

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY



**STUDENTS 'PERCEPTIONS OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE OF
INDEPENDENT COLLEGES IN KWAZULU- NATAL.**

By

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**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment for the requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy: Management Sciences (Business Administration)
In the Faculty of Management Sciences, the Department of Entrepreneurial
Studies and Management at the Durban University of Technology, Durban,
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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Ashna Sivai declare that the work exhibited in this thesis is based on my research and that I have not submitted this thesis to any other institution of higher education to obtain an academic qualification.

This thesis is presented by me for examination for the DPhil.

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ABSTRACT

Over the years Distance Learning (DL) programmes is assumed to have become a key to the global learning environment and key to the Education system of Africa and South Africa. DL systems have been branded as fecund drivers of education growth and sustainable development in South Africa and the world at large.

The existence of DL programmes in any economy is of paramount importance despite being bullied by the traditional classroom methods. There is growing recognition of the important role of DL programmes in the development of education systems in South Africa. They are often described as efficient and prolific job flexi hour studies, as DL has generally allowed the tertiary learners to study at leisure and at the same time contribute meaningfully to the economy as most of them are employed in different fields. Nevertheless, for a multiplicity of reasons, the pass rate of distance learners in South Africa is low, and many studies have identified a lack of aptitude on the part of the students as one of the main reasons for the low success rate.

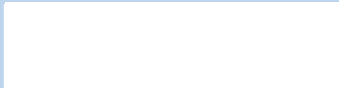
Substantive hypotheses were formulated in order to determine the validity of the propositions made in the literature review, with the objective of testing the proposed the conceptual model. The field data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 27. Statistical tools that include frequency tables, pie-charts and graphs were utilised in analysing data in chapter five. The Correlation matrix and linear regression analysis were also utilised to further analyse the strength of association between the variables.

The findings of this research study show that students at Independent Colleges have positive attitudes and are sensitive to the requirements of DL. However, a positive attitude without practical results in this research will not hold water given the fact that there are high failure rates in these Independent Colleges.

Despite their significance and contribution to education, Independent Colleges in South Africa are still faced with numerous challenges that inhibit effective delivery of DL programmes. However, it is unmistakably evident that the COVID pandemic saw DL

surpass most challenges to become the forerunner in technology driven DL teaching and learning. The use Microsoft Teams and Zoom became the household names at most public and private Educational Institutions. This study recommends that orientation programs provided to students at the College of Distance Education should be organized in such a manner that they will provide students an opportunity to have and maintain meaningful relationships with staff. Furthermore, it is recommended that the phrase 'Distance Learning' should be rephrased as 'Personalised Learning Program' as a way of contextualising the whole DL system.

Key words: distance learning, attitude, perception, stakeholder and learning

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I hereby wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the following individuals who enabled this Research document to be successfully and timeously completed.

My supervisor, Dr Bob Chazireni, for his unfailing support, guidance and dedication throughout the duration of this Research

The Chief Executive Director and the board of directors of the two Colleges used as case study

Prof Rosh Maharaj for always being an inspiring mentor and for editing this thesis

Dr Tinaye Mahohoma for his continuous assistance and patience with me

My late mum for her love support and moulding me into who I am today

Mother Durga for blessing me and giving me the divine knowledge and strength to complete this research

To my partner Lenny Jayalall, for all the love, support, patience and understanding offered
Thank you for being my life champion

To all my children who are my greatest achievements

DEDICATION

THIS RESEARCH AND QUALIFICATION IS DEDICATED TO MY MUM MRS
PREMILLA SINGH MY HUSBAND LENNY JAYALALL AND MY CHILDREN, KISHEN,
NEVLEN, ROHINI, HIMAL, AND TAMERA

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DL	Distance learning
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
CHE	Council on Higher Education
NCES	National Centre for Education Statistics
CDROM	Compact Disk-Random Operating Memory
KNUST	The Kwame Nkrumatre University of Science and Technology
IDL	Institute of Distance Learning
CEMBA/PA	Commonwealth Masters in Business Administration and Public Administration
UNISA	University of South Africa
SAIDE	South African Institute of Distance Education
SRI	Stanford Research Institute
GEC	Gedo Education Committee
AGM	Annual General Meeting
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
SRC	Students Representative Council
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ICT	Information, Communication and Technology
IT	Information technology
COD	Coefficient of Determination
NASFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme's
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authorities
DLP	Distance Learning Programmes
ADL	Administration of Distance Learning
CDL	Channel of Distance Learning
IDL	Creating the infrastructure for distance learning
PO	Spelling out the requirements (outcomes of each programme)

CD	Understanding the college drivers
EDL	Effectiveness of Distance Learning

CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Although Distance Learning (DL) has customarily been linked with American, European and Asian countries, DL has proved to be a substantial system worldwide, so attention has shifted to research analysis of principles and practice of DL for education growth. Haynes, Gregory and Diffley (2014) postulated that “DL is not merely an exaggerate approach to education and this resulted in a fast-growing body of academic work focused on commitment to DL in the education sector.”

Simonson (2014) concurred that “DL programmes have been identified as productive drivers of inclusive economic growth and educational development in South Africa and around the world.” In South Africa, it is projected that DL programmes are accountable for approximately 26% of the academic programmes and contribute approximately 6% of the significant skills pool (White, 2014). Given the critical socio-economic role played by DL programmes, it is vital that they grow and succeed.

While several studies have acknowledged the flexibility of student/lecturer contact hours as a key success factor, similar studies carried out around the world also highlighted the role of DL on the success of Independent Colleges. However, there is no record of any studies undertaken in this regard in South Africa. There is a general phenomenon in developing countries that there is very little information on DL programmes and research work on their implementation. DL in government colleges and universities is limited. Theoretical developments that originate from academics’ perspectives are virtually non-existent (Hurd & Murphy, 2014). There is a general belief that research on DL is rather meagre in developing countries (Mnkeni-Saurombe, 2015). Garrison (2011) shared the same view where he highlighted that, while articles have been calling for research on DL in developing countries, the work to date has been limited and there is a considerable amount of research needed.

For the purposes of this study, the stakeholder theory was utilised to provide an integrated and consistent theoretical framework for efficient and effective adoption and implementation of DL programmes in independent Higher Education Institutions. Therefore, this study will narrow the gap in the literature by investigating the effectiveness of DL programmes in the independent Higher Education Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal province

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

South Africa experiences socio-economic challenges, and many of these challenges are, however, in no small degree, linked to the high level of scarcity of critical skills contributed by a staggering education system. Jordano, Bárcena and Talaván (2015) pointed out that, “the pass rates for both matric and tertiary levels are very low with matric passes at 42%, and the graduation rate among undergraduate students in South Africa’s 23 public universities is 15%. The rate for master’s students is 20% and for doctoral students 12%.” According to Karodia, Shaikh and Soni (2015), the average pass rate for Independent Colleges plummeted to as low as 17.5% in 2014 compared to 24.3% in 2013. The reasons for these low rates include financial constraints where students enrol for courses but don’t have funding to see them through, lack of academic preparedness and students on DL programmes not getting enough support from their universities. The highest failure rates were in the mathematics and science programmes which covered medicine, science, technology and business studies. Pretorius (2015) was of the view that students tend to struggle with ‘anything with a mathematical component’. Students who hopped from one course to another also contribute to low graduation rates because they move to new courses without finishing the ones they had started. Students who are not well informed on the different career opportunities and those who fail to fully appreciate what studying towards their chosen field entailed, also lead to low output rates as they struggle with learning areas they’re not suited or skilled for. The pass rate fluctuates according to various factors, including the number of exam takers in a year, fulltime or DL, and the subject choices students make in a particular year. Only a very small percentage will qualify for tertiary education, and an even smaller percentage will likely go on to graduate. The growing enrolments have the unintended consequence of resulting in low pass rates, poor throughput rates and concomitantly poor uptake of graduates by the labour market

(Letseka, 2009; Pauw, Oosthuizen, & van der Westhuizen, 2008; Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2005). According to the Department of Education (DoE) (2001)'s National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE), the university pass rate of 15% is one of the lowest in the world. This was echoed by Letseka's (2010, 2009, 2008a, 2007) research at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) which probed the reasons why university students drop out without obtaining the qualification for which they are registered. Therefore, the main driving factor for this study is to research, examine and ascertain why the pass rates in the DL programmes in Independent Colleges in the KwaZulu Natal Province are so low. The Stakeholder Theory guided the study because it focuses on all the concerns that stakeholders have about the effectiveness of DL.

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 Aim of the research

This study aims to investigate the perception of students towards the effectiveness of DL programmes in Independent Higher Education Institutions: Case of College A and AAA Colleges in KwaZulu Natal Province.

1.3.2 Research objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- assess the attitude level of students towards DL programmes;
- investigate the DL approaches adopted by Higher and Tertiary Independent Colleges;
- establish causes of students' failure rate in DL programmes as compared with the classroom environment, and
- explore the linkages existing between students and college in the adoption and successful implementation of DL programmes.

1.3.3 Research questions

The research questions are:

- What are the perceptions of students towards DL programmes?
- What DL approaches are adopted by higher and tertiary Independent Colleges?

- What are the causes of students' failure rate in DL programmes as compared with the classroom environment?
- What are the barriers undermining effective DL programmes in Independent Colleges in KwaZulu Natal province?

1.4 FORMULATION OF HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses of this study are listed below:

HO1: The attitude level of students influences no DL programmes.
HA1: The attitude level of students influences DL programmes.
H02: Higher and Tertiary Independent Colleges have no particular DL approaches adopted.
HA2: Higher and Tertiary Independent Colleges have particular DL approaches adopted.
H03: There are no causes of students' failure rate in DL programmes as compared with the classroom environment.
HA3: There are causes of students' failure rate in DL programmes as compared with the classroom environment
H04: There is no linkages existing between students and college in the adoption and successful implementation of DL programmes.
HA4: There is linkages existing between students and college in the adoption and successful implementation of DL programmes

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

According to Jamali, Lund-Thomsen and Jeppesen (2015), in this globalised education setup, institutions are generally operating under immense pressure as societies and the governments have various and progressively burdensome expectations. Previously, little was expected for the business to offer in terms of advanced learning methods (the concept has developed with time). The world is increasingly getting complicated as tremendous fast-growing changes are experienced in such areas as ICT, marketing, supply chain, ever-changing employment opportunities etc. Governments play a critical role in creating sustainability for colleges and universities through designing feasible

policies and legislation that make it easy for institutions to operate and realise meaningful growth. Research as cited below shows that there is much literature lying around largely discussing students' pass rates, and ICT projects by government colleges. However, to this end, besides their immense contribution to the education system in South Africa, Independent Colleges were underrated and overlooked with respect to DL programmes. Fisher and Scott (2011) argued that South Africa's higher education can at best be described as "low-participation, high attrition system". According to Berg and Huang (2004 cited in Letseka, Cosser, Breier, & Visser,.2010) completion rates in distance education have been investigated and vigorously debated over the last seven decades. There is a general misconception that researches on DL for Independent Colleges have been undermined by the assumption that Independent Colleges have little or no opportunities to successfully implement DL programmes since state-owned colleges bulldoze their way into the limelight and exploit the benefits thereof.

However, Boon and Pagliano (2014) argued that Independent Colleges have gained the reputation of being less capable of fulfilling administration demands as compared to government universities. While the writers concede that the magnitude of resource investments or contributions by Independent Colleges may be small, and the visibility of their social and academic actions less conspicuous when compared to government colleges, they maintained that an enlightened view of DL programmes suggests that Independent Colleges academic and social actions are only limited by the imagination of the college owners.

In line with the above, this study shall try to answer questions such as: what are the perceptions of students towards DL programmes, what is the role of students to make sure the college achieves an effective DL programme and what can motivate Independent Colleges distance learners to excel in their studies. The purpose of this study then is to address such questions by investigating the perception of students towards the effectiveness of Higher Education Colleges' DL programmes in KwaZulu Natal province.

Therefore, considering the limited research conducted on Independent Colleges DL programmes as compared to government colleges, this research study will provide an

expansive contribution to the body of knowledge on DL programmes for Higher and Tertiary Institutions in and around South Africa. It is envisaged that this study will assist in creating awareness of reliability and effectiveness of DL programmes and associated benefits, not only among the surveyed Independent Colleges but, also in academic institutions in general (government and independent). In addition, it is expected that progressively, the research findings, recommendations and the proposed model will lubricate down to the Independent Colleges and colleges in general through the Council of Higher Education (CHE).

1.6 CLARIFYING CONCEPTS

In line with this research study, there is a need to clarify two concepts, namely DL and traditional face to face classroom contact.

1.6.1 Distance Learning

According to Boon and Pagliano (2014) DL, also known as correspondence education or home study, is a form of education where there is little or no face-to-face interaction between students and their instructors. DL students usually study from home instead of attending physical classes. Attending physical classes can be called Traditional face to face or Proximate Learning. This type of learning requires that people are together in the same space (Aruna et al., 2016). However, Bhuasiri, Xaymoungkhoun, Zo, Rho, and Ciganek (2012) argued that DL is clearly a type of learning that takes place in the lounges, cafes and bars in and around campus that simply can't be found on a Facebook page. The designers of DL programmes have developed what they term a "hybrid" model that combines contact with DL to deal with this issue. In any learning situation two factors are clearly evident; the person/s and the subject matter. The subject matter may be delivered or offered virtually or in face-to-face mode, hence, DL will not replace face to face learning. This assertion is supported by the studies of Tsangarides (2014) who maintained that robots will not replace educators!

Some other features of DL include the following:

- Study material is delivered to students via post, courier, email, or the internet.
- Assessments are carried out by means of written assignments, exams, or portfolios of evidence.
- Academic support is provided to students through various channels, including telephone, post, email, and instant messaging programmes.

Luttrell, Petty and Briñol (2016) pointed out that, one of the problems with DL is that when the lesson becomes uncomfortable or annoying the student can simply dropout without minimum push or encouragement from peers. It is too easy to walk away and disengage.” However, traditional face to face or Proximate Learning is the opposite. The student has invested time, effort and money to be in the learning environment he is experiencing. Leaving the learning site is far from cost-free, and so there is more incentive to see the situation through and learn despite the discomforts or challenges. People raised in the internet age have many ways to communicate and receive messages. The technology can be liberating but can also constrain teaching, learning and social interaction (Kuruppu, Mukheibir, & Murta, 2014).

The study will focus on Hybrid DL one of the six forms of DL. Hybrid distance education is a combination of asynchronous and synchronous learning in which the students are subjected to follow the specific deadline to complete their work. Students are permitted to complete assignments on their own time and submit those assignments via the online forum. Synchronous distance education is usually less flexible and unsettles a student's life. Asynchronous distance education provides students with the freedom to work as per their own will. Students can have more interaction with other students. In Asynchronous distance education, assignments and projects are more focused because that gives more time for the students to concentrate on their work. Degree programmes like legal assistant, healthcare administration, educational media design, marketing and advertising functions well in this format (Luttrell, Petty & Briñol, 2016).

1.6.2 Traditional face to face or Proximate Learning

Face to face and DL both have their own pros and cons. The difference between the two gains clarity when asking what distance and face to face learning is. According to Briñol (2014), there are so many aspects to both but simply put, face to face learning is where you attend on-campus classes on a daily basis and have your lectures at specific times and days, and DL is where you complete your studies at your own pace and time. However, Haring, Mougenot, Ono and Watanabe (2014) argued that, “Distance and Face to face Learning are suitable ways of learning, but it is the way in which people decide to complete their studies which depend more on their personal views and personalities, some people prefer the good old way of having their textbooks and making notes where others may prefer to have all their notes and study materials accessible online and then there are those who prefer to have the best of both.”

Face to face Learning is like being in school or varsity where you have your lecturer or teacher at the front of the room, and you have breaks and classes at specific times. But DL seems to be the way of the future where one can complete assignments, test, exams and submit online without interacting with the marker (Masemola, 2014).

1.7 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is confined to Independent Colleges in KwaZulu Natal Province registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) of South Africa. Furthermore, the study will not include colleges in other provinces, since the whole research study will become too expanded and geographically tiresome to carry out a conclusive study. It is of importance to note that the study considers an institution of higher learning to be identified as a college if it offers courses that are accredited by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) and the South African Qualifications Authority. DL is a vast concept which cannot be entirely exhausted in a single research study because there are so many different forms of DL. However, for the purposes of this study, the focus is primarily directed to DL with respect to Hybrid Distance Education.

1.8 RESEARCH OUTLINE

The dissertation is divided into the following **six** chapters:

Chapter one provides an overview of the study in terms of the background to the study; the research problem; the aim and objectives of the study; the significance and scope of the study; the research methodology and design, and the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter two is a critical literature overview that examines literature from different sources for and against DL as a concept and practice by colleges. The discussion is mainly focused on the existence, adoption, implementation and practice of DL outside the borders and inside the boundaries of South Africa. The chapter also looks at the interface between DL and the success of the college. The overview shall include examining literature under the research objectives as the main themes of the study.

Chapter three examines the theoretical framework on which this study bases its concept of DL. The chapter critically examines fundamental linkages that exist between DL as a practice and the Stakeholder Theory. Progressively, it further analyses the relationship and benefits accumulated towards DL due to wide stakeholder consultations. A panoptic analysis of Stakeholder Theory; descriptive Stakeholder Theory; instrumental Stakeholder theory are discussed. Amongst other aspects of the Stakeholder Theory the following questions are examined; is Stakeholder Theory normative in nature? How are the different Stakeholder Theory approaches related; What is the value of an in-depth analysis of Stakeholder Theory? In addition, emphasis is geared towards the strengths and weaknesses of the theory, a critical approach of; the link between Stakeholder Theory and DL.

Chapter four is a detailed discussion of the research methodology adopted in this study.

The focus is on the methodology and design utilised in the study, the research approach, target population, various samples, questionnaire development, data processing and tests to ensure validity and reliability are deliberated.

Chapter five presents and interprets the results of the survey on the students at Colleges A and B in KwaZulu Natal Province. The results are discussed and contextualised in relation to the literature, and other similar surveys carried out on the same concept.

Chapter six mainly features a detailed summary of key findings of the study survey and literature review. Recommendations are provided, and a model is proposed that Independent Colleges can adopt to further their practice of DL. Finally, the chapter concludes with an outline for future areas of research.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, an introduction and overview of the study was presented. This chapter also outlined the motivation for the study. The objectives were clearly outlined. The hypotheses as formulated for the study were stated. The limitations that challenged the study in some way or the other was also discussed. Finally, the structure of the entire study was outlined chapter by chapter.

The next chapter will focus on a thorough interrogation of the subject of Distance Learning, as presented by various authors. Reference will be made to previous literature on this subject.

CHAPTER TWO

DISTANCE LEARNING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the concept Distance learning (DL) in various countries and in South Africa. The merits and demerits are presented together with a critical overview of how they have contributed to DL in KwaZulu Natal.

2.2 DL BACKGROUND

Sustainability has been the focus of law and policy-makers since the inception of the African National Congress (ANC) government in South Africa in 1994. This focus has permeated throughout sectors of society including education as a whole, and higher education systems in part. Educators see the conception of distance learning and distance education in South Africa as instrumental in increasing the number of students that can gain a tertiary education at a reduced cost. The previous political dispensation's education policy prohibited black students attending the exclusive white universities. In 2004, South Africa celebrated its 10th year of democracy yet presently the black population, which represents over 80 per cent of the overall population in South Africa, still only represents 53 per cent of students enrolled in South African universities (South African Department of Education (DoE, 2003). There is, therefore, a need to increase access to higher education resources to the majority of the population in South Africa. Distance education is envisaged as a means whereby previously disadvantaged members of society, of all ages, can enrol either directly or remotely at a tertiary education institution. In a developing country distance education is desirable for a variety of reasons. First, distance education programmes increase educational access to four commonly excluded groups, including secondary school graduates who fail to gain admission to universities, married women with household responsibilities, geographically isolated or uprooted students (e.g., refugees), and economically disadvantaged communities (Saint, 1999).

Historically, distance education can be traced back to the 1700s and the beginnings of print-based correspondence study in the USA (Nania, 1999). It is believed that correspondence education, which is the earliest version of distance education, developed in the nineteenth century in Europe (Breetzke, 2007). Throughout the course of the twenty-first century, distance education's evolution has been predetermined by technological developments such as the advent of cable and satellite television in the 1970s and 1980s, and the Internet and other web-based educational tools in the 1990s. Distance education in southern Africa is not a recent development. The University of South Africa (UNISA) began a distance learning programme in 1946, while in Botswana, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia distance education initiatives have been in use for teacher training since the 1960s (John, 1996). Over 65 institutions provide distance learning in higher education in South Africa (Daves et al., 2001) with numerous universities having opened entire study courses on the Internet, and almost all mainstream universities giving students access to examinations schedules, class schedules, notice boards and evaluation marks online, for example, Students On-Line at UNISA (<https://0-sol.unisa.ac.za.innopac.up.ac.za:443/>) and the Virtual Campus at UP (<https://www.up.ac.za/sos/app/template/Login.vm>). UNISA is recognized as the leading university in South Africa providing distance education programmes with over 150,000 students registered in 2003 (DoE, 2003). Distance learning initiatives are also rapidly increasing in South Africa with participation rates at universities increased through distance education in the order of 40 per cent per annum since 1986 and nearly one-third of full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolments at universities being declared within distance education programmes (Glennie, 2004).

While several studies have acknowledged the flexibility of student /lecturer contact hours as a key success factor, studies as cited below carried out around the world also highlighted the role of DL on the success of Independent Colleges. However, there is no record of any studies undertaken in this regard in South Africa. Garrison (2011) concurred that a phenomenon exists in developing countries where there is very little information on DL programmes and research work on their implementation. DL in government colleges and universities is limited. Theoretical developments that originate from academics' perspectives are virtually non-existent (Hurd & Murphy, 2014). Research on DL is rather

meagre in developing countries (Mnkeni-Saurombe, 2015). Garrison (2011) shared the same view where he highlighted that, while articles have been calling for research on DL in developing countries, the work to date has been limited and there is a considerable amount of research needed.

The purpose of this section is to review and analyse relevant theories surrounding the research problem. Four fields of literature were reviewed. Of significant importance is establishing and examining the implementation of DL in selected countries and determining the challenges and implementation of best practices of DL.

2.2.1 Distance Learning in general

In an effort to interrogate the topic under study, White (2014) explained that distance education is characterised by teaching and learning being brought about by media: in principle students and their teachers do not meet face to face. One or more media are used for their interaction and for communicating subject matter, for example, the printed and written word, audio and video recordings, telephone conversations, computer communication etc. Murphy et al. (2014) emphasised that DL is a set of teaching and learning strategies (or educational methods) that can be used to overcome the spatial and temporal separation between educators and students. However, it is not a single mode of delivery. It is a collection of methods for the provision of structured learning. It avoids the need for students to discover the curriculum by attending classes frequently and for long periods. Rather, it aims to create a quality learning environment using an appropriate combination of different media, tutorial support, peer group discussion, and practical sessions.

Furthermore, distance education methodologies have come into prominence during the last decades of the 20th century. The confluence of the need for continuous learning and unprecedented technological innovation in communications has pushed distance education approaches to the forefront of educational practice (Garrison, 2011).

2.2.2 History of distance education

The foundations of distance education can be traced back to the late 1800s. One of the first forms of distance education was a correspondence course study. Sir Issac Pittman founded Sir Isaac Pitman's Correspondence Colleges in England in the mid-1840s. Correspondence courses took advantage of the then-new rural free delivery of mail to deliver course material to students. Students worked independently on the course material, and interaction between faculty and students was limited to one-way communications. Within a few decades, correspondence courses were developed in Germany, Canada, Australia, the Soviet Union, Japan, and the United States (Matthews, 1999).

William Rainey Harper (1856-1906) was an early pioneer in both education and distance education in the United States. He is known for helping establish the first college-level correspondence courses by mail while serving as the first president of the University of Chicago. He implemented an extension program at the University of Chicago, creating the world's first university distance education program. Rainey was an outspoken advocate of correspondence study and predicted that someday correspondence students would far outnumber classroom students (Simonis, 2004).

Early students of distance education consisted largely of students located in rural or remote areas that did not have geographical access to educational institutions. Another major population of distance learners in the United States were members of the military. The number of correspondence courses increased significantly after World War II when many veterans hurried to complete the education they had missed while in the service" (Sherron & Boettcher, 1997).

Many early distance education courses were not affiliated with institutions of higher learning. However, some Higher Education Institutions offered correspondence courses or extension courses through the continuing education branch of the university. The University of Chicago, Iowa State and the University of Iowa were early adopters of Distance Education in the United States. The University of Iowa's current Centre for Credit

Programmes web site states, “Correspondence study courses, the oldest form of distance education, were offered by the University of Iowa beginning in 1916” (Mekki, 2017).

Early distance education courses employed First and Second-Generation communication technologies. The First-generation (the 1850s to 1960) was predominately one technology and consisted of print, radio, and television. As new media emerged such as radio and television, these new technologies were integrated into distance education delivery methods. Second generation (1960-1985) DL courses utilized multiple technologies without computers. The media used to deliver distance education within the second generation included audiocassettes, television, videocassettes, fax, and print.

The establishment of the British Open University in 1969 marked a significant development in the delivery of distance education by offering a mixed-media approach to DL technologies. Learning materials (text, audio and visuals) were sent to students by mail and supplemented by broadcast radio and television (Matthews, 1999).

Like the Open University, Walden University, founded in 1970, is a well-known and accredited, fully DL institution in the United States. The doctoral and master’s degrees offered at Walden University are in Education, Health and Human Service, Management and Psychology (Matthews, 1999).

Multiple technologies, including computers and computer networking, make up the third generation (1985-1995) technologies used for distance education delivery. In the Fourth-generation technologies, the current generation, combines previous media but also incorporates high-bandwidth computer technologies including:

- Desktop videoconferencing
- Two-way interactive real-time audio and video
- Web-based media, etc.

Each new generation of DL technologies increases opportunities for student-to-student and faculty-to-student contact and collaboration (Sherron & Boettcher, 1997).

2.2.3 Distance Learning today

The "digital revolution" is having a major impact on distance education today. Traditional universities and new dot-com companies are jumping on the distance education bandwagon, competing to develop distance education programmes that take advantage of new and improved methods of distance education delivery. The National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES) reported the following statistics on Distance Education for the 1997-98 academic years (NCES, 1999):

The number of distance education degree programmes in the US increased by 72% from the 1994-1995 survey;

About 1 out of 3 of the nation's 2 and 4-year institutions of higher education offered distance education courses

- An estimated 54,470 different distance education courses were offered, most (49,690 were college-level, credit-granting courses)
- Enrolments in distance education courses were estimated at 1,661,100
- Arthur Levine defined three basic types of colleges and universities that are emerging today (Levine, 2012):
 1. "Brick Universities" - traditional residential institutions,
 2. "Click Universities" - new, usually commercial institutions, also known as "virtual universities" and
 3. "Brick and Click Universities", a combination of traditional and virtual universities

Jones International University is an example of a virtual/click university. Jones is the first fully accredited, completely online university offering both bachelors and master's degrees. International Data Corp. predicts that the U.S. e-learning market will grow to more than \$14.7 billion by 2004.

Distance education is a "hot" topic in many educational publications and journals today. For example, in the Fall 2001 Educause Quarterly publication, three of the article titles had the words "Distance Education or DL" within the title. The titles were "Confronting Cost Issues in Distance Education, "The Death of DL?" and "Student Distress in Web-based Distance Education." There are also many organisations and conferences about

distance education. Below are some of the current national and international conferences and organisations devoted to the subject of distance education:

- Conference Organisations Tele-Learning Conference Instructional Telecommunications Council 18th Annual Conference on Distance Teaching & Learning (University of Wisconsin - Madison)
- Telecoop (Telecommunications Cooperative of Colorado) Online Learning 2001
- European Association of Distance Teaching Universities DL: The Future of Education
- Conference ALN (Asynchronous Learning Networks) 9th Annual International Distance
- Education Conference US DL Association E-Learn 2002 Socrates DL Technologies Group
- Conference on Research in Distance and Adult Learning in Asia.

The terms "Distance Education" and "DL" are slowly being abandoned because they no longer adequately describe the range of educational options and delivery methods offered today. For example, is a course delivered primarily on the Web but having three on-campus sessions during the semester a distance education course? Does it make a difference if the students live a long distance from campus or are on-campus students? Distributed, hybrid and blended education are terms often used to describe courses that meet both face-to-face and at distance criteria.

According to Modesto and Gregorioso, (2016), distance education is shifting from a peripheral activity on college campuses to the centre of many Higher Education Institutions. Based on its long history and current trends, distance education should continue to be an important and viable educational option for many students.

2.3 DL: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

DL has been adopted globally, and in developed countries, the programmes are now at the highest levels. However, in South Africa, the government came up with a DL policy framework. According to Khabbaz and Najjar (2015) from 1994, the former combined

Ministry of Education encouraged the development of distance education and related approaches to teaching and learning at all levels, envisaging the role it could play at the heart of the transformation process. For decades, the provision of distance higher education programmes has afforded access to education to students in South Africa and the wider African region for whom full-time contact education has been inappropriate, unaffordable, or inaccessible. It has, therefore, served the invaluable role of bringing higher education within reach of students who would not otherwise have been able to study at this level. In the past, it has typically done so at a significantly reduced cost both to the state and to the student. In addition, niche programmes that serve a defined national need but have limited local appeal for contact students at any one institution have been offered effectively as distance programmes.

According to Pedro, Subosa, Rivas and Valverde, (2019) Distance education globally has also been an arena of innovation in higher education, an incubator for conceptual and technological advances that have been capable of strengthening teaching and learning in South African higher education across the board.

For at least a decade, South African distance education practitioners have joined their international colleagues in pioneering education technologies for higher education as for other spheres of education and training. They are providing leadership in the research and development, design, and advocacy of curricula and materials that are specially tailored to the needs of independent students and sensitive to the circumstances of South African students.

Nambiar (2020) concurred that familiarity and ease of using offline methods and lack of requirement for online channels of teaching have been the major barriers for adoption of online channels of education. However, in the wake of current COVID-19 pandemic situation conduction of online classes at college and university level has been made mandatory by the educational boards. Covid-19 has brought out a drastic change in the educational system not only in India but rather the entire world. Universities across India as well as around the globe have moved to the virtual classes suspending physical classrooms.

2.3.1 THE STATE OF DL IN SOUTH AFRICA

Since the beginning of higher education, from the time of colonisation to the era of decolonisation, almost all South African universities have been dependent on face-to-face learning (Cuban, 1986; Mgqwashu', 2017). Jansen (2004) argued that face-to-face learning is believed to be traditional and excludes students' experiences, because it occurs in the presence of a lecturer depositing knowledge for students in a demarcated classroom, using traditional methods (lecturer-centred) and traditional resources like textbooks, chats, chalkboards and others.

However, these demarcated physical classrooms are not accessible in the case of challenges ranging from student protests to pandemic outbreaks. Face-to-face learning provides real-time contact with resources and others, takes place within a specified contact time, and provides prompt feedback to students (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Waghid, 2018). That said, e-learning is education that takes place over the Internet is alternatively called online learning, and it is an umbrella term for any learning that takes place across distance and not in a face-to-face platform (Anderson, 2016; Mpungose, 2020a).

In complicating the above debate, some studies (Liu & Long, 2014; Nikoubakht & Kiamanesh, 2019) further argued that face to-face learning is irreplaceable and is the cornerstone of every learning institution, even if the current discourse and technological revolution demand the use of e-learning. The latter studies believe that there is still a conundrum between face-to-face (person-to-person interaction in a live synchronous platform) and e-learning (self-paced learning in an asynchronous platform). As a solution to this conundrum, other scholars (Anderson, 2016; Bates, 2018) believed that blended learning which combines online and face-to-face learning is the way to go, so that students can use many ways of accessing course content based on their needs.

Without taking credit away from brilliant initiatives in this regard, Mpungose (2020) argued that although South Africa is an acknowledged pioneer in its initial deployment of correspondence education, much improvement was needed to ensure that all of the distance higher education programmes fully exploit the advantages of the model and deliver learning opportunities with the required rigour, coherence, and effective student support. The concepts of e-learning, distance education, online learning and web-based education are concepts that have been used in the literature. However, Rodrigues et al. (2019, p. 88) affirmed that both these concepts share the common feature that “they are a form of instruction that occurs between a learner and an instructor and are held at different times and/or places, using several forms of material”. As such, Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015) referred to e-learning as the use of educational technologies to enable access to learning and teaching material online. Thus, the importance of e-learning which takes place through the use of the Internet in 21st century university education is undeniable, particularly for the students of today as digital natives (Bennett et al., 2008; Prensky, 2001). Amory (2010) and Khoza (2019b) stressed that e-learning is capable of making course content available online, because of the widespread use of modern technologies such as hardware resources (computers, laptops, mobile phones and others), and software resources (learning management system, software applications, social media sites and others).

The latter studies believe that there is still a conundrum between face-to-face (person-to-person interaction in a live synchronous platform) and e-learning (self-paced learning in an asynchronous platform). As a solution to this conundrum, other scholars (Anderson, 2016; Bates, 2018; Graham, 2006) supported the belief that blended learning which combines online and face-to-face learning is the way to go, so that students can use many ways of accessing course content based on their needs

2.3.2 GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF DL IN AFRICA AND SOUTH AFRICA

Further to the critical deficiencies noted by the authors above, Rusell, Noonan, and Ekman, (2004), pointed out that, “South Africa’s Independent Colleges’ higher education system has transformed dramatically following the public institutions since 1994, providing considerably increased access to larger numbers of the previously marginalized

group. From 2003 to 2011, enrolments in Independent Colleges DL programmes rose from 178,134 to 337,779 students, an increase of 47.2%. By 2011, the proportion of black South African students in the overall independent college higher education DL system had grown to 65%, and the proportion of women had risen to 57%."

With such a huge increase, the authors, Tekale and Dalve (2012) further argued that "Growth in student numbers has not been matched by growth in the number of academics; failure rate remained higher, increasing year by year leading to a greater lament towards the DL programmes by all stakeholders."

Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, have become prominent in the discourse of the digital divide (Giebel, 2013; Penard et al., 2015). According to the International Communication Union (ITU, 2017), Africa lags behind the rest of the world with regard to key indicators of the information society, such as subscription to the internet and the quality (broadband connection at home) of internet. In 2013, the rate of internet use throughout the African continent was estimated at 16% compared with 75% in Europe, with the gap widening in recent years (Penard et al., 2015). Based on ICT Development Index (ITU, 2017), South Africa is ranked 92 in the world and third in Africa, only behind Mauritius and Seychelles (Middleton, 2013), yet, different forms of digital divide are manifest amongst different population groups. This is evident by the increasing digital gap between urban and rural areas, households, and gender differences (Broadband Commission, 2013; Dixon, 2014). Oyelaran-Oyeyinka and Lal (2005) indicated that the low rate of internet usage is often associated with the low rate of computer ownership.

The studies by Lesame (2013), Robinson (2015) and the ITU (2017) pointed to factors such as education, income and the economic development imbalances between urban and rural areas as some of the factors that hindered the full integration ICTs. The deeper dimensions of social inequalities within the South African context are highlighted by Pashapa and Rivett (2017) who found that female household headship is strongly correlated with household access to ICTs in rural areas more than urban areas. A study of 10 different universities with freely available internet access on campus (Oyedemi, 2009; 2012) established that white students rarely used internet because they had home

internet. Nevertheless, Oyedemi (2009; 2012) proposed that analyses of digital divide should move beyond between-racial groups to within group analyses, especially due to the increasing importance of technology-enhanced learning in providing inclusive and equitable educations.

The spatial diffusion of ICT coupled with the need for lifelong learning opportunities have enabled ODL to move from the margins to the mainstream of university education policy and practices (Kaliisa & Picard, 2017). The broad concept of ODL, typically encompass the expansion of student enrolments and use of ICTs to support teaching and learning (Mykhnenko, 2016). Traditionally, a typical response to an upsurge in the demand for university education is to increase the infrastructural capacity of classroom sizes and/or the number of universities (Ajadi, 2010). In the current information society, advancements in ICT have triggered the need for a paradigm shift, with many education providers embracing ODL as an innovative and cost-effective approach of delivering their pedagogical responsibilities (McPhee & Pickren, 2017) while demonstrating commitments towards effective implementation of education agenda of SDG4 (UNESCO, 2016).

Clearly, African institutions that have adopted ODL are better equipped to face the future of university education than institutions that are solely based on the traditional classroom settings (Kaliisa & Picard, 2017). The spatial diffusion of ICTs, even though slow paced (Comin et al., 2012), offered some coping capacity to adapt to the growing demand for education at the same time remaining competitive in a global educational economy (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2005; ITU, 2017). Furthermore, the flexibility and environment of DL provide long term learning opportunities to previously disadvantaged population groups, especially those who find it challenging to attend classes at a regular university campus (Enoch & Soker, 2006). Potential learners such as mature individuals and women, have opportunities to study at their own space (McPhee & Pickren, 2017; Breines et al., 2019) while the remaining were committed to their work and family responsibilities. In order to reach greater digital equity, the ODL policy on ICT needs to place importance not only on literal access and use of ICT, but also on the need to understand the local realities associated with the broad contour of digital divides. At its core, is the need to

include digital divides in geography curricula with objectives of recognising and understanding the causes and consequences of the digital divides at different spatial scales. Teaching digital divides, a form of “social resources”, is proposed by Warf (2019) as a strategy to help students appreciate the nature and seriousness of digital divide. This uncharted area is premised to encourage students of different social-economic backgrounds to appreciate the differences that ICT makes in their daily lives and the disadvantages suffered by those without access (Warf, 2019), and thus help bridge the gap between those with and those without ICT. This aspect is addressed by investigating the location of access to a computer and internet, and factors shaping the different gradation of access.

On 11 March 2020 the WHO (2020) declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and everyone was advised to avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms. Therefore, universities across the globe had to shut down. In the South African context, the President called on all universities to shut down and find ways to offer lectures online as from 18 March 2020 as a precautionary measure (DHET, 2020). This call raised questions as to the feasibility of e-learning, particularly at the School of Education in one of the universities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, because of the extent of inequalities in the South African context. Mzangwa (2019) agreed with Bunting (2006) that since 1994 much has been done in higher education to redress the inequalities of the past through higher education institutions’ policy amendments through the National Plan for Higher Education (Ministry of Education, 2001). However, these amendments have not led to benefits for the majority of previously disadvantaged black South African students in terms of access to e-learning.

In addition, the digital divide—the gap between those who have and do not have access to computers and the Internet— seems to be a huge factor limiting the feasibility of e-learning in a South African context (Van Deursen & van Dijk, 2019). These latter studies further asserted that issues such as socio-economic factors, race, social class, gender, age, geographical area and educational background determined the level of the digital divide in a university context. While access to the Internet and computers is high in developed European and American universities, African universities—particularly in the South African context—are still battling because of the intensity of the factors which led

to the digital divide (Van Deursen & van Dijk, 2019). Research shows that various programmes and policies have been developed and implemented to remedy this challenge; hence, universities provide students with free laptops and Wi-Fi (wireless network commonly allows technological devices to interface with internet) access inside the university and residences (Rodrigues et al., 2019; Schofield, 2007). However, little or no research has been done in the South African context to intervene in addressing university students' challenges (the digital divide) that hinder them from accessing e-learning from home. This study argues that e-learning, while students are at home, can never be realised in a South African university context unless the digital divide is addressed.

2.3.3 WHY DO STUDENTS NOT SUCCEED IN DL COURSES

DL happens when students are in one location, and the teacher is in another remote location. In traditional classroom education, students use textbooks, listen to lectures, and use other nearby available resources. DL changes the practice of the student coming to the teacher. It gives students and teachers more flexibility and options concerning when and how to study and teach (Van & Thi, 2021).

Technology has given DL new rank. Today, it is a normal form of education for those in full-time employment, homemakers, and for those who choose not to go to schools or universities for purposes of learning. This concept has allowed individuals to continue their education, whether it is for personal or professional satisfaction. The teacher is still able to create, design, and plan with goals and objectives (Van & Thi, 2021).

Also associated with DL is multimedia. With the use of multimedia, the learning is literally at the 'fingertips' of the teacher and the learner. The long-distance allows the multimedia, or the use of video, audio, graphics, images, animation, and text, to let the teacher relay information from one location to the learner in a completely different location. Universities and institutions equipped with distance education and technology attempt to provide for their students a completely structured education (Greer, 2021). The communication is

interactive in that the teacher receives some feedback from the student. The feedback may be immediate or delayed. This type of education, typically college level, allows students to work on their own at home or at the office and communicate with faculty and other students via e-mail, electronic forums, bulletin boards, and other forms of computer-based communication. This is an alternate process to traditional face-to-face student and faculty interaction (Ali, Gulliver, Uppal & Basir, 2021).

Several researchers have studied this phenomenon of online courses. Initially, Sideri, and Chiou (2021) found that technical problems with course delivery, lack of general support from the university, and the students' general lack of preparation contributed to this issue. They went on to make several specific recommendations: online courses need to be clearly identified as such; delivery platforms need to be made more stable, university support must be expanded, and hardware, connectivity, and software specifications need to be clearly communicated.

Second, Delima (2020) wrote that the students with higher overall grade point average, who worked in a more conducive study environment, who were older, and who were better prepared for the rigours of online learning were more likely to succeed in the online course environment. He further cited the student's inability to get the technology to work properly as a causal factor for failure in online courses. Van and Thi (2021) concluded that learners were generally unaware of the difficulties inherent in online courses, were not prepared for these difficulties, and had expectations that were contradictory to those found on the syllabus and course description.

2.3.1 CONCEPTUALISING LEARNING IN A DIGITAL AGE

The rapidly evolving technological landscape in the 21st century has meant that university lecturers "have been forced to adapt their teaching approaches without a clear roadmap for attending to students' various needs" (Kop & Hill, 2008, p. 2). As a result, connectivism is the promising initial lens through which to conceptualise learning in this digital age, because of its varying attributes from face-to-face to e-learning. Thus, Siemens and Downes (2009) saw learning as the process of crossing boundaries by creating connections or relationships between human and non-human nodes through the setting

of an interconnected network. Connectivist learning draws much from available Internet and technological resources to make an effective network that will maximise learning. As a result, connectivity required university lecturers to consider the possibilities of Internet access and other technological resources for effective learning, so that each individual student may gather and share information irrespective of challenges (the digital divide) faced. In other words, for effective e-learning to occur even if students are at home, access to the Internet and technological resources should be made available so that they may make connections amongst themselves and the lecturers, irrespective of hindrances faced.

Siemens (2005) further argued that in connectivism, students are not regarded as blank slates or passive recipients of information but are taken as active participants who can nurture, maintain, and traverse network connections to access, share and use information for learning. In order to ensure this, Siemens and Downes (2009) proposed eight principles guiding connectivist learning, as depicted in Table 1 overleaf, which according to this study are now conceptualised to form dichotomies between F2F learning and e-learning. These principles draw from basic learning frameworks (behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism) to incorporate both subject and social experiences for learning. Traditionally, learning is believed to take place when the lecturer provides a stimulus (teacher-centred activities) so that students can respond, but the rapid development and implementation of new technologies seeks learning to be individually and socially constructed by students (learner-centred activities) to maintain a diversity of ideas. This suggests that digital learning is more participatory and effective than traditional learning because it encourages lecturers to engage students in a dialogue for social construction of knowledge. Siemens and Downes (2009) further argued in principle that traditional resources such as books, chats, chalkboard and others form the core of learning, but the digital age needs them to be supplemented by modern resources like the Internet, computers, mobile phones and others for students to make connections and share information amongst themselves and others. In other words, modern resources enhance active student participation and the capacity to know more; thus, the active student has the ability to use resources provided to seek out current information from

primary and secondary resources, as compared to being a passive student (see table below).

