed an email provided by a friend which enable me to contact him and arrange a time and place to personally explain the purpose of the interview. Communications to arrange time and place for the audio-recorded interview were undertaken through email correspondence (Appendix 9). Also, a debriefing email was sent after the participation.

No respondents or interviewees were offered any type of reward for their participation. Through my emails and conversations with prospective participants I explained the value of the findings of the study as lying in presenting the stories of successful South American students and to better inform prospective SSoSA before entering college.

#### 3.2.2.3 Description of the participants

The data for this study were primarily collected through an online survey and in in-depth interviews. I describe below the characteristics of the respondents and participants who were interviewed.

a) Respondents to the online survey:

Twenty-one respondents (n=15, female; n=6, male) provided demographic information. Nineteen students were enrolled in undergraduate programmes (n=13, female; n=6, male) and two were graduated/alumni (n=2, female). Of the nineteen undergraduate students five females were in Y1, five in Y2 (n=3, female; n=2, male), two in Y3 (n=1, female; n=1, male), and seven in Y4 (n=4, female; n=3, male). Table 30 shows the age distribution of the respondents.

| Age | Female (n=15) | Male (n=6) |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 18-20 | 7 | 2 |
| 21-23 | 5 | 0 |
| 24-26 | 2 | 3 |
| +26 | 1 | 1 |

**Table 30. Age distribution of respondents**

The students' faculties/schools were mostly in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (n=13), secondly, in the Engineering, Mathematics and Science (n=5) and a small group in Health (n=2).

b) Participants in the in-depth retrospective interviews:

Four participants (n=2, female; n=2, male) who voluntarily expressed their willingness to participate in the study through an in-depth interview, were contacted and interviewed following the interview protocol. Two of them (1 female, age= 25, 1 male, age=25) entered in 2012 through the International Foundation Programme which was managed by Study Group Dublin (a UK education provider). Students in this Programme had to complete and pass a nine-month course (a qualifying course) that included subjects such as Mathematics, Economics, Business, English for Academic Purpose, and other subjects depending on the students' programme preferences: a) Foundation Year in Business, Economic and Social Science [BESS], b) Foundation Year in Science and Engineering (Martin, 2015). After successful completion of the course, the students could progress to TCD or UCD. As the annual report of the Senior Lecturer noted, in September 2012 the first group of non-EU students (n=9) were admitted via the International Foundation Course (Geoghegan, 2012). The two students who entered through this programme followed degree courses in BESS (one in Economics and Business and the other in Sociology and Philosophy). They did not have EU citizenship, therefore they paid international student fees. They came to Ireland for reasons other than to enter HE.

### 3.2.3 Process of data treatment, analysis, presentation of findings and translation

The data I collected for this case study primarily consisted in responses to an online survey, pre-interviews with the four participants, in-depth interviews, casual conversations and email correspondence with the participants. Data were extensive and purposeful collected.

The online survey was completed in 5-7 minutes. The demographic and closed (forced answer) questions were tabulated and presented using descriptive narrative, tables and

charts (Oliver, 2011). Open-ended questions were coded, grouped and analysed following the same thematic analysis approach employed in Study 1 used (Fink, 1995; Jansen, 2010; Silverman, 2014). I employed open and closed coding on open-ended responses to the questionnaires. After coding I used labels to group codes under common themes related to meanings of success, factors, challenges, and strengths. Finally, findings are presented using tables with accounts of more frequent themes. As no respondent completed the survey in Spanish there was no need to translate.

The in-depth interviews had a duration of 1 to 1.5 hours and were audio recorded and transcribed. Due to the nature of this cross-cultural study and because my purpose was not to examine the participants' language competence, I employed a denaturalised transcription approach (Mero-Jaffe, 2011) I employed the assistance of a free-trial version of Dragon Naturally Speaking v13.0 software and a free version of InqScribe. I referred to on-site notes and memos to compensate for not using verbatim transcription which offers valuable insight into the interviewer-interviewees interaction, emotions, intonations, emphasis, and context of the interview (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003). Similarly, I proceeded to transcribe the interviews within a week to have fresh memories of the interaction, emotions, and meanings. Despite there not being a standard transcription procedure to better serve the purposes of qualitative study, proof reading is always suggested as a good practice (McLellan et al., 2003; Mero-Jaffe, 2011; Piazzoli, 2015b). Member checking served to allow the interviewees to proofread, check meaning and corroborate my interpretations of their cases. Likewise, they proofread the quotes I employed. As in the surveys, participants were asked their language of preference for the interview. One of the participants decided to conduct the interview in Spanish, however the approach for the analysis followed recommended procedures for case study analysis (Creswell, 2013; Simons, 2009; Silverman, 2014; G. Thomas, 2011, 2013). The transcribed interviews were analysed in the language of delivery to avoid losing the meaning in the participant's narrative. I read and listened to the interviews in the language of delivery and further coded using nodes in English. I primarily employed line-by-line manual coding of the transcriptions and followed the categorisation in themes with assistance of a free-trial version of NVivo11. Commonalities were observed among the codes and grouped using labels of different colours. Codes were regrouped again under the emerged common themes to serve the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. From the common themes, main themes emerged. The process continued until I had all the codes under main themes. In addition, unexpected and deviant themes were considered. For the presentation of the cases, I employed a previous within-case analysis, followed by a cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2013). The rational that led me to include the case studies in this dissertation was twofold: a) to give

the reader the flavour of my four participants' lived experiences (with whom any international student could easily empathise), and b) to remark the value of the participants' voices in this study as *individuals* and not mere *subjects of study*. Footnotes were employed to provide supplementary information, clarify, and state cultural differences between the host country culture and the culture of the interviewee (Oliver, 2004, p. 73).

### 3.2.4 Ethical considerations

An overview of ethical considerations that were central to this doctoral dissertation were presented in Section 1.8. However, I further refer to certain specific considerations in this part of the study.

There were no participants under 18 involved in this study therefore there was no need to ask for parental informed consent. All the respondents and participants in the study gave informed consent through the space provided in the data collection instruments (survey, interview protocol). All participants voluntarily participated in the study although I had been very intentionally and purposefully seeking them around college. None of the participants felt intimidated, pressurised or harassed and were open to participate after they learned the purpose of the study. Similarly, I did not pressurise college stakeholders to provide any type of information on the prospective participants and participants. There is one particular ethical consideration related to the protection of the privacy, safety and anonymity of the participants. By 2012-2017 the political situation in several countries of South American was unstable and some participants were reluctant to become involved in this research for that reason and certainly did not want their countries of origin explicit[70]. I have thus not identified their countries of origin by name in the text that follows. I have employed pseudonyms that were agreed with the participants. I showed empathy and sympathy when they were sharing their personal experiences at a more intimate level with demonstrations of their frustrations, emotions, and sense of achievements. I was ready to place the participants' wellbeing before the aims of my study. I debriefed the researcher-participant interaction and continued friendly relations

[70] https://www.listindiario.com/las-mundiales/2017/04/25/463265/protestas-contabilizan-23-muertes-en-venezuela
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/08/venezuela-hugo-chavez-ruben-avila-interview-political-chaos
http://www.hispantv.com/noticias/argentina/283711/argentina-inicia-agosto-marchas-protestas
http://www.eldiario.es/internacional/Sudamerica-vez-violenta-insegura_0_399660706.html

with some of the participants. I was always cautious of not disclosing information that may compromise the identity of the participants who were always valued as at the core of this study.

Despite this case study being conducted in the college where I pursued my doctoral degree, this did not compromise my critical interpretations. In addition, TCD was not funding my study or my college fees. None of the participants were offered or received financial compensation for their participation in this study.

## 3.3 Findings

The findings of this study are presented in two sections: a) the findings from the online survey, and b) the four cases that were constructed from the collected data (survey, pre-interviews, in-depth audio recorded interview, electronic communications with the participants, conversations with the participants out of the interviews (shadowing), college official documents and informative websites, and researcher notes, memos, and observations.

### 3.3.1 Views on success for international students in TCD

Seventeen (n=11, female; n=6, male) respondents answered questions that asked about their views of the nature of success. Most respondents (n=11, female; n=5, male) agreed on the point that their success in HE was going to allow them to get a good job or pursue further study after college, whereas one male respondent disagreed. However, their views on the likelihood of entering a profession after their college success were not uniform. Thirteen (n=9, female; n=4, male) believed they were able to enter a profession after college while three disagreed (n=2, female; n=1, male) and one male respondent remained neutral. However, their views of the nature of success related to high achievement were divided. Six (n=4, female; n=2, male) agreed in perceiving success in terms of getting high scores/grades, five disagreed (n=3, female; n=2 male) and six were neutral (n=4, female; n=2, male). Likewise, they did not have a common position on the nature of success as completion of a degree in the same college and in the normally expected time. I devised a table to better illustrate the variations in their views.

| Views of the nature of success in HE | Agree | | Neutral | | Disagree | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | M | F | M | F | M |
| Ability to get a job/further studies | 11 | 5 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Ability to enter a career/profession | 9 | 4 | - | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| High achievement Getting high/top grades | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Completion of a degree in the same college | 8 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Completion of a degree in a normal time | 8 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |

**Table 31. Views of the nature of success in HE for international students (n=11, female; n=6, male)**

An analysis of twelve responses to open-ended questions regarding the rationales for their views serves to better reflect those various views. Sixteen (n=10, female, n=6, male) out of seventeen participants self-reported being successful undergraduate students. Some responses were very profound and evidenced a deep critical analysis of the benefits of HE while other were simpler yet evidently sincere, such as ‘because I am not failing’. Inclusive, the student who reported not being successful evidenced a deep reflective response by attributing it to a ‘poor academic commitment’.

The responses were open-coded, categorised and most frequent themes were divided into two groups. Despite the questions not being intended to explore views on the factors for success, it emerged from the responses. The two groups are: a) evidence of transformation/impact of HE, and b) factors for success.

| Evidence of transformation/impact of HE<br>"I have become…" | Factors for success<br>"How?" |
|---|---|
| Personal growth (n=7): lifelong learner, thinker, communication skills, reflective, active learner, knowledgeable, reflective decision maker | Drive (n=3): motives, determination, interest, persistence |
| Sense of achievement (n=4): awareness of the challenge, increased self-esteem, self-confidence, ability to overcome difficulties | Academic commitment (n=2): balancing work/college, deciding over social/college life, not poor commitment |
| View of the world (n=3): cultural tolerance, widened horizons, view of social interactions | College social atmosphere (n=2): engagement |
| Value of L2/gain for the country of origin: (n=3) | Institutional factors (n=2): concern for the student welfare, support, quality of academic staff, encouragement |
| View of social relations (n=3): balancing college work/social, networking, social college life | Positive experience (n=2): value of the experience |
| Recognition (n=2): benefitting from the prestige of the college/lecturers/career, perceived as knowledgeable, getting high grades/top marks | |
| Job progression (n=2): becoming able to get a good job | |
| Ability to enter a career (n=1): improved skills, recognition of the degree, recognition of achievement | |

**Table 32. Views on the nature of success for international students (n=12)**

### 3.3.2 Stories of success for SSoSA students in TCD

The cases of the four SSoSA: María, Carlos, Laura, and Plablo, were constructed through their responses to the recruiting survey, pre-interview (informative about the purpose of the study, gaining trust), an in-depth recorded interview, and email exchanges. The cases are presented using a narrative approach connecting the salient topics mentioned by the participants and that emerged during our interactions. I employed a member checking approach and received commentaries from the

participants through exchange of emails and using the review tools on word document. All the participants lively and reflectively contributed to get me access to their stories of success. Getting their comments and revisiting some of my interpretations give me assurance that these cases fairly bring their voice into this study. A critical comment to research to the existent research on Latino/a in HE observed the poor use of quotes from interviews to example the participants experiences as a weakness of many qualitative research (Crisp et al., 2014). Therefore, in the construction of the cases, I am critically generous in including the participants' quotes in this study without overloading it as it may turn the cases into a copy of the transcribed interviews.

The cases are presented in the order the participants were interviewed without any particular purpose or intention and I present them in four separate subsections of this chapter. The rational that led me to include the case studies in this dissertation was twofold: a) to give the reader the flavour of my four participants' lived experiences (with whom any international student could easily empathise), and b) to remark the value of the participants' voices in this study as *individuals* and not mere *subjects of study*.

The agreed pseudonyms are: Maria, Carlos, Laura and Pablo. Due to ethical and safety issues the names of their home countries are disguised as XY in the narratives. Table shows some demographic and historic information on the participants.

| **Participant** | **Age** | **Gender** | **Marital status** | **Entry route** | **Degree** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MARIA | 25 | F | single | International Foundation Programme | Philosophy and Politics |
| CARLOS | 25 | M | single | International Foundation Programme | Business and Economics (Year 4) |
| LAURA | 39 | F | married | Mature student office | Genetics |
| PABLO | 33 | M | single | Mature student office | Psychology |

**Table 33. Information of the participants in case studies (Study2)**

#### 3.3.2.1 Case study 1: MARIA

> *-We, as international students, have the power to bring a bit of a balance to the general statements about the world -*
>
> Maria (pseudonym)

Maria was 25 years old at the time of the interview; she graduated in 2016, having entered in 2012 to participate in the Politics, Philosophy, Economics and Sociology [PPES] programme. On successful completion of her course she was awarded a BA degree in Philosophy and Politics. We conversed before, during and after the interview, and through exchange of emails. This evidenced her active and reflective personality full of emotion, sensitivity and the determination to overcome challenges.

Maria self-identified as coming from a lower middle-class background because she was born in a province in the desert region of her home country. She said that most of the decisions about her life were made because her mum had her at a very young age (16) and because of her mum's studies and work. For example, her moving to the capital city, and moving to Ireland. She said that her mum had difficulties at university as a result of her being a woman and was not allowed to do complete thesis there. Maria's mum therefore applied for and obtained a scholarship to undertake her research in Physics in Trinity College in Ireland. Maria, her younger sister and her mum left their country and came to Ireland in 2009 therefore, Maria did not finish secondary schooling in her home country and she said that she did not know any English at all on arrival in Ireland. Maria's preparation before coming to Ireland was restricted due to the short notice. And on being assigned an extra homework to prepare a presentation for the class on the Irish political system by one of her school's teachers, she found she understood nothing as the names were difficult to pronounce and had no meaning to her.

Maria thought that adapting to Ireland was going to be easier due to her previous experiences of moving home often. However, initially, she felt that she left everything she had behind and it was 'tough' and 'challenging' and she became depressed. After overcoming this she felt ready to move anywhere in the world, 'unless I go to Mars', she joked. Maria's reflected on her schooling in her home country. She attended had eight different private and public coeducational schools. She thought that changing schools gave her flexibility in adapting to different educational systems and being open to changes.

She said that Leonardo da Vinci [1452-1519] influenced her in her earlier years, before she attended college and her mum influenced her during her college years. Maria's mum held a postgraduate degree in Physics and Metallurgy. She had had little contact with her dad but she believed he had not finished college. When her family came to Ireland, it took a long time for Maria to understand the Irish school and HE system. She thought that working on her English on her own was going to be enough to allow her access to college but then she found out that she needed to undertake a pre-entry course. She was also advised to go back and attend secondary school in Ireland and obtain the local qualifications necessary for admission to college but she felt she was going to be at some disadvantage because the Irish system was different to her home country's. She entered the International Foundation Programme [IFP] in 2011 and after passing it, she had the option to attend either University College Dublin [UCD] or Trinity. She chose Trinity because of its reputational standing and because her mum was working there. Maria was interested in pursuing a career in visual arts or social sciences but the only options in the humanities were PPES and Psychology. She said that she was not attracted to Psychology as a career so she chose PPES.

Maria said she found the courses in PPES hard, having thought it would be easier. She said that before entering her course, she knew nearly nothing as to what Politics and Sociology were about. Little did she know that she was going to 'love' Philosophy the way she came to. She had had Philosophy in her secondary school back in her home country but she said the way of teaching it was totally different and she did not understand it as a subject despite scoring well in examinations.

Maria recalled her IFP experience and said it was good. She did not feel she learned anything new in Mathematics. However, she admitted that she learned things that prepared her for college in Ireland, especially in her Academic English Skills module. In her Academic Skills module she was taught how to write essays, how to read by skimming and get what one wants from a text, how to structure a paragraph, and how to prepare a proper bibliography. Because of the differences between this and what she had learned in her home country she found the experience 'mind blowing'. She thought it was shocking to her because in her home country the system is not based on essays writing but on short answer questions and multiple-choice questions. She also mentioned modules that were new to most of the international students and that she had to pass but which were not related to what she ended up studying, such as Accounting. Maria mentioned that the IFP experience was good because her classmates all were

international students, all were learning English and all were in the same situation of not understanding the Irish system but willing to go to college.

Maria said that learning to write in a more structured way was something very new to her, however, she admitted that it had helped her to organise her thoughts. After reflecting on this theme, she mentioned that when reading material from her country she finds it to be 'all over the place' most of the time. This passage illustrates her reasoning as to why there was a difference in these writing styles.

> I feel like actually in retrospective that when I read work that's from my country it is really all over the place most of the time. I don't think we think about that. I think, we think about talking more poetically and adding a lot of adjective so it sounds very fleshy. Whereas here, it is always more like just get to the point, get to the point, and do it in a more orderly manner.

Maria is a passionate reader. She recalled the moment her mum got her a book (despite not having much money) and since then she felt that reading had become part of her identity, which she saw as a 'noble' thing. Her 'love' for books had helped her to obtain good results during her studies. She had access to the library during her IFP year (2011) and learned how the library worked through the library tours. She understood databases, search engines, and the process for asking for any material that was not in the library. She said she spent a lot of her time in the library.

Maria felt that her lifestyle changed when she moved to Ireland. She said that she felt 'freer' in her home country to go out with her friends whereas in Ireland she did not go out as often. She explained that not knowing what things were like and because she did not have other family around, she minded her younger sister when her mum had to be out. She said in her home country she had her granny and other family members to help, but in Ireland there was only her mum and her. Because of her activities in her 'new life' in Ireland and the time difference (around six hours), she could not easily maintain contact with her friends in her home country.

Maria thought that she had to deal with the challenges of college and also those of settling into a new country with very little preparation. She referred to cultural issues that made her 'reformulate' her identity. She mentioned being popular with friends and funny (she liked telling jokes) in her home country but in Ireland, because of the linguistic and cultural barriers, she found that she was not 'funny anymore'. She could not refer to

cultural issues humorously because her college peers would not understand her. This was shocking and sad for her. She said she became more serious.

Adapting to college social life and making friends was hard for Maria too. She thought that Trinity College was primarily attended by students from a 'specific economic background' of a kind that she would only have found in a university for privileged people in her home country. In addition to the language and cultural barriers, she found many other barriers to entering into what she called 'Trinity culture'. Because of having to baby-sit her younger sister and due to struggles to earn money to pay her fees, she could not take part in activities with her course peers like partying, going out and travelling abroad to concerts. She felt some of her peers could not understand her financial situation and she, likewise, could not understand why they were so relaxed about money issues. Once, she was told that her family was 'violating her human rights' because she had to mind her sister. She said it was 'shocking' and started feeling 'left out', 'resentful' and 'depressed'. She found herself joining a 'betweeners group' and she was able to accept this, however, she realised there were barriers when trying to make friends, especially during her first years. As she felt the situation was affecting her academic performance, she decided not to think too much about it and simply kept going. When asked how she overcame it, she responded by saying that it had changed by her third and fourth year when she got more involved with some students of Philosophy who were different to the students in Economics and Politics. Maria said the friends she made in Philosophy were open-minded. This small group of friends she made were from various backgrounds and spent much time together. She felt 'safe' when she found them. She recommended finding the right people in college even though, as in her case, this can take some time to do. Maria thought that, in general, her college peers during the first year were not interested in trying to understand her identity as a Latin American student. She referred to the music she liked and her sense of humour. She felt she had very little space to show 'what' she was. She admitted that she had changed some of her behaviour simply to 'fit in'.

During her first years in Ireland and in college Maria faced loneliness and did not share the struggles she was going through because she did not want to disappoint her family or be seen as 'ungrateful' for not going making the most of the opportunity she was had to travel abroad. However, she thought she learned to be resilient by emulating the examples of resilience in her family.

> Maria: I mean... my mom would be a very big example of resilience actually she never gave up and she is still like, she never gives up.
>
> Interviewer: So she is like a role model you saw in her that you were like ...
>
> Maria: Especially the role of women in my family. Barely any man ever stayed in our family. Like ever one gets pregnant and they are just oh really awful people and then they break off the family and you were just all women...and so ...one of the narratives of the family is like we are strong women so I couldn't be the weak link. I couldn't disappoint. I think that's the way I see it. My mom would have been very tough and with that point like if she would have listened to me that I was sad, she would have been like 'No, we are doing this together and we have to do it'.

Maria became emotional in this part of the interview when talking about her feelings of sadness and loneliness. I asked her if she wanted to stop the interview there but she went on and said that she found relief when eventually she made friends and they helped her by telling about free counselling service in college. She also felt less 'alone' when realising her Irish student peers were going through the same struggles. She recommended trying not to be or feel alone, as it helped her a lot to find relief. In her words:

> I mean eventually I made friends. And, as I said before, and actually it was my friends and talking to them that got me to go to counselling because a lot of them actually go to counselling themselves. And they are Irish so completely unrelated so it was not like oh we are all international students so it was like nooo like everyone and they were like "it's so good" (the counselling). And actually uhm I can't disclose who was but one my friends actually worked at NiteLine [a free advice service for students] and so she is constantly saying you should do this, you should do that. And that helped a lot 'cos ultimately I think when you go abroad you have to make sure you are not alone. Or you don't feel alone. Because once sad is aside it is a lot easier just to move forward. Third and fourth year were like a breeze. Well and that's it.

Maria claimed that in her home country, she would not have developed the life skills she counted on now. She also said that her college experience would have been different in her home country for several reasons. In Trinity tutors cared about academic work, but also offered encouragement and support by reminding their students they are capable and taking an interest in students' wellbeing. There were also opportunities to seek out free counselling if one had any emotional issues. Maria responded to the online survey

by noting: ‘This is a level of caring that I know does not exist in my country’. In the interview she added that she had all the necessary resources to excel in her college work, she managed the Library resources very well and had good relationship with the staff members of her School (head, tutor, lecturers, and supervisor). She remarked that the staff members were supportive, and caring. This she illustrated by giving an example of help she had received financially.

> So they [staff member] were making sure I was having enough sleep and I have an email that examples that. My head of department saying ‘Aare you eating? Are you going to the gym? Are you doing something that's fun?’ and so when I needed they would give me extensions, which I hated, but you know, if it wasn't possible I would have extensions.

When I asked her about her relationship with the teaching staff, she said they were very professional, qualified, knowledgeable, accessible, and open. She recommended participating in class, asking questions, showing interest, contacting them, talking to them, and being respectful. She preferred to sit at the front of the class and it could give her more opportunities to listen better, be alert, interact with her lecturers, and feel less shy when asking questions.

She only recalled one bad experience. This was an incident with one the PhD students acting as a teaching assistant [TA] in Sociology. Maria mentioned that the TA told the group of her participation in some research undertaken in the area Maria’s family was from and where she was brought up. Maria felt the TA was referring to the people of her region in a very ‘patronising’ way and some of the information given showed that the TA had misunderstood. When Maria made this point in the class, the TA did not take criticism well and there was a row. Maria said it was a serious matter that the TA did not want to consider what Maria had explained and considered important, causing tension in the class. The TA had:

> a completely [wrong perception of the people in the region] and ...it's funny because she was like ‘I went there and I had a PhD so I know everything about it’ and you are like ‘No you don't, I lived there for seventeen years and my family is from there and that's not the way it is’. And so I think because I got, I think people... [wrongly believed] that ‘I was being confrontational’ and I wasn't allowing the class to continue. But I felt that it was very important to me [original emphasis] to say something I was like ‘I'm not going to stand here and just accept that’ and my classmates said because... [the situation] got so tense ...I feel like no one really felt like they could say anything. Because they would get bad grades.

Maria was not afraid of making her voice heard because she felt nothing could happen to her, given her record of good grades. She recalled she felt sad that the TA did not apologise and ignored the issue. Maria wrote about this particular topic in an essay and obtained 'not too bad' a grade for it. Maria mentioned what she wrote in her feedback about the course for her TA and she reflected on what she had learned.

> Maria: Yeah you have to write [a course review]…there are lots of points and you do a very thorough review of the course. So mine was extremely, you know, I was fair. Like: so many things were really cool but it really discredits your professional ability to be saying stuff like that. (Pause). So I mentioned that. And I said that that was unacceptable. You can't just (pause) teach [original emphasis] that and especially you have to be aware if you are teaching anthropological things to students that are from that place or make sure you...
>
> Interviewer: Are giving the right information?
>
> Maria: And, and, and watch your language! You can't just. (Pause.)
>
> Interviewer: And do you think this incident made you ...stronger somehow?
>
> Maria: Yeah! It kind of revitalised a kind of a Latin American pride. It felt like 'Okay. No!'. (Laughs.) That I[had drawn]... the line there.

After recalling this incident Maria said that it in her other modules it was 'good to feel like you could say what you thought'. She brought in that not only her, but 'all' international students brought something good to the college by being able to add to the experiences of Irish students. She referred to several cases when international students brought different views to bear that challenged the 'general statements' that were being made. She was very actively involved in those conversations.

> All the international students can say 'Well, in my country' and you know you've to be aware that, you know, you're very presenting whichever country and just say. But if you feel you can and you understand what is it like in your own country it really makes it stand out. Because the rest of the Irish people can find themselves on what is happening in their country but you get to say a lot of and counter arguments! So for example in Politics one of the big things was [the claim that] 'Young people don't care about politics' and in my country we have a loooong [sic] history of the students movement and in politics and people in politics where a lot of our ministers are young and I was like 'No!'... so it is not global sometimes. And that

> kind of, we as International students, have the power to bring a bit of a balance to the general statements about the world. Such as 'Everyone loves the US' and 'No!' … and all the people as well and they were coming up with their own examples [original emphasis throughout].

