*International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*
*Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 374-399, January 2024*
*https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.1.19*
*Received Nov 27, 2023; Revised Jan 15, 2024; Accepted Jan 17, 2024*

# Empowering e-Tutors for Effective Online Teaching and Learning: E-tutors' Challenges and Perceptions

**Prince Chukwuneme Enwereji**, **Annelien Adriana van Rooyen**, **Raphael Nhlanhla Ngcobo** and **Faith Sedzani Musundwa**
Department of Financial Accounting, College of Accounting Sciences, University of South Africa

**Abstract.** Online learning has been considered as a paradigm shift in education that offers a transformative approach to the acquisition of knowledge and skills. The objectives of the study included identifying the perceptions of e-tutors on the usage of e-tutoring by online students; investigating the challenges encountered by students in using e-tutoring; and recommending measures to enhance e-tutoring in the Department of Financial Accounting at a South African university. A quantitative research approach and a descriptive research design were used, employing an online survey to collect data from e-tutors involved in financial accounting modules. A total of 188 questionnaires were distributed electronically to e-tutors in the Financial Accounting Department. Due to unforeseen challenges, only 95 e-tutors filled out the questionnaires completely. SPSS was used to analyze the data through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and the rotated component matrix was applied to assess the suitability of the sample for factor analysis and to discern the underlying structure and behavioral patterns within the data set. Findings reveal that e-tutors play a crucial role in assisting students with module-specific problems, addressing difficult topics, and making the course content more engaging. However, challenges such as the need for continuous training in online communication skills and the use of online technology tools were highlighted. Issues related to Internet connectivity and costs also impacted the effectiveness of e-tutors. Reliable Internet infrastructure and adequate resources are vital for addressing these challenges. Based on the findings, the study recommends that e-tutors engage in continuous professional development and receive module-specific training to enhance their knowledge and skills. Collaboration between e-tutors and lecturers should be encouraged to foster a supportive learning environment. The study concludes that the facilitation of e-tutoring in financial accounting modules has shown promising outcomes in supporting students' teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** internet connectivity; internet cost; online communication skills; online learning; supportive online environment

## 1. Introduction

Open distance and e-learning (ODeL) institutions have emerged as leaders in providing online education to students worldwide. With rapid advancements in technology, institutions such as the University of South Africa (Unisa) have been able to offer a wide range of courses and programs accessible to students across different locations and time zones (Maré & Mutezo, 2021). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions are increasingly adopting various approaches to ensure effective teaching and learning options to achieve successful learning outcomes. One such approach is online tutoring, or e-tutoring, which has become more prevalent as higher education institutions (HEIs) transition to online learning modes (Okoro et al., 2021). Unisa, as the largest distance-learning institution in Africa, has long embraced and facilitated online tutoring to advance knowledge and human capital (Shange, 2022). This aligns with South Africa's national development strategy, Vision 2030, which aims to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, and address unemployment (Blom, 2021). Govender (2018) emphasized that HEIs can provide services to students who may not have access to face-to-face interactions by employing online tutors.

As the demand for mass education increases, HEIs recognize the pivotal role of e-tutors in meeting students' needs (Mkhlze & Davids, 2021; Ramblrltch, 2018). de Metz and Bezuidenhout (2018) and Enwereji and van Rooyen (2023) highlighted that lecturers perceive e-tutors as crucial role-players in enhancing the success of any computer-mediated communication method of teaching and learning. Technological advancements, such as networked technologies and virtual learning environments, have significantly transformed the interaction between students, institutions, and the learning environment, with e-tutors facilitating this transformation (Maré & Mutezo, 2021). E-tutoring offers individualized teaching or supervision in settings where frequent face-to-face interaction between a teacher/supervisor and student is challenging (Ramorola, 2018). According to Govender (2018), the primary objective of e-tutoring is to provide students with interactive sessions in the learning environment. E-tutors can assist students in understanding course material, answering questions, providing feedback, and supporting them throughout their academic journey (Joubert & Snyman, 2020). E-tutoring enhances the accessibility, flexibility, and effectiveness of online education by offering personalized support and guidance (Liu & Li, 2020).

In a global context, e-tutoring has become an integral component of online education, providing students with the necessary support and guidance to succeed in their academic pursuits (Rakoma, 2018). The Department of Financial Accounting, like many other departments at Unisa, recognizes the value of e-tutoring and has implemented various e-tutoring programs to cater to the diverse needs of its students. However, it is crucial to assess the perceptions of e-tutors regarding their roles and effectiveness in the online setting to establish measures to enhance e-tutoring. Exploring these perceptions can enable HEIs to identify areas for improvement and make informed decisions on enhancing the e-tutoring services offered to students. We expect that the findings of this study will provide insights into the effectiveness of e-tutoring in the Department of Financial Accounting and identify best practices for e-tutoring to improve students'

learning outcomes. This study addresses a significant gap in the existing literature by focusing on the understudied aspect of e-tutors' perceptions of the services they provide to the institution within the context of online education. While numerous studies have explored the roles of e-tutors and measured the perspectives of students on e-tutoring, there remains a noticeable dearth in understanding how e-tutors themselves perceive their contributions to the online learning community (Huang & Liu, 2015; Kola, 2018; Pitsoane et al., 2015). This gap is particularly pronounced in the context of developing countries such as South Africa, where the adoption of online learning is gaining increasing significance. The urgency of this study is highlighted by the transformative role that e-tutoring plays in facilitating accessibility, individualized teaching, and effective learning outcomes. This study aims to provide insights crucial for refining e-tutoring services, addressing challenges, and optimizing the impact of online education, thereby contributing substantially to the field of e-learning in the South African context. The following sections discuss the theoretical background, research setting, research methodology, findings, and implications of the study.

## 2. Theoretical Background

The theory of social constructivism posits that learning is a collaborative process in which students and teachers engage in dialogue, ask questions, and construct knowledge through social interactions (Shapiro, 2011). According to Dimitriadis and Kamberelis (2006), social constructivism is a philosophy of knowledge in communication science and sociology that emphasizes the joint venture of understanding formed by individuals. This theory challenges traditional constructivism by asserting that cognitive processes are influenced by social experiences and that learning involves students integrating into a cultural group rather than just assimilating and accepting new information (Palincsar, 1998). In support of this assertion, Geels (2020) stated that social constructivist learning occurs through social interaction with others. Students can construct new knowledge and meaning from their experiences by engaging in dialogue and collaboration (Kaufman, 2018).

Within the framework of social constructivism, three key components are identified: social interaction, the well-informed other, and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006). Social interaction can occur in physical settings, such as classrooms, as well as in online environments, including e-tutoring sessions (Doukakis et al., 2020). The well-informed other (e-tutor in this context) refers to a knowledgeable and experienced person who can provide guidance and support to students in their learning process (Zhang & Zhang, 2019). In the context of e-tutoring, Prestigiacomo et al. (2020) confirmed that e-tutors serve as well-informed others who offer feedback, advice, and resources to help students construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. The concept of ZPD, as asserted by Sage (2022), refers to the range of tasks a student can perform with the guidance and support of a more knowledgeable other but cannot accomplish independently. In e-tutoring, e-tutors can identify students' ZPD and provide appropriate guidance and support to help them progress beyond their current level of understanding (Pathan et al.,

2018). Social constructivism offers a framework for understanding how e-tutors can facilitate and support the learning process in an online environment by focusing on these three components.

Building upon the principles of social constructivism, learning is seen as a collaborative process that involves active participation and interaction between students and their environment (Handrianto & Rahman, 2019). According to Vygotsky (1978), students construct knowledge and meaning through social interactions with others. Consistent with this viewpoint, Dimitriadis and Kamberelis (2006) proposed that knowledge is not merely acquired but is constructed through social interactions and experiences. In an e-learning environment, e-tutors play a critical role in facilitating and guiding the construction of knowledge by students. E-tutors are essential in supporting the social constructivist theory of learning, which has demonstrated positive outcomes (Molotsi & Goosen, 2019). E-tutors create a supportive and engaging learning environment by providing feedback, guidance, and encouragement. They also foster peer-to-peer interactions, encouraging students to share their experiences and perspectives and collaborate in the construction of knowledge (Shange, 2021). E-tutors can personalize the learning experience by offering individualized support and guidance tailored to students' unique needs and learning styles. They facilitate collaborations, provide scaffolding, and deliver timely feedback (Kibuku, 2021). This personalized approach helps students to construct meaning from their experiences, enhancing their motivation and engagement in the learning process. The roles and effectiveness of e-tutors in an online institution align with the principles of social constructivism, as they promote knowledge construction, motivation, and engagement among students.