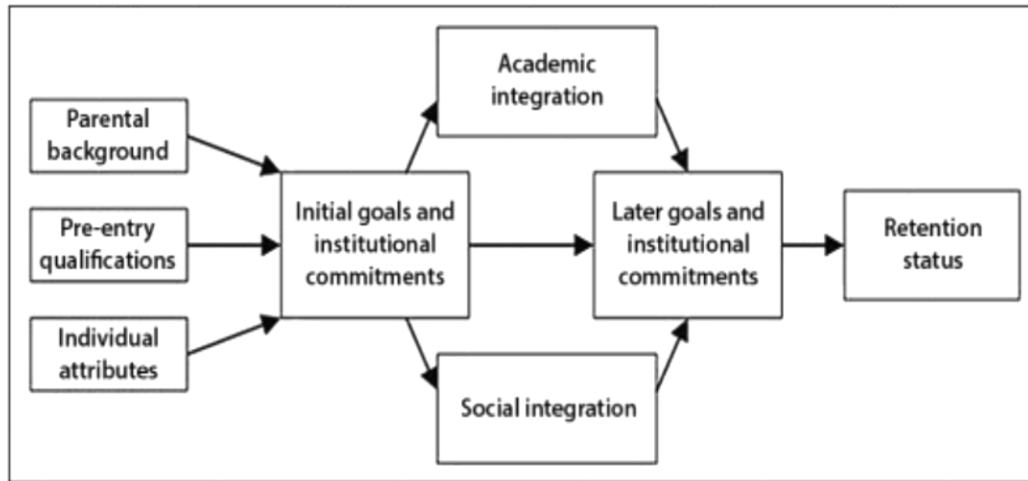
Table 1 Connectivism principles and conceptualised learning (Siemens and Downes, 2009).		
Connectivism principles	F2F learning	E-learning
1. Learning and knowledge rest in the diversity of opinions.	Teacher-centred activities	Student-centred Activities
2. Learning is a process of connecting specialised nodes or information sources.	University	Home/resident
3. Learning may reside in non-human appliances.	Traditional resources	Modern resources
4. The capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known.	Passive student	Active Student
5. Nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual learning.	Institutionalised connections	Social connections
6. The ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill.	Summative assessment	Formative assessment
7. Currency (accurate, up-to-date knowledge) is the intent of all connectivist learning activities.	Formal content	Informal content
8. Decision-making is itself a learning process. Choosing what to learn and the meaning of incoming information is seen through the lens of a shifting reality. Although there is a right answer now, it may be wrong tomorrow because of alterations in the information climate affecting the decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional rationale • Official time • Objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social rationale • Extra time • Learning outcomes

2.4 PASS RATES IN DL

Nelson Mandela once argued that: "Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a farmer can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine; that a child of a farm worker can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another". This sentiment is resonated by states and nations across the globe. In simple terms, the above quote emphasises the indispensability of education to the country, communities and individual. This view is supported by the Human Capital Theory, which argues that a causal link exists between expansion of educational partaking and economic growth (Case, Marshall, McKenna & Mogashana, 2018)

Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Theory is depicted in Figure 1. Tinto's (1993) hypothesises that the students' social background should be integrated into their academic environment for them to perform academically

Figure 1: Tinto's 1993 Student Integration Theory



Source: Tinto 1993 in Connolly (2016)

Mlachila, and Moeletsi, (2019) reported that the pass rates in South Africa's DL education system have been steadily falling for several years, according to local media. Comparisons with the pass rates for DL students at public universities have ranged from 15% to 20% for several years while, the pass rate for distance learners in Independent Colleges plummeted to as low as 12.3% in recent years.

Progressively, it is recognized that distance education students typically have competing demands for their time and progress more slowly through their studies because they do not usually carry full course loads. There are notable reasons for the undesirable failure rate in the Independent Colleges and to that end, disgruntlement by students is inevitable when it comes to pass rates; however, students learn best when the significant adults in their lives, parents, lecturers, and other family and community members work together to encourage and support them. This basic fact should be a guiding principle as we think about how colleges should be organized and how students should approach their studies. On their part, colleges should improve DL programme administration to avoid frustration

caused by severe processing delays. The meaningful involvement of parents and support from the community are essential.

In conclusion, the need for a strong partnership between Independent Colleges and students seem like common sense. In simpler times, this relationship was natural and easy to maintain. But because of the failure rate and compromised administration processes, the relationship can be likened to a seesaw. The result, in too many cases, is misunderstanding, mistrust, and a lack of respect, so that when students fail, the blame goes solely to the college and its Administration.

Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019) alluded to the fact that it is necessary to investigate the perceptions of students towards the DL programmes in Independent Colleges since the programmes play an important role in the careers of non-full-time students who cannot afford to be physically present at the learning institution.

Considerable literature recorded lack of student support as the main challenge students at ODL HEIs experience (Simpson, 2018). This is because ODL institutions have a tendency to generalise their students within the large group that participate in HE ; forgetting that this is a different group of students that is expected to learn differently from their peers at contact HEIs (The Higher Education Academy, 2015). In addition, Simpson (2013) argued that ODL institutions focus too much on the delivery of teaching materials, particularly online, and too little on motivating students to learn. It should be taken into account that ODL institutions accommodate students who could not get entry into a contact institution due to a lack of capacity, costly tuition fees or simply because they did not get enough admission, point scores (APS) (Pulker, 2016). As a result, such students may require a different approach to effective learning. Additionally, there seems to be also be a lack of support from the relevant stakeholders, other than lecturers and administrators (Mahlangu, 2018. p23), namely the government and the Department of HE.

There is substantial evidence that the world is shifting from a contact or classroom mode of tuition to ODL. However, HEIs should take it easy because not everyone is ready or

well prepared for ODL mode. Given the SA history, learners come from diverse backgrounds, with unequal access to technology. Therefore, the government should help with the development of a sound foundation of ODL pedagogy at school level by introducing an ODL curriculum. HEIs offering ODL should also strengthen their learner support strategies to embrace different learning styles among learners

2.5 PRACTICES OF DL

The number of Higher Education Institutions around the world offering distance education programmes has increased significantly in the last two decades, and most countries have seen a growth in distance education enrolments. In keeping with this expansion, there is an abundance of literature reviewing distance education trends, evolving methods of delivery, and emerging distance education technologies on the market. While this may be so, the rapid growth of technology in this field of education has outpaced research on practice, design, and models.

The earliest forms of distance education were little more than self-taught courses wherein course materials were delivered to students via postal mail and assignments were returned to instructors along the same route. Correspondence courses of this type still exist and are an option for students that do not have a reliable access to internet or telephone. Mahlangu (2018) suggested that, content can still be delivered on a CD-ROM (containing either audio files or some other computer-based media, such as PDF or PowerPoint). Given the importance of technology in modern distance education, it is important to understand the strengths, weaknesses, and potential of technologies currently in use. Many universities offer their educational provision online to learners globally, either using internal systems (e.g., virtual learning environments (VLEs) or learning management systems) or using online learning platforms owned by private companies e.g., MOODLE.

2.5.1 Print materials

In 2004, it was reported that only 24 percent of distance students had high-speed internet at home. While this number has certainly increased in the last six years, open and distance education programmes could exclude potential students if they move entirely

away from print material. Attig (2013) noted that there is potential for print material to serve as either the primary source for course instruction or as a supplementary source i.e., textbooks or other printed required readings. In this case, communication via email or other electronic means could be utilized for student questions, assignment submissions, and instructor feedback. Printed study guides have been identified as a key resource for distance education courses even if other forms of media are primarily used to deliver the content.

According to Attig (2013) there are several advantages to print media that are likely related to why it has remained, and will continue to remain, an important resource for distance education. Once printed or distributed, students are able to carry these hard copies with them anywhere they go allowing them to study at any number of locations. This can be important to distance learners since many of them choose distance education due to responsibilities that prevent them from being at the same place at the same time on a regular basis. Print materials also do not require batteries or advanced technology to support their use (other than a reading light), and by the time they reach higher education most students are accustomed to using print materials for learning.

2.5.2. Podcasts

Podcasts can be used to make digital audio and video files easily accessible to students with internet access and preferably their own computer. Learners are able to set their computers to automatically download new “episodes” in a series that is posted online. This is very easy for them to do. They simply tell their software to subscribe to the RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed and the latest episodes (or posted files) are automatically downloaded to their computer. These files can then be transferred to more portable playback technology such as a CD or an audio device, for example, an iPod or PDA (the term Podcast comes from combining iPod and broadcasting). They can also be played with any number of media programmes installed on most computers (Bates, 2018).

Furthermore, Nikoubakht and Kiamanesh (2019) noted that many students of the “Next Generation” will be fairly comfortable with the use of podcasts since they were originally

created as a feature on the popular music downloading the program, iTunes. Less technology-capable students may have trouble setting up a podcast on their machine and will likely need assistance or explicit guidance. Of course, if podcasts are incorporated as a major element of course delivery, instructors need to be certain that students have a computer (or at least have regular access to a computer)

2.5.3 Computer Technologies

As internet usage continues to increase around the world computer technologies are becoming more commonplace in the delivery of distance education (Mzangwa, 2019). Online learning does not necessarily imply DL as many traditional higher education courses now utilize internet-based course management software to aide in the learning process. Nonetheless, much research has gone into establishing best practices and guidelines for internet-based distance education courses and programmes. E-mail, online collaborations, and Web-based education have been identified as the primary computer technologies used for distance education. Obviously, only students that have reliable computer and internet access will be able to enrol in courses that utilize these technologies (Anderson, 2016).

Internet of Things (IoT) refers to small internet-connected objects that can communicate with each other (Yang, 2019). These things can work without human intervention, allowing for automation and control. IoT is used in a variety of fields and has great potential in the field of education (Bahja, 2018). For example, it can be used to monitor school buses, provide automatic lighting in classrooms to reduce power outages, and monitor and monitor a variety of activities such as stability. Develop, monitor student health using tools, track biometric availability, student position and track student progress. IoT can dramatically change the way universities operate and improve student learning across multiple disciplines and at any level. In addition, it enhances learning outcomes by providing better reading knowledge, providing better working skills, and gaining real-time, practical, and information about student performance (Serrano, 2019). Some companies are already using applications that use IoT and widespread implementation has not yet been achieved (Yang, 2019).

2.5.3.1 E-mail

Delima (2020) pointed out that e-mail messages are a relatively simple and inexpensive way for instructors and students to communicate throughout course implementation. Occasionally, designers plan an entire course around e-mail communication. This works particularly well for students that prefer asynchronous instruction and allows students that may be too shy to speak up in a traditional face-to-face course to interact with the instructor. More often, e-mail is best used to supplement print, audio, or video technologies.

McPheea and Pickren (2017) noted that in addition to conventional e-mail communication, bulletin boards and list serves can also be used to improve the quality of a distance course. Bulletin boards are online discussion groups or newsgroups where students and instructors can post messages that everyone subscribed to the group can read and reply to. Most instructors will be familiar with list serves, which can similarly be used to send an e-mail message to a list or group of students. Bulletin boards and list serves can be an effective way of facilitating interaction among students and with the instructor. E-mail is also a convenient way to distribute various files as attachments, such as PowerPoint presentations, spreadsheets, or PDF documents (McPheea & Pickren, 2017).

According to Kaliisa and Picard (2017), these types of files are themselves computer technologies, and for internet-based courses, they can be used to supplant printed materials so long as students are comfortable with their use. As mentioned, e-mail is inherently asynchronous – students do not need to be logged in at the same time to receive them – and this is one of the main benefits of e-mail technology. It can be accessed at any time, day or night. Furthermore, email accounts can be obtained for little or no cost. In most cases, the only cost of an email account is the cost of an internet connection. Of course, the requirement of an internet connection is also the main disadvantage of e-mail software. Students will need to learn the use of email software which includes knowing how to access and download attachments. Kaliisa et al. (2017) noted that prior to involving students in e-mail instruction, the instructor must ensure they have all the hardware, software, and knowledge to make the communication successful.

2.5.3.2 Online Collaboration: Internet Chat and Conferencing

Though email is asynchronous, as most educators are aware, there are synchronous computer technologies that can be utilized for distance education courses. These include online chat, shared whiteboards, and videoconferences. Online chat, also called instant messaging, can be between two people, for example, instructor and student, or numerous people via a chat room. As each person types and enters a message, the information is transmitted instantaneously to other individuals included in the chat session. Instant messaging allows for real-time communication. Loose and Remaud (2013) agreed that instructors could utilize this technology to establish virtual office hours when they will be available to answer student questions or engage subjects in an online course discussion. Since chat is internet-based technology, students and instructors need not be concerned with phone charges for this form of communication. Chats are useful for communicating across large distances with students that have internet access (Middleton, 2013).

A shared whiteboard is a form of internet collaboration wherein two or more people connected to the internet at the same time can communicate through graphic images. Using drawing tools, participants are able to draw arrows, circles, and other symbols in a shared space. Additionally, it is possible to paste in images or text copied from another source. Kaliisa et al. (2017) agreed that, more advanced versions of this software allow users at remote sites to view others' screens and even take control of their computer. For instance, an instructor could open an Excel file on his or her computer and display it on the screen of a remote student's computer. Both student and teacher have the ability to input data and make revisions. The main benefit of chats and whiteboards is that through their use students are able to receive immediate feedback from the instructor – something that has been historically absent in distance education. It is necessary, however, for all participants to download and install similar software and scheduling conflicts are to be expected. Chats and whiteboards combine well with all of the other technologies discussed in this section and can be used to replace more expensive forms of communication (Mpungose, 2020).

2.5.3.3 Electronic or Online Resources

The increased popularity and use of the internet have been coupled with an increasing amount of online information that students and educators alike can access to improve learning outcomes. Now, more than ever before, students can link to resources on the web that they once could only find in libraries or via expensive subscriptions. Teachers can take advantage of this situation and locate relevant Websites for students to review or task learners with searching the internet for information on a specific topic.

Growing concern for quick access to knowledge and increased desire to meet information needs of academic scholars has transformed the way in which information is stored, retrieved and disseminated. A lot has changed in recent years since the advent of modern technologies in the institution of higher learning. Meanwhile, the conventional information resources that constitute the sole repository of knowledge in the library in the recent past are being converted into electronic format. As a university programme is advancing to incorporating distance learning, the provision of electronic resources becomes a paramount factor to consider first.

According to Viswanatha and Sasireka (2016) Information Communication Technologies have helped to facilitate access to quick information through a computer terminal. The use of electronic resources for distance learning programme involves provision for and deployment of e-resources in conducting problem-solving research by the students and other users of the library.

Electronic resources simply refer to materials that contain information that can be accessed through digital or online means by the support of computer technologies. The information contained in electronic resources is not different from what is contained in printed versions except on the mode of access, storage and dissemination. Anyim (2018) defined electronic resources as contents of the information in a format that could be accessed through a computer or machine which in some cases require internet connections; this includes CD-ROMs, electronic books (ebooks), electronic journals (e-journal), electronic indexes, digital reference materials, online databases and other e-collection electronic resources available for distance learning are managed and delivered

by the institution's libraries to the users. They provide access to authoritative, reliable, accurate and timely access to information (Anyim, 2018). Distance learners depend on the provisions of the information communication technologies for access to accurate and authoritative information to bridge the physical distance divide. To maintain effective distance learning programmes, electronic resources such as computers and bandwidth are readily available for browsing the internet and downloading of files while online public access catalogue is also provided for access to the library resources (Mesagan et al., 2017).

Distance learners turn to the internet for accessing electronic resources for their learning and research activities Iyoro (2004) elaborated those electronic resources available for the distance learning programmes were mostly out-dated and the current ones were not enough to those that need them. Despite the abundance of electronic resources provided by the distance learning institutions, literature revealed they are underutilized by the users (Ubogu, 2006). This may be connected to the findings of the study conducted by Ternenge and Kashimana (2019) that attributed underutilization of electronic resources to inadequate computers; poor internet connectivity limited subscribed titles, power outages, difficulty to access and use, lack of relevant e-resources and lack of adequate assistance from the library. Electronic resources to a very large extent have helped distance learners across the world to gain easy access to huge information reservoirs; quick information; navigation with different search options; easy citations of scholarly works; uploading and updating of information; storing and disseminating information - and many other advantages such as flexibility, time, space, cost effectiveness and ease of archiving (Tekale & Dalve, 2012).

In addition, electronic resources provide accurate and timely information, especially for distance students who depend greatly on the electronic resources for information to champion their research and collaboration with other students across the globe for intellectual growth (Ukpebor, 2012). As much as what is obtainable in the conventional academic environment, electronic resources have benefitted distance learning institutions in various ways but not limited to reduction of pressure on academic libraries for physical storage space for books and journals as it provides unlimited access to digital information

for users (Lefuma, 2007). In the contemporary era, the focus of users has shifted from traditional library resources to electronic resources as it dominates research activities of distance learners due its easy-to-use potentials (Hadagali et al., 2012). Academic universities have recently adopted an electronic library section that manages electronic resources and plays a supporting role for effective teaching, learning and research activities of the distance learners (Zhang & Liu, 2011).

From the foregoing, it suffices to say that electronic resources are invaluable research tools for students in distance learning institutions. Despite the benefits that associate with electronic resources' usage, a number of challenges are also involved in the process. Challenges may differ from one individual's experience to another. As discovered from research, lack of information communication technologies' infrastructure, epileptic power supply or low electric current to power electronic resources are among the threats to effective use of electronic resources in Nigeria (Uzoagba, 2019). The challenges to the effective use of electronic resources faced by distance learners are endless. Nevertheless, other factors that hinder effective use of electronic resources in Nigeria were discovered in literature including; lack of adequate bandwidth size (for effective internet connectivity) and inadequate software (Ukoha, 2011); lack of human capacity in managing the ICT facilities in the libraries, inadequate library staff, inadequacy in finance or power supply, system law, ICT literacy and ICTs infrastructure (Abiolu & Okere, 2009).

2.6 ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS TOWARDS DL

2.6.1 United States of America: Midwestern University

There has been an unquestionable upsurge in distance education in recent years. Between 2002 and 2011, the percentage of college students who were enrolled in at least one online course increased from 9.6% to 32% (Shea, Joaquin, & Wang, 2016). Given this, it is extremely important to understand the experience of online courses from students' perspectives. The ultimate beneficiaries of online education are, after all, the students. In one study students were asked to describe one aspect of a very successful online class, and conversely, one aspect of a very unsuccessful online class they had experienced. A total of 748 of the survey respondents provided narrative commentaries.

According to Shea et al. (2016), positive student feedback related to technology usage where respondents described several technological features of the online courses, they felt were particularly helpful. These included: tutorials, audio and video lectures, and tools that addressed multiple learning styles.

Whiteside, Garrett and Swan (2017) gathered that positive student feedback related to the instructor was in three specific areas: organisation, promptness, and communication. A professor's organisational skills were the most important aspect of a successful online class. Wittenbols (2016) alluded that students appreciated having their assignments graded in a timely fashion, so that they could always gauge how one was doing in the class strongly emphasizing that regular communication from the professor was very crucial.

However, according to Sorva (2013) some negative student feedback related to technology were definite criticisms of certain technical aspects of online courses. The criticisms were around "mechanisms" of the class, such as difficulty opening files, compatibility issues with Macs, inconsistencies with various browsers, and confusion with the course management system. Allen and Seaman (2013) explained that another criticism, however, was focused on how the technology was utilized by the instructor which was disapproved by the students (Tu & McIsaac, 2002).

2.6.1.1 Student attitudes towards DL findings

Price, Arthur, and Pauli (2016) found that learner computer anxiety was a critical factor in predicting satisfaction with e-learning. In addition, Pineda-Corcho and Moreno-Cadavid (2017) used a biographical narrative approach to explore students' accounts of online learning. Analysis of the student narratives revealed that students' ability to control technology, along with students' educational experiences and expectations of managing their learning spaces" played a role in students' engagement with online learning. Moreover, the utilisation of asynchronous communication tools, such as discussion boards, also points to the dissimilarities in student preferences which may be based on internal, individual differences. Preisman (2014) found that while 68% of students he

surveyed were comfortable using discussion boards, 32% were “not sure” or “uneasy” about them. In addition, according to Price et al. (2016), 70% of the same surveyed students felt more comfortable participating in an online discussion forum compared to an in-class discussion.

These differences in attitudes about discussion boards could be attributed to personality differences, where an introverted student may enjoy the feeling of anonymity created by participating in an online discussion compared to a face-to-face discussion. Other studies have investigated satisfaction with the quality of online interactions (Pelz, 2004). Students had a negative attitude towards online learning when there was inadequate personal interaction. Some students noted the lack of presence of a teacher to be a disadvantage. Additionally, Molinillo, Aguilar-Illescas, Anaya-Sánchez, and Vallespín-Arán (2018) also found that students valued and benefitted from interaction with instructors and peers. Molinillo et al. (2018) proposed an online or on-campus study group as a means to avoid feelings of isolation and discomfort with a lack of interaction.

These effects related to interpersonal interaction could be due to personality differences. For example, an extroverted student may thrive on classroom interaction, feeling it is necessary to their understanding of the material. In particular, this extroverted student may value the direct interaction with a teacher. Continuing with the exploration of internal factors affecting students' attitudes towards DL, it would appear that one's self-discipline and drive will also play a role. Pelz (2004) postulated that a student lacking motivation may find it difficult to stay focused while completing online assignments. Blau, Porat, and Barak (2019) findings supported this belief as students who are interested in the material or identified with it demonstrated higher levels of motivation. Additionally, disinterest and distraction could explain some students' negative attitudes. Carretero, Vuorikari and Punie (2017) attributed distraction to the “wealth of information” offered by online learning. These authors acknowledged that this problem was not as prevalent during the age of CD-ROM-based online learning. Currently, while participating in online course work, the wonders of the internet and the potential for distraction are only a click away.

2.6.2 DL in the United Kingdom

Online Distance Education (ODE) is an increasingly common mode of learning within higher education (HE) (Qayyum & Zawacki-Richter, 2018). Recent figures showed that 378,000 students currently studying UK HE courses via ODE, of which 108,000 are postgraduate (Midgley, 2019). There are 586,000 postgraduate students at UK universities in total (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019), thus 18% (almost one fifth) of graduate students are Online Distance Learners (ODLs).

Distance Education (DE) is not a new phenomenon; people have been studying while geographically separate from the learning institution as far back as the 19th century (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). However, the upsurge in recent years is undoubtedly due to the ubiquity of internet connected devices. New technologies, which provide multiple opportunities for and channels of communication, both real-time and asynchronous, mean the distance learners (DL) can now interact directly with their instructors and co-learners. This has been a game-changer in the DE experience (Bates, 2005; Dabbagh, 2005). Where once, distance, or correspondence, education meant individual, independent study, the only contact being with a tutor in the form of posted written assignments and feedback (Holmberg, 1995), now DE potentially features virtual classrooms, rapid feedback on progress, and even collaborative group work tasks.

From an institutional perspective, ODE is a shrewd business move (Anderson & Zawacki-Richter, 2014), it is often seen as an efficient and cost-effective means of reaching more students (Panigrahi, Srivastava & Sharma, 2018), expanding reputation, and remaining competitive and ahead of the global technological game. From the learner perspective, ODE is affordable, convenient, and responsive (Naidu, 2017). It is often described as ‘anytime, anywhere’ learning (Selwyn, 2011); it enables one to access higher education without the expense or inconvenience of relocating or having to give up work. It is important to note at this point, however, that these discourses of convenience and accessibility do not consistently represent the realities of ODLs (Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015).

Liu, Liu, and Zhou (2018) quoted that any kind of learning, can serve different ends, DL appears mainly to serve those who cannot or do not want to make use of classroom

teaching. Demanding professional commitments and family responsibilities of many adults often make attending a conventional, full-time, face-to-face course with fixed timetables a rather unrealistic proposition, and the reasons why adults choose distance education are primarily "the convenience, flexibility and adaptability of this mode of education to suit individual students' needs" (Holmberg, 1989). All learning requires a degree of motivation, self-discipline, and independence on behalf of the learner, but these aspects are arguably more pertinent in the case of DL, where the student is largely self-directed and unsupervised, and expected to be more autonomous. Attardi, Barbeau and Rogers (2018) stated that maturity, high motivation levels, and self-discipline have been shown to be necessary characteristics of successful, satisfied students. Distance study is a self-study method, but the student is not alone. Botton and Gregory (2015) described it as a kind of conversation in the form of two-way traffic which occurred through the written or otherwise mediated interaction between the students and the tutors and others belonging to the supporting institution.

Botton et al. (2015) further stated that conversation is brought about by the presentation of the study matter if this is characterised by a personal approach and causes the students to discuss the contents with themselves. Such a development can be brought about by a readable style of presentation. The issue of course materials is directly relevant to the current study, and the dialogic approach to materials is examined in more detail later in the research. Buck (2016) believed that the success of DL courses "cannot be assumed". Sharp cut-off dates for tutor-marked assignments, the rigidity of learning content and materials, and inflexible learning structures are all common in distance education systems (Dron, 2005), and are factors which clearly will not meet the needs of all learners. Glazier (2016) summarised the most significant weaknesses of DL as: (a) its inability to offer dialogue in the way that conventional face-to-face education does; (b) the inflexibility of its content and study method; and (c) the isolation and individualisation of the student.

Garrison (2011) stated that, "the majority of distance education is concerned with meeting the educational needs of adults", while Holmberg (1995) stated that "distance teaching will support student motivation, promote learning pleasure and effectiveness if offer in a

way to make the study relevant to the individual learner and his/her needs". Defining and categorising adult learners' needs is, though, a difficult task.

DL offers students an opportunity to study and learn in a peer-free environment, when and if they prefer it. while also providing support during the learning experience in terms of guidance, planning, and feedback that is necessary for continued student motivation and completion of the course (Pappas, 2019). A review of the literature demonstrated that while there is no significant difference in achievement levels between distant and traditional learners, there is "considerable variance in student attitudes and satisfaction levels" (Peters, 2014). One of the most common problems of many DL courses is the limitation of dialogue between teachers and learners, and amongst learners themselves. As Holmberg (1995) stated, "Students need dialogue with their teachers and with other students in order to consolidate and check on their own learning". Perveen (2016) supported this view, finding student-instructor dialogue an important factor in DL. Furthermore, dialogue allows students to assess their learning and develop a sense of community with other students (a measure that can counter the effects of isolation often experienced by distance learners), and also allows the institution to assess its teaching objectives and see if they are being fulfilled.

Peters (2014) maintained that there was little empirical evidence to show that mediated instruction suffered in comparison to face-to-face instruction, stating that the instructional medium doesn't appear to make any important difference in student achievement, attitudes and retention. They concluded that the media itself is not as important to instruction as other variables, such as learner characteristics, motivation, and instructional alternatives. It is these variables, that are more pertinent to the process of learning and teaching at a distance, and thus to the ability of distance education to meet the needs of learners. The need for face-to-face meetings is undoubtedly important to the distance learner, although it is perhaps more a matter of the degree of interactivity than whether or not any interactivity takes place. As Perveen (2016) argued in his assessment of interactivity in DL, that adult learners may actually perform better in situations where they control not only where but when learning occurred and concluded that as long as students have some form of interaction with tutors, then high-quality learning can still

occur. One way to counterbalance the absence of dialogue in DL is to institute sufficient student support services. Perveen (2016) categorised student support as advice/counselling, tutoring (individually or in groups), the learning of study skills, peer group support, feedback concerning assessment and progress, language support and administrative problem-solving, where the aim is to support students' individual learning whether alone or in groups. These categories are still prevalent and significant in today's DL programmes.

Student support is a key issue in the provision of DL, and three services repeatedly appear in the literature: timely student feedback, on-site support, and access to library materials. The response of tutors and "turn-around time" for comments and grading is cited again and again as being a critical component of student support, with students who receive timely feedback on assignments responding more positively to the course than those who have to wait for feedback. The support provided by on-site facilitators has also been consistently cited as crucial to the effectiveness of a distance education programme. Pappas (2019) too, found that the effective utilisation of local tutors (or on-site facilitators) increases student satisfaction with courses.

Finally, access to library materials is a key component of distance education. For many learners, access to library resources may well be limited. This creates obvious problems for the distance learner. An evaluation of learner support conducted by Dickerson (2021) noted that Library resources are very important to distance students as the majority of them indicated that success in the course required access to library materials. The issue of student support has received renewed interest recently, with Simonis (2004) exploring this aspect of DL in some detail. In considering student support services, any institution that offers courses through DL must address the question of who their learners are and what their needs are. The institution must then determine how those needs can be met with regard to constraints of costs, technologies, and geography. It appears that media such as correspondence, face-to-face, telephone and electronic communications provide a variety of means which differ widely in their effectiveness (for individuals and groups) and in ways that appear to be only partially understood (Mekki, 2017), while Nambiar

(2020) stated that the tutor is "the main source of support for the student beyond the course materials".

Clearly, then, the course materials and the tutors are of significant importance in distance education, and resources that contribute greatly to meeting the needs of learners. With reference to the programme conducted by a British university, it is possible to identify five areas of support provision: local tutors who provided assignment feedback and arranged study groups and individual meetings; week-long intensive study schools (ISS's) which took place biannually in Hong Kong; the facility to communicate with the course tutors in the UK via e-mail; feedback from the tutors in the UK; and access to a library of relevant texts located at the British Council (BC), the institution which mediated between the British university and the Hong Kong-based students (Pappas, 2019).

This would appear to be a comprehensive support structure, but any structure needs to be implemented and monitored efficiently if it is to achieve its aims. It seems that students were satisfied with the course materials, the choice of modules, assignment feedback, and length of time given to complete assignments. In these areas, it seems fair to say that most students' needs were being largely met. An area of significant concern, however, was that of student support. Although this is an issue that inherently involves a high degree of subjectivity, this is an area worthy of further investigation since it relates directly to students' needs, and it would appear that students' needs are not being met in this aspect. Furthermore, as Giebel (2013) stated in her review of research literature regarding learner support, "multiple interacting factors (personal, environmental and course variables) are at work in determining learner success," although some "institutional interventions can assist if appropriately targeted".

Many people clearly appreciate the provision of local tutors, but there were questions about the quality of the assistance they provided in practice. As a way of more effectively utilising this valuable resource, it would be worthwhile for the course organisers and administrators to implement closer screening and monitoring of local tutors. The issue of access to library materials is often cited by researchers as a key component in distance education (Anyim, 2018). This is germane to the current programme, and since a number of students do not have access to reference material (and have expressed frustration at

not being able to access the material they need to complete their work), it is prudent to provide students with the ability to access key resource material, either by establishing a relationship for this purpose with a local university or by providing access to an on-line data bank.

Tekale and Dalve (2012) stressed that academic institutions have a responsibility to provide off-campus students with resources and facilities equivalent to their on-campus peers. Since the Internet has rapidly become a source of daily communications, education via the Internet is now more widely used. Many educational institutions actively use the Internet to deliver completely on-line programmes. In America, for example, the National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES, 1999) reported that "58% of two-year and four-year postsecondary education institutions offering distance education in the 1997-98 academic year used asynchronous Internet instruction (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and Web-based courses). Of these, 82% planned to start using or to increase their use of asynchronous Internet instruction as a primary mode of delivery in the next three years". According to Jabbar, Analoui, Kong and Mirza (2018) the online list of UK universities offering full Web-based courses is constantly growing, too. Given this international trend, the British University offering the current MEd programme usefully considered a similar course of action as a way of counteracting student frustration over lack of access to resource materials.

In these research studies (Pinzone, Appleton & Reschly, 2019) a number of respondents were unhappy with certain administrative aspects of the course in terms of arrangement of local tutors, feedback on assignments, and communication between the university and the British Council. It would appear that administrative procedures could be better coordinated to allow for quicker and more efficient communication between the students and the university, and the university and the British Council. This view concurred with Roger's (2020) study which found that speeding up communication and instituting quick response and turn-around times helped to reduce the frustration felt by students. An earlier study by Snowden and Daniel (1988) identified that "distance education systems, because of the inherent complexity and interdependence of their parts required 'tighter' management than conventional educational institutions". This belief was echoed by

Dickerson (2021) who stated that the key to successful management of distance education lies in planning, organisation, leadership and control. The issue of the UK-based tutors' individual concern for students was mentioned by a number of respondents as an area that could be improved, with one stating that the sending of "a bimonthly or quarterly email" to individual students might be a good idea "a personal one, with reference to your own time plan, modules, progress." This suggestion related to Rogers (2020) claim that isolation, anxiety, and failure to control the pace of work are particular problems with learners who have not undertaken a substantial piece of learning for some time. The comments are, therefore, important considerations, and more personal support and concern for individual students' welfare would help offset the sense of isolation that distance learners often feel (Holmberg, 1989) and contribute to learners' motivation, interest, and satisfaction (Willen, 2017).

Although there is a school of thought in DL that holds to treating the students as "potentially independent people to whom it is left not only to decide but expressly to state, if and to what extent they want to support or advice" (Holmberg, 1986) it would seem that the views of students who were investigated on the programme were opposing, which posits interference on the part of the institution to prevent failure and promote success as a social responsibility of the institution. The communication element is rightly considered a cornerstone in DL and, Lenka and Ravikant (2012) emphasized that learner-institution contact, such as regular contact with support staff, appeared to have a positive effect on learner performance and persistence rates and must, therefore, be encouraged.

The digital transformation of education is strongest in South Korea, the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. Countries like India and South Africa are moving in this direction at a slower pace, but definitely have increased digitization of educational processes. In China and Russia, there are concerted efforts by governments and higher education institutions to digitize more educational functions, including teaching. In all countries studied, the teaching function is not immune to the digitization of education. Teaching is increasingly digitized both for on-campus and off-campus students. The growth of distance education is another instantiation of digital processes and practices in education, manifest in the growth of online education. The growth and

acceptance of distance education seems to be a symptom of this digital transformation of all education.

2.6.3 Attitude towards DL among graduate students in India

India is a developing country with having the second largest population of the world. Due to lack of resources and limitations of the formal system of education, policymakers attracted towards nonconventional modes of education for providing non-residential studies like correspondence courses (Willen, 2017). The DL mode, there is flexibility in all aspects from admission to the examination. Lenka and Ravikant (2012) studied the attitude and perception of the learners towards DL. In the study, with the help of self-made tools and a sample of 150 graduate distance learners, it was revealed that gender plays no important role to develop positive attitudes and perceptions. It means, both male and female learners have similar attitudes towards DL and biographical factors i.e., locality, stream, and caste play a vital role to develop positive attitudes towards DL.

Student attitudes towards e-learning have been identified as critical to the success of e-learning (Zhang & Bhattacharyya, 2008). Bhuasiri, Xaymoungkhoun, Zo, Rho and Ciganek (2012) found that in developing countries the most significant factors were related to increasing technology awareness and improving attitude toward e-learning, enhancing basic technology knowledge and skills, improving learning content, requiring computer training, motivating users to utilise eLearning systems, and requiring high levels of support from the university. In addition, attributes used to assess the attitudes towards ICT of students, teachers and principals have been categorised in two groups: demographics (age and gender) and computer experience (training, years of using computer, ownership of computer, access to a computer, intensity of computer use) (Jimoyiannis & Komis, 2017; Papaioannou & Charalambous, 2011).

Student levels of access to technologies represent an initial factor that would shape their attitudes towards e-learning, and their willingness to use it; the availability of reliable ICTs and the convenience of accessing these technologies reflect student attitudes toward e-learning (Willen, 2017). Access to the necessary ICT infrastructure is one of the most important issues that come into focus in the assessment of how developing countries

have progressed in e-learning. The traditional means of learning, which are paper-based, are still the most commonly used in contrast to the web-based and online learning methods. According to Khan and Gulati (2021) the developing nations find the traditional means of learning more reliable and sustainable.

However, Omidinia, Masrom and Selamat (2011) reported that the use of ICT technology for learning was widely accepted in Iran's educational institutions. The authors, however, noted that obtaining the necessary e-learning content and providing the necessary infrastructure was still a major challenge. Tekinarslan (2018) examined computer anxiety and accessibility of personal computers between two groups of Dutch and Turkish students. The results of the study showed that the Dutch students had lower computer anxiety levels and higher levels of technology use than the Turkish students. This was explained by the relatively high levels of computer access and computer usage of the Dutch participants. Thus, in general, accessibility of technology tends to affect student and instructor attitudes and competencies and correlates positively with the level of technology use. Sweeney and Geer (2010) found that limited access to ICT constrains student capabilities, attitudes and experiences; Hussain (2007) concurred. According to Asad, Hussain, Wadho Khan and Churi (2020), students selected for a study on e-learning in Pakistan indicated that they faced many difficulties in accessing ICT facilities and this limited their ability to use technologies. A large number of students had to rely on a very limited number of cafes to access the Internet for their learning needs. There has been increased use of computing devices in educational institutions in developing countries with respect to Technology Use and Skills over the last few decades (Adedokun-Shittu & Shittu, 2015).

The use of the web, computer, and mobile-based technologies has drawn a lot of interest among students, who use them for educational purposes as well as for social networking. This at least implies a degree of familiarity with these technologies and the skills for using them (Adedokun-Shittu, et al., 2015). In Pakistan, the students' ability to use ICTs was significantly hindered by the low level of technology access. Many research studies identified correlations between positive computer experience and positive attitudes, competence and comfort with computers (Papaioannou & Charalambous, 2011) and an

inverse relationship between computer experience and computer anxiety other studies disagreed with these findings and claimed that computer experience did not play a significant role in reducing computer anxiety or developing positive computer attitudes (Rhema & Miliszewska, 2014).

Student satisfaction with e-learning environments was examined in several studies (Ivanaj, Nganmini & Antoine, 2019). Positive learning climates and performance expectations affect student satisfaction, and performance expectations provide the greatest contribution (total effect) to learning satisfaction. Users (students and instructors) will hold positive attitudes towards e-learning if they recognise that it would help them improve their learning and teaching effectiveness and efficiency Lin and Chen (2017) stated that understanding student attitudes can help expand e-learning system functions and meet student needs, which should further increase the impact of learning and enhance satisfaction with the learning process. Zhang and Bhattacharyya, (2008) found that the vast majority of students who were satisfied with an e-learning environment held positive beliefs and attitudes towards it; perceived satisfaction was identified as one of four factors that helped explain 83.8% of the variance of student attitude.

Zhang et al. (2018) demonstrated that there was a statistically significant correlation between student attitudes toward technology and their levels of access to various technologies; unsurprisingly, students who had better access to technology and the Internet generated stronger positive attitudes. According to the literature, the level of access to technology and its reliability influence student motivation.

2.6.4 Perceptions of students towards use of DL: Ghana

Distance learning has become a recognized method for delivering educational content in institutions of higher education in Ghana. According to Allen and Seaman (2007), improving students' access to higher education has been cited as a major reason for offering DL courses and programmes. Distance learning involves a student-centred approach in which the instructor takes the role of the facilitator and students engage in peer learning (Maor, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2005). The literature on education cites several

examples of research that have been conducted on DL (Hagel & Shaw, 2006). There is emphasis in the literature on the importance of research for improving students' DL experiences (White, 2005). According to Sahin and Shelley (2008) students' needs and perceptions should be central in the design, development and delivery of distance education courses. Overall, the literature suggested that there is a need to understand better the variables that affect student enjoyment of DL courses. This may lead to a greater understanding of the benefits and limitations of learning by distance and could be useful to programmes considering the implementation of DL initiatives and or students planning to enrol in DL.

From the early 1990s, DL began to receive the attention of the Government of Ghana (Spronk, 1999) to address the excessive demand for tertiary education in the country. DL has since emerged as a tool for widening access to higher education for personnel in employment and those who could not be accommodated in the conventional tertiary education process. The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Ghana, provides tertiary education in both conventional university classroom setting and DL modes. The University offers its DL programmes through the Institute of DL (IDL) (Levin & Wadmany, 2006; White, 2005). Among the 15 programmes offered by the IDL is the Commonwealth Masters in Business Administration and Public Administration (CEMBA/PA) whose students have had prior experience in a traditional classroom learning mode during their undergraduate studies. The mode of delivery of the CEMBA/PA program is predominantly by print medium and is supplemented by the electronic medium (virtual classroom and telephony) and occasional face-to-face tutorials. The program provides access to higher education for students who cannot attend traditional on-campus courses due to employment and family responsibilities (Allen & Seaman, 2007).

With DL opportunities increasing in tertiary institutions in Ghana, there is need to understand students' perceptions regarding DL in order to implement successful programmes. Sahin and Shelley (2008) contended that it is important for researchers and social scientists to explore the relationship between student satisfaction and DL. Accordingly, the study sought to assess student's perceptions about distance teaching

and learning to determine their level of satisfaction in DL mode compared to their experiences in conventional university classroom settings. With DL opportunities growing at a high rate in many tertiary institutions, students expect that prompt feedback on assignments is integrated in the instructional design process of DL courses. The provision of study facilities (computers, internet and supplementary reading materials and reading rooms) and well written instructional materials (self-explanatory, full of local examples) in the distance mode will go a long way to enhance students learning by distance (Chambers, 2006).

2.6.5 Students' perceptions and readiness towards mobile learning in colleges of education: A Nigerian perspective

According to Sahin and Shelley (2008), access to quality education is becoming a huge challenge in Nigeria, in view of the exponential growth in its population, coupled with ethno-religious crises and other acts of terrorism. A large chunk of the country's population about 26% have no access to education, as existing teaching and learning facilities have become inadequate. Some interventions such as eLearning and mobile learning (m-learning) have been explored in other levels of education, particularly universities. In order to explore the viability of m-learning to address the inadequacies of facilities and poor access to quality education, several researchers examined the perceptions of students towards m-learning (Chambers, 2006; Hagel & Shaw, 2006; Liao, 2006; Muilenburg & Berge, 2005).

Maor (2003) and Mitchell (2005) argued that although m-learning has not yet been implemented in colleges of education in Nigeria, results from several studies showed that students are optimistic that it will be useful to them, and have, therefore, expressed their readiness to adopt it. The mobile learning conditions seem to be conducive to m-learning. For this reason, the students are willing to adopt m-learning if introduced in the institutions.

2.6.6 Students' perceptions and readiness towards mobile learning in in South Africa

As the move towards technology-enabled delivery of distance education in South Africa gains momentum, distance learners and educators are facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The challenges involve the large technology learning curve required by all parties, as well as the sheer difficulty of providing access to computers and Internet connections with sufficient bandwidth. The opportunities, however, are limited only by our imaginations. Individuals and organisations around the country are exploring innovative ways of using emerging technologies to enhance the learning experience for their learners. The success stories are those in which technology has been used to engage learners in conversation about the learning, rather than simply to 'deliver' the content more efficiently to the learners (Sahin & Shelley, 2008).

According to Maor (2003) and Mitchell (2005) it is widely acknowledged that the face of education is changing and for the most part has already changed. We are generally just very slow to accept it and change with it. During the past 70 to 80 years, the nation has been subjected to the so-called "broadcast" model. This model where students are bombarded with information was stimulated by the advent of radio, and further embedded with the quick uptake of television broadcasts. This was a model where very little, if any, two-way communication took place. This was also the basis of early websites and online educational portals. Lecturers are seen as the source of all knowledge and they broadcast information to the students at a specific time each day (Spronk, 1999).

