

**Social factors influencing the success of adult learners: Examining the use
of online learning programmes at a higher education institution in South
Africa**

by

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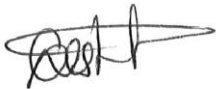
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DECLARATION

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“Social factors influencing the success of adult learners: Examining the use of online learning programmes at a Higher Education Institution in South Africa.”

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part thereof, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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ABSTRACT

This study presents a quantitative investigation of the influence of various social factors – including finances, secondary school attended, resources available, culture, and family support – on the perceptions of success (in terms of academic performance and skills gained) of adult learners who are using online learning as the primary educational medium. The research was conducted with 100 students of The International Hotel School in South Africa.

A quantitative research methodology was followed and a survey questionnaire was used as the data collection method. The data from closed-ended questions was analysed using Statistical Analysis System (SAS), with the data from open-ended questions being used to aid in the interpretation of the information organised quantitatively.

Findings suggest that certain social factor constructs namely: finances, secondary school preparation for tertiary education, and internet accessibility, significantly impact the perceptions the students have on being successful in online learning.

Some recommendations that spring from the study are to provide more funding to students, better access to more suitable resources and providing students with unlimited access to the internet for longer periods of time. It is also recommended that a follow-up study with a larger and more varied sample (possibly including public sector tertiary education students), and more questionnaire items per social factor is necessary to cast further light on the impact of social factors on adult students' online learning experiences.

KEY TERMS: adult learners, culture, educational support, family factors, internet access, perceived online success, resources, support, technology, tertiary education.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

SAS	Statistical Analysis System
CSCL	Computer-Supported-Collaborative-Learning
IHS	International Hotel School
RSA	Republic of South Africa
UNISA	University of South Africa

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Online learning systems – commonly incorporating web-based courses, multimedia, the internet and other forms of information technology – are becoming increasingly popular to use in learning situations (Sun & Chen 2016:170; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Baki 2013:2). Bledsoe and Simmerok (2014:57) propose a definition of online education as the process of providing systematic training to students in a given area of study within a web-based format. They refer to distance learning and internet learning as usable terms for online education. With the increasing need for the human population to be educated, online learning serves to provide a solution for meeting these needs. Platt et al. (2014), cited in Strycker (2016:2) say that different online delivery methods “have the potential to transform the landscape of higher education by expanding educational opportunities, transforming student populations.” In the last two decades, online education in the United States of America has expanded from single online course offerings to large virtual schools today (Liu & Cavanaugh 2012:149).

Much of the literature to date refers to the major benefits of using online education systems as providing a channel for synchronous communication between learners and between learners and facilitators via a chat facility, and raising confidence levels of the tutors. Asynchronous communication via group discussion boards and greater diversity among learners suggests that technology enables learners to exercise greater control over not only the temporal and spatial contexts, but also the pace at which they learn (Chung & Paredes 2015:243; Koutsoupidou 2015:243; Lundberg & Sheridan 2015:9; Gordon 2014, cited in Terras & Ramsay 2015:475).

Although learning is enhanced when people are driven by personal, rather than external, drivers (Clark 2002:600), it is important to justify how technological support for learning is viewed by the different groups of people. Zhu (2013:488) affirms this in her research by stating that the usefulness of Computer-Supported-Collaborative-Learning (CSCL) is perceived differently by people in different cultures or organisations. The cultural element serves as an important factor in the research reported upon in this study, as it has a relation to social components explored in the study that I undertook.

De Freitas, Morgan and Gibson (2015:455) suggest that due to the global economic downturn, we are living in a time of economic uncertainty and high unemployment. Thus, there is a need for individuals to up-skill themselves to become more employable is critical for ensuring local, regional, national and international social stability, and economic regeneration – an important factor in global societies. Everything from finance to lifestyle and education seems to be moving at a much faster rate than it has been in previous years.

Regarding the amounts of information available to people across the globe on the web, a recent study showed that the amount of information stored by Google alone is in the region of 10 exabytes (10 million gigabytes) of data (Price 2015). The amounts of data, technology, multimedia and other modern forms of information that are available to the average person are phenomenal in size and scope; and the subsequent usage of this data to educate is widespread. How it is used to educate is dependent mainly on the sector of education, type of learners, social environment and the educators. Currently the use of online learning courses within and for supporting an education programme is widely accepted and used. Research by academic and professional organisations suggests that using web-based learning environments can offer sound pedagogical benefits (BB Blackboard 1998:1; Ogunbase 2016:13; Silius & Tervakari [sa]:4-5). Bledsoe and Simmerok (2014:57) state that educational institutions often champion online learning as a viable supplement to face-to-face instruction for their students. This is also supported by research from the company Docebo – an e-learning solutions provider for the ‘E-Learning Market Trends & Forecast 2014–2016’ – which has found that the market for learning management systems is worth \$2.55bn worldwide (Robert-Edomi 2014).

1.2 BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

While concurring that the use of online learning systems within education is significantly vast, this study now explores distance learning from another angle. The following study theorises that there may be social factors that are involved which affect the success of the use of such online learning systems within an adult learning environment. Some of these social factors may include:

- Cultural upbringing
- Resources available
- Family structure and possible dependents

- Secondary school attended
- Readiness to accept this style

In the literature that is available, very little information was found that focuses on specific factors that influence the success of adult learners. There is significant research on how online learning systems benefit learners and educators. Some of the research (Bryant & Bates 2015:22; Gulatee, Brown & Combes 2008:213; Rashid & Elahi 2012:84) also makes mention of some of the disadvantages of using this technological medium in the education environment; but research on these the impact of these disadvantages among adult learners is minimal. This reveals a gap in the research that this study can hopefully address as it looks at learning success related to social factors.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study should be done due to the increasing usage and subsequent reliance on technology in the process of educating learners. As more and more education institutions implement online learning in their programmes, so the social factors – mentioned above – might have more influence on the students’ learning. Many of these organisations that are geared to education are so focused on ‘keeping up with current events’ that they are forgetting about the fundamental principles of education, and that the well-being of the learner should be a priority. In my review of the literature I found very few articles that had a direct link to the research that is the aim of this study.

In addition to exploring the social factors that might influence how a learner best uses online learning systems, related issues that my research examines is whether these various online and web-based information portals can be seen not only as a learning tool, but as a medium by which learning is directed. Instead of just using these online and web-based systems for gathering of informative knowledge of the students’ own accord, future related research could explore how effectively these systems are being used in the contact-teaching process. The research focus in this study is on the social factors that influence how students learn using online systems. The study further takes into account the adult learner and the social environment that they are in and investigates how these contribute to the knowledge gained using technology. The main objective therefore is to study the relationship between the success of adult learners in an online learning environment and the various factors that might influence this. Investigations are directed towards studying this.

A final goal of the research is to try to examine what those designing learning systems may need to take into account. This may also investigate the usage of technology within an education environment as a whole, and the proposition that it needs to be carefully structured and controlled, taking into account the types of student that will be involved in the process.

One opinion on this topic suggests that students should generally have the “ability to analyse information that they are confronted with, to challenge it and see if it makes sense” (Nguyen 2010). Although it would be the ideal for every student to have this skill set – in order to be effectively educated with technology– the study will set out to examine to what extent students have this within them and to examine social influences. Nguyen (2010) mentions that in addition to educators wanting the students to have the ability to analyse information, that it would be ideal for students to have people, reading and writing, and technology skills. This was believed by Nguyen to be sufficient for what the students needed to be successful in the 21st-century learning environment. This research serves to consider this in some depth.

1.4 THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem statement for this research in brief is to investigate the social factors that influence adult learners’ perceptions of success with the usage of online learning programmes. I defined success as having a passing grade, being happy with your learning performance overall and gaining a skill from the experience. Online learning is featuring more prominently as the preferred medium of educating students currently. Edmundson (2007:99) reckons that using e-learning is one way in which to increase access to technology education, subsequently introducing new technologies and improving technological literacy. As mentioned previously, a better understanding of social factors that might influence the learners’ perceived successful use of online learning could possibly be used to assist in the improved structuring of these online education systems. With various literature focusing quite notably on the technological aspect of online learning, the aim of this research focuses primarily on the social factors that influence the perceptions of success of adult learners in an online learning environment.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the social factors that influence adult learners’ success with the usage of online learning programmes. Success in this study is defined as having a passing grade, being happy with your learning performance overall and gaining a skill from the experience. Some of the social factors that could influence this are mentioned in

section 2.2 below. These factors will be explored by using a questionnaire. The research considers only social factors affecting adult learners, and is specific to an online learning environment, although traditional education methods may be used for comparative purposes throughout the study. The significance of this quantitative research will contribute to existing knowledge bases by identifying the factors that may have a profound effect on adult learners' success in online learning situations.

Bearing in mind the theoretical understanding that social factors may well be affecting adult learners, but in ways that thus far have not been explored in depth (within a South African context) in the current literature available, in the next chapter the methodology for examining this in the context of a higher education institute in South Africa is described.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

In relation to the previously mentioned problem statement, the specific research question is:

- RQ₁: What is the relationship between social factors and adult online learning experiences of success?

Two sub-questions for the research have also been identified as:

- SRQ₁: What is the relationship between the experiences of success of adult learners in online learning and the social factors that influence this achievement?
- SRQ₂: What is the effect of societal issues on the general perceptions of success of adult learners in online learning?

My analysis of the answers to the open-ended questions will help me to interpret some of the statistically significant results from the analysis of the closed-ended ones.

As this research takes on a mainly quantitative focus, the hypotheses identified are:

- H₁: There is a negative relationship between the experiences of success of adult learners and the social factors – within an online learning environment.
- H₂: There is a positive relationship between the experiences of success of adult learners and the social factors – within an online learning environment.

- H₃: Adult learners will show lower experiences of success in online learning programmes, as a result of the societal influences.
- H₄: Adult learners will show higher experiences of success in online learning programmes, as a result of the societal influences.

Null hypotheses:

- H₀: There is no relationship between the experiences of success of adult learners in learning programmes that use online learning and the social influences.
- H₀: There is no effect of societal issues on the overall understanding of adult learners in online learning.

1.6 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The primary motivation for this study came from my experiences as a lecturer. The private higher education institution that is the focus of my research is well established in the hospitality education sector and has been running for over fifteen years, training prospective students in every aspect of both hospitality management and culinary arts. The programmes vary from one-, two- and three-year courses and can be taken on campus, with full-time theory components or paid internships with tutored online study. There is a strong contingent of online learners, as well, who study their courses through the institute's online system while they are working full-time. Our main target markets are students who have completed their secondary education and are ready to move onto tertiary education, with matriculants being the ideal student. It was found, through an analysis by the previous Dean of the institution that the diversity levels of students that came through our doors over the years has changed. In order to keep up with these changes, we were almost forced to 'keep up with the times' and implement online learning options. These soon grew so exponentially that our educators are battling to stay abreast of everything. I say this judging from the way in which our student numbers keep growing, as well as the lecturer class-, subject- and teaching ratios. The fact that the educators seem to battle to deal with online learning systems, has also been reported by the Academic Heads of Department to the Dean of the institution.

It seemed to me, and has been noted by various departmental heads, that it was not only the educators who were having trouble keeping up with the systems but more specifically the

learners too. What I have chosen to investigate in this regard is the extent to which societal factors play a part in our students' lives at this institution. It has always been my opinion that the learners and how they use these programmes are influenced by many external factors. After reviewing the available literature, a gap was found that I felt needed to be investigated.

For the above-mentioned problem and research questions, the aims and objectives of the study are as follows:

- To determine whether or not there is a relationship between the success of adult learners in online learning and the social factors that are posited (in my hypotheses) to influence this achievement;
- To ascertain the existence or extent of an effect of societal issues (located in this study) on the levels of learning of adult learners and
- To recommend possible ways to improve the success of adult learners in online learning situations.

The purpose of the study was to gauge what social factors have an impact on how successful the adult learners are in their studies, using online learning programmes, considering what factors are most influential and how they affect the learners, in relation to their success.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The structure of the dissertation is as follows:

Chapter 1 brings in a introduction to the study, as well as putting forward the background, significance and objectives of the research.

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature is undertaken, focusing on four key areas: considerations such as culture, guidance and responsibility, support in online learning, adult learners using these systems, and the advantages and disadvantages in online learning.

Chapter 3 turns to discussing the research methodology and the research questions, research design, data collection and analysis methods as well as the motivation for the study. These are explained in detail. Further to this the sampling strategies, ethical protocol, and reliability and validity are also covered.

Chapter 4 addresses the results of the research and a subsequent discussion of the conclusions drawn.

Chapter 5 covers the limitations to the research, as well as the conclusions, recommendations and closing remarks.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter gave detail on the background of the research, as well as the significance and motivation for the study. The problem statement and research questions were discussed and the key objectives of the study were outlined.

The following chapter gives a detailed review of the literature available on the research topic.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A review of the current literature on the success of online education as a mode of learning reveals assertions proposing that online learning offers the flexibility of time, space and capability of reaching a greater student population around the globe and that novelty can engage learners thereby increasing student engagement (Fajardo 2014:36; Moreillon 2015:44). Further advantages and considerations of online learning will be identified later, but supporting evidence for the above is the claim made by Arbaugh (2014:350) who citing Arbaugh et al. (2009) puts forward that learner demographics, attitudes and behaviours have been commonly studied aspects of online or blended business courses. Other studies report that demographic influences can affect, for instance, limited access to home computers. Studies also suggest that a combination of class, racial, and gender divisions inhibit student adaptability to technology-rich environments due to their not being exposed to this (Cantrell & Visser 2011:279, citing Langa, Conradie, & Roberts, 2006).

Certain researchers in the field of online learning education have a strong belief that motivation is a key factor within the online education environment. Smith (2005) cited in Horzum, Kaymak and Gungoren (2015:760) states that “readiness for online learning is defined as ... having intrinsic motivation, and understanding the experiences and styles of self-learning.” In their view, for students to be successful with online learning, they need to have the inner belief that they can achieve their goals. Andrade (2016:45) adds that if learners are allowed to choose what they want to learn, when it is most important to them, this increases engagement and application.

An study undertaken by Atanda Research in Georgia in the United States of America found strong correlations between the solitary and logical learning style preferences and academic success online (Mativo, Hill & Godfrey 2013:37). This gives rise to the idea that by the learners being able to identify with the course they would prefer studying, and being aware of what their strongest learning style is, it would enable a fair opportunity for success in that particular course. It would certainly seem that motivation to achieve academically would be affected by some societal influences. A study done by Nath (2012:51) in Bangladesh

identified some of the socio-economic characteristics including age, sex and area of residence of the students, parental education and the household economy, while school-related factors included teachers' education, training and experience, and class size.

This societal influence may be explained via a theoretical illustration: if the student was brought up in a very strict religious and cultural environment – with strict parents – this may have an influence on how the student would then be motivated to achieve academically. A related factor of relevance is located by Sahin and Shelley (2008) cited by Bhagat, Wu and Chang (2016:352), who point out that if the online course is useful in their lives they will enjoy that course more and be motivated to continue. If that course is practical within their own spheres and links to what they believe and the society that they have been brought up in, they can then deem the online course as useful. This is a strong factor as it connects the necessity for both the internal and external motivation the learner needs to the influences of their social milieu. Students lacking the support needed from society may find that they lose the ambition to achieve more via online systems, as the learning situation is not the same as a full-contact, traditional classroom situation. With online learning, it seems that additional motivation to succeed is needed for online engagement. One of the primary driving forces for this extra ‘boost’ that is needed links to the participation of the learner in the course, as this would increase the retention rates overall (Clark 2002:599).

A relevant claim that Horzum et al. (2015:766) make about Turkish educational institutions is that increasing levels of online learning readiness also increases student academic motivations. Horzum et al. (2015:760) citing Wynn (2002) defines readiness as the body of skills needed by students to learn, and that it is affected by physical, social and emotional development. Their findings were based on a correlational research model, in which they discovered that there was a significant and positive correlation between online learning readiness, academic motivation and perceived learning (Horzum et al. 2015:764). Although only implicit in their work, online learning readiness could also be considered as one of the social influences on an online learner. This makes sense in that the more ready the students are to use the system, the more motivated they will be in wanting to study further; either in that programme or even an additional qualification. Many studies have focused on the students’ readiness using online learning systems, but there is a significant lack of research concentration on the social factors aspect. One study, however, that does concentrate on this is DiMaggio, Hargittai, Celeste, and Schafer (2004) cited in Cantrell and Visser (2011:280)

who carried out research in this area to find out how factors such as gender, ethnicity, location, age, education, income, employment, and family structure influenced computer use and skills. These factors indicate strong connections to those identified for this study, due to the linkages to structures of society.

2.1.1 Considerations in Online Learning

Further readings also show that although there has been much research done on online learning, there is still much to be done in analysing its relation to culture and cultural meeting points in the process of globalisation (Zawacki-Richter 2009 cited by Bedenlier 2016:256). The research will explore elements of cultural factors, such as religious influence, customs and dietary practices; and how these could influence online learning success. Eccles (2005) cited by Xu, Du and Fan (2015:203) have a similar stance in this sense, where they mention that it would be beneficial to conduct investigations to better understand and address the challenges associated with online group management in cross-cultural environments. In the case of my research my focus is on the social factors that influence the success of adult learners, at a higher education institution in South Africa.

In previous research, it has been suggested that cultural differences could have negative effects (such as language barriers) on students' participation in courses taken online (Liu, Liu, Lee & Magjuka 2010 cited by Yang, Kinshuk, Yu, Chen & Huang 2014:210). This research considers the various cultures each student could have experienced and how culture influences the behaviour of students using online systems, without presuming negative or positive effects.

