UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Southampton Education School

Volume 1

'Virtual Shock': Adult Students' Perceptions of Their Emotional Experience on an Online Learning Undergraduate Degree at a Regional Caribbean University

by

Vilma N. Clarke

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education

December 2015

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I, Vilma N. Clarke

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

‘Virtual Shock’: Adult Students' Perceptions of Their Emotional Experience on an Online Learning Undergraduate Degree at a Regional Caribbean University

Vilma N. Clarke

This phenomenological case study focuses on the emotional experiences of adult learners on an online undergraduate degree course at a regional Caribbean university. It examines four major elements as they relate to online learning environments: perceptions of the learning environment; perceptions of the learning process; descriptions of emotional experiences; and manifestations of behavioural outcomes.

Online learning as an instructional strategy for adult learners has gained global acceptance because it can accommodate those who work, and have family responsibilities and other social obligations.

A qualitative design was used to facilitate the collection of data, using interviews as the primary instrument and documentary sources as secondary data. A special effort was made to retain the *voice* of the ten participants, all full-time employees pursuing undergraduate degrees at the University of the West Indies Open Campus. It was a purposeful sample for a phenomenological study.

The findings show that both positive and negative emotions formed part of the learning experience in online learning and also influenced the learning. Negative emotions did not necessarily impede learning, as is implied by many studies. In this learning environment, despite the presence of many negative emotions and little support from instructors, the majority of participants survived the learning experience and some achieved good learning outcomes; for others, the consequences were failure, repeats and low grade point averages. The findings were that positive emotions encouraged students to persist, but that negative emotions did not necessarily deter them. In fact, the majority of the students remained highly motivated and seemed to strive even harder. This suggests that, more than being an impediment, negative emotions lead to positive outcomes, yet this is not automatic. It depends primarily on what the students bring to the learning environment; that is, a capacity to survive, determination, persistence, willingness to take hard knocks and not to give up, and openness to new experiences. Those students who survived were distinguished by their attitudes to the realities of online learning; they developed strategies to cope as they focused on their short- and long-term goals.

It is recommended that instructors use diverse technology applications in delivery episodes to provide opportunities for social interaction and stimulation. Online collaborative learning (OCL) based on constructivism could provide a framework for adult learners, especially in developing nations where resources are limited, in order to avoid the emotional shock of having to adjust to the new online environments. This study adds to the ongoing empirical and theoretical contributions to the emotional dynamics of adult learning in online environments in higher education.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to acknowledge the contribution of other individuals, without whom this project would not have been possible. First, I am extremely grateful for all the guidance and help I received from Professor Jacky Lumby, my chief supervisor. Your unswerving faith in my ability, your encouragement and your interest in me as a student was one of the motivating factors that kept me going each time I felt like I wanted to give up. I would also like to thank Dr Mike Tomlinson, who ably assisted me when my supervisor was on leave.

I should like to thank my colleague, Dr Herbert Redway, who gave me valuable and ongoing advice throughout the course of this project. I should also like to say a special thanks to my nephew, Mark Hines, who spent almost all his holidays as my research assistant. Many thanks to Christine Rodriguez, who proofread and formatted the document, and made the many adjustments that were needed at the last minute. I also express my sincere gratitude to the University of the West Indies and the students who participated in this research.

Lastly, a special thanks to all my friends and family who prayed for me and encouraged me when it seemed as if I would never complete the journey.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Adult learners are attracted to distance education and its online format in particular, due to its greater accessibility and convenience (Capra, 2011; Richardson & Swan, 2003). Their growing presence in higher education is a consequence of the demands of our fluid, information-driven society that require new skills and knowledge in the workplace (Howland & Moore, 2002). This context has opened up opportunities for established institutions to enter the global, higher education, distance-learning market (Hanover Research, 2011). Internationally, institutions of higher education are expanding their offerings to meet growing demand for educational opportunities, especially online, from adults who desire educational opportunities in order to be competitive in the workforce (ibid.). Currently, online learning is considered the fastest growing sector in distance education in higher education (Folinsbee, 2008). This growth, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (Wallace, 2003), has been well-documented in industrialised nations (Allen & Seaman, 2011; Bates, 2011).

Online learning, or 'e-learning', has been made possible by new information and communication technologies including the Internet and the World Wide Web (www). Online learning embraces a wide set of technology applications and learning processes such as computer-based learning, web-based learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaborations (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010; Urdan & Weggen, 2000).

One of the first attempts at online teaching was in 1980, based on the invention of computer conferencing by Murray Turoff in 1970 (Hiltz & Turoff, 1978, p.43, cited in Bates, 2008). In 1988, the British Open University was one of the first institutions to offer online courses to completely off-campus students. However, these pioneering efforts were limited and the real breakthrough for online learning arrived with the development of the World Wide Web and the resulting spread of the Internet into many homes, offices and universities in developed countries from the mid-1990s (Bates, 2008). However, while online is being established as a new pedagogical model, educators are still struggling to grasp the uses and limitations of this kind of learning environments (Douglas, 2007). The major challenge for institutions offering online distance learning is to ensure high quality teaching. This involves more than simply placing materials on the Web. It requires teaching and supporting students online, throughout the delivery of the course or programme. In addition to content, instructors have to think not only about high quality media or web design and production, but about the best way to organise online tutoring, as well as instructional design issues, for a diverse group of students (Bates, 2000). It is not simply a matter of delivering online courseware and letting the 'student sink or

swim' (Teo & Williams, 2005), but providing an optimal learning environment (Howland & Moore, 2002).

An optimal environment may be different for various learners. Like its predecessor, distance education, online learning does not need a classroom – but it does require an understanding of how adult learning takes place (Glancy & Isenberg, 2011). Online learning is considered a subset of distance education (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010) that dates back to a university tradition since the 1890s (Wallace, 2003). This is understood as formal education in which the teacher and students are physically separated in both the online and offline formats (Bates, 2000; Wallace, 2003). On the other hand, online education is used to describe classes in which instruction is delivered entirely online (Wallace, 2003).

A further elaboration of the online concept is provided by Kennedy (2000), who defines online courses as courses where most of the communication and interaction among learners and instructors takes place through online technologies such as e-mail, Internet browsers, chat, and asynchronous conference or bulletin boards. Additionally, online meetings employ the use of sound and video to enable individuals to carry on synchronous conversations across the Internet. Moreover, distance learning as described by Kennedy (2000) refers to any kind of learning at a distance, where the student does not come to college to attend classes on a regular basis, and can include formats such as correspondence courses, tele-courses, teleconferencing and online courses.

This research focuses on the emotional experiences of adults in online distance learning in which the student and the instructor are dispersed in time as well as space (Wallace, 2003). This is unlike a typical learning environment characterised by active interaction between learners and instructor, or between learners and other learners. In fully online learning contexts, opportunities for interactions such as those described above are often non-existent due to physical separation.

Despite the many advances in modern communication technology, supposed to provide several tools to minimise problems relating to the spatial distance across which learners interact with tutors and their class peers (So & Brush, 2007), online learning is still unfamiliar to many students and tutors. Besides, the technology continues to evolve, making it harder for adults, both as learners and instructors, to adjust to the variety of technological tools. The emergence of these new technologies in online learning has expanded the delivery mechanism for higher education; as well as changed the way in which students have traditionally experienced the learning environment.

For this reason, students' prior knowledge of what it means to learn is bound to colour their expectations of the new learning environment. Tutors, also, unless professionally prepared, will perpetuate the manner in which they were taught. Experiences of the online learning environment appear to be forcing students to re-examine old ideas of what it means to learn and tutors to re-examine what it means to teach. Fully online learning environments entail a shift from oral to written communication in the virtual classroom. Moreover, 'learners no longer meet with classmates face-to-face and instructors are now more responsible for completing instructional tasks without the explicit oral instructions provided in conventional settings' (Howland & Moore, 2002, p.183). These changes hold substantial implications for both online instructors and the adult students who choose online environments (Howland & Moore, 2002).

Despite the fact that online courses and programmes continue to grow in higher education settings, many questions remain in respect of the viability of online learning, particularly from the learners' perspective (Song et al. 2003). The convenience and flexibility of online learning and the possibilities of expanding educational opportunities for the many are often touted as some of the benefits of online learning. However, there are some reservations that the movement toward online learning environments is not rooted in 'compelling empirical evidence' (Song et al., 2003 p.60), or even that it is either effective or beneficial for learning. Many of the studies in online learning are anecdotal (Hara & Kling, 1999), based on the perceptions of instructors teaching a course or from the point of view of instructional technologists designing and or developing a course (Berge, 1997, Bourne et al., 1997, as cited in Song et al., 2004, p.60). Consequently, although the perspectives of instructors are regarded as important, it is true that few studies have examined learners' perspectives of online learning, inclusive of pedagogical strategies to promote learners' online experience, the impact of learners' characteristics in web-based learning environments and learners' overall perceptions (Song et al., 2003). In the context of these expressed concerns, one overriding question to be addressed is how the new educational delivery approaches, which move away from the accepted face-to-face relationship between learners and instructors, will impact on student learning and student perceptions of learning.

1.1.1 Adult learners in distance online higher education

Currently, online distance learners are primarily adults between the ages of 25 and 50 years (Cercone, 2008; Moore & Kearsley, 2012). It is advances in Internet technology that have made this type of learning possible, so much so that nowadays learning can occur asynchronously, anytime, anywhere, in any place (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Despite this, the high dropout rates are of major concern in distance higher education. Numerous studies have

reported that one of the most difficult challenges of online programmes is to retain learners. A number of studies have reported that a higher percentage of online learners tend to drop out than students in face-to-face studies (Carr, 2000; Diaz, 2000; Frankola, 2001; Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). Consequently, there is a large body of international research exploring the individual, social and organisational factors that impacts on student retention in higher education (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Berge & Huang, 2004; Galusha, 1997; Hart, 2012; Nash, 2005; Morgan & Tam, 1999; Park & Choi. 2009; Tresman, 2002; Willging & Johnson, 2004). More often than not, perceptions of the online learning environment in the instructional process are influenced by the individual learner's belief about the advantages of online education. Many students may find themselves unprepared for the rigours of higher education and drop out in their first year of study (Berge & Huang, 2004).

Ideally, students are considered to be at the centre of any educational experience, policy or programme and, in an acknowledged competitive, educational landscape, students are of the utmost importance to the viability of higher education institutions.

1.1.2 Emotion and learning

Recent research by neurologists and educators has indicated a link between emotions and reason, feeling and thought (Weiss, 2000). Even though there is general knowledge about the impact of emotion on learning, not much has been written about emotion and online learning (Cleveland-Innis & Campbell, 2012).

Recent developments in the study of emotion have brought about change in the understanding of learning processes (Rustin, 2003). Since online learning is considered a legitimate educational encounter and as such is a subset of learning in general (Anderson, 2004), it can be inferred that emotion has an impact on student learning in the online environment. Moreover, for some researchers, emotions are integral to human experience, so emotion is theorised as being present in all aspects of human endeavour (Dirkx, 2008; Lehman, 2006) and, as such, cannot be separated from learning. Learning takes places continuously and is a way of making meaning of experience (Shuck, Albornoz & Winberg, 2007). New accounts in the literature of emotion and cognition emphasise the link between cognition and emotion, and the understanding in this study is that emotions play a role in learning thus will be present in online learning (Cleveland-Innis & Campbell, 2012). This research, therefore, explores issues surrounding emotions and learning in an online learning environment. The premise is that both emotion and learning are inextricably linked. However, traditionally, emotion has been the invisible dimension in the learning process (Rustin, 2003).

Emotions arise in response to events that are important to individuals, and this importance is dependent on how the individual appraises what is considered an emotional event. Events that satisfy the individual's goals, or promise to do so, yield positive emotions while events that seem to threaten or impede individual concerns lead to negative emotions. Emotions are also elicited by novel or unexpected events (Frijda, 1988, p.349).

Emotion can be considered as individual mental states that carry such descriptive terms as anger, frustration, fear, sadness, happiness and joy, to name a few. Such descriptors are used to describe people's internal state. Bowlby (1969, p.104, as cited in Cleveland-Innis & Campbell, 2012, p.270) provides a more academic definition in reference to learning. Emotions are 'phases of an individual's intuitive appraisals either of his own organismic states and urges to act or of the succession of environmental situations in which he finds himself'. In education, emotions are an aspect of the affective learning domain (Krathwohl, 2002), as opposed to the cognitive and psychomotor domains of learning. Affective learning describes the emotional area of learning reflected by the beliefs, values, interests and behaviours of learners. This domain of learning focuses on how 'learners feel while they are learning, as well as with how learning experiences are internalised so that they can guide learners' attitudes, opinions and behaviour in the future' (Miller, 2005, as cited in Olatunji, 2013, p.96). Although affect has a much wider meaning than emotion, the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably in educational discourse (Dirkx, 2008). I emulate Dirkx (2008) in this study, while acknowledging the wider meanings of affect, emotion, and other related terms such as feelings are used interchangeably.

Like emotion, there are many definitions of learning. However, most incorporate the idea that for learning to be deemed to have occurred, there must be some form of change in the individual's behaviour. The term 'learning' focuses on the learner in whom the change occurs or is expected to occur. Robert Mayer (1982, p.1040, cited in Pociask, Dizazzo-Miller & Pellerito, 2010, p.27) proposes a definition for learning that is relevant to adult learning: 'Learning is a relatively permanent change in a person's knowledge or behaviour due to experience'.

According to Pociask, Dizazzo-Miller and Pellerito (2010), this definition comprises three critical elements: 'the duration of changes is long-term; the change entails the restructuring of the learner's cognitive architecture and/or the learner's behaviours, and the catalyst for change is the learner's experience in the environment' (p.27). Another equally important definition is provided by Smith (1982, as cited in Ponton et al., 2005), in which learning is defined in three ways, as follows:

> Learning is used to refer to (1) The acquisition and mastery of what is already known about something (2) the extension and clarification of one's experience, or (3) an organized, intentional process of testing ideas relevant to problems. In other words, it [learning] is used to describe a product, a process or a function (p.34).

Suffice to say, the way learning is defined greatly influences how it is theorised and also how it is operationalised in any educational context. Key elements of learning are thought to include change, learning as a product, learning as a process and learning as function. Learning theories are the means by which educators and instructional designers attempt to shape educational environments in order to determine outcomes or learning objectives. Two learning theories of importance to this study that are deemed applicable to online learning environments are adult learning theories and constructivism, and these will be discussed in a later section.

1.1.3 Researching emotion and learning in online learning

Adults are usually emotionally involved in their education and have a great desire to learn. Light and Cox (2002, p.29) note that students' involvement in higher education is not merely a 'cognitive or intellectual grappling with new ideas, concepts and frameworks but also a personal and emotional engagement with the situation'. Adult students come to learning in most cases voluntarily (Muller, 2004). They bring to the learning environment a wealth of experience (Dixon, Dixon & Siragusa, 2007). They engage in educational activities 'for the purpose of fulfilment, for bringing about improvement in their lives or even for recreation' (Mott, 2000, p.335). As result, they bring with them 'very clear ideas about themselves as learners, their expectations from the learning situation and preconceived ideas about what constitutes learning and teaching' (Dixon, Dixon & Siragusa., 2007, p.208). They recognise that, as adults, they have agency and volition. They therefore have the power to engage or disengage from the learning situation at any stage, depending on how they perceive the fulfilment of their expectations (Brookfield, 1990). Adults want to complete their programme in the minimum amount of time (Dixon, Dixon & Siragusa, 2007), so many adults are motivated to learn and, if they choose to, will do it with intention and enthusiasm. They will search out some of the information in depth as they adapt what they are learning to their learning goals (Park, 2006; Tough, 1979). Engagement/disengagement, motivation, intention and enthusiasm are emotional states related to the affective domain of learning. Educational researchers (Dirkx, 2008; Hascher, 2010; Pekrun et al., 2002) are aware that emotion is important in education; it drives attention, which in turn drives learning and memory. However, what is problematic is that educators know little about the complex relationship between student and teacher, emotions and their potential impact on academic learning outcomes in online contexts. Because most of the focus on learning is on measurable qualities,

not on emotional wellbeing, more research is needed to uncover the factors that students bring to a learning environment, which may also impact on their emotional experience in learning.

The influence of emotion on learning is under-represented in research. However, a growing body of recent research has begun to examine the role of emotions in learning, especially in online learning (Dirkx, 2008; Hara & Kling, 2001; O'Regan, 2003). Research exploring the complex set of factors surrounding online learning reveals the importance of emotional states of learners, particularly the relationship between emotions and effective learning (Shen, Wang & Shen, 2009; O'Regan, 2003). Artino (2012) asserts that, although the dynamics of emotions that emerge during online learning may be less obvious than those experienced in traditional face-to-face encounters, limited empirical evidence suggests that emotions contribute to learning and achievement in online environments.

Cleveland-Innis and Campbell (2012) present evidence of emotions in online environments, with empirical data to suggest emotions may exist as an essential element in an online community of inquiry. They conducted a study with 217 participating students who were enrolled in two graduate programmes at a single-mode distance education university. Courses were drawn from education, humanities, science, social science and science, and all were delivered online. In support of several other researchers' findings (Campbell & Cleveland-Innes , 2005; Derks, Fischer & Bos, 2008; Lehman, 2006; Marchand & Gutierrez, 2011; O'Regan, 2003; Perry & Edwards, 2005), they concluded that although emotion may constrain learning as a distracter, if managed appropriately it may serve as an 'enabler in support of thinking, decision making, stimulation, and directing' (Cleveland-Innis & Campbell, 2012, p.285). Moreover, they sought to remove the pathological approach to emotions in the literature by making the point that online learning is 'replete, not fraught' (Cleveland-Innis & Campbell, 2012) with emotion. Calling upon the work of Damasio (1994, 1995) and LeDoux (1996), Cleveland-Innis and Campbell (2012) further suggest that although emotion is neither an objective nor an outcome of learning, it is in fact central to cognition. Furthermore, Cleveland-Innis and Campbell (2012) suggest that although emotion is integral, studies have shown that positive emotions lead to positive outcomes and, conversely, negative emotions lead to negative outcomes. For example, negative emotions such as stress and anger are obstacles to learning. In opposition to these intuitive views, Damasio (1999) argues that it is important to recognise that negative emotions can enhance rather than impair decision–making. Thus, negative emotion, because of its perceived contradictory role, is critical both to the success and non-success of navigating online learning environments.

1.2 The Research Problem

For developing countries such as those in the Caribbean, distance education in general and online learning specifically have represented a lifeline for meeting increasing demand for higher education (Marrett, 2009). However, despite the growth in online learning and the increasing presence of adults in distance higher education, as evidenced in the international literature, there is a dearth of research into the experience of online education for Caribbean students in particular.

Thus far, little empirical research has been undertaken to examine learners' perceptions of the emotional experience of online learning and how the experience influences their learning, with little on Caribbean learners' experience in this area. This is of importance, particularly because there has been some speculation, albeit mostly anecdotal, about the apparently low completion rates and high instances of failure among students registered for particular online programmes and courses at the primary regional institution pioneering this mode of delivery in the region (Warrican et al. 2014). If this is so, then it becomes necessary for the institution to put measures in place to minimise this negative perception. This can only be provided by empirical evidence of various kinds. One method is to ask the online students about their perceptions of the fully online learning programmes for first-time users of University of the West Indies' (UWIOC) online learning environment. To date, there are few studies to uncover the reasons for these perceptions.

A recent quantitative study on learners at UWIOC (Warrican et al. 2014), using archival data from 2008, investigated the success rates and possible predictors of success among students for the campus. It examined completion rates for past students as well as for students enrolled in two online undergraduate courses in Semester 1 of the 2012/2013 academic year. Of significance to this study was the researchers' observation of the 'lack of significant contribution of the engagement of the course tutors, as measured by the number of times each e-tutor logged onto the site' (Warrican et al. 2014, p.343). They speculated that it did not appear to matter how many times the e-tutors entered the course site to interact with their students. However, many studies in online learning regard interaction with course instructors as critical to students' success (Anderson & Simpson, 2004; Garrison & Cleveland-Innis, 2005; Nichani, 2000; Picciano, 2002; Swan, 2002; Woods & Baker, 2004). Commenting on this finding, Warrican et al., (2014) made the suggestion that UWIOC might need to pay more attention to training e-tutors, to ensure that their quality of online engagement significantly contributes to learners' success.

One notable limitation identified by its researchers was that the study relied solely on archival sources, without any student input. In doing so, the researchers were not able to

explore factors such as motivation to succeed, academic self-efficacy, self-esteem and academic locus of control. These are all factors that appear to be relevant to students' emotional experiences but, like many other studies on retention, this study failed to consider that emotional factors might directly or indirectly also play an important role in students' success or lack of success in online environments. In an earlier internal assessment study prepared by the Programme Delivery Department of the UWIOC, it was concluded that while students report high levels of satisfaction with the flagship Management Studies programme, there were concerns about high failure rates on specific courses (Self-Assessment Report Management Studies, March, 2013). They also noted that recruitment numbers had declined since the introduction of online learning.

Specifically, students' perceptions of their emotional experiences of the online learning environment at one local site of the ten across Jamaica are not known. In order to address this issue, the following research aim and strategy have been developed.

1.3 Aim of the Study and Research Strategy

This aim of this study was to describe adult learners' perceptions of their emotional experiences in online learning environment at a Caribbean regional university with a view to identifying if and how emotions impact their learning and the learning outcomes. The exploratory nature of the study and its focus on participants' perspectives lent itself to a qualitative design (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Creswell, 2007). Specifically, the study sought to understand how learners' emotional experiences might have an impact on how adult students learn in a fully online environment. A phenomenological case study approach was selected for the investigation, as this research strategy allowed the study to focus on the subjective experiences of the participants. The study consisted of ten cases; each represents a Jamaican student enrolled on a Bachelor of Science degree programme at a Caribbean regional university. The participants were drawn from one country site in Jamaica .The primary research question was: What are adult students' perceptions of their emotional experience in the online learning environment at the Open Campus? Four sub-questions were formulated to facilitate the collection of data:

1. What are the adult students' perceptions of the online learning environment at the University of the West Indies Open Campus?
2. What are the adult students' perceptions of the learning processes while engaged in their online studies?
3. How do adult students describe their emotional experience in the online learning environment?

4. How is the emotional experience of online learning manifested in the students' behaviours and learning outcomes?

In response to the first two questions, the study investigated students' perceptions of the online environment and the learning processes. The aim was to solicit students' views, opinions and subjective understandings of an unfamiliar learning environment and novel learning processes as a backdrop to their emotional experiences. The third and fourth questions examined students' descriptions of emotional states and the behavioural manifestations, if any, of these emotions, with a view to discerning if emotional experiences had any perceived impact on their learning and learning outcomes. Together, the four questions were intended to unpack the students' retrospective accounts of emotional experiences in a specific online context in order to answer the primary research question, 'What are adult students' perceptions of their emotional experiences in the online learning environment?' Specifically, the study set out to investigate how the students described and interpreted their emotional experiences of engagement with an online learning environment.

Data were collected from the transcripts of ten adult learners. Each participant was interviewed twice, and asked to share and describe their emotional experiences of the online learning environment. The participants were drawn from a single distance education site in Jamaica. These ten students were at different stages in their online programmes. In terms of the theoretical approach to this research, the study relied on a mix of theories relevant to adult learning. The relevance of adult learning theories to this study inheres in the assumption that adult learning theories can help instructors to understand learners, which in turn will enable them to design meaningful learning environments (Frey & Webreck Alman, 2003).

Although there is no universal adult learning theory that applies to all adult learners (Cercone, 2008), it appears that the nature of adulthood determines that adult learners are responsible for their learning outcomes. Other characteristics are provided by Muller (2004).

Most adults usually come to the learning experience with a fairly good idea of what they are seeking and how they want to experience it (Brookfield, 1990; Park, 2006). Furthermore, when it comes to the matter of formal learning situations, several issues are important in attempting to facilitate the process of learning for adults. Those engaged in helping adults to learn ought 'to know who the adult learner is, how the social context shapes the learning that adults are engaged in, why adults are engaged in learning activities, how adults learn and how aging affects learning ability' (Merriam, Carafella & Baumgartner, 2007, p.ix).

In the literature on adult learners, adults are characterised differently from traditional university students; they are usually older (Cercone, 2008; Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

Implications for online learning are that adult learners have families, jobs, and situations such as childcare issues and other concerns that can interfere with the learning process. Adult learners participate in a variety of educational activities, both formal and non-formal. However, they may have fewer support systems, memory problems related to ageing and other life complexities (Cercone, 2008).

Most adult learning theories and practices make several assumptions about learners. One adult learning theory relevant to online learning environment is the theory of andragogy (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005). Although considered to be an atheoretical model (Houde, 2006), the term 'theory' is used for ease of reference. Basically, Knowles' principles of andragogy encapsulate the idea that ideally adults bring many prior real life experiences with them to the classroom. Critical to these are considerations relating to the learners' experiences, the importance of the learning environment, the learner's readiness to learn and the teacher as a facilitator. Specifically, Knowles' principles of adult learning are applicable to online environments because they are based on the learners' desire for control, flexibility and feedback. Moreover, online learning environments are much more conducive to autonomy than conventional classrooms. This understanding is based upon the fact that, whether synchronously or asynchronously, learners have much more control of when and where to complete course assignments. Further, flexibility is a key attribute to consider when examining online learning environments (Frey & Webreck Alman, 2003), as this is one of the advantages almost taken for granted (Richardson & Swan, 2003), and mentioned in the literature on online learning and a reason for taking online courses.

Knowles, Holton and Swanson's (2005) six principles provide some guidance to adult educators. However, the principles are lacking in one respect (Frey & Webreck Alman, 2003). They do not mention the adult learning issue of interaction, which is considered by more recent research as integral and significant to effective online learning environments (Anderson & Simpson, 2004; Garrison & Cleveland-Innis, 2005; Nichani, 2000; Picciano, 2002; Woods & Baker, 2004; Swan, 2002). Perhaps this is because this theory developed before the advent of online learning (Frey & Webreck Alman, 2003). The more recent affordances of the communication technologies, which make it possible (if used effectively), for rich student-to-student as well as student –instructor interactions, either synchronously or asynchronously, have generated interest in another learning theory: constructivism.

Constructivism is a philosophical approach to how we come to understand, know or acquire knowledge. According to Swan (2005), it is not considered a theory of teaching or instructional methods but a theory of learning. One core concept of constructivism is that understanding is in an individual's interactions with the environment. Much of the more recent

research on online learning has focused on interaction as a critical success factor in online learning. This construct of interaction is based on a social-constructivist view that has largely been influential in the pedagogical dimension of distance learning for the past decade (So & Brush, 2007). Social constructivists' ideals are based on the concept that learners construct knowledge through the process of negotiating meanings with others. This view of learning is linked to Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, which proposes learners' cognitive development is highly dependent on social interaction and collaboration with expert associates (So & Brush, 2007). Other forms of constructivist ideas also play their role. However, Piaget, another theorist, while concerned with how individuals learn and construct knowledge, emphasises the biological and cognitive aspects of learning and construction of knowledge (Light & Cox, 2002). Vrasidas and McIsaac (2000) argue that, along with being constructed through social interaction, knowledge is constructed in the learners' mind. Therefore, the view that knowledge is both individual and shared is upheld. Furthermore, unless the socially constructed knowledge being processed in the individual's mind is related to actual personal experience, it will not be meaningful. Currently, social constructivist ideas preponderate (Kanuka & Anderson, 1998; Swan, 2005).

Constructivist learning theories have become popular in various educational fields and include the application of technology to teaching and learning (Kanuka & Anderson, 1998). Constructivism examines how learners construct meaning from experience. From this perspective, knowledge is not viewed as a collection of truths, out there to be identified and transmitted to students by instructors, but socially constructed, relative, contextual and collaborative. Nevertheless, learning is also individualistic (Vrasidas & McIsaac, 2000). The personal experience, needs and perspectives of each student are considered both valuable and necessary to the process (Herod, 2003). Adult educators are now beginning to understand the relationship between emotion and learning (Dirkx, 2001; O'Regan, 2003). Constructivism perspectives provide a valuable opportunity to understand the learners' perspective and the construction of knowledge through experience (Shuck, Albornoz & Winberg, 2007).

The basic premise upon which constructivist educational activity is built in the online environment is that teachers and students are in a different place/time. As a consequence of this inherent separation, and in order to interact with each other, students and teachers are dependent on some form of communications technology. In this learning environment, students are required to communicate through a medium or media, and to learn how to study through technology. In doing this they will need to learn how to communicate for learning, hence there is need for interactions to take place in order to bridge the gap created by separation. However, it is not always easy for students new to the use of educational technology to adjust to the

online environment, as this is different from the way they use technology socially (Moore & Kearsley, 2012; Ratliff, 2009). Since adults are assumed to be responsible for their own learning, several key similarities between andragogy and constructivism make each an appropriate theoretical framework to understand and interpret the meanings of online learning experiences for adult learners. Both theories emphasise learner versus teacher centredness, facilitation of learning versus transmittal of knowledge and critical thinking skills versus rote learning (Herod, 2003).

1.4 Significance of the Study

Currently, Internet technology represents a shift in the distance learning paradigm and is still an under-researched area of distance education. Therefore, it is of particular relevance to understand how students learn to learn online. Acknowledging and seeking to understand this new reality can assist all those in the Caribbean who provide online services in higher education. Therefore, the interests of students, their attitudes and feelings, and their perceptions of online learning have major implications for enrolment figures and the longevity of the programmes.

The student experience is one of the best ways an institution can obtain free publicity for their educational products, as students who have a positive experience are the institution's best marketers. Moreover, since there are many aspects of university life that affect the experience of students, unless it undertakes the necessary research or simply ask students to give feedback about both their positive and negative experiences of university life, an institution will not be armed with sufficient information to make informed decisions.

Very little research examines adult students' emotional experiences in online learning environments. Additionally, there is a scarcity of indigenous and culturally relevant research carried out within the specific context of the English-speaking Caribbean. Caribbean tutors will benefit from students' perceptions of the learning environment, as this relates to process and learning outcomes.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

There are various limitations associated with this study. It is an investigation of the experiences of a single set of students at the University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus. These students reside in Jamaica and might not reflect the experience of students across the territories of the Anglophone Caribbean. The intention therefore is to garner in-depth information from students on the phenomenon of interest and not to produce generalisable results. However, it may be possible to identify some similarities, since the students studied belong to the same university and tend to present the same demographics. The study will depend largely on student

feedback about the key features of their experience. However, Sharpe & Benfield (2005) warn that asking students about their experiences of e-learning often results in surprising and even contradictory results, thus it is important to listen carefully to students if the researcher wants to avoid making unwarranted assumptions from a teacher-centred view or, as in this case, an educational administrator's point of view. There is also the dilemma of deciphering different interpretations and perceptions about the on-line learning environment, reflecting students' different backgrounds, interests and experiences, as responses are of necessity based on individual students' subjective experiences. The motto of UWIOC, 'online, on site on demand'(Open Letter, 2010, p.1) is instructive, because it offers face-to-face, print-based and online courses, but this study examines only fully on-line specific BSc degree programmes because of the researcher's interest in this particular area. Additionally, the BSc programmes and options, in particular the BSc in Management Studies, are the Campus' flagships (Self-Assessment Report, Management Studies, March 2013) and some of the initial programmes to be converted to online modality. Other programmes and options have been designed and implemented more recently; hence the findings will be limited to those online courses of particular interest to this study. The small sample size and study design prohibit generalisation to other higher education online contexts. Additionally, participants who agreed to take part in this study might have viewed this as an opportunity to air their grievances, as most of the emotions were negative. Also, because students had to volunteer to be a part of the research, there is a possibility that those who were disengaged might not have been willing to participate.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Online programme

Online programme refers to a pluralised version of many courses (Clark, 2012; Moore, Dickson-Deane & Gaylen, 2011). In this study an online programme is one in which all communications and interactions take place through online technologies such as e-mails, chat and asynchronous conferences, with no face-to-face meetings.

Programme design of the online learning environment

The programme design is instructor-led. This is an environment in which an instructor guides learners through the required instructional content. In this type of learning environment, the instructor controls the instructional sequence and pace, and all learners participate in the same learning activities at a specified time (Moore, Dickson-Deane & Gaylen, 2011; Rhode, 2009; Warrican et al., 2014). Each course falls on a traditional semester schedule and includes a mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities (Salmon, 2003). In this model, learners are expected to complete the course according to the instructors' predefined guidelines, which typically include deadlines (Lowenthal, Wilson & Parrish, 2009).

1.7 Conducting a Descriptive Phenomenological Study

A descriptive phenomenological method was used to achieve the goal of this study: describing adult learners' emotional experiences online learning environment at a Caribbean higher education institution. Several researchers have devised a methodology for descriptive phenomenology that includes procedural steps. This study followed a modified five-step version of Hycner's (1985) explication process, as set out in Groenewald (2004, p.17):

1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction
2. Delineating units of meaning
3. Clustering units of meaning to form themes
4. Summarising each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it
5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

1.7.1 Phenomena

A phenomenon is an object of human experience (van Manen, 1990, p.177, cited in Creswell, 2013, p.76**).** This is the central concept to be examined by the qualitative researcher; it is the concept experienced by the participants in a study (Creswell, 1998). The human experience may be a phenomenon such as sadness, motivation, anger or stress. The phenomenon may be a relationship, a programme, an organisation or a culture (Patton, 2002). In this study, the phenomenon is adult students' emotional experience on an online Caribbean learning environment.

1.7.2 Phenomenological study

A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or a phenomenon. The researcher reduces the experience to a central meaning or the 'essence' of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological study focuses on descriptions of *what* people experience and *how* it is that that they explain what they experience (Patton, 2002).

1.8 Overview of the Thesis

The chapter has provided an overview of the study. The remainder consists of a further seven chapters. In chapter 2, relevant literature is reviewed. The review provides a brief overview of online learning and focuses on recent research on online learners' experience, particularly on retention and persistence studies.

Chapter 3 gives a detailed account of theoretical and methodological approaches used in the research. The chapter introduces the site of the investigation, the study participants and the

data collection process. The results of this analysis are presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Each of these addresses the following concerns: chapter 4 provides a brief profile of the participants; chapter 5 examines students overall perceptions of the online learning environment and possible learning outcomes; and chapter 6 relates students' accounts of their emotional experience and provides a perspective on these experiences. Chapter 7 synthesises the findings presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6, interpreting these findings in the light of the theoretical framework presented.

Chapter 8, the final chapter, concludes the study by focusing on the implications of the study, recommendations and limitations, suggesting possibilities for further research.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the research literature relevant to the problem being investigated in order to identify gaps in the existing research. This literature review is structured into four main sections. The first sets out the current nature of online learning in higher education, focused mostly on industrialised countries. The second surveys recent research on online learners' experience in westernised societies. The third section is devoted to the emotional dimensions of adult learners' perception of online learning environments, as this is the focus of the research. It provides an examination of emotions, the link between emotion and learning, and a review of selected research into adult learners' emotional online experiences. The aim of this section is to explore the impact of emotion in online learning and how it has been researched and understood prior to this investigation.

2.2 Online Learning in Higher Education

The advancement of information and communication technologies has led to the growth of online learning environments (Allen & Seaman, 2010; Harasim, 2012; Wallace, 2003). As a consequence, the use of computers for education and training has increased since the 1990s and, worldwide, a great deal of money has been expended on the development of computer applications designed to help people learn (Phillips, McNaught & Kennedy, 2012). All modern computers can communicate through the Internet, the global computer communications network. Hence, individuals can now communicate for learning purposes through their home telephone service provider or through the growing availability of wireless network services. This global communication through the Internet has been further facilitated by the World Wide Web (Bates, 2008). Additionally, Web 2.0 facilitates a number of web-based tools that allow people to communicate inclusive of Blogs, Instant Messaging, Skype, Facebook, MySpace and Google Groups to facilitate social networking. Along with the aforementioned tools are others, such as YouTube, Google Docs and Flickr, which enable widespread sharing of videos, photos, documents and other digital resources (Toole, 2011).

The use of the Internet and Web technologies has implications for teaching and learning because of their capacity to create new experiences that can improve learning. However, their benefits are not fully understood, because these technological advances are still evolving (Harasim, 2012). Harasim (2012, pp.27-28) defines online learning as 'the use of online communication networks for educational applications, such as course delivery and support of educational projects, research, access to resources and group collaboration'. Littlejohn and

Pegler (2007, p.15) define it as the 'process of teaching and learning with computers and other associated technologies, particularly through use of the Internet'. Ally (2004), focusing on the learning process and the learner, provides a more comprehensive definition. He defines online learning as the use of the Internet to access learning materials, to interact with the content, instructor and other learners, to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning and to grow from the learning experience. Online learning is more than just the presentation of and delivery of materials via the web (Ally, 2004).

A wide range of terms has been used to describe the use of technologies in education and learning, including web-based training, e-learning, distributed learning, Internet based learning, web-based instruction, cyber learning, virtual learning or net-based learning (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010; Urdan & Weggen, 2000). Online learning is therefore associated with a wide-ranging set of technology applications and learning processes, including computerised learning, web-based learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaborations (Urdan & Weggen, 2000).

With the Internet and the World Wide Web, the potential for reaching learners around the world has increased greatly. As a consequence, online learning has emerged as a major topic for discussion in recent years, presenting an opportunity for educators to examine the quality and reach of their online programmes and courses in order to offer effective online learning environments. Contemporary online learning offers the possibility for access to rich educational resources in multiple media, and the possibility to support both real time and asynchronous communication between instructors and learners as well as among different learners (US Department of Education, 2010). Students can enrol on courses without being physically present at an on-campus location. Thus, the refinement and global diffusion of Internet technologies have resulted in transformative changes in education generally, and in distance education specifically (Bandura, 1997, Lynch & Dembo, 2004). Consequently, online education in various modalities has become increasingly widespread in a variety of learning domains (Bates, 2000; Kearsley, 2000; Lynch & Dembo, 2004).

The evidence for the growth of online learning in the industrialised world over the past two decades is well documented. Bates (2011) records the rapid growth of online and distance education throughout North America. Nationwide figures from the US indicate that enrolment in fully online distance courses in the USA expanded by 21 per cent compared with campus-based enrolments at 2 per cent and, while there were no similar nationwide figures for Canada, many institutions there reported similar increases (Bates, 2011). Equally, according to Allen and Seaman (2011), results from a USA national survey show that 65 per cent of all participating higher education institutions reported that online learning was a critical part of

their long-term strategy. In their 2010 review, Allen and Seaman claim that nearly 3.2 million students were taking at least one online course during the autumn of 2005, a substantial increase over the 2.3 million in the previous year. That figure represented an additional 800,000 students, more than twice the number added the previous years. Though the figures taper off in 2011, Allen and Seaman report that there was no compelling evidence to show that the continued upward trend in online enrolments was at an end.

Growth in online learning, though not as well documented, is not confined to developed nations. Nowadays, increasing globalisation and internationalisation of higher education is such that potential students in developing countries can also access educational opportunities offered outside their national borders via the Internet. This has accounted for a significant increase in the cross-border activities of higher education institutions (ICDE, 2009) and the impact has been felt in the Caribbean since the mid-1990s.

2.3 Online Learning and Teaching

Since the 1990s, universities and colleges internationally have been offering courses and, indeed, even entire degrees online (Wallace, 2003) as an alternative or complementary mode of education delivery. Phillips, McNaught & Kennedy (2012) surmise that one of the implicit assumptions of the range of new computer applications for education is that technology enhances learning. However, while enhanced learning may be the intention, it is not always the case (Phillips, McNaught & Kennedy, 2012). Though online learning or web-based instruction is mediated by the Web, knowledge of the implications of Internet and Web technologies for education is still in its infancy. Moreover, while the online environment can provide students with access to a wide and integrated range of tools and services to support their learning activities, the extent to which teachers and learners use these facilities is highly variable.

There are generally three kinds of online pedagogical approaches, namely adjunct mode online learning, blended mode and totally online learning (Harasim, 2012). Adjunct mode or blended online learning is the use of network communication to enhance traditional face-to-face distance teaching education. For this type of online education, the Internet is an add-on that complements the existing curriculum, and online activities are used to enhance class activities. Examples of this pedagogical approach include the use of e-mail to contact tutors or submit assignments, the distribution of course material by the instructor and the administering of quizzes or distribution of course grades. Campus-based online learning also involves the use of the Internet to search for course resources and undertake course-related research. It allows for computer discussion forums that enable the continuation of discussion initiated in class and it allows for the inclusion of guest experts or peers from other locations (Harasim, 2012, p.29).

Another pedagogical approach is that of hybrid mode or blended learning. This is basically a mixed mode approach to teaching and learning, in which a significant part of the traditional face-to-face classroom or distance education course is conducted online (Harasim, 2012; Picciano & Seaman, 2009). Customarily, about 50 per cent of course activities as well as of the overall grade is based on online activities in blended mode. However, this is just one way to describe a blended approach. Harasim (2012) explains that although 'blended' usually refers to a mix of face-to-face and online course activities; there are other ways to understand this mode of teaching and learning. It can also be applied to a mix of distance education or courseware applications with online collaborative activities, such as group discussions, seminars, debates, research or group projects. In addition, 'blended may also be institutional, as in the case of a degree programme offered by two or more institutions, or instructional, to refer to a course with team teaching' (p.29). The third approach, and one that is significant to this study, is the totally online environment. Picciano and Seaman (2009) describe this environment as one in which most or all the content is offered through the Internet and there are no face-to-face meetings. The fully online learning environment is the focus of the present study and no face-to-face classes are involved.

2.4 Learning Models Associated with Learning Online

Online learning environments include diverse range of pedagogical practices often characterised by active student centred pedagogical techniques founded on constructivist educational thinking.

According to Harasim (2012), there is a need to understand the different learning models associated with learning online. This is because there are several contradictory definitions in existence that draw attention to a set of confusing processes and outcomes. Understanding different learning models is necessary, because the nature of online learning is poorly understood. Therefore, identifying the different models encapsulated in the term online learning 'will assist educators in interpreting research or field results by understanding the pedagogy which undergirds the approach to those outcomes' (p.87). Outcomes were identified as dropout rates, user satisfaction, learning effectiveness and costs. As different online models may lead to different results, educators need to understand the underlying conceptual frameworks of each model to help to guide the design of pedagogical approaches better. This understanding will also assist in the selection of the most suitable technologies to initiate effective online courses and activities (Harasim, 2012).

Three distinct models of online learning, Online Collaborative learning (OCL), Online Distance Education (ODE) and Online Courseware have been identified (Harasim, 2012). The three approaches use both the Internet and the Web. However, each uses the Internet in a very

different way, associated with noticeable differences in learning theory, learning pedagogies and learning technologies. ODE uses a correspondence model of course delivery and individual communication with a tutor. This is based on the traditional nineteenth- and twentieth-century correspondence model. However, in this postal-mail delivery model, e-mail is used to replace the postal services. This is a model based on instructional pedagogy paradigm (Harasim, 2012). OC is supported by individualised courseware without instructor or peer interaction. Significant learning theories underlie these models. Both the OC and ODE are rooted in cognitive learning theory and pedagogies, based on self-study and individualised learning modules.

OCL involves a teacher role and emphasises student discourse and collaboration. This is referred to as an instructor-led model. It is often text-based and asynchronous in the form of web-based forums or small group computer conferencing. This approach is based on social constructivism, a learning theory that emphasises 'peer discourse that is informed by the process and resources of a knowledge community and facilitated by the instructor as a representative of that knowledge community' (Harasim, 2012, p.88). A social constructivist philosophy provides the framework for this study.

2.5 Online Learning Environments

Broadly speaking, online learning environments consist of the learner, other students, the instructor and the physical environment. Technically speaking, however, 'online learning environment' (OLE) is a phrase used to indicate web-based software designed to host or house the learning activities (Harasim, 2012). It is a learning environment based on the use of the Internet that is accessible to learners and instructors who are separated by time and physical distance. Universities use specialised learning management systems such as Blackboard and WebCT. In this kind of learning environment, learners have 24-hour access to a server and can connect and receive messages, or post messages to other learners.

By comparison, an online learning environment is representative of the physical architecture of a classroom, a campus or other learning locations associated with traditional face-to-face learning. The difference is that this classroom is an invisible virtual space, yet a teaching space nonetheless. Based on the conceptualisations of Allen and Otto (1996), online spaces are 'lived environments' that is, they are spaces for dynamic engagements where students exercise 'their powers of perception, mobility and agency within the constraints imposed by various technologies and learning theories and pedagogies' (Harasim, 2012, p.99). This means that online learning environments are much more than static spaces for transmitting information and receiving communication. Rather, they are environments where users can construct knowledge and negotiate meaning through dialogue and teamwork (Harasim, 2012).

Currently, two approaches to online learning can be observed; synchronous or asynchronous models. Students enrolled on synchronous courses experience instruction in 'real time' via the Internet and require the simultaneous participation of students and instructor (Lowenthal, Wilson & Parrish, 2009; Romiszowski & Mason, 2004). Synchronous models involve the use of technology applications such as live chat, audio and videoconferencing, shared whiteboard, virtual viewing of multimedia presentations and online slideshows (Faculty Handbook, University of Massachusetts, 2002). Synchronous instruction is therefore time and place-dependent. Consequently, 'synchronous technologies are used to approximate face-to-face teaching strategies, such as delivering lectures and holding meetings with groups of students' (US Department of Education, 2010, p.1), and allows for multiple users to communicate using text messages (Burnett, 2003). The significance of synchronous environments is that they offer opportunities for social interaction that could reduce the social 'distance' that students experience in online learning. This instructional model could also improve the quality of distance education experiences in that it adds a socio-emotional dimension to the online experiences in its ability to provide real time interaction with instructors and class peers.

Synchronous systems are relatively new and have not been studied extensively. A study by McBrien et al., (2009) on students on both graduate and undergraduate courses using software in the virtual classroom finds that students were pleased with the live experiences. However, they indicate three problems. One was the confusion that resulted from too many simultaneous interactions. This was due to the affordances of the learning technology that allowed for audio and live chat among other types of interactions simultaneously. They suggest that this problem could be managed by the tutor, because it is possible to control the number of communication devices that can be used at any one time. The second problem was that some students found the lack of non-verbal cues reduced their educational experience. Finally, technology problems such as broken links or faulty headphones were an issue. This last problem could be solved by using webcams, however, expense and limited bandwidth might be problematic in some cases. Additionally both student and instructors may need on-going instruction in the use of the evolving technology (McBrien et al., 2009). Thus, despite overwhelming advocacy for online learning, several problems are yet to be overcome in order to create a positive learning environment for all students.

In contrast, asynchronous instruction is characterised by students working independently, generally at their own pace, and in separate spaces (Bernard et al., 2004; Clark, 2012). Each of these two methods creates unique learning environments, however asynchronous is markedly different from traditional face-to-face on-campus teaching (Clark, 2012). Asynchronous learning methods use time delayed capabilities of the Internet including such tools as e-mail,

threaded discussions, news groups, bulletin boards and file attachments (Faculty Handbook, University of Massachusetts, 2002). In this environment, the students have more control over the learning experiences as they choose when or where to access learning material. This model of online learning is closer operationally to the early forms of distance education that emphasised independent learning (Keegan, 1996).

Typically, in the current online educational contexts, both synchronous and asynchronous online discussions are facilitated by dialogic interactions (conversations) between tutors and students. However, in the learning context, asynchronous interactions allow any participant to make a contribution at any time that suits them within a defined period (Holmberg, 2003). Despite the relative convenience of asynchronous facility, this type of interface is not without its problems. Unlike the linear interactions of face-to face interactions where there is generally a focus on a single issue, web-based asynchronous communications can have multiple discussion threads and interactions occurring simultaneously. Because of this possibility for multiple interactions, both with instructors and other students at the same time, students need to exercise caution in the use of the knowledge base in discussion forums. Kanuka and Anderson (1998) note that learners' discourses in computer conferencing on occasions was superficial and lacked the deep thinking required for construction of knowledge. Moreover, because of the number of comments that students may have to sift through, there is a risk of information overload (Garrison, 2000).

Like synchronous interaction, there is much to be learnt about the use of asynchronous technology facilitation for effective learning experiences. Hence, despite the increasing impetus to introduce online programmes, it is also increasingly obvious that much research is needed to illuminate the nature of online learning and its impact on the student experience.

Lowenthal, Wilson and Parrish (2009) highlight a selected list of contextual variables significant to the online learning environment in order to emphasise the critical role of context in education. Only those variables that, in their estimation, were likely to impact learning, performance and pedagogy were considered. These include the formality of the educational programme, the setting, the curriculum fit, synchronous/asynchronous, the pacing, percentage of the online interface, class size, developmental model and targeted learning; and the subject area, as well the type of media, was taken into account. Contextual variables are considered important because, according to Lowenthal, Wilson and Parrish (2009), context changes everything and specifying the context helps to illuminate research findings. Lynch (1999) adds a further dimension to the argument that context is important, because learning is context- and situation-specific. Although online learning can provide a materials-rich and stimulating educational experience, it can also be a socially deprived and isolating learning experience for

some learners (Lynch, 1999). Nevertheless, some may do well in the more unbounded learning environment, and what determines the difference is students' learning style preference. Whether a student thrives or flounders may depend on his or her pre-conceived perceptions of how, when and where learning can occur (Lynch, 1999). Thus students' previous expectations of learning can influence their emotional experience in an online learning environment.

2.6 Research in Online Learning

Traditionally, much of the online and distance education research has been atheoretical (Lynch & Dembo, 2004). Studies have focused on three general areas: distance education programmes; group academic outcomes comparisons of distance classes to face-to-face classes; and matching individual learner traits to media variables (Lynch & Dembo, 2004; Perraton, 2000; Saba, 2000). Such studies have consistently found 'no significant difference', shedding little light on the advantage or otherwise of either mode (Wallace, 2003). They provide little detail on how interaction takes place between students and tutors or with subject matter in distance or face-to-face learning (Wallace, 2003).

Even though these studies are acknowledged as valuable in their own right (Lynch & Dembo, 2004; Zawacki-Richter, Backer & Vogt, 2009), they are deficient in relevant underpinning pedagogical principles, that is, they do not generate advances in teaching and learning theory of benefit to teachers and learners in distance education (Lynch & Dembo, 2004; Diaz, 2000; Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). Moreover, most have used quantitative rather than qualitative data to arrive at their conclusions (Zawacki-Richter, Backer & Vogt (2009), which fails to represent student voice. A number of researchers suggest moving beyond these comparative studies in order to increase understanding of distance learning environments and their impact on student's learning and satisfaction (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999; Sher, 2009).

More recent research has sought to establish a theoretical framework based on social constructivist principles to guide research and practice about participation in online classes (Wallace, 2003). Three major constructs for studying student participation include transactional distance, interaction and social presence.

The concept of transactional distance was first proposed by Michael G. Moore in 1972 (Moore & Kearsley, 1995). Before that time, debates around distance education were centred on the physical separation of the teacher and the student. Moore (1993) proposed that there is a transactional distance in distance learning environments as tutors and learners do not interact in the same physical or temporal space. Transactional distance was seen as a function of dialogue, structure and learner autonomy rather than a function of physical separation. Thus, transactional distance exists as a pedagogical phenomenon that could be experienced even in

face-to-face classes and not just in classes separated by geographical distance. This theory identified three **distinct types of interaction** for effective online learning environments: interaction of the learner with content; interaction with instructor; and interaction with other learners.

Learner-content interaction is the means whereby students 'examine, consider and process the course content presented during the learning experience' (Woods & Baker, 2004, p.2). The content can be in the form of text, audio, or video tape, CD-ROM, computer program or online communication (Sher, 2009). Moore and Kearsley (2012) acknowledge that:

> Every learner has to construct his or her own knowledge through a process of personally accommodating information, attitudes, or behaviours into previously existing cognitive, attitudinal or behavioural structures. It is interacting with content that results in these changes in the learners understanding – what we sometimes call a change in perspective or performance. (p.132)

Thus, learner-content interaction is considered critical to the learning process, particularly when learning takes place at a distance.

Learner-instructor interaction involves communication between instructor and the student in a course. This usually takes place via computer and is not necessarily limited to instruction during the course, but 'include advising, offline communications and personal dialogue' (Woods & Baker, 2004, p.2). Interaction includes positive and encouraging feedback from instructors and was found to be important to persistence in online studies.

Learner-to-learner interaction is communication between two or more students in a course. This usually takes place asynchronously, but may include other forms of communication including other forms of interpersonal and small group communication, online and offline, which occurs during the duration of the course (Woods & Baker, 2004). Learner–learner interaction can promote learning through student collaboration and knowledge sharing (Sher, 2009).

Both learner-instructor interaction and learner–learner interaction have been positioned as key elements in the teaching and learning transaction in studies investigating student participation. Students in online courses appear to value and benefit from interaction with their peers as well as their instructor (Wallace, 2003). However, learner–instructor interaction is considered of paramount importance (Davidson-Shivers, 2009). Interaction with instructors appears to have a greater impact on 'satisfaction and perceived learning than interaction with peers' (Swan, 2001, pp.322-323, as cited in Garrison & Cleveland-Innis, 2005, p.136).

Other enhancements to the theory of transaction have been added by Hillman, Willis and Gunawardena (1994), and Burham and Walden (1997) and Gibson (1998, both as cited in Woods & Baker, 2004). Learner–interface interaction was added by Hillman, Willis and Gunawardena (1994), who propose that 'when dealing with any tool, it is necessary for the users to interact with the device in a specific way before it will do his or her bidding' (p.34). Learner–interface interaction is critical as it relates to the learners' capacity to use the communication medium relevant to their online programme (Park, 2006). Online learning programmes tend to assume students have a functional knowledge of computer operations. This includes assumptions that students will know how it is turned on or off, and able to use a mouse, view information presented on a visual display unit, and select and use appropriate software applications (Clayton, 2004). This is not always the case with novice online learners. Keeping up with the technological expertise required to thrive in online learning communities is found to be an issue for students (Hara & Kling, 2001; Mustafa, 2005). A further distinction is made 'between learner–interface and the necessary mediation of an interface which occurs in any interaction' by Hillman, Willis and Gunawardena (1994, as cited in Woods & Baker, 2004), who note that for the technically challenged learner the interface becomes 'an independent force with which the learner must contend' (pp.34-35). Burham and Walden (1997, cited in Woods & Baker, 2004) extend the concept of interaction as 'a reciprocal action or mutual influence between a learner and the learner's surroundings that either assists or hinders learning'. Gibson argues that 'the distance learner simultaneously engages and interacts with multiple contexts which extend beyond the classroom, such as family, workplace, peer groups, and larger institutions such as government, mass media, and organised religion, extending out to interaction with the larger culture'(1998, as cited in Woods & Baker, 2004, p.117).

From the foregoing, it is evident that however defined, interaction is considered to have an important role in online learning by various researchers. Interaction has been highlighted in the literature because of the perceived potential and current affordances of new technologies to support sustained educational communication, particularly in asynchronous interaction (Garrison & Cleveland-Innis, 2005) when compared to earlier models of distance education. Nevertheless, several researchers contend that interaction, particularly interaction between learners and tutors, is simply not enough and that exemplary online educators infuse a sense of presence while teaching online classes (Perry & Edwards, 2005). Interaction and social presence are linked in the online environment. Research suggests that interaction in online learning programmes is beneficial in that it 'promotes student-centred learning, encourages wider participation and produces more in-depth and reasoned discussions than face-to-face classroom interactions (Davies & Graff, 2005). Ostlund (2005) supports the view that factors

that contribute to motivation and successful progression through studies are learners' feelings of belonging to a group and social presence.

2.6.1 Social presence or connectedness

Social presence is the extent to which a student's true self is projected in the online environment so that they appear as 'real people' in the course (Rourke et al., 1999). However, Gunawardena (1995) accounts for a broader definition and regards social presence as the extent to which 'people, not just students' are perceived as 'real' in computer-mediated communication. The importance of this construct lies in the fact that an educational experience from a student perspective occurs at 'a convergence of three distinct types of presence: social, cognitive and teaching presence' (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000).

Teaching presence consists of two functions: the selection, organisation and primary presentation of course content as well as the design, direction and facilitation to ensure a meaningful educational experience, considered the primary responsibility of the teacher. The second function, facilitation is a responsibility that may be shared between the teacher and some or all of the other participants or students (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000, p.5).

Cognitive presence is defined as the extent to which a learner can construct and confirm meaning through discourse in a critical community of enquiry (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000). Teaching presence is the singular function that supports and enhances social and cognitive presence for the purpose of realising educational outcomes. In online learning, social presence appears to be significant to learners' perceptions of psychological distance with their instructor and other learners. Over all, social presence seems to be related to students' perceptions of the lack of communication cues and immediate responses in online environments (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Richardson & Swan, 2003; Rourke et al., 1999).

Garrison et al. (2001) argue that that the primary importance of social presence is to support cognitive presence and, when this is combined with affective (includes emotional) goals for the educational process, social presence is a direct contributor to the success of the educational experience (p.4). The significance of social presence to learning online is reflected in the fact that many of the indicators of social presence relate to the expression of emotions. Garrison et al. (2001) posit that adjectives commonly associated with physical closeness are used to describe presence. They support this observation by making reference to Kuehn (1993), who suggests that text-based asynchronous participants substitute unconventional symbolic representations to make up for the loss of the capacity to express emotions at a distance. Similarly, Gunawardena and Zittle (1997) report that conference participants 'enhanced their socio-emotional experience by using emoticons to express missing nonverbal cues' (p.8).