The only academic struggle she had undergone, she reflected, resulted from not being prepared to be independent and study her own time. She said that the system in her home country is 'parental' while in Trinity students were expected to be independent and mature. She found this different and encouraging. Maria's financial problems affected her during her studies, making her college experience 'tough'. The most critical year for her was the last year because she thought she was not going to be able to afford to get her degree. She reflected that for international students there was not 'much protection' because not having money meant that she faced the prospect of not being able to pay her fees, not having her visa renewed and having to go back to her country without any qualification. She said she worried when seeing her secondary school peers had finished college, some undertaking master's or PhD work, while she was struggling to finish college. She said it was 'stressful'. She managed the stress by talking with her friends and particularly her boyfriend who gave her assurance that things were 'going to be fine'. She mentioned that her financial problems were because her family's income depended on the copper prices in her country which crashed, causing her family not to have the money they had expected to have for her fees.

Some of the college services that Maria recalled as helpful in college were the library, the sports centre, the societies, the health centre, counselling, and the Students' Union [SU]. She said she went to the sports centre to relax when she felt 'emotional'. She had joined several societies but she got more involved with the Metafizz Society where she found a purpose as the club librarian and could meet a lot of people. She realised that the dynamics of the classroom were different to the dynamics in the societies as the latter were more diverse, inclusive, caring, and participative. She made use of the health centre and counselling services. The SU, especially the welfare officer, was very supportive and 'healing' when she came with some economic issues, helping her to obtain an Emergency Student Loans. She mentioned the SU president contacted people in the college to secure extensions on her fee payment deadlines. She admitted approaching the various services only in the third and fourth years and she recalled being 'very embarrassed' when initially coming to ask for support so that it took about a year and half for her to understand how the system and the services worked in college. When

asked how she had first heard of these services and why it took so long for her to approach them, she responded that she found out when talking to somebody about her struggles or by asking. She said that perhaps her experience in her home country made it hard to understand these services were available to everyone for free. She said it would be useful to encourage international students in particular to understand and get access to these services and emphasise that they were 'for free'.

As noted before, Maria came to Ireland with just basic level English which she attributed to the way she was taught English in her country. She said that watching movies without subtitles was a habit she has had always had and this had helped her improve her English and in Ireland she had improved her English before going to college by attending an English class every day, going to the library, getting some novels and audiobooks, listening to the radio, and talking to English speakers. She attended a specific course before going to college to prepare for the International English Language Testing System [IELTS] examination need before she could embark on the IFP. During her IELTS preparation course she said they corrected some of her mistakes. She said she was 'obsessively' listening to audiobooks and she found out that by the seventh time of listening to some she started comprehending the meaning of what was said. Maria recalled avoiding interacting with other South American students in her IFP because she would not be practising her English with them. She tried to talk to locals in shops and taxis instead. She said she did not have Irish friends to practise with at that point. Maria said that she realised she had improved in her writing skills when she was in college and started getting better grades for her work. When she started attending college she was not sure about her comprehension during the lectures, so she asked permission to audio record the lectures to help her when she was studying privately. She found this useful. Maria thought that she communicated well in English now, however she admitted to using 'Spanglish' at home most of the time. She used English to speak, write, read and listen most frequently. She thought that her comprehension was still more fluent when she reads and listens in her mother tongue than in English but she was more confident in her fluency when speaking and writing in English than in Spanish.

When asked about feeling homesick she said it was hard to overcome homesickness. However, despite her tough college experience during the first years she always wanted to come back to Ireland. She could understand the ways she had gained from her experience overseas. For example, she was now accustomed to being 'treated as a person first not as a woman first', as would have been the case formerly due to the sexist attitudes found in her home country. Regarding experiencing cultural shock, she said it

was important to find a way of building a bridge between the two cultures, keeping one's identity and being proud of it, being open and finding acceptance of who one is and where one comes from. But understanding the other culture was important for her. She said she had 'made peace with culture shock'.

Maria saw herself as a successful student because she was capable of completing her undergraduate studies and obtaining a highly desirable degree from a top world college in a normal length of time, had earned good grades and had interacted with very able professors. She said she had built relationships with college peers who were also successful and would surely be located in interesting environments, giving her access to interesting projects in the future. Maria reflected on the reason she had obtained high grades and said that she has always being 'hysterical' about doing things right. She felt that being academic had been the only consistent thing in her life and it was important for her identity. She felt that having success in her studies somehow compensated for what she left behind: her friends, her family, and her country.

Maria admitted considering dropping out several times, especially during her first years as she was unsure if her family could continue to finance her studies. She said she was very sad at the prospect of potentially losing an opportunity that it had been very hard to obtain. She said it was very distressing. She thought the reason she stayed was because she had not disclosed her circumstances to anyone and just somehow found the 'courage to keep going'. She remarked that academically she was doing well and this was not a reason for her considering dropping out. She said the academic demands of Trinity were fair and not excessive. She thought students do not have to be gifted to pass the courses. She even made the point that considering all the resources they have, students would have to try hard to fail.

She found out, after graduating, that other students were going through similar problems. She in particular mentioned cases of local students who had dropped out. She found out that one of them had, in addition to economic problems, problems with an alcoholic father. When I asked her, what made the difference between those who dropped out and her decision to stay and finish, she reflected that she could count on a 'solid block family'. Her father was not a good example but she had had little contact with him so he was not significant in her life, unlike the case of her peer the local student. Maria remembered being stressed about sitting her exams in her first year as the examinations were different to anything she had known previously and she could not count on any schooling

experience to help her deal with them. Despite obtaining good grades, she admitted having insecurities about being able to be successful, as she recalled:

> [i]n first year … I was so stressed out and I didn't know how to do them [the essays]. I had had a bit of practice in the (pause) uhmm I mean. This is the context: I always got really good marks. It's the stress of you know 'I will not be able to do it, I don't know how to do it, I never done that'. And which happens 'cos you know, ultimately, you have to show for the exam and you do it. And so the format is completely different from school [back home] and I hadn't had any college experience from Ireland.

Maria considered that the other international students were 'excellent' for the advice they gave in conversations and noted the extra work they (including her) had to do to overcome the language and cultural barriers. Maria had come to feel that the struggles she had to overcome made her mature and ready to undertake anything. She said that, after graduation many of her peers who had stronger backgrounds (financial resources and contacts) were beset by feelings of loneliness and disappointment at not getting what they expected when it came to obtaining jobs. However, she thought they would get better jobs later in life because of their family connections. On the other hand, she felt that all those students who had gone through difficult times during college were now in good jobs. Therefore, she was grateful at having had the opportunity to 'grow from within' as a result of her former struggles. Maria considered that she was successful because she got a good job immediately after graduating. She thought that she was successful in her work, too, because of the person she became during her college experience overseas, the academic quality, the flexibility of her degree, and her good writing skills. She said her job made her feel 'secure'. She proudly mentioned that she had been sent to present at conferences and she had not felt 'cornered'. She enthusiastically said that 'PPES was a good accident'.

Her final reflection on why she became successful referred to her family and the way they had always done things. She also said that she accepted that people can get knocked down, but there is always a way to 'get up again'. Maria repeated she was grateful for the opportunity she had to become the person she had since because of her undergraduate studies in Ireland. She learned to think of herself as a successful person and saw this tendency as being 'a great gift to give to someone'.

#### 3.3.2.2 Case study 2: CARLOS

*-Changing my focus was very important to me-*

Carlos (pseudonym)

Carlos was 25 years old at the time of the interview. He had entered a course in Business, Economics and Social Studies [BESS] in 2012. He was in his last year. In his degree he could opt for to specialise and he decided to pursue Business and Economics. His positive/optimistic attitude to facing difficulties and his determination to succeed in Business came across during our conversations before, during and after the interview, and in emails we exchanged. Carlos did not hold an EU passport so had entered college as a non-EU fee payer.

Carlos attended private school in his home country before his college studies in Ireland. He had two brothers and two sisters. Both of his parents had college degrees. His mother in Business and his father in Accountancy. Carlos felt that his father has influenced him most significantly during the course of his life. Carlos said that they used Spanish in his home most of the time. Carlos came to Ireland to undertake a six-month English course. When he heard of Trinity College's reputation and prestige he thought it would be good for his future to study for a degree in Business there. He decided to apply to attend. He said he had always been interested in Business as a career.

Carlos entered Trinity College through the IFP which offers international students a foundation year to prepare them to enter UCD or Trinity. After passing the course he got access to Trinity, being admitted to the course in which he was interested. Carlos maintained that he did not know any English at all before coming to Ireland. He said that he had never been interested in English and disliked it when he was at school in his home country. However, he says the English level in his school was good as some of his friends could enter college and never had problems with English. After finishing his English course and the foundation year he thought he had reached an upper-intermediate level in English.

The case of Carlos was peculiar. He was accepted into Trinity in 2012 but he could not register due to financial problems. He admitted he had not been very active in trying to deal with this problem as he should have contacted his tutor but did not. Because he could not register in time he had no access to his timetable and knew few people in his

course so he missed many classes. After learning he would not be able to sit the examinations at Christmas he decided to postpone his entry. A similar situation happened in the following year. Once Carlos was able to pay his fees, he registered in time, started his course and progressed straightforwardly in his course from then.

The only difficulty that Carlos has found during his studies related to financial problems. He said it had related to the economic and political situation in his home country which had affected his family's income and the availability of favourable exchange rates. Nevertheless, he had overcome these problems with a positive attitude. He observed that his situation was not critical and his problems were less extreme than those of other people who were undergoing more significant economic problems in his home country. He remarked that his family had always been supportive and provided him with a good life but they had experienced difficult times too. This has affected his college experience because, as noted above he had to postpone his registration twice before paying his college fees to register for first year and in the following years he had asked for extensions on payment dates. In his own words:

> I cannot make this story sound like an extremely difficult situation but now there are some problems because, yes, the economic situation is very bad. My mom works in the real estate market and yes, it is very hard. But before that, I had a good life, I don't complain, but you know? I had just now a few problems with paying college and maybe these days are not the best. But I cannot say that I haven't had a good life. If you think about the difficulties that other people go through and if I said I had a bad life, I wouldn't be fair; but I've had difficulties in paying college and well that's the only thing. Many difficulties in paying college.

Carlos mentioned that the support of his tutors was important to his overcoming his financial problems and ensuring that these did not affect his progress in college. They gave him more time to pay and the option to pay in instalments when he could not receive money from home to pay in one instalment, they provided him with letters he needed to send to his home country, and they always treated him well. They said he could register for his second year, attend the lectures and sit the examinations. He did not have access to his final results because he had not finished paying for his registration however he got notice of his successful progression to the coming year. Something similar happened in his third year. Carlos said that his tutors were always supportive, responsive and understanding about his financial problems. He said he should have gone to them earlier.

Carlos reflects on the differences between his college experience in Ireland and what he had heard the college system is about in his home country. The main differences he mentions were: a) the teaching, and b) the type and variety of societies.

Regarding the teaching methods, he said that in his home country students had lectures and some office hours with the lecturers. In Trinity, he explained that the system included lectures, tutorials and office hours. Carlos said he tried not to fail his classes, to use the office hours to ask questions of his lecturers, and to ask questions of his lecturers after class. He recalled that he used the office hours more frequently in his first years than subsequently. He noted that in his home country higher education was repetitive, and based on memorising. In Trinity, he said, it was more focused on knowing and understanding. He noted that the subjects taught in his programmes were diverse but covered in less depth due to the course's fast pace.

Carlos indicated that in his home country students had access only to sports in students' clubs. In Trinity, he said, there were various societies that helped students develop more fully. He said that the societies were very important. He mentioned in particular the Student Management Fund that helped him to improve his money-making skills, and the basketball club which had always been his favourite sport. He said he was not interested in the other societies or clubs because his main focus was on his studies. Carlos recalled his first years as the hardest for him for two reasons: a) the language, b) understanding the college system.

Firstly, he said he could only understand parts of his lectures and his reading. He also recalled being nervous about his examinations and he wondered how he was going to be able to 'memorise' and talk about content that he barely understood. He said he was not interested in some modules that were mandatory, including Sociology and Politics, therefore, he was little motivated to study them. Although he liked Business from the very beginning, it was hard for him too. He used the slides provided by his lecturers to help him understand and to study. He thought his comprehension improved from 70% in the first year to a 100% by the second year. Secondly, Carlos had difficulties in understanding how to access to the material from Blackboard (an online system or virtual learning environment used to augment teaching), his timetable and how to get to the different rooms and theatres for lectures. He tried to grasp why it was difficult for him to understand this. He thought it might be because he registered late (due to financial reasons) and he could not attend the introductory sessions. Retrospectively, he wondered why he could not understand something that he subsequently found simple,

such as his timetable. He said he was not used to locating dates in the way they were presented in the college calendar, i.e.: week 1, week 2, and on.

> Carlos: …about the timetables, it was easy but I don't know why I couldn't understand about the timetables. Those things. (pause) now it strikes me but (pause) yeah! I remember now! The week starts on the week 5, you don't see week 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. But you start on about week 5. I didn't know which week we were on. If we were on week 7, that was awful! Couldn't they put it in days? To make it more simple. Yeah, it was confusing! I got to the lecture and there was not lecture, you know. I was like: 'What am I doing here?' That was hard! I think they never explain that about the timetables because, of course, it is something so basic, but I don't know.
>
> Interviewer: Maybe it was not so basic?
>
> Carlos: That is something they could improve. If you are going to start on week 5, try to tell me which week are we on, or where should I go. I mean, there must be a way to put it by dates and then the next week or you could at least explain to the people that don't have much of it on their computers, you know. That's a good recommendation.

Carlos thought a successful student was one who was able to get a job or pursue further studies after college and to enter a profession. At the time of the interview he had recently found a freelance job in building up business portfolios. He thought the instruction in college did not teach him how to do what he was doing in his job but, rather, equipped him with good basics and business-related terminology. He said he learned more on his own by reading books by recognised experts in his fields of interest. He gave the example of how he learned to use specialised finance software after reading about it in a book. At his own initiative, he asked his tutor's permission to get access to the software in one of the computer laboratories and he made the most of it. He learned how to handle the software from a book and with practice.

Carlos said that he preferred studying at home place which was big and comfortable enough for him. He did not share his accommodation so he could be on his own. He used the slides provided by his lecturers and books he borrowed from the library to study. He said he does not like studying in the library and only did so when he was interested in a book that was not for lending. For Carlos, getting top grades was important but not essential to be a successful student. He thought it was not necessary to finish studies in the same college or in the normal length of time. He said his grades were good. He

was very conscious of the changes he had made to get better results. He reflected on his first year, when he got good enough grades to pass, although he did not have enough time to answer all the questions in his examinations. In his second year, he admitted, he did not give his best effort during the first term but worked harder in the second and passed. In his third year, he thought he got his best results because he could choose his subjects in Finance and Economics. During the interview he sounded very satisfied with his performance in college.

Carlos noticed he improved his grades when he changed certain things in his approach to study: a) starting to work on his assignments earlier, b) avoiding missing lecturers/tutorials and c) choosing subjects (modules) he really liked. He said he initially used to work on his assignments a few days before the deadlines but he noticed he could produce better writing if he started earlier and allowed more time to work on his assignments. Further, attending *all* the lectures and tutorials helped him to learn more and be better prepared for his examinations. He thought that other students found the academic work demanding and hard because they failed to go to the lecturers and tutorials. He thought that the fast pace of the course made it hard to catch up if you one missed a class. Finally, he admitted that when he could choose his modules he was more motivated to read and study more than when he had to undertake modules in which he had little interest.

Carlos repeatedly commented that he really liked what he was studying and learning and it motivated him to be positive about his college experience. Due to his financial problems he had feared being unable to get his degree however he was positive in his thinking, knew he could do something else and that he had benefitted from his experiences. Carlos had experienced several disappointments in trying to obtain a job to help finance his studies. He had overcome these disappointments with his optimistic attitude and confidence. He mentioned three cases to illustrate this: 1) he was called for a job interview in London but due his financial problems, in addition to restrictions caused by his visa status, he had to decline the offer; 2) he applied to a position in a local bank but he said his course did not prepare him to the kind of examination he had to pass to get that job and 3) he wanted to get an internship in a major company but was not shortlisted. He did not give up and kept trying to get a job. He applied for a job in digital marketing, which was not his field, and during the interview he talked with the company's owner and after discerning she also needed someone to build business portfolios for her company, he suggested he could do that job. He obtained a freelance contract and his client then recommended him to her contacts. Carlos thus hoped he might get other opportunities

as a result. He was ‘happy’ and said he was doing what he liked. He valued having his job as he had heard comments from people to the effect that going to college is nonsense and a waste of money as there are no jobs. He admitted getting a job was hard but Carlos said he never considered dropping out. He thought he was a successful student because of his determination to finish his degree and the interest he had in the course. He noted that he had changed his focus and priorities. He gave more importance to making a career and learning rather than to his social life. In his home country, he said, he was more interested in partying and going out with friends, but in Ireland as he had fewer friends he decided to change his focus to his studies, as he put it:

> Well, I guess it was persistence, obviously, persistence. It would be an important factor, you know. And also that I moved here and I changed my focus. I tried to change my focus a bit. In XY I knew more people and I was younger, maybe, other things meant the most to me, like friends and parties, you know. And here I said ‘I want to focus’. And, well, if you know less people it gives you more time for the things that matter the most, like getting a career, learning more things and the so. Perhaps, I changed my focus and all those things. Changing my focus was very important to me.

Carlos did not have any other preparation than the six-month long English course and the foundation year before entering college. He claimed he did not have good English skills before coming to Ireland. Despite saying that he did not have any strategies for success his account of his time in college was full of evidence of strategies that had helped him to improve his English. For example: he improved his reading by reading, speaking by speaking, listening by listening and writing by writing (which he thought was entirely obvious). To improve his reading, he mentioned that he aimed to read at least five papers or articles per day and he often read more. He read a lot and constantly *every day* he claimed. He was very confident in his writing skills but he recalled writing was difficult in the beginning and it cost a lot of effort to get there. He thought reading a lot helped him to improve his writing.

> Interviewer: And regarding your writing, for example, writing an essay?
>
> Carlos: Ahh I write very well (with a tone of satisfaction). (Pause). That was hard. The first year. That’s a good question, in the first year, it was hard on me. The second year a little, too. But now, you know? 5000 words, 6000 words, 7000 words are not a problem at all.
>
> Interviewer: And do you get good marks?

> Carlos: This year I didn't get less than 70% on any of my essays. You know. But of course!
>
> Interviewer: And how did you improve your writing?
>
> CARLOS: By reading and reading. I read a lot: articles in the Financial Times. I sometimes read more than 14 articles in a day. That means, I read non-stop, every day, constantly, day after day after day after day. I mean, I have a goal to read five, but I rarely stop in those fives, I read more.

Carlos admitted his pronunciation was not very good but he insisted that he could speak fluently. He learned how to speak in English by doing so. During his first six months in Ireland he purposefully avoided his compatriots and tried to mingle more with people who did not speak Spanish, only English. He said it helped him to improve. He worked on his pronunciation by looking up words he did not know in the dictionary and repeating them several times. Also, he said he always attended his English classes. He thought this was why he always did well in his presentations during his course.

Regarding his listening skills, he said it was hard for him to understand in the beginning. He said he likes watching TV in English. He could not understand in the beginning but he realised that his listening comprehension had improved by the second half of his first year. He claimed it was very rarely that he did not understand his lecturers or things he watches on TV any longer. He said listening to music had not helped him much but he still did so, though some songs were too fast for him to understand. Carlos used English more than Spanish to read, listen, speak and write. He thought that his was more fluent when reading in English than in Spanish whereas his speaking, writing and listening fluency were better in Spanish than in English.

Homesickness was something that Carlos recalled being hard during his first year in Ireland. He said he missed home a lot. He was able to go back home for his first Christmas break and after spending some weeks there, when he came back to Ireland he noticed he preferred Dublin and he had not felt homesickness since then. Carlos admitted he did not have many friends and the few he had were from his course. He accepted this and repeated that his main focus was on studying. However, he acknowledged the help of his tutors, lecturers and teaching assistants (PhD students). He remarked on their being excellent, professional, supportive, respectful, and willing to go beyond what was expected of them. He said their feedback had helped him and that they responded to interest and good manners on the part of students. Carlos reflected

on the cases of students who had failed and said that if it happens it is because the student has little interest in the subject or some particular problem. He said Trinity's entry requirements were high and the students who entered had usually achieved previously. He said that the availability of resources was sufficient for anyone to learn and pass his/her modules. The resources he mentioned included: lectures, tutorials, assignments and support.

Carlos felt that speaking language was the only advantage his English native speaker peers had over him. He said he had heard of the demands of the Leaving Certificate but it was also difficult to pass the foundation year. He said it might be that students who had studied Accounting and Economics in secondary school had some advantage, too. However, although he noted that local students had also to study hard to enter college, he suggested that local students (English native speakers) might take fewer hours to working on their assignments and projects than him due to the language.

Carlos thought a change in his attitude towards his studies and pursuit of a career came after reflecting on his own 'problems'. He gave importance to working hard for a good future and he believed he had grown as a person subsequently and had a better sense of what matters the most. This progress towards attaining maturity is reflected in his words:

> Well, you know. I had never been very focused on college and my studies and I changed that because I knew it was a problem. That I had to get me a future, right? I was not much interested on this and it made it hard. That was my difficulty that I was too relaxed. Then I said: 'No, you will have a terrible problem when you grow older' and then I said: 'I need to focus on this, to work on this and improve as a person, to grow as a person for the things that are important in life'. And those were the changes that made me get mature, and realising what was the most important. And that's it.

Finally, Carlos recounted what had worked for him: attending all his lectures and tutorials; starting to work on his assignments in time had also helped him to improve the quality of his projects.

#### 3.3.2.3 Case study 3: LAURA

> *-No! I'm not a coward! No! I've come from South America! I can overcome whatever obstacles on the way as I did in my country before!-* Laura (Pseudonym)

Laura was 39 years old at the time of the interview; she had graduated in 2016, being awarded a BA degree in Genetics. In our conversations, before, during and after the interview and in emails, she revealed herself as having a lively, adventurous and inquisitive personality with an evident passion for science in general, especially Genetics. Laura had formerly obtained a degree in Midwifery in her home country. She was able to compare her previous experience of going to college in her home country and in Ireland.

Laura was married and lived with her husband in Ireland. She was granted an Irish passport because her husband was a European citizen. She attended public coeducational primary and secondary schools in her home country. Laura was the second of three children. Her mum, who she said had influenced her, very much finished primary school and her father finished secondary school. They both still lived in the home country. Laura came to Ireland four years before entering Trinity. Her reason for coming to Ireland was related to her husband's job. Laura identifies herself as a 'high-achiever'. She decided to embark on her course in Trinity because of its reputation as the best university in Ireland and for the challenge of studying in a foreign country and in a foreign language. She believed her success was because of her personal tendency to be a high-achiever, something which she did not see in her parents/siblings. This was how she put this point during the interview:

> Interviewer: Can you describe factors that more contributed to success in your study for example: family, friends, your motivation, resilience?
>
> Laura: Well since I was a high achiever in school I always liked to really go for hard challenges. So studying in another university in English was a really tough time and challenging for everyone. So I just wanted to challenge myself so that was the main reason.
>
> Interviewer: So it has to do with your way of being really?
>
> Laura: Yeah I think it's a personality thing more than anything else.

> Interviewer: And do you think it comes from your family or you think it comes from your country of origin?
>
> Laura: I think it comes from a personal thing, in the way, my family is not like that. No one [original emphasis] is like that. I don't umm I haven't seen in my sister or my brother. (Pause). No. For some reason I was born in that way like a high achiever.

Laura's previous experience of living in an English-speaking country (the USA), a few connections with Ireland, and information about Ireland she had before coming, helped to alleviate the culture shock. However, she admitted that socialising was hard during her first years in college. She thought that her classmates were only comfortable within their own community and that their ways of socialising and having fun included going to pubs and getting drunk. Laura said it was hard for her because she was shy and was raised in a different way. During her final years, she realised that she was isolating herself and started going out with her college friends and drinking moderately, just to fit. She said after this she felt better about socialising (doing things together) with some of her peers. As she put it:

> It cost me a lot to adjust to the culture because the students in Ireland, they are like they have their community. They are a kind of a close community. They will not let you in there circle unless you are social [original emphasis]. I was a little bit maybe I could say shy because I didn't drink. So the main socializing part to form part of my class was going drinking and having fun but maybe I wasn't raised up in that way. The way I was quieter. But towards the end of college I realised that I was really isolating myself so I decided to join them. And I started going to the pub but I didn't have to drink a lot. Just a few drinks. And now it was like a really, really good thing. Like I should have done it before but I don't regret it. It's okay now.

Laura reflected on the importance of networking in college and said that this was her motivation to start engaging in more social activities with her college peers. She also reflected on her relationships with her lecturers. She said she valued them for their experience and deep knowledge of their specialist topics. She recalled their being busy but always accessible, informative, and ready to send her information through her email. She admitted that in the beginning she was 'ashamed' to ask questions in class for various reasons: fear that others would think she was asking a stupid question, fear that her lecturers would not understand her questions, fear of her lecturers doubting her being capable of understanding. After reflecting on this she was determined to ask questions when she had them and it helped her develop a closer relationship with her lecturers.

She remarked that her lecturers valued her and her background, showing interest and asking about South American culture. She also recalled that her lecturers valued the challenge of having a non-native speaker pursuing a degree in a foreign language, as she put it:

> So they [her lecturer]) were saying 'Okay. It's difficult for us sometimes to learn to grasp something in English with complicated stuff and research and you have to do in another language, in English'. So they were saying 'You guys, you are so brave to do all we do in our own language and you do that in a different language'.

Similarly, during the first, and most of the second, year, Laura struggled to get used to the system of instruction and the examination process, which, she noted, differed to her home country. In her home country, she said, the university system spoon-fed students with fewer topics being taught but with more depth than in the Irish system. She said that in Ireland students were expected to investigate on their own and the topics are less varied compared to her home country but the instruction was more particular because of the various specialisations of the lecturers. Having specialised lecturers seemed an advantage to Laura as she said she could ask them as many questions as she wanted because of their specialisation, experience and expertise. On the other hand, in her home country, lecturers would know a wider range of content but in less depth. She also thought that in Ireland the system gave more freedom to students to read on the topics that interested them.

Regarding the examination process, she identified various differences: a) the type of assessments, b) the frequency of these, c) the length of the examinations, and d) their content. She said that in her home country examinations were usually open-ended, in a way that required short answers while in Ireland there are primarily based on the writing of essays. The frequency of examinations was another difference examination was frequent. In Ireland, there was a single examination for each module at the end of the academic year. She felt that having continuous examinations (as in her practical modules) suited her better. Examinations took longer in Ireland than in her home country where they did not last any more than three hours. Finally, regarding the content of the examinations, the difference was that in Ireland students could choose which topics to revise for their examinations while in her home country, students were examined on nearly all of the taught content. Laura recalled that not until the end of second year did she start to understand how the system worked as it had not been explained to her.