An article by De La Varre, Irvin, Jordan, Hannum and Farmer (2014:324), who cite studies of Barbour, 2007a; Barley & Brigham, 2008; Beeson & Strange, 2000; Hobbs, 2004; Monk, 2007, reveals that rural schools in the USA use online courses to overcome problems such as attracting and retaining teachers, geographic isolation, low student enrolment, and financial constraints. This research, as with the research undertaken by Xu et al. (2015:201) and Cantrell and Visser (2011:280) citing DiMaggio et al. (2004) is particularly relevant to this study because they take a humanistic approach to understanding how culture might affect students and educators, in both a positive and negative light. Their suggestions are that the different cultural backgrounds of the students in the group may have an impact on how well

and how much the student partakes in their online programmes in terms of the level of participation with each other.

Within their study involving both Chinese and American students, it is also claimed that barriers in language for non-native speakers tend to detract from equal participation (Gunawardena et al. 2001 cited by Yang et al. 2014:210). This too shows up the social element that might influence online learning. A British study by Minocha and Roberts (2008:277) affirms the claims cited by Yang, by proposing that there are some social, pedagogical and technological challenges currently faced by institutions and educators in the era of technology-enabled learning. This has much to do, though, with how well that particular learning environment caters for these learners.

The researchers above offer some pointers to how aspects of culture and society influence learners who use or are interested in using online learning systems. Research done by Nagel, Blignaut and Cronjé (2009:40) citing Roycroft & Anantho 2003, found that there is connection to online learning through specific societal influences prevalent in developing countries. They also predicted that the digital divide in developing countries is increasing due to an inadequate infrastructure and few internet subscriptions. The exclusive use of English in non-English speaking cultures, economic development, and available bandwidth also affect student success.

Additional considerations for successful online learning systems include the guidance, support and responsibility components that are assumed by the educational institution. There needs to be sufficient support and stimuli for learners in online learning and this is indicated with the question of whether motivating students to invest more time would increase retention rates (Seaton, Bergner, Chuang, Mitros & Pritchard 2014:62). In research from the Philippines that was done by Arinto (2016:168), participants mentioned that there is a need for guidance and technical support. Arinto also considers the need to address the diversity of student backgrounds – when sustaining innovation for online learning. In terms of responsibility, Rashid and Elahi (2012:82) and Bhagat et al. (2016:351) have differing viewpoints: the former mention that the focus of responsibility in distance (online) education shifts from the teacher to the pupil whereas the latter mentions that the instructor plays a vital role in online learning. Both parties ideally have fundamental roles in online learning environments, because without one, you would not have the other. This report considers how

the role of the educator – as more of guide – might have an impact on students and the process by which they learn, using online programmes.

Important research shows one of the major considerations for those considering how to organise online learning systems are the obstacles and challenges faced in online learning environments. Once again, one of the participants in the research done by Arinto (2016:171) commented that there are too many opportunities, options and ways of doing things nowadays – so that the educators are getting confused as to what the ideal and best way of conducting learning programmes is. Arinto’s research suggests that there are multiple options available – while according to her, there should be a limited variety. This is consistent with the age-old coined saying of “not spreading yourself too thin”, like butter on bread. It just stretches resources too far, especially in a developing country with an unstable education system.

Additional obstacles that online learners need to overcome relate to the readiness for online learning as well. Hung, Chou, Chen and Own (2010) cited by Bhagat et al. (2016:351) argue that learners need specific skills such as technical computer and internet skills in order to be ready to use online learning systems. This relates back to Horzum et al. (2015:766) who found that increasing levels of online learning readiness increases students’ academic motivation. This is explored in the current study by viewing what is deemed to be an acceptable level of readiness. This is something that will be taken into consideration for the research, as it relates to the societal and cultural factors that impact becoming a successful user of online systems.

Lastly, one of the most contentious issues in the literature would have to be the time factor. Research that was done by Bonk, Lee, Kou, Xu and Sheu (2015:362) state that key challenges that respondents in their study faced was a lack of time to use available resources. However, another way of interpreting their results would be to look at how the lack of time may have been a product of family, work and personal commitments. This is one way of treating the time factor, which is explored as such in this research. Anderson (2008:419) casts additional light on this by suggesting an important statement of online learning: “Certainly strong academic and tutorial support is necessary”. This can be linked directly with both the time and management elements thereof. Time should be considered a significant social influence – because often adult students have many societal commitments to deal with, before they can even start thinking about themselves and their education.

2.1.2 Advantages and Disadvantages in Online Learning

Although the literature on the direct focus area of the research is somewhat sparse, it is important to consider some of the literature on benefits and limitations of technology in online learning systems. This influences the investigation, owing mostly to the societal implications that each of these factors has. Considering that not all societies are equal in nature, they will not all have access to the same types of technology in all of these areas. This would apply within each society as well, with each having differential access. Each one is going to be different and that is something that should be considered when discussing the use and types of technology in online learning systems. As indicated above, various advantages have been pointed out, with the most important of them being that online learning can be used anytime, anywhere with flexible scheduling; and that technology can be used to educate people, affording them expanded learning opportunities. It is also mentioned in much of the literature that online courses cost less than regular education courses due to the availability of the internet and the fact that the need for physical classrooms disappears. Furthermore, online education has a self-paced nature (Carver & Kosloski 2015:7 citing Hart 2012; Clark 2002:599; Jaggars 2011:1; Kowalski & Dolph 2014:31; Lytle 2016:74; Rashid & Elahi 2012:83).¹

Contrary to the few logistical costs associated with online courses mentioned above (internet facility usage and not needing a physical classroom), Rashid and Elahi (2012:84) also observe various technological problems, one of the most important being the high costs of technology in most countries; and secondly that many people are unfamiliar with technology. Bryant and Bates (2015:22) also point out that online learning has the potential to create an insurmountable distance between the participants. According to them, the nature of the online environment also means that students requiring immediate assistance to correct a misunderstanding may not receive it right away (Gulatee et al. 2008:213). Further negative aspects include a claim that is in line with the identifiable factors of this research, namely that progress is often negatively influenced by the realities existing in the schools in countries such as South Africa, as learners are so ethnically and socio-economically diverse and technological resources in schools are not equitably distributed (Cantrell & Visser 2011:280

¹ According to the current #Datamustfall campaign (started by RSA artist Ntsiki Mazwai) that is doing the rounds in social media, we have one of the highest data costs worldwide – but that it is a whole separate research area. (Head 2017:online)

citing Gudmundsdottir, 2010). The influence of technology in education can be overwhelming for many students who are not familiar with it and can lead to disengagement, incomplete courses, learning disorientation and cognitive overload among learners (Chen 2009:1029 citing Alomyan, 2004 and Eppler & Mengis, 2004; De Freitas et al. 2015:461; Flynn 2016:130 citing Park & Choi:2009).

Research by Buckingham and Rodríguez (2013:50) claims that an advantage of digital technology is that it provides forms of learning that are less constrained and more empowering than traditional schooling: “According to its advocates, technology-enhanced learning is not simply more efficient than old-fashioned face-to-face methods, but also more creative, more collaborative and more child-centred.” Further substantiations for this have also been stated: “Similar assertions have been made about virtual worlds, celebrating their transformative possibilities for experiential learning, empowerment and learner control” (Dede & al. 2005, cited in Buckingham & Rodríguez 2013:50).

Online technology can also assist the students in learning and enjoying online courses more than a face-to-face class, helping them to become more self-efficient in using the systems (Aragon & Wickramasinghe 2016:85, citing Holley 2002; Chen, Chen & Kinshuk 2009:136 citing Piccoli et al. 2001 and Clark 2002:599 citing Fletcher 1999, Kulik 1994 and Willett et al. 1983). Supporting advantages indicated that with the increased levels of diversity among students, focus-related courses, learner self-discipline and motivation were predictive of success in an online course (Mason, Helton & Dziegielewski 2010:232 citing Coe & Gandy 1999, Comeaux 1995, Crowell & McCarragher 2007; Helms 2014:148 citing Waschull 2005 and Chang & Wei 2016:177 citing Pappano 2012).

The literature shows that important issues for consideration have to do with the potential isolation of learners in a tertiary education environment and their “lack of interaction” , which may subsequently result in the student dropping out of the course (Jain & Jain 2015:180 citing Phillips 2005; Kowalski & Dolph 2014:31 citing Beam 2010 and Lee, Choi & Kim 2013:328 citing Rumberger 1987). Additional significant issues such as giving undue credit to students, plagiarism and lack of clarity of directions, surround the usage of online learning in education (Lytle 2016:74; Reilly, Gallagher-Lepak & Killion 2012:101; Rao, Edelen-Smith & Wailehua 2015:35).

Nonetheless, it should be recognised that the generations are changing; for example, my experience is that the way I did things when I was younger, is vastly different to the way a student at that same age today, would do it these days. Further to this, a vital source of information in this respect is research done by Jansen (2010:204) where she claims that the pitfalls and strengths of online learning should be assessed within the context of poverty, unemployment and skills deficits. This is an important viewpoint, as it is one of the first to consider societal implications of online learning. This is an extremely relevant article that provides a backing for my research, as she speaks about the problems within a developing world context. Jansen (2010:204) covers similar factors to the ones my study is attempting to address and this serves as a guiding point for where the research can start. Lastly, an element of importance that could be a limitation of online learning environments, asks the question: “How many students can a teacher support in an online learning environment?” (Wiley & Edwards 2002:34). This is important to consider in the research because the more students tutors have to support, the less time and guidance they will then provide to each of the students.

2.1.3 Support in Online Learning

There are various factors that need to be considered when referring to support that is needed in online learning education. Similar viewpoints on this are held by Yang et al. (2014:210) citing Setlock, Fussell and Neuworth (2004) and Edmundson (2007:101). The need for a better understanding of cultural elements and how they can be considered in supporting students are deemed vital in these studies – undertaken respectively in Western and Eastern cultures. Yang et al. state that groups of learners with similar cultural backgrounds tended to view the given online tasks differently from those with differing backgrounds and gave various points of view. This relates back to the differing societal upbringings to which each student is exposed which can be a factor in the learner understanding and engaging with the programme. Jansen (2010:196) also mentions that in South Africa and Africa in general, unique societal challenges and educational problems are faced. This is mainly due to learners not furthering their education upon leaving school which can be attributed to a lack of cultural and societal support. On the other hand, online learning does cater for those who otherwise may be left out of the system, possibly due to financial reasons.

Additional support elements that need to be considered relate to emotional sensitivity to learners' needs and sufficiently clear guidelines, adequate and effective feedback from the educator (Arguedas, Daradoumis & Xhafa 2016:88 citing Shen et al. 2009 and Bahreini et al. 2012; Suler 2004:396). Bryant and Bates (2015:18 citing McBrien, Jones, & Cheng, 2009:3) acknowledge a similar viewpoint where they say that "...instructors must strive to optimize interaction..." – which is presumed to be possible through effective communication. The current study examines how students experience this via the online medium. Compeau and Pevzner (2015:42 citing Bloom 1984) postulate that online education should move towards replicating the experience of receiving one-on-one tutoring in the professor's office.

Bonk et al. (2015:349-350) conducted research into self-directed learning preferences, goals, achievements and challenges of online learning and states that: by recording the ways in which online learning has impacted the learning experiences of people, in terms of ages, gender, ethnicities and culture, researchers can use this information in the hope of encouraging others to continue to learn. Further understanding of this is ideally then needed and elements will be explored in the research. The more that is learnt about the influences of social factors on online learning, the more we will understand it.

Delgado-Guerrero, Cherniack and Gloria (2014:47, citing Harwood et al. 2012) suggest a valuable point regarding support and feedback in that negative perceptions of campus climates (whether the students are enjoying their courses and/or campus facilities or not) can also contribute to lower academic performance, stress, anxiety, and set the stage for increased mental health concerns. This would, of course, not be the case so much with an online learning course; however, learning climates created online could also be influential – given the information that is being viewed and the peers with whom the online learners may be interacting. Although the research by Delgado-Guerrero et al. (2014:47) was mainly about cultural diversity relating to campus climate perceptions, it shows strong links to issues that could be noted in this study. A study by Jong (2016:195) from Taiwan makes the point that it all participants need to organise collaborative learning communities facilitating learners' completion of the courses. Within a South African context and through the support structures that can be developed at educational institutions, this can be made possible, thereby creating a healthy learning environment which encourages participation.

Additionally, support for online learning usage is shown in research by Leman, Trappers, Brandon and Ruppel (2008:244), and Hyllegard, Deng and Hunter (2008) cited in Flynn (2016:130) who mention that using more non-traditional approaches to learning provides opportunities to students who are absent, at-risk and non-traditional students. They describe non-traditional students to be people such as the working class, young mothers and those who were not afforded the opportunities in the past.

Various research has pointed out that effective support systems for learners in online education courses can be made possible by encouraging support and understanding from the learners' family (Lin & Chen 2015:21 citing Tsai & Liu, 2013; Lin & Chen 2015:21 citing Jager, 2011). Students must also actively participate and feel comfortable with using the systems (Küçük, Genç-Kumtepe & Tasçi 2010:40-41 citing Dennen 2005; McDaniels, Pfund & Barnicle 2016:2) and online discussions should be well-facilitated (Nagel et al. 2009:39 citing Cox, Carr, & Hall, 2004; Prammanee, 2003).

Newberry and DeLuca (2014:26 citing Heyman 2010) validate the need for effective support services through claims that student satisfaction with the institution's support services was among the top contributing factors to retention. Research also has revealed that learners' feelings of social connectedness (a key attribute of support) may be a factor in predicting online course success (Slagter van Tryon & Bishop 2012:347). Upadhyaya and Mallik (2013:3 citing Freire, Arezes and Campos 2012) make final mention of the need for usability awareness and support, as a lack thereof could cause problems.

2.1.4 Adult Learners in Online Learning

The research in this study looked mainly at adult, tertiary education learners in the context of the online learning programmes. Online education can cater for many non-traditional students (adult learners), which includes adult learners (McPherson & Bacow 2015: 149). Literature shows that the characteristics of non-traditional students, including having work and family responsibilities, a delayed entry to higher education and membership in the low to middle quartile of socio-economic status (Cass & Hammond 2015:85; citing Brown & Gross 2011; Lee et al. 2013:330 citing Holder 2007). An interesting consideration, that takes the above into account, mentions that the reasons for adults dropping out of online courses may differ from those of high school students, who have different goals (De La Varre et al. 2014:325 citing Barbour & Reeves, 2009; DiPietro, Ferdig, Black & Preston 2008).

Park and Choi (2009:208) substantiate this claim proposing that an increased workload, job change or other external reasons may cause the learners to drop out of the course. They further state that seventy percent of adult learners enrolled in a corporate online programme did not complete it (Meister 2002 cited by Park & Choi 2009:207). External factors that Park and Choi (2009:209) consider important for an adult learner to account for in an online learning programme are:

- Scheduling conflicts
- Family issues
- Financial problems
- Managerial support
- Personal issues (e.g. health)

Additionally, it is indicated that adult learners face additional challenges to learning emanating from work and family obligations (Dunn 2014:34; Loureiro-Koechlin & Allan 2010:723 citing Headlam-Wells, Craig & Gosland 2006). Research by Evans, Baker and Dee (2016:212 citing Christensen et al. 2013; Ho et al. 2014) shows that online education users tend to be employed, well educated, and young. Adult learners tend to be highly motivated individuals and this is reiterated by the claim that adult learners need to be self-motivated and to be active participants in their own learning (Fajardo 2014:29 citing Knowles et al. 2005).

A noteworthy postulation by Ng'ambi and Bozalek (2015:451 citing Bali, 2014a; Burke, 2013) is that there is increasing pressure on educational institutions to widen participation to those who were previously excluded from gaining access to higher education. Research by Rebollo and Vico (2014:174 citing Hargittai & Shafer 2006) mention that due to the greater share of responsibilities taken on by women in their homes and in the upbringing of their children, women had less time to use the computer and navigate on the Internet, suggesting that more consideration be given to this. This highlights the need for a greater understanding of the characteristics of all adult learners, before designing online learning courses. A further point in this regard suggests that women or students with grants were more likely to complete their courses (Ryser, Halseth & Thien 2009:252 citing Van Den Berg and Hofman 2005).

Research conducted in the United Kingdom by White and Selwyn (2012:463) states that neither the gender, ethnicity of respondents or the presence or absence of children had any substantial impact on online engagement. This seems to contradict statements made by other

researchers (see Section 2.1 above) which suggest that these factors may be influential. The research in my study pursues this matter further. The methodological approach of White and Selwyn is open to question since the way in which they went about the research was inadequate and could have been dealt with in a better manner. That is, they went about the research by surveying a time period of eight years, which in my opinion was too extensive and conducted in a time frame where technology and internet usage by adults for education was not as popular as it has become. What they also did was to conduct the study with new samples each year, which would indicate that their data collected are not consistent. On these grounds, I feel that their research does not cast sufficient light on the matter of whether and to what extent social factors may indeed be influential, and I do not agree completely with their study. Although the research conducted does investigate the use of online learning for educational purposes and the connection between this and social characteristics, their study was done in a First World environment. For this reason, a study into this within a South African, developing world context may generate more relevant data in this regard.

Meanwhile, the need for addressing the difficulties that adult learners commonly experience with online courses is reaffirmed by Xu, Du and Fan (2014:797) who cite Zembylas (2008). Their study of novice adult learners reveals that encouragement and support from the instructors and peers helps students to cope with their feelings of loneliness, stress, and anxiety.