Therefore a reasonable claim can be made for the presence of an emotional component in online learning environments even though it is largely inferred from the discourse on the role of interaction in online learning environments. This claim is affirmed by Han and Johnson (2012) who note that statistically significant relationships between students' emotional intelligence, social bond and interactions occurred naturally in the educational setting.

The value of social presence to students has been highlighted in several studies because of its implications for effective online teaching and learning. In the online environment, tutors are considered to be primarily responsible for conveying human presence through their facilitation of interaction, social presence and community (Richardson & Swan, 2003; Rovai, 2002). From the foregoing it appears that ideas about interaction, social presence and community are an associated construct in the literature and are all perceived as relevant to students' emotional experiences in online learning. Given that human beings are considered to be gregarious, and that the received wisdom that all learning takes place in a social context, there is an assumption that, although relatively unexplored, there is an emotional dimension to ideas of interaction, presence and community. Although there is as yet no conclusive agreement on what constitutes social presence (Lowenthal, in press), proponents of social presence argue that its importance lies in the fact that when learners feel highly connected to a group this may lead to greater satisfaction and may minimise the likelihood that the learner will drop out from the online environment.

Although the value of asynchronous communications is being lauded by advocates of online learning, other researchers suggest this model of learning may not give the immediacy that is required for effective interaction (McInnerry & Roberts, 2004). From the perspective of students studying in online environment, social interaction with peers and instructors can often be an exercise in frustration. In order to reduce frustration, care must be given to the methods of communication that will be utilised so that the desire for human social interaction will be realised (McInnerry & Roberts, 2004).

2.7 Adults in Online Distance Higher Education

The advent of the Internet and the increased emphasis on the benefits of education to society, has led to an increasing focus on the adult learner. Moore and Kearsley (2012) assert that adults are the most numerous distance learners in higher education. This is not surprising because adults have always been the primary target population for distance education (Holmberg, 2003). An observation from the annual report on the state of online learning in the US (Allen & Seaman, 2010) is that online students tend to be older and more often hold additional employment and family responsibilities than the more traditional student.

Adult students are assumed to have unique needs and expectations (Ashburn, 2004). Due to their adult responsibilities, unlike traditional students adults do not consider school as central to their lives, hence the student identity and role are secondary (Levine & Sun, 2002). These adults are sometimes referred to as mature students. Mature students are those who pursue educational opportunities after gaining experience in the job market or domestically. They therefore do not enter into educational programmes immediately after full-time schooling, like students at 18 and 19 years (Tyler-Smith, 2006). They are deemed to have diverse characteristics and life circumstances that impact on their learning in higher education. As they handle multiple roles and responsibilities, it is particularly difficult for adults to attend on-campus classes. Therefore, many of the challenges discussed in the literature about part-time students are relevant to distance education learners who are considered mature students. Challenges such as sense of belonging, confidence, inadequate tutor support, course content, quality of teaching, appropriateness of material and form of delivery (Callender & Feldman, 2009) are common to this sector. These challenges and other difficulties seem to suggest the more one understands the nature of adult learning, the better one can understand the nature of distance online learning (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). An important question for instructors and educational administrators is how to motivate adult learners to become fully absorbed in the online learning process.

Mature adults are often attracted to online distance learning due to its perceived advantages over traditional face-to-face instruction in a classroom. The major benefit of distance learning is that it allows adult learners who work, have family or other responsibilities to extend their education or to update their knowledge and skills related to their job by saving travel costs and allowing for a flexible schedule (Park & Choi, 2009). Hence, it is often the convenience and flexible schedules (Ivanoka and Stick, 2007; Nash, 2005) rather than the special nature of the distance learning environment that motivates students to choose such courses (Tucker, 2003). Unfortunately, many distance education students fail to ask themselves the pertinent questions that would help them to evaluate whether distance education, for example using computer-mediated technology, will meet their learning needs.

Distance education, and online learning in particular, is not a suitable option for all students (Tucker, 2003). Students fail to take the time to explore the nature of distance education and have difficulty completing their programmes or simply drop out (Muirhead, 2000). Svedberg (2010) suggests that online education appears to be able to accommodate the busy life styles of adult professionals, as online learners, access materials, participate in discussions, complete assignments, review content and lectures, and take tests according to their own schedules. However, Svedberg (2010, citing Burbules & Callister, 2000) suggests

that online learners perceive that ‘what is lost to them in terms of spontaneity and face-to-face interaction may be, for them, more than compensated for the convenience (and perhaps lower cost) of such course offerings’ (p.275).

Popular use of the Internet, particularly the World Wide Web, started in the 1990s and is still a relatively novel social activity. Before this time, prior educational experience did not prepare the older distance learners who now populate distance learning environments for the more so called learner-centred educational settings currently in vogue. The spread of Internet use has made it even easier for adults to access higher education, and many use computer technology on a need-to-know basis. However, although it is claimed that online education is gaining increasing acceptance as an effective tool for the delivery of instruction to adult learners, the issue of students’ successful transition in this environment has emerged as an area of concern (Harrell, 2008; Park & Choi, 2009).

Ironically, it is the perceived advantages of web-based instruction such as the inherent reduced personal interaction, with no physical attendance at classes and its flexibility that can create negative experiences for many time-bound adult learners. Novice online learners may initially find this kind of learning disorienting, without the physical classroom space and guidance from the physical presence of an instructor. Other students may mistakenly assume that learning online is easier than learning in a conventional classroom space (Carnevale, 2000b, as cited in Nash, 2005; Teaching and learning online, Handbook for University of Massachusetts Faculty, 2002). In reality, students often find the workload on an online course heavier because they must cover course material on their own and key in their discussion comments (Teaching and learning online, Handbook for University of Massachusetts Faculty, 2002). Additionally, the seemingly greater freedom allowed by online learning requires more responsibility on the part of the adult learner to meet deadlines and to stay abreast of classes (Rankin, 2004). Moreover, when forced to make a choice between school and a project at work, the adult learner may have little choice but to fulfil work obligations (Rankin, 2004). Therefore, when adults who self-select into online learning become frustrated, it can lead to withdrawal from the providing institution.

Given the peculiarities of adults’ personal and academic circumstances and their preponderance in online learning environments, concerns about high dropout rates or conversely low retention abound in the relevant research literature. A number of studies have demonstrated that a higher percentage of students participating in online courses tend to drop out, and do not complete studies than those in face-to-face teaching situations (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Nash, 2005; Park & Choi, 2009; Phipps & Merisotis, 1999; Pierrakeas, et al., 2004; Tresman, 2002; Willging & Johnson, 2004). Two sets of related studies, retention and

persistence studies are found relevant to drop out from online studies. On the one hand, retention is viewed as 'student's persistence to complete their educational programmes right up to graduation' (Taylor, 2006, p.12). On the other hand, persistence, which is the reverse of drop-out, is defined by Rovai (2002, p.1) as 'the behaviour of continuing action despite the presence of obstacles'. Both these factors are considered important measures of the effectiveness of distance and online learning. Therefore even as institutions design online programmes, it is imperative that educators understand the factors of student satisfaction and retention in these programmes (Taylor, 2006), as well as the more positive outlook on why students persist.

2.7.1 Barriers to persistence in online learning

Despite the fact that the structure of online learning gives adult learners more control over the time, place and pace of education (Galusha, 1997), such relative freedom is not without its problems. A number of studies have attempted to elucidate barriers to persistence in distance learning. Adult learners are more likely than conventional students to have insecurities about learning. These insecurities are multi-causal, but they may lead to student withdrawal from online programmes and courses. Research has shown that a wide variety of barriers may lead to student drop-out in online distance education. Galusha (1997) indicates a wide variety of barriers including factors such as full-time employment, grade point average, family responsibilities, feedback and teacher content, student support, alienation and isolation, lack of technical skills, loss of interaction, distance learning pressure, gender differences, inadequate pre-course information and guidance, time management and financial concerns (Galusha, 1997; McGivney, 2004; Moody, 2004).

In the following sections, previous research, related literature and factors influencing learners' satisfaction and intention to stay in an online programme or course are examined with a view to identifying critical factors that impact on learners in online environments. Understanding the learners' attitude to online learning is a critical issue for improving student retention and persistence in online studies.

2.7.2 Retention studies

Retention in higher education has been a subject of much debate for decades (Longden, 2004; Packham et al., 2004; Tinto, 1975; Willging & Johnson, 2004). Studies have identified retention as an intractable long-term problem in higher education, whether at course, programme or degree level (Tinto, 1975). However, this problem appears more acute in online learning. A wide range of other related terms has been used internationally to discuss the issue: non-persistence; attrition; drop-out and withdrawal; and non-completion. Nowadays, the advent of online learning has renewed concerns about this matter due to the perceived exceedingly

high rates of drop-out compared to traditional higher education. Anecdotal evidence suggests that drop-out rates in the US are believed to be 10 to 20 per cent higher than for face-to face learning (Carr, 2000; Diaz, 2000; Frankola, 2001; Willging & Johnson, 2004), which interestingly has been estimated to have held constant at between 40-45 per cent for over a century (Tinto, 1982). It is an imperative for educators to identify what leads to such higher drop-out rates and then to take appropriate preventative measures. Several researchers have examined the literature and highlighted numerous factors that, singly or in combination, can lead to student withdrawals in online learning. The findings are highlighted in this section.

Rovai and Wighting (2005) in their investigation of the literature note that multi-faceted factors can contribute to the lack of retention in online learning. They identify varying degrees of mismatch between the difficulty of online courses and students' academic preparation. Other contributing factors are family and peer influences, the high degree of self-directedness required for most online programmes and the need for students to adapt to computer-mediated communication. In addition, student economic factors and lack of employer support were contributing factors. The varied experience levels and skills of instructors teaching online were also implicated as a special factor that showed up in poor facilitation of discussion and group work, as well as in feedback to students that, from the student perspective, was neither timely nor constructive. Much research has implicated that students' interaction with instructors is vital to perceived satisfaction and effectiveness in online programmes (Davidson-Shivers, 2009; Woods & Baker, 2004).

Tyler-Smith (2006) addresses the issue of first time learners in e-learning. He argues that first-time online learners often experience cognitive overload in the early stages of their programme and that this might contribute to early withdrawal, particularly in the early weeks of a programme.

2.7.3 Persistence studies

Park and Choi (2009) describe persistence as the sum of those factors that enhance a student's ability to complete an online course successfully. Their study identified whether those students who dropped out were different in terms of individual characteristics (age, gender and educational level), external factors (family and organisational support) and internal factors (satisfaction and relevance as sub-dimensions of motivation). Factors indicated as contributing to persistence in online learning include communication with instructor, motivation, peer and family support (Park & Choi, 2009). The study revealed that there was not a significant difference between dropouts and persistent learners. However, their findings showed significant difference between the two groups in terms of persistence between family support and the workplace. Morgan and Tam (1999) examined the interrelated factors that contributed

to students' withdrawals in an online distance course for nine students who completed and nine who did not complete the course. They note that barriers to persistence fell into four categories:

1. Situational: These are barriers that include changes in student's life that impact his or her ability to stay enrolled. Changes in job, lack of family support and lack of time all contribute to poor learning environments, which hinder success in online learning.
2. Epistemological: these barriers include problems with course material and content.
3. Institutional: these barriers include those factors that arise from difficulties within the institution such as cost, course scheduling/pacing, technical support and institutional procedures.
4. Dispositional: these factors include students' attitude about their online study such as the pacing of the course (Taylor, 2006).

Although not explicit, given the broad parameters, all the factors implicated in Morgan and Tam's (1999) study have implications for students' emotional wellbeing in their online studies.

Feedback has been identified as a singularly important factor in learner development (Hara & Kling, 1999; Ryan & Dowling, 2006). The most important aspect of feedback is the provision of individualised feedback to learners on coursework (Lentell, 2003; Smith, 2004). Feedback is a key aspect of academic support for learners, and 'this involves assisting learners with programme content and assessment; managing programme workload, and assisting learners in developing appropriate learning competencies and helping learners become independent' (Ryan & Dowling, 2006, p.11; Simpson, 2002). Timely feedback has been found to be vitally important, as it allows learners make adjustments to their coursework before submission, if needed.

Dixon, Dixon and Siragusa (2007), in their study on student perceptions on online learning environments, report positive and negative outcomes. They indicate that students appreciated a high level of relatively prompt, constructive and varied feedback strategies. Conversely students reported negatively on limited, insufficient and untimely feedback from their tutors. Moore and Kearsley (2012), citing the views of Cole et al. (1986), report what students say they expect in respect of 'grading and feedback on assignments: fair and objective grading, to have their work treated with respect, an explanation and justification of grade awarded and a clear indication of how they can improve both in terms of specific responses and in general' (p.130).

2.7.4 Student satisfaction studies

Student satisfaction in online learning is viewed as student's perceived value of the educational experiences at the educational institution (Austin, 1993). Satisfaction is considered a good

predictor of student retention and it is important because it influences learners' levels of motivation. Motivation is implicated as an important psychological factor in student success (Bolinger & Martidale, 2004).

Sadik (2003), reviewing the literature, indicates that although there are a substantial number of studies in online learning, most of them investigated web-based (online) interaction or Internet conferencing on learning and not the entire on-line learning environment. Research also shows that most of these studies focus on a single course rather than a complete programme. Research studies, however, in traditional residential campuses have indicated that, together, the educational environment and organisational culture are important in determining student satisfaction and their motivation to stay the course (Demaris & Kritsonis, 2008). Altogether, persistence, students' overall satisfaction and their interactions in the online learning environments are assumed to be relevant to the emotive responses of novice online learners.

Sikora and Carroll (2002) also report that online higher education students tend to be less satisfied with totally online courses than traditional face-to face courses. Rovai and Jordon (2004) note that the text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) used by Internet e-learning systems for discussion board and email discourse is a powerful tool for group communication and cooperative learning, because it promotes a degree of reflective interaction that is sometimes lacking in face-to face, teacher-centred classroom. Nevertheless, they call to attention to how 'reduced verbal social cues in CMC, such as the absence of facial expressions and voice inflection, can generate misunderstandings that can adversely affect learning' (p.3).

Taylor (2006) reports on a study at Boise University conducted by interviews with completers and non-completers in a distance education programme to determine what factors contribute to students' dropout. Students between 1989 and 1996 who dropped out, as well as those who remained in the programme, were interviewed. Students' primary reason to drop out or persist was their level of satisfaction with the first or second course in the programme (p.11). According to So and Brush (2007), in general the research shows that distance learners are likely to be dissatisfied and frustrated with the following factors: '(a) unclear expectations from instructors; (b) tight timeline; (c) workload; (d) poor software interface; (e) slow access; (f) no synchronous communication' (p.4).

Liaw (2008) investigated students' perceived satisfaction, behavioural intention and effectiveness of e-learning based on the use of the Blackboard system. The result shows that perceived self-efficacy is a major factor that influences student satisfaction with the

Blackboard e-learning system. Perceived usefulness and perceived satisfaction both contribute to learners' intention to use the e-learning system.

Additionally, a small number of studies have indicated the likely link between student satisfaction and social presence mentioned above. Gunawardena and Zitttle (1997) argue that social presence is a strong predictor of student satisfaction. Richardson and Swan (2003) agree with the findings that students with high perceptions of social presence also have high perceptions of learning and high satisfaction with their instructor. Although these findings seem to suggest that students perceive distance learning to be as satisfactory as face-to-face learning, there may still be a need to examine closely whether there are any factors causing dissatisfaction, frustration and anxiety among distance learners (So & Brush, 2007). Additionally, if institutions are able to isolate the factors that seem to cause a lack of satisfaction, course designers may be helped to design courses that eliminate some of the causes of dissatisfaction in online environments. Finally, Bolinger and Martidale (2004) indicate three important factors, among others, that are of key importance to online students' satisfaction: the instructor; technology; and interactivity.

2.7.5 Student perceptions of the online learning environment

Students' perceptions influence their behaviour. Obtaining students' views about their own learning in online learning can assist educators in traversing a relatively unknown pedagogical domain.

One study, by Zhang and Kenny (2010), explored the learning experiences of three international graduate students at a university in Canada. Its aim was to understand students' experiences with and perspectives on the online learning environment. Its findings are that previous education and specifically language proficiency impacted strongly on learning. Barriers resulted from the difference in American culture and cultural expressions, and the three students involved tended to avoid socialising on the course and were marginalised in discussions. The researchers made several recommendations. First, they suggested raising the English proficiency requirement, as the CMC environment was primarily a text-based environment and required a high level of critical thinking skill in order for student discussion to be productive, as this interaction lacked the nonverbal cues natural to oral conversation. They suggested that institutions should ensure that course designers are aware of the needs and expectations of international students and should combine principles from both traditional and constructivism theories.

An investigation into student perceptions of the useful and challenging characteristics of online learning was conducted by Song et al. (2004). They note that these characteristics

included learner motivation, time management, comfort level at being online, a sense of community and a difficulty in understanding the objectives of the online course.

Alobiedat and Saraierh (2010) investigated students' attitudes towards using a platform as a learning resource at the University of Granada. The results showed that students responded positively to the use of a platform as a learning resource and there was a significant difference, due to gender, owning a personal computer (PC), and having access to the internet.

Student perceptions are thoughts, beliefs and feelings about a person's situation and events. Studies on student perceptions are important in online learning because they can help to explain factors that students themselves consider important in the learning environment, and how these factors influence perceived learning outcomes. Several kinds of studies have been chosen to illuminate students' experience in distance learning environments. None of these speak directly to the emotional experiences of students, although in some cases emotion can be inferred. Studies that come closest to indicating emotional experiences are those that speak to students' satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Others that refer to such factors as motivation, alienation, isolation and the need for support also allude to the emotional dimensions.

However, none of these studies demonstrates that interest was primarily focused on emotions and this creates a gap in our understanding of the emotional aspects of learning in online environments. The following sections will examine the idea of emotion, provide a brief look at theories that govern the concept, and examine emotion's relationship with learning and present studies that deal directly with the emotional experience of students in online learning environments.

2.8 Emotional Intelligence: Wellbeing and resilience

Pekrun et al. (2002) studied 'academic emotions', theorising that one can assume that students experience a wide spectrum of emotions in academic settings. Because academic learning and achievement are highly esteemed in society, they argued that the practice of using learning and achievement for distribution of these resources presupposes that learning and achievement are critical aspects of society and therefore primary sources of emotions of all kinds. Their literature search identified articles from 1974 to 2000 linking emotions to learning and achievement, and included a wide variety of emotions: joy; enthusiasm; hope; relief; pride; gratitude; admiration; sadness; anger; anxiety; hopelessness; shame and guilt; disappointment; boredom; envy; contempt; and surprise. This list confirms the presence of both positive and negative emotions in learning situations. Based on this knowledge, Pekrun et al. commented that, 'judging from the general functions of emotions for human agency, it may be assumed

that emotions influence students' cognitive processes and performance, as well as their psychological and physical health' (p.92).

Emotional intelligence may be defined as an individual's ability to recognise and manage his/her own emotions and, secondly, the ability to recognise and manage the emotions of other people. Although its place in psychology was initially greeted with great scepticism, the idea of emotional intelligence has continued to gain traction (Matthews et al., 2003). It is a hybrid construct that draws upon two concepts important to psychology: emotion and intelligence. The term gained international attention in the 1980s and matured in psychological history about two decades ago (Matthews et al., 2003). Although the emergence of the term as a new concept became popular in the 1995, it has been informed by a long history of theoretical and empirical work. Research on emotional intelligence has been ongoing and the basic assumption is that people differ in their skill in 'perceiving, understanding, regulating and utilising their emotional information and consequently, individual levels of "emotional intelligence" contributes substantially to an individual's intellectual or emotional wellbeing and growth' (Salovey et al., 2010, p.533). According to Matthews et al. (2003), emotional intelligence is self-regulating and involves competence to identify and express emotions, understand emotions, assimilate in thought and regulate both positive and negative emotions in oneself and others.

Pekrun et al. (2002) used mixed methods in their study and noted that almost no major emotions were left unreported by participants. Overall, they claimed that anxiety was the most reported emotion. This anxiety is not only related to exams but other aspects of studying. They reported, too, that achievement pressure and expectation of failure trigger emotional arousal, and concluded that there was a need 'to enhance students' psychological wellbeing by giving them chances to cope with excessive demands, and by increasing opportunities to succeed' (p.93).

Sharpe and Benfield (2005) report students' high emotional investment in learning online. Bassal et al. (2015) researched the relationship between emotions, emotion regulation and wellbeing of professional care givers of people with dementia. They describe caring for the elderly with dementia as an extremely complex task that requires nursing technology skills, efficient communication and emotional competences. There seems to be a similarity in the sentiments of these care-givers and those of adult learners to online learning, particularly at the initial stages of their learning experience. Students, like these care-givers, have to cope with their need for support from tutor interaction, the sometimes absence of reliable communication and, more often than not, a lack of interactional feedback (Galusha, 1997). Similarly, like these care-givers, online learners have to adjust their behaviours and attitude regularly to maintain a

proper relationship with their computer and other aspects of the online learning environment. Students who are required to log in to their computers as a daily routine to access learning materials, instructions and discussion forums may experience intense negative emotions and emotional depletion. Such adverse impacts may be the result of transactional distance in online learning, the need to develop skills in using technology to communicate (Hillman, Willis & Gunawardena, 1994), or to cognitive overload that may cause stress, preventing learning and ultimately resulting in withdrawal (Tyler-Smith, 2006).

Allen and Friedman (2010) imply that **emotional wellbeing** can perhaps be interpreted from both the institutional and the individual point of view. It appears that students' emotional wellbeing is a twofold responsibility, that of the providing institution and that of the students themselves. In sum, emotion is always present and educators are encouraged to acknowledge, observe and support it (Cleveland-Innis & Campbell, 2012; O'Regan, 2003). Subjective wellbeing appears also to relate to being happy. In the context of this study, subjective wellbeing appears to be connected to personality traits, and individual students' 'own evaluations of their lives' (Lucas & Denier, 2008, p.471) and the strategies they use to cope with life circumstances.-According to Robert and Cooper (2011), it is evident that schoolwork, like that of job-related work, 'that is rewarding in general, involves good relationships' (with other students, tutors, the administration) 'and opportunities to feel a sense of achievement on a regular basis' (p.3.) is a critical factor in psychological wellbeing (PWB).-There is in fact a great deal of emotional labour in academic work, and it is demanding and may lack meaning, and can damage resilience, psychological wellbeing and physical health. In the context of online learning, students' expectations about their learning environments can determine their sense of wellbeing.

Resilience is the ability to adapt positively to challenges, despite the presence of risk (Gutman & Schoon, 2013, cited in Expansive Network Research 2014/5, pp. 1-13). It is one among many character traits referred to as non-cognitive skills and implicated in supporting positive life outcomes. Resilience, therefore, resonates with the concept of emotional literacy and emotional intelligence, because these expectations incorporate the idea of the management of the self. Some elements of resilience can be seen in the way students deal with risk, with specific reference to online learning environments; they must be able to devise coping strategies to remain on task, bounce back (Thomsen, 2002, cited in Expansive Network Research 2014/5, p.9) or reduce disruptive behaviours in the face of stressors in the learning environment (Ecclestone & Lewis, 2014, cited in Expansive Network Research 2014/5, p.6).

2.8.7 Emotion, learning and online learning

The mainstream definition of emotion refers to a feeling state involving thought and physiological changes, and an outward expression or behaviour. Most individuals can identify what constitutes an emotion when asked to do so. A common-sense definition of emotion is that it can be considered as individual mental states that carry descriptive labels such as anger, frustration, fear, sadness, happiness and joy, to name a few. Such descriptors are used to describe one's internal state. Over the past two decades, research on emotion has increased significantly. Coupled with this heightened interest in emotion generally has been a growing interest in the emotional dimension of learning and its impact on student outcomes. Recent research has emphasised the central role that emotion plays in any learning endeavour and outcomes (Dirkx, 2006; Hara & Kling, 2001; Kort, Reilly & Picard, 2001; Shen et al., 2009; Shuck, Albornoz & Winberg, 2007). However, the interaction between learning and emotion, though now well recognised, is not equally well understood (Dirkx, 2006; O'Regan 2003). In formal educational settings such as higher education, performance outcomes such as high grade point averages (GPA), persistence and retention figures loom large as factors used to determine student satisfaction and engagement, as well as the reputation and ranking of universities.

The emotional dynamics of learning is still relatively under-researched. Not many educators in adult and higher education regard emotion as central in the processes of learning and meaning making (Dirkx, 2008). Shuck, Albornoz and Winberg (2007) have argued that a constructivist perspective can contribute to adult educators' understanding of emotion and learning, and their interaction. An understanding of these concepts enables teachers of adults to grasp the importance of learners' perspectives and the construction of knowledge through subjective experience. Learning is seen as primal (Shuck, Albornoz & Winberg, 2007), that is, instinctive, occurring imperceptibly through experience or practice.

Lumby (2010), in a study on enjoyment and learning, presents learning as a process that 'escapes the confines of a singular conceptualisation except at a level of generality that struggles to encompass the range and richness of learning' (p.5). Dirkx (2008) argues that learning 'is not strictly or even primarily a cognitive event or process' (p.1). Learning is bound up with making sense of experience, in relation to what is being learned and the context of learning. The meaning-making process reflects in a fundamental way one's emotional engagement with the text, or focus of learning. However, this learning takes place in relationship to other individuals who make up the broader social and cultural contexts in which learning is taking place – tutors, student peers, the administration and the broader institutional context. Learning, then, like emotion is a complex, multifaceted aspect of human behaviour

that helps humans to understand and interact with themselves, understand others and evaluate their surroundings.

Christie et al., (2007) point out that accounts of emotion and affect in learning have been gaining popularity. Using qualitative data from a group of non-traditional students enrolled in an elite university in the United Kingdom, they illustrate how 'feelings of loss and dislocation' are inherent to the students' experiences of entering university, and that 'coming to know' a new community is an emotional process that can incorporate negative feelings of alienation and exclusion, as well as positive emotions such as 'excitement and exhilaration'. They argue that understanding how students' learn is as much dependent on the 'individual's commitment to developing a new learning identity' as well as the 'emotional interaction between the student and the learning environment of the university' (Christie et al., 2007, abstract).

The affective domain includes 'all things that limit or enhance learning in addition to basic thinking' (Wirth & Perkins, 2014, p.7). Cleveland-Innes and Ally (2004) argue that the human experience of affect is often ignored in human social interaction and seldom specially addressed in educational settings. However, they note that it is integral to living and learning. Affect, as defined by the Webster Collegiate Dictionary (1999), is 'emotion, feeling desire leading to action; the conscious subjective aspect of emotion and embedded in the complex of experiences including cognition and context' (Cleveland-Innes & Ally 2004, p.17).

However, traditionally, Western societies have regarded cognition and emotion in teaching and learning as two discrete dimensions. Further, Western philosophical traditions regarded emotions as 'irrational urges that needed to be controlled with reason' (O'Regan, 2003, p.78). Thus, emotion has not been a major concern of learning theories, nor research in higher levels of education. In fact, for the most part, emotion has largely been dismissed as unreliable (Noddings, 1996).

Affective or emotional learning involves all learning domains, including cognitive, behavioural learning as well as values and feelings (Allen & Friedman, 2010). Weiss, (2000) reports that recent research conducted by neurologists and educators shows a strong correlation between 'emotion and reason, feelings and thoughts', effectively debunking the idea that emotion is the enemy of reason and strengthening the view that 'the more emotionally engaged a learner is, the more likely he or she is to learn' (p.45).

Feelings shape thought, and thoughts shape feelings. Thus there appears to be a link between the way individuals feel and the way they think. Feelings or emotions are valenced: positive, negative or neutral. It appears that negative thoughts exert a strong effect on emotional states and the reverse appears to have a similar effect. A deeper understanding of

feelings and emotions is important to learning in online environments. Emotions in education are considered a part of the affective domain of learning taxonomies. Wirth & Perkins (2014) relate that the affective domain is relevant to learning objectives that focus on feelings, emotions or a degree of acceptance and rejection. It is also pertinent to complex issues relating to character.

Expressions of affective outcomes of learning are demonstrated in statements of opinions, beliefs or an assessment of worth (Miller, 2005). Since it is not easy to measure affect and, by extension, emotions, researchers have developed conceptual models to explain affect, the best known being Krathwohl's taxonomy of affective learning. Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia (1964) arranged the elements of learning in the affective domain in hierarchical order, based upon an individual's commitment to learning in five progressive stages in learning. At the basic level, learning involves receiving and accepting information. More important is the response element, which involves a change in thinking or behaviour in response to learning. The next stage is to value or internalise the new learning, then it is integrated into pre-existing values and finally the new information is used to guide action.

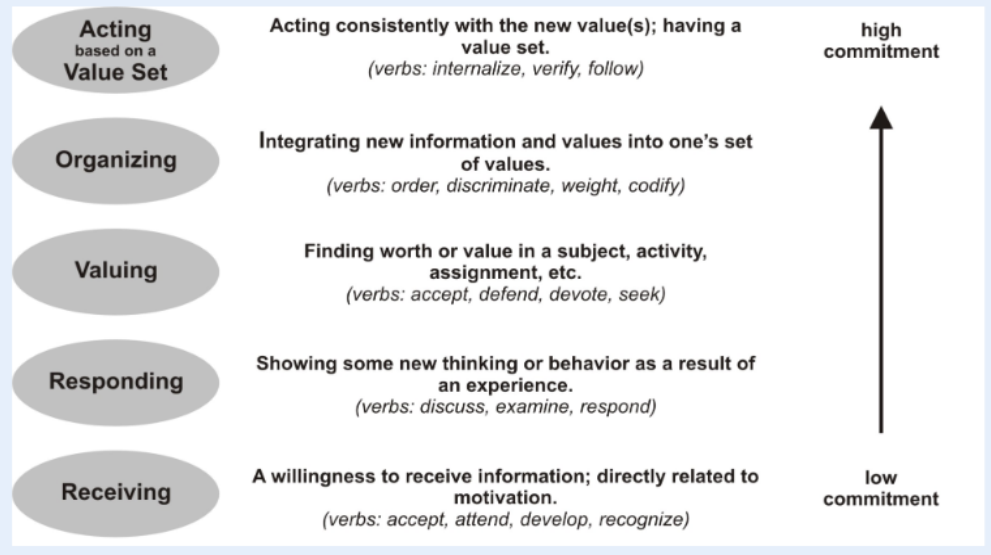


Figure 2.1 Affective domain as described by Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia (1964). Krathwohl organised the domain into a hierarchy based upon an individual's commitment to living and valuing (from Wirth & Perkins, 2014, p.7)

This model is of significance because studies have shown that students' perceptions about learning often have a significant impact on grades, so it is important that students develop good attitudes towards learning and what they learn. The importance of emotion to cognition is being increasingly realised, it is hard to measure because affect is mostly related to internal subjective states. Nevertheless, students can evaluate their internal motives and attitudes, and identify critical emotional factors that impinge on their learning. One way to assess students' emotional

state is to ask the students themselves. These emotional dimensions are important in this research of students' emotional experiences in an online learning environment (Wirth & Perkins, 2014).

Learning online is a new domain for educators. Focusing on the cognitive aspects to the exclusion of the emotional dimension leads only to an incomplete educational experience for learners. The reason for this neglect is for a long time emotions have been perceived as a kind of baggage that impedes effective teaching (Dirkx, 2008). Nowadays, for some researchers, emotions in learning are being viewed more kindly and being given a more integral and holistic role (Dirkx, 2008) in learning and meaning-making in higher educational settings.

2.8.8 Adult learners' emotional experience of online learning

Sadik (2003) reported that in studies that investigated entire online learning environments, student achievement was the most common indicator for evaluation. No other indicator or factors which might influence achievement, such as the emotional dimension was given any consideration. However, what these studies reveal by default is the need for research which considers the impact of the asynchronous online environment on students' emotional response to challenges. These would include the use of enabling technology, students interface with content, relationship with peers, the emotional impact of the instructor and administrative staff.

Research suggests that online learning is not suitable for all types of students and tutors. Collins (1999, as cited in Rovai & Jordon, 2004) observed that students and instructors react to new educational technologies with varied emotions ranging from enthusiasm to paralysing fear. Hara & Kling (2001) noted in their study of online courses, that prior studies indicate feelings of isolation as an important stress factor for online students. However, in their study they did not find that isolation was a major concern. Instead, students reported significant recurrent 'feelings of confusion, anxiety and frustration due to the perceived lack of prompt and clear feedback from the instructor, and from ambiguous instructions on the course website and in e-mail messages from the instructor' (p.68). Kort, Reilly and Picard (2001) contended that when the process of learning is not progressing well, learners experience feelings such as confusion, despair or frustration. However, when it is working well students may experience desirable emotions such as enthusiasm, delight, amazement and other higher order positive emotions.

Ludwig-Hardman and Dunlap (2003, p.2) argued in their study that, while some studies have revealed high satisfaction in learners (Hill, 1999; Hill, Rezabek & Murry, 1998; Wayland, 1994, cited in Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003), others have reported the opposite. They presented relevant information that distance learners 'often experience a great deal of frustration with their course because they do not possess the skills needed to be successful'

(Ritchie & Newby, 1989, and Swift et al., 1997, both cited in Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). Moreover, they related how 'some students do not possess the necessary self-directed skills set', such as 'self-discipline, the ability to work alone, time management, learning independence to develop a plan for completing work' (Burack, 1993; Dunlap & Grabinger, 2003; and Hancock, 1993; Piskurich, 2002, both cited in Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003, p.2), among others. They also pointed out that even though adults are often described as self-directed, some are not self-directed learners (Kerka, 1994, cited ibid.). Finally, they noted that in addition to challenges that students encounter with feelings of isolation and disconnection, there is the knowledge that self-directed learning skills are developed through various kinds of interaction in a social context and including communities of practice (Dunlap & Grabinger, 2003; Kerka, 1994; Long, 1994, all cited in Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003, p.2).

Wlodkowski (1985) dissected the emotional responses of an adult learning environment into four areas. He noted that emotions are seen as influenced by the learner, the input of the instructor, the reactions influenced by the learning process and materials, and the learner's response to the learning group. Basing his views on andragogical principles, Wlodkowski (1985) indicated the important role of the instructor in creating an emotional climate conducive to social relationships. When the learner is not comfortable, negative emotions particularly of threat, fear, powerlessness, rejection and incompetence completely defeat the principles of andragogy, and can disrupt motivation towards persistence and lead to drop-out.

Studies indicate that students who are enrolled in an online course experience a variety of emotions including stress and anxiety (Conrad, 2002; O'Regan, 2003; Zembylas, 2008). Gay (2010) concluded that online learning environments can be designed to provide emotional support to reduce students' stress and anxiety, and suggests that a shallow interpretation of the online learning experience results when the emotional dimension is excluded.

A study by Legum et al. (2011) found that anxiety relates to Mathematics and text anxiety at college level, as well as about technology. Causes of test anxiety were identified as students' perceptions of the test, their self-perception and perceptions of the test-taking situation (Bonnacio & Reeve, 2010, as cited in Legum et al., 2011). Other significant variables examined include personal knowledge and belief, as defined by achievement goals and perceived academic competency (Putwain, Woods & Symes, 2010, cited in Legum et al., 2011, p.2). Ignacio, Blanco and Barona (2006) noted that many learners generally have negative and even aversive perceptions towards Mathematics. For these learners, the subject does not generate a sense of satisfaction but rather feelings of frustration, discouragement and anxiety.

Another emotion that was replicated in several studies was frustration (Hara and Kling, 1999; Hara & Kling, 2001; Mustafa, 2005; O'Regan, 2003). Capdeferro and Romero (2012) noted that frustration was a common feeling among students involved in collaborative learning experiences. The researchers used Mandler's (1975) definition of frustration, 'a negative emotion aroused upon encountering an obstacle in the achievement of a task, goal or expectation or in satisfying one's needs' (in Capdeferro & Romero, 2102, p.3). Frustration was also identified as a concept relevant to goal attainment. Student frustration was investigated in a study on cognition and emotion in Nigerian undergraduate students' e-registration process (Abatogun et al., 2010). Unlike other studies, their findings were that, although students experienced various frustrating experiences during e-registration, cognition was the most potent contributor, not emotion. This is at variance with others where cognition and emotion jointly contribute to students' experiences during e-learning.

Mustafa (2005) noted that although much of the research literature emphasises cognitive factors in explaining individual differences in the way people learn, there are several areas of the research that indicate the important effect of emotions, intentions and key psychological factors. Factors such as passion, dislike, fear, satisfaction and frustration affect learning. Mustafa also reported that, of these, frustration is the affective aspect identified as a major obstacle to the online learning experience.

Zembylas, Theodorou and Pavlakis (2008) examined the origins and implications of adult learners' emotions in an online learning programme at the Open University of Cyprus. The aim of the research was to compile 'genealogies' of the emotional experiences of graduate students. The findings show how the novice learners' emotional talk transitioned over time. Some students expressed both positive and negative emotions in an ambivalent manner. For other students, negative feelings predominated. Students expressed positive emotions such as joy, enthusiasm and excitement for the flexibility of online learning. Surprise and excitement were expressed for the emotional nature of online communication as well as pride and contentment for fulfilling course requirements. Negative emotions included fear and anxiety over the unfamiliar methodology of online learning. Alienation and the need for social connections were reported, as well as stress and guilt about the inability to balance multiple roles and responsibilities.

Similarly, Zembylas (2008) reported the findings of research report in which he investigated how adults talked about their emotions and how the talk changed over a period of one year. The study revealed how novice adult learners responded emotionally and talked about their emotions of the course, how the emotion talk changed from the beginning of the

course to the end, and how students differed in their emotional responses in relation to social responsibilities and gender roles.

Conrad (2002), too, examined emotion talk with a group of graduate students in a dual-mode university, based on their 'first' online class. Emotions reported in this study were excitement, anxiety and fear in the early stages of the class. Smart and Cappel (2006) report that students were disaffected with shortness of time for online courses, compared to traditional classroom classes.

In a study on graduate students, Wiesenberger (2001) used a transition model to describe a small group of graduate students' coping strategies in an online class. She examined how students' coping responses changed over time as they moved into, through and out of their programme. Based on the findings, I suggest that instructors in online programmes might benefit from looking to the field of transition counselling to help students cope, as well as using the attributes of online communication to provide affective support. 'Figurative talk' is again implicated in the study by Manca and Delfino (2007), who investigated how participants on an online learning course employ language to express their emotions and feelings during the learning experience.

Studies of the emotional domain in online learning environment consistently indicate, in some cases indirectly, that students' emotions are piqued very strongly by their learning experiences. Students' emotional experiences are expressed through talk. The online learning experience is commonly represented through written and asynchronous communication. It appears, however, that students use language to project their presence and that emotive experiences resonate with and are implicated by the social experiences of online learning. Emotions expressed are sometimes positive. However, in most of the studies reviewed, emotions tend towards negative responses. None of these studies indicates that learners withdrew from these courses, so it is assumed that the students are primarily 'persisters'. These studies show that emotional states such as anxiety, fear, motivation and excitement are expressed verbally in the online environment. Despite the fact that drop-out rates are high, many students do persist. Studies on the emotional domain demonstrate the importance of this particular dimension. However, students' emotions, which may be a factor in the higher drop-out rates, are hardly acknowledged in research studies. Instead, educational programmes in distance education have tended to emphasise teaching in the cognitive and psychomotor domains (Rastegarpour, 2009). However, since the weight of the evidence continues to err on the side of no significant difference (Meyer, 2002; Phipps & Merisotis, 1999; Russell, 1999; Saba, 2000, 2003), it is necessary to search for other underlying causes of the lack of persistence in online higher education.

In this review of previous research on the emotional impact of online learning on the student experience, satisfaction, retention and persistence, few studies were found that focused on undergraduate students' emotional experiences in online settings. Moreover, Street (2010) asserts that early studies of attrition (retention and persistence) in distance learning often focus on withdrawals within a single online course. Tomasson (2007) also notes that in her qualitative inquiry into existing research on learners' needs in online learning she found that the study suffered from the constraints of inadequate record of learner feedback. Analysis of undergraduate students is limited also because much of the research investigating students' perspective and feedback in online learning has focused on graduate students.

2.9 Methods of Research Used to Investigate Emotions in Online Learning

Research studies on the role of emotions in online learning have used a variety of methods to collect data. Zembylas (2008) identified categorical scale questionnaires, stimulated recall measures and qualitative approach analyses such as interviews, observations of facial movement and content analysis. Some researchers have used the usual type of questionnaire surveys. However, several less familiar observation methods have been used such as online journals, students email accounts and discussion records. One study used emotion detection technologies from biophysical signals (Shen, Wang & Shen, 2009), while Berenson, Boyles and Weaver (2008) used three psychological instruments provided to online users to test emotional intelligence and personality. Han and Johnson (2012) used a pervasive e-learning platform to test emotional intelligence. These appeared to be highly sophisticated instruments not commonly available. Zembylas (2008) took a qualitative ethnographic approach grounded in Foucault's genealogical method, while Song et al. (2004) adopted a mixed method approach. Burton and Goldsmith (2002) used an online asynchronous focus group method. However, few previous studies have used learner voice to obtain authentic data from the students' perspectives.

Hurd (2007), in a study about the affective side of language in a distance education context, employed an unusual qualitative method, think-aloud protocols (TAPs) as a research tool to enable learners to talk freely about their learning. The studies were carried out as a part of a wider study to investigate aspects of affect, including beliefs, motivation, and anxiety. Borrowed from cognitive psychology, think-aloud protocols have been previously used in the language classrooms to investigate learner's thought processes as they perform reading, writing, listening, speaking or translation activities. According to Hurd (2007), this tool has been used widely in distance learning as well as web-based learning environments. She reports that, apart from one other study, no studies have been found to have used this tool to

investigate affect in a distance language learning context. Hurd (2007) noted that the audio-taped voices provided rich insights into the advantages and disadvantages, pleasures, frustrations, comforts and anxieties of learning a language at a distance, and the strategies learners used to manage in a distant learning environment. The broad range of emotions indicated underscores the importance of listening to students and using their voices as a basis for discussions on improving design and delivery of distance learning courses.

Measurement of such intangibles as, for example, feelings, emotions and attitudes among others may involve the use of tools that are not as well calibrated, may lack norms, and may assess hypothetical constructs that display differences from week to week. Several suggestions are given in the article as to how to overcome the difficulties of measuring affect, such as the use of multiple procedures, multiple methods, multiple sources and the assessment of multiple traits. Some examples of methods to collect information on affective qualities are interviews, naturalistic inquiries such as unobtrusive observations, standardised self-reports as well as un-standardised self-reports developed by researchers and practitioners, plus socio-metric methods and case studies.

2.9.1 Effective online learning

Based on a review of the literature, Lynch and Dembo (2004) selected five self-regulatory attributes as significant to the success of distance learning: motivation (self-efficacy and goal orientation); Internet self-efficacy; time management; study environment management; and learning assistance management. These, they believed, were important to learner autonomy and an important construct for distance and online learning. They also matched these attributes to related psychological processes comprising learner autonomy. In their view, learner autonomy or independence is considered a critical success factor for online learning. They identified motivation for learning as a critical component of learner independence. Two elements of motivation are efficacy beliefs and goal orientation. Other self-regulatory attributes, including both motivational and behavioural elements that contribute to self-regulated behaviours, are components such as ‘the value learners assign to specific tasks, locus of control beliefs, and affective factors’ (Lynch & Dembo, 2004). Self-efficacy and personal growth are felt to be relevant to persistence. Taylor (2006) agreed that online learners are required to possess high levels of self-efficacy, self-management and self-direction. These internal characteristics are closely linked to the emotional domain of learning.

From these recently examined studies, it can be concluded that a wide variety of factors can impede the learning experience and impact students’ attitude towards the online experience. Tomasson (2007) conducted an inquiry to review the topic of learner needs in distance education from the perspective of the student. Only research studies that reported on findings

obtained from undergraduate students' feedback of their needs in e-learning were considered. The theoretical foundation for the review was the principles of andragogy and social constructivist theory. Themes that emerged as key components of learner needs in online courses were closely related to the affective domain. The students' feedback revealed that self-management, self-efficacy and the students' ability to direct their own learning are key to success in online learning.

Abrahamson (1998, as cited in Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003) indicated that distance learners are required to be self-regulated and independent, while Marino (2000) revealed that learners in online learning environments encounter difficulties in adjusting to the structure of online courses, time management and maintaining self-motivation. Goal attachment and commitment was identified by Ivanoka and Stick (2007) as a characteristic of all levels of online students, apart from those who drop out. They found that both graduating and beginning students were found to be positively motivated. However, students who drop out were less motivated to complete their degree. Mueller (2008) confirmed that persistent students felt that attaining their educational goal was significant to their career, or the financial outcome of their education. Many of the factors implicated in online students' success appear to be internal and psychologically driven.

Another important factor implicated in successfully navigating an online environment is Grade Point Average (GPA), according to Harell and Bower (2011), which is the average result of all the grades achieved throughout a degree. They noted that researchers indicate a relationship between GPA and persistence. They claimed that students with a higher GPA display more competence in the online learning environment and demonstrate more successful academic behaviours than those who ultimately withdraw. Folinsbee (2008) reviewed several websites for characteristics of successful adult learners. Her findings are in keeping with research studies already mentioned. Her review of the literature shows that characteristics of successful online learners, in order of frequency, are:

- Self-direction and self-motivation
- Self-discipline
- Ability to communicate in writing
- Assertion
- Ability to stay on task
- Meeting the requirements of the programme
- Problem-solving and critical thinking skills
- Being comfortable with computers
- Access to computers and a modem. (p.14)

Many factors contribute to students' successful progress in online learning environments and not all are related to cognitive components. Since emotions and feelings are felt to be integral to humans (Dirkx, 2008), they are considered to play a significant role in learning and meaning making. It is important to understand adult distance learners' experiences of obstacles and opportunities that influence their study and learning in online distance learning environments, to see how emotions can impede as well as advance learning outcomes. As Capra (2011) asserted, online learning is a matter of not only being prepared for the autonomy of the online environment, but being ready for the rigour of an online learning environment. Hence, students who are not technologically prepared for an online course can find the experience to be one of high emotionality (Sharpe & Benfield, 2005). When students who are uncomfortable with the necessary technology and or learning platform but who nevertheless enrol in an online course, they may require assistance over and above that of the instructor or the help desk.

2.10 Theoretical Framework

Since the focus of this study is on adult learners in higher education, this section examines two learning theories significant to adult learning. Many learning theories exist, and there is no single learning theory that explains how all adults learn. Neither is there a single learning theory that applies to all adult learning environments (Cercone, 2008). In reality, many learning theories have similar components and can be combined to provide effective learning environments (Posiack, Dizazzo-Miller & Pellerito, 2013; Wicks, 2009) for adult distance learners. Consequently, there are several different approaches to learning that instructors may draw from to assist them in designing and implementing programmes for adults in online education. For the most part, adult learners are in a state of transition, seeking to improve their life circumstances through education, and many complex variables have been implicated in their learning. An understanding of learning theories is therefore critical. Adult learning theory is a highly useful concept to understand learning environments (Frey & Webreck Alman, 2003). Theories are important to teaching, learning and research, the three core functions of higher education. Garrison (2000) observes that a good theory helps people to understand complex phenomena. In the same way, learning, a highly complex phenomenon, can be reduced to greater simplicity by calling upon a theoretical explanation. Learning, however, is a dynamic process and individuals change with their experiences and surroundings. Adult learners make up a diverse group of learners, hence instructors and administrators are faced with the daunting task of providing meaningful and challenging experiences for all learners and theorising to include all. Adult learning theories provide a framework when designing online adult courses.

How adults learn has been debated and researched since the early nineteenth century when adult education became a professional field of practice (Cercone, 2008; Merriam, 2001). Most adult learning theories were developed before the advent of online education became a reality**.** Consequently, they were developed for adults in traditional settings**.** However, the learning processes and general life situations of adult distance learners are similar to those of adult classroom learners (Burge, 1988). Nowadays, the increasing use of two-way technologies and their sophisticated interactive capabilities are assisting instructors to create virtual classrooms situations, and these theories are considered of current relevance to the online learning environment, providing a starting point for discussions on adults learning in distance education situations via enabling technology. The goal of higher education is to promote learning, so a sound knowledge of learning theories is important to develop effective or emotional learning materials for online students. The theoretical framework underlying this inquiry is based on the principles of andragogy and constructivism, two related concepts relevant to adult learning experience in online learning.

2.10.1 Andragogy

Knowles' principles of adult learning (1980, as cited in Merriam, Carafella & Baumgartner 2007, p.84) are widely recognised as appropriate approaches to understand the need of adult learners (Tomasson, 2007). Andragogy is concerned with the individual learner, learning, teaching and adult development. Knowles' basic supposition was that adult learners have unique needs and expectations that set them apart from younger students (Ausburn, 2004). Hence his 'principle of andragogy' are the art and science of helping adults learn, as opposed 'to pedagogy, the art and science of helping children learn' (ibid.), in which Knowles theorised that adults learn differently from children.

Adult andragogy theory has six core principles expressed by Knowles, Holton and Swanson (2005). Four were originally proposed; the other two were added between 1980 and 1999 (Houde, 2006): (1) the learners need to know; (2) self-concept of the learner; (3) prior experience of the learner; (4) readiness to learn; (5) orientation to learning; and (6) motivation to learn. Knowles saw these principles as the foundation to the design of programmes for adult learners and they are viewed as a set of assumptions about adult learners' characteristics (Merriam, Carafella & Baumgartner, 2007) rather than a theory of learning. Their efficacy lies in the fact that they provide a point of departure from where adult educators can begin to design and deliver programmes suitable for adult online learners and for more effective learning, based on the characteristics of those learners. As more and more adults join the ranks of online learning in distance higher education, educators need to understand their preferences for various aspects the online learning environment in order to apply these insights to course

design and delivery (Ashburn, 2004). One of the tenets of adult learning is voluntariness; that is, unlike young children, adults engage in learning situations at will and can and do drop out at will, for many reasons. The reasons for high drop-out rates in online learning has been found to be multi-causal (Morgan & Tam, 1999), both confounding and representing a weakness in the relationship between student and university, and as a significant contributing factor in many instances (Retention Project Team, cited in Morgan & McKenzie, 2003, p.2). Given the nature of the online learning environment, where learners are expected to take responsibility for their own learning, Knowles' practical guidelines can be activated. The ideas are grounded in humanistic and behaviourist philosophies that focus strongly on the socio-emotional domain of learning (Houde, 2006). Specifically, humanistic orientations emphasise the development of the whole person and focus on the emotional domain that is of relevance to this study.

2.10.2 Application of andragogical principles to online learning environments

The application of adult learning principles to online environments is considered vital in relation to higher drop-out rates. These are new considerations, given the relative infancy of online learning environments in tandem with advanced communication technologies. However, what is not new are human learning processes or the emotional component. What is also not new is effective educators concerned with the learning needs of the students they teach. Based on learner feedback, principles of adult learning do not change in online settings (Tomasson, 2007), so a perplexing aspect of the teaching learning transaction for the effective online instructor is how to optimise learners' performance in their course to minimise drop-out. The problem of uncovering individual learners' needs is compounded in a scenario where students and teachers have little opportunity to interact, and where research recognises learning as a social endeavour and individual construction of knowledge dependent on collaboration and interaction (Tomasson, 2007). In the traditional classroom an important aspect of pedagogical approaches is to involve dialogue, as this helps the tutor to determine areas of misunderstanding. In the de-humanised online context teachers are confronted with the need to seek different strategies to present materials and to engage students in purposeful interactions for equivalent learning outcomes. These outcomes are not only grade outcomes and graduation but should involve creating enabling and safe environments (Knowles, 1984).

Safe environments include opportunities where students are challenged to change their attitude to new learning situations; to be self-directed and reflective; and to self-monitor and regulate emotional responses that can distract or disrupt goal oriented behaviours in an agile fashion. When the class is online, few teachers have any direct past experience and there is no established set of common practices that they can draw on. For both the tutor and the student, teaching and learning becomes a process of trial and error, as are many other aspects of human

experience where individuals are called upon to learn new things. Part of being an effective instructor involves knowing how adults learn best. Knowles' principles of andragogy focus primarily on the individual learner characteristics and provide a good place to start when teaching adults in online learning environments (Blondy, 2007).

Rossman (2000), and Moore and Kearsley (1995) support the use of andragogy as a theoretical framework for the study of adult education. They suggest that this is a most helpful basis for the design and teaching of distance education courses, particularly with respect to motivational aspects. Strategies for retention and implementing timely support for at-risk students can be linked to the knowledge of particular characteristics. Traditional distance learning focused more on individual learners, learning alone with occasional face-to-face meetings. With the advent of advanced communication technologies, adults have the choice of studying alone as well as interacting with tutors and other students when necessary.

The constructivist theory of education is closely aligned to Knowles' andragogical approaches. The complementary basis of the two can be seen in the thought that andragogy provides a description of learner characteristics, while constructivism is seen as theory of learning relevant to adults. Since adults are presumed to build on prior knowledge and are interested in more problem-based learning experiences, constructivists' perspectives appear appropriate for approaching the needs of distance learners (Tomasson, 2007).

2.10.3 Constructivism

There is an expanding academic literature on constructivist learning and its suitability for online learning environments. Constructivism is aligned to a set of psychological theories that share common assumptions about knowing and learning. The theoretical framework for these theories is that learning involves mental construction. The basis of this is that learners are more than passive receptacles of information and, that learning is active mental process: unique to the individual and tied to experience and the context of experience (Swan, 2005). This study is interested in authentic learner voices or perspectives. Constructivist learning theories, particularly social constructivism, are becoming widely accepted in educational fields including the application of technology to teaching and learning (Kanuka & Anderson, 1998). According to Kanuka and Anderson (1998), the basic tenet of social constructivism is that students construct knowledge based on what they already know, and learning is an active rather than a passive process. This is done through the process of negotiating meaning with others (So & Brush, 2007). This view of learning is linked to Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development that proposes that students' cognitive development 'is highly dependent on social interaction and collaboration with more capable and knowledgeable others' (So & Brush, 2007, p.1). However, the works of other early social constructivists such as Bruner

(1996), Dewey (1916) and Piaget (1973) have made contributions to constructivist learning theory. The importance of constructivist learning to this study is that it focuses on both experience of and the process of learning (Huang 2002), not simply on the outcomes.

2.10.4 Applications to online distance learning

The interest in constructivist learning theories has been fuelled by the technology environment of online learning in which a wide array of instructional technologies is available to instructors. Online learning allows students to learn independently of time and place (Huang, 2002; Vrasidas & McIsaac, 2000). It is acknowledged that distance education has different settings from traditional classroom, and this is not only due to the physical distance between instructor and learner but because differences exist in the designs of instruction. Since face-to-face instruction may be limited or not offered at all, many researchers have focused on the role of interaction in distance education (Huang, 2002). This is because learner isolation is one of the factors relevant to high drop-out rates. There is also the fact that communication is mediated through computer technology, thus online learning 'loses some of its humanity or it forms social isolation' (p.31), and the understanding that the nature of the setting changes the role of the tutor, who becomes more of a guide. The role of the learners is thought to have shifted to one of active co-constructor of knowledge, along with the tutor and peers. Thus collaboration, discussion forums and other kinds of cooperation featured in constructivists' theories of learning are encouraged.

Relevant research has shown that emotions can be inferred as integral to students experience in online learning experiences. However, few studies have detailed the learners' perspective of their emotional experiences in online learning. Despite being under-emphasised, there seems to be a positive relationship between emotion and cognition. There is a great need for continuing research studies relating to specific areas, such as the students' overall perceptions of their experience, as well as pedagogical strategies to promote learner experience in online learning and studies on the emotional dimensions of the learners' experience. There is also a need to examine what emotions are present and what role should be given to them, in particular the part that negative emotions may play in the learners' experience. Ultimately, how negative emotions influence learning outcomes, if at all, is important to this study.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 explored the background literature and identified the direction of this study. This chapter presents the details of the research design. The research adopted a phenomenological approach, which is discussed and supported throughout the chapter. The chapter is divided into five parts. The first restates the purpose of the research and the research questions. The second provides the rationale for the qualitative phenomenological case study approach selected for this investigation. The third details the research setting and the methods and techniques used to operationalise the research plan. The final part of the chapter addresses the strategies used to enhance the quality of the research.

3.2 Purpose of the Research

The primary goal of this phenomenological case study was to understand and describe the shared emotional experiences (van Manen, 1990) of adult learners in undergraduate degree programmes at a Caribbean regional institution. To fulfil the purpose of the study the following questions were formulated to guide the research process.

3.3 Research Questions

In phenomenological studies the researcher typically focuses on asking participants one general overarching research question and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Open-ended sub-questions may also be asked, but the primary focus is the understanding of how and in what context participants experienced the phenomenon. This overarching research question was: What are adult students' perceptions of their emotional experience in the online learning environment at the University of the West Indies Open Campus?

This main question was broken down into four sub-questions:

1. What are adult students' perceptions of the online learning environment at UWIOC?
2. What are the adult students' perceptions of the learning processes while engaged in their online studies?
3. How do adult students describe their emotional experience in the online learning environment?
4. How is the emotional experience of online learning manifested in the students' behaviours and learning outcomes?

The following research design presents the plan to answer these research questions.

3.4 Research Design

The research design is a detailed explanation of how this study was conducted. The plan includes data collection, the instrument used and the strategies for analysing the data; it also includes the ethical considerations that guided the study.

3.4.1 Choice of qualitative research

The study of emotion in online learning is a recent area of research and relatively little is known about emotion and online learning from the learners' perspective. Thus the study had an exploratory purpose which made a qualitative approach the most suitable choice for the investigation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Merriam (1998) summarises several critical features of qualitative inquiry, guiding its selection for this study:

> the goal of eliciting understanding and meaning, the researcher as primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the use of field work, an inductive orientation to analysis, and findings that are richly descriptive (p.11).

