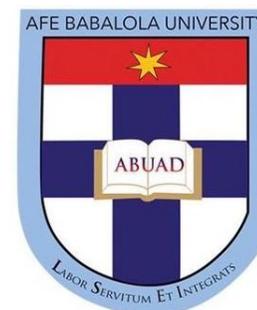




The Journal of Sustainable Development Law and Policy



ISSN: 2467-8406 (Print) 2467-8392 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jsdlp>

Unlocking academic excellence: The journey of online tutors at a distance learning institution in South Africa

Prince Chukwuneme Enwereji & Annelien Adriana van Rooyen

To cite this article Prince Chukwuneme Enwereji & Annelien Adriana van Rooyen (2023). Unlocking academic excellence: The journey of online tutors at a distance learning institution in South Africa. The Journal of Sustainable Development, Law and Policy. Vol. 14:2. 302-327, DOI: [10.4314/jsdlp.v14i2.16](https://doi.org/10.4314/jsdlp.v14i2.16)

To link this article: DOI: [10.4314/jsdlp.v14i2.16](https://doi.org/10.4314/jsdlp.v14i2.16)



Published online: December 1, 2023.

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jsdlp>

UNLOCKING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE: THE JOURNEY OF ONLINE TUTORS AT A DISTANCE LEARNING INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Prince Chukwuneme Enwereji* & Annelien Adriana van Rooyen**

Citation:

Prince Chukwuneme Enwereji & Annelien Adriana van Rooyen (2023). Unlocking academic excellence: The journey of online tutors at a distance learning institution in South Africa. *The Journal of Sustainable Development, Law and Policy*. Vol. 14:2. 302-327.

Submitted:

02 July 2023

Final version received:

30 October 2023

ISSN: 2467-8406 (Print)

2467-8392 (Online)

ABSTRACT

The study set out to assess the efficacy of an online tutoring programme at a large distance education institution in South Africa based on lecturers' evaluations. Online-tutoring or e-tutoring has emerged as a prominent educational support system, particularly in the context of online and distance learning. Understanding how lecturers perceive the effectiveness of e-tutoring is crucial for improving and optimizing this mode of instructional support. The study employed a quantitative research approach, utilizing online questionnaires as data collection instruments. The questionnaires focused on capturing the lecturers' assessments on the advantages, challenges, and overall effectiveness of e-tutoring services in facilitating student learning. Statistical methods, such as descriptive statistics and inferential analysis, were utilized to analyse the collected data and draw meaningful conclusions. The findings reveal that the lecturers perceive e-tutoring as a valuable resource which enhances student learning outcomes. The advantages highlighted include personalized support, improved accessibility, and flexibility in meeting individual student needs. The online tutors (e-tutors) were seen as effective in addressing students' queries and providing clarifications on complex subject matters. However, several challenges were also identified, such as the need for adequate training and support for e-tutors, ensuring consistency in quality, and managing the workload associated with e-tutoring responsibilities. Lecturers emphasized the importance of professional development and collaborative efforts between e-tutors and academic staff to enhance the overall effectiveness of e-tutoring services. The study concludes that e-tutoring has the potential to significantly contribute to the academic success of students at the University of South Africa.

Keywords: E-tutor; online support; academic success; online learning; professional development; student queries.

1. INTRODUCTION

The University of South Africa (Unisa) is a renowned open distance and e-learning (ODeL) institution which provides online education to a diverse student population in Africa and other parts of the world.¹ Unisa was established in 1873 as the University of the Cape of Good Hope and became a full-fledged university in 1951, which offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in various fields, including business, law, education, health sciences, physical sciences, and humanities.² Unisa's mode of instruction is primarily through distance learning, which makes it accessible to its diverse student population. Unisa's focus on ODeL has made education more accessible to students who face challenges such as geographic distance, work, family responsibilities, and financial constraints.³ The flexible study options offered by Unisa allow students to study at their own pace, on their schedule, and from anywhere in the world, making higher education more accessible and affordable to a wider range of students.⁴ With the increasing availability of technology and the necessity to attend to student needs, e-tutoring has become an important tool to deliver academic support services to students.⁵

E-tutoring is a form of online teaching and learning that provides students with access to academic support services, including online resources, virtual classrooms, and communication with lecturers, which is particularly beneficial for students studying at a

* Prince Chukwuneme Enwereji, University of South Africa.

** Annelien Adriana van Rooyen, University of South Africa

¹ Letseka M, Letseka M.M, and Pitsoe V, 'The challenges of e-Learning in South Africa' (2018)8 Trends in E-learning 121, 138

² Harkin D.G and Goedegebuure L, 'Exploring the potential for mergers and strategic partnerships within the Australian higher education system through the application of Value Nets' (2020)42 Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management 458, 477

³ Roos Breines Raghuram P and Gunter A, 'Infrastructures of immobility: Enabling international distance education students in Africa to not move' [2019] Mobilities

⁴ Letseka M, 'Stimulating ODL research at UNISA: exploring the role and potential impact of the UNESCO Chair' (2021)36 Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning 133, 148

⁵ Mokwena G, 'Student Support at Unisa: A Flowing-River Metaphor' [2021] UnisaRxiv.

distance.⁶ This form of tutoring is particularly useful for students who are unable to attend physical classes. E-tutoring can take many forms, including asynchronous or synchronous communication, e-mail correspondence, discussion forums, and video conferencing.⁷ E-tutoring has emerged as a valuable educational support system, particularly in the context of online learning, providing personalized guidance and assistance to students. As higher education institutions increasingly embrace online education, it is crucial to understand how lecturers view the effectiveness of e-tutoring services. Exploring these views can shed light on the strengths, challenges, and potential improvements of e-tutoring, ultimately enhancing the quality of educational support provided to students. Unisa, being a prominent institution in distance education, has implemented e-tutoring services to facilitate student learning in various disciplines. However, it is important to gain insight into how lecturers perceive the effectiveness of these services and their impact on students' outcomes.