After reviewing much literature, a commonality was found that little research has been done on the influence of social factors on the success of adult learners in online learning situations. The research design in this study further examines these issues within a South African context. Although the research will uncover the issues in a quantitative manner, there will be some open-ended questions in the questionnaire to help interpret the quantitative data. Pinpointing two last elements, regarding the literature, is firstly that much of the available research has been done by researchers working in collaboration; and secondly, that a significant number of them involve the Eastern and Asian sectors. This indicates the scope and extent to which the research has been done and the need for further studies in relation to all parts of the world. For my part, I will be focusing on a higher education institution in South Africa, and will be examining the social factors that influence the success of adult learners in online learning environments.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research by Selwyn et al. 2006 and Eynon and Hesper 2011, cited in White and Selwyn (2012: 452) states that individuals' social characteristics (such as gender, age and educational background) were still the factors most closely associated with continued engagement in learning, whether the delivery was traditional or technology-based; although their research did not show much engagement of the adult learners with using the internet for educational purposes. Previous research done by White and Selwyn (2012:454) served as the grounding for this where they suggest that adults with lower levels of education, those older than 65, and those working in manual jobs, were less likely to use the Internet for banking, purchasing, looking for work or accessing government services. Although their theories are rather implicitly defined, it would seem that they are implying that social inequality is exacerbated and not decreased via the use of the internet for educational purposes. The conclusion from their initial research was that policy interventions aimed at both increasing and widening internet access and use will be ineffective unless the social, rather than technological, basis of inequalities in access and use are recognised (White & Selwyn 2011). My interpretation of this is that it contributes to the theoretical framework that guides this study, namely that social factors need to be taken into account in considering online learning success. My intention was to apply White and Selwyn's conclusions to a different context (South African, a developing country) and time period (shorter).

From the review of the literature, it is possible to develop a theoretical framework which postulates that there may be a connection between social characteristics and the use of online learning. It would seem though that the authors who have done work in this field do not name any specific theory. Literature pointing to the potential social influences contributes to the theoretical orientation directing this study, which is a set of propositions regarding the way in which social factors may exert influence on the use of the internet in an adult learning environment. The theoretical concepts about the role that social factors might play in participants' experience of success in online learning were used as a basis to guide the hypothesis formation. One particular theory was not relied on, but on literature that pointed to the connection between social factors and online learning success.

The main factors that were found by White and Selwyn (2012:462) to have an influence on the usage of the internet in the learning process were found to be primarily age- and

occupational class-related. They found that the younger, more upcoming learners used the systems more than the older generations of participants in the study. This, one could argue, is due to the fact that the older a learner is and the more social responsibilities they have, the less inclined they might be to become successful in their studies online. Therefore I singled out the construct of family responsibility as one social factor to be explored in the study.

Additional research done by Nath (2012:50) reveals that studies available internationally explored the predictors of learning success of the students at various levels of education. These factors include the socio-economic background of the students and their families, and school-and-teacher-related factors. The theoretical starting point of this study, which will be tested during the study, is that social factors are influential in the way in which adult learners deal with online learning programmes. This will be examined in the research with adults as the focal point and within the context of South Africa.

Adult learners who participated in the study were over the age of eighteen but the vast majority were under the age of forty-five. Differential learner characteristics that I identified following Park and Choi included: age, gender and education (Park & Choi 2009:209).

Today, the increased awareness of how students learn is one of the driving forces behind my interest into how varying factors which can be called “social” play their parts. These social elements that can readily be located range from family influences, educational background, cultural upbringing, gender and socio-economic status. The rationale for conducting the research into this study was due primarily to curiosity to see if there are additional social factors (to the ones mentioned earlier) that influence the success of adult learners in online learning. The aim is to locate and see if there are any more factors that exist, and are only mentioned very scantily in the current research that is available. In addition, from experiencing a drop in success rates overall at the academic institution where I work; I deemed the study of the social factors that influence the perceptions of success as necessary. There was no other logical explanation that could be detected for the lowering success rates from approximately 2012 onwards in the institution in which this study was conducted. This was a general feeling that was expressed during informal discussions by the academic department staff at our campus, after a pass rate exercise that was conducted nationally for all students. Success in a fully academic sense, though, would be to pass with the minimum required mark in the programme of study, although perceived success could incorporate more

elements such as getting actively involved in the learning programme and gaining a skill from the experience.

2.2.1 Post-Positivist Epistemological Position Taken in this Study

The epistemological position taken in this study in order to explore these issues is closely linked to a post-positivist epistemology (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:14) and logical empiricism (Higgs & Smith 2006:1).² That is, to pursue the research I am relying on obtaining empirical evidence from quantitative data in relation to a number of hypotheses, to see whether the hypotheses are supported or not (and whether some modifications of these might be suggested that spring from the study). As shown below, several independent variables have been located that could possibly exert an influence on the hypothesised dependent variable, namely adult learner success in online learning programmes. The need for a clearer understanding of how these might affect adult learners' ability to succeed in online learning is the main justification for this investigation.

The discussion above, with reference to some literature, has suggested that there are indeed a few social factors that have an influence on the average adult learners' ability to learn using an online learning system. What this study aims to achieve is to clarify through statistical analysis the influence of the identified factors, with reference to the study in the chosen higher education institution. In the investigation, variables of the following nature are considered:

- Independent:
 - Method of instruction: online learning
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Social Factors: (measured by means of a questionnaire)
 - Cultural upbringing
 - Resources available
 - Family structure and possible dependents

² By adopting this position I recognise, as Johnson also notes, that there have been epistemological developments since the development of early positivism, with a recognition that knowledge claims are always somewhat tentative. As he notes, it is understood here that knowledge is always provisional. He indicates that the term *postpositivist* to characterize a researcher's work "is a kinder and gentler term" than the word *positivist* (2009:450), which is associated with a less sophisticated position regarding the status of the claims that can be made via the use of the scientific method.

- Secondary school attended
 - Readiness to use systems
- Dependent:
 - Achievement: perceptions of success in the programme – as defined above in section 1.3

The study draws on and extends previous research that exists from areas worldwide including but not limited to the United Kingdom, United States of America, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Taiwan and Greece. A very small percentage of the research was found in a South African context. In a developing country like South Africa, this research will provide valuable information that may be relevant for academic institutions across the nation. This will also hopefully help to provide better and clearer guidelines from which designers of online learning programmes can then use when designing their courses. Nevertheless, this is not to presume that the results can be generalised statistically to all institutions involved in online learning, but to make some statements that others may find applicable, especially insofar as the characteristics of the institutions match with the educational organisation where the study was conducted.

2.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the available literature on the research focus area. This was sectioned into major discussion points that explained their relative importance to the study. The chapter also gave insight into the theoretical framework, as well as a more detailed explanation of the problem statement.

The following chapter focuses on the research methodology used and the discussion thereof.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explicates the research design and methodology employed within this study. Firstly, the research questions, hypotheses and motivation for the research are reviewed. A detailed discussion on the research design, data collection method (via questionnaire), along with the sampling strategies and pilot study follows. Rounding off the chapter is a discussion on the construction of the questionnaire and assessment of its reliability and validity, and closing with ethical protocol and the data analysis methods.

As indicated in Chapter 2, the examination of the literature and my location of the need for further detail around possible influences of certain social factors on the way in which adult learners engage with and are successful in adult learning programmes, has led to the formulation of research questions and certain hypotheses, mentioned in Chapter 1, and thus will be examined in the context of the research.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Taking on a quantitative approach was the primary objective for this study. A small component of the survey questions took a qualitative/open-ended view, so as to further establish a clearer insight and provide support to the quantitative data. Cresswell (2003:18) states that a *quantitative* approach is one in which the investigator primarily uses postpositivist claims for developing knowledge and that a *qualitative* approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives. Cresswell (2003:14) also names surveys as one of the major strategies of inquiry for quantitative designs and statistical analysis being one of the major components. The research design that this study used is a cross-sectional survey that allowed the examination of a population at one point in time. The cross-sectional research is a research approach in which the researchers investigate the state of affairs in a population at a certain point in time (Bethlehem, 1999 cited in Zheng 2015:67). Through the survey, and my analysis of the data, the hypotheses as spelled out above were tested. The questionnaire that was constructed has mainly closed-ended questions, but also some open-ended ones to help me interpret the patterns that were found in the quantitative data.

The reasoning behind choosing the survey procedure is purely for the fact that the whole approach to factors that may be influencing educational experiences takes on a very structured and fact-based view. To justify the survey approach, rather than, say, the conduct of an experiment, I make the point that I did not have an interest in intervening with any aspect of the design; and nor would this have been feasible in the context in which I am based (hence no experimental methods were chosen). The survey methodology provides some factual grounding on which the study can base its findings. Although it cannot presume causality in the same way that an experiment might have done, this study was based on inferring the responses gained from the sample group. (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:31).

3.3 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The first step in data collection is to decide how the information can be structured and defined as variables that will directly relate to the above-mentioned research questions of the study. The objective is to investigate social factors that can potentially affect the learning of adult learners, specifically in the area of online learning. The research furthermore foresees that if such impacting factors can be identified, this newly acquired knowledge can be used to structure online learning systems more effectively (thereby increasing experiences of successful online learning).

The research question and sub-questions linked to the objectives of the study ask:

- What is the relationship between social factors and adult online learning experiences of success?
- What is the relationship between experiences of successful online learning and social factors that impact success-perceptions?
- What is the effect of societal issues on the general perceptions of success of adult learners in online learning?

At this stage, these research questions postulate that variables of importance to this research include variables that measure experiences of success in online learning in some way, as well as variables that measure social factors that potentially impact such experiences of success. Furthermore, the research questions are concerned with the relationship between success-measures and social factor measurement. This implies that in the planning of an analysis

strategy, specific variables must be identified as dependent variables and other variables as independent variables, as referred to and in connection with section 2.2. In this way, the research questions direct the definition of variables and subsequently the type of analysis relevant to this research (in this instance, some form of relational analysis). Two of the questions responses for certain factors were inverted, as indicated below. 'Inverted' in this instance indicates that for the question under discussion participants' response ratings are switched from 'negative' to 'positive' as follows: a rating of '1' becomes '5'; '2' becomes '4' and '3' remains '3'. This was done because scale reliability testing requires all questions in a subset to be formulated either in a positive or negative way.

The defining variables (success and social factor variables) that answer the research questions can be spelled out as follows, in order for the response data to be collected sensibly. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that sets of questions query specific topics. For example, in Section B (Non-demographic) of the questionnaire:

- Q1, q2 and q17 probe respondents' perceptions of successful online learning (as measured against their passion for the course they are studying towards; how realistic their expectations are; and their determination to finish the course). Research argues that the higher a person scores on these questions, the more determined/ passionate they are about succeeding: therefore, a measure of the perception of success.
- Financial issue/ social factor: responses to q8 (inverted), q9, q12, and q13 in turn probe financial issues that could potentially impact perceptions of online learning.
- Secondary school preparation for tertiary studies: q3 and q4 in turn evaluate whether respondents perceive that their secondary school education prepared them for tertiary studies (and thus online learning).
- Internet access: q5-q7 evaluate how respondents perceive their access to the internet (which is crucial for successful online learning).
- Family/ general social issues: research argues that responses to q11 (inverted), q15 and q16 possibly evaluate whether respondents perceive family/ social factors to impact their online learning.

The above definitions identified groups of questions designed to measure specific constructs or aspects of potential impacting social factors and a successful online learning construct.

Actual data collection was done by the questionnaire method using a 5-point Likert Scale for most of the closed-ended questions. There were two sections, with the initial section asking for demographic information with a formalised checklist approach for that section. The second section was the mainly Likert scale-based questions and open-ended questions. There were 17 scaled questions and five open-ended questions. Qualitative data was gathered from the last five open-ended questions – which served to assist in interpreting the quantitative data by identifying common themes in the responses.

Piloting of the questionnaire with a 10% sample of participants, who did not partake in the main study, indicated minor changes that needed to be effected on the questionnaire and the ideal length for the students too. Actually, for the piloting of the questionnaire 30 participants were initially chosen, but after examining their responses very few minor changes were needed. At a later stage, due to the lower than expected response rate, it was decided (on advice of a statistician who also referred me to some literature on this) to take 12 of the piloted participants and use their responses in the main data analysis. This was justifiable seeing that the questionnaire was largely unchanged after piloting, excepting for 2 changes (wording only) to the scaled-agreement questions that were made after the main pilot. The reason for choosing 12 out of the 30 piloted participants to add to the sample of respondents was so that statistically meaningful inferences could be made (as this then resulted in a sample of 100 respondents). Section 3.7 provides further details on this while Appendices A, B and E provide the actual questionnaires used for the pilot pre-test, main pilot and main survey.

3.3.1 Pilot Study

The data was collected during the first semester of the calendar year (2017), after the pilot test (and pre-test prior to this) had been conducted. The decision to carry out a pilot study was taken because the questionnaire was designed and developed by myself for this particular research, and thus had not been used anywhere else before. After the questions were carefully thought through and drawn up, the questionnaire was formatted and sent through for approval from both the academic supervisor and the ethics committee of the university, after the research proposal had been accepted.

A pre-test of the pilot study was conducted on the 24 February 2017 at 12.30pm. The decision to conduct a pre-test and then the actual pilot study was also made to ensure that reliability as well as validity principles were being adhered to. This is in line with the reliability section discussed in point 3.5 below. This pre-test was run with the pilot group of 30 participants as a written test, with the original questionnaire being printed out for this pilot group of 30 participants. For convenience reasons, the students for the pilot group were selected by calling for volunteers from the groups of learners studying hospitality management who were on campus at the time the pilot pre-test needed to be run. These 30 members then sat down together in one of the lecture venues and they tested the questionnaire.

Initially they were given a brief description of what the study was all about and the reason for needing their input into the structure and format of the questions. It was also specified that they needed to answer the questions as if they were taking part in the actual study. This was done in line with validity considerations as discussed in section 3.5 below. In essence, the pilot was designed to determine if the pilot group struggled with understanding any of the questions or if they seemed to understand the questions in the way that it was presumed they would. I was in the venue with the group for the duration of the pre-test so that the students could ask questions directly regarding the survey. There were two verbal questions asked in that time and the remaining feedback was written and indicated by the pilot group members on the actual questionnaires themselves – which they handed in as soon as they had finished. These hard copies were stored for future reference if necessary; however, the responses were tallied up and recorded onto a master data sheet, from which reliability, validity and other conclusions could be drawn.

After reviewing the pre-test responses, minor revisions were made to the wording (but not the topics) of four of the questions from Section B of the survey (questions 2, 8 and 9) and question 12 from the open-ended questions. These minor revisions were indicated by at least three different members, who mentioned that they did not understand how the questions were being asked and felt that those could be asked in a better way. It was interesting to note that a few of the members felt that question 8 from that particular section was too personal (as it was in connection with finance). The wording on that question was changed, but still retained the topic of finance as this plays a very important aspect in society these days given the current economic climate.

Reformatting of the wording to three of the demographic questions was done, as was noted by at least four of the members. This included taking out the age category of '16 – 18' from question 1 and placing the term race in question 3; as well as giving examples of disabilities the respondents may have. Minor reformatting was also done to two of the Section B questions (questions 4 and 5) and this included adding in the terms 'academics' and 'my parents' into those respectively. After it was recommended by the members, the addition of the wording 'state whether you agree or disagree with this statement' was inserted into the open-ended questions section. They concluded that the questions were important and needed to be asked but that they needed more guidance on how to answer the questions.

With the minor changes and additions to the questions now made, a further study was ready to be run with the 30 participants in the pilot group. After consulting with the academic supervisor, I added in the participant information and consent sections to the start of the survey online. The reasoning behind doing this was due to the logistical challenges behind the sample that was intended to be used for the main survey. Many of these online learners were located all over South Africa and to manually do consent forms and information sheets would have been impossible. These two very vital sections were added in as reader options, with a 'next' button choice given – that once clicked showed that the member would be consenting to participate.

This pilot was conducted on the 7 March 2017 at 12h30 and still in line with reliability and validity principles, using the actual online survey system (Survey Monkey) that was going to be used for the main study. Detail on the reliability and validity explanations are found in section 3.5 below. The time frame of the pilot continued through to when the remaining students from the group came through after their lectures had finished at approximately 15h30. The members of this pilot group were roughly the same members, with a few new participants selected to give improved opinions on validity, but with only 29 respondents partaking.

For this step, the pilot test was sent out via a link in an email to the pilot group, in order to test the medium that would be used for the main survey and would give the respondents a feel of how the formats were different (written vs. Online) and also allow for more of a verbal discussion surrounding the pilot group's thoughts. The respondents felt it was easier to respond to the survey in its online form and verbally said that they were consistently happy

with the amendments that were made to the questions that had been pinpointed in the pre-test. One tester maintained his dislike for the finance-related question and that particular question was reworded slightly, bearing in mind the notes made by the other members in the initial pre-test.

It was also noted by one tester that an additional answer option should be given for any of the scaled questions that did not apply to them. Adding in an 'N/A' column option was considered; however, that would have allowed that alternative for all the other questions, which may have skewed the results. It was pleasing to note that five members of that group commented that they really liked the survey and enjoyed taking part in the pilot study.

Once the last few members had completed and given their feedback, I correlated the data online and the main pilot answers were compared to the answers collected from the pre-test. On analysis, I found that the answers were sufficiently consistent among all sets to proceed with the questionnaire in terms of reliability considerations. As previously mentioned, reliability and validity considerations are discussed in section 3.5 below.

With the necessary the changes being made to the questionnaire (for the sake of increasing its validity), the actual data collection was ready to start. Prior to sending this out, the main participant information sheet that was approved by the ethics committee was sent to all the possible participants on Monday 20 March 2017 via a forum post on the online learning system. They were then notified that the link to the survey would be sent to them shortly afterwards and they could continue as necessary. The main link to the actual survey (including participant information sheets and consent agreements) was posted online to the participants on Monday 27 March 2017. Notifications were sent through the online messaging forums to ensure that each student selected completed it once. A hard copy was made available should it have been requested by any student, but this was not necessary, as no one asked for it.

3.4 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING STRATEGIES

The population of this study comprised the 250 students who were studying various programmes in Hospitality Management at a hotel management school in South Africa, through an online learning system. The programmes varied from short courses to full

qualifications such as single modules, Higher Certificates, and Diplomas. The courses varied in duration and academic level and ranged from skills and short courses to full programmes.

