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ATTRIBUTES, LEARNING PREPAREDNESS AND STUDY DISPOSITION OF ADULT VOCATIONAL DISTANCE LEARNERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC AS INFLUENCED BY THEIR PERSONAL, SITUATIONAL AND STUDY ENVIRONMENTS

Eileen Julie Tuimaleali’ifano

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
University of New England
1996
I hereby declare that this submission is my own work, and that the substance of the thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.

I certify that all sources used in the preparation of this thesis have been acknowledged.

[Signature]
ABSTRACT

This study examines the general question: to what extent do personal and situational variables, and variables within the study environment of adult learners at the University of the South Pacific (USP), influence their disposition and preparedness as distance learners. The USP Region encompassing 12 island nations and covering more than 30 million square kilometres of ocean in the South Pacific, represents diverse local environments - physically, politically, socio-culturally and economically - from which USP students are drawn. The genesis of the study is the concern that variations in student milieus, born of this diversity, are not given due consideration as a significant dimension of the USP’s distance education programme. The answer to the study question is intended to provide direct and relevant information about adult distance learners at the USP and their learning needs, in the interest of the appropriate and effective targeting of distance learning materials and study support facilities and services. This objective is embodied in a conceptual framework derived from principles of adult learning and distance education, and from interaction theory in particular.

A self-completion questionnaire was designed to elicit responses to variables in five categories: personal and demographic; cultural and social; economic; education, past and present; and study environment and support. The questionnaire was sent to 1,213 students enrolled in the Diploma in Accounting Studies (DACS) and the Diploma in Management Studies (DMS) across the USP Region. Two hundred and seventy-eight usable responses were returned and analysed in four major phases: cross-tabulation in a series of two-dimensional contingency tables; factor analysis; cluster analysis; and multiple regression analysis. The outcomes of these statistical procedures were complemented by qualitative data from the interview of 22 students in eight countries of the USP Region. These were analysed as a composite group and in five individual case studies. This methodological approach was intended to represent both an ‘outside’ and an ‘inside’ view of the students under survey, thereby presenting a more holistic perspective of the situation.

In this study, data analysis showed that although, as expected, the USP students shared features in common with adult distance learners elsewhere, they also had characteristics derived from
environmental dynamics which were context- and culture-specific and which set them apart from students in other locations. These results were useful in several ways. Foremost, they reiterated the need to be cautious about the relevance and applicability of extraneous research results and hence the need for local research to appropriately inform local efforts. The study also identified information unique and significant to distance learning at the USP. Descriptive data allowed the identification of features and attributes common to the majority of USP students under survey who were found to be comparatively younger than counterparts in the western world in particular, and different in many socio-cultural, economic and educational features. Multivariate statistical procedures enabled the identification of significant variables within the contexts of the USP students that were determinants of successful performance for them. A notable finding was the lack of inferential significance of the educational disposition of the USP group with respect to their academic performance as distance learners. More significant to performance was the impact of personal and environmental variables such as family situations, economics and socio-cultural obligations on determining the amount of time and effort that USP students were able to put into their studies. Interview data served to provide detail to these statistical outcomes and to the specific nature of the interrelationships among the variables under survey.

An important outcome of this study was the identification of areas in need of further investigation that would help to provide a more comprehensive picture of the adult distance learner in the context of the USP Region.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As a regional survey, this research project was a demanding one in terms of both its physical coverage and its research objectives. Its realisation and completion within the timeframe of a Ph.D programme would have not have been possible without the help and assistance of many supporters. To all of these, and the following in particular, I am indebted:

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CHAPTER 1: THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND BACKGROUND TO ITS DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

1.1 Introduction: a Brief Overview of Study Purposes

This study has two major purposes. Firstly, it sets out to explore, through a questionnaire survey, the personal, situational and study contexts of adult vocational students studying at a distance at the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the range of variables that constitutes these environments. The outcome of this objective is a profile of features and attributes which characterise the majority of students under survey. These features and attributes are derived from principles of adult and distance learning.

Secondly, the study investigates the extent to which these variables, individually or in groups, influence and predict the academic performance of the students under survey. This is undertaken by a variety of appropriate statistical procedures. Statistical outcomes are complemented by data obtained from the interview of selected students and intended to add a qualitative dimension to the study.

1.2 Outline of Chapter 1

Chapter 1 presents in brief a history of the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the development of its distance education programme, focussing primarily on features of diversity of the USP Region. It discusses the effects of this diversity on the learning environments of its distance education students. In addition, it shows how these effects, significant as they are to informing a sound educational philosophy and distance education policy, have not been given due consideration for many reasons including the USP’s instrumental approach to education. Issues derived from these situations constitute the study concerns on which the study objective and questions, presented at the end of the chapter, are based.
1.3 The University of the South Pacific: A Regional Institution

The University of the South Pacific is a regional educational institution with unique challenges. It began in 1968 as an initiative of the British government on behalf of eleven South Pacific island nations (joined by a twelfth in 1991), following the 1965 report of the Higher Education Mission to the South Pacific (Alexander, 1968: 1), to cater to the higher educational needs of the people of its member countries. That the report was an undertaking by the governments of the United Kingdom and New Zealand, with representation by the Australian Government, indicates the extent to which the University was the result of metropolitan influence in the USP Region at the time. Although the concept of the University was still very foreign to the people and cultures of the South Pacific, and the proposal that existing institutions catering for post-secondary education at the level required by the Region was a fairly strong alternative consideration, the creation of the University nevertheless had the suggestions of a bequeathal on the peoples of the South Pacific by the departing British government, particularly intended to be a cohesive factor among its member countries in the common pursuit of education. Now covering more than 30 million square kilometres of ocean, the Region of USP is marked more by the differences among its member countries than by their similarities. The map of USP provided as Appendix 1, shows its geographical spread as far north as the Marshall Islands, its newest member, east to the Cook Islands, South to Tonga and as far west as the Solomon Islands. Other member countries are Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Western Samoa. The countries range in size from single island nations to nations consisting of hundreds of inhabited islands scattered in linear or random fashion over a large area of ocean. Figure 1.1 following indicates the extent of the differences among these island nations in the areas given.

1.4 Regional Differences

1.4.1 Demography, language and culture

The Region represents the three major culture groups of the South Pacific - Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia - with a total population of just over one and a half million, about half of which occurs in Fiji with a little under 750,000 people. The smallest country is Tokelau with 1,700
people. Well over a hundred local languages and dialects are spoken in countries of Melanesia (Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu), as well as in the Marshall Islands. Polynesian (Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Western Samoa) and Micronesian (Kiribati and Nauru) countries are basically uni-cultural nations whose people speak a single native tongue (Douglas and Douglas, 1989). All countries of the Region are English-speaking with French spoken as well in Vanuatu, Hindi spoken by most of the large Indian population in Fiji, and many other languages spoken by ethnic minorities who have settled throughout the countries of the USP Region. In uni-cultural countries, there is a tendency for the local language to dominate work, social and family life, allowing limited opportunity for English to be spoken, practised and expanded. Multi-lingual settings tend to encourage the use of a common language or lingua franca, either pigin or English, the latter having more of an advantage in countries where English is the medium of instruction in schools.

Figure 1.1: Political, Geographic, Demographic and Socio-economic Features of Countries of the USP Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of Is.</th>
<th>Land &amp; sea area</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Political description</th>
<th>Language(s)</th>
<th>Average Wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>247 sq km</td>
<td>17,185</td>
<td>1976 self-gov.; free association with NZ</td>
<td>Maori &amp; Eng.</td>
<td>$NZ 12.95/hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>18,376 sq km</td>
<td>753,375</td>
<td>1970 ind. from Gt. Br. 1947 Republic</td>
<td>Eng., Fijian</td>
<td>$77.57/hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>810 sq km</td>
<td>43,681</td>
<td>1979 ind. from Gt. Br. 1979 Republic</td>
<td>English (off.)</td>
<td>$40.39/hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall Islands</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>271 sq km</td>
<td>43,355</td>
<td>1974 ind. from US; free assoc. with USA</td>
<td>English;</td>
<td>$US 42.75/hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21 sq km</td>
<td>3,043</td>
<td>1978 self-gov.; republic from trust; good, Aust.; NZ.</td>
<td>Nauru (natl.), Eng.</td>
<td>High Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niue</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>258 sq km</td>
<td>2,532</td>
<td>1978 self-gov. with free assoc.</td>
<td>Niuean; Eng.</td>
<td>$NZ 11.16/hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>297,785 sq km</td>
<td>285,796</td>
<td>1978 independent</td>
<td>Eng. (off); pigin, vernacular</td>
<td>$111.25/hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokelau</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.2 sq km</td>
<td>1,703</td>
<td>NZ administration</td>
<td>Tokelauan; some English</td>
<td>N/available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>656,710 sq km</td>
<td>94,535</td>
<td>1970 ind. from GB; treaty of friendship</td>
<td>Tongan; Eng.</td>
<td>$T in daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23 sq km</td>
<td>8,364</td>
<td>1978 ind.; 1999 treaty of friendship with USA</td>
<td>Tuvaluan; Eng.</td>
<td>1A 0.38/hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>111,800 sq km</td>
<td>140,154</td>
<td>1980 independence</td>
<td>Bislama; Eng.</td>
<td>N/available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Samoa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,900 sq km</td>
<td>162,200</td>
<td>1982 independence</td>
<td>Samoan; Eng.</td>
<td>$T 0.40/hr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Information is obtained from the 16th edition of the Pacific Islands Yearbook, 1982, edited by Norman and Ngaire Douglas. Dates of their sources vary from as early as the 1970s to the 1980s according to their official availability so that in some cases official information is quite dated.
The multi-ethnicity represented by these language groups also reflects the cultural diversity of the Region. Typically, indigenous cultures of the Region are based on the extended family and a communal way of life regulated by communal obligations. In the more developed countries of the Region, this way of life exists side by side with Asian and Western cultures favouring nuclear family existence and ethics of independence and individual enhancement.

1.4.2 Political and economic diversity

When the creation of the University was being considered in the late 1960s, the Region as a whole was characterised by scarce natural resources, an underdeveloped economy and an inadequate and poorly-developed transport and communication infrastructure on which much of the success of a regional venture would necessarily depend. However, a combination of factors of size, geographical location, colonial experience, natural resource endowment and size of population has continued to favour some countries over others in terms of economic growth, national development and per capita income. This imbalance among USP countries represents a significant dimension of diversity in the USP Region in terms of its total demand for education and training and the quality of the trainees as university students. Historically, nations of the Region have had some form of colonial, protectorate or international trustee relationship with different metropolitan countries (see Figure 1.1). With regard to the smaller countries of the Region this relationship continues to exist largely in terms of economic aid to assist national development following the attainment of self-government by these countries. The larger countries, notably Fiji, are dependent to a lesser degree on foreign aid for national and economic growth (Douglas and Douglas, 1989). In 1983, speaking at the Conference on Future Directions for the USP, national representatives of USP member countries brought a range of requests for training and educational assistance from the USP that reflected variations in national growth and standards of economic achievement in each of the countries of the USP Region. Within the same conference, while Fiji, the largest, most advanced country of the Region, pushed for specialist training for its broad-based labour force in both the public and private sectors, the Tokelauns requested simply that their civil servants be given the minimum amount of training that would qualify them for the various positions that they already held in the civil service (USP Future Directions Conference, 1983, USP: Suva). It is noteworthy that the training/education dichotomy
continues to influence the direction of the University and raises again the question of the readiness of the Region for a university at the time of its establishment.

1.4.3 Education

Remnants, in varying degrees, of British, French, American, and relatively recently, of Australian and predominantly New Zealand educational influences, have remained in the formal education systems and curricula of the countries of the Region, contributing to variations in philosophy and approach to formal education across nations. By the beginning of the 1980s all but two of the countries of the Region had attained independence and self-governing status. As far as possible, curricula have been adapted towards facilitating national development and identity with an increasing focus on local economic and social needs although again largely with the expertise of foreign specialists. In spite of this trend, whilst the larger countries of the Region can cope adequately with the Primary and most of the Secondary education needs of their populations, a number of the smaller countries continue to use their historical links within the Region and with metropolitan countries to cater particularly for secondary education for some of their youth who are sent abroad to live and study for a number of years. All of the countries of the Region, including Fiji to a much lesser degree, have opted for the USP Foundation programme (equivalent to the final year of high school) as part of, or to supplement their own national high school systems. The bulk of Fiji students now enter the University through national seventh form qualifications. Equivalent qualifications from other institutions are also recognised as fulfilling USP entry requirements.

1.5 The Development of Distance Education at USP: A Brief History

Considering the diversity of the Region and its variations in educational, economic and national development, Renwick et al. (1991), commented: "To envisage the successful creation of a university in these circumstances called for a leap of faith" (p. 2).
The leap was taken in 1968 when the University was established with its main campus (Laucala Campus) in Suva, Fiji. A second, agricultural campus, was opened later in 1977 at Alafaua, Western Samoa. To these campuses came mainly full-time students to undertake courses towards diplomas and degrees in arts, science, education and agriculture. The first courses in the distance mode for the Diploma in Education followed in 1971. Extension Services, as it was known then, created in 1970 to serve the University's regional outreach efforts, was given the task of administering the USP's distance education programme (also referred to as its extension programme) as part of this outreach.

The spectacular growth of this programme since then can only attest to its suitability and appropriateness not only in carrying out the main purpose of the USP to be a university "...regional in character as well as mission" (Renwick et al., 1991: 3) but also for students caught in the circumstances prevailing of distance, small scattered populations, low income levels, and the high cost (in broad economic and social terms) of full-time enrolment at Laucala and Alafaua. Distance education, with its focus on independent learning, also had the distinct advantage of being adaptable for students living on outer islands and remote rural areas and villages within the USP Region. Now in its 24th year of offer, the USP's distance education programme has registered a phenomenal growth rate particularly in the 1980s when it went from 1256 enrolments in 1980, 4055 in 1987 to 7100 by 1990. This increase accounted for 35.7 percent of the University's Equivalent Full-time Students (EFTS). In 1980 30 courses were being offered in the distance mode across a range of disciplines, the number exploding to more than 150 courses by the end of the decade. (Renwick et al., p.32).

However, although this growth has done much to establish the USP's distance education programme as an integral function of the University, its occurrence in the 1980s in a period of recession and budget freeze meant that it was not accompanied by an appropriate increase in resources over the better part of the decade. More importantly, the pressures on the University to continue to meet the increasing demand for its services by countries seeing education as a way out of the recession, within a severely restricted budget, meant setting priorities and taking restrictive measures wherever it could. Inevitably, by the end of the 80s not only were course and enrolment restrictions necessary to allow Extension Services, now University Extension, to cope with the logistics of the vastly expanded programme concern over the quality of offerings and
student support, and the effectiveness of administrative functions led to a request by University Extension to the University that its distance education policies, strategies and activities be reviewed before any further development took place (Wallace, 1990:14). In many respects, various features in the development of the USP’s distance education programme such as its increasing popularity as an alternative mode of learning for those unable and/or unwilling to attend traditional campuses, and the related budgetary and management concerns are issues of distance education worldwide.

The Review of the USP’s distance education programme was funded by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Vancouver, Canada, and carried out by an international team of consultants in 1989. Their report was presented in 1991. It confirmed the vital role that distance education had played and would continue to play in establishing the concept of USP as a regional university. Furthermore, it observed that much of the development in the first 20 years of the University had inevitably focussed on three main areas:

1. institutional matters of management policy involving budget and staffing primarily, and the logistics of coping with a region of its size, expanse and level of economic development;
2. the development of an adaptable and flexible teaching programme and the maintenance and improvement of its delivery; and
3. efforts towards the improvement of the quality of teaching.

Much of the direction for this development came by way of regional conferences mounted at intervals by the University in its effort to seek counsel from its member countries on how best to carry out its role in the appropriate and relevant

maintenance, advancement, dissemination of knowledge by teaching, consultancy and research and ... the provision at appropriate levels of education and training responsive to the well-being and needs of the communities of the South Pacific (University charter).

Five years into its existence, the University held a seminar on the theme What kind of University for the South Pacific? The variety of viewpoints and discussion which was represented at this seminar clearly reflected the dilemma that prompted the University’s call for direction. Attended
not only by leaders in education but by consumers of education in both the public and private sectors, and representatives of regional economic and religious institutions, the participants represented a diversity of educational needs across the then eleven member countries of the Region, as well as throughout the social and economic hierarchies of individual nations. Viewpoints on the raison d'etre of the University ranged from those with a political and economic bias seeking to direct USP towards a predominantly manpower training role, to those directly opposed to this utilitarianism, arguing instead for the traditional role of a university as the perpetuator of an appreciation for education and learning as valuable in themselves. Yet a third group pressed for the pursuit of both goals to exist in a teaching structure that would begin with a vocational bias and culminate in degrees and higher order educational achievements. There was talk also of the 'multi-purpose' graduate especially dedicated to the community and its needs as the price for the privilege of higher education. It was clear, however, that the fundamental tussle in this meeting was one which sought to determine the locus of control for decision-making for USP - did it lie within the University as an autonomous institution, or externally among the countries constituting its membership and contributing its finances and resources?

By 1979, from the report of the Tenth Anniversary Review Committee, constituted to review the progress of the University in its first ten years of existence and to offer recommendations for its future development, it was clear that USP had succumbed, to a large extent, to pressures from regional countries to concentrate on meeting their various manpower needs. Given the limited resources available and the demand implications of this task across the Region, it was inherent in this instrumental approach that the situation observed by Futa Helu, representing the Atenisi Institute, Tonga, at the 1973 seminar, "... as things are at present, social demands have altogether eclipsed the educational demands" (Seminar on What Kind of University for the South Pacific, USP, 1973), would be perpetuated. Indeed, although the need for a holistic approach to education with a focus on personal growth, quality of life and attitudes of self-sufficiency was beginning to gain recognition, the general focus of the Regional Conference on Future Directions for the USP held at the University in December, 1983, was the shifting pattern of regional manpower needs and the need for the University to shift with it. Dominated by the theme of national development, which by the 1980s had the additional dimension of the gaining of independence by a number of countries, USP understandably appears to have lost track of a holistic approach to its educational function as much in regard to its distance education programme as to its on-
campus offering. It had not the philosophical or the policy orientation nor the resources to move beyond the provision of 'relevant' courses as and when they were needed by its member countries in both its on-campus provision and distance education programme whose growth, by now, was beginning to outpace the ability of University Extension to cope with it. Not surprisingly, the COL Review team noted that

... from our examination of the many components which, taken together are USP’s Extension Services, it is clear to us that the University’s policy for its effective management has not kept pace with the explosive developments that have themselves been the result of general university policies during the last decade. It is managing Extension Services as if it were an optional extra - a desirable adjunct - to its teaching mission (p. 47)

1.6 The Student Dimension

1.6.1 Some significant considerations

Aside from attempts at an infrastructural support of its distance teaching function, one consequence of this situation is the fact that little attempt that can be described as appropriate and effective, has been made to incorporate the student dimension directly or indirectly, as an integral part of its distance programme and policy. A significant element of the student dimension is the diversity of the backgrounds and contexts from which students are drawn. Two immediate and obvious consequences of this feature are the need for USP to accommodate this diversity if it is to be an effective provider of higher level manpower training and education in the Region, and the need for specific strategies which would promote equal opportunity for higher education among all communities within its ambit of responsibility. Although the diversity of the Region and its implications for the University and its activities are generally recognised, there is no evidence in the approach of the University to distance education that its significance has been fully appreciated. To date, for instance, there has been no significant research looking into the nature of this diversity as it relates to the Region as a whole and its consequences for and on the population from which USP draws its students.
A second, equally significant feature of the student dimension of the USP distance education programme is the predominantly adult nature of its student intake. Given that the bulk of its students are adults, the USP's distance education programme is essentially one of adult education involving adults coming to their studies from a variety of backgrounds. Cross (1981) wrote "... if adult education is a distinctive field of study at all, it is adult learners who make it so" (p. 222).

The upsurge in the literature within the last three decades, of theories and empirical studies focussing on the adult learner, and more recently on adults learning at a distance, testifies to the increasing realisation that adults differ markedly as learners from children and adolescents in their ethos, approach to and reasons for learning. Andragogy, for instance, one of the best known sets of principles of adult learning, is premised on four crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from assumptions about learning as children (Knowles, 1990:195). Humanists such as Rogers, Maslow and Jourard writing in the 1960s and 1970s, described adult learning as largely a process of self-actualization in which adults are self-motivated towards educational goals (Ibid, pp. 8-9).

Development psychologists in the same period emphasised the important role of the environment in shaping the growth of the individual and advanced theories of interaction that formed the basis of recommended interactive learning for adults at various stages and phases of life (Cross, 1981: 229). This interactionist approach towards understanding the adult learner as a whole person whose

... learning activities are affected by every aspect of the individual, not just by a set of attributes and abilities which are abstracted for the purpose of undertaking specific learning tasks (Kelly and Shapcott, 1987: 5),

has gained momentum in recent years. Its popularity can perhaps best be attributed to the practical value that such studies have for course development and instructional design in indicating the position of the students with regard to learning need and preparedness. Various approaches to determine the extent to which variables in the students' environment contributed to motivation, disposition to study and performance marked the efforts of the late 1970s and 1980s. In a thought-provoking discussion of selected research in this area, Gibson (1990) examined the work of
researchers on the basis of Kurt Lewin's (1935) formula of \( B = f(P,E) \), where \( B \) represented learning and learning-related behaviours, \( P \) being the adult distance learner including such features as his/her learning style, motivation, prerequisite knowledge and skills, and \( E \) representing the learner's environment which would contain elements such as significant others, his/her work and vocation and the educational environment. The range of personal variables examined included demographic data, students' perception of academic ability, cognitive personality style or behaviour, learning styles and motivation, field dependence/independence and personality. A significant variable in the student's life space was the educational environment and the extent to which it could and should be modified and enhanced by the quality and range of services to improve motivation and success rates.

It was also clear from the 1970's that distance education was especially attractive to the adult population for the purpose of keeping up with work challenges caused by the technological and knowledge explosion of the latter half of the twentieth century. Yet, it was not until the creation of the Course Development Unit (CDU) at USP in 1982, with the special task of ensuring effective instructional design for distance learning, that the adult USP extension student began to attract appropriate attention. One of the problems easily associated with a dual-mode institution like USP is the risk that the same principles and strategies used in the teaching of the course to young, full-time undergraduate students with no previous job experience, and continuing straight on to tertiary study from secondary school, would be followed in the distance mode for a primarily adult, part-time extension clientele. Indeed, Coldway (1982) boldly declared that

much of the content of distance learning is taken from traditional campuses and distance learning institutions have never intended to be different from traditional institutions except by "doing it at a distance" (p. 91).

He went on to indicate that "almost everyone has grown up in a pedagogical system and overcoming this long term indoctrination into pedagogy would require much attention"; furthermore that "the evidence and logic of (Andragogy) demands that it be considered by distance educators" (p. 91).

By virtue of their maturity and the richer experience of life and employment derived largely from the interaction of personal and environmental variables on a daily basis, adults were inclined to
be more aware of the purposes and kind of education they wanted in their lives. They were usually self-motivating towards learning that had more immediate, and practical use and which drew upon the adult’s experience as a good part of its foundation. Research in a variety of adult education settings has produced much work on these qualities and characteristics of adult learning.

Aside from contributing to a theoretical base about the adult distance learner that may have universal application, such studies have also produced discrepancies which have led to questions about the kind of environmental conditions that provoke the various potential roles that these variables can play - antecedent, mediating, intervening - in the lives of the students. Furthermore, what degree of influence will they have, taken individually, or in combinations, when related to other students in different educational settings? That efforts at pulling together research on the adult learner and adult learners at a distance within more natural settings are beginning to confirm the importance of the environment in influencing the adult students’ motivation and disposition towards learning, there can be no question. Gibson’s (1990) recommendations for the continuation of such studies towards the establishment of a model encompassing the personal and situational circumstances of the adult distance learner, his/her educational environment extending beyond the institution to the broader context in which the learner exists, and the relationships which exist between and among these variables (p. 32), are appropriate for a more widely applicable and effective theoretical foundation on adults as distance learners. Such a foundation, Gibson also implicitly suggests, will challenge theories of distance education that do not incorporate environmental variables as significant determinants of effective adult learning.

1.6.2 Direct and indirect effects of the instrumental approach on the student dimension

The task of meeting educational needs in the context of the USP makes unique demands on the institution in that these needs are those of twelve member nations most of which, since the beginning of the University and into the 1980s, achieved independence or self-governing status. These changing political orientations were accompanied by redefined economic and social goals that translated themselves into a variety of educational needs over this period of time, to be met by the USP. Given the economic and social variations represented by the various sizes and populations of the countries of the USP Region, and given that economic conditions are never
static, it is reasonable to expect that the demands of responding to educational needs in the USP context would continue to require constant attention, time and resources. It would also make highly likely the situation that Regional governments and other employers will continue to exert a high influence on the future trends of the University.

In addition to the constant need to address and reflect these changes in its educational programmes, the University has also faced challenges generated by political pressures unique to its Region. For instance, the issue of control over the decision-making process, mentioned earlier, is a multi-dimensional one involving the University as an autonomous institution, its member countries, and among these, the larger more dominant countries and the smaller, less influential members. Decisions of the University were, and are, often a reflection of the ability of larger member countries to hold sway over the decision-making process in their favour rather than based on common regional interests.

Coupled with such political pressures, academic ambivalence and prejudice among many of the teaching staff of the University with regard to its distance education function continue to be dominating influences in the developmental approach taken by the University. Much of this bias can also be linked to the fact that about 50 percent of these staff are foreign to the Region and are therefore unfamiliar with the teaching and learning context and its special needs. These pressures and circumstances make additional and special demands of the University to the extent where the needs of adult distance students, in a more holistic context, seem likely to continue as a marginal concern for the University, in much the same way as University Extension has been relegated to 'optional extra' status among the activities of the University (Renwick et al., p. 47). An examination of some of the efforts by the USP to support its distance education programme and distance students in particular, will exemplify and demonstrate this trend, and the tendency, over time, for it to become more entrenched as other pressing priorities emerge:

1. **Dual-mode teaching**

   The University adopted, at the very outset, the dual mode system of teaching with the specific objective "...to involve teachers on-campus in the wider Region, to help them become familiar with its diverse needs and adapt their teaching accordingly" (Renwick et al., p. 11). Such an approach had additional justification in the fact that in the earlier years
of the University more than 50 percent of its academics were recruited from beyond the Region. Currently, the staffing situation is balanced between regional and non-regional teaching staff.

As a result of its high percentage of overseas staff, USP has a high staff turnover, with a recent survey showing 40 percent of the teaching staff staying for less than 1 year and 60 percent less than two years of their teaching contracts (Ibid, pp. 59-60). The objective of dual-mode teaching therefore occurs very little in practice. Many of the teaching staff do not stay long enough for the effects of being involved in dual-mode teaching to benefit their extension courses. Furthermore, this experience, limited though it is, leaves with them at the end of their contracts and there is little obligation for succeeding members of staff to pick up where predecessors left off. Thus, there is no onus upon staff to deal with issues of diversity in course delivery that would promote effectiveness by way of ensuring that the education of adult distance students is appropriate for them. Much of the work of accumulating regional experience, and addressing issues of diversity and equal opportunity, although this is currently still far from being satisfactory, has been and continues to be conducted by the Course Development Unit, now the Distance Education Unit (DEU) at University Extension since 1982 more as a matter of relevance and significance to its work rather than by university policy decree. This situation is borne out by the researcher from several years of experience initially as a Course Developer and more recently as the substantive Co-ordinator for Instructional Design and Development within the Distance Education Unit. This situation is far from ideal in that much is left to collegial goodwill and co-operation that can come under severe stress in a context where distance education is not treated with high priority among the many other responsibilities of the teaching staff.

2. Locus of direction and responsibility

This, and other initiatives for distance teaching and learning currently rest with teachers in the Schools in association with University Extension rather than on a clearly defined policy for the management and development of distance education based on an appropriate philosophy of education. The COL Review Report points out "...it is not clear why some courses have been developed and not others, or how they relate to overall academic policy" (p.98).
Because USP's distance education programme has been driven by the various manpower training needs of the countries of the Region, it has focussed largely on programme expansion, and course delivery and teaching support, in its bid to carry out its mission of providing higher education for the Region. There is no question that it has risen admirably to this task. For example, since the 1980s a new Certificate and Diploma structure with 50 percent cross-credit possibilities to higher level qualifications has opened university study to people in new occupational groups and provided for a wider range of manpower training for distance students. The late 70s marked a beginning in the improvement of the technical standards of presentation of course materials and in 1982 the DEU was established to be responsible for course design, development and preparation specifically for distance students. However, as has been noted by the COL Review, the current absence of a distance education policy and programme plan has led to the ad hoc mounting of courses by various departments, some not offering any courses at all. Of more concern is the resulting ambiguity about the locus of ultimate responsibility for the quality of courses and the assurance that courses supporting programmes of study at a distance will continue to be offered within reasonable timeframes.

What has also clearly been lacking is a distance education philosophical base generating decisions about course provision and delivery. In the case of the USP, such a philosophy is necessary for the appropriate direction of the University through issues such as foreign influence, the training/education dichotomy and consumer research. Some of the speakers at the 1983 Future Directions conference questioned the true purpose of the University - higher education or manpower training - and Futa Helu of the 'Atenisi Institute in Tonga summed up the general feeling of this small group in his statement:

A university whose aims and policy guidelines are solely inspired by the desires and perceptions of external forces, whether sponsoring governments or aid donors, cannot be much of an institution and cannot hold much for the future of education of the communities it is supposed to serve (Report on Regional conference on future directions for the University of the South Pacific, 1983: 152).

Whereas the chartered responsibility of the University to respond to regional needs has been implemented, this task has been too narrowly interpreted and overlooks the learning needs of students as individuals and as an integral part of the educational process whether
in pursuit of manpower training or of education in itself. In this respect, the USP appears to share a trend common to university education worldwide. Conspicuous by its rarity at USP is the research work, both theoretical and evaluative, that is necessary in order to ensure that the distance teaching effort, as much as the on-campus effort, is effective in terms of learning objectives. Another significant function of the DEU since 1982 has been to put in place a corps of distance education professionals specialising, in particular, in instructional design for regional students. The fact that the academic nature of this work and consequently the academic status of its staff have been debated until very recently, may well attest to the ambivalence with which the University perceives its responsibility towards its extension students. The absence of university policy clearly determining the work, function and authority of the DEU in relation to other units of the University has given rise to a situation where much energy and time have been expended by the staff of the DEU in defence of their role and status as distance instructional designers. Consequently, the creative and professional possibilities of the unit are continuously being eroded and the potential of the staff to contribute to the quality of teaching and learning by distance, diminished. Furthermore, the growth of the distance education programme has led to increases in workloads that have encroached on time to undertake research and other professional development activities, locking the instructional design and development staff into a catch 22 situation with regard to consolidating their academic roles within the university structure. Unless the USP puts in place appropriate policy and opportunity to ensure the proper functioning of the DEU as a professional and academic unit of the University, this initiative can be interpreted as mere tokenism towards meeting the learning needs of extension students.

3. Mature entry policy

Closely allied to the function of manpower training is the USP's mature entry policy which recognises the large number of adults in the workforce who either missed out on earlier opportunities for higher education or now need to upgrade qualifications or both. The creation of further dimensions of diversity for the University by this policy does not appear to have been fully appreciated. Inherent in any group of adults are differentials in employment, social and educational experiences and in marital and family status, among other variables, all the subject of a separate body of literature on adult learners which
recognises these differences as they relate to learning orientation, strategies and motivation. There is little evidence in USP’s approach to distance teaching that any consideration given to the teaching of its adult students is based on sound principles of adult learning.

4. Multi-media course packages

In 1978 a satellite communication network which began in an experimental way in 1971, was consolidated primarily for the continued facilitation of administering the distance programme across the Region. It was also intended to provide tutorial support for students within reach of the satellite network. In the following year, with the establishment of the Learning Resources Unit (now part of the University Media Unit), the University looked forward to the development of multi-media learning packages enhanced, in a limited way, by satellite tutorials and radio programmes. These initiatives were indeed stimulated by a recognition of the diversity of learning needs represented by Regional students and specifically by the difficulties that the largely English as a Second Language (ESL) students had with written English. Although laudable in their intentions, these developments were, at best, assumptive, clearly lacking in an appropriate and relevant knowledge base of the nature of this diversity that would have contributed to their effectiveness. Thus, without the precedent of feasibility or impact analyses studies for a Region characterised by poor communications and media technology, and inexperienced users, the years have shown the satellite network, limited as it was to the few students who had access to it, to be more usefully a medium for lecturing purposes rather than for the opportunity for active interaction between teacher and students, and students and students (Williams and Gillard, 1986). Both the satellite tutorial support programme and multi-media approaches to distance teaching were established on the basis of their successful use particularly by institutions in developed countries. In the case of USP, not only was their relevance untested, they were reactive and add-on elements (Renwick et al., 1991:50), rather than integral to the teaching/learning processes, designed as ad hoc responses to forestall further failure and attrition among extension students. Their continued existence attest not to their proven effectiveness but to stop-gap attempts by a university that has not prioritised resources and the appropriate knowledge and expertise to advise and provide more substantial measures. Hence, failure rates continue to be high and research is much
needed to direct these technologies more realistically and effectively towards the peculiar needs of students of the USP Region.

5. The local USP Centre

The establishment of local USP Centres in as many regional countries as possible, staffed and equipped by the University from the early 1970s and into the 1980s was another initiative based on the recognition that there would be local differences that would be best catered for at a local level. It also had a political objective in the attempt to provide a physical presence of the University in individual countries of the Region. In support of its distance education programme, each Centre has classrooms, a small library of reference materials largely supplementary to course packages, a general science laboratory, computer and satellite facilities, and the capacity to hire part-time local tutors and markers which varies from country to country.

Aside from administrative and academic conditions to which all USP students are subject, each Centre enjoys a semi-autonomous existence which allows it to be entrepreneurial and innovative within university guidelines. The Centres also make information about the University available locally, and transmit information about local needs to the University, as well as evaluative reports about the Centre's ability to successfully support its extension courses and students.

However, as much as this move assists the University's ability to cope with diversity, it has created its own additional problems. Economically, politically and socially, and with respect to levels and rates of national development, some countries are more suited and able to offer a wider range of student support facilities and opportunities than others. This has led to inequitable treatment of students by the various Centres across the Region, and a further factor of diversity that the University has to contend with in terms of its course development and delivery policies.

The question must also be raised about the University's disposition to receive information about local needs via its Centres and to act upon it. In November 1984, Cook Islands
Centre Director John Herrmann, in response to concerns raised about high failure rates, made a plea for the recognition of the special needs of the extension students. He said,

...in extension teaching, the university is in fact dealing with a student whose needs and attitudes are considerably different from those of one on-campus. And for 90 percent of the extension students it would be fairly accurate to say that they would not give continuing priority consideration to their studies. Most of them are employed for 8 hours a day. They are planters, housewives, and sportsmen who also have community and extended family obligations to attend to... Needless to say it becomes decidedly difficult for a student to concentrate and maintain a positive attitude towards his studies, in such circumstances (Herrmann, J.J., 1984).

Herrmann also pointed out the additional difficulties of adjusting to self-study and independent learning, new concepts in education for many of the students involved in USP's distance education programme. While Herrmann's observations cannot lay claim to having a scientific base, his long experience as a practising academic in distance education in the South Pacific lends soundness and relevance to the points he makes and calls attention to the need for the University to seriously address the special needs of its distance students, particularly those born out of issues of diversity.

The whole development of the USP's distance education programme has been marked by a top-down approach, expressed through a one-sided institutional focus on what and how best to teach, more than to learn, through the distance medium. As pressures mount for the delivery of more courses and programmes by Extension, the need to take the learner into consideration as part of a more holistic approach to its distance education effort seems to recede further into the background. Initiatives discussed so far reflect a reactive approach to specific needs as they arose and the absence of a development policy based on an educational philosophy has been noted by the authors of the COL Review Report. Its recommendations that

... an enhanced telecommunication network, phone-in opportunities for students who are unable to travel to university centres, a greater reliance on local tutors and more use of summer schools have the potential to make students' learning more effective, and by so doing, reduce drop-out rates, increase pass percentages, increase the number of students completing degrees and diplomas: and reduce the time it takes them to do so (Renwick et al., p. 107).

are significant in that they are put as testable hypotheses. This confirms that there is much about the USP distance education student within his/her broad study context that is as yet unknown. It
also implies that without this knowledge, any initiative to enhance distance education will, at best, be speculative and run the risk of being misdirected and misguided.

1.7 The Study Problem

1.7.1 The concerns of the study

This study has been stimulated by a variety of concerns:

1. In the growth and development of the USP, the pressure to provide higher education to a region dominated more by differences than by similarities, and by poorly developed economies and limited resources, has forced the University into an instrumental role of manpower training for national development. Pressure from the need to continue to meet changing educational demands over the years, as well as from Regional politics and the politics of a dual-mode institution, has caused it, over the years, to relegate its extension programme to a position of desirable but optional activity among its many other commitments. Thus, the COL Review Report has noted the lack of a development policy to guide the growth of the extension programme, and the absence of a philosophy of education on which to base its teaching/learning approaches and strategies. As a result, there have not been adequate and appropriate time, resources or attention allocated to the student dimension of the distance education programme and specifically to the task of fully understanding the distance learners and their specific needs as adults coming from diverse backgrounds and environments across the USP Region.

This oversight may have some degree of impact upon the performance of students within the courses and programmes offered by the University for two main reasons:

(a) Because the students come from diverse physical, socio-cultural, economic, political and educational backgrounds, their higher educational needs must reflect this diversity.
(b) In such divergent personal, situational and study contexts, environmental variables bearing directly or indirectly on students' dispositions and opportunities to learn will differ and will exert varying influences on students across the Region.

2. In addition to the knowledge about influential environmental factors within the personal, situational and study contexts of extension students, there is a need to know the extent and strength of the influence that these variables or combinations of variables bring to bear on the students' dispositions to learn. Specifically, from what kind of background and under what circumstances are students more inclined to learn effectively and efficiently: which variables, singly or in conjunction with others, pose barriers to learning that need to be considered and surmounted in the design and development of extension courses? Unless USP extension courses are designed and structured to accommodate these differences, they will not meet the needs posed by the personal and environmental circumstances of many students and may therefore discourage persistence and successful performance by students taking into consideration the principles of 'whole person learning'.

3. The bulk of USP's distance learners are adults. In view of the current knowledge about the specific educational requirements and learning strategies of adult students, it is necessary that courses for adults give due consideration to the principles of adult learning (andragogy) in order to be effective. The third concern of this study relates to the extent to which efforts at distance teaching at USP have been guided by andragogical principles. Again, with the focus of the distance education programme being on responding to the training needs of regional countries, programmes and delivery are characterised more by the aim to increase knowledge and upgrade qualifications in specific vocational areas from an employer perspective rather than from a student point of view.

4. Finally, to what extent has this lack of understanding of the distance learner as an adult and from a 'whole person' perspective influenced the opportunities within a course for student persistence and successful performance. What variables constituting the world of the adult distance learners at USP can be identified as correlates of persistence and
success. There is, in fact, due recognition of the necessity of this information in the claimed existence of a development philosophy for extension studies contained in the University Extension Annual Report, 1993.

... to which most departments and University have historically subscribed:

that a student studying through the distance mode shall normally be provided with teaching/learning packages which, in themselves, have been designed to enable him/her to succeed in the mastery and passing of the course. These packages shall, to the fullest extent, comprise instructional strategies and media appropriate to the known student market (researcher's underlining) and the general 'standalone' policy (p. 19).

A relevant and significant question here is the extent to which this market is, in fact, known to instructional designers and distance educators at USP given the dearth of research on the USP distance learner. It has seemed more likely the case that course development at the USP has been based on an ad hoc aggregation of knowledge and experience about the USP distance education context and students derived from pooling together the piecemeal knowledge and experience of course writers from the Schools and the instructional designers at University Extension. This situation can, quite easily, over the years, become accepted as sufficient for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements of such a development philosophy of extension studies although it does little to substitute for a philosophy of education based on sound adult distance education principles and substantial, empirical knowledge about the USP distance learner.

The answers to the concerns cited and implicit above, will, no doubt, make a significant contribution to the development of more effective USP extension courses, geared specifically for adult distance learners, coming as they do now, from divergent and heterogenous backgrounds.

1.7.2 Study Objective and Questions

The conceptual framework of this study is based on principles of adult learning at a distance discussed earlier in this chapter, incorporating humanist and development theories and concepts on which they have been founded and presented in Figure 1.2 as follows:
This study is exploratory in nature for three specific reasons: its physical scope encompassing the USP Region from which its population is drawn, the wide range of variables under investigation, and the fact that for this particular context, there has not been a procedent investigation of similar scope and nature. The study seeks to examine the adult distance students at USP in the context of the USP Region and to explore a range of variables within this context with the intent of identifying among them those that are significant in affecting learning and studying at a distance. The main thrust of this exercise will be the application of principles of adult learning currently contained in the literature to adult distance learners in the specific context of the USP Region. In particular, an assessment of the significance of personal, situational and study
environment variables and the kinds of influence they exert on the learning of these adults in their various locations in the USP Region, will be investigated. Also of significance to the objectives of this study is the profiling of characteristics and attributes of adult distance learners at USP, and the examination of the extent to which they are influenced by environmental conditions prevailing in the context of the USP Region. It is envisaged that not only will such findings contribute further to a theoretical base about the adult distance learner that might have universal application, they will also highlight variations that are caused by different educational settings not currently sufficiently accounted for by adult learning theory, and challenge theories of distance education that do not incorporate environmental variables as significant determinants of effective adult learning. The objectives of this study are contained in the following study objective and questions:

Study Objective: Data collected will be used to produce a profile of the typical distance student enrolled in the Diploma in Management Studies (DMS), and the Diploma in Accounting Studies (DACS) at the USP, taking into account answers to the following study questions.

Study Question 1: As adult learners, and with regard to theory and principles of adult learning, are these students
- self-directing and independent in their learning orientation;
- highly and intrinsically motivated;
- confident in their self-perception as students;
- preferring courses which are experiences-based and oriented towards problem-solving
in their disposition to learning?

Study Question 2: To what extent do personal and environmental variables influence this disposition and the preparedness of these adult learners to complete, and perform successfully in their extension courses?

Study Question 3: Are dispositional variables (motivation, confidence and attitude to study) and variables of learning preparedness (transition to distance and tertiary education, learning orientation, learning style/skills) good indicators of performance?
1.8 Concluding Summary

This chapter has provided a historical discussion of the development of the USP and the purpose of its distance education programme within this development. It has shown how pressure from its member countries to rise to high manpower training demands has led it away from concerns about the quality of learning of its distance students. Issues of diversity related to the personal, situational and educational environment of these students indicate differences in learning need among them that must have an impact on the quality of their learning. However, the 'neglect' of the student dimension in the USP's distance education programme discussed in relation to features of its development within the context of the USP Region and institutional development, gives rise to the concerns, objective and questions of this study.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Outline of Chapter 2

Chapter 2 examines the literature with regard to the various areas significant to the thesis topic. It begins with a history of the USP, focussing especially on the reasons and circumstances for its creation, its development and evolution into an institution for manpower training in the Region. This chapter also looks at the development of University Extension as an attempt to make university education accessible across the Region and in so doing, enhance the regional image of the USP. The literature depicts the phenomenal growth rate of University Extension reflecting the appropriateness of this mode of study for the distances of the Region and circumstances of its population. However, initiatives towards making distance education effective for its learners have been either ill-thought out or lacking, particularly in terms of the education of adults. Literature on the principles of adult learning both theoretical and empirical is discussed, and their application to distance education with particular reference to the USP context, is examined. The chapter concludes with a brief comment on the current state of the USP distance education programme and its present developmental emphases.

