

**Higher Education Engagement  
of Students from Bhutanese Refugee  
Background in South Australian Universities**

*This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the Honours degree of Bachelor of Psychology (Advanced)(Honours)*



**School of Psychology**

**University of Adelaide**

**September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

**Total Word Count: 9, 463**

## Table of Contents

### Introduction

<b>Background .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Terminology.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Development of Engagement Framework.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Pittaway’s Engagement Framework.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>General barriers and facilitators to engagement for refugee students.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Previous literature on Bhutanese students’ experiences.....</b>	<b>16</b>
 <b>Method</b>	
<b>Study Design.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Participants.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Procedure.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Personal Reflexivity Statement.....</b>	<b>21</b>
 <b>Results</b>	
<b>Overview.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>English language affects all aspects of engagement.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>The role of relationships with family, friends, and teaching staff on engagement.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<i>Relationship with family.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Relationship with friends.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Relationship with teaching staff.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<b>Engagement and culturally safe university environments.....</b>	<b>33</b>

**Intersections between available services and student’s attitudes to seeking support and impacts on engagement.....36**

**Discussion**

**Overview.....40**

*Personal engagement.....41*

*Professional engagement.....43*

*Social engagement.....44*

*Academic and intellectual engagement.....45*

**Strengths and Limitations.....47**

**Implications and support recommendations.....48**

**Future Directions.....51**

**Conclusion.....51**

**References.....53**

**List of Figures**

Figure 1 *Elements of Engagement.....11*

Figure 2 *Thematic map.....22*

## Abstract

University students' engagement is an important aspect of academic success, personal growth, and development. There have been multiple debates regarding the definition of engagement and the different elements of engagement in the literature. For this research, Pittaway (2012) model of engagement framework has been applied. It included personal, social, academic, professional, and intellectual engagement. Previous research has also shown that young people from refugee backgrounds experience unique barriers that are heightened by resettlement factors and post-traumatic stress due to their past experiences. However, there was limited research on how young people from refugee backgrounds engage in higher education, and little research with specific ethnic or cultural groups. As such, this research focused on young people from Nepali Speaking Bhutanese refugee backgrounds in the context of engagement in higher education in Australian universities. This qualitative study recruited 12 university students from two different universities in South Australia including nine current undergraduate students and three students who have completed their undergraduate degrees. The semi-structured interviews conducted with these students explored their engagement in higher education and the facilitators and barriers of engagement. Four themes were identified through thematic analysis, and these include: 1) English Language affects all aspects of engagement, 2) The role of relationships with family, friends, and teaching staff, 3) Engagement and culturally safe university environments, 4) Intersections between available services and student's attitudes to seeking support and impacts on engagement.

*Key Words: Bhutanese; Refugee students; culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD); engagement; higher education.*

### **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published except where due reference is made. I give permission for the digital version of this thesis to be made available on the web, via the University of Adelaide's digital thesis repository, the Library Search and through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the school to restrict access for a period of time.

### **Contribution Statement**

In writing this thesis, my supervisor and I collaborated to design this study, including the (low risk) human research ethics approval application. I led the research after that by conducting the literature search, recruitment, interviews, and the initial processes of data analysis but the final theming was done in collaboration. I wrote up all aspects of the thesis with revision and support provided by my supervisor.

## **Higher Education Engagement of Students from Bhutanese Refugee Background in South Australian Universities**

Higher education is an important factor for a range of reasons for people with refugee backgrounds in countries of resettlement, including in terms of improving employment outcomes, financial security, social inclusion, wellbeing, and a sense of hope and belonging in their new country (Lenette, 2016; McIntyre et al., 2018; Sheikh et al., 2019). A key component of success within higher education is student engagement (Pitaway, 2012, Bond et al., 2020, Bowden et al., 2021). A broad range of research considers student engagement in higher education for mainstream populations (Bond et al., 2004; Pittaway, 2012; Bowden et al., 2021), and research with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations has mainly focused on international students in higher education (Joyce et al., 2010). However, very little research has been conducted regarding student engagement among people with refugee backgrounds. Where there is research, certain groups have received more attention than others. For example, Mangan and Winter's (2017) systematic review found that literature on African refugees was overrepresented, and further research with other refugee populations was needed. This study, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by focusing on one specific refugee group: namely Nepali-speaking Bhutanese students with refugee backgrounds resettled in Adelaide South Australia. Specifically, the paper aims to: 1) explore what engagement in university looks like for young people from Bhutanese refugee backgrounds, and 2) identify the key facilitators and barriers to engagement.

## Terminology

**Refugee students:** According to the UNHCR (2022), refugees are those that are escaping violence, war, conflict, or prosecution. For the brevity of this research 'refugee students' are referred to those who came to Australia on a visa that fits the definition of refugee provided by UNHCR. However, the author acknowledges that this is only one aspect of student's identity.

**Bhutanese:** The term 'Bhutanese' is usually applied when referring to someone of Bhutanese Nationality. However, in this thesis, this terminology refers to a group of Nepali speaking people in countries of resettlement.

## Development of engagement framework

Literature on student engagement has received increased attention in recent years (Bond et al., 2020). However, there are disagreements in the literature regarding how to define the construct of engagement, including its definition and the nature of specific indicators or components (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Bowden et al., 2020; Reading, 2008; Zhao & Khu 2004; Pittway, 2012). Bond et al. (2020), define engagement as the observable behaviour students' show towards their learning such as their effort and energy. Further, they argue that engagement is shaped by both external (structural) and internal factors (relating to students themselves) including complex relationships and learning environments (Bond et al., 2020).

In terms of other commonly used definitions of student engagement, Kahu and Nelson (2018) established a model of engagement that extended Kahu's (2013) engagement framework, which includes components of self-efficacy, emotions, belonging, and wellbeing. The 2018 model is divided into three dimensions of engagement: emotional, behavioural, and cognitive. Furthermore, they argue that self-efficacy, emotions, belonging, and wellbeing are

impacted by structural influences such as university systems, policies, and culture as well as the student's background, including student's personal commitments family, and support. They argue that positive engagement within all three dimensions can lead to positive long-term and immediate outcomes. This may include immediate outcomes such as increased academic knowledge and skills, social satisfaction, and wellbeing. Additionally, long-term outcomes may include academic retention, employment, lifelong learning, citizenship, and personal growth. They further emphasize on the impact of the complex interplay of structural university systems, students' personal preferences and life experiences on student engagement. Further, this model also highlights the impact of family, as well as socio-cultural factors, and additional life challenges faced by non-traditional students such as a lack of belonging, decreased wellbeing, and increased stress due to past experiences (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). This engagement framework is meaningful in that it captures how different factors can impact engagement and considers the cultural factors unlike other frameworks such as that of Zhao and Kuh (2004), Reading (2008) and Ashkzari et al. (2018). However, it looks at social factors as an outcome of engagement rather than a form of engagement in higher education. When discussing the experiences of new arrivals and refugee students, it is important that social engagement is embedded within the engagement framework because previous literature has found that many refugee students are socially isolated and experience difficulties adapting into the new environment in their host countries due to socio-cultural differences (Crea, 2016; Naidoo, 2021; Ramsay & Baker, 2019). Therefore, to view social engagement as simply an outcome of university participation limits understanding of ways in which refugee students can be socially engaged.

Another recent model of student engagement in higher education is that of Bowden et al. (2020). This model consists of four pillars of engagement: namely, cognitive, behavioural, affective, and social. The model was developed through a quantitative study of 952 students which showed that students who were engaged in all four pillars of engagement achieved higher academic success. However, this was a quantitative-based study that recruited participants enrolled in only the Business Faculty in one metropolitan university in Australia. As such, it is unlikely that the research captured the experiences of students from either other universities, or different social and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the researchers themselves suggested that future research should be undertaken in a cross-cultural context to enhance understanding of student engagement.

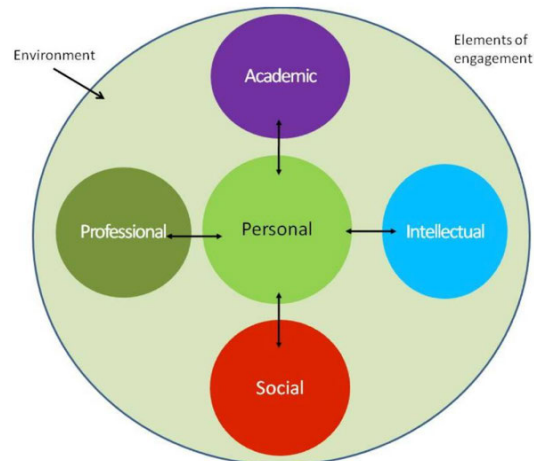
Finally, Pittaway's (2012) model of engagement in higher education is also a commonly used model, with five elements as seen on figure 1. These five elements are not based on hierarchy, rather they intersect with each other. This model has a strong emphasis on the role of educators and the university environment as factors impacting engagement. It also considers students as drivers of their learning and is a leading conceptual model in this area (e.g., see Johnson et al., 2018; Yockey & Jayne, 2017). Unlike Kahu and Nelson's (2018) model, Pittaway's considers social engagement as a form of engagement rather than the outcome. Additionally, unlike Bowden et al. (2020), Pittaway's model provides a framework to consider the role of the environment - including home and university - in how students engage in university. Thus, the broad focus of this model makes it suitable for use with refugee background students, in that it is likely that this cohort will have specific needs at the broader university level that impact engagement, which this model captures (Sheikh et al., 2019; Green & Wright, 2017).