The sample came from the all the students studying hospitality management through this online learning method at the institution. The students were all legal adults and ranged in age (which was the only exclusionary factor) from 18 to 45 and consisted of mixed races and genders. In addition, the students were studying at different levels (for example, first or second year; short courses or full qualifications). There were approximately 250 students in total. The actual students involved were selected from the Online Campus of the chosen institution, which has offices located in Umhlanga, KwaZulu Natal. As the students reside nationally but are connected in an online environment via online messaging and emails, their biographical and contact information was held at this location and the survey was communicated using these methods to them via this central point.

The reason for choosing students from the Online Campus was mainly because the campus where I am based has too small a population and would not have allowed for a successful study. Selecting the sample from the Online Campus seemed logical, as their primary medium of learning is an online system and the large numbers of students who make use of the system of learning added to this reasoning.

In all, approximately 250 participants were sent the information regarding the research, as well as the link to complete the survey. This figure was based on the number of students available, as well as to account for non-completion, low response rates and errors. After consenting, the respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire, and this gave an overall response rate of 88 participants that was recorded at the time the survey data was exported. This point regarding the response rate is discussed further in section 3.7.

3.5 ETHICAL PROTOCOL, VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Gaining ethical clearance may be vital step in the process of conducting academic research; due to the possibility of the sensitivity of the nature of the data being collected. Ethical clearance (needed due to the research being conducted with human participants) for this study was initially obtained from the University of South Africa: College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee with the approval number: 2016/10/19/49057316/22/MC. In order to carry out this research, permission was needed from various parties involved. The first and

most important level of permission needed was from the Chief Executive Officer of the institution selected for the study (The International Hotel School). This step also included obtaining permission from the Academic Dean of The International Hotel School, as well as each of the Managing Executives of the individual sites being informed, namely:

- Online Campus
- Westville Campus
- Sunninghill Campus
- Cape Town Campus

The research was done with full understanding of the need for confidentiality and non-disclosure with written information of this being given to all the parties involved. Consent was gained from the participants prior to their beginning the actual survey. Initially it was decided to distribute the consent forms manually, but after extensive discussions with my supervisor and the academic manager of the organisation, it was decided that this would be a logistical nightmare, as the students were not based at specific locations. Consent was thus done using the online survey distribution system, Survey Monkey. A covering letter and participant information sheet were also sent to each member to explain the study to them. The study only involved adult learners as previously mentioned in section 3.4. It was stated that the participation in the study was voluntary and that the respondents had the right to withdraw at any stage of the process. Clarity and openness surrounding the research were also made clear to the participants via online information sheets and consent forms; and it was indicated that the researcher would be available for consultation at all times. Furthermore, no risks were foreseen to cause any harm arising from this study.

Validity, in this case, refers to the questionnaire's ability to fulfil its intended purpose i.e. is it going to work the way it should in order to measure social influences in relation to experiences of success of students? Do the questionnaire items measure these phenomena such that the answers as given by respondents will allow inferences to be made about the hypotheses? To test the validity of this research, the appropriateness of the decisions regarding the construction of the questionnaire items were tested, based on the questionnaire used. To test the validity element of the research, the pilot study was run with a group of 30 participants as discussed in detail in 3.5 above. These members were similar in demographic profile to the sample used in the main survey but did not partake in the main survey. This

pilot study involved 30 participants chosen from students that were studying hospitality management classes at the Westville site of the institution. They were selected from the first-, second- and third year student groups at this campus who were studying using online programmes. Each student group was asked for 10 volunteers to assist with the research, by becoming involved in the pilot study in which they would answer the survey questionnaire and make notes on what they experienced. Some of the elements of validity that were looked at by the pilot group were:

- Face validity: the items on the questionnaire are relevant, systematic and it looks as though it will measure what it needs to measure. Relevance was checked by the following:
 - Did the questionnaire include an outcome or issue that students would care about such that they would be likely to answer the questions honestly and would take care to express their opinions in relation to the questions asked? This was indicated to be a yes by the group.
- Content: The content should be realistic, and geared to actually measuring what it should. This was worked out by examining the manner in which participants in the pilot study indicated that they interpreted the questionnaire items.

In view of the above, the pilot group was also asked to check if they were becoming fatigued by the length of the survey, to make notes on any questions that did not make sense to them, to understand why they answered any specific question in that particular manner and for me to see their involvement and reactions to the questions in the survey. Once the pilot testing was completed, reviewed the changes and points that were brought up by the group were reviewed and subsequently adapted and incorporated into the survey.

When assessing reliability, it is with reference to the dependability of the research questionnaire. This would mean that if this research were to be done again under similar circumstances, would the outcomes still be the same? The testing of the reliability of this study was done via the pre-test and the pilot to offer some indication of the overall consistency of the results over a two-week period: That is, after the initial pilot pre-test was done, and the amendments and changes that the pilot group noted as being important were incorporated, the survey was tested with the same pilot group again two weeks later as explained in Section 3.3.1. The first-round pre-test was done manually (via a paper questionnaire) with the pilot group, with the second round, “retest” being done using the

online survey method with the same questions being used (with the minor revisions mentioned in section 3.3.1). Thus reliability testing took the following into account as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2014: 195-198):

- **Stability:** a test-retest process was used during the pilot test to prove stability, where the survey questions were administered to the pilot group twice, over time. After reviewing and correlating the results from the pre-test and the main pilot study, the data was found to be consistent, stable over time and in line with each other. The answer ratings in the scaled-agreement question section varied by an average difference of three points for some of the Likert-scale categories. The question agreement categories that varied by a rating of greater than three were the questions that were revised and reworded.³
- **Equivalence:** two parallel forms of the initial survey were given to the pilot group to check that the scores were related. This was found to be constant as well, with the pilot group responses for both the written form (pre-test) and the Online form (main pilot study) being in line with each other, stable and reliable over time.

Further testing of reliability that was conducted included scale reliability testing. This was done to verify whether all the questions in the questionnaire (by means of identified specific constructs and subgroups) jointly contributed towards describing the specific construct. More detail on the scale reliability testing is given in Chapter 4.

3.6 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

A questionnaire (via online survey) was sent out to the selected sample and this was the only research instrument that was used. The reason for choosing this tool (Survey Monkey) was for ease of distribution and subsequent collection from each of the sample participants – due to them being located in different provinces. It was sent out electronically to the sample, using the campus coordinated Survey Monkey tool via a link sent to the students email inbox.

³ With reference to Appendix A – Section B, Question 9: many of the students answered as ‘Strongly Disagree’ or ‘Neutral’ on the pilot pre-test, and mentioned that they did not like the way the question was worded. When the main pilot was run, after the wording was changed, the responses moved from the original range, to a more positive range.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

The research was primarily quantitatively focused, albeit that there were some open-ended questions to help me to interpret the quantitative data: the capturing of the quantitative data was done initially via a software programme (Microsoft Excel), using the exported data from the Survey Monkey collection tool. For the full statistical analysis, the software choices were narrowed down to either Statistical Analysis System (SAS) or International Business Machines – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS). Upon recommendation by several fellow Masters Students, SAS was finally selected. It was quite easy to work with; and along with it being user-friendly and it is also trial freeware that is available for download via the internet.

Once the initial survey was sent out to the respondents on the 27 March 2017, after a week, the responses stood at 34. This meant that the ultimate target of respondents was not going to be reached, and thus the link to the survey was resent using the direct messaging system included in the online system. In the week following this, the responses went up to 88 respondents and remained there.

After consultations with my supervisor, a research support statistician and a few of my academic peers, it was considered that this was an insufficient response rate and that it needed to be bolstered. To improve that rate, the pilot study responses were analysed and some of these that were similar in criteria (using sequential random sampling) were set aside for inclusion in the main study. This was done because the pilot study did not suggest any major revisions to the questionnaire and the methodology being used was not different. This process can be substantiated by research that states “the sample used in the pilot may be included in the main study, but caution is needed to ensure the key features of the main study are preserved in the pilot...” (Thabane, Ma, Chu, Cheng, Ismaila, Rios, Robson, Thabane, Giangregorio & Goldsmith 2010). This decision meant that a final response rate of 100 respondents was secured.

The analysis strategy that was identified to be the most suitable for this research included scale reliability testing, Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient, Frequency tables, Chi-Square tests and Pearson correlations. In order to establish the relationships between the constructs (perceived online success scores and social factor scores) Pearson correlations were calculated. The calculation of correlation coefficients (and their associated significance level) was planned

because by identifying statistically significant correlation(s) between the perceived success construct and a social factor construct, a statistically significant relationship between the social factor and perceived online learning success is verified. For this study, a 5% level was decided upon. The analysis strategy is discussed further in Chapter 4.

3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed in detail the research methodology used. Details such as the research design, data collection, sampling strategy and ethical protocols were elaborated on. Further detail was given on the validity and reliability, and research instrument that was used.

A brief explanation on the data analysis methods used was also included, which will be explained in detail the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter, for the investigations into the social factors and the influences these may have on adult learners, using online learning systems. The results of the statistical analyses, including the reliability tests, as well as tabular and graphical representations are brought into the discussion. The first sections focus primarily on the quantitative aspects of the study, with the latter section discussing the few qualitative results that were analysed and aimed to assist in interpreting the quantitative data.

4.2 ANALYSIS STRATEGY DEVELOPED

The demographic properties of the respondents (age, gender, disability and nationality) are summarised in one-way frequency tables and pie charts to provide a profile of the participants. This was deemed necessary since analysis results are always interpreted and evaluated within the context of the particular study.

The next step in the analysis involved exploratory one-way frequency tables for each question in each subset of the agreement rating (Likert-scale) questions in section B of the questionnaire that probed a social factor or success construct (where an agreement rating '1' indicated 'strong disagreement', up to '5' which indicated 'strong agreement'). With some of the subsets relating to each other, the exploratory analyses served to verify data integrity (i.e. whether all responses fall within the '1' to '5' agreement option range on the Likert-scale question section of the main survey) and provided a first indication of how respondents perceived (general agreement or disagreement) each concept as well as each individual issue. In each table in Chapter 4 the frequency and percentage per agreement rating level is reported. If the proportion of agreement/strongly agreement frequencies was larger than the proportion of disagreement/strongly disagreement frequencies on a question, the deduction could be made that respondents were generally in agreement on the specific question-statement reported.

For each subset of questions designed to evaluate a concept of either probable impacting social factors or online-learning success, a scale reliability test was performed on participant

responses to this particular subset of questions to evaluate internal consistency reliability. A test statistic was calculated as part of this analysis. The statistic is referred to as Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The value of Cronbach alpha varies between zero and one. Alpha values in the region of 0.7 or greater than 0.7 are usually indicative of internal consistency reliability (Nunnally 1978: 245-246). However, in new developmental work, such as the study at hand, Cronbach's alpha values in the region of 0.6 or greater than 0.6 are also regarded as acceptable levels of internal consistency reliability (Bhatnagar, Kim & Many 2014: 683-690; George & Mallery 2003:53; Kline 2000:13). These authors indicate that internal consistency reliability can be evaluated according to the guideline: Excellent ($\alpha > 0.9$), Good ($0.7 < \alpha < 0.9$); Acceptable ($0.6 < \alpha < 0.7$) and poor ($0.5 < \alpha < 0.6$).

Once internal consistency reliability has been verified (or not verified) for the various social factors and perceived online success constructs (financial, secondary school preparation, internet accessibility, family/general social factor and perceived online learning success), construct scores for each participant for each construct can be calculated as the mean agreement rating each participant awarded to the subset of questions that described a specific construct. In this way measures of the variables defined for the study can be calculated from the data collected in the survey, and further analyses can be performed to investigate which probable impacting social variables truly affect perceptions of online learning success. This is discussed in the next section.

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated⁴ for the set of perceived online success scores and, in turn, for each of the three sets of impacting social factor scores (financial factor; secondary school preparation factor; and internet accessibility factor). For these mentioned constructs, a high degree of internal consistency reliability could be proven. A significant relationship implies that the particular social factor is identified as a social factor that truly/statistically significantly impacts perceptions of online success. The social factor then progresses from a factor that potentially impacts perceptions of success to a factor identified as statistically significantly impacting perceptions of success. In this way, the first research question of the study was addressed.

⁴ The correlation coefficient for the financial factor was 0.23; secondary school preparation was 0.30 and the internet accessibility factor was 0.44.

Furthermore something of the nature of the relationship between the effect of the impacting social factor on perceived online learning success can be derived from the sign (plus or minus) of the relevant correlation coefficient: a positive correlation coefficient implies that increasing social factor agreement ratings coincide with increasing (agreement) levels of success-perception; whereas a negative correlation coefficient would imply that decreasing social-factor agreement ratings coincide with increasing levels (agreement) of success-perception. The appropriate correlation coefficient to calculate in this instance is Pearson's correlation coefficient since this is the appropriate correlation to be calculated when the data can be classified as continuous/or scale data.

The calculation of two-way success/social factor frequency tables, chi-square tests and bar graphs was deemed appropriate for this study to further highlight the nature of the success/social factor relationships identified by means of statistically significant Pearson's correlation coefficients. Refer to Appendices C and D for further details.

The results of the correlation analysis, along with the two-way frequency tables, associated chi-square tests and bar graphs of the success/social factor relationships answer research questions 1 and 2 of the study.

The discussion of the results in the next section indicates that internal consistency reliability could not be established for the family/social factor construct. Spearman correlations were therefore calculated between the set of online success scores and agreement rating responses for each of the questions (individual) to evaluate the statistical significance of the impact of these individual issues. These issues involved questions 11, 15 and 16; and were originally designed to describe the family and general social factor construct influences on perceptions of online learning success.

All analyses presented in the next section were conducted using the SAS, version 9.1 statistical software package (SAS Institute 2002-2003). The results using the analysis strategy description as framework for the results discussion are presented in the next section.

4.3 QUANTITATIVE RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

4.3.1 Graphical Representations of Demographic Data

The results indicated here serve as a description of the research context against which the results of more advanced analyses are interpreted. Figures 4.1 to 4.5 report on age-distribution, gender, ethnicity, disabilities and nationality.

It is interesting to note that 54% of the sampled respondents were younger than 25 years of age, meaning more than half of the respondents are young adults. In South Africa, adults are defined as being over the age of 18. Data also reflects that 37% of the respondents were over the age of 26 years – indicating a more mature young adult. The figures also show 61.5% were female and most of the respondents were RSA nationals. Equally interesting is the relatively even distribution of Black African and White respondents at 38.4% and 47.5% respectively.

For further clarification on the demographic data, the one-way frequency tables in the appendix can be found in Appendix C.