2.2 The University of the South Pacific: Regional Diversity and its Educational Challenges for the University

2.2.1 Arguing for a regional university

The idea of a regional university in the South Pacific was based largely on two arguments by Morris (1966: 20): that among the countries of the South Pacific Region, "general situations bear sufficient similarities to allow some degree of common consideration", and that the fact of smallness in size of many of the countries of the Region meant that only through joint regional effort at meeting educational and training needs of these countries would such a venture become economically viable. There were several reasons for the necessity of local higher level education,
and most prominent were the "development and modernisation processes begun by colonial governments, and the manpower training required to sustain political independence that was approaching for those countries of the Region not already self-governing" (Tuimaleali’ifano, 1993: 281).

However, both Morris, and Alexander (Legislative Council of Fiji, 1967), in arguing for the creation of the University of the South Pacific in 1968, recognised that the differences prevailing among the countries of the South Pacific would give rise to unique educational and training challenges for the university. Reports produced by Morris and Alexander were direct and indirect results, respectively, of the Higher Education Mission to the South Pacific, led by Sir Charles (later Lord) Morris, "to enquire into the various suggestions which had been made in the past for the provision of higher education in the Region" (Report of the Higher Education Mission to the South Pacific, 1966: 9).

That the Mission was the result of talks in London between representatives of the British and New Zealand Governments, and included a representative of the Australian government, clearly marks the colonial influence on, and in particular the continuation of British educational traditions into higher level education in the South Pacific, conceptually foreign, therefore, to the cultures of the peoples of the South Pacific. In addition, the University was created in spite of the debate at the time on the readiness of the Region for university level education and whether it would have been more appropriate to enhance local institutions then catering for regional post-secondary education, most notably the Derrick Technical Institute (now the Fiji Institute of Technology), in Suva, Fiji. In light of this debate, the USP might be seen as a legacy to British territories in the Region, argued by the parties to the Mission as a factor beneficial in both its educational intentions and cohesive qualities for the countries involved.

In Morris’s report however, it is significant that several of the features of the South Pacific Region that he indicated would influence the kind of university to be established and direct its appropriate development, were features of diversity. He emphasised the geographical variations of the Region comprising "several territories, which are themselves divided into further separated
geographical entities, ... (with) close on a million people living under differing political systems and with different social environments ..." (p. 20).  

Significant differences also discussed in the report as containing potential challenges for the provision of higher regional education, were the wide variations in language and culture, the degree of availability of trained local teachers, variations in high school provision and qualifications across the Region (see also Fairbairn, 1992), as well as the variations in the provision, even lack, of information about current and future manpower needs for the various countries concerned (pp. 13-24). That the main campus was located in Suva, Fiji (on land formerly used and donated by the Royal New Zealand Air Force), brought its own measures of inequity in the area of access to higher education in the Region. Some aspects of this inequity will be discussed throughout this chapter. 

2.2.2 Challenges to regional university education

All of these features, and more, and problems that they posed for a newly-established University of the South Pacific, formed the basis of regional discussions organised at intervals by the university (Seminar on What Kind of University for the South Pacific, USP, 1973; Regional Conference on Future Directions for the University of the South Pacific, USP, 1983). 

The Tenth Anniversary Review Committee, constituted in 1979 to review the progress of the University in its first ten years of existence and to offer recommendations for its future development, established that the University had adopted an instrumental role in its teaching and was, by this stage, concentrating on meeting manpower training needs of the Region. By the time the Regional Conference on Future Directions for the USP was convened in December, 1983, the onus on the University to continue to respond to changing economic patterns in the Region was becoming firmly entrenched. That this was a task fraught with its own difficulties is reflected 

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1 See also:  
1. Appendix 1 for map of the USP Region, and a brief discussion of Regional membership and geographical spread in the Introduction and Background to Chapter 1.  
2. Tuimalaleali'i-fano (1993) for a more detailed discussion of regional diversity.
in the fact of differential political status, economic growth and national development among the
member countries of the Region. The comment made by one Conference participant that USP
courses "quite often have not met the particular needs of each individual country" because they
were determined to a large extent by "what the more powerful countries demand" (Proceedings
of the Conference on Future Directions for the University of the South Pacific, 1983, p. 92),
reflects the kind of political concerns related to differences in political and economic status among
member countries. From the University's perspective, the then Vice-chancellor, Geoffrey Caston,
stated that "these varying demands are not just in competition, they are often operationally
incompatible with each other" (ibid., p. 34).

These circumstances have the potential to lead education into the situation where "teaching can
so easily become instruction and even indoctrination rather than education" (Sewart, 1993: 124),
and become institution-based at the expense of student needs (ibid., p. 126).

One significant consequence of general regional diversity, and of the distant location of the
university for many potential students of the Region, was that only a small and select number of
sponsored students, mainly young school-leavers, would be able to receive education at the
university. For the vast potential of largely adults across all socio-economic levels there would
have to be an alternative mode of teaching. In addition, a significant consideration for a regional
university under these circumstances was that if its activities were concentrated in one country
of the Region catering for a select group, this would do little to enhance its role and image as a
regional university specifically adapted to meeting the educational needs of the peoples of the
Region.

2.3 Distance Education at the University of the South Pacific: Meeting the regional
challenges

2.3.1 Background and development of the USP's distance education programme

The USP's distance education programme was initially established in 1970 to fulfil both the above
purposes - make university studies more equally accessible to the people of the Region and, in
so doing, enhance the University's regional image. In 1970, University Extension was set up, initially as part of the then School of Education, becoming a separate, semi-autonomous unit of the University in 1974 (Lockwood et al., 1988: 265), to be responsible for various aspects of the University's outreach programme including distance education. Since its establishment, distance education registered a phenomenal growth rate particularly in the 1980s (Wallace, 1990: 12), with the increase accounting for 35.7 percent Equivalent Full-time Students (EFTS) (Renwick et al., 1991: 32). Course numbers also increased greatly (Extension Services Handbooks), so that by the early 1990s the pressures on University Extension to cope with the consequences of the phenomenal growth rate of the distance education programme and the consistently increasing number of students in spite of course and enrolment restrictions, prompted a proposal by University Extension to the University for a major review of its work, related objectives and its policies before any further development took place (Wallace, 1990: 14). The review, funded by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Vancouver, Canada, and undertaken by an international team of consultants between 1989 and 1990, produced the first comprehensive report (COL Report) on University Extension since its inception. Apart from tracing the history, growth and development of the various aspects of the work of the unit, drawing from extensive primary sources, it also confirmed the vital role of distance education in establishing the concept of USP "...regional in character as well as mission" (p. 3) as well as its suitability and appropriateness for students caught in the circumstances prevailing of distance, small scattered populations, low income levels, and the high cost (in broad economic and social terms) of full-time enrolment at the University's two campuses in Suva, Fiji, and Apia, Western Samoa. Distance education, with its focus on independent learning, also had the distinct advantage of being adaptable for students living on outer islands and remote rural areas and villages within the USP Region.

In addition, the COL Report observed that much of the development in the first 20 years of the University had inevitably focussed on institutional matters of management involving primarily budget and staffing, the logistics of coping with a Region originally encompassing 11 island nations spread over 28 million square kilometres of ocean and on initiatives in, and the development of its teaching programmes. The latter has been largely characterised by a manpower market orientation focussing on the training needs of countries of the Region towards the improvement of workforces and economic development.
It would appear from the report, therefore, that the student perspective, and in particular, policies and opportunities for effective student learning at a distance might not have received due and sufficient attention as an indirect consequence.

2.3.2 Carrying out the distance education function - how successful?

If institutions reflect the circumstances of their creation, then the diversity of the USP Region and the responsibility of the University to accommodate this diversity as much as possible in its teaching programmes, were major influential factors in the purpose and development of the University's distance education programme. In discussing aspects of distance education in Asia and the South Pacific, Selim (1987) and Setiajadi (1988) point out that one of the features of most institutions in developing countries/regions would be an attempt to meet educational needs with limited resources and a fairly heavy dependence on foreign aid. In addition, the nature of the need would be different from that of developed, industrialised countries in that distance education would be providing a second chance for many for first qualifications predominantly in the vocational field for people already in jobs and seeking the know-how and skills to do them better. Thirdly, the communication infrastructure is not nearly as sophisticated or as widespread as in developed countries (see also Wallace and Tuimaleali'ifano, 1989; Taylor, 1989). In his report mentioned earlier, Alexander saw that for the USP these features would pose special problems that would call for special measures and that the precedents from more developed countries did not necessarily apply (in Renwick et al., 1991: 4).

One of the dominating features of USP over the years as a university in a developing region has been its constant attempt to meet educational needs with limited resources. Most of the 1980s, for instance, were marked by an economic freeze on its recurrent budget although the educational needs of the Region continued to grow. Understandably such circumstances force a preoccupation with the institutions's ability to cope with both the management of teaching and teaching support systems and the delivery of courses. The COL Report on the work of University Extension contain recommendations (6 and 7 in particular) that indicate that not only are these perspectives predominant in the work of University Extension, much work still needs to be done in order to improve institutional and teaching support matters (pp. 48, 50), let alone allow room and resources
for the development and adaptation of programmes of study in order to incorporate in earnest the practical implications of relevant principles of adult learning at a distance.

Not surprisingly, the model of distance education adopted by the USP borrows according to its specific needs and circumstances of teaching and learning from the many western models of distance education (see Keegan, 1990; Holmberg, 1986 for descriptions of these models) which were developed to explain distance education conceptualisation and operations in developed and industrialised countries. More appropriately, an eclectic model, responsive to factors of regional diversities, of limited resources and the ensuing variations in national development across the Region, of the institution, and central institutional control, and of the variation in regional educational demands, has inevitably evolved in relation to the USP's distance education programme over the years.

2.4 Distance Education: a Model for the Education of Adults

It might have been implicit in all the discussion about the diversity of the Region - geographically, socio-culturally, economically, politically, and in terms of its educational experience - that the student body being addressed would reflect this diversity in the state of preparedness with which they came to their distance study. Furthermore, given that the bulk of these students were adults, the USP's distance education programme would essentially be one of adult education involving adults coming to their studies from a variety of backgrounds and needs. Evans and Nation (1992) argue that this social aspect must be a significant component of any theory that provides the foundation for a model of distance education (see also Muller, 1989; Jarvis, 1987). The argument for this approach is based on the concept of school and schooling as instruments of society:

... schools ... are tools that were invented by human beings to meet the challenge of new social circumstances and new human aspirations. If a school is a tool, then schooling can be thought of as a technology. And like all tools and technologies, schools and schooling have changed in concert with changes elsewhere in society (Hamilton 1989b, as quoted by Evans and Nation, p. 7).
The advice contained in this argument for USP’s distance education programme is that for it to be a useful tool of the society that it serves, it must adequately accommodate the student dimension and its specific needs. Jarvis (1987: 193) points out that each student brings to a teaching and learning situation a social past and this has to be recognised by the teacher. Learners cannot just throw off their social past when they enter a formal learning situation, because there is a sense in which they are, in part, that past. Their minds, their thought processes, their language, etc. all reflect that past, so that their definition of the teaching and learning situation, and their understanding of the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be learned, are affected by that past. Therefore, learners have to be recognised as people who are not totally responsible for what they are, even though all people do develop their individuality as they mature, and with it a considerable degree of autonomy, depending upon their previous experiences and their social situation.

Distance education, by virtue of the temporal and spatial flexibility it affords potential students, has generally attracted a largely adult clientele to date, and the literature has begun to address distance education synonymously with adult education (Garrison and Shale, 1990: 131). As such, it is logical to assume that distance education is based on recognition of principles of adult learning (Cross, 1981; Knowles, 1990).

2.4.1 Theories and principles of adult learning

In the last three decades theories and studies of the adult learner, and more recently on adults learning at a distance, have focussed on the differences between adults, and children and adolescents as learners. One of the outcomes of such studies is the concept of Andragogy (Knowles 1973, in Cross 1981) which is premised on four crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from assumptions about learning as children, that have influenced distance education pedagogy and approach to the teaching of adults. The more widely-acknowledged of these differences and relevant to distance education, are Knowles’ postulations that adults are more self-directed in their self-concept as learners, and that they draw upon their relatively wider experience of life and the workforce in approaching their learning tasks which orient them more towards problem-centred approaches to learning (Knowles, 1990: 195). Coldeway (1982) comments that

the evidence and logic of (Andragogy) demand that it be considered by distance educators (p. 91).
In an effort to "accommodate current knowledge about what we know about adults as learners". Cross (1981: 234) has produced the Characteristics of Adults as Learners (CAL) framework. Incorporating most of the principles of andragogy, it attempts to elucidate differences between adults and children and ultimately to suggest how teaching adults should be different from teaching children (p. 234).

Figure 2.1 illustrates the model consisting of two classes of variables. First, Personal Characteristics represented as

... gradual growth of children into adults ... expressed as growth or developmental continua along three dimensions: physical, psychological and sociocultural (p. 235).

Second, Situational Characteristics

... usually expressed as dichotomies: part-time versus full-time learning and voluntary versus compulsory learning (p. 235).

This model calls for an adaptive and adjustable role for the educator in response to the various developmental and situational levels represented in any group of adult learners in a programme of study. The process of distinguishing between attributes of adults and children as learners implicitly correlates this knowledge with the potential for effective teaching, and implies also (particularly with regard to the CAL model) that any one group of learners can represent a variety of developmental phases in respect to the three dimensions. Development in the psychological and sociocultural dimensions is largely a function of the interaction between the individual and features of his/her environment that forms the basis of interaction psychology.

Cross’s Chain of Response (COR) model is based on the assumption

...that participation in a learning activity, whether in organised classes or self-directed, is not a single act but the result of a chain of responses each based on an evaluation of the position of the individual in his or her environment (p. 125).
Figure 2.1: Characteristics of Adults as Learners (CAL)

**Personal Characteristics**

- Physiological/Aging
- Sociocultural/Life Phases
- Psychological/Developmental Stages

**Situational Characteristics**

- Part-Time Learning Versus Full-Time Learning
- Voluntary Learning Versus Compulsory Learning

Thus, Cross suggests that at any moment in the life of an individual, a variable (personal or environmental) can be assessed as a negative or positive force, given the quality of its link with the other responses.

The influence on Andragogy and other principles of adult learning by the work of both humanist and development psychologists is evident. Writing in the 1960s and 1970s, humanists Rogers, Maslow, and Jourard described the process of adult learning as a self-initiated process motivated by intrinsic reasons to know and thereby to grow. It was thus a process of self-actualization involving and pervading every aspect of the learner (Ibid, pp. 8-9). Houle (1961) saw these reasons in three broad and overlapping orientations to learning: the goal-oriented pursue education in episodes as need and/or interest arose; the activity-oriented participate in education for the love of participation, and the learning-oriented have a constant and inherent desire to know and learn (15-24). A study by Tough in 1968 led him to conclude that as well as his/her orientation to study, the adult learner underwent several phases in the process of engaging in a learning project. The importance of environmental features in helping the student gain competence in each phase might offer opportunities for improving his/her learning effectiveness (cited by Houle, p. 48).

Development psychologists, particularly those promoting theories of interaction, placed special emphasis on the role of the environment in shaping the growth of an individual and were thus more inclined than the humanists to take a more active role in deciding what kind of learning experiences were more likely to advance the individual throughout the various stages and phases of life (Cross, 1981: 229). Summarising the work of Miller (1967), Rubenson (1977), Boshier (1973) and Tough (1979), Cross pointed out common elements among them being: the conviction
"that (adult) participation can be understood through an analysis of the interaction between an individual and his or her environment" (p. 123); that adults are motivated to participate as a result of perceiving and balancing positive and negative forces in the situation; that the individual can determine his or her own destiny; that self-esteem influences participation; participation is personality related; there must be compatibility or congruence between attributes of the individual and features of the learning situation; and reward (intrinsic or extrinsic) is an important participation determinant.

2.5 Applying Principles of Adult Learning to Distance Education

2.5.1 Adult learning and theories of distance education

The influence, in varying degrees, of humanist principles of adult learning as a process of self-actualization based on self-initiated acts for largely intrinsic reasons, and also of developmentalist emphasis on the significant role of the environment in shaping the growth of the individual, on the development of distance education theory, is obvious in Keegan's classification of distance education theory into three distinct groupings. The first of these is grounded on principles of autonomy and independence and was developed in the late '60s/early '70s by such major contributors as Delling, Wedemeyer and Moore. The second category is based on a theory of industrialisation and was developed by Otto Peters in the early '70s. More recently, theories of interaction and communication were postulated by Holmberg, Baath, Sewart, Smith and Daniel.

Contributors to the first group believe that distance education is essentially about adult education, and principles of adult learning emphasising autonomy, independence and self-directed learning must apply. Institutional interaction with the students is not integral to the learning process. Rather, responsibility for learning rests largely on the student with the teaching institution offering guidance and support at the request of the student and to the degree that the assistance is requested. This assistance is gradually withdrawn as the student gains confidence and experience in the distance mode.
Theories of interaction and communication, however, emphasise student support as an integral part of the distance teaching/learning process. Models of distance education based on these theories range from Holmberg’s ‘guided didactic conversation’ in which interaction and communication are achieved largely through artificial, in-text means, to Sewart’s ‘continuity of concern’ which recommends as much inter-personal support as the student required. This support is based largely on the recognition of the variation in the learning needs influenced by personal, situational and environmental factors, that individual adult students bring to their learning tasks.

In Peters’s industrialisation theory, the mass production process and the related objectivity of the learning materials are geared towards catering for a far-flung and widely-scattered student population making the possibility of personal communication highly questionable. Communication in the industrialised context is therefore largely by technical means within and without the learning materials which must form an integral part of the institution’s student support system in a well planned, and paced teaching/learning structure. Because the industrialised model caters for mass education, it necessarily relies on the student’s ability to study independently and to utilise mechanical and electronic means for interaction where required. This has implications for their predisposition to technology and artificial means of interaction.

2.5.2 Significant features of adult learners: independence and self-directedness

Definitions provided by the literature of these two concepts indicate that there is considerable overlap in the way they have been seen and used. There is, however, a significant difference. With regard to the concept of independence, there is consensus among distance educators and researchers that this is represented by the degree to which the distance student is able to work individually from self-instructional learning materials and resources, within institutional conditions such as a course schedule and assignment submission deadlines (Keegan, 1990). Some authors have termed this a ‘private’ approach to study (Ibid, pp. 43-44), removing students from the group to more private and individual circumstances. Significant to the definition, however, is the degree to which there is dependence on a teacher to guide the learning process within institutional requirements. With regard to the concept of self-direction, the degree to which the teacher determines the learning content and process is the key element. The onus for what is learned and
how it is learned, and ideally, how long it takes to be learned, is on the student. Both concepts are about learner control, although an independent learner is in control of what is required of him/her by the institution which primarily involves the proper management of time and time commitments and the initiative to seek help when required, whereas a self-directed learner controls, to a large extent, the learning requirement. Bagnall (1987) sees the situation as one of dichotomy in the meaning of self-direction and suggests that what has often been taken to be self-direction in adults, is a situation of student self-management which relates specifically to the degree of control over the student by others. The capacity of the student to overcome constraints himself/herself, is the quality of self-determination. Neither skill, he suggests, must "be taken as a sufficient condition of a learner's preparedness to be self-directing" (p. 269).

Burge (1988), suggests that what has so far been accepted as self-direction in adults should, in reality, be seen as self-responsibility for learning (p. 269).

While there is general consensus among authors and researchers on the independence and self-directedness of adult learners relative to the learning of children and adolescents, the literature is beginning to challenge the universality of this claim and the accuracy of assumptions underlying it. Research into cognitive styles has indicated that adults will vary in their degree of self-directedness and independence. Some authors argue that these features are more a strategical approach to learning rather than characteristics of adulthood. Joughin (1991), while acknowledging that support for self-directed learning since Malcolm Knowles' 1970 theory of Andragogy has come from such prominent distance educators as Moore (1983, 1986), Holmberg (1989), Keegan (1990), and Garrison (1989), asserts however, "... that adult education has itself reached a turning point with respect to this concept" (p. 266), and now needs critical re-evaluation. He cites reasons given by several people, for example, Brookfield (1988) points out that most studies on self-directed learning used subjects from middle-class, educationally advantaged backgrounds, placing in doubt the generalisability of their conclusions (p. 267); in addition, these studies were almost always conducted in the context of western culture. Candy (1987) challenges the six assumptions commonly made in favour of increasing learner controls, i.e. adults are individual learners, learner controls allow for different learner styles, increasing learner control increases motivation to learn, learner control contributes to the development of the whole person, learner control recognises equality of adult learners and educators, and learner control models represent a changed power.
relationship (pp. 267-268). There is insufficient evidence, according to Candy, that these assumptions are accurate or resemble current practice in distance teaching/learning situations. He warns against the practice of ‘pseudo autonomy’ where teachers/institutions increase learner responsibilities in some areas while maintaining control over critical functions, especially assessment.

Similarly, Jarvis (1987), in support of Yonge’s (1985) point that the difference between andragogy and pedagogy lies in the way the learner is accompanied through the learning process by the teacher, suggests that "the way that the learner defines the total teaching and learning process may affect the process significantly ..." (p. 10).

The learner arrives at this definition through the social processes in which he or she is involved. Thus if society expects children to reproduce knowledge, this expectation will be held by the child. Adults on the other hand might be expected to be problem solvers and this will affect the perception of learning of the adult.

In relation to this notion, Holec (1985) recognises that self-direction and autonomy are skills that can be developed, practised and improved in the process of ‘learning to learn’ (p. 184), is understandable with respect to the process of changing the expectations and perceptions of the learner. This objective is achieved along a continuum ranging from no responsibility for learning to full responsibility for autonomy. "For a learner to be able to undertake a self-directed learning programme of some kind therefore, it is not a necessary prerequisite for him to be already perfectly competent in these respects" (p. 179).

He adds that decisions about various aspects of the programme may be revised "as and when the learner wishes" (p. 179). Sharma (1989) sees this self-reliance as crucial to the liberation of the learner so that "once equipped with self-learning capabilities, learners will become their own best teachers and will not be dependent upon the provision of a school and a teacher to acquire knowledge" (p. 18).

Vaherva and Koro (1993) produced similar research findings. In evaluating the applicability of the self-directedness in distance education to open university study, they concluded that "as the
capacity to engage in self-directed learning was enhanced, so was the capacity of learning how to learn" (p. 372).

The instigation of a self-directed learning programme however, must take into consideration psychological barriers which potential students may have against autonomous methods, and sociological obstacles in the negative attitudes society may have against this mode of teaching as second best to having a teacher (Holec, 1985: 189). Holec stresses the importance of personality and self-esteem in helping students adhere to such a learning programme. He also indicates the importance of teachers knowing how much intervention is required at any specific point in the continuum, and the need for institutions to create appropriate conditions for both teachers and learners (p. 180). Joughin (1991) cautions against the ready acceptance of self-directed learning for adults and urges the need to approach any research into autonomy from the perspective of the learner if it is to be worthwhile (p. 270). An apt summary of his conclusions is contained in Candy’s statement: "And in the final analysis, their willingness to accept increased control will depend on whether or not, in any particular case, they judge it to be a valid strategy" (Joughin, 1991: 268).

2.5.3 Situational and personal factors and educational experience

The significance of the student’s context and personal disposition in determining how much autonomy and self-direction is involved in any learning situation, is researched and discussed by Rekkedal (1988) and Benson et al. (1991). Rekkedal suggests that individuals who are well established in family, social and vocational life achieve more than younger students who are not married, living with their parents and often coming directly from other traditional schools and having only minor vocational experience (p. 219). In the Benson et al. study which set out to examine principles of distance education as represented by the Keegan categories cited earlier, and which involved 36 students enrolled in the first year Sociology units at Monash University, the authors found that research subjects did need a range of study support. They concluded that
...Peters' theory is more relevant to the inexperienced distance learner, that Holmberg's theory is relevant irrespective of distance education experience and that independence and autonomy, as promoted by Wedemeyer and Moore, become more increasingly important as distance education experience increases (p. 52).

Although the literature under review establishes the importance of environmental and personal factors with regard to successful distance teaching and learning, Gilson (1990) points out that major theories of distance education do not appear to consider the environment as a directly significant part of their models of the teaching/learning process (pp. 128-131). Its appearance is only recent, as an important element in Billing's (1989) model of distance education. Her own work in examining selected research on the basis of Kurt Lewin's (1936) behaviour model, that behaviour is a function of a person and his/her environment, has indicated that educational background, dispositional variables (attitudes and perceptions) and cognitive personality style and learning variables all appear to be good indicators of performance (122-123). The range of personal variables examined include demographic data, students' perception of academic ability, cognitive personality style, learning styles and motivation, field dependence/independence and personality. A significant variable in the student's life space is the educational environment and the extent to which it can and should be modified and enhanced by the quality and range of services to improve motivation and success rates.

Similar studies include that by Marland et al. (1990) who conclude from their research that, aside from poor textual material, students' personal situations, their academic backgrounds and approaches to study were key influences on how they responded to their respective courses. In addition, Yehezkel and Glicksohn (1993), Wagemans et al. (1991), and Eisenberg and Dowsett (1990) provided evidence of the significance of prior knowledge or academic background as indicators of achievement. In the last-mentioned study, the authors also found that people in occupations which require less qualified personnel had higher dropout rates, thus suggesting the influential role of colleagues in motivating persistence (p. 245). It is quite clear from the literature under survey that...

...student withdrawal is related to a set of complex multivariables that act additively and interactively in numerous context-dependent ways to result in a dropout decision that is almost idiosyncratic in nature (Garland, 1993, p.388).
2.5.4 Challenging universal applications

The question of the universal application of the results of these studies is called to question by two considerations: discrepancies in the findings and application to students in different educational settings. In the case of the former, Gibson (1990) points out that discrepancies in some findings in the area of educational background may suggest that there are other intervening variables such as the self-other, self-environment congruence, dispositional barriers and locus of control as crucial to completion of courses, not accounted for in the body of research under review. Several authors indicate the significance of motivation and self-esteem in positively predisposing students to educational opportunities in the environment and thereby to more qualitative learning (Ostman et al., 1988; Harper and Kember, 1989; Taylor, 1989; Coldewey, 1991; Boondao and Rowley, 1991; Myers et al., 1993).

Gibson observes that research on environmental factors focussed mainly on modifying the educational environment in support of student persistence - tutor contact, telephone tutorials, peer tutoring, intervention practices, assignment turnaround times, pacing and the use of media (pp. 124-127). Again variations in student needs in relation to the use of the various services, practices and facilities indicated, suggest that "certain conditions govern these needs" such as context, content and delivery strategies, area and level of study, student orientation to learning, motivation and perceptions of existing barriers to learning. Powell, Conway and Ross (1990) define these conditions as predisposing characteristics which interact with characteristics of life changes and institutional variables to influence the probability of student success and persistence in distance education (see also Garland, 1993). In their study of 243 newly-enrolled students at Athabasca University, Powell et al. isolated nine major predisposing characteristics which differentiated between successful and unsuccessful students. Positive attitudes and high self-assessment towards success rated highly among these characteristics. On the other hand, known reasons for drop out can be classified under four general categories: demographic, social interaction, interpersonal or psychological and institutional. "... all four categories interact and should not be thought of as mutually exclusive" (Ostman et al., 1988: 22).
Powell, Conway and Ross make the cautionary point that changing institutional factors eg. pacing policy, group learning and additional support facilities may de-emphasize the importance of such predisposing characteristics and bring others to the fore. However, they also indicate that

on the other hand, it is also reasonable to suppose there are certain aspects intrinsic to distance teaching and the adult population who learn through such methods that may yield a set of "generic" predisposing characteristics in distance education applying across institutions and student populations (p. 16).

Coldeway (1991), in replicating the Redal Project, found that for some students at Athabasca University distance teaching is more effective when supplemented with classroom group instruction. The same kind of support was indicated earlier in the Benson et al. (1991) study, and suggests the need for institutions to monitor and modify any open enrolment and self-pacing policies to accommodate varying needs among its student intake "to encourage patterns of behaviour that are more likely to result in course completion" (Coldeway, 1991: 10).

There can be no question that efforts at synthesising research on the adult learner and adult learners at a distance within more natural settings are beginning to confirm the importance of the environment in influencing the adult students' motivation and disposition towards learning. Gibson (1990) recommends the continuation of such studies towards the establishment of a model encompassing the personal and situational circumstances of the adult distance learner, his/her educational environment extending beyond the institution to the broader context in which the learner exists, and the relationships which exist between and among these variables for a more appropriate, widely applicable and effective theoretical foundation on adults as distance learners.

2.6 From Concepts and Principles to Practice

Transforming theoretical concepts and principles into a pedagogy of distance education taking into consideration the various implications that the "distance" factor and relevant adult learning theory, principles and research must have for this pedagogy, has been one of the larger challenges of distance education. Henri and Kaye (1985), as quoted by Keegan (1991: 113), state that
the real challenge lies in the fact that in distance education one has to recreate at a distance the teaching-learning relationship; one has to put in place from a distance an educational environment in the student's normal living milieu ...

This "re-integration of the teaching act", based largely on artificial means, is brought about in distance systems in two ways: through the learning materials (both print and non-print) designed to achieve as many of the characteristics of interpersonal communication as possible; and secondly, by attempts at communication between teacher and students using direct and indirect means (Ibid, pp. 111-112).

In the process of recreating the teaching-learning relationship at a distance, the questions arise: what major considerations have formed the basis of distance teaching and learning, and what features and principles have contributed to its success or ineffectiveness? The many accounts by distance educators of their experiences and research either from theoretical perspectives or on the basis of reflective critical analysis of their involvement in distance education show that the distance education dilemma has largely been the choice between how much independence/autonomy, and how much and what kind of student support to offer.

2.6.1 Universally-accepted practices

The suggestion by Powell et al. (1990) however, that certain aspects intrinsic to distance teaching and the adult population who learn through such methods may yield certain 'generic' predisposing features in distance education across institutions and across student populations, appears from the literature to hold some substance. The need for dialogue between teacher and student in both direct and indirect ways, for instance, appears to have universal acceptance. The debate on the role of local tutorials (Perraton, in Daniel and Marquis, 1988; Rekkedal, 1988; Holmberg, 1988; Thompson, 1990) is underpinned by the general recognition of the need by distance students for some face-to-face interaction. This need is based on a range of perceptions: that adults participate in learning activities for social purposes which are conducive to academic success (Houle, 1963; Garrison and Shale, 1990); Kirkup and von Prummer, 1990, and Ross and Powell, 1989, all note that women have a specific need to meet other students as a learning strategy; women also differ from men in other respects such as persistence and reasons for study (Ostman et al., 1988: 22-23);
race and ethnicity, in so far as they relate to socio-economic factors have been found to influence study persistence, (pp. 23-24); and there is also the special cultural need of students coming from strong oral traditions for group participation (Dunbar, 1991; Murphy, 1991; Leys, 1991).

Similarly, it is generally recognised that opportunities within the text exist for effective communication between teacher and student (Holmberg, 1988; Jevons, 1982; Gillard, 1981). Assignment feedback provides the opportunity for improving student performance (Cooper, 1992; Boondao and Rowley, 1991; Rekkedal, 1988). The use of technological support where possible is also becoming a significant ‘generic’ aspect of distance education. The ability of distance education and open learning to meet a wide range of educational goals previously constrained by time and place of offer, and by institutional admission regulations, has been demonstrated by the successful use of technology. Inevitably, these opportunities highlight the role of education as a liberating social force and make it available, on a more equitable basis, to a wide range of people in any given population. Various articles and studies have demonstrated the increasing demystification of technology as more and more projects are made possible by extensive and intensive use of media and technology. As a result, the use and merits of various forms of media have now become more focussed - between active and passive media, audio and visual possibilities and the potential of enhancing learning through the extended use of these media made possible by electronic means, through telecommunication and computer technology.

2.6.2 Practices generated by differences

What is at issue in the literature, however, is the extent to which any one feature of distance education dominates and why. In this respect, it is becoming increasingly clear that the effectiveness of the distance education mode and programmes, and their allied support services, are dependent to a large extent on sensitivities to differences and variant needs, with regard to delivery and the wider social, cultural and economic contexts. Demographic differences within the student body (Hiola and Moss, 1990), cultural constraints (Leys, 1991; Dunbar, 1991; Murphy, 1991), social class differences (McIntosh et al., 1988), differences in student perceptions of study benefits (Morgan et al., 1982; Holmberg, 1977, in Ostman et al., 1988) and status differences between on-campus and distance students (Mahoney and Morgan, 1991) are instances which call
for measures of teacher/student interaction specified by the needs of the group of students in question. Leys (1991) questions the choice of the distance mode for students who have a strong cultural need for group involvement, and the cultural appropriateness of the content being taught to them (p. 299). She points out that the group of students in Central West Australia have a history of learner dependency for which adult learning theory of self-directedness has no relevance (p. 300). Both Dunbar (1991) and Murphy (1991) have similar findings for Indonesian and Turkish students respectively. Whereas the open education models adopted by both countries assume autonomous and independent learning behaviours based on western culture from which the models have been adopted, both cultures have heteronomous biases and strong oral traditions that place students in a position of disadvantage with respect to the expectations of independent systems of learning. Both sets of students are in transition from authoritarian, face-to-face systems where teachers represent authority and knowledge figures to be deferred to by students. In this respect "learning is a communal, passive activity" (Dunbar, p. 168) and students are technically unprepared for "coping with a teacher relationship mediated exclusively through text requiring advanced skills in making meaning of tracts of literature" (p. 170).

In addition, Turkish students exist within a system of patronage where reciprocal links of service and protection are established between individuals of unequal status (Murphy, 1991: 43). Hiola and Moss (1990) point out that because the characteristics of students at Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia, including their study aspirations, differ in many ways from norms established by research into equivalent institutions in the developed world, this has implications for the kind of services offered to them.

In terms of our teaching at the OU, particularly regarding tuition and counselling, an awareness of the diversity of students' aims and purposes especially in relation to self-confidence and personal awareness, can make us more sensitive to learning from the students' perspectives and thus help them to achieve their goals (Morgan et al., 1982: 19).

One area in which distance students can differ is with regard to their study purposes. Holmberg (1977) argues that

some students, whom he calls 'self-actualizing', may not need to officially complete a course of study to achieve their personal goals. That is, they may have learned what they set out to learn (in Ostman et al., 1988: 8).
Similarly, Bligh (1977) points out that many students did not intend initially to complete a programme or course. Other students may drop out temporarily in order to continue later (p. 8).

Developing countries do not have the infrastructural, economic and sometimes political support to promote the extensive use and know-how of technology. Student populations in developing countries are less familiar with and have less access to technological opportunities than their counterparts in metropolitan countries.

When we write teaching material and organise tuition, we make assumptions about our student audience; their literacy, ethnicity, gender, educational attainment, motivation to study, study skills, need for information, and a host of other matters" (Forward by Evan I. Jones, Acting Principal NZTCI in Osman et al., 1988: vii).

Properly informed assumptions are a necessary ingredient for the formula for effective distance education proposed by Daniel and Marquis (1988) of 'getting the mixture right', which "can only be conceived in relation to the country and context in which it is set" (p. 355).

Sharma (1989) endorses this view in his suggestion that distance education has the capacity to accommodate differences by

placing the learner at the center of the curriculum development process. By focussing on the actual learning environments and specific needs of disadvantaged groups and by making the best use of today’s technologies, we can make the necessary quantum leaps in education (p. 21).

Interventionalist models of support (Brindley and Jean-Louis, 1990; Rekkedal, 1988), and special support programmes such as the SITE bridging programme produced by the University of New England, Northern Rivers, to assist students in developing effective learning skills and make the most of resources available (Kinney, 1991), are exercises based on the recognition of variations in student needs with regard to learning orientations and skills, and the need for enhancing motivation and self-confidence in the course of pursuing distance studies. Brindley and Jean-Louis justify recommending the compulsory involvement of students in pre-admission and pre-registration services on the ground that

although adult learners should be able to maintain their independence, it is wrong to assume they have the information they need to make sound decisions about their education or that they have the skills and background knowledge needed to meet their educational goals (p. 68).
2.7 Distance Education and Adult Learning at USP

When the teaching staff of the USP began offering their courses in a dual mode in 1971, the attitude that prevailed then was that these distance courses were substitutes for live teaching but could not replace it completely. In addition, it was felt that some courses, by virtue of the nature of their subject matter, or level and type of mental skills required to cope with them, could not be taught in the extension mode. Much has happened since this time to help change this stance to one where course materials must be as self-contained as possible so that "... a student working on his own in a remote location has a fair chance of success" (J. Chick, 1979, as quoted in Renwick et al., 1991, p. 16). This was not to preclude the offer of additional study support where it was accessible to students.

Although this philosophy places the distance education emphasis on the provision of equity and facilitation of opportunity mainly across the physical dimension, it is not difficult to envisage that its implementation could "encourage teachers to see that what really matters is facilitation of learning, not dogmatic instruction" (Sharma, 1989: 23); furthermore, that "distance education informs learners that learning depends on themselves, on their own motivation to learn, on their commitment to learn the lessons on their own, with guidance and support from tutors and learning materials" (p. 23).

2.7.1 The student perspective

The current development philosophy for extension studies, that a student studying through the distance mode shall normally be provided with teaching/learning packages which, in themselves, have been designed to enable him/her to succeed in the mastery and passing of the course. These packages shall, to the fullest extent, comprise instructional strategies and media appropriate to the known student market and the general 'standalone' policy.
continues to recognise the significance of the student in guiding the distance teaching process in particular. However, in spite of the existence of such a philosophy, both the COL Report and the CFTC Report saw the need to recommend putting in place plans, policy, objectives, teaching systems, methods and support facilities that would reflect an appreciation for the extension students and the circumstances in which they operate, and are taught (see Extension Services: Its Future Directions and Place in the University of the South Pacific, unpublished and undated University Extension report).

Wallace (1990) pointed out that "... to date, very little assembled information on a profile of the South Pacific student is available" (p. 13).

Research work of a regional nature bearing directly on the distance learner include an unpublished MA thesis (Tuimaleali'iifano, 1989), a 'Student Evaluation of USP Extension Studies Courses: Report of an Analysis of Course Evaluation Forms' by the Distance Education Unit of University Extension, 1991, and recently published research by USP staff on 'South Pacific Women in Distance Education' (1995). Apart from essential demographic data, USP also needs "... to consider how such psychological factors as motivation, cognitive styles, and socio/cultural nuances (e.g. independence versus co-operation) enter into and affect learning processes and outcomes" apart from the "... importance of understanding the learners' background, intellectual capability, attitudinal disposition, etc. in order that most meaningfully and pedagogically sound learning experiences are presented" (Wallace, 1990: 13).

Antecedent skills (English language levels, numeracy levels and prerequisite content knowledge) are also part of the broad prerequisite knowledge of the adult USP learner that is necessary for the planning and development of effective and relevant course packages.

2.7.2 Accommodating the students: Institutional initiatives

Since very little is known from research about the USP extension student market, much of the work of University Extension can therefore be said to be based on assumptions about it and the collective, but limited experiences of the instructional design staff in particular, of the students
for whom they collaborate with teaching staff to develop teaching/learning situations. The situation continues to be perpetuated in new developments. For instance, the newly created blueprint for the design and development of distance education courses,

... does not presuppose the use of any particular teaching approach, rather, consistent with sound instructional design principles, it provides a systematic approach for determining what combination of strategies are most likely to bring about the optimum teaching-learning experience for particular students in particular situations (University Extension Handbook, 1993: 1).

Furthermore, one function of the blueprint is to provide the Instructional Strategies Committee with "a formal means for determining if the proposed teaching methodologies and academic content are appropriate to achieve the objectives of the course" (p. 2).

If these objectives include learning by its target group, then there is a need to know who is learning and in what context this learning is taking place if indeed it can be ensured that for the student "... a well designed product is received" (p. 3). The blueprint document also recommends a productive study workload of 6-10 hours each week (par 2.4), presumably, in the absence of appropriate empirical evidence for the USP extension student, an estimation derived from years of experience in distance education in this context.

Another development deemed a success from the operational viewpoint alone is the newly-introduced 30-week teaching semester. This study schedule was introduced in 1993 "so that there is quantifiable, quantitative improvement in the student support services, content and management of the distance education programmes", as well as to allow "sufficient time for the assignments to be marked and returned to students well before the final examinations, and for students to accommodate study, family and work schedules" (University Extension Handbook, 1994, p. 63). Overwhelming and continued support for this initiative is reported in both the 1992 and 1993 University Extension Annual Reports from the planning, preparation and administrative perspective, on the basis of which additional courses are being offered over a 30-week study period. Yet initial evaluative comments about it in the 1993 University Extension Annual Report were all negative, and some Centres also sounded warnings of negative reception by students, in the same report. Completion and pass rates dropped for some Centres. Results in 1993 for the Fiji Centre which enrolls about 50 percent of the total extension intake per semester are as follows:
Table 2.1: Examination results for the Fiji Centre, 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>%Pass</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%Fail</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%EX awards</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>1475</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-week</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(From: University Extension Annual Report, 1993, pp. 68, 70).

It is obvious that these new developments are intended as effective measures to ensure appropriate delivery but they would benefit from the holistic perspective if the corresponding student dimension were also a designed rather than an assumed part of the total package.

Not only are research and data on the adult distance learner required as the basis for sound educational philosophy, policy and objectives, generating this, and related information should also be an on-going process so that as "distance education grows it must ensure that its programmes, methods and media are based on research and the educational needs of the masses with particular reference to time, place and environment" (Qazi, 1989: 158).

This continuity is an important objective of the Course Evaluation Questionnaire which accompanies each course sent out to extension students to elicit important evaluative information not only on the course(s) in question, but also about the student in relation to his/her performance in the course(s). However, aside from the relatively comprehensive data collation exercise conducted in 1990 and published in 1991, the use of this information over the years has been on a piece-meal and sporadic basis by instructional designers and course writers seeking information on particular courses. For distance education at the USP, this raises an important question: if the student dimension is significant, who is responsible for the provision of this, and other information pertinent to the student's situation, with the regularity required for it to be useful?

Dual-mode institutions such as the USP run the risk of continuing teaching traditions applicable to young, full-time students for adults in a distance teaching mode. Coldeway (1982) indicates that "almost everyone has grown up in a pedagogical system and overcoming this long term indoctrination into pedagogy would require much attention" (p. 91).

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1 This grade is awarded to students who fail to sit for their final examination.
It was partly this potential risk that prompted the dual-mode system of teaching which has now become a contractual obligation for teaching staff - "to involve teachers in the wider region, to help them become familiar with its diverse needs and adapt their teaching accordingly" (Renwick et al., 1991: 11).

This, and other initiatives to accommodate diverse learning situations in the Region, are discussed and reviewed by Tuimaleali’ifano (1993). The establishment of the Course Development Unit (now Distance Education Unit) in 1982, was a significant step forward for the student dimension. In support of the important role of the Distance Education Unit (DEU), the COL Report states that

Extension Services carries in the minds of its Course Developers (now Instructional Designers) an institutional memory of the requirements of distance education for the Region that the university would almost certainly not otherwise have (p. 54).

In view of the University’s high percentage of overseas staff and the high staff turnover caused in part by the contract system of staff hire, as well as the insufficient obligation for succeeding members of staff to pick up where predecessors have left off, this function is crucial. Foreign staff bring with them teaching experiences which

could be in danger of ignoring the cultural and social contexts in which course development, teaching and learning take place (Eldington, 1989: 117).