Within the online-education space, the integration of social constructivism as a theoretical framework becomes particularly crucial and this shapes the dynamics of virtual learning environments and the role of e-tutors. Online education, by its nature, relies on digital platforms and asynchronous interactions, yet the principles of social constructivism persist in emphasizing collaborative learning through social interaction. In the digital learning space, the e-tutor serves as the well-informed other who facilitates social interactions and guides students through their ZPD. As students engage in dialogue and collaboration within the online platforms, e-tutors play a pivotal role in providing personalized support, constructive feedback, and resources to foster knowledge construction. The principles of social constructivism, seamlessly adapted to the online-education context, highlight the importance of e-tutors in creating an interactive and supportive virtual-learning environment. In this paradigm, e-tutors empower students to construct meaning collaboratively, transcending the limitations of physical classrooms and embracing the opportunities presented by online learning.

## 3. Context of the Study

Unisa is an ODeL institution that offers e-tutoring services to its students as part of its comprehensive teaching and learning offering. As mentioned earlier, e-tutoring is an online mode of learning adopted by Unisa to provide academic

support to remote students alongside other support modes such as video conferencing, email, instant messaging, and other technology interventions possible via a digital platform (Molotsi & Goosen, 2019). Unisa utilizes the Moodle online learning management system (LMS), which enables students to connect with their tutors and access course materials from anywhere in the world (Unisa, 2022). E-tutoring sessions are typically scheduled in advance and are conducted for small groups of learners. In addition to traditional e-tutoring sessions, Unisa offers interactive online workshops and webinars that cover topics related to academic success, such as time management, examination preparation, and study skills (Maré & Mutezo, 2021). These sessions aim to provide practical tips and strategies to help students excel in their studies. E-tutoring has proven to be an essential component of Unisa's approach to distance education, ensuring that students have access to the necessary academic support to succeed in their studies (Makwara, 2019).

To avail support to all students, regardless of their location, Unisa implemented e-tutoring in all undergraduate learning programs in 2014 by assigning one e-tutor to approximately 200 students (Unisa, 2018). This reduced the teacher–learner ratio of 1:1000 which was in place prior to the implementation of the tutoring system. This initiative aims to make teaching more effective by providing module lecturers who oversee the delivery of modules to students with teaching assistance (Nsamba, 2016). The tutors are recruited from the institution and must hold a qualification with a higher National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level than the module that they will tutor. Once appointed, e-tutors undergo training sessions organized by the Human Resource Department through the LMS to familiarize themselves with the available tools. The LMS utilizes technologies such as discussion forums, online announcements, self-assessments, additional resources, and web materials for teaching and learning. Through the LMS discussion forum, e-tutoring encompasses synchronous and asynchronous aspects, allowing students to submit messages instantaneously and receive immediate feedback from other students and their e-tutor. E-tutors also receive subject-specific training from the module lecturer to become acquainted with the study-material content. Unisa's e-tutors are required to work 75 hours per semester, which translates to 5 hours per week on the e-tutor site (Unisa, 2018). E-tutors communicate their available days and times directly to students. Although e-tutors may only be available at specific times or on particular days, students can engage in synchronous or asynchronous communication and interaction on the e-tutor site. Collaboration between module lecturers and e-tutors is crucial to determine and coordinate activities on each site, minimizing redundancy and confusion. Tutors are not entirely independent, as lecturers have access to and monitor activity across all the sites availed to tutors.

The e-tutors at Unisa play a vital role in providing academic support to distance-learning students (Shange, 2021). They work closely with individual students, providing personalized academic support, offering feedback on written work, and answering questions about course content (de Metz & Bezuidenhout, 2018). E-tutors also facilitate and moderate online discussion forums and chat sessions to encourage student participation and engagement. Additionally, they

play a crucial role in creating and sharing resources such as study materials, tutorials, and online workshops, which are designed to help students succeed in their courses (Molotsi & Goosen, 2019). At Unisa, e-tutors actively monitor students' progress, providing feedback on their performance and identifying those who may be struggling. They offer additional support and work closely with other support services at the university, such as academic advisors and technical-support staff, to ensure that students receive comprehensive assistance (Unisa, 2018). E-tutoring not only serves a pedagogical and intellectual function but also creates a social learning environment that helps students overcome feelings of loneliness and a lack of motivation.

The Department of Financial Accounting at Unisa, which is under consideration in this paper, has on average 35,000 undergraduate students that must be catered to annually, with the largest group making up first year students and the least represented being third year students. Based on student numbers, the size of the department is the largest in the College of Accounting Sciences. Considering the significance of e-tutoring in supporting students' academic journey, the current study therefore aims to assess the perceptions of e-tutors regarding the implementation of the e-tutoring project in the Department of Financial Accounting at Unisa. The study seeks to gain insights into their experiences, the challenges they face, and suggestions for improving the e-tutoring program by exploring the e-tutors' perspectives. Understanding the perceptions of e-tutors would contribute to enhance the effectiveness of e-tutoring and ultimately improve the learning experience for distance-learning students at Unisa and in other developing countries around the world.

**3.1 E-tutoring Landscape in the South African Context**

E-tutoring, also known as online tutoring or virtual tutoring, has gained significant traction in the education industry worldwide, including in South Africa (Tan, 2019). The use of technology to facilitate tutoring services has seen a notable increase in recent years, further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ros & Neuwirth, 2020). There has been a gradual shift towards e-learning and e-tutoring, particularly in urban areas with widespread technology access. Various platforms and technologies support the e-tutoring landscape in South Africa (Maré & Mutezo, 2021). These include video-conferencing tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams, as well as online learning platforms such as Moodle and Blackboard. Private tutoring platforms in the country have also embraced online tutoring, enabling students to access a diverse range of subjects and tutors from any location (Ferri et al., 2020).

The concept of e-tutoring has been present in South Africa for quite some time, with early trials dating back to the early 2000s. Initially, e-tutoring initiatives focused on providing remote and online support to students in rural and disadvantaged areas (Makwara, 2019). While it is challenging to pinpoint the exact date when e-tutoring began in South Africa due to the gradual evolution of digital technologies in education, several key milestones have shaped its development. One such milestone occurred in the mid-1990s, when Unisa started offering distance education courses through digital technologies (Tarusikirwa,

2022). Unisa was among the first universities in South Africa to embrace digital technologies for distance education, expanding its e-learning offerings over time. In the early 2000s, the South African Government also invested in digital technologies to support teaching and learning in schools, with a particular focus on providing online support to learners in rural and disadvantaged areas (Mahlangu, 2022). Initiatives such as the Bridges to the Future Program and the Khanya Project aimed to integrate technology into teaching and learning, enhancing the quality of education and expanding access to educational resources (Ngqondi & Mauwa, 2019). The Khanya Project, for example, reached thousands of schools and trained numerous teachers (Mahlo & Waghid, 2022). Furthermore, universities such as the University of Cape Town, the University of Pretoria, and the University of the Witwatersrand introduced e-tutoring programs to support their students (Kgosinyane, 2019).

The adoption of e-tutoring in South Africa has enabled learners and students, even in the most remote areas of the country, to access educational resources and support from anywhere (Malale et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated the growth of e-tutoring, as schools and educational institutions shifted to online learning and remote teaching (Matarirano et al., 2021). This widespread adoption of digital technologies for teaching and learning has not been without challenges, especially concerning the digital divide. Many students in South Africa lack access to reliable Internet connectivity and affordable devices, particularly in rural areas (Lai & Widmar, 2021). This digital divide hinders the potential benefits of e-tutoring for students in these regions. Additionally, tutors require adequate training and support to effectively conduct e-tutoring sessions, as the online environment demands different skills compared to traditional teaching and tutoring (Doukakis, 2021). Additionally, Pedro and Kumar (2019) highlighted the lack of regulation and oversight of e-tutoring services in South Africa, which raises concerns about the quality and standard of online tutoring. This emphasizes the need for accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that students receive high-quality tutoring services that meet their needs.