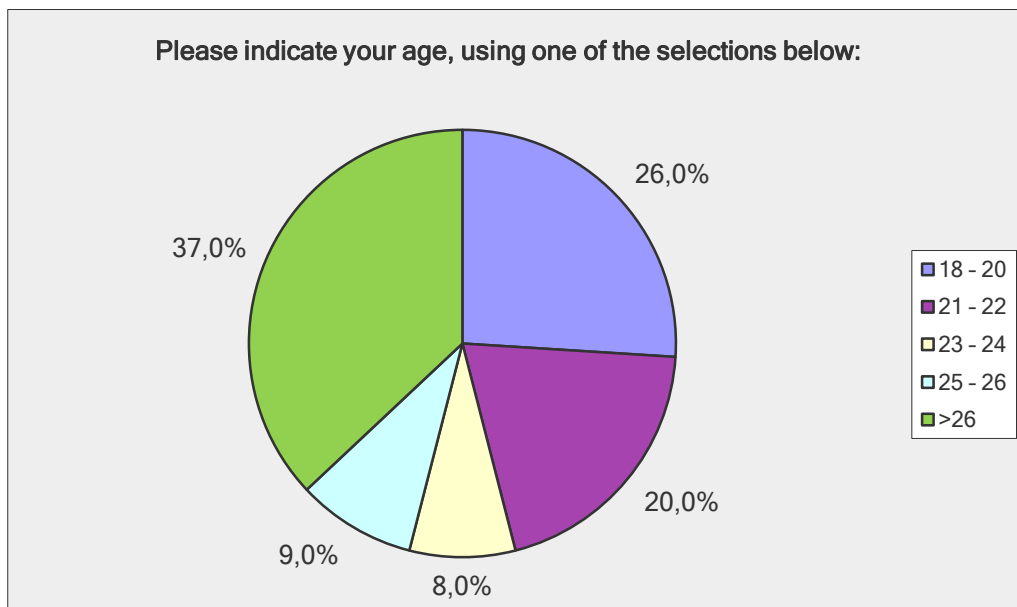


Figure 4.1: Age Distribution

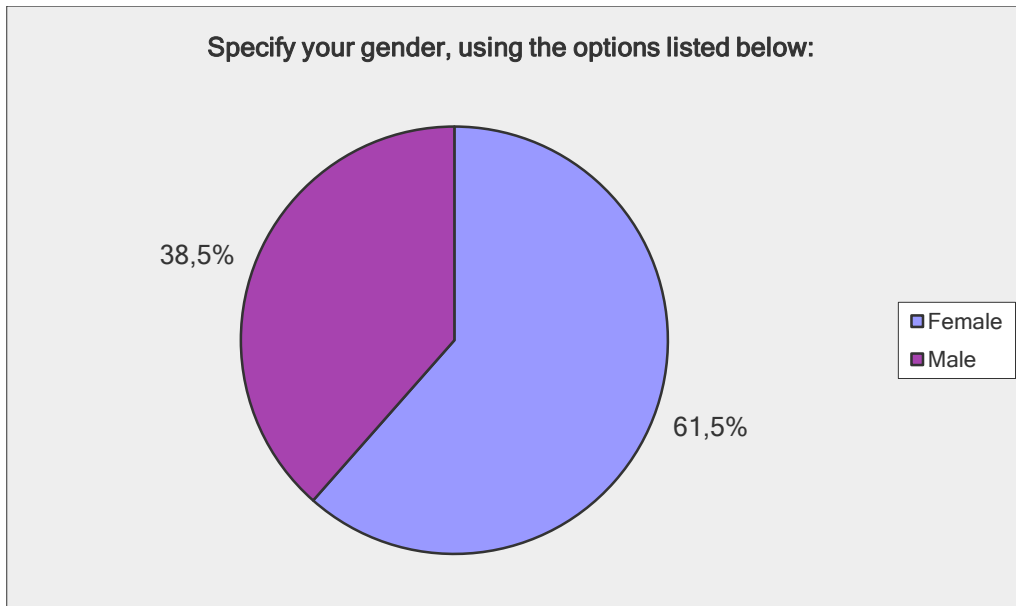


Figure 4.2: Gender Distribution

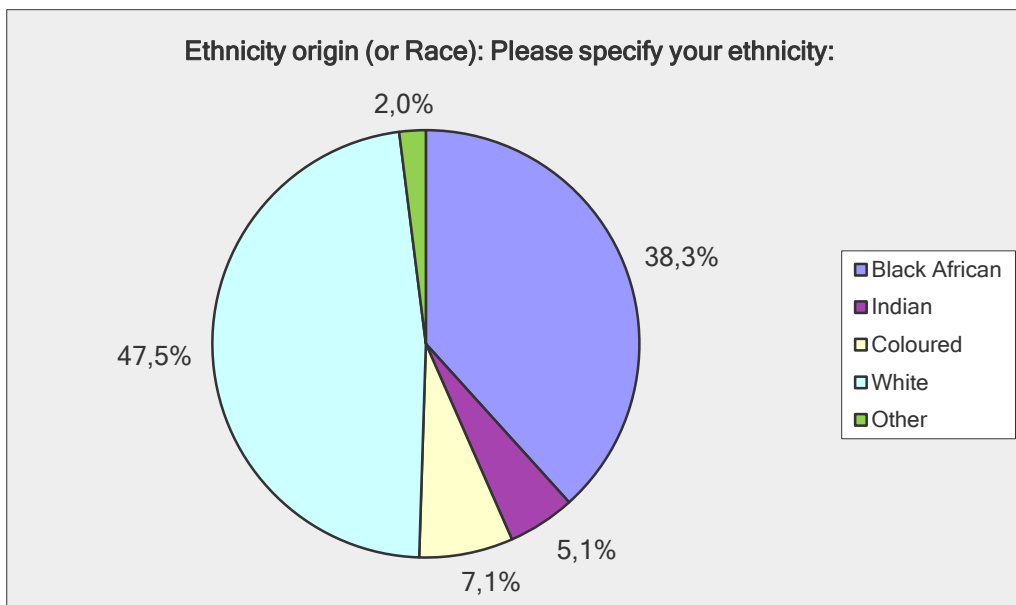


Figure 4.3: Ethnicity Distribution

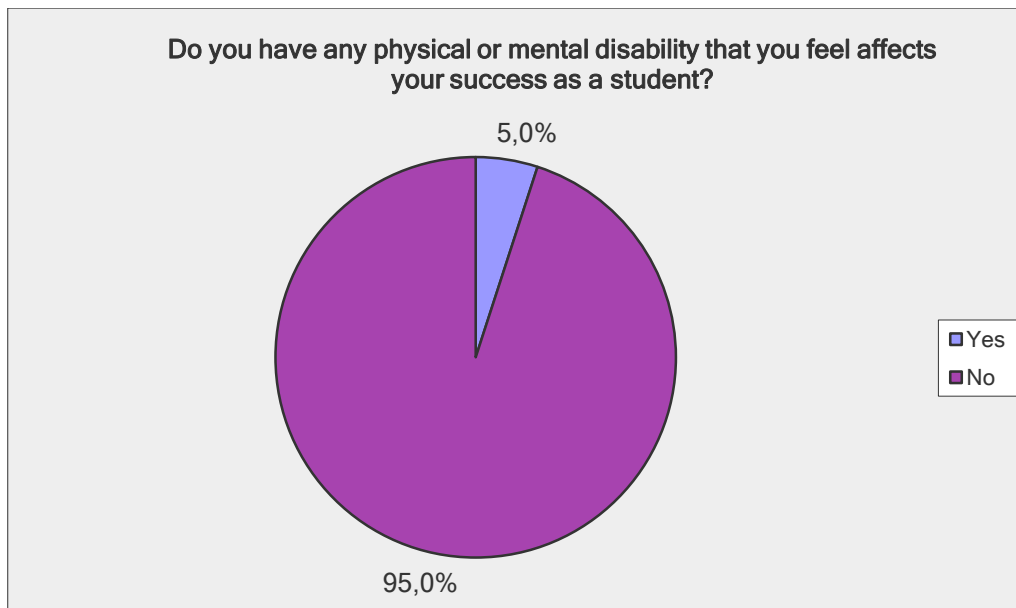


Figure 4.4: Disability Distribution

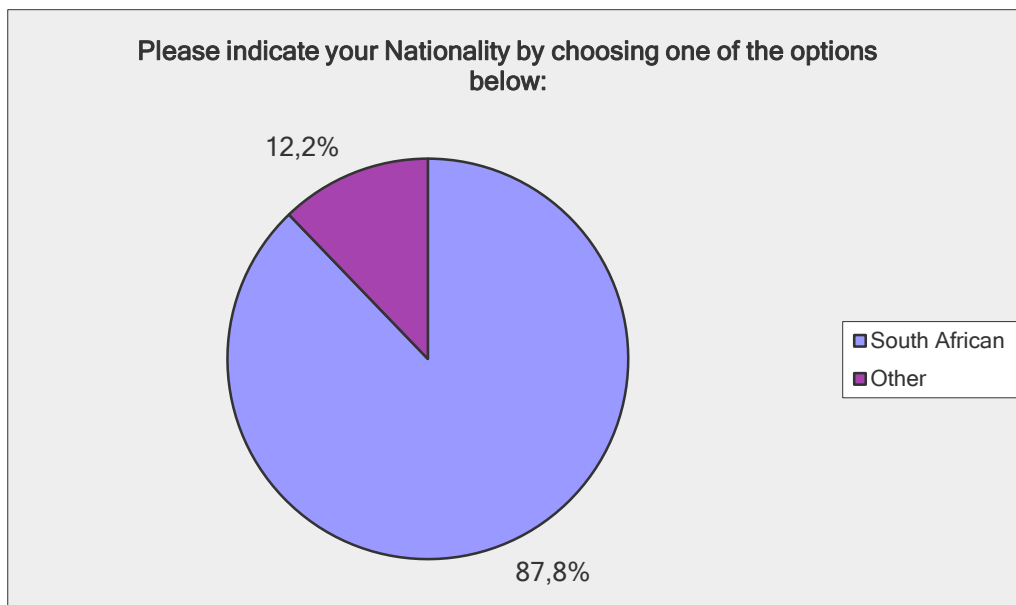


Figure 4.5: Nationalities Represented

4.3.2 Exploratory One-Way Frequency Tables of Success Subsets of the Questions

This section presents participants' response patterns to each agreement/disagreement question of the questionnaire. The tables for this section can be found in Appendix D.

A general impression of whether participants were in general agreement or disagreement with a particular question-statement can be gleaned from the percentage of 'agreement' or 'disagreement' responses reported for the particular question-statement. For example, for the

first question, q1, of the perceived online learning success construct, $18\% + 75\% = 93\%$ 'agree' or 'strongly agree' responses were recorded. This indicates that participants were generally in agreement or passionate about the qualification they were studying towards. The same deduction can be made regarding the response patterns of q2 and q17 that describe the construct of perceived online learning success. Therefore, these frequency tables suggest a positive perception/ or optimism/ or enthusiasm of online learning success (although the degree of optimism of individual participant might vary).

This example illustrates how an initial overview of respondents' perceptions of each construct can be gleaned by inspecting the individual frequency tables in each subset of social factor or perceived success constructs:

- The distribution pattern for the finance social factor suggests general agreement, barring the q8 responses. This issue will be touched on again when internal consistency reliability of the concept is evaluated.
- The distribution pattern for the secondary school preparation for tertiary studies factor suggests general agreement.
- The distribution pattern for the internet accessibility factor suggests general agreement.
- The distribution pattern for the family/general social factor suggests general agreement, barring q11 responses that strongly suggest a disagreement trend. This will be touched on again when internal consistency reliability of the concept is evaluated.

4.3.3 Scale Reliability Tests

These tests were done to verify the internal consistency reliability of proposed social factor and success concepts. They were firstly performed on the set of questions that were designed to describe the various social factors and perceived online learning success constructs. The results are reported in Table 4.1 below:

Table 4.1: Scale reliability test results – including Cronbach alpha coefficients

Results of scale reliability tests performed on respondents' agreement rating responses to the subsets of questions that probe the various social factor- and perceived online success constructs			
Constructs	Questionnaire questions describing the construct	Questions ratings inverted	Standardised Cronbach's alpha coefficients
<i>Perceived online success</i>	q1, q2, q17	-	0.67
<i>Finances as factor</i>	q8, q9, q12, q13	q8	0.70
<i>Secondary school prep factor</i>	q3, q4	-	0.61
<i>Internet accessibility factor</i>	q5, q6, q7	-	0.73
<i>Family/ general social factor</i>	q11, q15, q17	q11	0.31 [#]
[#] : The alpha value of 0.31 indicate that internal consistency reliability for this construct was unsatisfactory			

Each row reports on the results of a separate analysis. The first column of each row lists the particular construct evaluated, the second column of each row lists the subset of question responses included in a scale reliability test analysis; the last column of each row reports the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for a particular construct.

The third column indicates whether the responses to any question were inverted ('Inverted' in this instance indicates that for the question under discussion participants' response ratings are switched from 'negative' to 'positive' as follows: a rating of '1' becomes '5'; '2' becomes '4' and '3' remains '3'. This was done because scale reliability testing requires all questions in a subset to be formulated either in a positive or negative way: for the finances construct for example, q9, q12 and q13 were formulated positively while q8 was stated negatively: "Personal issues (e.g. finances) are an ongoing problem and I cannot always do my assignments effectively as a result". By inverting participant responses to this question, the question-statement is actually transformed to a positive statement "personal issues (e.g. finances) are not an ongoing problem that hinders me from completing my assignments effectively". The negative question formulation is automatically listed in analysis-output

which can then be rectified by inverting participant responses. In this way, reliable analysis results are obtained.

Table 4.1 above indicates that internal consistency reliability could be established for the perceived online learning success-, finances factor-, secondary school preparation factor- and internet accessibility factor constructs (with Cronbach alpha coefficients of respectively 0.67; 0.70; 0.61; and 0.73), but not for the family/ general social factor construct with a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.31.

These results imply that research could continue to calculate reliable construct scores for the perceived online learning success-; finances factor-; secondary school preparation factor-; and internet accessibility constructs which are presented in the next section. However, the family/ general social factor construct was not further investigated.

4.3.4 Calculation of Social Factor and Success Mean Scores

As indicated in the analysis strategy section, once internal consistency reliability of the various construct could be verified, measures of the dependent (perceived online learning success) and independent variables (finances factor-; secondary school preparation factor-; and internet accessibility constructs) of the study could be calculated.

Table 4.2 below reports the overall means of the construct scores for the perceived online success; finances as factor; secondary school preparation factor; and internet accessibility factor constructs. The values of construct scores are interpreted in the same way as agreement rating scores because these scores are derived from agreement rating scale responses: small score-values indicate a negative/disagreement perception and larger score-values a positive/agreement perception.

Table 4.2: Means and Standard Deviations of Constructs

Overall means and standard deviations of the calculated <i>perceived online success</i> and <i>social factor</i> scores		
	Mean	Standard deviation
<i>Perceived online success</i>	4.53	0.64
<i>Finances as factor</i>	3.55	0.93

<i>Secondary school prep factor</i>	4.02	0.90
<i>Internet accessibility factor</i>	4.14	0.92

4.3.5 Pearson Correlation Coefficients

As a first step in evaluating the statistical significance of the impact of social factors on perceptions of successful online learning, Pearson’s correlation coefficients were calculated for the success/ social factor sets of scores reported on in the next subsection.

Table 4.3 below reports the Pearson correlations coefficients calculated between the scores of the success/ finances-; success/ secondary school- and success/ internet accessibility constructs. In Table 4.3, the first entry in each cell represents the correlation coefficient. The third entry reports the number of paired observations analysed, and, the second entry in each cell reports the statistical significance associated with the test for success/ social factor dependency (the null hypothesis being that there is no correlation between the two variables investigated – independence). This second entry therefore reports the probability of the likelihood of the test statistic rho (r) (the correlation coefficient) assuming a value as large or as small as the calculated correlation-value if the null hypothesis of no dependency is true. A probability of less than 0.05 (5% significance level indicated by a ‘*’); or, less than 0.01 (1% significance level indicated by ‘**’); or less than 0.001 (0.1% level of significance, indicated by ‘***’) indicates that the null hypothesis on no dependency is rejected in favour of the alternative that the scores of the two variables of relevance are statistically significantly dependent and/or related.

Table 4.3 indicates that statistically significant dependencies between the success construct and each of the social factor constructs, namely finances, secondary school preparation, and internet accessibility could be established (correlation coefficients of respectively 0.23; 0.30 and 0.44 at significance levels of 5%; 1% and 0.1% respectively).

Therefore, this finding addresses the research question concerning which social factors statistically significantly impact perceptions of successful online learning. Furthermore, the fact that positive correlations were reported for each of the success/ social factor dependencies further details the nature of the established relationships/ dependencies: perceptions of

successful online learning increase (or become more positive) as agreement/ or positive opinion of the respective social factor constructs increases.

Table 4.3: Pearson Correlation Coefficients

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between <i>perceived success in online learning</i> scores and social factor scores (<i>finances; secondary school preparation and internet accessibility</i>) Prob > r under H0: Rho=0 Number of Observations			
	Finances	Secondary school preparation	Internet accessibility
Success	0.23911 0.0166* 100	0.30126 0.0023** 100	0.44267 <.0001*** 100

The above-mentioned positive dependency-trend between success/ social factor combination is illustrated in two-way success/ social factor frequency tables and bar graphs in the next section.

4.3.6 Two-Way Frequency Tables and Chi-Square Tests (Fisher’s Exact Probability)

This section presents frequency tables of success construct/ social factor score-combinations for the social factors of finances; secondary school preparation and internet accessibility to illustrate the positive dependency-trend between perceptions of online learning-success and social factors. To allow for the calculation of frequency tables, the relevant construct scores are rounded to the nearest integer – integer score-values ranges between ‘1’ and ‘5’ – similar to the agreement rating scale of the original participant responses.

It will be noted that in Tables 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6 and Figures 4.6 to 4.8, some construct score-levels (agreement ratings/ or positive perception ratings) have been condensed into fewer categories or levels. This was done to limit the number of cell-entries with reported frequencies of less than 3, the reason being that the probability associated with the Chi-square test calculated for a sparsely-populated frequency table tends to be unreliable. To further compensate for low cell-frequencies, Fisher’s exact test (McDonald 2009: 70-75) probabilities were calculated for the relevant Chi-square test associated with these tables. This was done to ensure that indications of statistical significance were reliable. The reason for the sparsely populated frequency tables can be attributed to the fact that response rate for this survey was somewhat limited (N=100) and, that certain cell-combination-responses were

simply not observed in the mentioned scores (e.g. strongly disagree or very negative success-score and social factor score-combinations).

The positive dependency-trend can, for example be observed when row-percentage of the three rows of Table 4.4 are compared: negative/neutral success-perceptions in row 1 correspond to negative finances-perceptions (71.43% of the total negative/neutral success-perceptions); compared to 84.62 of the positive/agree success-perceptions that correspond with the neutral/positive finances-perceptions (row two); and the 65.67% very positive/strongly agree success-perceptions that correspond with strongly-agree finances-perceptions in row 3: In other words negative/disagree success-perceptions tend to coincide with negative/disagree finances-perceptions and positive success-perceptions tend to correspond with positive finances-perceptions.

Table 4.4: Two-Way Frequency Tables (Financial Factor Scores)

Two-way frequency table of <i>success-scores</i> (rounded) against <i>financial factor scores</i> (rounded) to illustrate and verify the positive and statistically significant dependency-trend between <i>financial factor-opinion</i> and <i>positive success-perception</i>					
Perceived online success scores	Financial factor scores (agreement rating)				Total
Frequency Row Percentage	1-2: disagree/ negative perception	3: neutral perception	4: agreement/ positive perception	5: very positive/ strong agreement	
1-3: negative/ disagreement and neutral perception	1 14.29	5 71.43	0 0.00	1 14.29	7
4: positive/ agree perception	2 7.69	13 50.00	9 34.62	2 7.69	26
5: very positive/ strong agreement	5 7.46	18 26.87	24 35.82	20 29.85	67
Total	8	36	33	23	100
Fisher's exact probability of the Chi-square statistic assuming the value of 12.52 - under the null hypothesis that the distribution of financial scores (rows) over perceived success-levels (columns) is similar/ or independent - is 0.02*					
Therefore, the alternative hypothesis that perceived success is dependent/ influenced by the financial factor is accepted on the 5% level of significance					

Figure 4.6, the bar graph of the frequency distribution of perceived extent of success and extent of finances-impact agreement visually illustrates this described positive-trend dependency.