Another difference that Laura found between college in her home country and Ireland concerned using the Library. In her home country she did not have what the Library of Trinity College offers: a wide variety of resources, including electronic sources and training on how to use these. She found the extent and diversity of the holdings on offer to be valuable. She remarked on options of having group tutorials, personalised tutorials, videos, and tours where she learned how to use the electronic library properly.

Laura's preparation in English consisted of two years of full-time instruction in an English school in her home country. Despite those two years of preparation, and her prior experience of living in English-speaking countries before entering college in Ireland, she thought that the major difficulties, which she often called 'challenges', she met at the beginning of her studies were related to comprehension of a) texts, b) lecturers and c) instructions. First, she found it hard to comprehend written material related to science in journals, books on methodology and statistical graphics. Looking back, she wished she had focused more on the reading of scientific papers before entering her course to learn how to 'grasp their real meanings. Laura's past history of instruction on how to read in her home country influenced her way of reading in English, making her reading slower and less efficiently, especially considering the load of reading she had to accomplish for her assignments. Laura recalled that some of her international peers were experiencing the same struggles with the workload, compared to native speakers, who, she said, were 'really fast' at reading. She realised she needed to read more and faster and that over-reading was not helping her. She learned to skim first, then scan and then grasp the general idea of the text. She said she always recalled a recommendation made by one of her lecturers on treating a text as if one might enter a shop, taking what one needs and leaving it, instead of reading the whole thing exhaustively. As she put it:

> I said [to myself]: '…I won't waste the time in reading the entire thing, the way I was taught in [name of country] you read everything'. (Gesticulating). Here, just one little thing. (Gesticulates as if she is picking something up). And out. So it makes it faster and easier.

Laura also had difficulties in understanding her lecturers, especially those who had strong accents. Laura recalled that she was aware of the different English accents due to her former experience in an English-speaking country (she lived for a couple of years in the USA). However, when she came to Ireland, it took some weeks before she could understand as she said: 'it was a completely different accent'. She overcame this by listening to talks and lecturers with Irish accents on YouTube and listening to Irish

reporters on the radio. She said she could not understand what they were saying on the radio in the beginning, but later on her listening improved. She also said that something she still did not understand were uses of jargon/slang as she did not mix much with local students who used such language. The misunderstanding of jargon/slang resulted in her being unable to join in some of their conversations during breaks.

Further, when using equipment in the laboratories she found it hard to get used to the specialised terminology of the chemicals and equipment so that she could follow instructions. Despite knowing their names and being familiar with some of the procedures in Spanish, she reflected that translating these terms was difficult at the beginning. During her first college years she used Google translator (a free online service) to assist her in comprehending what she read and heard. The writing process was also a challenge for Laura. She said she heard of training courses but she could not attend at the beginning due to having limited time as she had to dedicate longer hours to her reading and studying. Her mother tongue (Spanish) was always with her at the moment of her writing as she said she was thinking in Spanish and then translating into English. She noted that the grammatical structures of Spanish and English are different so she had more to interpret than simply translate words. After realising she was struggling with her writing she remarked on this to some of her peers who were also international student and non-native speakers of English. She felt relieved to know she was not alone in her struggles. They told her about the Student Learning and Development centre, which offered training and support with the writing of essays. She said her friends did not find this helpful so they did not continue to attend but she attended the workshops. Laura said she was enthusiastic and motivated about learning how to write essays but she feels the course did not meet her expectations, though she kept on attending the workshops and clinics. She reflected on reasons why the training did not meet her expectations: the workshops had too many students, there were too many questions for staff to deal with, and she though the staff were not really teaching students how to write essays. Nevertheless, she persisted, and found that the writing clinics (one-to-one assistance) were more useful and met her expectations. She thought her writing had improved because her ‘brain changed’. In third year, she started producing more written assignments and receiving corrections. She noticed that her essays were better received and she stopped thinking in Spanish before writing. She started thinking in English and writing only in English.

Laura overcame her struggles with reading and writing English by ‘being patient and taking one day at a time’. She realised she was doing the best she could and that she

would no longer be the top of the class student she used to be in her former studies. Nonetheless, she did not feel she failed and she took things with good humour, as this extract makes clear.

> I had to learn that, and coming from my perspective, that I always wanted, I always headed a high score. So I wanted to have it but I understood that that was not going to be possible for me. So I understood that 'What I'm doing is the best I can' and that's it. So, not first class student anymore in Ireland. (She laughs).

Laura no longer considered that getting top grades was essential to be a successful student. She learned to organise her academic work to allow her time to socialise with her peers. She considered she was a successful student because she was able to pursue further studies after college. By the time of the interview, she had progressed to, and finished, a Masters in Science Communication in another college in Ireland. She also thought that a successful undergraduate student would be one who was able to enter a profession after college, finish his/her studies in the same college and do so in the normal length of time. Laura defined herself as a successful student because she had been able to overcome the challenges of studying a career in Science, in an Anglophone country, and away from home. Further, she saw the advantages of networking with her lecturers and college peers. She found being bilingual (Spanish/English) a benefit, as this, in addition to her degree, ensured her of opportunities to get a job and progress in her career.

Overcoming homesickness has been a challenge for Laura. She said it took some time for her to get used to being away from home, especially at moments when she had problems and had to make decisions. She said that in her home country women shared their problems with women in their family and they felt comforted and secure before making decisions. While living 'on her own' with her husband, she felt she had to keep everything to herself. She exemplified this by telling of instances when she had been unwell and she had to be 'tough' and 'strong and 'get used to' having to help herself.

> …Well in the family issues. I've been here on my own. Well, not on my own, with my husband. But my family are all in [name of country] and I really miss them. I've found really homesick for let's say a few years in the beginning. And they have the culture in [name of country] if you have a problem you have to talk to your mum or tell to your aunt or if you have older sisters with families they will give you an advice and you keep comforted and then ok then you make a

> decision. But here I just couldn't. I have to keep everything to myself and… and that I found that really difficult living of my own. And health issues as well, maybe just a little flu and you want maybe your mum or somebody to bring a cup of tea or some soup, chicken soup to your bed. And you don't have that priority here so you have to get up and do it on your own and you have to be tough and strong but you get used to it. You get get the hang of it eventually.

Laura also expressed feelings of sadness and loneliness as she did not know many people from the South American community in Ireland. She overcame those feelings by focusing on her lectures and working harder and overcoming 'the English barrier'. Laura also made use of some of the services that the college offered, including the sports centre and the health centre. She remarked on the attention she had received in the health centre, which was free and offered good care. She mentioned in particular the doctor who helped her during a stressful period of examinations with assuring words and cheering her up which Laura admitted she needed because she was away from home.

> I found her [the doctor] really good when helping with the cope of... With even college life college 'cos you are given advice on how to joggle things with exams. She usually reassured me 'Don't worry. The examinations are coming but you'll do okay'. Sometimes you need to hear like 'It's gonna be okay', that's it. 'Cos you're living here on your own and sometimes your friends sometimes don't say it because they are also busy. They are also struggling. Once I was coming down to visit her and saying 'It's gonna be okay don't worry'. It was enough… I needed that little bit of speaking or saying to cheer me up.

Laura admitted that she considered dropping out at the end of her third year due to problems with her husband related to money issues. She said that because she had to dedicate more hours to reading and writing compared to other students who were faster (especially English native speakers), she could not get a part-time job. Not being able to work part-time caused some family problems. But, in the end, these were resolved and she did not drop out. Laura recalled that in her first year she was 'lucky' as her good scores in practical subjects like Mathematics and Chemistry compensated for low scores in Biology. The second year became 'more theoretical' and because she was still not managing to grasp the core of her reading she was unhappy and fearful of failure. She was able to comfort herself by preparing for the worst to happen and also received some reassurance from her husband. In her words:

> [t]he second year, it was more theoretical I have to say that I was stressed out before the exams time. But I would say 'Okay if I just if I fail it's okay. That's gonna be okay'. My husband would say 'Okay that's second year, we'll see what's gonna happen'. But I passed, I passed! [Original emphasis; spoken great excitement as though she were reliving the moment].

Laura mentioned that the third and fourth years became even harder as work became more specialised. It was then that she started to doubt her capability and decisions but she found reassurance when recalling her previous successes and inner motivation, as she said:

> But in third year because it's the specialization on the third and the fourth. That was really hard and that's when 'I said okay maybe I took the wrong decision, this course is really hard'. (Pause.) Maybe it's because English is really hard for me to grasp and also this idea of 'I'm not intelligent enough for this course'. I considered dropping out but then I said 'No! I'm not a coward! No! I've come from South America. I can overcome whatever obstacles on the way as I did in my country before' and that was the main reason that encouraged me to stay and not quit that 'I'm not a loser'.

Laura found that the academic demand was very heavy on her so she spent more hours studying and did not have time to go out with her friends. At one point, she asked herself, and her general practitioner, if she was a slow learner. It was when she realised other students were similarly struggling that she stopped worrying about her capacity to meet the rigours of the course. She recalled other students complaining about the academic load and that it was principally non-native speakers who found it hard to 'adjust to the education system' of Ireland. The differences in the examination system also represented a challenge for Laura. She said this was hard to cope with because she was not used to writing essays, but by the end of third year she found that she could manage examinations quite well. She thought she had improved in her essay writing and now knows how a research article is structured and how an abstract should be presented. She thought learning to write essays and articles was important for success in college and she recommended preparing one's writing and practising writing often to make it easier.

By the time of the interview Laura used the English language to read, write, listen and speak although she thought her fluency in Spanish was greater than her fluency in English. She said she had always counted on having good speaking skills which she had

acquired during her previous period of instruction in her home country, watching videos on Youtube on how to pronounce words properly, revising her notes and phonetic charts, and being careful about pronouncing in the right way. However, she noticed when giving presentations in college her speech was not as engaging and 'funny' as in her mother tongue. When she wanted to introduce some jokes into her presentations, people ended not to understand. She admitted she had not been able to overcome this so she decided to adopt a *new style* in her presentations, finding other ways to make them engaging. She said that when she reverts to her mother tongue she can return to using her own style. She recommended not worrying overly much about accents as it is acceptable to have different accents.

Laura thought that her college experiences in Ireland had changed her as she found she was more organised and focused than before. She was happy with these changes being the case. Laura also felt that her experience overseas had 'shaped' her personality, making her more tolerant and respecting of other traditions. She said she was now more inclusive and had absorbed learned to love Ireland's culture as much as her own. She felt she was representing her home country's people in Ireland and hoped to contribute to the development of her country when she returns.

#### 3.3.2.4 Case study 4: PABLO

*-My college experience didn't really finish with the degree.–*

Pablo (Pseudonym)

Pablo was 33 years old at the time of the interview. He had graduated in 2016, being awarded a BA degree in Psychology. During our conversations before the interview, the interview itself and in emails he revealed himself as an open, friendly, talkative and reflective person. His sense of humour was shown through his witty comments and the laughter (from us both) in our conversations. Pablo held a European passport which was an advantage in allowing him to come to Ireland, to enter college, receive financial support, and avoid official problems. He attended public coeducational schools in his home country before his college experience in Ireland.

Pablo was the second of two sons in his family. Pablo's parents did not go to college. His mother's highest attainment was in a technical or vocational course while his father completed primary school. His only brother went to college in their home country. His brother and friends influenced him the greatly in his earlier years before going to college. His lecturers had influenced him the most during his studies. Pablo had lived for a year in Spain before coming to Ireland which was the first decision he made by and for himself. He said he did not come with the idea of entering college but that he was always curious about visiting the country and he had several jobs before finding himself in a call centre because of his mother tongue (Spanish). His words reflected his carefree and optimistic attitude when deciding to come to Ireland: 'Let's try, and work and see what happens'.

After six years living in Ireland Pablo started thinking he needed to do something else as he was feeling trapped ('in a cage') and 'worn out' by his job. He decided to try college again, despite two failed experiences in his home country (he dropped out a course on computing after 40 days and failed a course in Engineering) when, he admits, he was not motivated as his desire was to travel. Pablo decided to enter a course in Engineering in another college in Ireland and then decided this course was not for him. He considered various other options until he came across a course in Psychology at an open day. He felt this would sit well with his interest in music and was something he would feel comfortable at, while also being a way in which he helps others in future. This extract illustrates his thinking when deciding whether to study Psychology.

> One day I saw something about Psychology and that made a lot of sense for me. Something that I remember that made me decide was to think 'Well there is no perfect choice. If I am waiting and thinking about the perfect aspect in anything I would do nothing'. And Psychology was for me something, sort of, ticked lots of the boxes. So I tried that.

Pablo applied to three different colleges but he admitted that Trinity College was his preferred option for its reputation and prestige. Comparing the prospectuses for the courses, he found the course in Trinity College was most attractive and interesting to him than the other two options. He entered Trinity College through an access programme for mature students. He prepared himself with assistance of a private tutor to pass the IELTS, which was one of the requirements. He applied, completed an aptitude test, was shortlisted for an interview and got a letter of acceptance when he was on holiday in his home country. His words express his excitement when he heard he was accepted onto his preferred course in his preferred college: 'I was... over the moon because I [had previously] said [to myself]: 'Okay, this is not going to happen'

Pablo's search for his vocation is evident in his story of how he was accepted into Trinity College. He had been advised at the open day to be honest in his personal statement and he did this by saying how badly he 'wanted it'. He also referred to his attributes, a tendency to have 'commitment' and 'enthusiasm' and his recognition of the college's academic demands. He was evidently convincing enough in the interview despite the misunderstanding of a joke he included in his personal statement. Pablo said his former experiences in job interviews were different to the interview that got him access to college. He also wondered if the decisions were made based on a 'quota' or need to have a representation of groups depending on nationality or background. Pablo's tone during the interview revealed his passion for his chosen field. Pablo felt he had made the right choice of course and college, choices that had brought him to the study of something he 'loves'.

Pablo identifies two major gaps he found when entering college: the culture gap and the age gap. These gaps did not affect his college experience for two reasons. First, he already counted on having a social group to which he belonged (he explained that he was lucky to have an international group of friends), and second, his priority was to focus on 'the academic side'. He felt that his college mates and him were 'worlds apart' however, he considered it normal for teenagers to be interested in the social part of the college experience as well. In his early attempts to engage more in college social life, he

signed up for four or five societies but he only attended some events organised by the History and Chess societies due to his decision to concentrate in his studies and his work commitments. He said the Philosophical Society (a debating club for students) held interested talks with good speakers but he could only attend a few ones of these due to pressure of time.

Pablo reflected on the differences between the college experience in Ireland and in his home country (as he had heard that experience described by his brother and friends). He thought he had benefitted from the resources and facilities available at Trinity College: enough seats for students, projectors, laboratories, computers, the Blackboard system, library resources, study rooms, the Student Learning and Development centre (where tutors were available to help with writing), the health centre and sports centre (which included a swimming pool) and communication systems/email. However, he believed it was up to the student to make the best of what college offers by using these resources. Pablo had made his own decisions as to which resources to use and how. Another difference between college in his home country and Ireland concerned the extent of courses/lecturers' hours as he was expecting more teaching hours, as is traditional in most South American countries. He thought the lower number of teaching hours was compensated for by the degree of reading students had to accomplish by themselves. Being assessed through a single final examination was another difference that Pablo had noted (in most South American countries the higher education system is based on continuous assessment of one's courses).

Pablo admitted he had not thought about whether or not he was prepared for college as he did not know what to expect. However, he prepared himself beforehand by getting a book on general psychology, attending talks, and asking other college students about their experiences. He said he built up an expectation of the college experience as being 'great' but 'hard' thus he was prepared in a sense of expecting hard work. As he put it:

> I think I was preparing myself in a sense of expectations. I was expecting it to be hard, to be difficult. So, if it wasn't that difficult 'happy days' but I didn't want to be in a position like 'Oh it was harder than I thought'. So I was really expecting hard work.

Pablo had been told he would have to have good Mathematics skills to do Statistics. He believed he was not good with numbers and sometimes the language did not help as he knew how to perform arithmetical calculations but he did not know how to explain them in English. He said that some courses that were mandatory helped him to cope with the

demands of the course. For example, he mentioned a Statistics course. He said he did well in Statistics in the end. This extract best illustrates how he overcame challenges he experienced at first through a reflective process, awareness of his limitations and taking actions to overcome them. In his words:

> I think I had to learn a lot of things from the scratch. I remember, for instance, I came to an open day and so I came to a talk about Psychology and they were like 'Some people come to Psychology and they think they will be no numbers, then forget about it! There is a lot of stats and a lot of this and a lot of that'. So, my maths skills were dimmed. (He laughs; I laugh). And so strange enough I went well in Stats. But that was something new. I think I actually had to do something on the side for the Stats. I don't remember if it was something like a little course but I got something. Actually that's a funny thing for maths for instance my English was I guess worse than in other areas because of words so simple that have to do with arithmetical things. I didn't find myself in a situation before having to use them in English. And I was like 'Oh yes I know how to do this in Spanish but how do you say this in English'. So that was weird. I never actually thought much about being prepared or not prepared I guess because again I didn't know what to expect.

The workload was another challenge for Pablo. He found that the required reading was 'overwhelming'. He said his habit of being 'structured' and organised helped him cope, although in the beginning he 'panicked' as he was not aware how extensive the workload would turn out to be. He had moments of fearing not being able to finish his readings in time to write his essays but he always ended up meeting the deadlines. He found that sometimes being so structured could be 'counterproductive' so he had to balance the need to meet deadlines and the quality of his work. He said that having good organisation skills and managing time well is important for success, especially if one is working part-time also.

Pablo learned to regulate the pressure he experienced by resetting the balance between his expectations, of himself and the reality of his college work. He realised it was acceptable to miss some classes (which he tried not to do) and he learned to trust he would overcome the constant challenges of college life. This extract from the interview best illustrates what I see as an image of the college experience as a *roller coaster*.

> The third and the fourth year are usually the harder ones, they would say us. And we were like, with my friend [his female mature student peer] like getting ready like 'Okay this is actually going to be worse'. But yeah … the whole thing was a constant challenge but maybe

> lucky I didn't have at least I can't remember now like a moment apart from maybe those first term or second term that I was kind of not sure if I could make it. Apart from that I was just studying a lot.

Examinations were challenging for Pablo for the weight of the content he had to learn for one examination per module at the end of the college year (sometimes months after the end of a module) took a toll on him. He said it was hard having so much information to study and revise, and only a short period of time to revise between examinations. He found examinations demanding and stressful. He dealt with the stress by making sure he was doing his best, having time to relax and sharing his experiences with his friend on the course. He thought it helped that he had found he was not alone in his struggles with the course. Also, he excelled in his organisation skills, planning and ability to make decisions. Pablo admitted he struggled somewhat in dealing with a period when he was in a romantic relationship as it consumed a lot of his time but when they split up he decided to focus fully on his studies.

By the time of the interview Pablo was totally immersed in the Anglophone world. He said the college experience was the first time he had been fully immersed in an English-speaking context and more exposed to Irish and British culture. He had always had a positive attitude towards learning and communicating in English although he thought that schooling in his home country gave him only the basics, was very repetitive, and 'a waste of time'. His parents noticed his 'love for English and they had paid for private tuition which contributed to his preparedness as he had good conversational English when he came to Ireland. He considered his English level to be low intermediate and admitted he had been 'conscious' about his English level and took steps to improve it. Some ways in which he attempted to improve his English before entering college included buying a grammar book and learning from it, and getting private tuition for three months to prepare for his IELTS exam (one of the entry requirements for college in Ireland). His attempts to improve his English performance were demonstrated by his decision to register voluntarily for the English for Academic Purposes course during his first year in college, saying of this: 'I heard about it and I said: "Maybe it's going to be a good complement [to other studies]"'.

Reflecting on his time in college Pablo found he had had no difficulties in following lectures and he thought that living in Ireland for some time before entering college helped him to understand his lecturers well. His interaction with his Irish friend (a Dubliner) helped him in understanding slang and the Dublin jargon frequently used in college.

Pablo reflected on the fact that the need to learn the academic vocabulary related to his course was the same for native and non-native speakers but recalled that learning to write essays was a 'new challenge' for him. He said no matter the language, the writing of essays is always challenging. He described writing as a process and 'an art' that one keeps on learning. However, he thought that his Irish college classmates were at an advantage because they had written essays before college in their preparation for the Leaving Certificate. Constant feedback and a positive attitude in the receipt of that feedback helped him in his first moves towards improving his writing skills. As he put it:

> …sometimes you have to overcome that sense of pride and say 'Okay wait a minute, I am here to learn so ok great, I did this wrong? Okay good for this type of thing. The next time I have to expand in this and that way' or 'Make sure you don't use this word' or whatever it is. You have to be very self-conscious of the feedback and because they are helping you that's why they are doing that.

Pablo admits his first language influenced his writing style. He found that he needed to 'disentangle' from his first language to make his writing clear enough for an English native speaker. He said his Irish friend on the course helped him through her comments on his writing. His writing skills were eventually recognised by his getting a 'first' mark on his final project. He was told his writing had 'minor disfluencies' [sic] but that this was understandable enough. He was encouraged to publish his work by one of his examiners and was working on a paper at the time of the interview. His advice regarding improving writing skills was to 'relax' and keep doing.

When Pablo started doing his reading for his courses, he found he was reading 'inefficiently and slow[ly]' leaving him little time to do further reading on topics he came across and that interested him. He started giving priority to reading that would help him write his essays and prepare for his examinations and tried to engage with his reading material through using highlighters and writing in the margin. His interest in, and love for, his course allowed him to improve his reading skills. He was still reading English grammar books for non-native speakers and continued reading in Psychology. Pablo admitted he was 'self-conscious when speaking with non-native and native speakers. He noticed he was more relaxed with non-natives and more concerned about his grammatical correctness with native speakers. He said he had improved with time in making clear his meaning when asking questions in his classes. Pablo thought that having an Irish friend in the course helped him to improve.

Pablo was aware of the talent of his peers. He frequently referred to his female mature student course mate and only friend during his course who was Irish and had ‘a really wonderful mind’. He found in her a partner with whom to have discussions and share experiences. However, he thought that the other two mature students (one international and one Irish) were not meant to be there as one dropped out after finding out how extensive the reading was and the second failed, perhaps because he ‘was not making an effort at all’. He had no interest in relating to his other classmates whom he reckons he thought he might have misjudged due to their young ages. However, he admitted that some of them were ‘brilliant’, ‘smart’ and ‘nice’. He recalled that in third year he had the opportunity to engage more with some of his peers through a group project involving his friend and other three students (females). As he put it:

> It was very nice to have in the third year the group project because at least I had it with my friend but I also had it with this other three girls and it was then actually that I became more involved with the group because I was working with them in something in common.

Something interesting in that group project was that he was working on a topic he was not interested in as it was a democratically chosen topic. However, he learned the methodology and adopted a positive attitude, and when he had an opportunity to choose his own project for his final work he did so.

> …it was a group and I had you know some topics we ended kind of choosing something that most of us were interested into but not really me and but at the same time because of that I was so into ‘Okay, the next year it is going to be my project it's going to be something that I like and I'm gonna make the most of it’ and it worked fine on that way.

Pablo had become a bilingual person who communicated most frequently in English. He considered his Spanish fluency in speaking, reading and listening to be greater than his English but was confident of his English writing skills. He admitted he thought, planned his life, analysed his internal life and reflected in English on purpose. He observed: ‘a language changes or at least gives you tools to think’. Interestingly, he admitted that there were aspects of the subject of Psychology he found hard to explain in his mother tongue as he had learned them in English.

Pablo's self-perception of being successful in college relied on progress, getting satisfactory marks, and getting the most from the educational experience. He said he enjoyed his course and had been engaged with it. He made the decision to concentrate on his studies and not on the college's social life. He found the Trinity Ball and partying distracting. The extent of the engagement of his younger peers in the social life of the college was a novelty for him and surprising. He feels they did not understand the 'purpose of college itself and did not contribute academically so he decided to set himself apart from these things.

Pablo learned how to progress with college work on his own, learning such things as: how to submit papers, avoid plagiarism, use his weekends and reading weeks to work on his college assignments and how to use the library and find books. The only major difficulty he found during his studies, despite being allowed to pay EU fees and holding a Student Universal Support Ireland [SUSI] grant (he heard about the SUSI grant at the open day), was related to his financial situation. He had to juggle college work and a part-time job most of the time during his course. He made decisions about moving to another home and getting a job after he finished the first term of his first year. He admitted he was 'lucky' that one of his friends rented him a room for an affordable price and that college, his home and work were all within walking distance of each other. Further, his evening shifts at work and flexibility in his hours were an advantage especially during examinations.

Pablo claimed he had never considered dropping out. He thought the only reason to consider dropping out would be if one had experienced critical financial problems and was unable to pay one's college fees. Pablo did not experience any difficulties related to his health during his course and he said homesickness was not an issue for him during his studies. He noted that he had never been overly attached to his home and he felt happy in Ireland. He was enjoying the multicultural nature of his life in Ireland. Despite claiming not to need any recognition of his efforts by his family and friends in his home country), he wondered if they understood what his experience had meant to him and the challenges he had had to overcome to succeed in a different country, in a different language and in a prestigious college.

Pablo remarked the significance of his lecturers and tutors, particularly his tutor and supervisor for his final project who saw the potential of his work and suggested he work on it towards for publication. He says she was 'supportive', believed in him, and valued his effort. A few objections he had (as had his mature student friend) to the programme

was that it was sometimes addressed to the younger students. In some cases, he had to endure lectures about matters in which he was not interested in, including interview techniques and preparing CVs. Pablo had a high level of self-awareness in many aspects of his life. He had undergone some therapy and said this might have influenced his interest in Psychology. He exercised reflective thinking, analysis, examination of his internal and external lives, and made decisions only after a period of reflection. For Pablo, education was not 'a passive experience' and he recommended his fellow students to be 'actively engaged'.

Pablo went through his college experience as a conscious proactive and positive reactive learner to become a life-long learner.

> I am actually learning a lot now that for me actually my college experience didn't really finish with the degree. I am still engaged in that and I keep reading about Psychology and I think it is ridiculous to study something for four years and then forget about it. I am so much into it.