This study is an exploration of intangibles such as students' emotions, feelings and experiences, which are open to multiple interpretations. I was aware that many are personal to each individual, even if shared, and that different people construct meanings variously, even when sharing the same event (Crotty, 1998). I was able to understand their respective emotional states through their descriptive language representing their knowledge, which I was aiming to capture. It was the qualitative approach, which can accommodate the use of thick or idiographic description (Neuman, 2006), that allowed me to depict experience or represent my participants' experiences best.

3.4.2 Types of qualitative approach

Merriam (1998) presents five types of qualitative research approaches: basic qualitative study; ethnography; phenomenology; grounded theory; and case study. She identifies a generic qualitative study as one that uses the many characteristics of the qualitative model, as already identified. This type of research seeks to discover and understand a particular phenomenon. In contrast, a qualitative study based on grounded theory, in addition to possessing the generic qualities of qualitative research, embodies a specific research methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This method distinguishes itself through its emphasis on generating theory. The next type, ethnography, is a model of qualitative research that is employed by anthropologists to study human society and cultural artefacts. Its emphasis on culture sets it apart from other types of qualitative research.

This study will adopt a typical generic qualitative research process, neither an ethnographic nor a grounded theory study.

3.5 Rationale for Using Phenomenology

A phenomenological study 'describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon' (Creswell 1998, p.57). Phenomenology is described as 'a tradition in German philosophy with a focus on the essence of lived experience' (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.72). As a concept, this term refers to both a philosophy and a research method (Creswell, 2003). In conceptual terms, phenomenology has been influenced by the work of the transcendental or 'pure' phenomenology of philosopher Edmund Husserl, as well as the hermeneutic phenomenology of philosopher Martin Heidegger.

A purely phenomenological study is based on an assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 1990) or structure (Merriam, 1998) of human experience. The phenomenological approach is concerned with one overarching question: 'What is the meaning, structure and essence of lived experience of the particular phenomenon of interest to the researcher by an individual or a group of individuals'? My central research question was: what was the 'meaning', 'structure' or 'essence' of the emotional experience of adult learners in an online learning BSc university programme in one Caribbean institution? In order to achieve the purpose of this research, the phenomenological approach, which explores in-depth the essence of an experience, was chosen as an appropriate means of capturing the phenomenon of 'emotional experience'.

This research benefited from the explanation by Rossman and Rallis (1998) that:

> There should be two perspectives of phenomenological analysis of the perception of lived experience: from the people who are living through the phenomenon, and from the researcher, who has great interest in the phenomenon. (p.52).

This double interpretation involved me, as the researcher, first openly acknowledging my own consciousness and preconceived notions of the phenomenon through a process called epoché, or bracketing. I address this later in more detail in the section on data analysis. As researcher, I was able to employ bracketing, as set out by Denzin and Lincoln (1998):

- Locate within the personal experience or self-story, key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question
- Interpret the meanings of these phrases, as an informed reader
- Obtain the subject's interpretations of these phrases, if possible
- Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential recurring features of the phenomenon being studied
- Offer a tentative statement, or definition, of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified. (pp to the questionnaires. 55-56).

The purposes of phenomenological inquiry are description, interpretation and critical self-reflection into the 'world as world' (van Manen, 1990). This study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the lived emotional experiences of Caribbean students in an online learning environment from their perspective. I expected to study a small number of subjects, and through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell, 2003). By taking a phenomenological approach, I was able to listen, explore and understand these experiences, and vividly describe the essence of the experience and present these to my readers. Creswell (1998) highlights two phenomenological approaches: hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990) and empirical, transcendental or psychological phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). This study focused on Moustakas' (1994) approach, concerned with describing experiences and using *epoché*, where the researcher as much as possible sets aside past experiences or ideas about the phenomenon in order to take a fresh approach.

This research utilised the transcendental or descriptive method, that is, it was like looking at the phenomenon for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) makes it clear that this cannot be perfectly accomplished. However, to the extent that a researcher can begin a project by describing her own experience with the phenomenon and bracketing out her own views before proceeding with the study, it helped me to get closer to the participants' perspectives. Since I worked in the same online environment to which I was seeking answers from my participants, I was guided by the strategy espoused by Moustakas and reinforced in Creswell (1998).

Next, I will present the case study as a type of qualitative research.

3.6 Case Study

As defined by Creswell (2006, p.61) 'case study is a problem to be studied, which will reveal an in-depth understanding of a "case" or a bounded system, which involves understanding an event, activity, process or one or more individuals'. In this study, I focused on the emotional experience of my participants (multiple individuals) whom I selected to provide insight into the issue. In this, I was guided by Thomas (2011), who contends that there are two parts to a case study: a subject and an object or analytical frame. For example, the subject in this study would be online learning at UWIOC, while the object or analytical frame would be an analysis of adult learners' emotional experience of online learning in the BSc degree programme.

Thus the knowledge that I required was generated from investigating the impact of a clearly identifiable phenomenon. Thomas (2011) continues his rationale for what constitutes a case study by citing from Wieviorka (1992, p.160, cited in Thomas, 2011):

> For a ‘case’ to exist, we must be able to identify a characteristic unit.... This unit must be observed, but it has no meaning in itself. It is significant only if an observer... can refer it to an analytical theory. It does not suffice to observe a social phenomenon, historical event, or a set of behaviours in order to declare them to be ‘cases’. If you want to talk about a case, you also need the means of interpreting it or placing it in a context. (p.15)

As an example of a case, this study was an explication of one aspect of a set of individuals’ teaching and learning experience in higher education at a particular period of time in a particular educational context. This was in keeping with Thomas’ (2011) definition:

> Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions or other systems which are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame – an object – within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates. (p.23)

The rationale for using a qualitative case study strategy was that a case study is the preferred method when the researcher has little control over the events, when there is a contemporary focus within a real life context (Yin, 2004), and when a phenomenon occurs within a bounded context (Creswell, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is chosen for in-depth study of a single case with clear boundaries (Creswell, 1998) and focuses on relationships and processes in social settings where boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and systems are interconnected and interrelated so that, in order to understand one thing, it is necessary to understand many others and recognise the links (Denscombe, 1998). One of the requirements is that it is not contrived for the purpose of the case (Denscombe, 1998; Yin, 1984). The Open Campus and its students existed prior to the project and the entire study was seen as a single case, as it examined the contemporary phenomenon of Caribbean adult learners’ emotional experiences at a single Caribbean university campus.

A case study method was used because it provided the logical framework to support the exploratory and descriptive nature of this research; to describe, interpret and make knowledge claims based on interpretive/ constructivist perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1982) in a bounded context. It will be used to describe, explore or make comparisons between cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Asking ‘how and why’ questions helped me to understand the nature of the processes and build knowledge about the experience that could be useful in making changes.

As defined by Stake (1995), the intrinsic case study is one in which a researcher has a genuine interest in the case itself, that is, it is not undertaken because the case illustrates an issue or a problem but because the researcher is interested in all the ‘particularity or the ordinariness’ of the case itself. This research may be categorised as both intrinsic and instrumental. It was intrinsic as the case of the students’ emotional experience of online

learning as illuminated through the experiences of learners at the selected site was of interest to me, in and of itself. I wanted to understand the details of what was happening as learners viewed it and I was attempting to discern the process by combining two design frames, phenomenology and case study (Thomas, 2011). However, Stake (1995) explained that there is another kind of case study termed the instrumental case study in which a researcher uses a case to understand something other than the case itself. An understanding of the emotional experiences of the students allowed me to gain a better insight into how these online students learn. This greater insight into the learning was the 'something else' that would justify this research as an instrumental case study, which it did. Zainal (2007) suggested that when doing an instrumental case study, 'the researcher selects a small group of subjects in order to examine a certain pattern of behaviour, for instance, to see how tertiary level students study for examination' (p.3). To extrapolate from this analogy, I was proposing to use a set of ten single case studies as one method to examine the pattern of behaviour, to see how adult students operate in an online learning situation.

As noted in chapter 2, the research into students' online learning experiences has been poorly theorised and has not served to generate advances in teaching and learning theory (Wallace, 2003). Moreover, in using quantitative designs these studies have failed to represent student voice. To fill this gap, the goal of this study was to add either to the theory of online learners' experiences by drawing insight from the cases studied or to advance empirical knowledge of value to practitioners in the field.

3.6.1 The case

I found it imperative to identify the case so that it could be clearly seen, particularly since Merriam (1998) suggested that 'the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case' (p.27). Creswell (2006) and Merriam (1998) both presented a case as a 'bounded system', in which the unit of analysis is finite, for example constrained either by a definite number of individuals, or defined by a span of time or by both. This case has clear and demarcated boundaries and a limited time span, and I was able to determine who and what constituted the case to 'fence in' what I was going to study (Merriam, 1998).

Merriam continued that 'the case could be a person, such as a student, a teacher, a principal; a programme; a group such as a class, a school, a community; a specific policy and so on'. To determine who was in the case, it was further delimited by a set of selection criteria. These were those conditions, stipulations or characteristics that determined who were inside or outside the case. Adult BSc undergraduates who also worked full-time and had completed at least a semester of online courses part-time at Montego Bay Open Campus, yet were on no

face-to-face programmes, fitted the selection criteria and therefore eligible to participate, provided they were willing and able to share their emotional experiences. These criteria determined the small set of cases in order that as researcher I could 'drill down' (Thomas, 2011) into their emotional experience as online students and the context surrounding this experience. The study employed a multiple case-based strategy to form a composite picture of the adult students' experience in its context.

However, the case is not only the participants but the complex organisation of processes/experiences/behaviour patterns, or the situation that constituted the emotional context in which my participants functioned as students in the online environment at UWIOC from a single Jamaican local site. This meant that the case was my participants and their respective contexts as they engaged in the phenomenon of interest.

Against the background of the foregoing discussion, this study integrated a case study framework in keeping with Merriam's (1998) assumption that there is a possibility of a combination of different qualitative approaches. She suggested that the case study 'can be combined with any of the above '[five qualitative] types' (p.20) of research in education. The literature that I presented on phenomenology and case study has demonstrated support for the position that the two can be combined as they are both relevant and applicable in this research.

3.7 Research Setting

The research was conducted at a single Jamaican site of the UWIOC. The Open Campus is one of its four campuses and was established in 1948, initially in Jamaica as an external college of the University of London. It became independent in 1962 and is the oldest fully regional institution of higher learning in the Anglophone Caribbean. The University has three physical campuses that deliver traditional face-to-face programmes in three countries, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados, and in June 2008 established a fourth, the Open Campus, which is a virtual campus connecting the University to all its contributing countries through the Internet and the World Wide Web (www). The vision of the University is that 'by 2017, the UWI will be globally recognised as a regionally integrated, innovative, internationally competitive university deeply rooted in all aspects of Caribbean development and committed to serving the diverse people of the region and beyond' (University Vision Statement, UWI Strategic Plan, 2012–2017, p. iv).

3.7.1 University of the West Indies Open Campus (UWIOC)

Prior to the establishment of the Open Campus, the University maintained a physical presence in all countries of the English-speaking Caribbean in the form of extramural departments (formerly the School of Continuing Studies) and other outreach Distance Education Centres.

The UWIOC emerged from the reformulation of several units, including the School of Continuing Studies and the Distance Education Centre, as the two core elements of outreach to under-served populations. The UWIOC now offers multi-mode teaching and learning services through virtual and physical site locations. There are currently 42 sites serving 17 countries in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The UWI Open Campus has been given the mandate to expand the University regionally and globally as the pioneering online education unit of the University of the West Indies, and it is in this context that the present study is conducted.

Figure 3.1 University of the West Indies Open Campus countries
Source: UWI Open Campus Self-Study Report July 2012

The Open Campus is a new entity that is evolving in terms of its online modality and the creation of new and relevant programmes. One of the major concerns is that the online programmes are not growing. Furthermore, there is a perception of low completion and high failure rates the online programmes and courses. The aim of this study is to gain insight into the learning experiences of current students in order to assist the University to recruit and retain students. The study is therefore framed within the literature on retention, persistence and the emotional experiences of online learners.

During the academic year 2010/11 the UWI conducted an institution-wide survey on student attrition. The study examined first-year drop out among University undergraduates who enrolled during the first semester of 2009/10, as well as student-reported factors influencing persistence. Its purpose was to help decision making and to gain insight into factors relating to first-year attrition. The data gathered are expected to be used to develop programmes or interventions to increase students' persistence. It focused on students' self-reported factors; as a result, they were more related to social or institutional influences. Academic factors relating to student performance and preparedness, as well as student satisfaction and engagement, were

not investigated. Overall, the response rate for the survey was 42 per cent and it noted that most of respondents were registered with the Open Campus during their first year of study (39%), attended the University on a part-time basis (66%) and came from the Faculty of Social Sciences (42%). Of the 619 respondents, most had reported financial difficulties in negotiating the demands of the University alongside those of their job and family as the main factors behind their decision to drop out. The results suggest that the provision of substantial financial assistance to part-time students combined with a stronger support system for undergraduates may prove to be effective retention strategies.

Only selected aspects of the data relating directly to the Open Campus will be used as supporting evidence for the basis of this research, focusing on the emotional experiences of a group of students at the UWIOC. Of the four campuses, the Open Campus had the highest rate of attrition (35%). However, the report noted that this percentage was comparable to online institutions in the United States. The same point was made in another research article by Warrican et al. (2014). Despite this favourable comparison with other jurisdictions offering online learning, it is not a comforting position for the University generally, or for the Open Campus in particular.

The report noted the potential adverse impact of high attrition rates on the University's reputation as it seeks to enter the world ranking of global university systems. Retention is observed as critical to the financial stability of the University and particular campuses due to the loss of tuition revenue. The report noted that constantly recruiting new students to reduce losses is not a viable alternative, because this is not a cost effective strategy (Schultz et al., 1992, as cited in Best, 2011). Another important point is that a high level of student attrition can adversely affect a University's reputation by lowering its international ranking. Low retention rates can affect the University's standing and can influence prospective students' decisions when choosing where to study. High attrition rates may also indicate academic failure or student dissatisfaction with the University. Research evidence suggests that if students can be retained beyond their first year, their probability of success increases each subsequent year. However, it is instructive that, despite the fact that, overall, the major reason given is that financial difficulties might have led to departure, approximately 30 per cent of respondents stated they transferred to another tertiary institution, when asked about their activities since leaving. However, approximately, 90 per cent stated that UWI was their first choice when they had applied, showing that the University continues to be widely recognised in the community for the time being.

A summary of the factors for departure, taken directly from the report, indicate several ways in which the Open Campus failed to satisfy the needs of students. The responses from the

survey were collated for individual campuses, but only those of the Open Campus are of interest to this study. When the reasons for departure were disaggregated, the figures for the Open Campus tell their own story. Taking into account that online students are older and combine study with other substantial responsibilities, a possible reason for higher attrition and lower retention rates, it can be seen that many of the factors in the table below may relate to emotional experience. For the Campus, the top percentile is related to time management and lack of preparation for university studies (71%). Other factors were: course content unsatisfactory (3%); dissatisfied with my grades (10%); the course was too difficult (10%); the lectures were not approachable or supportive (12%); disappointed with the quality of instruction (15%); academic advising was inadequate (15%); and experienced class scheduling problems (3%). In addition, for the category experiencing emotional or mental health including depression, stress, anxiety and other emotional problems (15%) indicated a high level of emotional issues. Even though only 15 per cent of the students noted emotional issues with their programme, a close look at some of the factors shows that, although not directly referenced as emotional, these can be inferred as relating to emotional experiences. Overall, similar issues for drop out are evidenced in the international literature on student retention and persistence in online learning environments, as outlined in Chapter 2.

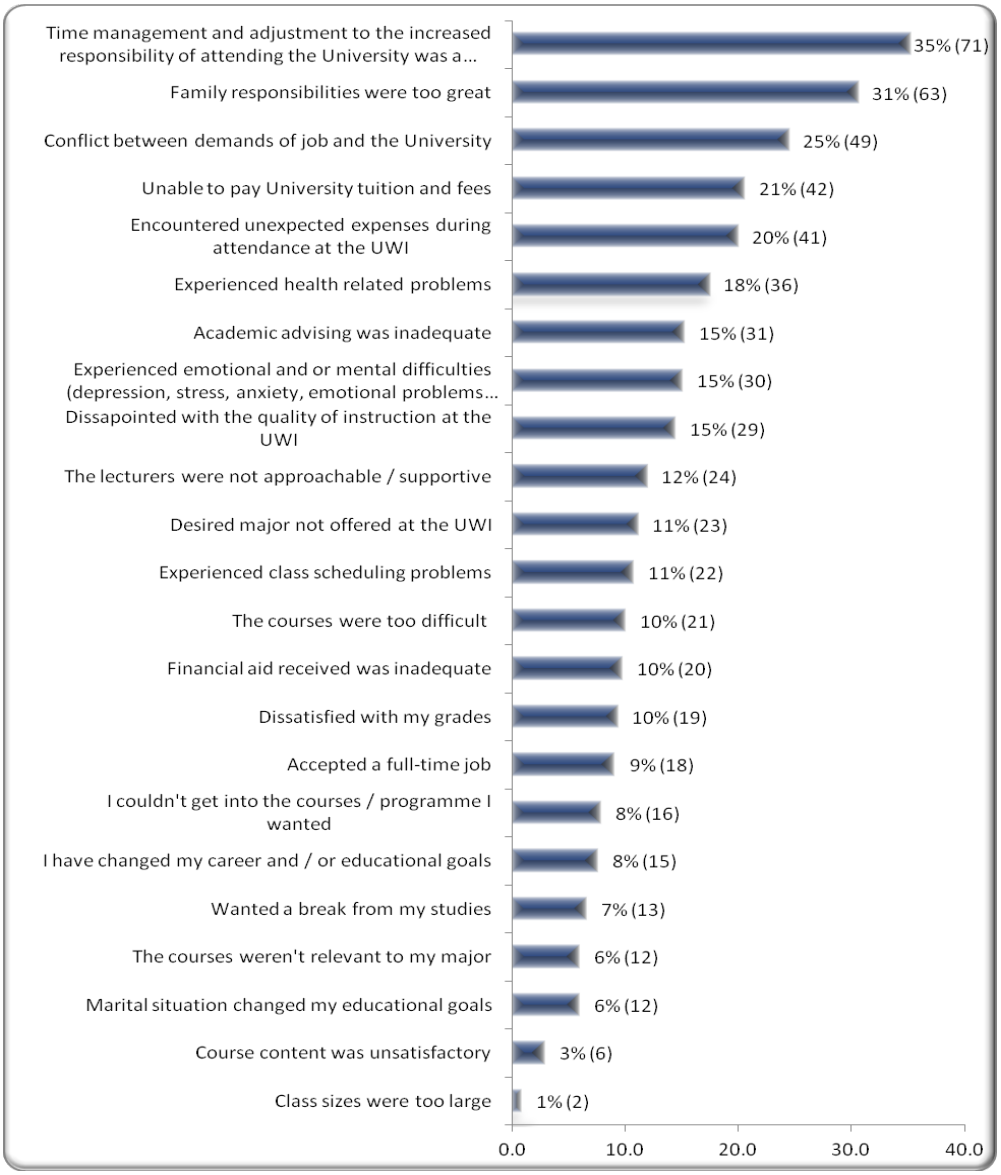


Figure 3.1: Major reasons that influence students' decision to drop out – OPEN CAMPUS% (n)
Source: University of the West Indies First Year Attrition Survey 2010/11

Data from the open-ended responses revealed that participants at the Open Campus wanted flexibility in terms of mode of delivery. Other respondents indicated a desire for additional face-to-face classes and that the quantity as well as the quality of tutoring should be improved. For example, one stated that 'Math tutorials should not be about copying assignment solutions. Solutions can be distributed beforehand so that tutorials can focus on discussion and practice questions'. The report also indicated other issues of concern. Many respondents believed that response times to queries could be enhanced. For example, one respondent stated 'I would like to see e-tutors respond in a more timely fashion to students questions'. Academic advice was another major source of concern. For example, one student indicated, 'better academic advisement is needed for part-time students and distance-learning students'. Students' wanted a more in depth and involved student guidance process. For example, one

participant stated that the provision of ‘academic advising during the enrolment process with respect to choosing full-time/part-time or evening programmes’ was needed. In addition, respondents suggested that guidance should occur at scheduled times in the year and include ‘personal interviews with students for more direct and better academic advising’ (Best, 2010/11, p.).

It is of note, too, that financial reasons, although rated highly, were not the most important reason for departure from the Open Campus. Based on the evidence in the table above and most of the reasons given, one could come to somewhat tentative conclusion of a potential for adverse impact on students’ wellbeing, leading to their departure.

3.7.2 Programme level

This section will provide a brief look at the self-assessment report for the two programmes in this study, Management Studies, Self-Assessment Report and BSc Accounting, Report prepared for the Quality Assurance Unit, dated March 2013 and February 2014, respectively. There has been a noticeable decline in enrolment that needs to be investigated, and one of the ways to do so is to gather information through surveys from students who drop out.

The reviews were conducted by the Academic Programming and Delivery Division (APAD). Input for the review was gathered from a variety of sources, including from experts who teach in the discipline, and from past and present students. The reports noted that, due to their part-time status, students of the Open Campus lacked the enriching experience of the informal curriculum experienced on the other campuses, for example, student-to-student assistance, student orientation and student societies. Several reasons are given: part-time students may be too busy with other responsibilities, and that the Open Campus differs from the residential campuses; that is, it is not discipline-specific and programmes are delivered through the Programme Development Department (PDD). Teaching staff are hired on a part-time basis and their contracts do not require that they engage in any informal activities. However, the Strategic Plan for 2012-17 identified the strengthening of co-curricular engagement and programmes as a strategic objective. There is a need for the Open Campus to take the initiative to fill these gaps and the PDD is making strides to rectify the deficiencies.

The teaching philosophy is that of constructivism, whereby students are positioned as active learners. Consistent and meaningful student-to-student and student-to-tutor interaction is espoused as critical to success in the Open Campus. The BSc Management Studies report noted that although the programme has turned out many graduates over the years, the failure rate for several courses is considered high for an undergraduate programme, ranging from 25 to 58 per cent. There is awareness that this needs to be investigated to inform possible interventions.

With reference to the BSc Accounting programmes, this was second to the BSc Management Studies in terms of numbers enrolled in the Open Campus during 2013/14. The report notes that 'the courses that support a quantitative concept and where the focus is on numbers such as with those in the BSc Accounting, there need to be a greater focus on tools and software strategies that allow for synchronous modelling and practice for the students' (SAR, BSc Accounting, February, 2014, pp.13-14). It also indicates that, although strides have been made to increase collaboration between facilitators to improve overall teaching and learning within the programme rather than the course, there is still a need to establish office hours for facilitators to 'provide students with access to tutors and course coordinators in real time' (SAR, BSc Accounting, February, 2014, p.14). Additionally, it would reduce the delay between the submission of online queries and the response. Similar to the BSc in Management Studies, there is a significant minority of courses with failure rates higher than the benchmark of 25 per cent, and five are core accounting courses. A sample of students' end of course evaluations revealed negative experiences about course materials, assessment, time constraints, the Blackboard Collaborate conferencing system, discussions and tutors. The report also indicated a need to examine Internet readiness issues, student Internet access and the performance of Blackboard itself. Students wanted face-to-face quantitative courses. The report expressed concern about the comparatively high level of negative comments about e-tutors and course coordinators, and noted that while in general 'many students expressed satisfaction with their courses, there was also a significant expression of dissatisfaction among students regarding their experience with course materials and course delivery' (SAR, BSc Accounting, February 2014, p.25).

Based on evidence from the institutional and programme-level surveys, there is need to identify the various emotions, their context, particularly of the negative emotions, and what can be done to make studying with the Open Campus an engaging and worthwhile endeavour, despite these. Surveys provide global information, but it is qualitative research that answers the how and the why of a phenomenon by drilling down into personal details of participants. Independent evidence from institution-wide surveys and internal self-assessment reports of the programmes in question provide credibility for this study.

3.8 Data Collection

3.8.1 Population, sampling and sample

I employed convenience, purposive, criterion and maximum variation sampling techniques in this study. These methods are considered appropriate for a qualitative phenomenological case study.

The student population from which the primary participants in the study were drawn consisted of all the adult students across the Anglophone Caribbean actively enrolled in the BSc fully online programme of the UWI Open Campus. Of this number, I estimated there were approximately 700 students on the BSc online programmes in Jamaica. Most of them were non-traditional learners returning to school after a period of absence from education. Most are employed full-time and study on a part-time basis (SAR, BSc Management Studies, March, 2013; SAR, BSc Accounting, February, 2014). I employed convenience sampling to choose participants from one of ten local sites in Jamaica, due to the dispersed nature of online BSc adult learners and the difficulty in accessing them all. I also chose convenience sampling procedures because there were online students who fitted the selection criteria at my site. Given the dispersed nature of the Open Campus, with 42 sites over 17 countries across the Caribbean, the expense to the researcher in terms of travel cost, time and other resources would otherwise make the project completion within the allowed period of time highly improbable, if not impossible. As its administrator, I had access to the records of all students assigned to this site. I did not seek permission to access the confidential database of any students at other sites who fulfilled the criteria, because this would not have been practical, feasible or efficient.

I am a part-time student and work full-time. Furthermore, the choice of instruments for this qualitative research, particularly the individual in-depth interviews requiring repeat visits, suggested that participants should be at a reasonable distance, accessible, safe and affordable in terms of expense to the researcher. Students from a single site were recruited, as resources were limited and it would have been difficult to extend farther afield. The site facilities could accommodate the ten students for interviews, thus I chose to use a convenience sample.

I also employed purposive sampling to ensure that participants were able to share personal knowledge of the phenomenon, based on my judgement and the purpose of the research (Babbie, 2010). At the site, students are enrolled not only on the BSc programmes but an Associate or Bachelor of Education degree programme. All have basically been converted to online modalities. I was not simply choosing any of these students, but seeking a set that could provide the specific data required to explain the phenomenon that I wanted to investigate. The students from the BSc programme were purposively selected, as this programme had the largest number of students who had experienced the online phenomenon. In arriving at a sample size, I was guided by Leedy and Ormrod (2005) in that a typical sample for a phenomenological study should be between five and 25 individuals who have personally experienced the phenomenon being studied. Ten students agreed to be interviewed.

In Jamaica, higher education is noticeably populated by females. At the UWI, the absence of men is a matter of concern (Best, 2010/11; SAR, BSc Management Studies, March 2013;

SAR, BSc Accounting, February 2014). It was my desire to involve as many males as possible and, despite my fears, two agreed to be interviewed. I wanted also to collect data across as many different year groups as possible. Maximum variation (Patton, 1990) across the sample was achieved as the participants were in different stages of the programme. This allowed me to obtain a range of perspectives, and in a qualitative study the ultimate goal of purposeful sampling is to obtain many cases that are deemed information-rich. The gender and level variation was intended for richer and thicker description of the emotional experience. Maximum variation allowed for diverse responses based on the participants' background and other factors that might impinge on their learning experiences. I also used criterion sampling. For a phenomenological inquiry, it is important that the participants share certain demographic characteristics, because the aim of the study is to describe common features of an experience of the participants' lived experience. A relatively homogeneous set would allow for a richer description of the specific phenomenon than from a more heterogeneous set. Each participant had to fulfil these inclusion criteria:

- an adult learner
- in paid employment
- an undergraduate student at the Montego Bay Open Campus
- in the BSc fully online programme
- a non-participant in any face-to-face UWI Open Campus programme
- willing and able to share their emotional experiences, and
- deemed to be studying part-time.

Additionally, each participant had to have completed at least one semester of online courses.

The original sampling procedure presented in Appendix C had to be changed. Before the start of data collection a detailed sampling procedure based on 54 students had been anticipated. However, before the start of the data collection process nearly half of the student population had gone, for various reasons. Some had graduated, but primarily numbers had diminished due to withdrawals and leave of absence. There were 27 students left in the original group at the site, 20 of whom were females and seven males. The BSc programmes have three levels (SAR, BSc Management Studies, March 2013; SAR, BSc Accounting, February 2014) and participation across all levels was represented. I interviewed beginning students, students in their middle years of the programme and students approaching the final stages for completion of their programme. Ten qualified participants were recruited for individual in-depth interviews. Fortuitously, there were eight women and two men: one man from Level 1 of the programme; two women and one man from Level 2; three women from Level 3; and three women from Level 1 of the programmes of study.

3.8.2 Participant recruitment

Once permission was granted, I obtained a list of the students at the country site who fulfilled the BSc experience criterion of being on the programme for at least one semester. Several adjustments had to be made to the initial proposal schedules. Data collection started in October and not in April, as proposed. While I waited for the ethics approval to be granted, I conducted a pilot to test the suitability of the research instrument in May 2013.

3.8.3 The pilot

I conducted a pilot study of the interview schedule to 'test the waters' and sort out all the possible quirks as a means of pre-testing this instrument (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). This was a chance for me to try out my interview technique, instruments and methods; to learn how well they would work in practice; and to make adjustments accordingly (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2002).

The pilot had three objectives: (1) to highlight any aspect of the interview instrument and the process that needed improving; (2) to assess the quality and relevance of its content; and (3) to provide feedback on how the process was executed by eliciting students' opinions of the design, their feelings about how the interview was conducted and to address any issues pointed out by participants. Another important objective was to become comfortable with using the RCA digital recorder, which was a first-time experience.

3.8.4 Participants and interviews

Four participants participated voluntarily in this pilot study. Each was asked to complete a consent form to indicate agreement to be interviewed and agreed that the interview should be audio-recorded. They were specially selected due to their experience in online learning. Four students in the Associate Degree agreed. This programme had recently been converted from a blended to a fully online model, and all four had experienced online learning. Negotiating access was challenging. These participants for the pilot were contacted through a member of staff who was also a student in the programme after no one responded to my letter of invitation. When contacted, they were willing to participate but had not replied since they were focused on examinations. All interviews were conducted at the site on the same day, taking an hour each.

I had a brief after-interview evaluation with the students. They reported that they had found the overall design and content of the instrument appropriate, and had felt comfortable and did not find the questions too difficult to answer. The pilot helped to prepare me for the contingency of a non-response as the students, though willing, had to put in considerable effort

to get to the meeting since some worked and lived far from the centre, a factor that always has to be taken in account when dealing with online and part-time students.

One concern that the pilot pointed to was that students might find it difficult to recall emotional behaviours. For this concern, I made a mental note to remind myself to probe deeply for emotional behaviours. However, I had a contingency plan for a second interview to make up for any shortfall during the first. Time was of the essence, so I concluded that the pilot was good enough for my needs, given the time available to me. Given the time constraints, the pilot revealed how hard it would be to contact these students, who were practically an invisible group. My contingency plan was to contact them by telephone if they did not respond to e-mails. However, the invitation letter and participant information form would use their student address and this would serve as my point of contact. The RCA digital recorder was relatively easy to use.

3.8.5 Participants

The interviews were held from October 2013 to January 2014. Two rounds were conducted over that period: Interview 1 between October 18 and November 7, 2013 and Interview 2 between December 11 and January 28, 2014. Contact was made through students' academic e-mail address (initial letter in Appendix F). Next, I sent text messages requesting participation in the research but, as responses were not forthcoming; I followed up within a two-week period by personal phone calls until ten participants were secured. The original purposeful sample had nine, but an additional student self-selected herself.

3.8.6 Data collection procedure

In a phenomenological study, data are usually collected throughout a long interview. In this study participants were interviewed twice, in person. Interview 1 lasted for one hour and Interview 2 for 30 minutes. With the participants' consent, each interview was digitally recorded to ensure that their perspectives were accurately captured. Eight interviews took place in a conference room at the learning centre in normal class hours between 5:30pm and 7:30 pm, and two at an office about 30 miles away between 3:00pm and 5:30 pm**.** Each time I visited here I was accompanied by a member of my staff. The interviews at the learning centre were incident-free, but the two at the office were challenging because they were in working hours and noise posed a problem. Also, one interviewee spoke softly and was difficult to hear. Consequently, the quality of that recording was not as good. Researchers are advised to conduct interviews in a quiet area, free from distractions, yet the interviewees including the final two had indicated a time and place convenient for them, and I accepted their decision as being better than no interview at all. I worked around the noise problem by asking to use another area for the second interview. The quality of this interview was much better, yet there

was another challenge because the new space was a common area where staff walked in and out at will. I was able to use these two audio recordings because the digital recorder was powerful enough to pick up most of the information.

Interview 1

The interview was an informal interactive process with open-ended questions and comments. A general semi-structured interview guide to the main questions and issues covered in Interview 1 and the script for Interview 2 are included (see Appendix H and G.). Questions were prepared with accompanying probes to assist me in directing the general flow of the conversation. Despite my schedule of questions aimed at evoking clear description of participants' experience with the phenomenon, as a researcher I did not stick slavishly to it and questions were altered, or not used at all, depending on the course of the interview. Also, I found that sometimes the students' disclosures pre-empted some of the questions I might have asked and the information I needed came out in the course of dialogue. On occasion, students' responses brought up a question that I incorporated into the next interview session. I conducted all the interviews and then sent them to be transcribed. Each set took between three to six weeks, however while I was awaiting their return I familiarised myself with the data by listening repeatedly to the audio recordings and making jottings in notebooks. These entries were occasionally reviewed, but were not formally entered as data for analysis.

An interview is a purposeful conversation (Berg, 2007; Polgar & Thomas, 2008) in which the researcher guides the interaction as he/she pursues topics raised by the participant (Babbie, 2010). The intention was to arrange for the participant to do most of the talking. Because, as a researcher, I was conscious of my Head of Centre role and did not want to have an interview in which the students would tell me what they thought I wanted to know rather than their honest opinion, I sought to put my student participants at ease. Besides, I knew hardly any of the students personally, so rapport was achieved by adopting a student-to-student stance and asking them for help with my research project. I tried to create a conversational atmosphere between equals (Glesne, 2011), that is, as two adult students exploring a topic of mutual interest rather than the formal power relationship between my Head of Centre persona and my student charges. In the first interview, I allowed the participants a degree of freedom, because I wanted to get to know a little about them. Seidman (1998) recommends a three-interview strategy in which the first interview focuses on past experiences with the phenomenon of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

I began by providing details about the study and what was expected of participants and their right to withdraw from the study. Because I had sent the participation information sheet in

advance and a few had read it, some were prepared for the interview, but most of them had been too busy to do so. I took the time to allow them to read the information and then satisfied myself that they had read and understood what was being asked of them. Each participant agreed to participate and signed the consent form. Each participant was given two copies of two different sets of consent forms, one requested by the UWI Ethics Committee and the other by the University of Southampton, as each consent form was a little different and to protect myself from being accused of any irregularity. Besides, I felt that the students would be a little less suspicious of my intentions if their (our) University was represented in the process. I kept copies of the signed consent forms for my records and returned copies to each participant for his or her personal records. To preserve their anonymity, each student was asked to provide me with a personal pseudonym. This pseudonym is used in all reported data from the interview transcripts.

The schedule for Interview 1 was divided into eight sections: Introduction and Sections A–G, consisting of relevant questions to draw out individual perspectives of experience (see Appendix H). During the interview I garnered much valuable information about students' online learning experiences at the Open Campus, but I felt students had not reflexively explored their feelings about it. This was indicated in the pilot. I initiated Plan B, as I wanted to have a little more of the emotional content of that experience, and decided to conduct a second interview.

Interview 2

A second interview was not too difficult to arrange because I had briefed students that I might need to call upon them a second time, and they had agreed to accommodate another meeting. The greatest difficulty, as with the first, was to pin the students down to a time that they felt would fit comfortably in their busy schedules. As in the first round of interviews, I had to travel out of parish to meet with two of the interviewees.

The second round of interviews was designed to focus on specific, concrete aspects of students' emotional experiences. There is precedence in the literature for having several interviews (Seidman, 1998). Hycner (1985) argues for returning to the participants a second time to verify that transcripts represent the participants appropriately and to make modifications where necessary. However, the timing of my second interview was a modification of this suggestion. It was done earlier, before after all the transcripts were completed. Giorgi (1971, as cited in Hycner, 1985) endorses that any research method must be responsive to the phenomenon.

For this second interview, participants were asked about two critical elements of their experience. Participants were asked to talk about incidents that could indicate that the experience was 'good/bad', or that a certain element of that experience was ‘terrible' and what it meant to them in emotional terms. To illustrate, during the first interview sessions several students described aspects of their experience as either ‘bad or good’ or were simply unable to produce an emotion word to depict or create a picture of their experience. In responding to my request, most of the participants reflected more deeply on the particular experience and discussed their emotional feelings in greater depth. This provided me with a clearer understanding of the emotionality of that experience.

3.9 Researcher as Instrument

Marshall and Rossman (1995) estimate that the human brain is the most powerful instrument for data processing, so thinking and intuition must not be underestimated in the data analysis process. The typical qualitative data generated in this study were refined as they were collected and I as the researcher was expected to play an active role in the process (Rowley, 2002). In doing this, the researcher’s role is particularly significant, functioning as the primary instrument of data collection and also the tool for data analysis (Cantrell, 1996; Patton, 2002). The aim of this study was to understand and describe the emotional experiences of adult distance online learners from their perspective. In achieving this aim, and in my role as researcher, I was guided by Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) suggestion that I develop the level of competence suitable for a researcher as instrument, or the vehicle through which data will be collected and interpreted. This required that I must have insight, understand and give meaning to data, and determine what was relevant to the study of my phenomenon of interest (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As a researcher, I was therefore aware of the conflicts regarding the extent and nature of my involvement in the research activities. I was conscious of my own participation in the research process and how I functioned with my participants, who were my students (Stewart, 1998). I was therefore aware of my positioning as the researcher with respect to my participants, and the possible associated biases. I had grasped that there might be issues of power, because I was an administrator at the site and not simply an outsider researcher.

Thus, this process was not value free or neutral. This process involved asking good questions, listening actively and testing my ability to interpret answers. This meant that, as the researcher, I needed to have a clear grasp of the purpose of my research and the research questions to be answered. My questions were directed to the participants’ experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions relating to research interest (Welman & Krueger, 1999, p.196).

I had to rely on my ability to suspend my preconceived notions, as they were likely to prevent me from functioning effectively as researcher, since it was my responsibility to try as

hard as possible to hear and present what the participants were saying (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). I was aware that I was working in the system; I therefore had to maintain enough distance from my participants to cause me to be able to ask real questions and to explore, and not share, assumptions (Seidman, 1998).

As the research process is heavily dependent on me as the researcher, I was aware that I could not separate my personal self from my researcher self, but must try at best to understand the implications of this. I was aware that I must endeavour to make good decisions as they pertained to the choices I make regarding all aspects of the research design, management of data, and participant rapport, specifically how I collected and analysed data. As the researcher, I was also aware of the possibility of my personal biography to impact the outcome of the study. This initially placed a great deal of pressure on me. However, I understood very seriously the responsibility invested in me to reflect on my persona in the study. I sought to carefully engage a process of introspection and to acknowledge my biases, values and interests (or reflexivity). I began the process with a keen awareness of the similarities of my own background and 'subjectivities' (Peshkin, 1998, p.17). Like my research participants, I was a distance learner and was in some measure was living through a similar process. Throughout the process, I kept reminding myself that I had to take a 'fresh look' (Moustakas, 1994) at the phenomenon, to keep 'an open mind' and to adopt a posture of 'researcher as learner' (Glesne, 2011) with my participants as the experts. As I maintained my learner perspective, I was reminded that it was not my goal to prove truth or a hypothesis, or to produce results that were generalisable (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2011; Patton, 2002); my primary goal was to describe the meaning of the emotional experiences of online learning for the BSc degree students at the UWIOC (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

I made every effort to prepare myself by consulting colleagues who had already completed their PhDs. These friends gave me advice. For example, I was reminded that I should write down the label, date and time of each interview and to have a folder for each item in my filing system. This was valuable advice that I found helpful in retrieving the data.

As the primary research instrument of this project, I stored the data collected into my personal memory system. However, I also wrote informal field notes to remind myself what I could have done differently, to insert a question I had not thought about, or anything that was surprising or unexpected. I used a personal field notebook to record as much of my own feelings and ideas that came across during the fieldwork. I kept an informal research journal to record impressions and ideas. I kept both a hard copy and an electronic copy of a list of what data are kept and where they are located, for auditing purposes.

3.10 Data Analysis

Thomas (2011) contends that case studies 'are studied holistically by one or more methods' (p.23). Consequently, in the process of analysis in this research I expected to see to the coming together of the analysis of the individual interview data through Hycner's (1985) phenomenological method, and case study analysis applying Thomas' (2011) technique.

Hycner's (1985) guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data were used to provide a concrete step-by-step procedure for explication of the data for this study. The process was developed as an additional guide to researchers with little background in philosophical psychology and based on the pioneering work of several researchers (Colaizzi, 1973; Giorgi, 1975, as cited in Hycner, 1985, p. 279; Keen, 1975, as cited in Hycner, 1985, p.279; Tesch, 1980, as cited in Hycner, 1985). A simplified version of Hycner's explication process is adapted for this study, employing components of Husserl's phenomenology, emphasising description of lived experiences as opposed to Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology that focuses on interpreting the 'texts of life' (hermeneutics) (Creswell, 2013, p.79). The simplified version includes the following:

1. Transcription
2. Bracketing and the phenomenological reduction
3. Delineating units of meaning
4. Clustering units of meaning to form themes
5. Summarising each interview, validating it where necessary
6. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

I used the three methods to uncover or isolate thematic aspects of experience from participants' descriptions, as suggested by van Manen (1990, p.93). These were the holistic approach, the selective or highlighting approach, and the detailed or line-by-line approach. When using the holistic approach, the researcher views the text as a whole and tries to capture its meaning. In the selective approach, the researcher highlights phrases that seem essential to the experience, and in the line-by-line approach takes a detailed look at every sentence.

Transcription

All interviews were transcribed verbatim by a copy typist. This was a lengthy process. However, given the limited time to complete and the slow rate at which I progressed when I tried, this was my best option; the transcript for Interview 1 took me approximately six weeks.

In preparing for data analysis, I decided to use the first three transcripts to pilot the level of accuracy of each transcript. One was incomplete and another somewhat garbled. I realised then that I had not settled with the typist the level of transcription that I needed. With hindsight, I found that what I wanted was a verbatim copy of the interviews. The was the main a disadvatage of not typing the material myself. The process was repeated and the second copies were nearer to what I had envisaged and I then I had to make only minor corrections.

Transcripts for Interview 2 were completed in three weeks. I had learnt from my mistake and this time I directed the process of transcription clearly. The second time around, the copies were transcribed according to the specifications with very few errors. The only mishap during the process was that each time I had to purchase a new thumb drive, as the original one, for reasons unknown, became corrupt. Eventually the files were sent electronically under confidential cover and there were no more problems.

To minimise the perceived disadvantage of not personally handling the transcription of interview, I listened to the audio recordings in order to immerse myself in the data as I awaited the return of the trancripts. Each interview recording was replayed numerous times. During that time, I made notes about each interview in three hard-copy notebooks. These were consulted in the design of the interview script for the second interview. Once the transcripts were returned, I checked them against the audio recordings and satisfied myself that the level of accuracy was satisfactory. I then proceeded to edit each transcript for minor spellings and missed phrases that only I as researcher could correct, due to my knowledge of the context and recall of the interview with each participant. I changed all identifiable names and inserted pseudonyms so that students would not be easily identified. Then I made two copies of the original document. The original, without any alterations, was put aside in a filing cabinet in my office for safe keeping. The edited version I also kept to ensure that I had a copy as near to the original as possible, and the second, termed the *working copy*. The data were analysed manually. First the sections of the transcript were divided into manageable chunks. My working copy was used for highlighting and colour coding aspects of the text. Each transcript was re-read multiple times to capture the sense of the text. On my working copy, I highlighted words and statements relevant to the phenomenon and made notes of the meaning of sections in text boxes in the right-hand margin. I inserted continuous line-by-line numbering of the text on all working copies. I used this for easy referencing of the texts. I also tagged or coded significant statements using the first letter of each participants' pseudonym in case I needed to make comparisons across texts. All these precautions helped me to immerse myself in the data in order to uncover meanings. Coding the interviews was a slow process at the start, but became faster as I began to see patterns across the data.

Bracketing and the phenomenological reduction

As indicated earlier in this chapter, bracketing involves putting aside what the resarcher already knows about the experience being investigated and approaching the data with no preconceptions of the phenomenon. Some researchers suggest not conducting a literature review before carrying out the research to avoid influencing the interview.

In this research, bracketing was a continous process throughout the analysis of data. I was conscious that as a distance learner with the University of Southampton there were many similarities between my current experience and that of my research participants. Before I started interviewing I met a professional colleague in an attempt to bring to consciousness any inate biases or assumptions about the research data. We discussed the steps to bracketing, which began with a mental assessment to see if I was equipped to adopt an attitude of conscious ignorance about the phenomena. I also recorded my thoughts in my personal notebook.

As, the researcher, I was aware that as an educational administrator, I had prior knowledge of previous distance education programmes and that many students had recorded their disastifaction both to me and a study by the Caribbean Development Bank. I had been involved in meetings of former resident tutors and listened to colleagues advocating for improvement in the student experience, regionally and locally. I was personally aware of student complaints because over the years I have borne the brunt of their outrage about the distance education process. I therefore viewed the new efforts at introducing online learning with a great deal of sceptisism. I had undertalem distance studies with another university and, effectively, doing so again by residing in Jamaica and using the computer to communicate with my PhD supervisors. My personal proficiency with computer technology was questionable. My feelings were that online learning was not neccessaily desirable for the Caribbean, and Jamaica specifically. I was not aware if a feasbility study had confirmed sufficient wider access to the Internet or even if prospective students possessed personal computers. I imagined that students would not be satisfied with online delivery and would be resistant to learning through and with technology. I was aware that Internet penetration varied across Jamaica and assumed that, due to the expense, many students would not have Internet at home. I was also aware that some had access to Internet at work but only after working hours. All this, I knew because of my insider knowledge (Greenbank, 2003).

I also reflected on my own experience when I was introduced to the new virtual environment and tentatively approached the new experience, sometimes with a feeling of annoyance. The experience became better over the years, but I was still learning. I recalled that I still tended to use the chat box more than the microphone in regional Blackboard meetings.

However, I noted that as I became more accustomed to the interface, it was much easier to communicate. My other convictions about the online environment were that most students would be more competent than their tutors. This was based on my thinking that tutors would be older, but this was not neccessarily the case. I also felt that students would have had highly negative experiences with e-tutors, based on student complaints as well as my knowledge of the student experience in the previous teleconference model.

Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question

The next step involved extracting chunks of data that illminated the phenomenon and organising these into relevant meaning units. This is the point at which as researcher I addressed the research questions to the general meaning units I had highlighted for use. I first isolated all words and phrases that had emotion words. These were colour coded: red for negative emotions; green for posituive emotions; and yellow for statements from which feelings could be inferred from the surrounding words. I carefully scrutinised the texts to remove all redundancies (Moustakas, 1994). However, whenever I was not absolutely sure I erred on the side of inclusion, in the hope that as I handled the data greater clarity would emerge.

Clustering units of meaning

The next step involved clustering the extracted unit of meaning to form themes, and clusters of themes were formed by grouping unit of meanings together. In several cases there were overlaps in the clusters and a judegement call had to be made in determining the meaning of the various clusuters and the central themes.

Summarising each interview, validating and modifying

Each interview was summarised for each participants, giving thought to the major experiences of that individual interviewee. At this point it is suggested that the researcher return to the participants to valdiate if the essence of the experience was captured. This was not done, however, until the final stages of the writing-up process. The transcripts and profiles that I had created of each student were returned to some of the students to ascertain if I had captured the essence of their experience. Minor adjustments were made to both documents where the students indicated their need for amendments.

Extracting general and unique themes for all the interviews and composite summary

Finally, I extracted general and unique themes for all the interviews, then all the summaries were coalesced into a single exhaustive summary of the essences of the experience. In this

research based on the research questions, there were different essences for Research Questions 1 and 2 and one for Research Questions 3 and 4.

3.11 Data Management

Before and while the analysis of data process is officially attempted, inexperienced researchers are sometimes overwhelmed by the vast amounts of data that are collected. Several authors have devoted time to explaining the process for other researchers (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Dey, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These readings have influenced me to present the following as how I managed the data.

Copies of the interviews and other documents were stored in several places. Each interview was saved in a digital folder on the recorder, and I manually noted the time and date of each in a small notebook. Soon after each interview the audio file was downloaded directly to my computer. This ensured that duplicate sources of original data were kept in case a backup file was needed. Data were also stored on a memory stick. A site technician assisted with these technical details. In addition, paper copies of all relevant documents were kept in a personal filing cabinet in my office. Working copies of the transcripts without any identifying information were also kept at home, for personal reference. However, as I gathered the different types of information, I created an electronic folder called ‘fieldwork’ and stored all the data I needed to use regularly in separate, individually labelled files. I kept adding to this over the life of the project and found it to be extremely helpful as I traversed back and forwards to verify aspects of the data from each transcript or to recall information at short notice. The electronic recording of the data made the process less arduous. It also made comparisons between cases also less demanding than searching through hard copies of transcripts. To this extent I am in agreement with Miles and Huberman (1994), who point out that ‘the strengths of qualitative data rest centrally with the competence with which their analysis is carried out’ (p.10).

3.12 Validation

In qualitative research, an examination of trustworthiness is crucial (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1995). In light of this, several concepts have been offered for judging the quality of the research design. One broad category in qualitative research is the extent to which the data, the data analysis and conclusions are believable and trustworthy. This speaks to the concept of trustworthiness. Concepts for describing trustworthiness are different in qualitative research from those in quantitative studies. In quantitative research these are traditional concepts of validity, reliability and generalisability, and explanations for these terms can be found in many research texts. Since this is a qualitative research, only concepts relative to these procedures are

of interest. The question that addresses trustworthiness is: 'how can an enquirer persuade her audiences that the research findings of a research inquiry are worth paying attention to?' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.200). In this study, I will establish trustworthiness through transferability, dependability, confirmability and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability relates to the extent to which findings can be transferred to another setting or group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2003). Dependability is the degree to which different researchers would generate the same or similar ideas and derive similar phenomena if the research is repeated in a similar setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is the lack of bias in the research methodology and results (Guba, 1981). Credibility relates to the focus of the study and how well the data and analytic processes match the focus of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For this study, I was guided by Creswell's (2013) suggested list of eight validation strategies. Creswell (2013) recommends that qualitative researchers engage in at least a minimum of two in any research study. For this study I employed member checking, peer review, rich and thick description, and clarifying researcher biases through bracketing.

To enhance the study's credibility, member checking was employed in two ways. In the early stages of the analysis one of my colleagues read transcripts and assisted me with coding some of the data, and verified some of the emerging themes (Mays & Pope, 1995). The benefit of this exercise was to obtain another opinion of emergent coding frameworks (Barbour, 2008). Member checking is another strategy of improving trustworthiness and involves informing participants about relationships and emerging theory, and checking if they agree with the researcher's interpretation (Creswell, 1998). In the later stages, I employed a research assistant to assist with the creation of tables and to double-check the theme clusters and emergent themes. As indicated earlier in the description of the phenomenological method of data analysis, I shared some outcomes with participants, including copies of their transcript and the profile in chapter 4.

Yet another method of validation is the use of negative or exceptional cases. This may be helpful as qualitative researchers examine distinct variation in findings (Dey, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this research study common themes were highlighted. However, unique or individual variations within themes unique to a single individual or minority of the interviews were also included. These individual variations acted as 'important counter points to the general themes' (Hycner, 1985, p.293).

To establish the confirmability of this study, a bracketing exercise was employed. Prior to the interview process, I made a conscious effort to identify as many presuppositions about the

phenomenon as I could identify. This was a dynamic ongoing process rather than a single exercise (Patton, 1990; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). During the data collection and analysis process I attempted to maintain an objective self-conscious self in order not to prejudice the evolution of the study. This I did by bracketing my past experiences, biases and orientations that might have 'likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study (Creswell, 2013, p.251). I used thick and rich description to describe the participants as I tried to give a detailed view of the participants' experience of the phenomenon. Lastly, along with the in-depth interviews as a means of triangulation, I used secondary documentary sources as corroborating evidence to shed light on the findings and add validity to the participants' perspectives (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990).

From the discussion of the preceding strategies, it is evident to me as the researcher that the quality of a qualitative research design depends on a carefully documented and conducted research process. Since qualitative research is not the normative research paradigm, questions may be levelled at how the researcher arrived at conclusions and if they can be held up if challenged on the basis of positivist standards. However, because the qualitative researcher never disregards his or her humanity in the research process, actions must be made explicit since it is largely impossible to leave one's subjective experience behind (Bashir, Afzal & Azeem, 2008). This research is expected to fill this gap by adding to knowledge in the specific area of emotional aspect of learning in the online environment. This chapter has presented the methodology that is being proposed to fill this gap, as it seeks to unearth data in the specific area of interest. In the next chapter, the results of the findings of the research, which will be derived from the methodology outlined in this chapter, will be presented.

3.13 Ethical Concerns

The concerns for ethical conduct are a deeply important aspect of the research process. Ethics in research relates to a code of professional conduct to which a researcher is expected to adhere during and after the project is completed. Ethical concerns are pervasive throughout the progress of this research project, beginning as early as the identification of the research problem. The researcher's personal position has been explained and the researcher as an instrument in this chapter has also been established. The role of the researcher and purpose of the research were clearly communicated to the participants and their agreement sought in the early and late stages of the research.

The first step in the ethical process was to obtain permission from UWI's and University of Southampton's ethics approval committees. As a means of gaining access to the participants of this study, an application was submitted for review to the SSEGM Ethics Review Committee of the University of Southampton and permission was granted. The research project also had to

be approved by UWI. This was done and approval granted through the UHWI/UWI/FMS Ethics Committee. The research was also supported by an approval from the Pro-Vice Chancellor and Principal of the UWI Open Campus (see Appendix B and C**).** Once the research proposal was approved there were several other guidelines to follow.

The participants were initially telephoned regarding participation. At that time and throughout the duration of the process they were informed of the expectations, the scope of the study and the terms of confidentiality. Before the first interview, I reviewed the confidentiality and informed consent agreement, and sent them to the participants via email so they could examine them ahead of time. At the interview the participants were given a chance to read the participant information sheet and the consent form to reassure themselves that they wanted to participate, and obtained signed copies from participants. This was because I was committed to beneficence, and committed to minimising risks associated with this research. Students were told that they could opt out at any stage of the process at any time. I was cognisant that in the event of unforeseen risks, then the research or that aspect that was construed as harmful must be sacrificed to protect the participant from any harm.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I was keenly aware that my primary responsibility was respect for my participants' anonymity. The pseudonyms used in all documentation were chosen by the participants at the first interview. In addition, the specific country site used in the study was not revealed. Participants were given my phone number and e-mail address to contact me if necessary, and advised who to contact in the case of any problems relating to me as researcher.

I was also committed to justice. Students were told that once the results were analysed, if they were interested I would provide feedback. I explained how the data would be used. The interview recordings are to be destroyed following the viva and are digitally stored on my personal computer. As the transcripts contain only pseudonyms, they will be preserved as they do not represent a threat to anonymity. I have considered the rights, interests and wishes of both participants and institution regarding reporting the data, and will make data collection procedures and data available on request. In addition, member checks were used to ensure the work properly represented the ideas of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011; Patton, 2002).

3.14 Summary

This chapter described the methodology used in the phenomenological case study. The chapter was divided into two sections. Initially the qualitative, phenomenological strategies were discussed. The chapter continued with a clear discussion of the techniques used for data

collection and data analysis. Next, the strategies used to validate the study were explained. The chapter concluded with the ethical requirements of the study and the measures taken to ensure ethical standards were maintained and discussed.

CHAPTER 4. BACKGROUND AND PROFILE OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of three that together present the findings that emerged from participants' responses to the primary research question that guided this study: What are adult students' perceptions of their emotional experience in the online learning environment at the Open Campus? The purpose of the study was to develop a deeper understanding of adults students' emotional experiences of learning in a wholly online degree programme with no face-to-face classes in a regional Caribbean dual mode higher education institution. Ten Jamaican students were interviewed and asked to describe their emotional experiences in their online programmes. Each interview was conducted by the researcher and transcribed. The transcripts were analysed by the researcher using the phenomenological method.

Consistent with Hycner's (1985) model, extracts of texts of relevant meaning based on individual descriptions were used to uncover general and unique themes from all the interviews and then made into a composite summary in order to depict what experiences were common to the group and what were unique to individual participants. Chapter 4 contains the biographical profiles created to introduce the participants who shared their experiences and contributed to this study. Specifically, the chapter aims to provide a description of each research participant to foreground the in-depth analysis of the next two chapters. It serves to introduce the major players in this study and illuminates the rich and complex texture of each participant's emotional experience in online learning. This is important because each participants may have a different view of online learning, and these perceptions may influence or shape dispositions towards online learning. Chapter 5 explores the students' perceptions of learning and the nature and organisation of the processes in a specific environment and their relevance to learning outcomes, if any. Chapter 6 will examine the raw, undiluted expressions of experiences as recounted by the participant.