The problem is that there is need to realize that this model has changed. Students are now part of the knowledge pool; they now generate knowledge just as much as they consume knowledge. On a daily basis they collaborate and create. A broadcast model will very soon no longer be an effective model for educating our learners. Studies have identified a need to make the necessary changes to our educational approach now. A collaborative system where students are not only collaborating in class while working through the content, but where they are also responsible for the creation of their content is crucial. Lecturers are responsible for the quality and the moderation of the content which these students create (Sahin & Shelley, 2008).

If these changes are not embraced and necessary adjustments not made to the methodologies of teaching, the demise of universities in the next few decades is evident. According to several authors (Chambers, 2006; Hagel & Shaw, 2006; Liao, 2006; Muilenburg & Berge, 2005), UNISA as an open and DL institution has decided to use ICT as one of its modes of teaching in addition to the traditional distance education delivery mode. An online tutoring system known as my Unisa has become a powerful tool that lecturers use to teach and most importantly communicate with the students. Though one would applaud this innovation by the university, students are not using this facility to their advantage. However, it is greatly surprising that students use unofficial online communication systems where communication is more open and freer. Several studies were conducted to ascertain the reasons for poor usage of my Unisa as an online teaching facility and also suggest possible mechanisms that will encourage the use of my Unisa by students.

Currently South Africa faces a huge challenge with the skills shortage crises and is striving to bridge the digital divide due to existing monopolies (Aixia & Wang, 2011), Education should be the key role player in addressing many of these challenges. With the Government's stance of supporting open source and eLearning initiatives, the country can only improve and develop education accessibility to the point where our education standards can be of international standards, in order to compete in the 'global' economy. Intensive Corporate Social investment in education in SA, can significantly contribute to the growth and prosperity of a country that has a market to support the upgrading of technical infrastructure, effectively bridging the digital divide, thereby making education accessible to all sectors and communities. Collaboration with Higher Education Institutions like Unisa, fosters the culture of life-long learning through using platforms such as the Sakai community, thereby giving new meaning to the word 'education' by contributing to new teaching methodologies, philosophies, and culture of SA education by taking education to the Nation, for the Nation (Sweeney & Geer, 2010).

2.6.6.1 A case study of the Promat College contact session at Jozini KwaZulu Natal

According to Sahin and Shelley (2008) SAIDE explored learning centres and existing programmes at Jozini, a village in northern KwaZulu-Natal, to further explore the challenges and implications of distance education and resource-based learning practices in rural areas. This was done as part of the Kellogg Rural Development Project, whose long-term goal is to contribute to development in rural areas through the provision of appropriate and accessible educational opportunities. As part of this investigation, SAIDE examined the operation of Promat's distance education programme at Jozini Quality Distance Education. Most Promat learners commented positively about the education provided by Promat, while as the researchers; felt that there could be an improvement in the delivery of courses (Agyei & Voogt, 2011). Tutors never taught in a manner that allowed learners to process concepts in the context of exploration, probing and discussions. They read from modules, explained the content by giving examples and clarified difficult concepts for learners to write in their own copies. The focus of learning was content, with fewer or no skills and values being consciously infused into teaching and learning. It was clear that everything was discussed for assignment and examinations purposes. In this contact session, only one observed session had a group discussion (Maor, 2003; Mitchell, 2005).

In the context where there was lack of resources as in Jozini; Agyei and Voogt (2011) highlighted that tutors become a key form of learner support and there was over-reliance on them. In drafting quality criteria for learner support, other forms of learner support reduced overreliance on tutors. These forms could include access to resources and other forms of media for learning. Generally, learner support needed to be planned in such a way that it helps learners to become independent learners. A statement of the quality criteria for learner support proposed by SAIDE, provided a framework for thinking about learner support in this context: 'Learners are supported to a considerable extent to become independent learners through the use of various communication systems; the need of learners for physical facilities and study resources and participation in decision-making was also taken into account' (Mitchell, 2005).

Another key issue is that lack of tutor support created tensions between institutions and learners. The effect of this lack of tutor support is that it undermined the confidence and authority of tutors and impacted negatively on the performance in the sessions. For instance, in one of the sessions observed, a tutor struggled to answer a learner who contradicted a given answer in the module (Mitchell, 2005). If contact sessions are pivotal as a strategy of learner support, it is imperative that tutors are fully trained on the content and issues that arise in their various subjects. More importantly, tutors should have confidence and authority in the subjects they deliver, otherwise their morale may diminish and the sessions may be used to telling learners answers to assignments. Tutor training and constant support is one of the aspects that receive important attention in drawing up quality criteria for distance education in rural areas. Elements of SAIDE's quality criteria related to programme development and management, and administration will be significant in this regard (Maor, 2003).

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This Chapter has provided a detailed Literature review highlighting pertinent issues relevant to DL; its growth and development in several countries. Challenges faced by the countries have been highlighted; together with intervention strategies to improve the delivery of DL programmes. In addition, the effect of culture, race and community support has been explained as fundamental requirements invaluable to growth of DL.

DL is still defined from a deficit stance, it is characterised by separation and the subsequent reduced interaction, which is often stated as the cause of lack of perseverance and high drop-out among DLs. Research then, seeks to address this 'problem' and ultimately consists in attempts to reduce the separation, or close the gap, by increasing interaction. This approach belies an assumption that DLs are alone, and that being alone is a result of an absence of interaction with tutors and peers; so, by increasing interaction with tutors and peers, DLs will no longer be alone, and, therefore, will be more likely to persist and complete their studies. It also hints at lingering assumptions regarding the superiority of face-to-face learning as inherently interactive

and social and the need to mirror this in DL programme design. The fact that attrition remains significantly higher in DL contexts would suggest that this approach of tackling separation simply by increasing interaction is not working well. The researcher argues that this is due to the lack of a contemporary theory base for DL, which means the assumptions around interaction and social learning go unchallenged.

It is evident that there are many advantages as well as disadvantages with the integration of technology into teaching and learning in higher education. The worldview of online learning is well documented in various literature both academic and in online articles. Stemming from the fact outlined by various authors it is evident that the impact of technology in teaching and learning varies in different geographical areas, this can be further argued when areas such as access to resources as well as financial status is looked at in depth.

The next chapter provides a detailed critique of the Stakeholder Theory that guided this study.

CHAPTER THREE

STAKEHOLDER THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a brief history of Stakeholder Theory, a review of the Stakeholder concept and the application of Stakeholder Theory to DL. This study also documents criticism of the Stakeholder Theory. For this study, independent college is referred to as an organisation or firm. The literature concurs on the need for Stakeholder support to create winning coalitions with Stakeholders, to ensure the long-term viability of the organisation, policies, plans, and programmes, as well as communities, and even nations. The study argues that the wise application of Stakeholder Theory to DL in Independent Colleges can help frame problems or issues that are solvable in ways that are technically feasible and politically acceptable, and that advance DL programmes for sustainable learning.

Stakeholder Theory is part of a comprehensive project that views the organisation-group relationships as both a foundation and a norm. The word Stakeholder has assumed a prominent place in public and non-profit management theory and practice in the last 20 years, and especially in the last decade. The term refers to persons, groups or organisations that must somehow be taken into account by leaders, managers and front-line staff (Asiyai, 2014).

Research and writing on the subject have both contributed to the rise in the use of the term, as well as to knowledge about what it might mean in practice. Ironically, while the term has passed the 'tipping point' into common use and the notion that key Stakeholders must be attended to is an idea 'in good currency', there is remarkably little in the public, private and non-profit literature on exactly how to systematically apply Stakeholder Theory to DL. Some apply it without knowledge in their operations with the students.

However, it is important to note that the Stakeholder concept has a long history and broad applicability. The Stakeholder Theory has become the focal point of a great many debates. It frequently serves as a point of reference in agents' discourses, in their acts and in a host of 'management science' studies (and even political analyses). Its current tendency is to impose itself as a point of reference as it imitates DL policies, to such an extent that it has taken on the allures of a dominant discourse (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2014). This explains the proliferation of false arguments currently circulating on this subject.

3.2 DEFINITION OF TERMS

According to Carroll and Buchholtz (2014), there are copious definitions of 'Stakeholders' in governance literature, based in part on the economic salience of these Stakeholders. Stone, Pozzi-Mucelli et al. (2014) suggested that current research defined Stakeholders broadly as those persons and groups who contribute to the wealth creating potential of the firm and are its potential beneficiaries and/or those who voluntarily or involuntarily become exposed to risk from the activities of a firm. Thus, Stakeholders include shareholders (preferred and common); holders of options issued by the firm; debt holders (banks, secured debt holders, unsecured debt holders); employees (especially those investing firm-specific human capital); local communities (e.g., charities); environment as 'latent' Stakeholders (e.g., pollution); regulatory authorities; the government (as tax collector); inter-organisational alliance partners; customers; and suppliers. These Stakeholders often gain substantially when the firm does well and suffer economic losses when the firm does poorly. However, Ackermann, Howick, Quigley, Walls and Houghton (2014) have a different view that Stakeholders are all the agents for whom the firm's development and good health are of prime concern.

However, the father of Stakeholder Theory made a precise contribution to the definition. In his strategic management book, Freeman (1984) concluded that Stakeholder is any group or individual that can affect or be affected by the realisation of an organisation's objectives. Ethical considerations are what have driven Stakeholder Theory's rise, having been deployed as a way of constructing its normative aspect (the idea being that we are all Stakeholders).

In agreement with the idea above, Donaldson and Preston (1995) pointed that Stakeholders are defined by their legitimate interest in an organisation. This implies that:

- Claimants are groups or persons with legitimate interests; that they are known; and that they have been identified; and
- All Stakeholder groups' interests have at least a modicum of intrinsic value.

However, Carroll (1989) argued Stakeholders are defined by distinguishing them as:

- Primary Stakeholders, referring to those actors who entertain a direct and contractually determined relationship, as the name indicates, with the company (and who are sometimes still called “contractual” Stakeholders); and
- Secondary Stakeholders, combining actors who are situated at the borders of a firm and who may be impacted by its actions without having any contractual connection to it (a group that is still described as diffuse).

Other distinctions exist between internal traditional Stakeholders and other external ones who have the power to influence matters. To this effect, a further distinction exists between institutional Stakeholders (those involved in laws, regulations, inter-organisational entities, plus professional organisations that may be specific to a given industry); economic Stakeholders (actors operating in the markets of the company in question); and ethical Stakeholders emanating from ethical and political pressure groups (a group whose figuration may be more difficult to define) (Fernando & Lawrence, 2014).

The general idea of the Stakeholder concept is a redefinition of the organisation. The concept is about what the organisation should be and how it should be conceptualized. In this study the organisations are the Independent Colleges which offer the DL programmes. In essence, the firm itself should be regarded as a grouping of Stakeholders and the purpose of the firm should be to manage their interests, needs and viewpoints. Stakeholder management is fulfilled by the managers of a firm. The managers should

manage the corporation for the benefit of its Stakeholders in order to safeguard their rights and their involvement in decision-making. Furthermore, management must act as the stockholders' agent to ensure the survival of the firm in the long-term interest of each group.

According to Ferrero, Hoffman and McNulty (2014) the definition of a Stakeholder, the purpose and the character of the organisation and the role of managers are very unclear and contested in literature and has changed over the years. Even the father of the Stakeholder concept changed his definition over time. In one of his latest definition, Freeman (2004) defined Stakeholders as those groups of people who are vital to the survival and success of the corporation. Freeman (2004) added a new principle which reflects a new trend in Stakeholder Theory. In his opinion, consideration of the perspective of the Stakeholders themselves and their activities are also very important to the management of companies. It is called the principle of Stakeholder recourse. Stakeholders may bring an action against the directors for failure to perform the required duty of care (Ferrero et al., 2014)..

All the mentioned thoughts and principles on the Stakeholder concept are known as 'normative Stakeholder Theory' in literature. Normative Stakeholder Theory contains theories of how managers or Stakeholders should act and should view the purpose of the organisation, based on some ethical principles. Another approach to the Stakeholder concept is the so called 'descriptive Stakeholder Theory', which is concerned with how managers and Stakeholders actually behave and how they view their actions and roles (Hörisch, Freeman & Schaltegger, 2014a).

Some definitions suggest that Stakeholders are those who have the power to impact an organisation or project in some way (Hörisch et al., 2014a). For example, people or small groups with the power to respond to, negotiate with and change the strategic future of the organisation (Ackermann et al., 2014). Nevertheless, Crosby and Bryson (2014) argued that this is a somewhat restrictive definition because it excludes those who are affected, but who do not have any power to respond to or negotiate with an organisation. This study prefers and utilises a more inclusive definition which extends to all Stakeholders who are

affected by change, and this wider definition is more compatible with notions of democracy and social justice Stakeholder management. Viswanatha and Sasireka (2016) agreed that a wider definition is preferable, but not just for ethical reasons. Projects whether small or large will impact people who do not have power during the implementation, but may do so in business as usual. According to Bridoux and Stoelhorst (2014) the Stakeholder Theory suggested that the purpose of a business is to create as much value as possible for Stakeholders. Friedman and Miles (2006) explained that in order to succeed and be sustainable over time, executives must keep the interests of customers, suppliers, employees, communities and shareholders aligned and going in the same direction.

However, Strand and Freeman (2013) pointed out that, at least as early as 1708 the term meant 'a person entrusted with the stakes of bettors' who must deliver the stakes to the winner of the contest. The meaning of Stakeholder in this sense carried a fiduciary responsibility. Later, a second meaning was added so that a Stakeholder became one who has a share or an interest, as in an enterprise (Fernando & Lawrence, 2014). This research adopts the definition by Freeman (1984) which stated that a Stakeholder is any group or individual that can affect or be affected by the realisation of a company's objectives.

This study further adopts the idea that ethical considerations are what have driven the Stakeholder Theory's rise, having been deployed as a way of constructing its normative aspect (the idea being that we are all Stakeholders). The following sections critically expound the Stakeholder Theory in order to situate it in the context of this study.

3.3 WHAT IS A STAKEHOLDER

Freeman (1984) posited that the earliest definition is often credited to an internal memo report of the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in 1963. They defined Stakeholders as those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist (Moriarty, 2014). Garrod *et al.* (2013) continued to use his definition in a modified form, as those groups who are vital to the survival and success of the organisation. This definition is entirely organisation orientated so academic circles prefer the definition by Freeman

(1984) where he defined Stakeholders as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives. About twenty of the 75 definitions share this definition. Friedman and Miles (2006) shared the argument that this definition was more balanced and much broader than the definition of the SRI. The phrase 'can affect or is affected by' seems to include individuals outside the firm and groups may consider them to be Stakeholders of an organisation without the firm considering them to be such.

3.3.1 Who are Stakeholders?

According to Asiyai (2014) a very common way of differentiating the different kinds of Stakeholders is to consider groups of people who have classifiable relationships with the organisation. After listing the main groups of Stakeholders Asiyai (2014) stated that there is a clear relationship between definitions of what Stakeholders are and identification of who are the Stakeholders. In support of the above Beach (2015) pointed out that managers are treated differently in the literature. Some regard them as Stakeholders; others embody them in the organisation's actions and responsibilities.

Nonetheless, an interesting view of managers is presented by Pedersen, Gwozdz, Hvass, (2018) who viewed managers as referees between investors and employees. All categories of Stakeholder groups could be defined more finely. For example, media could be split up into radio, television and print media, or employees as blue-collar and white-collar workers, or in terms of which department they work. An advantage of refined categories of Stakeholders is that by doing a more homogeneous grouping of people is likely. The negative fact about this would be the greater chance of overlap of interests and actions.

3.4 THEORIES IN DISTANCE LEARNING

In view of the fact that there is a great heterogeneity of theories and approaches of DL, discussion in this research study is based on a comprehensive analysis of views by Chesbrough (2007). Chesbrough (2007) came up with a group of theories based on a

criterion of what role the theories confer to the college and students. The theories are as follows:

- The utilitarian theory;
- The managerial theory; and
- The relational theory.

3.4.1 Utilitarian Theories

Busch Bauer, and Orlitzky, (2016) were of the opinion that in the utilitarian theories, the college serves as a part of the economic system in which the function is mechanical i.e., traditionally known as in profit maximization. However, DL ideas emerged after a realization that there is a need for responsibility, embedded in the business ethics of a college. On the same subject, Lambert. (2012) advanced the idea by proposing that Utilitarian could also be synonymous with Instrumental theories in which the college is seen as only an instrument for wealth creation, and its primary activities are only a means to achieve economic results (Ukpebor, 2012).

Taylor, Walton and Young (2013) contended that it is also called Instrumental theory because it is understood that DL is a means to the end, which leads to the fact that the economic power of the college is materialized specifically in its execution of the DL programmes and the relationship to students. The Utilitarian theory, therefore, suggests that the college needs to accept responsibility of the success or failure of the programme. Within it, the Functionalist theory specifically advocates that the college is seen as a part of the economic system, one of the goals of which is profit making. The college is viewed as an investment, and investments should be profitable to the investors and Stakeholders (Babalola, 2012).

In simpler terms, the researcher is of the opinion that the arguments by Babalola (2012) and Taylor, et al.(2013), focuses more on functionalist theory as put from the internal point of view of the college. Hence, DL is coined as a defence tactic of the ever-advancing ICTs against other competing Higher Education Institutions because there is need for a

balance between profit making and education objectives for the college system's equilibrium.

3.4.2 Managerial Theory

The logic of Managerial theory emphasizes corporate management in which DL is approached by the college internally to identify the difference between the Utilitarian and Managerial perspectives of DL. This suggests that everything external to the college is taken into account for organisational decision-making. Thus, the problem is that of managing the college considering social and economic factors together and it is based on the assumption that Independent Colleges depends on students for its growth and sustainability.

As a management observation in relation to DL in an independent college, the Managerial theory generates interest in the sense that DL considers economic variables to measure DL programmes' performance, as well as to link DL ideology to business strategy. There are several research studies in relations to Managerial theory that look at Managerial theory from a university point of view e.g. UNISA. Lambert (2012) commented that DL for government universities grows as a result of global competition and challenges they face. This aspect of Managerial theory comes into being as a result of the responsibility the administrators have to shoulder by defining useful tools about DL for the universities to survive in higher education industry.

It will be anti-academic to argue with the researchers above about managerial theories, but in simpler terms considering the applicability of the theories in business, social responsibilities of businesses arise from the amount of social power a corporation has and the corporation is understood as being like a citizen with certain involvement in the community. The origin of the political power of DL is based on the studies of Benn, Dunphy and Griffiths (2014) who proposed that a college is a social institution and it must use power responsibly. Causes that generate the social power are from inside and outside of the college. Furthermore, Haigh and Hofmann (2014) highlighted that the strategies colleges choose to adopt DL initiatives are conditioned in part upon the domestic, political institutional structures present in the home market. Political theories

further demonstrate the links between economic globalization pressures felt by companies, domestic political structures where the colleges are in DL policies (Garriga, 2014).

3.4.3 Relational Theory

According to Haigh et al. (2014) Relational theory has a basis in the multifaceted college-environment relationships. As the term implies, interrelations between the two are the focus of the analysis of DL. Relational theory is further divided into four sub-groups of theories:

- Business and society;
- Stakeholder approach;
- Corporate citizenship; and
- Social contract.

However, Leach (2014) explained college and society imply 'business in society', in which DL emerges as a matter of interaction between the two entities. One of the measures of DL is the development of education and economic values in a society. Another is a person's obligation to consider the effects of decisions and actions on the whole social system. In light of statements by Leach (2014), it is important to understand that the Stakeholder approach has been developed as one of the strategies in improving the management of the college. It is a way to understand reality in order to manage the responsibility and behaviour of an independent college. The Stakeholder approach further considers a college as an interconnected web of different interests where self-creation and community creation happen interdependently and individuals behave altruistically (Leach,2014).

Massa Tucci and Afuah (2017) stated that the Stakeholder approach is both within the integrative and ethical theories, where the former emphasizes the integration of social demands and the latter focuses on the right thing to achieve a good society. These contentions support the work of Litz (1996) where balances amongst the interests of Stakeholders are the emphasised and the work of Tukker, (2015) that considered fiduciary duties towards Stakeholders of the college.

3.5 HISTORY OF THE STAKEHOLDER THEORY

According to Pedersen et al. (2018), in the 2000's a Stakeholder approach to strategy germinated. One focal point of this revolution was the publications of Richard Edward Freeman. He is generally endorsed and credited with popularizing the Stakeholder concept. In doing so, he indicated that his view of the Stakeholder concept was from the viewpoint of the company. The use of the word Stakeholder came from pioneering work done at Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in the 1960s (Freeman, 2010).

Haigh et al. (2014) stated that already the Gedo Education Committee (GEC) was identifying four main groups with whom they had to consider. Those four groups were defined as shareholders, employees, customers and the general public. Further, Richardson (2008) mentioned that Johnson and Johnson identified customers, employees, managers and the general public in 1947. Sears named four parties to any business in the order of their importance as customers, employees, community and stockholders in 1950.

However Schilling (2000) argued that the start of thinking about the Stakeholder concept was the work of Follet in 1918. Freeman (2010) was concerned about the corporation, which emerged along with the origins of the corporation as a legal entity, which he called the soulless corporation. This shows a moral or normative vacuum that has favoured ideas of how this could or should be dealt with. In order to fill this vacuum, the Stakeholder concept has developed to handle this demand. By distinguishing between pre- and post-Freeman (1984) it should be easier to understand why the Stakeholder approach has become so popular over the last twenty years. Important to note is that the Stakeholder approach grew out of management practice (Robinson, 2005). According to Nataraja and Bright (2018), a central issue in DL is the question of 'to whom a college is primarily responsible'. The Stakeholder Theory, a managerial theory which explains the relationship between students and independent college and connects college and ethics has provided perfect answers (Phillips et al., 2003). Asiyai (2014) subscribed to the idea that the Stakeholder Theory has been designed to solve the following problems:

- That of value creation (education) and empowerment;
- The ethics of capitalism; and

- The managerial mind-set

According to Kefa (2014) numerous scholars have made contributions to the development of Stakeholder Theory and three types have been widely discussed, namely

- Descriptive or empirical;
- Instrumental; and
- Normative.

Where the descriptive or empirical Stakeholder Theory has been used to describe and explain specific college characteristics and behaviour, academics such as Brenner and Cochran (1991) have applied this theory in their research. The instrumental Stakeholder Theory offers a framework permitting the identification of the connections (or lack of them) between Stakeholder management and the achievement of college goals. Scholars such as Lerner (1999) have advanced this approach.

Normative Stakeholder Theory is an ethics-based theory offering the identification of moral or philosophical guidelines for organisational functions. According to this approach, organisations are morally required to regard the interests of all their Stakeholders. The central idea is that an independent college's success is dependent on how well it manages the relationships with key groups such as students, lecturers, parents, regulators, government and others that can affect the realization of its purpose. The DL administrators' job is to keep the support of all of these groups, balancing their interests while making the college a place where Stakeholder interests can be maximized over time.

3.6 THE STAKEHOLDER CONCEPT: POPULAR AND TRENDY

According to Asiyai (2014), academics wrote a lot about the concept of Stakeholders and Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), educational institutions, regulators, media, business and policymakers are also thinking about the concept and are trying to implement it in some way or other. Most contributions are predominantly about the normative principle. They prop up the vision of the company and the role of administrators, whose intent is mainly to maximize shareholder value in order to be sustainable

(Hassanien, 2017). This perspective, suggests that Independent Colleges have huge and broader responsibilities. Those are best defined in terms of the Stakeholder approach. Another reason why this topic is very fashionable and contested amongst theorists is that there is contesting literature around. Along with the popularity has come a profusion of different overlapping approaches to the Stakeholder concept. In order to deal with this conceptual confusion, a number of classification schemes have been developed.

3.7 STAKEHOLDER THEORY

The Stakeholder Theory is a theory of organisational management and business ethics that deals with inclusive participation, consultative, principles and values in managing an organisation (Phillips et al., 2003). According to this theory, Stakeholders (students, parents, government, regulators etc.) are acknowledged as a group of people interested in the company's activities (Freeman & Phillips, 2002).

Table 3.3: Stakeholder expectations

STAKEHOLDERS	PRIMARY EXPECTATIONS	SECONDARY EXPECTATIONS
College owners	Financial	Added Value
Administrators	Pay	Work Satisfaction & Training
Lecturers	Pay	Quality
Parents	Pass rate, Safety of their children	Security
Students	Knowledge	Long Term Relationships
Government	Compliance	Improved Competitiveness

Source: Adapted from Cannon (1994)

Hinton (2012) stated that according to Stakeholder Theory, the independent college's major objective is to balance the expectations of all Stakeholders through their operating activities. Similarly, Bridoux, and Stoelhorst (2014) suggested that the way colleges

involve students, parents, governments, regulators, college owners and other Stakeholders is usually a key feature of the DL concept.

However, Pedersen et al. (2018) stated that the fundamental aspect of Stakeholder Theory is determined by the Stakeholders of an independent college and reveal the college's responsibility for them. In addition, they are important to the independent college because their investment is subject to risk due to the activities of the college.

Three Stakeholders affected by Independent Colleges were identified by the present study, namely student, parents and government (Tama, 2017). From the literature above, this study concludes that the Stakeholder Theory can be considered a DL theory because it provides a normative framework for inclusive participation of students, parents and government. It has been established that the Stakeholder Theory can be presented and used in a number of ways that are quite distinct and involve very different methodologies, types of evidence and criteria of appraisal (Hughes & White, 2005). Therefore, they categorised three branches of Stakeholder literature, namely descriptive, instrumental and normative approaches. Each branch is discussed in the following sections and the common features of the various conceptions of Stakeholder Theory are identified (Hinton, 2012).

3.7.1 Nature and Purpose of Stakeholder Theory

According to Maier (2015), one of the fundamental problems in the progression of Stakeholder Theory has been mystification about its nature and purpose. For example, Stakeholder Theory has been used, either explicitly or implicitly, for descriptive purposes. Mahoney (2012) offered a 'Stakeholder Theory of the firm' for two purposes:

- To describe how organisations, operate and
- To help predict organisational behaviour.

However, Mellahi and Wood (2003) strongly argued that they contrasted this 'theory', which they developed only in outline form, with other 'theories of the firm', but they did not solicit whether the various theories identified have comparable purposes. In fact, different theories have different purposes and therefore different validity criteria and different

implications. For example, according to Miles (2012), the Neo-classical theory of the firm attempted to explain the economic principles governing production, investment and pricing decisions of established firms operating in competitive markets.

However, the Behavioural theory of the firm attempted to explain the process of decision making in the modern firm in terms of goals, expectations and choice-making procedures (Mahoney, 2012). Cooperative Game theory of the firm attempts to explain internal governance, particularly the balance between owner's and workers' interests. In contrast to all of these contributions the Transaction Cost theory attempts to explain why firms exist (i.e., why economic activities are coordinated through formal organisations rather than simply through market contacts). Although all of these theories are forwarded as positive or scientific conceptions, there is a tendency for them to be used for normative purposes as well. Mansell (2015) posed a similar argument when he commented on the Stakeholder Theory as differing from these and other 'theories of the firm' in fundamental ways. The Stakeholder Theory is intended both to explain and to guide the structure and operation of the established company. To that end, it viewed the corporation as an organisational entity through which numerous and diverse participants accomplished multiple, and not always entirely congruent, purposes.

In support of Mansell's (2015) contention, Moriarty (2014) postulated that the Stakeholder Theory is general and comprehensive, but it is not empty; it goes well beyond the descriptive observation that organisations have of Stakeholders. Unfortunately, much of what passes for Stakeholder Theory in the literature is implicit rather than explicit, which is one reason why diverse and sometimes confusing uses of the Stakeholder concept have not attracted more attention. Mok, Shen and Yang (2015) reiterated the need to understand the three branches under which the Stakeholder Theory can be used. They shared the view that the Stakeholder Theory can be, and has been, presented and used in a number of ways that are quite distinct and involved very different methodologies, types of evidence and criteria of appraisal. The three types of uses critical to the analysis are:

3.7.1.1 Descriptive / Empirical

This theory aims to understand how managers deal with Stakeholders, how they represent their interests and the impact the Stakeholder approach has on the achievement of various corporate goals. Mok et al. (2015) observed that Descriptive Stakeholder Theory has been used to describe the following:

- the nature of the company;
- the way managers think about managing;
- how board members think about the interests of corporate constituencies; and
- how some corporations are actually managed?

3.7.1.2 Instrumental

This theory has been used to determine whether there is a link between Stakeholder management and different corporate objectives such as profitability and growth (Moriarty, 2014).

However, literature has shown that DL makes explicit or implicit reference to Stakeholder perspectives using conventional statistical methodologies. In the researcher's opinion some studies have used direct observations and interviews to generate implications, suggesting that adherence to Stakeholder principles and practices achieve conventional corporate performance objectives, as well or better than rival approaches. The theory, in conjunction with descriptive or empirical data, is in most cases used to identify the connections, or lack of connections, between Stakeholder management and the achievement of traditional college objectives (e.g., educational excellence, profitability and growth). Many recent instrumental studies of DL, all of which make explicit or implicit reference to Stakeholder perspectives, use conventional statistical methodologies (Murphy et al., 2014). Other studies are based on direct observation and interviews (Mitchell, Agle,& Wood, 2016).

Conversely, Driessen and Hillebrand (2015) strongly disagreed that whatever their methodologies, these studies have tended to generate 'implications', suggesting that adherence to Stakeholder principles and practices simply achieves conventional

organisation performance objectives as well or better than rival approaches. Jawad,, Jamshaid and Wahab. (2014) supported Driessen and Hillebrand (2015) who specifically observed that highly successful Independent Colleges as Mancosa and Varsity College, although very diverse in other ways, share a Stakeholder perspective. Jawad, et al. (2014) wrote that ‘almost all their’ administrators care strongly about people who have a stake in the college such as students, parents and government.

3.7.1.3 Normative

Normative Stakeholder Theory identified the theoretical procedure linked to the activities or the management of institutions (Driessen et al.,2015). Etzioni (2014) and Driessen et al.(2015) considered this the core of Stakeholder Theory and identified the main objectives of normative theory as the determination of the responsibilities of the college in respect of Stakeholders and the reasons why colleges should take care of the Stakeholders’ interest rather than shareholder interest. Ferkins and Shilbury (2015) commented that the theory is used to interpret the function of the college, including the identification of moral or philosophical guidelines for the operation and management of Independent Colleges. Normative concerns dominated the classic Stakeholder Theory statements from the beginning (Fernandez-Feijoo, Romero & Ruiz,. 2014) and this tradition has been continued in the most recent versions.

3.7.2 Contrasting/Combining Approaches

Conclusively, Freedberg (2015) pointed out that each of these uses of the Stakeholder Theory is of some value, but the values differ in each use. According to Donaldson (1989) and Driessen et al. (2015) the descriptive aspect of Stakeholder Theory reflects and explains past, present and future states of affairs of Independent Colleges and their Stakeholders. A simple description is common and desirable in the exploration of new areas and usually expands to generate explanatory and predictive propositions (Ferkins et al., 2015). In essence, instrumental uses of Stakeholder Theory make a connection between Stakeholder approaches and commonly desired objectives such as profitability. Instrumental uses usually stop short of exploring specific links between cause (i.e., Stakeholder management) and effect (i.e., college performance) in detail, but such linkage is certainly implicit. The much quoted Fernandez-Feijoo et al. (2014) (SRI)

definition of Stakeholders is those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist; clearly implies that independent college administrators must induce constructive contributions from their Stakeholders to accomplish their own desired results (e.g. perpetuation of the college, profitability, stability, growth).

Miles (2012) contended that in normative uses, the correspondence between the theory and the observed facts of independent life is not a significant issue, nor is the association between Stakeholder management and conventional performance measures a critical test. Instead, a normative theory attempts to interpret the function of, and offer guidance about, the investor-owned corporation on the basis of some underlying moral or philosophical principles. Although both normative and instrumental analyses may be 'prescriptive' (i.e., they may express or imply more or less appropriate choices on the part of decision makers), they rest on entirely different bases. Furthermore, Keevil (2014) stated that an instrumental approach is essentially hypothetical in that it says, in effect, if one wants to achieve (avoid) results X, Y, or Z, then adopt (do not adopt) principles and practices A, B, or C. According to Keevil (2014), the normative approach, in contrast, is not hypothetical but categorical. It says, in effect, do (Do not do) this because it is the right (wrong) thing to do.

Khurana (2014) argued that much of the Stakeholder literature, including the contributions of both proponents and critics, is clearly normative, although the fundamental normative principles involved are often unexamined. A striking characteristic of the Stakeholder literature is that diverse theoretical approaches are often combined without acknowledgement. Furthermore, Adesokan (2014) in line with Etzioni's (2014) work, was of the opinion that the temptation to seek a three-in-one theory or at least to slide easily from one theoretical base to another, is strong. Clarkson (1995) for example, asserted an explicit connection amongst all three when he concluded that his Stakeholder management model represented a new framework for describing, evaluating and managing corporate social performance. All three types of theory are also to be found in the work of Costa and Menichini (2013) whom many regard as the leading contributors to the Stakeholder literature. In their original treatise, Costa and Menichini (2013) asserted that changing events created a descriptive fit for the theory. Just as the separation of the

owner-manager-employee required a rethinking of the concept of control and private property as analysed by Phillips (2013) so does the emergence of numerous Stakeholder groups and new strategic issues require a rethinking of the traditional picture of the firm.

Considering the above arguments, there is need to redraw the picture in a way that accounts for the changes. At the same time, Phillips (2013) also endorsed the theory's instrumental basis by noting that one should explore the logic of this concept in practical terms, i.e., in terms of how organisations can succeed in the current and future business environment. Instrumental concerns are also reflected in Phillips' (2013) extensive discussion of Stakeholder management implementation techniques, both in his 1984 treatise and in other papers. Phillip (2013) justified the Stakeholder Theory on normative grounds, specifically its power to satisfy the moral rights of individuals. He asserted that the theory of the firm must be re-conceptualised along essentially Kantian lines. This means each Stakeholder group has a right to be treated as an end in itself, not as a means to some other end, and therefore must participate in determining the future direction of the firm in which it has a stake (Putnam, 2012).

Friedman, and Miles (2012) lamented that the muddling of theoretical bases and objectives, although often understandable, has led to less rigorous thinking and analysis than the Stakeholder concept required. It is necessary to see the significance of the distinctions among descriptive, instrumental and normative uses of the Stakeholder concept, and consider the current controversy over the special privileges of top managers in large corporations, particularly in connection with mergers and acquisitions. According to Friedman et al. (2012) there is considerable evidence that in the burst of large corporate takeovers during the 1980s, share values typically rose for acquired firms and fell for acquiring firms.

However, many observers have speculated that self-serving managerial activity accounts for both results. Hasnas (2013) posited that the acquired firms gain in value because prior to the takeover, they were burdened by inefficient, self-serving managers and the acquiring firms lose in value because the impetus for the acquisition was not return on investment for owners but ego gratification and career advancement for their top

managers. Conclusively, the argument will be if this analysis is accurate and if managers' nests are often feathered in other ways (e.g., salaries, bonuses) at the expense of share owners, then it is descriptively true that those managers' interests have priority over those of other Stakeholders, including share owners. However, it is not academic enough to move directly from a claim-the-de facto priority of managers' interests to claim in either instrumental or normative contexts. On the same point, even if it was true that higher paid managers did, in fact, achieve higher levels of profitability thus meeting instrumental criteria, it would still not follow that higher pay or profit results were normatively justifiable.

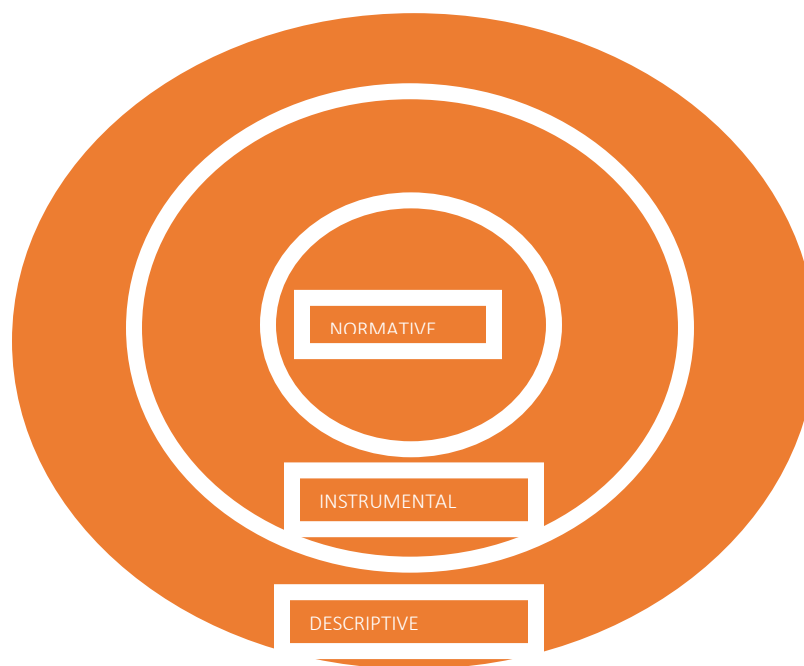
3.8 THE PROBLEM OF JUSTIFYING STAKEHOLDER THEORY

According to Hassard and Cox (2013), the underlying epistemological issue in the Stakeholder literature is the problem of justification: Why should the Stakeholder Theory be accepted or preferred over alternative conceptions? Until this question is addressed, the distinctions amongst empirical, instrumental and normative approaches can be papered over. Moreover, the answer to this question must be related to the distinct purpose that the theory is intended to serve. That is, reasons to accept the Stakeholder Theory as a descriptive account of how managers behave, or of how the business world is constituted, are different from reasons to accept the Stakeholder Theory as a guide for managerial behaviour, and so on. Moriarty (2014) noted that the Stakeholder Theory is justified in the literature, explicitly or implicitly, in ways that correspond directly to the three approaches to the theory set out in the previous section: descriptive, instrumental and normative. Descriptive justifications attempt to show that the concepts embedded in the theory correspond to observed reality. Instrumental justifications point to evidence of the connection between Stakeholder management and corporate performance. Normative justifications appeal to underlying concepts such as individual or group 'rights', 'social contract,' or utilitarianism.

Reggie's (2013) survey of this literature ignored descriptive issues but emphasized 'power and performance' (i.e., instrumental) and 'deontological,' (i.e., normative) arguments. A closer look showed that the three aspects of the Stakeholder Theory are nested within each other, as suggested in Figure 3.1 below. The external shell of the theory is its descriptive aspect as the theory presents and explains relationships that are observed in

the external world. The theory's descriptive accuracy is supported, at the second level, by its instrumental and predictive value; if certain practices are carried out, then certain results will be obtained. The central core of the theory is, however, normative. The descriptive accuracy of the theory presumes the truth of the core normative conception, in so far as it presumes that managers and other agents act as if all Stakeholders' interests have intrinsic value. In turn, recognition of these ultimate moral values and obligations gives Stakeholder management its fundamental normative base (Brummer, 1991). Figure 3.1 gives a brief illustration of the Stakeholder aspects

Figure 3.1: Three Aspects of Stakeholder Theory



Source: Adopted from Ruggie, (2013)

The following exposition carries the evidence and argument involved in each of these approaches to the justification of the Stakeholder Theory.

3.8.1 Descriptive Justifications

In the aforementioned literature, there is ample descriptive evidence, some of which has previously been cited, that a number of managers have confidence in themselves or are believed by others to be practicing Stakeholder management. Indeed, as early as the

mid-1960s, a survey of upper-level managers revealed that about 80 percent regarded it as unethical management behaviour to focus solely in the interest of share owners and not in the interest of employees and customers (Hill et al.,2014)

Since then, other surveys asking similar questions about the Stakeholder sensitivity of managers have returned similar results. On-going empirical studies by Phillips et al. (2012) attempted to distinguish firms that practise Stakeholder management from those that do not and the studies found significant numbers of firms in the first category. Managers may not make explicit reference to 'Stakeholder Theory' but the vast majority of them apparently adhered in practice to one of the central tenets of the Stakeholder Theory, namely that their role is to satisfy a wider set of Stakeholders, not simply the share-owners (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2015).

Phillips et al. (2012) agreed that another kind of descriptive justification for the Stakeholder Theory stemmed from the role it played as the implicit basis for existing practices and institutions, including legal opinion and statutory law. In the US Phillips et al.(2012) cited, recent court decisions and new legislation that have weakened the so-called business judgment rule, which vests management with exclusive authority over the conduct of a company's affairs only on the condition that the financial welfare of stockholders is single-mindedly pursued. Furthermore, Asiyai (2014) suggested that courts have tended to support these statutes. For example, the well-known Delaware Supreme Court decision in *Unocal*, although requiring corporate directors to show that a 'reasonable' threat exists before fighting hostile takeover offers, nonetheless allowed a number of concerns to affect the determination of such reasonableness, including the impact of the takeover on 'constituencies' other than shareholders (i.e., creditors, customers, employees and perhaps even the community generally) (Asiyai, 2014).

However, the so-called co-determination laws of Germany required employee representation on second-tier boards of directors. The Companies Act of Great Britain mandates that company directors shall include the interests of employees in their decision-making. The new harmonization laws of the European Community (EC) will, when approved, include provisions permitting corporations to take into account the

interests of creditors, customers, potential investors and employees (Mitchell et al., 2015).

Stone et al. (2014) added that the well-known corporate governance model in Japan through both law and custom presumes that Japanese corporations exist within a tightly connected and interrelated set of Stakeholders, including suppliers, customers, lending institutions and friendly corporations. Another series of legal developments in the U.S. asserted the interests of third party Stakeholders, specifically unsuccessful job applicants in business operations. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 explicitly makes it a violation of law for an employer 'to fail or refuse to hire any individual' on the basis of discriminatory criteria (Stone et al.,2014). A considerable group of authors accounted for law in their literature, and agreed to the fact that this legislation has become the focus of numerous legal complaints and some substantial settlements (Mitchell et al., 2015).

Ferkins and Shilbury (2015) contended that neither the legal developments nor the previous management survey results carried by scholars provide definitive epistemological justification for the Stakeholder Theory. Managers adopting the Stakeholder approach may be relieved to learn that they are not alone and indeed that they are conforming to the latest management or legal trends. However, both previous survey results and legal developments are, at bottom, simply facts. In the same vein Mok et al. (2015) added to the argument by pointing out that the legal developments and surveys do not constitute the basis for the Stakeholder (or any other) theory of management. Indeed, even if the Stakeholder concept is implicit in current legal trends (a proposition that is not universally accepted), one cannot drive a Stakeholder Theory of management from a Stakeholder Theory of law any more than one can derive a 'tort' theory of management from the tort theory of law.

Conclusively, in the researcher's opinion, the hazards of using purely descriptive data, whether jurisprudential or otherwise, as justification for a broad theory are well known. There is the problem of the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy', moving from 'is' to 'ought' or from 'describe' to 'evaluate', without the necessary intervening analysis and explanation.