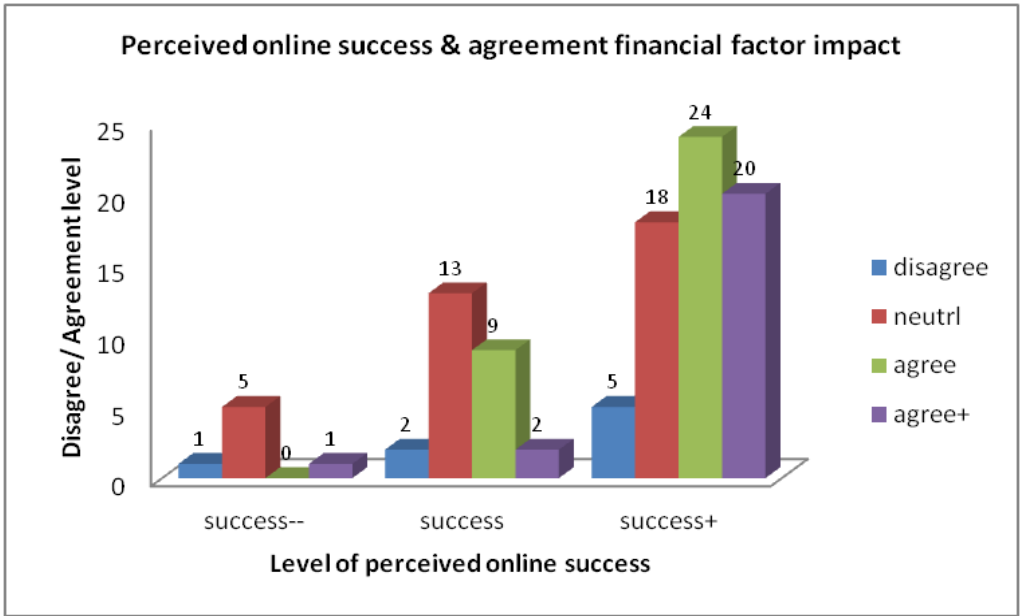


Figure 4.6: Financial Factor/Success-Perception Trend

In the same way, the positive success/ social factor dependency can be explained and visually illustrated for the internet accessibility (Table 4.5 and Figure 4.7) and secondary school preparation social factors (Table 4.6 and Figure 4.8).

Table 4.5: Two-Way Frequency Tables (Secondary School Prep Factor Scores)

Two-way frequency table of <i>success-scores</i> (rounded) against <i>secondary school preparation scores</i> (rounded) to illustrate and verify the positive and statistically significant dependency-trend between <i>secondary school preparation-opinions</i> and <i>success-perception</i>				
Success level	Secondary school preparation factor scores (agreement rating)			Total
Frequency Row Percent	1-3: negative/ disagree, neutral perception	4: agreement/ positive perception	5: very positive/ strong agreement	
1-3: negative/ disagreement and neutral perception	4 57.14	1 14.29	2 28.57	7
4: positive/ agree perception	6 23.08	12 46.15	8 30.77	26
5: very positive/ strong agreement	12 17.91	20 29.85	35 52.24	67
Total	22	33	45	100

Fisher's exact probability of the Chi-square statistic assuming the value of 9.13 - under the null hypothesis that the distribution of secondary school prep-scores (rows) over perceived success-levels (columns) is similar/ or independent - is 0.05*

Therefore, the alternative hypothesis that perceived success is dependent/ influenced by the secondary school preparation factor is accepted on the 5% level of significance

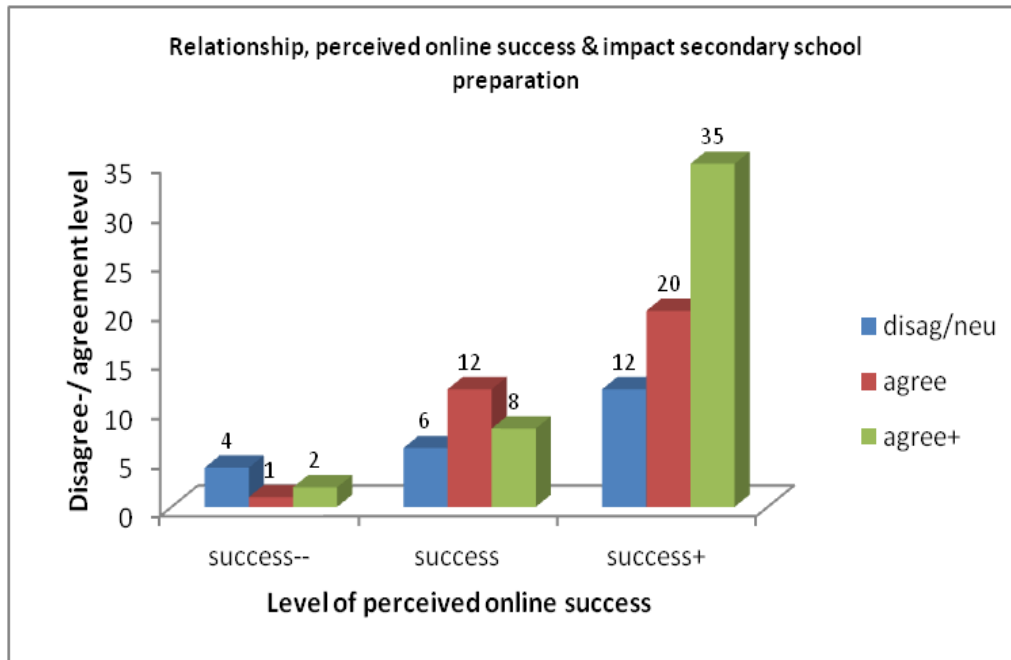


Figure 4.7: Secondary school prep/Success-perception trend

Table 4.6: Two-Way Frequency Tables (Internet Accessibility Factor Scores)

Two-way frequency table of <i>success-scores</i> (rounded) against <i>internet accessibility scores</i> (rounded) to illustrate and verify the positive and statistically significant dependency-trend between <i>internet accessibility opinions</i> and <i>success-</i>					
Success level	Internet accessibility factor scores (agreement rating)				Total
Frequency Row Percent	1-2: disagree/negative perception	3: neutral perception	4: agreement/positive	5: very positive/strong agreement	
1-3: negative/disagreement, neutral	2 28.57	2 28.57	2 28.57	1 14.29	7
4: positive/agree perception	4 15.38	2 7.69	9 34.62	11 42.31	26
5: very positive/strong agreement	1 1.49	8 11.94	23 34.33	35 52.24	67
Total	7	12	34	47	100

Fisher's exact probability of the Chi-square statistic assuming a value of 14.34 - under the null hypothesis that the distribution of internet accessibility scores (rows) over perceived success-levels (columns) is similar/ or independent - is 0.03*

Therefore, the alternative hypothesis that perceived success is dependent/ influenced by the internet accessibility is accepted on the 5% level of significance

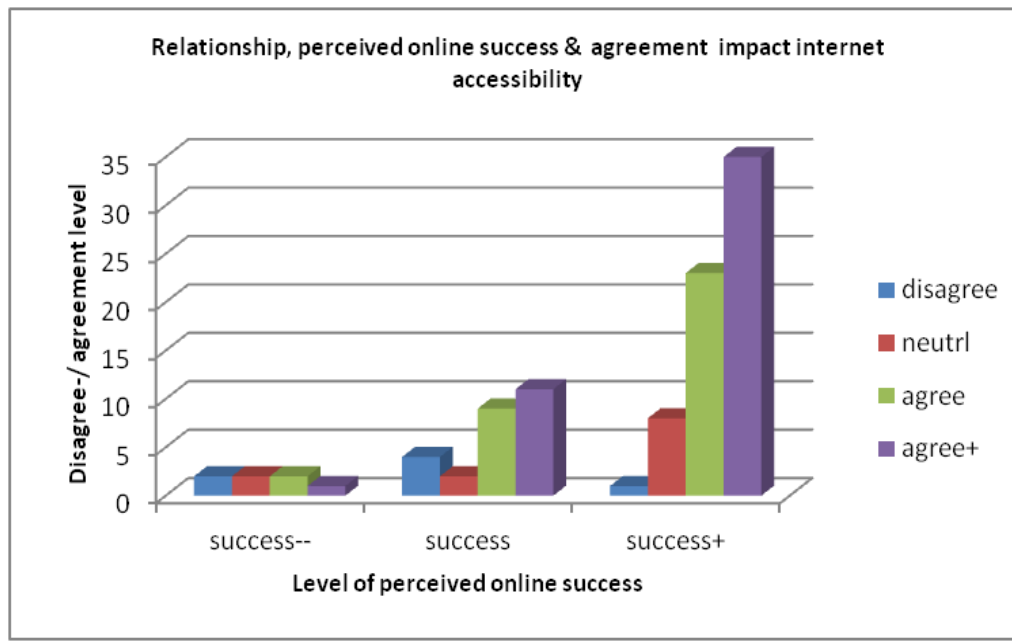


Figure 4.8: Internet Accessibility/Success-Perception Trend

4.3.7 Spearman’s Correlations

As a final step, Spearman’s correlations were calculated between the set of success-scores and each of the sets of rating responses for q11, q15 and q16 to investigate whether any of these issues individually relate to success-perceptions. Questions 11, 15 and 16 were originally designed to describe the family/general social factor-construct, but internal consistency reliability could not be verified for the set of questions, therefore possible individual impact still had to be investigated. Table 4.7 however indicates that the three correlation coefficients were not statistically significant thereby ruling out the possible impact these individual issues could have on perceptions of success in online learning.

Table 4.7: Spearman Correlation – Family/General Social Factors

Spearman Correlation Coefficients			
Prob > r under H0: Rho=0			
Number of Observations			
	q11	q15	q16
Success	0.10738	0.06520	-0.07375
	0.2876	0.5214	0.4681
	100	99	99

Overall, the quantitative analyses provide for a very interesting set of results of which the recommendations and conclusions will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.4 DESCRIPTIVE AND INFERENTIAL STATISTICAL SUMMARY

The descriptive part of the study's analysis strategy 'sets the research scene' (description of the demographic properties of participants); guides the choice of further and more advanced analyses to be conducted; and prepares the researcher for what they can expect final findings to be.

Overall the individual frequency tables of the 17 agreement (Success Subsets) questions (inserted as 'Appendix D') generally indicate a tendency of agreement ('more agreement than disagreement') or positive participant perception. They also point to specific questions or issues that participants experienced differently: e.g. the response pattern to q11 was very different to most other questionnaire questions. That is, because the original question was formulated in a negative context the response ratings were more negative, when compared to the other questions in the section. The need for that question's responses to be 'inverted' – as discussed in Section 4.3.3 above – was due to the scale reliability testing requirements. A similar concept was applied to question 8. This implies, for future research, that the context of the questions that would be posed to populations with matching characteristics to this study would need to be formulated in the same way (either negative or positive) in order to ensure reliable results.

Further data analysis showed that the mean construct scores in Table 4.7 also indicate that participants were generally success-driven or motivated. The overall mean success-score is reported to be 4.53, rounded up to '5'. This indicates strong agreement which could be interpreted that the participants are highly motivated to succeed. The mean internet accessibility score is 4.14 was rounded down to '4' indicates 'agreement'. In other words, participants agreed that internet accessibility is an important social factor in their lives.

It is important to note that these results as revealed here are applicable to this specific population and only to populations that agree absolutely with the characteristics and nature of this particular group of learners. The results show up that we can, with some confidence, say that social factors (as identified in this study) exerted an influence on experiences of success of students; and social factors that were inferred as most influential were internet accessibility, finances and secondary school preparation for tertiary education. In order to make sense of the quantitative data and interpret them further, the information that was

obtained from open-ended questions in the questionnaire was used (Appendix E' questions 9 to 13 of the final section).

4.5 QUALITATIVE RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The final five questions that were included in the last section of the questionnaire sought some answers from participants in their own words. The questions required the student to either agree or disagree with the statement/question, and to then give an open-ended response. The reason for inserting these open-ended response questions into the survey was to allow the students to express their opinions about the context of each of the questions, as each included various factors that were incorporated from the variables and main survey questions, as well as to aid me in substantiating and explaining the results that were identified in the quantitative section. This was discussed in further detail in Chapter 3. As it turned out this data set allowed for a more detailed approach to understanding the results relating to the family/general social factors construct (the quantitative data could not significantly justify the impact of this construct) and has provided improved insight into the influence family has on the success of adult learners, using online learning programmes. This is explained below with reference to the charts and related themes.

4.5.1 Question 1

My family is always there to support me with my studies and online work. State whether you agree or disagree with this statement and explain further.

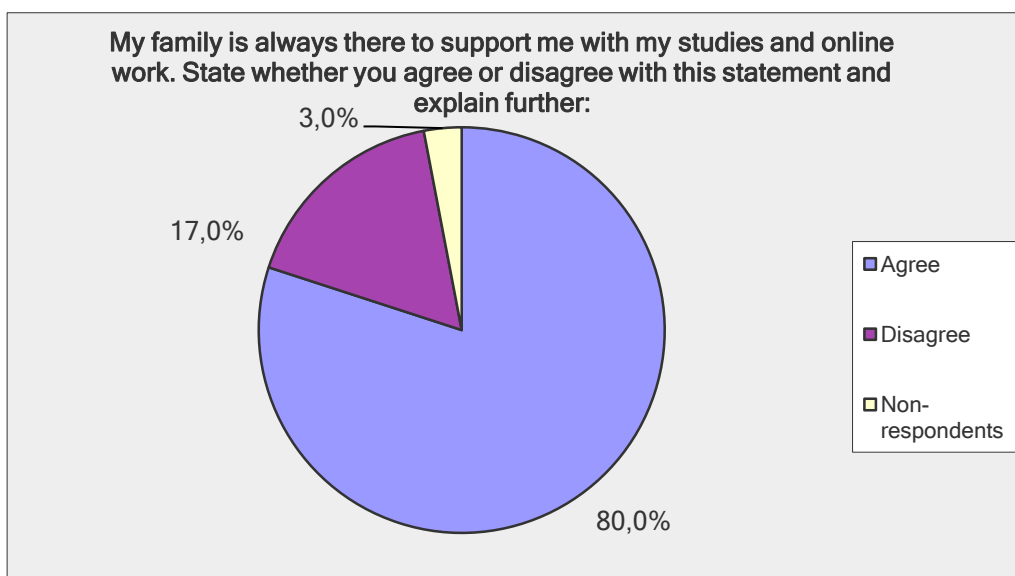


Figure 4.9: Open-ended question 1 (Family Support)

Of the respondents (N=100), 80% agreed with this question, 17% disagreed and there were three non-respondents. Most of the agreement reasoning went hand in hand with themes in favour of their families being supportive and helpful, guiding them with moral support and wanting to see the learner succeed. Many of the respondents also agreed that their families motivated them and gave the space needed for them to complete their academic work. The way in which family support might make a difference to people's educational experience (and experience of success) is thus highlighted by these types of responses.

For those who disagreed, the common themes that were identified focused on the fact that the learners were located far from their homes and that being away from their families caused the perception that there was a lack of support. A few rather interesting responses indicated that their families simply did not care about what the learner was studying and left them to their own devices.

4.5.2 Question 2

I have my own children and/or family to support and this negatively affects my online work. State whether you agree or disagree and explain your situation further.

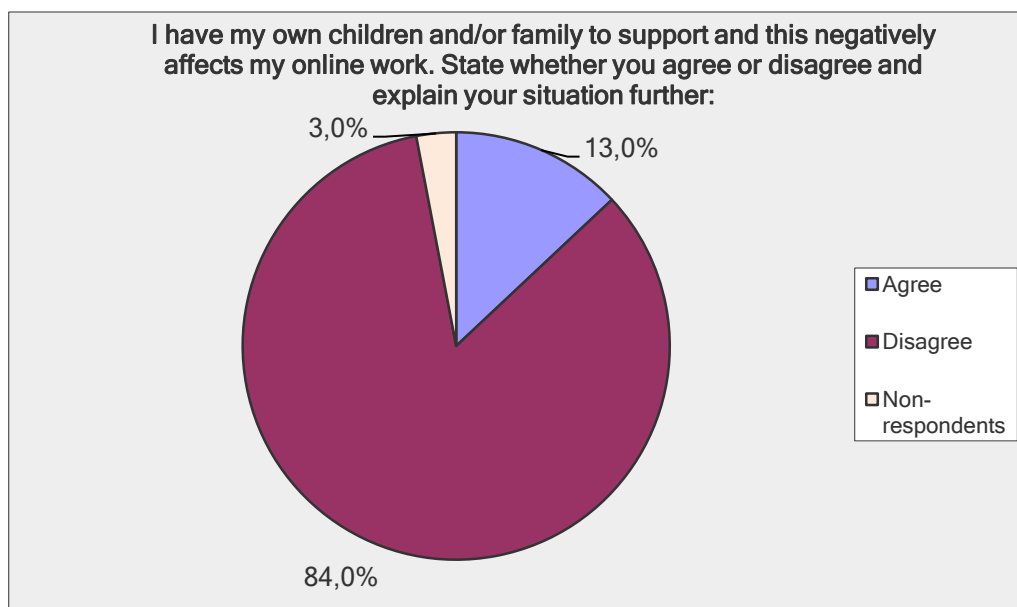


Figure 4.10: Open-ended question 2 (Family responsibility and work success)

For this question of the 100 respondents, 13% agreed with the statement, 84% disagreed and there were three non-respondents. The few learners that agreed with this statement focused on

the same type of theme: they felt that their children came first and spending time with them took priority over their academic work. They also mentioned that it was very hard work to have to run a family and to have to succeed at their studies at the same time. The fact that only 13% agreed that family should take priority and thus makes an important difference to how they approach their education, serves to cast additional light on the statistically generated data relating to the family/general social issues factor which suggested that having to support a family does not influence their successes and perception of success in online education. This substantiates the quantitative data analysis.

The majority that disagreed with this question stated that they did not have children to support and some also mentioned that they stayed by themselves and had no one else to support. Interestingly a few brought up the fact that it was ‘their choice’ if they were going to let having a family influence their online work and that they had accepted their responsibilities of being with their family and having to study at the same time.

4.5.3 Question 3

My culture/religion has a big influence in my education and affects how I do my online work. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your response further.

