



# The impact of socio-demographic variables on the study experience of second year Hospitality Management students at selected South African Higher Education Institutions

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## Abstract

Students transitioning from high school to university believe that they can separate and distinguish themselves from their parents and realise their individual potential, find themselves, develop their voices, follow their passions and influence the world. However, there are many challenges students face once they enter the Higher Education system. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the socio-demographic variables that impact on the overall study experience of second year Hospitality Management students at selected Higher Education institutions in South Africa. In order to identify the socio-demographic variables that could influence on the study experience of students, 228 participants from five selected universities completed a questionnaire. To determine the variables that impacted on the study experience, cross tabulations between categorical variables were tested for significance using Chi-square tests at the 5% level of significance. Results revealed statistically significant socio-demographic relationships for the reasons participants worked part-time ( $p < 0.05$ ) and the level of satisfaction participants experienced with their current living arrangements ( $p < 0.009$ ). Higher Education Institutions are therefore increasingly challenged with ways to prepare students for success at university by assisting them to become part of the educated population, by providing support to improve the determination of students to successfully complete their learning programme.

**Keywords:** South Africa, Hospitality Management students, Hotel Schools, study experience, socio-demographic variables

## Introduction

The current Higher Education (HE) landscape in South Africa (SA) is in many ways profoundly different from its fragmented, insular, privileged and uneven apartheid inheritance and much has been achieved since 1994 (Webbstock, 2016:5). The changes in the HE sector during the past two decades have been focused on the development of a coherent HE system to provide a quality learning experience for all students (Leibowitz, Bozalek, Garraway, Herman, Jawitz, Muhuro, Ndebele, Quinn, Van Schalkwyk, Vorster & Winberg, 2017:21). However, the legacy continues to



shape and influence the HE landscape in less desirable ways, and the pressures exerted by a challenging HE reviewed economic context are having a far-reaching effect on the quality of HE as a whole (Webbstock, 2016:5). The pressures of worsening underfunding in the context of enrolment growth, and increased student expectations and vexations with regards to access and financial aid, have led to widening fractures in the system (Bajjnath, 2016:ix).

The growth in student numbers (Bunting, 2006:96; Wolhuter, 2014:280) have led to a vastly diverse student population with different needs (McKenzie & Gow, 2004:107-108) due to the diverse cultural backgrounds, languages, social classes and educational backgrounds (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012:31). Therefore, it is critical for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to assist students in facilitating the transition from high school to university (Feldt, Graham & Dew, 2011:92) creating a study environment that encourages students to successfully complete their studies (Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali & Pohlert, 2004:256) and become part of the educated population (Landrum, 2001:196). According to literature there are conceivable socio-demographic variables such as, *inter alia*, gender, age, ethnic group, language barriers, nationality, marital status, having dependants and being a first-generation student that could impact on the overall study experience of students. Additionally, the availability of financial support offered to students, part-time employment and accommodation arrangements could influence the overall study experience. The representation of female university students in SA has grown significantly in the past couple of years, as enrolments have increased from 512 570 in 2010 to 574 677 in 2015. Likewise, male students have shown an increase in enrolments (380 353 in 2010 to 410 523 in 2015) but female students still constitute an increasing majority of the students nationwide (SA Council on Higher Education (CHE), 2017:3). The growing gender gap in enrolments is mainly because of increases in university attendance among females as they were previously underrepresented in HE (Sax, 2009:2).

A conspicuous change in student enrolments over the last decade in SA has been the increasing number of mature-age (aged 21 or older) students (SA CHE, 2017:6). Research did however establish that the age of a student had no impact on the academic performance (Dickson, Fleet & Watt, 2000:68) and was not a predictor of academic success (Fournier & Ineson, 2014:59). Contradictory to the above-mentioned statement were the findings of McKenzie and Gow (2004:113) and Sheard (2009:198, 200), who found that mature-age students performed better academically than students who entered university directly after graduating from high school. Additionally, Tumen, Shulruf and Hattie (2008:245) found that mature students were more likely to complete their learning programme successfully than students who were younger.

A study conducted in SA discovered that students from diverse ethnic groups still experienced HE differently, in light of the history of SA (Strydom & Mentz, 2010:26). Overall, Strydom and Mentz (2010:21) did not find favourable interactions between students from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds. It was reported that universities did not place adequate emphasis on encouraging contact between students from diverse economic, social and ethnic backgrounds. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado and Gurin (2002:351) found that positive diversity experiences indirectly promoted academic learning outcomes.

In the history of SA, different languages were developed separately, resulting in English and Afrikaans becoming the official languages in apartheid SA, with African languages being underdeveloped (SA Ministry of Education (MoE), 2002). Therefore, the primary dilemma students are faced with when attending HE is the type of academic language used. The history of students



plays a considerable role in their language education as not all students have been exposed to academic language at home, school or in their social sphere (Sinclair, 2006:1, 6). Scholtz and Allen-Ile (2007:920) stated that students should be able to read, think and reason with confidence in the academic language that is expected from them. There has been an increase of non-South African students enrolling at South African universities. The total non-South African students increased from 66 181 in 2010 to 72 960 in 2015 (SA CHE, 2017:7). According to a study performed at a Scottish university international Hospitality Management students indicated that the academic experience of studying in another country will both be challenging and rewarding. Competence with the English language was a main concern as English was not always the native language spoken (Barron, Baum & Conway, 2007:94-96).