## Pittaway's Engagement Framework

Pittaway's (2012) engagement framework provides a set of five elements as seen in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Elements of Engagement*



*Note.* From Pittway, S. (2012). Student and staff engagement framework in a faculty of education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37 (4), 37-45.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2012v37n4.8>

Personal engagement refers to a student's expectations, beliefs, attitudes, personality as well as ability to succeed at university. Personal engagement begins with a choice to enroll in university on a degree that student is passionate about (Pittaway, 2012). In terms of previous research exploring student engagement and the role of personal engagement specifically, Sheikh et al. (2019) explored the experiences of refugee students by interviewing 10 refugee students from a variety of countries who attended a University in Victoria, Australia. They reported that the students had differences in learning styles, expectations of teaching and levels of exposure to technology, which influenced their engagement at university. In another

study conducted in Australia, Baker et al. (2017) explored access to support, finding that refugee students often chose to access support from so-called “Hot forms of support” (p. 7) – with whom they felt more familiar and comfortable, such as family and friends rather than university teaching staff. In this case, students’ backgrounds and expectations of university led them to disengage from university provided support.

Professional engagement emphasises the professional experiences gained by the student in relation to their studies. It includes gaining experiences and building a network of people in relevant fields. As such, being professionally engaged involves students’ participation beyond classroom discussions and immediate learning and teaching. This may involve joining professional associations, attending professional networking events, conferences, internships, and placements. Thus, being professionally engaged enhances students’ professional network and prepares them for their life after graduation (Pittaway, 2012). Refugee students often experience challenges making professional networks due to language barriers, a lack of social connections, and an inability to join professional networks or associations due to barriers such as financial and time burdens (e.g., increased family caring responsibilities). For example, many refugee students live far away from their universities where there are more affordable housing facilities, making it difficult to travel to networking events (Sheikh et al., 2019). However, a study by Watts (2007) which looked at widening participation of students from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds in a university in England suggests that even having access to voluntary work, mentoring schemes, and the opportunity to connect with academics and professionals can contribute to gaining professional employment in the future.

Social engagement refers to a students' ability to have social interactions that can influence their own beliefs, views, and perspectives, extending their engagement with their studies through social connections. As such, social engagement involves connecting with peers and engaging in social activities at university, as well as building positive relationships with university staff. Social engagement is therefore also related to other forms of engagement, in that it allows students to not only connect to their peers but also provides an opportunity to build professional networks (Pittaway, 2012). Again, refugee students may have barriers to social engagement, including difficulty with social interactions with peers and university staff members due to reasons including discrimination and a lack of cultural competency in educators. For example, a study of engagement at secondary school level by Molla (2020) showed that students from African refugee communities had limited social engagement, primarily due to racial insensitivity. At higher education level, other researchers such as Sheikh et al. (2019) also found that students often felt disconnected from academic staff, feared being misunderstood, and felt unheard in class.

The final two domains of engagement are academic and intellectual. Academic engagement is when students take active control of their learning. This may include activities such as taking effective notes, reading, listening, and problem-solving. Intellectual engagement is when students develop new ideas and concepts that are related to their courses. Additionally, this form of engagement involves curiosity and desire to learn about broader aspects such as those relating to social, ethical, and political implications of their area of study. In doing so, students can discover new innovations and express their passion for their field. Academically engaged students are typically aware of academic culture including academic

writing, referencing and new findings in the literature (Pittaway, 2012). Refugee students may have challenges with active academic and intellectual engagement due to unfamiliarity with university environments and modes of teaching (Sheikh et al., 2019). Moreover, Randow (2011) suggests that many first-year students, even those with English language proficiency, lack academic knowledge and writing skills, and this challenge is heightened for those refugee and migrant students for people who speak English as a second language. Further, Deslandes et al. (2022) found that having limited proficiency in the language spoken in the host country impacted young people's ability to actively participate in their learning. For example, in their study students felt a sense of shame associated with their accent and lacked confidence to participate in class discussions and communicate with their educators even if they did not understand the class content. This sense of shame associated with language can discourage refugee students from expressing their ideas, insights, and curiosity and as such, they may be perceived as lacking intellectual engagement by academic staff (Deslandes et al., 2022). However, Lennette (2016) argues that when given the right support, refugee students thrive in the university environment, and thus it is also important to consider refugee students' strengths in relation to engagement.

### **General barriers and facilitators to engagement for refugee students**

In general, CALD students face a range of key structural barriers to engagement at university. Understanding the barriers and facilitators is important to ensure full participation for this group of students (Kong et al., 2016; McIntyre et al., 2018). One such barrier relates to the potential lack of overarching culturally responsive teaching at university (Green & Wright, 2017), which may lead to a lack of a sense of belonging and feelings of isolation amongst young

people from minority backgrounds. Studies have shown that people from CALD backgrounds often feel like an outsider in university due to the language differences such as inability to understand the accent of people in host country and challenges with the technical language used in the course they are studying (Jeong et al., 2011; McIntyre et al., 2018; Keating et al., 2020). As such, promoting culturally responsive teaching will likely play a large role in facilitating engagement, although there is very little research for specific cultural groups that consider how this may look.

Refugee students have specific additional challenges to CALD students more generally. The first of these may relate to psychological trauma and mental ill-health, which is experienced in larger numbers than the general population (Nickerson et al., 2022). These experiences typically hinder their ability to fully engage at university (Naidoo et al., 2019). A study by Hartley et al. (2018) found that the stress associated with adjusting into a new university environment, financial difficulties, and past experiences of living in uncertain situations while seeking refuge have significant negative impact on mental health which further impacts ability to focus and stay engaged on their studies.

Additionally, many refugee students will have experienced disrupted previous education, resulting in language difficulties, a lack of experience in formal education, and gaps in knowledge more generally (Naidoo et al., 2019; Joyce et al., 2010; Farzad et al., 2020). Therefore, language is a key barrier to all forms of engagement, and complicated academic language typically makes this more challenging (Baker et al., 2019). As such, Naidoo et al. (2019) argue that the lack of targeted intervention and support programs to help refugee students creates limitation for student engagement in higher education.

Finally, many refugee students come from lower socio-economic statuses and face financial difficulties. Due to this, they take external workloads to meet financial demands, limiting the time they have for study and extracurricular activities related to different forms of engagement such as attending professional events (Sheikh et al., 2019; Naidoo, 2019; Baker et al., 2022; Kong et al., 2016; McIntyre et al., 2018). Refugee students may also struggle to make social connections due to unfamiliar university environments and socio-cultural differences (Baker et al., 2016; Kong et al., 2016; Testa & Egan, 2013; Green & Wright, 2017).

### **Previous literature on Bhutanese students' experiences**

In 1991, ethnic cleansing led to the displacement of over 100,000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees living in the Southern Bhutan. They fled their homes in southern Bhutan and lived in refugee camps for over 20 years. This was due to the introduction of Bhutanese government policies classifying Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees as illegal immigrants, leading to enforced psychological and physical tortures including rape, imprisonment, and burning of houses (Meyerhoff et al., 2021). Therefore, this group of refugees often experience psychological trauma (Cardeli et al., 2020). Many parents in the Bhutanese community were farmers and did not attend school. Although most young people in the community do not have first-hand experiences of ethnic cleansing, they have typically experienced intergenerational trauma as they grew up with chronic stress and uncertainty living in refugee camps (Cardeli et al., 2020). The political dispute and conflicting national and cultural identities have left young people at confusion about identities or a sense of belonging. Further, this history of trauma, resettlement stressors, and lack of opportunities can increase vulnerability to psychological distress, which in turn impacts engagement at school for these cohorts (Cardeli et al., 2020).

There is limited literature that specifically explores the experiences of Bhutanese young people within the space of higher education after resettlement. The only known study by Ghising (2019) suggests that parents from Bhutanese backgrounds opted for resettlement hoping that their children will have better educational opportunities. However, their study suggests that young Bhutanese students in the United States experienced challenges which hindered their ability to transit to higher education, including parent's ability to support their children, financial burden, additional family responsibilities, and lack of system knowledge. To the students' knowledge there is no research specifically on this group's engagement in higher education in countries of resettlement.

Following the gaps in the literature documented in this chapter, this research aimed to 1) explore what engagement in university looks like for young people from Bhutanese refugee backgrounds, and 2) what are the facilitators and barriers to engagement.

## **Method**

### **Study Design**

This study is guided by the realistic perspective whereby it draws on the lived experiences of the participants (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021), with analysis following the reflexive thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019b).

### **Participants**

The inclusion criteria for the study were to be (or have been in the last five years) a student at a university in South Australia from a Nepali-speaking Bhutanese background, who arrived in Australia within the past 15 years in line with patterns of Bhutanese resettlement.

Other inclusion criteria included adequate English language proficiency and age between 18 and 25 years.

In total, 12 university students including seven women and five men from two different universities in South Australia participated in the study, including nine current undergraduate students and three students who had completed their undergraduate degrees. The most common courses studied by students were Nursing ( $N = 5$ ), Health and Medical Sciences ( $N = 3$ ), Aviation ( $N = 2$ ), Software Engineering ( $N = 1$ ), and Teaching ( $N = 1$ ). Participants had been in Australia between seven and 14 years ( $M = 10$ ,  $SD = 2.3$ ). Participants' age ranged between 18 and 25 years ( $M = 22$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ). Ten of the 12 participants either attended or were undergraduate students at the University of South Australia and two participants were currently studying undergraduate courses at the University of Adelaide. Ten out of 12 participants were the first to attend university in their families. No table summarising participant details was provided due to confidentiality concerns (Saunders et al., 2015).

### **Procedure**

The study received low-risk ethics approval from the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics School of Psychology sub-committee on the 5th of April 2022, approval number 22/25. Information about the study was disseminated to community leaders and organisations through email and shared on a range of social media platforms. In addition, flyers were distributed around all three South Australian university campuses amongst relevant student groups or associations. Further, snowball sampling was used whereby interviewed participants were asked if they were happy to share details of the study with other people.