Then, again, there is the simple problem of hasty generalization. By the logic of descriptive justification, if new surveys show that managers were abandoning Stakeholder orientations, or if the legal support for broad Stakeholder interests were to weaken, the theory would be invalidated (Mok et al., 2015). Nevertheless, this observation offers substantial evidence about the nature of the theory itself, because few, if any, of its supporters would be likely to abandon it, even if present legal or managerial trends were to shift. This suggests that the descriptive support for the Stakeholder Theory, as well as the analyses of this support to be found in the literature, are of restricted significance and that the most vital issues for Stakeholder Theory lie elsewhere (Ferrero et al., 2014).

3.8.2 Instrumental justification

According to Katzenbach, and Smith (2015) because the descriptive approach to grounding a Stakeholder Theory is inadequate, justifications based on a connection between Stakeholder strategies and organisational performance should be examined. Consider, for example, the simple hypothesis that corporations whose managers adopt Stakeholder principles and practices will perform better financially than those that do not. This hypothesis has never been tested directly and its testing involves some formidable challenges.

A recent effort to introduce practicing managers to the Stakeholder concept and to improve their ability to implement Stakeholder management practices is the work by Ferrer et al. (2015) but also Ackoff and Pourdehnad (2012) and others in support of Stakeholder Theory's instrumental base. Unfortunately, the large body of literature dealing with the connections, if any, between various aspects of corporate social performance or ethics on one hand, and conventional financial and market performance indicators on the other, does not translate easily into a Stakeholder Theory context (Etzioni, 2014).

Summarily, Castellini (2014) argued that whatever values the social or financial performance studies may have on their own merits, most of them do not include reliable indicators of the Stakeholder management (i.e. the independent variable) side of the relationship. Castellini (2014) posited that there is some evidence, based on analysis of

the Fortune corporate reputation surveys, that the satisfaction of multiple Stakeholders need not be a zero sum game (i.e., that benefits to one Stakeholder group need not come entirely at the expense of another). Case studies of a small number of high-performance companies indicated that the managers of those companies tended to emphasize the interests of all major Stakeholder groups in their decision making (Castellin, 2014). However, there is as yet no compelling empirical evidence that the optimal strategy for maximizing a firm's conventional financial and market performance is Stakeholder management.

3.8.3 Analytical arguments

According to Bridoux and Stoelhorst (2014), even without empirical verification, however, Stakeholder management can be linked to conventional concepts of organisational success through analytical argument. The main focus of this effort in the recent literature builds on established concepts of principal-agent relations and the Firm as a nexus of contracts. Agency theory and Firm-as-contract theory, although arising from different sources, are closely related and share common emphasis efficiency. Kujala and Sachs (2019) noted that Agency theorists argued that corporations are structured to minimize the costs of getting some participants (the agents) to do what other participants (the principals) desired. Firm-as-contract theorists (Freedberg, 2015) argued that participants agreed to co-operate with each other within organisations (i.e. through contracts), rather than simply dealing with each other through the market, to minimize the costs of search, coordination and insecurity.

Freedberg (2015) was responsible for the most ambitious attempt to integrate the Stakeholder concept with Agency theory. This author enlarged the standard principal-agent paradigm of financial economics, which emphasized the relationship between shareowners and administrators, to create "Stakeholder-agency theory," which constituted, in their view, 'a generalized theory of agency'. According to this conception, DL administrators can be seen as the agents of all other Stakeholders. Wasieleski and Weber (2017) noted that Stakeholders differ amongst themselves with respect to:

- The importance (to them) of their stake in the firm and
- Their power i.e., the DL administrators.

In support of the above, Kladchenko and Khobta (2019) argued that there was considerable friction within the Stakeholder-agent negotiation process, some of it because of some participants' ability to retard equilibrating adjustments that are unfavourable to themselves. Therefore, there is no reason to assume that Stakeholder-agent relationships are in equilibrium at any particular time. According to Kladchenko et al. (2019) the process, direction and speed of adaptation in Stakeholder-agent relationships, rather than the equilibrium set of contributions and rewards, should be the primary focus of analysis.

This brief summary cannot do justice to the rich conception, but the key point for current purposes is that the Stakeholders are drawn into relationships with the independent college to accomplish organisational objectives as efficiently as possible. Consequently, the Stakeholder model is linked instrumentally to organisational performance. A similar theme emerged from the firm-as-contract analysis of Wasieleski et al. (2017) who recommended integrating the Stakeholder concept with the Coasian view of the firm-as-contract and a Williamson-style analysis of transaction costs to conceptualize the organisation as a set of multilateral contracts over time.

According to Chiu et al.(2014), administrators managed contracts amongst students and the independent college. Since each of them can invest in asset specific transactions which affect the other group, methods of conflict resolution or safeguards must be found. However, Wasieleski et al. (2017) emphasized that all parties have an equal right to bargain and, therefore, that a minimal condition for the acceptance of such multi-partite arrangements by each contracting party is a notion of 'fair contract', (i.e. governance rules that ensure that the interests of all parties are at least taken into consideration). Once again, the Stakeholder model (and its implementation through a set of acceptable implicit contracts) is seen as essential to successful organisational performance (Ramadhini, Adhariani & Djakman, 2020).

In conclusion, the Stakeholder interpretations of both Agency theory and the Firm-as-contract theory give special attention to the differential position and special role of

managers (i.e., all other Stakeholders). The emphasis is on 'information asymmetry' between managers and other Stakeholders and contrasted the concentration of resource control by managers with the diffusion of control within Stakeholder groups in which there may be no mechanism to gain command over a significant portion of the group's total resources (Clarkson, 1995) .

Chiu et al. (2014) asserted that management has a duty of safeguarding the welfare of the abstract entity that is the corporation and of balancing the conflicting claims of multiple Stakeholders to achieve this goal. According to Otterbring, Sundie, Li and Hil (2020), a Stakeholder Theory of the firm must redefine the purpose of the firm. The very purpose of the firm is to serve as a vehicle for co-ordinating Stakeholder interests.

With this perspective, success is in satisfying multiple Stakeholders' interests rather than in meeting conventional economic and financial criteria which would constitute the ultimate test of corporate performance. However Hasnas (2013) posed a question regarding the above by asking how multiple and diverse Stakeholders will be assured that their interests are being coordinated in ways that lead to the most favourable possible results for themselves (i.e. the most favourable results consistent with the requirements of other Stakeholders). In line with the question from Hasnas (2013) researchers like Otterbring et al. (2020) pointed out that civic view to the whole scenario stressed the importance of :

- Monitoring devices that have the effect of reducing information asymmetry (e.g., public reporting requirements) and
- Enforcement mechanisms, including law, 'exit' (the possibility, or credible threat, of withdrawal from the relationship), and voice.

Akula, Shah and Ghosh (2018) emphasized the notion of fairness as they go beyond the notion of 'fair contracting'. They recommended that the criterion of 'fairness' in Stakeholder Theory bargains is a Rawlins veil of ignorance. Under a 'veil of ignorance', parties to a bargain agree upon a set of possible outcomes prior to determining which outcome will be received by which party (e.g., one person cuts the cake, another takes the first slice). Both pairs of analysts, Otterbring et al. (2020) placed greater emphasis

on the process of multiple-Stakeholder co-ordination than on specific agreements or bargains. Both groups stressed that mutual and voluntary acceptability of bargains by all contracting Stakeholders is the necessary criterion for efficient contracts. Both neglected the roles of potential Stakeholders not conspicuously involved in explicit or implicit contracts with the firm. The two pairs of authors differed slightly in one respect: Hill and Jones (2014) saw the network of relationships as consisting of separate implicit contracts between each Stakeholder group and management (as a central node), whereas Otterbring et al. (2020) ultimately viewed the firm as a series of multilateral contracts amongst all Stakeholders.

3.8.4 Weaknesses of Instrumental Justifications

According to Chiu et al. (2014) perhaps the most important similarity between these two autonomous attempts to justify the Stakeholder model lies in the fact that although they draw primarily on the conceptual apparatus of instrumental or efficiency-based theories (i.e., principal-agent relations and ‘firm-as-contract’ theory), they eventually rely upon non-instrumental or normative arguments. Kladchenko et al. (2019) asserted that this shift was less conspicuous in the case of Hill and Jones (2014), who implied that monitoring and enforcement mechanisms were sufficient to curb opportunistic behaviour by managers at the expense of other Stakeholders. The authors would no doubt agree, however, that the ultimate success of Stakeholder-agency theory would require a fundamental shift in managerial objectives away from shareowners and toward the interests of all Stakeholders; such a shift would necessarily involve normative, rather than purely instrumental, considerations.

Harrison and Wicks (2021) added that recourse to a Rawls concept of ‘fairness’ as the ultimate criterion for Stakeholder bargains was an overt elevation of normative criteria over instrumental ones. The statements above were critically opposed by Cavusgil and Kim (2014) who argued that no theorist, including Rawls, has ever maintained that bargains reached on the basis of a ‘veil of ignorance’ would maximize efficiency. By elevating the fairness principle to a central role, Freeman and Evan shifted their attention from ordinary economic contracts of the sort envisaged by, Costa, Lages and Hortinha (2015) and the mainstream agency theorists, which are governed by individual efficiency

considerations. Instead, they emphasized what have been called heuristic or social contracts that rest upon broad normative principles governing human conduct.

Nonetheless, considering the work of Crosby and Bryson (2014), it should come as no surprise that Stakeholder Theory cannot be fully justified by instrumental considerations. The empirical evidence is inadequate and the analytical arguments, although of considerable substance, ultimately rest on more than purely instrumental grounds. This conclusion carries an important implication: Although those who use the Stakeholder concept often cite its consistency with the pursuit of conventional corporate performance objectives (and there is no notable evidence of its inconsistency), few of them would abandon the concept if it turned out to be only as equally efficacious as other conceptions.

3.8.5 Normative justification

The normative basis for Stakeholder Theory involves its correlation with more elementary and better accepted philosophical concepts. The normative assumptions of traditional economic theory are too delicate to support Stakeholder Theory, and the concept of a free market populated with free and judicious preference seekers, however correct and important, is compatible with both Stakeholder and non-Stakeholder perspectives (Ferrero et al., 2014). According to Etzioni (2014) the two normative propositions stated at the beginning of this research that Stakeholders are identified by their interest in the affairs of the corporation and that the interests of all Stakeholders have intrinsic value, can be viewed as axiomatic principles that require no further justification.

However, it is the researcher's contention that this approach provides no basis for responding to critics who reject these propositions out of hand. One way to construct a normative foundation for the Stakeholder model is to examine its principal competitor, the model of management control in the interests of college owners, as represented by the business judgment rule. Scholars such as Grant (2013) and Lussier (2013) criticised the approach. There is considerable criticism of this model on descriptive grounds. In the modern corporation, as opposed to the owner-managed company, the rights of college-owners are attenuated by the dispersion of ownership and by high agency costs. The economic system, not the legal system, is responsible for this attenuation of the right of

ownership. Many direct observers (Ackoff, 2012; Kinuu, 2014) have questioned administrators' devotion to college-owner welfare and survey results such as those of Hill, and Jones (2007) and Ackermann et al. (2014) provided statistical support for these perceptions on management serving the shareowners model (i.e. the principal-agent model in its standard financial economics form) that it is descriptively inaccurate. Leach (2014) commented that careful analysis revealed that it is normatively unacceptable as well. Changes in state incorporation laws to reflect a constituency perspective have been mentioned. The normative basis for these changes in current mainstream legal thinking is articulated in the recent American Law Institute report, Principles of Corporate Governance 1992. Nevertheless, Hörisch et al. (2014) suggested that corporate decisions are not infrequently made on the basis of ethical consideration, even when doing so would not enhance corporate profit or shareholder gain. Such behaviour is not only appropriate, but desirable. According to Hörisch et al. (2014) corporate officials are not less morally obliged than any other citizens to take ethical considerations into account, and it would be unwise social policy to preclude them from doing so as it does not impose a legal obligation to take ethical considerations into account.

However, a point to take into consideration on the statement above is that the absence of a legal obligation to follow ethical principles does not mean that independent college decision makers are not subject to the same ethical considerations as other members of society.

3.9 CORRELATION BETWEEN FACTS AND CONCEPTUALISATION

Freeman and Mcvea (2014) stated that the Stakeholder Theory sprang out of a maelstrom of 'affairs. In 1967, community groups in the United States invited themselves to an Eastman Kodak AGM against a backdrop of racial tension and mass unemployment amongst Greater Cleveland's black population. Furthermore, in the United States, consumer organisations invited themselves to a General Motors' 1970 AGM to complain about safety defects on the cars being sold, and to ask other questions about Group social practices. The grilling of GM's Board of Directors received a great deal of media airtime. Both of these 'generating facts' attest to the significance that executives in these large

companies attached to the ‘societal’ dimension and to shareholder activism’s potential for criticism (Freeman et al., 2014).

Adesokan (2014) added that in Great Britain in 1997, several shareholders began to ask questions about the political nature of Shell’s relationships with the Nigerian government of the time, thereby highlighting a whole series of human rights and environmental protection issues. This ‘affair’ was then regarded as the starting point for Stakeholder governance, i.e., for the emergence of shareholder activism.

3.10 STAKEHOLDER AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Collectively, facts of this class (some of which are still imbued with a symbolic dimension) are the forces that gave rise to the shareholder capitalism- Stakeholder capitalism debate, for which Stakeholder Theory has been a bedrock (Adebisi & Adeola, 2014). Previous work by Purnell, and Freeman (2012) showed that, corporate governance issues highlight any and all relationships that may exist between a firm and its Stakeholders. In other words, these relationships contributed greatly to the development of the Stakeholder Theory’s practical aspects.

3.11 HOW TO IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS

The Stakeholder issue prompted questions about how such parties can be identified (Dacanay, 2012). Cordeiro *et al.* (2014) suggested that classifying them into different categories of actors:

- shareholders: internal Stakeholders (i.e., students, DL administrators, parents, community, government, lecturers and regulators) focused on issues such as students’ direct and indirect participation (via lectures, fee payment) in the college’s capital structure, and on issues pertaining to student representation and /or to a shareholder activism that can be implemented either working alone or else with other investors who also want to get their resolutions adopted;
- operational partners: i.e., DL administrators (including subcontractors) but also as parties that expect stability and solvency; and Independent Colleges having to contend with classes of risk currently undergoing a substantive and in-depth renewal, i.e., complicated E-learning methods and 4th generation industrial revolution which will

definitely demand compliance and upgrade in the way learning is delivered including subject content that is in line with the revolution.

3.11.1 The ambiguity of ‘social community’ when seen as something ‘singular’ or ‘plural’

Phillips (2013) noted that the American construct of ‘community’ is often mentioned as one of the Stakeholders in regards to which colleges are supposed to uphold the concept towards its Stakeholders. Cordeiro et al. (2014) also noted a shift in focus from relationships geared towards a single ‘close’ community towards more complex relationships with a crowd of communities that can be both close and more distant. From that viewpoint, Cordeiro et al. (2014) then posited that this shift has led to greater reliance on the Stakeholder concept. However, they failed to identify that the challenge here is how to define the community in its Stakeholder form in such a way as to account for the multiplicity of groups concerned whilst covering whatever they may have in common amongst themselves, as well as the modalities for managing such relationships.

3.11.2 Stakeholders’ changing action modes

Cordeiro et al. (2014) tried to classify these relationships in 2003 by suggesting that there are facts distinguishing between:

- The shift from dialogue to partnership (i.e., NGO representatives’ presence in decision-making processes and/ or the acquisition of shares in order to have the right to question executives at AGMs, all portrayed as shareholder activism in full flow) and
- The proliferation of the sorts of instruments of pressure that can be brought to bear within a conflictual context, including suggesting resolutions at AGMs, hijacking a company’s communications resources (‘right-wrong’ websites, counter-advertising, etc.), opinion-shaping campaigns, organising boycotts and lawsuits.

Crane and Ruebottom (2011) contended that Stakeholder Theory is different from a mere classification exercise. Cordeiro et al. (2014) concentrated on classification.

However, if one brings into the picture an analysis of the texts comprising this school of thought, it is in fact a plan to rearrange the theory of organisations by incorporating ethical perspectives or, if one prefers, by enhancing the said theory.

3.12 A PANOPTIC ANALYSIS OF STAKEHOLDER THEORY

According to Govindan, Khodaverdi and Jafarian (2013), before stretching any further or suggesting any investigations of the field under or covered by the Stakeholder Theory, one should remember its postulates the following:

- An independent college will sustain relationships with several groups that are affected or affect its decisions (Evan & Freeman., 1993a);
- The theory will be dependent on the nature of such relationships because of the manner in which the processes involved and the outcomes achieved can affect Stakeholders (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015);
- Stakeholders' interests have some intrinsic value, but it is absurd to find one interest dominating all of the others (Kinuu, 2014); and
- Generally, the theory is interested in managerial decisions (Gander, 2014).

Govindan et al.(2013) supplemented the above in view of the concept of DL, by stating that the Stakeholder Theory has two variants. The first relates to the empirical nature of responsibility. Theory here is based on the idea that an independent college's interests are the first to be taken into account and that its subsequent efforts are then 'divided' up amongst its various Stakeholders in a way reflecting their respective levels of importance. Here information is seen as a crucial element, allowing the college to 'manage' its relationships and at the very least, to avoid student opposition, as well as where possible to gain their adherence. The second relates to the College-Stakeholder relationship, conceived of here as a social relationship implying the genesis of an independent college's responsibility to its students as the main key Stakeholder. This is a normative approach to responsibility.

Ayuso *et al.* (2014) also pointed out that the research by Donaldson and Preston (1995) offered taxonomy of the different Stakeholder theories by placing them into three separate categories. Based on the following elements, this taxonomy has served ever since as a benchmark for this field:

- Colleges and DL administrators act with moral perspectives in mind (which is normative);
- Achieving results becomes more do-able if DL administrators act with moral perspectives in mind (which is empirical and instrumental); and
- Independent college and DL administrators behave with specifiable moral perspectives in mind (which is empirical and descriptive).

According to Machuki, Aosa and Letting (2012) this typology assisted to outline or define the cerebral areas that are covered by the Stakeholder Theory's two founding schools, namely the Empirical Stakeholder Theory based on instrumental and descriptive perspectives and the Normative theory based on ethics. Hence, their suggestion, above and beyond the aforementioned 'disputes', of a 'convergent' Stakeholder Theory border on the following arguments:

- Postulates somehow that Independent Colleges operate publicly in an economic marketplace that can be taken as competitive; decisions are made by professional DL administrators; and behaviours are conditional on circumstances and contexts;
- The theory in general focuses on the DL Administrator-Stakeholder relationship, which is believed to possess moral foundations; and
- The theory is collectively empirical and normative, since it offers practical results, for example describable norms.

Reed and Curzon (2015) disagreed that this perspective of Ayuso *et al.* (2014) lacked the formal construction or empirically testable variables. In agreement, Mintzberg (2003) supported that another distinction traverses this corpus between those who refer to Stakeholders as representatives of a moral or economic interest with 'diffuse' Stakeholders not necessarily entering the equation.

3.13 IS STAKEHOLDER THEORY EMPIRICAL IN NATURE?

The question posed demands a lubricate approach which takes in variants. This question requires, first of all, a precise delineation of the framework that surrounds Stakeholder Theory in its two variants discussed below (Govindan *et al.*, 2013).

3.13.1 Descriptive Stakeholder Theory

Hah and Freeman (2014) observed that this theory considers that an organisation is what one finds at the centre of co-operation and competition situations, each of which possesses its own intrinsic value. Here the theory is being used to describe and sometimes to explain specific characteristics and behaviours, including for example firms' nature; how executives' management of their firms should be conceived how some organisations are actually being managed; the diffusion of societal information; the notion of target Stakeholders; and the significance attributed to each Stakeholder, something that will vary depending on the phase that a firm has reached in its lifecycle.

However, the researcher's view, considering the statements by Hah and Freeman (2014) through Mason and Simmons' (2014) work, there is need for attention on the view that this descriptive approach only allows for exploratory propositions . It does not enable any connection to be made between Stakeholder management and traditional business objectives, for example, growth, and earnings.

3.13.2 Instrumental Stakeholder Theory

Several researchers had conflicting views in trying to relate the theory as instrumental. However, Wirl (2014) pointed out that Instrumental Stakeholder Theory was advanced by Jones in 1995 . O'Riordan and Fairbrass (2014) weighed in by commenting that the main

idea here was that everything else being equal, organisation that practice Stakeholder management will perform better in profitability, stability, and growth. In essence, one must accept that certain results can be obtained if 'certain' behaviours are adopted. In other words, the Instrumental theory is a contingent one, meaning that it involves reliance on certain types of behaviour.

3.14 IS STAKEHOLDER NORMATIVE IN NATURE?

O'Riordan (2017) emphasised that Stakeholder Theory's normative basis, as a perspective is distinct from the functionalism found in empirical theory. Instead of compiling data and using ad hoc quantitative methods to test hypotheses, the focus here is on normative outcomes; hence, specifying the moral obligations found beneath Stakeholders' positions. What the various approaches of this kind have in common is the fact that they treat Stakeholders both as an end and also as having interests that possess an intrinsic value (O'Riordan, 2017). Beach et al. (2012) stated that the narrative interpretation also characterises the normative perspective by offering narrative representations of firms' moral behaviour. Here emphasis is placed on the ethical obligations a firm encounters and on how it can satisfy them without denying its interest in achieving economic success. A further goal is that of explaining how it is that the objectives being pursued by the actors themselves (by the Stakeholders and by the organisation) can be mutually reinforcing.

However, Wirl (2014) commented on researchers adhering to this school of thought, that they will try to uncover the 'best' alternative in order to steer corporate activities in ethically more constructive directions. They argued that individuals will modify the language they use (expressing conceptual schemes through images and metaphors) depending on how they think and act. In other words, actors' underlying representations will influence the individual conceptions via which 'reasonable' strategic actions are developed. Though researchers made sound suggestions, Mintzberg (2003) and other scholars agreed with the notion that such comments like the above entertain close relationships with the search for paradigms found beneath the interpretative theory of organisations, which affirms that

individuals will build and maintain their own organisational realities at the social and symbolic levels.

13.15 HOW ARE THE DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDER THEORY APPROACHES RELATED?

El Akremi et al. (2015) noted that the typology presented by the researchers above can be criticised as being derived from positivism whereby it is assumed that descriptive theory will tell how the world really is; that normative theory will prescribe how it should be; and that instrumental theory will indicate the shape one can give to it. It is held by Chiu et al. (2014) that Stakeholder Theory's descriptive side reflects and explains the past, present and future. It tends to generate exploratory and predictive propositions, whereas Instrumental precepts try to apprehend the connection between Stakeholder approaches and mutually beneficial outcomes such as profitability. The instrumental approach is generally used to explore the relationship between causes (the management of Stakeholders) and effects (organisational performance). Normative theory tries to study these relations based on their ethical aspects and philosophical principles.

In agreement, Khoury, Amer and Khalaf (2014) contributed on the point of divergence by suggesting that depending on the point of reference being used, there may be some disagreement about Donaldson and Preston's (1995) typology. In an interpretative perspective, there is nothing automatic about the empirical-normative distinction (for instance, what interpretation is based on). Furthermore, certain 'normative' studies affirm that moral behaviour has no need of being justified, since morality possesses its own innate merits. Such studies consider that the biggest contribution of the instrumental theory's habitual variant is that it allows for the prediction of certain forms of moral behaviour will be sanctioned in the end, even though this may not occur in the short or medium term.

Chiu et al. (2014) suggested that Narrative modes seem unable to achieve the status of 'good research'; even if one does accept that it is possible to derive acceptable theories from narrative representations. After all, how does one distinguish between 'good' and

‘bad’ representations given that theoretical representations of this sort spring from their narrators’ own imaginary worlds?

However, Jones and Wicks (1999) emphasised that a ‘good’ theory must help individuals to lead better lives within organisations. The question here is whether one should in fact validate the idea that narrative representations do actually help people to lead better lives in the absence of any empirical verification for this proposition. In addition, according to Cavusgil and Kim (2014) the Stakeholder Theory contains ambiguities that an in-depth analysis should be able to reveal.

3.16 AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF STAKEHOLDER THEORY

Johnson and Schaltegger (2015) stated that despite its ostensible facility and ‘false’ evidences, the Stakeholder Theory was born in correlation to the ‘liberal moment’ of the 1980s and is therefore rooted in the developments of the philosophical school of thought that we can be called ‘neo-liberal’. It is with regards to the various categories that collectively build up this particular school that brings up the modalities for a comprehensive and in-depth analysis, once all necessary precautions have been taken against the exoticism that one needs to mention when referring to this particular body of knowledge. Indeed, it appears to be completely unacceptable for any analyst to suggest remarks whatsoever relating to the Stakeholder Theory without simultaneously commenting upon its presuppositions, grounded as they are in the pragmatic foundations of this particular school of philosophy (Mekki, 2017).

Phillips et al. (2003) have been forced to dig deeper into expressing themselves on the incorrect application and usages being made of this theory. Amongst other things, they have affirmed that it constitutes an ethical theory of organisations, a point of view to which appears promptly at the end of this argument, albeit in regards to other elements (Phillips et al., 2003). This is because the theory is not actually a contractualist one but germinated from American ‘neo-liberal’ philosophical perspectives, whose central purpose and arrow is to develop a theory of justice (Mellahi & Wood, 2003). In addition, Kaler (2003) and Harangozó and Zilahy (2015) expressed that the Stakeholder concept can be seen as referring to a communitarian perspective, with the Stakeholder thereby

helping to define the contours of a group to which actors can belong on a non-exclusionary basis. Indeed, this is what constitutes the theory's wealth and its ambiguity. According to these researchers, a citizen can simultaneously be a student, shareholder, employee and a 'diffuse' Stakeholder and the analysis of his or her position should be organised in terms of the category (defined by the particular type of search for fairness involved) that is relevant to the specific Stakeholder role she or he is playing at a given moment in time.

3.17 FALSE EVIDENCE IN STAKEHOLDER THEORY

Hoogendoorn, Guerra and van der Zwan (2014) posited that the first false evidence in the Stakeholder Theory related to its ostensibly descriptive status, which may justify using a 'Mintzberg complex' (to qualify this theoretical perspective (Pesqueux & Damak-Ayadi, 2005)). In much the same way as organisations that used to live happily before it came along allegedly suddenly turned into adhocracies or professional bureaucracies, now they are deemed to have become the central foci for Stakeholders. It is, therefore, possible to assert that the Stakeholder Theory is merely a reformulation of the old introductory lesson in corporations and partners, this time around using an ostensibly more modern discourse. Hoogendoorn et al. (2014) stated that this viewpoint raises questions about the not always very obvious dichotomy that is said to exist between the theory's descriptive usage (does it create better descriptions?) and its normative usage (are we all Stakeholders or else destined to turn into one?).

As the analysis incorporates invasive scenarios, De Clercq, Thongpapanl and Voronov (2014) expressed the fact that, a further usage is supposedly found in the strategy categories, which involved an intermediary expression that one can apply in its vaguest connotation, with the Stakeholder reference being seen as something enabling a superior formulation of strategy (or strategic discourse). The idea here is that the Stakeholder Theory serves to re-invigorate functionalism by not answering any questions about what it is that constitutes an organisation's actual foundations. One would then be dealing with an organisational metaphor that is ideological in scope. Simplification and incantation would be some of the traits of this construct, which is capable of specifying 'friendly' or 'enemy' factors at both the conceptual and the real levels.

In their argument, Seow et al. (2014) postulated that the second false evidence pertained to the possible merger between Stakeholder Theory and the new theories of the firm. Jones and Wicks (1999) saw the former as being generalised throughout the different categories of Agency theory, in the sense that the focus was mainly on the Stakeholder-manager relationship. It is of great importance to note that the theory appears as a substitute in the agency theory. Woo *et al.* (2014) posited that in this sort of forced contractualist perspective, managers are depicted as agents, whereas Stakeholders are distinguished from one another on the basis of their importance and power vis-à-vis managers. Therefore, agency relationship involves, in accord with market mechanisms and the ingredients comprising its logic, a balancing of interests.

Freeman (1994) managed to integrate the Stakeholder Theory into the transaction cost theory that Coase (1937) and Williamson (1985) developed based on the assertion that administrators are there to manage relations with students, parents, owners, regulators, government and such with a view towards developing fair relations that should be analysed as the necessary moral precondition before the different parties can commit themselves (Shapiro, et al. 2015). Lee, Herold and Yu (2015) noted that since all parties have equal rights to sign contracts, any group is capable of investing in specific transactions that might affect the other groups, but in so doing the goal should remain that of developing a mode that enables conflict resolution and safeguards the rights of all committed parties. Therefore, the concept of fairness becomes a key benchmark since it is based on the normative perspectives that are inherent to human behaviour.

Similarly, Gander (2014) and Reed and Curzon (2015) observed that Donaldson and Preston in 1995 tried to connect the Stakeholder Theory to Property Rights theory to justify the idea of getting property rights categories to represent the interests of Stakeholders other than shareholders. The main difficulty here was how to connect different Stakeholders by means of property rights that have been reduced to their formal dimension, and to do this within a distributive justice perspective. Distributive justice is a key concept in modern neo-liberal philosophy.

However, Slabbert and Barker (2014) argued that it remains that these attempts to connect the Stakeholder Theory to the new theories of the firm have stumbled over several postulates and their underlying hypotheses, including:

- The market efficiency postulate, since the normative foundation of Stakeholders' interests leads to their being recognised as possessing social 'depth', in turn disturbing the 'purity' of the economic signals being diffused; and
- The normative perspective, which is not in tune with the methodological individualism postulate.

Akeem (2014) stated that the third false evidence relates to the theory's psychological aspect and is part of a drive to refuse egotistical subjects and to accept more reflective ones that are merely expressing a desire that they may have. In referring to a generic subject, however, the theory is seeking less of a footing in neo-liberal perspectives (particularly those found in an ultra-liberalism predicated upon the bestowal of radical primacy upon individuals; and, therefore, on the proliferation of rights that can be valued in a market). According to Akeem (2014), it was sinking roots into a civic type of republicanism i.e., belief in the existence of a common good that adapts Stakeholder interests so they can encompass civic virtues, plus, a denunciation of deviations like the type of corruption that is caused by a conflict of interests; this being the place where one spills over into governance questions.

Several authors supported Akeem (2014) are. Ackoff (2012), and Akeem (2014) suggested that the fourth false evidence related to its sociological aspect. Stakeholder Theory features subjects that are generic (customers, suppliers, employees, etc.) but which do not constitute social categories. The authors contended that the discussion is about Stakeholder Theory's contribution to the anthropological conception of organisations that benefits from this generosity. The generic subject that is the subject of the organisation still appears here in his or her daily reality, i.e., in the concrete and peculiar form of being in situation. As such, the Stakeholder Theory paves the way for kinds of categories where subjects can have two reasons for belonging: one as the fully formed human beings they are; and the other as a specific form thereof. By so doing,

Stakeholder Theory offers a sort of false validation for Cultural Studies that advises rethinking about cultures no longer in terms of any culture nation links but instead in light of the culture social group connection. Cultural Studies of this nature currently enjoy a great deal of media-driven success in Business School education and research. The masses and the perspectives for understanding them have replaced class-oriented reasoning with Stakeholders constituting the figures used to enhance understanding of these masses based on a complex equality between each of their individual interests (Ackoff, 2012).

However, with reference to Coppa and Sriramesh (2013) and their reference to a role concept, the Stakeholder Theory does have something to contribute to the sociology of organisations. Along with Crozier and Friedberg (1977) it should be remembered that an actor is someone who plays a role in an organisation based both on his or her imaginary world (possibility of identifying with an ideal person or of masking one's personality) and functional aspect (involvement in a specific situation). As such, the Stakeholder concept offers the socialisation process a comprehensive perspective whereby it becomes possible to design an ideal-type role combining organisational and personal aims. This would also mean being able to imagine Stakeholders being brought back into the old categories, as analysed by Bridoux, and Stoelhorst (2014) when they distinguished amongst varying expectations of role, role transmission, role reception and behaviour within a role.

Further arguments to this effect (Coldwell & Joosub, 2014) shared the view that it is also by starting out with this role concept that one can move on to a games socialisation power in which case the Stakeholder concept does indeed lie at the heart of the role-game-strategy trilogy and of the influence concept. After all, influence is what creates a perspective that can be both intentional and interactional. It also creates a duality between substantive rationality (values) and procedural rationality (codify-able behaviours). At the same time, Stakeholders are characterised by an erosion of the Universalist nature of social contracts. They open the door to a cultural relativism that is connected to each and every one of them.

Most researchers are bewildered by assumptions that the Stakeholder Theory is intertwined to substantive rationality and procedural rationality as Jones, Harrison and Felps (2018) strongly opposed these assumptions with the support of Park and Ghauri (2015). This justifies the questioning of quality or inversely the relative mediocrity of any references to this theory, particularly given the way its legitimacy has developed over time. Built in opposition to the figure of the shareholder, the Stakeholder first appeared as a means for preventing the merry-go-around of excessive dividend distribution, before being co-opted to such an extent that Stakeholders are now viewed as the expression of a communitarian liberalism that has started to sag due to the spontaneity nature of its occurrence. Of course, its main ambiguity stems from the fact that non-Stakeholders are legitimately excluded raising questions as to what society these excluded parties belong to. However, Pérez and Elving (2015) concluded that the Stakeholder Theory is neither economic nor psychological nor sociological nor (and this is crucial for anyone interested in 'the theory of organisations') psycho-sociological. Ultimately, it is ethical, with all the ambiguity and richness that this entails.

3.18 THE ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF STAKEHOLDER THEORY

The Stakeholder Theory poses a number of questions with regard to the actual ethical foundations upon which it is based. At the very least, researchers in this field agree that it demands and requires some practical aspects so that it can be oriented in applied ethics from the very outset. On the other hand, this formal perspective does not answer all of the questions in line with the theory's foundations (Freeman & Dmytriiev, 2017).

Arguments have also been raised as researchers made efforts analysing and explaining the ethical foundations of the Stakeholder Theory. However, serious consideration should be given to the question: Is Stakeholder Theory rooted in needs or in desires? This question is a source of ambiguity, finding both aspects with so-called contractual Stakeholders. On the other hand, neither needs nor desires are capable of accounting for the foundations of the expectations of diffuse Stakeholders work towards developing good lives that they can use as a benchmark. For this group, the goal is to wake up at the right time, that is, whenever their good life starts to be perturbed by the consequences of a firm's actions (Costa et al., 2015).

To this extent, more generically, above and beyond the duality between needs and desires, considering the views of El Akremi et al. (2015) and other scholars, it may prove easy to use the concept of people's interests to ascertain the foundations for stakeholder ship. Freudenreich et al. (2020) suggested that Stakeholders are situated in categories defined by the modern reinterpretation of moral sentiments. There is a simultaneous ontological and normative perspective by which moral sentiments are characterised. In this vision, honesty is construed as a moral sentiment and is connected to the subject at a fundamental level because of the honest subject's presuppositions and because of the way in which she or he normalises his or her behaviour, depending on circumstances.

Consequently, Freeman et al.(2017) pointed out that to a certain extent, moral sentiment is situated between reason and emotion: reason because it provides an axiological foundation for behaviour (which can be either 'good' or 'bad') and emotion because of its deeply subjective underpinnings. the Stakeholder Theory is, therefore, a means for narrating one's 'good life' to oneself, against the backdrop of the moral substance of today's economic activities, and from a eudemonistic perspective (based on a conception of happiness) as opposed to a hedonistic one (solely based on desires). In fact, it is at this level that the theory can be truly described as a theory of organisations. It is also here that the Stakeholder Theory can be linked to countless organisational narratives (Valentinov, Roth & Will, 2019).

3.19 STRENGTHS OF THE STAKEHOLDER THEORY

Firstly, the theory seems ethically superior to maximizing shareholder value because it takes into consideration Stakeholder rights and their legitimate interests and not only what is strictly required by law in managing Stakeholder relations (Griffith-Jones& Karwowski, 2013). Secondly, the Stakeholder Theory has dated the theoretical imprecision of DL by addressing concrete interests and practices and visualising specific responsibilities to specific groups of people affected by independent college activity (Chandler & Werther Jr., 2013).

Considering researchers Griffith-Jones and Karwowski (2013) contributions, in simpler terms, the Stakeholder Theory is a managerial theory that is related to organisational goals and does not come within reach of business management. The theory ensures long-term rather than short-term success. However, further research will serve to establish sound conclusions about the relationship, profitable linkages between Stakeholder Theory and DL. Stakeholder Theory gives us the correct way to think about independent college risks (Driessen & Hillebrand, 2015). According to Melé (2008) taking a Stakeholder approach enabled us to develop a more robust theory of DL, one in which the role of independent college business risk is better understood. Taking such an approach would lead to risk avoidance behaviour by administrators, because according to them, constituencies except the residual cash flow claimants have incentives to dissuade managers from taking excessive entrepreneurial risks (Baumgartner, Gelbmann & Rauter, 2013).

Leaving aside the question of excessive risks and whether avoiding excessive risks is a good or bad thing, this argument showed that Driessen and Hillebrand's (2015) view of the Stakeholder Theory is one of allocating benefits to other Stakeholders at the expense of shareholders. Of course, it is in each Stakeholder's interest for a college to take risks that can lead to efficient DL programme beneficial to everyone (Delchet-Cochet & Vo, 2012).

3.20 CRITICISM OF THE STAKEHOLDER THEORY

Why should independent college administrators pay attention to Stakeholders? Schaltegger, et al. (2019) pointed out that the most fundamental challenge to the Stakeholder Theory is establishing a justification for managerial attention to Stakeholders akin to that justifying maximising shareholder wealth at the expense of Stakeholders. Any convincing justification for maximising shareholder wealth must, at its core, be a moral argument. However, instead, Wu and Wokutch (2015) proposed value maximisation of Stakeholder Theory by, stating that an independent college cannot maximise value if it ignores the interests of its Stakeholders. The big challenge facing college management is determining the trade-off between the independent college's objectives and the interests of its Stakeholder groups (Dewan, Banerjee & Randolph, 2014).

In support of Verbeke and Tung's (2013) work, administrators should make decisions that take the interests of the college's Stakeholders into consideration. Since there is no specific one interest of the Stakeholder groups, it is difficult for management to determine one Stakeholder interest that will meet the college's objectives and the interests of all its Stakeholders. Even within the Stakeholder Theory, the interests of individual groups compete with each other's interests, leaving college management with a theory that makes it impossible for them to make purposeful decisions. In trying to meet the needs of different Stakeholders' interests, the Stakeholder Theory can lead to management being unaccountable for their actions. Such a theory can be attractive to the self-interest of college managers and directors (Urban & Naidoo, 2012).

The researcher is of the view that, if the Stakeholder Theory is not good for colleges why do owners and management of colleges embrace it? Should they not discard its philosophies? Wymenga, Plaisier and Vermeulen (2013) claimed that one answer lies in directors and managers undercover of the Stakeholder Theory following policies that meet their personal interests instead of policies that meet the company's long-term objectives and the interests of its Stakeholders. Hamann et al. (2015) added that without criteria for performances, the Stakeholder Theory allowed managers to pursue their own interests at the expense of the college's primary beneficiaries who in this case are students.

In as much as the Stakeholder model may be considered moral, in practice there are problems that do not benefit everyone. There are shortcomings in the Stakeholder model, as it creates its own problems for the owners (Schaltegger, et al., 2019). According to Brown, and Forster (2013), finding solutions to the above problems created by the Stakeholder model calls for directors to take ethical and moral issues into considerations when setting their college objectives. It is a balancing act that looks good in theory but is difficult to deal with in practice, as directors are faced with the problems of determining not only who their colleges' Stakeholders are but what their interests actually entail (Mansell, 2015).

3.21 STAKEHOLDER THEORY BOUNDARY CONDITIONS

The Stakeholder Theory has been used in a variety of different ways by critics and friends alike. The following is a quick overview of what is considered to be some important misapplications and boundary conditions to Stakeholder Theory:

- Stakeholder Theory is an excuse for managerial opportunism. The root issue is that by providing more groups who management can argue their actions benefit, Stakeholder Theory makes it far easier to engage in self-dealing and defend it (Leach, 2014). In contrast, Delchet-Cochet and Vo (2012) argued managers who have a duty only to shareholders are better able to judge their performance and clearly see whether they have done well or not. However, Phillips et al.(2003), offer two assumptive replies:
 - Firstly, much of the current managerial opportunism has been done under the banner of shareholder maximization (e.g., Enron, WorldCom) and they specifically critique the actions of Al Dunlap who grossly mismanaged a number of companies to create his own financial benefit.
 - Secondly, this is an issue for any theory of organisation and does not put Stakeholder Theory in a worse light because of it. Indeed, the authors argued there are good reasons to see the Stakeholder Theory as creating more accountability from managers as they have more obligations and duties of care to more constituencies and are therefore less likely to engage in self-dealing (Hörisch et al., 2014a).
- Stakeholder Theory is primarily concerned with distribution of financial outputs (Moriarty, 2014). According to Brower and Mahajan (2013), this view provided a picture of Stakeholder Theory as primarily about who receives the resources of the organisation and fronts a stark and inherent conflict between shareholders and other Stakeholders in terms of who gets what. If one begins with the idea of the firm as having a fixed pie of surplus (i.e., profits) to distribute and views Stakeholder Theory

as providing different schemes for distributing that wealth, then the contrast between its existences appears to be sharp and stark.

However, Phillips et al. (2003) claimed that distribution is only part of the story, namely that a critical part of Stakeholder Theory is about process and procedural justice that Stakeholders deserve a say in how resources are allocated that such involvement affects how they view the distribution of resources and that their involvement can also create new opportunities for value creation (i.e., enlarging the pie).

In addition, Mutti et al. (2012) discovered that research cited in most articles show Stakeholders are more accepting of outcomes when they perceive the process as fair, and that distribution involves more than just financial resources since information is something which can be shared amongst Stakeholders and this does not pit shareholders against Stakeholders.

According to Northouse (2012) all Stakeholders must be treated equally although several versions of what it means to treat Stakeholders equally (e.g. egalitarianism; equalitarianism) are offered, the core point is that critics have focused on the notion of treating Stakeholders equally, particularly around the language of balance that has been prominent in discussions of what it means to manage for Stakeholders (Christopher, Hutomo & Monroe, 2013). Phillips et al. (2003) also claimed that one can use forms of meritocracy (e.g., using Phillips' notion of fairness in benefits given being in proportion to those received); that meaningful distinctions amongst Stakeholders can be made by theorists; and that each firm may handle this issue differently depending on its own particular version of Stakeholder Theory. This criticism also compounds the mistake of confusing Stakeholder Theory as primarily or exclusively about distribution of financial outputs rather than as about process and consideration in decision making.

Furthermore, Stakeholder Theory requires changes to current law. There have been arguments that the law requires to be altered, either to overcome the concern that doing anything other than shareholder management is illegal or to make it easier to practice Stakeholder Theory (i.e., making it more transparent that using Stakeholder Theory to

manage does not violate core principles of business law). For example, Verbeke and Tung (2013) acknowledged Freeman's view which seems to advocate passage of enabling legislation which will force corporations to be managed in the interests of Stakeholders. The core reply obtainable is that while there may be reasons to consider an assortment of changes to the legal system, Stakeholder Theory contains no requirement that the law be changed to allow firms to practice it (Sen & Cowley, 2013).