However, the pressing need over the years for University Extension to develop new courses and to upgrade existing ones has left little time for appropriate research by staff of the DEU. A recent staffing restructure and redesignation exercise appears to have overlooked this academic dimension of the work of the instructional designer to a large extent, stressing instead the management and leadership role of the Co-ordinator of Instructional Design and Development (CIDD), and the instructional design work of the Instructional Designers (IDs) focusing around a

demonstrated working knowledge of current advances in the field of instructional design for distance education pedagogy (Unpublished and undated University Extension Document on Redesignation of Post Titles).
As such advances are usually the result of empirical and theoretical research in developed countries, the question of relevance and applicability for the USP is raised, in the absence of opportunities for local research to establish the extent to which such advances are useful for a specific USP distance and adult learner pedagogy. When one considers also the mature age access policy of the USP (see Tuimaleali’ifano, 1993: 290-291), it does not need a great stretch of the imagination to envisage the kind of heterogeneity that must exist among these students that will render all sorts of implications for the way extension courses are taught and distance learning is supported at USP. Research work, as a priority task of the DEU, may be implicitly embedded in the total job description of the CIDD and IDs, but the failure to be explicit in this regard may also reflect a trend towards treating instructional design work from a largely teaching and institutional perspective at the expense of a more holistic educational one. The staffing restructure exercise mentioned above appeared to have given significant consideration to the results of a questionnaire feedback from IDs, obtained by a secondee to University Extension from the University of Southern Queensland, which indicated that many of the current ID staff did not have any formal training in the area of instructional design or experience in educational theory (transcript of Oral Presentation by R. Wah and Noel Thomas at the University of Southern Queensland, 15 June 1993, on the Restructuring of University Extension and the Distance Education Unit : 7). The danger in this approach is the possibility that the restructured situation may well have been created to suit the personnel currently in place rather than on the basis of need related to the educational objectives of the DEU.

In essence, the network of eleven study support Centres, twelve sub-centres and forty remote community liaisons for national Centres (University Extension Annual Report, 1992: 1), spread over all but one of the countries of the USP Region, serves the purpose of monitoring "local differences in the local environment that would be best catered for at a local level" (Tuimaleali’ifano, 1993: 292).

However, Tuimaleali’ifano also points out that

...economically, politically and socially, and with respect to levels and rates of, and priorities in national development, some countries are better suited and able to offer a wide range of student support facilities and opportunities than others (p. 292).
This has resulted in a situation of "unequal treatment of students by the system of Centres across the Region, (and) has created differentials in the opportunities for successful performance amongst USP extension students" (p. 293).

In light of the recommendations for improving teaching-learning opportunities by the COL and CFTC reports mentioned earlier, it would appear that the recommended USP distance education policy and philosophy need to take this factor into consideration in order to bring opportunities of equity and facility of their operation at the local student support level.

One further problem for the USP distance education student is contained in a memorandum from the Centre Director of the Cook Islands to the Co-ordinator of Course Development, in November 1984. He stated,

> It should also be noted that studying via correspondence, that is on one’s own, is a relatively new and often frightening experience for many of our students. This is said not as a justification for this high rate of failure to complete courses but rather as an explanation of the situation-reality of many students. And for many of them, the adjustment from a collective (group or class) to an independent learning situation, which is required of university study, it is a transitional period of great difficulty (Herrmann, 1984).

Although over 10 years have lapsed since this statement was made, for the ever-increasing number of new extension students each semester across the Region, the same anxieties and related difficulties can be expected.

2.8 Conclusion

Although the role of University Extension has changed from a largely administrative one in the 1970s, to one which now contains the DEU responsible for instructional design and related student support, there is still a predominant preoccupation with teaching and institutional matters. It is interesting to note that after more than twenty years of distance education, the University Extension’s response to the COL and CFTC reviews was to address primarily “a number of policy, organisational, and operational matters ... before significant progress can be made” (Extension Services: Its Future Directions and Place in the University of the South Pacific: par. 3).
The recommendations related to issues raised in the two reports were summarised into six categories. Of the six, the last recommendation was the only one directly pertinent to the student with its reference to the improvement of teaching/learning opportunities. In spite of the fact that this dimension got considerably more recommendations for attention by both reports than any other area, it was left out in the pursuit of "the best outcome for the institution" (ibid, pars. 2 and 3). These infrastructural and institutional policy changes have been endorsed by the University's Council for immediate implementation (University Extension Annual Report, 1992: 1).

These changes affect - or should affect - dramatically the institutional management of the Extension Studies programme, the internal structure of University Extension (newly named) and the future redevelopment of the University's regional communications system. ... The end result of the infrastructural changes should be a management system which is comprehensive, clear and large enough to meet the needs of a Distance Education programme which has grown substantially since its inception twenty years ago and which has potential for future expansion.

2.9. Chapter summary

In this chapter, literature on the establishment of the USP and its distance education programme was examined. It has been seen that the challenges facing the University were largely generated by the diversity of the Region and the resulting pressures on the University to continuously respond to the variations in training and educational needs across the Region. In so doing, it has tended to focus more on institutional matters than on the learning needs of its distance students who are mainly adults. An examination of the literature on adult learning theory and principles clearly indicated the many factors that have to be taken into consideration in order for adult learners to be properly accommodated by the institution. This examination also included a discussion of the relevance of principles of adult learning and features of adult learners identified by the literature across different educational settings and locations, with a special focus on USP. The relative neglect of the student dimension at USP, and the need to redress this formed the concluding comments of the chapter.
CHAPTER 3: STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Outline

This chapter describes the research procedure followed in this study, including its major components (study population and selected distance education programmes), design, data collection and analyses. References to the literature with regard to survey research and the interview process are made where appropriate and also in association with the discussion of questionnaire design and pre-testing. A brief data analysis plan, including statistical procedures used in questionnaire data analyses and the presentation of interview information, concludes the chapter.

3.2 Introduction: The Design of the Study

This study is essentially a survey seeking answers to research questions derived from principles of adult learning, and the influence of personal, situational and study environments on adult distance learners at the USP. To this end, two groups of data were obtained and analysed. The first group of data was elicited through a questionnaire and subjected to various statistical procedures. The second group was collected via the interview of a selected number of students in as many of the nations of the USP Region as permitted by the logistics, time and funds pertinent to the study. This data was intended to contribute a qualitative dimension to the study that complemented the statistical findings of the first group of data. The purposive selection of interviewees also provided an opportunity to address any imbalances that might occur in the questionnaire data such as regional, gender and ethnic representation. As well as a composite study and general discussion of the interview data, five interviews were selected and presented as case studies highlighting, in qualitative terms, some of the major statistical findings of the first part of the study. Again an important criterion for the selection of case studies was to ensure that as many variations as possible across the population dimension were represented.
3.3 Major Components of the Study

3.3.1 The selected extension studies programmes

This study set out to survey all students enrolled in the core courses of the Diploma in Accounting Studies (DACS), and the Diploma in Management Studies (DMS) in Semester 1 (February - June), and in the 30-week schedule (March - November), 1993. The 30-week schedule (see Chapter 2) is part of the on-going initiatives by University Extension to improve current study and support conditions for its students.

The selection of these two programmes was based primarily on their increasing popularity among regional students since their introduction and development during the 1980s. In this period the USP vocational programme structure was redesigned to cater for the increasing number of students who were aspiring towards further and complete study by extension (Renwick et al., pp. 23-24). The restructure essentially provided students with the opportunity to go on to Diploma studies from preparatory Certificate programmes. Thus both the DACS and the DMS build on Certificate programmes designed to "help students acquire basic skills and techniques" (Extension Students Handbook, 1992) that ensured that students moving towards higher level qualifications had undertaken preparatory and prerequisite courses which enabled them to do so. The preparation was provided for by way of lower level, background courses at the Foundation, Vocational and/or 100 level degree courses which could also be prerequisite study for select Diploma courses. In the case of the DACS, six out of the eight core courses of the programme are offered in the Certificate programme, two of which are prerequisites for the 200 level Accounting courses in the Diploma. For the DMS, two core courses are offered at the Certificate level which are also prerequisites for some of the 200 level Management courses in the Diploma. Both Diplomas consist of ten degree level courses, with core courses at the 100 and 200 levels, and optional enrolment in 300 level courses. Programme course components and details for each Diploma are provided in Appendix 2.

Table 3.1 below gives an indication of the steady growth since 1988 of enrolment numbers in core courses constituting the two programmes since 1988. In more recent years of the programme, quotas had to be placed on enrolments so that the departments concerned were able to cope with
their offer. MG201 and MG205 were new additions to the extension provisions towards the DMS. Other gaps in the data (following offers in previous semesters) indicate the fact that the courses were not offered in those years.

In the first semester of 1993, the time of survey, the Accounting courses AF102 and AF201 were offered towards the DACS, with the two 100-level Economics courses, EC101 and EC102, as well as MA101 Basic Mathematics, and SE100 Social Survey Methods and Data Analysis, which were offered on 30-week schedules. For the DMS, two 100-level courses, MG101 and MG102 were offered on the 30-week schedule, as well as MG207 on a semester basis. Enrolments in these courses constituted the population from which students in this survey were drawn.

### Table 3.1: Number of enrolments in core courses for the DACS AND DMS, 1988 TO 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>No. of enrolments for period '88-'94</th>
<th>Tot for Period</th>
<th>% of tot for per.*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AF101</td>
<td>255 318 324 289 369 308 314 2177 12.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF102</td>
<td>138 185 254 254 267 267 316 1681 9.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF201</td>
<td>90 132 128 112 68 97 149 776 4.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF202</td>
<td>76 121 114 121 125 161 109 827 4.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC101</td>
<td>113 198 180 224 160 175 - 1050 5.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC102</td>
<td>133 247 119 159 167 114 - 939 5.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA101</td>
<td>88 117 127 156 - 141 - 629 3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MG101</td>
<td>255 222 380 337 317 199 410 2120 11.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MG102</td>
<td>173 268 234 255 200 232 1362 7.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MG201</td>
<td>121 121 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MG202</td>
<td>10 10 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MG206</td>
<td>40 77 55 73 63 90 58 458 2.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MG207</td>
<td>74 52 65 69 82 69 106 517 2.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE100</td>
<td>205 180 274 272 264 163 - 1358 7.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOT** 1467 2022 2288 2300 2139 1984 1825 14025 78.0

* This column represents the total enrolment in the core courses for the DACS and DMS as a percentage of the total enrolment in extension degree courses for the period. The average number of degree courses offered per semester over this period was 38.

** Not calculated because courses began much later.

(Source: USP Student Database)
3.3.2 Features of the Diplomas conducive to this study

Several features of the two diploma programmes made them particularly conducive to the aims and objectives of this study and to finding out answers to the study questions. These are discussed as follows:

(i) **Target population**: Both the DACS and the DMS are vocational programmes aimed at "people already employed in areas of governmental, commercial and community activity" (University Extension Handbook, 1994: 9). It can therefore be expected that their target population will be adults in some form of employment for which some educational and experiential qualification were required. There is a strong possibility therefore, that a range of employment situations requiring different skills and levels of education, in both the public and private sectors, will be represented. These features are important to key issues of adult learning principles, requirements and strategies under investigation in this study, namely the significance of prior education and work experience to the learning disposition and orientation of adults (see Chapters 1 and 2).

(ii) **Enrolment Numbers**: The popularity of the two programmes among countries of the USP Region ensured the possibility that sufficient numbers of students would respond to the questionnaire in any given period of time, so that not only would the study sample be large enough to provide statistically viable results, it could also be expected to be as representative of the study population as possible. This was a feature of great importance to the study as, at the time of data collection, the researcher was informed that the student database software programme was still in the process of installation and trial and information beyond student names, registration numbers, postal addresses and examination results was unable to be generated in print format. This information was therefore unavailable to the researcher, who, for reasons of confidentiality, was not permitted to have direct access to the database. Because information regarding the study population such as demographic characteristics, educational background and exact location (for those who provided postal box addresses), was inaccessible, a comment could not be made about the representative nature of the sample who returned responses with respect to these features of the study population.
The large enrolment in the two vocational programmes selected was also likely to ensure representation of students across the LSP Region. Both this, and the possibility of a sufficiently large and statistically viable response rate widened the potential of this study to provide general conclusions about vocational distance education students as a regional body as well as comments about features peculiar to students and studying in individual countries represented by students in the study sample. Personal and environmental factors under investigation are derived from the diversity represented by this cross-section of students which forms the basis of the key questions of this study.

3.3.3 The students

Altogether 1,369 enrolments were recorded for these nine courses in the period under study. These enrolments included students enrolled in more than one of the courses so that the total number of students enrolled came to 1,213 in all. The following table presents the distribution of these enrolments across the research courses and across USP Centres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>AF102</th>
<th>AF201</th>
<th>EC101</th>
<th>EC102</th>
<th>MA101</th>
<th>MG101</th>
<th>MG102</th>
<th>MG207</th>
<th>SE100</th>
<th>TOT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>1068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ck. Is</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirib.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niue</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sol. Is</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.S/Tok</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 264 106 123 101 142 207 189 68 169 1369
3.3.4 Characteristics of the students

Features of the expected student intake into the DACS and the DMS as significant to this study have been discussed in the preceding section on courses. In addition, the University also has a mature entry policy which allows persons of 21 years and over admission into degree level courses. It is expected, therefore, that a number of students in the study population would have gained admission by virtue of the mature age policy. Implications related to this means of admission which are important to this study are the admission of adult learners and also the possibility that at least some of these learners would not have had adequate high school qualifications in terms of level or subject area or both. These may well be variables associated with appropriate preparation for and disposition to study by distance.

3.4 Data Collection

The design, scope and specific features of this research project such as the geographic spread of the USP Region and its distance students, lent themselves to the mail questionnaire as the primary means of data collection, from the outset. The choice of survey as research design was largely the outcome of the goals and objectives of the study to establish and evaluate attitudes to learning and academic achievement among USP distance education students, and to identify relationships among personal, situational and environmental variables, and academic performance and learning persistence. Openheim suggests that the research design and method selected "all depends on what we need to find out, on the type of question to which we seek an answer" (1966, p. 8). Two other reasons for the choice of the survey design were the large number of subjects involved (Oppenheim, 1966; McNeill, 1990; Bordens and Abbott, 1991), and the scattered nature of the study population. As presented previously, altogether 1,213 students formed the study population spread over 11 member countries of the USP Region. It would be almost logistically inconceivable, given the limited timeframe and budget of a full-time PhD programme, to endeavour to collect data from such a population through any other method than the mail questionnaire, typically associated with surveys of this scope and nature.
A fourth and equally significant reason for the choice of survey questionnaire in this study was the large amount of data that needed collecting. The heterogeneous nature of the Region and its people and the related diversities expected with regard to personal, situational and study environments, in addition to the exploratory nature of this study, meant that a large number of variables and factors must be investigated in order to encompass and accommodate the purposes and questions of the study.

3.4.1 The questionnaire

A questionnaire was prepared and tested as the main instrument of data collection. The questionnaire covered five general categories of questions, viz: Section 1: personal and demographic data; section 2: cultural and social context; section 3: economic context; section 4: educational background and current involvement; and section 5: study environment and support. Each of these sections represented major components of the personal, situational and study environments of the research population and the survey questions sought to elicit responses pertaining to variables within each component that were deemed influential upon the students’ disposition and preparedness to study as adult distance students as well as their persistense and performance. These envisaged relationships are summarised in the Conceptual Framework of the Study in Chapter 1.

3.4.2 Designing the questionnaire

Both open and closed question types were included. The former were especially required where the range and quality of responses concerned were unknown to the researcher at the time of designing the questionnaire. Predetermined choices could therefore not be devised without increasing the risk of excluding possible or accurate responses for the respondents. This situation might also have forced respondents into the position of ‘underreporting’, i.e. being forced to choose from a limited number of alternatives (Bradburn and Sudman, 1981: 14; also Warwick and Lininger, 1975: 134). Another reason for the use of open-ended questions in this study was the opportunity they provided for the "free, spontaneous sketch in the respondent’s own language and
containing his own ideas" (Oppenheim, 1966: 43) about select study variables. This was deemed particularly valuable for the variety and detail of interpretation it afforded when compared to related responses given in the closed format in other sections of the questionnaire.

Advice on the effective development of the various aspects and component parts of the questionnaire - significantly the introductory and cover letter, questionnaire presentation and layout and question writing and instructions, - guided the preparation and development of the study questionnaire as much as possible (Foddy, 1993; McNeill, 1990; Sudman and Bradburn, 1983; Belson, 1982; Bradburn and Sudman, 1981; Warwick and Lininger, 1975; Kerlinger, 1973; Oppenheim, 1966;). In the case of question writing, each question took note of Belson’s (1982: 23-27) 14 characteristics of questions containing difficulties, in particular those that had been found to occur most frequently such as presenting two questions as one, including a lot of loaded words, concluding with a qualifying clause or phrase, containing multiple ideas or subjects, containing difficult or unfamiliar words and/or phrases, containing more than one instruction to the informant, having a negative element in them and inverted sentences. Also, very long questions and grammatical issues such as the mix of present and past tense and the mix of singular and plural were avoided as much as possible. Instructions, particularly those pertaining to multiple choice items were kept consistent throughout the questionnaire.

Careful attention was also accorded the covering letter and its potential not only to introduce the questionnaire and its purpose but to persuade the respondent of its value and thereby encourage a response. Also significant was the opportunity provided by the covering letter to encourage a positive attitude within the respondent towards the questionnaire and its purpose. This was attempted especially by an explanation of the survey, its sponsorship and importance in relation to the student. The questionnaire, complete with introductory letter and cover page, is provided as Appendix 3.

3.4.3 Testing the questionnaire

The testing of the questionnaire took place among students enrolled at a distance through the Fiji Centre in Semester 1, 1993. The trial took special cognisance of the reliability and validity of the
questionnaire items: whether the questions would return consistent responses and whether the questions would be consistently interpreted by all respondents so that the information returned would be truly representative of reality (McNeill, 1990; Oppenheim, 1966).

Thirty questionnaires with instructions for administration were sent to the Fiji Centre for distribution to students enrolled at a distance in Fiji. These instructions were essentially intended to ensure that the conditions of the trial replicated as much as possible what was known and/or assumed about circumstances of the study population and situation, such as level of enrolment, student location, socio-economic differences, ethnicity and educational background. Staff at the Fiji Centre ensured that these conditions were met to the best of their ability. This was evident in the responses received and features of the students who returned questionnaires.

Of the 30 questionnaires distributed, 13 students (43%) returned responses. This was a satisfactory return rate which indicated the adequacy of the level of persuasion of the covering letter. These students were located in main urban centres such as Suva, Lautoka and Labasa, as well as in small rural towns and peripheral locations on the edge of the catchment areas of main urban centres. Although no one from an outer island returned a questionnaire, the isolation and distance factors of location were adequately represented by students in towns without a study centre such as Rakiraki and Ba, and by those in peripheral locations.

A profile of these students revealed a satisfactory representation of demographic and other personal features significant to the study. There were seven women and six men ranging in age from 19 to 46 years; five students were single and eight were married, living in both nuclear and extended family situations of between two and eight people; there were seven Fiji Indians, four Fijians, one Polynesian and one of mixed ethnicity; in the area of employment, civil servants dominated, followed by middle management and office support staff, with two students being unemployed.

With regard to the returned questionnaires, in general respondents appeared not to have had any major difficulties with interpreting and answering the questions consistently, which vouched for the reliability and validity factors. There were four major categories of difficulty; these are given below with a description of the step taken to redress the problem concerned.
Problems related to insufficient or unclear instructions:

1. The aggregate response to the questionnaire revealed that all students seemed to have had a problem with the instructions on how to indicate their answers to multiple choice questions which made up the bulk of the questionnaire. Students were instructed to indicate "the letter(s) of your choice in the space provided in the righthand margin". Consequently, underlined stress was placed on the key words (letter(s); righthand margin) in the relevant instruction.

2. In the question on community responsibilities, a sentence was included to advise students that job-related activities such as union involvement were also considered in this category.

3. The sub-centre was included as an option where references were made to the study centre, as sub-centres substituted for a full Centre for students particularly in smaller urban contexts, other/outer islands or peripheral rural areas.

Redundant instructions

These were revealed in some of the questions both from a semantic and structural point of view.

1. An example of the former was the question "How many people live in your household including your children?". The underlined section was subsequently removed.

2. Other questions had structural redundancies such as "some of the above" and "all of the above". These two options were replaced by instructing the students to indicate more than one option if they wished, in order of priority. The priority rating would help to identify and evaluate the importance of the individual options in response analyses later on.

Excluded questions

Comments by the respondents stimulated the creation of two very important questions which were left out of the trial questionnaire.
1. One of these related to the course(s) that the students were studying, and final examination grades, if they were available. Where examination results were not available at the time of survey, a section was included for students to give the researcher signed permission to obtain the results from the USP at the appropriate time.

2. The second omitted question was concerned with the amount of study time that the student was able to allocate himself/herself on a daily basis. This question would provide the basis for assessing the extent to which other commitments and/or time-consuming involvements competed with time for study in the lives of the USP students.

Loose structure
One question in particular (Q. 45), was not relevant to all students and an instruction was added to this effect to prevent these students from answering unnecessarily.

The trial questionnaire included an evaluatory section at the end, inviting student comment and criticism. Most of the respondents did not find any major fault with the questionnaire as it was and comments were largely related to extended explanations of responses to some of the questions which were not required for the survey. The average time of completion of the questionnaire was about an hour and a half, which seemed to be a reasonable expectation and no need was felt, therefore, to reduce the number of questions.

3.4.4 Questionnaire distribution

Because of the dispersed nature of the member countries of the USP, distribution of the 1,213 questionnaires to students began with the help of a research assistant based in Suva and continued by the researcher on her arrival in Suva for a three-month field period. The use of University Extension's mailbag delivery system to the USP Centres in countries of the Region was an integral part of the process and enabled the speedy distribution of the questionnaires. Within the countries of the Region, the assistance of the Centre Director and/or staff was sought in getting the questionnaires out to students by post or hand delivery to those who visited the Centres. Each delivery by mail consisted of a questionnaire, cover letter and stamped return envelope. After two
months, a reminder letter (Appendix 4) was sent out to those from whom there was no response. Those for whom a telephone number was available were reminded and requested to return their completed questionnaires by phone. Through these processes, just over 300 questionnaires were returned although more than 20 of these could not be used because they contained insufficient responses. Responses from 278 students provided the data for this study and represented a 23 percent response rate. Although low as a percentage of the total study population, the number was large enough in itself to produce statistically viable results that were generalisable to students in the study population.

3.4.5 Student interviews

Data was also elicited through the interview of a selection of students in the study population. Interview data was sought for the many benefits associated with it. Aside from the fact of its adaptability and flexibility for all kinds of respondents and situations, the interview also offers opportunities to keep the co-operation and motivation of the respondents high, to probe responses further to the satisfaction of the interviewer, and especially to enter into and pursue spontaneous situations that can lead to useful additional and relevant data (Douglas, 1985; Warwick and Linner, 1975; Kerling, 1973; Oppenheim, 1966). Warwick and Linner (1975) also advise "a methodological mixture which will capitalise on the strengths of each approach" (p. 12), which was the main reason for the survey/interview combination of this study. While the questionnaire survey allowed data to be gathered on the scale that this research project required, many of the weaknesses and gaps associated with quantitative assessments could be redressed and complemented by the interview process and results. In particular, given the limitations of the questionnaire data collection of this study discussed in this chapter and associated with the nature of the USP region, the widely-dispersed student body, and the fairly heavy dependence on external support for the distribution and return of questionnaires, anticipated gaps in the representativeness of the study sample were able to be redressed, where possible, by interviewee selection and interview data. Specifically, the interviewees were able to be selected more equitably across the USP Region, which allowed a regional representation not possible through the quantitative treatment because the questionnaire responses were overwhelmingly Fijian and in particular, Fiji Indian.
Both data collection exercises had, necessarily, to be conducted simultaneously given the logistics involved and the time and budget constraints of the study. Consequently, much of the complementarity of the interview data was left to chance and intuition, and gaps in the questionnaire data were largely anticipated at the outset in the structure and conduct of the interview. Much as it would have been ideal, the opportunity to check questionnaire interpretation within the interview was not possible under the circumstances of this study.

A semi-structured approach to the interview was deemed the best approach in this case. A list of questions was devised in keeping with the major categories of variables of the study (see Appendix 4). This list was used by the interviewer largely as a guideline for questioning although it did not restrict the interview process in terms of the order of questioning or the depth and breadth of the responses. Within interview time restrictions, (posed mainly by the fact that most of the interviews were conducted during the lunch breaks of working students), spontaneous and creative responses by the interviewees were given free rein, particularly if they provided insight into aspects of the lives of the students that explained or part-explained their current dispositions and situations as adult distance students. For instance, many of the respondents spoke at length about significant people in their lives, particularly when they were growing up. Although this information did not feature as a prominent questionnaire response, it was clear that a number of students might not have had the academic inclination or the appropriate commitment to consider returning to formal education and to persist in it without the prior influence of these persons.

The choice of students to be interviewed was made on the basis of several criteria, within time and budgetary limitations. These limitations, for instance, made it impossible for students in all countries of the USP Region to be interviewed. An important criterion for the selection of countries to be visited therefore, was the number of students enrolled in the survey courses in each of the USP countries so that countries with few enrolments were eliminated. This factor was combined with other practical considerations such as airline schedules and affordable fares. In the case of airline schedules, time was of the essence and the availability of flights to and connections between countries within a reasonable timeframe was important for the visit to the countries concerned to be considered. It was fortunate that at the time of data collection, the researcher was able to take advantage of packaged travel schedules involving the visit of three countries and more at a time, at fares that were affordable within the research budget. With this arrangement, Tonga,
Western Samoa and the Cook Islands could be visited in one schedule, and Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Nauru and Kiribati in another. In Fiji, one student each from Suva, Nadi and Lautoka were also interviewed.

In all, 23 students were interviewed although only 22 interviews were used in the study as one student was a foreigner studying in the Region at the time. As foreign students are only a very small minority of the USP distance education intake, it was felt that this interview would not make a significant contribution to fulfilling the research intentions. The interviewee selection process involved various steps: first, through random selection, up to eight names were selected for each country. These names were then sent to the Centre Directors of USP Centres in the countries concerned, with a request that the students be contacted and an interview time with the researcher scheduled. The names were submitted in order of priority based on limited information available at the time - age, gender, location and ethnicity - so that a good mix per country and overall was achieved. The first three or two students who were willing to be interviewed and available at the time of visit by the researcher, were selected. The researcher’s travel schedule was a very important, risk-related part of the process as the availability of the students was based on it. This risk was demonstrated when a connecting flight was cancelled and for the countries yet to be visited at the time, interview schedules had to be rearranged and new people approached to replace interviewees who were inconvenienced by the cancellation.

Eleven of the interviewees were also survey respondents although the order of their involvement in both exercises was not determined. However, there was no reason to suggest from the interview that their dual involvement affected their responses in any way.

All of the interviews were conducted by the researcher paying careful attention to situations of potential bias associated with the interview process (Oppenheim, 1966). The increasing experience gained by the researcher from one interview to the next, and the related awareness of and sensitivity to situations of bias were major advantages and outcomes of this approach.
3.5 Data Analysis Plan

Analysis of the data elicited from the questionnaire was conducted in four major phases. These are briefly described as follows. In the first phase, the subjects' responses were cross-tabulated to form a series of two-dimensional contingency tables, such as age by gender. This material was essentially descriptive in character and served to provide a profile of key features and variables associated with the study population. Because of the large number of tables that were possible to be generated from the data, only very limited use was made of chi-squared procedures and, in those instances where they were used, care was taken to adjust the overall x level so as to provide protection against an escalating type 1 error rate.

In the second phase, subjects' responses to questions that related directly to the conceptual framework specified in Chapter 1 were analysed using the principal components form of factor analysis. This form of factor analysis was used in preference to common factor analysis because the study was exploratory rather than theory-confirming in nature. As such, a wide variety and range of variables are characteristic of this study and the intention of factor analysis was to reduce the data to the minimum number of factors needed to adequately represent the variance in the response matrix. Additionally, since the number of variables in the data set exceeded 30, and the criterion was set that most of the variables would have communalities exceeding 0.60 before the solution would be considered acceptable, it was likely that component analysis and common factor analyses would produce identical results (Hair et al., 1995).

In the third phase, factor scores associated with each respondent derived from the principal components analysis were used in the K-means form of cluster analysis so as to produce a taxonomy of respondents sharing similar features.

In the fourth and final phase, these analysis of variance procedures were used to determine whether the groups formed by the cluster analysis differed in terms of academic performance. Additionally, the factor scores associated with each respondent were used in multiple regression analysis as predictors of academic performance.
In summary, the various statistical procedures used in questionnaire data analyses were selected as appropriate to the general objective of the study to identify those personal and situational variables, and features related to the students' study environments, that were associated with preparedness and disposition to study, and with persistence and performance.

With regard to the interview data, a composite description of the interviewees presented an overall picture of studying by distance as the students themselves saw and experienced it. Following this composite analysis, five interviews were selected for case study presentations, which continued to highlight, in greater detail, the real life experiences of the adult distance students in the USP Region. In so doing, the interview data 'brought to life' the quantitative results of the questionnaire data achieved through the various procedures described above.

3.6 Concluding Summary

Chapter 3 consisted of descriptions of the various aspects of the methodology and design of this research project. It began with a brief discussion of the choice of study design (survey/interview combination), followed by a description of the study population and the programmes of study in which they were involved, as major components of the study. Data collection methods - the questionnaire and interview - as well as the pre-testing of the questionnaire, formed a large part of the coverage in Chapter 3 with brief references to the literature where appropriate. Finally, statistical procedures used in the analyses of the questionnaire data, as well as interview data analysis, were presented.
CHAPTER 4: THE USP DISTANCE VOCATIONAL STUDENT - A PROFILE

4.1 The Chapter in Summary

In this chapter the profile of the vocational student studying at a distance at the USP is derived from frequency analysis and cross tabulation of the questionnaire responses in two-dimensional contingency tables. Various features of the profile are discussed in detail, followed by a summary portrait of the typical student derived from this information at the conclusion of the chapter.

4.2 Introduction

This study set out to achieve two major tasks. Firstly, guided by the literature, it sought to find out what the attributes and features of the USP adult distance learners were, and if these attributes and learning behaviours varied, and in what way, from those identified by the literature. It is hoped that the reasons for these differences will make a contribution towards a better understanding of adult distance learners in a different learning environment. Secondly, using final examination scores as performance indices, this study sought also to find out the extent to which variables within students’ personal, situational and study environments could be used to predict persistence and performance. The ultimate goal of these findings was to inform the course development process at the USP in order that learning exercises and opportunities within extension courses and learning support systems might appropriately accommodate the learning tendencies and needs of USP distance learners, and in so doing, encourage course completion and successful performance. The goals and objectives of the study are represented in the conceptual framework of the study (see Chapter 1).

Towards these ends, the study questionnaire (see Appendix 2) which was the major source of data collection for the study was designed keeping in mind both the attributes of learners and principles of adult learning, as well as variables significant to the learner’s personal, social, economic and study environment. A detailed description of the questionnaire is provided in Chapter 3. Data
elicited form the 278 responses was analysed using various statistical means. The results of these analyses are presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

One of the shortcomings of this study was the variation in the response rate across countries of the Region. In Table 4.1 below the number of returned questionnaires is shown against total enrolments in the DACS and DMS for the period under survey. It is evident from this comparison that while some countries (Fiji, Cook Islands, Kiribati and Solomon Islands) are well represented by the number of responses from their students, other countries (Tonga, Vanuatu, Western Samoa) are not, and the rest of the countries have very small numbers of enrolments and responses.

It is important to note here that responses from Fiji were dominated by Fiji Indians (55 percent). Because of the unavailability of a breakdown of Fiji student enrolments into the country's various ethnic groups, it is not possible to say whether the predominance of Fiji Indians in the study is a reflection of their disproportionate involvement in these programmes of study or their diligence in returning responses. The structure of the study sample may therefore be biased and as such, limits the generalisability of study findings.

Table 4.1: Total Enrolments in DACS and DMS and Questionnaire Response Rates Across the USP Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tot. Enr.</td>
<td>1068</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q. Resp.</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The representations above are borne in mind as the results of the survey are discussed. This chapter provides a description of frequency distributions of various features of the students under survey and contingency tables derived from them, culminating in a profile of dominant attributes of the USP distance vocational students. This profile presents a general description of the features that might be expected of the majority of students enrolled in USP's Diploma in Accounting Studies and Diploma in Management Studies as distance students.
4.3 A Profile of the USP Distance Education Student

The profile description of the USP distance students, and descriptions of other statistical outcomes, are presented under the major sub-headings of the conceptual framework of the study referred to above. This pattern will be followed wherever possible and appropriate to facilitate the handling of the wide range of data in the study and to ensure consistent and clear presentation. In the frequency distributions, total numbers represent those who returned responses per question. In many cases, not all students provided answers.

4.3.1 Demographic features

On examination, the questionnaire data appeared to indicate that most of the features and attributes of adult distance learners at USP were consistent with those described in the literature (see Chapter 2). With regard to demographic features, that more than 80 percent of the students were of 21 years and over clearly defined the group as an adult one. The age distribution, however, showed the USP students to be spread over a wider age range and to be younger than the general average in the literature with 47 percent (n=127) in the 21-30 years bracket and 35 percent (n=96) being between 31-40 years old. This age factor clearly reflected on other demographic characteristics of the sample. A little over a half (56%) of the sample were married (n=152) with one student divorced and one widowed. As expected, there was also a large number of single students (117=43%) most of whom were under 30 years of age. Table 4.2 provides a breakdown of the marital status of the sample in their various age categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Divorced</th>
<th>Widow/Widower</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(21 - 30)</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(31 - 40)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 50 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Observed Frequencies for Marital Status of various Age Categories
Another variable that appeared to be affected by the age distribution of the study population was the number of children per sample family. The data showed that only 51 percent of the students had children, and the majority of these students (n=93) had between one and two children which might be a reflection of the predominance of younger adults in the study. The distribution of children across age categories is shown in Table 4.3 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>none</th>
<th>(1-2)</th>
<th>(3-5)</th>
<th>(5+)</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(21 - 30)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(31 - 40)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 50 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was also a predominance of male students (171=63%) in the sample, over female students (100=37%). Seven students did not indicate their gender.

4.3.2 Socio-cultural features

Although the majority of students (57%) lived in a nuclear family structure (n=158), a relatively large number (n=116) maintained extended families, making this structure an equally important feature of the USP sample. Most students (n=156) had a household of between two and five people which made up two generations, one generation being either older or younger than the students.

The ethnic representation of the sample included the three major ethnic groups of the South Pacific Region - Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian - as well as an Asian/Fiji Indian option to represent the large Indian population living in Fiji and minority groups of Asian extraction throughout the countries of the South Pacific, and a European option. The location of the various ethnic groups across countries of the USP Region are presented in Table 4.4. The sample was clearly dominated by students of Asian/Fiji Indian ethnicity (153 = 55%). Next were the
Table 4.4: Ethnic Groups and their locations across USP Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Melanesian</th>
<th>Polynesian</th>
<th>Micronesian</th>
<th>Asian/Fiji</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>European</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suva/Nausori/Naboro</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of Viti Levu</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanua L./Outer Is.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarotonga</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarawa</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niue</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.i - Honiara/GC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nukualefo/Tongatapu</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga - Outer Is.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvalu - Funafuti</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu - Vila/Efate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu - Outer Is.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apia/Upepoli</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/S - Outer Is.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Melanesians (60 = 22%), followed by Polynesians (44 = 16%) with very small numbers of Micronesian, European and other ethnicity. From the geographic distribution of the various ethnic groups across the member countries of the USP, it was clear that the bulk of the students (202=73%) were from Fiji. All but one of the Indian/Asian students in the sample resided in Fiji, as well as 20 percent of the Melanesian component (n=41). For the rest of the sample, most of the Polynesians were located in countries of Polynesia with a proportionately large return from the Cook Islands (24 = 55%), and the rest scattered over Fiji, Tonga, Western Samoa/Tokelau and other countries of the Region. The relatively few Micronesians in the study were located in Kiribati (n=10) and Nauru (n=1).

In Table 4.5, the ethnicity variable (X) is considered with general language competence (Y). The numbers on the Y axis represent the following language categories:
1. Fluent and literate in 3+ languages, including English
2. Fluent and literate in 2-3 languages, including English
3. Fluent and literate in English only with some fluency and literacy in 3 other languages
4. Fluent and literate in English only with some fluency and literacy in <3 other languages
5. Fluent and literate in mother tongue only and limited competence in English
6. Limited competence in English and at least one other language
7. Competent in English only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Melanesian</th>
<th>Polynesian</th>
<th>Micronesian</th>
<th>Asian/Fiji</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>European</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>154</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>274</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of students indicated being fluent and literate in two to three languages including English (178=65%). Another 27 percent (n=71) reported being fluent and literate in English only but with limited ability in up to two other languages as well. More importantly, the distribution data showed that the USP sample was generally a multi-lingual group with only as few as six percent (n=17) indicating a limited ability in the mother tongue and English. Furthermore, this multilingual capacity was a feature common to all ethnic groups represented in the sample.

In terms of the use of the English language which is the language of instruction at the USP, frequency of use is indicated in Table 4.6. The distribution indicates that English was used for about 50 percent of their time by 36 percent of the students (n=100) and another 34 percent (n=95) used English for more than 50 percent of their time. These figures represented the majority of students in all ethnic groups but for the Micronesians, most of whom were involved in the English language for around 25 percent of their time. In all, about 26 percent of the sample (n=74) fell into this latter category and another eight students indicated they seldom used the English language.
Table 4.6: Ethnicity and General English Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Melanesian</th>
<th>Polynesian</th>
<th>Micronesian</th>
<th>Asian/Fiji</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>European</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(50% +)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(50% approx.)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25%)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Seldom)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A computation of the time spent in commitments other than education clearly indicated that study was in heavy competition with other areas of responsibility, the most dominant being work and home. With regard to family and household commitments (treated as inclusive constructs under the general household variable in the survey), 83.5 percent of the students spent more than 15 hours a week on related responsibilities, including being sole or principal provider for the family. In addition, a fairly high percentage of students in the sample were involved in other activities: 47 percent (n=130) spending an average of 1-5 hours a week on religion, 34 percent (n=93) being involved in socio/cultural obligations for up to five hours average per week and 34 percent (n=92) being involved in community affairs on an average of up to five hours per week. Time involvement, however, was minimal.

The dominant religion among the group was Christianity (129=47%), with Hinduism ranking next with 44 percent (n=121) of the students.

96 percent (n=247) of the USP students reported being in paid employment and 90 percent (n=249) said that they spent five hours and more in their employment, on a daily average. Of these, 28 percent (n=68) reported being in the teaching profession, with another 23 percent (n=56) reporting employment in other professional areas such as nursing, government inspectors in specialised areas and trainers in the technical field. A further 27 percent (n=67) of the sample were gainfully involved in Finance/Accounting work in the both the public and private sectors. Together, these three areas provided employment for the bulk of the students.
4.3.3 The economic situation

The largest group of employed students (117 = 48%) earned between $F5,000 and $F9,999 per annum. Another 20 percent (n = 50) fell into the next income bracket making a total of 68 percent of the students in the $F5,000 to $F14,999 annual salary bracket. However, only 41 percent of the students in this group indicated having suitable home study facilities which appears to suggest either that this income was not adequate, or that the financial commitments of the students were high. Most of the rest of the students in lower income brackets also indicated poor or unavailable home study facilities.

With regard to the affordability factor, 66 percent (n=181) claimed to be able to financially support their own studies. Another 16 percent supported their studies by means of reliable, external funding.

Given the full-time employment of the majority of students described above, it was clear that studies for these students were being conducted on a part-time basis. Furthermore, the USP sample also confirmed that for them income and employment were key objectives for undertaking these studies. In responding to a question which contained seven optional economic reasons for their studies of which they could choose more than one response, 26 percent of the sample (n=69) said success in their programmes would earn one or more increments at work; 23 percent (n=62) were studying to improve their qualifications and future employment opportunities. For those who gave second choices, job promotion was given as the objective by 30 percent of the students (n=49) and improved qualifications and future employment opportunities were reasons for another 25 percent (n=41). Of the 96 students who gave third choices, 34 percent were targeting improved qualifications and future employment opportunities, and another 28 percent wanted a better paying job. The general economic aspiration to earn more money through improved qualifications for better job opportunities appeared to tie in well with general study aspiration responses elicited through another question. Thirty-two percent of the sample (n=86) were seeking to upgrade their qualifications while another 25 percent were in the programme out of interest which seemed to be job-related in view of the number of students who reported learning success derived from employment experience (see below).
4.3.4 Educational background and current educational involvement

Fifty-two percent \((n=136)\) completed secondary education at sixth form while another 26 percent \((n=67)\) went as far as seventh form or its equivalent. All but six of the students sat for a public examination in their last year of school, the most common being the New Zealand University Entrance Examination \((48\%)\) and either a National Form 7 examination or the USP Foundation Programme \((24\%)\). Forty-three percent \((n=120)\) passed all subjects in their public examinations and another 24 percent \((n=66)\) failed one subject only.

With regard to post-secondary education, the USP sample showed consistency with the general expectation of adults in that, of the 80 percent \((n=222)\) indicating having done post-secondary study, 10 percent \((n=22)\) had at least an undergraduate degree with a further 50 percent \((n=113)\) having done either a Certificate or Diploma at college level. Furthermore, another 10 percent of the sample had already done a number of university extension courses and/or had an incomplete full-time tertiary programme to their credit.

That very little of the USP distance learner's life was spent at the institution was evident in the responses to a question on frequency of use of the local study centre. Twenty-nine percent \((n=76)\) reported that they sometimes used the Centre; another 20 percent \((n=53)\) rarely visited the Centre; and 16 percent \((n=41)\) never visited the Centre. An examination of the reasons given by these students for infrequent or non-access of institutional facilities showed that other activities in their lives were in competition with time for study and related commitment. Forty-one percent \((n=68)\), for instance, found the daily opening hours of the Centre inadequate most likely because they were at work during this period. Another 30 percent \((n=49)\) cited clashes with other commitments as the main reason for infrequent or non-use of the Centre. For a small number of the sample \((27=16\%)\) the Centre was either geographically inaccessible, or transport was inadequate.

4.3.5 Student disposition and preparedness to study

Just under 25 percent of the students indicated that they were well prepared for the return to formal study. Of the rest, 48 percent indicated that they needed just a little additional assistance
with the return to formal study. A question was asked on the nature of assistance that students felt they most needed in this transition, with four answer options as follows:

1. study skills
2. cognitive skills (eg. ability to understand, analyse, assess, etc)
3. motivation
4. confidence

More than one answer was allowed, in order of priority. Options 1 and 2 related to the student's preparedness to study while options 3 and 4 were dispositional variables relating to attitude. It was recognised that including these last two abstractions without operational definitions was to invite from the students subjective interpretations of the concepts which would include their own value judgments of the features that constituted being motivated and confident. In the context of the USP Region, these value judgements would be influenced by several other variables including the individual's culture and its attitude towards formal study, English language proficiency, socio-economic status, expectation of environmental support both physical and human, level of formal education achieved and relevance of work experience. The variance in the level of occurrence of each of these features across the countries of the Region, is the central concern of this study. To a degree, how students interpret being confident and motivated is a reflection of how they perceive these variable working together in their lives to evoke in them feelings of confidence and motivation. Taken separately, therefore, feedback on levels of confidence and motivation in this case is open to wide and speculative interpretation. Taken, however, with responses to other questions on factors reflecting and affecting motivation and confidence, eg. general and economic reasons for study, circumstances providing both the extrinsic and intrinsic 'push' towards studying, moral and concrete support available to the students and the degree and quality of learning independence, general interpretations of the concepts as features which positively dispose students to studying a distance can be adequately established. In addition, interview data provided substantially more discussion on the perceived meaning of the two concepts and on other attributes which contributed to motivation and confidence by the interviewees that appeared to generally confirm interpretations of questionnaire responses. A similar subjectivity was anticipated with regard to interpretation of other features such as learning style, independence and self-direction. The same approach was applied in these instances, with interview data substantially clarifying student perceptions.
1. Self-perception, confidence and motivation

Of the 211 students who responded, only six percent ($n=13$) felt they needed assistance with their confidence levels. One hundred and thirteen students gave second choices and again only 19 students felt they needed a boost in confidence. When questioned directly about their 'confidence to study successfully at a distance', 13 percent ($n=36$) were very confident and another 58 percent ($n=161$) said they were confident. The data appeared to indicate a satisfactory level of confidence and self-perception among the USP students in their ability to study successfully at a distance.