This study aims to investigate the views of lecturers regarding the effectiveness of e-tutoring in the Department of Financial Accounting at Unisa. Through an online quantitative survey, the study delved into the usage of e-tutoring, challenges, and overall effectiveness as perceived by lecturers. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on e-tutoring in the context of online education, specifically within Unisa and other online or ODeL universities. The study will identify areas of strength and potential areas for improvement in the e-tutoring services provided by understanding lecturers' perspectives. This knowledge will enable the university to enhance its support systems, tailor professional development programmes for e-tutors, and ensure that e-tutoring effectively supports students' teaching and learning outcomes. The subsequent section presents the theoretical background, the concept of lecturing at Unisa, e-

⁶ Tan, Paul Juinn Bing. 'An empirical study of how the learning attitudes of college students toward English e-tutoring websites affect site sustainability' (2019)11 Sustainability 1748

⁷ Doukakis S, Michalopoulou, G, and Chira T, 'The integration of e-tutoring programs in secondary education-A digital transformation strategy' (In 2020 5th South-East Europe Design Automation, Computer Engineering, Computer Networks and Social Media Conference 2019)

tutoring and the views of lecturers regarding the programme, research methodology, presentation of research results, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts the Community of Inquiry (CoI) theory as its theoretical framework. The CoI theory, developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer in 2000, is a pedagogical framework that outlines the essential elements of effective online learning environments.⁸ Grounded in constructivism and social constructivism, the CoI theory emphasizes three critical presences for successful online learning communities: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence.⁹ Social presence refers to the sense of community and connectedness that participants experience in an online learning environment.⁸ It involves creating an environment where students perceive themselves as part of a community and feel connected to others. Cognitive presence focuses on the construction of meaning through discourse, reflection, and the exploration of ideas. Students engage in critical thinking and knowledge construction within the online learning environment. Teaching presence relates to the role of the instructor or facilitator in designing and facilitating the learning experience to promote social and cognitive presence. The CoI theory emphasizes the importance of balancing these three presences to create a successful online learning community. By promoting social, cognitive, and teaching presence, e-tutors can foster critical thinking, collaboration, and meaningful learning experiences.⁸ Figure 1 illustrates the CoI diagram, which depicts how these presences are aimed at providing students with an educational experience through discourse, content selection, and a

⁸ Shange T.C, 'Fostering symbiosis between e-tutors and lecturers of an English studies module at an open distance learning university in South Africa' (2021)3 *Open Praxis* 253, 263

⁹ Guo P, Saab N, Wu L, and Admiraal W, 'The Community of Inquiry perspective on students' social presence, cognitive presence, and academic performance in online project-based learning' (2021)37 *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 1479-1493.

conducive climate for learning.¹⁰ The CoI diagram as presented in Figure 1 depicts the social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence which are aimed at providing students with an educational experience by supporting discourse, selecting content, and setting a conducive climate for Learning¹¹

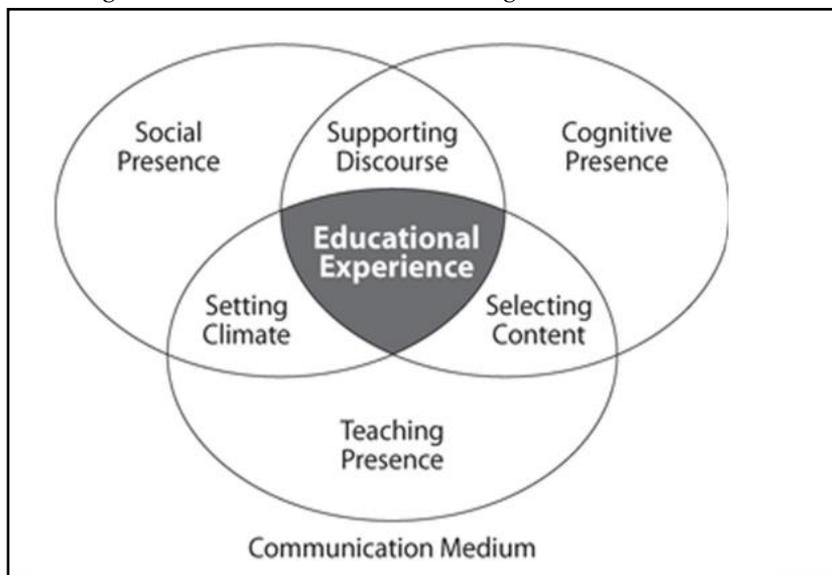


Figure 1: Community of Inquiry

Source: Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000)

In the context of online learning with e-tutors, the CoI theory can be applied to create a supportive and engaging learning environment which promotes the active participation and collaboration of students.¹² E-tutors play a critical role in facilitating the three types of presence and ensuring that students have a meaningful and effective learning experience. The CoI theory is highly relevant to e-tutoring as it provides a framework for creating effective online learning environments. Effective e-

¹⁰ Garrison D. R, Anderson T, and Archer W, 'Critical inquiry in a text-based environment' (1999)2 Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education* 87,105