A study done by Mudhovozi (2011:466) found that even though certain students were married, they still pursued an HE qualification. This is particularly true for previously disadvantaged, married African female students in SA, as they pursued HE qualifications to be financially independent from their husbands and to be treated with respect by their husbands. A lot of pressure is experienced by these students as they have to multitask studying, household chores and family obligations (Mudhovozi, 2011:466). Students did report feeling overwhelmed by the numerous responsibilities as it often took precedence over their academic obligations (Lasode & Awotedu, 2014:108). Many female students are faced with the responsibility of education and childcare, as many mothers consider themselves the primary caregiver regardless of the father's presence in the child's life. Many students are faced with economic adversities and being a mother makes it even more difficult providing for the child's needs. The educational situation can also be a challenge for student parents as they have academic obligations and time lines for assignments (Brown & Amankwaa, 2007:25, 27-28). However, the students wanted to provide a financially stable future for their children and be a good role model (Mudhovozi, 2011:466).

The majority of first-generation students (the first student in a family to attend university) (Ishitani, 2003:433) are perceived as being academically underprepared for HE (Tym, McMillion, Barone & Webster, 2004:1). First-generation students are often from lower socio-economic backgrounds and regularly studies in a second language (Bui, 2002:6). First-generation students have limited knowledge on the procedures regarding application for HE and financial assistance and have more difficulty adapting to the institution after enrolment (Tym *et al.*, 2004:1). Ishitani (2003:433) and Soria and Stebleton (2012:680) moreover reported that first-generation students had a greater risk of departure from university before graduating and therefore they spend more time studying than non-first-generation students (Bui, 2002:10).

Financial concerns of students play a significant role in their overall study experience and well-being (Thomas, 2002:429; Audin, Davy & Barkham, 2003:375). Reflecting on the history of South African students, many are from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, as SA is being transformed to an equitable society, HE is contributing by increasing the access and participation rates in HE to all the sectors of society (Jones, Coetzee, Bailey & Wickham, 2008:18). Many students from poor and working class families who want to further their studies do not have the funds to assist them with the expenses of attending a tertiary institution. Students taking out loans for their studies and students who are working part-time while attending university are more likely to feel financial strain which will affect their aptitude to participate in university activities (Fischer, 2007:134) and their decision to terminate their studies (Chen & DesJardins, 2008:6).

Working part-time has become an integral part of the study experience of students (Barron, 2007:40). Several studies have indicated that between 50% and 69% of students work part-time



(Carney, McNeish & McColl, 2005:310; Dundes & Marx, 2006:109; Burns & Yahanpath, 2011:47) either during the academic term or during holidays (Thomas, 2002:429) to assist with the payment of their tertiary qualification while balancing the demands of the learning programme (Sodexo & Times Higher Education, 2010:7, 9). Hospitality Management students usually work part-time to obtain work experience as the industry deems it valuable. However, the amount of time spent at work can impact negatively on their study time and class attendance (Kozar, Horton & Gregoire, 2005:6). Students working part-time have limited time for studying (Burns & Yahanpath, 2011:51) and are more likely to contemplate their studies (Sodexo & Times Higher Education, 2010:9).

Students feel more positive about university when they are satisfied with their living arrangements and the individuals they live with, who often provide emotional support (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005:714). Accommodation plays an important role in social interaction and the integration process as the strongest friendships are made with those individuals with whom one shares accommodation (Wilcox *et al.*, 2005:715-716; Nel, Troskie-De Bruin & Bitzer, 2009:983). Students that share accommodation experience a sense of belonging and acceptance as they are experiencing the same issues regarding poverty, debt and possible part-time work. The accommodation set up also breaks down barriers such as racism as students need to adapt to living with people from different backgrounds (Thomas, 2002:436).

## **Problem Statement**

Many students are pursuing a university education as a way of transforming their lives, providing them with better opportunities and hopes for a career after graduation. However, a fairly large proportion of students terminate their studies due to a complex interplay of variables that has severe consequences for the individuals involved, the society that finances tertiary institution costs and the financial well-being of the institution. Similar to the hospitality industry, students enrolled for the Hospitality Management learning programme are exposed to long working hours and mental and physical hard work from the onset of their studies. In addition, the hospitality industry reflects a negative image regarding inadequate remuneration, long working hours and a family life that is negatively affected by the unusual hours worked, which could discourage students to complete their studies or follow a career in the hospitality industry after graduation. Thus, a study was envisioned to determine the variables that could possibly impact on the overall study experience of Hospitality Management students at selected South African HEIs. The results could assist these institutions in developing appropriate strategies to address these issues. These strategies may contribute towards students' needs being met, encouraging them to successfully complete their learning programme, supporting a lifetime learning experience and student development.