The implementation of e-tutoring in South Africa has played a crucial role in providing equitable access to high-quality educational resources and support for students from remote or underprivileged areas (Mahlangu, 2022). This is particularly significant in a nation where many learners and students face socio-economic challenges, such as poverty and limited availability of educational resources. E-tutoring offers flexibility, allowing students to attend tutoring sessions from anywhere with an Internet connection, benefiting those living in rural areas or with mobility issues (Promtep et al., 2019). Another advantage of e-tutoring in the South African context is its cost-effectiveness. Online tutoring services are generally more affordable than in-person tutoring, making them accessible to a wider range of students (Lembani et al., 2020). E-tutoring can be scheduled outside of regular class and working hours, enabling learners and students to receive support at their convenience (Molotsi & Goosen, 2019). With online platforms, tutors can easily track students' progress and provide personalized support based on their individual needs. E-tutoring has the potential to offer valuable support to students in South Africa, particularly those facing

geographic and socio-economic barriers (Mahlangu, 2022). However, addressing the digital divide and providing adequate training and support for tutors are crucial to ensure that e-tutoring can effectively improve educational outcomes for all students (Pedro & Kumar, 2019).

**3.2 Perceptions and Challenges of e-Tutoring**

In online education, e-tutoring is perceived as a highly instructive and intellectually stimulating activity for students that offers a crucial opportunity to cultivate critical analytical skills and paradigms that are instrumental throughout their academic journeys and future careers (Rakoma, 2018). According to Maré and Mutezo (2021), e-tutoring, akin to traditional tutoring, is a specialized form of teaching, primarily characterized by virtual interactions between the tutor and the student. Effective instruction obtained in e-tutoring, as noted by Sauti (2021), revolves around the social development of students, which helps to address both personal and cognitive dimensions. In this digital era, e-tutoring is perceived as a dynamic process that goes beyond the transmission of information and fosters holistic growth and learning (Altmann et al., 2022).

According to Kunwar et al. (2020), the role of an e-tutor is perceived as that of a supportive mentor who not only imparts knowledge but also provides personalized attention to each student, consistently encouraging academic success. This personalized approach aligns with the perspective presented by Raviolo et al. (2020), who emphasized that e-tutoring involves teaching, guiding students through academic preparation, and instilling a passion for pursuing their chosen career paths. E-tutors, in their virtual capacities, continue to play the pivotal role of mentors and educators, adapting traditional tutoring principles to the digital landscape while maintaining a focus on the multifaceted development of students in both personal and academic dimensions (Enwereji et al., 2023).

Regarding the challenges of e-tutoring, Parte and Herrador-Alcaide (2021) affirmed that e-tutors are faced with numerous challenges in adapting to the dynamics of online teaching, maintaining communication with students, and fostering student growth and learning. Despite advancements in cloud-based collaboration tools and video-conferencing software, technological challenges persist as barriers to the growth of e-tutoring platforms, particularly in developing countries (Akhter et al., 2022). Notably, unreliable connections, a lack of good equipment, operating-system issues, and browser compatibility problems contribute to technical concerns for e-tutors (Rakoma, 2018; Tan, 2019). Access constraints, primarily due to insufficient equipment or connectivity, pose significant challenges (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). To address technological constraints, Pitsoane and Lethole (2022) recommended effective professional development for e-tutors in utilizing new technologies to their full potential, while Maré and Mutezo (2021) stressed the need for enhanced support through technology integration and administrative/peer support.

Another challenge in e-tutoring is the lack of experience of e-tutors, as highlighted by Youde (2019) and supported by Kebritchi et al. (2017). Inexperienced e-tutors may struggle to effectively manage virtual classrooms, engage with students, and

provide adequate support (Kebritchi et al., 2017). The experience level of e-tutors is crucial in helping students effectively interact with knowledge in an online learning setting (Altmann et al., 2022). Experienced e-tutors can provide timely feedback, create interactive learning activities, and foster a sense of community among students. In addition, inadequate feedback is identified as a challenge in e-tutoring (Carless, 2022). Although feedback loops are valuable in establishing strong ties with students in asynchronous learning environments, providing effective feedback in online learning can be challenging due to the lack of face-to-face interaction (Cook et al., 2021). Carless (2022) emphasized the importance of feedback as a critical component of online teaching, providing students with direction and helping them identify areas for improvement. E-tutors are expected to justify comments clearly and provide recommendations for student improvement, fostering an iterative cycle focused on individual student development (de Metz & Bezuidenhout, 2018).

Despite the challenges faced in e-tutoring, which include the digital divide and the need for tutor training, e-tutoring is experiencing a global surge in popularity as a transformative approach to education. This phenomenon is not limited to South Africa alone but is becoming increasingly prevalent worldwide. E-tutoring breaks down barriers and connects learners with knowledgeable tutors from around the globe, overcoming the limitations in access to quality educational resources. This makes tutoring more accessible and inclusive for students who may otherwise be unable to afford such support. While there are still challenges to be overcome, such as the digital divide and the need for tutor training, the potential benefits of e-tutoring make it a promising avenue for the future of education worldwide, enabling learners of all backgrounds to benefit from technology-enabled learning experiences. This study, therefore, investigates the perceptions of e-tutors in the implementation of e-tutoring in the Department of Financial Accounting at Unisa and the challenges encountered during the process of implementation.

## 4. Research Methodology

E-tutoring has become increasingly popular in HEIs, including the Department of Financial Accounting at Unisa. This study aims to investigate the perceptions of e-tutors and the challenges surrounding the implementation of effective e-tutoring. The purpose of the integrated e-tutor project at Unisa is to advise and assist students, promote participation, and answer their questions. It also aims to decrease drop-out rates, increase completion rates, and enhance student support. The research employed a quantitative research methodology to gather and analyze data from a subset of e-tutors, utilizing a close-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire employed a 4-point Likert scale to assess e-tutors' positive and negative sentiments regarding their perceptions of e-tutoring, as well as the challenges they anticipate in e-tutoring. A descriptive quantitative research design was adopted in the study, which helped to describe the reactions of interacting variables in the study.

The target population for this study was e-tutors at the Department of Financial Accounting at Unisa. A questionnaire was designed to assess the e-tutors'

perceptions of the effectiveness of e-tutoring. The questionnaire contained questions measuring various aspects of e-tutoring, such as communication, quality of resources, ease of use of technology, and overall satisfaction with the e-tutoring program. To maintain validity of the study, the questionnaire was distributed electronically to a sample of 188 e-tutors. In all, 95 e-tutors responded (51% response rate), which was deemed adequate to arrive at a reliable conclusion, according to the study of Anseel et al. (2010). Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29.

Reliability was maintained by employing a pilot test, where 10 questionnaires were distributed to a sub-sample of the respondents to ensure that the questions were consistent in measuring what they intended to measure. In the quest to maintain reliability, the 10 questionnaires for the pilot study were used to ensure that the questions were clear, simple, and easily understood by e-tutors. In maintaining internal reliability, each section in the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha to test the degree of reliability. SPSS was used to analyze the data through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and the rotated component matrix was applied to assess the suitability of the sample for factor analysis and to discern the underlying structure and behavioral patterns within the data set. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. Inferential statistics, such as the chi-square test of independence and factor analysis, were used to test for significant differences between groups of e-tutors or to compare the perceptions of e-tutors in different sub-groups. Descriptive statistics assisted in summarizing the set of data related to the population of the study. It concentrated on defining and analyzing all quantitative data to discover trends and patterns demonstrating the links among variables. The inferential statistics yielded appropriate inferences about the population from the sample, including generalizations and predictions. Additional statistical analysis was also required to determine the relationships between the various factors. We further analyzed the data to make sure it matched the study objectives and to offer concrete proof that the issue under study could be handled. Additionally, we verified the results with those from the literature reviewed to offer recommendations to improve e-tutoring.

## 5. Presentation of Research Results

The results obtained through structured questionnaires administered to e-tutors are presented in this section. The section presents results on the biographical information of the respondents, the perceptions of the usage of e-tutoring by respondents, and the challenges encountered by the respondents in an endeavor to discharge their services.

### 5.1 Biographical Information

This section presents the biographical information of the respondents, such as their ages, educational qualifications, and years of experience. Figure 1 presents the distribution of respondents according to age.