## 3.4 Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this case study [Study 2] was to describe the transformative process at the light of the experiences of South American students who followed their pathway towards success in Trinity College Dublin. The conceptual framework of this study was primarily identity construction [or reconstruction] in a process of self-discovery and negotiation through critical reflection.

Thomas suggests being intuitive and imaginative in the analysis of the case study to make meaning thus employing theories and critical reasoning (Thomas, 2011). Therefore, I present the development of my arguments based on the four case studies. To start, the cases were varied, surprising and challenged assumptions that may be built around the group of this study. Although commonalities were hard to find, there were patterns that I have grouped in three categories to explain my observed processes of transformation and identity construction on these four international SSoSA and successful students as per their own definitons of success. These three categories are: a) the transformative process from insecurities to assurance and the value of safe places, b) the life changing experiences and turning points, and c) the recovery from different shocks.

### 3.4.1 The transformative process from insecurities to assurance

In the literature review it was established the multidimensional challenges of international students that are added to those of domestic students in their transition from secondary to tertiary level and to adulthood (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016). In the cases studies I employed diverse types of students, two of them considered mature students by the time they entered Trinity [Laura and Pablo], similarly expressed several insecurities in the narratives of their transitioning to becoming a successful student. The insecurities that were evident in the narratives caused self-reported levels of anxiety, nervousness, low self-esteem, over worrying, and low self-confidence. Those insecurities were related to their previous experiences in their home countries and their previous education experience. Also, it was the product of the uncertainty of not knowing what to expect [or not] from their college experience despite valuing it. Different levels of expectations [low and high] were a motive to feel insecure of being un[able] and [in]competent to meet the demands of undertaking studies in a different country and a foreign language. Doubts about making the right career choices and decisions of embarking in the challenge of pursuing a degree in a foreign country were also present. These insecurities have been found in other research where the participants expressed a sense of not belonging or when the transition to higher education is found extremely hard to overcome in both domestic and international students (Bron & Thunborg, 2011; Cannon, 2002; Ceci, Williams, & Thompson, 2011; Smyth et al., 2011; Yorke & Longden, 2008). At institutional levels, those insecurities have been observed and addressed through provision of orientation and induction programmes, counselling and supportive environments. However, their attempts to assist those students are not sufficient and they end withdrawing from their courses. Within Tinto's model of retention, the provision of that kind of support should compensate insecurities through students engaging or 'assimilating' students in the college life yet have not been consistently effective, especially in the cases of Latino/a students. What is more, failing to succeed despite the assistance provided increased feelings of inability to cope and therefore affects the students' self-esteem creating self-constructed stereotypes of not being able. The participants in this study did not fully rely on institutional factors for their success. That is evident in those participants who were not recurrent users of the many supportive resources that the institution offered for various reasons: lack of time for their work or family commitments, studying preferences [studying at home instead of the library], and shyness in asking for assistance. Yet, they highly valued counting on a supportive institution. It was through a reflective process that made them realise the cause of those insecurities and taking actions. For example, by injecting more patience and sticking to

what was solid for them (i.e. family ties and socio-economic status, friends, identity as a reader, identity as a good achiever, identity as an 'obsessive', their drive). They responded to those feelings of insecurity following a time of critical reflection which draw them to seek a 'safe place' which some of them found in the societies and clubs, and more 'international and open' groups. The transformation was evident on feelings of assurance, higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of anxiety. Once their self-esteem and confidence was reassured, they could depend less on those 'safe places'. In other words, finding out that a non-seen reality becomes real reduced those insecurities. Seen through the lens of identity construction theory, it is understood as a process of relational factors to bring *assurance*. Those relational factors may be social classes, cultural capital, and the value of social spaces that Bourdieu calls *habitus* (Lawler, 2008; Rosenthal et al., 2011; West et al., 2013).

### 3.4.2 Life changing experiences and turning points

The stories of these four participants are consistent to many studies on non-traditional students and disadvantage students where access to education represented a life changing experience (Fleming & Finnegan, 2011b; Jimenez-Silva et al., 2009; Matheson & Matheson, 2008; Pérez, 2008; West et al., 2013). This was also the case of Glasser and Carson (Carson & Murphey, 1990; Glasser, 2001). In this case study, I observed a pattern that activated those turning points which is *a time of crisis*. There are various moments in the narratives of the four participants in this study where the perception of these times of crisis and a reflective and dialogical exercise [sometimes with themselves] facilitated actions that resulted in changes in their realities. I list some:

- Difficulties of studying in a foreign country.
- Difficulties of adapting to a new culture (academic, language, social).
- Realisation of a need of change.
- Need to be 'more social'.
- Need to 'do something'.
- Drive to succeed in their studies.
- Difficult economic situation.

I examined the narratives in the stories of the participants seeking for the process of moving from those critical points to a change. I found that a common pattern of reflective dialogue when the participants referred to phrases such as 'I said …', 'I thought…', 'I told

myself…'. The participants had conversations with themselves and realised it was necessary to do 'something'. The case of Carlos best examples this when he decided that he needed to be 'more focused'. Sometimes those conversations occurred when someone brought them a new view of certain situation. For example, Maria realising that she was not the only one going through financial difficulties, and Laura realising there were 'other' international students struggling with their essays writing. This conversation with someone usually came following the realisation of a need to change, as in the case of Pablo when deciding to do something by himself and try higher education again.

The resources employed to facilitate changes were varied and I have sorted them into two categories: a) own resources (intrinsic), b) resources that 'others' had. The participants' own resources that were more frequently mentioned were: persistence (the need to 'keep going'), being or becoming resilient, their drives (the pursuit of a community goal, the pursuit of recognition, the pursuit of realisation), good health (mental and physical), optimism (having a positive attitude), ability to see the whole picture, and passion. The resources they employed that were from the 'others' were primarily: financial aids, family/friend/peers/tutor/lecturer/counselling support and understanding. The result of this process turned into becoming:

- Better at managing time (balancing their college/family/work/social commitments).
- An autonomous learner thus proactive (initiative to access resources such as reading material, writing workshops, societies that nurture their academic life).
- A lifelong learner (realisation of the gain of education, interest in further studying, deconstructing the idea of opportunities of a good job resulting of their degree by giving more value to the learning experience itself).
- Reflective thinkers (better at making decisions, more awareness, reassessing values).
- Aware of being resilient and brave.

The awareness of resiliency and courage was interesting to me. Maria, for example, mostly related resiliency as an attribute of her family but not of her own. During the interview she realised that somehow, she had become resilient, too. She relied on the stories of resilience of her family to keep going. Laura, in the other hand, perceived being weak sometimes but the recall of her former overcoming in her home country gave her attributes of a resilient person. Carlos' resilience relied on his positive attitude and

awareness of ‘others’ being in more difficult situations and also the realisation that critical times were temporary. Pablo was more conscious about his resiliency. He armed himself of resources getting ready for the ‘worst’. His resource was expecting things to be difficult and hard so he could be relieved after finding out it was not too hard [I called it the ‘roller coaster’ attitude].

The stories were rich and various in the accounts of turning points but I have remark here the ones I have found more recurrent. When I asked the participants why their peers who dropped out did not persist. They reflected on it and found out that many of their peers also have difficult times. Pablo for example, attributed it to not being ready to commit to the academic demands of the course or having different expectations. Maria reflected on the strong [‘solid’ in her words] familial capital which made the difference. Carlos’ reflected on the case of a student he was assisting with maths tuition, he attributed to others having more difficulties so that they cannot cope. On the other hand, Laura found out that her peers, who were also international students, were finding ways to overcome their difficulties (attending to workshops). Despite it was not a commonality among the four cases, the realisation of overcoming difficulties assured or reassured a sense of ‘Latino pride’. However, the sense of achievement was frequent as a drive to persist.

To close this section on *turning points*, I further bring one case that stroke me because it corroborates my observation of turning points. It was a case of a community project that attempted and failed in bringing a transformative experience to a marginal area. The study compared the project failure to other similar projects that resulted in success (Matheson & Matheson, 2008). They concluded that differences in the population cultural values influenced the results. The considered failed project resulted on a population that were ‘empowered’ to complain about their perceived inequalities and demanded more services while the successful project resulted in the empowerment of a marginalised group [yet with strong community capital] who lead their ‘own way forward’ (Matheson & Matheson, 2008). In my view, the attempts of empowerment and transformation to a better situation failed because a) they population did not see the need to change, b) they did not enter a reflective process, c) they did not see the value of the resources they had to lead a change. Instead they decided to keep the *status quo* of their situation. My point is, the marginal group in Matheson and Matheson that did not transformed their situation, were resilient in their way, but resiliency was not enough to provoke a change. That is consistent with the rationale that transformative learning propose that sets the promotion of critical reflection as one of its core elements to foster a transformation and that

coincide with Freire's concept of *conscientization* (Mezirow et al., 2009; Freire, 1974, 1993). The figure below best illustrates the process I observed in the participants.

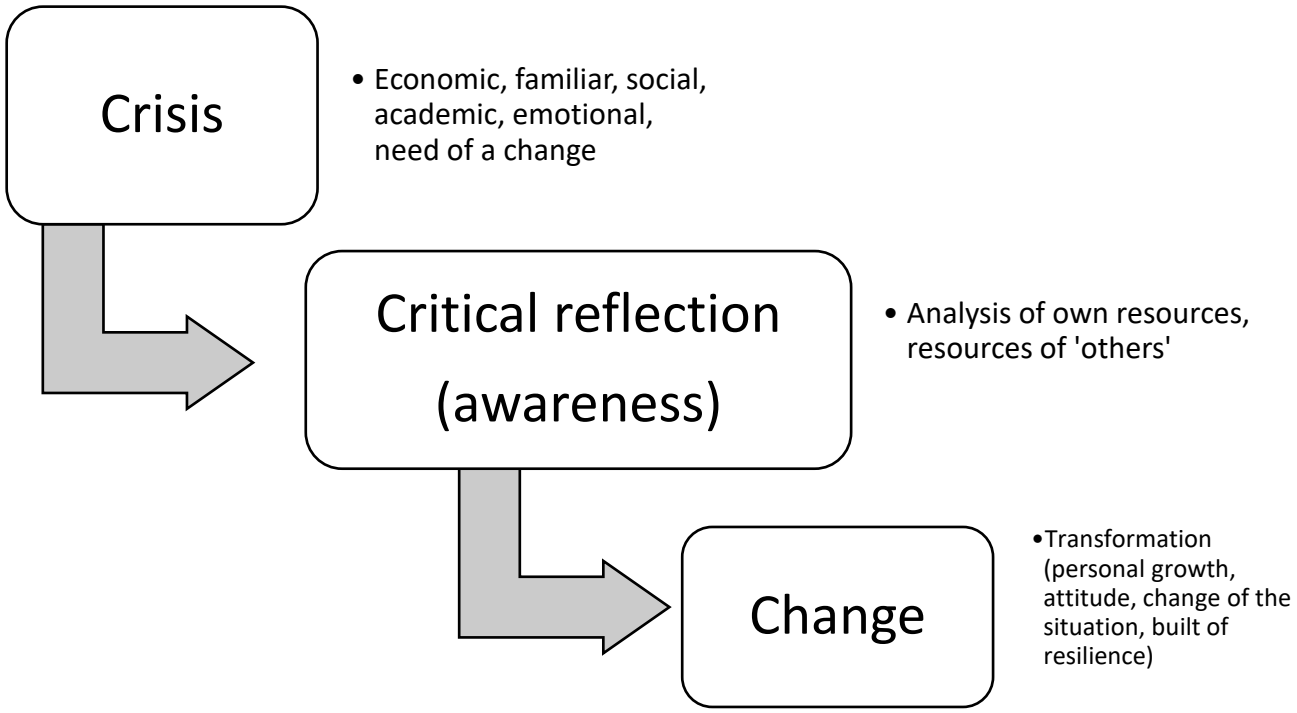


**Figure 4. Process employed to overcoming critical moments**

### 3.4.3 The recovery from different shocks

Experiences of international students and NNS international students are congruent in the different 'shocks' that they encountered in their overseas endeavour (Rienties et al., 2012). These various shocking experiences were similarly and frequently found in the narratives of the participants in this case study. I further describe two categories of shocks that I found and the process that I observed towards the students' success. These two categories are: a) the cultural shock, and b) the academic shock.

I begin by stating the causes of cultural shock in the four case studies. In addition to the various dimensional factors affecting a successful transition to and beyond higher education, the case of SSoSA involved multilayers of differences or gaps that caused the cultural shock. One of them is the perception of values between their home countries and the host country. For example, the way they value money, the value of family (ties, commitment, influence), the value of time, and the value of relational interactions (the self and others). It may be assumed that the value of family and community influences perceptions, decision making, actions, and feelings. I observed that family influenced in different ways: silently, actively, aware of not being like 'them'. The case of Pablo and Carlos who had a more distant relationship with their nucleus family than Laura and Maria, best examples this. Despite their conscious and purposeful detachment from their nucleus family (not only physically but emotionally), the value they give to their family influenced them in the willingness for them to understand 'what it is like' referring to the challenges and overcoming of pursuing a higher education degree in a foreign country and a foreign language as in the case of Pablo. Carlos, similarly referred to his family as being 'supportive' and that 'always gave him a good life' as a drive to seek doing something for his own future wellbeing. In the case of Laura and Maria, the influence of their family was more evident in their stories. For Laura, being far from home (physically) and missing their support (emotional) was 'hard' yet a drive to keep going. Maria reflected her bond to her nucleus family (that she referred to as her mom and her younger sister) and her family in her home country. In both cases, Maria's commitment to her family represented a friction in the negotiation of her identity and her willingness to be more independent but at the same time the examples of resilience in her family were a drive to keep going thus the commitment to not disappoint them. I am not making the point here that the host country does not value family, my point here is that they have different views on those values.

The difference in time, money and relational values were also recurrent and found as causes of 'shocking' experiences. That was the case of Maria and her conflict of not

understanding how her peers would have a more comfortable life with economic easy while she was economically struggling. She overcame that conflict by undermining it and understanding the gains of her overcoming. Pablo, reconsidered his value of time and redefined it. This was reflected in the way he balanced work and his college commitments, and the time he dedicated to 'indulge' himself in his hobbies. Carlos and Laura, expressed the negotiation of their relational values in different ways. Carlos, dedicating less time to his friends and committing more to his college work and professional development while Laura revisited her habits and purposeful entered the social sphere finding her 'own way'. In the case of Carlos, the result of this change in the values was perceived as an improvement in his academic performance while for Laura it was the gain of networking.

That links us to the academic shocks. The obvious multidimensional differences between the home country and the host country are also reflected on the way students are able or not to cope with the academic demands of HE. Yet, only recently especial attention are given to other factors than those related to the acquisition or competence in the second language. Researchers, practitioners and institutions have consistent interest in examining issues related to the various backgrounds of the individuals and that influence an appropriate translation not just of the language but of the cultural as influencing meaning and performance (Little, 2013; Llanes et al., 2012; Piazzoli, 2015a; Ransdell, Barbier, & Niit, 2006; Tran, 2013; Weigl, 2009). In this case study, the various backgrounds of the participants reflected their influence on their academic performance. For example, their preparedness on language competence and domain on the subject matter was important for the success, however, it was not all. The language competence for these four students were tested based on standard exams that are especially applied to international students. Universities' entry policies assume that a proven and minimal L2 competence may determine the success or failure of NNS international students. Nonetheless, they still have problems in proving they are competent enough to overcome and succeed in their studies. This causes an additional shock because of the gap of feeling prepared to the realisation of being not sufficiently prepared and noticeable when they compare themselves or are compared based on the standards of NS and a monolingual institution. That implies differences in the instruction, assessment, climate, and examination process between the home country (their former educational experience) and the host country. Sometimes these differences are not understood by the international students and totally undermined by the host countries. When I asked the participants about those differences, they were wide and diverse, though converging to the same point: the gap between L1 country and L2 country. Besides the differences

in accents, demanding and challenging extensive readings, vocabulary and technical terminologies, the most recurrent topic was related to exams and more particularly, writing of essays. This is consistent with other studies on NNS international students (R. Harris & Chonaill, 2016; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Tran, 2013).

As an EFL teacher, the accounts of the self-developed strategies employed by the participants to overcome their language related challenges were striking, especially because they got to reflect on the difference in their backgrounds to those of the L2 that influenced their language competence. For example, they found the benefit in a change of the reading style which is reading to *grasp* meaning rather than doing deep and intensive reading. Despite they were forced to change their reading styles due to the reading load of their courses, they found out that their way of reading in L1 was interfering their reading process making it less efficient and rapid. Additionally, they found that reading what interested them the most was a good motive to keep reading and as a result improved their reading skills. In EFL/ESL literature those are found as the benefits of extensive reading over intensive reading (Akkakoson, 2013; Anderson, 1999; Stephen Krashen, 2013; S. D. Krashen, 2004, 2007; Mason & Krashen, 1997). Yet, it made more sense to me after listening to the participants' stories. Despite the main challenges these participants encountered was related to writing, I further explain the difficulties of reading because they are closely related, especially in the case of L2 learners (Krashen, 2008). The participants of this study, referred to changes in their writing habits and styles. For example, Carlos simplified it when saying 'You improve writing by writing' which Pablo elaborated as 'you just have to keep writing and be patient'. Maria was very illustrative in comparing the way most Spanish speakers write making the text look 'fleshy' (which means with more flesh) by employing a rhetorical (pompous) approach that is one of the characteristics of the Spanish language. However, it has also been found as characteristics of other cultures and acknowledged by educationalists and international students. In the case of some Asian students, they call it the 'talk around' style of writing which employs metaphors and avoids criticising other's work (Tran, 2013). The recurrent use of metaphors was evident in the discourse of the participants and it may have an obvious influence on their writing. However, I do not to attempt to *justify* any type of language incompetence as it did not cause the participants in this study to fail. On the contrary, they brought in that their essays and exams were good to get them grades that surpass the average for both NS and NNS. Therefore, my point here is, first, there is a difference in the writing style which is more evident in the academic world which is not just expecting to write well but to write at a high Anglophone style level. Secondly, it is not a determinant of failure and therefore, it is possible to develop awareness on those

difference and achieve improvements. It is possible, as the participants put it, by 'learning to write in chunks', 'shorter sentences, 'straight to the point', and being 'more structured'. The participants referred to more language related issues but here I have referred to those most frequently mentioned. However, I elaborated more in the individual case studies.

To conclude this section on the various shocks (cultural and academic), I remark the importance of awareness in the differences between L1 and L2, a critical reflective exercise to find strategies that work, patience and practice. Awareness is central and critical reflection are essential to transform those shocking experiences into challenges to overcome. Similarly, for both types of shocks my 'roller coaster' image of 'expecting the worst scenario' and getting prepared for it, is applicable.

### 3.4.4 Concluding and opening a new gap

In this final interpretive phase, I attempted to make meaning of the cases by employing cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2013, p.101). I did not attempt to construct a theory because it is the competence of grounded theory and of those related to ethnographic studies. Not did I try to test a particular LatinCRT position or an EFL method. Although the lens I employed for the analysis of the cases was in the vein of Transformative Learning and incorporated its core elements. But, these core elements were not employed to foster TL in the sought of empowerment and social justice (Mezirow et al., 2009). What is more, TL was not employed strictly in a setting of a classroom or teaching setting but to better understand processes of transformation towards success in HE in the groups of these four SSoSA and successful students.

Bringing in the findings of study 1. Common challenges have been found in the endeavour of entering higher education. However, the nature of success differed (not dramatically) for those within the context of NNS international students. Concurrent themes were personal growth to become a lifelong and autonomous learner, renegotiation of identity, importance of any type of support (family, friends, financial aids, and institutional supportive climate which involves lecturers, tutors, mentors, college staff, facilities, and non-academic services). Differences were mainly related to the challenges of entering higher education in a foreign country and a foreign language that influenced the participants of the cases' various processes of transformation. Those

transformations were evident in the renegotiation of their identities, expressed as insecurities, academic competences, life skills, and values. The processes that resulted on those transformations were stimulated by their lived experiences, perception and awareness of critical moments and need to change. The processes involved the employment of critical awareness and reflection, dialogical practice and proactive actions. The stories of the participants reflected emotions and values such as the value of family, persistence, patience and resilience.

I further refer to some unexpected and deviant cases that were found across the cases: resilience is not always genetically 'inherited' but are transferred through the accounts of experiences (usually stories of overcoming) from various agents. Additionally, there were cases of subtle discrimination (neglecting and dismissing cultural differences, age difference) such as the case of Maria and her TA and the age gap in Pablo's experience as a mature student, however, they were not determinant of their success.

The limitations of this study were the small number of participants due to stakeholder and valid policies, which does not permit to make generalisations. However, the depth brought in the cases and the context of the participants valuing their critical and reflective voices brought in interesting and various insights. Additionally, the gain in the employment of member checking was twofold: to value the participants' views and to add credibility and validity to the study (Creswell, 2013).

The participants expressed their appreciation of being valued in this study. That is evident in the comments expressed through email exchanges. I further mention two of them:

> I'm totally fine with the name you gave me. I am attaching the docs with some minor corrections. Mostly you captured what I wanted to transmit very well, so I have only made a few clarifications when necessary. I agree with the way you build up the case, you have prioritised and mentioned what was important for me. It was nice and interesting to see my experience told by someone else, or reinterpreted by someone else. It has helped me to reflect back on my college years. I honestly thank you for including me in the study :)
>
> -PABLO (pseudonym), 2017, correspondence-

> Thank you so much, I feel like this is quite a fair representation of my experiences, with the exception of the stuff I read online. It really didn't affect my perspective that much, my experience counts far more than something I have been told or read once online. It makes it sound more tormented than it actually was and I am not comfortable portraying that situation when I feel is not true to me.
>
> Thank you so much for including me in your research, it makes me feel heard, and like it is going to be there written for other people to pick up on. It made me really emotional to read this section and I really am thankful for all your work.
>
> -MARIA (pseudonym), correspondence-

As a final reflection, the gain of bilingualism [multilingualism] and plurilingualism as Crips has put it (Crisp et al., 2014) is starting to be valued as an asset in HE within the utopian ideal of an intercultural and pluricultural global knowledge economy (Bravo García, 2010; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Jimenez-Silva et al., 2009; López, 2014; Ransdell et al., 2006; Vélez-Rendón, 2014). Therefore, a deeper understanding of the challenges and overcoming of NNS international students of South America may serve to benefit that goal.

# 4 Chapter four: Study 3

## Influence of co-education in the success of Spanish speaking South American undergraduate students in Trinity College

This section is an off-shoot of study 2 and a continuation of study 3 in the form of an analysis by gender. This analysis by gender attempted to respond research question 4:

*Are there any consistent differences in the results (on the definitions and experiences of success in HE) by gender?*

This study explores the experiences of students who considered themselves successful in a coeducational university to establish, as far as possible, if the attributes that are usually related to the male and female genders were in any way relevant to that apparent success, and if there were any perceived gender-related factors that favoured or restricted such success. The intention of this chapter is also to understand, through the consideration of the particular context of Trinity College Dublin, how South American students experienced the move from a more overtly sexist culture to one seemingly more open and equal in its treatment to students regardless of their gender.

My interest in studying the influence of gender and gender stereotypes on the success of undergraduate students emerged after reading various studies in which gender featured among the variables that influenced behavioural factors for success, including: attendance, retention, career choice, and motivation at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Cardoza, 1991; Leonard, 1997; Merrill, 2009; Quinn, 2013; Quinn et al., 2005). Other factors include gender biases in policies and teaching practice and widespread views that restrict gender equality while contributing to the construction of gender stereotypes which limit men's or women's equal participation in society generally (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012; Sadovnik & Semel, 2002).

Controversy has long raged on the benefits of single-sex education versus coeducation and this debate has rarely reached any firm conclusions, and none that have been universally accepted by policy makers, as to which would more certainly advance equality (Booth et al., 2014; Datnow & Hubbard, 2002; Goldin & Katz, 2011; Meade, 1996). Therefore, this study simply assumes that coeducation in higher education is a

means to the end of showing that gender equality is possible, but only in a context where women and men can coexist in fairness and cooperation with there always being provision of similar opportunities to men and women. This follows UNESCO's call for fulfilment and equal participation through: "valuing similarities and differences between women and men and the different roles they play" (UNESCO, 2014, p. 60). This study in particular concerns experiences of coeducation in higher education amongst Spanish speakers from South America who have undertaken their undergraduate studies in Trinity College Dublin, Ireland.

## 4.1 Introduction to literature review

This literature review starts with a general discussion of gender parity and coeducation and more in detail in South America. To set the context of the study, I later proceed to describe the pathway of TCD from single-sex to becoming a coeducational institution. I employed official reports, books, empirical studies, newspapers and magazines located using terms including: 'single-sex education', 'coeducation, 'gender parity, 'higher education', 'college', 'Trinity College Dublin', 'gender and success in higher education', 'gender', 'gender stereotypes', 'gender threat', 'women in higher education', 'equality', 'inequality', 'sex roles', 'women and Latin America', 'sexism', 'women and success in he'. Spanish references were similarly considered.

### 4.1.1 Gender parity and co-education in HE

Studies of gender recognise gender as an important social division in all cultures that recognise 'a social distinction between masculine and feminine. In this sense it can be distinguished from the term sex, which relates to the biological and by and large binary distinction between male and female'(Graddol, 1989, p. 7). Gender is typically said to be 'crucial to individual identity' and to be constructed by both society and culture (Socolow, 2000). Distinctions between rights granted to human beings based on gender have historically caused inequality, especially in patriarchal cultures (Graddol & Swann, 1989; Socolow, 2000). As a result, in many countries, girls obtained access to formal schooling later than boys, contributing to a parity gap that is reflected not only in higher education but also in the industrial, political, literary, artistic/socio-cultural and other spheres.

As a response to this inequality UNESCO has expressed its interest in advocating and achieving gender equality through an action plan intended to be completed in two

chronological phases, the first from 2008 to 2013 and the second from 2014 to 2021. In this action UNESCO recognised education as a paramount means of reaching equality and, in turn, equality as an important factor if people are to exercise their rights to education. It thus states:

> As education is increasingly considered as one of the most effective investments for achieving equitable and sustainable development, realizing gender equality must become a priority in the effort to promote not only the right to education for all; It is critical to the achievement of education for all (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and continue to be at the core of the post-2015 education agenda, hence Major Programme I places gender equality at the core of its programme support and monitoring progress in education.
>
> (UNESCO, 2014, p. 28)

Amongst the priorities in the UNESCO Equality Agenda were actions intended to increase women's access to education, to reduce disparities, the prevention of gender-based violence, deconstruction of stereotypes to enhance gender equal representations and development of women's leadership (UNESCO, 2014). Many organisations and institutions were then invited to include those priorities in their planning to unify efforts with UNESCO's agenda, seeking not only to bring about more participation by girls and women in educational contexts, but also to ensure equality in the provision of education at all levels.