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Maré S, and Mutezo A.T, 'The effectiveness of e-tutoring in an open and distance e-learning environment: evidence from the University of South Africa' (2021)36 *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning* 164, 180

tutoring requires the creation of a supportive and engaging learning environment, where students can collaborate, construct knowledge, and engage in critical thinking.¹³ The CoI theory highlights that social presence is critical in creating a type of environment where students need to feel connected to others in the community to be motivated to learn.¹⁴ In e-tutoring, this is achieved by using various online communication tools, such as discussion forums, video conferencing, and social media platforms, to facilitate interaction and collaboration between students. Cognitive presence is also crucial in e-tutoring, as students need to construct meaning through discourse and reflection to learn.¹⁵ E-tutors promote cognitive presence by designing activities that encourage students to critically examine and evaluate ideas, share their experiences and perspectives, and engage in collaborative problem-solving. Furthermore, teaching presence is critical in e-tutoring, as instructors need to facilitate the learning experience in a way that promotes social and cognitive presence.¹⁶ In this regard, e-tutors adopt a variety of strategies, such as providing clear instructions, giving feedback, and facilitating discussions, to promote teaching presence in e-tutoring. Through the promotion of social, cognitive, and teaching presence, the CoI theory provides a useful framework for designing effective online learning experiences that promote engagement, critical thinking, collaboration, and meaningful learning outcomes.

3. THE CONCEPT OF LECTURING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

Lecturing is a common term used to describe the process of imparting knowledge or skills to another person.¹⁷ It involves

¹³ Sauti G, 'Perspectives on Effective E-tutoring that Motivates and Enhances Students' Learning through Learner Management Systems and Social Media' (2021)40 In *International Perspectives in Online Instruction* 143, 56

¹⁴ Shange (No 8).

¹⁵ Turula A, 'The shallows and the depths. Cognitive and social presence in blended tutoring' (2018)27 *Technology, Pedagogy and Education* 233, 250

¹⁶ Tang and Others, 'A comparative study of problem-based learning and traditional approaches in college English classrooms: Analyzing pedagogical behaviors via classroom observation' (2020) *Behavioral Sciences* 105

sharing experiences and communicating information. At Unisa, lecturing takes on a unique meaning due to the university's focus on distance education and more specifically ODeL.¹⁸ Lecturing in this context involves delivering instructional content to students who are not physically present in a classroom. Lecturers at Unisa employ various teaching methods to provide instruction, including online resources, virtual classrooms, and recorded lectures.¹⁹ One of the primary methods used by Unisa lecturers is the utilization of online resources. These resources encompass recorded lectures, interactive learning modules, and online discussion forums. Lecturers also rely on communication tools such as e-mail and instant messaging to provide feedback and address students' questions.²⁰ Another crucial aspect of lecturing at Unisa is ensuring that students have access to support services that can assist them in succeeding in their studies.²¹ These support services include academic counselling, study skills workshops, and peer support groups, which help students overcome any challenges they may encounter while studying.²² Embracing this unique approach to lecturing, Unisa provides high-quality education to students across South Africa and beyond.²³

Collaboration in teaching and learning is essential in lecturing at Unisa, as lecturers must adapt their teaching strategies to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Unisa being an online institution attracts students from various backgrounds with

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Pretorius R.W, and others, 'Creating a context for campus sustainability through teaching and learning: The case of open, distance and e-learning' (2019)20 *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 530

¹⁹ Nsamba A, 'Maturity levels of student support e-services within an open distance e-learning university' (2019)20 *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 60, 78

²⁰ Broadbent, J and Lodge J, 'Use of live chat in higher education to support self-regulated help seeking behaviours: a comparison of online and blended learner perspectives (2021)18 *IJETH.Ed* 1, 20.

²¹ Lekhetho M, 'Postgraduate students' perceptions of support services rendered by a distance learning institution' (2022)11 *International Journal of Higher Education* 1,24

²² Ibid

²³ Zawada B, 'From functional quality apparatus to meaningful enactment: UNISA as example' (2019) 27 *Quality Assurance in Education* 384, 400

different learning styles and preferences.²⁴ Lecturers must, therefore, deliver instructional content in a way that is accessible and engaging for all students. The concept of lecturing at Unisa is shaped by the university's focus on open distance learning and the goal of providing high-quality instructional content to a diverse student population.²⁵

Lecturers must, therefore, deliver instructional content in a way that is accessible and engaging for all students. The concept of lecturing at Unisa is shaped by the university's focus on open distance learning and the goal of providing high-quality instructional content to a diverse student population.²⁶ Lecturers at Unisa adapt their teaching strategies to cater for the needs of distance students and ensure their engagement and motivation in their studies. Unisa's teaching and learning approach is designed to provide high-quality education to all students, regardless of their background or circumstances.²⁷ Through the implementation of innovative teaching methods and support services, lecturers assist students in achieving their academic goals and preparing for successful careers.²⁸

However, lecturing at Unisa also presents certain challenges. One of the key challenges is ensuring that students have access to high-quality instructional content equivalent to what they would receive in a traditional classroom setting.²⁹ To address this, Unisa has developed a range of resources to support lecturers in delivering high-quality instruction, such as online learning materials, interactive tools, and assistance in developing

²⁴ Lembani, R, and others 'The same course, different access: the digital divide between urban and rural distance education students in South Africa' (2020) 44 *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 70, 84

²⁵ Mittelmeier J and Others 'Learning design in diverse institutional and cultural contexts: Suggestions from a participatory workshop with higher education professionals in Africa (2018)33 *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning* 250, 266

²⁶ Van Wyk and others, 'The Responsiveness of Teacher Education Managers at an ODeL College to Resilience and the Well-Being of Staff Working from Home during COVID-19 (2021)7 *International Journal of Educational Methodology* 623,635

²⁷ Mawonde A and Togo M, 'Challenges of involving students in campus SDGs-related practices in an ODeL context: the case of the University of South Africa (2021)22 *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 1487, 1502.