## **Research objectives**

The primary objective of this study was to determine the variables that could impact on the study experience of second year Hospitality Management students at selected South African HEIs. In order to achieve the primary objective, the following secondary objectives were set:

- To determine the socio-demographic variables that could possibly impact on the study experience of students as indicated by literature



- To determine the influence of socio-demographic variables on the overall study experience of students
- To make recommendations to HEIs regarding the identified issues of socio-demographic variables that could impact on the study experience of students

## Research Methodology

The entire population of registered second year Hospitality Management students enrolled for a National Diploma in Hospitality Management at seven public universities in SA were decided upon for this study. The universities selected to participate in this study included all the universities of technology and comprehensive universities that offer a National Diploma in Hospitality Management. Second year Hospitality Management students were selected as the aim was to receive objective feedback regarding their first year as a student. The head of department from each hotel school was approached for permission to conduct the research at their hotel school. Five universities agreed to participate in this study and two universities declined the offer. The participating universities are referred to as Universities A, B, C, D and E. The actual university names are not disclosed due to ethical/confidentiality reasons.

A descriptive quantitative study design was followed (O'Leary, 2004:11). The survey method was employed to collect data from the participants and utilised a self-administered, closed-ended questionnaire developed by means of an in-depth literature study. A pilot study was conducted prior to the main study on 10 Third Year Hospitality Management students at University B. A sample of 10 students was selected as McMillan and Schumacher (2010:237) stated that a sample of 10 individuals similar to the participants of the main study will be sufficient for a successful pilot study.

The main study was performed during October 2012. After approval was received from each head of department, the co-ordination process began. Each Hotel School assigned a specific contact person with whom a date, time and venue for the completion of the questionnaire were organised. The universities participating in this study offered to facilitate the questionnaire completion due to time constraints. Questionnaires, accompanied by the instructions for the facilitation of the data collection process were couriered to the contact person from each university. The questionnaires were distributed for completion during class time. The purpose of the study was explained to the participating students and confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. Participation was voluntary and verbal consent was obtained from the participants before the questionnaire was distributed for completion. A total of 308 questionnaires were distributed and 228 completed questionnaires were returned. Table 1 indicates the number of questionnaires that was distributed to each university and the response rates.

The data were scrutinised using SAS/STAT software version 9.3 for Windows, ©2010, SAS Institute. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic characteristics of the data that were collected and was a source of summarising the variables. The aim was to present quantitative descriptions in a controllable and understandable manner (O'Leary, 2010:237). The results were portrayed by means of frequencies and percentages. As the variables that impacted the study experiences of students were to be determined, the applicable variables were measured against the participants' overall study experience. Cross tabulations between categorical



variables were tested for significance using Chi-square tests at the 5% level of significance. Where the dependent variable was continuous, the influence of categorical independent variables was tested with one-way Analysis of Variances (ANOVAs) and post-hoc Scheffé tests.

**Table 1: Response rate per university**

University	Distributed questionnaires	Number of completed questionnaires	Response rate per university
University A	120	85	71.33%
University B	48	34	71.33%
University C	50	30	60.00%
University D	45	37	82.22%
University E	45	42	93.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>74.03%</b>

## Results and discussion

The results of the socio-demographic variables that could possibly affect the study experience of second year Hospitality Management students are presented (Table 2) and discussed below. Additionally, it was determined whether or not the variable had an impact on the study experience of the participants. The socio-demographic variables discussed are the response rate of the participants according to university, gender, age, ethnic group, home language and the number of dependants of the participants. The study furthermore researched the number of participant parents that held a degree, the participants' financial concerns and financial support, accommodation arrangements, and the participants' part-time work schedules.

Table 2 indicates that more than one-third (37.3%) of the participants attended University A, 18.4% University E, 16.2% University D, 14.9% University B and 13.2% were from University C. It is important to note that the participating universities are not revealed in this study for ethical and confidentiality reasons and are referred to as University A, B, C, D and E. Female participants made up approximately two-thirds of the participants (68.3%) with only 31.7% being male participants.

Table 2 furthermore shows that most of the students fell in the age group 20-21 years. The average age of the participants was 21.2 years and the median age 21. This was consistent with expectations, as the study was confined to second year students. The greater part of the participants consisted of African participants (65.4%), followed by White participants (19.7%) and Coloured participants (12.7%). Other ethnic groups formed 2.2% of the total population. This study established that the dominant first language spoken was IsiXhosa (27.0%), followed by English (22.1%). Both Afrikaans and SeSotho were reported with a response rate of 12.2% respectively, followed by IsiZulu at 8.6%. The remainder of the languages (seven) was reported at 18.4%. SA is a multilingual country and it is evident from the results that the language dynamics associated with the South African society were represented within the researched universities' sphere (Mwaniki, 2012:228). It is important to note that the language of instruction at all the universities for the Hospitality Management learning programmes was English (100%) thus permitting 77.9% of the participants to study in a second language.

As shown in Table 2, more than three-quarters (76.1%) of the participants did not have the responsibility to provide for any dependants. However, 14.0% of the participants had one



dependant, 6.8% had two dependants and 3.2% had more than two dependants. More than half of the participants (55.1%) indicated that neither parent graduated from university, defining these participants as first-generation students since they are the first in the family to attend university (Ishitani, 2003:433; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004:275). Twenty-two per cent of the participants indicated that both their parents graduated from university, while 22.9% had at least one parent who graduated from university.