Differences in learning capacity attributed to sexual traits that differentiate men from women have long been questioned and challenged through studies examining IQ and achievement by gender (Eliot, 2013; Halpern et al., 2011; Sadovnik & Semel, 2002). However, the history of attitudes to coeducational higher education in many countries coincides with narratives of restriction and discrimination, especially in patriarchal societies (Goldin & Katz, 2011; Herring, 1959; Parkes, 2004; Socolow, 2000; David Webb & McDowell, 1982). The late arrival of women into academic life can be both the result and a cause of those traditional gender stereotypes that restricted women from going to college, entering careers in the scientific, technological, engineering and mathematics [STEM] subjects and caused them to opt for traditional careers resulting in inequalities in their participation in education and in society generally ("Female Graduation Rates," 2011; Mercadal, 2016; OECD, 2016).

The increasing interest in reducing gender imbalances and increasing the participation of women in careers related to STEM, business and economics have drawn the attention of researchers concerned with the benefits of single-sex education for female students (Booth et al., 2014; Eisenkopf, Hessami, Fischbacher, & Ursprung, 2015). It has been contended that single-sex education allows women more freely to enter and be confident in academia, though such research has typically been at primary and secondary levels. Empirical studies done in higher education settings have often proposed the benefits of coeducation (Hoffnung, 2011; Sadovnik & Semel, 2002).

As the setting for this study was a coeducational university, the discussion that follows deals with coeducational settings at postsecondary and higher education levels. A study undertaken in a coeducational university in the UK in a programme that had been traditionally deemed a stereotypically masculine field (business and economics) concluded that females who were exposed to periods of teaching in a course at which only other females were present obtained significantly better results (measured by passing courses, retention and completion of studies) than their peers in either all male or mixed courses (Booth et al., 2014). The authors attributed these results (including increased attendance rates and presentation of coursework) to the reduction of psychological factors such as stereotyped expectation and subtle discrimination. Social psychologists have studied the effects of stereotyping as threat to the social identity of the persona. In other words, people tend to conform to negative stereotypes found in their social context (Steele et al., 2002).

Stereotype threat theory applied in higher education settings concerns the influence of misconceptions of women as less capable than men of performing in certain ways, usually informed by patriarchal assumptions, and sometimes resulting in subtle gender biases. Roughly, women may tend to accept such stereotypes to the point that they actually fail to do well in certain subjects or refrain from entering careers in spheres including STEM, business and economics/finance (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012; Spencer et al., 1999). However, other studies argue that underrepresentation of females in STEM related careers is not actively caused by the presence of discrimination (especially in third and fourth level [doctoral] education) and suggest other reasons exist for women not opting for such careers that should be explored (Berezow, 2011; Ceci, Williams, Sumner, et al., 2011; Ceci, Williams, & Thompson, 2011). One significant study undertaken at the coeducational University of Amsterdam reported general behavioural effects of having more female-only classes during one part of a course (changes in the behaviour of both male and female students) but not specifically changes affecting

achievement or retention levels (Oosterbeek & Van Ewijk, 2014). The same study found that the predicted result of the reduction of stereotype threat was not reflected in female class participation but reduced male performance in courses that required higher levels of mathematics. A similar study reported benefits from the inclusion of a single-sex programme as part of a course by measuring engagement and experience of support amongst the female students (Rosenthal et al., 2011). The reduction of stereotype threat was also studied in another university, resulting in the increase of women's performance in mathematics examinations (Spencer et al., 1999) while another study on successful women in the US, confirmed that graduates of women's colleges were more likely to attain career success than graduates of coeducational institutions (Ledman, Miller, & Brown, 1995). All the studies mentioned above were quantitative, but by taking them as first steps we can see opportunities for the conduct of qualitative research to establish how these findings relate to the effect of gender on academic performance, differentiation in instruction given, existence of positive female roles, the reduction of stereotype threats, or any other factors.

A radical stance against single-sex education posits the lack of robust evidence of meaningful positive effects, its impracticality and harm to gender equality, as it: 'increases gender stereotyping and legitimizes institutional sexism' (Halpern et al., 2011, p. 1706). Additionally, one benefit of coeducation, not only in schools but also in higher education, may be its contribution to the deconstruction/erosion of traditional gender related stereotypes without jeopardising quality of education (Badley, 1920; Dale, 1974; Hannan, 1996; Sadovnik & Semel, 2002; Suberviola Ovejas, 2012). A longitudinal comparative study on the differences between graduates who had attended single-sex colleges and coeducational institutions in the United States reported some differences in the perception of engagement and support provided in white female students, but none amongst non-white female students (Hoffnung, 2011). Further, the same study reported no perceived effects on advanced degrees, career status or involvement in STEM careers but noted a stronger tendency to maintain post-college social/professional connections on the part of females attending coeducational colleges. Cases of single-sex colleges that became coeducational suggest the benefits of engaging their students in conversations on gender equity, as was so at Wheaton College (Miller-Bernal & Poulson, 2007; Sadovnik & Semel, 2002).

At the most basic level it can easily be agreed that coeducation best represents the scenario in the 'real world in what might be called western modernity (Europe, the US, South America and comparable regions and countries) where women and typically men

coexist/cooperate daily but the college experience in either case (coeducational or not) is influenced by institutional policies and their application. Institutions can contribute to the reduction of stereotype threats through proper administration to ensure the college operates in an egalitarian manner for all.

The influence of positive female role models has also been argued to contribute to gender equality by making females more confident, competitive and resilient (Booth et al., 2014; Ceci, Williams, Sumner, et al., 2011; Hoffnung, 2011; Oosterbeek & Van Ewijk, 2014; Rosenthal et al., 2011). It is a fact that, women who have reacted against claims of females being weak and incapable of or lacking in leadership skills have been an inspiration to those pushing for parity in science, education, management and leadership around the world. Considered advanced for their time and subsequently called pioneers, such women have contributed to the development of society through their legacy in breaking female gender stereotypes. What such pioneering women typically have in common is having had access to extended education and opportunities to enter a career, some of them in their home countries and others benefitting from student mobility. By 2017 various organisations and institutions were uniting their efforts and working together to meet an agenda that advocated reduction of disparities in access to education, meaningful career opportunities and the participation of women in society generally. I turn next to considering such issues as they affect the highly patriarchal culture (but not exclusive) of South America.

### 4.1.2 Gender parity in South America

The Americas, and in particular the Latin American region, were known in Europe as the New World after the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492. Initially, the history of this so-called New World was written by the colonisers in a way that was different to the former historical record in which narratives were passed through oral traditions or the histories written by the first educated natives. Nevertheless, in this section Europeanised accounts are used to explain how gendered roles developed in Colonial Latin American and how they influenced/caused gender disparity in Hispanic South America. Prehistoric or pre-Columbian archaeological studies in Latin America provide evidence of gendered roles that were fundamentally related to the sex of the individual. For example: male figures with penis are associated with hunting and war, while female figures are found depicting the ability to weave, conceive and work the land. These were used as symbols of the fertility of the land (Herring, 1959; Socolow, 2000).

The work of Susan Socolow has attempted to recast that prehistory in a feminist light. She contends that the positions of women in pre-Columbian times were influenced by their status. She finds no evidence showing the existence of matrilineal societies before the Incas and Mayas but acknowledges some elite women ruled in certain regions after their husbands' deaths (2000, pp. 18,19). However, some historians of Colonial South America, including Juan de Velasco, José Manuel Restrepo and Francisco Javier Yanez (Avilés Pino, 2016; Melo, 1990; Rivero, 2016), have taken account of oral traditions in the native languages of ancestral tribes and the revision of first hand evidence that were still available in the Colonial times and the theory of prehistoric matriarchy introduced by the Swiss historian Johann Jakob Bachofen, coincides with the oral traditions on the existence of what in Spanish are called *matriarcados* [matriarchy] in some ancient tribes of the Americas. In matriarchal societies it was women who made decisions on behalf of the tribe while men were expected to hunt to provide for the community. It has been claimed that the dominant accounts of the history of pre-Columbian South America have been influenced by a subsequent patriarchal culture and, therefore, some feminists have challenged their findings on sex and roles in pre-Columbian societies (Guerra Terra, 2014a, 2014b). Some of the archaeological finds in South American may suggest a privileged position for certain women in the prehistoric period society as they were venerated for their ability to bear children. For instance, evidence of burial traditions portrays the possibilities of women in leading positions (Guerra Terra, 2014a, 2014b).

Overall the evidence may be inconclusive either way but it is important to state that there is widespread agreement in stating that before Colonisers came to the Americas the land belonged to the tribe and tribal members had different roles and status. But regardless of whether there were patriarchal or matriarchal societies present in pre-Columbian times, all were affected by the conquest of South America by the Spaniards. Describing the situation of women in Spain in the period of conquest/colonisation, Socolow was driven by a patriarchal politico-religious culture (Socolow, 2000, pp. 5-15). Therefore, during colonisation and well into the post-colonial period, when countries in the region were free of direct Spanish political influence but retained its culture, women's role were restricted very largely to domestic work. Furthermore, as an obvious and direct result of these gendered stereotypes, little need was seen to educate women for other chores than housework and preparing to be good wives and mothers (Herring, 1959; Socolow, 2000).

Due to the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and the education system and practices it brought to the colonised territories, single-sex education was a norm at

primary level; nuns educated girls while priests educated boys. Education for girls, except rarely for those belonging to elite groups, mainly consisted of preparedness for domestic work and motherhood. Education for boys of low status consisted in the main in preparation as artisans (Herring, 1959, p. 209). In general, most of the population was illiterate and only elite boys were educated in the classics, mathematics and science. Religious obedience and practical purposes dominated the education of the masses (Pimenta, 2010). Such post-primary education as existed was reserved for elite young men and only a few young ladies belonging to the privilege group of *mestizos* or of the nobility benefitted from post-primary education. Parents of young ladies feared for the safety of girls who might attend post-primary schools. However, the initiatives of pioneering women and some men who advocated equal access to formal education started to provide further instruction to women as is the case of Rita Lecumberri in countries like Ecuador who became the first women to open an academy in her hometown to provide high quality of preparedness to young ladies (Pérez Pimentel, 2017) and to challenge ideas of women not being 'educable' (Herring, 1959, p. 209).

The liberation of South American countries and the emergence of new South American nations, influenced as it was by the Enlightenment and European Reformism which would ultimately contribute to changes in ideas about the education of women and men (Pimenta, 2010), did little or nothing to less the role of patriarchal culture and gendered stereotypes as this process of liberation was dominated by the male heads of leading landowning families and the new nation states restricted opportunities for women to have access higher education as it was not seen as productive or 'feminine'. South American countries experienced a wave of revolution in the early nineteenth century but these were socially conservative. Progress came hard.

However, by the early twenty-first century reports form the World Economic Forum (WEF) suggested a change in the position of women in countries of South America with regard to access to education, equal rights in the labour market and positions in academia, not only in higher education teaching work but also in research and management. Additionally, women were becoming more evident in administrative and political positions with women elected to the presidencies of certain South American countries including Chile, Argentina, and Brazil even before the United States of America. Correspondingly, in some universities there were women in positions of

leadership and management, not simply teaching and research (Quezada Pavón, 2017).[71]

National plans in South American countries, including Ecuador, came to echo the call in UNESCO's Gender Equality Plan to use higher education to enhance gender equality in schooling and the labour market by providing positive role models, promoting female leadership and educating the community so as to break down the barriers and stereotypes that a patriarchal society hitherto imposed on a female population no longer prepared to live submissively (Herdoíza-Estévez, 2015). These plans aimed at increasing women's participation in academia and STEM careers and generally giving them recognition for existing work and the empowerment to take more active social roles.

### 4.1.3 History of coeducation in higher education in Ireland and Trinity College Dublin.

The history of Irish higher education reflects a longer history of European segregation of women by gender and the widespread unhappiness at their entering university in any way is encapsulated in their being called 'blue stockings' as a pejorative term when they first did so in the late nineteenth century. Amongst the reasons advanced for their continued exclusion were that women's presence was thought likely to distract men, that they would endanger their femininity, health and social graces, and the fact that it was considered a waste of time as many women were still destined to be housewives, financially dependent on their husbands (Parkes, 2004, p. 1).

Ireland's interest in the provision of education for women was influenced by the movement in England that advocated women's rights to education from the mid-nineteenth century but much of the impetus to see women have access to coeducational universities had to do with preparing them to work in fields that were considered suitable for their gender, such as: 'telegraph clerks, law writers and sewing machinists' (Parkes, 2004, p. 8). Irish parents believed their girls needed either vocational or academic tuition and gladly accepted the opening up to them of hitherto single-sex colleges as the existing secondary schools for young ladies were not entirely preparing them for college life as

[71] For the first time in the 58 years since its foundation a woman was elected as *rectora* [president] of one of the most prestigious universities in Ecuador in 2017. The example of this university reflected the experiences of other formerly all-male higher education institution that had become coeducational.

their subjects were fewer, their curricula had lower standards and they were generally less ambitious than schools for boys. These differences became evident only after girls were allowed to sit national examinations following the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act of 1878. Girls' schools reported lower performance than boys' schools. In response to those results, and under pressure from Irish parents who wanted their girls to have similar opportunities to enter the labour market with good economic prospects, secondary schools started to face the challenge of preparing girls so that they would be ready for college with the inclusion of subjects formerly unavailable to them, such as: 'theology, arithmetic, algebra, natural science, mental and moral science, and Latin in addition to the traditionally female curriculum of modern language, history, drawing and music (Parkes, 2004, p. 9).

Changes in the ambitions of Irish parents for their girls between 1860 and 1904 and the demand for better quality in women's education generally prepared the way for women to enter coeducational universities in Ireland, especially Trinity College Dublin, the first of the medieval/early modern colleges in England and Ireland to admit female students in 1904 after some 30 years of failed attempts (O'Gorman, 2017; Webb & McDowell, 1982).

It is an irony that a university that was founded by a woman did not allow women to benefit to the right to higher education and as Joseph O'Gorman notes (2017), after amendments of the Statutes, the first female students were accepted to Trinity College against the will of then Provost George Salmon who had reputedly said women would only enter Trinity 'over [his] dead body' (Parkes, 2004, p. 3). By fully admitting the first female students in the three centuries since its foundation, Trinity College Dublin was a step ahead of other universities of the European Anglophone world, including the longer established Oxford and Cambridge. Yet, it took many years until women were really seen and treated as equals in their rights to belong and participate in a world that was mostly attributed as a privilege of men. Women had to face restrictions to some common areas like the dining and accommodation hall and access to Foundation scholarships. A slow move to parity in access and rights to equal participation in the college life is evident with historical accounts that the women could opt and get Foundation Scholarships for the first time in 1968 which allow them to have more presence in the dining hall and got college accommodation only in 1972 (O'Gorman, 2017; Parkes, 2004; Webb & McDowell, 1982).

Susan M. Parkes opens her compilation of the history of women in Trinity College Dublin from 1904 to 2004 with the following words from Maria Breen, a Trinity Access Programme student who graduated in Business Studies in 2000, under the title 'What Trinity Means to Me'.

> The unique combination of people, the surroundings, the traditions (and the tourists!) sets Trinity apart from all other colleges. As soon as you step through that 'front arch' you are greeted by an atmosphere of warmth, nostalgia and beauty – all the qualities that lie at the heart of Trinity…There is nowhere in the world I would have rather studied. I will always look back on those four years with a smile.
>
> (Breen, 2004, p. ii)

Those words make Trinity College Dublin appear a dream university to attend, but they are specifically the views of a female student who entered through a programme accessible to Irish or EU residents that are assessed as belonging to underrepresented groups. Thus, the words of Maria Breen are all the more meaningful if one knows the history of Trinity College Dublin towards accepting and graduating women students but they could also sound under representative if you consider the voice of students that entered college through different pathways, with less privileges and different backgrounds. Her voice reflects the excitement at her experience of a college life from which many women before 1904 were somewhat excluded and definitely does not reflect the struggles of many female students who attended Trinity College Dublin from 1904 to 1960 when their rights to be treated as equals were not fully recognised.

According to Susan Parkes' compilation of accounts, between 1904 and 1914, female students in Trinity demonstrated their intelligence and ability and showed they were not a threat for the male-dominated college. Despite the restrictions they had to face to integrating into college life, as they were not allowed to enter some schools, join some societies, benefit from college accommodation or join their male peers and lecturers in the Dining Hall, at the same time they showed that women and men could coexist in academia. It was during this decade that women students in Trinity became involved in activities such as debating and became more involved in college society. They gained the respect of some men for their intelligence and dedication, despite others still being of the belief that academia was not a proper place for women. By 1920, and after events that had changed Irish society and politics, including World War I (1914-1918), the Easter

Rising (1916) and the granting of women's first rights to vote (1918), women were active in the college's public life and both female students and staff members contributed in many fields, contributing to the acceptance and normalisation of coeducational higher education (Parkes, 2004). By 1939, despite the increase in women's matriculation in Trinity College Dublin and their active presence and high academic achievements in the college, they were still experiencing various forms of discrimination and inequalities with restrictions on college access after 6.00 p.m. and in other ways, including the prohibition of their joining societies like the prestigious College Historical Society (The His) and the Philosophical Society (The Phil). Specific codes of conduct applied to women, but they were determined to fight for their rights, sometimes at the cost of official reprimands and student mockery. Regardless, some male and female members of staff and some male peers encouraged them in their fight (Parkes, 2004).

Before and during World War II some female students seemed to be in a state of acceptance of whatever college gave them, silencing their claims for equal rights to enjoy college life. But from 1945 the college received other female students, Irish and international students, and this new influx may have contributed to changes such as the extension of the hours during which they were allowed to stay in the Reading Room to work. During the first 40 years after they were admitted to Trinity College Dublin, women proved to be successful in the fields of medicine, modern languages and social sciences though they struggled with late entry and poor performance in the School of Engineering. Women students were first admitted to the School of Engineering in 1920 but by 1960 only a few had entered and progressed successfully, 'by the 1990s there were [only] fifteen to twenty women graduates in engineering annually (Parkes, 2004, p. 159).

Slow but meaningful changes towards equality for women in Trinity College Dublin occurred in the 1950s through the influence of international students, Irish students who had been exposed to the world during and after the 1939-1945 war and younger male college staff who were pleased to see women taking part of the college academic and social life. Further, the creation of the Students Representative Council, a body open to everyone, and which was responsible for the provision and promotion of mixed common rooms, moved some societies to open themselves to women and areas including the Dining Hall to become more and more accepting of women's presence. Interestingly, some resistance to those changes was expressed in the newspaper Trinity News, suggesting some conservative ideas remained as to what female roles ought to be (Parkes, 2004). By the end of the 1950s the performance of women graduates and women staff and the support of allies in the cause of equality in Trinity College Dublin

resulted in something far closer than hitherto to the recognition of women as equals (Parkes, 2004). According to Professor Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven, a former Fellow and historian in Trinity College Dublin, first generations of women who were part of the college proved their ability to organise themselves and meet academic expectations with fewer resources and restricted opportunities than the men. But through their achievements and awards they demonstrated that 'within the same university, men and women could be intellectual equals and be recognized as such' (quoted in Parkes, 2004, p. 263).

By the time of writing there had been an increasing presence of women students in Trinity College since they were first time admitted slightly over a century ago. In 1914 only 15% students were women, while in 1939, women students comprised 23% of a total of 1543 (Parkes, 2004, pp. 86, 114). Women kept increasing in number in the coming years and by the 1960s and 1970s about 33% of 3000 students were female (Mayes, 2004). But more important than numbers of female students were that equal access to education, instruction and opportunity became part of college life. As Susan Parkes notes: 'by the end of the twentieth century women students in Trinity no longer saw themselves as different or inferior and they confidently take their place in all parts of college life' (2004, p. 301).

The Senior Lecturer's Annual reports evidence the participation of female students and academic staff across various disciplines (Geoghegan, 2012, 2013, 2014; Martin, 2015, 2016). This may suggest that by the twenty-first century Trinity was fully positioned as a coeducational institution. This may also raise questions such as:

- How do students perceive the coeducational climate in Trinity College, and
- How it influenced their experience towards success?

### 4.1.4 Analysis by gender: a tool to measure gender (dis)parity

Gender analysis is a situational analysis of the 'relationship, inequalities and power differences between men and women in a systematic way' (Leach, 2003, p. 19). It has been applied to enhance social justice by bringing awareness on people's rights, especially in developing countries. In educational settings, it has been employed for the purposes of training, learning and empowering people from disadvantaged populations. At government levels and NGOs, it serves for the purposes of assuring the equal

distribution of services (equity) and to detect any type of disparity (neglection in the recognition of equal rights and entitlements).

Gender analysis primarily employs sex-disaggregated data (Leach, 2003, p.20) and differentiates *sex* (biologically determined) from *gender* (socially determined). It also acknowledges the existence of gender roles that are patterns of behaviour socially assigned to men and women (but dynamic and interchangeable) by social and economic factors, norms, and values. The existence of these gender roles would lead to power relationships, stereotypes, and biases (Graddol & Swann, 1989, Leach, 2003).

Fiona Leach (2003) presents four tools of gender analysis that have been applied in educational contexts.

a) The Harvard Framework, focuses on the allocation of resources and activities. The Harvard framework, separates activities that women (girls) and men (boys) perform in three different categories: productive (those that provide goods and services for income or subsistence), reproductive (those involved in the maintenance and caring of the households and its members), and community (Leach, 2003, pp.18, 36,37).
b) The Women's Empowerment Framework, focuses on women's issues in relation to their level of participation, awareness and control. This framework observes five levels of equality: welfare, access, conscientisation, participation, and control; and three levels of recognition of women's issues: negative, neutral, positive (Leach, 2003, 58,59).
c) The Gender Analysis Matrix, takes into account changes on labour, time and resources over time (Leach, 2003, p. 32). It is participatory and permits to identify gender differences and to constructively challenge assumptions about gender roles (Leach, 2003, p. 71). The levels of analysis are: women, men, household, and community; and the categories of analysis are: labour, time, resources, and cultural factors (Leach, 2003, pp. 73,74).
d) The Social Relations Approach, engages with social relations in three categories (age, sex, and social class) rather than roles, resources and activities (Leach, 2003, p.86). This approach aims to seek inequalities in the four key institutions of society (the State, the market, the community, and the family) in regard to the distribution of resources, responsibilities, and power (Leach, 2003, p.87).

Leach suggests that gender analysis tools, despite mostly used to focus on women's needs, would also be applied to identify men's issues of those under any type of disadvantage, oppression or marginalised (Leach, 2003, 34). She similarly remarks that these tools are flexible and a good starting point for further analysis, planning and projects monitoring. Finally, she suggests the employment of other data collection tools like surveys, interviews, and focus groups to complement these tools.

The revision of these gender analysis tools informed this study on important aspects to be observed such as perceptions on access and control of resources, views that were dependent on traditional assumptions on gender roles, and awareness of (in)equalities in social relations regarding age, sex and social class.

In the context of this study, besides the equal provision (and control) of resources and instruction, I was interested in observing the language used (if sexist or not) and the existence (or not) of traditional gendered stereotypes in the data collected (interviews). I further elaborate on my rational for those particular interests.

Language is claimed to be a mean to (de)construct a sexist environment. As Sally McConnell-Ginet's remarked in 1983, the language used can portray a male dominant world: 'Talk works to create and maintain sex-stereotyping and male dominance. Our speech not only reflects our place in culture and society but also helps to create that place' (cited in Graddol & Swann, 1989, p. 10). Changes in the words used to express gender stereotypes can be the evidence as to changes in, or the elimination of, those stereotypes (Graddol & Swann, 1989). Because the core of this study is the use of English as a language of instruction, it is deemed important to note that it has been described as being among the most patriarchal and 'inherently sexist' languages (Graddol & Swann, 1989, p. 148). As language is understood to be a cause and consequence of social divisions, although the processes by which this comes to be so are not fully understood (Graddol & Swann, 1989, p. 172), we can demonstrate 'changes in the social/cultural environment' (Graddol & Swann, 1989, p. 194) through examination of the language. Therefore, in this analysis by gender, signs of sexist language perceived by the participants in their experience in their coeducational college are studied. Traditional gendered stereotypes portray women as more talkative than men, but men as being more disruptive in primary and secondary school. Some studies of women and men interacting in mixed classes at undergraduate level have assessed these tropes (Graddol & Swann, 1989, p. 70; see also Oosterbeek & Van Ewijk, 2014). Certainly, one study in a college context suggested that gender was not a determinant of tendency to talk as long as the participants were confident of the expertise they had in the subject matter (Leet-Pellegrini, 1980). Therefore, concerning to this study, levels of participation in the college community and class participation were explored.

## 4.2 Methodology

The specific research questions that led the design of the study and specific methodologies are:

1) How was the increasing participation of women in Trinity College perceived by the participants in this study?

2) What were the perception of male and female roles on the part of the participants in this study?
3) What were their perceptions of relative privileges and the degree of difficulties experienced by male and female students, if any?
4) Had their expectation of male and female roles been influenced by family traditions, cultural background, religion, or other factors?
5) Have such changes in those traditionally-informed gendered stereotypes (if any) been influenced by the exposure of the participants to an Anglophone European academic context?
6) Are stories of resilience and the overcoming of challenges/obstacles to success related to perceived characteristics or privileges related to gender?
7) Did the participants experience gender related differentiation in the facilities, provision of services and instruction during college?
8) Did the participants benefit from the experience of attending to a coeducational institution of the European Anglophone world?

This cross-cultural qualitative research took a case study approach following the interpretive (constructivist) paradigm. The purpose of the case studies was to describe experiences of and views on female/male gender issues during the participants' studies in Trinity College. The methods of data collection were mixed, with a participatory approach in the collection, presentation and analysis of those data. Each case study was built up from information collected through informal conversations, audio recorded in-depth interviews, an initial online survey, an extended online survey with explicit questions on the participants' most influential male or females relative, and emailed questions. The participants were asked to review my descriptions of their cases to confirm their voices had been accurately represented and that what was on offer to readers was not a biased misinterpretation on my part as researcher. This is consistent with the spirit of the participatory method. Participants offered feedback and suggested changes in the wording of their views as necessary.