Participants who expressed interest were provided with a participant information sheet and then if they still wished to proceed, a time was scheduled, and were provided with a consent form (see Appendix A for recruitment materials). Seven interviews were conducted face to face while five interviews were conducted via videoconference.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format based on previous literature outlined in the Introduction. Interviews included demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, the university they attend/attended) and questions that explored students' engagement in higher education. For example, questions about experiences in university in general, their engagement in social activities, in their education and what that looked like. After the first pilot interview, the interview questions were assessed, and other prompt questions were added. These were questions that helped young people to draw on their experiences during the interview. Some examples of these include: what were your experiences like with university teaching staff? How do you think the learning environment could be improved to cater to new students? (See Appendix B for an outline of the full interview schedule).

In terms of the sample size, data saturation is a key method used to determine the sample size of an interview-based study. However, Braun and Clarke (2019b) argue that research is a 'pragmatic activity' usually shaped by situations and resources available. Following this, this study did not fully use data saturation to decide on sample size – rather sampling was designed to capture the experiences of students studying various courses and attending different universities in South Australia.

Interviews lasted approximately 49 to 74 minutes with an average of 58.11 minutes. All interviews were conducted between April and July 2022, and were audio recorded and then

transcribed using Braun and Clarke's (2013) verbatim transcription method including pauses, laughter, and hesitations such as 'umm', and 'uhh', to capture the relevant contextual information (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

After the interviews were completed, participants' information was removed, and participants were assigned a pseudonym. All participants had the option to review their anonymized transcripts to make sure they were comfortable with the content and that their confidentiality has been protected. Five participants took up this option but did not make any changes.

To enhance methodological rigor, an audit trail consisting of self-reflection on the interview process, interview questions, participant reactions, and the interview situations, codes and themes, copies of communication with participants, meeting notes, and personal reflections regarding the interview processes was kept by the researcher. The audit trail assisted with a thorough reflection of the researcher's own biases and beliefs and provided direction for the analytical strategy and interpretation of themes (Tracy, 2010).

### **Data analysis**

The data analysis was conducted using the six steps of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013). The data analysis was informed by the Pittaway (2012) engagement model as an overarching conceptual engagement. Specifically, the first step suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013) is familiarisation, followed by identifying relevant codes and collating these at a semantic level which further enhanced immersion in the data and allowed the researcher to notice patterns and concepts occurring within the data. This was done by repeated readings of the transcripts and noting down potential codes and repeated patterns in the data.

Thereafter, the transcript was more formally coded both deductively (e.g., exploring codes in relation specifically to engagement as per the Pittaway model) and inductively (e.g., coding any information relevant to the research questions). Next, these codes were collated into themes, which were reflected upon, reviewed, and amended by the primary student researcher and were cross-checked with academic supervisor. Finally, representative extracts were chosen to include in the results.

### **Personal Reflexivity Statement**

Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that it is important to acknowledge potential influences on different aspects of the research process and reflect on them while conducting qualitative research. The primary student researcher in this study is an insider researcher for this research (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) as she is a psychology student with a Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugee background. The author's knowledge and personal experiences of the higher education system and experiences of Nepali culture are similar to the target population and may have influenced the interviews. Also, participants were familiar with the researcher's Bhutanese refugee background so it is important to acknowledge that it might have potentially influenced their responses. Therefore, the author's understanding and interpretations of experiences may have further influenced data analysis and shaping of the data.

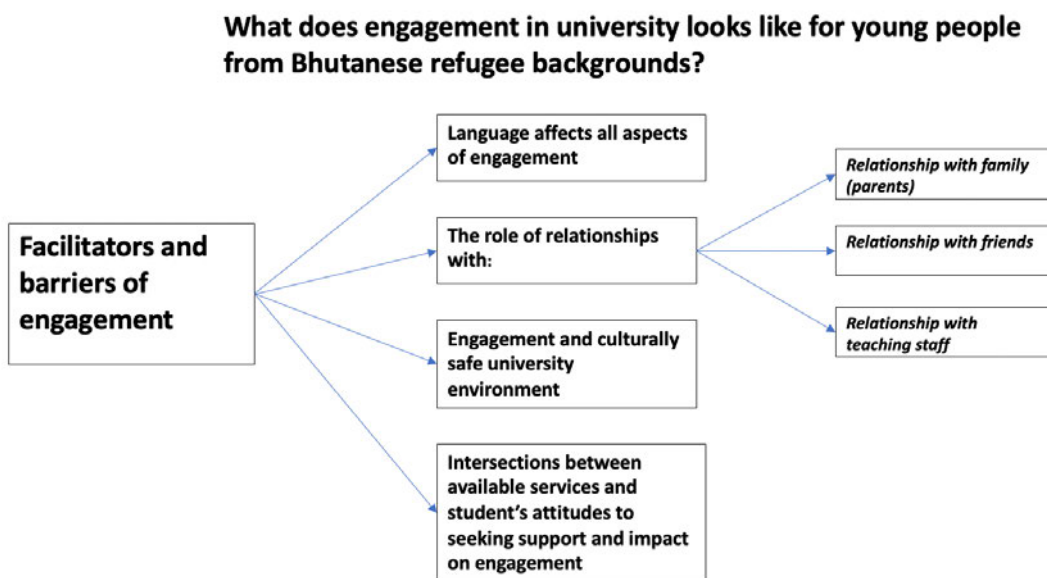
## Results

### Overview

Thematic analysis identified four overarching themes in relation to engagement in higher education for Bhutanese refugee students. These were: 1) English language affects all aspects of engagement, 2) The role of relationships with family, friends, and teaching staff on engagement, 3) Engagement and culturally safe university environments, 4) Intersections between available services and student's attitudes to seeking support and impacts on engagement. The interactions between these themes are shown on figure 2.

### Figure 2

*Thematic map*



Where extracts are provided, participants' pseudonym, gender, age, degree, and status of their study (e.g., completed, or current year of study) will be provided.

## English language affects all aspects of engagement

Participants consistently reported that English language was a barrier to all aspects of engagement, as it hindered their ability to achieve their potential, and put them at an academic disadvantage compared to their peers. For example, █████ who is a 21-year-old man in second year Nursing said that English being his second language hindered his ability to engage both academically and socially:

*“English is my second language and Nepali is my first, so I don't usually talk in English at my house and community, and it was a bit difficult for me to communicate and to know the terminology of specific area of subject.”*

He then explained that this difficulty with communication was also a barrier to forming friendships, especially during the beginning of his studies, he said that: *“I wasn't that confident since English was my second language and I didn't know more terminology of nursing and I wasn't good at engaging with friends and other social groups, due to language.”* █████ also said that he felt a sense of shame leading to being afraid and nervous when talking due to his accent, leading to difficulties in forming new friendships:

*“Back in Nepal, we had like different English accent then how we talk in Australia, I was a bit nervous and afraid to talk with other people, and I was ashamed to talk in front of people because I might speak in a different accent.”*

Other participants reported that they found it challenging to interact in classes due to language barriers which led to difficulty getting full marks for their class participation grading for some subjects. For example, █████ said he found it difficult to receive full marks for participation because of English language barriers:

*“It's not like you don't know anything because I know something that's why I am passing it, but you know, I had this course, which was called global health, 10% of the whole course is about communicating in the class and being in the tutorial itself so on those sorts of subjects, you are not going to get that full 10%. You know, you're not interacting as much so it is a challenge coming from different country and coming from different sort of background and having English as a second language.”*

(██████, 25, man, Nursing, completed undergraduate)

As such, participants noted that their English language skills often put them at a disadvantage in terms of academic engagement. For example, ██████ who came to Australia before she finished her primary level of education in her home country said that she did not feel proficient in either Nepali or English. She said that she couldn't understand the “big” words often used by teaching staff making it difficult to understand the course content:

*“In a way I had disadvantage and I say that because, in many ways, they say what's your culture and like they say, how do you to talk, or say certain things but like when I try to talk in Nepali, I can't fully talk in Nepali, I get so lost in some words and don't know how to pronounce it but then same thing goes back to English because there's some big words that like we've not really been introduced to compared to people who studied here from a young age. You know, those increased vocabularies and that put me in the disadvantages, especially because in uni they use big words and expect you to know the meanings and when the professors or lecturers or tutors are saying big words and sometimes you just don't know what they are on about.”*

(█████, 20, woman, Health and medical sciences, 2nd year student)

Participants indicated that they were hesitant to participate in class discussions, ask questions and articulate their thoughts when conducting presentations, even if they understood the content. This meant that even those with high levels of intellectual engagement found barriers to engaging generally because of English language skill:

*“I think [my English language skills are] limiting me because if I need to ask a question, like I can't do that and even when doing any class presentation, I wouldn't do well. Like content wise, I know what to do and say but when I get in front of the class, I get nervous and don't know what to do because I have a lack of confidence and I cannot communicate my ideas properly to the class or in writing so that is somewhat limiting my education.”*

(█████, 18, woman, Software Engineering, 1<sup>st</sup> year student)

Participants said that English language skills not only played an important role in shaping their learning and therefore academic engagement, but also impacted their ability to engage in professional settings either during or post-university, such as interviews and internships or placements. For example, █████ highlighted that he felt his English language skills placed him at a disadvantage in these professional areas, when compared to other students:

*“Some courses do require an interview process to go through right. I guess like I'm not good at public speaking, or like speaking so I may not come across as a very convincing person. My English is bad so there are people out there who are smart and can convey the message in a very convincing way, which I can't so I guess that's the main reason, that's main factor.”*

(█████, 21, man, Nursing, 3<sup>rd</sup> year student)

Overall, English language affected all aspects of engagement but particularly academic and intellectual engagement in that it impacted students' ability to understand terminologies and express their ideas in discussions and presentations. Further, students' social interaction and ability to engage in social relationships at university was also impacted by language barriers, often creating a sense of shame, fear of judgement, and lack of confidence.

### **The role of relationships with family, friends, and teaching staff on engagement**

Participants highlighted a range of key relationship that impact engagement, including relationship with family (specifically parents), friends and teaching staff at university. These are discussed as subthemes below.