Table 2 represents that just under 35% (34.1%) of the participants “sometimes” had financial concerns and 26% “always” had financial concerns. Almost 20% (16.6%) indicated that they “often” had financial concerns, 12.1% “rarely” had financial concerns and 11.2% “never” had financial concerns. Thus, the majority of the participants (88.8%) indicated that at some point in time they had financial concerns. Noteworthy is that 51.3% of participants received financial support from their parents and 43.9% student loans from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Furthermore, 10.1% of the participants reported relatives (other than parents) as a source of financial support and 30.2% indicated other sources as financial support. This was in order with the findings of a study performed in the United Kingdom (UK), where Sodexo and Times Higher Education (2010:9) implied that many students received the largest part of their financial income from their parents or relatives other than parents. In addition, Dwyer, McCloud and Hodson (2012:1133) articulated that increased numbers of students are studying with loans, investing in their future careers by obtaining a university qualification, expecting to pay back the large amounts of debt when they graduate (Sodexo & Times Higher Education, 2014:24).

The study discovered that the larger part of the Hospitality Management participants (80.1%) were not working part-time and a mere 19.9% indicated that they were working part-time while studying Hospitality Management (Table 2). The results of this study suggest that the proportion of participants that worked part-time while studying were much lower than that found in previous research (Curtis & Williams, 2002:7; Barron, 2007:46; Tessema, Ready & Astani, 2014:56). Table 2 portrays that the majority of the participants (65.9%) in this study worked part-time to cover basic living expenses 15.9% stated that they worked to gain work experience, 13.6% conveyed it was for spending money and 4.6% acknowledged that they worked to pay tuition fees. The findings of this study were similar to the findings of Manthei and Gilmore (2005:207) who found that many students worked part-time to cover basic living expenses. Thus, the main reason students took up part-time work was largely for financial reasons (Curtis & Shani, 2002:130; Curtis & Williams, 2002:7; Barron, 2007:47).

The findings in Table 2 show that approximately one-third of the participants (32.7%) indicated that they were staying at home with their parents or direct family while studying. A further 26.1% of the participants reported staying in a residence on campus and 16.8% reported student houses close to campus as a source of accommodation. Sharing accommodation with a friend (12.4%) was also a popular living arrangement and other forms of accommodation arrangements were reported at 11.9%. South African studies reported similar findings when the most popular living arrangements among student were reported as living with parents, rented flats (Gbadamosi & de Jager, 2009:884) and residing in a university residence (Jones *et al.*, 2008:36; Gbadamosi & de Jager, 2009:884). Similar to the UK, more students are living with their parents or family members while attending university or staying in student houses close to campus (Sodexo & Times Higher Education, 2014:10). Accommodation arrangements could be viewed as 26.1% (n=59) of the participants residing in an on-campus residence, leaving 73.9% (n=167) of the participants to reside elsewhere. As Table 2 shows, just over 40% of the participants (41.0%) were “very



satisfied” with their accommodation arrangements, followed by 39.2% of the participants “not satisfied” with their accommodation. Less than 20% of the participants (19.8%) were “satisfied” with their accommodation arrangements.

**Table 2: Socio-demographic variables of the participants (n=228)**

	n	%	Total
<b>University of study</b>			
University A	85	37.3	
University B	34	14.9	
University C	30	13.2	
University D	37	16.2	
University E	42	18.4	228
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	155	68.3	
Male	72	31.7	227
<b>Age</b>			
18-19	28		
20-21	122		
22-23	48		
24-25	18		
>26	6		222
<b>Ethnic group</b>			
African	149	65.4	
White	45	19.7	
Coloured	29	12.7	
Other	5	2.2	228
<b>Home language</b>			
IsiXhosa	60	27.0	
English	49	22.1	
Afrikaans	27	12.2	
SeSotho	27	12.2	
IsiZulu	19	8.6	
Setswana	17	7.7	
Xitsonga	6	2.7	
SeSotho sa Lebowa	5	2.3	
IsiNdebele	1	0.5	
SiSwati	1	0.5	
Tshivenda	1	0.5	
Other	9	4.1	222
<b>Language of instruction</b>			
English	226	100	226
<b>Dependants</b>			
None	169	76.1	
1	31	14.0	
2	15	6.8	
More than 2	7	3.2	222
<b>First-generation student</b>			
No	125	55.1	
Yes, both my parents	50	22.0	
Yes, father only	27	11.9	
Yes, mother only	25	11.0	227
<b>Financial concerns</b>			
Never	25	11.2	
Rarely	27	12.1	
Sometimes	76	34.1	
Often	37	16.6	
Always	58	26.0	223



<b>Sources of financial support</b>			
Student loan from NSFAS	100	43.9	
Bank loan	16	7.0	
Parents	117	51.3	
Bursary from hospitality industry	19	8.3	
Bursary from the university	7	3.1	
Paid part-time work	14	6.1	
Relatives (other than parents)	23	10.1	
Other	13	5.7	n#228
<b>Working part-time</b>			
No	181	80.1	
Yes	45	19.9	226
<b>Reasons for working part-time</b>			
For basic living expenses	29	65.9	
For work experience	7	15.9	
For spending money	6	13.6	
To pay tuition	2	4.6	n#228
<b>Accommodation arrangements</b>			
Board and lodging at a private residence	11	4.9	
Spiritual family	1	0.4	
Home with parents / family	74	32.7	
Residence on campus	59	26.1	
Residence on other campus	1	0.4	
Own residence	13	5.8	
Private accommodation with sisters	1	0.4	
Sharing accommodation with a friend	28	12.4	
Student house close to campus (3 or more people)	38	16.8	226
<b>Satisfaction with living arrangements</b>			
Not satisfied	89	39.2	
Satisfied	45	19.8	
Very satisfied	93	41.0	227

\*n#228 where the participants could either select more than one answer to the question or the responses to a question were limited to particular participants

Table 3 summarises the statistical significance of socio-demographic variables on the overall study experience of the participants. At a 5% level of significance, the reasons participants worked part-time and the level of satisfaction participants experienced with their current living arrangements had a significant impact on the study experiences.