Like the study presented in the previous chapter (Study 2), participants chose their language of preference for the interviews and online surveys. Interviews were audio recorded and transferred to a laptop in mp3 format. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed. Translations of the responses into English were made only for the purpose of presenting them in the findings, as: 'Subjective interpretation may shift the translation in one direction or the other (without necessarily being outright wrong), words may have no equivalents, or direct equivalents — even though available — may

not convey the set of connotations implied by a term in the original language' (Behr, 2015, p. 286).

The data treatment (transcripts of the interviews) proceeded similarly to study 1 and 2. I followed a line-by-line coding approach, sought commonalities for grouping and regrouping, made decisions on emerging themes and reassigned the codes (nodes) into those themes. I sought commonalities in themes whenever possible but these were not the only lenses used due to diversity in the participants' backgrounds, I also included deviant cases. In my analysis of the transcripts I scrutinised the language used, seeking signs of gender having had any significant influence on the course of their studies or signs of perceptions of those experiences being sexist. In the discussion section I have set details of Trinity College's policies and regulations related to the participants' courses (obtained from the college's websites and other official documents) alongside extracts from their various narrative.

### 4.2.1 Instruments development

The four participants in this study answered questions in extended (15-minute) audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with a view to exploring their experiences regarding traditional female/male gender roles and gender stereotypes. The questions emerged from my reading of the literature on coeducation in higher education and gender studies in higher education. The questionnaire was prepared in English, translated into Spanish and peer-reviewed by two bilingual people.

Open-ended questions (numbered as 21 to 26) in the semi-structured interview were aimed at exploring the participants' views of experiences related to gender and perceived gender-related equalities or inequalities. As with other questions, they were devised in English, translated and revised by bilingual (English/Spanish) collaborators to adjust their content and ensure they addressed the key concerns of this study. For simplicity in the presentation of the questionnaires only the English version is included here.

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The first few open-ended questions were intended to assess the influence of gender stereotypes or stereotype threats, whereas other, follow-up, questions emerged during the interviews. Questions 21 to 26 were as follows.

21. Do you think there is more presence of a certain gender in your career? For example, are there more men than women? Why do you think is the reason for that?
22. Do you think there are attributed roles assigned to the male/female gender that affected your college life? How, please give some examples.
23. Have some of the attributed male/female roles influenced by your family traditions, culture, religion, or any others? Please give some examples.
24. Has your way of thinking about those roles being affected by your experience in college in Ireland? How?
25. Do you think your gender contributed to success in your college life? How?
26. Would your college experience had been different if you had a different gender? How? For example: the treatment of your lecturers, staff, peers, college policies, facilities?

Some examples of follow-up questions are shown in the findings, where sections of the interviews are presented.

### 4.2.2 Participants

The four participants who consented to be interviewed and audio-recorded interview have had their names and nationalities withheld so that they remain anonymous and their details are confidential. They are identified hereafter using the same pseudonyms they were given in the previous section of this study. The participants were two females and two males. Three of them were single; one female was a married mature student.

### 4.2.3 Data analysis and findings

The experiences of the participants are presented in the case studies in a way intended not simply to provide a description of those experiences but in pursuit of evidence of the benefits of coeducation in higher education and with a view to establishing if there was always, sometime or never equal access to resources and in pursuit of signs of gendered influence on success.

The case studies are presented with a narrative (story-telling) approach because I deemed important to take into account the voices of this particular group and their cultural background. The stories of Maria, Carlos, Laura and Pablo are aimed to portray the experience of these four SSoSA in a coeducational higher education setting. Again,

footnotes were employed to provide supplementary information, clarify, and state cultural differences between the host country culture/context and the culture/context of the interviewee (Oliver, 2004, p. 73).

The cases are presented in the order of the audio-recorded interviews, which depended on the participants' availability. The names of the participants' home countries are disguised as XY in the narratives due to ethical and safety issues. Some of the demographic considerations relevant to the analysis included participant's marital status and type of schooling before he/she attended college in Ireland, as shown in the table.

| ***Participant*** | ***Marital Status*** | ***Sex*** | ***Gender*** | ***Primary School*** | ***Secondary School*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Case 1: MARIA | Single | Female | Female | Coeducational private/public[72] | Coeducational private/public |
| Case 2: CARLOS | Single | Male | Male | Private | Private |
| Case 3: LAURA | Married | Female | Female | Coeducational public | Coeducational public |
| Case 4: PABLO | Single | Male | Male | Coeducational Public | Coeducational Public |

**Table 34. Information of the participants in case studies (Study3)**

[72] María said due to her mom's study and work commitments she had to move very often in her home country, therefore she attended to various types of school systems.

#### 4.2.3.1 Case study 1: MARIA

Maria's schooling experience before college exposed her to coeducational institutions in the public and private sectors as she reported having changed school quite often. Her programme choice gave her the option to do two subjects: Philosophy and Politics, both usually perceived as non-traditional choices for females. She opted for those courses within the Philosophy, Politics, Economics and Sociology [PPES] programme because they were the most appealing options available after she passed her International Student course. She would have preferred a career in arts but said she ended liking her course and was satisfied with the outcome. In both courses (PPES and the earlier general or introductory International Student course) she found a greater male presence than female, not only in her class but more generally.

Although she did not know much about the content of her Philosophy modules before entering, she had some preconceptions of its being a career mainly for men. During the course of her studies she found this be a misconception. As she put it in her own words:

> When people imagine a philosopher you can imagine a big beard and a pipe cos that's a philosopher but then when you look at pictures of real philosophers today you know they walk in heels and they are very...have uhm you know they have...you know they come in all shapes and sizes.

Maria also mentioned comments she had heard about the risks of her subject choice for a woman: 'There is a lot of sexual harassment in Philosophy'. In her career in Politics, another traditionally male dominated career, she received comments portraying stereotyped reasons as to why it was not a good place for her. Reasons mentioned included the assumption of women not being god. In her words:

> …a lot of the assumptions come [from people thinking]: "Women aren't that tough". Which is <u>not true</u>!

As in her Philosophy courses, she was warned as to the risks of her choice, some comments she mentioned included: "'It's really hard there are lots of men' …and they [people giving informal advice on subject choice] even say 'They [male students] will harass you' …and it depends I suppose how'd you take that".

The circumstances in Maria's family (in which there was an absent father and grandfather) had surrounded her with strong female role models. In her narrative she referred to her grandmother, mother and sister primarily. She portrayed the women in her family as strong and resilient. She indicated that her mother came to Ireland for her doctoral research work in Physics and Metallurgic and that was what had that brought Maria and her youngest sister to Ireland. She said Leonardo da Vinci influenced her most before attending college and her mother was the most influential person during her college years. She did not feel there were marked gender roles in her family as women had had to perform all the roles because of the absent men in her family. As she put it in her own words: 'You kind of have to go on because there are no men'. However, she would identify some evidence of traditional gender roles among some of her relative. She reported: 'My uncle [back in her home country] wouldn't wash the dishes and I have to wash the dishes which is a bit annoying'.

Maria considered there to be a sexist culture in her home country. She mentioned shops called Coffee and Legs shops[73] with which she did not feel comfortable.

> MARIA: … it is like a working district or even near the palace... like the Presidential Palace. It is plagued with these shops called coffee and legs which I didn't know what they were until I walked in and I saw all naked women serving coffee to... you know and I was like...I cried so much ... it really, really shocked me and I cried because I realised if I had to go back for my country I have to accept that and I cried myself to sleep and I tried to reach out and talk to other … and it was like "what do you think? Is this normal?" I didn't know maybe I was the most naive person but I just didn't know and people, even women everyone was just like...
>
> I: Was that normal?
>
> MARIA: …It was so normal that the fact that I was bringing up [the issue] was kind of annoying [to some men].

Maria's narratives reveal the existence of sexist, gendered stereotypes that are learned from a very young age and which had obvious implications for South American women who can often expect to be treated as sexual objects.

[73] Coffee and legs [Café con piernas] are shops where women serve coffee wearing short dresses, in the most conservative ones and are semi-naked in others. It is a tradition that men after work call into such shops before heading home.

> I think it starts from a very young age and I don't think children are any raised to be developed. They really know from a very early age and they start collecting information so it's like: “This is how women behave and this is how men behave”. And you see ads like butts and teats everywhere and you kind of feel so that is what I have to do eventually.

She claimed her experience of higher education in Ireland had ‘definitely’ fostered a different view of gender than those typically found in her home country. She did not see any blatant gendered stereotyping in her college life or among the people with whom she most associated. Of her experiences with Irish boyfriends she said: ‘… I've only had two boyfriends and have both being from here [Ireland] and those [South American] gendered roles are virtually non-existent’.

One situation she described amply illustrated the contrast between the traditional stereotypes in her home country and Ireland, as outlined in this section of the interview:

> MARIA: … this was here in Ireland…it was the first time during … election and … I was elected President[74] and it was three of us two men and one woman and I was the youngest. In XY [name of the home country] I am completely sure I would have never [have] been named the president...
>
> I: Would it be something assigned to a man?
>
> MARIA: Yeah and I would have been the Secretary for sure. ‘Cos there is the President, Secretary and the Commissioner and the only female role there was secretary...

When asking if her gender somehow influenced her college success in Ireland, some of her words hinted at ways in which gender may have favoured her: ‘I can't really tell for sure. Maybe a little bit ‘cos I feel like certain people, not everyone, some people, have made choices in their life because I’m a woman’.

[74] This refers to a system for the counting of votes of those living abroad. The Embassy of X in Ireland ensures that one person is elected *Presidente de Mesa* and is responsible for ensuring the process is administered correctly.

She elaborated on this.

> Sometimes being a woman can work in your advantage because people have this agenda to make things a bit more fair, so maybe. I don't know how you can run out of this ‘cos it is not a bad thing. I am not complaining but I am wondering: can you keep this forever and maybe should be just be based on merit?

When asked if she specifically she had encountered any bias, positive or negative, on the part of her lecturers or other staff members, she responded:

> … I don't think your lecturers look at you in a gendered manner. There is so much like L[esbian] G[ay] B[isexual and] T[ransgendered] stuff going on that …I don't feel like anyone feels like they have any sort of entitlement to make any references to gender. It is just a MINEFIELD [original emphasis] so no one gets into it, which is very, very good.

Maria did not mention any restrictions resulting from her gender when it came to having her voice heard, making clarifications or contributing in her courses. And, finally, she mentioned being actively involved in the MetaFizz society (founded in the 1920s under the more formal name of the Metaphysical Society as a forum for the discussion of philosophical ideas). This had contributed significantly to enhancing the quantity and quality of her college experience.

#### 4.2.3.2 Case Study 2: CARLOS

Carlos's views and comments related primarily to his career background in Business. Business was what he had wanted to study since he first came to Ireland and it was one of the options available after he passed the International Student course. He has heard comments about the gender disparity in this field but he did not observe any significant disparity in his courses. He reported there were a large number of women attending although he had the impression of there being more men than women.

He attributed the cause of there being slightly more men than women to preference rather than gender. As he put it:

> It's a matter of preference. I don't think it has to do with any other thing than a matter of preference.

Carlos claimed that he had never thought of gender stereotypes or gendered roles as an issue. He added he had not seen gender stereotyping in his own immediate family, relatives or friends and this had not affected his college life. Carlos believed Latin America was a very sexist region but he claimed it was not any more so than Ireland or that his home country at least was comparable to Ireland.

> Yes, there was a time in the past when we were a male chauvinist society, that you could say, a very male chauvinist society. But I don't see any people of XY or my friends [male friend] or the people I talk to, disrespecting their girlfriends or that they treat them in a bad manner or that they [girlfriends] expect us to be the ones who have to work. For all of my friends [male friends] that I know now, it is very normal, since I was in XY for people to share the bills, for women to study, for women to work, for women to those be who earn the most money in the household. I see that a lot. I know more than three of my friends [male friends] whose mums are the ones who own a business[75] …the thing is that people like saying that the people of Latin America, that we are male chauvinists. I see more men carrying the buggies in XY than I see here. Then I wonder why are we the ones who are male chauvinists and why are we the ones who are like that?

[75] Carlos mentioned before and confirmed in his second interview that his mother was a business woman herself, working in the real estate industry (which is a good income in South America).

Carlos feels that those beliefs about gender disparity or lack of equal rights in South America were exaggerations and nonsense. He invoked the example of men and women being paid equally in shops.

> CARLOS: If you go right now here, you won't tell me that you will enter into a shop and that they are paying more to the woman than to the man.
>
> I: No
>
> CARLOS: They are paying the same to these two people who are doing the same job. It is the same in XY, the same everywhere else.

Carlos claimed that feminists actively promoted inequalities or discrimination.

> Maybe in an organisation it is different. You may say that there are more male C[hief] E[xecutive] O[fficer]s than women and so om. Well, that is what you have but if you talk to me about feminism and equality, nothing in the world is equal. That means, that if you are a feminist, you will want to have more women than men at the end of the day, because it will never be equal.

Carlos complemented this by commenting that in college he did not see any forms of discrimination against women. He did not believe there to be any gender differentiated privileges in the instruction or facilities offered in college. Therefore, he felt women's claims of gender inequalities were falsely based as he did not perceive any discrimination against women in this context. He maintained that the media and people generally put too much emphasis on gender related issues and he claimed there was bias with which he was uncomfortable. In his own words:

> But what makes me think like this, it seems rare to me, you know. That a conversation starts and then that's what people talk about constantly and constantly and that they bring it to a point that is exaggerating, I mean…that it is full of politics and all this about feminism and that now what it means to offend someone or not to offend someone and do you know what? It seems to me that they are starting to promote it too much.

Carlos suggested that much discussion of equality and gender rights had caused the promotion of gay rights, to which he did object entirely but which he found overwhelming.

> I am not homophobic or anything like that, but do you know what? I think there is a moment when you are disrespecting someone and you can be promoting something that does not exist and that doesn't have to be promoted in that way(pause)…
>
> … obviously we (South American countries) are behind in giving equal rights to homosexuals but it may come to the point that you are promoting it everywhere all around the world. They have the same rights but it is not something that has to be 'Wow'. So to me it has to be fair.

Carlos admitted there were gender stereotypes in some groups, not only in his country but everywhere, and he referred to this as something that resulted from socio-economic status or education. This point is illustrated in several extracts.

> CARLOS: It is something they talk about a lot and maybe it could be somehow. There must be people that get home and say Look, dinner is not ready' but it must be something from people of a different socio-economical group and with different education, that don't have any…
>
> I: So do you feel that it is more present in people who are not educated?
>
> CARLOS: Exactly! In people who are not educated because, what woman will stand that the man comes and says 'Look! Dinner is not ready. it is not cooked, but I have been working all day'? I mean, a person with a little respect for herself and who is well brought-up would say "Go to hell, you know" sorry for the word…but no way!

Carlos was aware of domestic violence[76], which is usually understood as violence against women. However, he thought of this as a worldwide problem and and that affects women and men. He claimed it was not something with which he was familiar in any person way. As he put it:

[76] Domestic violence refers to any violent or aggressive behaviour within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a spouse or partner. In South American countries this term was formerly used to refer to women being mistreated by their partners. Now it generally implies any type of abusive behaviour at home.

> I understand about violence against women. It would be irresponsible on my part to say it does not exist in South America or here (Ireland). Of course, there are people, women, that are abused and men that are abused by women but I don't know, it is not something I have experienced in the flesh. None of my friends are male chauvinists or anything like that.

Carlos claimed that his college experiences had not been shaped by his views on gender stereotypes or gendered roles as he had always thought everyone should have the same opportunities. He also believed success does not depend on gender. Nevertheless, he insisted that the feminist and equality movements had caused reverse bias against men, harming some in his field.

> CARLOS: I think that now women are having more success maybe, do you know why? Right now the companies have this problem as it is becoming something very… I mean now, among people I know who are getting work experience there are more women than men, do you know that? Because the companies, you know, the people are starting to talk about that
>
> I: Do they have to have equal numbers of men and women?
>
> CARLOS: Yes, something like a balance of men and women that is completely fair but there will come a time when it will incline more towards women. They will be afraid that now "Wow, this company has too many men" and that the press will make them look bad and they will start writing about them. But maybe it will be more than 50-50. But 70 (percent female).

When reflecting on his college life, Carlos claimed not to have observed women being at any disadvantage, other than risks to their safety when being invited to their male peers' places either to drink or to study. He reported that as a man he felt it was less risky for him than if he were a woman and he would have to be more cautious if he was a woman.

#### 4.2.3.3 Case study 3: LAURA

Laura reported in the short online interview that she had experienced some difficulties when first attending co-educational institutions. She reported that she went through public coeducational schooling in her home country and that she was 'bullied' in primary school by boys who used to pull her hair. At the time of the interview she lived with her husband, a European man. In several conversations she maintained that he did not subscribe to gender stereotypes related to housework or any other sexist stereotypes. He encouraged her to make progress with her studies and career and celebrated her success.

Laura reported her mother influenced her most significantly before college and during her college years. Her accounts of her mother showed her mother's strong will and character. Laura's mother's highest educational level was primary school but her father completed secondary school. Laura's mother ran her own small shop[77] in her home country. This was the basis of the family's income.

Laura entered the School of Genetics and she did not recall any comments that were gender stereotypical other than those about gender disparity in science. She claimed she had not seen fewer women than men attending her courses. The female representation was different among the teaching and research staff, but she mentioned that the head of her school was a female. In her own words:

> …in Genetics there was actually more women than men. I'd say, one third was men and two third were women. So, there were more women which actually contradicts what they think about women in Science. That there is not representation of woman in Science but in Genetics, it was! I have to say that the Head of the School of Genetics is a woman, but the majority of researchers are men. Yeah, there is only one woman head of school…and another principal investigator, two women and the rest all the rest like a team of 15 are men. But in the students it's just the opposite.

[77] It is very common in many South American countries for unemployed people to enter informal employment (sub-empleo) by opening small shops or tiendas de barrio [neighbourhood shops]. They are attached to, or in extension of their homes and provide the means of income for most unemployed people not receiving any allowances or benefits from the state. They can be similar to small grocery shops that in Ireland, selling milk, oil, rice, vegetables, and fruit among other basic necessities. By the early twenty-first century this was considered micro-entrepreneurship and many governments and private banks supported such initiatives with credit and loans.

Laura reflected on reasons for this imbalance among students in her field.

> I just feel Genetics appears, it is my personal opinion, that Genetics sounds so feminine to me. Maybe [it] just appeals more [to women than men … Probably also Genetics is quite new as well.

Genetics was Laura's second degree. Back in her home country she held a bachelor's degree in midwifery. She felt satisfied with her career in genetics and after graduation she progressed to a Master's programme in Science Communication in another Irish university. Laura was interested in non-traditional careers, including engineering and science since she was a young girl, despite her parents' gender stereotypical view that this was not suitable work for her. This emerged from her accounts when asked about the presence of gender stereotypes in her home country.

> My family is quite strong with that. For example, I wanted to study engineering when I finished, but my mum said and my dad said that this is actually for men and that I should go for something more feminine. So feminine was nursing, something in welfare, uhm, caring careers, related to caring. And that science was something for men and stuff like that. So I just wanted to break that, you know, that way of thinking.

.

Laura felt her success had nothing to do with her gender but with her personality. Despite the strong influence of traditional gender stereotypes in her family she wanted to pursue a certain course and subsequently entered her career in Genetics after she got married and came to reside in Ireland.

> I: …but do you think that there are some attributes you have because you are a woman that helped you to be successful? Or it has to do with personality no matter your gender?
>
> LAURA: I think it has to be personality, just personality. It's like as I said before I was educated that science and engineering are for men but I broke that I said "Why, why it has to be like that, it has to be neutral". You know, you study whatever you want.

She also felt she has contributed to gender parity by entering a career in genetics.

> …according to the latest statistics there is less women in science. So me studying science as a woman I felt I did contribute to the change. That standard of so many men being in head positions in all rather than women.

Laura did not experience any gender biases during her college life. She said lecturers, other staff members and facilities were equally available to students no matter their gender: '…well at the very beginning there was no division at all being men and women I felt it was all equal'. The reason why she referred to 'at the very beginning' is because she later mentioned some changes debate in the college and Ireland in general concerning the Same Sex Marriage Ireland Referendum[78] during her third and fourth years (2014-2015). She went on:

> …but since the Equality Law I think it was in 2014, I don't remember exactly yeah there is a quite and ..no I would say no difference but I could see that my classmates that before didn't kind of demonstrate that they are actually lesbians or gays or LGTB uhm they kind of they say "came out of the closet", I don't wanna say that but you know, they showed their true colours and I found that our classmates were actually having those tendencies but not before that. But I don't think it changed uhm not because maybe I was about finished I was on third year so I don't think it make it a change.

The changes to which she referred were related to the delivery of academic instruction and official treatment where she found no distinction with regard to the students' genders yet she noticed changes in the social aspect of her college experience:

[78] During Same Sex Marriage Ireland Referendum of 2015 the Students' Union, Graduate Student Union and the Equality Office of Trinity College conducted a campaign trying to get voters to support amendment of the Constitution of Ireland to permit same sex marriages. LGBT supporters' groups organised marches, debates and demonstrations in support of this cause. (The terms LGBTI [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and intersex] and QUILTBAG [queer/questioning, intersex, lesbian, transgender and two-spirit, bisexual, asexual/ally, and gay/genderqueer] are also used for the same purpose).

but what I think it would have changed is in the social circle and in the social media like for example Facebook: my friends that at the beginning they didn't say it was a gay and it wasn't that popular in the Facebook but when the Yes Equality was out and was accepted, then she had a lot of likes and then she was very famous and well but I haven't seen any type of different treatment for her or for other classmates being women or men in college. In the academic level it was all neutral no distinctions at all, I didn't note that.

During Laura's her account of her experiences of being an international student presented in the previous chapter, she did not mention any difficulties that she attributed to the fact of her being a married woman. She recognised that her experience in Europe had shaped her identity to some extent and had become less accepting of gendered roles than when her thinking had been informed by her parents in ways and along lines common in her home country. Laura did not believe she had experienced any barriers attributable to her gender. She claimed that her limited participation in her initial years in college was due to her lack of expertise and that after she found herself better informed in the subject matter of her course, she had started contributing more in her classes.

#### 4.2.3.4 Case study 4: PABLO

In Pablo's home country coeducation was the norm in public schools. He had attended a secondary school before coming to Ireland. In the online survey, he responded that his brother and friends influenced him most strongly before college; and members of the college teaching staff were those who influenced him the most during his college years. Pablo entered the School of Psychology because he was attracted to psychology as a career. He reported finding it strange to see more women (around 70%) than men in his course whereas he had expected more men than women. His words best reflect this: 'It is a strange case like, during the history of Psychology, it has been mostly driven by men, you know, if you think of all the greatest psychologist they are all men.'

He reflected on why more recognition was given to male psychologist than female. In his own words: '…it's just being historical, as you know, women didn't have the same access to education'.

Pablo had heard of changing gender stereotypes in his field and thought psychology was now seen as a field better suited to women, though he thought this was wrong. As he said:

> …but nowadays Psychology is something that is mostly women and I guess because the stereotypes of well and all it's about you know psychological lives, emotions, feelings and understanding of this and that. And women are more inclined to that and men are more like engineering, which is more a myth than true. It's not that much like that.

Pablo said that the content of his course, which included modules entitled Anthropology of Gender, Psychology and Gender, and Social Psychology, helped him to understand more and be more aware of gender issues in his career. As he put it: 'in the course we tried to focus on that. You know, to acknowledge women in psychology'.

Pablo represented a minority in his course in psychology, which was primarily female. A better understanding of gender issues helped Pablo not to feel at a disadvantage, as this section of the interview makes clear.

PABLO: …the female presence in psychology is so strong, you know, so you also, you are minority being a man. In that case, I never felt as you say that I shouldn't be doing this or when I worked within a group: It was four girls and me and it was the topic, I mean it was 'the female presence in sports and 'body image', you know, and we did a discourse analysis which is a lot about analysing how people see women... so and my friend, she is a feminist, in a good sense. And we did Anthropology of Gender as well so we discussed a lot of gender issues. So my experience was that...hum I was very aware of all of that and I didn't see any pressure.

I: Yeah but did you feel, as a minority in the group, any disadvantage because of that?

PABLO: Oh no.

I: And that the women were predominantly telling what the topics would be about?[79]

PABLO: No no hum it was I know it sounds 'cheesy' but knowledge is genderless so for me it was ...

I: it was not an issue for you?

PABLO: No no not at all. Not an issue.

Pablo mentioned that despite there being a strong tendency towards gender stereotyping in his home country he was not much influenced by such ideas.

You know the usual gender roles that we would find in society: how men are more inclined to do one thing, you know, the more technical things. That maybe men don't engage so much in sharing deep things or.... but I don't know I had lots of female friends and I share the same things with them than with males so like, I am aware of those things but nothing other than the ordinary.

He also believed it was more his subject of study than the college experience per se that changed his views of gender. As he put it:

[79] In the first interview (presented in the previous chapter), Pablo had mentioned that he wanted to look into a certain topic for the group project but the women largely dictated the topic. The topic he wanted to research became his final individual work.

> I came to realise and to appreciate how gender is so much constructed and there's not good basis at all to expect that all girls will play with dolls and all guys will play with a ball. And you're putting them into boxes on day 1, you know. Supposedly even, you hold a baby girl differently than a baby boy. You're making them use to more rough sort of handling just because they are boys. So it's all so much about constructing. It's a pity that people don't realise about that but on the other hand this is a human need, you know, for solid definitions, you need the gender as you take your nationality as you take your religion. You need to put labels to yourself to say 'I am this'.

During his years in college Pablo had not observed any gender stereotypes or any biases related to gender. He said the instruction was not delivered in a way that discriminated by gender. He claimed not to have experienced or heard of any cases of gender discrimination.

He depicted his success in college not as a consequence of his gender, but because of his 'obsessive' personality.[80]

He produced an interesting reflection on the only way in which he thought gender was an issue in the life of the college.