Verbatim quotations from all transcripts are used to illustrate ideas, concepts or themes and sub-themes that emerge from the data. Quotations from different participants are separated by a line space. In presenting themes and sub-themes, an overview of themes is described, followed by more in-depth descriptions of the themes. When only a part of a sentence is used, the portion is introduced or closed with an ellipsis. All identifying information of participants has been deleted or changed to ensure confidentiality. The participants' speech is presented as it was spoken and grammatical errors or vernacular speech have been retained, except occasionally when deemed necessary to enhance the clarity and conversational flow of the

interviews. This is in keeping with the phenomenological approach (Hycner, 1985) that stresses the importance of keeping as close as possible to the literal words of participants in attempting to arrive at the essence of the experience with the phenomenon. Both researcher and participants switched registers in between the vernacular and Jamaican Standard English, as is customary in both informal/formal conversations in Jamaica. In order not to distort participants' meanings, descriptions include minimal interpretation because the intent is to provide a 'vicarious experience' (Stake, 1995) for readers, 'so that they can relate it to their existing knowledge and participate in a rich experience' (Hara & Kling, 1999, p.7) from this study.

4.2 Participants' Profiles

Participants' profiles were developed in order to create a picture of each participant for the reader. These snapshots were created from the rich data derived from each transcript. Participants' self-descriptions of their emotional experiences were varied. These profiles were created from research notes, recall of the interviews, repeated replaying and listening to the audio recordings and information from the typed verbatim interview transcripts and my personal reflections. As portraits, these are reflective of the researcher's interpretation of the data from the students' retrospective accounts of experience in the online environment. Participants were identified through the use of self-selected pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

4.3 Sample Characteristics

General demographic information was extracted from students' records to provide general information about the participant pool for the study. A purposive sample of ten adult online students from the UWIOC participated in this study. Each participant was at a different stage in the online journey. Noreen and Rosie were in the first semester of Year 2, so they were the most recent entrants to this online degree programme. Annie was technically still a first-year student, not having completed all her Level 1 courses due to course failures, but in the sixth year of her programme. Ian, a male participant, was still at Level 1, having returned after a period of voluntary withdrawal due to financial issues, but in Year 3 of his online journey. Stacy had been in the programme for six years, much longer than she expected. Alethia and June would be graduating in a few weeks after two-and-a-half and three years, respectively. Kush, the only other male participant, was in Year 4 and having setbacks due to a new job with greater responsibility. Marie and Michelle were looking forward to completing their final semester and hoping to graduate in October 2014. The table below provides the demographics of the participants reflecting chosen pseudonyms, gender, age, programme, level and year and an indication of their residential status. Two males and eight females were interviewed. All

participants fulfilled the main criteria: (a) at least one semester on the online programme; (b) a student on the BSc degree programmes only; (c) combining work with studying.

Table 4.1: Individual interview participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Programme choice	Year of programme	Level	Resident
Noreen	F	22	BSc Management Studies	2	1	Urban
Annie	F	28	BSc. Management Studies	6	1	Rural
Stacy	F	30	BSc. Management Studies	6	3	Rural
Kush	M	32	BSc Accounting	4	3	Urban
Ian	M	38	BSc Management Studies	3	2	Urban
Alethia	F	40	BSc Accounting	2½	3	Urban
June	F	35	BSc Management Studies	3	3	Urban
Marie	F	41	BSc Management Studies	3	3	Urban
Rosie	F	26	BSc Management Studies	2	2	Urban
Michelle	F	27	BSc Management Studies	3	3	Urban

The following are the grouped and individual profiles of the participants**.** From the findings, it was observed that the ten individual participants fell into three distinct categories or groups:

Group 1 consisted of three participants who were experiencing defeat of some kind. Two participants were assigned to Group 2, and these were considered to be plodding along with some difficulty, and Group 3 consisted of the remaining five participants who, while facing obstacles along the way, were forging towards their goal of obtaining a degree. Students were placed in the different groups based on their overall emotional description of the online learning environment. Students assigned to Group 1 discussed their lack of regular Internet services, by and large, made explicit reference to their comfort level with face-to-face environment and indicated that online learning was not a first choice. The two males were included in the second group to see if there would be any variations in the findings due to their male status. The last five were grouped together because, despite setbacks, they had a positive outlook on their online studies, had reported no failures and seemed destined to achieve their degree goal. In fact, Alethia and June, who were awaiting official confirmation of final results, had already achieved at the time of their interviews.

For each student profile I have included introductory quotes to match my interpretation of their group and individual profile. This interpretation is based on a holistic view of each individual interviewee's transcripts whereby the researcher attempted to review the text as a whole in order to capture its meaning.

4.3.1 Group 1: Defeated by the online learning environment

Noreen - The agony of failure

Noreen was a Year 2 undergraduate student in the BSc Management Studies general option, living relatively near to the assigned learning centre. She was the youngest of the group. At age 22, she was not representative of the typical age group to enrol at this particular site. Based on the data collected, online learning was never considered an option for attaining her degree. Noreen said that her first choice had been to enrol in another institution. She reluctantly signed up for the online programme at the Open Campus. The events that played out in her first-year experience suggests that she had misconstrued what it meant to study in a programme of this nature. Since she did not set out to do an online programme, she was not mentally prepared. She had, in her own words, 'struggled' through a 'terrible' first year and was now at the first semester of her second year on the online programme. When asked 'what was the best' part of the experience, she replied that she had not 'seen it yet' but was still 'looking forward to it,' having failed six courses in the first year. She had an intention to persist because, in her own words, she was 'still going through', hoping to continue and complete the programme because she wanted to be an 'example' to others who might be find themselves in a similar predicament.

Like the other participants, online learning was a novel experience for this participant. She described her unresolved feelings of 'being in two minds' before handing in her application:

> I was told that it was an online, [programme] and however, we would have a few face-to-face classes. That's what I was told. I kinda waivered my mind a bit to hand in the paper – the application rather but then I handed in the application and when I got through... I said, 'Ok then fine.' [Noreen: Transcript 1: L 48-52]

There is no doubt that Noreen expected a blended learning experience. The fully online programme was not a first choice and she had entered the online programme by default. She was still undecided even at the point of handing in the application form. However, once accepted in the programme, she decided to give it a try.

Noreen failed all six courses taken in Year 1 and had a highly unsuccessful first-year and experienced psychological shock, describing her emotional state as feeling 'terrible'. Based on her devastating failure, it appears that she had failed to adjust to the requirements of the online learning environment. She failed to make sufficient effort and the outcome is a feeling of disappointment, hopelessness and defeat. Coping with work and her online studies had proved an insurmountable challenge. At the time of the interview, she was unable to come up with a purposeful strategy for success and this was her second year in the programme. She was hoping to change her present job for one less demanding in the hope that the new job would provide

greater time for studies. Her report of the emotionality of her online experiences was mentally and physically shocking. Despite seemingly highly intelligent and articulate, she had not made the transition to learning independently. She struggled with the problematic task of sitting before the computer for long hours, and understanding the mathematical component of her programme without face-to-face intervention had proved problematic. Referring to the online experience, she came to this conclusion about her suitability for online learning in the following emotional terms:

> Probably I'm not too fit for this environment as yet I'm still getting my mind around it trying to be more disciplined, cause as your research says adult learner, I'll just have to take on the responsibility on my own. [Noreen: Transcript 1: L610-617]

Noreen's experienced and expressed negative emotions regarding online learning throughout the course. This is contrasted with her positive stance to face-to-face learning, a major motif in her discourse on her online learning experience.

> There is something that grips you or that makes you want to push forward when you're sitting around a conference table and you're seeing the person and the expressions and the emotions and you're hearing them for yourself and face-to-face learning, it's different than online learning. [Noreen: Transcript 1: L 1253-1258]

Her preferred learning style was face-to-face interaction, because the learning process is 'better' or more student-friendly. She recalled her high school experience with the teacher standing in front of her and described how in examinations she is able to visualise the teacher in front of her and could recall the in-class discussions of relevant information. For online learning, there was the issue of finding the time and accepting that the tutor would not be there to explain misconceptions. Her advice to other students was for them to have the 'mindset' before registering for an online programme. The greatest obstacle for Noreen appeared to be her objection to learning through a technology-mediated environment and to exercise the discipline that this requires. Her profile appeared to fit that of a dependent learner, who might require more face-to-face contact throughout the instructional process.

Annie – In no man's land: a bundle of nerves

Annie was 27-years-old and lived and worked in a rural township in Jamaica. She was employed full-time in the public sector, now undergoing structural reform in Jamaica, and the workforce is mandated to improve their qualifications and training in order to be promoted. Many public sector workers on continuing education programmes may experience difficulty accessing online learning programmes because of a dependable consistent Internet service at

their place of residence. Furthermore, Annie was financial challenged and there was an urgent need to improve her qualifications, a requisite for promotion.

Annie was unable to find a consistent Internet alternative to solve her Internet problems, hence she had difficulty posting her assignments. Additionally, she lacked the financial resources to spend quality time at the Internet cafe due to the cost. Below, she summarised her approach and feelings about online learning. Like Noreen, online learning was not a first choice for this participant. Annie revealed from this quotation how life circumstances including financial difficulty and the requirements of the workplace have determined her choice of learning online:

> Sometimes I cry. My mom is like, oh Lord! What is wrong with you and stuff? And I'm like… mummy this is really killing me! I don't know why I took it upon myself to do courses on line. Just because I have to keep the work [and] I don't have the financial backing so I have to work and send myself to school but if I had the money, I would have gone face-to-face. [Annie: Transcript 1: L 68-81]

Coping with work and studies was indeed difficult. Although she was able to access Internet service at work, this privilege had to be done after working hours. Anxiety appeared to be the defining factor of her experience and this is understandable, given that her Internet problems seem insurmountable. Readiness for online learning assumes access to a consistent and dependable Internet source. Consequently, students cannot expect to have a grand experience in an online programme if Internet problems prove insurmountable throughout. Annie began her first interview by describing the impact of the link between the demands of work and study. This was compounded by anxiety about the Internet service, which might be 'down' when she finally gets home from work. This 'up and down' relationship with the Internet and its deleterious impact on some participants will be revealed in chapter 6.

> For my emotions, I have quite a few, per se. If I have an assignment to do and I'm leaving work, work that I'm doing there now; there is no real time frame to when it ends yes. We close off at certain hours but then I might have additional customers to deal with, so I might be hurrying to go home to post something by say 10 o'clock this is 11 o'clock their time [reference to Eastern Caribbean time] and I've to do it before midnight, so there's a bit of anxiety; then there's the problem now when I get home my Internet service is down. [Annie: Transcript 1: L 7-22]

Annie started off her interview session in the following manner: she had experienced much angst with her Internet situation, so much so that a clear picture of her overall experience was somewhat muted. It was difficult to get a comprehensive description of her online experience, as most of these experiences were coloured by the lack of a consistent Internet source. Lack of convenient source of Internet access had limited Annie's interaction with e-

tutors or with other students. Her enrolment on the programme pre-dated the changeover from a blended teleconference delivery model to a fully online model from 2008. She can recall being a part of the previous blended learning environment, which she preferred, but now that the programme has transitioned to a fully online programme she does not find it 'intriguing'. In fact, she describes the programme as rather 'boring'. She also found the relentless sequential pace difficult to keep up with.

Stacy - Between a rock and a hard place

Like Annie above, Stacy was a full-time employed public sector worker. At age 30, she was also a mature undergraduate and enrolled in the BSc Management Studies programme. Stacy entered the programme in 2007, a year before the programme moved to a fully online environment. Based on her self-report, she appears to suffer from self-doubt or lack of confidence.

Like Annie, she lived in a rural township without consistent Internet services at home. She was acutely aware of how dependent was her success on having regular access to the Internet. Her emotional experience had been adversely affected by several course failures, specifically repeated failures of the English component. At the time of the interviews she reported 'I'm doing English now for the third time'. She bemoaned the fact that she should have made a better job of analysing the questions, intimating that her critical thinking skills could have been sharper. She indicated in her own words that she was unable 'to strive' from negative experiences. Like Noreen and Annie, she was a reluctant enrolee in the course, because of the government's modernisation of the public service already referred to.

Stacy appeared to have matured over the six years in the programme because, like Noreen, she had entered the programme at a much younger age than typical of distance education students at this site. However, along with Noreen and Annie, she signalled that the population had changed somewhat. She had begun to value the experience rather late and was acutely disappointed at her low anticipated final GPA. She appeared to think that she had no control over the problems she has encountered. Her experience is defined by sadness, regret and resignation to the unsatisfactory outcomes of the learning experience.

In respect to the programme, her locus of control appears to be external, as she attributed her poor performance and low GPA mostly to the unavailability of e-tutors to help with questions about assignments. There is also some degree of self-negation evident in the fact that she felt that she could have dedicated herself more to meeting the requirements of the online programme. However, there was some motivation to complete, because this was her last semester and she was only one course away from being awarded her degree, in her sixth year in

the programme, and wanted it to be over. Now that she had experienced the online experience, her belief was that face-to-face interaction is the better of the two modalities. Below, Stacy explains the difficult position in which she finds herself, her feelings, her learning preference and internal unresolved issues:

> I'm so sad that... when I started UWI; I never really and truly gave school much thought. I was really partly forced because government... I don't want to say forced... they really suggested that for movements you need to start school because you need a bachelor's degree for a promotion... I never gave... much thought as to what I really wanted to do so... I have a company **[co-worker**] here who was doing Management Studies and we could study together when really and truly I'd rather do something in the accounting field... I really enjoy... the numeric subjects as opposed to the reading subjects… I was going to, [reference to changing the degree option**]**... but then it was too late and it would cost me more... [Stacy: Transcript 1: L 884-918]

Stacy later admitted that, besides being piqued at having to take an online course for promotion, she had seen personal growth from studying for this degree as a consequence of having to use the Internet to do research. While searching she became exposed to a greater level of knowledge: as she explains, 'because you're gonna see stuff that you never know'. She found, too, that what she has learnt can be applied to the workplace. In a real sense, the timing of her learning experience has been propelled by wider societal forces such as the credentialisation of society and the resulting promotion of credentials for career advancement and social status. She is most concerned that a low GPA will not advance her career goals, as shown by her comments below, but now there is little to do to improve this.

> The worst part of it is really my GPA. Because anybody asked me about my GPA I don't tell them. Anybody ask me I tell them I don't talk about my GPA because I know how bad it is. [Stacy: Transcript 1: L 1451-1457]

Group 2: Plodding along with some difficulty

Kush - Cognitive frustration

Kush was one of two males who participated in the interviews. He, too, was a mature student at age 32 and was employed full-time in the private sector. Since joining the online programme, he has changed from a slow paced job that afforded him time for classes to one that is demanding and more responsible. His experience is one of cognitive frustration, defined by the researcher as discomfort with comprehending and interpreting coursework, and accompanying instructions. His difficulty with programme content is illustrated by his frequent use of the words to 'understand', 'grasp' and 'unclear' in his self-report. The word 'understand' appears more than 15 times in his transcript. Such difficulty may stem from prior expectations that the online programme would have been blended with a greater degree of the use of Web 2.0 tools including video and sound, as on YouTube. He was expecting that he could listen and share in

a lesson with other students in an interactive classroom. He felt he would improve his ability to comprehend if he could hear other students asking questions, which would help to clarify some of his own internal anxieties about aspects of the course. This might have been an underlying wish for face-to-face support. As one of the participants who initially embraced the online opportunity, his difficulty in grasping information online was only made worse by the slow response from e-tutors, and the time taken to read the large amount of course content had proved difficult for him.

However, despite a few low grades and an occasional failure, he continued to regard online learning as still 'the only mode available' to him for his acquisition of a first degree, after four consecutive years in the programme. His rationalisation for his goal-oriented decision making is as below:

> From my perspective, I chose this mode basically due to the fact that I work full-time. So, I think at the time and even now that was the only mode that was available to me. I think it is my 4th year because I'm doing it part-time. I'm in my fourth year. [Kush: Transcript 1: L 9-14]

Due to problems with the delivery mode and lack of a supportive environment, in his second interview he expressed the view that he would not do another online degree. The quote below illustrates this participant's comprehension issues. In this environment, it appears that learning for him is largely guess work, as feedback on assignments and grades are not forthcoming. This is a link back to the idea that this participant experiences a great deal of cognitive frustration.

> So from an emotional standpoint, why I may have a little bit of problem is that... you don't really know when you're on the right track or not because you don't have that physical person there to encourage you or to tell you that the way you have it right now is not the way that we want it. It's just you have to guess how you should basically approach certain situations or certain questions that are posed to you. For some of the courses that I've done, you don't get a lot of follow up. For example, when you do some course and you do like the assignments and so forth, you get a grade, **but you don't** really understand how you get the grade. [Kush: Transcript 1: L 17-40]

Ian - Alone in his shell

At 38 years, Ian was an older mature student. He was currently employed in the private sector. Before enrolling in the degree programme, he had had prior learning experience as an adult learner at another tertiary institution, so he is not a newcomer to studying part-time. The difference, however, is that the previous experience was face-to-face. He is married with a spouse also studying for a degree, but in a face-to-face learning environment. He finds online learning a suitable alternative because it fits into his life style, particularly because it allows him time for his young child. Both he and his wife are achieving their academic goals at the

same time, since his educational experience is online, allowing her to attend a face-to-face programme elsewhere. He shares how this arrangement has had little impact on his family life or work situation.

> I tell my wife about my good grades and I can say to my wife that I get a B+ or got…. She goes to school in the evening she's doing her degree just the same but she's goes to a physical campus I can tell her I that am doing so and I am doing well and It is not affecting and the fact that she goes too it would be difficult for me to go, then our son wouldn't have any attention that is it basically it, so it doesn't affect my family life or work. [Ian: Transcript 1: L 1295-1310]

He has gone four semesters in the programme but is still at Level 1, due to a period of unofficial withdrawal. This participant's main issue is fear of number-based courses. He states categorically that online delivery is not suitable for the Mathematics components. To solve learning issues with Mathematics-based subjects, he thinks there should be more Blackboard Collaborate sessions. He notes that most e-tutors in his online experience are not suitable to teach online – or anywhere

Despite his self-identification as a recluse, and that he is not an emotional person, there is a sense in which he contradicts himself, because he wishes for informal, face-to-face caring interactions from the administration. He felt that no one appeared to notice that he had dropped out for a period of time and he longs for a sense of belongingness to something bigger than just the degree programme. Above all, he would like to feel that he belonged to a student guild or some kind of institutional society that includes social relations. He notes:

> The online experience for me, you know has suited me**.** The only negative thing would be that I'm somewhat of a recluse and it encourages that... so being an introvert now, you just spend time around with your laptop or your PC and somewhat in your little shell so to speak. So if anything, it encourages that introvert lifestyle to me. That has been… my emotional experience. [Ian: Transcript 1: L 163-186]

He felt like a number, and made a point of observing how a specific tutor made direct favourable reference to a piece of his work and appeared to know each student in the class. This e-tutor's actions left an indelible image on his mind, because he could recall her commendations and the pleasure he felt at being singled out for praise. He described her as the best tutor so far that he had seen. This tutor was in direct contrast to another tutor whom he believed had been unnecessarily stringent in his demands on students, without regard for their adult status of having to work and study. He was completely turned off the subject because of the late and unclear guidelines for submission from this e-tutor. In the end he achieved only a pass grade in that subject and still felt that the tutor was out of touch with the reality of the students' circumstances as adults with varied responsibilities.

There is some ambivalence in his attitude to the online programme because, although he said he was quite comfortable with being alone, he longed to be noticed and to feel a connection to a supportive group presence. It appears that the lack of interaction with tutors and lack of other institutional support was a matter of concern for this student. Students take the final examination face-to-face in this programme, and he observed that although some students turn up for examinations whom he did not normally see at the site, he was aware that there are others who have dropped out, even as far back as the orientation period. This is a telling comment of relevance to the findings and context of this study.

He commented on this in the quotation below. He noted:

> But I'm thinking though that somehow we have to find a way to simulate the physical class not like say a Blackboard Collaborate not the classroom but simulate a physical college where if someone doesn't do a course for one term they are contacted and not just on the UWI Open Campus email but some phone call thru the e-tutor somebody notice, this is one term, no subject... somebody calling. I think that is very important because in the physical setting when somebody is missing a lecturer would like [say] guys... Ian is not here. I know as adult learner the onus is on us to make the effort to attend and to study. Things happen and if you can have that you'd somehow feel less that you're on your own. [Ian: Transcript 1: L 1553-1587]

He acknowledges that in Blackboard presentations he is aware of the e-tutor and class peers. However, he does not recognise this as a social learning experience:

> You have an e-tutor and you have someone with general responsibility for the course that would be above the e-tutor. But even though they are there, to me... there's not so much a social aspect. [Ian: Transcript 1: L 291-293]

To validate these observations he pointed out that he had tried to reach out to another student who shared his unusual surname and nationality by sending him an e-mail, but that had elicited no response at all. He concluded from this non-response that online students were only interested in getting enough information to achieve their degree goal. From his perspective, there was in fact no avenue for socialising with others. One major concern for Ian was the quality of his prospective GPA, because his voluntary withdrawal had led to three fail absences and, despite his best efforts, this issue had not yet been resolved with the administration. Despite this he was happy about the online programme because, as he indicated previously, it did not affect his 'family life or work' unfavourably.

4.3.2 Group 3: Forging ahead despite setbacks

Alethia - Tunnelling through

Alethia is an older mature student, age 40 years. Among the participants, she is one of the two students who enrolled in the Accounting Bachelor's degree programme – the other is Kush.

Alethia was initially taken aback by the fact that she was enrolled on a course with no face-to-face component. Undeterred, she set herself a goal to complete the degree in two and a half years and, at the time of the first interview; she had just completed her last examinations, had achieved her goal and was on her way out, with official graduation only a few weeks away. She will graduate with higher level second class honours.

A diligent, self-motivated student, she thinks that the e-tutor's persona is sometimes one of disrespect to online students. Her experience is defined by her account of a particular e-tutor's unprofessional stance towards her. Due to her efforts to learn her Accounting course material, she was the only student of 27 in her first year consistently to post practice answers, much to the annoyance of her e-tutor, who made it plain that she did not appreciate having practice answers to mark when no grades were allocated. She informed Alethia that she had a day job, and Alethia interpreted this as an implication that she really had no time to mark work that was not required to be graded.

Alethia reported that her dedication as a student went unrewarded by this particular e-tutor, who did not support or give any positive reinforcement for her efforts. This led to a running interpersonal conflict with this e-tutor that became so bad that the course coordinator had to intervene on her part. In fact, she was told by that e-tutor that she was 'like a tooth without cocaine', interpreted by Alethia as an insult implying that interaction with her was as a painful as extracting a tooth without first deadening the area. These issues were mentioned several times and detailed in her report of critical elements of the programme in the second interview, although not reported here due to limits of space and time.

> I was the only student, I can remember vividly as if it was yesterday, twenty seven students were in the class. Back then, we were not given grades for participation. We were given material, activities at the end of each course unit... The course coordinator... posted questions, practice questions. I was the only person who did that every week. She [the e-tutor] wouldn't even grace me in looking at it and say ok that's wrong or no this is how it's worked out. I asked about it, her response- I'm a full-time teacher, preparing students for CXC.... As if I should take that into consideration. [Alethia: Transcript 1: Line 73-110].

Based on her report in both interviews, unknown to anyone Alethia did not have Internet at home and did not possess a modern computer, yet found ways to work around those challenges and achieve success. Although severely challenged by personal circumstances she used the convenience of the 'any place, any time' access to find alternatives outside the comfort of home. The following is what she shared about her strategies to achieve her study goals when she realised the programme of choice was fully online. Apart from her internal resolve to not forgo the opportunity and do well, she took practical steps to implement a plan to bypass the circumstances. She used the Internet at her workplace, asked for support from her

boss and sought his support for her desire to study, and it can be inferred from her narrative below that she was successful. She was rewarded for her efforts by a very high GPA.

> I don't have Internet at home right now, I am just working part-time I can't afford Internet so I just went to my boss I said, I can't afford Internet so we have two options I come to work and use it or you get Internet for me... And he burst out laughing, just like you. And he said you are serious. And he said oh, I realize you are not smiling. Yes! I have a computer at home, when, I checked it out, it is so old it was like it was made in 2000. He gave me a monitor because my monitor wasn't working.... So, I said, ok, I'll do what I can at work. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 121-124]

This student came across as a very intense, self-motivated, determined and goal-oriented individual. She completed her degree in record time and perhaps would have obtained a first class degree if she had not been in such a hurry to complete in the shortest time possible. She felt that the e-tutors did not grade fairly and implied that there seemed to be a prejudice against Jamaican students.

As with the others, she was challenged by the online environment. However, she developed strategies to cope. She reported that she was aware of her asthmatic condition, which could hinder her ability to complete assignments on schedule. To this end, she was highly organised and prepared. This is evident, because she was the only student to come to the second interview with prepared notes and could actually provide the names of the course coordinators and e-tutors with whom she had had negative and positive experiences.

Her overall experience is one of 'tunnelling' through impediments and, in the end, she succeeded in overcoming online delivery, poor interaction with facilitators and lack of resources. This is how she self–reflected on her personal attitude to life's difficult circumstances:

> Despite what's going on, if I need to get from here to the chair and there is a door, if there is a wall, if I can't get over, I'll get under, I can't get through, I dig a tunnel. There is a wall and the door and if you say I can't even if I have no intention of getting there, I'll show you that I can get there. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 1687-1695]

June -Thrill of triumph over adversity

June, 35 years, worked full-time in a highly demanding job in the private sector. Online learning was her first choice due to job demands. From the start, failure was not an option in her scheme of things. She provided her point of view on the relevance of a high level of commitment in this kind of learning environment.

Her experience was defined by contesting tutor grades because she believed that she was putting in a great deal of effort and expected to be rewarded for that effort.

June suffered from a high level of frustration, which is more often than not accompanied by anger and disappointment. This was driven by some e-tutors' disregard of her request for them to explain grades that were awarded. She reported that she felt as though she did not have the right to contest these grades. Her explanation for her assertive behaviour was that she was seeking a level of professionalism and open communication that was missing, in some cases. In an online environment, open communication is vital. She stated that she was not just trying to make trouble for her instructors, as some e-tutors did explain their grades and, provided the explanation was plausible, she was willing to accept the explanation given.

A rewarding moment for this participant was her increasing success with numbers-based courses. Her negative feelings were counteracted by moments of joy, happiness, pride and self-confidence as she learnt to 'listen and learn' without a physical tutor in front of her. She was determined to overcome any hurdle placed in front of her. At the time of this interview, she was waiting for official graduation and knew that she had obtained a first class honours degree. Starting out with being challenged by numbers-based courses, her initial successes led to greater successes. She was goal-oriented; and negative feelings and emotions did not deflect her from achieving her goals. This student appeared self-assured and projected herself as a 'go getter' who knew what she wanted and was prepared to do what was required. She was very hard on herself, had high standards and would fight for what she wanted. This participant appeared to have a strong sense of justice.

June reports that she experienced significant personal growth, as demonstrated in her reflections about confronting her fear of numbers and achieving high grades in courses that required those skills. This student graduated with a 3.95 GPA. June summed up her experience as being one of challenge and adversity, yet rewarding. More importantly, she made the point that what a student gets out of the online learning experience depends on that student's general disposition:

> As I said before, online learning experience is rewarding. It presents so many opportunities. However, it is going to come with a lot of adversity, through challenges, through frustration through disagreement And whether you think it is worth it, is dependent on who you are, but I would wholly endorse it for the right individual. [June: Transcript 1: 1178-1187]

Marie - On top of technology

Marie, at age 41, was employed full-time in a public sector institution. She was married with children. Her enrolment in an online programme was a deliberate decision and recounted that

she was seeking the kind of studies that would accommodate her monitoring her children, even while she worked to accomplish her goal of a first degree. Thus, the online learning environment suited her lifestyle. Like June, Kush, Ian and Michelle, she had embraced the opportunity to study online from the very beginning. She enjoyed the regional environment due to the opportunity for cultural exchange. She hoped to complete the degree the following year. For her, the online learning was much more than obtaining a degree, and was preparation for a top-level job. She reported that she enjoyed the team work of group study yet, more so, learning to use the technology had been a superb experience. She was proud of her growing computer proficiency, such as improved typing skills, the fine motor skills of manoeuvring the mouse, interacting on Blackboard Collaborate, and being able to use Skype and other web tools. She was committed to the online learning process and made reference to the sacrifices she had made in terms of installing the Internet at home and the financial cost of doing so. She was also cognisant that the sacrifice involved her time, herself and other social obligations that she has had to put aside. All in all, her elation and enthusiasm about studying via computer-mediated learning was contagious, as illustrated below.

> For example, I think my typing skill is up there. What else, for this course other day I was doing, IBM, I was using WhatsApp and I was talking with to my tutor all the way over there in Barbados what is it called again, not Facebook? Skype is one of the latest technologies you can talk to your tutors on also you can then there's email and texting and all the technology that is being used to you can use them to get to people... [Marie: Transcript 1: L 190-209]

Rosie - Bouncing back from chaos

Rosie was aged 26, and a full-time employee in the private sector. She was a single mother but lived in an extended family network. This participant's negative emotions were generated by a chaotic first-year experience. The 'chaos' was a result of her assumption that online learning would be much easier than traditional face-to-face learning. This is evidenced by her registering for five courses in her first semester, despite the orientation advice not to do so, with the responsibility of being a single parent. She eventually reduced the number to three courses, but was still severely challenged by the unfamiliar learning environment and learning to transition to being responsible for her own learning. This student had memorable positive and negative stories about her first-year experiences. However, the negative experiences spurred her on to becoming more disciplined. Now in her second year, she is much more relaxed. Throughout the interview she laughed at herself and all the mistakes that she had made. She came across as an optimistic individual as she reflected on the fact that she someone who was motivated by negative experiences. At the time of the interview, she had not failed a single course and was anticipating major improvements in her grade outcomes. She had persevered through Year 1 and very glad to have done so, and was advancing towards her

degree goal. This quote below illustrates how this student transitioned into her second year, and was at a much more comfortable place than at the start of the programme. This suggests that, for some students, online learning becomes better after the initial pressure and the student begins a process of adapting to the unfamiliar learning environment.

> The first year was a chaos if that can describe it. It was terrible! I'm a face-to-face person. The online was the first time and the first experience was last year**,** however by reading and reading online and speaking with Mr... and so forth and getting somebody to study with I began overcoming the pressure that I was under. At one point even in Sociology came up to the site and asked Mr... if he could just take off one because I was doing 3 courses at the time. He said well it is going to cost me and why I want to do it. I explained to him that it was so pressuring and he said guess what, it will come with pressure because it is your first year which honestly I realize that it did, because this year it is much relaxing. [Rosie: Transcript 1: L 7-36]

Michelle - The hotel version of school

Michelle was a 27-year-old student who made the choice to study online. She was a full-time employee in the private sector, single and still lived at home. She had never really liked school. Based on her life chances, she wanted to be an example to her siblings and was doing the degree out of appreciation for her mother, who expected great things from her. Transitioning from the alienating first-year experience, this student relished the idea of testing new waters, and a good degree was a major life goal. Despite intentionally choosing the online programme, she was a little scared and thought it would not work. That aside, the student demonstrated an understanding of the online environment and was enjoying the experience, having made the transition. Her experience of going on vacation and still being able to go to school had enamoured her to the online experience. She spent most of the time in the interview extolling the benefits of studying online. Unfortunately, by the time of the second interview she encountered a major negative experience in the programme; someone else had submitted an online quiz in her name using a strange internet protocol (IP) address. Despite all her efforts to prove she was not the author, she had not been given the benefit of the doubt and this had had an adverse impact, because the grade was not particularly impressive; to make matters worse, her study group partners all achieved high grades for that quiz. This experience has tempered what, for her, had been a very good experience so far and it has taken her some time to get over the bad feelings. In her own words, online learning is the 'hotel version' of going to school, because she can attend from the comfort of her home. She had learnt a 'new form of discipline' due to the online experience, which means she has to study when all kind of distractions are beckoning at home. She is an optimistic student who had thoroughly embraced online learning and was looking forward to achieving her degree goal in the succeeding year, as she had enrolled on her last few courses. Michelle had few adverse comments about this type of

learning. She made it clear that readiness for online learning can be achieved through a willingness to try new things, even when a degree of trepidation to the unknown is present.

Below she describes her first expectations of the course and the pleasant surprise that online learning has been for her:

> But I expected for it to fail actually... At one point I thought it was a means to which I could get my degree but when I sat down to think about it, the odds were more on the failing side I thought it would never work. But then after getting into it**,** and seeing that you have to apply yourself just as if you were going to a regular class**, …** you would have to be in the frame of mind, get ready, go to the class, it's just the same**.** You have to be in the mindset that oh, I have some school work. I have a session at 5 p.m. … It's just that you have the class in the comfort of your home.... I didn't know, I would have reached thus far. I thought I would just throw in the bucket and left online school, but then, I would not trade online school for anything. [Michelle: Transcript 1: 69-98]

4.4 Summary

The profiles of the participants were constructed from demographic information and their overall accounts of their experiences. These helped to add clarity and enhance an understanding of each student's perceptions and emotional experience in the online learning environment, and the ultimate outcome for each. A major supposition was that students in the earlier stages of their programmes were caught up in the emotions of becoming accustomed to online delivery and adapting to having to direct their own learning. Another inference from the overall reading of the transcripts was that students in the later stages of their degree programme and those who had transitioned relatively successfully were more concerned with assessment issues, feedback and the programme content rather than the technological environment. This is not surprising, because students were transitioning from a well-established instructional delivery to one that was new and suspect.

The profile of the participants provides useful information on how students perceived the online learning environment. To some extent, these limited findings suggest how students perceived the online learning environment at different stages of their learning journey. These participants fit the description of non-traditional students who have been out of school for five years or more and are actively engaged in the workforce.

Jamaica is a developing island state and the need to restructure the public service to make it more efficient is urgently pursued. Workers are therefore required to participate in continuing education to improve their ability to cope with the changing global environment. Unfortunately, public sector workers feel pressured to take online courses, because their jobs demand at least a Bachelor's degree for promotion.

Online learning was more suitable for these adult learners because of their obligations to spouse and children. This was the situation with Marie and Rosie; while those who were single wanted a better life. June and Michelle were also single and did not report on family obligations. Overall, online learning was not chosen in and of itself; because it appeared that, given a real choice, most would have opted for a face-to-face medium. Four of these students lacked easy access to the Internet and one had no modern computer.

However, being very realistic about their life situations online became the only choice and most made up their minds to make the best of a somewhat uncomfortable situation in order to achieve a long-desired goal. Students in **Group 1** appeared to have found it difficult to make the change in 'mindset' required to confront an unfamiliar learning environment. All the participants were new to online learning and their inability to adjust, coupled with other difficulties, resulted in very poor outcomes, particularly for Noreen, Annie and Stacy.

Participants in **Groups 2 and 3** were more favourably inclined to the online learning environment, despite the challenges confronting them. Like those in **Group 1**, they were facing a new online environment but their responses to the obstacles in this environment were different. Initially, all the participants expected a blended learning environment. However, participants in the second and third groups seemed to have decided to find ways to help themselves by using other resources. They appeared to be able to see the big picture of obtaining a degree at the end of their years of study. Participants in **Group 3** had either just completed or were near completion and did not report any failures, and this might account for their more positive responses to the learning context.

The use of participants' profiles derived from interview transcripts, students' academic and demographic data proved useful. They were included to illustrate the participants' overall disposition towards online learning towards online learning, serving to show how individual perceptions of emotions were linked to participants' overall perceptions. Moreover, they help to indicate how this has influenced each student's reactions to the new learning environment; and their final learning outcomes. The next chapter, chapter 5, reports on students' perceptions of their encounters with the online learning context and processes.

CHAPTER 5. ADULT STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND PROCESSES

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of participants and their background, presenting an image of each individual adult learner. The study now focused specifically on students' perceptions of the online learning environment and processes, as well as their learning outcomes. In total there were 14 emergent themes: seven themes for Section 1 and seven for Section 2.

Table 5.1 is an example of theme clusters and associated meanings that are relevant to this section.

Table 5.1: Emergence of cluster themes

Formulated meanings	Theme cluster
FM7[J]. The knowledge of the out-of-pocket expense for tuition fees generated a high level of determination to succeed. FM24[J]. Even though the online learning environment is new to some students, they will still embrace the programme because there is an incentive of getting their degree at the end of the programme.	Incentives to persist

5.2 Section 1: Emergent themes: Students' perceptions of the online environment [OLE]

Students' perceptions are defined as their thoughts, views and beliefs about the learning environment and its processes. The seven emergent themes for Section 1 are: personal characteristics for surviving online learning; readiness for online learning; advantages of learning online; virtual shock; ambivalence; adaptation; and technology interface.

The online learning environment refers to the 'physical' environment of the learning experience, devoid of the instructional strategies. This includes equipment such as the computer, the Internet, the Blackboard Collaborate software and other tools. This physical environment allowed students to interact with the online technology in their learning experiences.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Characteristics for surviving online learning

The first theme, *characteristics for surviving online learning,* describes the qualities and personal motivations that sometimes drive adult students' desire to succeed in the online

setting. These include incentives to persist, online is not for everyone/fitness for online learning and endurance.

For some participants, aside from the ultimate reward of a degree achievement at some time in the future, there were reasons for wanting to persist in the programme. Some, if not most, students were self-funded and they had to bear the full economic cost of their programme. Their knowledge of the out-of-pocket expenses for tuition fees generated a high level of determination to succeed. By comparison, the online programme was cheaper than studying at a residential campus. Several participants made reference indirectly to financial considerations being relevant to their choice of online learning. These participants alluded to the need to work and study, which had determined their choice of online learning.

> The fact that I was paying for this programme out of **my own pocket** meant I was very determined. [June: Transcript 1: 98-99]

Fitness for online learning was another major component of the manner in which students viewed the online environment. Online learning was not a suitable learning environment for everyone, because those who were not a suitable match for this environment would not have had the determination to stay on course:

> I don't believe online learning is for everyone. Your thought process, your approach, your openness of mind, has to be at a certain stage or else you're not going to come into with the kind of determination that you need to complete. [June: Transcript 1: 85-89]

From this participant's perspective, online was not suitable for everyone, because that kind of environment demanded extraordinary aplomb. It required of students deep thought processes, a strategy for success and a willingness to embrace new things. Students had to be able to see the big picture of the long-term reward as well as the immediate distraction of being a novice in a strange environment, as seen in the reflection below:

> So while it was new for me I embraced it... I knew at the end of the programme there will be a reward for me. [June: Transcript 1: 128]

New students had to be suitable for the online environment. Those persons who lacked that internal resolve would not be likely to complete the programme. From this participant's perspective, it seemed as if completion of the online programme was largely dependent on certain internal characteristics that students bring with them to the programme. A student had to be mentally fit for an online learning programme, with some level of maturity and responsibility required for success. The same participant emphasised demographically that the average 18 to 24-year-old young adult would not be suitable for the programme. Younger persons were likely still to be receiving support from parents. However, as a student who had

successfully completed the programme with exceptional results, she argued that the course could be recommended for the right candidate, as indicated in the quotation below.

> Online learning is the type of learning environment that requires you to use your commitment, [and] initiative... [Marie: Transcript 1: 1330-1335]

This concept of being purposeful was confirmed by another participant, Marie, who was also well on her way in the programme. In another year or so this participant expected to graduate. For this student, to be fit meant possessing two important characteristics, commitment and initiative. This perception was shared by other participants. Michelle 'mentioned that 'discipline' was another requirement of online environments. The physical classroom environment was unnecessary, but it required discipline, a point of view that was in keeping with other participants who made reference to the need for commitment to stay the course.

Endurance is defined as a student's ability to continue successfully through the programme despite encountering many impeding factors. This theme featured in several of the participants' interviews, but it was Alethia who made the point in a forthright manner in reference to her personal experience:

> It was like a marathon. So you fall down, you drink some water; you put a band aid on the cut and keep going. It's a marathon! [Alethia: Transcript 1: 1700-1704]

From this participant's perspective, online was comparable to a long race that was bruising to the mind and body. Thus, online learning was a test of endurance, both physically and mentally. It appeared that adult students needed stamina to survive this learning context. There was another implied aspect to this perspective of endurance. There appeared to be a need for some amount of resilience, whereby students needed to have the ability to refresh, dress their academic wounds and continue after rising from a fall. A fall, in this context, was likely to be a fail grade for an examination or in-course assignment. The ability to 'get up' was an underlying motif in other participants' narratives, particularly those of Noreen and Stacy. Alethia's perceptions seemed to foreshadow the emotional experiences that some students will experience in this online environment.

The perception of the need for endurance as a necessary student characteristic was highlighted by Alethia, again, a student who appeared to have a capacity to confront and overcome difficulties. In retrospect, this student had made mention of her propensity to build 'tunnels' through obstacles. There is another aspect to this theme, and one that suggests that students have to forego pleasurable activities to succeed. Online learning was described by the same participant as so 'absorbing' that a student could find little time to do anything else:

> School absorbed all of my time. But I look at it and I said, well, I said, if you want to be out of there in two and a half years, whatever you're missing now will still be there in two and a half years. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 161-167]

5.2.2 Theme 2: Readiness for online learning

The emergent theme *readiness for online learning* is related to students' preparedness, or lack of preparedness, for the rigour of the online learning environment. One critical aspect of perceived readiness was students' need for information to make informed choices. For all the participants, this was their first exposure to online learning. Students did not initially understand the meaning of 'any time, any place access'. They also did not understand the idea of computer-mediated learning. This interpretation was based on students' negative perceptions of the pre-enrolment information provided by University staff. Students needed to know what they were getting themselves into long before enrolling on the programme. It appeared from several students' perspectives that the information they received in the application stage and later at orientation was inadequate. Noreen, a participant for whom the online environment was an exercise in futility, offered her perspective on the subject of students' information needs:

> I would encourage the persons who are collecting the applications to tell persons like myself, who really don't like the technology and going on the computer day after day and sitting in front of the computer day after day – don't bother to apply. Don't bother to apply… [Noreen: Transcript 1: 55-58]

She is suggesting that perhaps personnel and even marketing and promotion literature should clearly articulate what is involved in online studies. This links back to an earlier point made about fitness for purpose. It may not have been surprising for students to perceive they were short-changed over the information given at the application stage, because the transformation to a purely online programme was, and is still is, in relative infancy at five years old. In a real sense, the process of programme transformation was also experiencing its own 'teething pains'. However, when an institution is in the early stages of a major transformation such as the move to online learning, staff may have no experience of the delivery of online programmes. Those with direct contact with students would need to be trained to convey information effectively. Nevertheless, institutions offering new programmes are responsible for providing clear information to the many constituents. The students in this study were unwilling participants to the vagaries of the institutional transformation that was taking place.

Noreen's perspective was that everything students needed to know to pass the examinations will be found only online was, indeed, true:

> Everything that you need to know, if you want to pass the exams any at all, you have to go online. There is no one to come, you don't have anybody you can come to [the] site and talk to you because I have been saying to persons that I have never gotten an e-tutor that is from Jamaica… and if you are not so technology savvy, then it makes no sense you apply online. [Noreen: Transcript 1: 67-71]

This came across as a very negative perception of the online environment. Computer-mediated interactions could not be by-passed as, indeed, this was a fully online programme environment. However, some students may have a perplexing relationship with their computer. It was necessary for effective information to be communicated about the level of student interface regarding the technology required for a programme of this nature.

In this case, Noreen has come to know this information from experience; that is, after the fact and much too late. That she is still on the programme may be linked to a previous point about the economic cost point, which is relevant to a student having the incentive to persist. Noreen would have paid her tuition fees and arrived well into the first semester, perhaps, before realising that this kind of learning was not appropriate for her sensibilities. This participant is alluding implicitly to some of the perceived negative factors that had led to her demise in the programme – factors such as all her tutors being located away from her immediate environment, and her need to be less resistant to the computer technology, are both pre-conditions of this online environment.

Another participant had a similar perspective to Noreen. Kush thought that although the online programme worked for some individuals, there were some things that could be presented differently:

> I think, it has worked for some persons but there are some aspects of the online education that should be, I don't know if it should be presented or changed so that persons should know from the outset what they are getting into. [Kush: Transcript 1: 116-123]

However, he did not state which factors would provide people with the knowledge and understanding of what was required of them from the start. This may suggest that the institution itself is not prepared for the needs of its online students. Based on students' unfamiliarity with the level of technological involvement, better pre-application information was needed.

Another aspect of readiness for the online environment was reiterated by some of the participants. June reported on the physical impact of the programme:

> The biggest thing to overcome, I think is just the fatigue. [June: Transcript 1: 303-305]

Because this was so, participants indicated that a state of readiness meant that it was preferable for students to have Internet at home so they could and study.

> [I] would prefer if I had Internet at home, so I could actually go home and get a nap and get up and do some work. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 1625-1627]

This need for Internet access was a problem for a minority of students. However, it was of critical importance to these students because its lack contributed to failure and low grades for some:

> Ok, for the Internet service, there are some times when the Internet service is ok. Sometimes you can get to do all you want to do. At times what you'd say now? You want to do it at the time you want to do it, or like for instant [instance] you say to yourself, I am going to spend twenty minutes today on this particular subject on the Internet. Sometimes, you will get to do it. Sometimes, you will go over that depending on the Internet issues. An Internet issue means that sometimes the system will be slow; sometimes it will be fast. Sometimes you can get no service at all. [Annie: Transcript 2: 13-37]

It was evident that some students initially mis-perceived the rigour and relentlessly ubiquitous presence of the Internet and its role in their online studies. Some students such as Alethia enrolled without equipment that was absolutely necessary. She joined the programme without a modern computer or Internet access at home. Two other participants had installed Internet services at home but, based on where they lived in rural Jamaica, the Internet feed was inconsistent and slow.

Alethia received high in-course grade achievements because she had devised a plan to achieve these goals. She reported how she sought the support of her employer by asking for permission to use the Internet at her workplace. At other times, she spent long hours at the learning site using the Internet to complete assignments. She also devised another strategy to compensate for no Internet at home. She would print all her assignments at the beginning of the semester and submit them as necessary.

By contrast, some students made the lack of Internet services impede their learning. To illustrate, Noreen, had started out with Internet access at her workplace but, due to technical glitches, no longer had that access. Like Alethia, it appeared not too difficult for her to get to the site. However, as she explains here, she has to pass by where she normally takes public transport to get home if she wants to go there. She makes the alternative choice; she goes home knowing full well she will be unable to perform her learning activities from home. This participant's strategy was avoidance and making excuses for not meeting her learning goals.

This participant reinforces that what the student brings to the online environment is more important than all the resources available at the students' fingertips. This one important finding is that environment shapes behaviour. For some students, whose preference is for a face-to-face learning environment, the absence of the constraining physical presence of a tutor can wreak havoc on their ability to cope. This is especially so, as in this case, if the student is already deterred by the technology environment. If there is no effective intervention, the effect on the learning outcomes can be devastating. Noreen has managed to fail all her Year 1 examinations.

Despite Alethia's success, it is unlikely that the typical student can do well without consistent access to Internet facilities. Being less typical, in her determination to achieve her goal Alethia had used her site resources as well as the workplace so, in that regard, had access to consistent Internet if not conveniently at home, and this had an impact on her feelings of wellbeing. Although she was successful in her learning goals, the lack of necessary facilities took its toll on this participant. Other students who appeared to have an external locus of control would not have done so well, and it appeared that Noreen, Stacy and Annie were individuals who found it difficult to rise above some of the obstacles that they faced. Readiness was accepting what needed to be done and doing it.

Other participants too had to come to grips with their own readiness or lack thereof. Each participant arrived at this point through different experiences. Marie was without Internet in the early stages of the programme. Her perceptions were coloured by an early experience when she had no Internet. She had come to terms with the fact that in preparation for an online programme, the learner must meet the requirements of that environment.

> If you're doing a course online... you're going to [be] dependent on the computer... you're gonna have to be able to manoeuvre and manipulate all of these softwares [BBC, Word, Skype] in order to be effective in your course of study... I had to go and download Blackboard. It wasn't on my computer so I had to download it to gain access to the classroom. I had to download those things. I have to have Internet at home... so you have to have whether your laptop or your desktop. Along with access [you need] a workable computer along with your mouse and your key board in order to be a part of these things [Marie: Transcript 1: 116-123]

Marie recounted going to a friend's house to post a graded discussion on the bulletin board, because at first she did not have Internet at home. The outcome was that she did not receive a grade for that discussion post. This experience made her realise that she had to post regularly and, given her family responsibilities, had to obtain Internet at home. Experience, in this case, was the best teacher:

> I was doing Law, Business Law and we had a discussion that runs for the week but I didn't realize… the discussion you have to start the discussion, carry it thru and end it, so I went to my friend's house Saturday evening at the end of the discussion, the day that it ended [accessed computer from my friend's house on Saturday] and just post a discussion and I didn't get any grade for it because I didn't realize, I didn't have any Internet at home so I just went to her house figuring I could still get in but it wasn't like that, you have to be continuous in the discussion from start to finish in order to get a grade. [Marie: Transcript 1: 236-261]

From the comments made by this participant, not only was she ill-prepared by not having Internet access at home, she was unaware of the programme requirements. As she explains, she had not understood that a graded threaded discussion needed participation from the start. This

level of unpreparedness showed that there was truly a lack of understanding of the requirements of learning in computer-mediated environments.

Other participants expressed how strange the new learning environment appeared to them. This was because it was a 'purely online' environment. Students were quick to make the comparison with previous experiences with conventional classroom interaction:

> This online environment is fully online so it was different from previous experiences and students do not know what to expect of it. Getting used to interaction with the operating system and its importance to students, a necessary tool to enable students' success was also different. [June: Transcript 1: 139-196]

These perceptions about becoming familiar with the environment were shared to some extent by other participants. For example, Rosie reported that at the outset of the programme, everything in the student learning domain was so blurred, she had not even realised that resources were provided in the learning domain for students because everything was so new.

> Well the online thing, it is software that I am not used to. Wasn't used to... It was just blurred. Now you can go into certain things like the resources, the different sessions, the different things. [Rosie: Transcript 1: 323-329]

5.2.3 Theme 3: Virtual Shock

Virtual shock is defined in this context as the mismatch between students' expectations and the present reality of their learning context. This factor of mismatch in expectations and reality appeared to be an outcome of what students believed they were told, either when applying or at orientation, to expect. Participants reported how they had expected a blended teaching and learning environment with to have some face-to-face tutoring. This was a key element of students' initial negative perceptions of the learning environment. They had enrolled expecting a teaching model as close as possible to the one they had experienced throughout their prior learning. From their perspective, face-to-face teaching was a fundamental aspect of learning so it was impossible for them to conceptualise an online teaching model. All the participants who reflected on these expectations had imagined their personal version of blended learning.

One version was that the assignments and materials would be delivered online; while there would be face-to-face teaching. This was not a far-fetched expectation, as it represents a model of online learning where technology is used to supplement face-to-face teaching in some higher education. This was Noreen's understanding of what online learning could mean:

> I expected some face-to-face classes; when I signed up I expected my whole assignments and my whole materials would be online, but some face-to-face classes were expected. [Noreen: Transcript 1: 196-198]

Another participant had expected that all numbers-based courses would have a face-to-face component. This stemmed from a general cultural bias against Mathematics in the macro-

context of the online learning environment, where a negative perception existed. These did not materialise for some participants.

> I had the expectations of what I expected blended to be meaning I would have had more face-to-face support for the math-based courses, which did not materialize as I expected. [June: Transcript 1: 71-76]

Another expected that the online environment would be similar to YouTube. This participant expected that he would have had the opportunity to listen to audio classes that simulated a real classroom environment and benefit from questions posed by other students.

> I didn't expect that all the units you were going to read everything and then you'll have to gain your own interpretation of everything. I was expecting that most of the units, they would be recorded and may be from one of the I don't know if the actual school, they would have recorded sessions of most of the units so it feels like you're in a classroom setting, so you can hear questions from other students. **[**Kush: Transcript 1: 120-121**]**

A fourth version was that there would be at least one face-to-face class per semester:

> But when I had started this course, I was expecting honestly I was expecting the mode would be yes, online but then you would have more or even once in a while, for I remember when I was doing the orientation they were speaking that for most, well, I was under the impression that for any given course there may be even one face-to-face. [Ian: Transcript 1: 50-57]

There was a high level of misinformation; one participant understood that if she was able to get a group of more than five students together, this would result in some arrangements for face-to-face classes. When she arrived with more than the five required, she was told that face-to-face teaching was no longer available. This perception was borne out in Alethia's remarks about what she originally expected:

> Initially when I came to orientation, I was told it was blended. I was not informed it was online. I was told if you have five students or more you will have a face-to-face class. Well, for my first semester, I gathered some students for one class and was told 'oh we don't offer face-to face anymore so then, YouTube became my face-to-face tutor' [Alethia: Transcript 1: 12-13]

The realisation that the online learning environment did not match the expectations of these adult learners was a *virtual shock*; having to adjust to the variety of technological tools without a student friendly support system.

5.2.4 Theme 4: Adaptation to online environment

This emergent theme, *adaptation* to the online environment, is defined as students' ability to manage the online context as they progress through the various levels of their online programme. Students' narratives made reference to how their interaction with the technology became better over time. There were two aspects that student perceived as changing.

Students made the point that their approach to the online context had changed as they transitioned through their programme. At first, a student's determination might not have been at its peak, but as the programme progressed and students began to experience good grades the determination to succeed increased. Even though the learning environment might be tough, barring unforeseen circumstances, students can achieve good grades, which can become a factor in their decision to persist. This is how June expressed this conviction:

> Coming in, my determination was high... it wasn't its highest point because I started the programme feeling like I was a 'B' student... And for the first semester or so I lived up to that. [June: Transcript 1:L112-116]

A second type of change was that students realised that they did not have to be experts at computer technology to succeed.

> If you apply yourself even if you are not savvy to it, if you apply yourself it isn't hard. [June: Transcript 1: 430-438.]

Through experience, students were learning that no classroom meant that they had to be responsible for regulating their own behaviours. Students were still expected to make the effort to obtain the information they needed. More importantly, students had to schedule time for their online sessions. This was how they would become acclimatised to the online teaching experience. Michelle had this to say:

> You have to apply yourself just as if you were going to a regular class, 'cause you would have to be in the frame of mind, get ready, go to the class, it's just the same. [Michelle: Transcript 1: 95-97]

5.2.5 Theme 5: Advantages of learning online

Students' perceptions of the *advantages of the online environment* emerged as another important theme. Advantages were perceived as the *convenience and flexibility* of the online learning environment, *the valuing of online learning*, and *transference of experience*.

Most of the participants commented on the many advantages of studying in an online environment. The convenience and flexibility of online learning was very important to students. Some of the students who had experience of the previous teleconference distance education model made the difference between these two models their point of comparison.

The previous model had required students to visit the site for teleconferences and Michelle viewed that model as just as demanding as going to a physical class.

> Before now we had the teleconference... and at that point I did not like the whole teleconference thing… it was coming here... it was like going to a class... [Michelle, transcript 1: L726-739]

However, with the fully online programme, visiting the site was no longer necessary. Most students concluded that the Blackboard Collaborate was far superior to the teleconference model.

> So because with 'BBC you can log on anywhere', it allows more students to attend than the teleconference so they don't feel left out or far away. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 799-803]

The convenience of the online environment was that it fitted into most students' work schedules and there was no compulsion to visit the site. This model was suitable for June, whose work schedule required travelling out of town. From her point of view, the online environment was simply ideal. It was the best fit for her life style.

> The online environment... it was the ideal circumstances for me... because I travel out of town for work, I would not be able to come back in time for a face-to-face class. [June: Transcript 1: 60-64]
>
> That's why I am saying this mode of presentation is best suited for me because with a family and work you get the time to deal with those very important aspects of your life and then have time afterwards to deal with school. I'm thinking that it has been good. [Ian: Transcript 1: 277-286]

For other participants like Ian above, their choice was deliberate. A fully online environment accommodated their work and family priorities, but providing them with an opportunity for study. From the perspective of Ian and Marie, this was the best of all worlds.

> I think the best part about it. I don't know if, I could classify it as a best part 'cause it's not a part. I guess it's the entirety. The best thing about it for me it gives you time. [Ian: Transcript 1: 911-915]
>
> When I was trying to find a school to do my degree, and I called around based on my family commitment and job, I find UWI was very convenient because it was if not the only university at the time that offered an online learning. [Marie: Transcript 1: 19-26]

Some of the students reflected that the flexibility of online learning made it adaptable to students' needs. Other students articulated that online learning was one of the most accessible ways of acquiring an education, because all that a student needed was a computer.