**Table 3: The study experiences of participants according to the various variables**

	Not satisfied		Satisfied		Very satisfied		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
<b>Study experiences of participants and their university of study</b>								
University A	22	27.5	36	45.0	22	27.5	80	
University B	5	14.7	16	47.1	13	38.2	34	
University C	5	16.7	12	40.0	13	43.3	30	
University D	9	24.3	19	51.4	9	24.3	37	
University E	17	41.5	10	24.4	14	34.2	41	
Total	58		93		71		222	(p<0.09)
<b>Study experiences of participants from different gender groups</b>								
Female	36	23.4	72	46.8	46	29.9	154	
Male	22	32.8	21	31.3	24	35.8	67	
Total	58		93		70		221	(p<0.09)
<b>ANOVA for age by overall satisfaction</b>								
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	Pr > F			
Model	2	11.12	5.55	1.38	0.25			



Error	213	859.56	4.04					
<b>DF = Degrees of Freedom</b> <b>SS = Sum of Squares</b> <b>MS = Mean Square</b> <b>F = F Value</b> <b>Pr &gt; F = Probability &gt; 0.05</b>								
<b>Study experiences of participants from different ethnic groups</b>								
African	41	28.3	58	40.0	46	31.7	145	
White	8	18.6	17	39.5	18	41.9	43	
Coloured	6	20.7	17	58.6	6	20.7	29	
Asian	2	66.7	1	33.3	0	0.0	3	
Other	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	100.0	2	
Total	58		93		71		222	( $p < 0.17$ )
<b>Study experiences of participants and their home language</b>								
IsiXhosa	21	36.8	15	26.3	21	36.8	57	
English	11	22.9	25	52.1	12	25.0	48	
Afrikaans	5	19.2	10	38.5	11	42.3	26	
SeSotho	6	23.1	12	46.2	8	30.8	26	
IsiZulu	7	36.8	6	31.6	6	31.6	19	
Setswana	4	23.5	10	58.8	3	17.6	17	
Xitsonga	1	16.7	3	50.0	2	33.3	6	
SeSotho sa Lebowa	1	20.0	2	40.0	2	40.0	5	
Shona	0	0.0	2	40.0	3	60.0	5	
French	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	100.0	2	
IsiNdebele	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	
SiSwati	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	
Tshivenda	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	
Korean	1	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	
Portuguese	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	
Total	57		88		71		216	( $p < 0.43$ )
<b>The study experiences of the participants and the number of dependants</b>								
0	44	26.7	72	43.6	49	29.7	165	
1	8	26.7	12	40.0	10	33.3	30	
2	4	28.6	3	21.4	7	50.0	14	
>2	2	28.6	4	57.1	1	14.3	7	
Total	58		91		67		216	( $p < 0.63$ )
<b>The study experiences of the participants and whether they are a first-generation student</b>								
No	34	27.6	48	39.0	41	33.3	123	
Yes, both my parents	12	25.5	19	40.4	16	34.0	47	
Yes, father only	6	22.2	12	44.4	9	33.3	27	
Yes, mother only	6	25.0	14	58.3	4	16.7	24	
Total	58		93		70		221	( $p < 0.67$ )
<b>The study experiences of participants and financial concerns</b>								
Never	4	16.7	10	41.7	10	41.7	24	
Rarely	4	14.8	11	40.7	12	44.4	27	
Sometimes	17	23.6	32	44.4	23	31.9	72	
Often	13	35.1	17	46.0	7	18.9	37	
Always	20	35.1	21	36.8	16	28.1	57	
Total	58		91		68		217	( $p < 0.26$ )
<b>Study experiences of participants and working part-time</b>								
No	47	26.6	78	44.1	52	29.4	177	
Yes	11	24.4	15	33.3	19	42.2	45	
Total	58		93		71		222	( $p < 0.23$ )
<b>The study experiences of participants and the reasons for working part-time</b>								
For basic living expenses	7	24.1	12	41.4	10	34.5	29	



For spending money	1	16.7	0	0.0	5	83.3	6	
For work experience	1	14.3	2	28.6	4	57.1	7	
To pay tuition	2	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	
Total	11		14		19		44	( $p < 0.05$ )*
<b>Study experiences of participants and accommodation arrangements</b>								
Home with parents / family	17	23.6	29	40.3	26	36.1	72	
Residence on campus	16	27.6	21	36.2	21	36.2	58	
Student house close to campus (3 or more people)	11	29.7	15	40.5	11	29.7	37	
Sharing accommodation with a friend	9	32.1	13	46.4	6	21.4	28	
Own residence	3	23.1	7	53.9	3	23.1	13	
Board and lodging at a private residence	2	20.0	5	50.0	3	30.0	10	
Spiritual family	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	
Residence on other campus	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	
Private accommodation with sisters	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	
Total	58		93		70		221	( $p < 0.93$ )
<b>The study experiences of participants and level of satisfaction with their living arrangements</b>								
Not satisfied	32	36.4	30	34.1	26	29.6	88	
Satisfied	11	25.0	24	54.6	9	20.5	44	
Very satisfied	15	16.7	39	43.3	36	40.0	90	
Total	58		93		71		222	( $p < 0.009$ )*