With regard to motivation to study, again as few as 15 percent ($n=31$) gave motivation for first choice as an area in need of assistance, and a further 27 percent ($n=23$) needed assistance with motivation as their second choice. As for confidence and self-perception, the USP sample could generally be described as well motivated to study by virtue of their own self-description.

2. Orientation to learning

Again, in assessing their own approaches to learning, 22 percent ($n=60$) of the students felt they were comfortable studying on their own. The largest group of students ($133=49\%$) opted for group sessions sometimes while the remaining 29 percent indicated a heavy dependence on group sessions in order to learn successfully.

3. Learning style

Four learning style options were presented as choices: memorisation, assimilation and understanding, application, and analysis and criticism. Students were invited to make more than a single choice but in order of preference. The majority indicated a preference for application-type courses as first preference ($126=46\%$), followed closely by understanding and assimilation ($115=42\%$). These two preferences made up 88 percent of the sample. Of the 150 students who gave second choices, 50 percent preferred applications and 27 percent opted for analysis and criticism. It would appear therefore, that the large majority of students had preferences for application-type learning and courses that required the understanding and assimilation of knowledge.
Figure 4.1: Comparison between features and attributes of USP adult distance learners and those that are generally accepted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature/attribute</th>
<th>USP distance learners</th>
<th>General description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>21-40 years</td>
<td>35-40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>mixed married and single*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>mixed yes and no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of children</td>
<td>1 - 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family type</td>
<td>mixed nuclear and extended</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. in household</td>
<td>2 - 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of people supported</td>
<td>3 - 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other income earners</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generations in h/hold</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Asian/Fiji Indian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>multilingual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>50%+ use</td>
<td>higher priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other commitments</td>
<td>work, family/household</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>employed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of employment</td>
<td>middle level professional; finance/accounting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>$F5,000-$F9,999</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support studies</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current study</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>income, employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study objectives</td>
<td>income, employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal education</td>
<td>6th form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public examination</td>
<td>NZ University Entrance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance in exam.</td>
<td>Passed all subjects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject area b/ground</td>
<td>Eng/Math/Commerce/Science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-sec education</td>
<td>college level</td>
<td>college level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Centre</td>
<td>infrequent &amp; limited use</td>
<td>limited use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other study facilities</td>
<td>Home fair, work and community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-perception</td>
<td>confident</td>
<td>confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>fair**</td>
<td>intrinsic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orient. to learning</td>
<td>group</td>
<td>group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning style</td>
<td>application; work/life exp.</td>
<td>application; work/life exp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>up to 50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning direction</td>
<td>tutor support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study hours daily</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This term is used in the table to indicate an approximate balance between components of the feature.

** Based on an assessment by the students of their persistence levels rather than the nature of their motivation.

4. Independence and self-direction

On the other hand, the great majority felt the need for direction by the course tutor in varying degrees. Thirty-four percent (n=91) wanted direction for most of the course;
another 30 percent (n=82) for some of the course and a further 21 percent (n=58) wanted direction by the course tutor throughout the whole course. This data appeared to contradict the information elicited on learning orientation and might be a reflection of the demands of the course rather than the learning preference of the students.

5. **Learning from work experience**

Experience gained from employment was shown to have made a considerable contribution to the learning success, and ability to do the required course assignments and tests for the majority of students. Thirty-eight percent (n=97) indicated that more than 50 percent of their learning success came from their employment experience, with another 33 percent (n=83) attributing between 26 percent and 50 percent to the same. Responses to a four-option question on learning style preferences showed that the largest group of students (126=46%) preferred courses that involved application of new knowledge and information to work or everyday life situations in a hypothetical or real way. Of the 150 students who gave second choices, again the majority (50%) preferred the application-type courses. It would appear that, for the USP sample, the immediacy of application of what was to be learned was a learning motivation factor.

4.3.6 **Summary of attributes of USP distance vocational learners**

Figure 4.1 above sets out in summary some of the more prominent attributes and features of the USP adult distance student identified and discussed above. A description from the literature is also included where available providing at a glance the opportunity to see similarities and differences between the two sets of information.

4.3.7 **Profiling the typical distance vocational student at the USP**

The information in Figure 4.2 represents a profile of the features expected of the majority of students enrolled in the Management and Accounting vocational programmes at the USP. In the composition of this profile, it is important to note that some of the features of the USP students
are derived from responses totalling just slightly more than 50 percent and in one or two cases, the difference has been too slim to be distinct one way or another.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Attributes</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demography</td>
<td>Fiji-Indian male, between 21 and 30 years of age; single, or married with very young children of pre-school or early primary school ages; nuclear family of between two and five people making up two generations, one of which is either older or younger than the respondent's generation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-cultural features</td>
<td>Suva-based; full-time income earner with heavy household and family responsibilities; minimum commitment to religious, cultural and community responsibilities; speaks Hindi and up to two other languages including English and uses English for 30% or more of the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Earns between $75,000-9,999 per annum either as a school teacher or in an accounting position; supports the family with the assistance of one other person either a parent or a spouse; supports own study expenses; main study objectives are to improve income and future employment opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational experience</td>
<td>Completed high school at Form 6, with mixed Commerce/Science background and passed all subjects in his public exam.; also undertook some post-secondary study at college certificate or diploma level; currently a part-time student spending 1-2 hours on studying daily; study is done mainly at home and Centre rarely visited because of other commitments during Centre hours. Study facilities at work and in the community are inadequate for study purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposition and preparedness to study</td>
<td>Confident and highly motivated as a distance learner; preference for application-type courses and up to 50% learning from work experience; also preference for group learning and at least some tutor support and direction required.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter focussed on describing the data and analysis towards the production of a profile of the typical distance education vocational student at the USP. The discussion included a comparison of the USP student with students particularly in western contexts where information was available. This made possible the opportunity to note especially areas in which the USP students differed from international counterparts and to attribute these to contextual differences.
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS OF FACTOR AND CLUSTER ANALYSES

5.1 Chapter Outline

In this chapter the 10 factors resulting from factor analysis are interpreted with regard to the associations between and among variables and the extent to which each group of variables accounts for variance in the data. Additionally, the cluster analysis yielded four large clusters of students whose attributes are discussed in detail.

5.2 Factor Analysis

As explained in Chapter 3, the purpose of factor analysis in this study was to reduce the data, necessarily broadbased because of its exploratory nature, to the minimum number of factors needed to account for an acceptable proportion of variance. Thus the subjects' responses were analysed using the principal components form of factor analysis, implemented in the STATVIEW software package. Various trials were run using different criteria to determine the number of factors to be extracted. Each solution was examined to assess whether it satisfied both statistical criteria and yielded interpretable factors. The solution providing 10 factors which accounted for 50 percent of the variance was chosen as that yielding the most acceptable data reduction. Appendix 6 contains the factor loading matrix for that model, and the tables of bivariate and partial correlations. The correlation matrix had a sampling adequacy index of .62, which is considered acceptable (Hair et al., 1995; Tabachinick and Fidell, 1989), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (chi square = 2458.466, DF = 819, p<.0001), indicating a factorable matrix. A summary of the factor loading matrix is given in Figure 5.1 and a description of the factors and their associated variables follows.
Figure 5.1: Summary of factor loading matrix

Factor 1: Demography
No. of child. .861
Age range: (resp) .833
Age range: (chn.) .832
Marital status .785
Income .486
School subjects -.425
Post/sec. study -.177

Factor 2: Household
No. in household .734
H/h. generations .633
H/h. earners .633
Family type .6
No. supported .448

Factor 3: Study Environ.
Community facil. .729
Home facilities .651
Work facilities .628
Centre facilities .445

Factor 4: Economics
Ext. assistance. -.76
Support study .733
Study reasons -.316

Factor 5: Study Disposition
Transition .765
Assistance .689
Confidence .595
Orientation .461

Factor 6: Study Habits
Study hours .769
Economic reasons .426
Centre use -.423

Factor 7: Soc. Disposition
No. of languages -.664
Work experience .474
Community work .429

Factor 8: Soc-cultural Env.
Ethnicity -.663
Cultural work .536
Religious work .481
First language .416
English use .366

Factor 9: Gender
Household work .575
Gender -.416
Learning style .376

Last school form .652
Exam. performance .615
Learn. direction .482

5.2.1 Factor 1: Demography

Factor 1, which accounted for 18 percent of the direct and joint proportionate variance in the data, was associated with mainly demographic variables which had the highest loadings on Factor 1. Factor 1 variables and their loadings were as follows: age range of respondents (0.833); marital status (0.785); number of children (0.861); and age range of children (0.832); subjects studied by the respondents at school (-0.425); income (0.486); and post-secondary study (-0.177).
As seen in the profile description in Chapter 4, a key feature of this study was the relative youth of the sample. More than 50 percent of the respondents were 30 years of age and under, the majority of whom were unmarried (see Table 4.2). These features were represented by low numbers on the age and marital status variables. The sample was also fairly balanced between those with children (51%) and those without (49%) (see Table 4.3). Of the former, the majority had no more than two children with younger students having younger children in comparison to the ages of children of older students. These features were represented also by low numbers on the number of children variable.

The demographic variables loading on Factor 1 appeared to indicate that younger students in the sample can be expected to be single or married, have no children, or young children with variable age ranges. Correlation coefficients between these variables were, as expected, highly significant at the .01 level (criterion $r=0.160$, $DF=276$, $\alpha=.01$): .645 between age of respondents and marital status; .503 between age of respondents and number of children; and .678 between age of respondents and age range of children.

Income levels were also expected to increase with age, with a highly significant correlation coefficient between the two variables of .457.

Younger students were associated with an English/Maths/Commerce background represented by high numbers in this question. Older students appeared to have concentrated mainly on English and the Social Sciences, with some science and commerce. This was to be expected given that the commercial subjects, particularly accounting, economics and business studies became incorporated in the high school syllabuses of Pacific Island schools only in more recent years.

With a much lower loading, the inclusion of post-secondary study in this Factor appeared to suggest that younger students were associated with lower levels of post-secondary study, represented in this question by high numbers. Older students, on the other hand, have had the time to pursue post-secondary education to higher levels, including university degrees for some of them. The correlation coefficient between age and post-secondary study, however, was not significant at .126.
5.2.2 Factor 2: Household

Factor 2 was associated with the household and accounted for 11 percent of the direct and joint proportionate variance. Variables loading highly on this Factor were family type (0.6), number of people constituting the household (0.734), the number of generations represented by members of the household (0.535), the number of people supported by the respondents (0.448), and other income earners in the household (0.633).

Nuclear families among the sample were associated with smaller households constituting fewer generations. These features were all represented by low numbers in the respective questionnaire responses. In extended families, on the other hand, a larger household could be expected, which would include a higher number of generations. Frequency distributions for family type and household numbers, and family type and number of generations are given in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 below.

**Table 5.1: Family Type and Number in Household**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nuclear</th>
<th>Extended</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(one)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2-5)</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6-10)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11-15)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15+)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>158</strong></td>
<td><strong>116</strong></td>
<td><strong>272</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.2: Family type and number of generations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nuclear</th>
<th>Extended</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(one)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2 + younger)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2 + older)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3 + younger)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3 + Older)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3, Mixed)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Four)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>151</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
<td><strong>259</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Correlation coefficients among these variables were significant (criterion $r=0.160$, $DF=276$, $p=.01$): .184 between family type and number in the household, and .392 between family type and generations in the household.

The relationship between the number of people in the household and the number of people supported was also significant, with a high positive correlation between the two variables of .47. Equally, larger households could also be expected to have more than a single income earner. The two variables were significantly positively correlated at .428. The statistical analysis also suggested that the number of income earners were related to the structure of generations in the household. The correlation coefficient of .209 was significant and indicated that the fewer the number of generations in the household, the fewer the number of income earners. More generations in the household appeared to represent the possibility of more income earners.

5.2.3 Factor 3: Study Environment

Factor 3 accounted for 10 percent of the direct and joint proportionate variance and referred to the study environment of the respondents. Variables loading highly on this Factor were home study facilities (0.651), community study facilities (0.729), work study facilities (0.626), and Centre facilities (0.445).

Facilities were rated high on low numbers and low on high numbers. Significant correlation coefficients (criterion $r=0.160$, $DF=276$, $p=.01$) between home and community facilities (.376) and between home and work facilities (.207) suggested that for many students much of their studying was accommodated by the home-community and home-work environments. There was also a significant relationship between community facilities and work facilities (.287) and community and Centre facilities (.256). These results highlighted the location dimension and suggested that those situated in a well-developed area such as an urban location, could expect good community, work and Centre facilities. Those that were not ideally located, such as those in rural or remote areas, did not have well-endowed community and work situations and might not even have a study Centre or sub-centre.
The correlation coefficients between home and Centre, and work and Centre were insignificant at .042 and .122 respectively. The suggestion of the independence of home and work study facilities from Centre facilities was acceptable and reflected the location dimension. In cases where students resided on outer or other islands, in remote rural areas, or on poorly-serviced bus routes, Centre facilities were inaccessible. This did not necessarily preclude good study facilities at home such as a private room for studying, a computer, audio-visual equipment and even subject area expertise among other family members. Students might also have access to workplaces with good study support facilities such as a high school with classrooms for use after hours, a fairly good library, science laboratories and school equipment such as computers and tape recorders that were available for staff use.

5.2.4 Factor 4: Financial support and reasons for studies

Factor 4 accounted for nine percent of the direct and joint proportionate variance, and was associated with economic indicators. Variables loading high on this Factor were: ability of respondents to financially support their extension studies (0.733), continued reliance on external financial assistance (-0.76), and reasons for studying (-0.316).

Students who were able to support their own studies did not need to rely on outside funding towards the financial support of their extension enrolment. On the other hand, those who were unable to support their studies, were enrolled because their external funding was assured. The correlation coefficient (criterion r=0.160, DF=276, p<.01) of .491 between these two variables was highly significant.

There was also an association between the ability to pay for study-related expenses, and the reasons for doing the course. Low numbers on the latter variable represented studying for first qualifications or to upgrade or change current qualifications. These reasons were associated with students who were reliant on external funding. There are a number of economic implications suggested here. Students who could not afford their own studies might be presumed to be in lower-paying jobs which did not require high levels of educational qualifications, hence the need to upgrade or improve qualifications to enhance future job
prospects. On the other hand, being able to afford extension studies might reflect better-paying jobs stipulating higher qualifications. In this latter case, students were associated with less basic study outcomes, such as broadening their education and the gaining of specialist qualifications which, presumably, would supplement other qualifications.

5.2.5 Factor 5: Educational Disposition

Factor 5 which accounted for 10 percent of the direct and joint proportionate variance, was concerned with how disposed the students were to studying at a distance. Variables with high loadings on this factor consisted of the transition from high school to current extension programmes (0.765), the kind of assistance needed to facilitate this transition (0.689), confidence to study (0.595) and learning orientation (0.461).

Low to high numbers on the transition variable represented ratings ranging from no assistance needed, to a lot of support required. Low numbers on the assistance variable represented assistance with study and cognitive skills, and higher numbers represented assistance with motivation. Confidence ratings on the confidence variable ranged from high (low numbers) to low (high numbers). In the same manner, the learning orientation variable went from low numbers for independent learners to high for group-dependent learners.

Correlation coefficients (criterion $r=0.160$, $DF=276$, $\alpha=.01$) between transition and the three variables of study assistance, confidence and learning orientation were significant (.45, .3 and .21 respectively). Those not needing (much) transitional assistance rated themselves high on confidence. These students also rated themselves more independent, requiring assistance mainly in the areas of study and cognitive skills. This was to be expected for mature students returning to formal study after a lapse of time. It was possibly also a reflection of the different kinds of study skills required by independent learning, as well as different cognitive demands by higher level education.

Those students who needed a lot more assistance with their study were also associated with low confidence and motivation. For these students, study persistence might rest on more fragile
circumstances and, aside from the need to cope with learning, there was also the need to maintain a level of confidence and motivation conducive to perseverance in the course of study. The significant and positive correlation coefficient of .232 between confidence levels and orientation to learning suggested that successful distance study might depend on maintaining the appropriate confidence level to persist with independent learning.

5.2.6 Factor 6: Effect of economic status on study habits

Factor 6 accounted for eight percent of the direct and joint proportionate variance and concerned the study habits of the respondents in association with their economic situation as indicated by their economic reasons for studying. Variables loading high on Factor 6 are study hours daily (.769), frequency of use of Centre services and facilities (-0.423) and economic reasons for studying (0.426).

There appeared to be an association between people who spent less time on study, with infrequent or non-use of their Centre services and facilities. In addition, low study hours were associated with students studying for monetary improvements and for reasons leading to this end, such as job promotion and profitability of economic enterprise. Those who put in more study hours daily appeared to use their local Centre more frequently, and were aiming at opportunities to improve and widen their job prospects and personal marketability.

If the economic reasons cited by students could be taken to reflect their economic situations, then the associations cited above made for several implications. Students studying to improve monetary conditions had a lower economic status than those aspiring beyond within-the-job prospects to the broader job-market scene. In the case of the former group of students, Centre access might be a case of affordability; students of lower economic status might not have the means with which to visit their local Centres as often as they might wish to. Another group of students that might fall into this category were those located in remote and rural areas and involved in jobs of lower income. For these students, the Centre might not be physically accessible. That they put in fewer hours of study daily might reflect a need, on the part of
these students, to put more emphasis and time on money-making activities such as overtime at work.

On the other hand, students not pressured by the priority need to cope financially, could afford both time and money in support of their extension studies. Hence they could make more frequent visits to the Centre. For these students the relatively higher educational aims of job-market competition might also be more demanding in terms of study hours required. Whereas the former group of students aspiring towards within-the-job benefits might be satisfied with a mere pass, improving and enhancing job prospects are dependent more on high quality achievements that require a higher level of study effort by the students concerned.

The correlation coefficient between study hours and Centre access is significant at .144, but insignificant (criterion $r=0.160$, $DF=276$, $\alpha=.01$) between study hours and economic reasons.

5.2.7 Factor 7: Social Disposition

Variables in Factor 7 accounted for seven percent of the direct and joint proportionate variance and referred to the social disposition of the respondent. Variables and loadings were: learning from work experience (0.474), time spent on community commitments per week (0.429) and general language competence ((-0.664).

Students who learned least from work experience (low numbers) were associated with less time spent in community involvement (low numbers), as well as competence in fewer languages (high numbers). These results seemed to suggest that where the opportunities and ability to learn from work experience were limited, the time needed to make up for this was sometimes found by limiting community involvement. A complementary interpretation would be the situation where students who were able to learn through application strategies normally associated with the workplace, took advantage of these opportunities as an alternative available to them in view of their heavier community involvement. Being multi-lingual, as reflected in their competence in a variety of languages, these students were likely to be members of several social and cultural groups and therefore have a commitment to a broader community.
5.2.8 Factor 8: Socio-cultural situation

Factor 8, which accounted for 10 percent of the direct and joint proportionate variance, was associated with the socio-cultural environment. Variables loading on this Factor were as follows: first language (0.416), general English use (0.366), total amount of time spent on religious activities (0.481), ethnicity (-0.663) and total amount of time committed to cultural activities (0.536).

In this study, the first language of the student could be used as a general indicator of country of origin and the culture of the student. It was significantly correlated with ethnicity with a coefficient of -.199, where low numbers represented Melanesians, Polynesians and Micronesians, while high numbers included those of Asian/Fiji Indian origin, as well as Europeans.

The association of first language with the frequency of use of English provided a partial picture of the variations in language environments throughout the USP Region. The first few numbers on the first language variable represented respondents of different ethnicity from Fiji, who made up more than two-thirds of the study sample. These ethnic groups were associated with more frequent use of the English language, also represented by low numbers. Also included in the low numbers were the Cook Islands students, indicated here as being frequent users of English. High numbers, on the other hand, represented first language speakers of Pidgin, Ni Vanuatu languages and dialects, as well as Polynesian students from the small island countries of Tokelau and Tuvalu. These students were associated with infrequent use of English. These associations appeared to be strengthened by the significant negative correlation coefficient of -.229 between use of the English language and ethnicity.

Associations were also indicated between first language and ethnicity, and the total amount of time committed to religious and cultural responsibilities. It seemed to be suggested that Fiji-Indian students, who made up more than half of the study population, were either not involved in religious and cultural activities, or were only minimally involved. Melanesians, Polynesians and Micronesians, on the other hand, had more commitments in these areas. The significant
correlation coefficient (criterion $r=0.160$, $DF=276$, $z=.01$) of -.163 between ethnicity and religion, and of -.226 between ethnicity and cultural responsibilities, bore out these indications.

Factor 8 appeared, therefore, to suggest that the strong Fiji-Indian component of this study was a more frequent English-speaking group than students in other parts of the USP Region who did not speak English very often and who, presumably, used their mother tongue or pidgin in the case of the Melanesian countries, for communication within the various aspects of their lives. Furthermore, Fiji-Indians were not as involved in religious and cultural commitments as were their fellow students of other ethnicity in Fiji and the rest of the USP Region. This latter situation implied that because of their socio-cultural obligations, this latter group of students came under more pressure for time to study than did Fiji-Indian students.

5.2.9 Factor 9: Gender and related issues

Factor 9 accounted for nine percent of the direct and joint proportionate variance and involved variables of gender (-0.416), learning style (0.376) and total household time (0.575).

Men appeared to be associated with learning of a higher cognitive order such as application and critical and analytical thinking. Women, on the other hand appeared to be more inclined towards memorisation, and understanding and assimilation. This can perhaps be partially explained in terms of the type of employment that the students were involved in. About 160 men and 80 women in the sample were employed. The largest group of men worked in accounting and financial management which involved the application of learned principles and knowledge. Nearly 50 percent of the women, on the other hand, were employed as teachers and might be studying to extend their knowledge of subject areas in which they taught. This educational aim would basically require memorising, understanding and assimilation of the knowledge sought. However, the correlation between these two variables was insignificant (criterion $r=0.160$, $DF=276$, $z=.01$) with a coefficient of -.074.

With regard to time spent on household responsibilities, again men were associated with a larger commitment than women. Given that household roles in this study included being an
income earner, and given that more men than women in the sample were employed, this association was most likely a reflection of the income-earning responsibilities of the men towards their household commitments. The correlation between these two variables was significant at -.194.

5.2.10 Factor 10: Educational background

Factor 10 concerned the educational background of the respondents and accounted for eight percent of the direct and joint proportionate variance. The variables involved were last school form attended (0.652), examination performance in that year (0.615), and learning direction (0.482).

The higher school years, represented by higher numbers in the last school form variable, were associated with poorer examination results as represented by higher numbers on the performance variable. The significant correlation coefficient of .16 between these two variables appeared to suggest that the higher the students went in high school, the poorer their learning. This situation might be a reflection of a number of issues: the change from local to international syllabuses at upper secondary, the complexity of the subjects at higher levels, poor teaching/learning, poor educational environments and/or poor subject area backgrounds on the part of the students.

The association between last school form and learning direction, might bear out a little more, the teaching/learning situation in high school. Lower forms were associated with more teacher-direction and higher forms with more independent learning. Given the examination performances indicated above, this association might suggest that the expectation of more independence on the part of the students in higher forms was not realised. It might also mean the lack of proper teacher training in counselling and guidance roles as the requirements of teachers in a more student-centred situation. The correlation coefficient between the last form variable and learning direction is not significant, however, at -.089.
5.3 Cluster Analysis

The respondents' factor scores were used as clustering variables in the K-means form of cluster analysis, as implemented in the SYSTAT software package. As with the principal components analysis various trials were run seeking an interpretable solution that also offered statistical validity. Following advice from Hair et al. (1995), a graph of mean, within cluster sums of squares was used to detect an 'elbow' in the shape of the curve. Figure 5.2 below shows that the mean, within cluster sums of squares continued to decrease substantially, as the number of clusters increased from four to ten.

![Graph of Mean, Within Cluster sums of Squares](image)

\[ \bar{X} \] denotes mean within cluster sum of squares.

Figure 5.2: Graph of Mean, Within Cluster sums of Squares

The 10 cluster solution contained four large clusters. The membership of these clusters remained stable in models having six, seven, eight and nine clusters. For that reason the 10
cluster solution was used for interpretive purposes. Table 5.3 contains the summary statistics for the 10 cluster solution. It will be noticed from Table 5.3 that the F ratios associated with each clustering variable are high, and that the corresponding p values are highly significant (\( p < .001 \)), indicating that each variable represented a significant 'effect' in an analysis of variance sense. This should not be emphasized, however, because the objective of the K-means clustering algorithm is to find clusters that maximise such effects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Between SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Within SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>F-Ratio</th>
<th>Prob.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demography (F1)</td>
<td>52.676</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>231.743</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>6.769</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household (F2)</td>
<td>143.984</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>162.655</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>26.360</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Environ. (F3)</td>
<td>58.175</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>225.040</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>7.081</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics (F4)</td>
<td>124.041</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>180.854</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>20.423</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposition (F5)</td>
<td>98.825</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>199.460</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>14.754</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Habits (F6)</td>
<td>102.494</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>196.306</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>15.547</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soc. Disp. (F7)</td>
<td>84.631</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>211.556</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>11.912</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-cult. (F8)</td>
<td>69.538</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>229.241</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>9.033</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (F9)</td>
<td>58.306</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>232.093</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>7.481</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edn. B/grd. (F10)</td>
<td>93.872</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>202.283</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>13.819</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The four large clusters are 1, 6, 8 and 10, having 85, 69, 58 and 59 members respectively. The other 6 clusters had only one to two members. Only the four clusters are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs as they accounted for 97 percent of the sample.

5.3.1 Cluster 1

1. Demographic and personal features

Cluster 1 contained 89 members and consisted of largely Fiji Indian males as well as a fairly large group of ethnic Fijian students, speaking Hindi and Fijian respectively, as first languages. With about half of these students in the 21-30 year old age bracket this Cluster could be described as a group of mainly young adults. Although slightly more than 50 percent were married, most did not have any children, and the majority of those who did had a maximum of two children only, mostly in the pre-school and school age categories. They lived in nuclear family units of between two and five people representing two generations, that of the respondents', and one other generation either
older or younger than the respondents. The financial support of the household was assisted by up to two other members of the family. Of those who were employed and who indicated their salaries, just under a half earned between $F5,000 and $F9,999 per annum, and another equal number received over $10,000, some earning as much as $F20,000 plus per annum. This group appeared, therefore, to be a fairly well-to-do group of students, well able to afford the expenses related to their studies.

Students in this Cluster were either bilingual or multilingual, being fluent and literate in two to three languages, including English which they used for about 50 percent of the time. It could be assumed, therefore, that they did not have any significant problems with English as their medium of instruction.

2. Socio-cultural features
As major, and even sole income earners for the family, employment and other household responsibilities took up the bulk of the week’s time for nearly all of the respondents in Cluster 1. Consequently, this left time for little else. In the area of culturally-related matters, most students opted not to be involved. Similarly, many students stayed away from community work, and those who were involved committed no more than five hours a week. With regard to religion, again up to five hours a week were committed by the majority of students.

3. Educational experience and environment
Students in Cluster 1 came from a background of upper high school, mainly sixth form, with a large group completing seventh form. About one third of this group studied the subject combination of English/Mathematics/Science, while another 25 percent undertook some commercial subjects as well. The majority of those who sat for public examinations in their last school year passed all of their subjects which was some indication that they should have been well-prepared for entry into university studies. In addition, many went on to undertake post-secondary college certificates and diplomas, and at the time of survey, a fair number were well into their university extension programme.
The two strongest reasons for current study for this group were interest in the area of study, and the need to upgrade their qualifications. In terms of the relation between seeking these qualifications and economic motivation, students in this group represented a variety of economic reasons such as the desire to earn more increments at work, promotion, improving the profitability of an economic activity, and improved personal marketability for future employment opportunities. These variations represented both immediate and long-term economic objectives and might well be a reflection of the ages of the respondents: younger students might be expected to be further sighted than more mature students relatively more settled in their careers.

Most students indicated being able to put in between just one and two hours of study daily. This was understandable in the context of a nuclear family with young children and where household responsibilities were shared among working adults. With regard to study facilities available to them, home facilities were rated the highest by most students as very good to satisfactory. Community and work facilities, on the other hand, were either just satisfactory or inadequate, while facilities at the local study Centre were either inadequate or unavailable to most students in the group. It was not surprising, therefore, that the Centre was rarely or never used by the majority of students.

4. Learning preparedness and disposition

Most of the students indicated that they needed at least some additional assistance with their transition to tertiary study at a distance while a fair number felt that they needed much more help. In particular, assistance was sought in the areas of study and cognitive skills. With regard to confidence, members of this group ranged mostly from those who felt a bit unsure about their ability to perform successfully, to those with average confidence levels. With such a disposition, the majority of the students felt that they needed to have tutor guidance at least some of the time, although many had a preference for a tutor throughout most of their course.

There was a majority preference in this group for learning through understanding and assimilation of knowledge. To this end, about 40 percent of the students felt that they needed group learning some of the time, and another one third preferred learning with
a group on a frequent and regular basis. Learning through practice at work was indicated by about 40 percent of the students as contributing between 25 percent and 50 percent of their learning although just under one third of the students gained under 25 percent of their learning in this way.

5. Summary description
Cluster 1 can, in summary, be described as young adult Fiji Indian and ethnic Fijian males mainly in the 21-30 year old age bracket. They were married with no children or up to two children only of pre-school and school ages, and lived in small nuclear family units. They were the main income earners of the family and, with fairly substantive salaries, were financially comfortable. In addition, it was likely that their spouses were one of the two additional income earners in the family. Their educational background and post-secondary levels of education suggested a good foundation for university study which they approached with some confidence. The disposition towards tutor guidance and learning in a group was most likely inherited from these past educational experiences. Reasons for study suggested that students in this group were at points in their careers where upgrading in qualifications was needed in order for progress to be made at work as well as in their economic situations. The preference for courses promoting understanding and assimilation might also be an indication of the need to broaden their knowledge base in terms of their objectives for promotion at work or improvements in the economic activities they were undertaking. Outside work and family there was little other time commitment besides study. However, the majority were able to commit only up to two hours of study daily, most likely because of heavy household commitments including the care of young children, given that wives were also employed. This might also reflect heavy work commitments characteristic of this age group when most students were in the demanding process of establishing and building careers. The stated need for assistance with cognitive, and study skills in particular most likely reflected the special requirements of studying at a distance. Although this group rated themselves as bilingual or multilingual, they did not appear to have a problem with the English language as the medium of instruction, and
indicated that they used it for about 50 percent of the time. Most students in this Cluster studied at home by necessity as facilities elsewhere were not suitable or unavailable.

5.3.2 Cluster 6

1. Demographic and personal features
Cluster 6 consisted of 69 members who were spread across the broad 21-40 year old age bracket and were married. Unlike students in Cluster 1, the majority of students in this group had between one and five children of varying age ranges. The dominant ethnic group was Fijian Indian with Hindi indicated as the most prominent first language. This group differed from Cluster 1 in that most students lived in extended family structures with larger households of between two and ten people representing three generations who were older and younger than the respondents. In most cases, only one other person assisted the respondent with household expenses, although an almost equal number of students had the support of up to four other people in the family. Consequently, the number of people the respondents had to support ranged from one to 10, depending on assistance available from other earners in the household.

Just over a third of the students earned between $F5,000 and $F9,999 a year, although almost as many earned less than $F5,000. However, the majority of students in the group indicated that they were able to support their enrolment and study-related costs.

This group was also bi- and multi-lingual, speaking up to three languages including English, their use of which ranged from 25 percent to more than 50 percent of the time.

2. Socio-cultural features
Cluster 6 students spent most of their week in full-time employment to support their families. Consequently, the majority of students in this group did not get involved in culturally-related or community activities, and either abstained from religious activities or allowed themselves a maximum of five hours of involvement a week.
3. Educational experience and environment

Most students went up to form six at high school and studied the subject combination of English/Mathematics/Commerce. However, with regard to public examination performance, a third of those who sat passed all their subjects, another 20 percent failed one, and a further 20 percent failed two subjects. Furthermore, almost 40 percent did no post-secondary study, with only 30 percent of the students undertaking some college certificates and diplomas and a smaller number having done some extension courses previously. In terms of previous educational experience, therefore, students in Cluster 6 appeared not to have been well-prepared for university in level of study and academic performance, although their subjects would have provided appropriate background for their current USP programmes of study.

As expected, therefore, the most popular reasons for returning to study were interest, and the upgrading of qualifications. These reasons were related to two specific economic objectives, namely improving the output, profit and productivity of the economic activities they were involved in, and improving their personal marketability for future job prospects.

Most students in Cluster 6 were able to allocate three hours of study a day, and an almost equal number studied for more than three hours daily. With households consisting of older generations as well as younger, it might well be the case that respondents did not need to be as committed to household responsibilities as students in nuclear family situations, and were therefore able to allocate more time to study. Much of this study was done at home where facilities were rated by more than 40 percent as very good, a further 14 percent had excellent home facilities, and another 14 percent with satisfactory study conditions at home. However, community, work and local Centre facilities ranged in ratings from mostly inadequate to satisfactory, and in a fair number of cases, unavailable. Use of Centre facilities therefore varied, with more students visiting the Centre sometimes.
4. Learning preparedness and disposition

Most of the students indicated requiring some additional assistance in the transition to tertiary and distance study, particularly in the area of cognitive skills, and another fairly large number requiring study skills. In view of their educational backgrounds, it appeared anomalous that nearly all of the students were confident in their return to study, more than 50 percent indicating the need for a tutor for some of the time or only on their request. Moreover, the majority of the students indicated they were either independent learners or needed to learn with a group sometimes only. These qualities reflect learning characteristics more typical of adults which extend also to the preference of most students in this group for learning through application. In this respect, learning from practice at work ranged from 25-50 percent for about one third of the students, to more than 50 percent for another two-fifths of the students.

5. Summary description

In Cluster 6 the majority of students were married Fiji Indian males spread throughout the 21-40 year old age bracket. This wide age range was most likely the main cause of the variations in other characteristics of this group. For instance, they lived in larger, extended, three-generation families of up to 10 people including their own children which could number up to five. The bulk of the students earned up to $10,000 a year and assistance with household expenses varied to the extent that the respondents were supporting between one and ten people. Variations in high school achievement, and the lack of, or limited post-secondary study of this group, suggested a lower level of preparedness for university study than among students in Cluster 1. Although confidence levels were rated at average for nearly all students, the need for tutorial assistance varied from some, to most of the time, and assistance with cognitive skills was needed by the majority. Although fluent and literate in 2-3 languages including English, English-speaking opportunities ranged from 25 percent of the time only, to more than 50 percent. In terms of study objectives, reasons for the need to improve qualifications ranged from the need to improve the output, productivity or profit of economic activities for those involved in them, to more long-term objectives such as the eligibility of respondents for better jobs in the future. The former objective might be associated with older students while the latter seemed to be more suited to younger.
adults still building careers. Although apparently constrained by economic and family circumstances, students in Cluster 6 were able to spend at least three hours of study daily, most likely because of the reduction of, or abstinence from activities outside work and family responsibilities. It was also possible that this opportunity might be related to the fact that the household also consisted of older relatives who might be able to assume family responsibilities which would otherwise have fallen to the respondents. Most students tended towards application-type learning and gained much from practice at work. They rated themselves independent learners, with a need for group learning sometimes only. Assessment of study facilities indicated that these students spent most of their study time at home, rarely visiting their local USP Centre whose facilities were generally rated as unsuitable and, in some cases, unavailable. This latter case might also be accountable for the students becoming independent learners by necessity than by choice.

5.3.3 Cluster 8

1. Demographic and personal features
Cluster 8 contained 58 members. About two thirds of the students in this group were females consisting of 45 percent Polynesian, 25 percent Melanesian and another 20 percent of Fiji Indian ethnicity. Dominant first languages indicated were Cook Island Maori, Hindi and English. The students were mainly single (60%), although a fairly large number were also married with children ranging in number from one to 3. The majority of students fell in the 21-30 year old age bracket, although another 30 percent were older students.

The dominant family structure was nuclear, consisting of between two and five people of mainly two generations, one generation being either older or younger than the respondents.

More than 50 percent of the group earned between $F5,000 to $F9,999, and another 25 percent fell into higher income brackets. With this income, respondents supported
between three and five people, assisted by up to two people in the household. However, 70 percent of the respondents indicated they were not able to afford their own studies, depending instead on reliable and regular external funding. This appeared to suggest that other financial commitments for this group were heavy.

This group was also a bi- and multi-lingual group of students being fluent and literate in 2-3 languages including English which was the first language for some of them. Students rated their use of the English language as for 25 percent to more than 50 percent of the time.

2. Socio-cultural features
Almost all of the students were in full time employment as the major income earner for the household. This, plus other family responsibilities took up the bulk of their week, so that their involvement beyond household commitments was minimal, and in the case of culturally-related and community activities, non-existent. The only other involvement indicated was religion in which case about one third of the students spent up to five hours a week on religious obligations.

3. Educational experience and environment
The majority of students went as far as Form 6 in high school and came from a background of mixed subject areas. Of the 70 percent who sat public examinations, more than 40 percent passed all their subjects, although the rest of the students failed up to three subjects.

In addition to high school, more than 40 percent of the students undertook college certificates and diploma and another 40 percent were well into their distance education programmes towards the fulfilment of university qualifications.

The overriding reasons for studying for more than 50 percent of the students were interest and improving qualifications. In terms of economic objectives, these qualifications were intended to lead to the earning of more increments at work for the
majority of students. Promotions, and improvement in the output, productivity and profitability of economic activities were also fairly popular reasons.

Unlike the previous two groups, the majority of students in Cluster 8 rated their Centre facilities very highly, from very good to excellent. Home, community and work facilities were rated satisfactory to excellent for about 50 percent of the students, although the other half rated them inadequate for study purposes and unavailable for a small number of students. It was clear that for this group, there was a wider range of options for study facilities. Students were able to put in 2-3 hours of study daily, and most visited their Centres sometimes.

4. Learning preparedness and disposition
Most students indicated needing at least some assistance with the transition and return to formal study, although another 20 percent felt they required a lot of help. This disposition was reflected in their confidence levels which ranged from confident to a bit unsure. Assistance was needed particularly with cognitive skills and a fairly large number wanted help with study skills. The majority also indicated a need for tutorial support for most of the time although another 25 percent were satisfied with a tutor for some of the time only.

About 60 percent of the students indicated that they learned best through understanding and assimilation strategies. Another 25 percent preferred courses which were application oriented. Work experience was a major learning strategy for these students with two thirds doing more than 50 percent of their learning from practice at work and another 30 percent up to a half of their learning. There was also a very strong preference by nearly all students for group work with half opting for it sometimes while another half wanting group work as frequently as possible.

5. Summary description
Cluster 8 consisted mainly of females in the 21-30 year old age bracket, and of mixed ethnicity dominated by Polynesians. The majority of these students were single, living in small nuclear family units of up to five people representing two generations.
Although most students earned between $F5,000 and $F9,999 and were financially assisted with household expenses by up to two people in the household, they indicated a dependence on external funding for their distance courses, suggesting heavy financial responsibilities, a significant one being the support of at least three members of the family. Understandably, most were studying to improve qualifications that would primarily earn them increments at work. High school achievement did not rate very highly, but further study, and previous extension courses were good preparation for entry into, and on-going university study. Confidence levels ranged from a bit unsure to just confident, so that there was a greater need for tutorial assistance, and also assistance with cognitive and study skills. Understanding and assimilation of course content were major learning styles and group dynamics and practice at work major learning strategies. In addition, English was the first language for some of this group who were competent in up to three languages and who used English from 25 percent to more than 50 percent of the time. Study was the only other major time commitment for these students outside of work and home responsibilities which meant they were able to spend two to three hours daily on their course work. Students in this group also had access to good study facilities at home, work, in the community and in particular at their local USP centre which was used frequently by most students.

5.3.4 Cluster 10

1. Demographic and personal features

There were 59 members in Cluster 10. As for Cluster 6, this group was dominated by Fiji Indian males in the broad age category of 21-40 years. However, they constituted a balance of both single and married students, the latter having mostly one to two children of mixed age ranges. Most students lived in a nuclear family unit of up to five people comprising two generations, that of the respondents, and a younger generation. The first language indicated for this group was Hindi.

Employed students who declared their salaries were concentrated mainly in the $F5,000 to $F9,999 income bracket, and an equal number was scattered over higher income
brackets, making salaries for almost all of the students in this group $F5,000 and above. Most students were assisted by at least one other earner in the household, most likely wives, and financially supported between three and five people. They were also able to support their own studies.

2. Socio-cultural features
Again, as with previous groups, most students in Cluster 10 were in full-time employment in support of families, which took up the bulk of their week. In addition, about two-thirds of the group spent up to 10 hours a week on religious activities and another one third were involved in up to five hours of community work weekly. Much of this was probably related to Parent and Teacher Associations of schools attended by children of the respondents. Otherwise, there was no involvement in activities of a cultural nature for the majority of students, and about 40 percent did not take part in community affairs.

As with other clusters, this group of students was largely fluent and literate in two to three languages including English, although about one third of the total indicated fluency and literacy in English only with a limited capability in up to two other languages. Use of the English language was from about 25 percent of the time with more people speaking it for 50 percent of the time and more.

3. Educational experience and environment
The last school form attended by about 50 percent of this group was Form 6, during which year about 80 percent of them sat for a public examination, with the majority passing all of their subjects and about one third failing up to two subjects. The subject area background was mainly mixed including combinations of English, Mathematics, Science, Social Science and Commerce. In addition, most students did some post-secondary study at the college certificate or diploma level, short local training courses or some USP distance education courses towards a university qualification.

Dominant reasons for the return to study were interest, and the upgrading of qualifications for the main purpose of improving their eligibility for future employment.
opportunities, again typical for young adults with a longer career future ahead. Two other fairly popular objectives were promotion at work, and also the improvement of the output, productivity and profitability of the economic activity for those concerned, objectives normally associated with older members of the group.

Students in Cluster 10 committed two hours and more of study per day. Ratings on home study facilities ranged from excellent to inadequate and also not available for some students. Similarly, the quality and availability of centre facilities also varied, so that for a fairly large number of students the centre was available and suitable for study purposes. Facilities in the community and at work, however, were not as satisfactory, with only a few students rating them as good or satisfactory, while for the majority these facilities were either inadequate or not available. It would appear from their responses that about 80 percent of the students used the facilities at their centre although with varying frequency from many going sometimes, to another 25 percent very frequently.

4. **Learning preparedness and disposition**

About two-thirds of the students in Cluster 10 declared that they were well prepared for their return to formal study and therefore did not need any assistance. They also rated themselves confident in their ability to pursue their studies, but, in contrast, indicated that they needed to have a tutor for all, or most of the time. This might well be a carryover from previous teacher-dominated educational experiences in which situation they were able to learn well.

Most students had a preference for courses which focussed on the application of knowledge and skills, and 70 percent of them did up to 50 percent of their learning at work. In addition, most students indicated the need for group-learning opportunities, sometimes.