#### ***Relationship with family***

Participants recognised the difficult past experiences their parents have been through, and said they wanted to ensure that they had better lives in Australia. For example, [REDACTED] said that her parents never went to school nor had the opportunities which being in Australia has given her. As such, she went to university to obtain a stable job and help her parents.

*"Since we're from Nepal, we're from a refugee background, my parents did not have education, and opportunity or access to schools and other things. When they came here, they were the one who had communication barriers like you know they were struggling with it a lot and I wanted to make money, I wanted to go to university, I wanted to like study more and get a stable job and then, so I went to uni."*

( [REDACTED], 22, women, Nursing, 3<sup>rd</sup> year student)

The above extract shows positive sentiments shared by participants about their parents, and a desire to attend university to please them, showing levels of personal engagement. Similarly, [REDACTED] who is 22 and currently in third year of studying Aviation said he had to really push himself to go to university because he wanted to make his parents proud as they are expecting financial assistance from him. He said:

*"I just push myself really, I mean maybe to make my parents proud in a way right that's one thing because, they're expecting big things. I have a lot of pressure to uphold and bring my family out of the financial state we are in, they expect a lot from me, so I have to prove myself, so I come and study here to get a good job, earn some money, help them out, that's really the only motivation to study."*

([REDACTED], 22, man, 3<sup>rd</sup> year student)

[REDACTED] also said that he had not felt ready for the transition to higher education after he finished high school, feeling that he lacked knowledge and the required skills. However, his parents were not able to understand his situation and pushed for him to enrol. He initially enrolled in IT but withdrew and changed to Aviation. Of this experience, he said:

*"I was in high school, and I didn't really want to study. I wanted to take a break because you have years of study and then like I want to take a break, but my parents were expecting me to go to uni, so I just jumped in, and it was the first thing that came to mind, I was like okay I'll do IT. I had no idea what else you can do, and it was sort of challenging. I had no idea how uni works, and I had only been in the Australian education system for almost 3 years, I started halfway through year 10 and year 11, 12, that's like two and a half years, maybe three years of the*

*Australian education system and I had no idea how to write assignments or essays or anything.”*

█ expressed similar feelings as she initially enrolled in university because of parental pressure. However, she said that the pressure also came from the broader Bhutanese community, where there was a general view that university is the only way of success. █ said:

*“I feel like at this time it was probably just my parents pressuring me because I feel like my parents or majority of the parents in the Nepali Community just feel that university is the only way to have a successful life.”*

(█, 20, woman, Health and medical sciences, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student)

In addition to parents’ impact on lack of academic and personal engagement, participants also reported that their parents often did not allow them to stay in the university after hours even to study or to socialise with their friends due to their overprotectiveness associated with the safety concerns as they lived far from their university and travelled in public transport. This had clear impacts on most forms of engagement. █ for example reported that although she is 18, she still has a curfew at home, which had a broad range of impacts including in relation to study and social relationships:

*“I’m not allowed to [stay at the university]. It’s because the events are usually during the evening. That’s a bit too late for me. Also, I live like an hour away so, like if they’re in the evening, it will be hard to get home. I have a curfew. Yes, I’m 18 years old. I don’t like it because like, even if I’m going to uni and I have to spend a bit longer than I expected, if I have to be at uni till eight or even nine, I can’t do that, I must come home and then study. I wouldn’t be able to hang out*

*with my friends any longer. Sometimes I am being focused on my study or my assignment at that moment and I need to stay longer but then I must also go home then thinking about going home, I'll just be stressed because it takes an hour to go home, and it feels like `oh I'm just wasting an hour just going home doing nothing."*

(█, 18, woman, Health, and Medical Sciences, 1<sup>st</sup> year student)

Since university social and professional networking events also usually occur during the evenings and after hours, this creates the barrier for students like █ to participate in such events organised by students.

Overall, then, parents had a broad impact on student's choices regarding their decision to enrol in universities and enrolling into courses they enjoy. Participants indicate that parent's expectations were priorities over personal choices, thus limiting students' ability to engage in subjects and courses of personal interest. Parents also impacted students' ability to spend social time with their friends after hours and engage in associations and events which are known to enhance professional and social networks.

### ***Relationship with friends***

Participants rarely referred to themselves as 'Australian' even if they were now an Australian citizen. Their sense of being an 'other' impacted their choices regarding who they chose to socially interact with, often orienting to students from CALD, refugee, or migrant backgrounds. For example, █ said:

*"Well, I used to have more sort of multicultural friends like not the actual Australian one, for example, the Burmese friend who come from Burma and have gone through the same situation and it's easier to make them friends because we*

*have the same sort of lifestyle, we have the same struggles. It's easier to make Afghan friend and it's much easier to make another Nepalese friend and another Bhutanese friends rather than approaching to someone who's better in English because you might still think I still don't understand some of the accent and some of their language, and all this sort of stuff. "*

(██████ 25, man, Nursing, completed undergraduate)

Choices of friendships were seen by participants as influencing their social engagement, specifically by which student social associations or events they chose to join. Almost all participants said they would not attend social events or join associations if their friends had not joined, potentially limiting engagement. As ██████, a 19-year-old woman doing first-year teaching said: *"so, if my friends are not involved, I'm not going to go alone."*

Participants reported that having friends significantly impacted how they engaged with their studies. For example, those participants who did not have meaningful friendships reported not attending classes at all; and even when they did attend, they often did not interact in discussion. For example, ██████ shared that he wouldn't usually attend classes and that his lack of friendship contributed to his lack of engagement.

*"I only had classes a few days a week, which I wouldn't attend too because all of them were unnecessary, and I didn't have friends back then. I would just go there, mind my own business, do my work, and come back home."*

(██████ 21, man, Nursing, 3<sup>rd</sup> year student)

Overall, participants highlighted that friendship was an important aspect of their engagement in university. Lack of meaningful friendship did not just impact their social

engagement but also their motivation to go to classes and academic engagement within university. Their sense of ‘othering’ led them to choose friends that shared similar backgrounds and experiences.

### ***Relationship with teaching staff***

Participants also reported that their lack of knowledge on academic culture created challenges for students. For example, [REDACTED] relayed an incident regarding an email exchange with his lecturer:

*“Let me tell you one of my experiences, one day I emailed my lecturer and I forgot to greet her, you know we should always greet them before we write the main message in an email right but then I forgot to greet her and then she messaged me saying I’m not your friend and you’re not chatting with me on Facebook and then that gives me another sort of phobia and I’m still very scared, I still have that fear, it still hasn’t gone, so I re-read the email every time before sending.”*

( [REDACTED], 25, man, Nursing, completed undergraduate)

Participants reported that if they had an unpleasant experience with their teaching staff– such as the example from [REDACTED] above about email etiquette – they were more likely to disengage and stop interacting with them in the future. For example, [REDACTED] said that one of her teachers did not reply to her emails for weeks and it discouraged her from communicating with them again:

*“Just made me feel like I just did not want to engage anymore in my second semester because I did not have a pleasing experience in my first semester, so I just distanced myself and did things alone in the second semester. It made an impact on the way I communicated with them and interacted with my teachers.”*

(████, 20, woman, Health and Medical Sciences, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student)

Additionally, █████ said that, as seen in themes above, language barriers played a role in her academic engagement, but that teaching staff did not understand this, resulting in her feeling unsupported:

*"Sometimes I did feel unsupported. You know, as a uni student, you're supposed to be independent when doing the assignment and other things but you might need some help to understand assignment better so like whenever you ask them personally like I don't understand this or that they might feel like oh it's not our job to explain that to you, you got to work it out yourself, so at the time, of course I did feel unsupported. I did have some difficulty with understanding some assignments so yeah it was like the language barrier played some role I guess."*

(████, 22, woman, Nursing, completed undergraduate)

Conversely, when teaching staff were willing to understand participant's situations and were approachable to students, they felt like they did not have to rush their work and could submit their assignment to the best potential thus gave them more time to enhance their academic writing, supporting their level of academic engagement. Further, it enhanced social engagement by creating a positive teacher-student relationship.

*"I did feel comfortable talking to my teachers, they were friendly, they weren't mean or anything and they were quite easy going like if you were going through difficult times and need some extra time to finish your work, they would understand, with a good reason of course. They would be happy to extend deadlines and stuff, so the lecturers and tutors were pretty good. I did not feel*

*like I needed to rush my work when I could not finish, it helped me to submit better work even if it took longer for me to do.”*

(██████, 24, man, Aviation, completed undergraduate)

In summary, students reported that relationships with teaching staff were significant for engagement, particularly academic and social. Negative relationship with teaching staff led to lack of teacher-student interaction and disengagement unlike having positive relationship with the staff led to feeling supported and understood which enhanced both academic and social engagement. Lack of understanding of small etiquettes i.e., writing email sometimes created barrier for communication.

Overall, participants reported that positive relationships with their friends, family and teaching staff facilitated engagement in different aspects particularly academic and social whereas negative relationships led to disengagement and lack of teacher-student interactions.

### **Engagement and culturally safe university environments**

As seen above, relationship with staff was a key aspect of student engagement at university. This extended to the broader university environment, which was also key to promoting student engagement. For example, students felt more understood and supported by the teachers who shared a sense of culture with them. This created an environment which allowed students to ask questions when they did not understand the content, which is clearly important for academic success. For example, ██████ said:

*“One of my teachers is from India, we share a similar culture. I feel confident talking to her after lecture and ask questions. I usually do that only with her because I don’t really talk to other lecturers that much but with that specific*

*course like I think I can relate to her more like in depth in terms of culture and understanding.”*

(██████, 18, Woman, Software Engineering, 1<sup>st</sup> year student)

Overall, participants indicated that teaching staff played an important role in creating a culturally safe environment. Discussing what a safe space at university looks like, ██████ said:

*“A place where I am able to talk and not be made fun of for having a certain opinion and in this unit, like in this degree, I felt that. All my tutors or my lecturers, course coordinator, she just really does encourages talking about yourself and sharing your story. Like voicing your opinion out and just even if you're involved like no opinions are wrong. You can voice it and maybe share your insights and your opinion to the class.”*

(██████ 20, woman, Health and Medical Sciences, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student)

Here, ██████ highlights how creating a safe space for students encourages engagement – particularly academic engagement through participating in class debates and sharing of knowledge and intellectual engagement in that they express ideas and insights, they share personal stories and about themselves and feel safe to share their insights or opinions knowing it is not ever “wrong”.