\* Indicates a statistically significant relationship between the study experience and the socio-demographic variable

It can be observed in Table 3 that University C had the most participants who were “very satisfied” (43.3%) with their study experience and the participants (51.4%) from University D reported the highest level of being “satisfied” with the study experience. The relationship between the university of study and the overall satisfaction with the study experience was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2=13.60$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p < 0.09$ ). This implies that the participants’ university of study did not have an impact on their study experience. It was expected that the university of study would have an impact on the study experience as a study performed by Sojkin, Bartkowiak and Skuza (2012:572-573) found that satisfaction with a chosen university was determined by various factors such as the social conditions on campus, educational facilities and a variety of good quality learning programmes offered by the institution. Satisfaction with a university also affected the academic performance of a student and predicted persistence at a university. It was stated that students would want to continue their studies at a university where they generally felt happy and satisfied (Gbadamosi & de Jager, 2009:888, 890).

It is evident from Table 3 that male participants were more likely to report being “very satisfied” (35.8%) with their study experience when compared to female participants who were more likely to be “satisfied” (46.8%) with the study experience. No significant relationship was established between gender and the study experience of the participants ( $\chi^2=4.75$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p < 0.09$ ). This



suggests that the gender of participants did not impact on the study experience. The finding was similar to those of Ilias, Hasan, Rahman and Yaso'a' (2008:137) and El Ansari and Stock (2010:520) who found no gender differences for educational satisfaction levels. It was expected that gender would have an impact on the study experience as Sheard (2009:198-199) found that female students were more committed to their academic work and outperformed male students with regards to academic performance. As men were less integrated academically (due to lower academic performance), female students were also more likely to persist to graduation (Carbonaro, Ellison & Covay, 2011:134; Ewert, 2012:834).

An ANOVA showed that there were no statistically significant differences ( $P > 0.25$ ) in age for participants reporting different levels of satisfaction describing their overall study experience (Table 3). This suggests that the age of a participant did not impact on the study experience. The findings were similar to a study performed by Ilias *et al.* (2008:137) who found that there was no relationship between the age of a student, regardless if they were younger or older, and their satisfaction level with their study experience. It was expected that the age of participants would impact on the study experience as Yorke and Longden (2008:16) reported differences in the challenges younger and older students faced that impacted on their study experience. The study experience of younger students, more frequently than older students, was impacted by difficulty in making friends during the transition period; they more often reported having made a poor choice of field of study, lacked commitment towards the learning programme and/or institution and were making insufficient academic progress. Older students reported the aspects that impacted on their study experience as financial problems, the lack of support from family and/or a partner (Yorke & Longden, 2008:16; Bone & Reid, 2013:102), responsibility in providing for dependants and the demands of employment while studying (Yorke & Longden, 2008:16). As older students were more likely to have additional responsibilities such as work and family, effective time management and appropriate organisation of learning material was vital because of the increased pressure and reduced time that these responsibilities resulted in (McKenzie & Gow, 2004:120). Older students did report greater use of effective learning strategies such as time and effort management (McKenzie & Gow, 2004:120) and therefore older students outperformed younger students in terms of academic performance (Sheard, 2009:191, 198).

Based on the results in Table 3, 41.9% of white participants were "very satisfied" with their study experience and more than half of the coloured participants (58.6%) were "satisfied" with their study experience. No statistically significant relationship was found between the participants' ethnic group and the study experience ( $\chi^2=13.95$ ,  $df=10$ ,  $p<0.17$ ). This suggests that participants' ethnic group had no negative impact on their overall satisfaction with their study experience. The finding is similar to that of Ilias *et al.* (2008:137) who reported that the satisfaction of students would be the same irrespective of ethnic group. In addition, Fischer (2007:151, 154) discovered that successful social relations for all ethnic groups had a positive influence on their overall university satisfaction. Formal academic relationships with lecturers for all ethnic groups positively related to university satisfaction and resulted in positive academic performance. It was remarked that a negative perception of the campus racial climate emasculates university satisfaction and increased the likelihood of termination of studies for all ethnic group students, thus positive campus racial conditions were beneficial for all students (Fischer, 2007:155). As stated in literature, informal interactions among ethnic diverse students exposed students to diverse viewpoints (Pike, Kuh & Gonyea, 2007:13). Therefore, informal interactional diversity and classroom diversity had a positive impact on intellectual engagement and self-assessed academic skills, thus influencing the educational experiences. Further, diverse experiences among students equipped them to develop skills to participate and lead in a diverse democracy (Gurin *et al.*,



2002:351-353). Given the history of group segregation in SA, every university student must be equipped with life skills to be meaningful role-players in a diverse democracy and an increasingly complex society once they graduate from university (Strydom & Mentz, 2010:27).