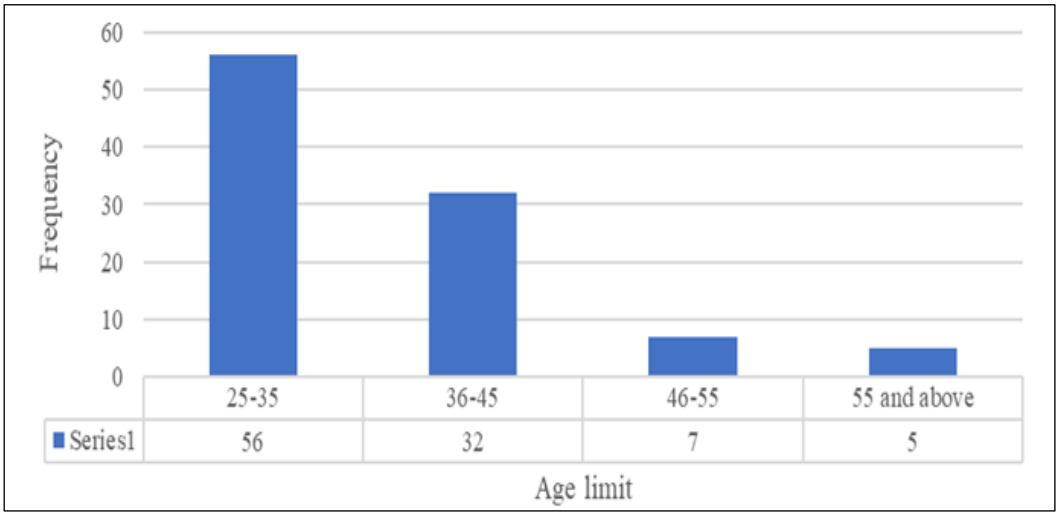


**Figure 1: Age distribution of respondents**

As seen in Figure 1, the age distribution of the e-tutors who participated in the study reveals interesting patterns. The majority of respondents (56%) fell within the age range of 25 to 35 years. Following that, 32% of the respondents were between 36 and 45 years old. Additionally, 7% of the respondents were in the age range of 46 to 55 years, while only 5% of the respondents were older than 55 years. These findings shed light on the age demographics of the e-tutor population and the corresponding student population from which the respondents were recruited. Figure 2 presents the distribution of respondents according to highest educational qualification obtained.

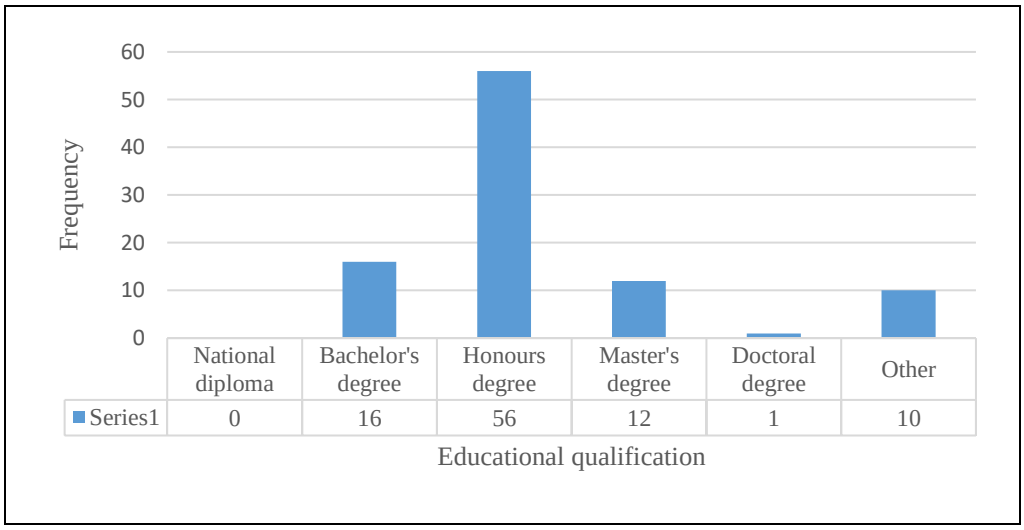


**Figure 2: Distribution of respondents as per highest educational qualification obtained**

Figure 2 indicates that the participating e-tutors had a diverse range of academic backgrounds. The majority of respondents (56 individuals) held an honors degree, followed by those with a bachelor's degree (16 individuals). Additionally, 12 respondents possessed a master's degree, while only 1 held a doctoral degree. It is worth noting that 10 respondents did not specify their highest educational

qualification. These findings highlight the prevalence of higher education qualifications among the e-tutor population, with a significant proportion having attained honors and bachelor's degrees. This falls in line with the recruitment strategy of the institution, which requires tutors to hold higher NQF qualifications than the module they tutor. All respondents held a minimum of a bachelor's degree, which is what is offered in the department. The varying educational qualifications among e-tutors can contribute to a rich pool of knowledge and expertise in online teaching and learning practices. Figure 3 presents the distribution of respondents according to years of experience as accounting e-tutors.

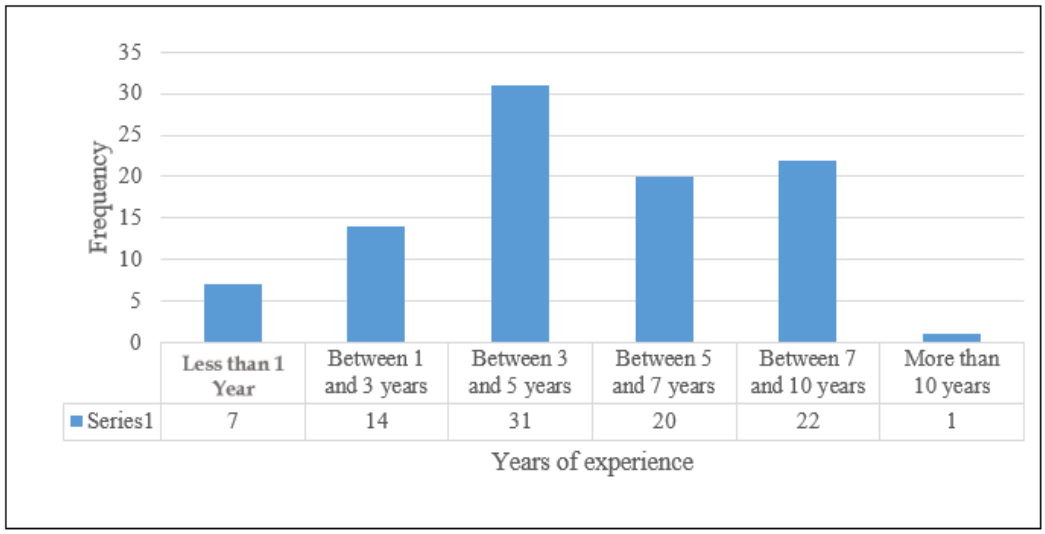


**Figure 3: Distribution of respondents as per years of experience as accounting e-tutors**

According to Figure 3, the distribution of respondents' years of experience reveals interesting findings. Among the e-tutors surveyed, only 1 individual reported having more than 10 years of experience in e-tutoring. In contrast, 22 respondents had worked in the field for 7 to 10 years, while 20 had 5 to 7 years of experience. Additionally, 31 respondents (the majority) reported having 3 to 5 years of experience, while 21 had 3 or less years of experience in e-tutoring. These findings provide valuable insights into the varying levels of experience among e-tutors, which can have implications for their proficiency and expertise in the online tutoring environment.

### 5.2 Perceptions of e-Tutors on the Usage of e-Tutoring by Online Students

This section measures the usage of e-tutoring and how it is perceived as an effective mode of teaching and learning at Unisa. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the KMO measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the KMO measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **KMO measure of sampling adequacy** | | .860 |
| **Bartlett's test of sphericity** | Approx. chi-square | 682.271 |
| | Df | 136 |
| | Sig. | .000 |

Factor analysis was used to identify the important factors concerning e-tutors' perceptions of the usage of e-tutoring. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy reflected a score of .860, which is well above the recommended value of .7. The score yielded by Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant at the $p < .05$ level. It can therefore be concluded that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix.

Table 2 shows all the factors (which can be referred to as components) extractable from the analysis, along with their eigenvalues. Only four factors were considered. The extraction method used was principal component analysis factoring with varimax rotation. The varimax method was chosen because it was assumed that the factors are independent of each other. For analysis and interpretation purposes, the study was only concerned with initial eigenvalues or extracted sums of squared loadings. In this case, four components contained 60.8% of the variation of the original variables, so the study considerably reduced the complexity of the data set by using these components, with only a 39.2% loss of information. Component 1 explains 36.6% of the variation, Component 2 explains 8.7%, Component 3 explains 7.9%, and Component 4 explains 7.7%. The remaining 13 components explain 39.1%.