However, Spence (2014) noted that the business judgment rule allows firms to use the Stakeholder Theory without fear of running afoul of the theory or practice of the law. Hence, enacting specific changes in the law may force management to consider Stakeholders (e.g., corporate constituency statutes) will prove useful. However, they are not to be confused with the core of what constitutes the Stakeholder Theory or to be seen as essential concomitants to embracing the theory.

The Stakeholder Theory is socialism and refers to the entire economy (Miles, 2012). In some parts of the United Kingdom and in other parts of the Europe Union, there is talk of a Stakeholder economy (e.g., a term used by the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair). However, Spence (2014) contributed to the discourse when he highlighted that Stakeholder Theory is first and foremost a theory of organisations, not a theory of political economy. In addition, while there may be some merit in drawing from Stakeholder Theory to discussions of economies within a political context, doing so makes truly problematic the concerns raised about the breadth of the theory and for what purposes it is being used. Stakeholder Theory has been developed as a system of voluntary exchange for individuals within a capitalist economy. It is decidedly not a form of socialism or a set of social policies to be enforced by the state.

- Stakeholder Theory is a comprehensive moral doctrine. In debating what constitutes a comprehensive moral doctrine, Lussier and Achua (2015) claimed that it is a theory which can address the full array of moral questions that arise without reference to any other theory. However, according to Lam (2014) the Stakeholder Theory cannot be regarded as a comprehensive doctrine. Rather, it is a theory of organisations that does

not even envelop all the moral questions pertinent to a business context, let alone the rest of the moral world.

Urban and Naidoo's (2012) analysis of the boundary conditions to Stakeholder Theory, is a tool to better describe and act in a complex world. Tools have better and worse applications. In the researcher's view the Stakeholder Theory is best used to make sense of issues revolving around the three problems outlined in previous research. Scholars from a variety of disciplines have selected the Stakeholder Theory to better address the issues that the three problems have created in their respective areas.

3.24 THE LINK BETWEEN DL AND STAKEHOLDER THEORY

In trying to link Stakeholder Theory to DL theories , Hörisch et al. (2014a) indicated that the focus of Stakeholder Theory is articulated in two core questions. Firstly, it asks, what is the purpose of the independent college? This encourages managers to articulate the shared sense of the value they create and what brings its core Stakeholders together. This propels the firm forward and allows it to generate outstanding performance, determined both in terms of its purpose and marketplace financial metrics. Secondly, the Stakeholder Theory asks, what responsibility does management have to Stakeholders (students, parents, community, government regulators etc.)? This compels college administrators to articulate how they want to do business specifically, what kinds of relationships they want and need to create with their Stakeholders (students, parents, community, government regulators etc.) to deliver on their proposed DL.

A number of researchers made collective contributions towards the same notion that Hörisch et al. (2014a) suggested. Wu and Wokutch (2015) discovered that today's economic realities underscored the fundamental reality at the core of the Stakeholder Theory that economic value is created by people who voluntarily come together and co-operate to improve everyone's circumstance.

However, considering Hörisch et al's.(2014a) contributions above, there is a strong belief that administrators must develop relationships, inspire their Stakeholders and create

education communities where everyone strives to give their best to deliver the value the college promises. Certainly, college owners are an important constituent and profits are a critical feature of this activity but concern for profits is the result rather than the driver in the process of value creation. Many Independent Colleges have developed and run their businesses in terms highly consistent with Stakeholder Theory. To this end, the Stakeholder Theory starts with the assumption that values are essentially or unavoidably and explicitly a part of doing business and rejects the separation thesis (Freeman, 1994).

Conclusively, Carlisle et al's (2013) work explained and summarised that whereas all these Independent Colleges value their shareholders and profitability, none of them make profitability the fundamental driver of what they do. These colleges also see the importance of values and relationships with Stakeholders as a critical part of their DL programme. They have found compelling answers to the two core questions posed by Stakeholder Theory, which underscores the moral pre-suppositions of managing namely that they are about purpose and human relationships.

3.25 STAKEHOLDER THEORY AND ITS APPLICATION TO DL

In addition to making a profit and obeying the law, an independent college should attempt to consult, involve Stakeholders when developing, implementing and providing DL programmes. Such a view is commonly and generally advocated through the Stakeholder Theory. This theory maintains that Independent Colleges should chew over the effects of their actions upon their students who have interest in the college (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Phillips et al., 2003; Hörisch, et al., 2014a; Moriarty, 2014).

Supporters such as Castellini (2014) reasoned that by involving Stakeholders (students and parents) through DL Independent Colleges ensured a balanced business, continued success and expansion of the program to reach a larger population. Advocates of Stakeholder Theory maintained that increasing shareholder wealth is too myopic a view. Although profit maximisation for owners is core to most independent colleges, according to Stakeholder Theory, increased DL makes independent college more attractive to potential students. Therefore, DL should be undertaken by all independent college as this

is a modern learning model that is applied widely and effectively by public and private universities across the world (Carroll et al., 2014; Moriarty, 2014).

Regardless of this diverse discussion on Stakeholder Theory and its application to DL, it is evident that the theory offers a theoretically and practically useful framework for studying and evaluating DL which meets the needs of this research (Chiu et al., 2014). In this context, the definition of 'Stakeholder' is based on the work of Lynch-Wood, . and Williamson, (2014) and Freeman (2004) which identifies Stakeholders as having three attributes: power, legitimacy and urgency (Phillips, 2013).

3.25.1 Legitimacy

In relation with Stakeholders' attributes, Mahoney (2012) noted that in a more extreme version of Stakeholder Theory, Legitimacy theory claims that colleges have implicit contracts with Stakeholders to provide for their long-term needs and wants. By providing for the desires of Stakeholders, the college legitimises its existence. Because community provides important benefits to the college, the college is obligated to promote students' interests in return. The theory in effect claims that because colleges have the resources, they should engage, consult and include community, parents, students when developing, implementing and offering DL programmes.

Nonetheless, the degree to which Independent Colleges consider each Stakeholder group in the DL programme depends in practice on the urgency of the claim, the power and the legitimacy of the Stakeholders concerned. Colleges usually prioritise DL activities to respond to time-sensitive and critical issues raised by particular Stakeholders, such as failure rates, DL programme portal development, uploading of education material. Legitimacy refers to the contribution that Stakeholders make to the college value. If a Stakeholder group is vital for the college's existence, the college will consider more of their interests in the DL programme. The power dependence relationship indicates that if a Stakeholder group has significant power and influence over the college, the college may be forced to align their DL program to the wish of that particular Stakeholder group (Manente, Minghetti & Mingotto, 2015).

3.25.2 Let Business Try

Waldman and Balven (2014) argued that the education community should let Independent Colleges attempt to solve students' problems because other institutions have clearly failed to do so. Consequently, in order for colleges as institutions to retain their educational authority, colleges must meet the needs of students.

However, proponents of the argument, which is also known as the Iron Law of Responsibility (Mansell, 2015; Mahoney, 2012; Sen & Cowley, 2013; Meier, Favero, & Zhu, 2015) contended that the education community ultimately acts to reduce the power of those colleges that have not acted responsibly. The studies of Mason, and Simmons (2014) concluded that Stakeholder attributes affected not only Independent Colleges involvement of Stakeholders in their DL programmes for efficiency, but also the perceptions of DL performance by the education community in which the independent college operates in.

In trying to establish the Stakeholder Theory as the appropriate theoretical framework for DL in Independent Colleges, a more detailed explanation on the application and link between the theory and DL is provided below.

3.26 STAKEHOLDER THEORY AND DL

Fernandez-Feijoo and Romero and Ruiz (2014b) posited it is not enough to focus on *what* the Independent Colleges are responsible for in DL programmes, but also to *whom* they are responsible for. According to Mellahi and Wood (2003) who terminologically formalised the DL concept, DL is an educational obligation and follows the objectives and values of Higher Education. The educational approach to DL argued that Independent Colleges have not only economic, educational and legal obligations, but also particular responsibilities to students and the community as a whole (Walmsley & Partington, 2014).

However, Melo and Garrido-Morgado (2012) specified that the success of DL programmes resides in the Stakeholder instead of the ability of Independent Colleges society as a whole. Brown and Forster (2013) as well as Crane and Ruebottom (2011) in their research on DL, subscribed to the notion that individual businesses can be deemed

responsible only to Stakeholders. The Stakeholder Theory defines the objective of companies as being able to satisfy both the economic and non-economic demands of various Stakeholders. In a broad context, the Stakeholder Theory derives a normative framework to link the independent college and education community and can be considered as the DL theory, normally accepted as the Stakeholder approach to DL. The concept of Stakeholder and DL are intimately linked to each other (Hillenbrand, Money & Ghobadian, 2013). In this modern era, the Stakeholder Theory is the most common framework for conceptualizing and understanding issues concerning DL (Miles, 2012). In addition to Miles' (2012) statements, Mohamed and Mnguu (2014) stated that the Stakeholder Theory is a complementary rather than a conflicting body of literature, which is considered as a necessary process in the operationalisation of DL. The Stakeholder Theory provides a practical platform for DL as in essence, DL reflects the fundamental premises of Stakeholder Theory (Mok et al., 2015).

The Stakeholder concept has been accepted as an important driver, amplifying corporate involvement in DL (Moon, 2012). In addition, Moriarty(2014) noted that the Stakeholder Theory asserted that college business can be understood as a set of relationships amongst groups which have a stake in the activities of that college. The Stakeholder Theory places more emphasis on the fact that Independent Colleges should be motivated not only to pursue profit maximisation, but other multiple objectives as well. In other words, to manage and coordinate the various competitive and co-operative demands of Stakeholders (Mohamed et al., 2014). Mok et al. (2015) pointed out that Stakeholder Theory and DL activity have been integrated. Functionally, the Stakeholder Theory is essentially a way of making capitalism more equitable in serving non-shareholder interests and a way of understanding DL.

The manipulative power influence of the Stakeholder Theory in a DL programme can be classified according to the three types of Stakeholder Theories which have been described in the preceding sections. The Normative Stakeholder Theory suggests a comprehensive, multidimensional DL programme which is inclusive of all the Stakeholder views, needs and concerns equally; the Instrumental Stakeholder Theory leads to a DL programme emphasising the economic performance and benefits of college owners and

the Descriptive Stakeholder Theory emphasizes upholding Stakeholder interests, college image and college behaviour, thus leading to a DL program in accordance with shared Stakeholder expectations (Mullerat, 2018).

According to DL studies, Stakeholder Theory offers an important foundation for assembling and analysing DL data and serves as a framework for empirical studies (Munasinghe et al., 2012). Moon (2014) stated that Stakeholder Theory holds that DL issues consider all the Stakeholders, managing divergent and conflicting interests among them. Thus, the Stakeholder Theory offers a theoretically and practically useful framework for studying and evaluating DL (Driessen & Hillebrand, 2015).

Finally, the researcher would like to use Freeman's (2010) new approach to DL called 'company Stakeholder responsibility' to explain the relationship between DL and Stakeholders. Mutti et al.(2012) citing Freeman *et al.* (2010) advocated for a practical application of DL through the Stakeholder Theory. The approach looks at college business and education community as intertwined and it looks not just at Independent Colleges, but at many different forms of institutions and promotes a pragmatic focus on managing the relations with all the college's Stakeholders as a primary task for success. This requires a detailed understanding of, to which exactly an independent college is responsible and the nature of responsibility. Independent Colleges address these questions in a variety of ways, but each time they need the language of Stakeholders to get to a more actionable level of specificity.

3.28 GENERALISATION OF A STAKEHOLDER APPROACH TO DL

Some key central concepts associated with what is known today as Stakeholder Theory began to gain currency during the mid-1980s. Freeman et al.(2014) and Purnell, et al's. (2012) work facilitated the reconceptualization of the nature of the independent college to persuade a consideration of external Stakeholders on DL decisions, beyond the traditional internal Stakeholders, lecturers, administrators, legitimising in turn new forms of managerial understanding and action (Rahim & Wisuttisak, 2013). College businesses, from this viewpoint, are expected to responsibly manage an extended web of Stakeholder interests across increasingly permeable organisational boundaries, as well as

acknowledge a duty of care towards traditional interest groups international boards (Simmons & Elkins, 2004).

In the future, many researchers will be using Stakeholder ideas and terminology as several authors have indeed favoured a stakeholder approach when examining DL (Reed,et al., 2015). In their assessment of DL in the context of Independent Colleges, researchers have identified the demands of key Stakeholders (students) regarding the creation of value by the college in their study (Revathy, 2012).

The same approach was applied by Reverte (2014) in their exploration of the DL experience and practice by Independent Colleges in Portugal, where four key Stakeholders were identified, namely students, regulators, education community and the international examining boards. Within the college, they also examined workplace practices (i.e., lecturers). Their research propagates a clear inclination on the part of Independent Colleges operating in Portugal to attend to the external dimension of DL. Another study was carried out in the Spanish context by Saunders, and Lewis (2012) who also applied a Stakeholder approach, defining DL effectiveness as the ability to satisfy a wide range of constituents within and outside the Independent Colleges. Two categories of Stakeholders, economic and social, were identified and the findings suggested the salience of economic Stakeholders (i.e., students and parents) over social ones which included sports clubs, the church and the community. The researchers confirmed on the basis of their study the utility of a Stakeholder approach in the context of DL (Reed &Curzon, 2015).

A Stakeholder approach was also utilised by Reverte, (2014) in the context of KZN Independent Colleges. Their underlying principle for using a Stakeholder approach is that Stakeholders habitually affect or are affected by college business and, therefore, can be seen as imposing on them different responsibilities. Their findings suggested that KZN Independent Colleges award most attention to students and parents in their pursuit of DL; judicious attention to the education community Stakeholder; and limited consideration to suppliers, international examining boards and the regulators. The bulk of the studies encountered in the literature and outlined above fall within the scope of Descriptive

Stakeholder Theory, which outlined the views of participants on the mission or objectives of their organisations and its actions (i.e., different Stakeholders). This methodology can yield interesting insights, particularly that organisations are socially constructed and act in accordance with shared perceptions (Casson, 2015). Seabela and Fatoki, (2014) added that there are also spicing flavours in the literature of assessments along the lines of Instrumental or Normative Stakeholder Theory. Instrumental Stakeholder Theory assumes that the independent college is an apparatus for wealth creation with DL conceived as a strategic tool to promote economic objectives on a wider educational outreach. According to Seabela and Fatoki(2014), Normative Stakeholder Theory on the other hand delineates philosophically based moral obligations Independent Colleges has towards Stakeholders, focusing on the ethical requirements that cement the relationship between the college and students.

Adegoju (2014) explained that while the tenet of Stakeholder Theory is that all Stakeholders matter and also, agreeably, Independent Colleges should integrate their obligation to the various Stakeholder constituencies, this balancing exercise has proven difficult to implement in practice. Rather than producing every kind of economic value for every Stakeholder, Independent Colleges find themselves constrained in practice by limited resources and bounded rationality and thus tended to prioritise their Stakeholders according to instrumental and or normative considerations. Such Stakeholder classification or prioritisation usually draws on managerial discretion, their specific instrumental or normative inclinations, as well as their assessment of relational Stakeholder attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency, legitimizing in turn the usefulness of a descriptive Stakeholder Theory or methodology (Allen et al., 2012).

Conclusively, considering all the arguments, the Stakeholder Theory in all its three veins or branches brought to the fore a set of new insights for DL academics and practitioners. It accentuates the notion that college business must be viewed as operating at the centre of a 'network of interrelated Stakeholders that create, sustain and enhance value creating capacity' challenging in turn an exclusive focus on shareholders.'

3.29 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The contention advanced is that the Stakeholder Theory is 'managerial' and the recommendation of attitudes, structures and practices if taken together constitute a Stakeholder management philosophy. The theory goes beyond the purely descriptive observation that Independent Colleges have Stakeholders, which, although true, carries no direct managerial implications. Furthermore, the notion that Stakeholder management contributes to successful business performance featured prominently in the literature and most researchers agree to a large extent that the Stakeholder Theory through DL propels college business upwards. This notion, although widely believed (and not patently inaccurate), is insufficient to stand alone as a basis for the Stakeholder Theory. Indeed, the most thoughtful analysis of why Stakeholder management might be casually related to independent college performance ultimately resorts to normative arguments in support of the views. For these reasons, the ultimate justification for the Stakeholder Theory is to be found in its normative base. According to this perspective, managerial relationships with Stakeholders are based on normative, moral commitments, rather than on a desire to use those Stakeholders solely to maximize profits. In short, an independent college is naturally expected to establish certain fundamental moral principles as it grows. These guide how the college does business, in particular with respect to how it treats Stakeholders. The college uses those principles as a basis for decision making. One genesis of this normative model is the fact that college decisions affect Stakeholder outcomes.

The most prominent alternative to the Stakeholder Theory (i.e., the management serving the shareowners theory) is morally untenable. The theory of property rights, which is commonly supposed to support the conventional view, in fact in its modern and pluralistic form supports the Stakeholder Theory instead.

In reaction to the results, the Stakeholder Theory advocates argued that inclusivity is the right thing to do whether or not it leads to profitable DL programmes. In contrast, proponents of other theories would argue that this lack of DL awareness impairs the case for DL. If an independent college cannot make profits from implementing a DL

programme, then the programme is detrimental to owner wealth and should not be implemented.

However, a general view that featured promptly in most researchers' work is that independent college should maximize long term owner's wealth, but not at the expense of Stakeholders (students) and ethical guidelines. An independent college should not deliberately harm Stakeholders (students) to make a profit, and they should not go out of their way to promote Stakeholders' interests; if in doing so suck the life out of the independent college business. In reverse, Independent Colleges cannot be profitable in the long term if they have poor relations with their Stakeholders (students). At the same time, colleges cannot meet all the needs of their students and remain profitable.

Additionally, independent college decisions should be based on objective ethical codes of conduct. Therefore, Independent Colleges should make a profit, obey the law, act according to an ethical standard and pursue DL programmes that improve student results and shape careers, at the end of the day promoting long-term sustainable growth of the college. It is against this background that this research study is anchored by the Stakeholder Theory, which directly feeds into the Research Paradigms i.e., positivist (aligned to a quantitative perspective): Considering Stakeholders, the positivist position presumes the social world exists objectively and externally and that knowledge is valid only if it is based on observations and consideration of this external reality.

The next chapter presents the research methodology utilized to collect the primary data.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the research methodology and design employed in this study. The focus is on the research methodology; research approach; target population; sample selection; sample size; distinction between qualitative and quantitative research; questionnaire development; ethical issues and how they were addressed; data coding; data processing; and tests to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. Since the Stakeholder Theoretical Framework determined the research paradigm, the researcher chose to develop the research methodology as described below (4.3) to enhance the researcher's ability to make quality conclusions from the quantitative viewpoint.

4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM/PHILOSOPHY

Bairagi and Munot (2019) described a research paradigm/philosophy as fundamental beliefs which are acknowledged primarily based on religion and that offer a framework for the research procedure as a whole. The research philosophy of science includes beliefs and assumptions concerning ontology (which refers to the nature of reality), epistemology (which refers to the relationship between the researcher and the research participant), axiology (which relates to what role a researcher's personal values play in the research process), rhetorical structure (the language and presentation of the research study), and methodology (the process and procedures of the research) (Muse & Baldwin, 2021).

4.3 DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The key building blocks for this research involved directional relationships between ontology, epistemology and methodology. Inevitably, there is an inter-relationship between what can be researched (the ontological position), what can be known and discovered (the epistemological position), and how to go about acquiring it (the

methodological approach). This research design has been structured from key concepts which eventually became variables through the specification of procedures for their measurement.

4.3.1 Ontology

The root definition of ontology is described by Berger (2013) as the science or study of being. He developed this description for the social sciences to incorporate 'claims' about what exists, what it exactly looks like, what are the units that make it up and how these units interact with each other. However, in essence, ontology describes one's view (whether assumptions or claims) on the nature of reality and is specifically used to answer the question, is this an objective reality that really exists or only a subjective reality created in our minds (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006).

In an effort to simplify the whole concept of ontology, Vainio (2013) used both an everyday example and a social science example to demonstrate the point. For the everyday example, he used the workplace report. He took a chance picking one employee to question whether the workplace report describes what is really going on or only what the author thinks is going on. He went on to highlight the complexity that is brought up when considering phenomena such as culture, power or control and whether they indeed exist or are simply an illusion.

Furthermore, extending the discussion as to how individuals and groups determine these realities, Vainio (2013) posed such critical questions as does the reality exist only through experience of it (i.e., subjectivism), or does it exist autonomously of those who live in it (i.e., objectivism)? Conclusively, as a result of this exegesis, people have a number of deeply entrenched ontological assumptions which will definitely affect their view on what is real and whether one attributes existence to one set of things over another. Consequently, if these underlying assumptions are not identified and considered, then the researcher obliquely may be blinded to certain aspects of the inquiry or certain phenomena, since these aspects are implicitly assumed, often taken for granted and therefore not opened to interrogation, contemplation or discussion (Holbraad, Pedersen & Viveiros de Castro, 2014).

In considering that different views exist on the subject of what constitutes reality, then another question will obviously arise on how that reality is measured and what constitutes knowledge of that reality. Epistemology comes into the picture.

4.3.2. Epistemology

Simon (2015) highlighted that closely coupled with ontology and its consideration of what constitutes reality, epistemology considered views about the most appropriate ways of enquiring into the nature of the world and what is knowledge and what are the sources and limits of knowledge. Questions of epistemology begin to consider the research method. Epistemology defines how knowledge can be fashioned and argued for (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). With that in mind, Berger (2013) described epistemology as the theory or science of the method or grounds of knowledge. In the process of intensifying this into a set of claims or assumptions about the ways in which it is probable to gain knowledge of reality, how what exists may be known; what can be known, and what criteria must be satisfied in order to be described as knowledge. In his description, Berger (2013) stated that epistemology is how and what is possible to know and the need to reflect on methods and standards through which reliable and verifiable knowledge is produced. Furthermore, Bristowe, Selman and Murtagh (2015) through Bryman and Bell (2015) collectively summarized epistemology as knowing how one can know and expand this by asking how is knowledge generated, what criteria discriminate good knowledge from bad knowledge and how reality should be represented or termed.

Cooper and Schindler (2011) highlighted the interdependent relationship between epistemology and ontology, and how they inform and depend upon each other. In view of this link, the need to understand the position of the researcher becomes more evident. Corbin and Strauss (2014) mentioned that if the researcher holds certain ontological positions or assumptions, these may influence the epistemological choices or conclusions drawn. Hence, as with ontology, both objective and subjective epistemological views exist. In the same context Creswell (2014) described an objective epistemology as presuming that a world exists that is external and theory neutral, whereas within a

subjective epistemological view no access to the external world beyond one's own observations and interpretations is possible.

On Davies and Hughes' (2014) authority, data collected from objects that exist separate to the researcher (an external reality) is less open to bias and, therefore, more objective and if social phenomena are studied, these must be presented in a statistical rather than narrative form in order to hold any authority a position of course that many researchers would challenge. Bell and Waters (2014) posited that since social research involved so many choices, the opportunity for researchers' values and preferences to influence the process make it difficult to ultimately achieve true objectivity.

These debates direct one to the next area for deliberation, which different researchers identify by unique names but are the same thing. Bell and Waters (2014) described the subject as the 'research paradigm' and others such as Creswell. (2013) described it as the 'research philosophy'. Under research, these philosophies are formed from basic ontological and the correlated epistemological positions and have since developed in both contemporary and classical forms in order to meritoriously categorize different research approaches. Other researchers (Corbin et al., 2014) described the research paradigm as an interpretive framework, after borrowing from Cooper, Schindler and Sun (2006) who described it as a basic set of beliefs that guides action.

The researcher takes a closer look at three key paradigms, namely positivist, interpretivist / constructivist and realist.

4.4 RESEARCH PARADIGMS

The following is a discussion of the three key paradigms and a simple classification is used to distinguish the key components. These paradigms are chosen not only for their common usage in management research but also primarily because they effectively form the cornerstone from which other paradigms are derived. Habitually, different names tend to be used to simply describe apparently similar paradigms. Generally, this is as a result of similar approaches being developed in parallel across different branches of the social sciences.

4.4.1 Positivist

Bairagi et al. (2019) postulated that the positivist position is derived from that of natural science and is characterized by the testing of hypotheses developed from existing theory, *hence deductive or theory testing*, through measurement of observable social realities. Bryman and Bell (2015) added that this position presumes that the social world exists objectively and externally, that knowledge is valid only if it is based on observations of this external reality and that universal or general laws exist or that theoretical models can be developed that are generalizable, can explain cause and effect relationships and which lend themselves to predicting outcomes.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) and Simpson (2014) agreed that Positivism is based upon values of reason, truth and validity and there is a focus purely on facts gathered through direct observation and experience and measured empirically using quantitative methods such as surveys and experiments and statistical analysis. Creswell (2014) related this to the organizational context by stating that positivists assume that what truly happens in organizations can only be discovered through categorization and scientific measurement of the behavior of people and systems and that language is truly representative of the reality.

4.4.2 Interpretivist / Constructivist

Bristowe, Selman and Murtagh (2015) described the interpretive position as anti-positivist, while Bel and Waters (2014) described the same position as post-positivist since it is contended that there is a fundamental difference between the subject matters of natural and social sciences. In the social science world, it is argued that individuals and groups make sense of situations based upon their individual experience, memories and expectations. The position is, therefore, constructed and constantly re-constructed over time through experience, resulting in many differing interpretations that obviously at the end of the day create a social reality in which people act (Bless et al., 2016).

Furthermore, in line with this paradigm, it is viewed as imperative to discover and understand these meanings and the contextual factors that influence, determine and affect the interpretations reached by different individuals (Berger, 2013).

Arguably, Bryman, et al. (2015) posited that interpretivists consider that there are multiple realities, *since all knowledge is relative to the knower*. Interpretivists aim to work alongside others as they make sense of, draw meaning from and create their realities in order to understand their points of view and to interpret these experiences in the context of the researcher's academic experience. It is, hence, inductive or theory building. The focus of the researcher is on understanding the meanings and interpretations of *social actors* and on understanding their world from their point of view, is highly contextual and hence, is not widely generalizable. Castells, and Himanen (2014) added that understanding what people are thinking and feeling, as well as how they communicate, verbally and non-verbally is considered important and given the subjective nature of this paradigm, and the emphasis on language, it is associated with qualitative approaches to data gathering. The researcher also discovered that the close nature of the researcher and the researched in this paradigm and the risk that any interpretation is framed within the mind of the researcher means that steps must be introduced to avoid bias. Therefore, the use of self-reflection is advised (Bristowe et al., 2015).

4.4.3 post-positivist

According to Cooper et al. (2011) the position originated from the view that positivism was over-deterministic in that there seems to be little room for choice due to the causal nature of universal laws and that constructionism was entirely relativist and hence, highly contextual. Collectively, realism takes aspects from both positivist and interpretivist positions. Realism generally states that real structures exist free of human consciousness but that knowledge is socially created. Corbin et al. (2014) contended that our knowledge of reality is a result of social conditioning. Bell et al. (2014) stated that whilst realism is concerned with what kinds of things there are and how these things behave, it accepts that reality may exist despite science or observation. Therefore, there is validity in recognizing realities that are simply claimed to exist or act, whether proven or not.

According to Creswell (2013) in common with interpretivist stand-points; realism identifies that natural and social sciences are diverse and that social reality is pre-interpreted. Nevertheless, realists, in line with the positivist position also embrace the position that science must be empirically-based. Davies et al. (2014) noted that rationality and

objectivity argue that social objects may be studied 'scientifically' as social objects, not simply through language and discourse.

While positivists posit that direct causal relationships exist, that these relationships apply universally (*leading to prediction*) and that the underlying mechanisms can be understood through observation, Denzin, Lincoln and Giardina (2006) asserted that Realists take the view that the underlying mechanisms are simply the powers or tendencies that things have to act in a certain way and that other factors may moderate these tendencies depending upon circumstances. Hence, the focus is more on understanding and explaining rather than on prediction. Even though Bechhofer and Paterson (2012) described realism as *ultimately a search for generative mechanisms* he pointed out that Realists recognize that the underlying mechanisms can act apparently independently or *out of phase* with the observable events and that events can occur independently of them being experienced. This is a view that Eriksson et al. (2014) called a *stratified* form of reality whereby shallow events are molded by underlying structures and mechanisms, but often what we see is only just a splinter of the picture (Fellows & Liu, 2015).

From an organizational perspective, Spodek and Saracho (2014) generally described the realist researcher as enquiring into the mechanisms and structures that underlie institutional forms and practices; how these emerge over time; how they might empower and constrain social actors; and how such forms may be critiqued and changed.

In addition, Rea and Parker (2014) concurred that Realists take the view that researching from different angles and at multiple levels will all contribute to understanding since reality can exist on multiple levels. Hence, realism may be seen as inductive or theory building.

Therefore, the philosophical paradigm that guides this study is positivist, which subsequently recommends a Quantitative approach. Also, the problem under study required the participants' quantitative opinions, which justified a Quantitative approach as it enabled the researcher to triangulate the views and ideas of previous researchers who used other methodologies.

4.5 RESEARCH APPROACH

This study is guided by a positivist position which utilized a Quantitative approach to collect the primary data. Silverman (2013) posited that the positivist research tradition uses quantitative methods of hypothesis-testing as it seeks to test correlations between variables. Holbraad et al. (2014) stated the various research traditions suggested that the positivist tradition aligns itself with quantitative research methods in that it holds a view which is objective and based on empirical analysis. Conversely, Holbraad et al. (2014) stated that the interpretive tradition uses qualitative methods of hypothesis-generation, as it is more concerned with observations and descriptions. Then, Gummesson (2000) argued that the interpretive tradition in its subjective nature aligns itself to qualitative research methods in that the research performed holds the view of only those individuals who are directly involved in the study.

4.5.1 Quantitative and Qualitative

Qualitative research, is defined as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Creswell, 2012). Quantitative research aims to test the predictive and cause-effect hypotheses about social reality, and it encompasses surveys which are often used for descriptive and explanatory resolutions (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2012).

Kratochwill (2013) discovered that descriptive methods seek to answer questions like what, when, where, who and how many. The advantage of using the qualitative approach is that qualitative researchers can formulate and reformulate their work; may be less committed to perspectives which may have been mis-conceptualized at the beginning of the study; and may modify concepts as the collection and analysis of the data proceeds. The question underlying differences in research paradigms should be their ontological and epistemological assumptions. Hence, specific methods, particularly data gathering methods, are not necessarily linked with one set of assumptions as opposed to another. It has been discovered through research that qualitative research helps the researcher to find meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors and descriptions of issues, as a complementary process. The quantitative approach supplements the process by counting and measuring the variables under the research study (Ritchie et al., 2013).

In agreement with the above, quantitative methodology is often considered more objective and is naturally allied with a positivist perspective, while qualitative methodology is linked with an understanding of uniqueness derived from an interpretative perspective (Silverman, 2013).

Summarily, according to Berg and Lune (2013), qualitative data are associated with meanings while quantitative data are related to numbers. However, for this research study a quantitative methodology was adopted as the methodology allowed empirical analysis and evidence justification through calculative methods like Chi square and measures of central tendencies (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

4.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design should be viewed differently. Ritchie et al. (2013) viewed a research design as the judgment that associates the information to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn from the original questions of the research. This means the research design can be described as a process of designing strategies to gather data which answer research questions. Similarly, Cooper et al. (2010) and Kratochwill (2013) concurred that it is a master plan or scaffold which outlines the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing data. These two views differ in that the former emphasises answering research questions and obtaining generalisation from the data, whilst the later views research design as a framework which guides the research process. Other scholars like Corbin et al. (2014) described the research design as a plan or proposal to conduct research. However, most recent researchers Holbraad et al. (2014) based their definition of research design on work done by Berg and Lune (2013).

Yin (2013) defined research design as a logical plan for getting from here to there, where 'here' may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered and 'there' is some set of conclusions about these questions. Corbin et al. (2014) viewed a research design as a reasoned transformation from problem to the answering or finding possible solutions to the problem. Yin (2013: 321) proposed another definition namely,

“Research design can be defined as a plan that guides the researcher in the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting observations. It is a logical model of proof that allows the researcher to draw inferences concerning causal relations among variables under investigation”.

The above definition epitomises the key aspects of research design, namely the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Collection refers to the process of gathering data from objects. Analysis shows the process of coding and drawing inference from data to become information, whilst interpretation means generalisation of the data in order to come up with a theory or model.

Cooper et al. (2010) and Silverman (2013) agreed with Ritchie et al. (2013) on four issues that a research design addresses. Firstly, it addresses the issue of what questions to study. Secondly, the problems of what data are relevant are addressed. Thirdly, issues of what data must be collected are raised. Lastly, the problem of how to analyse the data and reach a conclusion is explored. Therefore, the main purpose of the research design is to help to avoid a situation in which the evidence does not address the initial research question. According to Ritchie et al. (2013) a research design dealt with a logical problem and not a logistical problem. Silverman (2013) summarised the description of a research design by saying that an appropriate research design gives focus to a study, and ensures the data collection processes are in line with the objectives of the study, considering that accurate data must be collected if the results of a study are to be useful.

There are five types of research designs, namely Experiment, Survey, Archival Analysis, Historical design and Case study (Ritchie et al., 2013; Silverman, 2013). The researcher selected the case study research design for the reasons explained the below.

4.6.1 Research design that guided the study

As mentioned in the previous sections this research study is descriptive in nature thereby reinforcing the Researcher's research design choice. The Researcher selected the Case Study research design as a framework for collecting data to answer the research questions. However, the area (KwaZulu Natal province) is made up of different Stakeholders which are in line with the Stakeholder Theory. In this section, the researcher

defines the case study research design. Secondly the researcher justifies the use of it. And lastly, the Researcher discusses the strengths and limitations of the case study.

4.6.1.1 Definition of a Case Study

Various scholars suggest a number of definitions. The researcher started by analysing the definitions proposed by Corbin et al. (2014) and Yin (2013). Instead of giving a definition, these authors outline what the case study does. They posited that it is an inquiry that:

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context;
- is used when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evidently clear;
- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest data points, and as one result;
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result;
- benefits from prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis; and
- is not merely considered as a data collection tactic but is a comprehensive research strategy.

The above characteristics emphasise that a case study is suitable where objects are examined in their social settings and where the researcher can use various data collection methods to triangulate data and reach a conclusion.

Yin (2013) elaborated that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions; why they were taken; how they were implemented and with what result. He added that it is a strategy to be preferred when circumstances and research problems were appropriate rather than an ideological commitment to be followed whatever the circumstances. Therefore, a case study guides the researcher in the process of solving a research problem using data collected from observing an object, group of objects or an organisation. Similarly, Silverman (2013) described the case study as a research

stratagem which implied the use of either qualitative or quantitative data collection or analysis while using the case study as a platform. The data compilation procedure is usually interactive as the researcher relates to persons implicated in the case under consideration. The case can be an individual person, an event, a group or an institution to which in-depth analysis is applied.

In their study Rose, Spinks and Canhoto (2015) also described the features of the case study. They outlined five features. Firstly, it is an in-depth study of a small number of cases, often longitudinally (prospectively or retrospectively). Secondly, data is collected and analysed relating to a large number of features for each case. Thirdly, cases are studied in their real-life context, understanding how the case influences and is influenced by its context. Fourthly, cases naturally occur in the sense that they are not manipulated as in an experiment. Lastly, it uses multiple sources of data including interviews, observations, archival documents and even physical artefacts, to allow triangulation of findings. This description concurred with other scholars' views, for example, (Ritchie et al., 2013; Silverman, 2013).

4.6.1.2 Justifying the use of the Case Study

The researcher applied the case study approach as the main technique for this explanatory research for the reasons discussed below. The case study addresses the research problem within the positivist paradigm which also aligned with the Stakeholder Theory discussed above. The case study permits the use of a single method for collecting data. In this regard, the researcher used questionnaires (quantitative) to collect data. This gave the researcher leeway to address the shortcomings of methodologies used by previous researchers on DL as discussed in Chapter Two.

In line with Ritchie et al.'s (2013) view that the case study does not require extensive access to or control over the behavioural patterns of the objects, the researcher established that there was no way she could control the behaviour of students. The case study enabled the Researcher to collect closed-ended emerging data through questionnaire, which was used to answer the research questions. The other reason the researcher used the case study as it has many advantages.

Rose et al. (2015) outlined the many advantages of the case study. Other scholars (Ritchie et al., 2013) and Silverman (2013) indicated that there is less bias in the case of summarising and coming up with general propositions based on the work done. The case study enabled the researcher to extract the richest and most significant data, given that objective sampling was applied. The case study also allowed one to analyse generalisations.

However, many researchers Cooper et al. (2010) and Silverman (2013) warned of certain pitfalls inherent in the case study. The case study can be time-consuming. To overcome this limitation, the researcher used weekends and afterhours to make up for time with the respondents and for her. The other weakness cited was that it was labour intensive. The researcher allocated more time and resources to concentrate on the data gathering stage.

Location of Study

For the purpose of this research study two independent colleges were used in the case study. They are College A hereafter referred to as College A and AAA School of Advertising hereafter referred to as College B

Both the Institution's programmes have been historically driven by demand in the workplace. The National Master Scarce Skills List for South Africa provided by the Department of Labour as well as Seta Sector Skills Plan demand work-based programmes that are geared towards preparing students in finding meaningful employment in the ICT, commerce, government and industry sectors. Work-integrated learning Included in the curriculum are compulsory work-readiness skills and work integrated learning programmes requiring appropriate workplace assessment for all students, before awarding qualifications. These qualifications are offered via blended learning techniques including face to face and Distance Learning.

Learner management system

The Institution has migrated to the Moodle Student Management System which is also used by major universities of the world. Students can directly access additional learning content from the website.

Benchmarking

An active benchmarking strategy of the key processes, programmes and curricula with other private, public, national, international and trade organisations is carried out in the constant pursuit of excellence and continued improvement.

Relevant curriculum

Developing and delivering curricula in line with industry and employer requirements are supported by an externally represented Senate. In addition, academic faculties and departments provide support to all teaching for learning activities.

Professional management

Teaching and Learning expertise on each campus, together with professional management, ensure that the learning needs of students are met and that the quality of teaching for learning, assessment and research is continually improved and consistent at all campuses. Students are provided with a system of nationally managed, standardised learning materials and curricula which are reviewed and upgraded annually. Learning materials are also preloaded on Tablet or laptop PCs, making them easily accessible. Interactive Learning Small and manageable class sizes allow for interactive teaching for learning and provision of strategic supplementary classes in smaller groups targeting specific needs in student development. Concurrently classes are streamed using Teams classrooms and Videos and power points which are saved on Teams classroom and MOODLE to be accessed by both contact and DL.

International ISO 9001: 2015 and OHSAS 18001: 2007 quality standards The Institution also holds to the ISO 9001: 2015 and OHSAS 18001: 2007 internationally certified quality

standards for the provision of higher education and training, distance and vocational technical studies, professional learning and skills programmes to international organisations and individuals.

South African Regulatory Compliance

In addition to the International Quality Standards, the Institution meets the quality standards of the Council on Higher Education, Department of Higher Education and the South African Qualifications Authority. Internet-enabled libraries Access to internet-enabled libraries, which offer full text electronic database downloads for teaching and learning purposes, are available to students.

Social networks using Wi-Fi connectivity and Tablet or laptop PCs are encouraged and freely available at all campuses.

Academic infrastructure: The Institution has state-of-the-art facilities and highly qualified academic and support staff including a mix of foreign academic professionals who also provide scarce and critical skills.


Industry Engagement: College A has a dedicated team working closely with industry experts and thought leaders, as well as key stakeholders in recruitment, and learning development to ensure we develop cutting-edge curriculum that will in turn prioritise College A graduates for employment.

Articulation of qualification: The Institution's qualifications are positioned on the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and certain qualifications are also positioned on the new Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF). All qualifications have an occupational content and allow for vertical and horizontal articulation. Academic

Agility: Despite Covid-19, the institution continued the academic year without any teaching and learning disruptions. Library and e-library resources College A possesses a substantial academic library collection of over 135 000 textbooks across its 30 libraries nationally. The latest available textbooks are prescribed and kept in the libraries

nationally. The e-library subscribes to an increasing number of electronic journals (e-journals), electronic case studies (e-cases), electronic books (e-books), electronic magazines (e-magazines) and electronic newspapers (e-newspapers) from leading academic publishers such as Elsevier Science Direct, Emerald Publishing, Springer Nature and Press Reader. Major book publishers such as Cengage Learning, Pearson Education, Wiley, McGraw-Hill, Juta, Oxford and Lexis Nexis provide academic support to the institution. Health and wellness policy Students are to familiarise themselves with the institution's health and wellness policy. Policy on disability Students is to familiarise themselves with the institution's policy on disability. (College A and AAA websites)


Digital Libraries




PressReader offers unlimited digital access to over 4 000 top newspapers and more than 3 000 magazines from around the world. Students choose from full-version, current day content in 60+ languages from more than 100 countries.

Students can enjoy reading the world's newspapers and magazines the way they want to receive them:

- In downloads, online, or on their mobile device, tablet or e-reader
- Wherever they live, travel, work or play



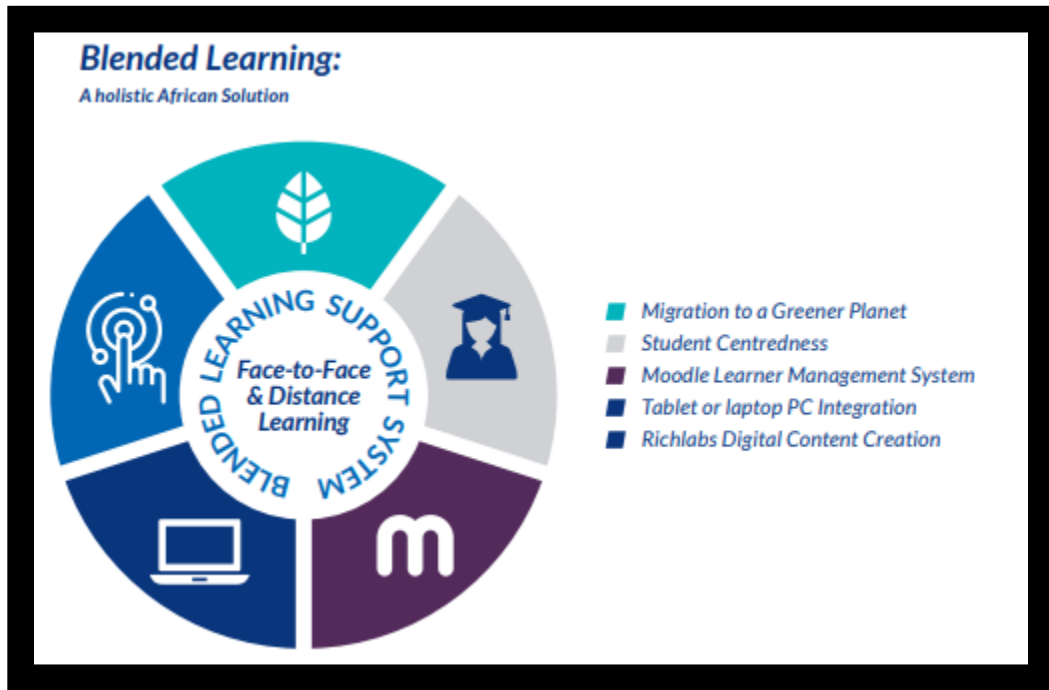


The Institution has perpetual access to Elsevier ScienceDirect e-book collection. The e-book collection consists of the following subject areas:

- Computer science, business, management, hospitality and tourism, finance, media technology, medicine and dentistry



Discover this unparalleled resource for accelerating research and learning for students, researchers and professionals. Richfield has partnered with International Publisher, Springer Nature, to make available over 3 000 new Titles of 2018/2015



Reference: College A

Student Centeredness

Moodle Learner Management System Tablet or laptop PC Integration Richlabs Digital Content Creation Blended Learning: A holistic African Solution Students who register for a Diploma, Degree or Postgraduate qualification will receive a Laptop with Windows 10. This laptop fully supports all programming languages utilised during the course and comes with a 12-month warranty. Students also gain access to world-class campus-based Wi-Fi, e-libraries and student learner management system. All other students registering for other full Higher Education courses, such as Higher Certificate will receive a FREE Vodacom Tablet or laptop PC which includes limited warranty and storage, e-libraries and 100mb monthly data valid for 12 months. All students have FREE access to the College A Website and Moodle platform. The Tablet or laptop PC is compact, very lightweight and extremely easy to carry. Their tablets or laptops can easily fit into most backpacks. The learning material also includes global podcasts of experts' opinions on pertinent subjects and provides online entry to the Integrated Tertiary Software (ITS) and Moodle for assignments, accounts information and assessment results.