> I: Would your college experience had be different if you had a different gender. Let's say you were a women instead of a men or in regards the treatment of your lecturers, colleagues or facilities? Or did you see that the women in your course had some advantages or disadvantages for the fact of being women?
>
> PABLO: I am glad I remember this at this point because it's very important. My friend did this kind of job herself. There is whole thing [emphasis added] going on in college about going out, you know, guys and girls and getting laid in this and that. And there is also concerns about, you know, sexual abuse sometimes and the drinking a lot and sort of: 'Okay, if you are a boy you have to go and score and if you are a girl you have to do this or that'. And because I am a mature student I was sort of, as I say, not really participating in that, not really caring about the Trinity Ball[81] or anything like that. I wasn't direct witness but that is an issue. The whole, I guess, gender, relations and stereotypes and lack of sexual maturity. There is an

[80] In the previous chapter we noted that in the interview he claimed he was very organised and he planned carefully his study time. This was the behaviour he seemed to consider *obsessive*.

[81] Trinity Ball is one of the biggest social events in college. Organised by the Students' Union, stories abound of extensive drinking and frenzied partying during this.

> issue and I guess if I was a woman I would have had different pressures you know not that I wouldn't have pressures as a man but, you know, maybe I would have been in a higher risk of going through certain situations for the whole thing about gender. It's funny how it comes to my mind now after talking so much about college,[82] because it was kind of a different world for me but for what I've heard it's, 'Wow! That's a topic on its own'.

To conclude Pablo's case, it is important to take time to mention his comments on peer-cooperation with an Irish female mature student (someone whom he refers to as a 'good feminist'). He mentioned she helped him to understand more about Irish culture and the use of slang language. He felt she was good company because, as he mentioned in the first interview, he did not at first feel very closely integrated with his peers because of an age barrier, given his being a mature student.

[82] At this point the interview altogether with the first part rounded one hour and forty minutes.

## 4.3 Cross-analysis and Discussion

The findings of this study that will be discussed are: a) absence of a discourse that mirrors inequalities attributed to gender within the context of Trinity College Dublin from the views of the participants, b) presence of stereotype threats during the college experience yet not being a factor affecting success, c) revisiting the views on existent and traditionally informed gender stereotypes and gendered roles resulting from the college experience and the 'Ireland experience', d) perceived emerging gender related threats.

### 4.3.1 Perceptions of [In]equalities and the co-existence of the sexes

Absence of a discourse that mirrors inequalities attributed to gender within the context of Trinity College Dublin. After presenting the cases of these four South American students, their narratives suggest a change in the patriarchal mindset that former female and male students experienced during the transitioning years of Trinity College towards coeducation. Literature suggests that the language used demonstrates a sexist approach but also evidences 'changes in the social/cultural environment' (Graddol & Swann, 1989, p. 194) as this study confirms. Despite no generalizations can be done, the diversity in the non-traditional careers chosen by the participants: Philosophy, Politics, Business, Genetics and Psychology, permits to observe that none of them experienced any inequalities attributed to gender during their studies. All the narratives coincide in a fair provision of instruction, access to facilities, and the facilitation of services disregarding their gender. Pablo's words can best convey this as saying, 'knowledge is genderless' which coincides with the college's policies, expressed through the Equality office's documents. Those policies are evidently administered and executed by members of the teaching and administrative staff, and students' bodies.

Within this awareness of gender issues, topics like disparity in certain areas are reasoned as an issue related to the individual's preference rather than a gender related issue. Also, some explicit actions towards equality in participation in the STEM, Business and Politics are understood as fair and justified for the sake of enhancing parity. Therefore, actions like decision making based on gender, like the ones mentioned in Maria's case and in recruitment mentioned by Carlos, are not perceived as evidence of inequalities or biases.

Supportive resources experienced during college life were *genderless*. There are not accounts of a predominantly supportive gender within the college. However, it is important to mention the influence of some formerly 'just-for-men societies' that are now open to females and males mirroring the benefits of the coeducational experience, as is the case of Maria and her participation in the MetaFizz society (as explained in the revisions of the literature historically, debating societies were male attributed ones).

Based on this study, it can be suggested that coeducational settings permit a fair and open field to discuss gender issues, the gain of gender awareness and a conscious seek of equality. The participants' experiences coincide with those presented in the case of the Wheaton College when transitioning to coeducation (Sadovnik & Semel, 2002).

### 4.3.2 Perceptions of gendered stereotypes in the college climate

I observed the presence of subtle gendered stereotypes and stereotype threats during the college experience yet not being a factor affecting success. Stereotype threats are so linked to traditional gender stereotypes that it is difficult to draw a line in between. Nevertheless, in this section, the discussion is around the sexist language that the participants conveyed in their narratives of their college experience. In the case of Maria, she was unaware of any stereotype threats of her courses in Philosophy and Politics before choosing them. It was after she entered her courses that she heard and read about 'not being a place for women' or about the risks of being 'harassed'. For Laura and during her career in Genetics she read that there were less women in Science but was surprised to see more women than men attending her courses. She said that she was happy with the idea of contributing to balance that disparity by opting for that career even though it was not the main reason for choosing a Genetics course. In the case of Carlos, because of the absence of gender stereotypes in his close family and social circle, the only signs of a sexist language during his career were those comments related to the big gender disparity in Business courses, which he admitted were not that big.

The case of Pablo is particular for being a minority in a predominantly females attended course besides a NNS international student. Pablo said that Psychology has been lately attributed as a feminine career, which can be considered a statement with a sexist connotation. Similarly, he was surrounded by comments attributing women being more emotional, open and suitable to enter a career in Psychology than men and that men were more for things like Engineering. None of the participants perceived any explicit

sexist language from their lecturers or within the college. They referred to sexist language coming from something they heard or read but that did not affect their success, their engagement or their performance in their courses. However, I would like to note here one example of a sexist language being issued by one of LAURA's lecturer. When Laura was explaining how she changed her reading habits to 'grasp' the core of a text. Laura said one of her lecturers suggested reading the way 'men do shopping' instead of the way 'women do shopping'[83]. In my view that is an example of subtle sexism informed by gender stereotypes.

The literature suggests that the increase of female share in coeducational settings reduces the stereotype threat on females. If we take that as a fact, we could also say that in the case of Pablo who was exposed to a predominantly female attended course thus a minority as a mature student, the stereotype threat was high yet it was not the case. Pablo did not perceive that stereotype threats somehow shaped his personality or abilities. He did not perceive that being a minority was a factor favouring or impeding his success either. He recognised in him the attributes needed to enter his career not because of his gender but because of his personality as an individual.

It is interesting to note that at revising the participants' wording in the interviews, there are some shades of a sexist language, like when Laura says that Genetics 'sounds feminine to me' or repeated references of what they heard or read with very strong sexist language. Yet, the revision of the case studies suggests that despite the presence of a sexist language connoting stereotype threat, it did not affect the participants. In some of the participants because of a total unawareness of those stereotype threats before entering the career, non-existing strong gender stereotypes affecting the participants, and the influence of the college experience with opportunities to test those threats wrong. Similarly, all the participants went through the experience of coeducational settings before entering Trinity College which would be a reason why they were more open to challenge stereotype threats yet maybe a large quantitative study could better prove this. What is very likely to be a positive factor in the reduction of stereotype threats, is the appropriate delivery of the instruction without a sexist language that would reinforce pre-existing experiences of stereotype threats or those encountered during the course of the studies.

[83] In this section of the interview Laura elaborated on saying 'men go, enter a shop and get what they want, but women enter a shop and go all the way around it and they finally get what they want'

### 4.3.3 Perceptions of gendered stereotypes in the host country

It was enlightening to revisit the views on existent and traditionally informed gender stereotypes and gendered roles resulting from the college experience and the 'Ireland experience'. None of the participants' career choice responded to traditional gender stereotypes but to their preferences. Laura for example, went consciously against those stereotypes and despite being informed by her parents that a career in Science like Genetics was not a career for women, she opted for it and became a successful graduate. It is important to note that Laura was not in close contact with her family traditional stereotypes as she had emigrated abroad for working purposes before she got married and established her residency in European countries before entering Trinity College. Therefore, her family life with her husband and her experience living abroad would have driven her to break those gender stereotypes that are common in her home country.

Pablo entered his course in Psychology not knowing his courses were going to be mostly attended by women. He left his home country and was living in Europe on his own long before entering Trinity College as mature student. Therefore, his actions were not informed by gender stereotypes which contributed to overcome of being a minority in a course as: an international student, mature student and a male student in a course with high female share.

Maria and Carlos learned about the presence of gender stereotypes in their careers after they entered their courses but they did not affect them. In the case of Maria it can be reasoned that her confidence in her study skills and the strong female roles present in her family surpassed the stereotypes she got from the material she read or what she heard. In the case of Carlos, the strong non-existence of gender stereotypes in his immediate context permitted him to deal with those constant equality and feminists comments that bothered him but did not affect his performance in college.

None of the participants attributed their success or their struggles during her college experience to their gender. They always refer to other factors than to gender issues.
Interestingly, the most predicted participant to experience struggles attributed to her gender was the married female participant. Maybe the length of time away from her family traditional stereotypes and her home country thus being married to a European man with less traditional gender stereotypes contributed to the reduction of stereotype threats in and outside college.

### 4.3.4 Perceptions of gendered related threats

Despite not being the interest of this study to explore sexual orientation preferences, a radical feminist approach and sexual lifestyles, some related themes emerged as important during the interviews:

- Trinity College during and after the Same Sex Marriage referendum. Ireland has been lately involved in political issues campaigning for the legalisation of the same sex marriage. Despite international students are not called to vote on referendums that seek to make amendments on the Law, the participants have been affected by this massive propaganda in and out the college and in the media in various ways. As Carlos perceives, all those gender and equality talks have political reasons behind but are overwhelming to the point that it is difficult to openly talk about them at the risk of being accused of being homophobic. Maria refers to equality and gender talks as a 'minefield' because of the influence of the same sex marriage movement yet she sees it as something positive in a way that in Ireland and in the college people stopped talking about differences attributed to gender but about accepting all genders. Another effect was the changing in the dynamics of the participation of the genders. Laura's experienced that in her last years in college the same sex marriage and equality movement led some of her peers to show their sexual orientation openly, causing an effect in the social circle that despite not affecting her success she noted out a lot in the social media.

- The feminist approach on gender parity actions in Ireland and Trinity College Dublin. Both men and women in this study mentioned equity actions that may bias decision making. In the case of Carlos, he thinks that the actions towards reducing the gender gap and excessive talks (in Ireland) advocating equality are 'overwhelming' and somehow moves the trend favouring more women than men. Similarly, Maria reflects that some decisions were made on her favour because she was a woman but she also wonders if it should be more based on talent than for the sake to reduce gender gap. Those interesting views bring the case of the creation of unperceived biases favouring certain gender and that may cause a counter effect in maintaining gender gaps. This is consistent to Leach's views that opposing gender identities may be destructive and holding a single-minded feminist approach undermining men's part in equality talks, may cause other undesired breaches in the sought of social justice (Leach, 2003).

- The talks about partying and sex in Trinity College Dublin. Another topic that was marked as important by the male participants alone were the disadvantages of being a female student because of the risks in the social relations between women and men. It could be seen as two separate situations but are really very closely associated. Carlos mentioned that it is a disadvantage for female students having to go to their male peers' houses (for study or other purposes) for the risks it conveys. Those risks can be understood complementing that idea with what Pablo said regarding partying, going out and getting laid which he said is a 'whole issue' in college. Pablo thinks those issues are pushing especially sexually immature students to follow what is perceived as emerging stereotypes like 'guys should score' and 'girls do this'. Maybe the intention of those groups that promote social life by means of becoming sexually active, is to increase college engagement but they are only segregating the groups that are not comfortable with that type of 'social life' plus increasing the risks of female students being sexually abused, as per the concerns of the male participants in this study. Interestingly, none of the female participants noted out this as one of their perceived disadvantages and actually not disadvantages attributed to being a woman were at all mentioned.

## 4.4 Conclusions

Considering the three inter-connected studies, disparity in the career enrolment is perceived as a matter of preference more than by the influence of gender. However, the extended interview on Study 3 permitted to find out that in some courses there are still echoes of gendered roles and stereotypes that has been tested and proven wrong as per the experiences of the participants. Similarly, it was agreed that the success obtained was not perceived to be related to gender characteristics but for the characteristics of the individuals *per se*. One of the aspects that are interesting to be further studied are the perceptions of the changing traditional gender stereotypes in both females and males in the academia.

This study suggests that Trinity College Dublin has reached the fulfilment of the continuum towards gender equality through advocating equity actions for both women and men in the provision, access and control of resources (study material, lectures, lecturers and tutors, college services, funds, information, societies, and facilities). However, the deconstruction of gender stereotypes can be risked by the construction of

other gender stereotypes that are perceived as constantly promoted. At least, as the ones perceived by the participants in this study and at the light of interviews. Male participants perceived inequalities especially in courses that are predominantly attended by women or in careers that advocate actions towards more female participaio, but as presented in this study they were not perceived as a threat so far. Therefore, this study suggests being attentive to excessive talks and actions that can open a breach for other types of inequalities.

In conclusion, evidence of gender stereotypes affecting success were not present in the narratives of this study. Reduction of stereotype threats due to the conscious coeducational context, permitted women and men to focus on their talent and learning indistinctly to their gender. Social relations may be perceived as affecting the individuals but were not reported as affecting their stories of success. However, because of the small size of the study group of interest in this study, generalisations cannot be made.

Finally, along Study 1 and Study 2, I have no evidence of perceptions of gender related issues affecting the students' views on the nature of success. What is more, the co-educational experience in the case of the four participants in the cases studies, contributed in various manners to their success, directly or indirectly. For example, the paramount importance of their relationships with members of the college community and the various service that are equally accessible for male and female students and the presence of role models in the across the disciplines. The perception that knowledge and the ability to succeed is genderless are important to remark. The only element I note is the perception of gender talks being 'a minefield' due to the influence of national referendums that are brought into the college climate. The perception of having to be careful when talking about gender issues, in my view, is the opposite to what equality and the fostering of egalitarian opportunities are attempting to achieve.

# 5 Chapter five: Epilogue

In this section, I bring together the findings from the three inter-connected studies, discuss the strengths and limitations of the research overall, and suggest implications of the work in policy making, pedagogy and further research in higher education in Ecuador and in other countries or regions. This chapter also includes some of my final personal unbracketed reflections and my new understanding of success in higher education.

## 5.1 A summary

The purpose of this study, as expressed in the first chapter, was to 'explore the experiences of success of Spanish-speaking students of South America [SSoSA] enrolled in universities in Ireland, with a view to forming a description of the roots of that success and how to replicate it to inform forthcoming generations of students prior to embarking on their undergraduate studies in English speaking countries.' I employed three inter-connected sub-studies: a) a study of the nature of success for Ecuadorian students in SA, b) a study of the experiences of success for SSoSA in Trinity College Dublin, and c) an analysis by gender across Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3.

In Study 1, various definitions of success were explored in the literature review and this empirical study in an attempt to respond research question 1: *What are the different meanings of success in higher education and the views of the requirements to succeed on the part of Ecuadorian students?* The voices of Ecuadorian students who seek to undertake postsecondary education overseas were consistent in remarking the value of higher education to enhance quality of life for them and for their families. Employability and readiness to enter a profession/career were among the most mentioned definitions of success in higher education which was reasoned at the light of the Ecuadorian socio-economic, cultural and political context. However, other meanings of success that are related to the development of the persona are important to note: the gain in maturity, knowledge, readiness for life, experiences, self-exploration and enjoyment. Other definitions were more related to being successful to serve the community through a vocation/calling, profession or career, becoming a role model for others, and getting family recognition. Factors for succeeding in higher education were diverse and barely took into account the need of gaining academic domain in a second language. Similarly, challenges were related to counting on or lacking those perceived factors for success. Finally, family and parental support was deemed important to this particular group. The findings of this study provided a good ground for the second study.

In Study 2, the particular cases of four SSoSA in TCD were observed and analysed to find their own definitions of success and the factors that drew them towards it. This substudy was designed to respond research questions 2 and 3: *How Spanish speakers of South America who are successful in their undergraduate studies in European universities where English is the language of instruction define success in higher education and what where their ways to obtain it?* and *What features of English language programmes could better prepare Spanish speakers of South America to succeed in their undergraduate studies in English speaking countries?*

At the light of study 2, academic success was not the only valued type of success but also those related to personal growth, lifelong learning, transformative process, acquisition of domain in a second language, progression to further studies, networking, making the best of the college experience, and readiness to contribute to the society. Some of them were also present in Study 1. The rich accounts of the participants in the case studies portrayed their challenges and their pathways towards overcoming them through reflection, awareness and actions. The stories of their challenges and overcomings reveals a spirit of persistence, resilience and strong will and at the same time informed on the complex and multidimensional factors that affect international students, in particular those who are undertaking studies in a second language. The accounts contain the self-developed or adviced strategies that those participants employed to overcome language and cultural barriers to gain an identity as bilinguals and biculturals enough to successfully undertake and complete (in most of the cases) their undergraduate studies in TCD. Those actions undertaken to overcome language barriers are good source of information for EFL practicioners, and those in EFL curriculum design and policy making. A stronger attention to academic language should be placed in general and academic reading and writing in particular.

In study 3, a gender analysis was employed as a tool to observe how these four SSoSA perceived the coeducational climate in TCD and if it was somehow a determinant of their experience of success. This gender analysis naturally led the design of the study in an attempt to respond research question 4: *Are there any consistent differences in the results by gender?* The sex-disagreggated data obtained from study 1 and 2, suggest that definitions of the nature of success in higher education were not perceived as being gender related but of one's preference. This was confirmed in study 3 at the light of the interviews. The context on the history of TCD towards coeducation permitted to see the changes that incurred since the foundation of the college and the benefits of it becoming a coeducation institution, reflected on the college experiences of the participants in this

study. The provision of instruction, services and facilities were perceived to be available for both female and male students. Equity actions were seen as fair and justified. However, as I suggested, some aspects that may threaten the climate of equality have to be considered.

As an overall, the nature of success was diverse though consistent in terms related to preparedness, overcomings and achievements. The difference between experiences in HE institutions were evidently related to the student context, that being in their home country or overseas. There were similar challenges and perceptions of overcomings. However, there were differences in the various pathways toward success. The core element of this study was the cross-analysis of four case studies of SSoSA students who succeed in their studies in Trinity College. The analysis of their narratives served to depict the transformation process on becoming successful, multilingual and multicultural along their cross-cultural experience. Various resources that these successful students employed were portrayed as proven successful elements for their success. Additionally, an analysis of gender permitted to bring up some evidence on the benefits of a conscious coeducational context and the risks to the sought of equality.

## 5.2 Implications of this study: Strengths and limitations

This study contributed to the study of NNS from South America in higher education. The employment of various method approaches (qualitative survey and case study) and various data collection methods (surveys, interviews, narratives) served to triangulate the data and widen the views considered in the analysis. In addition, the bicultural approach offered a different view on the nature of success for SSoSA than other studies conducted hitherto. The understanding of the context of the participants in this study was believed important to relate the various meanings of success that differ to those coming from Anglo-European countries. Not narrowing the concept of success to ‘academic success’ permitted to explore other definitions as per the voice of the students who are usually enforced to accept institutionally informed meanings of success. The gain of knowledge, the pursue of a calling/vocation and the readiness to serve the community and contribute to the society were valued by the participants and mentioned in their accounts. Academic success was believed to be important but not the only aim for the participants yet a mean towards their aims. I belief this view has not been deeply explored in other studies of success in higher education.

However, I admit some limitations, mostly of methodological character. The size of the sampling and the employment of purposeful sampling in the studies do not permit to make generalisations. Likewise, the few numbers of international students that were eligible to participate did not permit the use of other approaches such those of quantitative study approach. Logistics and access to the participants were factors that primarily influenced decisions on the recruitment, gaining of access, and data collection methods. However, these were acknowledged and considered in the research approach and the research design. It was also compensated by giving more voice and participation to the participants valuing them as at the core of the study in the provision of data and their critical reflective contributions. Another limitation which limited a wider view of the experiences of the participants as non-English native speakers, was not counting on other than self-reported perception of language and academic competence and success. That made the study rely on the institution's strictness on their entry requirements, L2 requirement testing, and the grades the students obtained from their lecturers. In the same vein, counting on lecturer's views may have raised the view of the context of those students. Thus, this is observed in the implications for further research.

## 5.3 Further research

Difference in the cultural background of NNS international students have been found to influence their academic performance and some recommendations have been offered, however, a deeper understanding of those issues is necessary to study in other contexts such as the experiences of international students and their willingness to succeed in Anglophone universities with a multicultural approach. This study gave a good ground to bring awareness on cultural differences that are sometimes dismissed or underseeing by policy makers, practicioners and students. What is more, some of the questions that rise are:

- How do differences in cultural backgrounds influence academic performance?
- How they are understood among the academic staff, the examiners and lecturers in particular?
- How can those students better transition to becoming L2 academic competent?
- What institutional factors can better bridge this transition?
- What system would be proposed to better assess the students L2 competence and be ready to succeed as overseas students?

Despite the aim of this study was not to explore cases of any type of discrimination and institutional factors, and therefore, did not use a feminist approach, some themes that emerged from the narratives of the participants in the case study. Some salient points were the perception of restrictions to discuss gender related issues perceived in the college climate. Also, the perception of the social life that is practiced within HE institutions, following a hedonist approach, may lead us to ask:

- How those perceptions interfere on the academic success of the students?
- Could they be risking the equality achieved in HE education institutions?
- How college social life influence students' success when cultural differences are not considered?

Another point is related to the perception of openness in the college climate not only in regard to tolerance but as honouring various cultures. It brings a warning to think on the real purpose and gain on hosting international students and the importance of pluricultural awareness:

- How can institutions engage domestic and international students in common projects to increase intercultural interactions?

## 5.4 Applicability and final reflections [Unbracketing]

The findings of this study that were depicted in the transformative processes that resulted in a description of self-developed resources that SSoSA successful students employed may help to inform other students that are willing to embark on their overseas studies. Similarly, they may inform HE institutions and teaching practitioners to better understand best practices that resulted on the success of these international students. At an institutional level, the understanding of the differences in the value system of host countries and those of international students should be considered to minimise the effect of the cultural, academic shock for both sides. A better understanding of the context of both, host and home countries, implied in student mobility would prepare students in a better way to meet their expectations. A stronger focus on academic language in a second language should be given to better prepare students undertaking their studies overseas.

As an EFL practicioner, I was delighted to hear the various resources that students had and developed to cope with the difficulties of undertaking their studies in a second language. My assumption that a stronger focus on academic reading and writing was necessary in the EFL curriculum, was consistent with the literature review and the findings of this study. I also encountered by interacting with other academics whose first language is English, that 'academic language' was nobody's first language. Therefore, it needed time, effort, and practice.

Regarding, the influence on reading Freire's work, I confirmed that reflective practice, awareness and critical thinking are key elements to empower people as it leads them to find resources to transform their own realities. I also, belief at a personal level, that the meanings of success should be defined by the individuals as the greater success, for me, is to decide to go for whatever one's think success means. I was personally, inspired by the story of Carlos, who was going through financial struggles and was not sure if he was going to be able to afford college fees and complete his studies. Carlos, defined success in terms of the learning gained, being able to do things (in Business related areas) that he could not do before and the revisiting of his goals in life.

While being an international student and parent of two college children who were undertaking their studies in Ireland, I would empathize with the struggles, non-academic and academic challenges, especially for not being EU citizens. The stories of Maria and Carlos were so related to the reality of my family and also to those I read about while conducting the literature review on Latino/a in HE. Knowing there some stories of success, gave us hope to keep going.

As a Christian and theist, I belief there was a Providential touch along my doctoral study, in counting on a good supervision and the provision of resources (financial) to complete them. In the stories of the participants I translate their comments on 'being lucky' to *being blessed*. For both the opportunity to undertake studies in a prestigious university in Europe and for being able to complete them, I feel extremely blessed.

This study has influenced my personal, academic, and professional growth for my engagement and commitment with this study (Appendix 10). A critical reflective examination of the resources I had and needed to undertake this study were drives to improve and acquired abilities and competences I did not have before. These are the cases of my completion of the Postgraduate Certificate in Innovation & Entrepreneurship which was another challenged yet an achievement. The networking and interaction with

academic staff and peers have widen my perspectives of research and areas of interest such as Special Education and the use of non-traditional resources to communicate research in the humanities. I also count the acquisition of some academic research related abilities in the use of more sophisticated tools were important in the improvement of the quality of my further research. Yet, I am aware, it is a lifelong learning process and I perceive the completion of this doctoral study as a first step in that process. The employement of this baggage of new resources acquired along my doctoral study, would lead me to translate the findings of this study back to the context of my home country and seek for better policy making and practice to better show competence at global levels in the provision of high quality of education and equal opportunities for our Ecuadorian students.

As another and final personal reflective note, this study brought awareness of my own intercultural and language competence as a NNS international student and parent of two college age children who are undertaking their studies in Anglophone European universities. Consciousness of what we need to observe as L2 learners when undertaking our HE studies, resulted from my experience along this doctoral research.

*He peleado la buena batalla, he acabado la carrera, he guardado la fe.*
*Por lo demás, me está guardada la corona de justicia, la cual me dará el Señor, juez justo, en aquel día; y no sólo a mí, sino también a todos los que aman su venida.*
2 Timoteo 4:7-8 (Reina-Valera 1960)

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*
2 Timothy 4:7-8 (New King James Version)

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# 7 Appendices

**Appendix 1. My revisited philosophy of education (June 2014)**

I think education is the route to get goals and dreams. In order to achieve that, effort, good guidance and a proper learning environment are required as well as the love for learning and values. Through education people can get the discovery of themselves, a better knowledge of the world, and the responsible understanding of their role in society. For me, education does not always involve teaching but is related to a learning process in all cases. This learning process should never end as human beings can keep learning throughout their whole lives.

Learners, teachers and administrators play an important role in education, their combined work can enhance a better achievement of its goals. Learners should be at the center of formal education closely observed and guided by teachers and supported by a sound administration system that provides proper resources and supportive policies. Researchers help to better understand the complex processes of education for their improvement and efficiency.

My role in education is mainly as an educator, but also as a researcher. While being a researcher I become a learner and then a better teacher and human being. While becoming a better human being, I can positively influence my society.