²⁸ Unisa, 'Learner support' (*Unisa*, 2023)

²⁹ Nkumane, K.G, 'Lived experiences of black women academic researchers at the University of South Africa' (Doctoral Dissertation, 2018)

multimedia content.³⁰ Another challenge faced in lecturing at Unisa is maintaining students' engagement and motivation in their studies, particularly for distance students who may lack the same level of social interaction and support found in traditional classroom settings.³¹ To tackle this challenge, Unisa provides various support services for students, including academic counselling, study skills workshops, and peer support groups. Additionally, large class sizes are addressed through the provision of e-tutors who offer academic assistance to students.³² Other challenges may involve technological issues, time management, and addressing the needs of a diverse student population.³³ Despite these challenges, lecturers can overcome them and provide students with a high-quality education at Unisa by utilizing the appropriate support and resources. Lecturing can be challenging in higher education institutions including Unisa, but with the right support and resources, lecturers can overcome these challenges and provide their students with a high-quality education.³⁴

4. E-TUTORING AND THE ASSESSMENT OF LECTURERS OF THE PROGRAMME

An e-tutor, also known as an online tutor or virtual tutor, is an individual who offers academic support services to students through various online platforms such as video conferencing, e-mail, chat, and virtual whiteboards.³⁵ E-tutors work remotely and can be located anywhere in the world, providing students with access to academic assistance regardless of their geographical location.³⁶ E-tutors may work as freelancers or be employed by educational institutions or private tutoring companies. They possess expertise in a wide range of subjects and can assist

³⁰ Van Den Berg G, 'Context matters: Student experiences of interaction in open distance learning' (2020) 21 *Online Journal of Distance Education* pp.223, 236

³¹ Makwara C, 'Experiences of e-tutoring at Africa's largest distance education university' (In ICERI2019 Proceedings, 2019)

³² Van (n 30).

³³ Makwara (n 31)

³⁴ Nkumane (n 29)

³⁵ Makwara (n 31)

³⁶ Maré (n 11)

students at all levels of education, from primary school to postgraduate studies.³⁷ E-tutors typically demonstrate strong subject knowledge and effective communication skills. Moreover, they are experienced in using online learning tools and platforms and are proficient in utilizing various forms of technology to deliver successful online tutoring sessions.³⁸ Additionally, e-tutors provide personalized and tailored support to address the individual needs of students.³⁹

Unisa has embraced e-tutoring as a means of enhancing students' learning experiences. Due to its large student population spread across the continent, Unisa faces challenges in providing traditional face-to-face tutoring services to all students.⁴⁰ E-tutoring has been introduced to address the issue of large class sizes and ensure academic support is available to students regardless of their location. Through e-tutoring, students can conveniently access academic assistance from the comfort of their homes.⁴¹ They can use smartphones, tablets, or laptops to connect with e-tutors without the need for physical travel. E-tutoring offers flexibility in scheduling, allowing students to access support services at their convenience. This flexibility is particularly valuable for non-traditional students who may have work or family commitments which make it challenging to attend on-campus tutoring sessions.⁴² E-tutoring contributes to improved academic outcomes by providing more frequent and consistent feedback, enabling students to identify areas where they need improvement and make progress more effectively.⁴³

At Unisa e-tutors provide valuable support to lecturers by assisting with student support, time management and technology

³⁷ Sedio M.Z, 'Exploring e-tutors teaching of the design process as content knowledge in an Open and Distance e-Learning environment' (2021) *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists* 329, 38

³⁸ Maré (n 11)

³⁹ Makwara (n 31)

⁴⁰ Tang (n 16)

⁴¹ Maré (n 11)

⁴² Rakoma M.A, 'Rural students' experiences of online learning support in an open distance learning environment' (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University, 2018)

⁴³ Tan (n 6)

support.⁴⁴ Through collaboration between e-tutors and lecturers, students are offered high-quality online learning experiences, ensuring their success in academic pursuits. E-tutors play a crucial role in assisting lecturers at Unisa through student support services.⁴⁵ In this capacity e-tutors provide one-on-one support to students, answer their questions, and offer feedback on marked assignments, thereby freeing up lecturers to focus on delivering course content.⁴⁶ E-tutors assist in managing lecturers' workload by handling certain administrative tasks associated with teaching, such as monitoring online discussion forums, and providing feedback to students.⁴⁷ This support can help alleviate the workload of lecturers. In terms of technological support, e-tutors assist lecturers who may be less familiar with online teaching tools and platforms. They can aid in setting up online courses, troubleshooting technical issues, and providing guidance on the effective use of online teaching tools.⁴⁸

The successful integration of e-tutoring into higher education requires lecturers to be willing to embrace new approaches to teaching and learning and recognize the value of e-tutors in supporting student learning.⁴⁹ It is essential to provide adequate training and support to lecturers to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to work effectively with e-tutors and deliver high-quality online learning experiences to their students. While e-tutoring offers students more freedom and access to academic support services, it is also crucial to understand how lecturers value the role of e-tutors in higher education. Lecturers' views of e-tutoring can vary based on their beliefs, values, and attitudes toward technology and online teaching.⁵⁰ Some lecturers view e-tutoring as a convenient and effective way to reach a larger audience of students, particularly those who may face