The above amplifies both the colleges' infrastructure preparedness in rolling out blended learning.

4.7 POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING

4.7.1 Targeted Population

In this study, 'target population' refers to the members or elements of a group under study and the term 'sample' refers to a subgroup chosen from the population to participate in the research (Wegner, 2010). The target population in this research is made up of different Stakeholders according to the Stakeholder Theory. The target population comprised of students from College A and College B in KwaZulu Natal province. The target population was made up of a total of 3000 students from 4 institutions combined. The researcher made use of the student registration list on the Institutions Information Management System to select the participants.

4.7.2 Sample size

Simple random sampling is a primary type of sampling since it can be a component of other more complex sampling methods. The principle of simple random sampling is that every object has the same probability of being chosen (Ritchie et al., 2013). Based on this understanding, random sampling was used to select a representative sample of 400 students from College A and College B in KwaZulu Natal province. Randomly, the students' membership list on the Institutions Information Management System was used to select the participants. According to this study, the representative sample of 400 was made up of students from the four Higher Education Institutions in KwaZulu Natal province. A total of 200 students were randomly selected from Independent College A and another 200 from Independent College B. Separately, a total of 10 students were selected randomly for the pilot study.

4.7.3 Sampling method

The sampling procedure involves drawing a representative sample which includes all the elements of the universe, which can be finite or infinite. Rose et al. (2015) stated that a

population or universe is the aggregate of all the elements, whilst the survey population is the aggregate of elements from which the sample is selected. According to Rose et al. (2015) the target population referred to the group of people or enterprises who form the object of the survey and from which conclusions are drawn. The sampling unit refers to the entity which is the focus of the survey. In order to select sampling units, a sampling frame is required. The sample frame could be obtained from census lists, telephone directories, maps, payrolls and membership lists of organisations. Rose, et al. (2015) postulated that the sampling frame comprises the complete list of all the units from which the sample is drawn.

Creswell (2012) pointed out that a sample is a subset of the population. However, not all the elements of the population would form the sample and by studying the sample, the researcher may draw conclusions or make inferences that allow generalizations about the target population. In addition, Creswell (2013) stated that the selection of a sample can be attributed to various factors, the most important being that it is simply not possible to study every unit in the population or to engage in a laborious exercise to collect data from the entire population. Even if it were possible, the financial costs incurred would be massive and unmanageable. Likewise, quantifying the capacious data would be a tiresome, long and gruelling task. Basically, through research, studying or working on a small sample is likely to yield reliable results and easily facilitate data collection, at the same time reducing the impact of errors (Krysik & Finn, 2013).

Conversely, the fundamental premise when choosing a good sample is generally and universally expected that it should be representative of the target population (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2011).

Though the research considers random sampling as a primary sampling method to choose participants, volunteering approach was used to solicit students' participation in the study. The sampling method is justified because they cut across all the target population learning programmes, and the population selected allowed a generalisation of results to the rest of the Independent Colleges.

4.8 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Measuring tools are used in research for the evaluation of participants, and these instruments are spread out to collect data on variables. The study made use of self-administered structured questionnaires (Creswell, 2014) in order to generalise results to a target population. The questionnaire was handed over to the participants. A reply-paid self-addressed envelope accompanied the questionnaire to facilitate a smooth return of the completed questionnaire.

4.8.1 Recruitment process

The recruitment process was based on volunteering. A sample of 400 students was randomly selected on a volunteer basis across all the DL programmes. The Researcher visited the Independent Colleges as part of recruitment and made use of lunch breaks and knock off time. Gatekeeper's letters (**Annexure B**) were sent to the target Independent Colleges.

4.8.2 Questionnaire

Thomas and Rothman (2013) pointed out that a questionnaire is a formalized set of questions for eliciting information and is generally associated with survey research to obtain primary data regardless of the form of administration. A researcher must come up with three parameters before a questionnaire can actually be designed or developed. The three parameters are as follows:

- The first one is to state the problem which initiated the research and to decide on the information necessary to solve it;
- The second one is to define the population to be surveyed; and
- The third one is to pick the best means of collecting the required information (Krysik & Finn, 2013).

For this study, in designing the questionnaire (**Annexure C**), the researcher attempted to fulfil the attributes or criteria for good questionnaire design as advanced by Foray et al. (2012) and also cited by Finn and Krysik (2013): The questionnaire must

- be complete and elicit all the data required;

- ask only pertinent questions;
- start with general questions;
- give clear instructions and;
- Have objective questions with sensitive questions spread at the end (Holbraad, et al., 2014).

Thomas et al. (2013) contended that there are more than a few advantages that come with questionnaires. The self-administered questionnaire was selected because generally through some previous research it proved to be less costly, less time consuming and the self-administration aspect reduced bias from differences in administration. In addition, self-administered questionnaires progressively gave participants sufficient time to go through it, review and think about their responses.

On other hand, the questionnaire is naturally susceptible to errors likely caused by respondents' steadily imperfect memory; lack of gestures, visual cues and emotions and respondents' desire to give a socially acceptable generalised view. In addition, when using a questionnaire, the response rate can be very low. Furthermore, with the questionnaire there is limited control as far as exactly how long the respondents will take to reply.

The other major drawback is that, sometimes, the knowledge of what questions follow may incidentally influence answers to earlier ones resulting in continuous changes to the answers by the respondents. Generally, misunderstandings of questions which arise when respondents attempt the questionnaire cannot be corrected (Finn et al., 2013).

However, all the drawbacks mentioned above and those not mentioned in this study are accepted as part of any study. In the process of using a self-administered questionnaire as the measurement instrument, the common question often raised is whether the answers given by the respondents mirror social response bias or the real situation. Conversely, as the questionnaire was anonymously completed, respondents had no good reason to show a more positive picture compared to the real situation.

For this study, the questionnaire was made up predominantly of structured closed-ended questions and only one open-ended question. The Likert scale was used as the measurement instrument. The questions were sectioned to focus on specific areas of the study in an effort to generate accurate data that could easily be used to facilitate statistical analysis. The structured closed-ended questions allowed the respondents to simply choose from a number of provided alternatives and in this respect, the Likert scale was used (Finn et al., 2013). Bairagi, et al. (2019) explained that the Likert scale consists of statements that express either a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the object of interest, and is the most frequently used variation of the summated rating scale because it is easy and quick to construct. In this study, respondents were asked to choose between five levels of agreement, ranging from '*strongly disagree*' to '*strongly agree*'. The major advantages in using closed-ended questions are that they reduce the variability of responses; are less costly to administer; and are much easier to code and analyse.

4.8.2.1 Structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire except Section 1 was divided into the following sections in line with the objectives of this study:

- Section 1 deals with biographic details
- Section 2 deals with the distance learning programmes in the independent college
- Section 3 deals with the aspect of distance learning as an optional avenue in the life of a student
- Section 4 deals with distance learning administration processes
- Sections 5 and 6 deal with effectiveness of distance learning channels

The biographical details include the gender of the respondents, age range and educational level, position in the company, legal status of the business etc. I discovered that this information is very critical since it actually provides knowledge on the respondent's understanding as far as DL is concerned. A biographical detail is also a measure of the degree to which the respondents perceive DL in business.

Level of education: Beach et al. (2012) argued that level of education is a factor that influences students to understand its effectiveness and the need for Independent Colleges to consult students whenever the college make changes or improves the DL programme. In addition, Finn et al. (2013) discovered that level of education has a positive effect on how the students perceive DL.

Finn et al. (2013) constructively argued that students at different levels of education are more capable of finding ways to improve their pass rate (Murphy et al., 2014). Most studies that have been carried out around the world involving DL programmes attempted to determine reasons why there are high failure rates in DL programmes. One of the research studies conducted in Singapore in 2002 discovered that successful DL programmes consulted with students at different levels of education (Shaw, Golden & Buckland, 2012).

4.8.2.2 Administration of the Questionnaire

The questionnaires were physically distributed to the chosen sample between January 2020 and March 2020. To reduce the unnecessary burden to participants while at the same time trying to improve the response rate, reply-paid envelopes were enclosed and some were physically collected after they were completed, depending on the location of the independent college. As part of research ethics, participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

The researcher allocated enough time for the participants to go through and complete the questionnaire as a period of four weeks was allowed for the completed questionnaires to be returned. Since the responses were anonymous, it was not easy to establish who exactly amongst the respondents answered. Hence, friendly reminders were sent via email provided by the respondents themselves during the scheduling of appointments. The researcher also highlighted that if there was need for another uncompleted questionnaire, the researcher was ready to physically deliver it or if there was need for clarification on the actual questions or any other issue pertaining to this exercise, then she was available. However out of the 400 questionnaires returned, 26 of the questionnaires were incomplete; 8 were blank (no attempt); 1 was spoilt Therefore, only

365 questionnaires, representing a response rate of 91.25 percent were usable in this study. The following reasons contributed to a high response rate:

- The questionnaire was clear and in English;
- The Likert scale that provided a range of alternative answers made it simpler for the respondents to easily choose from the list; and
- The average time required to complete the questionnaire was 23 min, which is reasonable considering the respondents' busy work schedules.

The response rate was adequate or even much higher in order to draw meaningful inferences as compared to some other studies on DL programmes. As soon as the questionnaires were completed, returned and received, the raw data contained in each returned questionnaire were captured on Excel by the Researcher. The analysis of the data was done by a qualified statistician using descriptive statistics.

4.9 ANALYSIS OF DATA AND STATISTICAL STRATEGIES DEPLOYED

This section is concerned with how the collected data was analysed. For this research study, it is not of great importance to look at the types/sources of data collected (primary or secondary), as the researcher concentrated on discussing the kind of data collected and the analysis thereof. Tubey, Rotich and Bengat (2015) stated that the fundamentals of the outcome of research should be remembered in all situations, that the essence of any analysis procedures must be to return to the terms of reference, statement of objectives or hypotheses of the research and begin to sort and evaluate the information gathered in relation to the questions posed and the concepts identified. With this in mind, research aims and questions were identified and one analytical tool (i.e., quantitative analysis) was discussed.

4.9.1 Quantitative analysis

For this study, the questionnaire was made up predominantly of structured closed-ended questions. The Likert scale was used as the measurement instrument. The questions were categorised to focus on specific areas of the study in an effort to generate accurate data that could easily be used to facilitate statistical analysis. The structured closed-

ended questions allowed the respondents to simply choose from a number of provided alternatives and, in this respect, the Likert scale was used (Shaw, et al., 2012).

4.9.1.1 The Likert Scale

The Likert Scale was developed by Dr. Rensis Likert in 1932 (Tubeyet al., 2015). The objective was to develop an instrument measuring psychological attitudes in a scientific way. Likert sought a method that would produce attitude measures that could reasonably be interpreted as measurements on a proper metric scale, in the same sense that one considers grams or degrees Celsius as true measurement scales (Yin, 2013). He developed a 5-point scale (Boone, 2012). Other researchers developed Likert scales which can take points ranging from 4 to 9. However, the commonly used scale remains the 5-point scale (Yin, 2013).

Using the Likert Scale, the respondents were provided with a scale of possible responses to the question. The attitudes ranged from “strongly agree” to the exact opposite measure of “strongly disagree”. The study used a variety of these measures. For Example:

Domain: <i>Agreement</i>			
Ratings: Strongly-Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Strongly Agree			
Domain: <i>Evaluation</i>			
Ratings: Least Important	Moderately-Important	Important	Highly Important
Extremely Important			
Domain: <i>Knowledge</i>			
Ratings: Don't Know	Not at All	Little	Fair
a Great Deal			

These different domains of questions were used to check the level of agreement, evaluation and knowledge of students towards DL programmes.

The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement, evaluation and knowledge for a range of questions. Each level on the scale was assigned a numeric value or coding, starting at one and increased by one for each level. This provided the researcher with quantitative data for analysis.

The researcher opted for the Likert Scale due to the benefits of this scale. It was very simple to construct, saving time for the researcher. The instrument produced a highly reliable scale (Shaw et al., 2012) and it was easy to read and complete for the respondents. However, the Likert Scale has its own drawbacks. Shaw et al. (2012) argued that participants may avoid extreme response categories. The researcher informed the participants to answer the questions honestly and truthfully according to the best of their knowledge and understanding of the question.

4.9.2 Descriptive Statistics

The questionnaire results were first captured on an Excel Spread sheet and variables were identified that allowed the researcher to categorize the questionnaire responses for analysis. Analysis was done through SPSS to produce descriptive statistical results.

Kruger, Mitchell and Welman (2005) revealed that descriptive statistics is concerned with the description and/or summarization of the data obtained for a group of individual units of. They contended that Descriptive statistics are the most efficient means of summarizing the characteristics of large sets of data. Furthermore, Finn et al. (2013) stated that in a statistical analysis, the analyst calculates one number or a few numbers that reveal something about the characteristics of large sets of data. Often in statistics of quantitative data there are either measures of central tendency (mean, median and mode) or measures of dispersion i.e. *how the data is spread out*. Tubey et al. (2015) explained that the population mean is the average and the median is the middle value when the data is sorted in any order. The mode is defined as the most common value in the data set, while the mean is more commonly used and the median can be a better summary of the data if there are extreme values.

For measures of dispersion Davies et al.(2014) stated that the variance is a measure of score dispersion about the mean. If all the scores are identical, the variance is 0. The greater the dispersion of scores, the greater will be the variance. Both the variance and the standard deviation were used with interval and ratio data. The standard deviation summarises how far away from the average the data values typically are. It is an important concept for descriptive statistics because it reveals the amount of variability within the data set and, like the mean, the standard deviation is affected by extreme scores. Together, measures of central tendency and variability enabled the researcher to describe and compare distributions more precisely and objectively than can be done by tables and graphs alone. The descriptive statistics made use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 for windows.

4.9.3 Inferential Statistics

Whilst descriptive statistics facilitate initial data analysis, inferential statistics allowed the researcher to draw inferences about the population from the sample (Tubey et al., 2015). The objective of inferential statistics is to enable the researcher to establish whether or not a difference between two treatment conditions occurred by 'chance' or is a 'true difference' (Finn et al., 2013). For this study, ANOVA tests were used to analyse data. Shaw et al. (2012) stated that if a quantifiable variable was divided into three or more distinct groups using a descriptive variable, the researcher can assess whether these groups were significantly different using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). ANOVA analyses the variations within and between groups of data by comparing the means. These differences are represented by the F ratio. If the means are significantly different between the groups, this difference will be represented by a large F ratio, with a probability of less than 0.05. The t-test determines whether an observed difference in the means of two groups is sufficiently large to be attributed to a change in some variable or if it merely could have taken place according to chance (Coakes & Steed, 2009).

4.10 PROCESSING OF DATA

The processing of the data was done with the aid of MRP Consultancy Services, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27 for Windows. SPSS is an integrated set of modules used for manipulating, analysing and presenting data.

Microsoft Excel, which is a spread-sheet programme, was also used to produce the preliminary analysis, which was made up of bar charts, pie graphs and tables. These programmes relieved the need to come up with the researchers' own programme to do analysis. The other notable advantage is that the SPSS programme is designed in such a way that its flexible in terms of type of data, minimum or maximum sample size and the number of variables that can be allowed per given time (Cooper &Schindler, 2011).

4.11 PILOT TESTING

Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) stated that pilot testing is a small-scale trial, where a few examinees take the *test* and comment on the mechanics of the *test*. They point out any problems with the *test* instructions, instances where items are not clear and formatting and other typographical errors.

A pilot test is intended to scrutinise the design and viability of the proposed research (Ford & Tusting, 2013). There are chances that the results of the pilot will be used to adjust the actual research if need be, in order to manage and avoid any negative reparations of working on an inconclusive research. Finn et al. (2013) stated that a researcher who avoids a questionnaire pre-test is either naive or a fool. In line with the comment above, a pre-test was considered, and carried out within the target population to increase the face validity and reliability of the survey instrument. A sample of 10 participants selected by volunteering was involved in the pilot testing. An Emotional Intelligence programme was applied as a pilot to students. Short closed-ended questions on students' perspectives towards DL were tested. The questionnaire was pre-tested in order to identify and remove any ambiguities or superfluous questions.

The purpose of the test was:

- To check the clearness of instructions;
- To check the maximum time taken per questionnaire;
- To check out ambiguities of questions; and
- To confirm questions were not offensive and inappropriate.

For this study, the results of the pilot study showed that there were no anomalies from the questionnaire; hence, the survey could safely progress with a larger sample.

4.12 RELIABILITY

Creswell (2013) postulated that Reliability shows the degree of solidity and consistency of a measuring tool, over a number of repeat measurements. Platz et al. (2005) defined reliability as the degree to which the measure would yield the same results on different occasions, or the extent to which similar observations would be made by different researchers on different occasions. Cooper and Schindler (2011) explained that Reliability is concerned with estimates of the degree to which a measurement is free of random or unstable error, and reliable instruments can be used with confidence that transient and situational factors are not interfering.

According to Platz et al. (2005), the reliability of a measure indicated the extent to which it is without bias and hence ensures consistent measurement across time and across the various items in the instrument. Reliability is the instrument which measures the repetition of the research findings, whilst the validity is the extent to which research findings accurately represent what is really happening in the situation (Tubey et al., 2015). An effective research instrument needs to measure what it intends to focus on in order to attain its objectives (Tubey et al., 2015). Data reliability entails that when data is processed into information; it should be free from material error and bias and can be depended upon by users. Although unreliability is always present to a certain extent, there will generally be a good deal of consistency in the results of a quality instrument gathered at different times. Research instruments are considered valid if they measure knowledge and skills. Ford and Tusting (2013) stated that poorly constructed questions, unrelated and confusing items and lack of truthfulness in response are some of the reasons that lessen the validity of the questionnaire.

In this study, the reliability was tested using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient where a coefficient of 0.3 is low reliability, 0.5 is mild and above 0.7 is high reliability, as suggested by Lyons and Bengat. (2015). the determination of reliability was made as per the scale shown in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2 Determination rules for Cronbach Alpha Coefficient.

Coefficient	Reliability
≥ 0.9	Excellent
$0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$	Good
$0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$	Acceptable
$0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$	Questionable
$0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$	Poor
$0.5 > \alpha$	Unacceptable

Source: Ford, W. and Tusting, D. (2013)

4.13 VALIDITY

Validity aims to show the degree to which the measurement process is free of both random and systematic errors. Validity refers to how the data measure what it is supposed to measure (Creswell, 2013). Ford et al. (2013) defined validity as the extent to which the data collection method and/or related methodologies accurately measure what they are intended to measure, as well as the extent to which the research findings are really about what they profess to be about.

Furthermore, Bless et al.(2006) expressed that content validity is achieved by referring to the literature relating to the area of study. In this case, to ensure that this research study achieves high validity, the research objectives are practical and clearly defined. The measuring instrument applied in this present research study was carefully linked to the theory that defines the scope of the study and was restricted to the variables that were to be examined in the area of DL programmes and Independent Colleges.

The research variable items were actually picked from the literature review in the previous chapters and a sample review of questionnaires identified from other similar studies in Africa entitled: Impact of Distances learning on content delivery in the education sector in Africa, case of Africa's developing countries. The questionnaire was reviewed by two

former PhD students from the department of Management Sciences University of Zimbabwe and Durban University of Technology respectively; one runs an independent college while the other is an independent DL program consultant, as well as a statistician. The exercise was done before the questionnaire was sent out to students as it is authored that modifying questionnaire after data collection amounts to bias (Babbie, 2013).

Building on the feedback from the exercise above, there were a few changes made to the questionnaire (i.e., 5 questions were re-phrased; 2 questions were completely removed as they were considered as not directly relevant, the actual framing or layout of the questionnaire was reviewed and revised to make it objectively simplified but addressing the critical points). The researcher also discovered that further refinement to the questionnaire was not going to change the whole course of the research objectives. Through the pre-test, the average questionnaire completion time was 21 minutes. Therefore, for this study, in line with the exercise above, the design of the questionnaire boasted high content validity and the techniques used were progressively evaluated through pre-testing in an effort to ensure that the instrument was expectedly measuring what it was supposed to measure.

For this research study, the face validity standard or benchmark was achieved by considering the following issues:

- Avoidance loaded questions to maintain neutrality;
- Avoiding offensive and ambiguous questions;
- Ensuring that questions were applicable to all respondents;
- Questions were designed to be easy to answer and reduce fatigue;
- The Likert Scale as a measuring instrument was used where respondents had a choice to pick from a number scale ranging from *agree* to *strongly agree* to show their view on the question; and
- Closed questions were used as they are easier and quicker to respond, at the end of the day also allowing ease of comparison when the researcher was analysing results.

It is imperative to test the measurement instrument before it is administered and for this study this was done by means of a pilot study. Therefore, the following measures were applied to improve validity and reliability of the research instruments:

- The whole study included a bigger sample the outcome of which is expected to be more accurate compared to the smaller pilot sample.
- There were improvements to the study reliability brought by the pilot study which actually provided many learning points.
- To avoid any misunderstanding or mix-up in collecting data, a brief explanation of both the purpose of the study and the content of the questionnaire was provided before administering the actual questionnaire.
- Questions were shaped in such a way that each question addressed or fulfilled a particular research objective.
- In consideration of the differences in the intellectual capacities of the students, the questions were straightforward, clear and easy to comprehend.

4.14 DELIMITATION

Delimitations are simply the constraints of the study (Thomas et al., 2011). The scope or parameter of the research was restricted to the investigation of students' perceptions of distance learning in higher education, a case of Independent Colleges in KwaZulu- Natal province.

4.15 LIMITATIONS

Generally, research has limitations. A limitation is defined as an uncontrollable threat to the validity of research and this research study encountered a fair share of its limitations some of which are common disadvantages of quantitative research methodology (Berger, 2013).

Secondly, there was a limitation based on the dependency on key participants to get sufficient information to lay the ground for analysis and discussion (McKenny, 2014). Initially, the aim was for the data collection to be completed earlier. However, it was very challenging to get through to the students due to their different lecture timetables. It was also difficult to get information from some students as most of them had no idea of the

subject at hand. Some would simply refer back to the independent college management or fellow students.

For these reasons, the research process took longer than anticipated. Nevertheless, the following are limitations of the study:

- Since the results were derived from a Case Study in a location (KwaZulu Natal province), the results' national and global application need further study;
- With enough time and resources, the sample could be sampled on a wider area for further studies;
- Compared to other developed countries, there is a dearth of information in respect of DL in South Africa, which is regarded as a developing country. Furthermore, some of the available information, especially the statistical information, is conflicting and/or out-dated. Although the state has, since the early 1990s, recognized the importance of DL to the higher education sector, the published literature in this area remains limited. Hence, the need for updated literature for further studies.
- The case study results provided very little basis for scientific generalisation since the researcher used a small sample. The question commonly raised is "How can you generalise from a single case (Yin, 2013)?" The study was restricted to Independent Colleges in KwaZulu Natal province. Ideally, the DL programmes in higher education throughout South Africa should have been studied. However, due to time and budgetary constraints, this was not feasible. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all Independent Colleges, creating areas for further studies.
- Since the DL programmes of public Higher Education Institutions can be easily verified, similar structures are extremely difficult to verify in Independent Colleges due to the perceived confidentiality of systems.
- Respondent bias: Respondent bias refers to a gamut of viewpoint bias that avert the response of participants away from providing accurate response (Vithal & Jansen 2012). This limitation is common in studies that involve participant self-administered reporting, such as questionnaires. The questionnaires were directed to students and as such, the risk of 'ego' related responses, ego as of those who passed

course/courses at some level through the DL programme; bias is inexorable in question misinterpretation or ignorance.

4.16 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS/CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Cooper et al. (2006) stated that the goal of ethics in research is to ensure that no one is harmed or suffers adverse consequences from research activities. Ethical clearance for the survey instrument was obtained from the Research Administration Office at Durban University of Technology (**Annexure A**). This study is confined to the regulations and principles of the Durban University of Technology's research ethics policy and guidelines. All participants and Stakeholders in this research are provided with information and letter of consent prior to their participation in the research (**Annexure A**). The letter of information contains detailed accounts of the rights of the participant. Efforts were made to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents. Information used in the research was disposed after the study. Furthermore, the respondents were not required to write their names and addresses or cell numbers of their organisations, thereby ensuring the anonymity of their responses.

Babbie (2013) asserted that being formal can greatly assist in ensuring that ethical issues are addressed. Key aspects on ethics are voluntary participation, no harm to the participants and anonymity and confidentiality, *generally no one must be forced to participate*. Consequently, the subject must not be forced to participate in the research by any means.

It is from this background that it was decided not to offer any form of compensation to the individuals who agreed to participate in the project. Through research, it has been discovered that compensation in the form of money or presents may force people to participate in the research against their will. Furthermore, any form of compensation might obviously have a strong bearing towards answers provided by the respondents, thereby jeopardising the purpose of the research.

The final critical issue is that of harm. It is of great importance to note that social research should never injure the people being studied, regardless of them volunteering or not (Babbie, 1999). When one looks at the definition of 'harm', it does not include not only physical harm but also includes harm such as for example, psychological harm. This study ensured that the participants were not harmed or exposed to danger because of particular questions that were posed in the questionnaire. Babbie (1999) critically mentioned that the point is that investigation techniques towards people should never ask for information that would embarrass them or endanger their home life, friendships, jobs, and so forth. Everything possible was done to the best of the Researcher's experience to avoid danger arising out of the research

4.17 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter described the research design, the target population and how the sample was drawn from the target population. In addition, the chapter also explained, inter alia, the questionnaire development, questionnaire administration and data analysis that were performed on the data stemming from the survey. The research design constitutes the basis on which a research question is developed, while research methodology actually relates to the choice of the specific research methods that are available to the researcher for collection and analysis of data. The measuring instrument used in this study was made up of a structured questionnaire. All the questions for the study were established directly and squarely from each of the research objectives. In ensuring validity and reliability of results, a pilot study was employed and it provided some learning points that improved reliability.

The next chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of data analysis. The sample involved 365 participants. Chapter four discussed the research design and methodology in order to justify how the data collection was conducted. The chapter also paved the way with regard to how the collected data would be analysed using various steps, as outlined in this section. Utilising the data collected, this section attempts to answer the research objectives formulated in the first chapter.

SPSS Version 27 was used as the main tool to analyse the data, and the results were presented in the form of frequency tables, bar charts, histograms and pie charts in order to enhance their understanding. Because the questions were closed ended, contained binary and 5-point Likert scale questions, the reliability and validity were measured by the means of Cronbach's alpha. A variety of appropriate inferential statistical tools, including correlation matrix, linear regression and a chi-square test, were used to analyse and interpret the data collected from the participants to identify important patterns and relationships. Resulting from this, the research questions were answered.

5.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

5.2.1 Aim of the research

This study aims to investigate the perception of students towards the effectiveness of DL programmes in independent Higher Education Institutions. Case of College A and AAA Colleges in KwaZulu Natal province

5.2.2 Research objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- Assess the attitude level of students towards DL programmes.

- Investigate the DL approaches adopted by Higher and Tertiary Independent Colleges.
- Establish causes of students' failure rate in DL programmes as compared with the classroom environment.
- Explore the linkages existing between students and college in the adoption and successful implementation of DL programmes.

5.2.3 Research questions

The research questions are as follows:

- What is the perception of students towards DL programmes?
- What are the DL approaches adopted by Higher and Tertiary Independent Colleges?
- What are the causes of students' failure rate in DL programmes as compared with the classroom environment?
- What are the barriers undermining effective DL programmes in Independent Colleges in KwaZulu Natal province?

5.3 Reliability test of the instrument

For empirical research to be reliable, it relies primarily on validity, or vice versa. Cronbach's alpha is a measure commonly used in quantitative research to demonstrate that the tests and the research instrument developed during the study are fit for purpose (Plummer & Ozcelik, 2015). In this study, Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability, or the internal consistency, of an instrument or an instrument scale in relation to a particular sample. Reliability means that the scores of an instrument are stable and consistent (Corbin et al., 2014). The scores should remain the same when the instrument is administered repeatedly at different times, and they should remain consistent. Validity, on the other hand, means that the individual scores of an instrument are meaningful and allow the researcher to draw good conclusions from the sample population being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). Reliability can more easily be understood by identifying the testing methods for stability and consistency. In this research, the instrument was checked for reliability and the findings were presented in Table 5.1 which shows a summary of the number of cases that were involved in the reliability test.

Table 5.1 Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	365	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	365	100.0
a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.			

The scale reliability test involved a list wise deletion process where a case is dropped from analysis because it has a missing value in at least one of the specified variables. The instrument reliability analysis is only run on cases which have a complete set of data. This means in this research all the 365 cases were used to conduct the reliability test as no response was found to be missing. Table 5.2 shows the reliability test statistics i.e., Cronbach's Alpha value and the number of items which were considered in the reliability test.

Table 5.2 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.679	26

The Cronbach's alpha showed that the questionnaire almost reached acceptable reliability with $\alpha = 0.679$. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.679 which is near 0.7 indicating an imaginary acceptable level of internal consistency for the scale data in the questionnaire. This means the questionnaire used in this research was reliable as it had a reliability coefficient of 0.679 which is very close to the acceptable range. Thus, further analysis could be done using data collected using the instrument. An average Cronbach's alpha score of 0.679 was recorded on all the statements/questions of the questionnaire. This highlights a good level (67.9%) of internal consistency in the questionnaire regarding all the items of the questionnaire

5.4 Descriptive analysis

According to Heeks and Wall (2018), descriptive statistics is concerned with the descriptions or summaries of empirical data obtained for a group of individual units. Descriptive statistics are the most efficient means of summarizing the characteristics of large sets of data. Moreover, Heeks and Wall (2018) pointed out that in an analysis of data, the researcher calculates one number or a few numbers that reveal something about the characteristics of large sets of data. In this section, the results are presented using descriptive statistics in the form of graphs, tables and charts for the quantitative data collected. It presents biographic information, distance learning programmes in the independent college, distance learning as an optional avenue in the life of a student, deals with distance learning administration processes and effectiveness of distance learning channels.

5.4.1 Biographic information

This section looks at the biographic information of the research participants. It looks at membership of the respondents to the college SRC and their current highest educational qualification.

4.4.1.1 College SRC membership

Table 5.1: Are you a member of college SRC?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	3	.0	.8	.8
	No	362	2.1	99.2	100.0
	Total	365	2.1	100.0	

Table 5.1 shows that the majority of the research respondents (Students) (99.2%) were not members of the college SRC whilst very few (0.8%) were members of the college SRC. This shows that this research was dominated by non-members of the college SRC.

The SRC is a representative group of the student body and therefore, the champions of the student's cause. Any or all concerns with regards to DL implementation will be directly brought to the attention of any stakeholder concerned by this very student body.

5.4.1.2 Current highest educational Qualification

Figure 5.2 Educational qualifications of the respondents

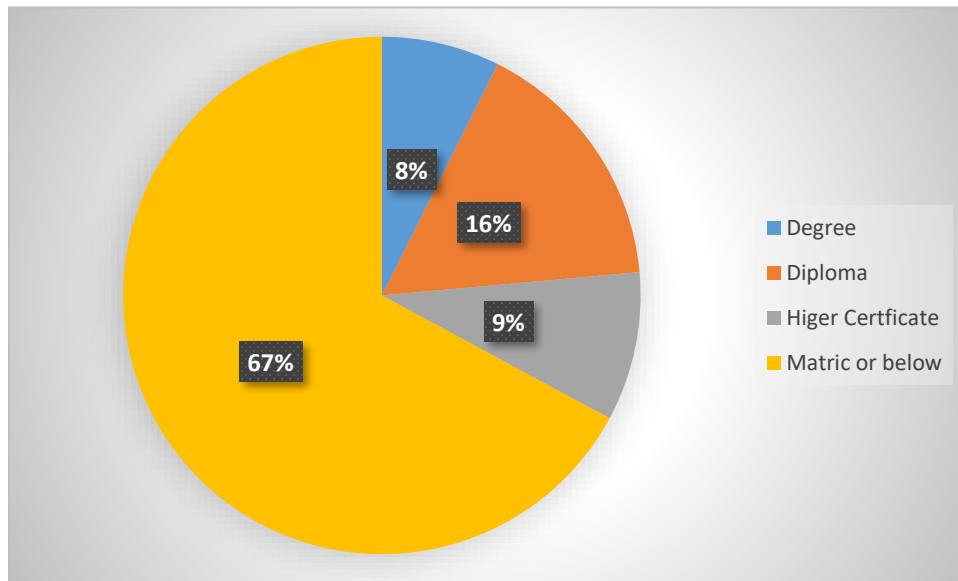


Figure 5.2 shows that most of the respondents (67.12%) had a matric or below while a few (16.16%) had diploma, very few (9.32%) had higher certificate and the least being 7.4% had some undergrad degrees. These results reflect that this research was dominated by Matric holders and it is interesting to note that the majority of the respondents were not highly qualified. The pie chart is positively skewed showing fewer people under lower levels of education. Graduate students tended to be more satisfied with DL compared to undergraduate students. This result concurs with the studies of Davies, and Hughes, (2014) who investigated the possible socio-demographic and education related factors that influenced student's DL satisfaction and found that education level had a significant relationship with DL satisfaction. They indicated that graduate students tend to be significantly more satisfied.

5. 4.1.3 Age group

The aim of this question was to establish the age distribution pattern in relation to the students. The goal was to make the researcher and the readers clear on the active age group involved in the DL.

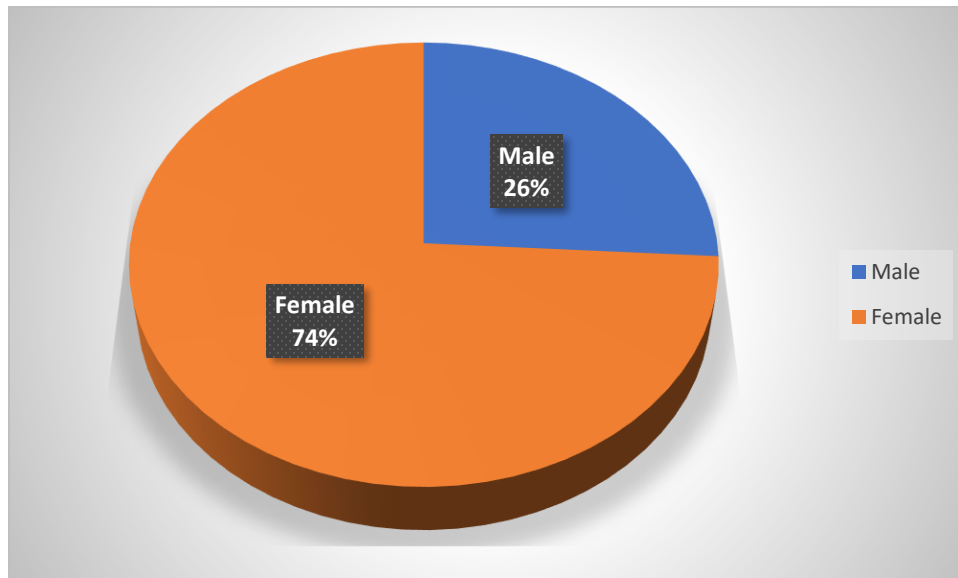
Table 5.2: Age group					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	25 years and below	207	1.2	56.7	56.7
	26 to 35 years	49	.3	13.4	70.1
	36 to 45 years	14	.1	3.8	74.0
	46 to 55 years	14	.1	3.8	77.8
	56 years and above	81	.5	22.2	100.0
	Total	365	2.1	100.0	

Table 5.2 shows that 56.7% of the respondents were of 25 years and below, while 13.4 % of respondents were 26 to 35 years of age. There were also 22.2% of the learners who were 56 years and above whilst 3.8% of respondents were 36-45 years of age, similar to the age group of 46 to 55 years. Therefore, the majority of the respondents were at the age of 25 years and below. Consequently, it can be concluded that most of the students were within age 25-29 years. This finding compares favourably with the studies of Davies et al. (2014) who indicated that a distance learner is most likely to be between 25 and 50 years. In addition, findings from other countries show remarkable similarity with the findings of this current study for example: Germany (average age = 34.8), Greece (age group= 30-37) and in Hungary (between 30 and 40) (Eriksson et al., 2014). In addition, this finding lends credibility to studies of Rea et al. (2014) who stipulated that older students were more likely to succeed because they were not only better prepared but also mature.

5. 4.1.4 Gender

The aim of the question was actually to establish if there is any change in gender patterns of distance learners.

Figure 5.2: Gender



Of the distance learners who responded, 74% were females and 26% were males. The response rate implies that females make up the greater part of the student population at these institutions. This finding is inconsistent with the findings of Fellows, et al. (2015) who found that in South Africa, a majority (63%) of distance education students were males while the minority (37%) were females... The current finding is also contrary to the studies of. Spodek and Saracho (2014). In their study on learner characteristics and distance education preference in Nigeria, Corbin et al. (2014) concluded that distance education students in Africa are more likely to be males.

5.4.1.5 Population group

The aim of the question was to explore the population groups among distance learners in the independent colleges. Spodek et al. (2014), stated that race or population group plays an important role in distance learning. On the other hand, Rea et al. (2014) found that some ethnic groups have cultural norms of encouraging learning. The Population group of learners in the study area is reflected in Figure 5.3 below.

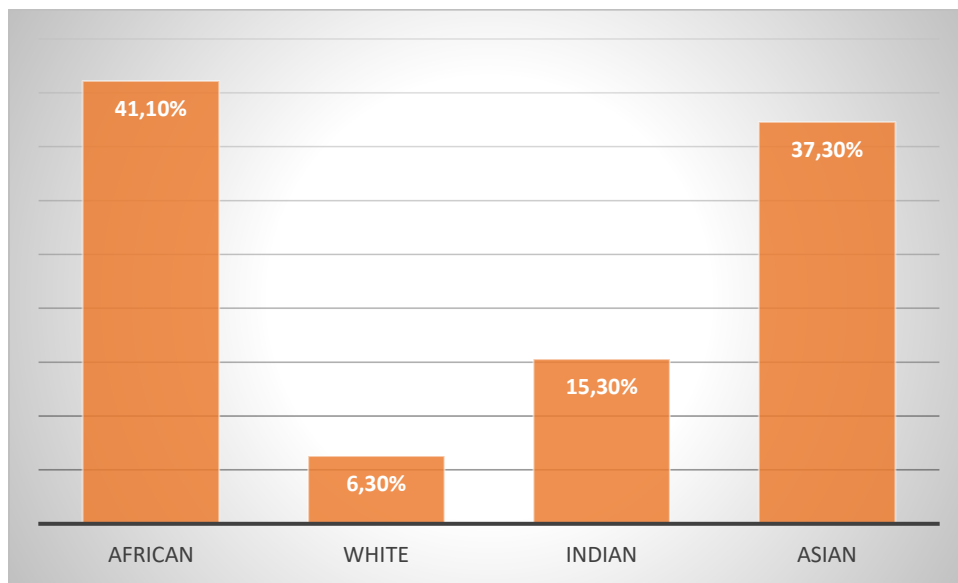


Figure 5.3 above reveals that out of 365 respondents who participated in the study, 41.1% of the total sample was Africans/ Blacks, while the smallest percentage (6.3%) of the total sample was whites. Additionally, in Figure 5.3 above, 37.3% of the respondents were Asians and 15.3% were Indians. The respondents were reflective of South Africa's general demographic data. These results are supported by the findings of the study conducted by Berg (2013) and Lune (2012). In addition, the findings establish the fact that ethnicity affects students' perceptions. These findings are consistent with the views of Foray et al. (2012) that ethnicity influences perceptions and attitudes toward online learning and DL. What is interesting to note is that irrespective of ethnicity, Franklin and Blyton's (2013) work revealed that students are generally unaware of the difficulties inherent in online learning and, hence, were not prepared because they had different expectations of DL.

5.4.2 Distance learning programmes in the independent college

The frequency and dispersion of the responses pertaining to five statements that described distance learning programmes in the Independent Colleges are reflected in Table 5.3 below. Gray (2013) explored students' perspectives about the quality of online courses using the quality matters standards for online course design. The participants were undergraduate students at a Midwestern Urban University- Ohio.

Table 5.3: Distance learning programmes in the independent college

Statements/Questions relating to the private college	%Yes	%Not Sure	% No	Total
Are you aware of what exactly distance learning is all about?	82.2	15.3	2.5	100%
Do you think there is difference between distance learning and classroom environment?	42.2	22.5	35.3	100%
Do you have full knowledge of the requirements and the outputs from distance learning programmes	55.9	16.4	27.7	100%
Do you think the private college where you are taking you studies has the capacity to run distance learning programmes	52.3	15.3	32.3	100%
Given choices, do you think distance learning programmes would be on your priority list to build your career	52.3	33.7	14	100%

Table 5.3 shows that the majority of the respondents (82.2%) believed that they were aware of what exactly distance learning is all about while a few (15.3%) were not sure and very few (2.5%) were not aware of what exactly distance learning is all about. This shows that the majority of the respondents were aware of what exactly distance learning is all about and in all probability will be in a better position to cope with the demands of distance education. This finding does not support the contention of Franklin et al. (2013) who found that students were generally ill prepared and unaware of the difficulties inherent in DL programmes. The chief reason for this unpreparedness was the fact that students had different expectations about what online education involves. It can be argued that students were attracted to the various online technological teachings which they believed will facilitate their studies (Gray, 2013). Regrettably their expectations did not materialise because technology on its own cannot pass a student. Diligence, hard work and perseverance are required!

In addition, some of the respondents (42.2%) believed that there is a difference between distance learning and classroom environment whilst others (35.3%) said no to the

statement and a few (22.5%) were not sure. These results reflect that to some extent, the respondents believed that there is a difference between distance learning and classroom environment. Teaching distance and online learning student's demands skills and pedagogies different from those used in the traditional, face-to-face environment (Heeks et al., 2018), explained that the character of distance and online course delivery poses challenges in relation to building experiential experiences. This is because of the time allocation as suggested by Costa et al. (2013). The experiential study comparing face-to-face and online course delivery indicated that online learners had insufficient time plan, prepare, discuss and put their thoughts on computers. This finding could be attributed to the lower performance levels of distance education students.