> From my perspective though first and foremost, this is one of the most accessible ways of getting an education because it's online, so once you have a computer you can access it. [Kush: Transcript 1: 1637-1642]

For other students, online learning had simply become integrated into the everyday routine of their lives, an observation made by Michelle:

> So for me, the online school, it has become a part of my life... If I am anywhere, just like how I would go on and I would check Facebook... I would just go in and log in. [Michelle: Transcript 1: 764-761]

This is the advantage of being able to access classes from anywhere. Finally, some students thought about the money that online studies had saved for them, because of not having to study on a campus. This was how it was articulated by Annie:

> Everybody wants to do things online… do it at your own free time. It means using a system to your convenience, where exams are online, makes it easier for you so you don't have to go in to main campus saves you time, money. [Annie: Transcript 1: 358-357]

Students also provided their perspective on how they valued the online programme and its advantages. This was not the same as being convenient or flexible, but how the online programme had changed them in some way. For Marie, it became seen as comparable to a 'real' classroom; that is, a face-to-face class, although she might once have found it puzzling to access studies outside the walls of a physical building. In a real sense, she valued the new learning experience and its advantages. Her remark below shows that there has been a change in perspective in her understanding of where formal learning could take place and this change has been shaped by the online learning experience that has opened her mind to new possibilities as an adult learner:

> Well yes, it has taken a different toll, you're accustomed to sitting in a classroom but here you are as an adult you have the flexibility to do what you want to do. You're doing a degree but nobody see you going to school and all that so yes, it kinda bring you to a different level in your thinking and a different level otherwise. [Marie: Transcript 1: 132-136]

One participant, echoing an earlier observation of becoming a stronger person, concluded that, overall, the programme was a tough environment. Its value to some was that it was possible to learn in the online environment, as outlined through Kush's voice:

> So all in all I'm saying it's a tough experience, but it's an experience you can learn from, it's an experience that will make you stronger once you continue. [Kush: Transcript 2: 814-818]

The third theme of t*ransferrin*g *experience* relates to how knowledge from the workplace could be transferred and made applicable to the online learning environment, such as from June and Alethia's workplaces. June found that her knowledge of software could transfer to the learning environment. Adults, in fact, have prior knowledge and experience that can enhance learning.

> I didn't think it was difficult [technology] I can say that because of what I've been exposed to, what I do at work every day. So when we have to do courses that require working with intermediate-level Excel tools and formula it wasn't very difficult for me. I was able to grasp it easily. [June: Transcript: 1: 403-412]

Alethia confirmed this, because she found the online learning to be worthwhile on the basis that she was able to apply some of her experiences in the workplace to class discussions.

5.2.6 Theme 6: Technology interface

Students' perception of the benefits of *technology interface* is defined as students' interaction with the computer itself. Unlike the conventional classroom, as students progressed through the programme and interacted with the computer and the other technologies, they became more computer literate and improved some students' proficiency with technology. For example, before entering the programme Marie recounted that she had previously only used the computer for word processing and to surf the net.

> I think if I was in a classroom setting, would not be so technology savvy but because I'm in an online setting where I have to keep abreast and have these facilities in order for me to use, think it's an advantage for me. [Marie: Transcript 1: 169-178]

Over the years, she has improved from this limited knowledge base of the computer to a level of competence. She was now planning to add this enhanced computer knowledge to her résumé. A minority of students expressed their perceptions about the downside of technology interface.

One aspect of the technology interface which was perceived as a negative was the lack of a standardised presentation of materials; one student described course pages as resembling a scrapbook. This made the learning domain unattractive and visually more complicated than it really was. This point is related to the learning processes to be discussed later, but is included here because of its relevance to the physical appearance of the learning domain. Students new to an online learning domain need to be able to learn in a student-friendly virtual environment:

> Okay some of the course materials I feel that even though they say somebody edit them, they appear to be like scrapbook'... the way it is arranged it makes the material more complicated than simplified. You would be reading this and you wonder. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 839-842]

5.2.7 Theme 7: Ambivalence (mixed feelings)

Students also had simultaneous negative and positive perceptions about the learning environment. *Ambivalence* described students' mixed feelings towards various aspects of the online learning environment. According to some, it was depersonalised, disembodied and encouraged unsociable behaviour.

This was perceived as a negative experience with the technology. This demonstrates that' despite the perceived advantage that online learning brings to the adult learner, the computer interface was inferior to that of human contact and interaction. They expressed the view that the lack of interaction made online learning difficult, because the facility to meet and greet was no longer possible.

Some students viewed the situation differently, that the technology environment removed the boundaries of time and space, facilitating their interaction with people, regionally and internationally. They perceived technology as expanding their friendship network so wider friendships could be facilitated through social media: there was no need to confine friendships to the local learning centre. Such an advantage accommodated lasting friendships beyond the school environment. Michelle, along with Alethia and Marie, seemed to embrace that facility, and her views are reported as a proxy for the other two:

> I'm in a virtual environment... I need not confine myself... if it was the sense of confinement... we wouldn't be here....We wouldn't be in an online environment. So then by being there, you become friends.... You've built a relationship where even though you're not doing the same course you're there to lend a helping hand to your friend in Antigua or Trinidad or wherever that friend is. [Michelle: Transcript 1: 970-998]

5.2.8 The essence

This learning environment shaped student behaviours. Some students failed to adjust to this new learning modality, while others embraced it, despite its being a sterile environment. Some students learned to value the benefits of convenience and flexibility, while others positively embraced the Blackboard asynchronous facility. However, they are aware that 'anytime, any place' has its downside. The Internet never stops, so student must log on constantly and keep abreast of their classes. Not all will adjust, and students must weigh the decision to take an online course carefully. Institutions are responsible for providing clear information when recruiting. There must be a suitable fit between students' internal characteristics and the environment that will let them learn through computer-mediated systems. Those who like a high degree of structure may not survive this specific learning environment where interactions are not modelled. The essence is that it is a tough experience for all participants and novice online learners either adapt or resist the unfamiliar conditions. In this environment, most students have learnt to adapt. However, some failed to adapt and continued to reminisce about face-to-face environments. This made it even more difficult. Consequently, they failed courses and had few good impressions of the learning environment. Over time it became easier for others to accept it as a valid learning environment, despite its challenges, and those who adjusted appreciated that, as working adults, this was a convenient way to achieve a degree.

5.3 Section 2: Emergent themes: Students' perceptions of learning processes

Table 5.2 is an example of theme clusters and associated meanings relevant to this section.

Table 5.2: Example of theme clusters and associated meanings

Formulated meanings	**Theme clusters**
Fm 79[N]. E-tutors and CC also arrange group learning sessions online but students can only access that if they are proficient with the technology interface. Fm 181[J]. There were good e-tutor and CC who went the extra mile and made it clear that they were not there to trick the students but if students applied themselves they would learn what was required and the outcome would be positive. Fm 186[J]. Not all CC were unresponsive some were very active and kept in regular contact with their students. Fm 188[Al]. An exemplary tutor is one who on recognizing that students have difficulty with a particular course makes the effort to use a variety of teaching methods and tools and online tool to help student learn. For example, regular feedback, questions, tools such as power point show. Fm 201[Ma]. In the early stages of the programme it seemed as if no one cared about students but now this has changed. The tutors are present and they give students the work they need to succeed. Fm 209[R]. Some e-tutors even post approving comments on students' post and that is a very helpful behaviour especially in a student's first year. Fm 223[J]. E-tutors should try to replicate the interaction that happens in a classroom, by introducing new ideas to guide and progress discussions.	Positive role of e-tutors

There were seven emergent themes in respect of the learning process. These were students' perceptions of: tutor interactions and support; feedback; how students learn; coping with online learning; student learning preferences; presentation and quantity of coursework; and overall perceptions of the learning process.

5.3.1 Theme 8: Tutor interactions and support

The emergent theme of *tutor interactions and support* is defined as students' views of their relationships with their tutors and their perception of supporting roles in the learning processes. Students had high expectations of the e-tutor's role. These were based on prior experiences in traditional learning environments.

Positive roles of e-tutors

Students indicated the vital role they thought their e-tutor and course coordinators should play in creating an effective and constructive learning environment. A key element in the learning process was how their e-tutors projected their teaching approach through the Blackboard facility and other text-based encounters. Tutors who were perceived as performing their roles positively were a rarity.

Positive descriptions of tutor behaviours towards students included responsiveness, going the extra mile, providing a variety of instructional methods and replicating the interactive process of the traditional classroom. June was highly vocal about what she thought was the role

of the e-tutor or the opposite. Most of her sentiments were shared by all of the participants. One of the ways that some students described the support they received was through the impressions of their encounters with those tutors who went the extra mile for students. June articulated this perception in her narratives of a caring e-tutor, as someone who attempted to build a supportive relationship by assuring students of their support:

> We had a couple of e-tutors as well as CC who go the extra mile to assure you that we're not here to get you, nobody is here to trick you if you apply yourself to learn what you're supposed to learn then you'll do fine. [June: Transcript 1: 488-489]

For Alethia, the characteristics of good e-tutors were those who shared learning encounters with their students through a variety of instructional methods and presented themselves through voice by using the technological affordances. One such tutor made a difficult subject seemingly a pleasant encounter for students who were challenged by a numbers-based course. Alethia describes her good experience in the following way:

> I had a good e-tutor for Statistics. Statistics is a hard course especially if you're not a mathematician or somebody who loves maths she would go and research. . She would find clipping that is related to the unit. She would find questions and she would actually give feedback. She would do the PowerPoint show. You'd actually hear her voice and she would be explaining. She pre-record these so that whoever want to could access them. [Alethia: Transcript: 2: 703-728]

Other characteristics that students believed contributed to a good learning process were credited to e-tutors who were communicative and supported students through regular contact:

> I had a CC in the last part... She was very, very supportive, very communicative, you hear from her every day. Not everybody is like that. We also had the CCs who were a little gruff but you know they mean well. And I would love very much one day to meet this gentleman. He does not mince his words but you learn to appreciate him. [June: Transcript 1: 1006-1009]

Rosie was another student who reported a good encounter with an e-tutor who provided personalised individual feedback:

> [A particular e-tutor] when you post something she would say ok excellent... it's just like you're in kindergarten and getting some stickers with very good or something... that really help me in my first year. [Rosie: Transcript 1: 148-163]

These memorable encounters demonstrate that tutors could make a difference in the depersonalised, disembodied online environment that some student described in the discourse of the learning environment. These accounts of students' memorable encounters with tutors highlight some good e-tutors' approaches to their professional responsibilities.

Negative tutor posture/stance

Students perceived that they experienced many negative learning encounters with e-tutors. These included: *interpersonal conflicts* between student and tutor; tutors who did little work but were hard markers; course coordinators and tutors with bad attitudes; tutors who were lazy; classes that lacked intellectual stimulation; tutors who were unapproachable; tutors whom students described as doing nothing; and course coordinators whose presence was never felt.

Alethia had a disagreement with an e-tutor who refused to acknowledge her postings since there was no participation grade required. Here, Althea spoke of the issue of how part-time staff may unwittingly disadvantage students because the e-tutor may be overworked or too hard pressed to attend to the needs of those who share the same part-time issues:

> [E-tutor] She has a day job. She teach[es] in the day. That's not my business. If you knew you couldn't manage, don't take it up. So you're telling me you have a day job. I have a day job too and I try to get my assignment in on time. I'm not gonna come and say well, you know I had to work so my assignment is late. So if I can take the time out I don't business if the other students don't do anything she says, you're not getting [a] grade for participation and every week you posting something on it. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 1409-1427]

Some-tutors were perceived as doing little work. Some students reflected on how the different tutors interpreted their teaching roles. They perceived a tutor who did not do much work as being someone who turned up on Sunday only to post unit materials. Such tutors were not seen again until a week later. June and Alethia described their perceptions of e-tutors who did very little to interact with students. These two scenarios are symptomatic of the kind of environment that students described in their accounts of the learning processes:

> Some e-tutor[s] do little online I believe they 'make up' for that by not being too hard on the marking but then you have those who are very hard on the marking and they don't do very much... when I say they didn't do much, I mean coming online on a Sunday, Monday or Tuesday (that has happened) to post the notes whether it's a presentation or whether it's information copied from somewhere discuss... and you don't them again for the rest of the week until they come back the following week on a Sunday, Monday or Tuesday to chime in on the discussion that has been taking place in the previous week. [June: Transcript 1: 465-473]

Alethia explained the unstimulating atmosphere of some of her sessions, a perception shared by Noreen below.

> The course material is black or white, done. You're the e-tutor for the course do some research too so instead of giving us a PowerPoint and use the summary in the course material what about finding an example or expounding on what is already in the book?... So if the e-tutor will make it a two-way street not just come and post the end of the unit summary but actually speak to the students... they are too lazy. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 647-657]

> [E-tutor] They just come and tell you what to do and where to go and get it, that's it, no little enthusiasm about it. Probably I'm not too fit for this environment as yet. [Noreen: Transcript: 1: 412-413]

Alethia's and Noreen's comments typify how some of their e-tutors present learning materials with little conviction and no attempt to engage with their students.

Communication/miscommunication

Some students reported that the text-based learning processes were open to misinterpretation. For example, Ian describes the difficulty of asking a question and getting an effective response during a Blackboard session, especially for a numbers-based course:

> I think they are difficult to be conveyed online because for numbers-based it is practice, practice, practice and you have to get the steps down and there are time when you may have to get the first step even a day before you go on to the next step, all right so having it being posted out or worked out by someone is difficult without you having to ask the person why is it they. So there's some footnotes or there's something to the right as to the reason they did it, it is difficult when you're not able to ask. Now the only time you're able to ask… because you can post something and ask... but then if the person would be writing something, what they're writing might not be what you are asking, so you may end up having to ask and so the back and forth. [Ian: Transcript 2: 817-848]

Kush also described a similar experience in his reflection on how messages between students and e-tutor can be open to miscommunication, because it is an environment that lacks the vital facial clues to guide both the sender and receiver of the message:

> But as I said before, not all questions that you send to the e-tutor are answered in the time you want them answer, number 1 and not all questions are answered in a way that you fully understand or grasp what it is... So because of that you may not get your answers the time that you want it or you may not get your answer explained enough, because it is written, you may not get it explained enough so that you'll be able to understand it because you send an email and that person may send an email. [Kush: Transcript 1: 1030-1065]

Inconsistent grading outcomes

Some participants described how they perceived their grades were inconsistent or unfair. June and Alethia in particular had disagreements with e-tutors about grades. June successfully contested her grades, on occasion, and a course coordinator had to intervene on Alethia's behalf. Other students had the same problems, but not all students had such courage in their convictions. Some students expressed how e-tutors seemed to enjoy giving students low grades or seemed to want students to lower their expectation of obtaining good marks by accepting what they perceived as a low pass mark. Students described their puzzlement when grades

suddenly increased at examination times. June was sometimes surprised at e-tutors' intransigence and reluctance to engage in dialogue with students:

> I believe sometimes the grades appear arbitrary... that for the first few assignments you were getting 4 out 10 and 5 out of 10 for a grade and for me that's unusual... There was no explanation as to why the grades were low and then as it got closer to exams the grades started to improve for everybody from our own biased perspective you don't see any difference in the quality of your work to justify why all of a sudden your grades have just jumped from a 5 to a 9. [June: Transcript 1: 224-248]

> But I think they get a kick out of seeing who can get the highest failure. I had numerous e-tutors telling me 40 is a pass mark. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 416-420]

5.3.2 Theme 9: Perceptions of feedback

Feedback was very important in the online environment because no opportunity existed for tutors and students to meet due to the regional environment. Students viewed non-response from e-tutors as disrespectful, just as it would in a face-to-face environment. Students described their need for effective as well as timely feedback, in keeping with what was expressed in their student charter of a 24- to 48hour guideline. Below are some of the students' views on feedback, which was a way that student thought could improve their learning. However, late responses, no responses and inadequate responses made students find alternative ways to learn.

Students' view of feedback

> Imagine being in a face-to-face learning situation where you say excuse me, sir, I don't understand how you gave me so and so, and having the CC or the e-tutor walking away from you and not answering; it's the same thing. So again as we said before the virtual environment is not that much different, the only exception is that you're not seeing each other. [.June: Transcript 2: 992-1004]

> I think they need to be more engaging I think they need to be more engaging with the students**.** They need to follow up especially all of do have course work. And we don't have 1 course work, we have multiple course work; and if we provide them with a particular course work and you for example [give] a low grade, tell us why we get those low grade... It would be a big part of the online, because of that a lot of persons feel neglected by the whole thing, and the course itself. [Kush: Transcript 2: 249-280]

Timing of tutor feedback

> I escalated it to the CC [who took] an inordinate amount of time to get back to me and I thought that, based on the service level that are promoted in the course guide, your e-tutor or CC will respond to your questions within a timely manner perhaps 24-48 hours I went weeks without a response.... I escalated stepped up my actions again to the programme delivery department. [June: Transcript 1: 258-270]

> Worst part is lack of communication at times. Some CC I don't think they realize that if it wasn't for the student, we wouldn't have any need for them...

> I've posted on an example; I don't understand what probability is. I did a question from the work book and I post it. No e-tutor response for days. I want to know if.... I'm on the right path; it's the job of your e-tutor to check it. Now, if I post it, there where you and the e-tutor are there, some course coordinator if the e-tutor doesn't respond in 24 hours will assist the students. So you keep telling me every time I ask it's the e-tutor's job... then I ask her the person above the course coordinator, and she was like ask the course coordinator. So I was like why they say they give you a chain to follow and then they sending you right back down. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 1341-1382]

5.3.3 Theme 10: How students learn

Despite the highly negative learning environment, students still managed to learn and do well. Several students had to learn to take responsibility for directing their own learning. Those who found it difficult to do so had many failures. Without saying as much, they found that they learnt in a variety of ways that had little to do with interaction with e-tutors.

Taking responsibility/independent learning

> It has to do with you finding the time to really sit down and study. Really sit down and go through the whole concept and broaden your horizon and you have to think deep into some things for yourself; some things that the e-tutor or the CC will not tell you. You have to sit down and think, have a broad thinking for yourself. [Noreen: Transcript 1: 370-375]

June shared how she earned a 'C' by taking course coordinators' hints rather than covering the topics required. This was also her lesson in accepting responsibility for her own learning. It appeared to be a lesson she learned well. June underscored a point made earlier about young adults being used to face-to-face who might not understand that in online learning; students had to do all the work on their own.

> I earned one 'C' I earned it because I made a decision that came back to bite me.... I cherry-picked. What do I mean by cherry-picked, I went through and selected of the topics, 5/7 to prepare for and ensured that I'm able to cover it backwards and forwards ten times from here till next Sunday... I recall feeling as though I was misled by the CC... it is the only blot. In my opinion, even if it was a B, I could live with it but a C? I don't see myself as a C person. [June: Transcript 1: 341-372]

Students indicated the inadequacy of some of the course material provided; for example Marie explained that there was too little material for the Mathematics and too few tutorials to work out complex problems.

Doing coursework/using course resources

> And they give you an assignment what I don't like about their unit material; you're going to give us an assignment on a complex problem. Can you at least at some point give us an example of that complex problem, so we have something to follow? [Alethia: Transcript 1: 863-870]

Students had to source their own information and to do the necessary preparation to excel in examinations, because there were little or no tutorials online to give assistance.

Live teaching sessions

Some students did not prepare for participation in discussion forums, and it appeared that they disrupted sessions by asking questions. Michelle indicated both the advantages of the recorded version of the Blackboard sessions and one problem: that a student could not ask questions. However, students had the option to contact e-tutors via e-mail:

> Students who don't read in advance have problems participating. It's only two hours long so if you don't read you'll be like what did you mean, what you didn't mean. Yes you can ask questions but you can't read an entire chapter and not understand. So that was some of the problems. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 718-727]

Doing online discussion

Student reflected both negatively and positively on the online graded discussion forums. Kush shared that the level of discourse was low, without a tutor guiding the discussion. Student posted uncritically to get the participation grade. Alethia reflected on its advantages to students, since it forced them to read the unit material.

> The forums are not in a way where it's really collaborative... and there is not enough intervention from the instructor... persons are putting these post just to ensure that they have post... most of these posts are graded... so a lot of times, you may not understand stuff. [Kush: Transcript 1: 64-84]
>
> The weekly discussion forces you to read because they are asking you something from that unit, because so even if you're saying I can read the next 2 chapters next week or whenever I get a chance it forces you to read and then if you miss something or you didn't understand something you can read what others are saying. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 196-400]

Peer interaction

Three participants relayed their positive thoughts on small-group online and offline interactions:

> Sometimes by reading a unit, doing a discussion, reading a unit with your other adult learners from different countries in the region... you learn so much more than what the text actually has to offer. [Michelle: Transcript 1: 134-138]
>
> But with friends... I think it makes it little bit easier... Apart from you going thru all the readings, what you get is these persons they have things that they are unclear of... they may ask another friend who may have the answer to what they need... and because of that without you reading you can pick up stuff. [Kush: Transcript 1: 694-713]

Learning from the World Wide Web

Participants learned from the World Wide Web through YouTube, which became an alternative to the less-than interactive-e-tutors.

> For example, I'm doing probability with Statistics, because YouTube offer. You can hear somebody speak and in my opinion when I use more of my senses it reinforces the information so when I read it and I hear it I'll read it and then I'll go and listen to it... I'll work out some probability problems and I'll type in probability and they'll show you different, different universities, because is not just anybody I listen to on YouTube... so I look for the one that say EDU or the CMIA or the ACCA those type of things and listen to them. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 587-611]

> I heard persons saying that they have terrible e-tutors but he was the only one that I... apart from sometime they... reply to you late when you already maybe go on YouTube or Google and find the answer. [Rosie: Transcript 1: 168-176]

5.3.4 Theme 11: Coping with online

Participants learnt to cope with the learning environment by regulating their sleeping time. By doing so; Noreen could cover all the material. Despite the sleep deficit, students had to adjust by putting in the work necessary to achieve their goals.

Getting sleep

> I think I been, but obviously I'm not doing it enough... I work in the day... I don't have time to read and the material that I have to cover and to grasp... to cover the material, then, I have to get less sleep and do it when I am at home. [Noreen: Transcript 1: 1027-1050]

> But that means sleeping from 1:00-6:00, or sometimes you're up later so you're getting an average of 5 hours sleep per night for 5 days out of the week that is a heavy sleep deficit... you have to put in the work to get what you want. [June: Transcript 1:323-331]

Keeping pace

Coping also had to do with learning to keep pace with the programme, as Noreen explained.

> [Contacting e-tutor] I don't think so. Most times from what I know they have moved on. so if you're behind the only notation that you're getting and I will draw it back to the e-tutor that I said for Sociology she is always saying, catch up on your reading, catch up on your reading, but other than that if you're behind you have to discipline yourself to catch up. [Noreen: Transcript 1: 141-1175]

Discipline/procrastination

> I try telling myself that I need to be more disciplined, 'cause if I'm not disciplined I will continue to fail and then I will say that's a waste of my money that I don't have. I think that's just it – I need to be more disciplined. [Noreen: Transcript 1: 168-570]

> think initially… I had a laid back approach but the spinoff is not good because you spend more time at the University when you could have been finished within a certain time frame. [Marie: Transcript 1: 493-500]

June expressed her view that students had to find the time to balance their life to take their minds off the online process. Other students also mentioned in the interview how time management factored as they tried to balance busy lives.

Using a schedule/finding a balance

> Even though I said, I made sacrifices in the beginning; you cannot not make time for other things. At the start you don't achieve balance. It was only 3 years, it was only three years for me but you have to find, some kind of attempt at balance. There wasn't balance, there wasn't because it was school and everything else was down here but you had to find a moment to relax your mind, take your mind off… [June: Transcript 1: 725-734]

5.3.5 Theme 12: Learning preferences

Some of the students reflected on their difficulty with learning mathematical subjects online. Three students shared their experiences: two had to pay for private help in Mathematics.

> I was doing Mathematics for Social Sciences and I don't understand some of the terms and I wanted somebody for instance to sit beside me and work it out and show me that you do it this way, however, I did not have that being that it's an online programme. [Noreen: Transcript 1: 121-132]

Delivery preferences

> I was expecting more audio… programmes... So that you know when persons, on an audio programme... if there is in an actual setting, persons will be able to ask questions and from those question you can understand what, let me just use the term emotional, emotionally what the instructor is gaining at. [Kush: Transcript 1:49-160]

5.3.6 Theme 13: Presentation and quantity content

The main problem students perceived with the course content was the large quantity for most courses. The learning was heavily text-based and it appeared that very few e-tutors used the interactive facilities to create a better atmosphere for their classes. Most students talked about the insurmountable coursework and the amount of reading. Alethia referred to the '200 page PDF' that students were given to read, and June shared about the 'level of application', the 'critical thinking'. These were two highly effective learners, but they did express some of the issues that concerned:

> The main material alone is a lot to cover in one week, more so the e-tutor's comments, the e-tutor's presentation and you have additional readings that they give to you at times online that you have to download and read and that you have to grasp all those things... Remember, it's the first time you are doing all these courses and they are giving you one week to go thru one unit, it's a lot, I really think it's a lot. [Noreen: Transcript 1: 276-299]

5.3.7 Theme 14: Overall perceptions of the learning process

Students' expressed a variety of views about their overall learning processes. For some students like Alethia there were 'lots of negatives'.

June expressed that perceptions of online learning being easy was a misconception.

> I don't know why people think online studying is easier, it is not; it isn't. [June: Transcript 1: 595-596]

Kush pointed out that the lack of interaction and being unable to hear other students was a drawback of the online delivery. However, based on an earlier comment, he still viewed online learning as an opportunity:

> What you don't get from being online is that you can ask questions to your e-tutor... you have some questions that you may not think of at that particular time but other students may ask that e-tutor... that's what you don't get from being online. [Kush: Transcript 1: 332-333]

However, Alethia shared that a good thing about the learning process was the ability to transfer knowledge from the workplace to the learning environment.

The overall atmosphere of the virtual classroom in this context is one of adversity and lack of interaction between the two important agents of the process, students and tutors. However, students at the start and right throughout their programmes crave this kind of interaction. When it is not forthcoming, they have to seek alternative sources of support, mostly in themselves with help from the workplace and friendship groups. Feedback, a vital aspect of students' learning, was mostly absent and the fact that students learn was due largely to their disposition and what they brought to the environment, rather than the resources that were provided. Creative teaching is absent, but this may be due to e-tutors' lack of training and a professional approach to their students. Students' descriptions show that tutors remained aloof from their students, although students' responses show that they valued interaction with tutors.

5.4 Section 3: Types of perceived learning outcomes from their experiences

Students appeared to be learning, albeit imperceptibly and with minimum intervention from e-tutors and course coordinators, although a few did engage positively with their students. There were a variety of learning outcomes; formal and informal. In terms of performance achievement goals, the majority of students made progress despite some negative perceptions about the learning environment. However, the progress in terms of learning support and interaction with e-tutors and course coordinators was almost non-existent. One student, Noreen seemed to have major problems with learning the technology in order to participate. She had

already failed all courses and was likely to fail again, given that there was no indication that she would find a way to get help or to even help herself.

At the time of the interview, two students already knew the outcomes of their studies. Both Alethia and June would graduate with high honours. Stacy, the other student who had a subject left to complete already knows that the GPA will be disastrous, and Annie experienced failures due to problems with the Internet access. Kush and Ian will likely persist, like Rosie, Michelle and Marie. Marie had improved her proficiency with computers and been progressing through the course and should eventually graduate.

With respect to performance achievement, it is likely that at least eight of these students will achieve their degree goal. Other outcomes are students learning to learn independently with very small amounts of tutor interaction. They have formed their own small groups within the environment and offline. They are making decisions about how to learn and what to learn by using YouTube, Google and other online sources. Most have adapted to the learning environment. Students are learning to seek additional resources from the workplace and are aware that there is knowledge transfer between the two environments

Students also have exhibited personal development and growth in the learning. They have learned to self-regulate by managing time, have developed self-discipline, commitment and endurance, and they become stronger through the adverse circumstance of this online learning context.

Students' views of their experiences of learning through the computer mediated environment can be interpreted in the light of their student profiles, developed earlier. They show that the students can also be grouped in relation to their disposition to the learning environment. In this context, the tentative conclusion is that there are again three categories of responses to the learner environment. Some students are early adopters: that is, those who become assimilated very quickly. One such student was Michelle, whose early experience with the technology was influenced by the convenience of being able to go on vacation without missing anything relating to the online programme. Throughout the interviews, Michelle made little negative responses to the learning environment. The second group was the adapters: that is, those who had embraced the programme but reported that they had some difficulty with adjusting to some aspect of the environment. For example, this could be having difficulty with numbers-based courses in the early stages, or other issues based on prior expectations, lacking understanding of some other aspects. These were June, Alethia, Kush, Ian, Rosie and Marie, students who tempered their expectations. These are the students who were moving towards their goal and achieving either excellent or satisfactory performances, respectively. The last

group of students comprised Noreen, Annie and Stacy, who were either having limited success or no success at all. These students are the resisters and in this group are three levels of resistance: avoidance is practised by Noreen, forced compliance by Stacy; and detachment by Annie. Noreen gets nothing from the environment and she is not logging in for classes, while Annie has problems with the Internet that she tries to overcome but is limited to accessing it from work. She barely engages with anyone because of time and lack of Internet services. Stacy is in the programme because of her job requirements that staff must upgrade, but did not really commit to the programme until she found that her GPA was not acceptable to her aim of obtaining a good degree.

In respect of student views or beliefs about the learning processes, students perceived their tutors in general as unapproachable. This was a common view. Some students actively resisted the way e-tutors and course coordinators executed their teaching role. These were the students who contested and confronted the system through its tutor representatives. These were the students who achieved excellence, as June and Alethia did. These were those students who viewed their adult status as deserving of an environment where their views were taken into consideration of how their work was assessed and, if necessary, accompanied by explanations about grading outcomes. In general, these students received support from the system even as they challenged how the learning processes were executed. Other students appeared not to want to challenge the system and the tentative conclusion is that their outcomes would be lower.

5.4.1 The essence

The essence of the learning environment and the learning processes as perceived by the students was that the learning environment was a tough one and the learning processes were overwhelmingly negative in respect of interaction between students and their e-tutors or course coordinators for all students. However, it was not all negatives in relation to the technology environment. Even students who embraced the online delivery mode with some trepidation learnt that it was possible to learn via computer-mediated technology. Most students found the online learning environment suitable to their life, work and study lifestyle. However, in order to succeed it was necessary to draw on internal reserves of commitment, discipline and determination. Convenience and flexibility meant that successful students had to learn to self-regulate by putting in the time, face the large quantity of reading that was required and find alternative learning resources outside of tutor interactions. Successful students learnt to direct their own learning by being assertive, taking responsibility and embracing the affordances of the new environment. Successful students recognised that, to succeed, dependency was not an option so they sought assistance from the workplace and formed small friendship learning groups on and offline. Most students who experienced difficulty with the numbers-based

aspects of the programme content found a way around that impediment by employing the services of a local tutor and sharing the cost among themselves to make it affordable. The more dependent students continued to compare the face-to-face environment with the online learning environment and did not accept that it was different, and not meant to be a replication of the traditional learning environment. The consequences for these students, a minority, were repeated failures and low GPAs. All students found tutor feedback insufficient, untimely and sporadic. Grading criteria were unknown, appeared arbitrary and tutors reluctant or unwilling to provide the formative feedback on which students placed high value. Some students contested grades and openly disagreed with their e-tutors over participation and explanations of grading criteria. Some students found discussion forums useful, while others did not.

However, most students favoured the Blackboard interface, especially the asynchronous facility. Only a minority of the students found it difficult to access or could not cope with how it was executed. Additionally, there were pockets of effective interaction with a few tutors and course coordinators who extended themselves to assist and support students' learning.

Nevertheless, the overall conclusion was that not all students are suitable for an environment that calls on students' capacity to endure. Although the institution should provide a learning environment conducive to students' wellbeing, those students who focused on the big picture of earning a degree were able to adjust and obtain high grades in a highly demanding and unsupportive environment.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, the findings of the study were discussed by incorporating extracts from participants' interviews. Each student's perception of the learning environment was a unique experience, given that each participant was at a different stage of their journey through the degree programme. Students found the environment mentally demanding due to a great deal of content reading, with little tutor support or guidance. Despite these challenges, some students displayed the capacity to adapt to new learning. These students internalised incentives to persist and qualities of endurance, and accepted that to succeed they would have to adapt to the requirements of the learning environment. Some participants found the overall experience to be a rewarding one, while others remained consistent in their belief that it was an inferior learning environment overall compared to a traditional face-to-face environment. The next chapter, chapter 6, will present the findings on students' emotional experience in the online learning environment.

CHAPTER 6. FINDINGS: ADULT STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES AND BEHAVIOURS IN THE ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

6.1 Introduction

The primary objective of this study was to describe the 'lived emotional experience' of the participants of this study. Information from these adult learners' transcripts addresses their emotional experiences, and how these were manifested in their actions or behaviours.

The aim was to uncover commonalities as well as to underscore what was unique. Phenomenological analysis aims to keep as close as possible to the literal statements of participants (Hycner, 1985). Phenomenological analysis seeks to understand the nature of experience shared by several individuals (Creswell, 2007). The branch of phenomenology that was used is empirical or transcendental phenomenology. This type of phenomenological analysis places more emphasis on a description of the experiences of participants and less emphasis on interpretations of the researcher. Another key element of this process is that the researcher brackets his or her own perspectives and seeks to describe the common structure of the phenomenon using the voice of the participants.

Phenomenological reduction of the data focussed on **what** students said they experienced and **how** they said it was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Hycner's (1985) phenomenological guidelines were used to analyse the data in this chapter, as in the previous. Significant statements relevant to the phenomenon were extracted from the participant's transcripts. Meanings were formulated and arranged into cluster themes. The results were integrated into a composite description of the lived experience. The rich and thick data descriptions required the researcher to find a meaningful way of presenting a complex body of evidence to the reader. Thus a decision was made to display these emotions visually. All significant statements were reviewed by the researcher to ensure that the statements reflected the objectives of the study.

6.2 Step 1: Description of what the participants said they experienced emotionally.

Table 6.1 below illustrates how significant statements/words/phrases were distilled from one participant's interview. The highlighted areas demonstrate how significant emotion words were extracted.

Table 6.1: Significant statements/words/phrases distilled from participant's interview

[I was angry] [Negative emotional affect] .[J24h] I was not the only one who felt that way. There are persons who I studied with who were able to attempt the question however they too got C. **[result of being unprepared for an exam**] [J24i] I was so angry [J24]j[negative emotional affect] I could not contest the grade. If I did I don't know if you'd have me in any kind of regard here so I decided to leave it alone. ["I was mad,"][J24k] [Very angry] [Feeling statement] ['it is the only blot"].[J24]l[the only bad grade on an otherwise perfect score]In my opinion even If it was a B, I could live with it but a C? I don't see myself as a C person **[academically self assured**][J24m]

[consequences of second guessing exam questions]

"I was mad"][J25][very angry] [**feeling statement**] and I just decided to leave it. **[Taking responsibility for a low grade**][J25a]I know persons or heard, persons wrote letters and asked for review and I did not. The person who is always challenging, challenging [emphasis]their grade did nothing and why I did not, I knew, I was partially at fault because I cherry picked it**,[taking responsibility][J25b]** I handpicked what I thought was coming and that was partly my fault [**value of preparation for exams**] [J25c]

[accepting responsibility for unsatisfactory learning outcome .

So regardless of what I was told the tutors and the CCs cannot tell you what is coming on the exams…they can't tell you the questions so I had a hand in that C. **[learning to learn independently]** [J25d] [June: Transcript 1: 361-386]

(All student names are pseudonyms)

6.2.1 Unpacking the (texture) of students' emotional descriptions

The transcripts were viewed holistically for general meaning, then examined line-by-line, after which selective coding was used to extract the relevant meaning units. In this section, the individual emotions that emerged reflected the texture of the experience as shared by the ten students individually and collectively. These emerged as either a common or uncommon emotional theme. In the example above, interest is focussed on the extraction of emotion words and feeling statements, which are encapsulated in the theme '*feelings of anger*'.

Students described both negative and positive emotion states. Negative emotions were coloured red and positive green. All feeling statements were colour-coded yellow. All discrete emotions were identified by their everyday emotion name, for example, anger as a negative emotion or happiness as a positive emotion state. However, as in everyday experiences, emotions are also inferred from descriptions of a situation, so a second method coded as *feeling statements* was used to identify emotion concepts. Feeling statements are statements and sometimes single words that, in the context of the texts mirror an emotion, for example, **'I was livid'**, which suggests feelings of anger. Once isolated, all emotions were separated into two mega-categories, negative or positive; they were then classified into categories as explained and displayed in the tables below.

6.3 Step 2: Common and uncommon emotions

All the emotions that were gathered from each transcript were separated into common and uncommon emotions, based on how many students used that particular emotion. All the emotions were reorganised into four clusters: A, B, C and D. Cluster A, primary common emotions, were those used by five or more students. Secondary primary emotions, Cluster B, were those used by three or four participants. Cluster C were emotions common to two students, and Cluster D were emotions unique to one student. The reorganisation of emotions into specified clusters is displayed in Tables 6.2 and 6.3 to follow, displaying the four negative and positive clusters respectively for each emotion identified.

Table 6.2: Distillation of relevant negative common and uncommon emotions clusters

Negative emotions			
Primary common emotions	**Secondary common emotions**	**Uncommon emotions relevant to 2 participants or unique to a person**	
Cluster A	**Cluster B**	**Cluster C**	**Cluster D**
frustration	fear	distraught	helpless
anger/upset	overwhelmed	worry	ignored
alienation/lonely/alone	confusion	dismay	disheartened
distress	discomfort	uncertainty	offended
stress/pressure	dissatisfaction	dislike	disrespected
disappointment	regret	depressed	impatience
struggle	sad	insulted	distrust
anxiety	scared	disinterested/bored	panic
challenged	shock/surprise	resigned	unexcited
fear/scared/afraid	discouraged	hopeless	discontented
	demotivated	doubt	nervous
		heartbroken	lackadaisical
		displeased	sceptical
		guilt	

Table 6.3: Distillation of relevant positive common and uncommon emotion clusters

Positive emotions			
Primary common emotions	**Secondary common emotions**	**Uncommon to emotions relevant to 2 participants or unique to a person**	
Cluster A	**Cluster B**	**Cluster C**	**Cluster D**
confidence	appreciation	grateful/thankful	joy/overjoyed
encouragement	comfortable	elated	pride
enthusiasm	empathy	relief	calm
happiness	enjoyment	like	ecstatic
motivated	excitement		contentment
relaxed	glad		peace
	satisfied		fun
			interesting
			hope
			patience/tolerance
			surprise
			delight
			affirmation

These tables show that:

- students resided in a heavily charged emotional environment
- the categories show a wide array of positive and negative emotions that were present as an integral part of learning in this context
- these emotions were valenced, either negative or positive
- there were many more negative than positive emotions, and
- students were conscious of these emotions throughout, because they were able to recall the specific emotion episode and link it to a particular object, event or situation.

Since the research was based on generating subjective experiences, all individual emotions were considered equally valid. Every attempt was made to keep close to the literal words of the participants, based on the clues to the context in each statement. In keeping with the phenomenological approach, it was important to acknowledge that each participant's individual experience as an adult learner in the online learning environment was unique. Consequently minority expressions of the phenomenon are not discarded and can be used to illuminate experiences for a specific individual (Hycner, 1985). In sum, participants' descriptions of such a wide variety of emotional expressions reflect the emotionality of the overall student experience in this online context.

Interestingly, the negative emotions were much more differentiated in terms of their subtle nuances and variations than the positive. It was also found that these retrospective accounts of emotions were not articulated in a vacuum. All the emotions were aroused in response to events such as examinations, social interactions such as relations with e-tutors/course coordinators or simply to objects in their learning environment, like having to use a computer on a regular basis. Students also described emotions that were internal to themselves, for example the act of blaming oneself for a particular outcome. These responses to situations, objects or towards the self are referred to as contextual triggers. All common contextual triggers were further clustered under generic contextual categories.

6.4 Step 3: Linking negative and positive emotions to specific participants

At this stage all positive and negative emotions were linked to a specific participant in order to show which emotion was relevant to that participant, as well as how these emotions were commonly distributed across the group. These tables are presented to depict the textural description of the phenomenon. The data as interpreted are displayed below: Tables: 6.4, 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7 depict negative emotions; Tables 6.8, 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11 depict positive emotions.

Feelings of frustration and disappointment emerged as the two most frequently described emotions. Nine students described their feelings of anger and eight their feelings of frustration. Anger emerged when students felt they were wronged or unfairly treated, and frustration emerged when a student was thwarted in their goal-directed behaviour.

The tables are displayed together so that comparisons can be made across the group relating to each participant's emotional experience. Interestingly, it was found that the same emotion was sometimes aroused by the same contextual trigger and, alternatively, sometimes different triggers aroused similar emotion states, demonstrating that an emotional experience is a highly individual factor and no assumptions can be made about emotional factors a priori.

The majority of the emotions portrayed were spontaneously identified by each participant; students provided their own words and were not dependent on a researcher script. This is important because students were able to articulate their conscious experience of their feelings, helping to preserve the authenticity of the emerging emotion themes and contextual triggers. This is noteworthy because the study is interested in subjective experiences where interest is focussed on hearing the voices of the research participants. These tables provide evidence for the wide array of emotions that emerged in this online setting. Some were shared among the group, but others were unique variations of emotional experience.

Table 6.4: Primary negative emotions common to five or more participants

Common emotions									
Noreen	**June**	**Alethia**	**Marie**	**Kush**	**Michelle**	**Rosie**	**Ian**	**Annie**	**Stacy**
anger	anger	anger	upset	anger	anger	upset	anger		upset
frustration	frustration	frustration		frustration	frustration	frustration		frustration	frustration
struggle			struggle	struggle	struggle	struggle	struggle	struggle	
disappointment	disappointment		disappointment	disappointment	disappointment	disappointment	disappointment		
stress	stress		stress	stress	stress			stress	stress
alienated		aloneness		alone/lonely	lonely/alienated		alienated/alone		lonely/alone
pressure	pressure			pressure		pressure			pressure
anxiety	anxiety	anxiety	anxiety			anxiety		anxiety	anxiety
challenged	challenged		challenged	challenged		challenged			challenged
distress		distress	distress	distress		distress			distress

Table 6.5: Secondary negative emotions common to three or four participants

Noreen	**June**	**Alethia**	**Marie**	**Kush**	**Michelle**	**Rosie**	**Ian**	**Annie**	**Stacy**
confused					confused	confused		confused	
overwhelmed	overwhelmed	overwhelmed	overwhelmed						
			regret			regret		regret	regret
		dissatisfied		dissatisfied		dissatisfied		dissatisfied	
	fear		fear	fear	scared		fear	scared	
discomfort				discomfort	discomfort	discomfort			
		demotivated					demotivated		
discouraged			discouraged					discouraged	
		shock/surprise		shock/surprise					shock
					sad			sad	sad

Table 6.6: Negative emotions common to two participants

Noreen	June	Alethia	Marie	Kush	Michelle	Rosie	Ian	Annie	Stacy
worry		dislike	worry	distraught	depressed	dislike	disinterested	disinterested/bored	despair
distraught	dismay	depressed		uncertainty	guilt	insulted			dismay
	uncertainty	insulted		guilt					embarrassed
	embarrassment/shame								

Table 6.7: Negative emotions unique to one participant

Noreen	June	Alethia	Marie	Kush	Michelle	Rosie	Ian	Annie	Stacy
helplessness		ignored	impatience	disengaged		panic	discontented	nervous	lackadaisical
		disheartened		distrust		unexcited	sceptical		nerve wrecking
		offended							resigned
		disrespected							hopeless
									doubt
									heartbroken
									self-blame
									displeased
									hate

Table 6.8: Primary positive emotions common to five or more participants

Noreen	June	Alethia	Marie	Kush	Michelle	Rosie	Ian	Annie	Stacy
happy	happy	happy	happy	happy	happy		happy	happy	happy
encouraged	encouraged		encouraged	encouraged		encouraged	encouraged	encouraged	
	confidence	confidence		confidence	confidence	confident	confident		
			motivation	motivated	motivated	motivated	motivated	motivated	
			relaxed		relaxed	relaxed	relaxed	relaxed	
	enthusiastic		enthusiastic	enthusiastic	enthusiastic		enthusiastic		

Table 6.9: Secondary positive emotions common to four or more participants

Noreen	June	Alethia	Marie	Kush	Michelle	Rosie	Ian	Annie	Stacy
	appreciation	appreciation				appreciation	appreciation		
				enjoyment		enjoyable		enjoyment	enjoyment
		empathy	empathy						empathy
	gratitude/grateful			grateful/thankful	thankful				thankful/grateful
					comfortable		comfortable	comfortable	
	satisfied	satisfied				satisfied			
				glad	glad			glad	
	excited		excitement			excited			

Table 6.10: Positive emotions common to two participants

Noreen	June	Alethia	Marie	Kush	Michelle	Rosie	Ian	Annie	Stacy
		relief				relief			

Table 6.11: Positive emotions unique to one participant

Noreen	June	Alethia	Marie	Kush	Michelle	Rosie	Ian	Annie	Stacy
	elated	determined	ecstatic	elated	contentment	approval	affirmation	hope	
	joy/overjoyed	like	calm		peace	thrilled	interesting		
	pride	amused			fun	composed			
	assurance/reassurance				humour				
	surprise				patience				
	delight				tolerance				
	commitment				joy				

In the tables representing the number of positive emotions, nine participants described themselves as ‘feeling happy’ at particular events. The number of mentions for ‘feeling happy’ was also greater than for other positive emotions. Thus, the data demonstrated that ‘feeling happy’ was the most pervasive positive emotion that the students reported experiencing in the online learning environment. This was followed by motivation and feeling encouraged.

The fact that more negative emotions were experienced by each student is symptomatic of an environment skewed towards shared negative emotional experiences. Nevertheless, each participant had a unique experience as a single entity, so the individuality of each experience is retained even when participants identified similar emotions, given the subjectivity of individual experiences.

In each section negative emotions are analysed first, because students in all cases chose to discuss their negative emotions first and how these shaped their responses in this learning context. Interestingly, the findings showed that even within the emotional experiences that were considered general or common, some individuals had experiences that were singularly uncommon. Most students could clearly recall their negative experiences in detail.

Figure 6.1: Number of participants identifying a single common primary negative emotion mentioned collectively

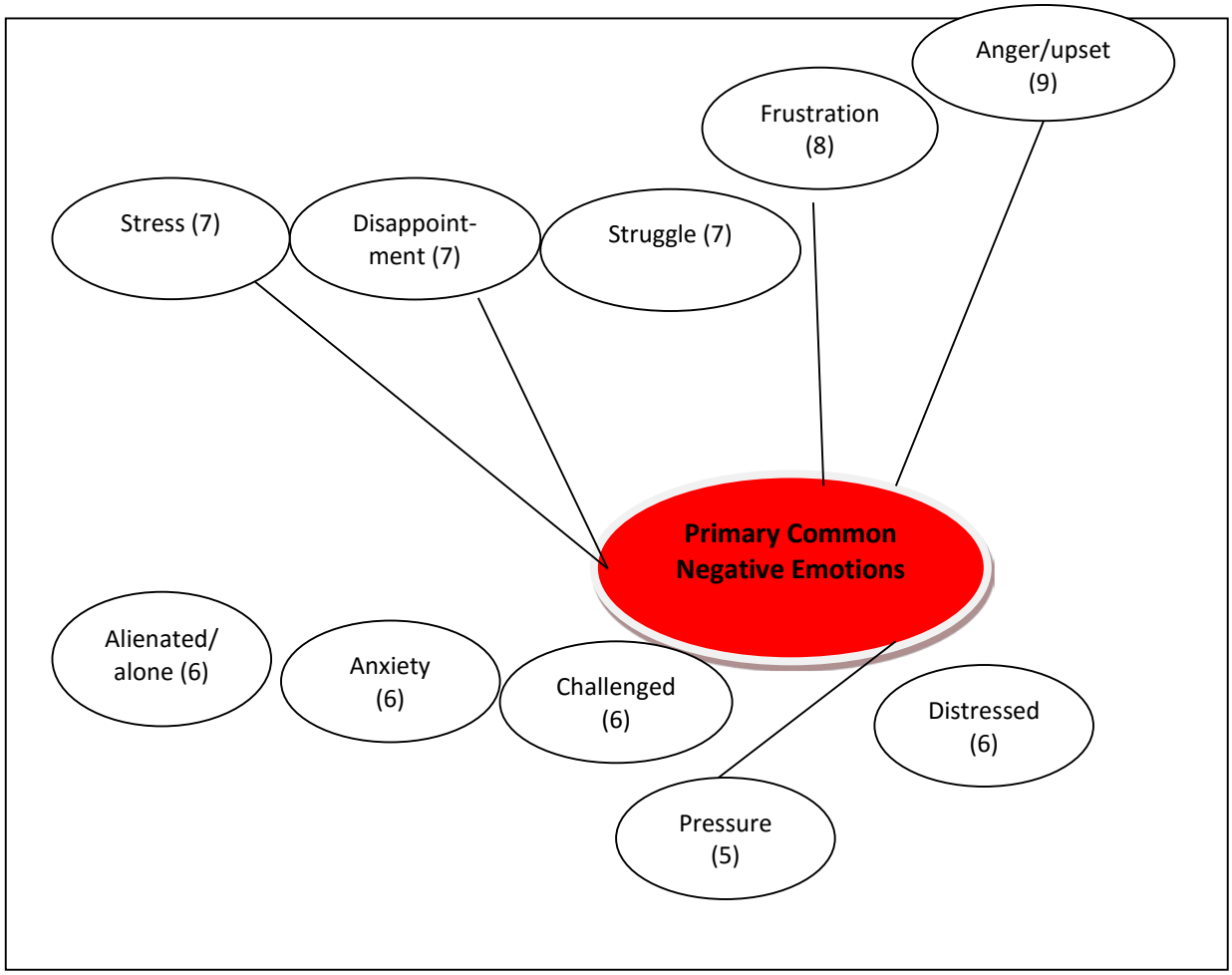


Figure 6.2: Number of participants identifying a single common primary positive emotion mentioned collectively

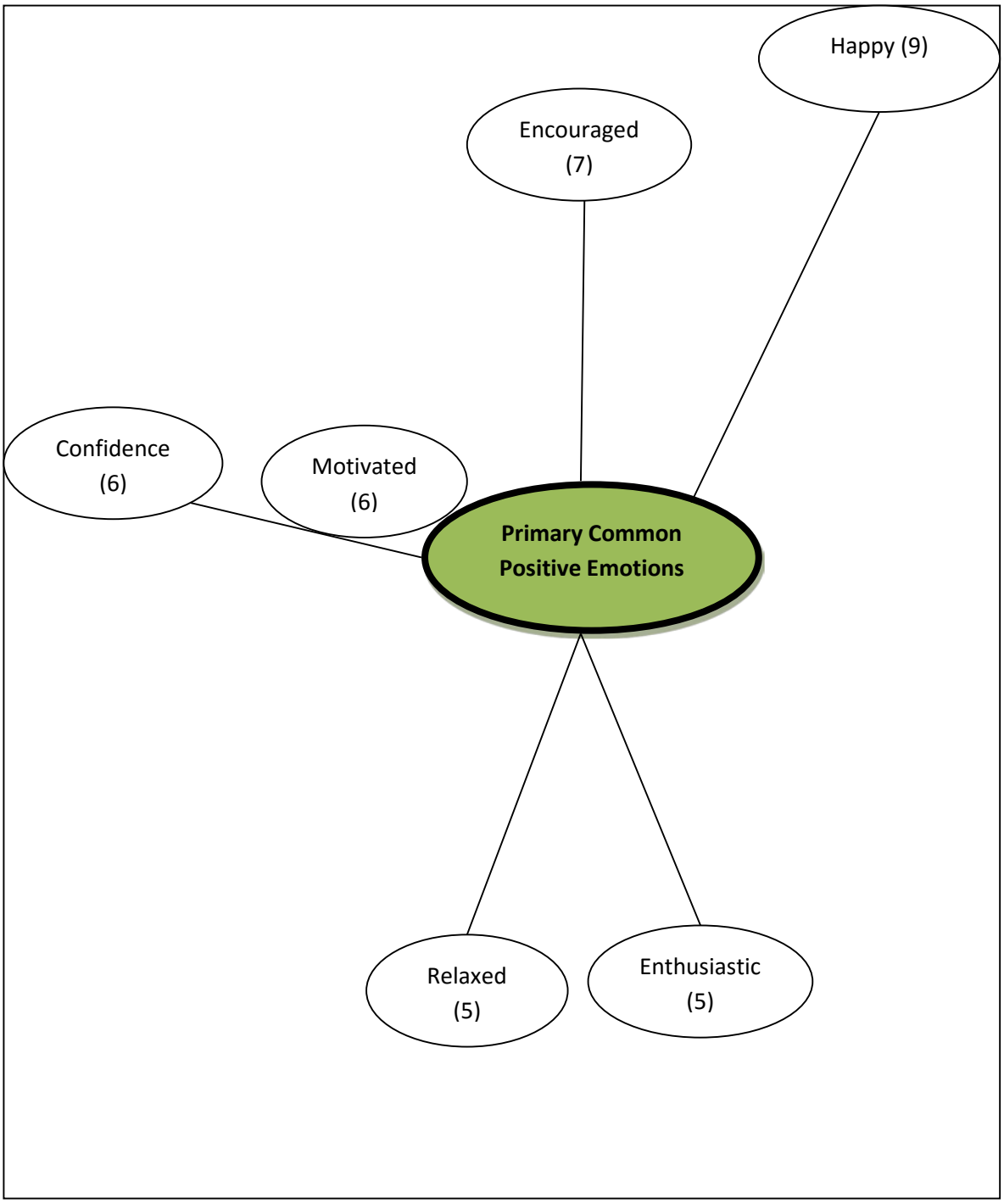


Figure 6.3: Number of times each negative common emotion theme was mentioned

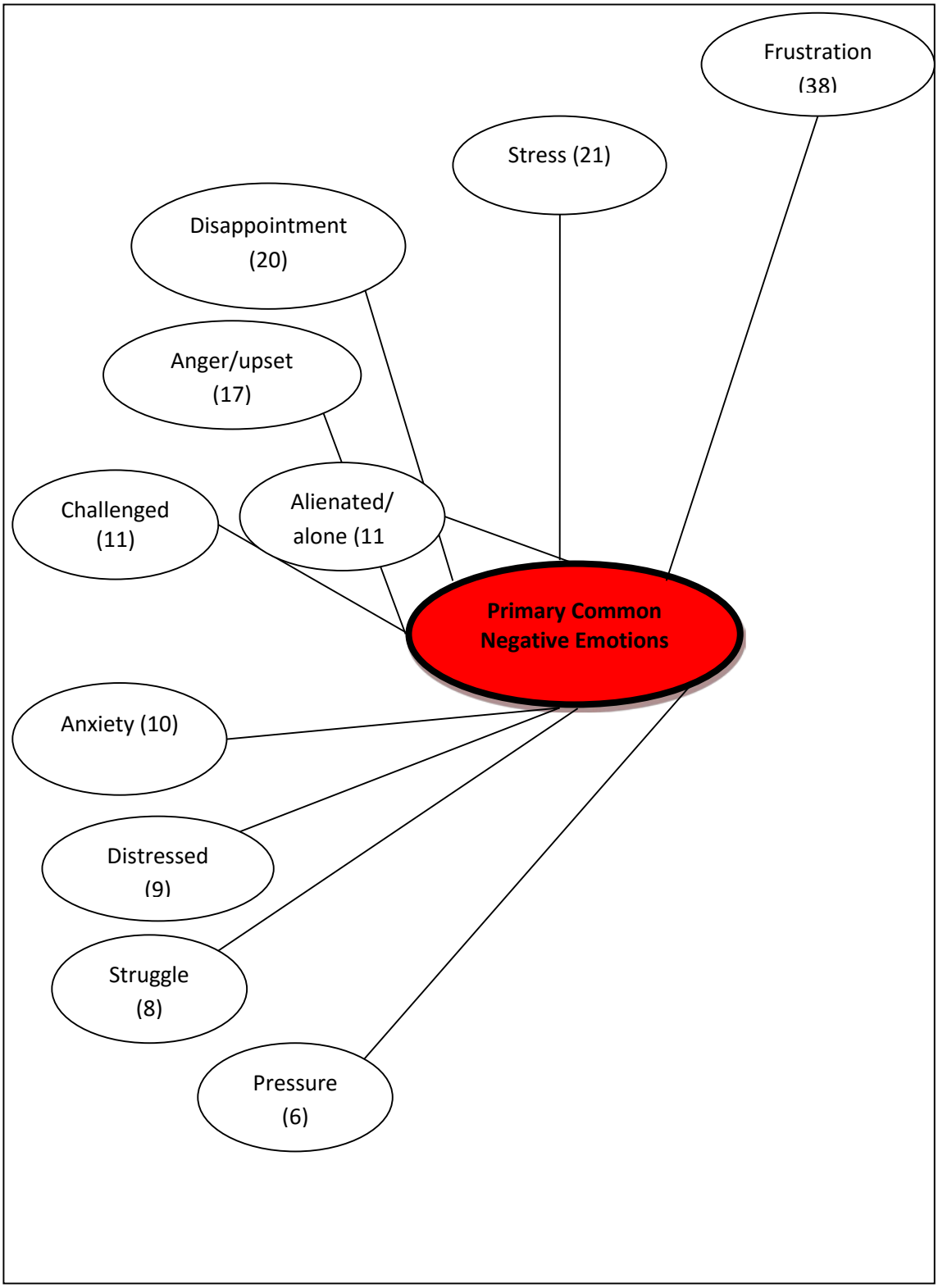
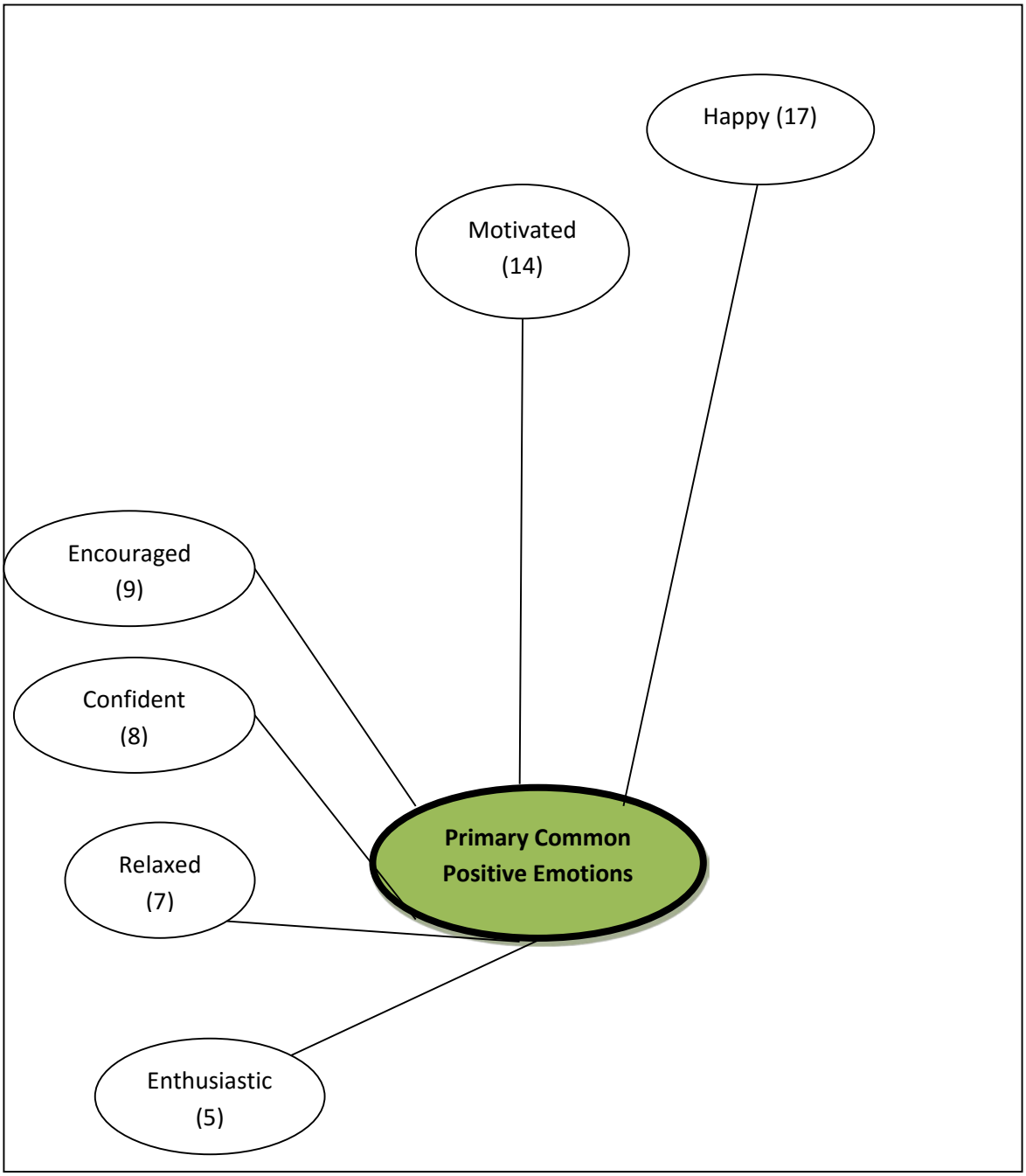


Figure 6.4: Number of times each positive common emotion theme was mentioned



6.5 Step 4: Clustering

The emotions outlined in the tables and figures above were used to develop clusters of emotions, and these were grouped in two ways: first in the order of the number of participants who mentioned a specific emotion either negative or positive; and, second, to show the number of times an emotion was actually mentioned. It was important to note the number of times each unit of relevant emotion theme was mentioned and how it was mentioned, in order to determine its importance and significance to the texture of these commonly shared emotions (Hycner,

1985). What is critical here is the emphasis on the subjective perspective, hence it is important to retain descriptions of subjective emotion from each participant's viewpoint, while also noting that every phenomenon is multi-layered with multiple realities (Munhall & Boyd, 1993).