Other aspects of cultural safety include specific cultural rituals or practices that may not be recognised by participants’ universities or teaching staff. For example, ██████, a 22-year-old woman who recently graduated from Nursing shared an incident. ██████ said:

*“I think the course coordinator does not know much about the 13-day funeral rituals. I don’t think they care a lot about what we do during that time or our*

*experiences. I only got four or six days off, and I had to make up for all those days later when I was meant to be on the holiday. I think there's a lot of things that people don't know about our cultures, they should be aware, because we as a like different background we might have different cultural thing than people from here, so they should know about our culture and there should be like you know if they could understand our culture, then only they can help us out in those situations."*

For this reason, she said it is important that academic staff are trained to respond to student's needs in a culturally safe manner:

*"Well, like each culture has a different ritual. I wouldn't say they should know about all of them because there's so many but even though, if the staff get trained to respond to students' problems in a responsible way considering their culture and get like cultural awareness training, if they've got any students that are like you know they have any problems with their personal life connected to the cultural aspect. Then they should know how to respond."*

Other issues raised by participants in relation to cultural safety included common drinking cultures on campuses, which often led to them feeling left out socially, since most didn't drink alcohol. For example, [REDACTED] also shared that she would not usually go to social events which were known to be a popular way of forming friendships and networking with others because these usually revolved around alcohol. Since she does not drink alcohol, she felt excluded and a sense of discomfort at such events:

*“Like I don't drink, so it kind of makes me feel like they're all drinking but I'm the only one who's not drinking and I kind of feel left out and feel like I don't really belong, so I don't feel comfortable in that situation.”*

█████ said he had a similar experience, but he was able to adapt to the university social environment where alcohol is usually treated as a normal. He said that he had developed “bad habits” as part of his attempt to adapt and to feel a sense of belonging:

*“I've also learnt some bad habits like going to pub drinking and all and that makes me used to it. I can easily make few friends if I was having a bottle in my hand and drinking but I think it's the adapting to this type of environment that was important to me to fit in.”*

(█████, 25, man, Nursing, completed undergraduate)

Overall, participants indicated that they often felt like an outsider at the university for a range of reasons. A key issue related to awareness of cultural rituals and their impact on academic studies, including staff and university policies that did not meet students' needs. Additionally, participants highlighted that alcohol and drinking culture on campuses was not culturally safe for students and therefore impacted their social engagement and ability to make professional networks through involvement in social events.

### **Intersections between available services and student's attitudes to seeking support and impacts on engagement**

The final theme relates to the intersections between the broader university support services that are available, student's attitudes towards support seeking and its impact on engagement. When students first joined university, they were not aware of

the supports. For example, [REDACTED], a 21-year-old man in third year of Nursing degree said: *“Well, to be honest, I don't know like what kind of services are out there.”*

However, having knowledge and awareness about available support and being able to access them seem to help young people enhance engagement. [REDACTED] who is not the first person attend higher education in her family unlike most of other participants said:

*“I knew what I was expecting before coming to uni, but a lot of people like me have a little understanding of what to expect in uni and they wouldn't know where to seek support from. For example, if you need help, you could go to peer assisted study sessions (PASS) and a lot of people didn't know about that and even if there are resources, they didn't know where to seek support from.”*

([REDACTED], 18, woman, Software Engineering, 1<sup>st</sup> year student)

Here she highlights the advantage she had over her peers who she said did not know about the services which were there to enhance academic and social engagement by revising on the content as well as an opportunity to meet others (e.g., PASS sessions).

Unlike [REDACTED], those who were first in the family to attend university felt like there could have been more help provided. For example, [REDACTED] said she wanted to get into the masters of Sonography in the beginning and she was told that there's only one pathway to that. She later found out that there were other pathways after she had already “wasted” a year doing a course she regretted doing. Therefore, she suggested:

*“Rather than just giving out the booklets because they usually just hand out the booklet, they should hold information session. Not everyone knows everything. So maybe come to schools and educate children that there's many more pathways to where you want to be. Like it's either you can do it through uni or*

*maybe if you want to do, because I didn't know that you could do a diploma and then get into your bachelors. You know that extra thing that you could have done. Like there's always extra steps that you can do to get into the field you want to do."*

(█████, 20, woman, Health and Medical Sciences, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student)

However, even when supports were available, students were reluctant to reach out. For example, █████ perceived help seeking as not being self-reliant and this attitude hindered his social engagement as he chose not to join a group or association.

*"So, I probably didn't join or at least use the services because I was self-reliant, I usually do it alone. I was used to doing the assignments and studying by myself, even before uni. So, I didn't think I needed that extra help. Now, like mostly I just did everything by myself so that's probably why I didn't join other groups or associations."*

(█████, 24, man, Aviation, completed undergraduate)

Other students reported being reluctant to seek help due to a lack of confidence which even led them to failure. For example, █████ said:

*"I wasn't very confident, I was very shy I guess, I was embarrassed to reach out. I was like nah, I was too scared to reach out, I was like I'll do it myself and find out, but then if I don't then alright, it is what it is so yeah. That's one of the things. If I was as confident as I am now, I would have reached out and everything would be fine, but lack of confidence led me to fail my courses."*

(█████, 22, man, Aviation, 3<sup>rd</sup> year student)

These attitudes and perceptions of help seeking behaviour extended especially when reaching out for mental health support even if they were experiencing extreme

distress. For example, [REDACTED] who is a 19-year-old, first year Teaching student said she did not feel confident to seek mental health support although she has thought about it a lot of times.

*“I’ve thought about it a lot of times, but I just can’t get that. I don’t have the confidence to walk out and go talk to somebody about my issues and problems. I guess I fear judgement. I don’t want to be judged or anything you know, and I don’t want other people to know my own personal stuff or just lack of confidentiality.”*

However, it was clear that participants recognised the importance of positive mental health to be able to stay focused and engaged in university. For example, [REDACTED], a 20-year-old woman in second year Health and Medical Sciences said: *“If you’re good mentally then you’d be able to focus on your assignments and do good in uni as well.”*

[REDACTED], who is a second year Nursing student, suggested seeking such support is a “big effort”. He said:

*“I was a bit nervous to talk to a counsellor. It was a big effort, it was very difficult for me to say the exact feeling that I was having like to translate my thoughts from Nepali to English but yeah, I tried to manage to explain in such a similar way, and he understood me.”*

Notably, as data was collected during covid - participants spoke about its impact on their studies and that even where there was good support, covid impacted their ability to get those supports and led to negative professional engagement. Participants reported that having lack of exposure to professional settings before attending placements led to a lack of confidence. For example, [REDACTED] who is now a third-year Nursing student said he was nervous when he had to go to his first placement because

he did not have the opportunity to get hands-on experience through clinical simulations due to COVID19. This lack of exposure to a professional working environment negatively impacted his first professional engagement.

*"Uni provides a lot of support, provides a lot of clinical practice, clinical simulations and you do get that hands on experience so like I didn't have that in my first placement because of COVID19, all of the courses were cancelled, all of the parties were cancelled, so I guess that put me in the deep end when I had my first placement, so I guess that was the reason why I was pretty nervous and scared so that's probably why I didn't like it."*

(██████, age 21, male, 3<sup>rd</sup> year student)

Overall, participants' attitudes towards support seeking leads to reluctance to reach out and a lack of personal engagement with available supports and services at university which is partly caused by their knowledge and awareness of the support services. Additionally, even when the support was available, COVID negatively impacted participants' professional engagement.

## Discussion

### Overview

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the ways in which Bhutanese students engage in higher education and identify facilitators and barriers to engagement. It was apparent that English language impacted all aspects of engagement. Participants relationships with people in their immediate circle including their family, friends, and teaching staff were also important, particularly for social and academic engagement. Furthermore, personal engagement was seen through

participant's attitude towards support seeking, strategies of adapting into new university environment and choices to enroll into university. Subsequently, the university environment was an important factor which impacted ways in which Bhutanese students engage in different aspects, particularly social. These key findings are now discussed below in respect to the Pittway (2012) engagement framework described in the introduction.

### ***Personal engagement***

Personal engagement was evident in different choices that participants in this study made to adapt to the new university environment. For example, some participants chose to avoid going to events which involved alcohol, whereas some chose to drink alcohol to fit in with the new environment. It is interesting that different students approached the similar situation using different strategies. This different behaviour demonstrated by students are likely to be due to their acculturation strategies they followed. According to conceptual framework of acculturation and adaptation of immigrants developed by Berry (1997), people adapt different strategies for acculturation including assimilation, separation, or integration. (See Berry, 1997 for more information on this).