On average 55.9% of the respondents believed that they have full knowledge of the requirements and the outputs from distance learning programmes while some (27.7%) said they do not have and a few (16.4%) were not sure. These results show that to some extent the respondents believe that they have full knowledge of the requirements and the outputs from distance learning programmes. The fact that these students have knowledge of the programmes offered, it is assumed that they would have made the right choices to perform to their optimum. Allen and Seaman (2013) found that positive student feedback related to technology usage where students described several technological features of the online courses, they felt were particularly helpful. Hence, the findings indicate that the colleges must provide initial training in technology so that students do not experience anxiety and frustration. Findings revealed that there was a significant difference in the perceptions of the quality pertaining to online courses between students who have had an online course with those students who have not had an online course.

Similarly, on average 52.3% were confident that the private college where they are taking their studies has the capacity to run distance learning programmes whilst some (32.3%) were not confident at all and a few (15.3%) were not sure. These results show that to some extent the respondents are confident that the private college where they are taking their studies has the capacity to run distance learning programmes, however, a significant portion of the respondents are not confident at all meaning that further information is

needed to establish such a contention. While the majority of students believe their current institution has the capacity to offer DL programmes, one must be cognisant of the fact that over 47% disagreed with this claim. These respondents are aware of the fact that established distance education institutions require state of the art technologies as well as highly qualified academics who know how to use the technologies to inspire students as delivery systems not only to enhance student pass rate but also promote and grow education.

Finally, on average 52.3% of the respondents believe that, given choices, they think that distance learning programmes would be on their priority list to build their careers whilst some 33.7% were not sure and 14% did not think that distance learning programmes would be on their priority list to build their careers. These results reflect that to some extent the respondents believe that distance learning programmes would be on their priority list to build their careers. However, there are significant proportions of those who are not sure and those who do not believe. This means that further information will be needed to explain the doubts and negative perceptions towards distance learning programmes being on priority list to build the respondents' careers. Since DL is more reflexive and practice driven, it is critical that all stakeholders are aware of the importance of teaching technologies and superior academic performance by the lecturers in order to improve the pass rates but also to ensure the perceptions of the negative perceptions of 47.7% of the respondents are changed to positive ones.

An analysis of the responses in Table 5.3 can be favourably compared to similar findings by Hah and Freeman (2014) who indicated that teachers had conflicting attitudes about teaching distance education. They reported that many were eager to teach again after teaching a course but rated the quality of the course taught to distance and online learners as equal or lower in quality than courses taught in traditional lecture rooms. It appears as if the teachers have confidence that the technology on its own will enhance the quality of the class but technology does not teach students; effective teachers do. They pointed out that technology is not what matters but the design and delivery of distance and online courses matter. Most of the time, distance and online learning teachers do not design the course materials using the most appropriate technologies. This affects the quality of

teaching and learning. The teachers should understand the students' needs while designing the learning materials for maximum effective impact in the whole distance and online learning experience.

5.4.3 Distance learning as an optional avenue in in the life of a student

A five- point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (5), was used to ascertain the extent to which respondents agreed/disagreed with the statements regarding the perception towards distance learning programmes and the results are shown in Figure 5.4 below

Figure 5.4: Perception towards distance learning programmes

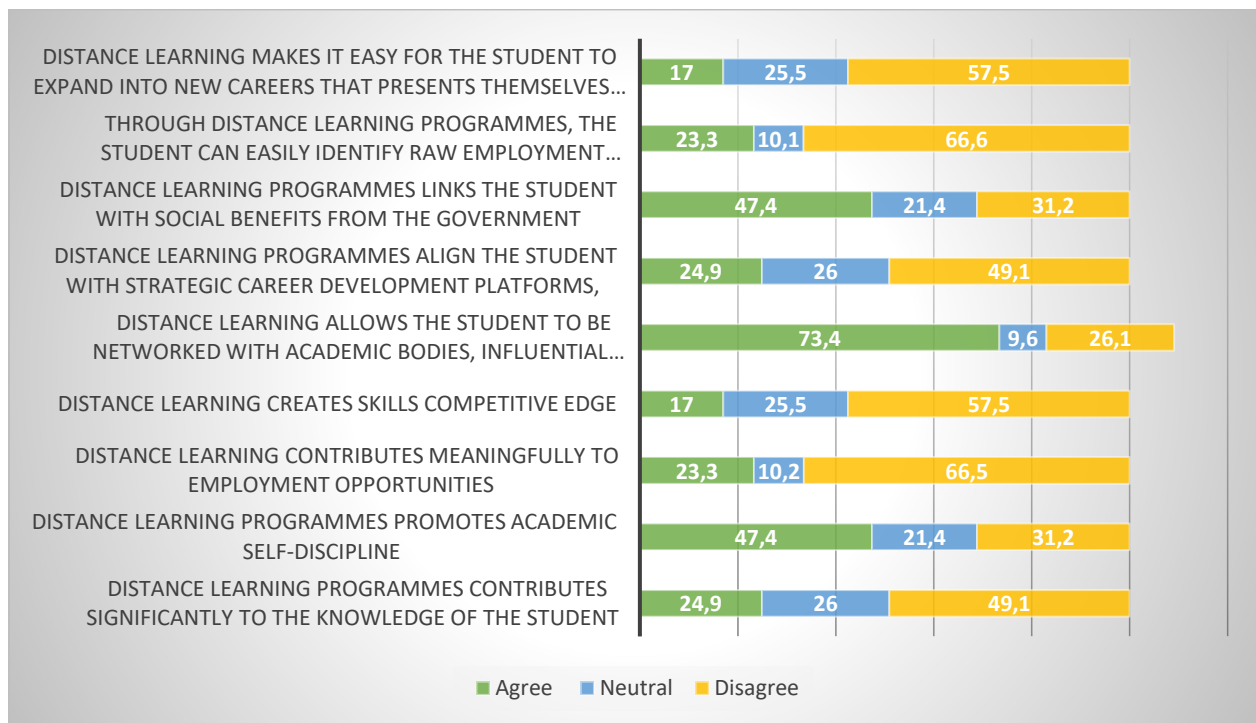


Figure 5.4 shows that on average 49.1% of the respondents disagree or do not believe that distance learning programmes contributes significantly to the knowledge of the student while some (26%) were neutral and others (24.9%) believe that distance learning programmes contribute significantly to the knowledge of the student. These results show that the majority of the respondents disagree and do not believe that distance learning programmes contribute significantly to the knowledge of the student. These findings are

contradictory to the study conducted by Simpson (2014) who examined student perceptions of quality and satisfaction in regionally accredited online courses' satisfaction questionnaire. The results confirmed with statistical significance that students who were more comfortable with distance learning reported higher satisfaction with their online course. Furthermore, the study also indicated that online courses that have undergone a formal peer review may lead to higher student satisfaction in the course.

Moreover, Figure 5.4 reveals that some of the respondents (47.4%) believe that distance learning programmes promote academic self-discipline while others (31.2%) disagree and a few (21.4%) were neutral. These results indicate that the majority of respondents believe that distance learning programmes promote academic self-discipline. While this finding supports the studies of Gorbunovs and Kapenieks (2012) who found that learner self-discipline, frequent access collaborative e-environment module, and careful implementation of particular group-working tasks, enables students to achieve better learning outcomes; it must be remembered that 52.6% of the respondents had negative perceptions regarding the contributions of DL in so far as instilling academic excellence and self-study discipline.

While the E-learning environment involves students in a continuing educational process – all the day and during the working week students are engaged in a wide spectrum of educational activities: lectures, seminars, tests, labs and so on. All activities are scheduled, and learners perform according to expectations. E-learning offers more freedom for learners, but also requires planning of their own self-development and high self-discipline. It means that self-discipline becomes highly important to ensure learners accomplishments and allow them to achieve their learning goals.

However, while this maybe so, the 31.2% of respondents who disagreed that DL programme promotes self –discipline is a cause for concern. This implies that they embarked on the programme without considering the advantages it offers; in such cases these students will not perform to their optimum; neither will they benefit from their studies. This contention is supported by the studies of Simpson (2014) who confirmed that students who are comfortable with their DL will perform far better than those who are not.

In addition, most of the respondents (66.5%) did not agree to the fact that distance learning contributes meaningfully to employment opportunities while a few (23.3%) believed that distance learning contributes meaningfully to employment opportunities and very few (10.2%) were neutral. These findings reflect that to a greater extent the respondents do not believe that distance learning contributes meaningfully to employment opportunities. In order to ensure that DI provides meaningful guidance towards career opportunities for all students, Heeks et al. (2018) recommended that there be strong partnerships between Independent Colleges and students so that all stakeholders are meaningfully involved in the development of education, society as well as the economy. A strong case for DL, especially in the current pandemic, is the fact that it is safer to study online, at a fraction of the costs as compared to the conventional campus system.

Similarly, most of the respondents (57.5%) disagreed that distance learning creates skills competitive edge while some (25.5%) were neutral and a few (17.0%) agreed that distance learning creates skills competitive edge. This means that most of the respondents do not see distance learning as a way of creating skills for competitive advantage. This finding is disturbing, because it does not in any significant measure satisfy the definition of distance education as the acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, encompassing all technologies and other forms of learning at a distance ((Heeks et al.,2018).The researcher is inclined to believe that current students embark on programmes to probably satisfy their egos or keep their parents happy because if they truly engaged in distance learning as a planned teaching and learning experience they would definitely benefit from the programme.

Interestingly, most of the respondents (73.4%) agreed that distance learning allows the student to be networked with academic bodies, influential individuals and other students while the 26% of. respondents disagreed and very few (9.6%) were neutral. These results clearly show that the respondents believe that distance learning allows the student to be networked with academic bodies, influential individuals and other students to a greater extent. This implies that most of the respondents see distance learning as a social platform where they can communicate and network. These findings concur with the views

of Jung et al. (2013) who maintained that DL can facilitate not only delivery of instruction, but also the learning process itself. Moreover, DL can promote international collaboration and networking in education and professional development. There is a range of ICT options, from videoconferencing through multimedia delivery to web sites, which can be used to meet the challenges teachers face. In fact, there has been increasing evidence that ICT may be able to provide more flexible and effective ways for lifelong professional development of teachers.

Majority of the respondents (49.1%) do not believe that distance learning programmes align the student with strategic career development platforms while some (26%) were neutral and others (24.9%) believed that distance learning programmes aligned the student with strategic career development platforms. Distance learning facilities, student counselling and career development, scholarships and library services, was researched by Park, Band and Ghauri (2015). These responses are indicative of the fact that many students are not aware of the support services offered by DL programmes. Learner support is an important issue for DL and all educational institutions (Shin, 2014). Yet, not all students are aware of the support systems available; hence the negative perceptions of more than 75.1% of the respondents of what DL institutions offer. It stands to reason that students require additional support when enrolled for DL programmes because it is a lonely, long journey. The current trend of minimal positive responses at the research sites is indicative of the lack of preparedness of the institutions to offer DL programmes in its totality!

A training needs analysis was conducted with some Unisa staff and revealed that there is need for training in DL. Academics expressed the need for training that would enable them to teach/facilitate learning in DL environment, especially in the South African higher education landscape. They pointed out serious concerns about their ability to teach effectively within the constraints of DL in the South African context. The administrative and the professional staff pointed out that the digitization of information resources has forced them to change how they have been functioning. As a result, there is a need for

training on technology. This lends credibility to the findings on the preparedness of independent colleges to offer DL. Training proves to be essential

A total of 47.4% of the respondents agreed that distance learning programmes link the student with social benefits from the government while some 31.2% of the respondents disagreed and 21.4% were neutral. In some measure this finding confirms the fact that distance learning can be utilised as a social platform because of government aid. Accordingly, the state government can create distance learning policies for offering programmes as well as determine how various technological tools can be used to enhance online learning and provide all students with an equal chance at getting a quality education while using e-learning tools (Singh & Thurman, 2019). The partnership between the different stakeholders must be developed and strengthened in the interests of the student and society.

Most of the respondents (66.6%) disagreed that through distance learning programmes, the student can easily identify raw employment opportunities to explore; 23.3% agreed with the statement while 10.1% were neutral. These findings clearly reflect that most of the respondents do not believe that through distance learning programmes, the student can easily identify raw employment opportunities to explore. This finding refutes Stephen and Plowman's (2008) argument that online courses offer a flexible way to improve academic skills and employment prospects. Such courses may lend themselves to continuing education and provide the convenience of studying from remote locations; but they fail to identify and locate job opportunities. Many online programmes also offer career-specific certificates and degrees, often cost less than traditional programmes, and enable students to juggle academic work with other engagements. These certificates are not an end in themselves because businesses now focus on experience rather than educational qualifications (Yilmaz, 2019).

Most of the respondents (57.5%) did not believe that distance learning makes it easy for the student to expand into new careers that presents themselves through links while some of the respondents (25.5%) were neutral and a few (17%) believed that distance learning makes it easy for the student to expand into new careers that presents themselves

through links. This means that to a greater extent the respondents do not believe that distance learning makes it easy for the student to expand into new careers that presents themselves through links. In the final analysis the perception by 57.5% of the respondents is that DL fails to make it easy for students to branch out into new career opportunities despite the fact it offers several qualifications that come with certificates and maybe cost effective (Yilmaz, 2019).

5.4. 4 Distance learning administration processes

A five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5) was used to ascertain the extent to which respondents agreed/disagreed with the statements that deals with the perception towards the administration of distance learning programmes by the college. The cumulative responses of the respondents to each of these statements are reflected in Figure 5.5 below

Figure 5.5: Deals with distance learning administration processes

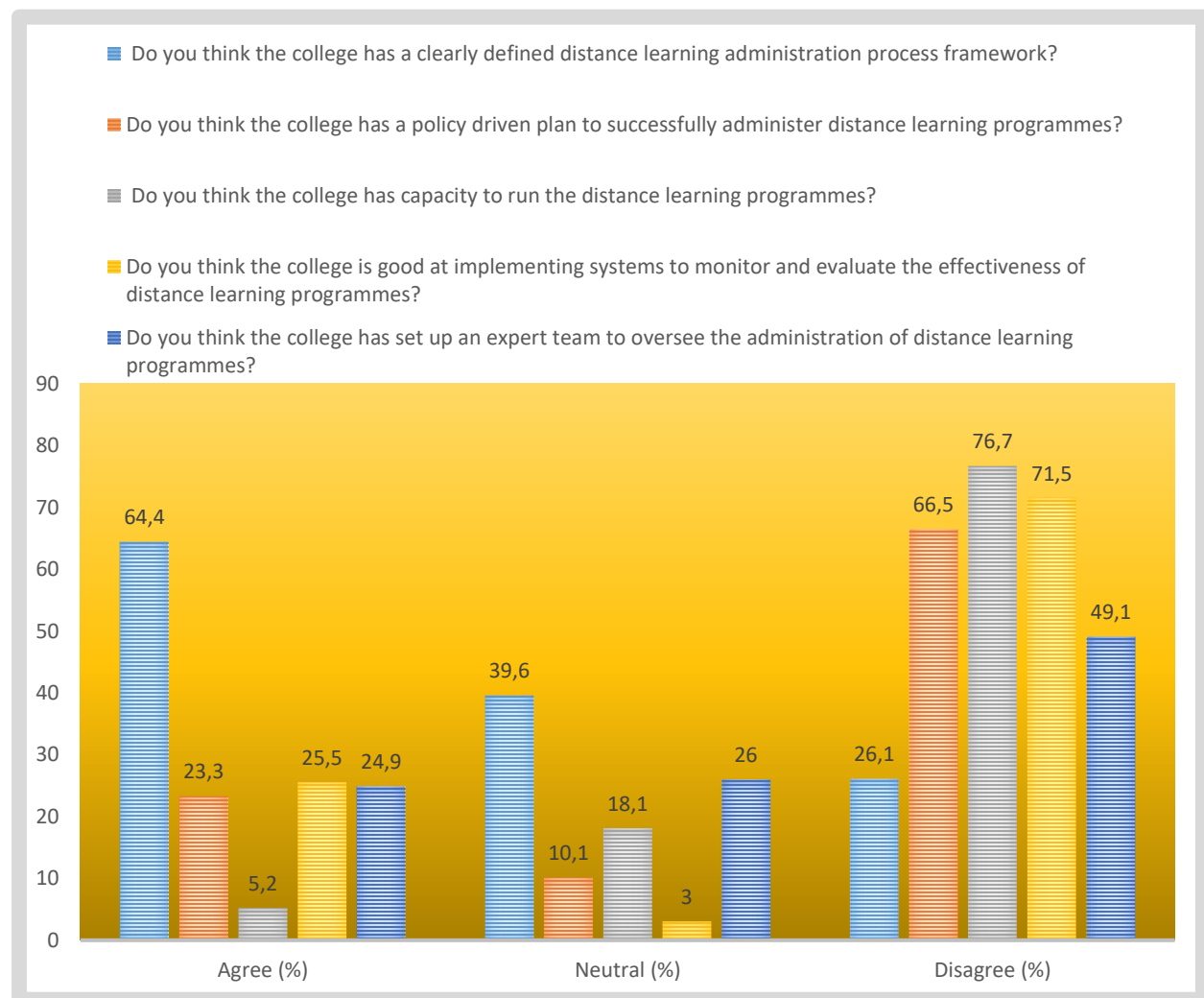


Figure 5.5 shows that most of the respondents (64.4%) believe that the college has a clearly defined distance learning administration process framework while some (39.6%) were neutral about it and others (26.1%) disagreed to that effect. When academic administrators work in tandem with students and provide special favours in terms of higher grades, more time to complete assessments and trying to meet the needs of the different stakeholder, it can prove to be attractive to the self –interests of college administrators and directors (Zaharia & Zaharia, 2013).

Surprisingly, most of the respondents (66.5%) did not believe that the college has a policy driven plan to successfully administer distance learning programmes while some (23.3%)

believed that and a few (10.1%) were neutral. These research findings imply that the college must make the policy available to all students; more especially if it has one. If no policy is available, then the onus is upon the institution to create one that informs all students in order to improve its delivery mechanisms (Levine & Dean, 2012). Only when all students are familiar with the institutions product offerings and are well informed, by enlightened administrators, will DL become a success.

Interestingly, most of the respondents (76.7%) do not think that the college has capacity to run the distance learning programmes while a few (18.1%) were neutral and very few (5.2%) agreed. This finding is rather surprising because in Section B item 1.4 students readily agreed that their college has the capacity to run DL programmes. This same question is repeated in Section D, item 1.3 and there is a strong difference of opinion! This is indicative of the fact that students are not sure of whether their college can offer and manage DL programmes. This supports the contention; that policy makers must inform students about the status quo prevailing in the college prior to registration so that students can make informed decisions! Too often the stress is on numbers and fees!

In response to the question, “do you think the college is good at implementing systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of distance learning programmes?”, most of the respondents (71.5%) disagreed that the college is good at implementing systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of distance learning programmes whilst some 25.5% agreed and only 3% were neutral. These results strongly support the contention that most of the respondents believe that the college is not good at implementing systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of distance learning programmes. This finding strongly supports the need for the colleges to develop policy programmes that inform students about the management of DL programmes. In addition the college’s administrators should make decisions that take the interests of the college’s Stakeholders into consideration (Pillay, 2010).

The responses to “Do you think the college has set up an expert team to oversee the administration of distance learning programmes” is very disappointing; yet it ties up with the other responses in that the overall impression of the students towards the

management of DL in the colleges need to be beefed up! It is a cause for concern when 49.1% of the respondents disagreed; 26% were neutral and only 24.6% agreed to this statement. The fact that a total of 75.1% disagreed including neutral responses reflect the pathetic nature of the administration prevailing at the institutions. The big challenge facing college management is determining the trade-off between the independent college's objectives and the interests of its Stakeholder groups (Dewan et al., 2014) if they want to maximise value and high performance . More important is sharing and disseminating correct information to the students.

In response to, "Do you think the college has serious commitment to distance learning programmes?" most of the respondents (57.5%) disagreed, while some 25.5% were neutral and 17% believed that the college has serious commitment to distance learning programmes. The findings in this item lend strong credibility to the urgent need for the colleges in question to revisit their modus operandi if they want to change the perception of the students! The level of commitment is sadly lacking as indicated by 73% of the disagreed and neutral responses; whilst only 17% believe that the colleges are serious about what they do! In this regard it is imperative that independent college administrators pay attention to Stakeholders who will ultimately provide justification for sound managerial administration (Rusell et al., 2004).

In synthesising the above results students believed that College A failed to recognize the importance of proper administration of DL whereas at AAA School of Marketing students believed that management had failed to implement the administrative policies in a manner that enhanced the delivery of DL. As a result, the promise of distance education remains unfulfilled despite their good intentions. Planning the strategy and following specific steps are of crucial significance in order to implement successful and sustainable distance education initiatives (Pedro et al., 2019). The need to increase access to learning resources by adults and postgraduate students and the availability of adequate technology to deliver a variety of educational content are critical factors that have driven the growth and success of distance education programmes (Modesto et al., 2016). However, there are still many challenges that affect the planning of distance or technology enhanced learning. Such challenges are: globalization, collaborative course

development, educational content sharing and adaptation to individual learners (Rusell et al., 2004).

5.4.5 Perception towards distance learning channels

According to Mhlanga et al. (2020) from their experiences of online learning during the pandemic emergency, have observed that school-provided IT systems are frequently too expensive, cumbersome and quickly go out of date. They suggested moving to personal devices integrated into schools. The purpose of questions was to determine the perception towards distance learning channels. In this study a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5), was used to ascertain the perception towards distance learning channels and how they agreed/disagreed with the statements, and the results are reflected in Table 5.5 below.

Table 5.5: Perception towards distance learning channels

Perception towards distance learning channels	%A	%N	%D	Total (%)
Do you think the current distance learning channels provides an easy way of reaching the student?	4.1	1.1	94.8	100
Do you think the existing channels are effective enough to improve pass rate?	5.2	18.1	76.7	100
Do you think the channels serve all the needs of the students?	33.7	18.1	48.2	100
Do you think there are other approaches that are better than the current systems at the college?	25.5	30.0	71.5	100
In any case do you think the pass or failure rate can be attributed to the distance learning channels at the college?	27.1	34.5	38.4	100
Do you think the college's distance learning programmes create an opportunity for the college to reach government subsidies or funding?	88.5	11.5	0	100

Table 5.6 reveals that the majority of the respondents (94.8%) do not think that the current distance learning channels provided an easy way of reaching the student while very few (4.1%) think that the current distance learning channels provided an easy way of reaching the student while 1.1% was neutral. These results demonstrate strongly that to a greater extent the respondents do not believe that the current distance learning channels provide easy access to students. This could be attributed to the fact that most students are not familiar with the operational procedures of technology and therefore find it very difficult to adjust to the digital teaching and learning system of DL (Pedro et al., 2019).

Similarly, most of the respondents (76.7%) do not think that the existing channels are effective enough to improve the pass rate while a few (18.1%) were neutral and only 5.2% believe that the existing channels are effective enough to improve the pass rates. These results reflect that most of the respondents do not find the existing channels as being effective enough to improve the pass rate. These findings strongly support the studies of Pedro et al. (2019) that students' accounts of online learning and their ability to control and successfully operate technology determined their success factors and satisfaction levels when engaging with online learning techniques

Some of the respondents (48.2%) do not think that the channels serve all the needs of the students while some of the respondents (33.7%) believe that the channels serve all the needs of the students while a few of them (18.1%) were neutral. These results reflect that to some extent the respondents do not believe that the channels serve all the needs of the students the utilisation of asynchronous communication tools, such as discussion boards, points to the dissimilarities in student preferences which may be based on internal, individual differences.

Most of the respondents (71.5%) do not think that there are other approaches that are better than the current systems at the college while others (30%) were neutral and the remaining 25.5% agreed that they think that there are other approaches that are better than the current systems at the college. These findings strongly support the notion that there are other approaches that are better than the current systems at the college. It may be assumed that the introduction of digital technologies may offer opportunities to

introduce new and better approaches to distance teaching and learning (Mhlanga et al., 2020).

In response to the question, “In any case do you think the pass or failure rate can be attributed to the distance learning channels at the college?”, some of the respondents (38.4%) disagreed while the others (34.5%) were neutral and some (27.1%) agreed that they think that the pass or failure rate can be attributed to the distance learning channels at the college. These findings reflect that to some less extent, the respondents do not think that the pass or failure rate can be attributed to the distance learning channels at the college. The fact that more students disagreed is indicative of the fact that students are happy and comfortable with the learning channels. However, the responses in the other items contradict this opinion. Mhlanga et al. (2020) found that learner computer anxiety was a critical factor in predicting satisfaction with e-learning. Those students who were neutral/or agreed with the statement have probably negative attitudes towards online learning because of inadequate personal interaction and probably they require the presence of a teacher.

To improve the pass rate and possibly the perception of the respondents, it is strongly recommended that the DL instructor introduce the presence of a facilitator together with technology, such as interactive boards, online conferences, and other resources to strengthen the teaching and learning process (Irawan, 2020). In response to the question, “Do you think the college’s distance learning programmes create an opportunity for the college to reach government subsidies or funding?” the majority of the respondents (88.5%) believe so while very few (11.5%) were neutral and no-one contradicted this statement. These findings clearly reflect that the majority of the respondents believed that the college’s distance learning programmes create an opportunity for the college to reach government subsidies or funding. This finding sheds light on the need for close relationships between the different stakeholders because the concept of Stakeholder and DL are intimately linked to each other (Irawan, 2020).

For effective DL the instructor has engagement technology, such as interactive boards, online conferences, and other resources to strengthen the teaching and learning process (Irawan, 2020). The development of technology has been inspired by many of the “new” ways of learning and teaching. Digital instruments have contributed to the increasing development and distribution of information as strategies that provide tools. The Internet allowed new forms of computer-based learning, with virtual classrooms a scenario guided by technology convergence that brought about revolutionary elements of learning, as it was characterized by the availability of texts, audio, and video on the same communication channel, allowing geographical, temporal and above all, communication barriers to be transposed. In a pandemic global situation, people are digitally linked in a knowledge-based society living an educational scenario where digital education is nuclear to all levels of formal education.

5.4.6 Effectiveness of distance learning channels

If communication is the nucleus of teaching, then as Brown (2019) postulated, the major skills in teaching are explaining, presenting information, and generating interest and lecture preparation. The outcomes associated with these major skills are the topic coverage, understanding and motivation. As a guarantee to ensure that these outcomes are achieved then proper didactic strategies are vital. These strategies include, but are not limited to, using audio-visuals, varying students’ activities and maintaining the attention of the audience.

The aim of the questions was actually to establish the factors that affect effectiveness of distance learning programmes. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which factors affect effectiveness of distance learning programmes. Their responses are reflected in Table 5.6 below.

Table 5.6: Factors that affect effectiveness of distance learning programmes

Factors that affect effectiveness of distance learning programmes	NE	SE	ME	LE	VLE	Total (%)
Key: NE = No Extent, SE = Small Extent, ME = Moderate Extent, LE = Large Extent, VLE = Very Large Extent						
1.Communicating the initiatives (ensuring understanding of distance learning programmes)	40.0	24.4	9.6	12.1	14.4	100
2.Achieving buy-in (acceptance and adoption by students)	18.9	6.0	26.0	13.2	35.9	100
3.Creating the infrastructure for distance learning (Organizing teams to attend to students concerns)	40.0	24.4	9.6	12.1	14.0	100
4.Spelling out the requirements (outcomes of each programme)	1.6	3.6	18.1	49.3	13.2	100
5.Understanding the college drivers (Awareness of the college reasons for any distance learning initiative)	18.9	6.0	26.0	13.2	35.9	100

Table 5.6 shows that some of the respondents (40%) believed that communicating the initiatives (ensuring understanding of distance learning programmes) affect the effectiveness of distance learning programmes to no extent; while 24.4% said it affected to a small extent, 14.4% said it affected to a very large extent, 12.1% said that it affected to a large extent and very few (9.6%) said it affected to a moderate extent. These findings reflect that when colleges prepare students prior to registration, they are more geared and motivated towards enhancing their studies and consequently their success and effectiveness of DL programmes (Khabbaz & Najjar, 2015).

In addition, some of the respondents (35.9%) believed that achieving buy-in (acceptance and adoption by students) affect the effectiveness of distance learning programmes to a very large extent while the other respondents (26%) indicated to a moderate extent, a few (18.9%) indicated to no extent, while 13.2% indicated to a large extent and only 6% indicated to a small extent. These results clearly show that there are notable challenges with achieving buy-in by the respondents. These views clearly illustrate that positive student feedback and buy in related to the instructor in three specific areas: organisation, promptness, and communication. A professor's organisational skills were the most important aspect of a successful online class and positive perceptions and acceptance by students (Pillay, 2010).

Some of the respondents (40%) believed that creating the infrastructure for distance learning (Organizing teams to attend to students concerns) did not affect the effectiveness of distance learning programmes while others (24.4%) believed to a small extent, a few 14% believed to a very large extent, 12.1% believed to a large extent and 9.6% believed to a moderate extent. These findings reflect that the respondents believed that creating the infrastructure for distance learning does not affect the effectiveness of distance learning programmes in other words it is not a big deal to most of the respondents. These findings imply that students are prepared to study with whatever learning channels the colleges provide. This conclusion correlates strongly with the poor pass rates in DL. This contention is supported by the studies of Modesto et al. (2016) who found that student attitudes towards e-learning are critical to the success of e-learning and performance rates.

The efficient and effective use of IT in delivering DL-based components of an online course is not only critical to students' acceptance of DL; it is also important to the success of student learning. IT tools include network bandwidth, network security, network accessibility, audio and video plug-ins, courseware authoring applications, Internet availability, instructional multimedia services, videoconferencing, course management systems, and user interface. Therefore, the success of the DL model is necessarily related to a university's wise and careful investment in its IT infrastructure.

On average 49.3% the respondents believed that to a large extent spelling out the requirements (outcomes of each programme) affect the effectiveness of distance learning programmes while 18.1% believed to a moderate extent, 13.2% believed to a very large extent, 3.6% believed to a small extent while 1.6% believed to no extent. These results reflect that spelling out the requirements affect the effectiveness of distance learning programmes to a greater extent meaning there are significant noticeable challenges there. These opinions are justified by the contentions of Brown and Pehrso (2019) who found that the most significant factors were related to increasing effectiveness of DL programmes was technology awareness and improving attitudes toward e-learning and enhancing basic technology knowledge and skills. This finding clearly illustrates that students require a high level of support from the college to improve their perceptions of DL.

Lastly, some of the respondents (35.9%) believed that understanding the college drivers (Awareness of the college reasons for any distance learning initiative) affect the effectiveness of distance learning programmes to a very large extent while 26% believed it affects to a moderate extent, 18.9% believed to no extent, 13.2% believed to a large extent and only 6% believed to a small extent. These results reflect that most of the respondents have a problem with understanding the college drivers and these impacts on the effectiveness of distance learning programmes. This finding is justified by the studies of Buchanan. (2021) who found student capabilities, attitudes and experiences were marred by lack of information. Therefore, it is critical that colleges provide first-hand information on all aspects of the institutions driving forces and reasons thereof. The use of ICT Information Communication Technology will definitely facilitate this process.

5.5 Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics are techniques that allow us to use these samples to make generalizations about the populations from which the samples were drawn (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). It is, therefore, important that the sample accurately represents the target population. Inferential statistics arise out of the fact that sampling naturally incurs sampling error and thus a sample is not expected to perfectly represent the population.

Cranmer, Desmarais and Morga (2020) have shown that parametric tests can be used to analyse ordinal data; Moreover, the mentioned authors concluded that parametric tests are generally more robust than nonparametric tests when analysing ordinal data such as that seen in Likert scales, even when statistical assumptions (such as normal distribution of data) are violated. In this study a maximum of three analytical tools were used that included Coefficient of Determination, ANOVA and Pearson regression equation.

5.5.1 Coefficient of Determination (COD)

The coefficient of determination is a statistical measurement that examines how differences in one variable can be explained by the difference in a second variable, when predicting the outcome of a given event (Kumar, 2019). In other words, this coefficient, which is more commonly known as R-squared (or R^2), assesses how strong the linear relationship is between independent and dependent variables and is shown in table 5. 7

Table 5.7: Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.622 ^a	0,387	0,377	0,474

Table 5.7 reflects, a R^2 of 0.387, this implies that 38.7% variation in Effectiveness of DL (EDL) is explained by understanding the college drivers (Awareness of the college reasons for any distance learning initiative), Creating the infrastructure for distance learning (Organising teams to attend to students concerns), Spelling out the requirements (outcomes of each programme), Distance Learning Programmes, Channel of Distance Learning and Administration of Distance Learning as exogenous variables. This means that the exogenous variables have 38.7% impact to the EDL. A close analysis of Table 5.7 implies other exogenous variables like education, age, gender and race contributes 61.3% variation in EDL.

5.5.2 ANOVA

Table 5.8:ANOVA^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	50,707	6	8,451	37,656	.000 ^b
	Residual	80,345	358	0,224		
	Total	131,052	364			
a. Dependent Variable: Effectiveness of Distance Learning						

The p-value associated with this F value is very small (0.000) in Table 9. This implies the given exogenous variables (refer table 5.7) reliably predict the residential satisfaction. So, the regression model is significant to make generalisation to other African residential places. Referring to table 5.8 it can be concluded that there strong positive relationship (66.2%) between EDL and understanding the college drivers (Awareness of the college reasons for any distance learning initiative), Creating the infrastructure for distance learning (Organising teams to attend to students concerns), Spelling out the requirements (outcomes of each programme), Distance Learning Programmes, Channel of Distance Learning and Administration of Distance Learning as exogenous variables in the model. The results may point to the fact that students gain access to a reliable internet connection which is one of the pillars of successful online learning. The effective and efficient use of information technology (IT) in delivering online learning is critical to student learning success. IT tools include network bandwidth, network security, network access, audio and video plug-ins, tutorial applications, internet access, educational multimedia services, videoconferencing, course management programs and user communications. This argument is supported by the studies of Modesto et al. (2016) found that internet communication is the key to e-learning and is essential to e-learning success and performance standards

5.5.3 Regression Model

Regression analysis mathematically describes the relationship between a set of independent variables and a dependent variable (Wegner, 2016). Linear regression analysis finds the straight-line equation representing the relationships between two numeric variables, the independent variables, and the dependent variable.

Table 5.9 :Coefficients^a of the regression equation

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1,748	0,231		7,554	0,000
	Distance Learning Programmes	0,032	0,046	0,029	0,700	0,484
	Administration of Distance Learning	0,552	0,058	0,517	9,563	0,000
	Channel of Distance Learning	-0,182	0,054	-0,160	-3,339	0,001
	Creating the infrastructure for distance learning (Organising teams to attend to students concerns)	-0,005	0,020	-0,013	-0,276	0,783
	Spelling out the requirements (outcomes of each programme)	-0,040	0,032	-0,058	-1,232	0,219
	Understanding the college drivers (Awareness of the college reasons for any distance learning initiative)	0,090	0,019	0,223	4,789	0,000
a. Dependent Variable: Effectiveness of Distance Learning						

Let the following variables be:

- Distance Learning Programmes - DLP
- Administration of Distance Learning - ADL
- Channel of Distance Learning - CDL

- Creating the infrastructure for distance learning (Organising teams to attend to students concerns) - IDL
- Spelling out the requirements (outcomes of each programme) - PO
- Understanding the college drivers (Awareness of the college reasons for any distance learning initiative)-CD
- Effectiveness of Distance Learning - EDL

The coefficients of the model are explained as follows:

- β_0 represents constant
- β_1 denotes the coefficient of DLP
- β_2 denotes the coefficient of ADL
- β_3 denotes the coefficient of CDL
- β_4 denotes the coefficient of IDL
- β_5 denotes the coefficient of PO
- β_6 denotes the coefficient of CD

$$EDL = \beta_0 + \beta_1 DLP + \beta_2 ADL + \beta_3 CDL + \beta_4 IDL + \beta_5 PO + \beta_6 CD$$

$$EDL = 1.748 + 0.032DLP + 0.552ADL - 0.182CDL - 0.005IDL - 0.40PO + 0.09CD$$

The explanation of the model is as follows: assume *ceteris paribus* if there is no influence of any given exogenous variable the EDL is very positive. This implies that at College A without any variable be considered the distance learners are very satisfied with the level of services, at AAA School of Marketing students were able to use online learning much more effectively and, therefore, felt that DL was highly effective. In analysing the relationship between EDL and DLP, one-unit increase in DLP will result in an increase of 0.032 units in EDL. Moreover, EDL will increase by 0.552 units if ADL is improved by one unit. However, increase in CDL by unit will reduce EDL by 0.182 units whereas one unit increase in IDL reduces EDL by 0.005 units. Finally, a 0.04 units decrease in EDL is witness if the PO increases by one unit, and a one-unit increase in CD will improve EDL by 0.90units.

The results may point to the fact that students gain access to a reliable internet connection which is one of the pillars of successful online learning. This means that most students

were of the opinion that all learning centers should provide or teach students how to use computers to easily access online learning platforms. The above findings are supported by research by Onyeaghala-Obioma and Anele (2014), which found that there is a link between adherence to ethics and business practices; this relationship was found to be important. These ideas are supported by the arguments of Brown and Pehrso (2019) who found that the most important factors were related to increased online learning success in technology awareness and improved attitudes toward e-learning and the development of basic technical knowledge and skills

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The data collected from the questionnaire helped analyse, interpret and discuss. This chapter presented a detailed discussion of the research findings. It presented a reliability test of the instrument which was used to collect the data which were used in the research and data analysis was presented in different sections according to the research objectives. Some of the major findings related to the provision and the implementation of ICT resources, the preparedness of the staff in providing the critical support and the orientation of the learners in using the Online platforms effectively to enhance their studies.

The final chapter highlights the main findings of the study, draws conclusions, and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to investigate the perception of students towards the effectiveness of DL programmes in independent Higher Education Institutions. The research involved a brief examination of the attitude level of students towards DL programmes. Furthermore, this chapter through review, attempts to ascertain the extent to which the study questions were addressed. Given the findings from the study, conclusions and recommendations are provided in line with perception of students towards the effectiveness of DL programmes in independent Higher Education Institutions. As stated in the abstract of this research study, a five-step model based on the Stakeholder Theory is proposed to promote DL in independent Higher Education Institutions. The chapter concludes by narrating the limitations of the research study and subsequently describing directions for future research.

6.2 REVIEW OF THE MAJOR FINDINGS OF LITERATURE VIEW

According to Schwartz (2020) many Institutions are providing leadership in the research and development, design, and advocacy of curricula and materials that are specially tailored to the needs of independent students and sensitive to the circumstances of South African students. Although South Africa is an acknowledged pioneer in its initial deployment of correspondence education, much improvement is needed to ensure that all of the distance higher education programmes fully exploit the advantages of the model and deliver learning opportunities with the required rigour, coherence, and effective student support.

In addition, niche programmes that serve a defined national need but have limited local appeal for contact students at any one institution have been offered effectively as distance education programmes e.g. the Bachelor of Public Management at College A became a very popular DL qualification as it appealed to people already in employment in Government and municipalities.

An evaluation of learner support conducted by Brown et al. (2019) noted that "Library resources are very important to distance students as the majority of them indicated that success in the course required access to library materials." The issue of student support has received renewed interest recently, with Mhlanga et al. (2020) and Simpson (2000) both exploring this aspect of DL in some detail. One of the reasons that distance education has become and remained so prevalent, for higher education, is that various studies have validated its practice revealing no significant differences in learning outcomes between traditional and distance students.

In an effort to interrogate the topic under study, Irawan et al. (2020) explained that distance education is characterised by teaching and learning being brought about by media: in principle students and their teachers do not meet face to face. For decades, the provision of distance higher education programmes has afforded access to education to students in South Africa and the wider African region for whom full-time contact education has been inappropriate, unaffordable, or inaccessible. Demanding professional commitments and family responsibilities of many adults often make attending a conventional, full-time, face-to-face course with fixed timetables a rather unrealistic proposition, and the reasons why adults choose distance education are primarily the convenience, flexibility and adaptability of this mode of education to suit individual students' needs (Brown et al., 2019).

Such a view concurred with the studies of Brown et al. (2019), who found that speeding up communication and instituting quick response and turn-around times helped to reduce the frustration felt by students, while Snowden and Irawan et al. (2020) stated that distance education systems, because of the inherent complexity and interdependence of their parts require 'tighter' management than conventional educational institutions. Moreover, considerable improvement is required in success and throughput rates in distance programmes if the potential cost-benefits of distance education are to be realized. In the same line of thought, Cranmer et al. (2020) argued that in common with higher education generally, distance higher education programmes also needed to

ensure that they equip students with the kinds of graduate competencies needed for success after graduation.

Given the potential for distance education to cut costs and increase revenues by reaching students who may otherwise be left out of traditional classroom-based higher education, it is important for institutions to continually seek to improve and expand their capabilities in this area (Brown et al., 2019). Authorities in higher education e.g., CHE concurred that while the pass rates for DL students at public universities have ranged from 15% to 20% for several years now, the pass rate for distance learners in Independent Colleges plummeted to as low as 12.3% in recent years. A twenty-year meta-analysis released last year, went so far as to argue that in 70 percent of cases students taking courses by distance education actually outperformed their student counterparts in traditionally instructed courses. Printed study guides have been identified as a key resource for distance education courses even if other forms of media are primarily used to deliver the content. Furthermore, dialogue allows students to assess their learning and develop a sense of community with other students (a measure that can counter the effects of isolation often experienced by distance learners), and also allows the institution to assess its teaching objectives and see if they are being fulfilled. Online learning does not necessarily imply DL as many traditional higher education courses now utilize internet-based course management software to aide in the learning process.

Brown et al. (2019) categorised student support as advice/counselling, tutoring (individually or in groups), the learning of study skills, peer group support, feedback concerning assessment and progress, language support and administrative problem-solving, where the aim is to support students' individual learning whether alone or in groups. The study demonstrated that there was a statistically significant correlation between student attitudes toward technology and their levels of access to various technologies; unsurprisingly, students who had better access to technology and the Internet generated stronger positive attitudes. Many early distance education courses were not affiliated with institutions of higher learning.

6.3 SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR FINDINGS REGARDING THE KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

6.3.1 Highest educational qualification of the respondents

Majority of respondents were educated with a master's qualification. The study was dominated by educated respondents which buttress the assertion that the responses provided were informed and from an enlightened group of distance learners. The majority of respondents who had a basic matric reflected the narrative of highly perceived effectiveness of distance learning in higher education.

Independent Colleges are not in line with the Stakeholder Theory which requires that all Stakeholders must be treated equally. Independent Colleges hold the idea that they provide education options to the society; therefore, caring about the demands of the parents is not part of their core business. Considering the community, Independent Colleges in KwaZulu Natal province believe that DL programmes is part of community responsibility through providing education options that can be accessed at the comfort of their homes. By looking at DL programmes, Independent Colleges are of the belief that they assist communities by reducing their transport cost because they can learn without moving to a physical location for lessons.

6.3.2 Distance learning programmes in the independent college

Majority of the students confirmed that they were aware of what DL was all about and were aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the DL programmes. Respondents believed that they have full knowledge of the requirements and the outputs from distance learning programmes. They believed that the Independent Colleges in KZN had capacity to run DL programmes, however, given a chance they preferred to go for other educational options than DL.