When emotion numbers were tallied, frustration emerged as the most pervasive emotion, followed by disappointment and stress. It is important to note that the number of emotions students called upon were tallied not for any statistical analysis, but to reduce the phenomenon to manageable units so the researcher could better understand the context and clarify the issues.

6.6 Step 5: Structure of how students said they experienced emotions

This section focuses on the students' emotions in context. Once all the general and unique themes were noted, the next step was to return these emotion themes to the overall context or the horizon from which they emerged. This is in recognition of the importance of context (Hycner, 1985) in determining the meaning of the phenomenon.

The three tables shown below together demonstrate significant statements, the development of formulated meaning units and how individual and generic contextual triggers were derived from meaning units. The development of formulated meanings is based on the judgement and skill of the researcher. This procedure is described by Collazi (1978, p.59, cited in Hycner, 1985, p. 279) as the researcher exercising 'creative insight' in making a 'precarious leap', from what the individual said to what that means from the individual's perspective. It is suggested that at this stage (Hycner, 1985) the researcher should utilise independent judges to see if they would also come up with the same meanings. This was not possible, and this step was modified by verifying meanings with a research assistant. In fact, Giorgi (1985) relies solely on the researchers' judgement at this stage. His view is that it is not necessary for the researcher to employ independent judges or even to return to the participants to validate findings. The following examples are all based on negative aspects of the learning environment. In the first example below, June's frustrations in the learning environment show the significant statements to which each was linked.

Table 6.12: Example of a negative emotion and its link to relevant significant statements

Transcript	Pseudonym	Emotion/feelings	Statements	Lines	Statement no.
2	June	frustration	So in 6 weeks I moved from a 4/10 to an 8/10 and I'm performing and responding the same way? How? It was frustrating [students' perception of arbitrary grading criteria].	879-894	94
2	June	frustration	I was frustrated at the fact that I had to pay, to ensure my success [Mathematics course].	206-210	95
1	June	frustration	I remember feeling frustrated because you weren't getting the kind of interaction needed from some of the tutors.	462-464	96
1	June	frustration	and that makes it very frustrating for us student where you're not able to benefit from the face-to-face not beg for grade but try to gain some kind understanding and that can be frustrating [lack of explanation for grades].	475-482	97
1	June	frustration	It is challenging when it comes on to managing your time and sticking to time and it is going to get frustrating.	995-997	98

Table 6.13: Development of formulated meanings from significant statements

Pseudonym	Negative statement	Formulated meaning	Emotion	Statement no.
June	So in 6 weeks I moved from a 4/10 to an 8/10 and I'm performing and responding the same way? How? It was frustrating.	Students become frustrated when their grades change when they can see no perceived improvement in the quality of their answers. FM85^{J}	frustration	94
June	I was frustrated at the fact that I had to pay, to ensure my success [Mathematics component].	Students become frustrated at having to pay a tutor so they can pass the exam. FM86^{J}	frustration	95
June	I remember feeling frustrated because you weren't getting the kind of interaction needed from some of the tutors.	Students are frustrated at the lack of interaction from the e-tutors. FM87^{J}	frustration	96

Table 6.13 is an illustration of how formulated meanings were developed from the extracted significant statements leading to the emergence of cluster themes. Clusters are shown below in Table 6.14.

Table 6.14 demonstrates how the formulated meanings were grouped together and used to link feelings of frustrations to different emotional triggers, which were then linked to an emergent generic category. Emergent generic categories were formed by grouping similar individual triggers and then clustering them into one generic grouping for ease of discussion and uniformity. The table shows how formulated meanings that shared similar concepts in keeping with the study's objectives were grouped.

Table 6.14: Development of formulated meanings with their individual theme cluster and associated emergent generic theme cluster

Formulated meaning	**Emotion**	**Individual triggers**	**Generic learning categories**
FM84[N]. Students find it frustrating being on their own because they cannot get help and share knowledge with other students.	Frustration	Peer interaction	Student-to-student interaction/ relationship
FM86[J]. Students become frustrated at having to pay a tutor so they can pass the exam. FM113[S]. Students find the online programme frustrating because there are no face-to-face classes for Mathematics components.		Delivery mode	Online technology interface
FM108[An]. It is frustrating for students when they want to do research and they cannot log on. FM109[An]. Students who do not have frequent access to the Internet find online learning very frustrating. FM110[S]. Students find it frustrating when they have to rush to do their work because of the inconsistent Internet connection.		Setting	

Table 6.14 also shows how the contextual triggers, both individual and generic, were derived from relevant meaning statements**.** All common and uncommon emotions as displayed earlier were linked to a context. In the brief example above, frustration is linked to three different individual triggers, and these are based on the formulated meanings to the left. The triggers in this instance are: first, the lack of student-to-student interactions; second, perceived inadequacy of the instructional strategy for Mathematics components; and the third, associated with the

setting and the need for Internet access. These three individual triggers were then linked to a relevant generic category. All three different elements in the learning environment have triggered feelings of frustration. Below, another set of examples alluding to the positive aspects of the learning environment is included for uniformity and coherence. These positive elements were derived from the data in the same manner as those for negative emotions.

Table 6.15: Example of positive emotion and its link to relevant significant statements

Transcript	Pseudonym	Emotion/feelings	Statements	Lines	Statement no.
2	Noreen	happy	However, there was a course that I did, and we did an online quiz, and the grade that I got there was a sense of happiness.	27-32	186
2	June	happy	and I got an A; oh Lord, to say I was happy is an understatement.	121	187
1	June	happy	I remember doing something that I was told not to do when I started the programme, which is do not do 5 courses in one semester if you're employed full-time, however I wanted to finish the programme in 3 years because I had plans for September following that…I was happy.	505-534	188

Table 6.16: Development of formulated meanings from significant statements

Pseudonym	Positive statement	Formulated meaning	Emotion	Statement no.
June	and I got an A; oh Lord to say I was happy is an understatement.	Students are very happy when they receive an A. FM175[J]	happy	187
June	I remember doing something that I was told not to do when I started the programme, which is do not do 5 courses in one semester if you're employed full-time, however I wanted to finish the programme in 3 years because I had plans for September following that however at the end of the semester and the beginning of the other when the grades were posted and I saw that I got 5 As I was happy.	Students are happy when they do a lot of courses in one semester, and the hard work is rewarded with good grades at the end. FM176[J]	happy	188
June	So when I saw the paper was happy in what I saw. Elated, even.	Some students are happy when they see the content of an exam paper because they are prepared. FM177[J]	happy	189

Table 6.17: Development of formulated meanings with their individual theme cluster and associated emergent generic theme cluster

Formulated meaning	**Emotion**	**Individual triggers**	**Generic learning categories**
FM174[N]. Students are happy when they receive good grades from an online quiz. FM175[J]. Students are very happy when they receive an A. FM176[J]. Students are happy when they do a lot of courses in one semester, and the hard work is rewarded with good grades at the end. FM183[K]. Students are very happy when they get an A for a course. FM187[An]. Students feel happy when they get good grades.	happy	grades	Assessment and evaluation activities
FM177[J]. Some students are happy when they see the content of an exam paper because they are prepared.		exams	
FM186[An]. Students are happy when they finish the online quiz in time.		quiz	

In order to illuminate the experience, emotions were linked to context. The richness of individual experiences makes it prohibitive to illustrate each example with corresponding significant statements as evidence, therefore only those considered to be the most poignant or ebullient from across the participants will be used as illustrations.

However, emotional triggers are directly related to aspects of the learning environment, so issues of learning are a secondary concern of this study. The relevance of students' perceptions of the learning environment and the learning processes were explored in chapter 5. The contextual emotion triggers here are seen as important interrelated themes, because these focus directly on aspects of learning processes and the learning environment. Emotions are primarily concerned with students' feelings or internal states in response to the events, objects, activities and social relations associated with the learning environment. Emotions are also concerned with students' feelings about themselves.

Because the results show that the participants' varying emotions were aroused by similar contextual triggers, it was considered more useful to discuss these triggers in relation to each emotion theme. Only a few will be used to illuminate some of the points. Despite this, it is significant to note that sometimes in the text, what appeared to be similar experiences generated completely different emotions in individual participants. However, based on the findings, there was no doubt that frustration was singularly the most frequently mentioned emotion theme.

So far, the discussion has focused primarily on the steps in isolating three important elements of the findings: emotions; contextual triggers; and significant statements relating to aspects of emotional experiences**.** Specifically observed so far is that a range of both negative and positive common and uncommon emotions are associated with the online learning experience.

Effort must now be made to relate these negative or positive emotions to the teaching–learning contexts that generated such emotional responses**.** The significant statements were used to identify each emotion and its corresponding contextual trigger. Since each time an emotion was mentioned it was linked to a specific situation, the label contextual trigger refers to the specific element in the learning environment that aroused the emotion. The groups of common, uncommon and some unique emotions identified earlier are integrated with the six generic categories of contextual triggers, namely interactions/relationships with e-tutors/course coordinators; online technology interface; programme matters; assessment and evaluation activities; student-to-student interactions and self-awareness/the emotional self. This was undertaken to show how students' emotional reactions shaped their discourses about the

learning context. It also ultimately showed the mechanisms that each participant employed to manage these emotions and the consequences for each participant. The next section will show the impact of negative emotions and their corresponding contextual triggers. Due to limited space, for the purposes of this study and to minimise the repetition of contextual triggers relating to similar incidents, only the primary general emotions will be discussed at length. As can be observed from the graphical presentation of the data, all participants were included in either all or most of the emotions designated as Group A in both positive and negative emotion clusters. However, selected unique occurrences in the data will be highlighted if necessary to show significant variations from the general cluster of emotions. Ten primary common negative emotions from Cluster A are linked to relevant contextual triggers. These emotions include frustration, anger, disappointment, stress, pressure, alienation anxiety, challenge, and struggle and distressed. Similarly, the six positive emotions included in Cluster A will be illuminated to demonstrate what emotion triggers were linked to their corresponding emotion theme.

6.7 Step 6: Relating negative emotions to contextual triggers

The following statements indicate how participants perceived the impact of negative encounters in the learning environment. Michelle shares her perspective by starting off with how negative encounters influence experience:

> One of the most outstanding experiences was a negative one. And, we all know how negativity sticks out in our mind more than the good, regardless if we want to, even if we try to control it, it's really hard but the negative will always stick out. [Michelle: Transcript 1: 70-77]

Another, participant, Kush validated this approach of focusing on the negative emotional aspects of his experience, stating that:

> I think I'll go for the... well, in most cases for some reason the negative ones always stick[s] out, so I think, I'll start there. [Kush: Transcript 2: 11-13]

Students' emotions are considered to be the major themes and are closely linked to contextual triggers, which are seen as important interrelated themes because these focus directly on aspects of learning and the learning environment.

6.7.1 Feelings of frustration: Group A: Theme 1: Feelings of Frustration

Frustration was a major negative emotional component in students' recollections of their experience. Frustrating experiences are discussed first because of the greater number of times that this feeling was identified in all student narratives. Additionally, all, but two of the ten participants identified feelings of frustration about various aspects of the learning environment.

This and other negative emotions mirror how participants' emotions impacted their short-term experiences, influenced their short-term behaviours, shaped their long-term perceptions, and ultimately affected both short- and long-term learning outcomes. Contextual factors that triggered feelings of frustrations and discussed under a relevant generic category were: (a) their interactions with their e-tutors; (b) the technology interface; and (c) matters relating to the programme.

(a) *Frustrations relating to interactions with e-tutors/course coordinators*

A critical factor in participants' experience of online learning was their frustratingly negative interactions with their e-tutors/course coordinators in relation to their need for feedback. Only a few examples of students' frustrating interactions with e-tutors are outlined.

Michelle underscored the relative importance of e-tutors to the students and their contribution to the student experience by sharing this insightful commentary about her understanding of the role and functions of e-tutors:

> Some of the e-tutors as you know, they too contribute to your experience, because they are the ones we communicate with on a daily basis; so they have a lot to do with the experience of the class. I have a few e-tutors that I would not want to see be my e-tutors again. [Michelle: Transcript 2: 1088-1094]

For all ten participants, online learning was a new experience. Therefore, as new online learners, their initial expectations were based on their former experiences of a traditional classroom environment. Thus, initially, students were acutely aware of the missing physical presence of tutors. There were implicit expectations that they would be supported and that there would be no obstacles to obtaining information.

Two students (June and Stacy) had even embraced the online learning environment, under the assumption that e-tutors would engage with students by providing timely and responsive feedback. As did all the other participants, as explained previously in chapter 5, they had entered the programme anticipating that they would be studying in a blended learning environment with regular interaction with their online course facilitators. Kush's and Stacy's perspectives on the e-tutor's role stress the need for immediacy in e-tutors' responses and a regular supportive presence:

> Most of these courses, you may have to ask your e-tutor questions.... What you find is that the questions you ask, **the answers don't come back to you timely**. So you may have something that's due but because you don't get that answer back.... And because of that sometimes it's frustrating because when you get back the answer, you find out that you have done something totally wrong but it's too late at that particular time.... The second part is sometimes... you might

> get a response but the response is not appropriate and when the response is not appropriate you have half information. [Kush: Transcript 1: 738-755]
>
> My expectation is that they will be there for us all the time, as [in] face-to-face**.** Even though you [are] not seeing the person, that you can go online, you could interact with these persons and while they might not be there at the moment to answer, that at the earliest possible time. It is not a week or a month, or whenever time, but the earliest possible time like the following day. [Stacy: Transcript 1: 34-36]

The importance of having timely feedback has already been highlighted in students' perception in chapter 5. However, its significance is repeated because of its meaning to students' emotional experience The reality for all the participants was that their emotional need for regular interactions with e-tutors often went unmet, and this was extremely frustrating for all the students. Kush offers an additional important perspective on the emotional aspect feedback and how frustratingly difficult and limiting he found the text-based communication between students and e-tutors.

> I've never call my e-tutor so most of the information you send, you send it via text. Number one, you may [or] you may not convey exactly what you don't understand via text. Number two, the information that you receive, you may not get what you really want from that information so because of that is almost feel like two opposite force[s] acting on each other so you don't fully understand, [and] the e-tutor don't fully understand. [Kush: Transcript 1: 1575-1591]

Students often felt frustrated because of the perceived lack of a warm and encouraging e-tutor presence. Noreen described how being devoid of regular human interaction created an emotional effect and she describes that feeling below.

> [need for e-tutor support] But the whole emotional aspect of it, if you don't have somebody to encourage you, you will get frustrated. [Noreen: Transcript 1: 553-554]

Alethia vividly described her frustration in the first year with an e-tutor who was unnecessarily punitive when a technical administrative glitch prevented her from downloading the correct version of an assignment. She tells how after submitting the incorrect assignment one week early, the e-tutor did not see it as her duty to enquire about it. However, the e-tutor quickly assigned a grade of zero for what was an obvious misunderstanding. This participant's narrative highlights how some e-tutors adopted an adversarial rather than supportive role to their students.

> If it was left up to her, I would have dropped the course, stop UWI... There was a glitch because they had contacted me to see if I'd got an email that the assignment has changed and I said no. So she put a zero in the comments. She put a smiley face. Congratulations! So the course coordinator told her to remove the comment and I got 10/10 and she remarked the script... and in one of her

> email to me, a private email she say you gripe too much... So it left me frustrated. [Alethia: Transcript 2: 63-210]

Sometimes, students' frustrating experiences were not with the e-tutors but with the course coordinators. Students were well aware that the CCs, as they called them, were in charge of a course. They were assumed to be overseeing the work of the e-tutors. However, students did not make any distinction between the two roles. They viewed course coordinators as a part of the resources providing support for students' learning outcomes.

(b) Frustrations relating to the technology interface

Some students' perceived that online delivery was inadequate for their needs if they wanted to pass the exam. They described their frustration and the compensatory strategies they had to put in place when the face-to-face classes they expected did not materialise.

> [Mathematics course] I was frustrated at the fact that I had to pay, to ensure my success. [June: Transcript 2: 206-210]

Other students found it equally frustrating when, because of inconsistent Internet access, they were hindered from doing research or completing a piece of coursework, or had to rush through an assignment and how the lack of focus had a detrimental effect on their grade outcomes.

Annie and Stacy described how critical it was for students to have regular access to Internet services.

> I would type what I going to do from home. When you go to the Internet cafe, there's not much... [so I would] type the information and go to the computer lab and drop it in a Dropbox, or if it's a discussion, I copy and paste in the discussion screen, so with Internet, service is key. It's critical in terms of the online process and online learning but if you don't have frequent access to it, can be frustrating. [Annie: Transcript 1: 104-131]
>
> Frustrating, you can't really focus on the work how you want to focus on the work because you have to be hasting to get the work out of the way in case the Internet might go down. [Stacy: Transcript 1: 68-75]

Alethia's frustration was a little different from the others. She reflected on her experience of carrying a heavy course load without Internet access at home.

> [Without Internet at home] It was taxing because I didn't have Internet at home so I kinda felt frustrated. I felt like I'm doing five courses everybody is gone out, Jeez, I am at work. I go to work seven days a week. I'd get to work at 6 in the morning and leave there at 7. And I come up here when up here is opened leave here when R. [site technician] is leaving. So that's how I get Internet access. It was taxing. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 89-109]

(b) Frustrations relating to assessment and evaluation

A very strong theme of frustration emerged from the interviews in respect of students' need to have feedback on grades. All participants were concerned about the quality of the grades that were being assigned to their work because of high expectations, based on how much effort was being expended.

> But then you have those [tutors] who are very hard on the marking and they don't do very much. And that makes it very frustrating for us students where you are not able to benefit from the face-to-face where you can appeal to that personal and emotional level not beg for grade but try to gain some kind understanding and that can be frustrating [June: Transcript 1: 475-482]

Alethia noted that there were inconsistencies between marks allocated by e-tutors and course coordinators. She stressed the vast differences between the 4/10 allocated by the e-tutor and that of the course coordinator who awarded a score of 9/10 for the same assignment. Alethia' perception was that that there was no room to work very hard, because tutors had no intention of upgrading beyond the 40 per cent pass mark.

> To know that I can submit an assignment and the e-tutor would give you 4/10, that's Social Science and Med Tech. And the course coordinator would mark it at the same thing nothing more is added because you cannot touch it when you submitted and the course coordinator could mark the same thing without anything added and you get 9/10. And when I ask on numerous occasion, I was told either; you Jamaicans are always griping. 40 is UWI's pass mark. So is like, it doesn't matter how hard you work, I'm just going to pass you. [Alethia: Transcript 2: 808-837]

c) Frustrations relating to programme matters

Frustrating programme matters that concerned students were the heavy course content, assignments and difficulties with the course administration unit. Stacy had issues with the English component that used up her intellectual resources, because she has failed the same subject several times. She expressed her longing for someone to teach her in the English course:

> This is probably my 4th semester the first one, English is my weakest point and the first one [the first semester when she failed] when I probably just a touch of it a bit to get an understanding of what UWI English is, as I said I really don't handle English well from CXC level much less university level, so that's a whole lot a frustration cause you actually want someone to actually teach you the English. [Stacy: Transcript 1: 393-408]

Some students noted the importance of students being provided with adequate course guidelines and course examples that would advance their understanding of specific aspects of a course:

> They don't provide sufficient examples. So you may have an example but on the text what they give to you is totally different from what the example actually shows you, again that comes back to being a bit frustrated, because you may see something that says after tax information and something that says before tax and you're trying to figure out how to approach both of them, but when you look at the example that you saw it only shows you after tax. How do you do a question that says before tax? [Kush: Transcript 2: 561-578]

> So right now, I don't know what format is it that is expected from UWI for a literature review. I just do it, like you do it in the blind. I get fed up and frustrated and I just like, ok I'm just going to do it because for each time you ask, you get an assignment and sometime you're not provided with much guidelines. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 922-960]

Alethia also voiced her frustration with the students' appeals procedure. She had appealed to the programmes delivery (PDD) and that department had taken an inordinately long time to respond. This issue is considered unique to Alethia, but an important one nonetheless, because is indicative of an environment that appears to be deeply unsympathetic to students' needs.

> You ask [the] course coordinator and the course coordinator ignores you. Then you go above and then they'll get back to you. Two months later nobody gets back to you, so it's really frustrating. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 308-318]

Rosie shared that she was so frustrated in her first year that she did not even recognise that there was introductory course material that could help her to understand the Sociology course:

> For example... Sociology, I was reading, I was calling the words, but at the end of the day I don't have a clue what I've read so I think I was just blank. I didn't understand.... You know what I read first? I was reading the book... the one that they normally refer you to. The big book, that's the one... and honestly I was... so blank of what I was reading until a mind say go back and I had the books on a shelf... as I said I was frustrated. [Rosie: Transcript 1: 744-773]

Most of the participants shared that course content for mathematical courses proved difficult to grasp. The theme of giving up was an undercurrent in all the students' narratives.

> That's another thing I couldn't do it... for example Mathematics and Social Sciences. Some of the concepts they were not so easy to grasp and when I try to grasp them.... it was not working... I looked online for other examples of what was posted there but I myself never contacted my e-tutor and say sir or miss I never understand this part. Can you explain this part a little better for me? I didn't do that. What I did was I looked online and see if I found some other examples but anger and frustration just got the best of me. I just signed out and never bother with it. [Noreen: Transcript 1: L 105-140]

6.7.2 Theme 2: Feelings of anger

Anger, an emotion common to several participants, was at times simultaneously combined with frustration. Feelings of anger were mostly associated with the technology interface. A small number of students experienced severe difficulties relating to the use of the computer and the Internet, respectively.

Anger relating to technology interface

Annie shared several experiences of anger relating to the use of the Internet. Her anger stemmed from the inability to post an assignment because of low Internet feed from home. She describes her behaviour in two of these incidents:

> Then there's the problem now when I get home, my Internet service is down, what do I do? I have to be running all over the place. I become so angry at times at the computer. [Annie: Transcript 1: 173]
>
> I become so angry at times at the computer, I may take the computer and throw it down and that one is not working because of that now. Yes! I throw it because every time I try to log in, it kicks me out and then when I email my e-tutor, they are saying that I would have to go thru the technical advisor at UWI and thing is I didn't do there [did not submit assignment through learning centre] so I can't go thru there so they can't really help me. I end up losing that grade and then I end up failing that subject. [Transcript 1: 33-58]

Anger relating to interactions with e-tutors/ course coordinators

Students' anger was sometimes directed at e-tutors/course coordinators. Marie described how upset she was with a particular e-tutor, whom she described as being very 'unkind.' Students were given a submission deadline for a book review. However, both e-tutor and students were aware that the text was not immediately available. The book became available after the deadline and Marie explained she had to borrow another student's copy after that student had completed the assignment. The assignment was submitted late and the tutor refused to mark it without Marie providing a medical certificate to say she was sick. When Marie refused to use such an excuse, she was not given a grade. Marie became so upset she appealed to the course coordinator who accepted the late assignment and gave her a grade. She describes her feelings in the manner below:

> I was upset about it but then I was reminded that I can speak to the course coordinator... I was upset about it because she [the e-tutor] didn't give me the time and what was hurtful about it [because] **she knew** the book was not available initially. [Marie: Transcript 1: 1124-1144]

This situation again highlights not only how important it is for e-tutors to understand the nuances of the new learning environment but also how the role of course coordinators can be used. I can assist both e-tutors and students to adjust their attitudes and improve the virtual ambience by creating a space for students to feel empowered and supported.

Anger relating to assessment and evaluation

Several students related their anger due to incidents associated with grades. Alethia had a particularly trying experience with a certain e-tutor, as illustrated by her account of her

experience of trying to understand how e-tutors arrived at the grades. Like all the students, she voiced her concern strongly about the need for formative assessment.

Anger relating programme matters

Stacy had an upsetting surprise on a course in Business Law when she found herself scraping a bare pass after she had gone into the examination expecting to get a grade A.

Some participants had difficulties or found inadequacies with the way prerequisite courses were displayed in the student domain. Michelle was also angry that the course page had not displayed the page with the list of prerequisites effectively enough for participants to make informed choices and choose their courses to advance completion in the quickest possible time. She explained that where prerequisites are not clearly displayed; the outcome can be a student taking a longer time to complete the degree programme. From her perspective, students want to take the shortest route possible to completion and will feel upset that they took longer than was needed to graduate.

> Other than one of my pitfalls, starting, the whole prerequisite, prerequisite thing for school... most person starting an online environment, some of us spent certain amount of time because we weren't aware of certain, the whole pre-requisite thing, what is prerequisite to which course and what is what, and then you may sign up for a course and then you may be held back because that course was supposed to. That's one of the pitfalls. [Michele: Transcript 1: 1485-1563]

Anger relating to technology interface

When faced with the mundane task of having to sign onto the computer on a regular basis, some participants directed their anger towards the computer as a part of the online setting. Noreen described her response to task of logging on every day as stated in this comment:

> if I have to do it [logging on to the computer] once or say thrice per week then that's ok. But if I have to do it every day at a specific time frame then it makes me angry so to speak. [Noreen: Transcript 2: 175-180]

Students' disappointments were focussed again on the four primary areas that were similar to those for feelings of anger and frustration. However, one new area emerged; students expressed disappointment with themselves.

6.7.3 Theme 3: Feelings of disappointment

Disappointment relating to self-awareness: the emotional self

Students were sometimes disappointed with themselves, particularly in reference to their first-year examination experience. Noreen and Rosie were first-year students who expressed a sense

of disappointment over events that occurred in their first year in the online programme. Noreen expresses feelings of disappointment at herself for failing first-year courses. As she articulates:

> There was a sense of disappointment when I'd gone thru first year and knowing that I'd failed all the courses that I've done. [Noreen: Transcript 2: 18-21]

Students who had high performance grade expectations for themselves recorded disappointment when the grade was not according to their goal. June reports her disappointment at not getting a 4.0:

> ...Disappointed that I didn't get the 4.0. That's what I was working for. [June: Transcript 1: 1054]

Likewise, Rosie described her disappointment with herself after an examination, because she did not use all the resources available to her.

Disappointing interactions /relationship with e-tutors/course coordinators

Students mentioned their disappointing encounters with course facilitators. June observed that some course coordinators were active while others were really quiet. June spoke at length about her disappointment with specifically the course coordinators. She was disappointed in their lack of leadership for the e-tutors whom they were expected to supervise and monitor. She was also disappointed that they had not played a more active role so that their presence and willingness to support students was more evident. She graded them on average of about 70 per cent for interactivity. However, the remaining 30 per cent was considered ineffective; from her viewpoint, she felt that they should have known the importance of interaction in the online environment. She articulated how much of a disappointment some of the e-tutors had been:

> In general I's give the course coordinators an average of 7 for their interactiveness because you had some of them who were really, really quiet, really, really quiet and I was disappointed, knowing that they are the leader for the e-tutor and knowing how important interaction is to the online environment. [June: Transcript 2: 644-656]

Other students described feelings of disappointment because some e-tutors were not interested in participating in discussion forums. Rosie wanted sometimes to have personal feedback, not a general response:

> the e-tutors themselves give you that feeling of like I'm not interested in participating, because me personally if I am doing something I still have the childish mentality in terms of when I do something. I expect to be recognized or to say ok very good and get comment on it. You post you thing sometime and like and dem just go ahead and dem just do something in general like just put a solution in general. [Rosie: Transcript 1: 436-452]

Disappointment relating to technology interface

Some aspects of the technology interface were a disappointment for some students. Ian expressed that the students could not communicate because of a shortfall in how the student interface was designed and something that should be corrected. He perceived this inability as the fault of an inadequate technology interface:

> You should be allowed to respond to that and to say well… because I recently got a course where what would have caused me to not get a maximum grade, to me is fine. I should be able to, even it doesn't change the grade I should be able to say but the reason it is that way it is because of this response that you gave me in the draft.... It may not change the grade, but at least to have the grade and not be able to say the reason why you did it that way. I think that is something that can be fixed. I was not angry, but I was disappointed. I am disappointed at the fact that I cannot respond to things like those. [Ian: Transcript 1: 709-743]

Relating to assessment and evaluation

Overall low grades brought on a sense of disappointment for all students. Kush explains the feelings that he had when his grades were low:

> When you get low grades, it makes you feel like Number 1, you not doing enough. Number 2, you are disappointed… so it's a lot of burden on you. Put it that way, as it relates to how you feel. [Kush: Transcript 1: 618-625]

Relating to programme matters

Students expressed disappointment at the online experience because learning support was not provided. Kush had a disappointing experience, both because of the unsupportive environment and the instructional strategies involved in the online delivery mode, which he considered was too heavily reading-based with no audio visual support .The experience had been so bad he swears he would never do another online degree again:

> As I said the experience so far hasn't been tremendous. The support is not really there and I think we could do a lot better with the course delivery as well. [Kush: Transcript 2: 296-302]

This was surprising, because Kush is one of the students who had initially embraced the online learning mode. Marie reflected on the ambivalent feelings she had had from day to day. Sometimes she felt like dropping out, yet on another she wanted to continue, implying that online learning consists of both good and bad feelings and that the negative ones are not sustained over a prolonged period:

> Oh, I can't forget that, there are many times when I feel so disheartened and discouraged but the spirit of the Lord is always with me and I may feel that I am not going back, but then there is still voice inside of me that says actually, go, just finish up, just finish up. I can't forget that. It's my inner emotions, my inner

> drive. I might feel disappointed and quarrel now; but by I wake up next morning I feel like I want to continue. [Marie: Transcript: 1365-1369]

In the comment above Marie combined her feelings of disappointment with discouragement.

Annie was a student whose transcript was replete with the term ‘discouraged’. Her discouragement stems from her poor Internet service, which has resulted in late submission of assignments and loss of valuable marks, and though she has had to push herself to rise above that particular obstacle she still admits to being discouraged. The lack of continuous Internet access has restricted her access to the online interface to responding to e-tutors’ posts and sometimes to ask for help. Other than that she reads on her own and uses additional books to enhance her learning.

6.7.4 Theme 4: Feelings of stress

Relating to technology interface

Stress-related feelings were reported by several students, associated with no face-to-face support, as in traditional teaching. June expressed how this made it on Mathematics courses.

> So not having that face-to-face support made it stressful. [June: Transcript 2: 233-239]

Another student, Stacy, found herself in a stressful situation due to Internet problems. Internet problems were unique to a minority of students. She described the impact of unreliable Internet source on her ability to complete a learning task:

> I end up getting my Internet at home, but you know it’s not reliable and therefore it’s stressing knowing that chances are you might be doing your assignment, especially a quiz and the Internet might just go down on it. I’ve experienced a lot of that as I’ve explained before in the first interview that doing my quiz and the Internet would go down, not from the school point, but from the source maintenance, that’s where you have the problem. [Stacy: Transcript 2: 28-51]

Relating to assessment and evaluation

Stress was related to grades and the heavy workload on some of the courses. June explained that she felt lost, while Marie found doing exams particularly emotionally stressful. These two expressed their viewpoint below:

> So that explains why we felt lost, marks seemed arbitrary... it was stressful it was... I’m feeling something but I don’t know what it is. [June: Transcript 2: 879-894]
>
> [Doing exams] Emotionally it can be stressful. [Marie: Transcript 1: 384]

Relating to programme matters

> Well, at one point I did 4 courses. That's a lot a load cause in those 4 courses you may have 3 or even all of them may have a mid-term to study for plus assignments and all a that, so that is where the stress can come in. [Marie: Transcript 2: 490-502]

Relating to student-to-student interactions

Some stress-related triggers were associated with students' interaction with other students, as conveyed in Marie's commentary below.

> Sometime you have group meeting with them online, on Skype. For the ones that are in your region you meet them. We have exams coming up next month and we have to meet now and start studying. We have everybody's number and everybody call and texting everybody to meet and so on. It can be stressful because it means you're taking away time from your family. [Marie: Transcript 1: 359-373]

Other students reported inadequacies of discussion forums, as sometimes students could not follow the thread of the argument. When there was some sort of understanding of the matter students were able to make a comment, but at other times some students found participation a stressful exercise, like when they had to add to a discussion although they did not understand what was going on. Annie expressed her feelings below about the weekly discussions below:

> Sometimes you may not really understand what they're trying to get to, but if you kinda understand and you want to add something to it then you can but sometimes it's kinda stressful. [Annie: Transcript 1: 687-692]

Relating to interactions/relationships with e-tutors/course coordinators

Feelings of stress were associated with students' need for feedback. This was especially so when a student was in the middle of piece of work and needed a quick response. Below, Michelle noted her response when tutors were not responsive:

> When you're into the schoolwork and you need an answer and you have two wait two days for an answer, it really stresses you out. [Michele: Transcript 1: 1217-122]

6.7.5 Theme 5: Feelings of struggle

Under the theme of struggle, feelings were associated with several triggers such as the programme, the technology interface, interaction with tutors and assessment and evaluation.

Online technology interface

Noreen described the struggle to adjust to this routine requirement in the following terms.

> It was a struggle, it was a little struggle because as I said I'm not a person like this who love to sit in front of the computer day in day out, and an online programme a little bit of that is involved. So it was a struggle. [Noreen: Transcript 2: 156-164]

Programme matters

Participants found that in this learning environment there was a great deal of material to read. This was difficult for Kush, whose learning preference was for number-based subjects. The extract below was part of an explanation of how a new and demanding job role had reduced the time for studies. Kush recalls his struggle to keep up with schoolwork:

> So it's really difficult [to read] and even now most of the courses that I get really good grades in, those are the courses I really like so the Finance courses and the Accounts courses are fine. But when it comes to the Management and the courses like the Company Law and so forth, I am struggling a bit. [Kush: Transcript 1: 554-562]

There were other students who found keeping up with the pace of the online courses a little difficult. Annie recalls her struggle to keep pace with the unrelenting course sessions:

> Struggle I have is trying to keep up with the sessions. [Annie: Transcript 1: 668-669]

Struggle relating to interactions/relationships with e-tutors/course coordinators

Feelings of struggle were also associated with obtaining feedback, especially when students could not understand e-tutors' assessment of their work. Adult students' 'need to know' was clearly evident in this context, so students sometimes invoked the academic appeals process, yet found the exercise an 'unpleasant' one when the appeal went unanswered. Kush recalled an experience below:

> And, as I said you went through a lot a struggle because you try e-tutor, and you went above that person. And it wasn't a good experience for a better word, it was unpleasant. [Kush: Transcript 2: 77-85]

Struggle relating to assessment and evaluation

In the interviews several participants emphasised their difficulty with understanding mathematical concepts on a number-based course as it was being taught online. Ian explains his perspectives on the matter.

> You understand what I'm saying so that is it; you'll struggle when you get to the exam for most of the courses that is numeric. [Ian: Transcript 2: 474-478]

6.7.6 Theme 6: Feelings of being challenged

Online technology interface

For some students, adjustment to the technology interface without regular Internet access proved an intractable issue. In the comment below, Noreen expressed her challenge from studying without Internet access, either at home or at the work:

> Well, this year posed another challenge as I said earlier. Well I don't have Internet at home and the Internet access that I had at work is no longer there. [Noreen: Transcript 2: 254-259]

Self-awareness/the emotional self

Other students also found that self-regulation was a necessary part of the online experience. June described the challenge some students had with managing their time:

> So manage your time well to allow you time to live because even though it's difficult there are times when you can actually do things... To repeat, it is challenging especially when it comes on to managing your time and sticking to time. [June: Transcript 1: 706-995]

Assessment and evaluation

Some participants expressed how challenging it was for them to cope with work and to prepare for examinations. Rosie described her challenges in the quotation below:

> Sometimes at work like doing recruiting - while I have an exam like tomorrow - is going on in the week, those are some challenges and then like waking up sometimes when I come from work actually tired, oh my God, that is one of the big challenges. [Rosie: Transcript 1: 1375-1383]

Programme matters

Other students found that their challenges were associated with specific components of the programme. In the quote below, Marie reported having challenges which seemed to point to the instructional strategies of a particular course coordinator and the need for more resources to be allocated for the numbers-based components of the programme:

> It was a challenging course [cost and management accounting] too but they changed the coordinator, because it had a high failure rate and so they changed the course coordinator and so it improved as time went by... had, there wasn't enough… the maths course, for example, there was not enough information we know that there was no face-to-face teaching online but there no there were little or no tutorials online. [Marie: Transcript 1: 112-128]

Other participants such as Kush found that keeping up with the pace of the reading and the demands of a new job were associated with highly adverse consequences to his performance outcomes. He reported on the impact of the interplay between balancing his job role with his student role in the extract below.

> I remember I think for about 2 semesters straight I did really poorly**.** That was a combination of a couple of stuff. It was a combination of the fact that it's a new job, it's a new role and because of that I had to provide more attention to that particular new role; but number 2, is that I had less time for school... and well pretty much all the chapters I have to read to get any form of information. It posed a challenge because I started to get behind and once you're behind it's so hard to catch up… [Kush: Transcript 1: 463-486]

Some students underestimated the rigour of the online programme when they started. This misconception led them to start off with a heavy course load, even before they had adjusted new experience. Rosie describes her early preconceptions of online learning and how the experience changed her attitude, as illustrated below:

> Well, I think it would be much easier to me. Let me tell you a secret. It's like when I first applied, I choose 5 courses [course load] it didn't look that difficult but it is a lot of challenge. [Rosie: Transcript 1: 263-283]

6.7.7 Theme 7: Feelings of pressure

Several students described how pressured they felt trying to cope individually with the vagaries of the online interface. Below, as examples, Rosie, June and Kush described three different aspects of the pressure related to their online experience.

Programme matters

> At one point even in Sociology, I came up to the site and asked Mr H. if he could just take off one because I was doing 3 courses at the time. He said well it is going to cost me and why I want to do it. I explained to him that it was so pressuring. [Rosie: Transcript 1: 22-26]

Self-awareness/the emotional self

> Mondays are horrible, there's a lot of tension and you are feeling that tension and so you go home and all you want to do is sleep. But I've learnt that if you make a schedule you have to try as much as possible to stick to it, and if you don't stick with it, you're gonna get a bottleneck at the end of the week and you're going to feel pressured... even though it's difficult there are times when you can actually do things, go see your family, go see a movie,... but if you don't keep to your schedule you're... overcoming feeling tired, fatigue, and you're having a headache today and something else happens tomorrow, and by Thursday, Friday you're so bogged down with so much work that even if you wanted to do something you can't, so you gain nothing for yourself for that week. [June: Transcript 1: 690-743]

Assessment and evaluation

> It puts a lot of pressure on you.... The pressure part comes when you go through the course and you know you tried your best. And, I can attest to this in Financial Management 2. When I know, I tried my best, when I know the limited amount of time I had, and when you went into the exam and you saw a paper that was almost foreign to you, it's a lot of pressure for you, you even

> though you think you went through all the material that you have. [Kush: Transcript 2: 740-767]

6.7.8 Theme 8: Feelings of anxiety

As for many of the other emotional experiences already described, feelings of anxiety were generated by similar contextual triggers such as programme matters, assessment and the technology interface. Several students described their anxieties about different aspects of the learning experience in the quotations below.

Programme matters

> ....Maths, It made me feel anxious like there was something I was just not good at. [June: Transcript 2: 15-21]
>
> You are like oh Lord; I have one more discussion to do. You are like oh bwoy. Get yourself together. You're anxious at times.... So it's a kind of mixed feelings of anxiety. [Annie: Transcript 1: 469-492]

Online technology interface

> To me, the face-to-face section especially for the math area, where I think you need the most support that was yanked, that's how I felt it was pulled away, and that added to my anxiety. [June: Transcript 2: 191-207]
>
> If I have an assignment to do, and I'm leaving work, work that I'm doing there now; there is no real time frame to when it ends. Yes... I've to do it before midnight, so there's a bit of anxiety. Annie: Transcript 1: 8-22]

Assessment and evaluation

> I'm more anxious to see my grade than do it. I am more anxious at the end of the time and you have to wait until the course finish. [Annie: Transcript 1: 476-481]

6.7.9 Theme 9: Feelings of alienation

Two interrelated aspects of students' alienation were the technology interface and its contribution to the lack of student interactions to tutors and other students. Students invoked metaphors to describe how profoundly they were affected by their feelings of loneliness. They felt alienated, it was 'like a virtual desert', it was like being in 'an empty room, or being in "one's shell" teaching yourself', or 'being in space with no one to talk' to. These descriptions highlight students' ongoing discourse about the lack of human interaction which characterised the online technology interface. Students provide their recommendations on how such alienating experiences could be minimised.

Alienation relating to the technology interface

> But I'm thinking though that somehow we have to find a way to simulate the physical class, not like say a Blackboard Collaborate, not the classroom but

> simulate a physical college, where if someone doesn't do a **course,** for one term, they are contacted and not just on the UWI Open Campus email, but some phone call thru the e-tutor, somebody notice, this is one term, no subject somebody calling. I know as adult learner, the onus is on us to make the effort to attend and to study but things happen and if you can have that you'd somehow feel less that you're on your own and you not just doing this by yourself, somebody have your interest at heart. [Ian: Transcript 1: 1553-1598]

6.7.10 Theme 10: Feelings of distress

Some students described their distressed feelings in an ongoing discourse within themselves.

Self-awareness/the emotional self

Noreen's description of the knowledge of the implication of failing is a unique experience in the students' narratives of emotional experiences

> [Thinking about failing prior courses] As you put it – it's very emotional, if you think about it. In my view, if I think about it too much I'll break down. if I don't think about it any at all then I get too relaxed, and as I said, I waste my time, I waste money, I waste the University's time. [Noreen: Transcript 1: 726-747]

Assessment and evaluation

One memorable description of student's distress was exemplified in Rosie's' articulation of taking an online quiz and the race to finish in the allotted time after a mishap while taking the quiz at the workplace. This was a uniquely distressing experience for a single student. Rosie expressed her heightened feelings of distress in this commentary below:

> I was doing this online quiz, it was in Macro [economics], to be fair, since September, and I was doing it at work, right in the evening and I was the only person at work and my phone rang, the company phone rang. I answered one then I answered the other one. Time was going I was watching the time... I don't know what happened, but I know I clicked something. And can you believe it?... Everything, everything! [Disappeared] I think I clicked, either I clicked, I don't remember but I know I clicked something and when I go[t] back on the quiz I see like there's no answer! No answer! And when I checked the time I had 5 [minutes] I got what, 1 hour to do 30 quiz! When I checked the time it was 5 minutes and 45 questions left and no answers! [I] me start whoa! Why! The devil a try me today? [I started to say] Me start say zero! zero!, zero! [Rosie: Transcript 1: 1101-1132]

Programme matters

Rosie also expressed how the excessive reading rather than problem-solving examples made it hard for students to get to the point in some of the numbers-based components. The lack of sufficient examples for practice made it difficult for students to complete assignments and to do their examinations. This was also an ongoing issue for several other students. Rosie describes some of the insufficiencies of the material of particular courses.

> In the math book, you know, you have a lot of writing, a lot of words, and it don't really go straight to the point and tell you what, it will tell you down the

> line you.. .but it has to go thru like, you know sometimes you on you[r] own and reading, you just want to get to the point, give some examples and again the thing is in the book sometimes you have some of the books they give you some easy examples and when it comes on to like the assignments and doing you[r] exams, it is so hard. [Rosie: Transcript 1: 957-972]

Interactions/relationships with e-tutors/course coordinators

Students' ongoing intense concern about the lack of tutor-to-student interaction is a concern in Alethia's narrative, included here. This was not an isolated commentary as, throughout all the interviews, students' comments were replete with references to the need for guidance from their e-tutors as well as coordinators. Alethia expressed her expectations of tutors who teach adult learners:

> You're an educator yeah, we're adults, yes, we have other issues outside of schools, if you come and a mean, don't let it look like when we ask for clarification we're are burden, without us UWI would have no need for you. [Alethia: Transcript 2: 685-689]

The preceding examples of negative emotions exemplify how students' experiences in the online learning environment were full of themes of negative contextual triggers. It can be observed that emotional experiences were even interrelated. However, although triggers remained the same, the emotional response was a different emotion for each student. The ten selected negative emotions provide an insight into the world of student experience in the context of this online experience. These selected emotions demonstrated that what the students experienced was a multiplicity of negative emotions on a regular basis. The next section will describe how pockets of positive experience provided emotional relieve from a spate of negative emotions.

6.8 Relevant Positive Emotions and Their Corresponding Contextual Triggers

Positive emotions, though few, were recalled by several participants. These are also linked to relevant aspects of the online context.

6.8.1 Feelings of Happiness: Group A: Common positive emotions

The most obvious observation is that list of happy feeling is shorter than that of the negative emotion themes.

6.8.2 Theme 11: Feelings of happiness

Feelings of happiness were primarily related to performance outcomes. All students described their happiness at receiving a good examination or quiz grade. They were also happy when they saw an examination for which they were prepared and thus could manage.

Assessment and evaluation

June described her feelings when she obtained five As in one semester, after going against the advice not to attempt so many courses at once. She recalled that critical incident in this comment below:

> I remember doing something that I was told not to do when I started the programme, which is do not do 5 courses in one semester if you're employed full-time, however I wanted to finish the programme in 3 years because I had plans for September following that.... I remember being, tired is not the word, exhausted is the word. It is sheer willpower that got me thru…. However at the end of the semester and the beginning of the other when the grades were posted and I saw that I got 5 As. I was happy. [June: Transcript 1: 505-534]

Interactions/relationships with e-tutor/course coordinators

Some students were happy when their course coordinators intervened on their behalf against what appeared to be e-tutors' discriminatory practices against particular students. Not all of the narrative is included here, but one intervention concerned a critical personal conflict between Alethia and her e-tutor. This was not the kind of interaction that a student would want, however it was unique incident. Several references to this incident were made by this student, giving the impression that this was a particularly significant negative emotional experience for her:

> I was very happy that the course coordinator assisted. I posted something and she quickly… because she realized that the course coordinator was responding to them and maybe she felt bad about it. [Alethia: Transcript 1: 1456-1479]

Online technology interface

Other reasons for happiness were the opportunity that students perceived would be opened up by the online degree. Marie expressed this view as she reflected on her personal reasons for choosing an online degree:

> Yes there were many times I had that experience where I feel happy that I'm doing the degree especially now that I'm almost finished. When I reflect as I said initially when I called around everybody said I had to be at school 2 or 3 times a week and having young kids, I said no, it's not possible for me. I don't want to really... leave them like that. [Marie: Transcript 1: 963-973]

Ian also noted his happiness at obtaining a recorded version of the Blackboard sessions, which meant that, despite missing the live real time sessions because of work, the asynchronous facility fitted into his life style of study and work. Here he articulates how much he appreciated that particular facility:

> I think that it's lovely; I think that it is great that it is recorded. And there's no steadfast rule that if you miss it then you miss all. I think that it is very good and I am happy about that because I miss most of them. [Ian: Transcript 1: 826-839]

Programme matters

In the quotation below, Kush describes his initial openness to the online programme:

> And I think it was a good opportunity. I didn't think it would be a[n] obstacle, as long as I get all information that I wanted... At the time, I was really happy. [Kush: Transcript 1: 338-355]

6.8.3 Theme 12: Feelings of motivation

Assessment and evaluation

Another positive emotional experience was that the majority of participants described how the environment and lack of e-tutor interaction had a major input into the generation of their self-motivating activities. Kush describes getting good grades as 'positive reinforcement':

> For example when you're online, that's number 1, when you and get a good grade you do what is known as positive reinforcement. [Kush: Transcript 1: 1378-1381]

Kush also mentioned students' personal motivations for persisting in the programme. He described his perspective in this brief commentary below:

Self-awareness/the emotional self

> So I think these are the thing that still drives most of the student here, because having that first degree paper is important to us. And the better degree you have I think it is better for us student. At the end of the day when you finish that degree even if it's just a pass, you know to yourself you have a first degree. Even that is better. [Kush: Transcript 1: 1461-1473]

Student-to-student interaction

Other conditions that motivated students were described by Kush in these two comments about interactions, one with other students and the other with e-tutors:

> I think it was my second year when I start actually having what I would consider friends at university. For that year, it was a little bit more engaging to have persons close to you that are doing the same thing, because what it does, it actually pushes you. [Kush: Transcript 1: 671-677]

Interactions/relationship with e-tutors/course coordinators

> I remember a particular course, I don't remember the person, but that person was so motivating... What's motivating about this particular e-tutor was that whatever you do, he keeps it, he follows up. [Kush: Transcript 2: 164-176]

6.8.4 Theme 13: Feelings of encouragement

Several students reported how they formed small study groups, which helped their emotional stability. Three aspects of encouragement were related to student-to-student interactions, interactions with peer groups and interaction with the self.

Student-to-student interaction

June provides a description of the encouragement provided by other students in her small face-to-face group study:

> And that relationship also helped me because, I had somebody lifting me up and I was providing support for her. We had another member of the group who just wanted to pass. Recently, that person who just wanted to pass got three A's, and I said hmmm... Please make sure that you finish up with pure A's now. [June: Transcript 1: 870-878]

Interactions/relationship with e-tutors/course coordinators

Noreen reported a single happy moment in her interactions with an enthusiastic and supportive e-tutor in her account of an overwhelmingly bad experience. This was another singularly unique variation of one student's experience, and from a student who spoke glowingly about the face-to-face experiences that she could recall, in direct contrast to her disconnection in the online environment. Despite failing the course, Noreen described her impression that an encouraging presence could make the difference to a bad experience:

> I remember last year I was doing a Sociology and my CC was very enthusiastic, she was one that, I think I'll just blame myself for failing that course because she is on, even if I don't log on every day but every other day when I log on. I can that she posted something for me. It's almost like she was sitting in front of me encouraging me every day. [Noreen: Transcript 1: 342-353]

Self-awareness/emotional self

Some students at times encouraged themselves to persist with the course by keeping their long-term goal of obtaining a degree in sight. Kush's self-awareness is described below:

> And, I know that by finishing this degree, here and now, it assist me to get to the place where I want to be to get to the next level. So to encourage yourself or to motivate yourself.... [Kush: Transcript 1: 1442-1449]

Assessment and evaluation

Annie is another who in general had few positive moments in her online experience but, as with all the other students here, described how sometimes performance outcomes can be encouraging to students in general:

> So sometimes the results can be encouraging. [Annie: Transcript 1: 350]

6.8.5 Theme 14: Feelings of confidence

Some students' self-confidence improved as they started to see improvements in grades, and particularly so for numbers-based courses.

Assessment and evaluation

June articulated these feelings in the quotation below:

> But… and then after Statistics, I gained more confidence in approaching the others. [June: Transcript 2: 248-250]

Michelle's confidence was driven by the fact that she could use the asynchronous discussion which she found more useful than the text books to study for examinations.

> You can just go and read over those discussions and I'm telling you, you can go to your exam with confidence knowing that the discussions that were held can assist you greatly with your exams. [Michele: Transcript 2: 664-668]

Online technology interface

Over time, some students came to value the opportunity that online degree had provided. Both Marie and June described their confidence in the online experience.

> Yes, and it had to do in part with my level of comfort and also the course coordinator, they played a big part, but I won't say it's because of them, it also had to do with my confidence, overcoming my anxiety. [June: Transcript 2: 394-404]

Michelle's confidence is reflected in her promotion of the online experience below:

> Other than that one experience, I'm confident that online school is the best way to go.... Even if you're busy at work or your work allows you to be online, you will sit there online for hours. [Michelle: Transcript 2: L 445-457]

Self-awareness/emotional self

Ian described his self-confident awareness, expressed in his belief that he had mastered keeping a mental timetable of his course. Earlier, he had described missing classes because the online process of individual learning was so strange. He describes his confident approach below:

> When what is due, so if you ask me, I can tell you what is due without looking at the time table, so I have better control now. I am mastering it now. [Ian: Transcript 1: 1249-1254]

Interactions/relationships with e-tutors/course coordinators

Kush, portrayed earlier as suffering from cognitive frustration due to lack of feedback or clear guidelines, later described in glowing terms his confidence when the interactions with the content were guided by an interactive e-tutor.

> now for the last couple of weeks especially for these 3rd year courses, we've asked the instructor to clarify some stuff and now what we have is that almost for every other unit, we'll have, the instructor put up some form of forum that we can discuss the unit and those are answered timely, so I think from that perspective, we we're getting more involvement from, the person in charge, the e-tutor. We are getting a little more interaction from them. Actually, it makes you feel better, because you are now more confident of what to do, and how to do it. [Kush: Transcript 1: 251-277]

6.8.6 Theme 15: Feelings of relaxation

Students describe their feelings of relaxation with the technology and assessment activities.

Online technology interface

Some student described how the convenience of the Blackboard facility made him feel relaxed:

> [Blackboard] So when I get home in the nights and relax now from say about 10 to about midnight, I listen it through. [Ian: Transcript 1: 848-849]
>
> The best part is the relaxation for me. I do it at my own convenience, that's my best part. [Annie: Transcript 1: 543-545]

Assessment and evaluation

Marie earlier alluded to how she found examination times time so stressful that she had to ensure that she had her hypertension medication handy. Here she reported on feelings of relaxation because she has learnt over time to prepare for these examinations in advance:

> So I have learnt that preparation is key from early, right now I'm relaxed, the other day we had midterm exam. [Marie: Transcript 1: 396-401]

6.8.7 Theme 16: Feelings of enthusiasm

Some students demonstrated their enthusiasm for the online technology that gave them time for their family obligations. This was one of the main strands of Marie interview transcripts.

Online technology interface

> Enthusiastic... to know I don't have to go to sit down in a classroom for 3 to4 hours. I can go home to my children in the evenings and while I'm in the house monitoring them. I can be, [in class] that is a great advantage for me. As I said to you in the first interview, when I was looking for a school to do my degree when I was looking for a school to do my degree I chose UWI because of the online environment [Marie: Transcript 2: 389-407]

Interactions/relationships with e-tutor/course coordinator

The theme of interactions with e-tutors was again repeated in students' reports of feelings of enthusiasm. Kush reinforced this underpinning theme in the student's emotional experience in his statement below.