Table 3 portrays that just over 40% (42.3%) of the Afrikaans speaking participants were “very satisfied” with their study experience and 58.8% of the Setswana speaking participants were “satisfied” with their study experience. These findings were surprising: as the reported academic language was English, it was expected that the English-speaking participants would have indicated higher levels of satisfaction with their overall study experience, in comparison to the non-English-speaking participants. This study found no statistically significant relationship between the home languages spoken by the participants and the study experience ( $\chi^2=30.5$ ,  $df=30$ ,  $p<0.43$ ). This implies that the home languages of the participants did not have any impact on their study experience. Hirano (2014:47-48) found that students studying in a second language did not impact negatively on the overall study experience. Findings indicate that within a highly supportive environment, available resources, a motivated and hardworking student, students would be able to cope with the academic language. However, literature indicates that language would impact on the study experience as the language skills demanded by HE, such as reading and writing sound assignments, thinking at a theoretical level and applying new knowledge, could only be achieved by students for whom the language was not an issue (Jones *et al.*, 2008:44). Studying in a language that was not a student’s home language was reported as a disadvantage; also, the effectiveness of the educational experience was limited (SA MoE, 2003:9). Poor proficiency in academic literacy was closely linked to students’ academic performance (Weideman, 2003:56) and students who fail to complete their learning programme in time (Weideman, 2003:56; Fraser & Killen, 2005:34).

As mentioned earlier and observed in Table 2, more than three-quarters (76.1%) of the participants did not have the responsibility to provide for any dependants. However, 14.0% of the participants had one dependant, 6.8% had two dependants and 3.2% had more than two dependants. Interesting to note that half of the participants with two dependants indicated that they were “very satisfied” (50.0%) with the overall study experience and participants with more than two dependants mainly reported being “satisfied” (57.1%) with the study experience. The relationship between the number of dependants the participants had and their overall study experience was statistically insignificant ( $\chi^2=4.35$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<0.63$ ). This implies that the number of dependants of participants did not impact negatively on their study experience. It was anticipated that having dependants would impact on the study experience of students as it was reported that students with dependants encountered many difficulties and challenges whilst in university. They have to balance motherhood and student life (Dolbik-Vorobei, 2005:52-53; Cox & Ebbers, 2010:348) and often experienced discrimination and financial pressures (Te Riele, 2007:61). However, Jennings (2004:124) found that for many parent students, providing for a dependant was the main motivation to obtain an education. Research indicated that even though it was difficult, the roles of being a parent and a student could be accomplished simultaneously (Brown & Amankwaa, 2007:28). Being a parent motivated students to focus on academic obligations (Mudhovozi, 2011:466) and support from family and friends, such as looking after the dependant(s) and providing financial assistance impacted positively on students’ study experience that led to them persisting at university (Cox & Ebbers, 2010:344-345).

As indicated in Table 3, 34% of the participants reported being “very satisfied” with their study experience when both of their parents had graduated from university and more than half of the



participants (58.3%) with a mother that graduated from university reported being “satisfied”. No statistically significant relationship was found between participants having university educated parents or not and the impact it had on the study experience ( $\chi^2=4.05$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<0.67$ ). This implies that even though a participant was either categorised as a first-generation student or a non-first-generation student, it did not impact on their overall study experience. The finding of this study was not expected as Pascarella *et al.* (2004:278) observed that there were substantial differences among first-generation and non-first-generation students that influenced their overall study experience. First-generation students were found to not compare favourably with non-first-generation peers. They were specifically less engaged in class and less likely to successfully integrate, they perceived the university environment as less supportive, reported less progress in successful learning outcomes (Pike & Kuh, 2005:289) and were less satisfied than non-first-generation students (Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals & Durón, 2013:137). First-generation students are reported to have a disadvantage in terms of family support, prior knowledge about HE, academic preparation and educational expectations (Pascarella *et al.*, 2004:250). Study termination risks were also reported to be higher among students who did not have university-educated parents (Ishitani, 2003:444).

Table 3 portrays, as expected, that the participants who “rarely” (44.4%) had financial concerns were “very satisfied” with their study experience and participants who “sometimes” had financial concerns were “satisfied” with their study experience. The relationship between the participants’ financial concerns and their satisfaction with their overall study experience was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2=10.01$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p<0.26$ ). This indicates that the financial concerns participants encountered did not impact their study experience. Audin *et al.* (2003:375) found that increased financial concerns among students produced poorer student well-being leading to lower levels of student satisfaction. One of the worst aspects of student life was cited as student stress due to limited financial resources (Carney *et al.*, 2005:309). It was reported that financial concerns affected studying (Thomas, 2002:429) and while financial concerns on their own may not be the leading cause of student withdrawal from university they can impact on academic achievement and social integration (Jones *et al.*, 2008:29).

The results in Table 3 indicate that 42.2% of the participants who worked part-time were “very satisfied” with their study experience and 44.1% of the participants who did not work reported being “satisfied” with their study experience. The relationship between either working part-time or not working part-time and the effect it had on their study experience was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2=2.89$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.23$ ). This indicates that regardless of the participants’ work status, it did not influence their overall study experience. In a study performed by Tessema *et al.* (2014:56) it was discovered that non-working students were slightly more satisfied than students who worked part-time. The overall satisfaction levels of students working part-time were determined by the amount of hours they worked weekly. Part-time work was found to have a positive impact on satisfaction when students worked less than 10 hours and a decline in satisfaction was only reported for students working more than 11 hours per week. Curtis and Shani (2002:134) and Barron (2007:49), however, found that working part-time had either no impact or no serious impact on the students’ satisfaction with their study experience.