⁴⁴ De Metz N and Bezuidenhout A, 'An importance-competence analysis of the roles and competencies of e-tutors at an open distance learning institution' (2018)34 *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*

⁴⁵ Sithole and Gumede. 'Sustaining a tutorship programme at a university of technology: A systems approach' (2022)40 *Perspectives in Education* 224, 240

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ Hansen and Gray, 'Creating boundaries within the ubiquitous online classroom' (2018)15 *Journal of Educators online*

⁴⁸ De (n 44)

⁴⁹ Adnan Müge, 'Professional development in the transition to online teaching: The voice of entrant online instructors', (2018)88 *ReCALL*, 88,111

⁵⁰ Tan (no 6)

geographical or scheduling constraints which prevent them from attending in-person classes.⁵¹ Also, e-tutoring provides a more flexible learning experience for students as they can access instructional materials and receive feedback at their own pace and schedule.⁵² However, some lecturers are sceptical of e-tutoring, expressing concerns about the quality of instruction and the potential for student disengagement or cheating.⁵³ They may also feel that e-tutoring lacks the personal interaction and engagement inherent in in-person instruction, making it more challenging to build rapport with students and gauge their understanding of the material.⁵⁴ Lecturers' views of e-tutoring vary depending on their personal experiences and teaching philosophies. With the increasing prevalence of online education and the continued development of e-learning technologies, e-tutoring is likely to remain a topic of discussion in the education sector for the foreseeable future.⁵⁵ While there may be concerns and varying opinions among lecturers about e-tutoring, it is important to recognize the potential benefits of this teaching and learning method. However, through e-tutoring, lecturers can collaborate with e-tutors to ensure that students receive high-quality online learning experiences which meet their individual needs and preferences.⁵⁶ In this regard, Unisa can provide training and support to lecturers to help them effectively integrate e-tutoring into their teaching practices. The subsequent section presents the methodology of the study.

5. RESEARCH METHODS

This study investigates the views of accounting lecturers on the effectiveness of e-tutoring services in the Department of Financial

-
- ⁵¹ Shikulo Lukas and Lekhetho Maphleba, 'Exploring student support services of a distance learning centre at a Namibian university' (2020)6 *Cogent Social Sciences* 1737401
- ⁵² Liu Ruo-Lan and Li Yu-Chi, 'Action research to enrich learning in e-tutoring for remote schools' (2020)33 *Systemic Practice and Action Research* 95, 110
- ⁵³ Dwivedi P, *Technology of Education and Instruction* (KK Publications, 2020)
- ⁵⁴ Ibid
- ⁵⁵ Tan (no 6)
- ⁵⁶ MAHLANGU Vimbi, 'Exploring the supervision of gifted students in open distance e-learning setting in higher education context: University of South Africa'(2022)9 *Journal of Gifted Education and Creativity* 57,74

Accounting at Unisa. The study adopted a positivist research paradigm. The positivist research paradigm is based on the notion that there exists a single tangible reality; one that is capable of being understood, acknowledged, and quantified.⁵⁷ A quantitative research approach and a descriptive research design were applied to provide answers to the research objectives of the study.

Descriptive research offers several advantages, including the ability to scrutinise data in depth, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the research problem,⁵⁸ also enabling the opportunity to analyse how individuals or data behave in real-world scenarios.⁵⁹ The population of this study included the 46 undergraduate lecturers in the Department of Financial Accounting at Unisa who were actively teaching at the time of the study. A structured questionnaire was designed to assess the views of lecturers of the effectiveness of e-tutoring in the department. The questionnaires were administered online and measured some variables such as the usage and challenges of e-tutoring. It is to note that only 28 lecturers participated in this study which was deemed adequate to arrive at a reliable conclusion. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Statistical Analysis System (SAS) were used to analyse data collected from the lecturers. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data and provide clarity on the behaviour of variables tested in the study. To summarize, the collection of data regarding the study's population, descriptive statistics were used. It focused on defining and analysing all quantitative data to find patterns and trends illustrating the relationships between variables. From the sample, the inferential statistics generated valid inferences about the population, including generalizations and forecasts. To ascertain the connections between the various elements, extra statistical analysis was also necessary. The researchers conducted additional analysis of the data to confirm that they supported the goals of the study and to provide verifiable evidence that the

⁵⁷ Žukauskas Pranas, Vveinhardt Jolita, and Andriukaitienė Regina, 'Philosophy and paradigm of scientific research' (2018)121 *Management culture and corporate social responsibility* 506, 18

⁵⁸ Siedlecki Sandra L, 'Understanding descriptive research designs and methods', *Clinical Nurse* (2020)34 *Specialist* 8, 12

⁵⁹ Rutberg, Shannon and Bouikidis, Christina D, 'Focusing on the fundamentals: A simplistic differentiation between qualitative and quantitative research' (2018)45 *Nephrology Nursing Journal* 209,13

problem might be resolved. To provide recommendations to enhance e-tutoring at the Department of Financial Accounting at Unisa, the researchers also cross-checked the findings with those from the literature review. The subsequent section presents the data collected from the respondents.

6. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

This section provides an overview of the opinions surrounding the facilitation of e-tutoring in the Department of Financial Accounting from two key viewpoints: the opinions of e-tutoring by the lecturers and the feedback of the challenges encountered by e-tutors. The first part of the presentation focuses on the opinions of e-tutoring by the lecturers. It explores their views, beliefs, and experiences regarding the effectiveness and impact of e-tutoring in enhancing student learning outcomes. The feedback from the lecturers shed light on the role of e-tutors in facilitating student success, their expertise in addressing challenging topics, and their ability to make the course content engaging and interesting. The second part of the presentation delves into the challenges encountered by e-tutors. It highlights the areas where e-tutors face difficulties and identify potential areas for improvement. Furthermore, the presentation explores the extent of the role of e-tutors and proposes ways to expand their responsibilities to better support student learning.