5. **Summary description**

Cluster 10 was dominated by Fiji Indian males in the broad age category of 21-40 years, and constituted a balance of single and married students. They lived in nuclear
family units of up to five people, representing two generations and including up to two children of varying age ranges for those who had them. Salaries for this group was SF5,000 plus. With assistance from at least one other person in the family towards household maintenance, this group of students was comfortable in economic terms. Most achieved secondary studies up to sixth form with the majority passing all subjects in their public examination, as well as some post-secondary study including previous extension courses, provided good preparation for beginning, and on-going university programmes. English language competence was also rated satisfactorily with many students using the language for about 50 percent of the time and more. Although this group felt that they were well-prepared for university study and were highly confident in their ability to undertake it successfully, they were still far from being independent learners in that they needed the support of a tutor for most of their course. This suggested that students in this group placed the onus for learning on the teacher rather than on their own abilities. It would appear that this group was largely practice-oriented, doing a lot of their learning by application at work, sometimes with the help of their peer group. The most popular reason for the upgrading of qualifications was the improvement of future job prospects. Most students were able to commit at least two hours of study a day, the majority going beyond this amount of time. This might be a reflection of the generation structure of the family, where households with older members were able to relieve students of time-consuming responsibilities, while households with children were more demanding on respondents. Most students used facilities at home and/or at the Centre which were rated suitable for study purposes.

5.4 Conclusion

Figure 5.3 provides a summary of the features of the four major population clusters of this study. It is clear from this summary that the four clusters shared similar features as well as having differences among them. In particular, Cluster 1 students had features in common with Cluster 10 students in the areas of demography, family and educational background. Similarly, Cluster 8, although dominated by female students of a different ethnicity, had a lot of demographic and familial similarities with Cluster 1, as well as common features in the areas
of learning preparedness, orientation and style. Among Clusters 6, 8 and 10, students in Cluster 6 had more in common with Cluster 10 than with Cluster 8, particularly with regard to age, confidence level and preferred learning strategy. Between Clusters 8 and 10, there were hardly any similarities.

Each cluster also had features unique to itself which separated it from the rest. Students in Cluster 1, for instance, supported from one to five people in the household. Most students in this group committed up to five hours a week to religious responsibilities. They were science oriented in educational background and did 25-50 percent of their learning from work experience. They spoke English as often as they used their other language(s). For this group, only their home facilities served their study purposes adequately so they rarely or never used their Centre or other facilities.

Cluster 6 differed from all of the other clusters particularly in its household features. Students here had the most children, from one to five. They lived in extended family households of three generations and supported the most people with their salaries. Most students in this group had a commercial education background, and a large number of them had no post-secondary background. They were the only group to rate themselves largely independent learners and their learning from work experience ranged from 25-75 percent. Their study hours exceeded those of students in the other clusters, and while, like Cluster 1, they had good home study facilities, they varied among themselves in their use of the USP Centre.

Cluster 8 was the only female-dominated group as well as representing a different ethnic group. It was also dominated by single students. These students were the only ones who were not able to afford their extension studies, depending instead on reliable external funding. Many students in this group indicated being well into their extension programmes and tended more strongly than students in the other clusters towards group learning. They were also the only students to rate their USP Centre highly, and consequently, used it more often. This Cluster contained the only group of students who spoke English as their first language.
With regard to Cluster 10, both married and single students were equally represented, and most students had up to two children. In the two-generation structure of the household, the respondents were the older generation. With one to ten hours a week on religious involvement, this group spent more time outside home and work commitments than students in the other clusters. They were the only group of students for whom English was a dominant language, although not their mother tongue. In returning to formal, university study, Cluster 10 students indicated they were more prepared than the other students and did not need any assistance. However, once in their programmes, they had a much heavier dependence on tutorial support. For this group, the home and USP Centre accommodated study needs between them.

5.5 Concluding Summary

This chapter constituted a discussion of the 10 study factors and variables associated with each of them. The associations between and among variables were also discussed. This was followed by an examination of the four population clusters derived from factor scores associated with each respondent which centred around shared features among the clusters and those that set them apart from one another. Some suggestions for these differences were also made.
Figure 5.3: Population Clusters and their Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster 1</th>
<th>Cluster 6</th>
<th>Cluster 8</th>
<th>Cluster 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(85 cases)</td>
<td>(69 cases)</td>
<td>(58 cases)</td>
<td>(59 cases)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>21-30 yrs**</th>
<th>21-40 yrs</th>
<th>21-30 yrs+</th>
<th>21-40 yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Fiji Indian</td>
<td>Fiji Indian</td>
<td>Polynesian</td>
<td>Fiji Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital stat.</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of chn.</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>0-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family type</td>
<td>nuclear</td>
<td>extended</td>
<td>nuclear</td>
<td>nuclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family size</td>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>2-10</td>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>2-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generations</td>
<td>2 (mixed)</td>
<td>3 (mixed)</td>
<td>2 (mixed)</td>
<td>2 (younger)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>$5,000-9,999+</td>
<td>$5,000-9,999+</td>
<td>$5,000-9,999+</td>
<td>$5,000-9,999+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Supported</td>
<td>1-5 people</td>
<td>up to 10 people</td>
<td>3-5 people</td>
<td>3-5 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other earners</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support study</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External supp.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural time</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H/hold time</td>
<td>&gt;15 hours</td>
<td>&gt;15 hours</td>
<td>&gt;15 hours</td>
<td>&gt;15 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion time</td>
<td>1-5 hours</td>
<td>1-5 hrs; N/A</td>
<td>1-5 hrs; N/A</td>
<td>1-10 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community time</td>
<td>1-5 hrs; N/A</td>
<td>fluent and literate in 2-3 languages including English</td>
<td>fluent and literate in 2-3 languages including English</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. lang.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English use</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25% - &gt;50%</td>
<td>25% - &gt;50%</td>
<td>&gt;50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last sch. form</td>
<td>six</td>
<td>six</td>
<td>six</td>
<td>six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam. perform.</td>
<td>passed all</td>
<td>p. all/f. up to 2</td>
<td>passed all</td>
<td>Coll. cert/diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-sec study</td>
<td>Coll. cert/dip</td>
<td>Coll. cert/dip</td>
<td>extension</td>
<td>extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic reasons</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>output; emp. opp.</td>
<td>increments</td>
<td>employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>interest and the upgrade of qualifications</td>
<td>needed some additional assistance</td>
<td>well prepared</td>
<td>not needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>cognitive and study skills</td>
<td>cognitive skills</td>
<td>cognitive skills</td>
<td>cognitive skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study assist.</td>
<td>a bit unsure to confident</td>
<td>confident</td>
<td>a bit unsure</td>
<td>confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>tutor mostly to some of the time</td>
<td>tutor mostly</td>
<td>tutor mostly</td>
<td>tutor mostly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>group sometimes independent to group sometimes</td>
<td>independent to group sometimes</td>
<td>independent to group sometimes</td>
<td>independent to group sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L/orientation</td>
<td>understanding &amp; assimilation</td>
<td>application</td>
<td>application</td>
<td>application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Style</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>25% to 50%</td>
<td>25% to &gt;75%</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>&lt;25% - 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study hours</td>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>3 hours+</td>
<td>2-3 hours</td>
<td>2+ hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home facilities</td>
<td>very good - satis.</td>
<td>very good</td>
<td>inadequate</td>
<td>mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>satisfactory to inadequate</td>
<td>inadequate</td>
<td>inadequate</td>
<td>inadequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
<td>inadequate</td>
<td>inadequate</td>
<td>inadequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>inadequate</td>
<td>inadequate</td>
<td>excel.-v.good</td>
<td>mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access Centre</td>
<td>rarely to never</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>most to s/times</td>
<td>most times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First lang.</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These are represented by most frequent response(s)
** + and - signs indicate tendencies upward or downward from given feature.
CHAPTER 6: INFERENTIAL ANALYSIS

6.1 Chapter Outline

Aggregate academic performance scores were computed for each member of the four large clusters identified in Chapter 5, and an analysis of variance carried out to determine whether the clusters differed in this respect. In addition multiple regression analysis using the 10 Factor scores as predictor variables and academic performance as dependent variables provided the basis for a discussion of the predictive and non-predictive nature of the study variables.

6.2 ANOVA

The academic performance of each member of each of the four large clusters was computed according to the following algorithm:

Let $a_1$, $a_2$ represent unit 1 and unit 2; and
$b =$ weight applied to each result level; where

- $b = 4$ for a "A" result
- $b = 3$ for a "B" result
- $b = 2$ for a "C" result
- $b = 1$ for a "D" result
- $b = 0$ for a "EX:" result

Then academic performance $C$ is computed from:

$$C = b_{a_1} + b_{a_2}$$

For example, if student in received an "A" for Course 1 and a "C" for Course 2, then her overall score, $C$, is given by:

$$C = 4 + 2 = 6$$

The academic performance score so derived was regarded as the dependent variable with group as the independent variable in a single factor analysis of variance. Table 6.1 below shows the means and standard deviations for each group. The analysis revealed a significant difference between groups ($F(3,264)=4.684$, $p=.0033$), and posthoc comparisons using Fisher’s protected
least significant difference procedure indicated that Cluster 6 had a significantly (\(\alpha = .05\)) higher mean academic performance than Cluster 1 and Cluster 8, and that the differences in mean academic performance levels between Clusters 1, 8 and 10 were not significant (\(\alpha = .05\)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster:</th>
<th>Count:</th>
<th>Mean:</th>
<th>Std. Dev.:</th>
<th>Std. Error:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1.345</td>
<td>1.418</td>
<td>.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 5</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.757</td>
<td>.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 8</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1.526</td>
<td>1.501</td>
<td>.199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 10</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1.831</td>
<td>1.622</td>
<td>.198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1: Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Cluster
One Factor ANOVA X 1 : CLUSTERS Y 1 : aggregate

It will be recalled that Cluster 6 was composed of married Fiji Indian males spread throughout the broad age category of 21-40 years. Features of this group set it apart from the other clusters in various ways. With regard to family and household characteristics, students in Cluster 6 had the most children, from one to five. They lived in extended family households of three generations and supported the most people with their salaries. Life for these students was centred around family and work responsibilities with an abstinence from or limited involvement in community, religious and cultural activities. Like other groups, they were multilingual, although there was a wide variation in the use of the English language from 25 percent to more than 50 percent of the time.

Most students in this group came from a commercial education background, and although like students in other clusters they had gone as far as 6th form in high school, Cluster 6 students also included a large number of people with no post-secondary background. Together with variant high school examination performance, these features suggested a lower level of academic preparedness for university study than that of some of the other groups in the sample. The stated need by Cluster 6 students for assistance with cognitive skills in their return to formal education might very well be a reflection of this unpreparedness.

However, they were the only group to rate themselves largely independent learners which was most likely a feature of the maturity level of the group. This was borne out by their assessed
need for group assistance only some of the time. Many might also have been admitted to their programmes of study on the mature entry basis rather than on the strength of their formal qualifications. On the other hand, while they indicated good home study facilities, the fact that many rarely visited their local USP Centre which was described as unsuitable and in some cases unavailable, might be responsible for students becoming independent learners by necessity rather than by choice. In addition, although confident in their return to formal study, students also indicated a need for tutorial assistance with their learning.

Much more of their learning was attributed by this group to work experience (25%-over 75%) which seemed to suggest the relevance of their areas of study to their occupations. An examination of their study objectives highlighted the plausibility of this suggestion in that many students were studying to improve the circumstances of the economic activities they were involved in, most likely to be a business of some sort. An equally important objective was the improvement of qualifications for better future employment prospects, which might be associated with the younger adults in the group who were at the early stages of their careers.

The allocation by students in Cluster 6 of at least three hours of study daily exceeded those of students in the other clusters. That this was possible was most probably due partly to having older members in the household who were able to undertake family responsibilities that would otherwise have fallen on the respondents. Limited or non-involvement in other activities might also be part of a deliberate plan to make time for study.

6.3 Multiple regression analysis

A multiple regression model was also built using the 10 factor scores as predictor variables and academic performance as the dependent variable for all respondents. The factor scores were entered into the model in the order of their contribution to overall variance, as determined by the principal components analysis. The summary statistics from the analysis are given in Table 6.2 below.
Table 6.2: Summary Statistics for Multiple Regression Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count:</th>
<th>R:</th>
<th>R-squared:</th>
<th>Adj. R-squared:</th>
<th>RMS residual:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>277</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.164</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>1.467</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Variance Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>DF:</th>
<th>Sum-Squares:</th>
<th>Mean Square:</th>
<th>F-test:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>112,348</td>
<td>11.235</td>
<td>5.217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>572.8</td>
<td>2.159</td>
<td>p = .0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>685.148</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It will be noted from Table 6.2 that the set of factor scores accounts for a statistically significant portion of the variance (F(10)=5.217, p=.0001). The associated Beta coefficient table is given in Table 6.3 below:

Table 6.3: Beta Coefficient Table for Multiple Regression (Y) and Aggregate 10x Variables (X)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>Std. Coeff.</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.722</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demography</td>
<td>0.197</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.126</td>
<td>2.223</td>
<td>.027*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>-0.111</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
<td>1.254</td>
<td>.211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study, Env.</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>.9057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>.8509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposition</td>
<td>0.157</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>1.773</td>
<td>.0774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Habits</td>
<td>-0.275</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>-0.181</td>
<td>3.016</td>
<td>.0021***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soc. Disp.</td>
<td>0.232</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.152</td>
<td>2.623</td>
<td>.0092**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-cult.</td>
<td>0.211</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.139</td>
<td>2.369</td>
<td>.0092**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.114</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.073</td>
<td>1.267</td>
<td>.2063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edn. B/grd.</td>
<td>0.353</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.232</td>
<td>4.003</td>
<td>.0001***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at \( \alpha = .05 \)

** Significant at \( \alpha = .001 \)

*** Significant at \( \alpha = .0001 \)

An inspection of Table 6.3 reveals that five of the factor scores were significant predictors.

Results of the analysis indicated that variables constituting the 10 factors of the study accounted for 16.4 percent of the variance in examination performance scores. While this figure was not high, it represented a significant result particularly in view of the fact that the variables
constituting the study accounted for only one aspect of the USP distance education entity, that of learning and the learner.

6.3.1 Significant predictors within the learner's environment

Among the 10 study factors derived from variables within the learning dimension of the USP's distance education programme, five were identified through multiple regression analysis as significant performance predictors. A description of these five factors including a discussion of the relationship between component variables and performance, follows in order of most significant to least significant predictor.

Factor 10: Educational Background

Factor 10 consisted of variables related to the educational background of the students: last school form attended by the respondents, their overall performance in public examinations taken in their final high school year, and their learning dependence/independence. With a coefficient of .353, Factor 10 is a highly significant predictor of performance. Last school form attended appears to be highly influential. Although students in higher forms did not perform as well in public examinations as students who finished at lower forms, they were associated with a greater ability to learn independently. Although this ability did not assist students to pass at high school, the fact that they were exposed to it, and had some experience in it, meant that they were more adequately equipped for studying successfully at a distance. That the correlation coefficient of -.089 between examination performance and field dependence/independence is not significant, bears this out.

Factor 6: Effect of economic status on study habits

The next most significant predictor is Factor 6 with a coefficient of .275. Variables loading highly on this Factor are average number of daily study hours, frequency of use of Centre services and facilities, and economic reasons for studying. Students spending more time studying daily are motivated by long-term economic objectives such as improving eligibility
for better job prospects. This objective is usually associated with older students who have overcome the demands of basic career building and are looking for improvements. They are also earning higher salaries and therefore are not pressured by the priority need to cope financially, which means they have the time and means to enable a more frequent use of the local study Centres. On the other hand, students spending fewer hours studying are those seeking mainly monetary gains from improved qualifications normally associated with those at lower socio-economic levels. For these students, the comparatively infrequent or non-use of their Centre may be a matter of affordability as it can be expected that they will be in lower-paying jobs. They may also be located in rural or remote areas such as the outer islands in the case of the USP Region where paid employment is limited and usually lower-paid. The Centre then becomes, for these students, inaccessible on two counts: cost of transport or physical inaccessibility. That they spend fewer hours studying might be a reflection of more time spent elsewhere as a priority such as in overtime work in order to earn more money.

In terms of the reflection on performance, for students aspiring towards the wider employment market, this objective is more qualitatively biased in that eligibility depends on the strength of the qualifications gained and requires more study effort. In the case of monetary rewards, increments and promotions are usually awarded on the basis of a pass, the quality of which is not normally scrutinised very closely.

**Factor 7: Social disposition**

Factor 7 has a coefficient of .232 and is associated with the social disposition of the respondent. Variables are learning from work experience, time spent on community commitments per week, and general language competence. The general language competence of the students is a rough indication of the range of social groups that the respondents are associated with. From these factor loadings it does appear that students who are multilingual are associated with more community involvement, suggesting a link with a variety of language/social groups. This situation might also contain an explanation for the orientation of this group towards learning from work experience as the best alternative study strategy, in view of their heavier time involvement in community activities, so that successful performance for them is associated with using work time and work experience for learning. On the other hand,
students unable to learn from work experience for want of either opportunity or ability, need more time, derived from decreasing or eliminating community commitments, to use other learning strategies. The fact that they have limited language ability suggests also that their community responsibilities are limited to fewer socio-cultural groups.

Factor 8: Socio-cultural situation

Variables in Factor 8 which has a coefficient of .211, refer to the socio-cultural circumstances of the students. They are the first language of the respondents, their general use of the English language, average amount of time spent on religion each week, ethnicity, and average amount of time spent on culturally-related activities each week.

Both the first language variable and ethnicity are good indicators of country of origin of the students and their culture which, in association with the level of use of the English language and the amount of time spent on religious and cultural activities, are significant predictors of performance. In this study, Fiji Indians are more frequent users of the English language than any other ethnic group across the USP Region. Given that English is the language of instruction at the USP with special emphasis on written English in the distance mode, this feature must also indicate higher competence levels in English borne out of frequent practice. Limited involvement in religious and cultural activities, also a feature of this group, particularly predisposes them towards successful independent distance study than groups of other ethnicity in the sample whose greater socio-cultural obligations bring pressure to bear on time for study.

Factor 1: Demography

The seven variables comprising Factor 1 and relating mainly to demographic data have a coefficient of .197. Variables include the age of respondents, their marital status, number of children, age range of children, subjects studied by the respondents at school, annual income and post-secondary study undertaken.

Age appears to be significant with strong influential associations with other variables in Factor 1. Students in older age brackets for instance, appear to be in a better position to succeed than
younger students for several reasons: they are older and therefore have relatively older and less demanding children; they have had more time for post-secondary education, and more life and work experiences; their salaries are expected to be higher which enables them to afford facilities and amenities conducive to study, eg. own home, transport, study etc.; although their high school subject background is indicated as not as suitable as the background of younger students, this is compensated by post-secondary study and other experiences accumulated over the years.

Younger students on the other hand are less likely to perform as well. There is the likelihood of single students still living with their parents being constrained by the relative lack of independence; young, married students are likely to have young children requiring more supervision and attention; younger students are also associated with lower income and are therefore not as able to afford much study support; although their subject area backgrounds appear to be relevant and appropriate, they have not had much time and possibly opportunity for post-secondary education and training.

6.3.2 Non-predictive factors

Variables constituting the other five study factors were not significant predictors of performance. Factor 2 variables associated with the household vis-à-vis family type, number of people in the household, number of generations in the household, number of people supported by the respondents and other income earners in the family are good indicators of study environment, time availability, and the economic situation of the students. However, they are not good predictors of performance because of the opportunities available to the students to manipulate other variables to their advantage to compensate for unfavourable household and economic conditions. For instance, where large families and ensuing crowded conditions are not conducive to study, alternative study places can be found at work, in the community or at the local USP Centre. Time for study can be made available by cutting out activities other than those related to the family, and external funding can be found to enable enrolment.
Similarly, study environment variables - home, community, work and Centre facilities - loading on Factor 3, although good indicators of conditions conducive or otherwise to study, are overridden by other variables in terms of performance prediction. The multiple regression results suggest that variables such as educational background, social disposition, English language competence and study habits are more significant indicators of performance for the USP students than access to appropriate study facilities.

Variables indicating financial support for studies loading on Factor 4 are unexpectedly not performance predictors. Most students in the study indicated being comfortably able to afford their studies or have access to a reliable source of external funding. The issue of study affordability might therefore be irrelevant in that students are involved because they are able to pay for the opportunity which thus has no bearing on whether or not students complete their courses. It is also possible that students under unstable financial circumstances perform as well as those who are more secure, because they have a lot more invested in achieving their qualifications. The course reasons also load highly on Factor 4 and are perhaps overridden by the students' economic reasons for studying which are a significant performance predictor loading on Factor 6 above.

Perhaps the most unexpected results of the multiple regression exercise is the indication of educational disposition not being a significant predictor of performance. Variables loading on this Factor are transition to formal study, the kind of study assistance needed for this transition, confidence to study, and orientation to learning. It would appear therefore that the personal and environmental variables that influence and shape this disposition and preparedness are significant in their direct relationship to student persistence and performance and therefore override disposition and preparedness as performance predictors. Therefore it would seem likely, for instance, that without the ability to set aside an appropriate number of study hours daily, a positive disposition and a high degree of learning preparedness will yield variable performance. It is also possible that because assistance with improving learning disposition is minimal for the USP students, other compensatory situations such as becoming more adept at independent learning, making more time available for studies and utilising alternative learning strategies such as work experience are highlighted which then become better performance predictors.
With regard to gender and related issues (Factor 9), there are insufficient differences between the men and women in the study in terms of personal and study features - both males and females work and take part in other activities in similar ways. In terms of household responsibilities, a variable loading on this Factor, these include being a full-time income earner for the family, which involves both men and women alike. Learning styles, another Factor variable, are probably a sub-set of educational background and therefore in themselves are not as predictive as background.

6.4 Concluding Comments

Two other very important constituents of the USP distance education programme which were either only minimally considered, or not considered at all in the study were its teaching and institutional components. Variables within these two components must account for much of the balance of the variance not accounted for by the study variables, in that they interact between themselves and with the learning component to contribute to the final outcome of the teaching/learning process.

Within the teaching dimension, the distance education course packages, for instance, must bring their own measure of accountability for the learning which takes place. In teaching courses at a distance, one significant variable which bears on learning is the course loading - too much, just right or too little for the learning time allocated. Lockwood et al. (1988) suggest from the investigation of student workload for one USP Foundation course, that course loads for some USP distance courses might be excessive. Other course-related concerns bearing on student learning are the appropriateness of its levels of content, study and learning demands for its target population and their learning situations; appropriateness of assessment and assessment techniques; degree of accuracy of assumptions about learning support systems and resources available to the students.

Among institutional variables which might influence student learning and performance are those which relate to the teaching delivery system in place. In the case of the USP this would include the structure of the course development team with course writers based in the teaching
departments and instructional designers and editors working at University Extension. Naidu (1984) indicates in his survey of Faculty involvement in the preparation of extension courses at USP that a problem existed with the allocation of too little time to teaching staff to put together their course packages, some writing up their courses in as little time as approximately five working days. Similar and other questions could be asked about the development and design team at University Extension - are workloads realistically calculated to ensure course teams are able to conduct research and engage in activities that would lead them to effective decisions about teaching at a distance, etc.? Other significant variables would be the effectiveness of the delivery and despatch infrastructure in getting and returning learning materials and assignments with feedback to the students on time; is the local USP study Centre adequately equipped with staff and resources to cope with teaching and learning support required by course packages? Not least would be the institution's information network - did it generate important and relevant information and ensure that it was made available to all students so as to positively influence student persistence and performance?

6.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 6 was a discussion of the outcomes of ANOVA and multiple regression analysis. Variations in academic performances among study population clusters were compared with features which set them apart one from the other. Multiple regression analysis revealed that five study factors were performance predictors and the other five did not appear to be significantly associated with performance. These issues were also discussed in some detail. The chapter concluded with the suggestion that two other dimensions of the USP distance education programme viz the teaching and institutional components, although not part of the study, must be significant contributors to the balance of the variance in the examination performance of the students.
CHAPTER 7: THE INTERVIEWS

7.1 Outline and Purpose of Chapter

This chapter presents the interview data of the study in a composite description of the information provided by the interviewees. Main headings are derived from the conceptual framework of the study (see Chapter 1). They represent the groups of variables under survey within the personal and study environments of these students. In describing these variables as they are depicted by the interviewees, the impact that they have had on the preparedness and disposition to study of these students as a group, is also presented.

7.2 The Interview Process

Twenty-two students across eight countries of the USP Region were interviewed using a semi-structured approach intended to allow students a certain amount of freedom in their responses, while at the same time guarding against "... unfocussed, unstructured, extraneous data" (Lauffer, 1988: 144). These responses to interview questions are accounts of the lives of the interviewees as distance students within various local environments of the USP Region. The real life situations provided through this qualitative dimension are intended to complement, in a holistic way, the statistical findings of Chapters 4, 5 and 6, and remove some of the sterility of mere numbers and symbols, often cited as the main criticism of purely statistical studies. Rothe (1985, as cited by Ljosa, 1993) discussed this complementarity:

... as a link between quantitative and qualitative research in distance education, or between an 'inside' and 'outside' viewpoint on individuals and situations - where the 'inside' view represents experiential knowledge of the everyday world, and the 'outside' view represents accepted generalized understanding of human actions ... . These two complementary approaches should, according to Rothe, be combined to form a holistic, representative picture of educational phenomena (p. 14).

In addition, the contextual interpretations of these variables, influenced in this study by relevant theory and conceptualisations of adult and distance learning, provide the opportunity for deciding the degree of their universal and general application. Much as these theories and
concepts, and models derived from them, "... give new insight and help us understand the everyday situations better" (Ijosa, 1993: 33), the knowledge gained from them is "partial in perspective", "subjective in conceptualization", and "incomplete as a result of generalization. However, the loss of completeness is compensated by the number of cases where the knowledge can be applied..." (Ibid, p. 35). If large families, for instance, are found to be statistically conducive to further study, are the reasons for this the same for this population as for other groups of students, or are there qualitative differences influenced by context? While differences can and must be expected, can they be sufficiently significant to challenge any existing assumptions that already exist on the basis of previous study and experience? The complementary function of the interview analysis will not only provide a more holistic account of life as a mature distance education student in the USP Region, but help also bring to light any qualitative differences that might make this group of students unique.

From an initially randomly selected group of students (see Chapter 3 for a description of the selection process), 12 female and 10 male students who indicated being available at the scheduled visiting time of the researcher, were interviewed. The interviewees represented all major culture groups - Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian and also included a male Fiji Indian and a female of mixed ethnicity. As expected, most of the interviewees were employed in the accounting and management/administrative areas, holding junior to middle level positions. In addition, five students were aspirants for more senior management positions and were obtaining the required formal skills to improve their employment opportunities.

Interview data is presented under the major headings of Personal Factors and Environment, Study Environment, and Student Preparedness and Disposition to Study. There is no deliberate attempt at this stage to emphasise any relationships among variables across these three headings. It is intended that these relationships become exposed and expressed as they occur in the lives of the interviewees as USP distance education students. Quotations used to highlight and/or exemplify these relationships and the issues that they raise are quoted verbatim in this chapter so as to retain their original essence as fully as possible. The identities of the interviewees are also protected in that they are not named, and where certain information is deemed to be threatening to this anonymity, it is withheld or muted as required.
7.3 Personal Factors and Environment

7.3.1 Demographic features

1. Age
   Of the 22 students interviewed, 18 (82%) were 35 years of age and under, making this group relatively young. A notable feature is that the majority fell into two distinct age brackets, that of the 21-25 year olds (n=8), and that of the 31-35 year olds (n=7). Only one student was under 21 and, of the rest, two were in the 26-30 age bracket and the remainder were over 36 years, the oldest interviewee being more than 51 years old.

2. Marital Status
   As expected from the ages of the respondents, 14 (64%) were married. Within this group, three clusters of students with distinct common characteristics were apparent: a young, married group, a middle married group, and an older group of married students. The young group consisted of three students aged 22, 23 and 25 years respectively. The middle group had two students in their late 20s, and the older group had nine students over 31 years of age. In the case of the first group, there were two male students with one child and three children, respectively, and one female student with a baby and expecting her second child. Although they were from the Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Western Samoa respectively, they shared certain common features. The female student and her family lived in her parents’ household because they could not afford to be on their own. In this way, she was able to afford to continue her studies. The two men, similarly, lived with their in-laws and shared living expenses with them. While this enabled one of them to afford studying by extension, the student with three young children and a wife to support, and whose household consisted of three nuclear families and 10 people in all, had to rely on external funding for his fees. Much of the nuclear family aspects of the lives of all three students were confined to the bedroom that they were allocated in the house. The female student was able to leave her baby in the care of her family during the day while the wives of the two men were assisted with childcare by other members of the household. This arrangement meant that the men did not have to become as involved with their families as would have been expected under
nuclear family circumstances, a situation which caused the wives frustration and unhappiness from time to time, and the withdrawal of their support from negligent husbands. One husband remarked:

Sometimes my wife gets fed up looking after the kid but I sort of have to encourage her - it's very important that I sit down and do my work ...

The response of the other husband with the larger household had a little more urgency:

Well, I don’t think of my wife because my wife is not really school-minded because she only [went to] primary school, she doesn’t go to high school so maybe she doesn’t see education as a very ... I have to push her to help me. Instead of helping me I have to ask, I have to make her understand you know it’s our future ... especially when she was very busy doing her jobs and she ask come and help me. Please leave me, I show you already my timetable, this is my time to study, so please leave me.

The third student’s nuclear family life too, was far from ideal. Her husband worked long and overtime hours to earn the extra money which they needed to support their current needs. This meant that they spent little time together during the working week, a sacrifice necessitated by their economic situation.

It is not surprising, then, that all three were pursuing first qualifications to enable them to get jobs or promotions that would allow them the financial independence necessary for them to break away from their extended family.

The two married students in their late 20s, one ni-Vanuatu male and one Solomon Island female, had one child, and two children respectively, all under school age. These two respondents were relatively more settled in their jobs, the male student being in a middle level management position with the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church organisation, and the woman a qualified librarian. Both students had nuclear family households of fewer numbers, and, contrary to the younger married students, concentrated their efforts primarily for the improvement of opportunities and living conditions for their immediate families. The two students, however, came from very different family backgrounds. For the ni-Vanuatu student, growing up was a struggle
and involved a life of hard work and personal sacrifices on the part of his parents towards the education of their children:

My father and mother both came from Tanna and all through the years of my primary studies it was a little bit difficult for the parents to support us in our studies especially me and my first born brother who is going far ahead of me doing his studies.

Both worked, yeah. But sad to say that both of my parents were not educated, not really with educational background so I’ll be talking about casual wages they get around here, Vila....

They really express themselves now that it was at that time that we [parents] really, we go hungry or we really struggle to find something because we believe that some day education mean something to us. We’re not well educated but we know some days in future education will really mean the life for you.

By comparison, the Solomon Island student came from a fairly well off family:

My father used to be in the police. He’s the chief inspector of fire brigade. In 1983 he retired then he worked as a shipping clerk now.

Consequently, the ni-Vanuatu student saw his educational achievements and aspirations for a better job and pay, as the continuation of his parents’ vision. In this respect, he contributed towards the financial expenses of two siblings still at school, as well as their upkeep and the upkeep of their parents. This sense of extended commitment did not apply to the female student whose other siblings were married and lived independently, and whose parents now lived alone and were comfortably supported by the father’s salary.

Students in the third and largest group of nine married students over the age of 31 years were again different in many respects, including their cultural ethos, from the previous two groups. The children of these students were generally older, including a few who were themselves married; the mean and median number of children per family was three. The two respondents who had the largest number of children included the relatively large number (four and six) from their husbands’ first marriages. They themselves had only one child each, both of whom were fostered by extended family.
The sense of community and extended family was more pronounced among this group of students than can be said for the previous two groups in that nearly all of them continued to maintain links with their community and extended family, and made regular financial contributions towards the upkeep particularly of parents and siblings and other relatives of school age. Five of them continued to maintain extended family households usually looking after a parent, parents or parent(s)-in-law. There was often a mutual support system in this arrangement whereby the older generation of people played a role in the physical care of the respondents’ families. Tied to this sense of community and extended family, was a sense of responsibility for the future development of the group as a whole. In one case, the student saw herself as a role model and her achievements as a credit to her wider family.

... I have nieces who are about to enter the university stage, like three or four coming up so if I get through that [study] I can be an example too.

... Yeah, I think with our society that elevates the extended family too, when somebody gets a degree. ... And the other thing is because we’re a big family but not all of us have good jobs ... and I always have my brothers and sisters coming around borrowing money and things like that so I think if I get a degree ... if I get a good job, I’d be able to help them better you know, give them more than what I can give them now.

It may be noted that the majority in this group themselves came from large (5-8) to very large (10-13) families. Two features appear to have been instrumental in instilling this sense of wider commitment in these students: being the eldest or older members of their family, or being younger members who had benefited both financially and morally from older siblings. In the case of the older members of the family, this fact accorded them a special cultural role within the family of carer for the younger members. One interviewee cited as one of her financial commitments the requests now and then that came from her sisters who were married and lived overseas, for artefacts from home. Although she was struggling financially, she felt ‘obliged’ to provide these things and explained it thus:

I think it's sisterly love because I'm the oldest girl in the family and I always feel kind of maybe if I have something I could share with my younger sisters ... It could be culture. I think because see we are brought up ... in those kind of culture ...
In the contexts of the younger members of the family, this sense of responsibility within the family hierarchy became quite evident. In the words of one interviewee,

Well they [parents] started off with my eldest brother going to school. Then they paid for his schooling and when he finished off schooling because he is much older than us, so he started paying for us. Then in turn I got a job, then I helped paying for the rest ...

Thus, it seems that the older married students had two major parallel commitments; while they pursued qualifications because of the need to improve living conditions of their own immediate families, this did not preclude the provision of assistance to the extended family and community on both a regular basis and when required. Both sets of responsibilities were seen unquestionably as the facts of their lives and relinquishing the extended family and community, even temporarily, was not an option for these students. The instilling of these values appeared to have had a strong cultural basis whose significance might, for various reasons, have diminished over the generations, resulting in parents with a less broad sense of commitment. This was seen in the lives of the younger married students discussed above.

However, marriage might be a significant factor in narrowing the focus of the younger generation. With regard to the single students, although all but one were in the 25 years or under age category, nearly all maintained links in varying degrees with the community, and continued to help in the support of their parents and family. The majority of the students continued to live with their parents and helped with household expenses. One student had a child whom she adopted from a few months old. She undertook the adoption because her mother was not happy that she was over 30 and not married and might end up alone in her old age! The two Kiribati women lived with an older brother and an uncle respectively, in the ‘urban’ centre because their family home was on an outer island. Only one student in Vila lived alone away from the family, but continued to support his mother and only remaining sister in school. Household sizes for these students ranged from very large (parents and 13 children), to fairly small (5). However, particularly because of large families and little children, students in this group reported conditions at home being conducive to study.
Most of the single students were aspiring towards first qualifications and had more
definite career outlooks than the older students in the study whose formal educational
pursuits were influenced by jobs held over a number of years. Although most of these
students were, by comparison, just starting out in their jobs, they were enrolled in either
the DACS or the DMS because they wanted to be qualified accountants or pursue
careers in management. One student already had a degree in Management but wanted
some formal qualifications in Accounting because it would improve her own job
marketability.

The oldest of the interviewees was a divorcee. She lived with her elderly mother, and
her divorced daughter with five children. For her, more than 20 years had lapsed since
her last formal programme of study, not all of it successful. Extension study was for
her, therefore, an opportunity to prove to herself that she was capable of undertaking
a successful programme of study at tertiary level. This reason was so important, that her
one failed course caused her to cease studying for a while until she got her confidence
back. She had no other reason for studying as she received royalties from phosphate
mined on her family’s property that provided her with a comfortable living and helped
her take care of her mother.

3. Family: Past and Present
As has been seen, family sizes among the interviewees varied. For the 16 (73%)
students who had them, the number of children ranged from one to seven. Of the 16,
10 had between one and two children, most of whom were under school age. The rest
had mainly children of both primary and secondary school ages. Considering the ages
of the parents, the fact that the majority of the children of the interviewees were young
and very dependent, was to be expected. Of the largest families, one interviewee had
five children between the ages of two and eleven, and another had seven children, one
of whom lived with relatives, while the other six were stepchildren from her husband’s
first marriage were all going to school except for the eldest who was married, and all
living with them. This feature, in addition to the tendency for fairly large extended
family households, made this group a family-oriented one, constantly motivated by the
need to provide for a variety of dependents and in particular, their very young children.
One interviewee explained his study objectives in terms of the change of emphasis in his life:

Yeah, I think one of the main reasons now that is giving me the motivation to go further is that because I'm now having a family and that is a major problem. Like if I was on my own I wouldn't mind if I just continue where I am now and maybe getting probably a better chance in the future, later in the future.

Another interviewee provided the practical interpretation of this ideal:

If I get more money I can do good house and look after my children in a more better way. They need more things, they need new bicycle, they need new bag, they need new shoes ...

Yet another student placed her drive on behalf of her children in a historical perspective. Coming through a childhood of economic hardship as a member of a very large family shaped her achievement objectives from an early age:

I think it made me more determined to have a better life and if I were to have kids ... I wouldn't put them through the same thing.

The family backgrounds of these respondents, briefly touched on for some students above, were characterised by large families with an average of 6.7 children. Ten interviewees had between five and seven siblings including themselves, and another six had more than eight of them altogether. No one was an only child. The following figure provides a summary and also indicates the position of the interviewee (Int) with respect to his/her siblings in the family. The table excludes one respondent who did not give any information regarding his family background.

A feature to note here is that eldest and second eldest members of fairly large to large families made up the biggest cluster among the respondents. The second biggest cluster of students were those at the lower end of families which included the three interviewees with families of over 10 siblings.

 Twelve of these students now lived with extended family while 10 maintained a nuclear household. In the extended family situation most respondents lived with parent(s) or
parent(s)-in-law where the physical care of the household was largely in the hands of the older generation. In other extended family situations, one respondent lived with an older sibling and another with an uncle. For these latter two categories of respondents, their

Figure 7.1: Family sizes of interviewees *

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<td>Int13 (2/4)</td>
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* The first digit in brackets after the interviewee numbers represents their positions in the family; the second digit refers to the total number of children.

extension study was the means of transit to a more independent way of life in evidence among the students in nuclear family situations (see Havighurst, 1974). The majority of the students in nuclear family situations were now able to maintain life for themselves and their families on their own, as well as, in some cases, support parents and other extended family, externally. Formal qualifications were directed at continued economic improvement and related improvement in lifestyle and living standards.

7.3.2 Educational experience

1. **Background**

Most of the students in this group did not report being motivated by their families in the pursuit of education beyond the expectation that they complete primary and secondary schooling. In this respect, their fees were paid for either by parents or older siblings or relatives, regular attendance at school enforced, and homework scheduled
at home. Parents were mostly uneducated or did not complete their own schooling. They therefore did not hold good jobs and were not at all familiar with the world of education beyond their own experience of it. As a result, one interviewee explained:

I think another factor is because mum and dad were so weighed down bringing up the thirteen children, and that aspect you know like study and motivation, they weren't really concerned. ... I think their main concern was they got us through school and made sure we got a good job than them. You know that was those days. When it came to study-wise and all those things there wasn't really much push.

Other factors in their lives, to be discussed later, were more instrumental in leading to their involvement in extension studies, although the initial respect for education came from families that knew only that it was the key to a better future but were able to ensure its provision only to a limited extent.

The respondents brought with them a diversity of educational experience from village and state schools, to institutions run by Catholic, SDA and Hindu religions both at home, and abroad in some cases, giving some respondents their only overseas experience. High school achievements were as low as Form 5 and as high as Form 7 or equivalent, so that this group had the formal requirements for entry into post-secondary and/or tertiary education. All of the students had done some post-secondary study either continuing their distance education programmes begun some semesters back, or having undertaken some other programme prior to their extension studies. The majority of these studied overseas at TAFE and CAE levels in Australia, Polytechnic and teacher-training colleges in New Zealand. Seventh Day Adventist students went to church colleges in Papua New Guinea and the rest studied within the USP Region. Others undertook specialist national programmes for work in the civil service. Only five students in this group did not have any overseas experience.

2. Overseas Experience

Many of these students were not successful in their secondary and post-secondary endeavour, particularly those who undertook them abroad. The most common reasons cited for this was the unfamiliarity of life in a new land, and within different physical and cultural contexts.
It was also obvious from their responses that a significant problem with studying abroad was an unfamiliarity with self-discipline and the ability to deal with the relative freedom that confronted them. Much of the discipline that was necessary to maintain a regular study programme came from a strict family environment or from the teachers at school. The unfamiliarity with the different approach to education which emphasised the learner was another common problem in addition to coping with the climatic differences of the temperate region in which they found themselves.

Yes, yes, you know from one extreme to the other. I went from an educational society where, you know, the teacher says, and what the teacher says is right. And then I go to another educational system where the teachers are wanting you ... to talk freely and to give your comments and I was so shy ... it took me almost two years to relate to that. ... I was given so much freedom to do that ... my father was quite strict with me, and I didn't have freedom to go out, but when I went there [New Zealand], I had so much freedom to go anywhere ... it was such a shock, it was all at once.

However, many of the students affected in this way, turned their negative experiences into positive forces in their lives. In particular, the failure to successfully complete their programmes of study made them determined not only to seek out a second chance, but to use the opportunity to redress the shortcomings of the first attempt. In this respect one student said:

Well, when I came here and I worked here, even my husband himself, like we both worked here and we just realised how really important - you had to have a degree to get to the top and like around here if you don't have a degree people just really look down on you. And so we really regret what we did during our school years so that really made me want to take some more courses through extension.

Other students whose overseas experiences were successful, saw many benefits related to their current study. An overriding benefit was the influence that the experience had on their educational outlook. In one case, this experience was totally responsible for the student's continued pursuit of qualifications to the degree level. He said:

... had I was left out, not going to Fiji, then I probably would not have the view of how important education is. Because staying here, I wasn't that bright. I wasn't a very intelligent student, but going out of my country and witnessing the end process of education students have - that's the graduation ceremony of USP and Fulton College. And that kind of give me an impression that have an influence on me - I must fight to go there. I must struggle, do my best
to reach the end of the process. That really had a very great impact on me and change my whole view of study ...

Other students saw benefits in their attitude to education and the acquisition of qualities that contributed to being better able to access learning and learning opportunities. One student declared:

You know in Truk it was the first time in my life to be separated from my parents and I used to think one day ... I have to go on my own and I have to stick to my own decision. So it was very encouraging when I was in Xavier High School. It was like being independent.

A female student who was sent abroad for high school by her church mission, benefited from the exposure to another culture and a different social environment.

Because in other place ... we don’t have like my own people. Maybe I can involve with other people and we can discuss - that’s what I always have in mind when I was in school.

In all, it can be said that the students in this study found some advantage in their overseas educational experience, whether or not it was successfully carried out. With respect to preparing them for their current studies, there was evidence that it helped to provide motivation, reshape determination, boost confidence and mould certain relevant attributes such as discipline, independence and preparedness for group interaction.

3. **English Language Levels**

Exposure to the English language for this group was varied. The majority spoke English at work only, reverting to the vernacular outside the office. Most church services are now conducted in the vernacular, and only one student attended services in English. Only two students spoke English at home. One was the product of a mixed marriage whose husband was of a different ethnic origin from her. The other was a Cook Islander who was fostered by a New Zealander, studied and lived in New Zealand for a number of years, and was married to a Cook Islander who had himself spent many years in New Zealand. Others with overseas experience claimed that being in an English-speaking environment forced them to improve their standards of English, particularly
in speaking it. However, many of the students did not rate their formal English expression, both written and oral, very highly.