Additionally, lack of personal engagement with university services was demonstrated by students' attitudes towards support seeking. Part of this was impacted by lack of knowledge and awareness of the support services that were available to them and difficulty navigating through the services. The reluctance in accessing general support was mainly due to embarrassment and lack of confidence. However, reluctance to access mental health support was due to cultural perspectives, mental health stigma, difficulty translating their feelings from Nepali to English, lack of trust and

confidentiality. This was consistent with the previous findings which showed that CALD students fear accessing support due to emphasis on individualism in university, challenge in finding a right clinician within university, and language barrier (Testa & Egan, 2014, Joyce et al., 2010; Hartley et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Pittaway's (2012) suggests that personal engagement begins with enrolling into university and being aware of the motivation and intentions of enrolling. For Bhutanese students, participants reported of enrolling into university without having an interest to do so, rather it was due to the family pressure and societal expectations that were driven by a perception that participating in higher education is an only way of success. While students did not particularly agree with this perception, their respect for their parents and their desire to please them led them to enroll in university. They shared a sense of responsibility to give back to their parents as they have had a difficult life in the past. They desired to make them proud, get a stable job and help their parents financially. This experience was not unique to this population. Phommasa (2015) studied aspirations for higher education of second-generation immigrants from Lao resettled in America. They found that parents played an important role, in that some parents had direct influence on the student's choice of degree through internalised pressure while other parents had more indirect influence due to the same reasons reported by participants in this study. This showed that participants did not have the privilege to make choices about their education based on their own interest and passion although it was not completely forceful. Museus (2013) suggests that scholarly research provides evidence for culturally complex mechanisms through which parents from Asian American backgrounds instill cultural values on education and influence their children. However, previous research on this field has not linked the

impact of this on student engagement as it was seen on this research. For example, students reported of not engaging in their placement because they were not interested in their course and the placement associated with the course that they were doing due to the family pressure.

### ***Professional engagement***

A key barrier to professional engagement was English language. Participants felt that their lack of language proficiency put them at disadvantage during the interview processes when applying for professional opportunities. Participants said they struggle to clearly convey their message in a convincing manner and had 'different' accents which led to a lack of confidence and made the interview process a challenging one. An interpretive review conducted by Baker et al. (2021a) on studies including experiences of CALD refugee and migrants about transitions from education to employment for CALD people, showed that participants often reported not having language proficiency, but even when students did have good English language skills, they were discriminated by employers in workplace settings due to their visibly different accent and foreign names. Furthermore, the findings from this study demonstrated that the COVID19 pandemic created another hurdle to professional engagement for students. This was because they were not able to attend workshops, clinical simulations, and practicals which usually exposes them to the professional environment making them feel nervous and unprepared before their placements. In addition, participants' experienced barriers to developing professional networks associated with challenges in joining social associations and attending events as discussed in the section below.

### ***Social engagement***

Again, a key barrier of social engagement was language as it led to challenges in interacting with other due to being embarrassed about their accents and having English as a second language. For example, students reported having challenges making friends, joining any social associations, or attending social events limiting them to enhance social and professional networks at university. Another key finding of this research regarding social engagement was that university environments often limit the ways in which refugee students can socially engage in university due to culturally unsafe and unwelcoming environment as also consistent with previous literature by Joyce et al. (2010). Participants indicated that they often felt like an outsider at the university for a range of reasons. A key issue related to awareness of cultural rituals as well as staff and university policies that did not meet students' needs similar to findings from Earnest et al. (2010). Replicating the findings of other studies on experiences of refugee students by Mangan and Winter (2017) and Joyce et al. (2010), it showed that students often felt unsafe to participate in social events due to the presence of alcohol and social drinking culture encouraged in universities impacting their social and professional engagement.

Furthermore, participants often shared that they felt like an 'other' and a lack of a sense of belonging within the university environment due to the cultural differences. This influenced who they chose to have social interactions with. Participants often orientated towards choosing friends that also shared similar experiences. For example, they chose to be friends with those from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This finding was also consistent with previous literatures on experiences of refugee students (Deslandes et al., 2022; Jeong et al., 2011; Naidoo, 2019). Their choice in friendship and having meaningful friends was important because those who did not have friends were

also likely to not attend classes, avoid attending social events or joining association. This extended to relationships with teaching staff as students reported feeling more comfortable and confident talking to teachers who shared a sense of culture.

In addition to these, barriers to social engagement were seen in relation to parent's stipulations that participants be home at certain times limiting students' ability spend social time with their friends. While there is limited research on how parental control impacts students' engagement, previous literature has shown how overprotectiveness and parental control on adolescents growing in modern western society can result in parent-child conflict, lack of a sense of autonomy and negative impacts on their overall wellbeing (Lowinger & Kwok, 2001). These findings therefore add to this literature regarding how parental control on adolescent's behaviour could impact student social engagement.

### ***Academic and intellectual engagement***

English language was also a significant barrier to final two domains of engagement including academic and intellectual engagement for Bhutanese students. Students found it difficult to understand what the teacher was saying, needed longer to think about their opinions and articulate their thoughts. Additionally, participants felt as if their level of intellectual ability was questioned by their teaching staff due to language barriers because they had difficulties presenting their ideas even when they were well versed with the content of the course whether in writing or in a class discussion. These findings were consistent with a systematic review by Mangan and Winter (2017) which included ten studies on experiences of refugee students in higher education. In their review, they found that participants felt like they were significantly marked down for small mistakes with their grammar and punctuation although they had applied the

knowledge of the course content to their assignments. Furthermore, this study demonstrated that when participants felt comfortable to communicate with their teaching staff, it facilitated interaction between teacher and student thus allowing students to seek help from teachers and ask questions related to the course content when they did not understand. Zepke et al. (2009) referred to this type of interaction as teacher-student interaction. Teacher-student interaction was hindered when participants did not feel a sense of comfort in communicating with their teaching staff and avoided interaction. This impacted their academic engagement because they were unable to be clarified on course content and enhance their understanding due to avoidance in interaction.

Moreover, students did not have awareness of the learning approaches as some students had only been within Australian education system for around three years when they transitioned into higher education. This lack of exposure was a barrier to different aspects of engagement, most specifically academic and intellectual because students lacked knowledge and skills to adapt to university academic culture – including challenges with referencing and academic writing. Similar findings were also demonstrated in qualitative research conducted by Joyce et al. (2010) on experiences of refugee students in Australian universities as the refugee students reported of feeling under-prepared to transition into higher education due to the lack of exposure. Additionally, a study conducted by Randow (2011) on English language needs of refugee students and language support for students in a university in New Zealand showed that while most first-year undergraduate student struggled with academic writing, this challenge was heightened for refugee students due to English language proficiency.

### **Strengths and limitations**

This study was conducted by an insider researcher which was both a strength and limitation. Kusow (2003) suggests that it is criticised that insider research role increases the level of researcher subjectivity and raises concerns about the authenticity of the research, thus one must be detached from the group they are studying if they are seeking truth. However, participants were more open with the researcher (e.g., using phrases such as “we come from”, suggesting shared experiences) so there was a greater depth of the data gathered as participants may have felt the researcher empathised with them (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Nevertheless, it is important to ensure that the research is transparent and rigorous. To ensure this, the “Big Tent” criteria suggested by Tracey (2010) was applied. It specifically used audit trail to reflect on researcher’s experiences, subjectivity and how this might be influencing the data analysis. Detailed discussion and cross-checking with the supervisor were also conducted to reflect upon and modify the results to prevent the subjectivity and ensure transparency.

Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that the purpose of thematic analysis is not to have a generalisable sample, with the focus instead on representations. The results of this study were unique to the experiences of young students from Bhutanese community attending universities in South Australia and may not be representative of the experiences of refugee students more broadly, including those in other Australian universities. It might be seen as a limitation that the sample is skewed with higher representations of Nursing students, but this is representative of sample where many students do undertake Nursing compared to other courses. However, the strength of this research is the spread of sample in that it captures experiences of young Bhutanese

students doing variety of courses including those that are not as commonly studied by this population, for example, Aviation, and Software Engineering.

The findings of this research showed that both family relationships and teaching staff played a crucial role in student engagement. Unfortunately, it was beyond the scope of this study to include triangulation with other participant groups such as parents or teaching staff. As such, future research with these groups may be beneficial to also understand the experiences of teaching staff in teaching refugee students and understanding the perspectives of refugee parents regarding higher education – including those related to specific cultural groups.

### **Implications and support recommendations**

A key theoretical contribution of this study was to show that Pittaway's (2012) engagement framework broadly provides a good structure for exploring engagement experiences of refugee students at university and could be used in future research with some adjustment and special considerations. For example, participants felt a lack of empathy from their peers and a lack of understanding from their teaching staff regarding their cultural barriers to engagement. An example of this was demonstrated in the result when [REDACTED] relayed her experiences relating to the 13-days funeral rituals and how this impacted her professional, academic, and social engagement. This was also evident in the previous literature on experiences of refugee students in higher education by Joyce et al. (2010). Further, complex interplay of culture and parenting styles were demonstrated regarding parental control and overprotectiveness (Lowinger & Kwok, 2001). However, it was also associated with safety concerns of using public transportation after hours and this barrier is placed on students' due to living far from university thus, this broader societal barrier to

engagement is also equally important to be considered (Sheikh et al., 2019). In addition, participants felt the need to get a stable job and help their parents financially and this is linked with the socio-economic conditions of their family. Moreover, it is important to consider the additional challenges they face being the first to attend university in their families and differences in their privileges compared to their peers who may not share the same background and experiences. Therefore, it would be important to capture the broader socio-cultural differences, socio-economic barrier, university environment, relationships with others, university policy and support systems and participant's past experiences of coming from refugee background on student engagement as also suggested by (Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

An obvious practical intervention will be to look at improving cultural safety at university by considering the diversity of their students when organising social and networking events even if they are organised by student bodies such as student representative councils, as well as designing social hubs in universities that don't involve alcohol (Joce et al., 2010). This will particularly enhance social and professional engagement of students. Additionally, participants reported of not being responded to their situation with cultural consideration by their teaching staff, thus ensuring that training is provided for teaching staff to identify refugee students' needs would enhance social and academic engagement. Previous literature by Baker et al. (2021b) suggests that there is no mandatory requirement for higher education teaching staff to be trained in responding to such students' needs thus limiting them in their ability to support their students and adding extra labour in their workload when they are willing to support their students as this issue is not recognised in the system-level. Thus, a

system level recognition of refugee students' needs, and system-level policy changes are necessary (Baker et al., 2021b).