Table 2: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigen values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1 Strategies	6.183	38.641	38.641	6.183	38.641	38.641	4.820	30.126	30.126
2 Specific module	2.683	16.770	55.411	2.683	16.770	55.411	3.434	21.460	51.585
3 Age	2.031	12.691	68.102	2.031	12.691	68.102	2.643	16.517	68.102
4 Highest qualification	.962	6.012	74.114						
5 Experience	.846	5.286	79.400						
6 Help specific	.744	4.651	84.051						
7 Content interesting	.605	3.780	87.831						
8 Helpful	.451	2.816	90.647						
9 Interest students	.387	2.416	93.063						
10 Essential	.283	1.770	94.833						
11 Address needs	.261	1.632	96.465						
12 Effective use	.174	1.087	97.552						
13 Useful add	.160	.998	98.550						
14 Outdated	.104	.648	99.198						
15 Outdated	.095	.593	99.791						
16 Monitor progress	.033	.209	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. <<Correct formatting so that Analysis could be next to Component.>>

The findings presented in this section aim to provide valuable insights for institutions and stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of e-tutoring programmes and address the challenges faced by e-tutors.

6.1 Usage of e-tutoring

This section examines the opinions of lecturers regarding the utilization of e-tutoring to facilitate accounting modules. It explores how lecturers view the effectiveness and benefits of incorporating e-tutoring methods in their teaching practices for accounting courses. The following table presents the KMO and Bartlett's Test.

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.696
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	293.546
	df	120
	Sig.	.000

Table 1 presents the KMO and Bartlett's test and the table presents the descriptive statistics. In Table 1, factor analysis is used to identify the important factors concerning lecturers' views of who is utilizing e-tutors. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's measure of sampling adequacy reflects a score of 0.696, which is very close to the recommended value of 0.7. Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant at $p < 0.05$ levels. We conclude that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix.

Table 2 shows all the factors which can be referred to as components) extracted from the analysis, including their eigen values. In this analysis only two factors were taken into consideration. The extraction technique employed was principal component analysis factoring with varimax rotation. The varimax method was selected based on the assumption that the factors are independent of each other. For the sake of analysis and interpretation, the study only focused on Initial Eigen Values or Extracted Sums of Squared Loadings. In this case, three components encapsulated 68.1% of the variation of the original variables. Consequently, the study managed to considerably simplify the dataset by using these components, incurring only a

31.9% loss of information. Component 1 accounted for 38.6% of the variation, component 2 contributed to 16.8% and component 3 explained 12.7%. The remaining 13 components collectively explained only 31.9%.

Table 2: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigen values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1 Strategies	6.183	38.641	38.641	6.183	38.641	38.641	4.820	30.126	30.126
2 Specific module	2.683	16.770	55.411	2.683	16.770	55.411	3.434	21.460	51.585
3 Age	2.031	12.691	68.102	2.031	12.691	68.102	2.643	16.517	68.102
4 Highest qualification	.962	6.012	74.114						
5 Experience	.846	5.286	79.400						
6 Help specific	.744	4.651	84.051						
7 Content interesting	.605	3.780	87.831						
8 Helpful	.451	2.816	90.647						
9 Interest students	.387	2.416	93.063						
10 Essential	.283	1.770	94.833						
11 Address needs	.261	1.632	96.465						
12 Effective use	.174	1.087	97.552						
13 Useful add	.160	.998	98.550						
14 Outdated	.104	.648	99.198						
15 Outdated	.095	.593	99.791						
16 Monitor progress	.033	.209	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. <<Correct formatting so that Analysis could be next to Component.

The purpose of rotation is to decrease the number of factors on which the variables under examination exhibit substantial loadings. The Rotated Component Matrix displays the factor loadings for each variable and identifies the factor to which each variable is most strongly associated. In Table 3, based on these factor loadings, the positive views subsets loaded strongly on Component 1, and this is the "helping needs" factor group. The "student support" factor is strongly loaded in Component 2 and Component 3 is strongly loaded with the "roles and duties" factor

Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component		
	1	2	3
Q6_HelpSpecific	.699		
Q8_Helpful	.633		
Q10 Essential		.776	
Q9 InterestStudents	.501	.755	
Q11 AddressNeeds		.848	
Q12 EffectiveUSe	.823		
Q13_UsefulAdd	.725		
Q18_MotivateStudents	.861		
Q15 OutdatedExamples			-.725
Q19 HelpOrganise	.583		
Q17 MonitorStudies		.553	
Q20 AnswerTimeously	.685		
Q24_RoleClearToLecturers			.760
Q36_TimeousAssistLect			.809
Q51 AdditionalLecturer		-.742	
Q43_AdhereToGuidelines			.645

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations

6.2 Challenges identified by lecturers in facilitating e-tutoring in Department of Accounting

This section focuses on the challenges of e-tutoring as identified by the lecturers in their role of facilitating financial accounting modules. It delves into the obstacles and difficulties they

encounter while providing online support to students in this specific academic domain.

Table 4: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.589
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	59.617
	df	10
	Sig.	.000

Table 4 presents the KMO and Bartlett's test and the table presents the descriptive statistics. In Table 4, factor analysis is applied to detect the significant factors pertaining to lecturers' perceptions of e-tutor usage. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's measure of sampling adequacy reflects a score of 0.589, which is near the recommended value of 0.7. Furthermore, Bartlett's test of sphericity shows statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level, leading us to infer that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix.