In general, the opportunity to use the English language was limited. Outside Fiji it was confined mainly to the workplace and to the few occasions of tutor visits from Suva. The following was the language context of a Solomon Island interviewee working as a librarian:

Here in the library or at home we use pigin - most of the time we use pigin. The time we only use English is say when an expat came into our library or we happen to meet any expat on the road that’s the time we use English. Otherwise, we use pigin English.

One of the iKiribati interviewees described his situation thus:

And in the office we don’t really use English all the time. Especially when you’re writing. Sometimes when you’re writing you just don’t know what to write in English. The only way in using English is when you’re writing letters...

Even in Fiji, the situation was far from ideal with respect to opportunities for the use of English and the following Fiji interviewee’s situation did not appear to differ much from the two above. He spoke English

Only at work. I only speak English when I’m speaking to a person who understands English and speaks English only. If that person speaks my language, Hindi, I speak to him in Hindi. I prefer speaking in Hindi than in English because it’s my mother tongue.

Even at work the language environment did not appear quite conducive to good English:

See, this company, ... we have our manager from Hong Kong - Chinese. You see he’s got broken English, so I’m not learning from him. In fact he’s breaking my English.

Across the Region, local tutorials and any other study-related communication within the local context, were also dominated by the local language and conducted in either a mix of English and the vernacular, or totally in the vernacular. The language used on social occasions was the local vernacular or pidgin in the case of Vanuatu and the Solomon
Islands. In Fiji, the multi-ethnic nature of its population meant that English, its official language and the principal language of education, provided the lingua franca for its various ethnic groups. The standard of spoken English, evident during the interview process, was generally higher among the Fiji respondents than it was among interviewees from other parts of the Region. The effect of language situations on the level of English use in the Region was represented by the following comments:

- ... the level of English in our course is okay. We can understand ... our course materials and all the words in our course book only say we find it hard to speak it.
- We understand, we can read but sometimes it's hard to speak ... sometimes it's hard maybe to explain.

Many respondents felt that the poor quality of their English expression made a fairly big difference in their educational achievements and consequently in the assessment grades that they were awarded for assignments and examinations in their respective courses.

7.3.3 Socio-cultural environment

1. Cultural Involvement

Although all the interviewees now lived and worked in towns and urban areas of their respective countries, more than half of them came there as children or teenagers from outer islands or rural villages. For these students, and others whose parents migrated to the towns and urban areas before their births, and also two from other countries, this meant being away from their villages and extended families. There was a general admission among the students that this situation had kept their cultural commitments down to a minimum. For quite a few, these commitments were realised only in terms of financial contributions every now and then. The major commitment of this group was to their family. Twelve students indicated being directly involved with the regular care of their parents either on their own or with other siblings. As has already been seen, some of these parents made up the students' households. In addition, financial
contributions were also made to extended family ‘back home’ whenever they were needed and requested for the usual circumstances of births, deaths and marriages, for the regular contribution of family members to the church and upkeep of the pastor and his family, and for special projects such as community buildings and education. Otherwise, only two respondents felt the pressure of cultural commitments more heavily than others. One male student was the eldest in his family and therefore made to feel obliged to participate in customary ceremonies whenever these occurred. Asked whether he participated for himself or his family, he replied:

Well, I guess it’s for both, otherwise they think that the parents don’t teach their kids the ways and it’s sort of both. And if you don’t do it, like speaking specifically about the North Pentecost culture, if you don’t do it they look at you and they say, oh, this guy is no good, he’ll be useless in society. No matter how much education he get but if he cannot ... so you know the pressure is there so you just got to ...

Another female student’s father was the village chief which obligated her to participate in monthly visits back to the village for the sake of maintaining appropriate links with the community. She described this situation as a matter of finality:

My father is high chief of the village at ... My stepmother is president of the women’s committee and when it gets to those meetings we all go to [the village] on the weekend to, you know, we have to be involved in it. I have to be a member of the women’s committee because my stepmother is a member.

On the other hand, other students did not feel any culturally-related obligation. For two students, their multicultural upbringing had much to do with this situation. Two others adopted and pursued religious values in place of cultural observances. In general therefore, it appeared that direct customary cultural practices did not have a very strong hold on the lives of this particular group of students.

2. Religion

Religion, on the other hand, did seem to exert a lot more pressure on practising respondents to the point where related activities were a major competitor for the students’ time. One Catholic respondent described his involvement as follows, when asked if he were not better off quitting:
It's very hard to say why because I grew up like that and I can't quit it. Sometimes I don't go
to functions but then people will look down on you and they will come and encourage you and
pull you out. Well it's like culturally a shame - it's something you have to do for your life.

Another student was clearly unhappy about his need to travel to outer islands on
religious business because it affected his study schedule and there was little he could
do about it. A third student stated that she was obliged to attend church services twice
on Sundays and so came under some finger-wagging when she stayed at home for one
service to complete her assignment. She suggested that the frown from the community
was not just for her but for her whole family, and so the pressure on her came from
both from the community and also from her parents. There were also various church
groups that members belonged to such as youth groups, women's groups and the choir,
that brought their own set of responsibilities and made participation in them more an
extension of the respondents' social commitments rather than religious. In the contexts
of the students concerned, participation by them was seen as representative of the
involvement of the family and so there was the added pressure of ensuring the good
name of the family by participation.

It was also notable that those for whom religion was not obligatory, participation was
either minimal or non-existent. Equally notable was the fact that most of these students
came from outer islands and were therefore physically removed from their extended
family and culture group. The physical removal from the source of pressure to
participate in cultural affairs worked in the same way for involvement in religious
activities, increasing the choice of non- or minimal-participation for the students
concerned. This situation worked in their favour in that it allowed them more time for
their study.

3. Community Involvement

With regard to community involvement, the group was only minimally committed or
not at all. Again, the physical distance from the location of their community of origin
might be a significant reason for this situation. For the few who were involved, this was
mainly through their church groups. One Tongan student described her church Youth
Group activities as follows:
... any activities, cultural activities in the district around where I live, always this youth group is involved. For instance, suppose that there is this wedding and it's always the youth who goes to the homes and helps in the preparations of this, preparations of that. Any funeral, the girls they go sweep out the place, help the elderly women and all that. And at the moment we also have a communal yam garden where not only youth but we also have elderly men. I mean men who also wants to join in where we have separate plots allotted to each and every member which is every two weeks one has got to go and see which one is the best where. We'll harvest it next year and distribute it to some needy members in the community, and give a share to the pastor ...

In Kiribati, another student reported the same kind of activities organised by the Women's Group of the church:

We have like a service for the widows - we can help them out maybe just only a weekend like Saturday we all go out and help them. We spend maybe two hours.

Sports appeared to be a more time-consuming activity for the three students who indicated an involvement in competitive sports. In addition, because they played, or were involved in competition, it was a priority activity in their lives and could not be given up easily. Comments by two of the students indicate the strength of their involvement:

- Netball and basketball. That's one of the problem - too much involved in sports.
- And I still find it so hard to maybe give up one night's sports to study for a few hours. And I'm still trying to get that right.

The rest of the students did a variety of community activities on a casual basis; the majority played recreational sports. Two students were involved in PTAs and one other in a women's lobby group. For this group it was clear that this was the area of least priority and time-saving cut-backs were made in their community work, or there was no initial involvement. In the words of one student,

... the church activities and community things, I control.
7.3.4 Economic situation

Because of the variations in income levels and cost of living across the USP Region, the economic situation for the students was assessed in terms of their economic commitments and ability to cope with them. Priority commitments were given as family support which included the extended family in most cases, as well as financial contributions in support of culturally-based and religious commitments discussed in the foregoing sections. For students in this study, distance study was obviously a priority economic consideration, being seen as it was by the majority of students as the way out of economic stagnation.

1. Extension Studies

However, although all but one of the students shared household expenses with at least one other income earner, just over a half indicated they were comfortably able to support their extension studies. Two of these were also receiving assistance from their employers. Of the remaining students, about half were just able to afford their studies, while the rest had to have external support in order to continue to pursue their studies. One student received USP Centre support for fees; another took advantage of the Centre’s time payment scheme as a form of assistance. She was also given a refund of her fees by her employer if she passed her course, which was an added financial incentive; a third depended on a bank loan and therefore needed to ensure that her credit-repayment ability was trustworthy as future loans depended on this credibility. Finally, a fourth student had his fees paid by a cousin who was earning a relatively good wage. These circumstances were also reflected in the economic reasons that the respondents cited for becoming involved in studies. One student remarked:

I just want to start studying again ... honestly I just want to increase my salary. Because, see the problem with our finance we couldn’t cope ... my qualification was not good and they couldn’t give me any higher job than the present one. So the best thing I presume I have to study to advance my qualification and that will help me to give me a good salary.

2. Nuclear and Extended Family Needs

The majority of students had some economic need for which they needed more salary. Those with the greater need lived in circumstances that they wished to change for the better such as crowded home conditions, being unable to better provide financially for
their families, both nuclear and extended, and also not being able to set up a nuclear household independently from the extended family. For one student, this was the situation:

Like the pay that we get without a degree is quite small, so we can’t really cater for what we have to.... like we have to pay the power bill and at the same time fork out money to help my parents out. And then at the end we only get such a little sum, it will only last us for about three days and then the next whole week we just go without money. ... To save, yes, because you know how you have a family, you want to have your own house, so you can’t really get that.

Another feature of this group of students that had economic repercussions for them was the fact that they were among the very few, or were the only educated members of the family and consequently held relatively better paying jobs. This made them the most likely target by members of the family in need. In most cases the students accepted this condition, as has been seen particularly in the way they responded to financial needs within the family. This acceptance is captured in the comments of the following student:

And the other thing is because we’re a big family but not all of us have good jobs so it’s just a few of us and I always have my brothers and sisters coming around borrowing money and things like that ...

In one extreme case, the student had to defer study for a semester in order to be able to pay for a distant relative to go to school. He said:

Also something I experienced when I started working was we have relatives and friends asking money. And I’m the type of person like I find it difficult to tell them lies. If I have to tell them I don’t have any money at all when in fact I have some money, I feel guilty about it. So what happens, when they come they ask - and it’s not single people, it’s married ... they come and say, I’ve got a kid at school and I really need to pay the school fees otherwise the kid is not going. Please help me. My mother is very sick I really need some money. So it’s just going, I cannot have anything. ... And even like right now there’s a kid here that I gave $200 just for the fees. Because they got two kids studying in NZ privately and they wanted me to, you know ... and I try to tell them that I wanted to enrol this semester. I needed some money for my course. So I got nothing so I said all right, that kid otherwise he won’t go to school. So finally I gave her the money and I never enrolled this semester.
3. Urban Living

In addition to the financial commitments obligated by the cultural values of the interviewees, living in town also had its financial demands not normally associated with village or rural life such as rents, electricity and water bills, transport costs, and so on.

7.4 The Study Environment

7.4.1 Motivation and reasons for study

1. Economic

The economic reasons cited above counted strongly among the features that provided the incentive to study for these students. The majority of students were looking at improved job situations and circumstances through the gaining of first qualifications, the acquisition of new skills or further training in particular areas. These would, in turn, result in improved economic conditions with the attainment of better jobs, promotions at work and salary raises that would allow better living standards for respondents and members of their household.

2. Significant Others

Much of the motivation to study for the students in this group was generated by their environment. For most of the students, a member, or members of the family had been instrumental in getting the students going in their programmes of study and in many cases, keeping them motivated along the way. These have been parents, spouses, older siblings and uncles. Parents, in all of these cases, had provided support by way of their desire for education for their children from the start, setting up and establishing a family educational tradition which instilled in their children the objective of education as their ticket to a better future. Years on, a sense of appreciation for the instigator(s) of this vision provided a major educational boost. One student was studying for her late father, and for her mother, and oldest brother who was the only other sibling in a family of 13 to have gone on to university studies. Another student was also dedicating his efforts
to a late, hardworking father who was highly committed to the education of his children and whose sacrifices to this end have made a lasting impression on the respondent.

My father is now no longer with us ... Very hard working. He as a person did not bother to wear a good shirt, a good trousers, a good shoe, but he was much worried that his children get educated. He was much worried that I get high educated and better for my future. And I'm sure that he didn't thought ever that he would go so soon but before he left, he had house for us, he had educated us up to high school ...

Older siblings, when they became financially independent, were also instrumental in the financial and moral support of their younger brothers and sisters in the continuation of the educational tradition and philosophy initiated by their parents. The cases of the following three students highlight this:

- Because in those days we were relying on our brother - the one who is now manager ... and he encourage us to go to school. Especially at those times because he was no longer got children, no father, so he encourage me to go to school. So we view the education at those times, it's a must.

- My first, my elder brother has got a degree in accounting and he's doing his masters. He used to be a principle lecturer at the College [Solomon Islands College of Higher Education], now he's working ... and he's the one who was paying for my fees cause my father can't pay anymore. And when I came up to secondary school, my brother was the one who was paying for my school fees.

- Yeah, my bigger brother. Up till now he's still that kind of person who has a soft heart. I think that's the kind of thing that giving us ... to stay on like with the experience of being out, growing up away from home, but in another country. In fact when I go down to spend weekend with him at USP, during the weekend we don't go out to like cinema or walk around town, we would stay home and he would help me out with my studies, mathematics, English, that sort of thing. Show me how to do my studies.

This kind of support, including exemplary educational achievement, came also from other members of the extended family.

3. Role-modelling
Most of the students in this study were in the forefront of educational involvement within their respective families, particularly with regard to university levels. This was most probably due to the increased provision by the USP of tertiary education to the Region, particularly through its distance education programme. In addition, awareness of educational opportunities, and knowledge of the importance of the role of education
in modern day living, gained momentum and expression over the generations. The example-setting achievement of older siblings and relatives appeared to have rubbed off on some of the respondents who have, in turn, expressed a wish to be role models for the younger generations - their own children, or children in the extended family.

I want my children to see me on that desk working at home. Now they trying to pick up. They do their own homework in their own time.

4. Partner Support
In the case of married students, three husbands and one wife were cited as especially supportive; of these four, two husbands were educated to levels where they were able to provide their wives with learning assistance and with opportunities to carry out their studies.

... my husband is an understanding man. He used to help me along with my assignments and he really encourages me. Say if I'm married to a non-educated person I don't think he gonna encourage me.

The other two spouses gave a lot of moral support and assistance in other ways such as videotaping interesting material for their spouses and helping out with family chores as often as possible.

And my husband really help me a lot ... not on the subject but he always want to do the work for me at home like the washing, cooking, while I have to do my study.

5. Positive Results from Negative Experiences
There were also cases of negative situations being cited for current motivation. One student said that she worked hard because she did not have money to waste on repeating failed courses. Another did not want her children to experience the hard childhood she underwent, and her study was an assurance of a better-paid job for a better lifestyle for her children in particular. In addition, she wanted to encourage an interest in education among her older nieces and nephews so that they too, would be able to improve their economic circumstances and living standards. Another student decried the lack of role models in his family which was poor, and therefore

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continuously tied up with making a basic living. He saw the importance, therefore, of being a role model for his children and his current study efforts were motivated by the need for him to instil a love of studying in his children.

Among the students who did not succeed in their first attempts at higher level education, all looked forward to the opportunity to prove that this failure had little, if anything, to do with their academic ability. This attitude was probably fostered by the competitive nature of educational achievement in small island communities where the performance of members was more easily monitored and used in the 'critical' assessment of students and elements in their immediate environments. This competitive edge is evident in the following comment:

And my friends as well, some of them have made it to a scholarship and I didn’t, so that’s another factor - gives me the motivation to study even though if they study outside of Samoa, I study here, but we can still go on the same level if I keep on studying by extension - taking my extension courses.

6. **Social Esteem**

   In the small communities of the USP Region, it is not surprising that social status for both the students involved and their families was also cited as an important motivator. In these cases, students indicated how highly education was regarded in their respective communities and university qualifications brought credit not only to themselves but to their families, and to significant others in their lives.

7. **Opportunities offered by Religious Institutions**

   These were also cited by a group of students as highly instrumental in their current motivation for further education. Seventh Day Adventist (SDA), Mormon and Catholic students were given opportunities by their religious organisations to travel abroad and continue high school and post-secondary study, and the effects of these experiences remained and continued to influence the educational goals of these students.
8. Employers

For a number of interviewees the motivation to study was provided by their employers by way of either all-expenses paid opportunities, part-payments, or fee refunds for courses passed by the students. In one case, the opportunity came too soon for the student, but she undertook the programme anyway. In another, the financial assistance offered was not really needed, but it got the student started.

7.4.2 Hurdles and problems within the study environment

With regard to the nature of distance courses to be self-contained study packages, many students felt that the USP materials fell short of providing the necessary opportunities for independent learning. Criticisms included unclear instructions, insufficient opportunities for self-assessment and application of learned knowledge and information, insufficient materials and information to carry out exercises, language presentation levels, and inadequate and inappropriate feedback from course tutors.

1. Lack of Tutorial Support for Independent Learning

All students indicated the need for tutorial support in varying degrees, and were not happy with the tutorial support provided by their respective Centres, for a number of reasons: it was not available for a number of students; where available, it was either insufficient or held at inconvenient times, or both; in some cases, students were not happy with the calibre of the local tutor. The following comments by some of the students give an indication of the extent of the problem:

- ... the problem is that we don’t have a tutor so we are not doing any tutorials at the moment.
- but most of the time he’s busy ... so we do our own work,
- sometimes he’s confused himself; ... when he’s confused, he confuses all of us.
- Because to be honest, some of my assignments I received during the coursework ... I received assignments rated A’s. But I don’t know why ... I don’t know why I just felt that I shouldn’t have got A’s. Maybe because I was biased because I thought it’s because he is a Tongan tutor, he’s a local tutor here, maybe he didn’t mark it properly because I would rather see a B or a C+ to A maybe ...
my problem would be especially to our local tutor. I think my first problem there is especially ... not all of them. Especially the one I'm doing now, I've only attended two tutorials and I've just said to myself it's waste time, you know.

I think if I want to go higher I need that extra support.

2. Other Learning Support Options

For all of these students the major learning hurdle engendered by the situation was the need to find alternative support. Many difficulties, in this respect, were encountered: the students did not know people with the required expertise; where the expertise was available, the student was usually of low priority in a busy schedule; where peers and other students were the only means of group assistance, the Centre did not usually assist with organising and scheduling meetings or there were too few students in the course to make this a viable option. Alternative sources of information such as the library and satellite tutorials had their own deficiencies. Hardly any student was happy with the capacity of the local community or Centre library to support his/her level of study. In the case of satellite tutorials, poor reception and scheduled times were cited as the main problems. In addition, the satellite was not an appropriate medium for teaching courses such as Mathematics where visuals were more important.

3. The Family

A few students cited family attitudes to their studies as a problem. In these cases, it was clear that ignorance about education beyond the formal school system was the key reason for non-support or, at best, passive acceptance of the student status of the respondents. One student cited the lack of a post-secondary tradition in working class families as a problem for him in that he did not have the information or direction to lead him to it.

When I was in College there was nobody to look at doing something. All you do is just get up, go feed the pigs and come home. ... I always believed that if you look at people ... I mean I give you an example, there's a doctor, they have tea and they talk about what they do at work and doctoring and the children are listening, you know. And actually one day you see his son going to the medical field too. I had none in my family so I don't know what Customs is or police is or what doctor is ...
Similarly, another student saw his progress through the educational ladder as just a normal course of events, typical of the mentality of a particular period of time:

I suppose there wasn't really an objective, you know. It happens that I was probably slightly brighter than the others and I continued from class to class. I didn't really have any plans - what I should become when I finish school or I didn't have someone telling me you ought to be this or try and be someone or go into this particular field. It was just more or less coming from A to B and then working on from there. ... I suppose probably it's just the intellect then, you know. Otherwise if you compare it to today's kids, you have parents directing their kids or otherwise kids have something to work towards.

By contrast, those whose older siblings began to establish an educational tradition, cited this as a significant influence in their current studies.

Wives, in particular, were described in some cases to be unsympathetic with student husbands who claimed they did not have the time to lend a hand at home. The husbands concerned put this down to lack of education on the part of their wives which made persuading them for support more difficult. Two student wives, likewise, looked forward to more self-initiated support both physically and morally from their husbands, towards their study. Unlike their male counterparts, they could not expect privileged exemption from household responsibilities in order to undertake their study and found they could only work late at night when their work was done and their children in bed.

One student spoke with passion of the need for husband support:

The other thing I could add to that is the family part - how much the husband helps. I think often, at times, it's difficult ... my husband is tired as well from his basketball and at that stage when I want to study, it's hard for me because ... he's too tired to want to watch the kids so I have to wait till the kids go to bed and then I study. So I probably start studying about 11 onwards. ... I think he's supportive but he doesn't show it. ... I think they should show it more. ... And encourage you sometimes ... like if you ... have assignments and then they see you sitting in front of the TV, just a word or two or something, you know. "Do you think you should be sitting there? Why don't you go and ...?" Just a reminder. That helps. ... So I'm really envious of those women whose husbands ... because I've come across a lot of students whose husbands are very supportive.

4. Cultural and Religious Obligations

Some families or family members also were portrayed as unappreciative of the requirements of extension study, in that they continued to expect participation by the respondents in family activities particularly with respect to culture and religion. In one
case a respondent claimed his family saw his extension study as extracurricular work because it did not take place in a normal educational setting. In another case a guardian older brother continued to enforce the customary prohibition of girls being out at night over his student sister to the point where she could not attend tutorials or peer group meetings or use the library at the Centre, after dark.

... that's another problem like when I do my private study at USP maybe almost at nights, my brother get mad of that. He get mad because it's not right that girls ... they should not leave the place at dark, they should leave before the night.

Other demands of culture and religion were seen and discussed in the section on sociocultural involvement earlier in the chapter.

5. **Physical Amenities**

Large households or households with small children were cited by many respondents as especially problematic in that study space and appropriate atmosphere were practically non-existent for most of the time. Again, for these students, regular study hours were late at night or early in the morning when the rest of the household was asleep. Although students claimed that they got used to working this kind of schedule, anything out of the ordinary such as overtime at work or other unforeseen activities threatened these patterns.

6. **Economics**

Economic insecurity was, for a fair number of students, a distressing factor. This situation was related to large households and the extension of economic assistance to the extended family, as well as low salaries and wages. Financial contributions required by commitments to the culture group were also an additional burden for some and threatened their ability to continue to pay for their study, and led consequently to their reliance on outside sources of financial assistance.

I think money is a big problem, because you know the salary is very low. I get only $150 in two weeks, that's not enough. ... Mostly I have to ask for donations from my relatives outside ...
The resulting insecurity caused by this dependent situation can be particularly destructive to student confidence.

7. **Other Time Commitments**
As all students in this group were employed, work was the major consumer of their time. Very few employers were described as supportive, and most, while encouraging further study among their employees, discouraged or forbade the use of work time for such. Other time-consuming activities included church-related functions which, in one extreme case, required the respondent to travel to other parts of the country.

Competition sport was also a major involvement for three of the respondents and was cited as a hurdle because the respondents held it in high priority. The main ill-effects of involvement were the time factor and the physical exertion that took its toll on the energy levels of the students.

8. **English Language Levels**
The various dimensions of studying in the English language was a problem also for most students. Some of these problems were touched on earlier in the discussion on the educational background of students. English expression was the most common difficulty cited by most students. This was understandable in the case of these students for whom English was a second language and relatively rarely used. Work and study were the only situations where the use of English was enforced. For these students reading was also a problem and the use of specialist terms and jargon in course texts provided an additional dimension of difficulty. English expression in assignment and tutorials was rated by these students as particularly problematic and many students admitted that it was the major cause of low course grades.

7.4.3 **Centre support**
There seemed to be a general indication that the Centre, where it was accessible to the students, was reactive rather than proactive in its approach to student learning support. There did not
seem to be a clear understanding of what students could expect from a Centre. In the following quotation the question and hesitation seemed to suggest this:

... if we ask them they help. But I think that's all right? If we ask them they ...

The ratings of Centre services and facilities ranged from acceptance by a few students that what one gets, if anything, is all one can expect from distance education, to those who expressed expectations of facilities requested that should be provided for if their study were to be successful. In the preceding sections, some reactions to the local Centre and its provisions or lack of them have already been discussed. The two major learning support services that came under criticism throughout the Region were local tutorial provision and the library. Criticisms of local tutorial services which ranged from non-existent, to not guaranteed or irregular, to ineffective, were provided in detail as the first major study hurdle above. The variations in the degree of provision of these services, or non-provision, are an indication of the inequities of opportunities of learning provided through the system of local Centres. In addition, similar inequities appeared to exist among the courses on offer in the variations in provision of tutorial support for each of them.

Similarly, students were critical of the ability of Centre libraries to support their level of study. One student remarked:

In the Centre here that is one of our biggest problem as well is that we don't have enough reference at the library especially the science courses. The science books we find almost nothing. All of the books that are on the shelf are very early secondary level.

Then there was also the matter of opening hours:

I try and come and find them (references) on my own here in the library, especially when I come here and there's no librarian because it's off work time.

This was a particularly frustrating problem for students without local tutors, as it was their next best option. At best, students indicated that the Centre provided satisfactory administrative services so that course materials were received on time, and assignments sent out for marking.
and returned as expected. For some students, information that they required regarding their programmes of study and other matters related to the university, was provided to their satisfaction either through the staff or by way of information brochures. Relationships with Centre staff were generally good and the staff were helpful to the best of their ability when approached for help. However, this ability fell short of satisfactory for a number of students with regard to assistance with their specific courses and subject areas. This was to be expected as the Centre lecturer was a general, study skills facilitator and might be specialised in one or two subject areas only. Alternative means of assistance vis-a-vis satellite tutorials, peer group support, the library and local tutorials, however, also fell short of satisfactory, as seen in the latter two cases above. There was no mention of special needs programmes such as English writing or study skills which were most problematic for many students, nor was there any special proactive attempt at encouraging students in the pursuit of their studies. This, if any, came through their marked assignments which students felt could be improved by way of directing students in more detail to areas that they needed to improve. This requirement is captured quite well in the following comment:

You don’t get much of a feedback. It’s just “you’ve done well, well done assignment”. You don’t want to know really what you’ve done well, you want to know what you haven’t done well so you can do better next time.

For the two students for whom the Centre was inaccessible, one did not have a local tutor, but appeared to accept this situation as normally associated with studying independently by extension. He admitted, however, that he was falling behind with his work for want of tutorial, library and moral support.

If they have tutors and other facilities that would improve our learning, I would opt for that.
7.5 Student Preparedness and Disposition to Study

7.5.1 Personal motivation

1. Self-determination and confidence

As mature students, returning to study was approached with mixed feelings for many, particularly those with some history of negative academic performance. It was not surprising, therefore, that the most common internal motivator for those students who cited them, was the desire to find out what their current academic capabilities were. Comments by the following two students highlight this:

... another thing too was I had left schooling behind for how many years - I think '81 was my last time at school and so I took my first course ... and I sort of went with it with so much fervour, you know. I was wanting to do so well and I'd lost touch so I think the first one I did I was really determined to do well. I was asking for help around our section because it was convenient for me to ask.

I said, "Oh I think this will suit my capabilities". So I took that and enrolled and I said this is great. So I did that and I came all right, wasn't too bad.

But I only do it myself, I try to be honest with myself so that, in a way to try my ability if I could still be able to do study.

This was in turn, related to the confidence to continue.

I got a B but for me that was, oh I did okay because I'd been out of school for so long ... I could do better, yeah!

So when I do my own study in my own free time and I'm my own boss and I find I got good high marks, so I thought I can do this too.

2. Self-perception and motivation

For those students who had wasted and regretted former opportunities, current studies were part of a resolution to make good their past mistakes:

Yeah, that's why I thought to myself I'd better not let any chance run away anymore. I've wasted the other two already.
I came back 1991 and then I said I’m not giving up. I still want my accounting degree but I have to look for other ways so I decided extension courses are here, I’ll do it and I’ll have to find a job, I cannot just live it tough because I’ll have to meet the fees and all this. ... I still want to get a chance and do what I want to do.

In some cases, this opportunity was also for self-conviction that they were as good as other members of the family, friends and work colleagues who were also involved in university studies.

My sister gives me the charge because she went for a scholarship - I kinda feel bad about it. ... like probably she’s younger than me and she’s already on scholarship. ... And my friends as well, some of them have made it to a scholarship and I didn’t so that’s another factor - gives me the motivation to study ...

Some of the students’ current learning disposition was owed to the overseas experience that they had had (see educational background). Among the qualities that were developed and/or enhanced were study confidence and independence as learners. The experience also helped to broaden their educational outlook and course expectations.

7.5.2 Learning orientation and styles

Learning orientation and styles have been mentioned in the discussion on hurdles and problems. Learning orientation refers to whether students learned best independently or within a group. In most cases, a combination of some degree of both was more suitable. The learning style of the student, termed frequently as surface and deep learning in the literature, describes cognitive strategies which students used in order to learn. Most common of these are memorisation, understanding and assimilation, application, and analysis and evaluation. With regard to the group of interviewees in this study, the following were some of the more common orientations and styles of learning.

1. Group and Face-to-face Learning

As has been seen, there was a preference for group learning among the students and in particular for tutor-guided tutorials and peer-group learning. Face-to-face group
interaction and dynamics were the main motivating features of this orientation. With regard to opportunities for personal interaction, the lecture was also cited as a preferred means of learning for this group who saw the main benefits as quick feedback, the opportunity to interact with a more knowledgeable person, and consequently, the opportunity to immediately fill in the gaps of information in the course materials. One interviewee couched all this in the following terms:

I'm used to people lecturing me and see, if you have any doubt you can ask him. But here it's a bit difficult and they don't arrange any tutorial satellite for us to talk directly to our lecturer at USP. We've got only a local tutor here but ... he's okay but we really can't, you know ... I think to me speaking from experience it's better to speak to a lecturer who's in charge of a course.

There was general discontent with the provision of opportunities for group and face-to-face learning by the local USP Centre. Many of these criticisms however, might be reflections of the state of preparedness of the student to undertake independent study. Many admitted a preference for tutor direction and having lectures as learning strategies they were used to from former formal educational experiences. In terms of learning style, others were unable to apply new learning to real or hypothetical situations because they had not been taught how. For those who undertook some overseas study, this was cited as a major drawback for them in their educational setting and caused them to fail their programmes because they were not used to being left on their own or to be responsible for their own learning.

Given the general lack of confidence in local tutors and the low ratings accorded them by the group above, the preference for tutorial support and lectures might, on the other hand, reflect a reaction to an inadequate situation rather than a real orientation towards teacher domination. This possibility is borne out by those who claim preference for independent learning on condition that adequate tutorial support was available when required, and regular opportunities for interaction with and feedback from the course tutor were guaranteed. It is noteworthy that these students saw the role of tutorial support as guidance; they saw tutor assistance as unblocking learning clogs that might occur from time to time. The opportunities for interaction with a more knowledgeable
person and for the answering of queries were also stressed. It was noted that direct subject area teaching and direction in how to proceed were not suggested as a role for tutors to play.

I want somebody to not really tell me how to do it but in the sense that she knows or he knows that I understand what she's talking about. ... One good answer would be just grab one of these exercises in the book and do it on the board! That'll be excellent. ... I mean if I had total independence ... the problem is I mean like every field you study and you think you doing the right thing and the marker might say, no, no it's not right. So I think what I want is just to be guided to go on the right track, the right way.

Tutor assistance, suggested one respondent, should make a qualitative difference in course grades rather than be the reason for whether or not a student passed a course.

2. Learning from Work Experience

Many students also indicated that working benefited their learning in the opportunities provided by the work situation for the application of newly acquired knowledge and information. This was described by one student in terms of the clarity that was afforded him by being able to see what he learned in context:

So I was quite fortunate 'cause I learned a lot in accounting and it helped me with my studies here, ... a lot of the things I can see clearly because I do them at work.

The same student indicated that anything in his course that he could not apply to his work situation quickly became boring for him. Another student indicated that the actual application of what she learned to her work helped her to consolidate this learning.

...if I didn't have like experience, and then I don't think I can ... like when we have practical I know I learn ...

For students acquiring new skills and broadening work-related knowledge, there was a strong suggestion that the immediate and/or potential applicability of what was being learned provided a strong incentive for learning.
3. **Learning Independence and Self-direction**

Time-management and self-discipline were cited by many students as their major faults as distance students and independent learners. Although most students said they preferred some form of face-to-face teaching and interaction, and also learning through group dynamics, there was also a very strong recognition that many of the problems associated with the lack or shortage of these opportunities would be overcome with better time management and more self-discipline on their part. These two factors would be influential in helping them improve their strategies of independent learning, lessen their dependence on external support and sharpen their resistance to distracters as the following student admits:

I cannot really say that I'm coping because ... out of the few assignments that I've done I think I've been submitting assignments late which is an indication that I'm not coping. But I think again it's a question of discipline as I mentioned. I can cope but there are other pressures that often distract me.

4. **Features of Adulthood**

Some students observed that their learning orientation and attitudes were a function of their maturity. With the benefit of life experiences and with continued independent study, the students were able to see the benefits of discipline, better personal organisation and time management, and the importance of placing a priority on study over other activities. This was contextualised quite appropriately by the female Cook Island respondent:

I think the maturity part comes into it quite a lot because when I did a full-time degree I was straight out of school, didn't have the life experiences to go with it. So it's not a trial and error, and this time, second time around it's been much better. I'm actually thinking about it and doing what I want to do or what is required of me, more prepared, better able to manage my time and it's a juggle for me sometimes because I also help my husband in a second job.

From this account it would appear that the ability to be an independent learner was a learned experience; the longer one studied at a distance, the more assured he/she was of mastery of the qualities required to be an independent learner, including better self- and time-management and related, appropriate attitudes.
5. **Study Plan**

Most of the students did the bulk, if not all of their study at home at night. The major obstacles here were shared home facilities and children. In most of these cases, therefore, studying was done late at night when members of the household, and especially the children, were asleep. The difficulty with this study plan was maintaining it, as respondents worked during the day, usually had some other extracurricular activities after work such as PTA or religious group meetings, or sports, came home to family commitments, and might be too tired for study by the appointed time. Alternative study times were after work at the workplace or at the Centre when there were no after-work commitments. The constraints here were overtime workers also present at the workplace, or distance from the Centre which might make it viable only a few times a week. A few students found opportunities to fit in some study during the day, although this was unreliable. In a couple of cases, however, an employer allowed some time off for studies in support of the student employees.

Contrary to popular expectation, the weekend did not seem to be a good time for study for this group of students. Only four students claimed to put in a few more hours in the weekend, one of whom came under pressure to attend church on Sunday whenever she decided to use the time for studying. For the others, the weekend was time for catching up with other commitments particularly with the family, for religious observations and for some relaxation or being lazy.

So if I'm not doing my USP course on a Sunday then I'm actually being very lazy, having a rest and going out and having a few drinks and I'm ready again for the next week! I like to be busy.

6. **USP Student Status**

The students were asked to rate themselves as USP students in order to find out the extent to which they felt they belonged to the institution, and what USP was doing to make them feel they were as much a part of the institution's goals and objectives as the on-campus students were. It was felt that this view of themselves as USP students would affect their confidence in what they were doing, and therefore their performance.
Responses ranged from the feeling that distance education courses were the equivalent of their on-campus counterparts, to the opinion that distance courses were a softer option and led to qualifications of less merit. There was consensus, however, on the fact that on-campus students were at an advantage with regard to learning support services and facilities. Some of these feelings are captured by the following perspectives:

- "... what I have attain from the USP, I didn't gain it from anywhere else, just straight from what they have provided and could be the same with those at campus would be. ... this is USP quality."

- "I certainly think that if I can really get into what is supplied for me in the extension course, the materials, there is no problem of achieving the same level. You know, when I was accepted at work what I can find out from doing my extension, I apply that one, I find that it is acceptable. So I tend to think to myself that if I can grasp or get everything that is supplied from these materials, if my office can accept it, then it is acceptable."

- "... you know they see me around most of the time so they just think they must be finding it very easy so it's just useless - something like that. When they look at the other person they probably think oh he must be very important that's why they send him overseas and he has to do his studies overseas - this sort of thinking, eh?"

- "... we are not having those facilities at USP and like in Fiji too, some of the companies do not very much recognise after you ... if you have completed, it's ok. If you say you've been studying at USP for one year foundation and if you say you did extension for one year, that person will have more power. ... They learn more than us because they spend more time in studying and they have access to lectures and the library. They have a study ... they can study in the library. I've been to the USP and I see the way they study, they get into groups and ... you know they share ..."

- "We have to work harder, but that's the choice we've made anyway because of the reason, the fact that we have families and we can't take time, so that's the extra ... effort we have to put into, in order to get our degree, compared to the on-campus students where they have everything handed to them. ... I would have gone on-campus if I had the finance, if I had a choice. Because I don't have the choice and financially I can't afford to go on campus, for that reason I'm taking it by extension."

The influence on these ratings by community and potential employers came through quite clearly. By implication, most students accepted that support for their learning by the institution fell short of that provided to on-campus students. By this token, they had to work harder to achieve the same results and take much more responsibility for their learning than did their on-campus counterparts. Interviewees were also of the opinion that their performance in their tasks could be improved to the level of on-campus students if they were given learning and study support to some equivalence of what obtained on campus. In addition, extension students studied part-time, with various
other commitments posing as study detractors that full-time on-campus student did not have. Any difference in performance, therefore, was due largely to the learning and study environments and not the quality of the students. The following student did her first degree as a full-time student at the main campus, and so had the ability to compare her two experiences. This was her assessment:

Uh it’s funny because I feel more a part of the University in Fiji. I don’t feel the same as this extension Centre. I don’t.

7.6 Concluding Summary

In describing the various features and characteristics of the interviewees as a group of USP distance students, this chapter focussed also on the dynamics of life within the USP Region. These features were discussed under major headings taken from the conceptual framework of the study which is based on theories and principles of adult and distance learning. The variety of relationships between and among the variables in the personal lives of the students as well as variables within the study environment such as physical resources, cultural and religious activities, and educational background, were seen in terms of their influence on the preparedness and disposition of the interviewees to study.
CHAPTER 8 : STUDENT CASE STUDIES

8.1 Outline of Chapter

In this chapter, the responses of five interviewees are presented as case studies in which features attributed to groups of interviewees in the previous chapter are examined in more detail in the lives of the individual respondents. As with previous chapters, their 'stories' are told under the sub-heads representing the major categories of variables in this study. In these discussions, responses highlight key issues of the study in terms of how they exist in the reality of the context of the USP Region as represented by the lives of these students.

8.2 Introductory Comments

The following students were carefully selected on several criteria in order to represent, as much as possible, the diverse features and circumstances of students studying at a distance at the USP. Primarily, they represented each of the major locations and cultures of the USP Region, including the large Indian population of Fiji. In addition, although the interviewees were all located 'centrally' in their respective countries and were thus accessible to the interviewer within her limited visit schedule to these countries, the Fiji Indian student lived in another town in Fiji and represented, to some extent, the circumstances of the physically remote student. A gender balance was sought - three women and two men - as well as age and marital status differences. Other criteria also represented were the variations in family history and current situations, educational background and post-secondary experiences, economic circumstances and access to study support.

As for Chapter 7, quotations derived from the interviews in support of issues under discussion are all given verbatim so that atmosphere and emotional state are also captured in the responses. Verbatim responses also give an indication of the level of spoken English of the USP students, a major variable of this study, seen in previous chapters to be highly influential on the performance of these students.
Students have also been provided with pseudonyms in respect of the assurance of confidentiality given to them as a condition of the interview. Again, as for Chapter 7, information threatening this confidentiality has been downplayed or not included. However, this has not prevented the full discussion of issues and situations in question.

8.3 Case Study 1: Maria

I could have finished my schooling (in New Zealand) but I was homesick. See I let that affect me and I didn’t finish my education. You know I was so homesick I came home and didn’t finish it ... But now since I’m married I realise the mistake I’ve made and I’ve tried to put that behind me and just carry on.

8.3.1 Demographic and personal information

1. Family background

Maria is 32 years old. She was born in Suva, Fiji to a mixed marriage of a Samoan father and a Fijian mother, the eleventh of their thirteen children. With such a large family, she recalled her childhood as a difficult one, economically:

Dad didn’t have a very good job, basically he was a carpenter by trade so he ... it was just him. At the time I was growing up it was just him and two of my older brothers ... so basically we had a very hard life growing up.

Vivid therefore, in her memory of growing up as part of a very large household, was the sharing and stretching of limited family resources to accommodate her many siblings and herself. However, it was not with regret, but with nostalgia and warmth that she spoke of a close-knit and loving family held together by hardworking and self-sacrificing parents. She remembered them thus:

I think the relationship (between her parents) was really good because dad was really loving. ... The way I saw the relationship between him and my mum, he was always helping her around the house and doing things ... which I notice husbands and wives nowadays, our ... younger ones don’t do. He would do the washing up for her and washing the clothes and things like that, you
know. And I appreciate that because it's left with me and my brothers and sisters, you know, it's rubbed on to us and my brothers do that and I think their wives are lucky, you know.

There was no question that the circumstances of her childhood and the qualities of her upbringing had made their mark on her adult life and influenced to a very large extent, her own philosophy of life. For one thing, it gave her a wider perspective of life and sharpened her sense of appreciation for the economic distance she had travelled since then:

I’m more appreciative of it now because I have a good job and have so many things now which I can give to my kids - I don’t want my kids to go through that but at the same time I wish they could go through that so that they can appreciate what they’re getting ... we are getting now.

The years of being part of a large household were also responsible for the strong sense of family and community that became apparent as she spoke of her future plans, of which her study was a significant component. She saw any academic achievement on her part as a success shared with the rest of her family, and any benefits derived from it were never for just herself. This expansive philosophy was most likely also rooted in the circumstances of her childhood. She told, again without rancour or regret, of the incident of her eldest brother being singled out for special educational treatment by her parents:

You see John⁴ was the eldest and at that time mum and dad had a house at Veisari, ... and so ... they sacrificed that to send him to NZ. ... They paid for him. So I think giving him that the others had to struggle. ... No, no resentment. Because he was the eldest and at that time there was only about four others.

When she was asked how it was that the rest of the family came to accept this situation so well, she answered simply that it was the way they were brought up, implying the influence of cultural values. In addition, she explained that because her brother went on to become a Catholic brother, this was something that brought 'prestige' and 'blessing' to the family which rewarded the sacrifice entailed in sending him to school in New Zealand.

⁴ This is a pseudonym.
In looking at her own cultural background for an explanation of the generation of this kind of thinking and mentality, Maria began to show the first signs of some of the regrets of her childhood. It was clear that her father's Samoan culture dominated many aspects of their family life. She attributed the strictness of their upbringing and the orderliness of family life with its defined gender roles, to Samoan values. However, because the marriage was a mixed one, neither parental culture was observed to the full, and there was more a borrowing of values from both parents and from other sources that constituted the eclectic cultural situation of Maria's family, "more like a Samoan, European-related, western-type upbringing". Consequently, Maria now found herself in a far from satisfactory situation viz-a-viz her knowledge of her parents' cultures. In addition, she acknowledged that, in not being able to speak her parents' respective languages, her own personal identity was in jeopardy in that she was unable to communicate with members of the wider family who did not speak English.

2. Educational experience

With regard to her educational experience, Maria described herself as having been an above average student who did not remember having to struggle through school. However, she felt too, that she might have made more of her educational opportunities if for the fact of her large family. There was no question about the value of education in her family, and the sacrifice on John's behalf bore testimony to this. But while her parents struggled to ensure that each child had a chance to go to school, that was the extent of their effort and ability. She put this down to two main reasons: that her parents had their hands too full with their large family, and that their own level of education meant that they did not have the capacity to appreciate the needs of education beyond what they themselves were familiar with.