Finally, this research demonstrated that language was an important facilitator of all domains of engagement particularly academic and intellectual. However, the need for language support in higher education setting often goes unnoticed (Baker et al., 2021b). Randow (2010) suggests that incorporating language support within the course itself would help enhance discipline-specific language development and therefore would be more effective. A university in New Zealand adopted a diagnostic English language needs assessment (DELNA) tool which was administered post entry to identify those who needed language supports. Providing such language supports to those from refugee backgrounds improved their academic writing abilities, and they achieved higher overall success at university. Thus, providing similar language support would potentially enhance academic and intellectual student engagement of refugee students in higher education.

While it seems important to address participants' own attitudes towards support seeking and raising mental health awareness within the university to encourage help-seeking behaviour, it was evident that these services are not well promoted and made easily accessible to this group of students. Young people often struggle to navigate through the services due to the booking system that they were not made aware of. Similarly, literature by Baker et al. (2021b) found that support models adopted by universities limit access due to booking system and students from refugee backgrounds often prefer to talk face to face with a trusted person. The same was demonstrated in this research as participants suggested they would access support if they had familiar faces within the support centers and would appreciate having someone who shared a

similar sense of culture with them. Therefore, to increase personal engagement of students with services at university, university services should meet students' needs and should improve accessibility through better induction processes (Earnest et al., 2010). Finally, the lack of awareness of different educational pathways and lack of clear and accurate information was evident in this research thus universities should use opportunities to go to schools and promote their courses as well as by having direct communication with communities through liaising officers, community groups and community leaders Joyce et al. (2010).

### **Future Directions**

In terms of future research, it would be useful to extend the current findings by examining experiences of those who may have withdrawn from university to understand what influenced them to withdraw and how it could possibly be prevented. Additionally, future studies should explore experiences of teaching staff in depth as teacher-student interaction seems crucial for student engagement in higher education (Zepke et al., 2009). Furthermore, as mentioned above, exploring the perspectives of parents around higher education and how parents can be supported in creating a better environment at home would be helpful. Each group of refugee populations tend to have unique complexities and barriers in higher education based on their experiences in the past and in their host countries (Lawson, 2014). Therefore, it may be useful to conduct more research with other under researched refugee populations specifically focusing on the context of student engagement in higher education in different universities.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study provide important implications and insights into the ways in which Bhutanese refugee students engage in higher education and the

facilitators and barriers to their engagement. As Pittway (2012) suggested, the university environment played an important role in fostering engagement in which teaching staff played a particularly significant role. Overall, refugee students' engagement was impacted by an interplay of complex relationship with others including their family, friends, and teaching staff as well as their own attitudes towards support-seeking, knowledge and awareness and language proficiency. Findings also showed that student's engagement would be facilitated when university environment is culturally safe, meets students' needs through policy changes and increasing staff awareness, and fostering positive relationships. Therefore, providing targeted support would be beneficial for Bhutanese refugee students to enhance engagement in higher education. These findings are unique to the experiences of Bhutanese students and points on the direction for further research on other under researched refugee communities in different universities focusing on the context of student engagement in higher education. However, it addresses the literature gap by identifying facilitators and barriers as well as enhancing understanding of the ways in which Bhutanese student engage in higher education which has not previously been researched in South Australian universities.

## References

- Ashkzari, M. K., Piryaee, S., & Kamelifar, L. (2018). Designing a causal model for fostering academic engagement and verification of its effect on educational performance. *International Journal of Psychology, 12(1)*, 136-161.
- Baker, S., Ramsay, G., & Miles, L. (2017). 'Hot', 'Cold' and 'Warm' supports towards theorising where refugee students go for assistance at university. *Teaching in Higher Education, 23(1)*, 1 - 16.
- Baker, S., Irwin, E., Freeman, H. (2020). Wasted, manipulated, and compressed time: adult refugee students' experiences of transitioning into Australian higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 44(4)*, 528-541.
- Baker, S., Due, C., & Rose, M. (2021a). Transitions from education to employment for culturally and linguistically diverse migrants and refugees in settlement contexts: what do we know? *Studies in Continuing Education, 43(1)*, 1-15.
- Baker, S., Due, C., Karan, P., & Rose, M. (2021b). Teaching for diversity: university educators' accounts of care work and emotional labour with CALD students. *Teaching in Higher Education, 1-7*.
- Berry, J. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied psychology, 46(1)*, 5-68.
- Bond, M., Buntins, K., Bedenlier, S., Richter, Z. O., & Kerres, M. (2020). Mapping research in student engagement and educational technology in higher education: a systematic evidence map. *Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 17(2)*, 1-30.
- Bowden, J. L-H., Tickle, L., & Naumann, K. (2021). The four pillars of tertiary student engagement and success: a holistic measurement approach. *Studies in Higher Education, 46(6)*, 1207-1224.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2)*, 77-101.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019a). To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample-size rationales. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 13(2)*, 201-216.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019b). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11(4)*, 589-597.
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners. *Successful Qualitative Research, 1-400*.

- Cardeli, E., Phan, J., Mulder, L., Benson, M., Adhikari, R., & Ellis, H. (2020). Bhutanese Refugee Youth: The importance of assessing and addressing psychosocial needs in a school setting. *Journal of School Health, 90*(9), 731-742.
- Crea, T. (2016). Refugee higher education: Contextual challenges and implications for program design, delivery, and accompaniment. *International Journal of Educational Development, 46*, 12–22.
- Deslandes, C., Kaufmann, L., Anderson, R. J. (2022). A systematic and integrative review of qualitative research exploring experiences of acculturation and education among African-born migrants. *International Journal of Intellectual Relations, 86*, 240-257.
- Dwyer, C. S., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The apace between: on being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8*(1), 1- 10.
- Earnest, J., Joyce, A., Mori, D. G., Silvagni, G. (2010). Are universities responding to the needs of students from refugee backgrounds? *Australian Journal of Education, 54*(2), 155-174.
- Ghising, H. (2019). *Bhutanese refugee students: their perception of high school and challenges of accessing a four-year college degree in the U.S.* ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2308204353>
- Green, S., & Wright, C. (2017). Retaining first generation underrepresented minority students: A struggle for higher education. *Journal of Education Research, 11*(3), 323-338.
- Hartley, L., Fleay, C., Baker, S., Burke, R., & Field, R. (2018). *People seeking asylum in Australia: Access and support in higher education.* National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University, Perth: Western Australia
- Jeong, S. Y., Hickey, N., Jones, T. L., Pitt, V., Hoffman, K., Norton, C. A., & Ohr, S. O. (2011). Understanding and enhancing the learning experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse nursing students in an Australian Bachelor of Nursing program. *Nurse Education Today, 31*(3), 238-244.
- Johnson, E., Morwane, R., Dada, S., Pretorius, G., & Lotriet, M. (2018). Adult Learners' Perspectives on Their Engagement in a Hybrid Learning Postgraduate Programme. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education, 66*(2), 88-1-5.
- Joyce, A., Earnest, J., Mori, G. D., & Silvagni, G. (2010). The experiences of students from refugee backgrounds at universities in Australia: reflections on the social, emotional, and practical Challenges. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 23*(1), 82-97.
- Kahu, E. R. (2013). Framing student engagement in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 38*(5), 758-773

- Kahu, E. R., & Nelson, K. (2018). Student engagement in the educational interface: understanding the mechanisms of student success. *Higher Education Research & Development, 37*(1), 58-71.
- Keating, M., Rixon, A., & Perenyi, A. (2020). Deepening a sense of belonging: A LAS and faculty collaboration to build inclusive teaching. *Journal of Academic Language & Learning, 14*(2), 40-46.
- Kong, E., Harmsworth, S., Rajaeian, M. M., Parkes, G., Bishop, S, Mansouri, B., & Lawrence, J. (2016). University transition challenges for first year domestic CALD students from refugee backgrounds: A case study from an Australian Regional university. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 56*(2), 170-197.
- Kusow, M. A. (2003). Beyond indigenous authenticity: reflections on the insider/outsider debate in immigration research. *Department of Sociology and Anthropology, 26*(4), 591-599.
- Lawson, L. (2014). "I Have to be my own Mother and Father": The African student experience at university, a case study using narrative analysis, *The Australasian Review of African Studies, 35*(1), 59–74.
- Lennete, C. (2016). University students from refugee backgrounds: why should we care? *Higher Education Research & Development, 35*(6), 1311-1315.
- Lowinger, R. J., & Kwok, H. (2001). Parental overprotectiveness in Asian American children. *Psychotherapy: Theory/Research/Practice/Training, 38*(3), 319-330.
- Mangan, D., & Winter, L. A. (2017). (In)validation and (mis)recognition in higher education: the experiences of students from refugee backgrounds. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 36*(4), 486-502.
- McIntyre, J. C., Worsley, J., Corcoran, R., Harrison, W. P., & Bentall, R. P. (2018). Academic and non-academic predictors of student psychological distress: the role of social identity and loneliness. *Journal of Mental Health, 27*(3), 1–239.
- Meyerhoff, J., Iyiewuare, P., Mulder, L. A., & Rohan, K. J. (2021). A qualitative study of perceptions of risk and protective factors for suicide among Bhutanese refugees. *Asian American Journal of Psychology, 12*(3), 204–214.
- Molla, T. (2020). Refugee education: homogenized policy provisions and overlooked factors of disadvantage. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 1*-22.
- Museus, S. D. (2013). Unpacking the complex and multifaceted nature of parental influences on Southeast Asian American college students' educational trajectories. *The Journal of Higher Education, 84*(5), 708-738.