Table 3 reveals that the majority of the participants (83.3%) who worked for spending money were “very satisfied” with their study experience and 41.4% of the participants working to cover basic living expenses were “satisfied” with their study experience. A statistically significant relationship was confirmed between the reasons for working part-time and the participants’ study experience



( $\chi^2=12.32$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This implies that the reasons for part-time work had an impact on the overall study experience. Given that part-time work could have a positive impact on students' satisfaction, the reasons students worked part-time were seen as advantages (covering expenses for basic living essentials, relieving financial burden of their parents, improving employability after graduation, gaining skills, and improving network with supervisors, colleagues and customers) (Tessema *et al.*, 2014:56-57). Literature, however, indicates that working part-time had more of a negative impact on the study experience as Curtis and Williams (2002:9) stated that students working part-time to pay necessities, had to work to continue with their learning programme. The financial obligations placed on students increased their stress levels, which could have detrimental consequences on their study efforts and academic success (Watts & Pickering, 2000:131-132; McInnis & Hartley, 2002:40; Manthei & Gilmore, 2005:212).

Table 3 reveals that participants who were "very satisfied" with their study experience resided either in a residence on campus (36.2%) or with their parents at home (36.1%) and participants staying in their own residences (53.9%) were more "satisfied" with their study experience. No statistically significant relationship was found between the participants' accommodation arrangements and their study experience ( $\chi^2=8.46$ ,  $df=16$ ,  $p<0.93$ ). This suggests that whether or not the participants resided on or off campus it had no impact on their study experience. Gbadamosi and de Jager (2009:888, 890), however, found that the living arrangements of students had an impact on the overall satisfaction level with university. The more acceptable the living arrangements were for the student the more satisfied they felt about their university experience. It was stated that students who lived farther away from university tended to be concerned with transportation arrangements, and thus had an impact on students' satisfaction. It is therefore interesting to note that previous research established that students living on campus reported better adjustment to the university experience than students living elsewhere (Gray, Vitak, Easton & Ellison, 2013:204). According to Pike and Kuh (2005:289-290) students living on campus tended to be more engaged, academically and socially and had encountered a more diverse integration experience into the university environment resulting in greater learning outcomes and intellectual development than students not residing on campus.

The results in Table 3 indicate that 40% of the participants who were "very satisfied" with their living arrangements reported being "very satisfied" with their study experience. Furthermore, 54.6% of the participants who were "satisfied" with their living arrangements conveyed being "satisfied" with their study experience. The relationship between the participants' satisfaction with their living arrangements and the study experience was statistically significant ( $\chi^2=13.43$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.009$ ). This implies that the level of satisfaction experienced by the participants with their accommodation arrangements had an impact on their study experience. These findings were similar to a study performed by Audin *et al.* (2003:375, 377) who learned that students satisfied with their accommodation arrangements, especially on variables such as noise, ability to study, ability to sleep and the relationships with other students reported higher levels of well-being, enhancing student satisfaction with their overall study experience. In addition, it was found that students living with compatible friends were more satisfied with their living arrangements and more optimistic about university life. It was discovered that unsatisfactory living arrangements often led to students terminating their studies (Wilcox *et al.*, 2005:714-715).



## **Limitations**

The first limitation to this study was obtaining permission to conduct the study from the tertiary institutions. The process was time consuming and two universities rejected the invitation to participate in this study. Thus, the opinions of students from these tertiary institutions who rejected the invitation to participate are lacking. Secondly, the participating universities were limited in its scope as only selected comprehensive universities and universities of technology were represented, not including other institutions offering a similar programme. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to students from other institutions such as colleges and private hotel schools. Thirdly, even though the participating population (n=228) was fairly large, the population only represented second year Hospitality Management students, excluding first and third year students enrolled for a National Diploma. Lastly, the survey concentrated on particular aspects of variables that could impact on the study experience, providing only a snapshot into student experiences at university in a specific field of study.

## **Conclusion**

Enhancing the quality of the study experience of students has become a priority in most HEIs. Positive experiences not only shape students' cognitive functions, feelings and behaviour, but also improve their satisfaction with the experience (Awang, Kutty & Ahmad, 2014:261). The study is of value to the HEIs offering the learning programme because it has established the socio-demographic variables that influence the study experience of the students. The socio-demographic variables that were discovered to have an impact on the study experience, included the reasons students worked part-time and the level of satisfaction students experienced with their accommodation. These findings were similar to literature, and it could be concluded that even though 'working part-time' and 'accommodation' contained many components, only certain aspects impacted on the study experience of the students. The results of this study could hopefully enhance the study experience of Hospitality Management students encouraging them to successfully complete their well-intended studies.

## **Recommendations for future research**

The research could be expanded to other institutions in SA offering a similar learning programme. The findings could then be compared to determine if students studying at public HEIs in SA had the same study experience as students studying at colleges and private hotel schools. The population of students could include first and third year Hospitality Management students, to compare and contrast with the present results, and to provide a clear picture of student well-being and study experiences across their time at university. Future research could furthermore focus on fewer variables that could possibly impact on the study experience, as the questionnaire was quite lengthy. A shorter questionnaire may increase the participation rate. The study expectations and study experiences of Hospitality Management students could be compared. As the participating universities in this study were located across SA, future research could focus on comparing the results from the participants at the different universities to determine if students had a different study experience when studying in different areas of SA.



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