I wasn't given that much motivation then. I sort of just flowed along. But I could have done better at school like I was coming within the first ten from primary school then I went to secondary school it was like just going through the process. And I didn't value the education then. You know I look back now and wished I could have - you know - done better. Because I had the capabilities to do better.

I think another factor is because mum and dad were so weighed down bringing up the thirteen children, and that aspect, that side, you know like study and motivation, they weren't really concerned. I think their main concern was they got us through school and made sure we, you
know, got a good job than them. You know that was those days. When it came to study-wise and all those things there wasn't really much push.

And my dad and mum didn't have a really good education. I think around that time they only got up to fifth form and then they started working... so he didn't have much of an education background to help me when I needed help with my homework and things so I didn't have motivation from that side or help at all.

Maria was fortunate at this time to have had a sister married and living in New Zealand to whom she wrote for assistance with her schooling. As a result of this correspondence, her sister offered to pay for her to go over and finish her secondary schooling in New Zealand. Never having been away from home before, this opportunity, although a most welcome one, came with its own set of problems. Her first major setback in New Zealand was what she described as the culture shock.

...at that time coming from two different societies I was sort of plonked into a new type of culture and all the new things were so new to me I was distracted by all that...

Her next major problem was related to the educational experience itself.

I went from an educational society where, you know, the teacher says, and what the teacher says is right. And then I go to another educational system where the teachers are wanting you... to talk freely and to give your comments and I was so shy, you know,... it took me almost two years to relate to that, you know.

As a result, Maria did not complete her schooling in New Zealand, having failed her seventh form. This failure constituted the second major regret of her childhood, and one that was to have a significant effect on her second attempt at gaining an educational qualification later on in her life.

8.3.2 Social environment

1. Current family status

Maria is now married to a self-employed surveyor and they have three children. At the time of interview, one child had already started school. The family live in Suva, where Maria works as a textprocessor at the main campus of the University of the South
Pacific, the equivalent position of a clerk-typist at the junior level of the administrative support services of the University. With their joint income, she was able to afford a housemaid who took care of her household and housework, so that when she got home from work, everything was taken care of.

2. Socio-cultural involvement

In terms of her social and cultural activities, Maria lived a quiet life. On the cultural front, her mixed ethnic background meant that there was very little involvement with either her father’s or her mother’s culture group. Their participation in any activity of a cultural nature was rare, with the occasional wedding or funeral, and their related customary observances, that had to be attended. She was not involved in religious activities beyond the weekly service, and as she had only one child in school, she did not feel the pressure to participate in the Parent/Teacher association and its related activities. Her major time-consuming passion, aside from work and family life, was her sports. Both she and her husband were involved in basketball on a competitive basis and she was a very strong contender for the national team. This required a heavy commitment to training on both their parts and represented a major hurdle to her current study.

8.3.3 The Educational environment

1. The motivation to study

Maria had more than one reason for resuming study, but the link between her current quest for further education, and her past was very strong.

I think it (her past) made me more determined to have a better life and if I were to have kids ... I wouldn’t put them through the same thing.

It was also evident that this quest for ‘a better life’ was inspired by the hard work of her parents and the many sacrifices they made towards providing for their children to the best of their abilities. In another, also significant way, her eldest brother John was
also instrumental in inspiring her in that she wanted to "be educated like him" and to prove to her mum that another member in her large family was also able "to do it and to make her proud too." In this sense, Maria was fortunate that the hardships of her childhood were overridden by a loving family environment which allowed the nurturing of a positive outlook to life.

The strong sense of community that was also nurtured during her childhood and youth was also influential in evolving her educational vision. Through it, she saw her involvement in education as her personal contribution to both her own nuclear family as well as her extended family. Apart from pursuing her degree "for all my children, not for me", assistance to her brothers and sisters was also an important reason for her:

... if I get a good job, I'd be able to help them better you know, give them more than what I can give them now so it'll make me be able to help them more, better.

This contribution extended to role-modelling for the younger generations in her family so that if she got through, she could "be an example too" to her nieces who were about to enter university study.

Not least of all her study reasons was the social esteem that was accorded educated people in the island communities of the USP Region. As this was accorded to her for her educational achievement, so too would her extended family benefit from the 'elevation':

Yeah, I think with our society, that elevates the extended family too, when somebody gets a degree... the fact that it's one of us gets a degree it'll make them look good too.

All of these socially-related educational objectives did not diminish with her less successful endeavour in New Zealand. If anything, what she saw as her failure to achieve in New Zealand made her all the more determined to find and make good a second opportunity which came her way when she heard about distance education on joining the University as an employee. She recalled that 'that's when I thought about
what I had left behind and what I can look forward to. So that's when I decided well I better start”.

2. **The study environment**

As expected, Maria went through the concern and self-doubts, usually associated with the return to study after being away for as long as she had been. The first attempt, therefore, was a crucial confidence factor, as evident in her following comment:

> You know, another thing too was I had left schooling behind for how many years - I think '81 was my last time at school and so I took my first course ... and I sort of went with it with so much fervour, you know. I was wanting to do so well and I'd lost touch so I think the first one I did was really determined to do well. ... I did do well. I got a B but for me that was, oh I did okay because I'd been out of school for so long.

Once over this first hurdle, her confidence to continue was established and improved over the semesters. She became more aware and more critical of her study environment as well as of her own learning abilities. Maria described a study environment balanced between supportive and enhancing features, and those that could be improved. On the positive side, being a university employee meant that she not only found herself daily in an atmosphere of learning, she also had access to amenities and facilities in support of her studies. The campus Library and its resources, for instance, were readily accessible, and so were her subject area specialists. She therefore did not need to physically visit her local USP Centre, although this too, was not a problem as she owned and drove her own car. However, although these facilities were readily available to her, Maria’s favourite study spot was her home.

The thing that she missed most in distance education was the group.

> I think just that relating with students, that's what we need in distance education, ... Even if it wasn't an organised one like we have tutorials, you know maybe the Centre could organise all the students and somehow let us know who's taking what so, if they're taking our units so that we can have a meeting, organise ourselves. ... and then when you come back and you get feedback from your assignments and you can know where you stand in the group, and should you perform better, because you say "oh she got this much so I'm sure I'm capable of doing much better". So you interact, you talk, you know ... ideas and ... you know?
This was an important reason, among others, for the difference in learning quality between on-campus and distance students. She counted herself fortunate in that she had done some of her courses part-time on campus and was able to compare the two learning situations. She had a definite preference for group learning, counting among its benefits, the opportunity to meet with and share ideas with other students.

Well, for instance on campus, because we have those groups, I find that I'm able to bring out more than I would otherwise have, if I was on my own. You know I find that I come up with so many more ideas than if I... because other people are bringing up things and touching on little points and it sort of... I just get that click "oh yeah, I know about that too" so I bring it all out. Whereas I'm on my own, it doesn't... you know, it doesn't hit me.

When asked whether she considered her learning and her status as an extension student as good as that of an on-campus student, she replied

... on-campus they have everything available to them - they have the tutors guiding them along, and I always think it's easier for them to get theirs instead of ours ...

Included in the better deal that on-campus students got was the opportunity to interact and negotiate with tutors whenever it was necessary, on any aspect of study. Maria had a disappointing experience with a late assignment which was refused marking. However, it was not so much that it was not marked as the inconsistency of behaviour among tutors that was particularly upsetting for her. In this respect, she saw being a distance student as a disadvantage because she did not have the opportunity available to an on-campus student to make a personal case in her defence to her tutor. The opportunity to interact directly with her course tutor also had its advantages in terms of assignment feedback over communication in print only. In the latter case, Maria claims

You don't get much of a feedback. It's just "you've done well, well done assignment". You don't want to know really what you've done well, you want to know what you haven't done well so you can do better next time.
One of the things she came to appreciate in her efforts to learn at a distance was the assistance from and co-operation of her family, and in particular, her husband, in order to ensure the success of her studies.

The other thing I could add to that is the family part - how much the husband helps. I think often, at times, it's difficult ... and at that stage when I want to study, it's hard for me because he's ... too tired to want to watch the kids so I have to wait till the kids go to bed and then I study. So I probably start studying about 11 onwards.

Moral support from spouses was just as important as physical support for Maria, probably something she inherited from the past where she was used to being part of a larger group and larger activity which required the co-operation and support of many people.

And encourage you sometimes ... especially when they ... know you have assignments and then they see you sitting in front of the TV, just a word or two or something, you know. "Do you think you should be sitting there? Why don't you go and ..." Just a reminder. That helps.

8.3.4. Learning disposition

1. Personal attributes

There can be no doubt about Maria's high level of motivation to study, and confidence in her ability to do so. What problems she encountered were caused mainly by factors in the external environment. In terms of the time required for part-time distance study, Maria appeared to be in a well-placed situation. In an earlier section, it was seen that she did not have too many other commitments outside of work, family and sports. However, in spite of the seeming availability of time, she soon became aware that becoming disciplined and learning to juggle the priorities in her life were key problems that she knew she had to come to terms with in order to be a successful distance student.
And that was the hard part for me - discipline - because ... see I'm still involved in sports. That is so much a part of my life, and my family life, my husband. So I had to try and work it out between my sports and ... even at this stage I'm still trying to cope with that and I still have to try and realise that one is more important than the other. ... And I still find it so hard to maybe give up one night's sports to study for a few hours. And I'm still trying to get that right.

At the time of interview, she was still trying to reconcile herself to the requirements of independent learning.

You know, funny enough when they said distance education, I never thought about independence. I just thought, just the word distance, that's all. Until I actually started taking it myself then I realised the distance between you and ... the tutor and, you know ... there's nothing really personal like on-campus. Then I started to really get the meaning of distance - I never realised before.

2. External factors

Maria enjoyed courses that had some aspect of relevance for her. With regard to her Management courses, although it did not have much value for the work that she was currently doing as a text processor, she found learning it immediately fulfilling for two main reasons. In the first instance, learning about management principles improved her position in helping her husband with their family business. More importantly, management principles had a direct relationship "to life as well - time management, how you manage your money at home - so that's helped me a lot too".

There was one aspect of her study where she found relevance wanting, and that was with respect to the learning materials. They focussed almost exclusively on ideas and concepts of a foreign nature and made learning a little more difficult for her.

But all the texts that we get, examples are all overseas examples. And if they could change that, give us Pacific island examples that we can relate to I think it'd be better.

However, she felt that she was at an advantage with her overseas educational experience in that she was able to relate to her expatriate tutors at the University. Her following comments suggest that the problem for her was the communication barrier across the different cultures represented by regional students and expatriate teachers.
Well, it’s helped me a great deal because ... I can almost imagine what he’s expecting of me ... So because I’ve had experience with expat teachers and I was brought up in their sort of educational way of thinking and their children’s way of thinking, it’s helped me a great deal, you know, because it’s totally different from our way, our education, the way we were brought up - a new approach.

Her fluency in English was also another factor which facilitated her learning experience. Again, she attributed this in some degree to her overseas experience in an English-speaking country and the fact that all of her schooling, even in Suva, was done in the English language.

8.3.5 Conclusion

In the final analysis, however, the distance mode was the only other option available to people like her, in her circumstances:

We have to work harder, but that’s the choice we’ve made anyway because of ... the fact that we have families and we can’t take time, so that’s the extra ... effort we have to put into, in order to get our degree, compared to the on-campus students where they have everything handed to them. They have lectures, they have everyday meetings, relationships, discussions, whereas we have to do everything on our own.

There was no missing the sense of isolation with which she made this statement. It did not seem like an accident, therefore, that the group meeting she appealed for was couched for its social rather than educational appeal:

That’s why I appreciate that social group meeting.

She also wondered just how much better her learning might be if she did not have all the other time commitments so typical of extension students that affected how much she put into her own study.

... because I’m really tired. I’m not concentrating. So I just wonder whether doing it when I’m really tired and managing to get a B and ... well most of my assignments I’ve been getting A’s and B+’s. I’m just wondering if I do it when I’m not tired I could do better.
She continues therefore in her endeavour to get her priorities right and to come to terms with the need to make the appropriate sacrifices that will improve her opportunities to learn at a distance.

8.4 Case Study 2: Anand

In my work area I always want to be a person who has knowledge of the business. The second thing is in the community I want to be a person with a good education. Like I'm involved in social work so everybody knows that this person how much he's educated. And the third thing is with my education I can get a good job. Now if you have a good job, people recognise you very well he's got a good knowledge that's why he's got a good job - they come to that conclusion.

8.4.1 Demographic and personal information

1. Family background

Anand was born 31 years ago, and spent the first few years of his life in Ba, a small rural town on the western side of Viti Levu, one of the two main islands of Fiji. Not long after he started primary school, the family moved to Korovuto, on the outskirts of Nadi town, location of Fiji’s international airport and centre of the country’s tourist industry. They set up home in a small, two-room unit, built from the father’s savings from the various manual jobs he had held until this point including being a driver for a supermarket firm. The number of children was now four, two girls and two boys all going to primary and high school. Anand described his family life as one run on a very tight budget and to a very well defined plan:

Like the income from my father was enough to run our family and little bit of saving he could do. He used to get groceries from that income and pay our school fees and buy our books and save a little bit of that money, say of the total income he probably was saving 10 percent to 15 percent every week. We were not in this house before. Before we were in a smaller house and this house was built from his income. So this is a six-room house. Before we had a two-room house and now on this saving he managed to get this house and he managed to educate me, my sister and like I said, two brothers, two sisters were educated.

Within this basic two-room unit, the family conducted all of its activities. One room served as kitchen/bedroom, the other was a sitting room/bedroom in which there was
a table. For studying, the children used the table, bed and floor under an oil lamp as, at that stage, they did not have electricity.

Under these severe circumstances, Anand and two other siblings made it through high school. When Anand’s father died, not long after this, Anand was full of regret. Being the older boy, he had vivid memories of his father as the driving force behind his family and in particular, behind the quest for education that dominated throughout.

Very hard working. He, as a person, did not bother to wear a good shirt, a good trousers, a good shoe. But he was much worried that his children get educated. He was much worried that I get high educated and better for my future. And I’m sure that he didn’t thought ever that he would go so soon but before he left, he had house for us, he had educated us up to high school ...

2. Educational experience
Anand did not harbour any regrets about the strictness with which he was brought up. He was able to see the positive results it bore for him in comparison with the lives of some of his peers who he described as being "in a bad position now". He himself completed high school up to Form 6 and then began work in the tourist industry working as an apprentice in the accounts section of one of the large hotels in Nadi. Several jobs later in other international hotels over the years, Anand picked up computing skills and skills in the management area, as well as increasing competence in the field of accounting. One of his employers prompted the return to study by offering to pay for his expenses in an extension course. Although this opportunity was provided, Anand did not accept payment as he felt he was not ready to be bonded to a particular company, preferring, at this stage, to keep his job options open. He succeeded in his first distance course, and since then has continued to study towards a Diploma in Financial Management.

8.4.2 The social environment

1. Current family status
Included in the legacy left behind by his father, were two distinct features: a close-knit and well-managed family unit, and the quest for a better life through education.
Anand’s older sister was now married, lived with her husband and worked as a secretary. The rest of the family, including new additions, were still together: Anand and his wife and two young sons just starting primary school; his brother who was a policeman and was still unmarried, and the younger sister who was the only one still at high school. Anand’s mother took over as the matriarch of the family which reflected the continuing influence of the father’s type of family management:

In the beginning she said no, it shouldn’t be like this, it should be my wife. But I said no, you should have a role in the family as the leader and you should maintain on that one and we should listen to you. See the father was telling the right things and that’s how we came up and we are in a good position and we want to listen to you and you give us good advice and you handle the finance.

The family income consisted of a large contribution from Anand and some financial assistance from his brother, the only other member of the family in paid employment. The budget at this point was described as rather tight in that whatever savings was made from living and other expenses, including Anand’s fees and study-related costs, went into the extension of the family house, ongoing at the time of the interview.

While Anand continued to impose on himself the hard educational discipline characteristic of his father’s household, he himself recognised changing times and the need to go with them in terms of the upbringing of his own children. Their day’s programme was less rigid, and included watching a bit of television, going for car rides and other forms of entertainment, as well as some school work.

2. Socio-cultural involvement

Anand’s social life, at this stage, was cut right down to a minimum. Being in the centre of the tourist trade, and being a hotel accountant, he was in the midst of a group of people for whom socialising was part of the job in many instances. This did not faze him, and he turned down many invitations to cocktail parties and social functions because he knew that drinking and studying did not go together.
Other time-consuming activities were also cut down to what he could cope with and, at this stage, involved being the treasurer for the Parent and Teacher Committee for his children's school. In his estimation, this involved only up to two hours a week on an average, which he was able to afford. He did not include, among his extra activities, any involvement of a religious or cultural nature, because they were insignificant in terms of time commitment.

Anand was well aware of the need to make changes and sacrifices in support of his extension study. His major regret was the fact that he could not spend as much time with his children and family, as well as his friends and workmates, as he would have wanted to. However, he did realise that the investment in his study now, would mean improved opportunities for his family and their social life in the future.

8.4.3 The educational environment

1. The motivation to study

That education formed the pivot around which all of the activities of family life rotated in his childhood, there was no question. Studying was so central to Anand's life then, that he never questioned it:

To me it was just happening - like I need to do this. It's like I could not do anything which I want cause what I wanted was to go and watch movies and play with the other boys which I was not allowed to do.

This attitude towards education prevailed into the adult lives of Anand and his siblings and was most evident in the way family life continued to be organised around study:

Normally in my case, and my sister's too, what happens is that we give them (other members of the family) time to watch TV - ok this is the time to watch TV, eight o'clock you have to go to bed because in the morning you have to wake to go to school. From eight o'clock we start studying.
His return to formal study came almost ten years after high school and therefore, was approached with a lot of apprehension and self-doubt. The fact that this was university-level studies also challenged his confidence, and his ignorance of what to expect from the institution, coupled with inadequate information on how to go about basic study functions generated a fear that resulted in his concern to remain anonymous.

Firstly, the first course was a very short one. At the same time I didn’t know much about it. I used to give a call to USP Centre and I was a bit frightened that those people might know my number and know me. They might think how this person doesn’t know. Most important things I used to ask them like how to do this, you know really nowhere in the book it says you can use a foolscap or you do this, if you can do typing or you handwrite, you know. Those sorts of things - how to do it. You see a study guide and assignment book and then you have assignment. So how to go about it. And you know I met a few students who have already done it and I discuss with them. And I used to ring Fiji Centre to get some information. So beginning it was difficult.

His confidence has built up significantly since this beginning. He continued to believe in the significance of education. For him, gaining further qualifications opened many personal doors: a career in Accounting and Financial Management, higher salary, knowledge of the wide world of accounting, and social esteem.

This latter objective appeared to hover strongly above all of Anand’s educational aims and objectives. Although unmentioned, the inclination towards being a recognised person in society, felt very much like rewarding the social anonymity of the hardworking, self-sacrificing father who pioneered Anand’s move towards educational achievement.

... with my education I can get a good job. Now if you have a good job, people recognise you very well - he’s got a good knowledge that’s why he’s got a good job - they come to that conclusion.

In addition, the monetary benefits in particular, were necessary in order to give his young and growing family, material and other opportunities he never had as a child:

Yes, when we are talking about a better job there’s a better pay too, there. If I get more money I can do good house and look after my children in a more better way. They need more things, they need new bicycle, they need new bag, they need new shoes, so...
In his drive towards achievement, his wife was described as his number one encouragement, making his educational efforts very much a family affair.

2. The study environment

On the physical front, the extension of the home continued to be an important family project. From the original two-room unit, the family now shared more than six rooms among them, with electricity. However, physical study facilities were still far from ideal:

... like sometimes I study here like this and my sister is studying too. She's in Form 7, so we take turns for the table. If I'm writing ... we take turns for that. And sometimes we share the table.

At work, Anand claimed that as much as 60 percent of his learning came from practical applications. However, other circumstances were not as conducive to study enhancement. Management staff, for instance, were often Asian expatriates whose English speaking skills left much to be desired and which tended to influence his own level of operational English which was, by Anand's own admission, not of a high enough standard. In addition, he counted among his weaknesses, the preference for speaking in his mother tongue whenever he could, which did not help him improve his ability to speak English.

I only speak English when I'm speaking to a person who understands English and speaks English only. If that person speaks my language, Hindi, I speak to him in Hindi. I prefer speaking in Hindi than in English because it's my mother tongue.

3. The USP Centre and institutional support

Being so far away from his USP Centre had many regretful elements for Anand's distance study. His Centre is located in Suva, more than 100 kilometres away.

We have our Centre in Suva and when we normally communicate by mail, they send letters to us telling us the time for the examination or telling us any instructions. That plus we are not able to attend the library, get more books on the particular subject. Those two are the main things I'd say. And not to attend any tutorials which USP has for particular courses in the afternoon - I wish I was near the Centre I would attend afternoon classes ...
His only access to assistance provided by the Centre was a Local Tutor who conducted weekly tutorials in support of the accounting course that Anand was enrolled in. This support was invaluable; if he did not have it, Anand estimated it would make a 20 point difference in his assessment marks.

There were other things that would have enhanced his study if he had them. Self-assessment material in the textbooks would have made a difference; the supply of past examination papers by the Centre to give students an idea of examination standards would also have been appreciated. It meant that all the help he needed hung precariously on the shoulder of one person. The enormity of this situation was captured in this articulated thought:

And if the tutor (didn’t have the answer)... I don’t know!

8.4.4 Learning disposition

1. Personal attributes

In spite of the limitations that he faced in terms of learning support, Anand’s very clearly defined educational objectives, the disciplined approach to study nurtured from childhood and his determination to make the changes and the sacrifices required to enable him to accommodate his study helped him to adjust to independent learning without too much trouble. In fact, independent learning was not altogether a new idea for him. He explained that in high school he went from a small rural religious school to a large town school to complete the final year.

... when I was in high school up till Form 5 level I was studying in Korovuto where all the teachers here are trying to get each and every student to write a note and do this, do that, and they check the assignment the next day. And when I go to Sangam College which is in town, they had plenty students. ... And the form teacher used to come - subject teacher - they come, they go; they don’t bother. They come and read this and this and then go. They wouldn’t check the assignment. ... the way they were treating me here and over there, I see the difference. ... and I realised that ... these people wanted us to go and research and study on our own. From
Form 6 I learned - study is ours. We have to bother how to study, how to grab information. If you need something to ask them we ask. Otherwise sort of they were not bothered. So I'm the person to bother how to study. Now when I get this one (extension), I hardly depend on the tutor.

He was now a confident distance education student, his self-esteem having improved over the semesters as his study experience expanded.

2. **External factors**

It would appear, therefore, that by the time Anand came to distance education, he was already equipped with the two most important attributes for learning at a distance - discipline and learning independence. He continued, however, to have a preference for group learning and the opportunity it provided for discussion and the sharing of ideas. His weekly tutorial being only an hour long each time, there was sufficient time only for tutor discussion of the topic of the week. Anand got the maximum out of a tutorial therefore, by listening:

I don’t ask any questions. I listen. Other students they ask. The tutor explains and we go to tutorials, we give the assignments, we get the assignments and some of the notes we write. And after writing the notes I come back and cross-check the topic and make my own notes - very simple notes, very short notes to get into my head to understand the concept rather than the way the tutor wants to explain and get you to understand the whole concept. So I try to learn myself - okay, this is the concept, this is how I'm going to learn.

In many ways, he saw the advantages that on-campus students had over distance education students. They had a lot more time, they had access to lectures and direct access to course tutors, they had the library, and they had one another to share with. Under such circumstances, they were set up for more qualitative learning than the extension student. In his favour, the local tutor was a good friend and he was trusted enough, therefore to be lent his reference books, an opportunity he took advantage of whenever it was necessary.
At home, with the rest of the family in bed at scheduled times, Anand was then able to use the rest of the evening for his studies:

So we start studying ... In my case like at least two hours everyday, but it goes more, normally goes more till 11, 12. If I have to submit the assignment, if I have to give the assignment tomorrow, so I have to finish this today, so sometimes it's one o'clock, two o'clock

8.4.5. Conclusion

Anand has come a long way since the 'beginning'. From being self-conscious about his ignorance of the requirements of university and extension study, he is now a confident student, well aware of the personal attributes that he needs to nurture in order to be able to study successfully, and the kinds of changes and adjustments that he needs to make in and to his environment in order that his learning be facilitated. His responses however, suggest that he feels he can do much better if given the learning opportunities that on-campus students had. He regrets also that employers, in his experience, do not seem to value qualifications obtained by distance as much as they do on-campus qualifications. On the other hand, however, distance education students hold a very important trump card - they are able to work and study at the same time. For many people, as for him, this opportunity was imperative, and an overriding one.

8.5 Case Study 3: Ana

Yes, I mean, you know, in the society they look at you that you are 20 going on to 25 up to 30 it's either they think ... oh what's wrong with you! But I have learned to ignore what comments that they have. Only if they ask me why aren't you getting married then I say well I want to be independent, that's all. I want to develop my own career, I want to do what I want to do.
8.5.1 Demographic and personal data

1. Family background

At 32 years of age, Ana was, as she declared, still single by choice. She lived with her parents, her unmarried brother and an 'adopted' daughter in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, where she was born and raised. Under pressure from her mother to get married so that she would have someone to look after her in her old age, she saw the solution in the adoption of her child. In the following description of the 'adoption', the fact that cultural protocols and norms were still very much alive in Ana's life, was evident:

... then there came a time when my brother and the wife, they had this child and he rang me (they're in Australia) to say - well it's in our culture that the sisters are the ones who are in higher rank and you know the brother's children, I have the right to do what I want with them. And so right from the beginning when the baby is born it's the sister who gives the name. So he rang me and then I said oh then this must be something that will cool off my mother, you know, will stop her from saying these things. So I asked my brother to name the baby after me and then at the same time I said if you want me to look after the child I'm most willing to ... firstly I wanted to have the child because I want to, knowing that I have nothing to spend my money on, my resources, whatever. She will be somebody very dear to me and also ... I said mum look, there's someone here who will look after me so stop pushing me to get married because it's not what I want. So my brother was willing then to give the child so I sent my mother to Australia and she brought back the baby, five months old, and now she's four.

Ana's daughter was not legally adopted, she was fostered in the 'Tongan sense' which was suggested in her comments above, in which case "you don't sign papers or documents but it's agreeable, it's understood".

As a USP Economics and Management graduate, Ana worked first as an administrative officer for the Ministry of Civil Aviation for one and a half years. From here, she moved on to a regional organisation involved in projects on family health in the South Pacific Region. In this organisation she continued in the capacity of administrative officer, although her job now involved travelling to other parts of the Pacific, servicing meetings organised by the office.
2. **Educational experience**
Ana did all of her primary and high school education in Tonga and went as far as sixth form. Her school life was uneventful in that she progressed through its requirements as a matter of course. Her parents gave her the support of parents who knew that good education held opportunities for a better economic future for their children. However, beyond high school, they did not have very much enthusiasm, most probably because it was an area which they knew nothing about. Ana described their reaction to her current studies as follows:

... the truth is they didn’t care whether I took extension study or not. Maybe they are not interested ...I don’t see them happy when I say I’m taking an extension course but I think if I was saying to them, “oh, I’ve got another degree”, they would be thrilled ...

Ana completed her first degree at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, in 1988, and began work in 1989.

8.5.2 **Social environment**

1. **Current family status**
Ana and her family still lived in Nuku’alofa where she worked, and her daughter went to preschool. Her father, who used to work for the church, was now a retired teacher. Her brother worked as a civil servant and her mother ran a small retail store from home. With her salary, Ana helped with the support of her family, and was entirely responsible for her daughter’s upkeep as well as her own. She paid for her own education, taking advantage of the USP Centre’s time-payment scheme which enabled her to cope with her financial obligations.

2. **Socio-cultural involvement**
Ana’s community work and cultural commitments were undertaken through the Youth Groups of her church, and Christian Workers Fellowship, of which she was a member. In her description of her commitments to the work of these groups, the interplay
between culture and institutional politics was quite evident. Trying to disassociate the two was part of her commitments:

We have this workers fellowship it's a christian meeting every week of all these government employers. And we also have some cell groups who also attend the youth activities you know the church activities. And there's also a separate group - it's called the Beloved Youth of Kolomotu'a - it's not under the church they want it independent of the church regardless of so that any youth in the district from any religion can join, be a member, which is something that I tried. I tried to get the youth group out, separate it from youth activities which is under the church umbrella.

Some of the activities associated with her Youth Groups she described as culturally-associated. The community element was also obvious:

For instance, suppose that there is this wedding and it's always the youth who goes to the homes and helps in the preparations of this, preparations of that. Any funeral, the girls they go sweep out the place help the elderly women and all that. And at the moment we also have a communal yam garden where not only youth but we also have elderly men, you mean men who also wants to join in. We have separate plots allotted to each and every member which is every two weeks one has got to go and see which one is the best where... We'll harvest it next year and distribute it to some needy members in the community, and give share to the pastor.

Aside from these activities, Ana also participated in the Parent-Teacher Association of the International Montessori School where her daughter was enrolled as a pupil. This entailed attending council meetings of the school. She was also a member of the school fundraising committee. All of these tasks, including work and those related to the household, took up the bulk of her time so that she admitted that "... sometimes it's just too much."

8.5.3 The educational environment

1. The motivation to study

The opportunity to return to study was provided by her employer who offered to pay for her enrolment. Her description of this offer as "something I value" reflected her appreciation for the opportunity. The reason for giving it serious thought came from two sources: her great interest in Accounting, and a situation at work. In the latter case,
there had been an on-going problem with finding a permanent accountant for the organisation which resulted in the hiring of several people in temporary positions. This caused the organisation much inconvenience and Ana saw a partial solution in improving her own Accounting qualifications so that she could assist with this aspect at work. Aside from providing her with qualifications that would be useful to her work in the organisation, the fact that it would complement her current qualifications would improve her future job prospects.

The fact that other members of staff were also taking extension courses added to the motivation to take up studying again:

We've also got a physician ... she's also taking a management course. And it's kind of fun, you know we all come together ...

2. The study environment

Ana did most of her study after hours at work, on days when she was not committed elsewhere. This was because her daughter presented a major distraction for her:

... how I manage my time for studies is after work here because I can't do much studies at home because my child is always there. Except if there's no meeting after hours ... the preschool or the youth group ... I will stay here (in the office) after hours and do my work.

She supplemented this time with some study on Sunday, although that too, had its problems:

And also sometimes on Sundays, when my families go to church, although it's not acceptable at home I also take my textbook home and do my reading.

Her family was not very happy with this situation because Sunday was set aside for church services. Ana's family, along with the rest of the community, attended two services on Sunday and she was expected to do the same. On the occasions when she did some work on Sunday, she skipped the morning service which was not without the
displeasure of the family and community. Fortunately for Ana, there was a compensatory option:

No, not a big pressure because see if I miss going to church morning service, then my going to afternoon service is sort of telling them, oh, she made it up ...

However, the fact that the social pressure did exist meant that she was able to use her Sundays in this way only when it was absolutely necessary.

The pressure that she did find overwhelming was that of revision of her course materials for her final examination. Her comments below indicated how busy she was with work and her other commitments resulting in her inability to take time off when she required it:

But it was only at the end when I had to have a whole day or two days to do my revisions I couldn’t ... find the time.

However, this was all part of the experience she gained in studying by distance over one semester, which enabled her to cope fairly comfortably under the circumstances of her current enrolment, and in the time available to her for it:

... and I find that from what I’ve gone through last semester, semester one, I could manage.

This was certainly a reflection of the ability to control and manage her time well, a quality that might well have been enhanced by her experience with university study on campus and her familiarity with the requirements of university courses, as well as her more limited experience over one semester of distance study.

3. The USP Centre and institutional support

In terms of her expectations of support from her USP Centre, it appeared that other than administrative support and the provision of information pertinent to her study programme, as well as facilities for both local and satellite tutorials, Ana’s response did
not indicate that anything more could be expected. This came out quite clearly in her following comments:

I think the USP Centre is very good, the support, I mean. From my experience I go there to look for my assignments, there's always somebody there at the counter. Once I say I want to check whether my assignment is there, she checked it right away. Otherwise I'd feel disappointed. And also I go there to find out how much is the rest of my fees to be paid before the exams. ... is always there to run up and down and look for it instantly, which is something I appreciate. It's very good the supporting facilities.

Any information she got was limited to her course and study programme and she indicated that other information pertaining to the University and matters related to it, would be useful for students studying remotely from it. Access to the Centre was also an obstacle to attendance of the learning support activities organised by the Centre. Although the Centre is only 8 kilometres from the Centre of Nuku'alofa, the bus service to and from it was infrequent after hours and taxi fares expensive for most students. This meant that students like her could not benefit as much from learning support opportunities as those with private means of transportation. In this context, Ana's description of the Centre as being "right out there" was understandable, and her request for the USP to organise transportation of students for tutorials, appreciable.

The other major problem that Ana had was with the scheduling of satellite tutorials with her course tutor in Suva, by the USP Centre. These usually occurred during the day and while her employer was willing to pay for her studies, work policy forbade the attendance of other activities during work hours:

Sometimes the satellite is at three o'clock or four o'clock. Sometimes I just can't ... I couldn't make it because I cannot get out from this place because we made it clear at the beginning that let not your studies interrupt your work here ...

For someone used to the lecture method of on-campus education and the opportunity for direct tutor interaction that it offered, this represented a major shortcoming for Ana.
8.5.4 Learning disposition

1. Personal attributes

Ana’s decision to resume study was part of her overall objective of placing her first priority on the development of her career. Part of achieving this objective was her decision to remain single, a decision which could not be taken lightly in the Tongan community. Her explanation showed how close-knit Tongan society was and how strong social pressure could be in ensuring appropriate cultural behaviour in the community. It also carried an indication of the strength of personality and motivation that was needed in Ana’s case for her to continue to be able to stand up for what she wanted:

Yes, I mean, you know, in the society they look at you that you are 20 going on to 25 up to 30 it’s either they think ... oh what’s wrong with you! But I have learned to ignore what comments that they have. Only if they ask me why aren’t you getting married then I say well I want to be independent, that’s all. I want to develop my own career, I want to do what I want to do.

With this kind of determination, Ana faced the challenges of distance study with the positive attitude to be expected of her, although not without the initial misgiving about attempting something new and different:

When I got my textbooks from the Centre and I came back home first thing that I felt was that I miss the tutor-student face-to-face discussion back in Fiji where you can ask questions directly everyday because you have these tutorial classes. But also it was a challenge for me to try this different thing altogether, out, see if I can make it. Because see in Fiji you have a tutor there but at the same time you can have the attitude like back in Fiji even though the tutor was there but every time I can run away from class I don’t appreciate it but now I said I’ll do it myself and see if I can make it. That was the first thing that I missed was talking directly - getting ... the information directly from the tutor.

It took her just a semester to come to terms with the requirements of independent learning. In her case, the challenges were quite a few as were apparent in her following comments:

I think I enjoy working on my own. When ... everybody’s gone home and I sat down to ... get things out from the textbook alone I really put all my effort into this ... my studies because I knew the tutor is not there and the Centre is right out there and I have to do it and because the
deadline is next week. I have to do it and finish it. So because there was no tutor here like I had at USP I said I have to get it, the answer is right here in the textbook and I have to get it.

One of the main challenges of independent study for Ana, was the level of English and the special language of Accounting that she had to cope with on her own. Because she was unfamiliar with Accounting vocabulary and terms, she faced the need to put in an extra effort and therefore extra reading time:

If I read it once I wouldn't understand, but if I read it again and slowly, going through it slowly ... because it's instructions - debit this, credit this - I could follow it certainly. ... always have to turn to the examples that it's giving ... if not it would be hopeless for me.

2. External factors
Besides not having sufficient opportunity to interact directly with her course tutor, and not having easy access to the facilities at the USP Centre, Ana was also dissatisfied with her local tutor. She felt he did not challenge her enough in the marking of her assignments and although not directly, she appeared to question his credibility as a tutor:

Because to be honest, some of my assignments I received during the coursework ... I received assignments rated A's. But I don't know why I just felt that I shouldn't have got A's. Maybe because I was biased because I thought it's because he is a Tongan tutor, ... maybe he didn't mark it properly. Because I would rather see a B or a C+ ... But getting these A's I kind of say oh he's local maybe he ... marked it just to finish it off and ... because then the A's ... kind of tells me false hope ... I say oh this is okay, I can make it through the exams because I've got A's I won't put in too much effort because now I approximate, I get 45 percent course work ...

If it were indeed the case that her work did not have adequate supervision and assessment, this situation would represent a significant variation in the learning opportunities of USP distance students. For people like Ana, sincerely motivated towards learning, the amount and quality of learning she was doing would be suspect and might well influence her performance in the final examinations. For others,

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At the time of interview, the Accounting course that Ana was enrolled in required the submission of weekly tutorial assignments.
interested only in the qualifications that the courses brought, passing the course was essentially reduced to putting the bulk of the student's effort into the final examination.

Another shortcoming in her study programme was the insufficient provision of tutorial and group support. She was quite clear about the benefits that she would derive from this opportunity, particularly as a relative newcomer to the accounting field:

... because we have different levels of knowledge of this accounting thing and for me I know so little while some of my classmates are experienced people from government ministries. They've been working in accounting departments of these ministries for years and years and they know more, whereas for me I have to get it from the textbooks only and my job here does not involve any accounting ... Sharing, yeah, sitting there and listening and learning from the others I would know more.

8.5.5 Conclusion

By inference, then, Ana's comments suggest that USP students studying in the different modes, can expect to be treated differently in terms of the provision of learning support and study facilities. In her experience, they are treated differently. Being in a position to be able to judge, having been an on-campus student, it is obvious from her following statement that she has a strong preference for her on-campus student experience:

Uh it's funny because I feel more a part of the University in Fiji. I don't feel the same as this extension Centre, I don't.

For the time being, going away to study on a full-time basis is out of the question because of the strong attachment she has to her daughter and vice-versa. However, her career development plans and her determination to meet the challenges of distance education as the only opportunity currently available to her to pursue them, are factors and qualities in her life which make her future plans seem highly feasible. Her on-campus experience probably stands her in good stead in so far as the requirements and level of university studies are concerned. There is also no discounting the support she gets from her family, in spite of their apathy to her involvement in studies. This is shown in the exemption from household obligations that she gets when she has to do her studies.
In all, therefore, Ana seems poised for a successful programme of distance studies in the semesters ahead of her.

8.6 Case Study 4: Simon

... it would depend on how I do my studies and how much time I have. ... I can assure you that I don’t believe in failing ’cause I’m sure that everybody can go through it. One person can go through it, there’s no reason why we shouldn’t be able to go through it.

8.6.1 Demographic and personal information

1. Family background

Simon, now 22 years old, was born in Wagina, Solomon Islands, to iKiribati parents. The island of Wagina was allocated for settlement to iKiribati immigrants in the 1950s, so he spent his childhood among people of his culture group. His mother had had two previous marriages from which she had one son each. Simon was the eldest in her third marriage which produced another three sons and the only daughter of the family. Simon described the relationships in the family as a good one where all the siblings "get along very well". He attributed this to the fact that they were all brought up by his biological father, and were all treated equally.

He also described his family as a 'very poor' one. When Simon was still of pre-school age, his family moved to another island, Kolombangara, where his father worked as a labourer in the forestry industry. After this, on their return to Wagina, he worked as a cook on a tug boat. His mother never worked, staying at home to take care of her large family. Simon attributed the family's low economic status to the fact that both his parents never went to school and, by implication therefore, could not get well-paid jobs.

2. Educational experience

Simon started his primary schooling at Kolombangara and completed it at Wagina when the family returned there. He remembered his uncle who was the headmaster of the school at Wagina, as the driving force behind him then:
He's the one who always, you know, sort of push me all the time - go to school and never to miss doing my studies and all this.

Simon saw this source of support and encouragement as crucial to his schooling because his own parents had an apathy to education that Simon attributed to their own lack of it.

You know, I mean because they are people who are not educated so they don't really worry about it. Probably if I finish at form five level they will just think that it's all right you can still get a job.

On completion of his primary education, Simon came to Honiara to undertake secondary schooling at the national high school. He was fortunate that by this time his eldest brother was working and was able to pay for his fees. More than this, he also provided the encouragement and moral support through high school. Having himself won a government scholarship to undertake and complete a university degree in Australia, he, no doubt had the same vision of achievement for his younger brother in the advice that he often gave him:

... see what I did. Do what I teach you, you will be successful.

The vision took shape in reality in 1991 when Simon went to the University of Papua New Guinea to pursue a medical degree on a government scholarship. However, his studies were disrupted six months later by student riots on campus. He returned home, and in the following year was sent to the University of the South Pacific in Fiji on another government scholarship. This opportunity was foiled by ill health, and Simon returned once again to Honiara. His scholarship was terminated at this point.
8.6.2 Social environment

1. Current family status

Subsequently, Simon married a Solomon Islander and they had a baby son. The three of them lived with his wife’s family in Honiara where Simon worked in one of the banks in town. With his income he supported his wife and child, as well as contributed food and things that he could afford for the extended household. He also paid for his own education, and his fees and study-related expenses constituted the initial deduction from his salary. However, he described himself as ‘coping well’ with all of his economic commitments.

2. Socio-cultural involvement

Aside from the responsibilities of his family life, Simon’s social and cultural life was lived at a minimum. For instance, there was very little involvement that could be described as culturally-obligated. Simon ascribed this situation to the fact that both he and his wife now lived away from their culture groups and therefore were not physically present to be expected to participate in cultural activities. However, the situation would have been different if he were ‘back home’:

‘If it was back home, yes I think it will be almost every week.

Social life in Honiara was therefore restricted to the occasional visits from and to relatives living in town. There also did not seem to be any religious obligations:

‘I don’t go to church very often. In fact I haven’t been to church the whole of this year.

Simon’s only other time commitment, aside from work and the family, was a maximum of five hours a week to sports, usually after work.'
8.6.3 The educational environment

1. The motivation to study

It was evident from Simon’s attitude to study that education had a significant role to play in his life and his future plans for his family’s progress and development. It has already been seen that this perception was instilled in him from an early age, and nurtured in later years, by educated family members. This early motivation towards education appeared to continue to have an effect in Simon’s refusal to give up in spite of two unsuccessful attempts at university education, and his almost dogmatic continued pursuit of further potential opportunities.

I was really disappointed but I’ve been trying many other ways to find funding for studies for this problem... Yeah, that’s why I thought to myself I’d better not let any chance run away anymore. I’ve wasted the other two already.

Simon now had an opportunity to compete for a scholarship to study computer systems engineering in Australia. His present enrolment in USP distance education courses was mainly to improve his eligibility for it.

On the family plane, his newly-acquired marital and family status also provided him with strong personal reasons, and sharpened the urgency for improving his qualifications at the earliest opportunity:

I think one of the main reasons now that is giving me the motivation to go further is that because I’m now having a family and that is a major problem. Like if I was on my own I wouldn’t mind if I just continue where I am now and maybe getting probably a better chance in the future, later in the future. But right now... I see that my family is very in need of financial assistance and a lot more.

Implicit in the above comments was the connection between educational achievement and improved economic status and conditions for himself and his family. The ‘better pay’ that he aspired towards would help them get a ‘better home’ among other necessities for the improvement of their family circumstances.
2. The study environment

The ambition for a better home can be better appreciated, juxtaposed against his current physical situation. Simon and his family occupied a room in the family home of his wife’s parents. All other facilities in the house were shared, but Simon’s study was done in their bedroom. With a wife, and especially a baby to accommodate as well, this posed problems for him such as his lack of control over study times described below:

I only have a certain limit to the time I have to do my work because if my child feels like going to bed I have to put off the light. Because we don’t have a house on our own so we sort of live in just a room of that house and so if I use the light, when my child goes to sleep I have to put off the light and that will be the end of the work that I’m doing. ... Sometimes he gets up very early in the morning so that was also when I also have time like when he wakes up at four and probably stays up for the rest of the morning. I can get up and then do my work because even though I put on the light he will be playing around although he gives me some disturbance ...