> [Getting help from kind e-tutor] You feel enthusiastic; you're enthused to do whatever is going on. [Kush: Transcript 2: 528-530]

Programme Matters

A final point under the theme of enthusiasm was made by Ian, who reported that initially, based on prior learning experience at another institution, he had been looking forward to his new accounting programme with this institution.

> All right, so for the number figure based courses initially, I was enthusiastic. There was some amount of enthusiasm because prior to coming here the previous college, I did well in courses that were number based. As a matter of fact, my major at Community College level was Accounts. [Ian: Transcript 2: 8-18]

This section has presented the extracts from students' accounts of their positive emotional experiences in their online programme. The themes are few in the overall scheme of things, nevertheless, their nature makes them vital to students' survival. Intense negative emotions cannot be sustainable or good for students' wellbeing over long periods. Feelings such as happiness and motivation, to single out two of the six positive emotions, can only be good to recall when students experience the toughness of this particular online environment.

6.8.8 Summary

All themes selected for illumination were limited, due to restricted time and the scope of this study. All selected emotions were distributed among the ten participants and care was taken to examine the data to include as many aspects of the student voice as possible. All were linked to the relevant interrelated individual and generic contextual triggers. These included students' emotional arousal to issues such as grades, interactions with e-tutors, aspects of the programme and to the students' emotional self. All were submerged under six generic contextual clusters. These were student-to-student interactions, programme matters, tutor-to-student interactions, technology interface, assessment and evaluation, and students' self-awareness/emotional self. The patterns that emerged across the emotion themes showed that in most categories negative emotional elements outflank positive emotional components. This showed a learning environment skewed towards negative emotional experiences. Primarily, the major negative emotional experiences were linked to interactions with e-tutors and the online instructional strategies. Most importantly, students highlighted the difficulty of grasping Mathematics-based courses under the present online teaching styles. Negative emotional reactions with e-tutors were generated in response to the lack of timely, appropriate and adequate feedback. Grades were heavily scrutinised by the students, due to expectations of high performance grades and students' knowledge of the amount of effort they had put into their private study time. Grades were also linked to the importance of a high GPA to the participants. Frustration was the emotion most frequently experienced, based on the number of times it was mentioned in students' narratives. Other emotions heavily referenced were disappointment, stress and anger. Positive emotions were related to grades. Happiness was the most frequently mentioned, but motivation also received many mentions.

6.9 Step 7: Students' description of emotional behaviours or actions

This section focuses on what behaviours were manifested in the learning environment and the ultimate consequences for each participant and, by extrapolation, demonstrates how particular participants may behave in an online learning environment. A few examples are demonstrated in Table 6.18 below. The next two tables illustrate how meaning statements were formulated and then used to determine emergent theme clusters and the final emergent themes.

Table 6.18: Examples of behaviour in an online learning environment

Pseudonym	Transcript	Emotion	Behaviour statements	Lines	Statement no.
Noreen	2	struggle	I think at one point I gave up and just worked at my own pace.... I just stopped (logging on).	204-221	1
Noreen	2	frustration	The fact that I cannot understand some of the things and that I didn't know who to go to, at first I didn't know who to go to. But as I had mentioned in the first interview, I'm not such a person who is outspoken, I guess that was my downfall.	62-76	2
Noreen	1	frustration	I try not to think about it very often, because if I think about it I would argue.	288-291	3
Noreen	1	frustration	Probably I'm not too fit for this environment as yet; I'm still getting my mind around it, trying to be more disciplined, cause as your research says adult learner, I'll just have to take on the responsibility on my own.	610-617	4

Table 6.19: Examples of formulated meaning drawn from behaviour in an online learning environment

Statement no.	Pseudonym	Emotion	Statements	Formulated meaning
1	Noreen	struggle	I think at one point I gave up and just worked at my own pace.... I just stopped (logging on).	Students struggled because of the demand to log on regularly. Initial behavioural response was to work at own pace. However, students gave up and stopped logging on completely. $FM320^{N}$
2	Noreen	frustration	The fact that I cannot understand some of the things and that I didn't know who to go to, at first I didn't know who to go to. But as I had mentioned in the first interview, I'm not such a person who is outspoken, I guess that was my downfall.	Students were frustrated because they were unable to understand concepts in Mathematics and felt that there was no one to support their needs. The students described the inability to seek help was due to personality traits, and alluded to the fact that their downfall was due to their lack of forthrightness. $FM321^{N}$
3	Noreen	frustration	I try not to think about it [the failures] very often, because if I think about it I would argue.	Students avoided confronting the reality of the failures. $FM322^{N}$

Table 6.20: Themes extracted from formulated meanings

Formulated meanings	**Theme cluster**	**Emergent theme**
FM320[N]. Students struggled because of the demand to log on regularly. Initial behavioural response was to work at own pace. However, students gave up and stopped logging on completely. FM326[N]. Some students tried to find relevant information online instead of seeking help from e-tutor. However, instead of completing the strategy, they gave up and signed out. FM328[N]. Some students stopped trying when they felt the stressfulness of online learning. FM375[K]. Stress puts a lot of pressure, which forces students to think about giving up when they get low grades [thoughts of giving up] FM386[Mi]. Students felt like giving up in Year 1 due to no participation grades.	Giving up	Avoidance/passive resistance
FM322[N]. Students avoided confronting the reality of the failures. FM345[J]. Students' anxiety about Math, cause them to avoid it where possible.	Avoidance	

Six relevant themes emerged from this section. These were: avoidance/passive resistance; self-regulation; actions/inactions; positive/negative internal behaviours; physical discomforts; and miscellaneous. Some behavioural responses were negative and others positive. Additionally, some were internal to the emotional self and others were external and observable. In this section, some of the themes already extracted may be repeated, but this indicates how important they were to the participants. For example, the theme of avoidance is obvious in Noreen's perception of the learning environment, as well as her emotional experiences in this environment. The five examples of avoidance can be applied to Noreen's behaviour:

> I think at one point I gave up and just worked at my own pace... I just stopped [logging on]. [Noreen: Transcript: 2: 204-221]

She spent most of her year trying to avoid the reality of online learning. As a consequence, she did not log on for classes and seldom interacted in the online environment. She reported getting nothing from the live Blackboard sessions and did nothing but log off from the computer when she tried to get information to assist her with mathematical concepts. The consequences of these behaviours was failing all her first-year courses, and there was a likelihood that she would fail again in the second year, because there is no evidence of any practical steps that she has taken or will take to alleviate the devastating trend of failure.

The theme of *self-regulation* is effectively epitomised in the reports made by Alethia, Marie, Michelle, June and Rosie. Their narratives are underpinned by examples of learning from their mistakes. The recurring motifs of these discourses are ideas of 'discipline', taking 'responsibility', being 'self-motivated', 'assertiveness' and 'commitment' to the goal. At points throughout the early stages these students have thought of giving up but are still persisting and attaining in-course grades, despite the many impeding factors already discussed. Their disposition towards meeting adversity with courage and strength is directly related to their evolution into independent learners. When these students first encountered the disorienting experience of the erstwhile unknown learning environment they were concerned about learning without face-to-face tuition, but there is now a level of acceptance.

Students persisted through the uncertainty, became more organised and accepted responsibility for some adverse circumstances they experienced. Two cases in point are when Rosie blamed herself for not preparing adequately for her first-year examinations and when June did what she called 'cherry picking' for an examination, for which she obtained a grade C:

> I blamed myself a lot every time I came out of the exam in my first year. I wish[ed] somebody was there to give me a slap, say Rosie, you need to do better, but when a [I] finished my first year, I looked in the mirror, and said, Rosie, literally, literally, Rosie you need to step up, you need to do better. [Rosie: Transcript 2: 195-214]

Very interestingly, some students had to regulate their expectations of performance outcomes. For example, Kush had to face the reality of a demanding job that reduced his time for studies and led him to fail one course and obtain a low grade for another. By contrast, June, on receiving an A for one of the numbers based components, challenged herself to getting an A+ in the next numbers-based component.

> This should be a first-class degree for me now, I have to lower that standard a little bit because one course and I think I got two low grades of all the courses, I have done so far. So I have pushed that first class down and hope to get something else. [Kush: Transcript 1: 1357-1367]

Students also activated a great deal of internal resolve in order to get over the hardships in the environment. One example of a student's digging deep inside to find internal resolve is that of Marie, who reported her feelings below:

> [Sometimes] I might feel disappointed, I quarrel now but I wake up next morning and I feel like I want to continue. [Marie, Transcript 1: 1366-1368]

As a theme, coping strategies are associated with students' practical actions to succeed. Students activated alternative plans to get help for courses that they found difficult, especially numbers-based courses. They stopped paying for these classes once they had adjusted to the learning environment. Some students also completed the end of semester evaluation of courses, resulting in a change of a course coordinator for one course. Other students made the effort to cover the heavy course, engaging with the more positive e-tutors. Some students actively participated in the discussion forums and made sure to use these as study guides for examinations. One such student was Michelle, who found these discussions an aid to her learning. Others, as indicated in chapter 5, used web tools as alternatives to their e-tutors.

Some students, such as Marie, made the financial sacrifice to install Internet in order to be able to access classes conveniently from home. She also ensured that she had enough medication to deal with stress brought on by examinations. Other students appealed when they felt that e-tutors did not mark their papers fairly and, in most cases, they triumphed. Those who did nothing to confront their circumstances, such as Stacy and Noreen, settled for failure or low grades.

> But I myself never contacted my e-tutor and say sir or miss, I never understand this. Can you explain this part a little better for me? I didn't do that. [Noreen: Transcript 1: 129-140]

Some students practised good time management skills by setting aside a scheduled time to studying at night, even though they worked in the day:

> But time and scheduling is important. It is important for you to stick with it. [June: Transcript 1: 831-832]

For some students, physical discomfort was a factor of the online learning environment. Some students cried out in their distress with online learning. One such student reported that she had many 'prayerful moments, accompanied with "tears flowing"'. June reported crying 'angry tears'. Due to Internet issues, Stacy sometimes had to hurry to complete assignments without properly focusing on the requirements:

> Sometimes, I have to be hasting to get the assignment done [in] haste, not focussing on the question just to get it done, to get it out of the way to say yes I will get a grade instead of not getting any grade. [Stacy: Transcript 1: 2: 52-58]

Finally, the theme of positive or negative internal behaviours is associated with a student's emotional self. Some students acknowledged that they could see growth in themselves. Others learned to relax over time in the environment. June reported how much being challenged by learning independently developed characteristics that made students become more resourceful, intelligent, assertive and dedicated individuals:

> When you have learn it yourself, when you are given the material and you have to figure it out, it helps to make you a more resourceful, a more intelligent, a more assertive, a more dedicated individual. [June: Transcript 1: 1162-1169]

Finally, some students reported exhibiting negative internal behaviours. Marie, for example, reported that sometimes for a night a student may remain emotionally disturbed at getting an unexpected examination paper:

> But sometimes, you come and your entire night is ruined because it is just not what you expected to be on the exam. [Marie: Transcript 1: 416-420]

Michelle found it hard to get over a negative incident in the online programme when she felt cheated out of expected good grade because someone else used her IP address to submit an online quiz using her student identification. The major issue with this is that it was the technology interface that facilitated this kind of cheating. In a face-to-face situation, the quiz would have been supervised by a contracted invigilator, but this online quiz was unsupervised.

6.10 Step 8: Composite summary of students' emotional experience of online learning in context

In this section, the findings of chapters 4, 5 and 6 are integrated to provide a composite description of the emotional experiences of all the participants. All the emergent themes have been subsumed into two themes: (a) online learning – '*it's a tough experience'*; and (b) *survivors and casualties*.

The essence of the emotional experience of students in this specific learning environment as described by the online learners is that it was a 'tough experience' that can make students

stronger if they persist. This online learning environment appears to be characterised by the maxim, 'only the strong survive'. Overall, the experience is one of survivors and casualties. A minority of the students become 'fatalities' 'suffer throughout' 'or make the best of a bad situation'. The other group, which represents the majority of the ten participants, persists under the most arduous circumstances. Thus, the online learning environment was not an easy experience for any of the participants.

The learning environment was made up of both negative and positive elements. However, the negatives far outweighed the positive moments. Surviving this online environment was dependent on having the right characteristics to persist in the face of obstacles. The characteristics were having both long- and short-term incentives to persist. One important incentive was the short-term expense to the adult learner; the other was the long-term reward of a degree achievement. Other qualities needed to survive were endurance and being fit for the purpose of studying in an online environment. Therefore, students' innate qualities of strength and weaknesses were intensified by the online environment.

All of the students entered the programme as novice online learners. At first, their expectations of a blended learning environment created a mismatch between preconceptions and reality. This led to 'virtual shock' for all participants. For most students, the desire for a blended environment was linked to the felt need for face-to-face support in numbers-based courses. However, most students adjusted to learning environment and over time it became easier to manage. Some students' lack of readiness was conveyed by the fact that a minority of the students had no computer and little or no Internet access from their homes. No Internet or unreliable access contributed to some of the fatalities or suffering that some students experienced.

6.10.1 Survivors

Survivors were those students who embraced the convenience and flexibility afforded by the online learning environment because it suited their life style as working adults, with families and other social obligations. Those who were achieving success over time began to value the experience as an authentic learning environment once they accepted the difference between the new environment and their previous experience of a face-to-face teaching environment. This reality was the absence of a physical tutor. The value of the course was appreciated because students found they could transfer knowledge from the workplace to the learning environment and from the learning environment to the workplace.

Students acknowledged that there were both disadvantages and advantages to the learning environment. To succeed, students needed to make sacrifices, sometimes even to forgo

recreational activities because they had to keep up with the relentless pace of the online environment. For the majority of the students, the technology interface was beneficial in that learning could take place anywhere, and the interface accommodated both live and delayed learning capabilities. Successful students attributed their growth from dependency to independent, resourceful, disciplined organised individual to the demanding learning processes embedded in this learning environment. Successful students also devised successful coping strategies

The learning environment provided limited e-tutor support and much of the learning that students achieved; they did so primarily on their own. The learning process provided very little formative feedback. It appeared that e-tutors and course coordinators did not model a responsive approach and teaching strategies were based on providing an overwhelming amount of cognitive content with little or no guided interaction. Students basically discovered how to learn on their own. They learned to learn imperceptibly through various means: becoming independent, avoiding procrastination and seeking help outside the immediate learning environment. Students helped themselves through formation of study groups, online and offline, using the resources of the World Wide Web and from support from the workplace. In extraordinary cases, students paid for supplementary tutorials to help them through conceptual difficulties with numbers-based courses.

Students found the process one of high emotionality. There were many negatives, but the most frequent emotion was frustration, largely concerned with the lack of interaction between student and e-tutors about grades, general interaction and feedback. Students expressed a host of other common negative emotions including stress, pressure, anxiety and anger. Students also experienced positive emotions, basically founded upon achieving high grades, but were also encouraged by the fleeting moments of engaging e-tutor feedback.

6.10.2 Casualties

For a minority of students, the online experience was one of failure. They failed when they could not solve intractable Internet problems. They failed when there was a disconnection between their learning preferences and the reality of the online environment. For some of this group, failure meant low grades and a low GPA. Failure also meant spending longer time than expected on the programme and being on the verge of dropping out. These students practised self-defeating behaviours, such as not logging on to the computer regularly and failing to meet deadlines.

Despite the differences in outcomes, all students acknowledged that discipline, time management and taking responsibility for one's own learning, and staying on task were key elements of successfully surviving this online learning environment.

6.11 Summary

This chapter focused on the description of students' emotions and emotion behaviours. The students identified an array of negative and positive emotions indicative of a highly charged emotional learning experience. The students identified many more negative than positive emotions. The most frequently mentioned negative emotion was frustration; despite the fact that more students said they experienced anger. The most frequently mentioned positive emotion was feeling happy, and motivation was a close second in this category. This contrasted directly with frustration, which was the most frequently mentioned of all the emotions. Ten negative emotion themes emerged in comparison to the six positive emotion themes. Generic contextual triggers were identified as: interactions/relations with e-tutors/course coordinators; student-to-student interactions; programme matters; assessment and evaluation activities; and self-awareness/the emotional self and technological interface.

CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to obtain a description of the emotional experience of adult learners in the context of an online programme at a Caribbean regional university. It employed a descriptive phenomenological case study approach to investigate ten learners' perceptions of their emotional experience in online learning. The chapter is divided into two; the first part deals with perceptions of the environment, learning processes and how students experienced it, and the second focuses on descriptions of emotional experiences and behavioural reactions to these experience. As a whole, the findings of this study were consistent with previous studies that found that emotions to be integral to the learning experience of online learning environments, with important effects on overall experience, learning and achievement (Artino, 2012; Cleveland-Innis & Campbell, 2012; O'Regan, 2003; Zembylas, 2008). The following sections describe in more detail the extent to which these findings are consistent with the literature

7.2 What are the students' perceptions of the online learning environment?

A common impression of online learning among participants was that it was a 'tough experience' compared to face-to-face interaction with an instructor. Some students had major problems, but physically interfacing with and communicating using technology tools were less of a problem than the absence of social presence. This is consistent with the views of Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000), who argued for the primacy of social presence as a support for cognitive presence. Feelings of belonging to a group were found to contribute to motivation and successful progression through participants' studies (Ostlund, 2005) and may minimise learner drop-out (Lowenthal, in press). Adults in online environments have to cope with challenges such as a reduced sense of belonging and confidence, and a lower quality of teaching and tutor support (Callender & Feldman, 2009), so social constructivist principles should be applied to provide them with a high quality online educational service. The Online Collaborative (OCL) Learning Model, based on social constructivism, and peer discourse that is informed by the process and resources of a knowledge community, like that of developing countries such as Jamaica, should be considered when providing educational services to students in these regions. Students usually feel more comfortable collaborating with each other and e-tutors in order to bring about a greater understanding of the learning process.

Most of the previous studies in online learning have used quantitative data to arrive at conclusions (Lynch & Dembo, 2004; Perraton, 2000; Saba, 2000) and therefore provide few

details on how interaction takes place between instructors and learners, and as a result the students' voice may not be considered when designing online learning. This study uses qualitative data reliant on student voice to increase an understanding of online learning and the influence of emotions on students' learning outcomes and satisfaction. In this study, students expressed a desire for shared learning experiences with tutors and peers. According to Sher (2009), learner-to-learner interaction can promote learning through collaboration and knowledge sharing, and this observation is consistent with that of Lynch (1999), who argues that although online learning may provide a materials rich and stimulating educational experience, it can be a socially destitute environment for some students. Some students' learning preference may be for the more unbounded online learning environment, however, and whether a student thrives or flounders depends on their perception of how, when and where learning can take place. Lynch (1999) asserts that learners' previous expectations of learning also influence their emotional experience of the online learning environment.

Convenient and flexible online learning is suited to adult learners who need to work; study and yet take care of their family responsibilities and other obligations. Accessibility was therefore viewed as compatible with their requirements (Tucker, 2003). However, the very flexibility can create negative experiences for many time-bound adult learners, as some assume that learning online is easier than in a conventional classroom (Carnevale, 2000b, as cited in Nash, 2005).One essential for online learning is basic computer proficiency and access to the Internet. This was not true for all online learners in this study. The consequence of this disposition can be devastating for online learners and efforts should be made by learners to adjust to the rigour of online course pace.

In this study, adult learners perceived online instructors to be professionals who dominate the online learning. They found this painful and refused to surrender fully to online academia. They perceived the online learning environment as intimidating and that their attempts to actualise their full potential was impeded. Pekrun et al. (2002) suggested that there was a need to enhance students' psychological well-being by giving them chances to cope with excessive demands, increasing their opportunities to succeed. Some students wanted a high GPA in order to enrol in higher degrees, and desired an environment that was dynamic, student friendly, using online technology as a learning tool.

The theme of virtual shock was related to students' prior misconceptions of what was involved in a fully online course. This was due in part to inadequate pre-registration and orientation information. This has been implicated as a barrier to online learning (Galusha 1997). Most of the students had their own private conceptualisation of a 'fully online' programme. This was assumed to be a blended or hybrid environment incorporating some kind

of physical interaction with a tutor. The mismatch between expectations and reality accounted for much of the early negative perceptions of the online context. While the majority of the students were able to adjust and embrace that reality, a few students never did. This concurs with research that suggests that online learning is not a suitable option for all types of students (Collins, 1999, as cited in Rovai & Jordon, 2004).

The challenge faced by students new to online learning experience is similar to those who travel to foreign lands where they experience 'culture shock' (San Jose & Kelleher, 2009). The unfamiliar learning environment was particularly disorienting for students in the first year of the programme. Christie et al., (2007) found similar feelings of dislocation when students entered university. There were varying degrees of mismatch between the difficulty of the online programme and students' academic preparation (Rovai & Wighting, 2005). For some, the experience was exhausting, while others had to medicate themselves to cope with the stress, and others refereed to the physical impact of sleep deficit. It is clear that when students are exposed to the unfamiliar ecology of the online learning environment the shock can cause a great deal of stress (Conrad, 2002; Gay, 2010; O'Regan, 2003; Zembylas 2008), and this proved true for all participants, particularly those already experiencing difficulty in their approach to learning through computer technology. This is consistent with Liaw (2008), who found that perceived self-efficacy was a factor influencing learners' satisfaction with the Blackboard facility.

In this case study, there was no drop out because the number of students was small (10); the higher the number, the greater the probability that there would be dropout. In this study, there was a high level of frustration that could lead to withdrawal from the programme. Students used their negative emotions as motivation to complete their programme of study, because the flexibility of online learning accommodated their life style and was easier to access than face-to-face instruction. Svedberg (2010) found this to be true of all adult learners.

7.3 Students' perceptions of the online learning processes

All the students found the learning experience deficient, whether they were high or low performing. The process was devoid of regular contact with e-tutors, who did not encourage interaction. Learner–instructor interaction is considered vital to the learning experience (Davidson-Shivers, 2009). Formative feedback was mostly late, insufficient or absent. Some students felt that assessment of their work was unfair and arbitrary because tutors either were unable or unwilling to explain low grades given to them. This finding is consistent with previous studies that indicated that students appreciate positive feedback and view negatively, limited insufficient and untimely feedback from their tutors (Dixon, Dixon & Siragusa, 2007).

Students who did a great deal of independent study were concerned and contested their low grades. Cole et al. (cited in Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p.130) reported that what students say they expect on assignment and feedback is fair and objective grading. This was not the case for students in this study; the grading outcomes were inconsistent with expectations. When asked for an explanation, tutors moved grades upwards without justification. Students reported that their grades went from low to high without them putting in any effort to improve the quality of their work.

Students generally viewed the instructional strategies of the learning context as lacking in pedagogical creativity. Teaching strategies were heavily geared towards providing course content, or at least that was how students perceived it. This meant that they had to undertake a great deal of personal reading and clarify meanings on their own. Completing assignments was based on guesswork because there were so few guidelines on the execution of assignments. In this environment, students received limited advice on assignments and individual comments were usually lacking. Feedback is considered one of the most important factors in learner development (Ryan & Dowling, 2006; Hara & Kling 1999). Without feedback there is little opportunity to construct and confirm meaning through discourse in a critical learning community. Teaching presence is also a vital function that enhances social and cognitive presence for meaningful learning outcomes. Rovai and Wighting (2005) emphasised that varying experience levels and skills of instructors teaching online was a barrier to students learning which showed up in poor facilitation of discussion of group work and in poor feedback.

One of the six andragogical principles, as outlined by Knowles, Holton and Swanson (2005), the principle of mutual respect, was ignored when tutors failed to respond to students' need for feedback in a timely manner or at all. These adults were returning to formal learning after years in the workforce and some may have suffered from low self-esteem and need hand-holding in the early stages. However, they had valuable experience and knowledge that can enhance learning outcomes, and do have a concept of themselves as adults. Brookes et al., (2001, as cited in Dixon, Dixon & Siragusa., 2007, p.208) argue that the most effective learning environment requires 'educators to create and employ strategies to make learning active (p.108). Laurillard (2006) argues that online learning needs to develop a teaching strategy to bridge what facilitators know about learning and what they should do as tutors (cited in Dixon, Dixon & Siragusa, 2007, p.208). E-tutors seemed unaware of the gaps in their knowledge about what it meant to be teaching in a constructivist teacher-led environment which supports collaborative and cooperative learning. Therefore the online collaborative learning model supports the need for professional development for instructors. The application of adult learning principles is considered important to all adult instructors.

7.3.1 Students' description of their emotional experience in online learning environment

In this study, students' perceptions of the learning environment and the processes involved provided a rationale for discussing their emotional experiences in accessing computer – mediated learning. Emotions are an individual's intuitive appraisal of events in their environment. Online learning occurs in an environment where learners must adjust to the dynamic communications and interactions among instructors and other learners; therefore their attitudes, beliefs, values, interest and opinions will affect their experiences in the learning process (Cleveland-Innis & Campbell, 2012; Miller, 2005).

According to Rustin (2003), emotions have an invisible dimension in the learning process. These can be positive or negative and are linked to a set of contextual triggers, such as grades, interacting with the computer, with tutors or peer group. These emotions include enthusiasm, motivation, confidence, anxiety, frustration; stress, disappointment and anger.

In this study, feelings of frustration were aroused when students felt that they were being thwarted in their goal-directed behaviours (Capdeferro & Romero, 2012). In the context of negative emotions, these students directed their frustration primarily towards interactions with e-tutors or their course coordinators, mostly about grades and lack of feedback. O'Regan (2003) found frustration to be the most pervasive feeling as students were exasperated by various aspects of the learning environment. From the students' discourses about frustration in this study, their implicit assumptions of a safe and supportive learning environment were not a premium consideration for some e-tutors or even course coordinators. Overall, students' concern about interactions with their e-tutor was indicative of a weak teaching presence. This inference is drawn because, although participants recalled the emotions they felt and the context in which the emotions occurred, not many could recall the names of their e-tutors or course coordinators, even when interactions were described as positive. It appears that the e-tutors had little influence on how the interactive environment was managed. In a study at UWI by Warrican et al. (2014), there were similar findings that the e-tutors were not adequately managing the learning environment in order to foster good relationships with learners, so that they had a sense of achievement on a regular basis. Tutor visibility is highly recommended in online learning environments (Davidson-Shivers, 2009; Wlodkowski, 1985).

Stress, a negative emotion, was mostly associated with keeping up with the heavy course load. Sometimes students felt disappointed in themselves for failing the course or sometimes it was directed at the lack of interaction with e-tutors. Alienation was associated with the overall environment of the virtual space, which appeared to be empty because there was little interaction with other students and the e-tutors were perceived as aloof. The few students who

described an experience of struggle wrestled with the online setting, the course load, exams and poor feedback. Anger was expressed when students felt wronged or unfairly treated. This anger was mostly directed at interactions with e-tutors.

Regarding positive emotions, students had happy feelings if they had a good e-tutor and received high grades for exams. Students had increased confidence in themselves as their grades improved, especially on a course that was considered difficult. Students became more confident as they grew more familiar with the online environment. This became especially so, after a successful first year. Students were motivated when they had good relations with their e-tutors. Some students were enthusiastic about their interaction with the technology space and its benefits. Lastly, students described how relaxed they became over time with various aspects of the online environment.

The variety of negative emotions experienced in this online learning environment indicates that, despite growing advocacy for online learning, many problems are yet to be overcome in order to create a positive learning environment for all who choose the online experience. Furthermore these findings concur with the point that the roles of negative emotions should be viewed with caution (Hascher, 2010; Pekrun et al., 2002), because in some instances negative emotions can be a source of motivation to achieve positive learning outcomes.

7.3.2 Behaviour manifestation of students' emotional experience of online learning

According to Dirkx (2006), few instructors in higher education regard emotion as central to learning. Shuck, Albornoz and Winberg (2007) argue that the constructivist perspective can bring meaning to the learning environment, since it can impede or motivate learning. The students in this study expressed feelings of loss and dislocation. Online environments should therefore consider the affective domain and the role it plays in positive learning outcomes; therefore, social interaction should have a place in curriculum development. The students were disappointed with themselves, and this relates to awareness of the self; moreover, they were disappointed in the lack of leadership displayed by coordinators who did not actively support their learning and e-tutors who disregarded their need for interaction. This identification of the strengths and weaknesses in online learning environments should be assessed continually to avoid tension in the learning process.

7.4 Conclusion

Emotional intelligence, according to Matthews et al. (2003), is self-regulatory and involves competence to identify, express and understand emotions in order to regulate internal feelings as these relate to life events. Emotional intelligence therefore is relevant to online learning

because it influences how students adjust to stressors in the environment. In this study, the majority of the students adapted positively to the challenges. This level of resilience was no doubt an indicator of success in their learning outcomes. Posiack, Dizazzo-Miller and Pellerito (2013) agree that resilience involves coping strategies and behaviours in face of stressors in the learning environment.

This study contributes to previous research on the role of emotions in online learning environments. It discovered that the online learning environment can be a desolate and lonely place; and that the emotional experience of inhabiting this place impacts on learning outcomes.

Nevertheless, negative emotional experiences can lead to increased motivation and achievement due to feelings of self–efficacy. Nonetheless, not all students were fit for online learning given their inadequate pre-registration information, limited technological skills, their access to internet, and financial instability.

E-tutors and course coordinators can track student progress and identify students at risk, as well as using teaching strategies that are suited to the environment. One implication therefore is that e-tutors and course coordinators are obligated to make online learning experience less frustrating and more rewarding.

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

The conclusions drawn from this study are based on students' interviews and documentary evidence from the UWIOC. Specifically, students' perception of the online learning environment, process, emotional experiences and manifestations of behavioural outcomes were considered.

The study extends the assumption that adult learners experience a diversity of academic emotions during the learning process. The presence of negative emotions can impact on the learning outcomes for at-risk students differently from that of more successful learners. Older mature adults who are committed to studying online are attached to their goal and therefore are not deterred by the presence of negative emotions and feelings. Most are able to regulate these emotions, based on their attachment to a personally important goal. This may lead to superior learning outcomes, even in a learning atmosphere where there is little or no positive interaction with e-tutors or other students as recommended by constructivist principles. The suggestion is that older adults may have a greater store of emotional resource for coping in crisis situations due to greater life experiences, hence negative emotions influence the effort expended to meet the requirements of the programme. Negative emotions seem to be more disruptive to the learning experiences of younger adults, whose emotional resources may be deficient due to less life experience. This points to the need to design early intervention strategies for younger students who may be more at risk. However, interventions in the first year could be helpful for all novice learners, who are likely to be suffering from virtual shock associated with studying through a technology interface instead of interacting with other human beings.

Negative emotions cannot be eliminated from educational settings, specifically from online learning, because of the nature of learning in a differently enabling environment. The study shows that more dialogue or conversations may be necessary for more naturally autonomous learners, while more structure may be necessary for less autonomous learners who may need cajoling at the beginning of an online programme. This points to tutors' need to infuse a balance of both structure and dialogue in their instructional strategies because of the diverse dispositions towards learning online. All programmes should be designed to address the transactional and psychological distance due to the lack of immediacy and presence in online learning environments.

8.1.1 Suggested guidelines for practitioners

Constructivist principles of learning and teaching assume active engagement and the high visibility of the tutor in the learning activities. Some suggest that pedagogical strategies may be different, but good teaching is good teaching (see Chickering & Gamson, 1987, *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*).

i. Feedback

- During the course, general feedback should be provided to students on assignments and questions in a timely manner within the stated guidelines.

- Constructive feedback goes beyond assigning grades and provides specific feedback on how to improve or reasons for the grade, if it is low. Do not ignore students' request for explanations: give specific suggestions as to how to improve their work.

- Unpreparedness will result in high in-course failure rates and students will drop out. Therefore, marketing and recruiting strategies to enrol more students will not succeed if inadequate preparation for online learning continues.

ii. Communication

- Tutors should present themselves as approachable by using polite and respectful language to their adult students. **P**rofessional and ethical behaviour should always be expected in both student and tutors.

- Clear netiquette guidelines should be established and enforced with a mediation appeals process if students feel that they have been insulted or otherwise disrespected by the tutor. This is important, given the power relations between students and e-tutor.

iii. Guidance

- Provide clear guidelines and expectations for assignments. Give feedback on assignments by allowing students to submit draft copies within a specified time; they can then improve the final draft before submission.

- Although there is an agreement that students should meet assignment deadlines, because adult students work as well as study e-tutors can use discretion where necessary and be a little flexible if students can provide a valid reason. Late assignments can be accepted at a reduced grading level if students can provide a valid reason.

- Tutors should log in routinely at least once every 24 hours, or at least every two days. Tutors should set regular online office hours for one-to-one consultation, as would be common in face-to-face interactions. e-tutors should make themselves available for other informal meetings.

iv. Interactions

Encourage dialogue by knowing the names of your students and directing questions to them. Assign a minimum mark to their participation, rather than to the correct answers, to encourage students to talk.

v. Discussion forum

Monitor and moderate collaborative discussions via the student tutor learning exchange. Pose stimulating questions, interject comments, corrections and keep the discussion on track, as necessary. Give marks for significant contributions to prevent students from simply posting without proper consideration of the subject matter.

vi. Pair each student with a 'buddy 'in the course

Especially in the first year, encourage student-to-student interaction. For example, instead of using collaborative groups, which are sometimes hard to manage because of the distributed learning environment, assign an online 'buddy' by pairing students.

Preparedness for online learning

- Arrange for courses to begin a week or so before the official start date to provide an orientation to the course and to inform students of the expectations for learning.

- Make the course material available in advance. If students have the material and motivation, they will find a way to learn if the content is relevant and interesting.

- Note the areas where students might have difficulty with new concepts and prepare material to help students to grapple with these concepts. Provide exemplary answers.

- Give special attention to instructional strategies for numeric subjects. Make no assumptions about the students' mathematical skills. Most students will need extra tutorial sessions to grasp some of the concepts. Where possible, use prepared recordings of difficult concepts using video or other multimedia tools that students can use repeatedly. Tutors could also provide alternative ways of solving mathematical concepts so that students can look at alternative ways of working out the same problem.

Assessment

- Occasionally, give students assignments that they can mark on their own, as this provides immediate feedback and reduces the workload of tutors.

- Tutors should establish trust by outlining clear procedures for allocating marks for assignments. Clear assessment guidelines will support transparency and help the students to view the assessment process as fair and understandable.

Technology literacy

- Tutors should strive to become familiar with the online technology interface of this online environment and its advantages in making the learning environment more comfortable for the students.

- Tutors need to experiment with the technology, along with their students. They should pursue self-development strategies to improve their knowledge and use the affordances of the different types of communication media to help students learn.

- Tutor should have ongoing training in technological facilities.

8.1.2 Policy: Organisational guidance for university staff

Programme design

In curriculum development, provision should be made for the affective domain of learning in order to address the need to develop emotional intelligence. All programmes should be designed on the principles of best practice:

- Tutor accountability

- A policy of accountability that should be emphasised and monitored, and stiff sanctions should be in place for tutors who do not follow the rules and regulations set out for ethical behaviour towards students (netiquette).

- A policy of response time of 24 to 48 hours should be enforced, and if students make a complaint this should be verified and tutor sanctioned.

- All tutors should post online the office hours so both the administration and students are aware, just as in face-to-face situations, so a student can make an appointment to chat, Skype or make a WhatsApp meeting as convenient with a tutor at a particular time.

- Since all students are assigned to local country sites, where possible all tutors should be assigned to a local site where, if necessary, they can meet face-to-face with a student on exceptional issues relating to the teaching and learning experience.

- Since technicians are assigned to all sites, they should be used as an additional resource for tutors and students. For example, they should provide mandatory training seminars for e-tutors in using PowerPoint, videos and other multimedia tools. Technicians can help tutors format the uploading of teaching material to be more standardised and not like a 'scrapbook', as one student described.

  (a) Tutors should organise, monitor and encourage small-group student-to-student collaboration, both online and offline, to provide mutually supportive relationships for learners, especially as a part of the first-year experience.

  (b) Provide meaningful feedback on graded assignments with recognition for good work as well as specific suggestions for improvement. Clear assessment guidelines for assignment and rubric should be provided and given to all students. This will help to create a sense of trust between learners and tutor that there is transparency and fairness in the marks allocated for assignments.

  (c) Tutors should encourage and model interaction by responding to students' comments or questions in a timely manner within the guidelines provided for students. Active tutor participation will model appropriate online behaviour for students and create high tutor presence when tutors share in the learning process, by guiding discussions, providing constructive and corrective comments and interacting outside of the limits of online classes.

  (d) Recruitment strategies should include the use of an online assessment tool in the pre-enrolment period, so prospective students can establish in advance if online learning is a suitable option.

  (e) Provide continuous staff development training for e-tutors and course coordinators on effective teaching and assessment strategies in online learning. For example, tutors should be required to experience online courses from the student perspective and to develop their own online courses.

  (f) The PDD should track the number of times a tutor logs on and to provide feedback to tutors on their logging-on activities as a part of their performance appraisal. This would improve accountability for interaction by signalling to tutors that the department is serious about tutor-to-student interactions and will take action.

(g) As the students are from diverse backgrounds, every attempt should be made to ensure that the tutor pool is ultimately as diverse as the range of Caribbean nationalities so that students do not feel that they are being singled out by being a different nationality to the tutor.

(h) Accountability should be emphasised, and tutors and course coordinators should be removed or counselled if there is a barrage of complaints about their teaching style or lack of interaction. Above all, tutors should strive to create an atmosphere of empathy between equals.

(i) Course material should be available, of good quality and easy to use. Also, given the cultural knowledge of the need to improve mathematical competencies, special attention should be given to numbers-based courses, with provision for students to call someone to help in particularly difficult areas. Alternatively, tutors can develop prepared answers in a format that students can access at any time, in any place (for example audio, video or other relevant multimedia).

S**tudent support**

In this online environment, it is an acknowledged fact that there is a shortage of resources, particularly financing the necessary student support. Access and programmes appear to be major foci. Therefore the suggestion is that the leadership should focus primarily on providing comprehensive student support in the first year, while the learning curve is at its peak.

- Introduce one- or two-credit access residential introductory programmes for students without a passing grade above Level 3 in the Caribbean Secondary Certificate Examination to improve competency in English.

- Run computer literacy classes based on the skills students will need as they transition through their first year and beyond.

- Introduce optional time management and study skills classes.

While courses for the programmes should be taught online, these one-off courses can be used to assist students in developing friendships, choosing courses together and creating the sense of belonging to a university that some students crave.

Administration

- The PDD should introduce a dedicated officer to track how often individual tutors log on, and use students' evaluation and complaints to determine the effectiveness of particular tutors, based on predetermined standards of good teaching in online learning.

- Infuse site technicians officially in the teaching learning loop. Train site technicians to help tutors to present material to predetermined standards.
- A more diverse group of teachers from across the Caribbean to match the diversity in students' representation.
- Develop a comprehensive profile of Open Campus students and use to build a database of information about them to assist in student satisfaction, retention and elimination of external barriers. Profiles, it is suggested by Folinsbee (2008), should include age, gender, location, student goals, familiarity with online learning, computer access, learning preferences, employment status and reasons for taking the online programme.

8.2 Limitations

There are various limitations associated with the methodology applied in this study. The reliance on data that are based on participants' recall of information is problematic, because of the effects of the lapse of time on their ability to remember events or information. There was also the dilemma of different interpretations and perceptions about emotions and learning.

The purposeful sampling technique restricted the generalisability of the findings. The study was limited to the experience of ten participants from one of many local country sites. These findings were not expected to reflect emotional experiences at other centres in Jamaica or across the Caribbean, rather to obtain in-depth information from students on the phenomenon studied. However, since most online students appear to have similar characteristics, the result could be generalisable, to some extent.

8.3 Future Research

Future research should focus on tutors' emotional experiences from and perspective on teaching in an online learning environment. Teaching strategies should be considered, as these can lead to the creation of emotionally aware environments, providing techniques for adult educators in the field. Intervention studies can make evidence-based recommendations on designing OLEs sensitive to the components of learning, emotion and performance.

Participants in this study were all from business-related areas. Researching the emotional experiences in another discipline such as fully online education degrees may indicate a

different experience. Thus, comparing the experience among the different groups is suggested. Finally, longitudinal studies following the trajectory of a cohort of learners starting in the same year could be helpful in understanding the experience of students in fully online learning, about what works and what does not. Since there were only two men, and although there were no major differences in the experiences based on gender, it is admissible that the findings reflect the emotional experiences of mostly women. For this reason, comparing experiences between genders is suggested to help in designing programmes attractive to Caribbean men.

8.4 Contribution to Knowledge

The present study offers several important contributions. First, it fills the gap in the literature on online learning and international students because it focuses on a comparatively under-researched and under-represented group, Caribbean and Jamaican students to be specific. Previous studies have compared international students' learning outcomes between online learning environments and face-to-face learning environments, yet have provided little information on how they actually experience online courses and why some persist and some drop out. The study focuses on both completers and non-completers for a more comprehensive analysis of both the departure and persistence puzzle, as is encouraged in the literature. Thus the study presents empirical data on a group of students for whom there is little information in the international literature. The study shows that women, who represent the majority enrolled in Caribbean online learning, will mostly complete despite the obstacles. However, there is a significant minority who want to persist despite their preference for face-to-face tuition, but need assistance in their first year.

Second, this research contributes as it addresses emotion, as an under-researched and relatively under-represented phenomenon in the literature, and how it influences adults' learning in online learning in higher education. Notably, this study focuses on a wide number of emotions, providing a more comprehensive perspective that is largely lacking in the empirical research, which tends to focus on one or two (Pekrun et al., 2002). This study on Caribbean learners in online learning serves to extend the growing interest in emotions research in online learning, based solely on the perspectives of the students themselves. In doing so, it shines a spotlight on the dynamics of students' emotions, because it identifies the kinds of emotions, the triggers and behavioural strategies students adopt to cope. The descriptive phenomenology framework provided a wide perspective on students' emotional experience in their own words and without distorting their personal perceptions through the use of a systematic approach with clearly identifiable procedures (Hycner, 1985, Moustakas, 1994).

Third, the tentative conclusion on the dual role of negative emotions leading to positive outcomes of older adults and its role in contributing to drop-out of at-risk younger students

may advance theories on the role of negative emotions in learning. In this study, negative emotions and experiences contributed mostly to older adult learners by encouraging yet more effort. This effort was linked to their commitment to achieve a degree.

Fourth, the study highlights frustration as a common learning emotion in online learning, and that persistence and success are two distinctly different aspects of learning. The detailed description of participants and the stories they told provides a greater understanding of international students in online learning. The descriptions include minimal interpretation in order to provide a vicarious experience (Stake, 1995, cited in Hara & Kling 1999, p.7), so that the reader can relate to the knowledge and participate in the rich experience from this study, from the perspective of Caribbean and Jamaican students.

Fifth, the study contributes a label or new construct, *virtual shock,* for the emotional experience of novice adult learners in a technologically enabled but foreign learning environment. This environment is comprised of little structure and dialogue, where the interactions, objects and language are as strange as the exotic features and creatures experienced when visiting a foreign country for the first time.

8.5 Policy: Guidelines for online programmes at regional and national levels

UWI is the region's mega-university, with satellites in all English-speaking countries of the Caribbean. A decision was taken to develop a more integrated strategy that would field into both regional and national programmes. The University has been given the mandate to assist in the upgrading of human resource needs in order to assist with the resolution of development issues facing the Caribbean (Strategic Plan 2012–2017).

Due to the presence of three national residential campuses and satellite campuses in 17 countries and 44 locations in the Caribbean (UWI Open Campus Annual Report 2013/2014) countries, the University is recognised as serving the needs of both regional and national stakeholders, including the governments of the region. Institution-wide pioneering online learning guidelines would of necessity be subject to both national and regional governments and need to meet the standards of all national accrediting bodies. Therefore, national policies would have the input of both the University and regional governments. This assumption is based on the 1989 Grand Anse Declaration, which recognised the role of the University in providing the human resources need for integration and made the commitment that UWI would remain a regional institution in perpetuity (UWI graduation ceremonies, Chancellor's address, 2013: Sir George Alleyne).

These guidelines identify issues that regional and national universities, colleges and other tertiary institutions should address when developing online higher education programmes for adult learners. By appropriately addressing these guidelines, the regional university recognises that any online programme will need to meet the scrutiny of several regional and national accrediting bodies: the Barbados Accreditation Council; the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago; the University Council of Jamaica; the Antigua and Barbuda Accreditation Board; the Dominica National Accreditation Board; the St Christopher and Nevis Accreditation Board; and Ministries of Education in other member countries.

These guidelines have been based on reviews of guidelines and other documents from UWI Self-study Report for Institutional Accreditation (July, 2012), the UWI APAD Self-assessment Reports for Management Studies (March, 2013) and Accounting (February, 2014), along with several research articles based on implementing best practice in online learning, and the findings of this study.

8.6 Policy Statement

As a publicly funded entity supported by all the governments of the English-speaking Caribbean, UWI crosses several national borders but does not belong to any national government. UWI is committed through its Strategic Plan 2012–2017 to provide a creative solution to existing problems of access to distributed communities and diverse learners in the English-speaking Caribbean. It is committed to supporting the development of online learning through national governments and regionally through its own institutional development. To do so, the University will align its policies, practices, procedures and structures to international standards by ensuring that best practice in service delivery to online learners is developed and implemented. Consistent with this commitment, the University will ensure:

1. Pre-entry information should include specific definitions for the meaning of online learning/programmes in this context. All the requirements should be clearly visible on the campus website and, where possible, included in all promotion material. Full disclosure of all processes and expectations relating to all areas of online learning is the ideal, through a variety of informational and instructional tools tailored to online delivery.
2. A pre-entry assessment tool to assess readiness for online learning. Students must be made aware of the level of Internet skill and other knowledge of electronic software that is required to succeed in the programme. Where necessary, preliminary training courses should, as implied in Point 3 below, be in place for the new online learner or as required by any student.

3. Specific programmes and activities for improving the first-year experience and early adjustment to the online technology and the intellectual requirements of higher education.
4. Specific preliminary and ongoing programmes for Mathematics and English requirements that student can access at any time to improve their performance and competence in these skills.
5. Strict enforcement of the 24–48 hour guidelines for student requests for feedback, guidance and advice on assignments.
6. Identifying 'at risk' students and arranging for face-to-face or online support, depending on assessment of the situation.
7. Building trust between students and tutors by providing clear and transparent assessment and evaluation for assignments.
8. Online learners cannot always meet strict time demands. Therefore it is essential that e-tutors/course coordinators exercise a caring, understanding attitude and provide a flexible learning environment that stresses outcomes over processes. For example, late assignments within defined limits should attract a penalty of a reduced grade when a valid reason is provided rather than a failure grade.
9. The posting of grades within reasonable deadlines should be strictly enforced.
10. Setting office hours for tutors and providing students with the ability to make contact during those hours to set up appointments with tutors for academic support and advice online.
11. Tutors/course coordinators should model interaction for students (teaching presence) by being visible through engaging regularly with their learners for the 'design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realising meaningful and educationally worthwhile outcomes' (Anderson, 2008, p.5).
12. All requirements and information for classes must be included in each syllabus.
13. Social integration with the wider community of the school by notifying students of all activities taking place at any given time with the learning institution.
14. The Internet must be seen as a tool for learning, and all learning activities must be developed around the needs of the learners. An institutional model that is distinct from the traditional instructional planning model and that supports the design, development, and implementation of high quality instruction on the Internet, regionally and nationally must be the underlying principle guiding all online activities and planning.
15. E-tutors should be Faculty trained to deal with adult learners accessing online education. Training should include best practice in online teaching, the use of multimedia resources such as YouTube, training to create their own videos, also how to use PowerPoint appropriately and using the relevant learning management systems.

16. UWI should ensure that there are specific programme advisors for all online students, as well as one or more admissions representatives to deal with student concerns and problem resolutions. The advisor should serve as a mentor for online students throughout the degree programme. This reduces the number of persons with whom an online student should liaise for assistance and advice.
17. A system should be in place to contact learners after they have dropped out to see if the institution can help them to resolve the issues that led to their departure.

8.7 Conclusions

The study concludes by reflecting on the evidence gathered by this phenomenological case-study approach. It highlighted the role of emotions, an under-researched area in higher education, particularly in the newer pedagogical paradigm of online learning. It explored how ten adult Caribbean learners in an online learning environment described their emotional experiences and the essence of that experience. The study used the framework of persistence and retention to demonstrate how emotions can affect the decision of some students to leave an online programme. It highlights the dual role of negative emotion and its importance in drawing learners' attention to the gaps in their learning experience, propelling them to develop coping strategies or self-regulatory behaviours leading either to success or failure. This provided evidence that, although negative emotion can disrupt previous perceptions of learning, especially in novel situations that demand a paradigm shift in perception from that in the past, it does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes. Indeed, for the majority of these learners, it led to positive outcomes. This is because negative emotion, like a thermostat, is a warning system that tells learners that more effort needs to be expended to achieve a valued goal. However, for a significant minority, it can lead to disappointing failures or unsatisfactory outcomes.

The study focused on some learners in the early stages, others in the middle and a few at the end of their studies, and on emotional experiences in an undergraduate degree programme rather than a single-semester course. The findings are significant to higher education and contribute to the literature on adult learners in online learning, providing valuable insight into their perceptions and emotional experience by identifying the common negative and positive emotions and their influence on achievement outcomes for both completers and non-completers. Consistent with other research in the international literature, frustration was found to be one of the most significant academic emotions.

The study showed that the emotional experience in learning situations is not limited to the five basic discrete emotions that have been theoretically identified in the literature, but is

replete with psychological internal emotion states that involve regulatory behaviours. Emotions are always present in any educational setting and are integral to learning, neither parallel nor oppositional, because all learners enrol in any educational endeavour as emotionally embodied beings.

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Appendix A**:** Recruitment Letter

Invitation to participate in my research project

September 6, 2013

Study Title: Adult Learners in Higher Education: Exploring Learners' Perceptions of the Emotional Experience of Online Learning in a Caribbean Institution

Dear Online Student,

My name is Vilma Clarke. I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom.

I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Education on the emotional experience of online students in the BSc degree at the University of the West Indies Open Campus. I am inviting you to participate.

This research should benefit students, administrators and educators interested in student experience in online education. However, only students who have completed at least one semester of the online learning environment at the Open Campus are eligible to participate at this time.

The fieldwork for this project is designed to be done in two phases, individual interviews, followed by focus groups. Should you choose to participate you will be asked to meet with me for individual interviews or focus group discussion. The interview sessions will be conducted first and are scheduled for October 2013.

For the individual interviews, you will be asked questions about

A. Your previous experience and expectations of online learning

B. Being an online adult learner

C. Your social learning experience

D. Your emotional behaviours

E. Your overall emotional experience and how you cope

F. Any other important information relevant to your emotional experience

The meeting will take place at Harrison House which is your assigned learning centre or a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last about one hour for each interview.

Focus group meetings will last for approximately one and a half hours each but the schedule for this will be designed during the interview stage and these sessions will not take place until the interviews have all been completed.

Each interview or focus group session will be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by me and a research assistant who will help me with transcribing the tapes. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of Southampton and the University of the West Indies. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings but your identity will not be revealed.

Thank you for your kind consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me at the number listed below to discuss participating or please sign the attached form and return it to vilma.clarke@open.uwi.edu.

I will send you a text message as a reminder within the next week to see whether you are willing to participate

The research has been approved by the University of the West Indies Ethics Committee (Ref. ECP 290, 12/13).

With kind regards,

Vilma N. Clarke
C/o UWI Open Campus
Harrison House
Montego Bay
Telephone: 876-455-4180/952-2321
Email: vilma.clarke@open.uwi.edu

Confirmation of Participation

I agree to participate in the study entitled: **Adult Learners in Higher Education: Exploring Learners' Perceptions of the Emotional Experience of Online Learning in a Caribbean Institution,** to be conducted by Vilma N. Clarke.

Please tick your choice:

[ ] Individual Interview
[ ] Focus Group

..... **……**
Participant Signature **Date**

Appendix B**: Ethical Endorsement Letters**

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES
OPEN CAMPUS
OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Professor Hazel Simmons-McDonald, OBE, BA, Dip. Ed. (UWI), MA (Ed), MA (Ling), Ph.D. (Stanford)
Pro-Vice Chancellor and Principal

April 26, 2013

Ms. Vilma Clarke
Head, Open Campus Jamaica Western
Harrison House
P.O. Box 969
Orange Street
Montego Bay
St. James
Jamaica

Dear Ms. Clarke

I acknowledge receipt of your letter requesting permission to select a sample of subjects from students registered online at Montego Bay for your Ph.D. thesis. I have also read the proposal and noted the instruments that you will be using for the study. They are acceptable and I approve your collection of data from the students. I would simply remind you to submit the proposal to the University Ethics Committee to inform them that you will be using human subjects and to solicit their approval also.

I wish you success with the research.

Yours sincerely

Hazel Simmons-McDonald
Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal

P.O. Box 1341, Bridgetown BB11000, BARBADOS
Tel: (246) 417-4022 Fax: (246) 424-0722 E-mail: principal@open.uwi.edu

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

MONA CAMPUS
Faculty of Medical Sciences
Office of the Dean

Dean: Horace Fletcher, MB, BS, DM (O&G), FRCOG, FACOG
Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology

July 9, 2013

Ms Vilma Clarke
Head, Open Campus Jamaica Western
Harrison House
Organ Street
Montego Bay, St. James

Dear Ms. Clarke,

Re: Research proposal entitled- Adult learners in Higher Education: Exploring learner's perceptions of the emotional experience of online learning in a Caribbean institution. ECP 290, 12/13

Thank you for submitting the above mentioned proposal for review by the UHWI/UWI/FMS Ethics Committee.

The proposal was reviewed and approved, having met the required ethical standards.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Horace Fletcher
Chairman UHWI/UWI/FMS Ethics Committee

Mona, Kingston 7, Jamaica W.I.
Tel: (876)927-1297, (876)927-2556 Email: horace.fletcher@uwimona.edu.jm

Appendix C: **SSEGM Ethics Sub-Committee Application Form**

Please note:

- ***You must not begin your study until ethical approval has been obtained.***
- ***You must complete a risk assessment form prior to commencing your study.***
- ***It is your responsibility to follow the University of Southampton's Ethics Policy and any relevant academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing appropriate information sheets and consent forms, and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data.***
- ***It is also your responsibility to provide <u>full and accurate information</u> in completing this form.***

1. Name(s): Vilma N. Clarke

2. Current Position - Head of Centre

3. Contact Details:

Division/School School of Education

Email - vnc@soton.ac.uk/vilma.clarke@open.uwi.edu

Phone - 876-952-2321/455-4180

4. Is your study being conducted as part of an education qualification?

Yes ☒ **No** ☐

5. If Yes, please give the name of your supervisors

Professor Jacky Lumby and Dr Felix Maringe

6. Title of your project:

Adult Learners in Higher Education: Exploring Learners' Perceptions of the Emotional Experience of Online Learning in a Caribbean Institution

7. i) What are the start and completion/hand-in dates of your study?

Start date: October 2013: End date: December 2014

ii) When are you planning to start and finish the fieldwork part of your study?

Start date: October 2013: End date: January 2014

8. Describe the **rationale**, **study aims** and the **relevant research questions** of your study

The purpose of this study is to understand better the emotional experience of adult learners in an online programme at the University of the West Indies. The University of the West Indies has embarked on a transformative process. In 2007, a new campus, the Open Campus, was created and given the mandate to extend the influence of the University of the West Indies by becoming its online face in the Caribbean and the rest of the world. In keeping with this mandate, all regional systems in this Campus have been undergoing the process of transformation into becoming a virtual space. As part of this process, all new and existing programmes are being delivered online and students now have to make the associated adjustments, particularly in an environment which has embraced a culture of face-to-face delivery. It is against this background that I have developed an interest in the emotional experiences of students as they engage in this novel way of learning.

There is also little Caribbean research on student experience in the international literature. This study aims to fill the gap for such contextually relevant research, to improve my practitioner's perspective on online learning and to help educators, administrators and students in understanding the under-researched role of emotion in online learning.

The specific objective of the research is to explore the students' perceptions of their emotional experience of the online BSc degree programme at the University of the West Indies Open Campus. The key research question is: What are adult students' perceptions of their emotional experience in an online learning environment? Four further sub-questions are as follows:

1. What are the adult students' perceptions of the online learning environment at the University of the West Indies Open Campus (UWIOC)?

2. What are the adult students' perceptions of the learning processes while engaged in their online studies?

3. How do adult students describe their emotional experience in the online learning environment?

4. How is the emotional experience of online learning manifested in the students' actions or behaviours?

9. Describe the design of your study

This research is designed as a qualitative phenomenological case study. The purpose of this approach is to understand and describe the meaning for several individuals of their lived emotional experience of studying in a specific online learning environment. This will involve collecting data from the student participants who have experienced the online phenomenon and using this data to capture the essence of their emotional experience and representing it from their perspective. Since my goal is to get close to my participants and investigate their emotional experiences, the methods that I have chosen to best elicit these are individual interviews and focus groups. The fieldwork will be conducted in two phases. Phase one will consist of semi-structured interviews and data from these interviews will be used to inform the design of the focus group protocol. Focus group sessions will be held in the second phase of the fieldwork process.