- Naidoo, L. (2019). Traversing the terrain of higher education: experiences of refugee youth on the inside. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(2), 182-195.
- Naidoo, L., & Adoniou, M. (2019). "I speak 19 languages" accessing the linguistic and cultural resources of students from refugee backgrounds. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(1), 111-130.
- Naidoo, L. (2021). Traversing the terrain of higher education: experiences of refugee youth on the inside. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(5), 182–195.
- Nickerson, A., Byrow, Y., O'Dannell, M., Bryant, R. A., Mau, V., McMahon, T., Benson, G., & Liddell, B. J. (2022). Cognitive mechanisms underlying the association between trauma exposure, mental health and social engagement in refugees: A longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 307, 20-28.
- Phommasa, M. (2015). Expanding definitions of family: influences on second generation Lao American college student's aspirations. *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advertisement*, 10(2).
- Pittway, S. (2012). Student and staff engagement framework in a faculty of education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(4), 37-45.
- Ramsay, G. & Baker, S. (2019). Higher education and students from refugee backgrounds: A meta-scoping study. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 38(1), 55–82.
- Randow, V. (2011). How much language do they need? The dilemma English-medium universities face when enrolling English as an additional language student. *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*, 3.
- Reading, C. (2008). Recognising and measuring engagement in ICT-rich learning environments. In proceedings of ACT in ICT, the Australian Computers in Education 2008 Conference. *University of New England*, 1-7.
- Saunders, B., Kitzinger, J., & Kitzinger, C. (2015). Anonymising interview data: challenges and compromises in practice. *Qualitative Research*, 15(5), 616-632.
- Sheikh, M., Koc, Y., Anderson, J. R. (2019). A qualitative exploration of the tertiary education experiences of refugee and asylum seekers in Australia. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 24(4), 346-368.
- Testa, D., & Egan, R. (2014). Finding voice: the higher education experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 19(3), 229–241.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: eight “Big-Tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851.

- United Nations Higher Commission of Refugees (UNHCR), (2022, September). *Refugees*. <https://www.unhcr.org/enau/refugees.html#:~:text=Refugees%20are%20people%20fleeing%20conflict,can%20be%20difficult%20to%20imagine>.
- Watts, M. (2007). Widening Participation in Higher Education for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. *Race Equality Teaching*, 25(3), 44-48.
- Wiltshire, G., & Ronkainen, N. (2021). A realist approach to thematic analysis: making sense of qualitative data through experiential, inferential and dispositional themes. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 20(1).
- Yockey, V., & Jayne, S. (2017). *Increasing Response Rates for Student Evaluations of Teaching for an Online Graduate Program*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED584550>
- Zepke, N., Leach, L., & Butler, P. (2009). The Role of Teacher-Student Interactions in Tertiary Student Engagement. *New Zealand Journal of Education Studies*, 44(1), 69-82.
- Zhao, C. M., & Kuh, G. D. (2004). Adding Value: Learning communities and student engagement. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(2), 115 - 138.



## Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

### Flyer

**Researchers from the University of Adelaide are conducting a study called Higher Education Engagement of Students from Bhutanese Refugee Background in South Australian Universities**

If you:

- Identify as Nepali speaking Bhutanese
- Are between the age 18-25
- Arrived in Australia less than 10 years ago.
- Can speak English
- Have been, or are current attending, any university in Adelaide.

Then we would like to invite you to chat with us about your experiences of tertiary education. Interviews will last approximately 60 minutes. We will ask about your motivation to attend university, what it was/is like for you at university, any challenges you have experienced, and what you are now doing or would like to do when you finish your studies.

If you would like further information, please contact:

E-mail:

Or

.....



# Participant information sheet

**PROJECT TITLE: Higher Education Engagement**

**of Students from Bhutanese Refugee**

**Background in South Australian Universities**

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: 22/25**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: .....**

**STUDENT RESEARCHER: .....**

**STUDENT'S DEGREE: Bachelor of Psychology Honours**

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

## **What is the project about?**

This research project intends to explore the inspiration and experiences of young people from Nepali Speaking Bhutanese background by understanding their motivations and engagement within social and educational aspects of their tertiary education. The main aim is to understand young people's experiences of tertiary education, what inspires or motivates them, the challenges, support services or needs and to find out how education equity could be made possible by addressing the challenges if there is any.

## **Who is undertaking the project?**

This project is being conducted by..... This research will form bases for the degree of Honours in Psychology at the University of Adelaide under the supervision of.....

## **Why am I being invited to participate?**

You are being invited as you are a young person aged 18-25 from a Nepali Speaking Bhutanese background who arrived in Australia within the last 10 years and you are either currently undertaking your tertiary education or have completed it already, at any university in Adelaide.



### **What am I being invited to do?**

You are being invited to participate in a one-on-one face to face interview for approximately 1 hour with the researcher. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed (typed up). You may choose to read your transcript and make changes if you wish. The interview questions will concern your experiences of being at university, including your motivation to study and any support needs that you had.

You can do the interview at a time and place that suits you or over zoom if you would prefer.

### **How much time will my involvement in the project take?**

The interview will take approximately an hour.

### **Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?**

There is a possibility that the questions asked may relate to incidents that may have negatively impacted you, resulting in mild discomfort however this is unlikely. If you do need support, you could contact:

Headspace: [1800 063 267](tel:1800063267)

[https://headspace.org.au/online-and-phone-support/connect-with-us/talk-about-mental-health/?gclid=CjwKCAjwloCSBhAeEiwA3hVo\\_WB8HhY78rwQ0HqeqAr-RFk8TX7tkVv4Gtgb1MNiV8jiq8ZALA-TJBoCS1UQAvD\\_BwE](https://headspace.org.au/online-and-phone-support/connect-with-us/talk-about-mental-health/?gclid=CjwKCAjwloCSBhAeEiwA3hVo_WB8HhY78rwQ0HqeqAr-RFk8TX7tkVv4Gtgb1MNiV8jiq8ZALA-TJBoCS1UQAvD_BwE)

Lifeline: [\(08\) 8202 5820](tel:0882025820)

<https://www.lifelineadelaide.org/crisis-support/>

### University Counselling Services

Adelaide University: [\(08\) 8313 4455](tel:0883134455)

<https://www.adelaide.edu.au/counselling/>

University of South Australia: [1300 301 703](tel:1300301703)

<https://i.unisa.edu.au/students/student-support-services/counselling/make-an-appointment/>



Flinders University: [1300 512 409](tel:1300512409)

<https://students.flinders.edu.au/support/hcd/counselling>

### **What are the potential benefits of the research project?**

There is no immediate benefit to participants. However, we hope the project will lead to better support services and enhanced university experiences for not just young people from Bhutanese backgrounds but also for people from culturally diverse backgrounds more broadly.

### **Can I withdraw from the project?**

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time until [REDACTED] submits her thesis (September 2022).

### **What will happen to my information?**

Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed (typed up). Your name and any identifying information will remain confidential and will be removed from the typed-up versions of the interviews. However, anonymity cannot be entirely guaranteed despite the precautions in place. If you wish, you can be provided with a copy of your individual transcript and you are welcome to ask for any parts to be removed. Further, direct quotes may be incorporated into the report, but when this is the case pseudonyms will be used, and other identifying information will be removed, to ensure confidentiality. Your name and identifying information will not appear in any publications or reports. Only the named researchers will have access to the interview transcripts, for the purposes of analysis. The data will be stored on secure University of Adelaide drives for 5 years.

Your interview data will contribute to [REDACTED]'s honours thesis, together with other participants. We may also present the results of the study at conferences, and in academic publications. A short report of the study will also be written, and we will send you a copy of this report if you wish. The data may be used by the researchers for other studies in the same area.

Your information will only be used as described in this participant information sheet and it will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except as required by law.

### **Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?**

Primary Contact: ....

Email:

Contact Number:

Student Researcher:

Email:



### **What if I have a complaint or any concerns?**

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics low risk sub-committee at the University of Adelaide (22/25). This research project will be conducted according to the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant, please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat on:

Phone: +61 8 8313 6028

Email: [hrec@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:hrec@adelaide.edu.au)

Post: Level 3, Rundle Mall Plaza, 50 Rundle Mall, ADELAIDE SA 5000

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

### **If I want to participate, what do I do?**

If you want to take part in an interview, please contact .....

Yours sincerely,



## Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) – Consent Form

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Higher Education Engagement of Students from Bhutanese Refugee Background in South Australian Universities</b>
<b>Ethics Approval Number:</b>	22/25

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, and the potential risks and burdens fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the project and my participation. My consent is given freely.
  3. I have been given the opportunity to have a member of my family or a friend present while the project was explained to me.
  4. Although I understand the purpose of the research project, it has also been explained that my involvement may not be of any benefit to me.
  5. I agree to participate in the activities outlined in the participant information sheet.
  6. I agree to be:  
Audio recorded  Yes  No
- I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my information from the project until the interview is not finished and the report has been written.
7. I have been informed that the information gained in the project may be published in an honours thesis available via Barr Smith Library Digital Thesis Repository and or through peer-reviewed journal articles, lay report available via the researchers' webpages.
    - I have been informed that in the published materials I will not be identified and any personal information that could identify me will not be divulged. Yes  No
    - I have been informed that while I will not be named in the published materials, it may not be possible to guarantee my anonymity given the nature of the study and/or small number of participants involved. Yes  No
  8. I understand my information will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except where disclosure is required by law.

### Participant to complete:

Name:

Signature:

Date:



## Appendix B: Interview Schedule

Initial information to gather:

- University attended
- Course completed or currently studying
- Highest qualification and where this were gained (e.g., Australia or elsewhere)
- Age
- Gender
- Length of time in Australia

Questions about:

- Students' experiences academically at university
- Students' friendships
- Students' Family relationships
- Students' participation in different aspects of university life, i.e., social events, associations etc
- Student's relationship with teaching staff
- Supports and services
- Motivations to attend university
- Aspirations
- Post-graduate
- Other relevant questions based on the conversation i.e., employment and life after graduation