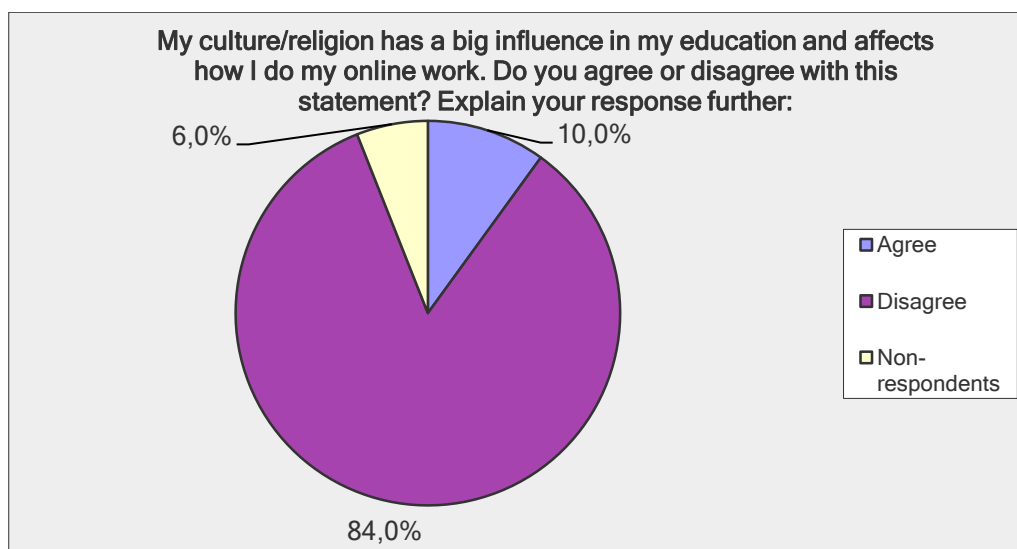


Figure 4.11: Open-ended question 3 (Cultural/religious influence)

Again, this was a fairly clear cut result with only 10% of the respondents (n=94) agreeing with this question, 84% disagreeing and the non-respondents being 6. The very few that agreed with this provided for an interesting set of responses. Some stated involvement in

church took up most of their spare time; some stated that not having English as their first language was a factor because understanding the academic work was difficult; some stated that culture taught one to be humble and to respect others and that the person's social status (such as affluent or middle-class in society) had an influence on whether it was easy or not to gain access to the internet, in terms of affordability.

As can be seen from Figure 4.11, most of these responses were in the disagree range and the themes included expressions of feeling that culture had no influence on their education at all and that one should not allow schoolwork to be influenced by one's culture. Many respondents mentioned that culture should be put aside and should not dictate their futures. These responses help to explain why in the quantitative data there was found to be no significant relationship between culture as a family/general social factor and experiences of success in online learning.

4.5.4 Question 4

Interaction with fellow students and people from other cultural backgrounds assists me in my learning experiences. State whether you agree or disagree with this statement and explain further below.

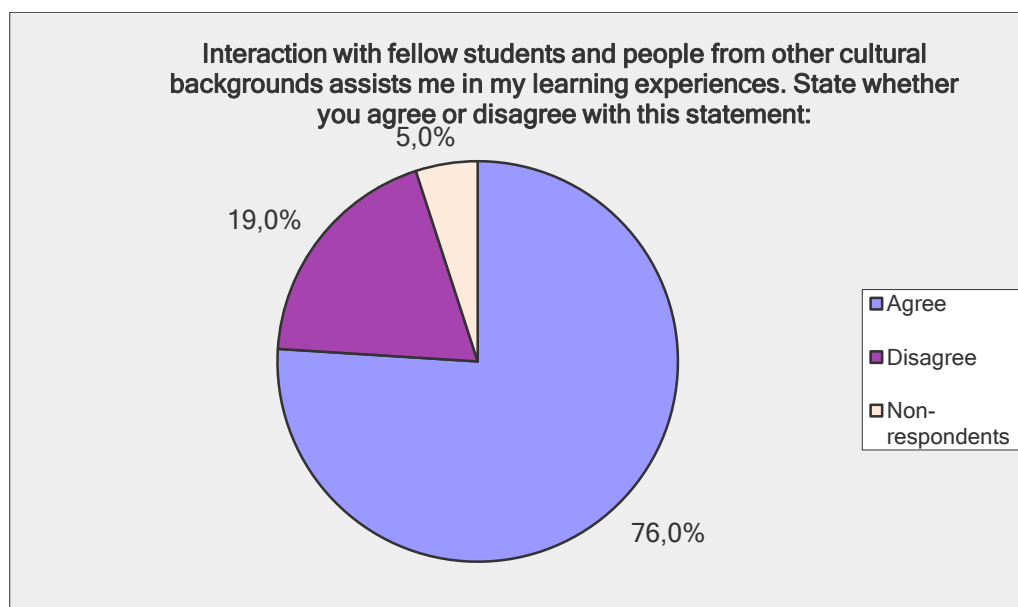


Figure 4.12: Open-ended question 4 (Interaction with cultures and learning)

This question had 95 responses with 76% agreeing, 19% disagreeing and five non-respondents. Interestingly, the range between agree and disagree for this question was slightly

higher with most of the common themes for the agreement aspect being that the respondents did not know everything and that they needed to learn from other people to gain a better understanding of the learning process. A few also mentioned that being in the hospitality industry allowed for them to interact with guests and other people more, which contributed to their overall learning experience. They also felt that this interaction allowed for them to make new friends and to work better as a team. As this question was about the interaction with cultures, the respondents here presumably mean that their interactions with people from other cultures assisted them in their learning experiences. These responses helped to cast light on the question of how the social environment (in this case quality of interaction with peers and others) can make a difference to the learning experience (and experience of success).

The disagreement comments were mainly that the respondents worked better alone and they did not have anyone to share their studies with. A few also mentioned that they did not interact with others in an academic sphere because they were online students and they did not see each other. Interestingly though, they did not mention anything with regard to interacting with each other in the online area.

4.5.5 Question 5

How do you, as a student, define success in an academic sense? In other words, what does it mean to you?

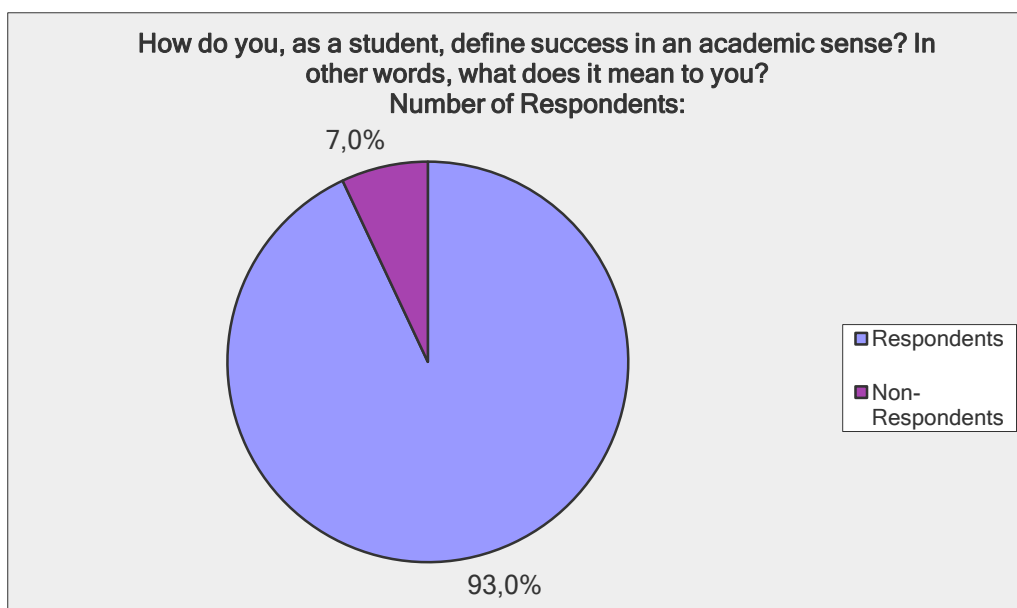


Figure 4.13: Open-ended question 5 (Definitions of success: Respondents)

As this statement did not have a 'agree or disagree' part included, it is important to note that 93 respondents gave an answer to this question, and only seven skipped responding to the question overall. This question did provide for a range of varied responses but importantly the theme of the individual respondents reaching their own personal goals (in terms of career and academic success) related to their definition of success. Many of the learners mentioned that they felt that passing with good grades, doing the best that they were capable of and growing as an individual were good measures of success in an academic sense. Thus perceptions of success for most of the respondents were linked to these kinds of measures mentioned above. This is important as it shows that the concentration in the questionnaire design, on what were regarded as success factors, resonated with their conceptions of how one can measure success. This gives an indication of the measures that the respondents were using when they answered the questions (that is, the closed-ended ones relating to success).

Lastly some of the respondents also specified that a skill being gained, getting a better job in the future and never giving up could be considered important measures of academic success.

4.5.6 Qualitative/Open-Ended Questions Summary

The analysis of the open-ended questions reveals that the respondents for the most part felt that their families were there to support and guide them through the learning process and that having family/children to support should not and did not need to affect their academic work online. They also felt that their own culture had very little influence on their success in online education but that through the interaction with their peers and fellow students from other cultures they did indeed learn and experience more with a better understanding of their coursework overall.

Lastly, they mentioned that good measures of academic success were primarily reaching their own goals, passing with good grades and gaining additional skills overall.

4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented and discussed the findings of the study. A largely quantitative approach was taken, with a small section of qualitative data being used as an aid to substantiate the results overall. The questionnaire that was analysed was broken down into three sections: demographics, agreement/disagreement scales (both quantitative) and the open-ended section. The analysis showed that in relation to the hypotheses, there was a

tendency of positive participant perceptions regarding the influence of social factors on success in online education, with certain factors (namely, finances, secondary school preparation and internet accessibility) being significantly related to perceptions of success.

The research data analysed showed that the results were consistent with the information gathered in the reviews of the literature that was available, which is summarised in Chapter 2. In particular, the data agreed with some of the postulations that were implied by White and Selwyn (2011) that various social factors contribute to individuals' continued engagement in online learning. Nevertheless, the factors located in this study as exerting significant influence differed somewhat from those located by White and Selwyn's study, which identified gender, ethnicity of respondents and presence or absence of children as not having any substantial impact on online engagement.

The next chapter presents a detailed summary of the research results, the limitations of the study, as well as the conclusions and recommendations, based on the findings of the data analysis.

CHAPTER 5

LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter of the dissertation provides for a brief summary of the study, as well as identifying the limitations, while offering some recommendations and conclusions. Feasible recommendations shall be noted, and discussed, based on the findings of the study.

The main intention of this study was to explore the social factors that possibly influence adult learners' success, with online learning programmes being the primary medium of learning. The various factors were explored using a questionnaire that was distributed via Survey Monkey to the sample. The significance of this quantitative research will hopefully make a contribution to academic structures by identifying the factors that could have a profound effect on adult learners' success in online learning situations. The need for a clearer understanding of how these factors might affect adult learners' ability to succeed in online learning was the chief justification for this investigation. Hence I developed various hypotheses concerning relationships between selected variables in order to direct the study (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2). It was found in the study that the factors that had a profound effect in the population under study were: finances, secondary school preparation, and internet accessibility. The other category of factors that did have a moderate effect on the population, but not a hugely significant one (in terms of the empirical data collected), were family support and cultural-interaction factors. The quantitative data showed that the family/general social factor category was not statistically significant in terms of the influence on the perceptions of success. However, the qualitative data that were collected from the five open-ended questions gave a clearer insight into this factor and the influence it has on an adult learner's perception of success in online learning. The qualitative data also found that support from the learners' family and interaction with students and peers from other cultures had a positive effect on the learners' perceptions of success. This construct (family/general social factors), as discussed in the quantitative analysis above, given the qualitative findings mentioned above, therefore justifies additional research into this field of online education influential factors.

5.2 LIMITATIONS

Considering the scope of the research and the nature of the methodology used, there were most limitations that were involved and taken note of. These should be taken into account when reviewing the research overall.

One of the most important limitations was the response rate of the participants. There seemed to be a general lack of stimulation to answering the initial survey that was sent out; and only after the survey was sent out a second time to the sample, via direct online messaging, did the response rate start to increase.

A second limitation that was identified was the inability to control the environment in which the respondents completed the questionnaire. As these surveys were conducted in an online environment, it was difficult to ascertain the surrounding factors that could influence the respondents at the time that they were completing the actual questionnaire.

Lastly, a limitation of a decisive nature was that the results are only generalisable to populations that have the same absolute characteristics to the research participants.

Despite the above, the research nevertheless provided some valuable and insightful data and views into the social factors and their influences in the adult learning process using online systems.

5.3 FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research gave insightful evidence into the social factors that could have an influence on how adult learners can be successful in online learning. The findings assisted in answering the research question and sub-questions, addressed the research hypotheses and found that statistically significant correlation coefficients were established. This indicated that a relationship exists between specific societal factors and success-perceptions in relation to the following factors: finances, secondary school preparation and internet accessibility.

Additionally, the sign of the correlation coefficient addresses the second hypothesis and tells the researcher more about how the perceived success level of online learning is affected by different societal factors. In this study, the factors that related significantly to the learners' perception of success in online learning will show an increase (or improvement, more to the agreement side of the rating scale) as internet connectivity improves or increases; or, as

finances improves or increases; or, as the quality of secondary school preparation for tertiary education increases. Family support and general factors subsets did not appear to relate significantly, according to the quantitative data; however, the qualitative responses gathered seem to indicate otherwise, subsequently pointing towards more research needing to be completed in this regard.

It can be concluded that the data analysis assisted in answering the research sub-questions one and two by: firstly defining social factor constructs and secondly by identifying social factor constructs that have a statistically significant impact on perceptions of successful online learning, namely finances, secondary school preparation and internet accessibility. The data analysis led to the establishment of the relationship between perceptions of successful online learning and the social factors of: internet accessibility, finances and secondary school preparation for tertiary education – as a positive dependency – where an increase in success-perceptions/or scores coincided with an increase in social factor agreement/ opinion or scores; and a decrease in success-perceptions or scores (disagreement/negative perception) coincided with a decrease in social factor construct scores (negative/disagreement perception score).

A significant positive correlation could not be established for the family/social factor construct in the quantitative data analysis, but with the supporting data collected and analysed from the open-ended (qualitative) question section, it can be substantiated that this construct did have a moderate impact of the perception of success, but that more significant data are needed to prove this. As mentioned above, the findings in this particular section indicate the need for more in-depth research in this regard, due to the slight differences in analysis identified, with the coefficients for the Spearman's correlations being insignificant, but the actual learner full responses in the open-ended section indicating otherwise.

These findings can be used firstly to restructure online learning courses to provide, for example, more funding to students, better access to more suitable resources and providing students with unlimited access to the internet for longer periods of time. Secondly they also indicate that improved access to academic support structures, with personal guidance and counselling services would be extremely beneficial to adult students learning primarily in an online sphere, where support of this nature is typically lacking (Chapter 2, Section 2.1.3).

It is recommended that a follow-up study with a significantly larger sample size be conducted. This ideally should incorporate respondents from other tertiary academic institutions who

make use of online learning as a primary medium of learning. These institutions should also not be restricted to the private sector, and should incorporate the public tertiary institutions. This may generate a different data set and possibly different results owing to the nature of many of the students who study via the South African public education system.

Additional recommendations include that the questionnaire design be adjusted to include more questionnaire items per social factor as well as success-perception constructs, and in particular, the family/general social factor construct.

With the considerations that this particular study was time- and money-restricted being a dissertation of limited scope, I am of the opinion that there is much more to ‘discover’ and verify on this particular research topic.

5.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The numbers of academically associated establishments that are offering online learning study options are on the rise. This seems to be a global trend, due to the increasingly technological nature of today’s society. It is said that the deployment of broadband internet has increased significantly in the past five years and that there may eventually be high-speed internet access in student homes (Wiley & Edwards 2002:34). Although this was stated a few years ago and has not yet been achieved, in South Africa in any event, the influence of the internet on the use of online learning systems is significant.

To conclude, the notion of the students being affected by the elements that influence their success surrounding online learning is an important part of the system that was the focal point for this research. Although the primary data indicated that three of the four constructs (finances, secondary school preparation and internet accessibility) did have a significant impact on the learners’ perceptions of success in online learning programmes, the research also showed that the family/general social factor construct had no statistically significant influence. The substantiating data that were collected from the open-ended responses, connected mainly to the latter construct, seemed to indicate an almost contradictory response from what arose from the quantitative analysis. This, for me, signifies a need to investigate this further.

The decision regarding the need to investigate this topic was two-fold: firstly, to see what factors the major sources of influence are and secondly to recommend ways to combat or

reinforce the factors that are positive in the social environment in order for the students to maintain or improve their successes in academic programmes. The idea was that online learning, technology, the internet and multimedia will all, undoubtedly, be a part of our lives for many years to come. Future research on this topic will hopefully uncover more influences and help to find ways to counteract and resolve some of the major hindrances that prevent this educational medium from being more successful.

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter rounded off the study by giving the limitations and recommendations of the research undertaken. The study is closed off by the researcher giving conclusions as well as concluding remarks to the research.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PILOT STUDY PRE-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire: Masters in Education (Adult Education)

Student: Catherine Chesterton

Number: 49057316

The Influence of Social Factors in Online Learning Success

**Please complete all sections and questions of the questionnaire below. Your answers will remain anonymous and are being used for statistical purposes only.*

Section A: Demographics

1. Please indicate your age, using one of the selections below:

- 16 – 18
- 18 – 20
- 20 – 22
- 22 – 24
- 24 – 26
- >26

2. Specify your gender, using the options listed below:

- Female
- Male

3. Indicate your ethnicity by selecting from below if you identify with any of the following:

- Black African
- Indian
- Coloured
- White
- Other: Please explain below:

4. Do you have a disability that you feel affects your success as a student?

Yes

No

Please explain

5. Please indicate your Nationality by choosing one of the options below:

South African

Other

Section B: Influencing Social Factors

Please answer all the questions below, by indicating in the corresponding column, the option that you best agree with as your response:

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I feel passionate about the qualification I am studying towards.					
2.	I knew what I was getting myself into when I enrolled at IHS.					
3.	I am happy with the level of education given to me <u>before</u> starting at IHS.					
4.	High school prepared me well for my Tertiary Education.					
5.	Access to a computer facility or laptop is very easy and cheap for me.					
6.	I know how to use a computer or laptop effectively to complete my online work.					
7.	I have easy access to Internet facilities to complete my schoolwork.					