**Table 2: Total variance explained**

| Component | Initial eigenvalues | | | Extraction sums of squared loadings | | | Rotation sums of squared loadings | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
| 1. Strategies | 6.220 | 36.591 | 36.591 | 6.220 | 36.591 | 36.591 | 5.710 | 33.588 | 33.588 |
| 2. Specific module | 1.478 | 8.696 | 45.286 | 1.478 | 8.696 | 45.286 | 1.612 | 9.484 | 43.072 |
| 3. Age | 1.334 | 7.847 | 53.134 | 1.334 | 7.847 | 53.134 | 1.512 | 8.895 | 51.967 |
| 4. Highest qualification | 1.301 | 7.654 | 60.788 | 1.301 | 7.654 | 60.788 | 1.500 | 8.821 | 60.788 |
| 5. Experience | 1.031 | 6.066 | 66.854 | | | | | | |
| 6. Difficult topics | 0.879 | 5.168 | 72.022 | | | | | | |
| 7. Helpful | 0.820 | 4.822 | 76.844 | | | | | | |
| 8. Content interesting | 0.643 | 3.780 | 80.625 | | | | | | |
| 9. Essential | 0.571 | 3.357 | 83.981 | | | | | | |
| 10. Needs | 0.493 | 2.902 | 86.883 | | | | | | |
| 11. Forum | 0.466 | 2.739 | 89.622 | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. Add resources | 0.383 | 2.253 | 91.875 | | | | | | |
| 13. Must add resources | 0.348 | 2.045 | 93.921 | | | | | | |
| 14. Outdated | 0.335 | 1.972 | 95.893 | | | | | | |
| 15. Struggle to interact | 0.303 | 1.781 | 97.675 | | | | | | |
| 16. Monitor progress | 0.251 | 1.478 | 99.152 | | | | | | |
| 17. Motivates | 0.144 | 0.848 | 100.000 | | | | | | |
| Extraction method: principal component analysis | | | | | | | | | |

The idea behind rotation is to reduce the number of factors on which the variables under investigation have high loadings. The rotated component matrix shows the factor loadings for each variable and the factor where each variable is loaded on most strongly. As seen in Table 3, based on these factor loadings, the positive perceptions subsets loaded strongly on Component 1, which is the "problem-solving and psychological" factor group. The "admin and progress" factor loaded strongly on Component 2. Component 3 leaned more towards the "content and assistance" factor group and, finally, Component 4 loaded on the "duties and roles" factor. Table 3 presents the rotated component matrix.

**Table 3: Rotated component matrix**

| | **Component** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** |
| Q6_DifficultTopics | .692 | | | |
| Q5_Experience | .819 | | | |
| Q7_Helpful | .759 | | | |
| Q8_ContentInteresting | .655 | | | |
| Q14_Outdated | .722 | | | |
| Q16_MonitorProgress | | .613 | | |
| Q17_Motivates | .670 | | | |
| Q19_Timeously | .743 | | | |
| Q18_Organise | | | | |
| Q20_Active | .867 | | | |
| Q21_Admin | | .538 | .519 | |
| Q22_Value | .797 | | | |
| Q23_Clear | | | | .544 |
| Q25_NotExtensive | | | -.724 | |
| Q35_TimeousAssist | | | .757 | |
| Q42_ProvideAnswers | | -.708 | | |
| Q46_UseStandardised | | | | -.760 |
| Extraction method: principal component analysis.<br>Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization. | | | | |
| a. Rotation converged in five iterations | | | | |

### 5.3 Challenges of e-Tutoring

This section presents the findings obtained from the study on the challenges faced by the respondents in discharging their services at Unisa. Table 4 presents descriptive statistics of the KMO measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test.

**Table 4: Descriptive statistics of the KMO measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **KMO measure of sampling adequacy** | | .640 |
| **Bartlett's test of sphericity** | Approx. chi-square | 316.233 |
| | df | 66 |
| | Sig. | .000 |

Factor analysis was used to identify the important factors concerning e-tutors' challenges on the usage of e-tutoring. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy reflected a score of .640, which is very close to the recommended value of .7. The score yielded by Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant at the $p < .05$ level. We conclude that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix.

Table 5 displays the factors (referred to as components) derived from the analysis, presenting their corresponding eigenvalues.

**Table 5: Total variance explained on components of e-tutor usage**

| Component | Initial eigenvalues | | | Extraction sums of squared loadings | | | Rotation sums of squared loadings | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
| 1. Strategies | 3.077 | 25.640 | 25.640 | 3.077 | 25.640 | 25.640 | 2.318 | 19.319 | 19.319 |
| 2. Specific module | 1.904 | 15.866 | 41.506 | 1.904 | 15.866 | 41.506 | 2.057 | 17.144 | 36.463 |
| 3. Age | 1.305 | 10.879 | 52.385 | 1.305 | 10.879 | 52.385 | 1.695 | 14.128 | 50.591 |
| 4. Highest qualification | 1.288 | 10.735 | 63.120 | 1.288 | 10.735 | 63.120 | 1.296 | 10.801 | 61.393 |
| 5. Experience | 1.081 | 9.011 | 72.131 | 1.081 | 9.011 | 72.131 | 1.289 | 10.738 | 72.131 |
| 6. Difficult topics | 0.802 | 6.681 | 78.812 | | | | | | |
| 7. Helpful | 0.678 | 5.646 | 84.459 | | | | | | |
| 8. Content interesting | 0.568 | 4.735 | 89.194 | | | | | | |
| 9. Essential | 0.435 | 3.624 | 92.818 | | | | | | |
| 10. Needs | 0.374 | 3.117 | 95.935 | | | | | | |
| 11. Forum | 0.279 | 2.326 | 98.261 | | | | | | |
| 12. Add resources | 0.209 | 1.739 | 100.000 | | | | | | |
| Extraction method: principal component analysis | | | | | | | | | |

The analysis considered only five factors. The extraction method employed was principal component analysis factoring, utilizing varimax rotation. Varimax was chosen due to the assumption that the factors are independent of each other. The study focused on initial eigenvalues or extracted sums of squared loadings for analysis and interpretation purposes. In this case, five components contained 72.1% of the variation of the original variables, so the study considerably reduced the complexity of the data set by using these components, with only a 27.9% loss of information. Component 1 explains 25.6% of the variation, Component 2 explains 15.9%, Component 3 explains 10.9%, Component 4 explains 10.7%, and Component 5 explains 9%. The remaining seven components explain only 27.9%.

**Table 6: Rotated component matrix of challenge variables under investigation**

| | Component | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| Q15_StruggleInteract | | | | | .743 |
| Q28_ShouldGetTrain | | | .659 | | |
| Q26_Demanding | | | | .885 | |
| Q27_StruggleFinAcc | | | | .642 | |
| Q30_TrainInOnline | .869 | | | | |
| Q31_AppreciateTrain | .856 | | | | |
| Q32_Quizzes | .776 | | | | |
| Q36_OftenNeedAssist | | | .816 | | |
| Q33_CommunicateLect | | | | | -.779 |
| Q34_EngageMore | | | .675 | | |
| Q38_BadInternet | | .869 | | | |
| Q39_InternetCost | | .904 | | | |
| Extraction method: principal component analysis.<br>Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization. | | | | | |
| a. Rotation converged in six iterations | | | | | |

The idea of rotation is to reduce the number of factors on which the variables under investigation have high loadings. The rotated component matrix shows the factor loadings for each variable and the factor on which each variable is loaded most strongly. In Table 6, based on these factor loadings, the "positive challenges" subset loaded strongly on Component 1, and this is the "train challenges" factor group. The "internet-related costs" subset loaded strongly on Component 2, while Component 3 mainly comprised of the "engagement" subset. Component 4 is strongly loaded with "effort" factors and Component 5 with "interaction" factors.

## 6. Discussion of Research Results

The results obtained in this study reveal the perceptions of e-tutors on e-tutoring and the challenges encountered in e-tutoring. Firstly, regarding the perceptions of e-tutors on e-tutoring, findings reveal that e-tutors play a crucial role in assisting students in solving module-specific problems in financial accounting modules. E-tutors support students in overcoming specific learning challenges by providing targeted assistance. This conforms with the findings of Joubert and

Snyman (2020), who affirmed that personalized support from e-tutors helps students overcome obstacles and gain a deeper understanding of the course material. The findings on perception demonstrate that e-tutors excel in helping students with complex topics within financial accounting modules. Their expertise and guidance in these areas provide students with the necessary tools to navigate through challenging concepts. Sauti (2021) reinforced the idea that e-tutors are instrumental in building students' confidence and competence in tackling difficult subject matter. Furthermore, e-tutors are effective in making course content interesting by incorporating innovative teaching methods and engaging instructional approaches. This not only enhances students' motivation but also facilitates their comprehension and retention of the subject matter, as highlighted by Sauti (2021).