Table 5: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigen values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.518	50.370	50.370	2.518	50.370	50.370	2.382	47.644	47.644
2	1.446	28.923	79.293	1.446	28.923	79.293	1.582	31.649	79.293
3	.583	11.665	90.958						
4	.301	6.025	96.983						
5	.151	3.017	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Table 5 presents a comprehensive list of factors (which can be referred to as components) extracted from the analysis along with their eigen values. In this analysis, only three factors were taken into consideration. The extraction method employed was principal component analysis factoring with varimax rotation, chosen due

to the assumption that the factors are independent of each other. For analytical and interpretative purposes, the study exclusively focused on Initial Eigen Values or Extracted Sums of Squared Loadings. In this case, two components encapsulated 79.3% of the variation of the original variables. Consequently, the study managed to significantly simplify the dataset by utilising these two components, incurring only a 20.7% loss of information. Component 1 explained 50.4% of the variation, while Component 2 explained 28.9%. The remaining three components collectively explained just 20.7%.

Table 6: Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component	
	1	2
Q29_TakeATest	.781	
Q28_SpecificTraining		.830
Q30_OnlineCommSkills	.870	
Q31_OnlineTechTools	.921	
Q25_NotExtensiveEnough		.925

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations

The purpose of rotation is to decrease the number of factors onto which the variables under examination exhibit substantial loadings. The Rotated Component Matrix displays the factor loadings for each variable and indicates the factor to which variable is most strongly associated. In Table 6, based on these factor loadings, the positive views subsets loaded strongly on Component 1, and this is the "training needs" factor group. The "module specific" subset is strongly loaded in Component 2.

7. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

According to the findings from the study, the lecturers confirmed that e-tutors play a crucial role in assisting students with challenging topics in Financial Accounting modules. This highlights their expertise and ability to provide targeted support in areas where students may struggle the most. The lecturers attested

that e-tutoring is highly beneficial to students as it helps them better understand the course content and makes it more engaging and interesting, and this indicates that e-tutors are effective in enhancing the learning experience for students. Findings showed that e-tutors make effective use of discussion forums to assist students with difficult topics which submits that e-tutors are skilled in facilitating online discussions and creating an interactive learning environment. The lecturers indicate that e-tutors go beyond the standard course materials by providing useful additional resources such as videos, online discussions, and slides. This demonstrates their commitment to enhancing students' access to diverse learning materials. Another significant finding is that e-tutors play a motivational role in students' studies, encouraging them to stay engaged and motivated throughout their learning journey. Additionally, e-tutors are praised for their ability to answer students' questions promptly, ensuring timely support and clarification. The study highlighted that e-tutors assist students in organizing their studies, suggesting that they guide effective study strategies and time management. These findings are consistent with the studies of Maré and Mutezo who confirm that e-tutors assist students in achieving their academic endeavours by providing academic guidance.⁶⁰ E-tutors are essential in bridging the gap between students' learning needs and the available resources, ultimately enhancing the overall learning experience and academic success of students in online education settings.⁶¹ E-tutors provide timely and accurate answers to students' questions, serving as a valuable source of support and clarification in online learning environments.⁶²

Continuing, the lecturers confirmed that e-tutoring is considered essential for students to achieve success in their Financial Accounting modules, emphasizing the pivotal role of e-tutors in providing the necessary guidance and support for students to grasp the subject matter and excel academically. The results highlighted that e-tutors are prompt in answering students' questions. This timely responsiveness ensures that students receive the support they need when they need it, enhancing their learning experience and preventing potential learning gaps or confusion.

⁶⁰ Mare (n 12)

⁶¹ Sauti (n 13)

⁶² Rakoma

Moreover, the lecturers confirmed that the e-tutor project effectively addresses the needs of the students, indicating that the e-tutoring initiative is designed in a way that aligns with the specific requirements and challenges faced by students in their Financial Accounting studies. E-tutors significantly contribute to enhancing students' learning experiences and outcomes by addressing these needs.⁶³ The findings further highlight that e-tutors play a crucial role in helping students monitor their progress. By providing guidance and feedback, e-tutors enable students to assess their performance and identify areas for improvement.⁶⁴ The e-tutor's proactive approach to progress monitoring empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey and make necessary adjustments to achieve their academic goals.⁶⁵ The study also revealed that lecturers have a clear understanding of the role of e-tutors and appreciate their contributions to supporting student learning and academic success. This understanding fosters a collaborative environment where e-tutors and lecturers can effectively work together to meet the needs of students. E-tutors have a comprehensive understanding of the valuable contributions they make in assisting students to succeed.⁶⁶ This understanding underscores the dedication and effectiveness of e-tutors in enhancing student outcomes and fostering success in the learning process.

Regarding the challenges of e-tutoring, the lecturers confirmed that e-tutors should receive training on the specific module content of Financial Accounting to enhance their subject knowledge and provide more effective and accurate support to students. The lecturers suggested that e-tutors should undergo a test on the module content before their appointment, ensuring that they have a solid understanding of the subject matter. E-tutors often face challenges related to their content knowledge, both in terms of providing comprehensive support to students.⁶⁷ Some e-tutors may lack the necessary depth of understanding in

⁶³ Kilfoil W.R, 'Tutoring: At the Interface of Teaching and Learning' [2021] Student Success 96

⁶⁴ Sauti (n 13)

⁶⁵ Mare (n 12)

⁶⁶ Joubert, Yvonne and Snyman Annette, 'The contribution of the e-tutor model in an open distance learning higher education institution: the perspective of the e-tutor1', (2020)15 The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning 6,21

⁶⁷ Sedio (n 37)

certain subject areas, which can hinder their ability to effectively convey complex concepts and address students' specific academic needs.⁶⁸ In terms of communication, the study indicates the need for e-tutors to receive training in online communication skills.