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
8.	Money is an ongoing problem for me and can't always do my assignments as a result.					
9.	We are wealthy as a family and I am able to do or get whatever I want to complete my work.					
10.	We are a small, close-knit family and are always there for each other.					
11.	My parents are divorced, and this does affect me in my studies.					
12.	I can afford and eat regular, healthy and nutritious meals every day.					
13.	Exercise and de-stressing activities are done on a daily basis and help to clear my mind.					
14.	I work on a part-time basis to help pay towards my studies at IHS.					
15.	Any extra money that I make or receive, I save it to use for my family.					
16.	I feel that various social factors (such as culture, family status, emotional intelligence and financial position) have an influence on my success in my studies					
17.	Finishing and graduating from IHS is one of my goals.					

18. My family is always there to support me with my studies and online work. Explain further:

19. I have my own children and family to support and this negatively affects my online work. Explain your situation further:

20. My culture/religion has a big influence in my education and affects how I do my online work. Do you agree with this? Explain why or why not below:

21. Do you feel that you are learning as a result of interaction with people from other cultural backgrounds? Explain why or why not below:

22. How do you, as a student, define success in an academic sense? In other words, what does it mean to you?

APPENDIX B: PILOT STUDY MAIN TEST SURVEY

Miss C Pilot Study 1

Welcome to My Survey

Thank you for participating in our survey. Your feedback is important.

1. "Social factors influencing the success of adult learners: Investigating a Higher Educational Institution in South Africa"

Dear Prospective participant,

You are invited to participate in a survey conducted by Catherine Chesterton under the supervision of Norma Romm, a Professor in the Department of Adult Basic Education and Training towards a M Ed (Adult Education) at the University of South Africa.

The survey you have received has been designed to study the influence of social factors on adult learners in online learning programmes. You were selected to participate in this survey because you are a student of the Online Campus of The International Hotel School, studying a course in Hospitality Management. You will not be eligible to complete the survey if you are younger than 18 years. So please do not complete it if you are not yet 18.

By completing this survey, you agree that the information you provide may be used for research purposes, including dissemination through peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings. It is anticipated that the information we gain from this survey will help us to improve online academic offerings at The International Hotel School. You are, however, under no obligation to complete the survey and you can withdraw from the study prior to submitting the survey. The survey is developed to be anonymous, meaning that we will have no way of connecting the information that you provide to you personally. Consequently, you will not be able to withdraw from the study once

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you have clicked the send button based on the anonymous nature of the survey. If you choose to participate in this survey it will take up no more than fifteen minutes of your time. You will not benefit from your participation as an individual, however, it is envisioned that the findings of this study will assist in clarifying how to better serve our students in an academic manner.

We do not foresee that you will experience any negative consequences by completing the survey. The researcher(s) undertake to keep any information provided herein confidential, not to let it out of our possession and to report on the findings from the perspective of the participating group and not from the perspective of an individual.

The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes where after it will be permanently destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded and electronic versions will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer.

You will not be reimbursed for your participation in the survey. The research was reviewed and approved by the CEDU Ethics Review Committee.

The researcher, Catherine Chesterton can be contacted during office hours at catherinec@hotelschool.co.za or on 0312674700. The researcher's supervisor for this study Prof. (Norma Romm) can be contacted at norma.romm@gmail.com or rommnra@unisa.ac.za. Should you have any questions regarding the ethical aspects of the study, you can contact her. Alternatively, you can report any serious unethical behaviour at the University's Toll Free Hotline 0800 86 96 93.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate by continuing

2

to the next page. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time prior to clicking the send button.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Chesterton (Miss), Researcher

(Ethical Research Reference: 2016/10/19/49057316/22/MC)

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

2. I confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

Researcher's Name & Surname: Catherine Chesterton (05 March 2017)

(Ethical Research Reference: 2016/10/19/49057316/22/MC)

Please click next to continue. By clicking next, you are confirming your consent to participate in this survey.

Pilot Study 1: for Miss Chesterton (MEd: Adult Education)

The Influence of Social Factors in Online Learning Success

*Please complete all sections and questions of the questionnaire below. Your answers will remain anonymous and are being used for statistical purposes only.

3. Section A: Demographics

Please indicate your age, using one of the selections below:

- 18 – 20
- 21 – 22
- 23 – 24
- 25 – 26
- >26

4. Specify your gender, using the options listed below:

- Female
- Male

5. Ethnicity origin (or Race): Please specify your ethnicity:

- Black African
- Indian
- Coloured
- White
- Other

If Other (please specify):

6. Do you have any physical or mental disability that you feel affects your success as a student?

- Yes
- No

If Yes, please explain:

7. Please indicate your Nationality by choosing one of the options below:

- South African
- Other

Other (please specify):

8. Section B: Influencing Social Factors

Please answer all the questions below, by indicating in the corresponding column, the option that you best agree with as your response:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel passionate about the qualification I am studying towards.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understood the challenges I would face when I enrolled at IHS.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am happy with the level of education given to me before starting at IHS.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High school academics prepared me well for my Tertiary Education experience.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to a computer facility or laptop is very easy and cheap in cost for me and/or my parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know how to use a computer or laptop effectively to complete my online work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I have easy access to Internet facilities to complete my schoolwork.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finance is an ongoing problem and I can't always do my assignments effectively as a result.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have the means and easy access to everything I need to complete my work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We are a small, close-knit family and are always there for each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents are divorced, and this does affect me in my studies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can afford to and eat regular, healthy and nutritious meals every day.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exercising and de-stressing activities are done on a daily basis and help to clear my mind.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I work on a part-time basis to help pay towards my studies at IHS.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Any extra money that I make or receive, I save it to use for my family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that various social factors (such as culture, family status, emotional intelligence and financial position) have an influence on my success in my studies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finishing and graduating from IHS is one of my goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. My family is always there to support me with my studies and online work. State whether you agree or disagree with this statement and explain further:

10. I have my own children and/or family to support and this negatively affects my online work. State whether you agree or disagree and explain your situation further:

11. My culture/religion has a big influence in my education and affects how I do my online work. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your response further:

12. Interaction with fellow students and people from other cultural backgrounds assists me in my learning experiences. State whether you agree or disagree with this statement and explain further below:

13. How do you, as a student, define success in an academic sense? In other words, what does it mean to you?

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHICS FREQUENCY TABLES

Table 1: Frequency distribution of age

age	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
18-20	26	26.00	26	26.00
21-22	20	20.00	46	46.00
23-24	8	8.00	54	54.00
25-26	9	9.00	63	63.00
>26	37	37.00	100	100.00

Table 2: Frequency distribution of gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
female	59	61.46	59	61.46
male	37	38.54	96	100.00

Frequency Missing = 4

Table 3: Frequency distribution of ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
Black African	38	38.38	38	38.38
Indian	5	5.05	43	43.43
Coloured	7	7.07	50	50.51
White	47	47.47	97	97.98
Other	2	2.02	99	100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

Table 4: Frequency distribution of reported disabilities

disable	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
yes	5	5.00	5	5.00
no	95	95.00	100	100.00

Table 5: Frequency distribution of nationality

Nationality	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
SA	86	87.76	86	87.76
Other	12	12.24	98	100.00

Frequency Missing = 2

APPENDIX D: SUCCESS SUBSETS FREQUENCY TABLES

Perceived online success

Table 6 1: Passionate, qualification studying towards				
q1	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	2	2.00	2	2.00
disagree	1	1.00	3	3.00
undecided	4	4.00	7	7.00
agree	18	18.00	25	25.00
agree+	75	75.00	100	100.00

Table 7 2: Realistic when I enrolled at IHS				
q2	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	4	4.04	4	4.04
disagree	3	3.03	7	7.07
undecided	15	15.15	22	22.22
agree	34	34.34	56	56.57
agree+	43	43.43	99	100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

Table 8 17: Goal is to finish at IHS				
q17	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	1	1.01	1	1.01
disagree	2	2.02	3	3.03
undecided	1	1.01	4	4.04
agree	3	3.03	7	7.07
agree+	92	92.93	99	100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

Social factor, finance

Table 9 8: Finance is an ongoing problem to me				
q8	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	26	26.00	26	26.00
disagree	21	21.00	47	47.00
undecided	19	19.00	66	66.00
agree	22	22.00	88	88.00
agree+	12	12.00	100	100.00

Table 10 9: I have the means to complete my work				
q9	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	4	4.00	4	4.00
disagree	5	5.00	9	9.00
undecided	18	18.00	27	27.00
agree	37	37.00	64	64.00
agree+	36	36.00	100	100.00

Table 11 12: I can afford to daily healthy, nutritious meals				
q12	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	8	8.00	8	8.00
disagree	11	11.00	19	19.00
undecided	12	12.00	31	31.00
agree	26	26.00	57	57.00
agree+	43	43.00	100	100.00

Table 12 13: I exercise/ de-stress daily to clear my mind				
q13	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	15	15.00	15	15.00
disagree	20	20.00	35	35.00
undecided	24	24.00	59	59.00
agree	20	20.00	79	79.00
agree+	21	21.00	100	100.00

Social factor, secondary school preparation for tertiary education

Table 13 3: Happy educ. level received before IHS				
q3	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	3	3.03	3	3.03
disagree	5	5.05	8	8.08
undecided	20	20.20	28	28.28
agree	25	25.25	53	53.54
agree+	46	46.46	99	100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

Table 14 4: High school prepared me for tertiary educ.				
q4	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	3	3.03	3	3.03
disagree	6	6.06	9	9.09
undecided	21	21.21	30	30.30
agree	33	33.33	63	63.64
agree+	36	36.36	99	100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

Social factor, ease of internet access

Table 15 5: Access to computer is easy for me				
q5	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	9	9.00	9	9.00
disagree	11	11.00	20	20.00
undecided	21	21.00	41	41.00
agree	25	25.00	66	66.00
agree+	34	34.00	100	100.00

Table 16 6: I know how to use a computer effectively				
q6	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	3	3.03	3	3.03
disagree	2	2.02	5	5.05
undecided	6	6.06	11	11.11
agree	8	8.08	19	19.19
agree+	80	80.81	99	100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

Table 17 7: I have easy access to internet facilities				
q7	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	3	3.03	3	3.03
disagree	6	6.06	9	9.09
undecided	12	12.12	21	21.21
agree	24	24.24	45	45.45
agree+	54	54.55	99	100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

Family/ general social factors

Table 18 11: Parents divorced, affects my studies				
q11	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	66	66.00	66	66.00
disagree	11	11.00	77	77.00
undecided	14	14.00	91	91.00
agree	3	3.00	94	94.00
agree+	6	6.00	100	100.00

Table 19 15: I save all extra money to use for my family				
q15	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	11	11.11	11	11.11
disagree	12	12.12	23	23.23
undecided	26	26.26	49	49.49
agree	16	16.16	65	65.66
agree+	34	34.34	99	100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

Table 20 16: Various social factors affect my success at HIS				
q16	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
disagree+	7	7.07	7	7.07
disagree	13	13.13	20	20.20
undecided	17	17.17	37	37.37
agree	32	32.32	69	69.70
agree+	30	30.30	99	100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

APPENDIX E: MAIN SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Social Factors Influencing Online Learning Success

Welcome to my Survey! - by Catherine Chesterton (Researcher)

Thank you for participating in our survey. Your feedback is important. Please read carefully through and complete all the sections below. Your answers will remain anonymous and are being used for statistical purposes only.
Ethical Clearance Number: 2016/10/19/49057316/22/MC

1. "Social factors and the influence on online learning for adult learners: Investigating a Higher Education Institution in South Africa"

Dear Prospective Participant,

You are invited to participate in a survey conducted by Catherine Chesterton under the supervision of Norma Romm, a Professor in the Department of Adult Basic Education and Training, towards a M Ed (Adult Education) at the University of South Africa.

The survey you have received has been designed to study the influence of social factors on adult learners in online learning programmes. You were selected to participate in this survey because you are a student of the Online Campus of The International Hotel School, studying a course in Hospitality Management. You will not be eligible to complete the survey if you are younger than 18 years. So please do not complete it if you are not yet 18.

By completing this survey, you agree that the information you provide may be used for research purposes, including dissemination through peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings. It is anticipated that the information we gain from this survey will help us to improve online academic offerings at The International Hotel School. You are, however, under no obligation to complete the survey and you can withdraw from the study prior to submitting the survey. The survey is developed to be anonymous, meaning that we will have no way of

1

connecting the information that you provide to you personally. Consequently, you will not be able to withdraw from the study once you have clicked the send button based on the anonymous nature of the survey. If you choose to participate in this survey it will take up no more than fifteen minutes of your time. You will not benefit from your participation as an individual, however, it is envisioned that the findings of this study will assist in clarifying how to better serve our students in an academic manner.

We do not foresee that you will experience any negative consequences by completing the survey. The researcher(s) undertake to keep any information provided herein confidential, not to let it out of our possession and to report on the findings from the perspective of the participating group and not from the perspective of an individual.

The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes where after it will be permanently destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded and electronic versions will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer.

You will not be reimbursed for your participation in the survey. The research was reviewed and approved by the CEDU Ethics Review Committee.

The researcher, Catherine Chesterton can be contacted during office hours at catherinec@hotelschool.co.za or on 0312674700. The researcher's supervisor for this study Prof. (Norma Romm) can be contacted at norma.romm@gmail.com or rommnra@unisa.ac.za. Should you have any questions regarding the ethical aspects of the study, you can contact her. Alternatively, you can report any serious unethical behaviour at the University's Toll Free Hotline 0800 86 96 93.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate by continuing to the next page. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time prior to clicking the send button.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Chesterton (Miss), Researcher

(Ethical Research Reference: 2016/10/19/49057316/22/MC)

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

2. I confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

Researcher's Name & Surname: Catherine Chesterton (15 March 2017)

(Ethical Research Reference: 2016/10/19/49057316/22/MC)

Please click next to continue. By clicking next, you are confirming your consent to participate in this survey.

Section A: Demographics

3. Please indicate your age, using one of the selections below:

- 18 – 20
- 21 – 22
- 23 – 24
- 25 – 26
- >26

4. Specify your gender, using the options listed below:

- Female
- Male

5. Ethnicity origin (or Race): Please specify your ethnicity:

- Black African
- Indian
- Coloured
- White
- Other

If Other (please specify):

6. Do you have any physical or mental disability that you feel affects your success as a student?

- Yes
- No

If Yes, please explain:

7. Please indicate your Nationality by choosing one of the options below:

- South African
- Other

Other (please specify):

8. Section B: Influencing Social Factors

Please answer all the questions below, by indicating in the corresponding column, the option that you best agree with as your response:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel passionate about the qualification I am studying towards.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understood the future academically-related challenges I would face when I enrolled at IHS.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am happy with the level of education given to me before starting at IHS.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High school academics prepared me well for my Tertiary Education experience.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to a computer facility or laptop is very easy and cheap in cost for me and/or my parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know how to use a computer or laptop effectively to complete my online work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have easy access to Internet facilities to complete my schoolwork.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal issues (e.g. Finance) are ongoing problems and I can't always do my assignments effectively as a result.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have the means and easy access to everything I need to complete my work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
We are a small, close-knit family and are always there for each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents are divorced and this does affect me in my studies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can afford to and eat regular, healthy and nutritious meals every day.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exercising and de-stressing activities are done on a daily basis and help to clear my mind.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I work on a part-time basis to help pay towards my studies at IHS.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Any extra money that I make or receive, I save it to use for my family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that various social factors (such as culture, family status, emotional intelligence and financial position) have an influence on my success in my studies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finishing and graduating from IHS is one of my goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. My family is always there to support me with my studies and online work. State whether you agree or disagree with this statement and explain further:

10. I have my own children and/or family to support and this negatively affects my online work. State whether you agree or disagree and explain your situation further:

11. My culture/religion has a big influence in my education and affects how I do my online work. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your response further:

12. Interaction with fellow students and people from other cultural backgrounds assists me in my learning experiences. State whether you agree or disagree with this statement and explain further below:

13. How do you, as a student, define success in an academic sense? In other words, what does it mean to you?

APPENDIX F: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

19 October 2016

Ref : 2016/10/19/49057316/22/MC
Student: Miss CA Chesterton
Student Number : 49057316

Dear Miss Chesterton

Decision: Approved

Researcher: Miss CA Chesterton
Tel: +2731 205 5891/+2731 267 4700
Email: cachesterton@yahoo.com or catherinec@hotelschool.co.za

Supervisor: Prof. NRA Romm
College of Education
Department of ABET and Youth Development
Tel: +2782 406 0585
Email: rommnra@unisa.ac.za

Proposal: Social factors influencing the success of adult learners: Investigating a Higher Education Institution in South Africa

Qualification: M Ed in Adult Education

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted for the duration of the research.

The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee on 19 October 2016.

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

- 1) The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.*
- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the College of Education Ethics Review Committee. An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.*



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3) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.

Note:

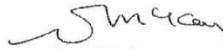
The reference number **2016/10/19/49057316/22/MC** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication [e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters] with the intended research participants, as well as with the College of Education RERC.

Kind regards,

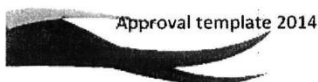


Dr M Claassens

CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
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Prof VI McKay
EXECUTIVE DEAN



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