Furthermore, findings confirm that e-tutors use up-to-date examples and case studies to assist students. This ensures the relevance and currency of the content, enhancing students' understanding of financial accounting concepts and their application in real-world contexts. This aligns with the view of Maré and Mutezo (2021), who emphasized the crucial role of e-tutors in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Moreover, e-tutors are perceived as motivators who inspire and encourage students in their studies. Fandiño and Velandia (2020) found that e-tutors are perceived as being supportive, fostering a positive learning environment, and instilling a sense of motivation and determination in students. The promptness of e-tutors in answering students' questions is also evident, addressing students' queries and concerns without unnecessary delays. Kibuku (2021) affirmed the importance of timely responses in ensuring students' progress in their studies. The support and guidance provided by e-tutors are recognized and appreciated by students, indicating the positive impact that e-tutoring has on their learning outcomes and academic experience. The respondents highlighted that e-tutors assist students with administrative problems, such as navigating online platforms, accessing course materials, and understanding administrative processes. This finding of this study is consistent with Joubert and Snyman (2020), who confirmed the e-tutor's ability to provide comprehensive support beyond academic matters, ensuring a smooth and hassle-free learning experience for students.

The findings from respondents indicate that e-tutors require training in online communication skills to effectively engage and interact with students in a virtual environment. Fandiño and Velandia (2020) emphasized the significance of fostering meaningful connections and facilitating effective online discussions through e-tutor training in online communication skills. Respondents of this study also expressed a need for training in setting further assessments, demonstrating the importance of understanding and implementing effective assessment strategies within online platforms. These findings suggest that e-tutors recognize the value of continuous professional development and acquiring the necessary skills to navigate the online teaching and learning environment. Addressing these challenges through targeted training programs can further empower e-tutors to enhance their effectiveness and support students' learning outcomes in the e-tutoring setting, as emphasized by Khtere and Yousef (2021).

Another finding highlights the connectivity issues and Internet costs faced by e-tutors. The study revealed that e-tutors struggle to maintain a reliable Internet connection, which directly impacts their ability to actively engage in online teaching and support activities. Motaung and Makombe (2021) attested to the significant hurdle posed by unreliable Internet connections, hindering e-tutors' effective communication with students, access to online resources, and delivery of instructional materials. Moreover, respondents mentioned the financial burden caused by Internet costs, further limiting their active participation in e-tutoring activities. These challenges emphasize the importance of providing adequate technical support and resources to e-tutors to ensure a seamless online learning experience. Letseka and Pitsoe (2018) highlighted the need to address connectivity and cost issues encountered in e-tutoring to mitigate the impact on e-tutors' involvement and enable them to effectively fulfil their roles in supporting students in the learning environment.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the significance of training e-tutors in the specific module content of financial accounting. This specialized training is intended to equip e-tutors with the necessary knowledge and expertise to effectively support students in their learning journey. Such training ensures prompt and efficient assistance in addressing student queries and concerns. Bakare (2020) emphasized the importance of establishing clear communication channels and support systems to facilitate seamless collaboration between e-tutors and lecturers. Additionally, fostering increased engagement between lecturers and e-tutors, as advocated by Clauss et al. (2021), can promote knowledge sharing, collaboration, and the exchange of best practices. By prioritizing training, timely assistance, and enhanced engagement, institutions can enhance the effectiveness of e-tutoring in financial accounting modules, resulting in improved learning outcomes for students.

Other challenges noted in the study include the demanding nature of e-tutoring roles and difficulties in answering module-specific questions in financial accounting. E-tutoring requires a significant investment of time and effort, as e-tutors are responsible for providing support to students and addressing their academic needs (Sithole & Gumede, 2022). The diverse range of questions and inquiries from students, particularly those related to module-specific topics in financial accounting, can pose a challenge for e-tutors. This again highlights the importance of continuous professional development and support mechanisms for e-tutors to enhance their subject knowledge and problem-solving skills. Acknowledging and addressing these challenges can allow institutions to implement strategies that mitigate the demanding nature of e-tutoring and provide targeted support to e-tutors in effectively addressing module-specific queries, thereby enhancing the overall e-tutoring experience for both e-tutors and students (Pedro & Kumar, 2019).

## 7. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study highlighted the significant role of e-tutoring in enhancing students' learning experiences within financial accounting modules. The findings affirm that e-tutors are perceived as actively contributing to

students' academic progress by addressing module-specific challenges and difficult topics. Respondents confirmed that students perceive e-tutoring as highly beneficial, making course content more engaging, thus appreciating the efforts of e-tutors in providing relevant examples and case studies. E-tutors play a motivating role by offering timely assistance and actively engaging with students, a sentiment acknowledged and valued by the students themselves. However, the study brought to light certain challenges faced by e-tutors, such as the need for training in online communication skills and effective use of technology tools. Internet connectivity and cost-related issues also pose notable challenges to e-tutoring activities. Addressing these challenges through targeted training programs and improvements in Internet infrastructure can further enhance the efficacy of e-tutoring. The generalizability of the findings of this study can be supported by the size of Unisa's Department of Financial Accounting e-tutor project, making the findings applicable to similar settings both within and outside the institution. Particularly relevant is the applicability of these insights to HEIs in developing countries, where socio-economic challenges often impact educational outcomes. In essence, enhancing e-tutoring and addressing its challenges can elevate the quality of education and support provided to students in online learning environments.

## 8. Recommendations of the Study

This study makes recommendations to Unisa, e-tutors, and other HEIs.

### 8.1 Recommendations to Unisa

*Continuous professional development*: Unisa should ensure that e-tutors are given opportunities for continuous professional development to enhance their online communication skills and proficiency in using online technology tools. This will enable e-tutors to effectively engage with students and deliver quality e-tutoring sessions.

*Module-specific training*: E-tutors should receive specialized training on the specific content of financial accounting modules. This will enable them to have a deep understanding of the subject matter and better assist students with module-specific questions and challenges.

*Collaboration with lecturers:* Individual departments should ensure that e-tutors engage with financial accounting lecturers to foster collaboration and the exchange of knowledge. Regular communication and feedback sessions with lecturers can help e-tutors stay up to date on any changes in the curriculum and ensure their assistance aligns with the academic requirements.

*Fostering a supportive environment*: Unisa should ensure that e-tutors create a supportive and encouraging learning environment for e-tutors and students. This can be done by providing timely assistance, offering constructive feedback, and motivating students to overcome challenges and excel in their studies.

### 8.2 Recommendations to e-Tutors

*Effective use of technology*: E-tutors should receive training on the effective use of online technology tools, ensuring proficiency in navigating virtual platforms and facilitating seamless engagement with students. This includes mastering the use of communication tools, collaborative platforms, and assessment tools.

*Timely responses and engagement*: E-tutors should prioritize timely responses to student queries and actively engage with students in virtual discussions. This can significantly contribute to a positive learning environment and foster a sense of motivation and determination among students.

*Support mechanisms for administrative issues*: E-tutors should receive training and support to assist students with administrative problems, such as navigating online platforms, accessing course materials, and understanding administrative processes. This comprehensive support ensures a smooth and hassle-free learning experience for students.

*Feedback mechanisms*: E-tutors should establish effective feedback mechanisms to provide solutions to students' queries. Regular feedback loops between e-tutors and relevant stakeholders can contribute to ongoing improvement and refinement of e-tutoring practices.

### 8.3 Recommendations to Higher Education Institutions

*Training and support*: HEIs should provide comprehensive training programs for e-tutors, focusing on online communication skills, effective use of technology tools, and module-specific content. Continuous support and professional development opportunities should be offered to ensure that e-tutors have the necessary skills to deliver high-quality e-tutoring sessions.

*Collaboration and coordination*: Institutions should promote collaboration and coordination between e-tutors and lecturers. Regular meetings, workshops, and communication channels should be established to facilitate knowledge sharing, clarify expectations, and ensure a cohesive approach to supporting students' learning.

*Infrastructure and resources*: Institutions should invest in robust Internet infrastructure to ensure reliable connectivity for e-tutors. Additionally, access to necessary resources and technology tools should be provided to e-tutors to facilitate their e-tutoring activities effectively.

*Recognition and support*: HEIs should recognize the valuable contributions of e-tutors and provide them with the necessary support and resources. This includes acknowledging their efforts, addressing their concerns, and ensuring fair remuneration and professional growth opportunities.