6.3.3 Distance learning as an optional avenue in the life of a student

Students did not agree with the notion that if one studies through DL, one is able to get access to or identify lucrative employment opportunities that one can exploit. The main

reason why students argued is because most of them who are into DL have their careers already and their aim is to further their studies and not necessarily look for employment. DL programmes mostly target students who are not into full time education. The responses showed that DL can make it easy for a student to get employment. The responses showed that DL promotes academic self-discipline.

The role of students	The role of the lecturer	Pedagogical design and assessment	Content characteristics and the learning environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Active learning - individual, in small teams, and in the course learning community •Sharing learning outcomes with peers •Mutual assistance and peer feedback - in lessons and in the course learning community •Norms of respect, listening, patience, and a culture of trust and openness in the course learning community •Developing a sense of belonging to the course learning community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Scaffolding students' learning •Participation in group discussions and availability for learners' questions •Encouraging teamwork and interaction in the course learning community •Demonstrating norms of respect and openness. •Sensitive feedback to students' learning outcomes •Communication with learners through different channels: face-to-face, synchronous and asynchronous. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Bridging theory and practice •Cultivating the course learning community •Designing learning activities that stimulate critical thinking and develop creativity •Designing learning activities that require continuous collaboration in small teams •Designing learning activities to include experience with a variety of digital tools •Integrating self- and peer-assessment •Presenting clear criteria for assessing learning outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Adapting content to students' interests and backgrounds •Designing a flexible digital learning environment, independent of place and time •Integrating a variety of channels in presenting the course content - visual, verbal and auditory •Integrating face-to-face classes with online synchronous classes, as well as with ill- and well-structured asynchronous learning activities.

Fig. 2. The components of the pedagogical design mapped in the study

Figure 2 presents the components of the pedagogical design that were mapped in this study based on the diary analysis and can be recommended for blended and online academic courses, in order to promote deeper learning, collaboration, and communication in the learning community. These components are divided into four topics:

1. The role of learners - elements related to students' activity, the nature of communication with the lecturer and among peers.
2. The role of the lecturer - elements related to scaffolding students, communicating with them and providing constructive feedback.
3. Pedagogical design and assessment - teaching characteristics and the nature of learning assignments.

4. Content characteristics and organization of digital learning environment.

6.3.4 Distance learning administration processes

Results showed that students did not believe their colleges had a policy driven plan to manage and administer distance DL programmes. This is the main reason why in other results presented majority of students confirmed that they could take other educational options other than DL. However, for this research, the reason could be that there are delays in delivery of DL study material resulting in high failure rates and frustrations. Also, students refused that the college is good at implementing systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of distance learning programmes. They disagreed in that Independent Colleges set up expert teams responsible for overseeing administration of DL programmes. Their view is true in that most Independent Colleges develop from entrepreneurship foundation whose drive is mostly profit and little attention to stakeholders; therefore, it is apparent that Independent Colleges lack systems that monitor the implementation of DL programmes.

6.3.5 Effectiveness of distance learning channels

According to the Stakeholder Theory, morals play an important role in the applicability of philosophical principles. Most Independent Colleges in KwaZulu Natal province see their businesses driven by morals. However, students believe failure to effectively communicate DL initiatives (ensuring understanding of distance learning programmes) affect the effectiveness of DL programmes. Also, results have shown that there are notable challenges with achieving buy-in by students when it comes to the effectiveness of DL programmes. Most of the respondents believed that achieving buy-in affects the effectiveness of DL programmes because it may prove difficult and expensive for the independent college to customise the DL programme to suit everyone in the community.

6.4 CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research study show that students at Independent Colleges have positive attitudes and are sensitive to the requirements of DL. However, a positive attitude

without practical results in this research will not hold water given the fact that there are high failure rates in these Independent Colleges.

Despite their significance and contribution to education, Independent Colleges in South Africa are still faced with numerous challenges that inhibit effective delivery of DL programmes. Apart from content delivery (which is a major reason for the high failure rates), Independent Colleges fail to adopt, implement and practise effective administration of DL, which results in most learners either failing to seat for their exams, delayed assignment submission and in some cases, learners drop out of college because of frustration.

- **What is the perception of students towards DL programmes?**

Respondents had a positive perception towards the orientation program provided by the university. The overall respondents' perception and students' level of satisfactions towards the orientation program show that the way and manner the service was provided to some extent was of a good quality to students. However, some of the respondents stated that they were unable to interact with staff from the institution. This interaction needs to be enhanced because individual psychological strengths and good relations with others in any institution are important protective factors that enhance one's transition in the institution. When staff has regular contact with students, they serve as advisors, set expectations, and assess student progress.

This finding concurred with the views of Nadeem and Ahmed (2020) in that their studies revealed that participants believed that their interactions with staff were minimal. Hasan and Kumar (2019) believed that when staff and students interact actively, staffs are seen as a source of guidance and support. Further, if staff and student interactions are strengthened, it can help reduce the problem of isolation as the College of Distance Education is primarily a commuter college. The test of correlation also showed that the orientation program is significantly related to retention of students in distance learning.

it was seen that “provided opportunities” and “limitations” categories emerged in both groups. Distance education is not indispensable for face-to-face students. Some of the distance education students prefer distance education because of desperation. As for sub-categories, it was seen that unlike face-to-face students, distance education students perceived distance education as a road to dreams and they thought that distance education provided them to study while working in a job. The most repeated metaphors in distance education students were “a golden blessing, a great opportunity, and indispensable”

Perception of students towards the electronic resources in distance learning showed that electronic resources generally are vital learning tools for effective distance learning programme. Specifically, findings of this study revealed that electronic resources provide users with more up to-date information, increase efficiency in distance learning, enhance self-learning, provide unlimited information from different sources, provide speedy and easy access to information etc. In line with the findings of Amir, Sharf and Khan (2020) electronic resources facilitated easy access to information, enhanced research activities as unlimited information from different sources could be retrieved at any time and also enhanced the quality of academic and research activity by providing up-to-date information. In support of the findings, Amir et al. (2020) discovered that the use of electronic information resources for research and learning make access to information speedy and easy and also provide users round the clock access to users.

- **What are the DL approaches adopted by Higher and Tertiary Independent Colleges?**

Education administrators know that technology is never neutral and any change has certain amount of resistance and contention. Undue protests and dissents during COVID-19, regarding the decision to use “online” and “blended learning” has become political and is politicized a lot. Blended learning has been drawn into existing political agendas and extreme claims have been made such as one mode is better than another (Czerniewicz, 2020). Conspiracies have flourished and those with limited ICT

knowledge have paddled unfounded lies about online and blended learning (Zhang et al., 2020). Some people believe face-to face is superior to online and blended mode. This current period is also likely to evoke political responses, in ways that we may not expect. Literature further entails that fake news such as inferiority of online and blended mode as compared with face-to face mode certainly infiltrates the system and further creates chaos and uncertainty. However, some administrations are arguing and discussing as to what needs to be done, while some have already started venturing into online learning. The World Bank believes that little research attention has been paid to documenting and analysing attempts of education systems moving swiftly and at scale to provide online learning when all or many schools and universities are closed (World Bank, 2020b). Even UNESCO is aware that transitioning to online learning at scale is a very difficult and highly complex undertaking for education systems, even in the best of circumstances but states it has become a necessity (UNESCO, 2020).

During the period of protests and disagreements, universities have started going online differently, shaped by their specific institutional contexts. This means not only designing strategies appropriate for specific contexts, but also being aware that technological decisions will be shaped in ways that reflect existing differences, alliances, discourses and perspectives in particular institutions (Murgatroid, 2020). It may feel like the last thing on one's mind, but it is important to be aware of what message is being sent when explaining the need to replace face-to-face teaching with virtual alternatives. At the time of the protests, the general term used has been blended learning. All university entities need to work cooperatively to effectively launch online and distance learning. Curriculum and other logistics need to be considered and assessment tasks need to be revisited and replaced with assignments to avoid face-to-face final examinations. Acceptance and compliance by all stakeholders will minimise resistance and in turn will facilitate the implementation of online and remote learning especially in times of calamity like COVID-19 pandemic.

College A and College B have also adopted the blended learning approach.

- **What are the causes of students' failure rate in DL programmes as compared with the classroom environment?**

Retention of students has been cited as one of the greatest weaknesses in distance education. The following factors contributed to student's failure and low retention rates:

- The lack of support from the staff of the Institution, as well as lack of academic and administrative support.
- Challenges in working with content and curriculum without the face-to-face interaction.
 - Institutional inability to synergise learning and teaching using the online resources effectively.

Retaining students in institutions of higher learning is essential to a nation's development because it has an economic impact in increasing human capital. As part of the effort to find solutions to the issue of dropouts in distance learning, retention studies have increased; yet, it is often difficult for colleges and universities to decide on what is the best method to implement in order to improve their retention rates. Newly admitted students feel less self-reliant in their ability to succeed in academic settings and need additional help in developing habits favourable to academic success. Orientation programs are therefore organized to facilitate academic and social interactions, increase students' involvement, and enhance students' sense of belonging to the learning community

Orientation programs are essential in helping students persist and they increase retention. They are also the bridge between the last stages of student recruitment and the first stage of retention. Orientation programs are geared towards introducing new students to college and university services that support their educational and personal goals, they also assist students in gaining the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that will help them adjust and make a smooth transition into the college/ university community

Unlike public institutions that provide DL, Independent Colleges are owned privately and, therefore, experience less pressure from labour regulatory institutes and less risk to brand image or reputation when recording high failure rates. Very few of these private owners take a strong stance in upholding the needs of students since the major issue to private

owners is to make a profit in all circumstances, despite some unfashionable DL administration, exorbitant fees and even the delivery methods. Private owners apply a partial approach to DL where they target revenue generation approaches. Any other DL activity that comes with a cost to their pockets is considered less relevant. The idea with Independent Colleges is that since they operate in a cash education business environment, the strategy is that the lower the use of money in non-revenue education supportive activities, the higher the revenue for transactions. Hence 95 per cent of their students have less educational support such internet data, devices (tablets etc.) as they are regarded cost-intensive initiative. If every independent college in KwaZulu Natal considered students as number one Stakeholders, then the DL programmes were going to be a huge success maybe comparable with developed countries.

- **What are the barriers undermining effective DL programmes in Independent Colleges in KwaZulu Natal province?**

The respondents revealed in the findings that the provision of ICT was a crucial factor and proved to be a major barrier. The barrier was not in the device or the data as the Institutions made provisions for this; it was, however, in the implementation of these resources, preparation of their staff and training of learners in using the devices effectively.

- **Student Accessibility**

Students of today are known by many names, like digital natives (Singh et al., 2018), millennial (Amir et al., 2020), net generation and digital generation (Wahab Ali, 2018). Their entry in the world was at a time when technological expansion was ubiquitous and widely adopted throughout the world. A previous research undertaken by the author has revealed that students tend to have a strong bonding with ICT (Wahab Ali, 2018). Today's children are exposed to technological gadgets such as mobile phones and tablet from very tender ages the world over (Hodges et al., 2020). An empirical study undertaken by Jesse (2015) confirmed the aforementioned comment as his findings revealed that majority (99.8%) of the students have access to mobile phones and they use it for texting,

visiting social media and applications apart from talking. Looking at the rate at which technology is integrated in the education system, it can be assumed that students' display a high degree of acceptance and receptiveness towards it (Willms & Corbett, 2003). Likewise, there are certain paradoxes and delusions associated with net generation that needs to be considered as the belief that they know all about ICT is a fatal misconception. Similar sentiments are shared by World Bank (2020a) that by simply pointing students and teachers to large online repositories, without appropriate guidance would not auger well during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. For despite they may be technology canny they may lack the theoretical knowledge base required for particular occupation. Support for this contention can be found in the study of O'Sullivan (2018) who strongly advocated that many young people, the so-called digital natives, have shown limitations in their use of technology. There have been numerous studies worldwide and one such study in 2014 signposted a huge disparity between young people's false impression and their real knowledge of computer skills. Considering COVID-19 pandemic, World Bank further reiterated that most students will have great difficulty accessing online learning; especially those that have poor Internet access and are subject to numerous other disadvantages (World Bank, 2020b).

There is no doubt that ICT has become an integral part of everyday life and has transformed the learning environment to the extent that ICT literacy has become a functional requirement for nearly all qualifications. The integration of technology in education has not only changed how students learn but has also changed the teaching pedagogies by promoting collaborative activities. The online learning environments foster additional learning experiences where learners can interact, collaborate, and take ownership of their own learning at their own pace and time. Hence, ICT immersed lessons provide a motivating and encouraging learning environment for our students and also it leads to self-directed learning. When there is a shift from a teacher-controlled environment to a more learner-controlled environment, the role of the educator becomes more of a facilitator and minimal scaffolding may be required (Zhang et al., 2020). Obviously, the teaching staff members in form of professors, lecturers and teaching assistants are the key players in the effective implementation of ICT integrated learning. As such, it is pivotal that they have the right attitude and perceptions about ICT so that

they can integrate technology effectively in teaching. Likewise, students' perceptions and aspirations also need to be considered as it directly affects their learning space and style (Singh et al., 2018). The unprecedented situation in wake of COVID-19 has brought about challenges to staff, students and administrators to adopt online learning despite certain shortfalls in its organization and implementation. There is no doubt that massive technological advances in the world demand a paradigm shift in way we approach our educational goals and aspirations. Many universities and educational institutions have adopted ICT tools such as laptop, projectors, tablets, smart phones, ipads and interactive white boards to mention a few. This is apart from many educational soft wares and learning applications readily available on the internet. Likewise, the findings revealed that staff members have found that students have a special bonding with ICT. They further believe that today's" students are quite attached to mobile technology and look forward to technology integrated learning. None the less, students' receptiveness of ICT is well acknowledged by all. On a similar note, Zhang et al. (2020) concurred with the views of Jesse (2015) that students look forward to ICT integrated learning and as it enabled them to use internet and catch up with lessons from the comforts of their homes. This impetus in students calls for lecturers and administrators to have adequate ICT infrastructure and student support services to make learning meaningful and enjoyable for all students. In essence, it can be concluded that lecturers and teaching staff in general are key stakeholders in the successful implementation of ICT integrated learning and reciprocally they need to be valued and assisted accordingly. However, the World Bank has highlighted a number of challenges as education providers are rushing to go online so that education of the students is least affected in times of social distancing amidst COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the issues raised by it are as follows:

- Transitioning to online learning at scale is a very difficult and highly complex undertaking for education systems, even in the best of circumstances;
- Moving to online learning at scale raises profound equity concerns;
- Highly motivated learners, especially those with previous experience in online learning, are the most likely to take the most advantage of online learning opportunities;
- When first going online, education systems and parents should expect dips in student achievement in the short term;

- Organizing digital educational content to align with existing curricula can be critical in providing users and teachers with a way to ensure that the learning opportunities provided correspond to broader educational objectives within an education system;
- Making content available on a wide variety of devices and mobile friendly is critical;
- Supporting the use of low bandwidth including offline solutions is key to effective learning;
- Staff teaching online need to be supported; <http://hes.ccsenet.org> Higher Education Studies

It may conclusively be stated that incorporating technology into education exposes students to modern and relevant technologies. This helps both students and academic staff close the technological literacy gap while also fostering expertise in online and digital media, thereby preparing students for the job market in an increasingly technology-reliant world of digitization and automation. Students' accounts of online learning and their ability to control and successfully operate technology determined their success factors and satisfaction levels when engaging with online learning techniques. It may be assumed that the introduction of digital technologies may offer opportunities to introduce new and better approaches to distance teaching and learning. Meta-synthesis revealed that willingness to embrace change is a major requirement for successful integration of technology as it provides students opportunities to learn and apply the required 21st century skills (Singh et al., 2018). Given the relentless advent of ICT in education arena, its use in enhancing lesson delivery has been widely discussed and adopted in many HE institutions globally. This is because technology acts as a catalyst and supports staff members in lesson preparation and delivery.

In this regard, Hasan et al. (2019) is quite sceptical as institutions may have necessary ICT facilities, but there may be other shortfalls such as lack of time for lesson preparation and unsupportive curriculum design. He reiterated that just having the resources does not imply that ICT can be easily implemented but there needs to be the presence of other supportive factors and one such factor is staff readiness (Hasan et al., 2019). That is why Singh et al. (2018) asserted that before ICT can be effectively integrated lecturers should be provided with adequate training and support in ICT and pedagogy. There is no doubt

why staff readiness and motivation need to be considered as important factors for the successful assimilation of technology in HE institutions.

An earlier study undertaken by Ali (2019) revealed that some of the staff members in a tertiary institution seemed to be integrating ICT in their lessons especially during lectures and tutorials. However, majority (92%) of them still believed that confidence is a factor that can be further enhanced (Ali, 2019). This lack of confidence could be due to the administration of the different tools and learning platforms. On similar note, Ogunode (2018) asserted that staff members' attitude and their willingness to implement ICT made a big difference in the lives of their students. This is because if staffs are unwilling and do not implement ICT embedded learning, their students can be just left to rote learning and 'chalk and board' explanations. Similar sentiments are shared by Yuen and Ma (2002) who strongly recommended the need to empower teaching staff and build their confidence so that they are able to implement ICT integrated teaching. Considering COVID-19 pandemic, World Bank stressed that staff working online need to be trained and supported. They further warned that staffs that do not have access to sufficient broadband and a connected device at home will obviously not be able to support student learning online (World Bank, 2020b). Subsequently, they urged that staff need to be supported technically, socially and morally so that they can effectively deliver online classes.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

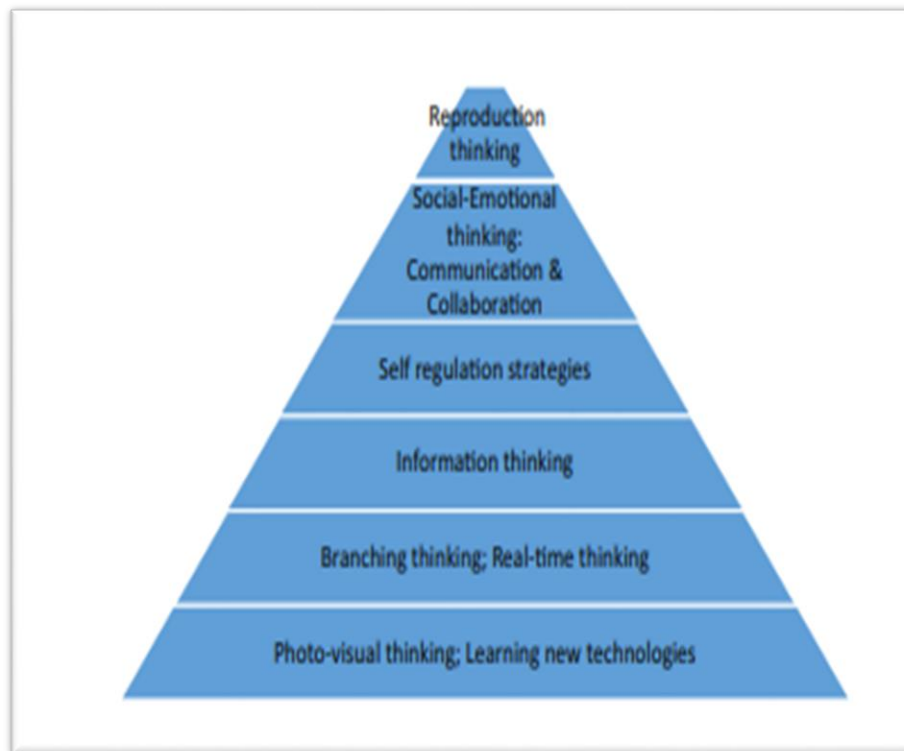
The tertiary education ecosystem is, like nearly every sector, undergoing a period of change influenced by digital, networked technologies, as well as broader social and economic shifts. As a consequence, higher education institutions (HEIs) seek to harness new technologies to better serve current students and also to reach new student populations. Over the past twenty years' participation in higher education has been expanding rapidly across the globe, it has proved difficult for Independent Colleges to engage in the type of DL practised by public colleges by the mere fact that they refer to themselves private college and business-driven, hence the approach to DL.

Based on the conclusions drawn from the findings, this study recommends that orientation programs provided to students at the College of Distance Education should be organized in such a manner that they will provide students an opportunity to have and maintain meaningful relationships with staff. This will help increase students' sense of connectedness and integration into the institution, which can enhance their retention. Further, the university should support the interest of students' retention through a continuous orientation process from the beginning of admission throughout the entire first year.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the phrase 'Distance Learning' should be rephrased as 'Personalised Learning Program' as a way of contextualising the whole DL system or idea and to promote and refer to the DL programmes in Independent Colleges. The phrase simply makes DL programmes look detached from an acceptable and efficient way of learning.

There are innumerable gains that can be realised from delivering DL, as discussed in the previous chapters. However, contrary to the aforementioned, the Independent Colleges in KwaZulu Natal province are not aware of these potential benefits, thus failing to adopt and utilise the strategy holistically. Given this background, it is recommended that Education forums, respective ministries and the responsible higher education regulatory authorities in KwaZulu Natal province carry the responsibility of creating awareness and educating Independent Colleges on the benefits realised from being a DL provider. There are a number of platforms and education institutions locally or internationally that advocate and forward DL ideas and the responsible government ministry can simply attach themselves to these networks in order to accrue free updated information that will assist in advancing delivery of DL programmes in the education sector.

Figure 6.1: Digital Literacies



The pyramid in Figure 6.1 classifies the digital literacies found in this study by representing their complexity. The skills at the bottom of the pyramid represent the basics literacies: photo-visual thinking and learning new technologies. As stated above, the development of photo visual thinking requires, among other things, the skill of learning and effectively deciphering interfaces of new technologies. These skills are the important background for conducting digital tasks. The next two levels of the pyramid include branching thinking, and real-time thinking skills, which are the basis of using the internet regardless of students' purpose, and information thinking, which specifically refers to the ability of dealing effectively with digital information. The most advanced levels include skills such as self-regulated learning, social emotional thinking - with an emphasis on digital communication and collaboration, and finally, reproduction thinking - an expression of creativity in digital environments.

Other recommendations proposed are:

- Distance education should be encouraged and initiated to offer training to the employees and both students and employees should be targeted. This is so because

distance education is an effective mode of training. There is also some need for setting up new infrastructure for distance training to ensure its effectiveness.

- Multimedia and prints plus other media should be suitable learning materials to be used in the study. Course content should influence learners' interest to train through distance learning since it provides an avenue for learners to receive well researched materials.
- The management of the institution should add more study materials for effective and efficient learning by both the students and the employees. Also, there should be special training for the preparation of study materials.
- More library materials should be added in the library and in addition the learners should also have their own materials in need and also should have means to get access to any required information. Information technology should be included in the curriculum as it plays an important role in implementation of distance education at college insurance.
- The institution management should encourage both the staff and the stakeholders to have an email address for a better communication and exchange of ideas within and outside the institution. Also, both the staff and the stakeholders should possess an E-library account to be able to access library information and materials efficiently. This would play an important role in both education and training of the students and the employees in the insurance college.
- Stakeholder participation must be accelerated and sustained in the interest of all parties.
- As the cost of education continues to rise, especially in colleges and universities, cost and time efficiency of learning, effective instructional approaches, and methods and tools capable of fulfilling the primary mission of education are all critical of research and inventive solutions. The area will become Colleges and universities should focus on expanding the value of education, maximizing learning productivity, correlating investment with predictable outcomes, and improving cost and time efficiency.
- Whatever technologies are designed for education, no matter how much technology is integrated into learning, the human element, especially the learner and teacher, remains problematic. Therefore, taking advantage of effective educational technologies, it should be necessary to place those modern tools like laptops, wifi and

Ms Teams in the wider context of human education so as to preserve its humanistic, developmental purpose and, thus, make their more effective use.

- All technology applications require a solid theoretical foundation based on purposeful, systematic research and sound pedagogy to increase efficiency and reduce potential side issues. When integrating new technologies into teaching and learning, policy makers in collaboration with academics, IT professionals and students must first consider their potential applicability, estimated costs and benefits, and then develop successful educational practices.

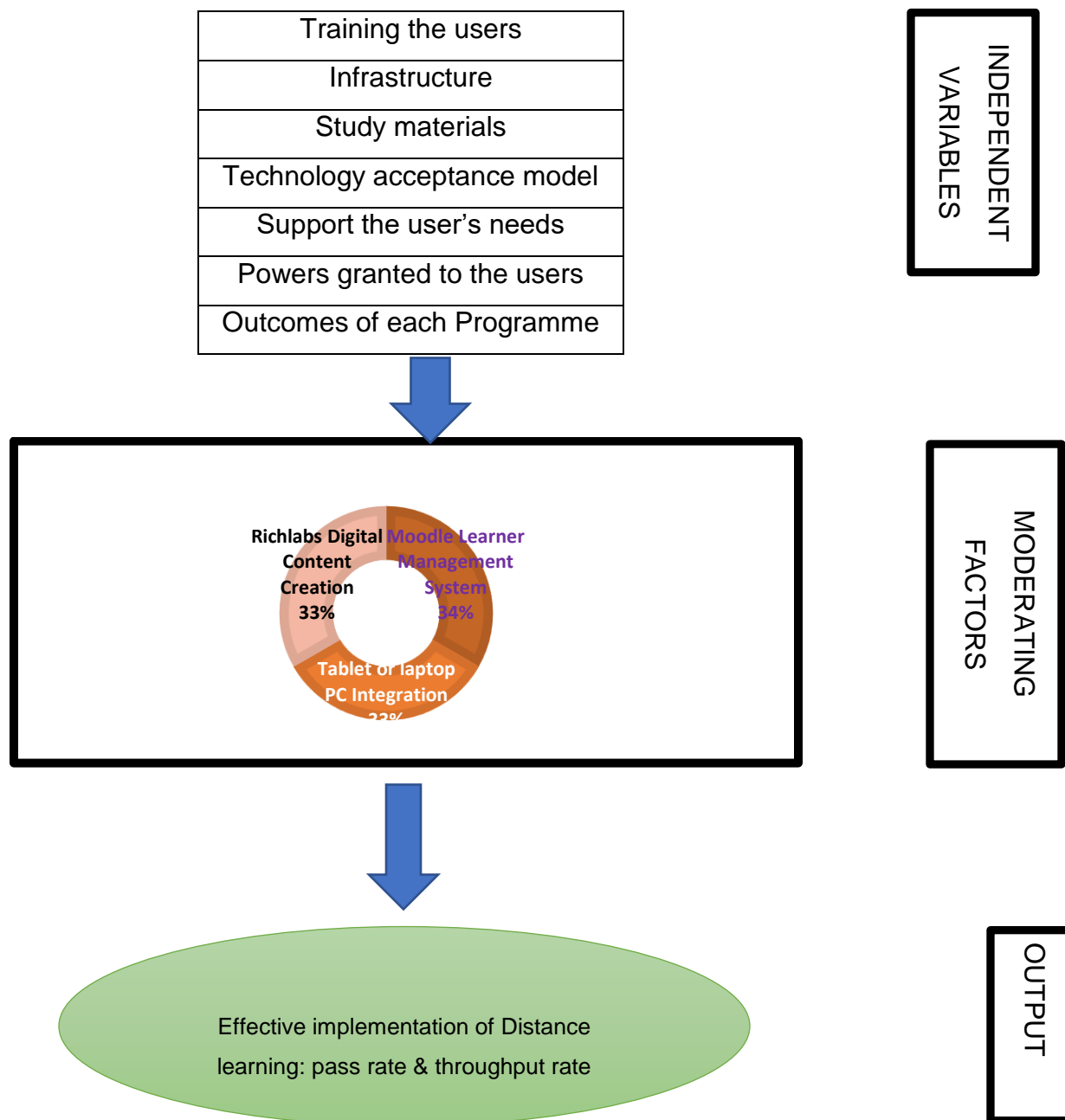
6.6 CONTRIBUTION TO NEW KNOWLEDGE

Provided below is the proposed model based on the Stakeholder Theory for Independent Colleges in KwaZulu Natal province to efficiently deliver DL programmes. The conceptual framework shows the relationship between four independent variables study materials, CDL, ADL; moderating factors that is computer technologies and how they influence dependent variable (EDL). It may conclusively be stated that incorporating technology into education exposes students to modern and relevant technologies. This helps both students and academic staff close the technological literacy gap while also fostering expertise in online and digital media, thereby preparing students for the job market in an increasingly technology-reliant world of digitization and automation. Students' accounts of online learning and their ability to control and successfully operate technology determined their success factors and satisfaction levels when engaging with online learning techniques. It may be assumed that the introduction of digital technologies may offer opportunities to introduce new and better approaches to distance teaching and learning.

Implementation of distance education is highly dependent on availability of study materials. Students require reading materials and guideline to prepare for assessment and reading purposes. The choice of technology greatly influences the implementation of distance education because communication through internet and accessibility to information on the Websites has positive impact on learning. The flexibility is key aspect to implementation of distance learning. A teacher can provide training to learners located in different geographical location at the same time. The flexibility is achieved through frequent enrolment, self-pacing of students and provision of support services. After

analysing the regression model in terms of the coefficients of all exogenous variable and their p values it may be noted (refer to Table 5.7) ADL, CDL and CD were significant variables (p values <0.005) that have influence to the EDL. This is illustrated below.

Figure 6.1: PROPOSED MODEL TO GUIDE INDEPENDENT COLLEGES IN KWAZULU NATAL PROVINCE TO IMPOROVE THE DELIVERY OF DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES



6.7 Area for further research

The study focused on investigating the perception of students towards the effectiveness of DL programmes in independent higher education institutions

Future research can be undertaken in the following areas:

- a similar study could be conducted among public universities in Kwa-Zulu Natal;
- a similar study could investigate the influence of demographic variables on the implementation of DL, and
- a similar study could be conducted in other private colleges in KwaZulu-Natal, and in South Africa, and

6.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Generally, research has limitations. A limitation is defined as an uncontrollable threat to the validity of research and this research study will meet a fair share of its limitations some of which are common disadvantages of quantitative research methodology (Berger, 2013). The literature reviewed for the study was limited to the investigation of perception of students towards the effectiveness of DL programmes in independent higher education institutions. Due to constraints in both time and resources the study was restricted to College A and AAA in South Africa only. The results can, therefore, not be generalised to other private colleges in other areas as situational issues may differ.

There was a limitation based on the dependency on key participants to get sufficient information to lay the ground for analysis and discussion. Initially, the aim was for the data collection to be completed earlier. However, it was very challenging to get through to the owner-managers as their busy schedules were the order of the day. It was also difficult to get information from representatives as most of them had no idea of the subject at hand. Respondent bias refers to a gamut of viewpoint bias that avert the response of participants away from providing accurate response. This limitation is common in studies that involve participant self-administered reporting, such as questionnaires. The

questionnaires were directed to owner managers and as such, the risk of 'ego' related responses; bias in inexorable; and question misinterpretation or ignorance.

6.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This concluding chapter discussed the findings, provided recommendations, summarised the contributions of this work, discussed the limitations, and finally gave some pointers for future research in this field. It is hoped that this will help Independent Colleges and stakeholders achieve their educational targets.

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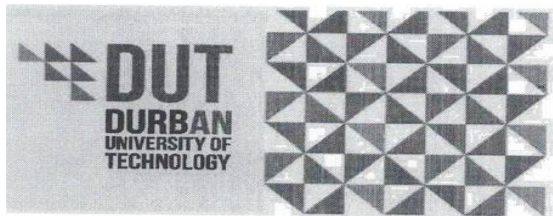
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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: IREC Approval



Institutional Research Ethics Committee
Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate
2nd Floor, Berwyn Court
Gate 1, Steve Biko Campus
Durban University of Technology
P O Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001
Tel: 031 373 2375
Email: lavishad@dut.ac.za
http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics
www.dut.ac.za

8 December 2020

Ms A Sivai
101 Challen Avenue
Northcroft
Phoenix
4051

Dear Ms Sivai

Students' perceptions of distance learning in higher education: A case of independent colleges in KwaZulu-Natal
Ethical Clearance number IREC 034/20

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your notification regarding the piloting of the data collection tool.

Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

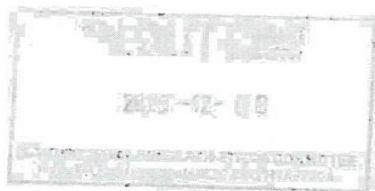
Please note that FULL APPROVAL is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the IREC according to the IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the IREC as outlined in the IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely,

Professor J K Adam
Chairperson: IREC



ANNEXURE B: LETTER OF INFORMATION



LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: Students 'perceptions of distance learning in higher education: A case of independent colleges in KwaZulu- Natal.

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Mrs. Ashna Sivai

Supervisor: Dr. Bobo Chazireni

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Over the years Distance Learning (DL) programmes is assumed to have become a key to the global learning environment and key to the Education system of Africa and South Africa. DL systems have been branded as fecund drivers of education growth and sustainable development in South Africa and the world at large. The existence of DL programmes in any economy is of paramount importance despite being bullied by the traditional classroom methods. There is growing recognition of the important role of DL programmes in the development of education systems in South Africa. They are often described as efficient and prolific job flexi hour studies, as DL has generally allowed the tertiary learners to study at leisure and at the same time contribute meaningfully to the economy as most of them are employed in different fields. Nevertheless, for a multiplicity of reasons, the pass rate of distance learners in South Africa is low, and many studies have identified a lack of aptitude on the part of the students as one of the main reasons for the low success rate.

Responsibilities of Participants

Once the participants have consented to partaking in the survey, they will be requested to complete a self-administered questionnaire, and e-mail same to the researcher. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant

The participants will not be asked to perform any acts or make statements which might be expected to cause discomfort, compromise them, diminish their self-esteem or cause them to experience embarrassment or regret. There are no foreseeable adverse reactions.

Benefits

The benefits of the research include the following:

- The findings of the study have the potential to benefit SMEs in Durban south area by identifying those ethical values that are positively correlated to business success.
- It is envisaged that the research results will be presented at a local or international conference, and the findings will be published in an accredited journal.

Reason why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study

Participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the study for their own personal reasons, like a lack of time to complete the questionnaire. They will be no adverse consequences for the participants should they choose to withdraw.

Remuneration

The participant will not receive any monetary or other types of remuneration.

Costs of the Study

The participants are not expected to cover any costs towards the study.

Confidentiality

The data collection process will not involve access to confidential personal data. Participants will be assured of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. The completed questionnaires, which do not contain the name of the participant or his/her enterprise, will be stored for a period of five years, and will, thereafter, be shredded.

Research-related Injury

There is no anticipated injury to the participants as the participants will not perform any physical acts.

Persons to contact in the event of any problems or queries:

Please contact the researcher, or the supervisor, or). Complaints can be reported to the DVC: TIP, on 031 373 2382 or dvctip@dut.ac.za.

ANNEXURE C: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT



CONSENT

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number:
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

Full Name of Participant Date Signature herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Full Name of Researcher Date Signature

Full Name of Witness (If applicable) Date Signature

ANNEXURE D: COVERING LETTER ACCOMPANYING QUESTIONNAIRE

Faculty of Management Sciences

Department of Entrepreneurial Studies and Management

Date: 28 June 2020

Dear Participant

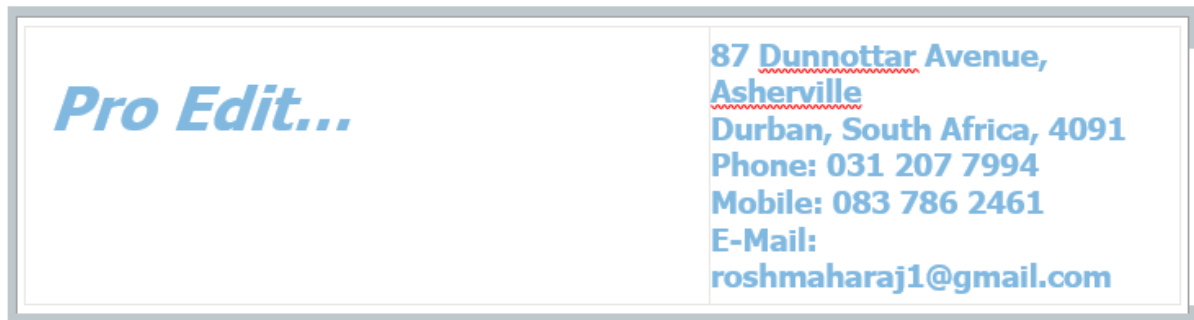
I am currently undertaking a 'Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sciences (Business Administration)' in the department of Entrepreneurial Studies and Management at the Durban University of Technology. The study aims to investigate the perception of students towards the effectiveness of DL programmes in Independent Higher Education Institutions: Case of College A and AAA Colleges in KwaZulu Natal Province.

Would you be kind enough to agree to complete a questionnaire for the study? The questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary, and all information collected will be treated as confidential. Upon your request, the findings of the study will be made available to you once they have been finalised. No personal details will be made available to the public or third party.

Please return the completed questionnaire

Thank you for your anticipated response and cooperation.

ANNEXURE E: PROOF OF EDITING



To WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Please be advised that I have edited Ashna Sivai's dissertation entitled

PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS TOWARDS DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES: A CASE OF INDEPENDENT COLLEGES

I have not fabricated and or manipulated any information. The emphasis has been on ensuring academic correctness and coherence. Several missing sources were also identified and conveyed to the candidate for completion.

Yours sincerely

Dr. R. D. Maharaj (Prof)

PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS TOWARDS DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES: A CASE OF INDEPENDENT COLLEGES

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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PUBLICATIONS

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STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1

www.circles-of-confusion.com

Internet Source

7

2

Yvon Pesqueux, Salma Damak—Ayadi. "Stakeholder theory in
perspective", 'Emerald'

Internet Source

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ASHNA SIVAI (STUDENT)

DR BOB CHAZIRENI (SUPERVISOR)

ANNEXURE G: Questionnaire

Title: Students 'perceptions of distance learning in higher education: A case of independent colleges in KwaZulu- Natal.

Research Objectives:

- Assess the attitude level of students towards distance learning programmes.
- Investigate the distance learning approaches adopted by Higher and Tertiary Independent Colleges.
- Establish causes of students' failure rate in distance learning programmes as compared with the classroom environment.
- Explore the linkages existing between students and college in the adoption and successful implementation of distance learning programmes.

This questionnaire is divided into 6 sections:

1. Section 1 deals with biographic details
2. Section 2 deals with the distance learning programmes in the independent college
3. Section 3 deals with the aspect of distance learning as an optional avenue in in the life of a student
4. Section 4 deals with distance learning administration processes
5. Section 5 and 6 deals with effectiveness of distance learning channels

Please be assured that your responses are confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

Section A

Please indicate in your response by marking the appropriate box with either a cross "X"

1. Are you a member of the college SRC?

1.1	Yes	
1.2	No	

2. What is your current highest educational Qualification under-study?

2.1	Doctorate/PHD	
2.2	Master's Degree	
2.3	Honours Degree	
2.4	Undergraduate Degree (or equivalent e.g. three-year diploma)	
2.5	Post school diploma	
2.6	Other specify	

3. Please indicate the age group to which you belong in?

3.1	25 years and below	
3.2	26 to 35 years	
3.3	36 to 45 years	
3.4	46 to 55 years	
3.5	56 and above	

4. Please indicate your gender

4.1	Male	
4.2	Female	

5. Indicate your population group

5.1	African	
5.2	White	
5.3	Indian	
5.4	Asian	
5.5	Other	

Section B

The questions below relate to the college's distance learning programmes. Please indicate your response by marking the appropriate box with a cross "X"

Statements/Questions relating to the private college	Yes	Not Sure	No
1.1 Are you aware of what exactly distance learning is all about?	1	2	3
1.2 Do you think there is difference between distance learning and classroom environment?	1	2	3
1.3 Do you have full knowledge of the requirements and the outputs from distance learning programmes	1	2	3
1.4 Do you think the private college where you are taking your studies has the capacity to run distance learning programmes	1	2	3
1.5 Given choices, do you think distance learning programmes would be on your priority list to build your career	1	2	3

Section C

This section deals with the aspect of distance learning as an optional avenue in the life of a student. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing a cross "X" in the appropriate box.

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, DA = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Perception towards distance learning programmes.	SA	A	N	DA	SD
1.1 Distance learning programmes contribute significantly to the knowledge of the student	1	2	3	4	5

1.2 Distance learning programmes promotes academic self-discipline	1	2	3	4	5
1.3 Distance learning contributes meaningfully to employment opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
1.4 Distance learning creates skills competitive edge	1	2	3	4	5
1.5 Distance learning allows the student to be networked with academic bodies, influential individuals and other students.	1	2	3	4	5
1.6 Distance learning programmes align the student with strategic career development platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
1.7 Distance learning programmes links the student with social benefits from the government	1	2	3	4	5
1.8 Through distance learning programmes, the student can easily identify raw employment opportunities to explore.	1	2	3	4	5
1.9 Distance learning makes it easy for the student to expand into new careers that presents themselves through links.	1	2	3	4	5

Section D

The following are statements regarding distance learning administration processes in the college. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing a cross “X” in the appropriate box

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, DA = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Perception towards the administration of distance learning programmes by the college.	SA	A	N	DA	SD
1.1 Do you think the college has a clearly defined distance learning administration process framework?	1	2	3	4	5
1.2 Do you think the college has a policy driven plan to successfully administer distance learning programmes?	1	2	3	4	5

1.3 Do you think the college has capacity to run the distance learning programmes?	1	2	3	4	5
1.4 Do you think the college is good at implementing systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of distance learning programmes?	1	2	3	4	5
1.5 Do you think the college has set up an expert team to oversee the administration of distance learning programmes?	1	2	3	4	5
1.6 Do you think the college has serious commitment to distance learning programmes?	1	2	3	4	5

Section E

The following are statements regarding the effectiveness of distance learning channels utilised by the college. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing a cross “X” in the appropriate box.

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, DA = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree.

Perception towards distance learning channels	SA	A	N	DA	SD
1.1 Do you think the current distance learning channels provides an easy way of reaching the student?	1	2	3	4	5
1.2 Do you think the existing channels are effective enough to improve pass rate?	1	2	3	4	5
1.3 Do you think the channels serve all the needs of the students?	1	2	3	4	5
1.4 Do you think there are other approaches that are better than the current systems at the college?	1	2	3	4	5
1.5 In any case do you think the pass or failure rate can be attributed to the distance learning channels at the college?	1	2	3	4	5

1.6 Do you think the college's distance learning programmes create an opportunity for the college to reach government subsidies or funding?	1	2	3	4	5
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Section F

To what extent can distance learning programmes influence the following factors that affect effectiveness? Please indicate your response to the following statements by placing a cross "X" in the appropriate box.

NE = No Extent, SE = Small Extent, ME = Moderate Extent, LE = Large Extent, VLE = Very Large Extent

Factors that affect effectiveness of distance learning programmes	NE	SE	ME	LE	VLE
1.1 Communicating the initiatives (ensuring understanding of distance learning programmes)	1	2	3	4	5
1.2 Achieving buy-in (acceptance and adoption by students)	1	2	3	4	5
1.3 Creating the infrastructure for distance learning (Organizing teams to attend to students concerns)	1	2	3	4	5
1.4 Spelling out the requirements (outcomes of each programme)	1	2	3	4	5
1.5 Understanding the college drivers (Awareness of the college reasons for any distance learning initiative)	1	2	3	4	5

Should you wish to receive a copy of the research findings, please provide your details?

Name	:
Email Address:	

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire and for your contribution to this study. Please use the self-addressed and paid envelope to return your completed questionnaire.