10. Who are the research participants?

The research participants are online learners in the BSc regional degree programme of the University of the West Indies, and are assigned to a learning centre which is located in Montego Bay, Jamaica. The population for this study is adult learners (over the age of 21) who have experienced the online delivery at the University of the West Indies Open Campus. The proposed sample will comprise online students from the learning centre at which the researcher is assigned as Head of Centre. Each participant will be:

- an adult student,
- in full-time employment,
- an undergraduate student assigned to the Open Campus in Montego Bay,
- in the BSc online degree programme,
- a non-participant in any face-to face UWI Open Campus programme,
- willing and able to share his/her emotional experiences,
- deemed to be studying part-time,
- and must have completed a least one semester of the relevant online programme.

There are presently nine male and 45 female students in the population of BSc students registered at the local centre. I expect to interview a total of nine participants for the individual interviews (three males and six females). There will be 21 students who will comprise the three focus groups.

11. If you are going to analyse secondary data, from where are you obtaining it?

Secondary data directly relevant to this study will include background information on the University of the West Indies, higher education in Jamaica and the Caribbean as well as literature on emotion, learning and online delivery to provide a setting and context for the study. This background information will be obtained from relevant University of the West Indies internal documents, online articles, hard copy texts, and professional literature obtained from library and public websites.

12. If you are collecting primary data, how will you identify and approach the participants to recruit them to your study?

The potential participants will be identified from the official list of students assigned to the Montego Bay Centre. They will be approached by text message and e-mail and invited to participate. Follow-up to confirm their participation and attendance at a briefing meeting will be done by telephone contact.

Please attach a copy of the information sheet if you are using one – or if you are not using one please explain why.

13. Will participants be taking part in your study without their knowledge and consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people)? If yes, please explain why this is necessary.

No.

14. If you answered 'no' to question 13, how will you obtain the consent of participants?

Please attach a copy of the consent form if you are using one – or if you are not using one please explain why.

At the briefing meeting mentioned above, I will discuss with potential participants the research and their level of involvement. At this point, I will hand out the participant information sheet which will provide details for them to make an informed decision whether or not to participate in the study.

At this meeting, I will also introduce the consent form which I will ask them to read, sign and return by a specified date or when we meet at the interview or focus group sessions.

Each participant will be provided with a copy of the signed form for their personal records. Despite their signed consent, at each session (interview or focus group), students will be reminded that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

15. Is there any reason to believe participants may not be able to give full informed consent? If yes, what steps do you propose to take to safeguard their interests?

No. To the best of my knowledge, students are mature adult students who are not known to have any disabling conditions that inhibit their ability to voluntarily consent to take part in this study. Since all students have the qualifications to matriculate into the University of the West Indies degree programme, I have made the assumption that they will be able to read and interpret the contents of the consent form.

16. If participants are under the responsibility or care of others (such as parents/carers, teachers or medical staff) what plans do you have to obtain permission to approach the participants to take part in the study?

Participants are generally working adults over the age of 21 who work full-time, study part-time and are deemed to be adults capable of making informed decision about their choice to participate. However, I have been granted ethical approval to conduct this research from the University of the West Indies Ethics Committee. I have also been given permission to contact students by the Principal of the University of the West Indies Open Campus (UWIOC). This means, I have permission from the relevant authorities to contact the students as indicated above.

17. Describe what participation in your study will involve for study participants. Please attach copies of any questionnaires and/or interview schedules and/or observation topic list to be used

Participants in this study will be asked to share their emotional experience of studying in an online programme at the University of the West Indies Open Campus. They will be specifically invited to share their knowledge and experience by either participating in individual interviews or focus groups. This will involve students meeting with me individually for two one hour individual interviews at the local site. If for any reason, a third becomes necessary, a rationale will be given for its inclusion in the final version of my methodology chapter. In addition, participants will be asked to take part in one of three one and half hour meetings for each focus group. The protocol for the focus group sessions will be developed while the data from individual interviews are being collected because I wish to use some of the initial findings in its design. Consequently, the focus group protocol will be submitted to the university ethics committee at a later date. In the process of carrying out my fieldwork for the focus groups, I will employ the services of an assistant moderator, who will help in the conduct of the focus group sessions. As with the individual interviews, focus group sessions will also take place at the local learning centre.

I will utilise the help of a colleague in the transcription of both the interview and focus group data. This will be the same person who was enlisted as my assistant moderator in the focus group sessions as previously indicated. Permission will be obtained from

participants to audio-record and/or take notes in the interview and focus group sessions.

18. How will you make it clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate at any point during the research without penalty?

The consent form and participation information sheet indicate that participation in this research is entirely voluntary and that participants can withdraw at any time. Nevertheless, at every session participants will be duly informed that even after signing the consent form, they can still withdraw from taking part in the research either during or after the session with no penalty legal or other wise and this will not affect their relationship with the University of the West Indies Open Campus in any way. I will also tell them that they can refuse to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable even if they choose to be a part of the research. The participants will be required to read and declare that they have understood the contents of the consent form before they affix their signature. At the conclusion of the interview and focus group sessions, it will be reiterated that participants can at that stage or even later withdraw their consent to be involved in the study.

19. Detail any possible distress, discomfort, inconvenience or other adverse effects the participants may experience, including after the study, and you will deal with this.

I do not foresee that participating in this study will result in any adverse effects. However, there will be a demand on participants' time. Additionally, audio-recording could be intimidating to some participants. I will ask their permission to audio-record each interview and focus group sessions. If students do not agree, I will take notes and will have a notebook on hand as a contingency measure. The participants will be assured that they could ask me to discontinue the use of any electronic equipment at any time during the sessions. I will ask participants if I can still take notes as an additional precaution even if they consent to being audio-recorded. Additionally, I will let participants know that I intend to present the transcripts and or the recorded material afterwards to them so that they can make adjustments, particularly in places where they may be uncomfortable with how they are being represented. I will also offer to present the findings of the research to the participants if they so desire so that they may satisfy themselves that the final data to be released are acceptable to them. If the data are not acceptable, I will make adjustments accordingly.

20. How will you maintain participant anonymity and confidentiality in collecting, analysing and writing up your data?

In this research there will be linked anonymity, as I am aware that complete anonymity cannot be promised. This is because there will be focus group discussions, and anonymity is difficult to secure in such contexts. However, students will be told about the requirements for confidentiality, and that whatever takes place in the focus group discussions should not be disclosed or referred to outside of the meeting. I expect that

there will be more anonymity with the individual interviews, as I will be meeting each participant privately and I will be using pseudonyms to represent their names so that these individuals described cannot be easily identified. However, details provided and reported may enable other students and staff to identify individual interviewees and participants in the individual interview will be made aware of this. Audio-recordings, transcripts and other documents will be stored electronically and password protected. My research assistant/moderator for the study will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement and will be briefed about the terms and conditions relating to confidentiality requirements of the research.

In maintaining confidentiality, I will use codes on data documents instead of recording identifying information. Participants will be assigned a different name for any quotes that might be included in the final research report. This means, I will be keeping two data sets as a separate document linking data to identifiable participants will be kept and stored separately and will be accessible only to the researcher. I will make every effort to comply with the Data Protection Act and university policy which sets out the terms and conditions for protection of participants and the storage of data.

21. How will you store your data securely during and after the study?

The University of Southampton has a Research Data Management Policy, including for data retention. The Policy can be consulted at http://www.calendar.soton.ac.uk/sectionIV/research-data-management.html

I am aware of the Data Management Policy referred to above, and as such, during the study I will be particularly careful that the data are stored away in safe and secure locations. The recorded data will be stored electronically on my lap top, on compact discs and hard copies on paper in envelopes in a drawer for which I am the only person who has a key. For the duration of the study, no one will have access to the data on my computer as this will be password protected.

Since my assistant moderator for the focus group sessions, will also assist with the transcription of the raw data, and will also have access to the data during the process, this individual will be reminded of the requirement for confidentiality and anonymity and its significance to the integrity of the research process. After the study, the data will be kept in accordance with the University of Southampton research data management policy and in accordance with any special requirements of the University of the West Indies.

22. Describe any plans you have for feeding back the findings of the study to participants.

Participants will be given the opportunity to review a summary of the findings and provide feedback. This will be done either by e-mail or in person or by telephone depending on participants' choice.

23. What are the main ethical issues raised by your research and how do you intend to manage these?

I expect that it may be neccessary to compensate my participants with the travelling costs to the meetings. However, this reimbursement is not expected to exceed JA $1000.00 (approximately £6.00). Participants will be told that there is no monetary benefit to taking part in the study. Another issue is that although I will not necessarily be familiar with all online students at my site, they may be aware that I am the Head of the Centre. As the sole researcher in this study, I will still be serving in my capacity as Head of Centre in charge of my student participants and I am aware that this has implications of power. Students may feel that they are compelled to take part in the study. However, I make note that I do not currently teach/tutor on any of the programmes regional or local. I therefore cannot have any impact on their grades, or GPA or performance outcomes. Although, I generally meet with these students at orientation, I am acquainted with them only superficially as the regional programme of interest in this study is an online degree and students do not visit the learning centre often, except during the examination period as they are required to sit examinations at their local centre. I do not invigilate these examinations either. This means that I have very little day to day contact with these students.

24. Please outline any other information you feel may be relevant to this submission.

Due to the fact that Jamaica has a strong oral culture, I am aware that potential participants may not respond readily to text and e-mail messages. This does not necessarily mean that they are unwilling to take part in the study. Hence, if some potential participants are slow in responding, I may have to enlist the assistance of the early responders in contacting other students on my behalf. Additionally, if recruitment is insufficient at the Montego Bay Centre, I may have to extend the search to other Open Campus sites in Jamaica.

NB. I am a part-time student and I live and work in Jamaica, so I will not be travelling from the UK to conduct the fieldwork for this study. As required, I have duly completed the International Risk Assessment Form. Please see new attachment.

Appendix D: Risk Assessment Form

January 2012

- Please see Guidance Notes for completing the risk assessment form at the end of this document.

Researcher's name: Vilma N. Clarke

Part 1 – Dissertation/project activities
What do you intend to do? (Please provide a brief description of your project and details of your proposed methods.) This study seeks to investigate the emotional experience of adult students in an online learning environment at the University of the West Indies Open Campus in Jamaica. A qualitative phenomenological approach is proposed, using semi-structured interview and focus groups.
Will this involve collection of information from other people? (In the case of projects involving fieldwork, please provide a description of your proposed sample/case study site.) All participants in this study are adult part-time students enrolled in the institution's online BSc degree programme. These students are assigned to the site in western Jamaica that is under the charge of the researcher who is the Head of this particular centre. There are nine male and 45 female students in the population of BSc students at the centre. Initial contact will be made with them through text and e-mail announcement, inviting them to a meeting to talk about the study and to seek their participation in the research. I expect to interview a total of nine participants for the individual interviews (three male and six female students). There will be 21 students who will comprise the three focus groups. The 21 will include all of the nine males if they are willing and an additional 12 female students, who will be chosen by maximum variation. The inclusion criteria will ascertain that each participant will be: • an adult learner, • in paid employment, • an undergraduate student at the Montego Bay Open Campus, • in the BSc online programme,R • a non-participant in any face-to-face UWI Open Campus programme, • willing and able to share their emotional experiences and, • each participant must have completed at least one semester of online courses.

If relevant, what location/s is/are involved? The research will take place in Montego Bay, Jamaica.
Will you be working alone or with others? I will be working as the sole researcher under the supervision of Professor Jacky Lumby and Dr Felix Maringe.
Part 2 – Potential safety issues/risk assessment.
Potential safety issues arising from proposed activity? The potential safety issues arising from this project are perceived as minimal and no more than those associated with everyday life such as the use of participants' time and possibly taking them away from their ordinary routines. I am a Jamaican, resident in Jamaica, and therefore cognisant and aware of any safety issues relating to my personal safety and that of my participants. As Jamaicans, students will not be exposed to any more risk than I would be exposed to in the course of our daily affairs. Students can also negotiate the most convenient time when they are available to meet with me. I assume that all interviews and focus group meetings will take place at the local centre which is a secure facility for both students and staff. However, if for individual interviews a student may want to meet at any other venue, I will be accompanied by one other person for safety reasons.
Person/s likely to be affected? In the unlikely event of an adverse occurrence both participants and researcher will be affected.
Likelihood of risk? Minimal
Part 3 – Precautions/ risk reduction
Existing precautions: The local site where all meetings are expected to take place is equipped with electronic security and there is always a security guard as well as other staff members present until the building is locked up. Every effort will be made to conduct all interviews and focus group sessions in the day or early evenings and within normal class times.
Proposed risk reduction strategies if existing precautions are not adequate: Apart from the regional online programmes, other local face-to-face courses are held at the centre and there will be other persons on site to assist in case of an emergency. In addition, the learning centre is located next door to a large public school (government owned) and if needed help is available in the case of an emergency.

CONTINUED BELOW …

Part 4 – International Travel

If you intend to travel overseas to carry out fieldwork then you must carry out a risk assessment for each trip you make and attach a copy of the International Travel form to this document

Download the Risk Assessment for International Travel Form

Guidelines on risk assessment for international travel at can be located at: www.southampton.ac.uk/socscinet/safety ("risk assessment" section).

Before undertaking international travel and overseas visits all students must:

- Ensure a risk assessment has been undertaken for all journeys including to conferences and visits to other Universities and organisations. This is University policy and is not optional.
- Consult the University Finance/Insurance website for information on travel and insurance. Ensure that you take a copy of the University travel insurance information with you and know what to do if you should need medical assistance.
- Obtain from Occupational Health Service advice on any medical requirements for travel to areas to be visited.
- Ensure next of kin are aware of itinerary, contact person and telephone number at the University.
- Where possible arrange to be met by your host on arrival.

If you are unsure if you are covered by the University insurance scheme for the trip you are undertaking and for the country/countries you intend visiting, then you should contact the University's Insurance Office at insure@soton.ac.uk and check the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website.

Risk assessment form for International Travel attached NO **(Delete as applicable)**

Appendix E: **Risk Assessment for International Travel**

All staff and students who are undertaking an overseas visit on any University business must leave **travel and contact details** with the School of Social Sciences by completing **Part I** of this form.

You must also carry out a **risk assessment** by completing **Part II** of this form.

Also ensure that you are familiar with the University's Travel Insurance Scheme, including the Summary of Cover, and ensure that you take a copy of the Summary with you. Details can be obtained from **www.soton.ac.uk/finance/insurance** under the 'Personal Accident & Travel' section.

Email **insure@soton.ac.uk** if you need further information and guidance on insurance matters, particularly to ensure you have adequate insurance cover.

Up to date travel information can be obtained from the *Foreign and Commonwealth Office*

website **www.fco.gov.uk**

PART I - TRAVEL & CONTACT DETAILS FORM

Name: Vilma N. Clarke

TRAVEL DETAILS I will not be travelling from the UK as I am currently residing in Jamaica

Destination(s):

Intended Dates of Travel: N/A

Mode of Travel:

Approximate Flight/Train Details (Airline/train company, flight/train numbers, dates and airports/stations):

N/A

CONTACT DETAILS

Contact Details at Destination (Name, address, email, telephone):

Mr Ian Hayles

Programme Officer

Open Campus

Harrison House, Orange Street

P.O. Box 969

Montego Bay

Jamaica

E-Mail: ian.hayles@open.uwi.edu

Telephone: 876-952-2321/455-6345

Designated School Contact Person (Name, Division)

Anna Lyons

Administrative Officer (Education)
Faculty of Social and Human Sciences Graduate School
Building 54, Room 5015
University of Southampton
SO17 1BJ
023 8059 5699

PART II - RISK ASSESSMENT FORM: OVERSEAS VISIT/FIELDWORK

This section of the form is to help you assess significant risks of your intended overseas visit or field work trip and to make sure that adequate controls have been put in place.

ASSESSMENT OF RISKS

Destination(s)	**Intended Dates**
Montego Bay, Jamaica	Fieldwork Start date: October: End date: January 2014

Brief outline of activities to be undertaken	I will be conducting a two phased research project on the emotional experience of adult online students at one centre of the University of the West Indies Open Campus. The centre is located in Montego Bay Jamaica. The first phase consists of individual interviews with selected online students. These interviews will be conducted between October and November 2013 with nine BSc degree students. Phase two consisting of three focus groups will be conducted between December 2013 and January 2014. Data from the interviews will be used to design the focus group protocol.

List significant hazards that might affect you	There are no significant hazards envisaged other than those that might be experienced in the course of daily living. However, students will have to schedule time outside their daily routine to accommodate these interviews.

MEASURES TAKEN TO MINIMISE RISK

Indicate control measures taken/to be taken (e.g. seeking health advice, checking the Foreign office site www.fco.gov.uk/)	All the parties to be included (participants and researcher) live and work in Jamaica and are generally exposed to the same dangers. There are no general major health issues for me or the participants as there are no epidemics here and most Jamaicans have been duly vaccinated against major contagious diseases from the early childhood stage. Jamaica is susceptible to hurricanes and earthquakes but this is a factor of its geophysical location and the government has its own disaster preparedness plan for each parish. I have not checked with the Foreign Office as I am not residing in the UK and I have easy access to any information relating to health and safety issues affecting Jamaica at any time. The University of the West Indies also have their own arrangements in respect of health and safety of staff and students. Specifically, the centre at which I am located and where the interviews will take include both electronic and manual security measures and offices are located in the vicinity of a large government public school. In the case of an emergency I can access help. All sessions are scheduled for the day time or early evening at the convenience of students who are working adults. Regular class times are 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. daily.

ARE RISKS ADEQUATELY CONTROLLED? [X] YES [ ] NO

If NO, list additional controls and actions required	Additional controls	**Action by:**

N.B. Please note I am currently resident in Jamaica and not travelling overseas from the UK to conduct my fieldwork.

QUICK CHECK:

	YES	**NO**
Have you assessed the risks for the overseas trip and are you satisfied that adequate measures and control have been taken?	X	
Have you got details of the University's Travel Insurance Scheme with you? (available from **www.soton.ac.uk/finance/insurance/travel**)	X	
Have you consulted the University's Insurance web pages for general information on travel and risk assessment? **www.finance.soton.ac.uk/insurance/** Email **insure@soton.ac.uk** if you need further information and guidance on insurance matters.	X	
Have you consulted with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Website for the latest travel information? **www.fco.gov.uk/**		X
Have you notified someone of your travel itinerary and contact details abroad?	X	
Have you made arrangements to contact the School to advise of your wellbeing and any changes to your itinerary?	X	

Declaration:

I declare that I have taken adequate measures to minimise risk to myself and to University property both in transit and during my overseas visit.

Signature:  Date: September 19, 2013

Name: Vilma. N. Clarke

Supervisor/Tutor (for students only):

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Name:_____

NB: Students should consult with their supervisor or tutor before any travel arrangements are made or before any work is carried out.

School Safety Officer:

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Name:_____

Please return a copy of the completed form to Michelle Pemberton, FOS Office. (Building 58/2087, m.pemberton@soton.ac.uk). It is acceptable for staff to complete this form electronically, including inserting their name electronically in the signature field and returning the form by email. Students must submit a printed version which has been hand signed by their supervisor/tutor.

Guidance Notes for completing this risk assessment form

The purpose of assessing risks is to ensure everyone works safely. To carry out a Risk Assessment, ask yourself:

- How can the activity cause harm?
- Is it safe to carry out this activity without additional protection/support?
- If someone else is going to do the work, can they do it safely?

Activity

Give a brief outline of the activity/project including the methods to be used and the people to be involved

- Think about everything you are going to do, from start to finish
- Ensure that you complete the assessment before you commence any work. If you are unsure if your proposed work carries any risk, go ahead and complete the form as the process could highlight some issues which otherwise may not have been aware of.

Potential Safety Issues/Hazards

- Only list those hazards that you could reasonably expect to cause significant harm or injury
- Talk to people who have experience of the activity
- Will the activity involve lone working or potential exposure to violence? * For more guidance see the Social Research Association website at www.the-sra.org.uk under Staying Safe
- Are there any significant hazards due to where the work is to be done?

Who might be affected?

- List anyone who might be affected by the hazards
- Remember to include yourself, co-workers, your participants and others working in or passing through the area of activity
- Those more vulnerable or less experienced should be highlighted as they will be more at risk (e.g. children, disabled people or those with medical conditions, people unfamiliar with the area of activity)

Precautions/Risk Reduction

- List the control measures already in place for each of the significant hazards
- Is the hazard dealt with by the School Health & Safety Policy, or a generic safety method statement?
- Appropriate training is a control measure and should be listed
- Is the risk a low as is reasonably practical?
- List any additional control measures/risk reduction strategies for each significant hazard (e.g. practical measures, training, improved supervision)

Risk Evaluation

- With all the existing control measures in place do any of the significant hazards still have a potential to cause significant harm? Rank as Low, Medium or High

Remember

- Risk Assessments need to be suitable and sufficient, not perfect
- Are the precautions reasonable?
- Is there something to show that a proper check was made?

This information is based on “An Introduction to Risk Assessment” produced by the Safety Office and the Training & Development Unit of the University of Southampton.

Appendix F: **Participant Information Sheet**

Study Title: Adult Learners in Higher Education: Exploring Learners' Perceptions of the Emotional Experience of Online Learning in a Caribbean Institution

Researcher: Vilma N. Clarke **Ethics number**: ID 7663

Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?

I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of Southampton and I am conducting a study on the emotional experience of adult students in online learning at the University of the West Indies Open Campus (UWIOC). Since 2008, the Open Campus has been converting old face-to-face and new regional programmes to online delivery in order to fulfil its mandate of becoming the UWI online face to the Caribbean and the world. However, not much research has been done to investigate the impact of this conversion on the student experience. I am conducting this research to learn about your experience in this online environment and to fulfil the requirements of my PhD programme. The primary research question is: What are adult students' perceptions of their emotional experience in the online learning environment at the Open Campus? Four further sub-questions have been developed for this study:

1. What are the adult students' perceptions of the online learning environment at the University of the West Indies Open Campus (UWIOC)?

2. What are the adult students' perceptions of the learning processes while engaged in their online studies?

3. How do adult students describe their emotional experience in the online learning environment?

4. How is the emotional experience of online learning manifested in the students' actions or behaviours?

Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to take part in this study because the delivery method and course you are enrolled in fits the profile that is relevant to my research interest. In order for me to conduct this research, I need to understand the emotional experience of persons such as you, who choose this way of studying and have actual experience of studying online.

What will happen to me if I take part?

There are two ways in which I will collect data. I will conduct two one hour interviews with each of nine students; and three separate focus groups sessions each of one and a half hours. If you agree to take part, you, along with a few other selected persons, will be asked to share the experience that you have had in online learning at this university. After giving your consent voluntarily, you will be asked to sign a consent form and return it to me, either before or on the day of your interview or focus group session. You will be invited to share your knowledge and experience by participating in either the individual interviews or as a member of a focus group discussion which will have seven participants. All sessions will be audio-recorded if you give your consent for this to take place. I will only ask for a follow up meeting if I need to clarify any important details that can affect the findings of this research. There will be a research assistant present to help with the recording of the focus group sessions and to take notes. The individual interview will involve me meeting with you in a comfortable classroom at your local learning centre at a time convenient to you. For the individual interviews, I will be the only one present in the room. However, if you prefer to meet at another venue, either in your home or at another private location, I will be accompanied by one other person purely for safety reasons. This person will not be a part of the interview. The focus groups will be conducted at your assigned Open Campus site.

Individual interviews will be conducted in the first phase of the study and the focus groups sessions will be conducted later in the second phase after most if not all of the interviews are completed. I will ask for your cooperation to be a participant in the individual interview or one of the focus group sessions.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

You will not derive any tangible benefits from your involvement in this research. However, there is much that you, in your capacity as an online student, can contribute to knowledge locally, regionally and globally in this area by sharing your experience. By taking part, you will be helping to increase the body of knowledge on online learning and its emotional impact on students. I hope you will find the experience interesting.

Are there any risks involved?

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study but these are no more than those of everyday living such as the use of your time and possibly taking you away briefly from your ordinary routines. Also, you are not obliged to answer any questions that you perceive to be uncomfortable in any way. The data in all instances will be processed and submitted anonymously. However, the comments of focus group participants will be known to others in the group and confidentiality though desirable cannot be guaranteed given the nature of focus groups which necessitates a group setting. Nevertheless, participants will be asked to keep the discussions confidential. In the case of individual interviews, it is possible that other students or staff might be able to guess the identity of the respondents from the details given in all quotations. Therefore complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Will my participation be confidential?

Confidentiality is very important in this project and I must comply with the Data Protection Act/University policy, which sets out the terms and conditions for the protection of participants and the storage of their data.

If you agree to participate in this study, your responses will remain completely confidential and you will not be identified in any way in the data. All interview and focus group recordings will be stored in a locked drawer accessible only to me. No one will be able to access the data that are collected from you and stored on my computer, as all of these data will be password protected. I will use pseudonyms to represent each of my participants from the time of the collection of the data, so that there is no means of identifying you. The pseudonyms will only be known to me.

Please note that for the group sessions you will be placed with other students that you may know. Students will therefore be asked not to disclose any information from these discussion sessions but this cannot be guaranteed. In the case of individual interviewees, as explained above, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed in terms of other students and staff on the programme.

What happens if I change my mind?

You can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time. If this happens there will be no penalty, legal or otherwise and this will not affect your relationship with the University of the West Indies in any way.

What happens if something goes wrong?

If at all you have any complaints or concerns about how the research is conducted, you may contact:

Dr Martina Prude,

Head of Research Governance

(02380 595058,

mad4@soton.ac.uk)

Or

Professor Horace Fletcher

Dean, Faculty of Medical Sciences,

The University of the West Indies,

Mona, Kingston 7

(Tel: 876) 927-1297,

E-mail: medsci@uwimona.edu.jm

Where can I get more information?

If you need any further information you can contact me at:

The University of the West Indies Open Campus

Harrison House, Orange Street

Montego Bay

Tel: 876-952-2321or

Mobile: 876-455-4180

E-mail vilma.clarke @open.uwi.edu/vnc@soton.ac.uk

Or

Professor Jacky Lumby

The University of Southampton

School of Education

jlumby@soton.ac.uk

Appendix G**: Consent Form**

Study title: Adult Learners in Higher Education: Exploring Learners' Perceptions of the Emotional Experience of Online Learning in a Caribbean Institution

Researcher name: Vilma N. Clarke

Ethics reference: ID7663

Please initial the boxes if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (Revised Version1, July 25, 2013) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. ☐

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be recorded and used for the purpose of this study ☐

I understand that my responses will be anonymised in reports of the research ☐

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected ☐

Data Protection

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study.

Name of participant (print name)……

Signature of participant……..

Date……

Appendix H: **Interview Questions**

Interview schedule: Adult students' perceptions of their emotional experience of an online degree programme and the related online learning environment

This interview schedule was developed out of a combination of literature reviewed, my personal beliefs and dialogue with a peer who functions in the online delivery of education in a higher education environment. Its design has also been influenced by looking at examples of phenomenological interviews done by other researchers.

Introduction
I will introduce myself as a student researcher from the University of Southampton and will also outline the purpose of the research and the participant's role which is to tell me about their emotional experience of the University of the West Indies online BSc. degree programme. I will thank each participant for agreeing to meet with me. I will then explain that the interview will last no longer than an hour but that I may need a second meeting with them in order to get a good understanding of their experience and to clarify any unclear information. I would also explain that I would like to meet with them when I have finished the research in order to share my findings with them.

I will explain to participants that their involvement is entirely voluntary and that a signed consent form to indicate their agreement to being interviewed is absolutely necessary. I will distribute the consent form to ensure that all present have agreed to being interviewed. After these are signed and collected from participants, I will then request permission to record the interview so that I can listen to it later explaining that this would leave me free to focus on listening to them as they describe and reflect on their emotional experience. I will also seek permission to jot down a few notes while they are talking. I will make it clear to them that they can stop participating at any time if they feel uncomfortable.

Starting:
I am trying to understand what it is like for adult students like you who study in an online learning environment in higher education. Specifically, I am interested in learning about your experience of what it is like to be studying for a degree in the Open Campus online learning environment and the role that emotions play in the context of this experience.

A Previous Experience and Expectations of Online Learning

Tell me why you chose this way of studying*?*

Is this programme different from any other previous study experience? If so how?

Tell me about your expectations (if any) of this online programme?

Prompt: Are these expectations being met? Explain.

B Being an Online Adult Learner?

How would you describe your attitude to trying new experiences?

Prompt: Happy, confident, nervous etc?

What kind of student did you see yourself as before embarking on this online experience?

Has studying in an online environment made a difference to how you see yourself now as a learner?

Have other persons described any changes in you as a result of studying on this programme?

Prompt: members of your family, friends etc.

C Social Learning Experience

How do you feel about relating to your online peers?

What are your feelings about your relationship with various e-tutors and or course coordinators?

What are your feelings about the course?

Prompt: the content, the assignments, assessments.

What are your feelings about the way the online technology is being used to communicate with you and your peers?

Prompt: Describe as you see it what is done?

D Emotional Experience

In your own words describe any emotion that comes to mind when you think about your online sessions?

Prompt: How do you feel when you are having a class?

What has been the best part of your experience with online learning?

What do you consider the worst aspects?

Think of a specific occasion when you felt good that you had chosen to study on line.

Prompt: Describe this time. Say what triggered these happy feelings.

Describe a time when you felt negative about this choice of study mode.

Prompt: what triggered these feelings?

Prompt: Use emotion words so you can help me to understand how you felt?

E Emotion Behaviours

If there were times that you felt happy in the online environment, how did this show up in your online behaviours or otherwise?

If you were not happy how did you express or demonstrate your mood or feelings?

F **Coping: Overall Experience**

What does the term online learning mean to you now? How would you define it?

Prompt: what words come to mind, what images?

Describe the strategies that you use/used to deal with having to study, work and do other things in your life?

Prompt: Talk about their emotional impact.

What kinds of impact do you think your emotional experience may have had on your ability to learn?

What are some strategies you've used successfully to help you deal with your anxieties, frustrations or fears as you learn?

Prompt: focus on how your feelings may have affected your learning

Final Question

What else do think it is very important for me to know about any other aspect of your emotional experience with the online learning environment, the programme or anything in general that these questions have not appreciated or covered?

Interview Schedule 2: Follow-up Interview

Adult students' perceptions of their emotional experience of an online degree programme and the related online learning environment

Dear Student:

I am very appreciative of your time spent in speaking to me about your experience of studying online at the UWI Open Campus. I would be very grateful if you could spare just a little more, about 15 – 30 minutes, so I can deepen my understanding of this experience. I would like to focus on just one part of what you explained.

Some students understandably did not find it easy to speak about their experience as they had never been asked about it before and finding the words was difficult.

For example, during my interview sessions, several students described aspects of their experience as either 'bad or good' or were unable to produce an emotion word to depict or create a picture of their experience. A clearer picture of what this emotional experience means can emerge if you can describe one critical element/incident (that is one thing which happened to you including your feelings at the time) while in the online environment which can indicate that the experience was 'good/bad' or that a certain element of that experience was 'terrible' and what it meant to you.

This second interview will ask about a critical element or incident which I have identified from listening to the audio recordings of your first interview with me.

Please reflect on this particular element or incident that I have highlighted by imagining your emotional self as you are experiencing it and describe as best as you can using suitable emotive words that can convey your emotional state or feelings at the time. Specifically, I want to know what it felt like and how it made you feel. In your case, I have identified one significant element of your experience, the **positive or negative experience which you have had with your e-tutors.**

Below are a limited number of emotion words that you might find helpful. However, please feel free to use another if none of these apply to your situation.

Positive	**Negative**
joy	fear
enthusiasm	confusion
excitement	anxiety
pride	stress
contentment	alienated
confidence	guilt
relaxed	struggle
happiness	embarrassment
delight	anger
thankfulness	frustration
surprise	disappointment
like	dislike
enjoyment	unhappiness

Once again, I want to thank you for your kind assistance with this study. The information you provide may be helpful to me and other administrative staff and may have an impact on improving the experience of future students.

Vilma Clarke
Researcher

Appendix I: **Extract from an Interview with a Participant**

June Transcript 1

Interviewer: Firstly as I said before your participation is entirely voluntary, you can stop at any time and you can choose not to answer any question. You've agreed to the audio recording and my jotting down. I've told you I'm a student of the University of South Hampton and this is a requirement for my research project. This interview should last no longer than one hour and your pseudo name is June. I've called your name just to know whose transcript I'm going thru but I will not identify you in anything that I say. My primary question today is what has been your mixed emotional experience of the online learning environment at the UWI Open Campus. You can be as free and honest as you want.

Respondent: Could you qualify that, what is the scope of the emotional experience? What exactly do you mean?

Interviewer: Well, the truth is I can't tell you anything, it's what you tell me it's up to you. It's entirely up to you you're the expert; I'm here to learn from you, I can't define it for you because I would be prejudicing your answers. But before you delve into that maybe you can tell me a little about yourself what option you're in.

Respondent: I went with straight Management, the major I would have preferred was not available and I would have to first have to have done somethings along the Marketing discipline, there were only Accounts and Economics where I didn't really have an interest. If human resources were available I would have taken that but that too was unavailable. It was a very good experience it taught me a lot about myself and about real life experience, things that you experience in the virtual classroom or during the process of learning that you can apply to life.

Interviewer: What did it teach you about yourself?

Respondent: It taught me about my mind, that in the learning process the mind is greater than anything I can fear. Perhaps the biggest thing other than I got a degree is the fact that I excelled at the numeric courses because I almost dropped the course when I realized how many numeric courses there were because numbers and I are not friends and to go from what is equivalent to a c+ in my first math base course to A and A++ in the end is remarkable for me. Whatever you set your mind to you can achieve and it's not just a saying it really is.

Interviewer: You used an emotive word "FEAR," let's talk about that in respect to the online learning.

Respondent: I didn't fear the online environment because it was the ideal circumstance for me because I travel out of town for work I would not be able to come back in time for a face-to-face class so for me it had to work, so I came into this knowing that it had to work. I had the expectation of what I expected blended to be meaning I would have had more face-to-face support for the math based courses which did not materialized as I expected and there was some fear that I would not be able to overcome that hurdle without the kind of support that I expected. I don't believe online learning is for everyone you're thought process your approach

your openness of mind has to be at a certain stage or else you‘re not going to come into the kind of determination that you need to complete.

Interviewer: Let’s talk about determination

Respondent: The fact that I was paying for this programme out of my own pocket I was very determined, because it is costly it’s a pretty penny and once you’ve added up the cost for me that meant that there’s no room for failure, there’s no room for resisting any course what so ever no room for failure so for me coming in my determination was high, it wasn’t at its highest because I started the programme feeling like I was a “B” student and for the first semester or so I lived up to that until my determination to do better got higher.

Interviewer: You talk about expectation. Let’s look at the whole thing of being an adult online learner. How would you describe your attitude towards learning new things?

Respondent: I’m fairly opened minded to processes people and things. So while it is new for me I embrace it because I know at the end of the programme there will be a reward for me.

Interviewer: What was new about the experience for you?

Respondent: It was purely online I’ve never done anything like that before, I didn’t know what to expect. Interaction online was different because you’re used to being in a classroom setting where you can see the tutors and ask questions and get them answered same time. Assimilating how the Moodle works being the online platform and the importance of my own interaction on there to my success was different, but it was not a hindrance for me it’s what was necessary it is a tool that is given to you to succeed.

Interviewer: Who did you interact with and how did you feel about it? Let’s get into some of the emotional things.

Respondent: I interacted a lot with the tutors, the course coordinators and some of the interactions was not the kind they would have liked because I constantly saw things I didn’t agree with I’m sure you came upon some of those yourself. We are all adults we have our expectations, I’m a customer and as a customer you have certain expectations whether it’s that you’re entitled to them or miscommunication which needs to be explained and for me that’s how I got things cleared up through interaction. I must say I did not interact on a personal or social level with as many of the students as I could have I did not cease that opportunity for me it was about learning. It meant responding to the discussion questions and trying to add a little friendliness to it when allowed but to say I remember so and so from Trinidad or from St. Lucia no, but to be fair they reached out to me and those friendships are from Jamaica and a couple of those friendships remains today even though the programme has ended.

Interviewer: You talk about contesting thing how does that make you feel? What was the response to you was there any emotional aspect of that?

Respondent: There’re a few people that stand out in my mind. There were times when there was no meeting of the minds but based on the explanation of the tutor you or I would agree to disagree and leave it there because our argument is flawless. What was difficult was when there was no explanation and was just told the grade you’re gonna get; there are persons I believe even if you’re right I believe the grades appear arbitrarily one course in particular every student and I’m using the every student loosely because quite a few complained, that for the

first few assignment you were getting 4 and 5 out of ten for our grades and for me that's unusual, the lowest on any assignment where I have to write or a 7 and that's low for me, but give me a 7 I won't quarrel I expect 8,9s and 10s. there was no explanation as to why the grades were low and as it got closer to exams the grades started to improve for everybody and from your own minds perspective you don't see any difference in the quality of your work why your grades have just jumped from a 5 to a 9. So those kinds of experiences make you think that the tutors are against you.

I also remember a particular situation where I challenged the grades and I was denied an improvement by the e-tutor I escalated it to the cc who took an inordinate amount of time to get back to me and I thought that based on the service level that are promoted within the course your e-tutor or CC will respond to your questions within a timely manner perhaps 24 -48 hours I went weeks without a response where I escalated again to the programmes delivery department and truth be told I was worried that I would be penalized for being so bold to want to quote and quote report on anybody, but that's something you have to overcome because if there's something you don't agree with as long as you do it respectfully which is something I always try to do, keep it respectful I don't see why you shouldn't be able to ask your questions and have them answered. So now I was worried because by now I had a streak of "As" and I was worried that my streak was going to be interrupted because of this little quirk to the relationship between the facilitators of this programme and I but I came out with an A for which I'm grateful.

Interviewer: Tell me about overcoming in this programme.

Respondent: The biggest thing to overcome is the fatigue, it's tiring, and it's hard it's a sacrifice. I don't know about other people but to get the kind of results I wanted I had to give stuff up. I've not socialized as much I didn't go out; I've had people/friends complain that we don't hear from you anymore. When I go home in the evenings its dinner, I try to free up the brain by watching some TV but by 9:00 o'clock all TV over and I may go from 9:00 till 1:00, but that means sleeping from 1:00-6:00, or sometimes you're up later so you're getting an average of 5 hours sleep per night for 5 days out of the week that is a heavy sleep deficit and it weighs on you, you're tired it is hard but you have to put in the work to get what you want.

Appendix J: **Example of Coded Significant Statements**

OBJECTIVE 1

To determine the adult students' perceptions of the online learning environment

Negative Perceptions				
Transcript	**pseudonyms**	**statements**	**Lines**	**Statement Number**
1	Noreen	I was told that it was an online, and however, we would have a few face-to-face classes. That's what I was told	48-52	1
1	Noreen	I would encourage the persons who are collecting the applications to tell persons like myself, who really don't like the technology and going on the computer day after day and sitting in front of the computer day after day – don't bother to apply….. because everything that you need to know, if you want to pass the exams any at all, you have to go online. There is no one to come, you don't have anybody you can come to site and talk to you because I have been saying to persons that I have never gotten an e-tutor that is from Jamaica….. and if you are not so technology savvy, then it makes no sense you apply online.	54-77	2
1	Noreen	they will suggest to you that being as you are not going to have a teacher face-to-face then they put in the programme where you have BBC sessions, you have Skype sessions and you have to be technology savvy so to speak, you have to know how to do those things and from my point of view, you have to like those things.	82-87	3
1	Noreen	I expected some face-to-face classes; when I signed up I expected my whole assignments and my whole materials would be online, but some face-to-face classes were expected.	196-198	4
1	June	I had the expectations of what I expected blended to be meaning I would have had more face-to-face support for the math based courses which did not materialize as I expected	71-77	5
1	June	But I don't believe online learning is for everyone your thought process, your approach, your openness of mind, has to be at a certain stage or else you're not going to come into with the kind of determination that you need to complete	85-89	6
1	June	The fact that I was paying for this programme out of my own pocket meant I was very determined	98-99	7

1	June	The biggest thing to overcome I think is just the fatigue.	303-305	8
1	Alethia	Initially when I came to orientation, I was told it was blended. I was not informed it was online. I was told if you have five students or more you will have a face-to-face class. Well, for my first semester, I gathered some students for one class and was told "oh we don't offer face-to face anymore So then, YouTube became my face-to-face tutor	ll.12-13	9
1	Alethia	School absorbed all of my time But I look at it and I said. Well, I said, if you want to be out of there in two and a half years, whatever you're missing now will still be there in two and a half years	161-167	10
1	Alethia	Okay some of the course materials I feel that even though they say somebody edit them, they appear to be like scrap book'	839-843	11
1	Alethia	I would prefer if I had Internet at home, so I could actually go home and get a nap and get up and do some work.	1625-1627	12
1	Alethia	It was like a marathon. So you fall down, you drink some water; you put a band aid on the cut and keep going. It is a marathon"	1700-1704	13
2	Alethia	In the online environment it's hard when you have no body to talk	740-741	14
1	Kush	I didn't expect that all the units you were going to read everything and then you'll have to gain your own interpretation of everything. I was expecting that most of the units, they would be recorded and may be from one of the I don't know if the actual school, they would have recorded sessions of most of the units so it feels like you're in a classroom setting, so you can hear questions from other students**.**	110-121	15
2	Kush	alright for me, the experience that I've had here, I must say it's invaluable. I think it also help me to be a stronger person cause it definitely did. Because there's couple times when I felt like I want to give up	777-789	16
1	Michelle	before now we had the teleconference...and at that point I did not like the whole teleconference thing…it was coming here...it was like going to a class..	726-739	17
1	Ian	The online experience for me, you know has suited me. The only negative thing would be that I'm somewhat of a recluse and it encourages that	162-166	18
1	Ian	There should be somewhere in the grades where if someone gave you a grade, you can disagree and contest your grade for a course work without no other student being able to see such…. I think there should be something or some area of it where you can respond to the tutor's grade for a particular course work. You should be allowed to respond	697-709	19

1	Ian	I think it is good. Because even when you're attempting quizzes and you have a problem with your PC, you have the option of sending something immediately to IT. The problem may not be resolved but then you may get a chance to do over the quiz because it would have been recorded that during the time of the quiz at the time that you did make a request or statement that you're having trouble	756-772	20
1	Annie	When I just started, the first year was ok, because I was doing online and we also had face-to-face classes which I remember. But somehow they cut out all that little face-to-face so you really don't get to meet and greet face-to-face, it's more online	238-246	21

Positive Perceptions				
Transcript	pseudonyms	Statements	Lines	Statement Number
1	June	the online environment...it was the ideal circumstance for me...because I travel out of town for work, I would not be able to come back in time for a face-to-face class	60-64	22
1	June	Coming in, my determination was high... it wasn't its highest point because I started the programme feeling like I was a "B" student.. And for the first semester or so I lived up to that	112-116	23
1	June	So while it was new for me I embraced it...I knew at the end of the programme there will be a reward for me	128	24
1	June	I didn't think it was difficult. [technology]I can say that because of what I've been exposed to, what I do at work every day. So when we have to do courses that require working with intermediate level Excel tools and formula it wasn't very difficult for me. I was able to grasp it easily.	403-412	25
1	June	In terms of the tool, I was given a guide as to the minimum specification you'd needed to be able to function online, the minimum operating system, ensuring that you're compatible with the tools that were used online....I was given what I needed and it carried me very well	430-438	26
1	June	but if you apply yourself even if you are not savvy to it, if you apply yourself it isn't hard.	441-444	27
1	June	But I would whole heartedly recommend the programme for the right candidate	546-547	28
1	June	It gives you flexibility.	1157	29
1	Alethia	So experience as an adult is good" in the learning environment because you're able to apply some of your experiences to even the class discussions. You're able to add some meat to the bone	349-354	30
1	Alethia	So because with 'BBC you can log on anywhere', it allows more students to attend than the teleconference so they don't feel left out or far away	799-803	31
1	Marie	when I was trying to find a school to do my degree, and I called around based on my family commitment and job, I find UWI was very convenient because it	19-26	32

Positive Perceptions				
		was if not the only University at the time that offered an online learning		
1	Marie	since we are online students, you can't run down a teacher and ask him or her for something, would be online would be available on line**….**Yes for most part yes, can say now, over the years, it has improved	65-75	33
1	Marie	I have the latest technology at my fingertips at home because the University uses these technology in order for you to maneuver and get by on site you have to have these facilities. Also to get into your classes, you have to have Blackboard Collaborate, you have to have all these things is available	162-167	34
1	Marie	I think if I was in a classroom setting, would not be so technology savvy but because I'm in an online setting where I have to keep abreast and have these facilities in order for me to use, think it's an advantage for me	169-178	35
1	Marie	all the technology that is being used to communicate with people all over the world, they are available on UWI you can use them to get to people, it doesn't matter where they are in the Caribbean, you can reach them	205-210	36
1	Marie	it has impacted me in a positive way. It means that I can keep abreast so it's an advantage. I can use it on my Resume	217-222	37
1	Marie	. So it's an advantage for me you have everything there, you're not missing anything, everything is there as in a real classroom.	255-259	38
1	Marie	you're accustomed to sitting in a classroom but here you are as an adult, you have the flexibility to do what you want to do	152-155	39
1	Marie	You're doing a degree but nobody see you going to school and all that so, yes it kinda bring you to a different level in your thinking and a different level otherwise	132-136	40
1	Marie	Online learning is the type of learning environment that requires you to use your commitment, initiative... you have to have the drive	1330-1335	41
1	Kush	From my perspective, I chose this mode basically due to the fact that I workfull-time. So, I think at the time and even now that was the only mode that was available to me. I think it is my 4th year because I'm doing it part-time. I'm in my fourth year.	Sep-16	42
1	Kush	when I came up here the first time...they advised me that the last 2 years of that, I had to go to Kingston...I remember when I reached my second physical year in the campus they start offering those courses	357-375	43
1	Kush	From my perspective though first and foremost, this is one of the most accessible ways of getting an education because it's online, so once you have a computer you can access it that's #1	1637-1642	44
1	Michelle	online school is like the hotel version of going to day school...it gives you so much peace...but then it requires discipline too…	488-495	45
1	Michelle	So it's just like you are you're in a regular classroom, me and you talking, I have a question, I ask and you answer	607-608	46

Positive Perceptions				
1	Michelle	So for me, the online school, it has become a part of my life... If I am anywhere, just like how I would go on and I would check Facebook… I would just go in and log in…	764-771	47
1	Michelle	I'm in a virtual environment...I need not confine myself...if it was the sense of confinement...we wouldn't be here...We wouldn't be in an online environment. So then by being there, you become friends	970-976	48
1	Rosie	Well the online thing it is software that I'm not used to. I wasn't used to - it was just blurred. Now you can go into certain things like the resources, the different sessions, the different things	323-329	49
1	Ian	I think the best part about it. I don't know if, I could classify it as a best part cause it's not a part. I guess it's the entirety. The best thing about it for me it gives you time	911-915	50
1	Annie	everybody wants to do things online,… do it at your own free time …... It means using a system to your convenience, where exams are online, makes it easier for you so you don't have to go in to main campus saves you time, money	358-637	51

Neutral Perceptions				
Transcript	**pseudonym**	**Statements**	**Lines**	**Statement Number**
1	June	It was purely online. I've never done anything like that before; I didn't know what to expect ……. So assimilating how the Moodle works, the Moodle which is the online platform and the importance of my own interaction on there to my success was different...for me it's what was necessary, it is a tool that is given to you to succeed	139-156	52
1	June	I don't think the programme is best suited for the average school leaver. If I may, demographic wise, ["I'd say age 18, to maybe 24-25 I don't think, in my opinion, it is for that group depending on the person's level of maturity and responsibility as well	552-556	53
2	June	one of the things that we're told...is that the online learning environment is not that different from the physical environment...the only difference is you can't see each other, but you have to ask your questions, you have to engage...that's the way you gain the most out of your learning	672-683	54
1	Marie	However, as time goes by, I realized the time, yes it is an online programme therefore you don't sit in a classroom for 2-3 hours, therefore you have to make the effort to get the information to be in classes they are scheduled and to be at tutorials and so on when they are scheduled to get, to have a fair…or enough teaching experience with online	35-47	55

Appendix K: **Coded Significant Statements and Corresponding Formulated Meanings Relating to the Objectives**

OBJECTIVE 1

To determine the adult students' perceptions of the online learning environment

Statement	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
1	I was told that it was an online, and however, we would have a few face-to-face classes. That's what I was told.	Some students expected a blended learning environment based on what they were told. FM 1^{N}
2	I would encourage the persons who are collecting the applications to tell persons like myself, who really don't like the technology and going on the computer day after day and sitting in front of the computer day after day – don't bother to apply. Don't bother to apply….. because everything that you need to know, if you want to pass the exams any at all, you have to go online. There is no one to come, you don't have anybody you can come to [the] site and talk to you because I have been saying to persons that I have never gotten an e-tutor that is from Jamaica….. and if you are not so technology savvy, then it makes no sense you apply online.	Because most students are unfamiliar with the degree of technology interface in online learning, clear information should be provided so that students can make an informed choice, whether or not this educational experience is for them. FM 2^{N}
3	alright they will suggest to you that being as you are not going to have a teacher face-to-face then they put in the programme where you have BBC sessions, you have Skype sessions and you have to be technology savvy so to speak, you have to know how to do those things and from my point of view, you have to like those things.	In place of a face-to-face teacher, students are provided with BBC and Skype sessions, but students have to know how to use these unfamiliar software and have to like using them. $FM3^{N}$
4	I expected some face-to-face classes; when I signed up I expected my whole assignments and my whole materials would be online, but some face-to-face classes were expected.	The expectation of the online programme was that the assignments and materials would be delivered online, but it would also include some face-to-face teaching. $FM4^{N}$
5	I had the expectations of what I expected blended to be meaning I would have had more face-to-face support for the math based courses which didn't materialize as I expected.	Face-to-face classes expected for numbers-based courses did not materialise $FM5^{J}$
6	But I don't believe online learning is for everyone your thought process, your approach, your openness of mind, has to be at a certain stage or else you're not going to come into with the kind of determination that you need to complete.	Online learning is not appropriate for everyone, because it requires a level of depth to your thinking, a strategy of approach to success, a willingness to engage in new things, without which, a student will not go into the online programme with the level of determination to complete programme. $FM6^{J}$

Statement	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
7	The fact that I was paying for this programme out of my own pocket meant I was very determined.	The knowledge of the out of pocket expense for tuition fees generated a high level of determination to succeed. FM7[J]
8	The biggest thing to overcome, I think is just the fatigue.	The online environment is strenuous. FM8[J]
9	Initially when I came to orientation, I was told it was blended. I was not informed it was online. I was told if you have 5 students or more you will have a face-to-face class. Well, for my first semester, I gathered some students for one class and was told "oh we don't offer face-to face anymore". So then, YouTube became my face-to-face tutor	Information provided at the start of the programme, created an expectation of blended learning. When this did not materialise, an alternative plan was to use YouTube. FM9[AL]
10	School absorbed all of my time. But I look at it and I said. Well, I said, if you want to be out of there in 2.5 years, whatever you're missing now will still be there in two and a half years	The online programme was time consuming, but on reflection, if students want to succeed, and complete the program on schedule, students will have to forego other activities as such activities will still be there when the programme is completed FM10[AL]
11	Okay some of the course materials I feel that even though they say somebody edit them, they appear to be like scrap book…. "the way it is arranged it makes the material more complicated than simplified".	Although the course material is supposed to be edited, the way some of it is presented is like a scrap book, so it very unattractive and it appears much more complicated than it actually is. FM11[AL]
12	I would prefer if I had Internet at home, so I could actually go home and get a nap and get up and do some work.	It is preferable to have Internet at home because it allows the students to schedule time for rest and study at their own convenience. FM12[AL]
13	It was like a marathon. So you fall down, you drink some water; you put a band aid on the cut and keep going. It is a marathon.	Like a marathon, the online learning demands a great deal of endurance and strength to persist even in the face of difficulties. FM13[AL]
14	In the online environment it's hard when you have no body to talk	The lack of interaction makes online learning environment difficult for the students. FM14[Al]
15	I didn't expect that all the units you were going to read everything and then you'll have to gain your own interpretation of everything. I was expecting that most of the units, they would be recorded and may be from one of the I don't know if the actual school, they would have recorded sessions of most of the units so it feels like you're in a classroom setting, so you can hear questions from other students.	It was expected of the online environment that there would be audio recordings that would simulate a classroom environment where you could hear other students asking questions, and not that you would be given the material to interpret on your own. FM15[K]
16	All right for me, the experience that I've had here, I must say it's invaluable. I think it also help me to be a stronger person cause it definitely did. Because there's couple times when I felt like I want to give up.	The value of the online environment is that it makes students stronger, because there are many times when they want to give up, but they still persist. FM16[K]
17	before now we had the teleconference... and at that point I did not like the whole teleconference thing… it was coming here... it was like going to a class.	The previous teleconference model was just as demanding as going to a face-to-face class, but with the fully online program, that was no longer necessary. FM17[Mi]
18	The online experience for me, you know has suited me. The only negative thing would be that I'm somewhat of a recluse and it encourages that	There is value to the online environment, however it does reinforce unsociable behaviour. FM18[I]

Appendix L: Development of Associated Clusters and Emergent Themes

Development of formulated meanings and associated clusters and emergent themes related to Objective 1

Formulated meanings	Theme cluster	Emergent theme
FM7[J]. The knowledge of the out of pocket expense for tuition fees generated a high level of determination to succeed. FM24[J]. Even though the online learning environment is new to some students, they will still embrace the programme because there is an incentive of getting their degree at the end of the programme.	Incentives to persist	Personal characteristics of successful online learner
FM10[AL]. The online programme was time consuming, but on reflection, if students want to succeed, and complete the program on schedule, students will have to forego other activities as such activities will still be there when the programme is completed. FM13[AL]. Like a marathon, the online learning demands a great deal of endurance and strength to persist even in the face of difficulties. FM58[MA]. For an online programme students need to spend a lot of time weekly attending classes but this is what is required for students to succeed and pass the course exams. FM 62[MI]. Students still have to apply themselves as if they were in a physical environment.	Endurance	
FM6[J]. Online learning is not appropriate for everyone, because it requires a level of depth to your thinking, a strategy of approach to success, a willingness to engage in new things, without which, a student will not go into the online programme with the level of determination to complete the programme. FM27[J]. Based on experience in the online environment, the programme can be recommended to the right candidate. FM41[Ma]. Significant characteristics required for the online learning environment are commitment, initiative. FM 45[Mi]. Online learning is the hotel version of school, but it requires a great deal of discipline. FM53[J]. Demographically, this programme is not very suitable for the average 18 -24 or 25 year age group because of the level of maturity and responsibility required to succeed.	Not for everyone (Suitability for online)	
FM 2[N]. Because most students are unfamiliar with the degree of technology interface in online learning, clear information should be provided so that students can make an informed choice, whether or not this educational experience is for them. FM8[J]. The online environment is strenuous. FM12[AL]. It is preferable to have Internet at home because it allows the students to schedule time for rest and study at their own convenience. FM26[J]. In readiness for the online learning environment, students were provided guidelines to the specifications of tools required for the online, to which most of the students readily complied. FM34[MA]. In order to be ready for the programme, students have to have these facilities (Internet and computer) in order to get by. FM49[R]. At the start, the online environment is like a blur to some students, because they are unfamiliar with the software, but as they progress, they become familiar with where to find the resources, the different sessions among other things. FM52[J]. This online environment is fully online so it was different from previous experiences and students do not know what to expect of it. Getting used to interaction with the operating system and its importance to students a necessary tool to enable students' success was also different. FM56[MA].	Lack of readiness for online learning	Readiness for online learning

Formulated meanings	Theme cluster	Emergent theme
Students must prepare themselves and be ready for the online environment by purchasing a computer and ensuring regular access to the Internet to get the work done. FM60[K]. The online delivery works for some persons but there are some things that perhaps could be presented differently so that persons would be knowledgeable and understand what is required of them from the start.		
FM17[Mi]. The previous teleconference model was just as demanding as going to a face-to-face class, but with the fully online program, that was no longer necessary. FM22[J]. Based on work situations, the online environment is the most suitable because it does not necessitate going to a physical classroom. FM29[J].The program is adaptable to the students' changing circumstances. FM31[AL]. The BBC is an improvement over the teleconference systems, as a consequence, more students attend the BBC sessions. FM32[MA]. The choice of the UWI online programme was based on its convenience and suitability for students' work and family situation. FM39[MA]. The difference with this environment is that, as an adult learner, the student has more flexibility to adapt to their schedule. FM42[K]. Students who work full-time find that online learning is the only option available, even after a number of years in the program. FM44[K]. Online learning is one of the most accessible ways of getting an education because all you need is a computer. FM47[Mi]. Online learning becomes another aspect of the students' everyday life because they can gain access to the class from anywhere. FM50[I]. The best part of the online experience is that it gives students time for the important aspects of life such as work, family while studying. FM51[An]. Online allows students to study in their own time, it is a convenient way to study with examinations on line and because students do not need to be on campus it saves, time and money.	Convenience and flexibility	Advantages of learning online
FM16[K].The value of the online environment is that it makes students stronger, because there are many times when they want to give up, but they still persist. FM38[Ma]. Like the face-to-face environment, this online environment provides everything that is needed for the programme, and nothing is missing. FM40[Ma]. The idea of doing a degree without going to class generates a different concept about how students access classes. FM43[K]. When the program changed to fully online, it proved beneficial to students, because there was no longer any need to complete the program at the main campus as was previously expected. FM 61[K]. Overall the OLE is a tough environment, but it is still possible to learn, it is also the kind of experience that makes students stronger if they are able to persist and continue to completion.	Benefits/value of online learning	