## 9. Limitation and Future Recommendations

The findings and recommendations of this study may be context-specific to the environment of Unisa and the Department of Financial Accounting. Generalizing these recommendations to other disciplines or institutions without further

investigation may not be appropriate. The study relied on self-reported data from e-tutors, which may introduce response bias. Respondents might have provided answers that they perceived as favorable, affecting the accuracy and reliability of the data. Future studies should consider a comparative analysis of e-tutoring practices across various disciplines to explore potential differences in the challenges faced and the effectiveness of implemented strategies. Future studies should investigate the perspectives of students regarding the effectiveness of e-tutoring. Understanding student experiences and expectations can complement e-tutor insights, providing a more comprehensive view of the e-tutoring landscape. In addition, a study should be done to investigate the direct impact of e-tutor training programs on student outcomes. Assessing the correlation between the depth of training received by e-tutors and the quality of their support can inform the design of future training initiatives. Finally, a qualitative study should be done to explore the challenges of e-tutoring and measures to improve e-tutoring from the e-tutors' perspectives.

## 10. References


Adnan, M., & Anwar, K. (2020). Online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Students' perspectives. *Journal of Pedagogical Sociology and Psychology, 2*(1), 45–51. http://www.doi.org/10.33902/JPSP. 2020261309

Akhter, H., Abdul Rahman, A. A., Jafrin, N., Mohammad Saif, A. N., Esha, B. H., & Mostafa, R. (2022). Investigating the barriers that intensify undergraduates' unwillingness to online learning during COVID-19: A study on public universities in a developing country. *Cogent Education, 9*(1), 2028342. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2022.2028342

Altmann, M., Langesee, L. M., Berger, V., Höflich, M. A., & Materna, A. (2022). Determining factors of international e-tutoring. *International Journal of Management, Knowledge and Learning, 11,* 105–115. https://doi.org/10.53615/2232-5697.11.105-115

Anseel, F., Lievens, F., Schollaert, E., & Choragwicka, B. (2010). Response rates in organizational science, 1995–2008: A meta-analytic review and guidelines for survey researchers. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 25*(1), 335–349. https://link. Springer .com/article/10.1007/s10869-010-9157-6

Bakare, T. V. (2020). *Use of e-learning as a teaching method to improve academic efficiency in the Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos* [Conference session]. 2020 IACB, ICE,
ICTE, & ISEC Proceedings. https://api-ir.unilag.edu.ng/server/api/core/bitstreams/a4621d17-fa29-4d0e-93c5-3b816a4106a5/content

Blom, P. P. (2021). *Progress with regard to the unemployment reduction targets set by National Development Plan Vision 2030* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Johannesburg, South Africa. https://ujcontent.uj.ac.za/esploro/outputs/graduate/Progress-with-regard-to-the-unemployment/9914909407691

Carless, D. (2022). From teacher transmission of information to student feedback literacy: Activating the learner role in feedback processes. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 23*(2), 143–153. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787420945845

Clauss, A., Altmann, M., & Lenk, F. (2021). *Successful virtual collaborative learning: A shift in perspective* [Conference session]. Computer Supported Education: 12th International Conference, CSEDU 2020 [virtual event], May 2–4, 2020 (pp. 245–262). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86439-2_13

Cook, K., Lakin, H., Allen, S., Byrd, S., Nickerson, B., & Kastelein, K. (2021). Virtual coaching PLCs in and out of school. *Connected Science Learning, 3*(1), 1–13.

de Metz, N., & Bezuidenhout, A. (2018). An importance–competence analysis of the roles and competencies of e-tutors at an open distance learning institution. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, *34*(5), 27–43. https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.3364

Dimitriadis, G., & Kamberelis, G. (2006). *Theory for education: Adapted from theory for religious studies, by William E. Deal and Timothy K. Beal*. Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Theory-for-Education-Adapted-from-Theory-for-Religious-Studies-by-William/Dimitriadis-Kamberelis/p/book/9780415974196

Doukakis, S. (2021). A management approach of an e-tutoring program for high school students. *International Journal of Managing Information Technology, 13*(1), 21–31. https://doi.org/10.5121/ijmit.2021.13102

Doukakis, S., Michalopoulou, G., & Chira, T. (2020). *The integration of e-tutoring programs in secondary education: A digital transformation strategy* [Conference session]. 2020 5th South-East Europe Design Automation, Computer Engineering, Computer Networks and Social Media Conference (SEEDA-CECNSM). https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/9221809digital divide and epistemological access. *Unpublished paper*. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Lesley-LeGrange/publication/347974339 _The_COVID-19_Pandemic_Online_Teaching_Learning_

Enwereji, P. C., & van Rooyen, A.A. (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, 14*(2), 302–327. https://doi.org/10.4314/jsdlp.v14i2.16

Fandiño, F. G. E., & Velandia, A. J. S. (2020). How an online tutor motivates e-learning English. *Heliyon*, *6*(8), 04630. https://www.cell.com/heliyon/pdf/S2405-8440(20)31474-2.pdf

Ferri, F., Grifoni, P., & Guzzo, T. (2020). Online learning and emergency remote teaching: Opportunities and challenges in emergency situations. *Societies*, *10*(4), 86–98. https://www.mdpi.com/2075-4698/10/4/86

Geels, F. W. (2020). Micro-foundations of the multi-level perspective on socio-technical transitions: Developing a multi-dimensional model of agency through crossovers between social constructivism, evolutionary economics and neo-institutional theory. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *152*(1), 119894. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science /article/abs/pii/S0040162518316111

Govender, P. (2018). E-tutors' pedagogical practices in a selected open and distance learning university in South Africa. *Progressio*, *40*(1), 1–16. https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.25159/0256-8853/44706

Handrianto, C., & Rahman, M. A. (2019). Project based learning: A review of literature on its outcomes and implementation issues. *LET: Linguistics, Literature and English Teaching Journal*, 8(2), 110–129. https://jurnal.uin-antasari.ac.id/index.php/let/article/view/2394

Huang, C. W., & Liu, E. Z. F. (2015). E-tutor perceptions towards the Star Rural Area e-Learning Project. *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (IJOPCD), 5*(1), 20–29. https://doi.org/10.4018/ijopcd.2015010102

Joubert, Y., & Snyman, A. (2020). The contribution of the e-tutor model in an open distance learning higher education institution: The perspective of the e-tutor. *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, *15*(1), 6–21. https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC-1d66798530

Kaufman, D. M. (2018). Teaching and learning in medical education: How theory can inform practice. *Understanding medical education: Evidence, theory, and practice*, *2*(2), 37–69. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227581502_Teaching_and_Learning_in_Medical_Education_How_Theory_Can_Inform_Practice

Kebritchi, M., Lipschuetz, A., & Santiague, L. (2017). Issues and challenges for teaching successful online courses in higher education. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems, 46*(1), 4–29. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239516661713

Kgosinyane, E. M. (2019). *Open distance learning (ODL): A "shock" to learners in South Africa*. University of Limpopo. http://hdl.handle.net/10386/2768

Khtere, A. R., & Yousef, A. M. F. (2021). The professionalism of online teaching in Arab universities. *Educational Technology & Society*, *24*(3), 1–12. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27032852

Kibuku, R. N. (2021). *An e-learning theory for interaction and collaboration* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Nairobi. http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/155761

Kola, M. D. (2018). *Perceptions of job characteristics, job satisfaction and organisational commitment of e-tutors at a South African ODL university* (Master's dissertation). University of South Africa.

Kunwar, R., Poudel, K. K., & Shreshta, A. K. (2020). Online education as a new paradigm for teaching and learning higher education in Nepal: Issues and challenges. *Global Scientific Journals, 8*(8), 208–219. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343655645_Online_Education_as_a_New_Paradigm_for_Teaching_and_Learning_Higher_Education_in_Nepal_Issues_and_Challenges

Lai, J., & Widmar, N. O. (2021). Revisiting the digital divide in the COVID-19 era. *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*, *43*(1), 458–464. https://doi.org/10.1002/aepp.13104

Lembani, R., Gunter, A., Breines, M., & Dalu, M. T. B. (2020). The same course, different access: The digital divide between urban and rural distance education students in South Africa. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *44*(1), 70–84. https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2019.1694876

Letseka, M., Letseka, M. M., & Pitsoe, V. (2018). The challenges of e-learning in South Africa. *Trends in e-Learning*, *8*(1), 121–138. https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.74843

Liu, R. L., & Li, Y. C. (2020). Action research to enrich learning in e-tutoring for remote schools. *Systemic Practice and Action Research, 33*, 95–110. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11213-019-09517-5

Mahlangu, V. P. (2022). Exploring the supervision of gifted students in open distance e-learning setting in higher education context: University of South Africa. *Journal of Gifted Education and Creativity*, *9*(1), 57–74. https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2212792

Mahlo, L., & Waghid, Z. (2022). Examining information and communication technology use in public primary schools in South Africa from the capability approach. *Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, *18*(1), a1201. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/td.v18i1.1201

Makwara, C. (2019). *Experiences of e-tutoring at Africa's largest distance education university: 2013−2019* [Conference session]. 12th annual International Conference of Education, Seville, Spain (pp. 5787−5793). https://doi.org/10.21125/iceri.2019.1400

Malale, M., Gomba, G., & Dichaba, M. (2018). *Constraints to optimal adoption of e-learning resources by UNISA students: An open distance learning context* [Conference session]. South Africa International Conference on Educational Technologies, Pretoria (pp. 182–192).