My main model in my teaching practice is Jesus as I consider him the greatest Master. My common practice before beginning any new course or task in education is committing it to Him asking for direction and help. I pray for my students to succeed in life and for God to use me as an instrument in His hands. I try to follow Jesus in his way of teaching with a sincere concern and love for my students, the use of varied resources while walking with them in our way to learning. Mirroring the example of Jesus, I can see being a true teacher is sacrificial but sublime and has given to me a lot of rewarding experiences.

As a teacher I think some of my roles involve caring, nurturing and motivating my students in the acquisition of critical thinking and reflection that can later lead them to discover knowledge, acquire skills and develop positive values. My approach is student-centered and it leads me to be more a facilitator than a teacher so I try to provide what would help my students to be independent and autonomous in the selection and use of techniques and materials to achieve learning. Having said that, I consider myself another resource for my students to learn although not the only one.

My philosophy of education is reflected on the way I plan my lessons, put them in action, assess, design teaching material and learning tools and also in my relationship with my students who I would like to better call my friends. I always try to understand my students, their surrounding and backgrounds. I try to use this understanding as a tool to promote their learning. I will not prejudge them but accept them. In order to reach their hearts I will give them my sincere open

heart totally exposed as a human being first and later as their teacher. If I expect them to listen to me, I will be ready to listen to them first. My understanding of our fast changing society and times, leads me to get concern about using technology information and communications tools (ICTs) to improve the quality of material and its accessibility for my students. As an undergraduate professor, I have witnessed the benefits of the implementation of the principles of horizontality and participation in Andragogy (teaching to young adults and adults) as it provides a proper learning environment. Resulting from my research I incorporate the explicit teaching of reading strategies that are more effective in language acquisition.

My role as a researcher and my relationship with my colleagues and the people who oversee me are also part of my philosophy of education. I believe proper peer-evaluation and feedback helps my practice and I welcome any suggestion based on observations of my classes and performance. I like being part of a teaching collaborative community and I find essential the sharing of experiences and resources.

Not being a native English speaker is one of my self-perceived weaknesses, so my philosophy of education contemplates strategies to improve my listening and speaking skills. Enrolling in a university of the Anglophone world to pursue my doctoral studies will help me to get proficiency in the language. I also expect to acquire researching skills as research and reflective teaching have improved my teaching practice in the better understanding of the different processes of my classes to detect and anticipate problems and ways to solve or avoid them. Innovation and creativity are also elements of my philosophy and I try to be a model for my students inviting them to reflection, critical thinking and enquiry.

My strength is my love and passion for teaching and my conviction of this calling. My desire is helping my students to think about their future and ways to be responsible and active participants of their own destiny for the good sake of their families and their community. I want to cultivate in them values by setting an example of love, solidarity, respect, hard work and love for God.

**Appendix 2. Strengths, weaknesses and needs (Reflective exercise)**

| Strengths | Weaknesses and needs<br>I should: |
|---|---|
| Spanish/English speaker | improve my English competence |
| EFL teacher | have critical thinking / write critically |
| Good IT skills | get some it courses: word, Power point, basic statistics, suvery monkey, endnote, nvivo, media production |
| Drive: high motivation | get library skills/searching tools/referencing |
| My family | get interviewing skills |
| Support from my colleagues in my home country | improve my interpersonal/presentation communication skills |
| Creativity | understand some Irish / Irish English |
| Sense of communitarian wellbeing, social justice | handle stress/anxiety/unsolved traumas |
| Willingness to bring some of the Ecuadorian culture to Ireland | explore some research methods, data collection tools, |
| I have an opportunity of a lifetime | learn as much as I can |
| | make the best of this |
| | help my children to adapt to Ireland/school/college |

**Appendix 3. Study 1 survey questionnaire (Spanish version)**

## ¿Cómo pueden los Hispanos de Sudamérica prepararse para tener éxito en universidades de habla inglesa en Europa?

Esta encuesta es realizada por Katherine Salvador, estudiante doctoral a tiempo completo de la Facultad de Educación del Trinity College Dublin supervisada por el doctor David Limond. El propósito de este estudio es establecer un perfil de los hispanos de América del Sur que son exitosos en sus estudios de pregrado en universidades europeas de países de habla inglesa donde el idioma de instrucción es el inglés. Los resultados de esta encuesta serán usados de manera anónima en mi trabajo de tesis y otras publicaciones derivadas de ella.

Estamos buscando respuestas de estudiantes de pregrado en Irlanda con la intención de encontrar posibles participantes para este estudio.

Esta encuesta es voluntaria y usted tiene el derecho de abandonarlo en cualquier momento. Todos los participantes permanecerán anónimos.

Su usted decide participar en esta encuesta se le pedirá que responda unas pocas preguntas en su idioma de preferencia (Ingles o Español).

¿Le gustaría ir a la versión en Español de esta encuesta ahora?
( ) Quiero permanecer en la versión en Ingles de esta encuesta.
( ) Quiero ir a la versión en Español de esta encuesta.

DECLARACIÓN:
( ) Tengo 18 años y soy competente para proveer consentimiento.
( ) He leído la información anterior acerca de esta investigación y este formulario de consentimiento. Entiendo la descripción de la investigación que se me ha provisto.
( ) Estoy de acuerdo que mi información sea usado para propósitos científicos y no tengo objeción para que mi información sea publicada en publicaciones científicas de manera que no se revele mi identidad.
( ) Yo libre y voluntariamente acepto tomar parte de este estudio, sin prejuicio a mis derechos legales y éticos.
( ) Yo entiendo que mi participación es totalmente anónima y que mis información personal no será registrada y que tengo libertad de retirarme en cualquier momento.

1. ¿Da usted consentimiento para participar en esta encuesta?

Sí No (Gracias por su participación)

2. ¿Es usted un(a) estudiante de pregrado?

Sí No (Gracias por su participación)

3. ¿Cuál es su rango de edad?

18-20

21-23

24-26

26+

4. Género: Masculino Femenino

5. Facultad / Escuela/ Carrera:

Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
- Business
- Drama, Film and Music
- Education
- English
- Histories and Humanities
- Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
- Law
- Linguistics, Speech and Communication Studies
- Psychology
- Social Sciences and Philosophy
- Social Work and Social Policy
- Religions, Peace Studies and Theology

Engineering, Mathematics and Science
- Biochemistry and Immunology
- Chemistry
- Computer Sciences and Statistics
- Engineering
- Genetics and Microbiology
- Mathematics
- Natural Sciences
- Physics

Health Sciences
- Dental Sciences
- Medicine
- Nursing and Midwifery
- Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Studies

Otro, por favor especifique:

6. Año de carrera:
1er año
2do año
3er año
4to año o más

Un estudio exploratorio encontró algunos criterios de medición de éxito en educación superior. ¿Cómo se calificaría usted de acuerdo a éstos?

7. Soy un estudiante de pregrado exitoso porque podré encontrar un buen trabajo/proseguir con mis estudios después de terminar mis estudios en la Universidad.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Totalmente en desacuerdo | En desacuerdo | Neutral | De acuerdo | Totalmente de acuerdo |

8. Soy un estudiante de pregrado exitoso porque podré tener una profesión después de terminar mis estudios en la Universidad.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Totalmente en desacuerdo | En desacuerdo | Neutral | De acuerdo | Totalmente de acuerdo |

9. Soy un estudiante de pregrado exitoso porque obtengo calificaciones altas.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Totalmente en desacuerdo | En desacuerdo | Neutral | De acuerdo | Totalmente de acuerdo |

10. Soy un estudiante de pregrado exitoso porque tengo la intención de terminar mis estudios en la misma universidad.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Totalmente en desacuerdo | En desacuerdo | Neutral | De acuerdo | Totalmente de acuerdo |

11. Soy un estudiante de pregrado exitoso porque tengo la intención de terminar mis estudios dentro del tiempo establecido.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Totalmente en desacuerdo | En desacuerdo | Neutral | De acuerdo | Totalmente de acuerdo |

12. De manera general, ¿se considera usted un estudiante de pregrado exitoso?
Sí No

Por favor explique por qué respondió sí o no:

13. ¿Es el español su lengua nativa y es usted de uno de estos países: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Perú, Uruguay, Venezuela?

Sí No (Gracias por su participación)

14. Por favor seleccione su país de origen:
Argentina
Bolivia
Chile
Colombia
Ecuador
Paraguay
Peru
Uruguay
Venezuela

15. ¿Le gustaría participar en este estudio proporcionando información acerca de sus experiencias como estudiante internacional en un par de entrevistas?

Yes No (Gracias por su participación)

Nota: más información acerca de este estudio en el siguiente enlace al video:

Si su respuesta es Sí, por favor indique su dirección de correo electrónico o número de teléfono para ser contactado(a):

¡Gracias por su participación en esta encuesta!

**Appendix 4. Study 1 survey questionnaire (English version)**

## How can Spanish Speakers of South America prepare for success in Anglophone European Universities?

This survey is being conducted by Katherine Salvador, full time PhD student of the School of Education of Trinity College Dublin supervised by Dr. David Limond. The purpose is this study is to establish a profile of Spanish speaking people of South America who are successful in their undergraduate studies in European Universities in Anglophones countries where English is the language of instruction. The results of this survey will be used anonymously in my thesis work or any other publications that derive from it.

We are looking for responses from undergraduate students in Ireland seeking prospective participants for this study.

This survey is voluntary and you will have the right to leave it at any stage. All participants will remain anonymous.

If you decide to participate in this survey you will be asked to answer a few questions in your preferred language (English or Spanish).

Would you like to go to the Spanish version of this survey now?
I'd like to remain in the English version of this survey.
I'd like to go to the Spanish version of this survey.

DECLARATION:
• I am 18 years or older and am competent to provide consent.
• I have read the above information about this research and this consent form. I understand the description of the research that is being provided to me.
• I agree that my data be used for scientific purposes and I have no objection to my data being published in scientific publications in a way that does not reveal my identity.
• I freely and voluntarily agree to be part of this research study, though without prejudice to my legal and ethical rights.
• I understand that my participation is fully anonymous and that no personal details about me will be recorded and that I am free to withdraw myself from it at any stage.

1. Do you give consent to participate in this survey?
Yes No (Thanks for your participation)

2. Are you an undergraduate student?
Yes No (Thanks for your participation)

3. What is your age range?

18-20

21-23

24-26

26+

4. Gender: Male Female

5. Faculty / School:

Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
- Business
- Drama, Film and Music
- Education
- English
- Histories and Humanities
- Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
- Law
- Linguistics, Speech and Communication Studies
- Psychology
- Social Sciences and Philosophy
- Social Work and Social Policy
- Religions, Peace Studies and Theology

Engineering, Mathematics and Science
- Biochemistry and Immunology
- Chemistry
- Computer Sciences and Statistics
- Engineering
- Genetics and Microbiology
- Mathematics
- Natural Sciences
- Physics

Health Sciences
- Dental Sciences
- Medicine
- Nursing and Midwifery
- Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Studies

Other, please specify:

6. Year:

1st year

2nd year

3rd year
4th year+

An exploratory study found some perceived measures of success in higher education. How would you rate yourself according to these?

7. I am a successful undergraduate student because I will be able to get a good job/do further study after university.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |

8. I am a successful undergraduate student because I will be able to enter a profession after university.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |

9. I am a successful undergraduate student because I am getting top grades.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |

10. I am a successful undergraduate student because I intend to finish my studies in the same college/university.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |

11. I am a successful undergraduate student because I intend to finish my studies in the normal length of time required.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |

12. Overall, do you consider yourself a successful student?

Yes No

Please, explain why you said yes or why not:

13. Are you a native Spanish speaker of one of these countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela?

Yes No (Thanks for your participation)

14. Please select your country of origin:

Argentina
Bolivia
Chile
Colombia
Ecuador
Paraguay
Peru
Uruguay
Venezuela

15. Would you like to participate in this study by providing more information about your experiences as an international student in a couple of conducted interviews?

Yes No (Thanks for your participation)

Note: more information about this study in the following link to the video

If yes, please provide your email address or telephone number to be contacted by the researcher:

Thank you for participating in this survey!

**Appendix 5. Study 1: Interview protocol**

Fecha: Hora: Participante No.

Primeramente muchas gracias por tu colaboración en participar de esta entrevista escrita para mi estudio doctoral.

Te recuerdo que tu participación es anónima y las respuestas que me des serán muy confidenciales. Si en algún momento hago una publicación de alguna información que me proveas no será revelada tu identidad ni ningún dato que pueda relacionarte con la respuesta. De igual manera si en algún momento hay alguna pregunta que no deseas contestar me puedes avisar o si no deseas continuar con la entrevista me puedes decir y paramos.

Estás de acuerdo?

Te parece bien si te escribo las preguntas y tú me vas contestando?? Si tienes alguna pregunta en algún momento no dudes en interrumpir y preguntarme, ok?

La investigación que estoy realizando se trata de la manera en la que los estudiantes de secundaria perciben lo que es tener éxito en la Universidad y lo que se necesita para tenerlo. He hecho algunas encuestas y necesito profundizar un poco más tal vez escuchando tus anécdotas como estudiante universitaria de primer nivel.

Tienes alguna pregunta? antes de iniciar con la entrevista?
Edad
Facultad o Carrera
Universidad
Nivel :

1.- Para ti que significa tener éxito en la Universidad? Cómo definirías ser exitoso en estudios universitarios?

2.- Pensabas lo mismo antes de ingresar?

3.- Cuáles fueron tus motivaciones para ingresar a la Universidad y

4.- Han cambiado tus motivaciones en algo ahora que estás en ella?

5.- Antes de ingresar te sentías listo para ser exitoso en tus estudios universitarios? Si o no y por qué?

6.- Cuáles consideras que son los elementos importantes para lograr tener éxito en la Universidad?

7.- Cuáles eran tus más grandes temores antes de ingresar?

8.- Cuáles fueron los mayores obstáculos que tuviste que pasar?

9.- Qué crees que te ayudó a superar esos obstáculos o cuáles crees que fueron tus fortalezas?

10.- Sientes que eres exitoso o serás exitoso en tus estudios universitarios? Si o no y por qué?

11.- Puedes contarme una o dos anécdotas que se relacionen a los temas que hemos discutido?

Muchas gracias por tu colaboración. Exitos en tus estudios.

FIN DE LA ENTREVISTA. Hora: …….

**Appendix 6. Study 2: online survey (English version/Spanish version)**



How can Spanish Speakers of South America prepare for success in Anglophone European Universities?

1. Participant Information

This survey is being conducted by Katherine Salvador, full time PhD student of the School of Education of Trinity College Dublin supervised by Dr. David Limond. The purpose of this study is to establish a profile of Spanish speaking people from South America who are successful in their undergraduate studies in European Universities in Anglophone countries where English is the language of instruction. The results of this survey will be used anonymously in my thesis work or any other publications that derive from it.

We are looking for responses from undergraduate students in Ireland, seeking prospective participants for this study.

This survey is voluntary and you will have the right to leave it at any stage. All participants will remain anonymous.

If you have any questions about the study please contact me ekalvador@tcd.ie or my supervisor at limondd@tcd.ie.

If you decide to participate in this survey you will be asked to answer a few questions in your preferred language (English or Spanish).

* Would you like to go to the Spanish version of this survey now?

- I like to remain in the English version of this survey
- I like to go to the Spanish version of the survey (you can click 'PREV' and come back to this page to proceed in the English version at any later stage of the survey)

How can Spanish Speakers of South America prepare for success in Anglophone European Universities?

2. Participant Consent

Declaration:

* I am 18 years or older and am competent to provide consent.
* I have read the above information about this research and this consent form. I understand the description of the research provided to me.
* I agree that my data be used for scientific purposes and I have no objection to my data being published in scientific publications in a way that does not reveal my identity.
* I freely and voluntarily agree to be part of this research study, though without prejudice to my legal and ethical rights.
* I understand that my participation is fully anonymous and that no personal details about me will be recorded and that I am free to withdraw myself from the study at any stage.

* Do you give consent to participate in this survey?

- Yes
- No

How can Spanish Speakers of South America prepare for success in Anglophone European Universities?

* 10. Soy/Fui un(a) estudiante de pregrado exitoso(a) porque tengo/tuve la intención de terminar mis estudios dentro del tiempo normalmente establecido

| Totalmente en desacuerdo | En desacuerdo | Neutral | De acuerdo | Totalmente de acuerdo |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

* 11. De manera general, ¿se considera/consideraba usted un(a) estudiante de pregrado exitoso(a)?

- Si
- No

How can Spanish Speakers of South America prepare for success in Anglophone European Universities?

18. Spanish version of page 6: Are/Were you a successful student? - YES

Usted respondió que sí se considera/consideraba un(a) estudiante exitoso(a)

* 12. Por favor explique por qué respondió sí:

How can Spanish Speakers of South America prepare for success in Anglophone European Universities?

19. Spanish version of page 7: Are/Were you a successful student? - NO

Usted respondió que NO se considera/consideraba un(a) estudiante exitoso(a)

* 13. Por favor explique por qué respondió "no":

How can Spanish Speakers of South America prepare for success in Anglophone European Universities?

20. Spanish version of page 8: Additional demographics (2):

¿Cómo pueden los hispanos de Sudamérica prepararse para tener éxito en universidades de habla inglesa en Europa?

Información demográfica adicional (2):

**Appendix 7. Study 2: Interview protocol**

Date: Interviewee No:
Start Time: Finish time:
Place:
Material:

**Study: How can Spanish Speakers of South America prepare for success in Anglophone European Universities?**

This interview is part of my study. I am Katherine Salvador, a full time PhD student of the School of Education of Trinity College Dublin and supervised by Dr. David Limond. The purpose of this study is to establish a profile of Spanish speaking people from South America who are successful in their undergraduate studies in European Universities in Anglophones countries where English is the language of instruction. The results of this interview will be used anonymously in my thesis work or any other publications that derive from it. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to leave it at any stage. If you have any questions about the study please contact me at salvadok@tcd.ie or my supervisor at limondd@tcd.ie

If you wish to answer questions in Spanish feel free to do so at any stage of the interview.

Participant Consent
DECLARATION:
• I am 18 years or older and am competent to provide consent.
• I have read the above information about this research and this consent form. I understand the description of the research provided to me.
• I agree that my data be used for scientific purposes and I have no objection to my data being published in scientific publications in a way that does not reveal my identity.
• I freely and voluntarily agree to be part of this research study, though without prejudice to my legal and ethical rights.
• I understand that my participation is fully anonymous and that no personal details about me will be recorded and that I am free to withdraw myself from the study at any stage.

Participant (signature): _____ Interviewer/researcher: _____
Participant (printed name): _____ Date: _____

Interviewee No:

Demographics:

1. Age:
2. Gender: Female Male
3. Faculty / School / Course /Year:
4. Single/married/divorced/in a relationship/have children/have no children
5. Country of origin
6. Nationality/citizenship

Questionnaire:

7. Please tell me about yourself. What was your main purpose/motivation in coming to Ireland and rationale for choosing Trinity College Dublin. (mention your time length in Ireland before getting into college)

8. Please describe the route you took to your course. (Were you admitted on your first try? Did you try other routes first?) – Personal note: history of retention

9. Please tell me about your preparedness for college life in Ireland generally and in Trinity College Dublin and your chosen course. Personal Note: culture / language / content / skills

10. Could you give me examples of the preparation you had before starting your course. Personal note: own/ private/ public / college's service department

11. Please describe what were the main differences you found between college life in Ireland and your previous education experience. PN: Were they a problem for you? How? How did you proceed?

12. Please describe factors that more contributed to success in your study, for example: family, friends, motivation, resilience)

13. Please describe major examples of your overcoming difficulties or challenges you have found to your studies.

14. What difficulties did you have in matters that are not related to your academic life? How did you sort them out? For example: finance / family issues / visa issues / health.

15. Were you a frequent user of the services provided by the college? How did you learn of them and how frequently have you used them? Were they helpful? How?

16. Did you ever consider dropping out? When? Why? What happened? Why did you decide to stay?

17. Please describe any difficulties you have had in the following categories and your actions to overcome them:

a. Language (reading, speaking, writing, listening, everyday language)
b. Homesickness
c. Culture shock
d. Family issues
e. Finance
f. Academic demands
g. Relationship with peers
h. Relationship with lecturers
i. Exams
j. Others (specify)…

18. Please tell me if you think your peers had problems related to the academic demand of the course. Any particular examples?

19. Please describe if at any point you felt at a disadvantage to the locals (Irish students) or other international students? How, why, what did you do about this?

20. Please say what made you successful in your course? And what recommendations would you have for other international students?

**Appendix 8. Study 2: Recruiting participants (invitation email)**

Dear undergraduate students of TCD,

I am Katherine Salvador, a PhD student in the School of Education of Trinity College Dublin supervised by Dr. David Limond.

I am conducting a research study around success in higher education with special interest in South American Spanish-speaking undergraduates. You can find more information about my study in the following video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziUOv0SbYH8

I need your help in filling in an online survey which will not take more than 3 – 7 minutes. Simply click on the link below, or cut and paste the entire URL into your browser to access the survey:

Survey link: https://es.surveymonkey.com/r/SUCCESSINHE

Your response would be very much appreciated. I assure you that all responses obtained are anonymous and this study is approved by the School of Education Ethics Committee, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland.

If you have any questions please contact me at salvadok@tcd.ie or my supervisor at limondd@tcd.ie

Sincerely,

Katherine Salvador
PhD candidate
School of Education
Trinity College Dublin

**Appendix 9. Study 2 and 3: Email correspondence**

Dear XXXXXXX,

First of all, thanks the time you will give today to be a participant of my study. I have booked Room 4 in the Berkeley Library (attached map) from 3-5 pm. I will be there from 3 if you would like to come earlier otherwise 16.00 pm (4.00pm) is just right as we arranged. The interview will be audio recorded and will last around 1 hour.

I am sending you the links of my videos where I explain the interest of my study and a few things to think about before the interview if you would like to do so. I also ask you to sign a form to give your consent to voluntarily participate in my study (as per our School's and college's policies).

I am in college today so please any question you would have before the interview just let me know. I would like you to just feel relaxed.

My questions will be about:

1.- Demographics
2.- Your background before, during and after your studies in Trinity
3.- Your experiences as an international non-EU student whose first language is Spanish
4.- Some examples that illustrate your experiences, challenges, success.
5.- Your experience as a female student in Trinity
6.- Recommendations to other students that like you would like to be successful in their undergrad studies.

Links (videos):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziUOv0SbYH8

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9Ezsp-pxIY

Thanks again, see you later,

Katherine
[Quoted text hidden]

Berkeley - 00 - Basement INTERVIEW GRO.pdf
38K

**Appendix 10. CV (courses and presentations along my doctoral study)**

PhD in Education Research Student, Year 4, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. Thesis title: *How can Spanish Speakers of South America prepare for success in Anglophone European Universities?*
Supervisor: Dr. David Limond (limondd@tcd.ie)

**Qualifications**

2016 Postgraduate Certificate in Innovation & Entrepreneurship of the Innovation Academy after completion of all the modules and passing the examination process.

2009 Magister in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral (ESPOL), Ecuador. Graduation modality: Thesis work and dissertation *Impact of Extensive Reading on Ecuadorian Learners' Attitudes Toward L2 Reading: A Qualitative Research Study*. First Class Honours.

2002 Engineer in Aquaculture, Escuela Superior Politecnica del Litoral, Ecuador. Graduation modality: Thesis work and dissertation *Marketing Plan for the Introduction of a Marine Product with Added Value: in Shrimp Products*. First Class Honours.

2008 Diploma of Virtual Tutor in Higher Education, CTI, ESPOL.

2006 Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) Modules 1, 2 and 3, Cambridge University ESOL Exams.

**Myers-Briggs Type Indicator:** ISFP (Introverted Sensing Feeling Perceiving) kind, friendly, sensitive, quiet, easy-going, loyal to values and beliefs, dislikes arguments and conflict, practical.

**Achievements**

2016 Granted the TCD Visual & Performing Arts Fund towards the event *Meet Ecuador: its Folk Music and Dance*.
2013 Awarded a Scholarship to pursue my doctoral studies by the SENESCYT, Government of Ecuador.

**Memberships and Affiliations**

- Member, Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI)
- Member, Common Ground Publisher
- Member, Maryland Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MDTESOL)
- Member of Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education (IATSE)

**Interests**

Social and Community Voluntary work:

- Coordinating Children's club and Teens' club for Free Grace Evangelical Church and the community of Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, Ireland since August 2013.
- Helper for Riding for the Disable Association (RDA) in Mullingar Centre, since September 2014. Assisting horse riding therapy with children from the Midlands.
- Big Brother Big Sister (Foroeige) in Mullingar, since September 2015. Mentoring a teenager.

**Publications, Conference Presentations and Papers**

- Co-organiser of International Women's Day event, School of Education in 2015 and 2016
- *'Be creative' – they said, my research in a comic strip*, for the Thesis-in-Three, Long Hub Room, TCD, Dublin, Ireland, April 28th, 2015.
- *All they want is a good job!': Perception of success in higher education in a rural Irish post-primary school*, for the 40th ESAI Annual Conference: Educational Research and Practice in Times of Transition: Looking to the Future, Maynooth, Ireland, April 9-11, 2015.
- Workshop presented for 2014 MD-TESOL Conference: 34th Maryland TESOL Annual Fall Conference: *Demonstration of Reflective Teaching Practice to build and revisit a personal philosophy of education*, in Baltimore, USA on October 25th, 2014.
- *Perception of Readiness and Success in Higher Education: The Voice of Ecuadorian Second Level Students,* for the International Journal of Arts and Sciences (IJAS) Conference in Barcelona, Spain, June 16-19, 2014 and also presented for the 5th Annual School of Education Postgraduate Research Conference "Adventures in Education" on June 21st, 2014 in the Jonathan Swift Theatre in Trinity College Dublin.
- *My Philosophy of Education Revisited: Demonstration of Reflective Teaching Practice*, presented for the Twelfth International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities in the Universidad CEU San Pablo, Madrid, Spain, June 11-13, 2014
- *Success in Higher Education*, presented for Thesis-in-Three in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, May 7, 2014.
- *Reflections on/of my Philosophy of Education for present and future generations*, presented for the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) Conference 2014: Imagining and Innovating for Sustainable Futures; education in challenging times, April 10-12, 2014, Athlone, Ireland.
- Salvador, K. (2012) *Applying principles of adult learning in a higher education setting: reflections on my experience with the andragogy theory and practice*, INTED2012 Proceedings, pp. 3666-3673.

**For more information:** http://www.tcd.ie/Education/research/degrees/supervised/katherine-salvador/