Effective communication is essential in the online learning environment and enhancing e-tutors' communication skills would enable them to engage more effectively with students and address their needs and concerns.⁶⁹ Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of providing training on the use of online technology tools to e-tutors. Considering this finding,⁷⁰ uphold that online learning platforms and tools play a significant role in e-tutoring and ensuring that e-tutors are proficient in using these tools would enable them to leverage technology effectively in their support activities. Moreover, the findings indicated that the role of e-tutors may not be extensive enough, suggesting that e-tutors should be given a broader scope of responsibilities and involvement in the teaching and learning process. This may include additional support activities such as facilitating discussions, providing feedback on marked assignments, or offering guidance on study strategies. The results emphasize the importance of continuous professional development for e-tutors. Higher education institutions can enhance the effectiveness of e-tutoring and ensure that e-tutors are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to support student learning effectively by addressing the identified challenges through targeted training programs.

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Yen, Shu-Chen, et al. 'Learning online, offline, and in-between: comparing student academic outcomes and course satisfaction in face-to-face, online, and blended teaching modalities' (2018)23 *Education and Information Technologies* 2141

⁷⁰ Pitsoane Enid and Lethole Patricia, 'Exploring e-tutors' views on in-service training for online student support: A professional development analysis' (2022)37 *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning* 53-64

8. CONCLUSION

The findings obtained in this study demonstrate the significant impact and effectiveness of e-tutoring in Financial Accounting modules. E-tutors play a crucial role in assisting students with challenging topics, providing targeted support, and enhancing their understanding of course content. The engagement of e-tutors through discussion forums, provision of additional resources, and prompt responses to students' questions create an interactive and enriching learning environment. Moreover, e-tutors motivate students, assist in organizing their studies, and contribute to their overall academic success. E-tutoring is considered essential for student achievement, addressing their specific needs, and enabling effective progress monitoring. The results also align with the Community of Inquiry (CoI) theory, which emphasizes the importance of cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence in facilitating meaningful online learning experiences. E-tutors demonstrate teaching presence by providing guidance, resources, and timely assistance, promoting cognitive presence by engaging students in critical thinking and problem-solving, and fostering social presence through online interactions and discussions. The CoI framework highlights the collaborative and interactive nature of e-tutoring, which contributes to students' engagement, learning outcomes, and overall satisfaction with the learning process. However, the study also identified certain challenges that need to be addressed. The need for e-tutors to receive training on the specific module content of Financial Accounting, online communication skills, and the use of technology tools is crucial to enhance their effectiveness. Expanding the role of e-tutors to include additional support activities and responsibilities could further improve the learning experience for students. Continuous professional development programmes should be implemented to ensure e-tutors are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the evolving needs of online students. In conclusion, the study highlights the pivotal role of e-tutors in enhancing student learning experiences in Financial Accounting modules. By leveraging the principles of the CoI theory and addressing the identified challenges, institutions can optimize e-tutoring practices, promote student success, and create a supportive and engaging online learning environment.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study made recommendations to the lecturers and higher education institutions.

9.1 Recommendations for the lecturers

The following recommendations are made to the lecturers:

- Embrace e-tutoring: Lecturers should recognize and embrace the value of e-tutoring in supporting student learning. They should actively collaborate with e-tutors and provide them with the necessary guidance and resources to effectively assist students.
- Provide training and support: Lecturers should offer training and professional development opportunities to e-tutors, particularly in the areas of module content, online communication skills, and the use of technology tools. This training will enhance their effectiveness and ensure they are well-equipped to support students in the online learning environment.
- Foster collaboration: Lecturers should foster a collaborative environment where e-tutors and lecturers work together to meet the needs of students. Regular communication and feedback channels should be established to facilitate effective collaboration and information sharing.
- Recognize and appreciate e-tutors' roles: Lecturers should acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of e-tutors in supporting student learning. This recognition will foster a positive working relationship and motivate e-tutors to continue their valuable work.

9.2 Recommendations for higher education institutions

The following recommendations are made to higher education institutions:

- Establish support structures: Higher education institutions should establish support structures and resources dedicated to e-tutoring. This includes providing training programmes, guidelines, and materials to support the professional development of e-tutors.
- Implement quality assurance measures: Higher education institutions should implement quality assurance measures to ensure the effectiveness of e-tutoring services. This can include regular evaluations, feedback mechanisms, and

monitoring of e-tutors' performance to maintain and improve the quality of support provided to students.

- Promote collaboration and communication: Higher education institutions should promote collaboration and communication between e-tutors, lecturers, and students. This can be achieved using online platforms, discussion forums, and regular meetings to facilitate information sharing and address any concerns or challenges.
- Continuously evaluate and improve: Higher education institutions should continuously evaluate and improve e-tutoring practices based on feedback from students, e-tutors, and lecturers. This will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that e-tutoring services align with the evolving needs of students and the institution's goals.
- Allocate sufficient resources: Higher education institutions should allocate sufficient resources, both financial and technological, to support the implementation and maintenance of e-tutoring services. This includes providing access to relevant technology tools and platforms, as well as ensuring adequate staffing and training opportunities for e-tutors.