Maré, S., & Mutezo, A. T. (2021). The effectiveness of e-tutoring in an open and distance e-learning environment: Evidence from the University of South Africa. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, *36*(2), 164–180. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680513.2020.1717941

Matarirano, O., Yeboah, A., & Gqokonqana, O. (2021). Readiness of students for multi-modal emergency remote teaching at a selected South African higher education institution. *International Journal of Higher Education*, *10*(6), 135–152. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1334322

Mkhlze, T. R., & Davids, M. N. (2021). Towards a digital resource mobilisation approach for digital inclusion during COVID-19 and beyond: A case of a township school in South Africa. *Educational Research for Social Change*, *10*(2), 18–32. http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2021/v10i2a2

Molotsi, A. R., & Goosen, L. (2019). *E-tutors' perspectives on the collaborative learning approach as a means to support students of computing matters of course* [Conference session]. 48th annual conference of the Southern African Computer Lecturers' Association (SACLA), Northern Drakensberg, South Africa. (pp. 37−54). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336699639_e-Tutors%27_Perspectives_on_the_Collaborative_Learning_Approach_as_a_Means_to_Support_Students_of_Computing_Matters_of_Course

Motaung, L. B., & Makombe, R. (2021). Tutor experiences of online tutoring as a basis for the development of a focused tutor-training programme. *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, *16*(2), 101–117. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-jitl1-v16-n2-a9

Ngqondi, T., & Mauwa, H. (2019). *A review of digital integration for high school curriculum* [Conference session]. 2019 international conference on Advances in Big Data, Computing and Data Communication Systems (icABCD), Winterton, South Africa (pp. 1–6). IEEE. https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/8851034

Nsamba, A. N. (2016). *Exploring the quality of students' support services in distance learning environments* (Doctoral dissertation). University of South Africa, Pretoria. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/79170891.pdf

Okoro, C. S., Takawira, O., & Baur, P. (2021). An assessment of tutoring performance, challenges and support during COVID-19: A qualitative study in a South African university. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, *18*(8). https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol18/iss8/04/

Palincsar, A. S. (1998). Social constructivist perspectives on teaching and learning. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *49*(1), 345–375. https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.345

Parte, L., & Herrador-Alcaide, T. (2021). Teaching disruption by COVID-19: Burnout, isolation, and sense of belonging in accounting tutors in e-learning and b-learning. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(19), 10339. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph181910339

Pathan, H., Memon, R. A., Memon, S., Khoso, A. R., & Bux, I. (2018). A critical review of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory in second language acquisition. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *8*(4), 232–236. https://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ijel/article/view/67948

Pedro, N., & Kumar, S. (2019). *High quality online learning: What institutional support services must higher education institutions ensure?* [Conference session]. 12th annual

International Conference of Education, Seville, Spain (pp. 9111–9119). IATED. https://library.iated.org/view/PEDRO2019HIG

Pitsoane, E., & Lethole, P. (2022). Exploring e-tutors' views on in-service training for online student support: A professional development analysis. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 37*(1), 53–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680513.2020.1801404

Pitsoane, E., Mahlo, D., & Lethole, P. (2015). UNISA e-tutors' perceptions, experiences and views of active learning. *International Journal of Educational Sciences, 9*(1), 29–36.

Prestigiacomo, R., Hadgraft, R., Hunter, J., Locker, L., Knight, S., van den Hoven, E., & Martinez-Maldonado, R. (2020). *Learning-centred translucence: An approach to understand how teachers talk about classroom data* [Conference session]. Tenth International Conference on Learning Analytics & Knowledge (pp. 100–105). https://doi.org/10.1145/3375462.3375475

Promtep, S., Arcand, M., & Cherkaoui, S. (2019). The impact of online service quality on e-engagement in the context of e-tutoring services. *10th International Conference on Society and Information Technologies (ICSIT 2019)* (pp. 73–78). https://www.iiis.org/CDs2019/CD2019Spring/papers/EB337XD.pdf

Rakoma, M. A. (2018). *Rural students' experiences of online learning support in an open distance learning environment* [Doctoral dissertation]. Stellenbosch University. https://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/103278

Ramblrltch, A. (2018). A social justice approach to providing academic writing support. *Educational Research for Social Change, 7*(1), 46–50. http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2018/v7i1a4

Ramorola, M. Z. (2018). *The roles and responsibilities of e-tutors in open distance and e-learning environment* [Conference session]. South Africa International Conference on Educational Technologies. http://aa-rf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018 /08/ SAICET-2018-Proceedings.pdf#page=85

Raviolo, P., Messina, S., Mauro, I., & Rondonotti, M. (2020). *E-tutoring in higher education: A case study*. International workshop on higher education learning methodologies and technologies online (pp. 289–299). Springer International Publishing.

Ros, M., & Neuwirth, L. S. (2020). Increasing global awareness of timely COVID-19 healthcare guidelines through FPV training tutorials: Portable public health crises teaching method. *Nurse Education Today*, *91*(1), 1–6. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S026069172030811X

Sage, K. (2022). *Zone of proximal development.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367198459-REPRW163-1

Sauti, G. (2021). Perspectives on effective e-tutoring that motivates and enhances students' learning through learner management systems and social media. *International Perspectives in Online Instruction*, *40*(2), 143–156. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2055-364120210000040010

Shange, T. (2022). Reconceptualising 'caring' in e-tutor–student interactions during the Covid-19 pandemic in an ODeL university in South Africa. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning (CriSTaL)*, *10*(2), 22–41. https://www.ajol.info/index.php/cristal/article/view/240802

Shange, T. C. (2021). Fostering symbiosis between e-tutors and lecturers of an English Studies module at an open distance learning university in South Africa. *Open Praxis*, *13*(3), 253−263. https://doi.org/10.5944/openpraxis.13.3.135

Shapiro, B. L. (2011). Towards a transforming constructivism: Understanding learners' meanings and the messages of learning environments. *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET)/Revue de la Pensée Educative, 45*(2), 165-201. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23767078

Sithole, M. P., & Gumede, P. R. (2022). Sustaining a tutorship programme at a university of technology: A systems approach. *Perspectives in Education*, *40*(3), 224–240. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-persed_v40_n3_a15

Tan, P. J. B. (2019). An empirical study of how the learning attitudes of college students toward English e-tutoring websites affect site sustainability. *Sustainability*, *11*(6), 1748. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11061748

Tarusikirwa, M. C. (2022). Managing staff and training in an ODeL institution. In C. Majoni (Ed.), *Leading and managing open and distance e-learning (ODeL) institutions in Africa* (pp. 11–28). Vernon Press. https://www.google.co.za/books/edition/Leading_and_Managing_Open_and_Distance_e/gj-MEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Leading+and+Managing+Open+and+Distance+e-Learning+(ODeL)+Institutions+in+Africa&printsec=frontcover

Unisa. (2018). *Learner support*. http://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Learner-support-&-regions/Tuition-Support/Tutorial-Support-Services

Unisa. (2022). *myUnisa upgrading to a new teaching and learning management system.* https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Announcements/myUnisa-upgrading-to-a-new-Teaching-and-Learning-Management-System

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4

Youde, A. (2019). *A conceptual framework for effective tutors and tutoring within a blended learning context* [Conference session]. 11th Annual International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies (pp. 317–323).

Zhang, D., & Zhang, L. J. (2019). Metacognition and self-regulated learning (SRL) in second/foreign language teaching. In X. Gao (Ed.), *Second handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 883–897). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58542-0_47-1