Being involved in his studies also meant that Simon was unable to afford much time to assist his wife in family-related responsibilities. This sometimes put a strain on their relationship which was an additional problem for him:

Sometimes my wife gets fedup looking after the kid but I sort of have to encourage her - it’s very important that I sit down and do my work ...

On the other hand, the offer by Simon’s employers of a half day off each week for his studies provided him with much needed balance in his study situation. Given his home situation and family conditions, this opportunity was a much-appreciated one because it was regularly available and he was therefore able to control his use of it with regard to his studies.

3. The USP Centre and institutional support

Overall, Simon appeared to be disappointed in his USP Centre, suggesting that there was much that needed improvement in its study and learning support programmes and facilities. In his comments there was a strong suggestion that the learning opportunities provided by his course materials needed to be supported and enhanced by other means. In this respect, Simon’s main criticism of his extension studies was the lack of, or
inadequate tutorial support in the system. This was making the difference, for him, in the quality of his learning, or, as he put it, in his ability to cope:

To me at the moment I am coping quite well, not very well, but quite well. Cause I know that I've been having some quite hard time with my time - same thing with my Maths because we don't have a tutor and that is one of the subjects that is really challenging and we really need a tutor for that - we don't seem to have one.

With regard to library support, he found a major drawback in the level of science books held by the Centre library which he described as "very early secondary level" and therefore of not much use to him. The Honiara Library was not a viable option either because although he had time available in the lunch hour, the distance to the library meant that he would not be able to make it there and back on time.

A more feasible option for him and other students in his situation, was peer group assistance during which students could support one another by pooling their experiences, knowledge and information. However, even here, problems were encountered, particularly with respect to organising group meetings among students with varied time schedules and commitments. Simon saw the assistance of the USP Centre as crucial in situations such as these:

I think if the Centre make arrangements in such a way that we can come together and meet and discuss about the problems that we have like that, than probably it (the Centre) would give us a really really good benefit. ... Yeah, in the Centre I think I don't see much encouragement from the Centre.

8.6.4 Learning disposition

Simon's criticism of his study support environment as an extension student was perhaps a reflection of the learning orientation that he had acquired from having been a full-time student for more than a year. It was not surprising, therefore, that he found studying independently the biggest challenge in distance education:
I think the biggest challenge that I faced when I first started extension study was that, you know, doing your work without the lecturer. And sometimes we don’t have tutors as well which is one of the major problems. Cause all we have is our course books and all this. But I mean all of these course books you know, the way the things are explained in them are not that clear as you would expect. Sometimes you’d really need, you know, some sort of assistance. Like if your tutor can go through it with you, then I think you’d probably find it easier.

These comments appeared to suggest two things: an inclination towards group and face-to-face learning, and the inadequacy of his course materials for independent learning. It was also possible that the two situations were related and that the inadequate course materials were cause, in his case, for need of tutorial and group support. His inclination towards group learning was rationalised largely by the opportunity it provided to interact and share ideas and information with other students. However, in his case, it was not so much the opportunity to ‘borrow’ from one another, as it was a means of stimulating his own thinking by the discussion and exchange. This was evident in his following comment:

To me I think that’s the only way you can learn a lot. Like if we share ideas and exchange ideas of how we do things then I think we will be able to gain more. ... Yeah. Like if I do my assignment, for example, myself, then if I find it difficult and there’s no one else I can talk to, you know to sort of discuss the matter, not to copy the answer but to sort of discuss the problems, then probably we can come to a consensus because he might have a different idea as well on how he approach it.

In his comparison of the USP on-campus and distance education programmes, there was an implication that the latter was seen by the community as second-rate and a soft option for less competent students. He indicated that in the Solomon Islands, more competitive students were selected for study abroad, the others remaining behind to take up local opportunities such as USP extension courses. He admitted that he probably felt that way himself!

However, in the final analysis, Simon was quite adamant that successful studying and learning was dependent primarily on the individual’s commitment to it. Everyone had the potential for successful learning by extension. As he explained it:

I can assure you that I don’t believe in failing cause I’m sure that everybody can go through it. One person can go through it, there’s no reason why we shouldn’t be able to go through it.
However, to “be able to go through it” there had to be a readiness to do the work required of the student, and to commit the time required to do the work:

... it would depend on how I do my studies and how much time I have. ... It’s just that if you don’t do your work because of maybe time or maybe because you just don’t feel like doing it, that’s when ...

He strengthened his point by citing the example of the student who left school at Standard 6 but was currently successfully involved in Form 6 level work at the Centre.

8.6.5 Conclusion

In light of Simon’s description and criticism of the lack of support for extension studies that he is experiencing, his comments on successful learning at a distance contain strong suggestions of the need for qualities of independence. In particular, self-determination, time-management and the ability to seek out additional support where necessary, are key elements of success. The ability to learn, as far as he is concerned, is inherent. Perhaps this kind of confidence is bred from the realisation that the individual’s destiny is largely composed of two main elements: the opportunities for development present in the environment, and the personal decision to use them. In Simon’s case, two key people, in his youth, initiated the awareness of the value of education for life in the modern world, that influenced the development of his current outlook. Along the way, no doubt, other factors in his life, such as family life, economic need, unsuccessful first attempts at university education, and personal determination for achievement, helped to sharpen and add other dimensions to this outlook. At this stage, he is confident as a student, his educational plans well-determined, and their place in his future well-understood.

So I seem to be getting on, everything is looking positive and I hope that after completing the course that I’m doing I will be able to go for further qualification.
8.7 Case Study 5: Teri

...to help me in my job and also he told me this is really important to have further education so that's why I'm planning to just take accounting plus they check all my report and they find out that I am good in accounting just weak English but not much so they help me take courses.

8.7.1 Demographic and personal information

1. Family background

Teri's parents were working on Ocean Island, a phosphate rich island west of Kiribati, when she was born there 25 years ago. There were seven children altogether, four brothers and three sisters; she was the fifth child. When she was 12 years old, the family returned to their home island in Kiribati, while she continued her education in Tarawa, the administrative capital of the island republic.

Her parents did not have much education. Her father completed primary school only and her mother went a little further, to about two years at a local high school. As a result, they managed only manual work on Ocean Island, as domestic workers for phosphate mining officials. However, they did not want the same kind of life for their children and aspired towards providing them with the education that would ensure them better jobs. Teri described her father's ambitions in this regard as follows:

Because that time he's not really have a good job at Ocean Island and so they want us to be ... have a good future. ... Yeah, because he only earn a little money not much as those who pass [complete high school]. And so they plan for us to have further education and encourage us ...

With this vision for the future of their children, Teri's parents developed in them the desire to get as much education as possible, encouraging them in various ways and means. They went to the extent of finding alternative schools for the children if they were not successful in the schools they were enrolled in. In Teri's estimation, the bulk of their parents' earnings from Ocean Island was spent educating their children. It might
have been a result of this esteem for education by the parents that caused Teri herself to be proactive in the pursuit of her own educational opportunities.

2. Educational experience

When Teri was 12 years old, she returned to Tarawa and tried to find a place in high school. She claimed that because her mother was not a Catholic before she got married, the attitude to this by the church authorities was such that it was difficult for her to get a place in a Catholic high school, even though she had passed her entrance examination. Hence she decided to become a Mormon and pursue her education through the Mormon high school in Tarawa. At the end of third form she was selected out of 72 students, in a group of 15, to continue the rest of high school to Form 6, in Tonga. This achievement was an indication of her high aptitude as well as her determination to get ahead. She described this period of her life with great zest, from the excitement of her first trip overseas, to the experience of a new way of life in a different country and culture. In this experience, she remembered in particular, being able to shed the cultural restrictions and inhibitions imposed on her in her own country.

Because in other place, and maybe because we don't have like my own people, maybe I can involve with other people and we can discuss - that's what I always have in mind when I was in school.

At Liahona High School in Tonga, she took up Accounting because she realised she had an aptitude for it and could make a career of it:

Yes, like when I was in Liahona High School, I'm good in Accounting, so that way I know that accounting is like my fieldwork [future career prospects] and whether I can have a job of that. Also I know that if I do the accounting I think I will be pass 'cause I know the kind of knowledge of that.
8.7.2 Social environment

1. Current family status

On completion of high school, Teri served two years of mission work in Guam. She returned to a job as an accounts clerk in the Fisheries Department of government in Tarawa, where she lived with her brother, his wife, a niece and a nephew. As yet, she is still single, with good prospects in her Accounting career. Her skill at accounting earned her a promotion to senior accounts clerk in 1991, with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Employment, a job that she currently holds. With her income she continues to help support her parents, now living on their home island, as well as pay for her study expenses.

2. Socio-cultural involvement

Aside from work, Teri was involved in a lot of church-related activities. She attended services regularly on Sunday, and was the president of the young Mormon women's association. In this capacity, she organised charitable community activities in which the young women of the church participated. One such project was the assistance to widows in the community:

We have like a service for the widows - we can help them out maybe just only a weekend like Saturday we all go out and help them. We spend maybe two hours.

She was also involved in recreational sports organised for after work by ministry staff, but this occurred only once a week and did not take up much of her time. What she appeared to resent was the time she felt was wasted in social protocols and obligatory commitment to activities involving the extended family and culture group. When people visited, for instance, she was caught up in the small talk:

Like they talk too much - like we don't have time because that's our custom too, if someone talk you cannot leave.
There was also the matter of family activities and social functions:

Maybe the family if they like to have a party or something like that then they will bring us like to help first instead of doing our studies. Other relatives, not my dad but people they come and ask us if we can go to their place and help them.

8.7.3 The educational environment

1. The motivation to study
This might well be traced back to the days of her childhood which was characterised by a priority on going to school imposed on the family by her parents. Later on, at about the time of her promotion to senior accounts clerk, she was encouraged by her brother to enrol in extension courses in order to improve her Accounting qualifications and consequently, her career prospects in the Accounting field. At work, a memo was sent to everyone informing them that

... if we have like a diploma maybe you can jump, maybe earn more money, promotion, increase your wages - make me more careful for that - encourage me.

Financial assistance schemes offered by her employers and her local USP Centre also provided incentive towards the positive consideration of extensions studies. There was a refund of fees by the Ministry for every course passed. In addition, she was able to cope with her study-related expenses by taking advantage of the time-payment scheme offered by her local USP Centre which she described as 'a good help'.

With her own high aptitude and interest in Accounting, all of these considerations were more than sufficient to get her involved. However, although her last formal education experience was, as yet, still within fairly clear memory, she approached her initial involvement in extension studies with some misgiving and self-doubt, her confidence in herself as a student returning after the first successful attempts at studying.
2. The study environment

Within her small family unit, Teri did not appear to have any problem with physical study facilities at her brother's home, although she did not say whether or not this meant she had her own room. However, being satisfied with what she had was a fortunate situation because although her brother gave her the initial encouragement to study, and continued to offer her his support, he also enforced a traditional requirement that his sister always return home before nightfall.

... that's another problem like when I do my private study at USP maybe almost at nights, my brother get mad of that. ... He get mad because it's not right that girls ... they shouldn't leave the place at dark, they should leave before the night.

This had implications for study support opportunities provided after hours:

That's another problem like if we have a tutorial and then if I don't have ... not enough time for me so I just leave the class right away.

Aside from the restriction on her ability to participate in learning opportunities, Teri lived with the constant knowledge that at 25 years of age, she was still subject to parental chastisement and physical punishment for wrongdoing. Although not explicitly discussed, it was implicit in her responses and her reference to 'girls' that this situation was specifically related to her gender and unmarried status. The customary before-dark curfew was intended to not only protect their reputations as 'good girls', it was to ensure their physical protection. The fact that she saw her brother and her father in particular, as the guardian of these statuses, gave a clear indication that Kiribati females were restricted to a clearly defined gender role within the society, and that males stood in supervision over the observance of this role by the women in their charge. There was an element of fear in her discussion of the potential reaction of her father if she should step outside of this boundary:

Like if he (brother) get mad maybe ... I don't know, maybe they will send me home. I don't know ... Maybe they will tell my parents, my dad, and I don't know about my ... My dad is not a good man like once we make a mistake I don't know what he's gonna do to us.
Most of Teri’s study, therefore, was done at home, after work and after her household chores. Her ‘before dark’ curfew also meant that she was almost totally reliant on her course materials for her learning, having very little time to use the facilities and services provided elsewhere, and particularly by her local USP Centre.

8.7.4 Learning disposition

Teri described her process of settling into distance study as ‘lazy’, although on further reflection she realised that her initial slowness to respond to the requirements of her course was due to her lack of preparedness and self-discipline. Into her study programme, the opportunity to interact with her fellow students became an enjoyable experience for her. Again this reflected the sociable nature that contributed to the fulfilling experience in Tonga. For her, the most enhanced feature of her extension experience was the opportunity for group learning, when it occurred:

Yeah, I prefer the extension because I’m involved with other friends and maybe they have an idea and then maybe they discuss and they have different ideas and then maybe they can combine with mine and I can do mine.

This did not preclude a preference for direction and also for being taught, which was conveyed in terms of her enjoyment of the summer courses for which lectures and face-to-face teaching were provided. She was also disappointed with the lack of tutorial support for her current extension course.

Discouraging part like when we don’t like have tutorial - like we don’t have a man to provide for us to be our tutor.

It was fortunate, therefore, that Teri was able to learn from the practical experience afforded her by her job.

Sure, it help me a lot ... like I know like the budget and some other thing, I can do it. Like last year our SAS - senior assistant secretary, he asked me to just draft my estimate for this ministry so I just did up the budget and I just give to them and they know that I’m good.
This, plus a friend who was ahead of her in the programme and who was approachable for assistance, provided the alternative options for learning, although did not altogether compensate for the lack of tutorial support.

One other obstacle to learning for Teri was her level of English expression. Her primary school subjects were taught in the vernacular, and it was not until high school that English became the teaching medium. Later, in Tonga, English speaking was enforced, although Teri continued to speak in her native tongue whenever she had the opportunity, a habit which prevailed to this day. As a result of inadequate background in, and experience with the English language, Teri now found that although she understood English fairly well, she had a problem with written and oral expression. Her halting explanation of her problem with the language was indicative of her level of difficulty:

Like English - I understand but only a little bit. ... It's okay but, ... yeah, like in talking it's kinda hard.

This had implications for the quality of her course work and assignments, and to a lesser extent, for her understanding of her course materials. It was likely that this shortcoming was a partial reason for her tendency to learn through work experience and practice.

8.7.5 Conclusion

Teri admits that over the years she has become adept at studying at a distance because she now knows what to expect and is better disciplined. She counts herself lucky too, that her study is relevant to her job which provides opportunities for her to put new information into practice and learn from the situation. She feels, however, that USP qualifications obtained through extension do not rate as highly as those obtained on campus. This is perhaps due to the fact that on-campus studies are done at the university proper, while extension courses have less of that association. Consequently, on-campus courses are perhaps more academic in nature compared to the more socially organised extension course. She describes it thus:
Maybe because they thought that it's like academic more than social having in extension here.

She also refers to the fact that on-campus education is 'overseas' education and therefore has more esteem in the eyes of the community. These attitudes do not faze her too much though; as far as she is concerned

We all plan to pass by working hard so that I can have the same level...

She herself admits a preference for full-time study on campus, but if she put as much as she had into her extension studies, she deserves the same recognition of achievement accorded the on-campus student. She is certainly willing to accord it to herself, if nobody else did!

8.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has focussed on the lives, as distance education students, of five of the study respondents in the form of a narrative. No attempt was made to link the information with that in any of the previous chapters in any detailed way as it was intended primarily to add depth and detail to the composite discussion in Chapter 7 and to provide real life contexts for the statistical outcomes in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.
CHAPTER 9: OVERVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

9.1 The chapter in brief

Chapter 9 is a synthesis of the results of the various ways in which data from this study has been treated and brings together the outcomes of the statistical analysis of the questionnaire data as well as the qualitative interpretation of the interview data. This is followed by a discussion of the findings with respect to the study objectives and questions and also in terms of their comparability with research findings in the literature. The final section of the chapter covers the results of multiple regression and analysis of variance procedures and the implications which these have for the USP distance education programme.

9.2. Introduction

In Chapter 1 the USP and its Region were presented as the context of this study, unique in that the USP is the only regional University of its kind in the world, owned by and serving 12 island nations, scattered across more than 30 million square kilometres of ocean in the South Pacific. In this presentation, the influence of the diverse and heterogeneous nature of the Region on the personal, situational and study environments of the USP distance students was seen as a significant cause of the variant learning needs throughout its member countries. This diversity, across the Region’s physical, socio-cultural, political and economic dimensions (see Tuimaealial’ifano, 1990), emerged as the single, most challenging factor in the realisation of the educational goals of the USP. In summary, on the physical front, nations of the Region are either a single island or comprised of several scattered islands. The islands are either coral atolls or volcanic in origin, a factor which has implications for natural resource endowment and for the potential for economic development. Socio-cultural differences not only occur among the broad population groups of Melanesians, Polynesians and Micronesians, there are in-country differences among the numerous Melanesian language communities, and also among the international migrant communities settled throughout the countries of the Region and adding to the language and cultural diversity. Educational, governmental and economic systems
inherited from former colonial governments and now found to be inadequate for and irrelevant to the needs and ethos of the societies of the South Pacific, are currently undergoing policy redirection for localisation and nationalistic purposes, posing major challenges for the USP as the main provider of tertiary education and skilled manpower training for the Region.

The bulk of the intake into the USP’s distance education programme were adults. Principles of adult learning discussed in Chapter 2, and the psychological perspectives from which they were derived, indicated certain attributes that were accepted as generic to adulthood and influenced the approach to and style of learning by adults (see Powell, Conway and Ross, 1990). In discussing the literature on distance education learners, Lauffer (1988) provided an apt summary of these features of distance students in terms of common characteristics among themselves and in comparison with students in traditional modes of study (pp. 31-32). Empirical studies examining these attributes, agreed with the generalisability of these features to a large degree but cautioned about the extent of their effect on adult learning behaviours beyond the conditions, location and context of the studies from which they were derived. In this respect, there was strong recognition of the significance of variables within the personal, situational and educational environments of the students in influencing and contributing to the attributes of adults as distance learners. Furthermore, it has been questioned whether certain learning behaviours were not so much an attribute of adulthood as they were a personal learning style preference irrespective of age.

Two of the more popularly acknowledged features of adult learners as derived from theoretical and empirical studies were their independence and self-directedness. These features were accountable for some of the features of adult learners indicated by Lauffer above, that adults were expected to be more aware of the purposes and kind of education they wanted and that they were inclined to draw upon life and work experience in their learning and were therefore more problem-centred in their approach to learning. The humanists of the ’60s and ’70s saw adult learning as a self-initiated process motivated by intrinsic reasons and this was thus a process of holistic self-actualization. Developmental psychologists in the same period postulated that the participation of adults in learning activities was best understood by examining their interaction with the environment. Both of these perspectives formed the basis of current accepted principles of adult learning and have particularly highlighted the
significance of the adult learner's environment in motivating persistence and completion of courses of study. Some of the more effective of these features in shaping the disposition of adult learners towards study, as identified by the literature, were family, social and vocational life, past educational opportunities, educational environment and study support facilities, and opportunities for interactive and group learning. The extent to which these features helped to shape the confidence and positive self-perception of the students, their motivation to study, their development particularly as independent learners and orientation to learning, varied not only across educational contexts, but also with each group of adult learners.

If the teaching of these adults in the distance mode is to be effective, then two aspects in particular of the teaching/learning process are to be seriously considered. Firstly, knowledge about the features governing the students' predisposition and preparedness to learn is an imperative precondition for the distance educator aiming to produce learning opportunities that avoid or find alternatives to learning barriers within the students' personal, situational and study environments. Secondly, where this knowledge is not available, then assumptions about their disposition and preparedness to study must be properly informed particularly by relevant research findings so that they are given the appropriate and right amount of learning support. In this case, the applicability of the research information, especially if extraneous to the situation in question, must first be established.

In relation to this knowledge and information, this study set out to achieve several objectives. Firstly, using responses to the study questionnaire, a profile of the typical distance vocational student at the USP was developed that would provide the distance educator at the institution with a general idea of the features and personal attributes peculiar to the student and relevant to the appropriate targeting of learning opportunities by the USP course development team. Next it was hoped to be able to provide the answers to a series of study questions related to the degree of influence of variables within the personal, situational and study contexts of the adult distance learner at the USP on his/her learning needs and disposition to study, particularly at a distance. Multivariate statistical analyses of the questionnaire data were conducted towards this end. In addition, the interview responses of selected students provided further insight into the student dimension which complemented the statistical findings by revealing real life situations in the case studies provided in Chapter 8. The following discussion will focus on the
extent to which the results of the profile exercise and multivariate data analyses have provided answers to the questions raised in this study and consequently their significance and implications for the distance teaching/learning processes at the USP. The discussion will focus first on major findings under the general sub-headings followed in previous chapters. These findings will then be examined in light of the study questions and issues deriving from them.

9.3 The USP Distance Learner: How Typical, How Unique?

9.3.1 Personal and family attributes

The typical distance education student in the USP’s Accounting and Management vocational programmes is male, with approximately two-thirds of the respondents in this study being men, and one-third being women. Hence this chapter uses the male pronoun in reference to the student. It is evident, from the composition and discussion of the profile of the USP distance learner in Chapter 4 that one of the most significant characteristics to emerge from the data is the age of the student. By comparison to the typical age of distance students, particularly in the Western world, the USP distance learners, falling in the 21-40 years age bracket with a slight emphasis on the 21-30 year old group, are some years younger than their cohorts in developed countries where the typical adult distance learner is between the ages of 35 and 40 years (Lauffer, 1988). This might well be a characteristic of distance students in developing countries as it is for Indonesian distance learners (Hiola and Moss, 1990). The data in Chapter 4 has also suggested that this factor is crucial in determining several other features of the USP distance learner with regard to the personal environment within which he operates. This is to be expected given the wide age range of the students. The several different age cohorts inherent in this age range will reflect variations in the physical, psychological and sociocultural, and situational characteristics that constitute the dimensions of Cross’s (1981) Characteristics of Adult Learners model which are responsible for variations in any one group of adult learners. Results of the factor analysis of the data indicated age as a variable loading highly on the Demography Factor which accounted for 18 percent of the direct and joint variance in the data. Demographic variables were also significant performance predictors for
the USP group which did not appear to be as much the case for adult distance students elsewhere (Gibson, 1990; Eisenberg and Dowsett, 1990).

The reasons for this difference must lie within the differences in age. With respect to the USP group, the wide age range makes it possible and necessary to group and discuss younger and older students separately, as borne out by the data. Younger students have been shown to be less likely to perform successfully in their distance courses than older students. Various reasons for this are suggested in Chapter 5. In particular, it is clear that the age factor places the student in a specific demographic and family environment combining variables especially challenging for the younger distance students such as being single and still living a relatively less independent life with parents; or being married for relatively fewer years with young children of a more demanding age; household economics are likely to be more challenging for younger income earners, who, without sufficient work experience or post-secondary study opportunity, find themselves in lower income brackets. In addition, the typical USP extension student is a major income earner for the family, and with the help of one other earner therein, supports between three and five people altogether on an annual salary of up to $F10,000, apart from other financial commitments such as his study. It is not surprising, therefore, that for these students, the ‘teachable moment’ (see Havighurst, 1974), comes from the economic ‘push’ enshrouded particularly by matters of the household. For the typical USP extension student, economic pressures may not necessarily arrive any earlier for him than for students elsewhere in the world, but combined with other circumstances of his life, wherever in the wide age cohort of 21-40 years this typical student may fall, these pressures have made him return to formal education as a highly logical if not only option for life’s solutions. Interviewee 3 from Western Samoa, for instance, was 25 years old at the time of the interview, and expecting her second child. She described her family situation thus:

I’m just working at the moment to get some money to support the family because we’re living with my parents at the moment and my husband’s working as well.

Her 21 year old compatriot, Interviewee 4, was single and also still lived with her father, stepmother, three siblings and five half-siblings. In addition,
I have extended family - got three cousins living with me and my brother is married so he's staying with his wife at our place as well with their daughter.

Interviewee 4 is also expected to make her financial contribution to the family's budget as well as participate in household chores as is required by Samoan family values. Other 'circumstances' exemplifying the lives of USP distance students, were discussed in detail in Chapters 7 and 8 and will be referred to throughout this chapter.

9.3.2 The Socio-cultural environment

The USP distance learner's life, at face value, is almost a typical one where he is seen to hold a full-time job through which he supports a family. His next most important commitments are those related to his family and household outside of which he has very little time, although he does observe some religion, and gets involved in the occasional cultural and community activity. However, as a multilingual person, his social community very likely extends beyond his own language/cultural group to include members of other ethnicity. The fact that he is a frequent user of the English language relative to his native tongue and other language(s) is most likely a reflection of the work situation where English is the official language as it is for all countries in the USP Region. However, the language situation is not uniform across the USP Region. In some countries, English is rarely used even at work, and the native tongue, or in the case of the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, pigin, constitute the main language of communication. Matthewson (1994), former Director of University Extension, USP, throws further light on this situation:

For the main ethnic groups, therefore - Polynesian, Micronesian, Melanesian and Indian - the varying 'distances' between them, and between them and the university, begin with language: not only in their differing familiarity with the vocabulary in course materials but also in the differing world views proceeding from or created by language. These can differ not only from country to country, but from island to island, atoll to atoll. Our students do not live in a common world but in diverse linguistic worlds of differing conceptual frameworks (p. 30).
Variables loading on the Social Disposition and Socio-cultural Factors were significant performance predictors for the USP group. The relationship between these variables and the performance of the respondent as a distance student suggests quite clearly the influence that the socio-cultural circumstances and social disposition of the respondent has on his disposition to study. In the case of the USP Region, it would be plausible to argue that aside from special problems related to the variant language situation described above, social and cultural obligations bring more pressure to bear on South Pacific communities than they might do in other cultures, particularly those of the Western world. Many students continue to live in extended family situations where, as married or single students, they continue to provide income for the household. In the male-dominated cultures of Melanesia, 25 year old Interviewee 8 finds that, after the death of his father, the pressure on him to resume his father’s role as head of the family, was mounting. In spite of the fact that he was hardly able to speak his mother tongue, he felt obliged to participate in cultural ceremonies, or bring shame and social rejection on himself and his family, and be accused of the snobbery of using his educational status to socially segregate himself from his people. Interviewee 1 from Tonga, a mature 32 year old at the time of interview, now finds that her major hurdle to studying at home is the daughter that she was pushed into ‘adopting’ partly to reassure her mother that she would have someone to take care of her in her old age, and partly to fend off criticism by her community of being still unmarried at her mature age. Although she had learned over the years to live with the curiosity and criticism of her community, it did have enough of an effect on her initially to push her into having her own ‘family’, a circumstance which now poses a challenge to her studies. While the adoption of a child might not be a regular occurrence in the context of USP Regional cultures, the cultural pressures and circumstances that provoke this kind of behaviour as well as the renewed sense of cultural obligation felt by Interviewee 8, still prevail, and have varying consequences across the Region. In the interview discussions, both from the group and individual perspectives in Chapters 7 and 8, it is quite evident that one of the major benefits to their study for the students the fact that they lived in urban areas in their respective countries, away from their cultural communities. Being thus cut off and physically distanced from ‘home’, the students were less obligated and came under lesser pressure to respond to cultural and/or communal commitments. Indeed, comments confirming this knew no national boundary. From the Solomon Islands across to the Cook Islands, students echoed the comment of Interviewee 12 from the island of Wagina, now living in Honiara.
... here we are living in the town area so... we don’t seem to be having any cultural activities. If it was back home, yes I think it will be almost every week.

The near or total abstinence of respondents from things cultural, communal and/or religious has therefore become possible, and for many a deliberate move in support of, and to protect and accommodate their student status. Time spent on religious, community and cultural activities loading on factors referring to social disposition and the socio-cultural situation of students, suggest that the degree of involvement in these areas are good predictors of performance. In addition, factor analysis results indicate that Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian students (ethnic cultures of the South Pacific), are likely to be more involved in activities in these areas than the large number of Fiji Indian students in the programme. This might be a reflection of cultural differences in attitudes towards education. At 25 years of age, Interviewee 15 from Kiribati was still not allowed out after dark without proper escort as unmarried girls in particular are highly protected by the male members of their family. On the other hand, when there was a family function being held, girls of the family are expected to participate particularly in the work that is required such as cooking, cleaning and serving, as a priority activity about which they appear to have no say. This ‘enforced’ participation can interfere with study, as indicated by Interviewee 15:

Maybe the family if they like to have a party or something like that then they will bring us like to help first instead of doing our studies.

Among the Christian communities of the South Pacific Region, religious duties have become synonymous with community activities. The Christian Youth work of Interviewee 1 of Tonga, LDS Church Women’s community work of Interviewee 16 of Kiribati and Interviewee 7’s participation in drama and related activities to convey messages of his SDA faith in Vila, Vanuatu are all examples, among others, of community work done under the auspices of the church. While these activities have a strong community base, they are seen by participants as religious obligations and therefore as expressions of their faith. Fiji Indians, on the other hand, do not appear to have this community/religion overlap, and community involvement on their part is largely to do with the work of voluntary organisations such as the Jaycees and Lion’s Club, and especially with activities close to the family such as PTAs and other school-related work. In the case of Interviewee 21, the only community work that he does is as Treasurer of
the PTA of the primary school attended by his children. Beyond this he claims he is unable
to afford the time because of the priority commitment to his study and family. Invitations to
social functions organised at work are also avoided:

I think it's better for me to stay here and study - I get more marks rather than I go and have drinks and
I come back I cannot study.

The suggestion in the literature that individuals who are well established in family, social and
vocational life achieve more than younger students who are not married, living with their
parents and often coming directly from other traditional schools and having only minor
vocational experience (Rekkedal, 1988, p. 219) appears to need modification for the USP
context. These features are obviously Western conceptions of society; the south pacific cultural
feature of married students still living with parents, for instance, is not accommodated in this
suggestion. Furthermore, the dynamics of socio-cultural life in the South Pacific represented
above and particularly seen in the lives of the students in Chapters 7 and 8 suggest that the
idea of being 'well established in family, social and vocational life' is a foreign concept in the
South Pacific context and particularly with reference to its ethnic cultures, in that age, better
jobs and experience are associated with increased family and social responsibility rather than
with the stability implied by Rekkedal. So much is this so that Interviewee 8 of Vanuatu
indicated that if he were to get anywhere in his career and his life, he might have to leave
Vanuatu altogether.

9.3.3 Economics

The typical distance vocational student at USP is either a teacher, or works in a financial
accounting position. It is logical to assume that at the most, given his age, he is at the mid-
point of his career, and in this situation, has most likely come to the end of the usefulness of
his first qualification in terms of making any further progress in the work and/or financial
situation. The most popular reasons for his return to study - interest and the upgrading of
qualifications - bear this out. His economic reasons for studying constitute a significant variable
loading on Factor 6 concerned with study habits which is the second most significant predictor.
of performance in this study. The variable combination in this Factor suggests that younger students hope to achieve more immediate economic solutions through their studies and qualifications such as increments and job promotions while older students (30+ years) are associated with longer term objectives such as eligibility for better jobs, presumably in terms of pay and status. Interviewee 23 from Kiribati, 23 years old and married with three young children, perhaps sums up the situation very well for his age cohort:

I think money is a big problem, because you know the salary is very low. I get only $150 in two weeks, that’s not enough.

His situation is generally representative of the group of young married students described in Chapter 7, living with parents or in-laws because they are unable to afford to break out on their own. Aside from the physical limitations this poses for the respondents and their families, there are negative social implications in that the relationships among respondents, spouses and children are strained by the lack of privacy. Together with the resulting psychological stresses, all these features combine to portray a reality that might be described as economically grim. For these students, a university qualification is overwhelmingly an economic solution with the awarding of increments as they progress towards it, and a promotion or better-paying job at the end of it. The primary objective for attaining better salaries is the opportunity to move out and get their own homes as well as all of the benefits associated with the independence that come with it. This economic situation fits the USP students into Houle’s (1961) goal-oriented group of adults, and represents a learning phase described by Tough (1979), (as cited by Cross, 1981) in which environmental features are key determinants of motivation. It also supports the developmentalist view that adult participation can be understood through an analysis of interaction between individual and environment, that adults are motivated to participate as a result of perceiving and balancing positive and negative forces in the situation, and that the individual can determine his or her own destiny (Cross, 1981, p. 123).

That promotions to higher-paying levels in the workforce for this cohort has become more competitive and therefore difficult to achieve without formal qualifications is a reflection of the economy of the USP Region in general where competition for jobs is increasing in terms of numbers and skills. Respondents in older age cohorts in this study have been more fortunate.
in that they have managed under the more accommodating economic circumstances of their earlier years to get to higher employment levels on the basis of accumulated work experience and through short vocational training courses over the years which supplemented initial qualifications.

The economic situation of this latter group, however, cannot be described as being very much better than that of younger married students. The data indicates that students generally over 30 years of age are living in a nuclear family situation with spouse and children. Although it also indicates that older students are associated with higher income, this group are also major providers and the fact that their children are older also suggests that their costs include school fees which become more expensive as the children progress upwards. Having their own home, either rented or owned, and related maintenance expenses are additional costs not specific to younger students in this study. Thirty-three year old Interviewee 2 from Tonga is the second wife of her husband from whom she inherited six school-age sons and to whom she had her only son. Although her family size is not typical, her financial circumstances and responsibilities are representative in real life terms of the kinds of financial obligations that students particularly in her age cohort have. Apart from the wide-ranging needs of her own immediate family which include living expenses, school fees, repayment of house and ear loan and donations to the church, Interviewee 2 and her husband assist members of the extended family with food and money, especially in the form of church donations from her parents-in-law and niece living in their home island of Vava'u; food for her own parents; school fees for her youngest brother; unexpected events such as weddings and funerals to which contribution in kind and money must be made and the occasional request for cultural artefacts from her sisters living abroad. Although the data on socio-cultural features of the study population indicated a physical isolation from matters cultural by the majority of students, it is obvious from the interview data that cultural obligations and commitments continue to be a prominent part of the lives of students. Those single or married and still living at home continue to contribute in cash and kind to the running of the family; those married and independent, usually older students, have culturally-based obligations not different from those listed by Interviewee 2 above. For this older group, it is likely that they represent the first generational move into modern, salary-based lifestyles from a traditional, custom-bound upbringing whose values which are still very close to the heart continue to be a reality of life. Younger students are
likely to be at least one generation removed from the traditional lifestyles of their parents and although affected by them, are involved to a lesser degree than their older counterparts.

As revealed by factor analysis, study hours are associated with the economic situation and appear to be related to economic reasons for studying. It is plausible that younger students have fewer hours for studying because their time is diverted more necessarily towards money-making and money-saving opportunities than the case may be for older students. Many of the younger interviewees, talk about overtime work at the office for instance, as a time-consuming but necessary activity not just in terms of the additional income, but as a factor in the building and improvement of their careers. In the case of Interviewee 3, her potential study time at night is usually taken up with babysitting while her husband worked overtime hours for money that they badly needed. Considering the study objectives of younger students for additional increments at work, these are awarded on the basis of a pass in the course rather than on that quality of that pass. Older students, on the other hand, are looking to improve their marketability for better jobs in which case quality performance becomes the crucial criterion. The study hours put in by the students might thus be a reflection of the differing requirements in performance as perceived by the students in the pursuit of intra- and inter-job objectives.

### 9.3.4 Educational experience and environment

The typical USP distance vocational student not only completed high school but passed all his courses, which included some Commerce, in the New Zealand University Entrance. This, plus the fact that he did some college level education before his current involvement in university studies means that he was fairly well prepared, both in terms of subject area background and study skill requirements, for his present level of education. Factor 10 which combines variables on educational background, is the most significant predictor of performance. In this respect, the last school form attended appears to be crucial to performance at further levels. Furthermore, the last school form variable appears to be related to the ability of the respondent to work and learn as an independent student, a quality highly required by distance learning and associated with adult learners, although this latter situation has been recently challenged by the literature (Jarvis 1987). The more current argument has been that independent learning is not
so much a feature associated with adulthood as it is a human learning preference. USP students appear to have been given some initial exposure to it in their higher levels of high school study. In the student interviews it becomes evident that this field independence was acquired under a variety of circumstances. Of the students who indicated that they went abroad for the final high school years, and one interviewee did her first degree as a scholarship student in New Zealand, it was clear that this experience represented their first encounter with learning independence and self-direction. This experience was related either to the teaching philosophy of the institution they attended, or to the fact that they were living away from home and were therefore in charge of their own lives, or both. Having come from teacher- and family-dominated backgrounds, the experience in independence was associated with maturity for the USP group and understandably had negative repercussions for many involved in that they did not know how to cope with the new-found freedom and spent it on other activities more than on study. Consequently, many were not successful. However, the negative consequence was in itself an important lesson in independence and contributed to what can be described for this group as a more holistic appreciation of what it took and meant to be in charge. This experience shaped an appropriate attitude towards independence and an appreciation of its requirements and management, more than it fitted them with the relevant learning skills for studying at distance. However this attitude and appreciation predisposed them towards acquiring these skills such as time management and peer assistance when it came to distance study.

Within the Region, Interviewee 21 from a rural town in Fiji, described his last year at high school as an exercise in educational survival and independent resourcefulness. In Fiji, as in all other countries of the Region, the educational provision pyramid is characterised by a very wide base, with very narrow provisions at the top. Numerous primary schools feed their students into fewer high schools and into even fewer institutions catering for senior secondary education. In the Fairbairn Report of Seminar on South Pacific Post Secondary Education, 1992, he pointed out that

The reality is that many countries do not have the capacity to run Forms 6 or 7 and those that do, have great trouble running quality programs (p. 44).
In the case of Interviewee 21, he went from a small, well-catered community rural school into an overcrowded urban high school, which was under-resourced and understaffed. He described his experience thus:

From Form 6 I learned - study is ours. We have to bother how to study, how to grab information. If you need something to ask them we ask. Otherwise sort of they were not bothered.

Interviewee 21 represents the experience of being forced to 'learn how to learn' under adverse school circumstances presumably common to many students in the USP Region where places in high school are limited and competitive, and well-trained teachers and resources scarce. In the Fairbairn report quoted above, the reasons for poor quality secondary education in the Region were poorly qualified teachers, poor quality and quantity of educational materials and resources, variations in provision of secondary education across the Region and often incomplete provision especially in rural areas and in Melanesian countries. The result was low quality graduates from primary and secondary schools (pp. 44-45). Without proper training in the mental skills appropriate to different learning needs and situations, the question needs to be raised about the kind of learning independence that is being acquired by these students, seeking, at all odds, to pass the final examination through which either to get a job or gain admission into some post-secondary institution. It is quite feasible that this objective can be achieved with limited and surface learning skills such as memorisation techniques which, also quite possibly, are the only cognitive strategies familiar and available to these students with which to undertake their university education. This, therefore, is not a case of learning how to learn, but rather a kind of pseudo-independence based on intensifying the art of stretching limited learning skills and strategies, most likely producing gruelling study situations, in order to succeed. Landbeck and Mugler (1994) call this the 'achieving' approach to learning in which the student's main preoccupation is to pass the course, and which often involves highly organised study methods. This approach best described that of the majority of the 16 USP on-campus students that Landbeck and Mugler interviewed with respect to their approaches to study and conceptions of learning. The results of their survey showed that the students associated their first year at university with the acquisition of new approaches and attitudes towards learning that replaced the limiting effects of teacher-domination in high school which were reflected in their initial approaches to study. The students surveyed were affected by
factors such as study time limitations of part-time students, lack of appropriate reading and study skills for university level, lack of appropriate and adequate information about courses, course expectations and lecturers, etc., features similar to those affecting adult learners studying at a distance. Landbeck and Mugler also indicate that the factor of being ESL students played a major role in learning strategies in that for these students, memorisation was the safest way for them to remember. This strategy was adopted in situations where they did not particularly understand what they were learning and for tests and final examinations. For these students, as for adult distance learners either studying at university level for the first time or left to cope largely on their own, the questions are raised: to what extent then can they cope with the deeper level mental skill requirements associated with university study; will they reach a learning saturation point and level off, or can surface level learning skills take further intensification; or can such students learn to unlearn inappropriate learning habits for more appropriate ones? In view of this situation, the recommendation by Landbeck and Mugler that for first year students,

The transition to university could be helped by teaching students about learning styles and study techniques in orientation workshops, and by greater explicitness on the part of lecturers about what they expect from university students in their discipline on one hand, and on the other about practical applications and connections between the subject they teach and the "real world" (p. 23),

is also quite appropriate for the adult distance learners under survey in this study.

With respect to the current involvement of the respondents in distance education, as distance learners much of their work is done at home where facilities are comparatively better than are available to them elsewhere, including their USP Centre. Many of the students in this survey were critical of the quality and availability of support facilities and services provided by their respective Centres. The largest group of students (31%) assessed their Centre facilities and services as inadequate, while for another 20 percent these facilities and services were not available. These students were therefore deprived of institutional support in varying degrees. Comments from the interviewees throw further light on the situation:

I don't know with others but I find that satellite was a problem and I find it should be at a good condition (Interviewee 2, Tonga).
... my problem would be especially to our local tutor ... I’ve only attended two tutorials and I’ve just said to myself it’s waste time, you know. Not really worth it (Interviewee 6, Cook Islands).

No, I don’t have anyone (at the Centre) who tells me ... about encouraging us and all. We just get along on our own (Interviewee 10, Vanuatu).

I think there are lots of things that need sort of improvement. In the Centre here that is one of our biggest problem as well is that we don’t have enough reference at the library especially the science courses. ... All of the books that are on the shelf are very early secondary level. So sometimes when we run into difficulties with our work we have to find other students who probably understand it because we wouldn’t be able to get any help from the library. Even we don’t have tutors as well so there’s no other way we can find help (Interviewee 12, Solomon Islands).

... because doing extension, that is the thing that you do. I wouldn’t know what benefits people doing extension and are from Suva, have compared to us. Probably they have the Library, but I can’t really say or point out any difference (Interviewee 22, Lautoka, Fiji).

Educational environment is seen in the literature as a significant variable and the extent to which it can be modified and enhanced by the quality and range of services that it offers can improve motivation and success rates to a large degree (Gibson, 1990). Study facilities and services, however, do not rate as performance predictors for the USP students. In light of the presentation above, and the likelihood that the USP intake is used to coping with adverse study conditions, this does not seem to be an unexpected outcome. In the words of Interviewee 1:

I really put all my effort into this ... my studies because I knew the tutor is not there and the Centre is right out there and I have to do it and because the deadline is next week I have to do it ... the answer is right here in the textbook and I have to get it.

There are obviously stronger overriding and compensating features for the USP group such as number of study hours, and in the case of students such as Interviewee 1, sheer motivation. For the typical distance vocational learner, two to three hours are allocated for studying daily. As a variable loading highly on Factor 6, study hours are a highly significant predictor of performance. The data appears to suggest, in this case, that for the USP students, limitations posed by poor or just adequate study facilities are compensated by increasing the length of study period. These 'study economics' - balancing one resource against another - might well be a feature of the USP group and of students in the developing world in general, where facilities are either unavailable, inaccessible or inadequate, and the ability of the student to improvise and juggle the elements in his environment in order to achieve his educational objectives, become the mark of success or lack of it. This argument has some foundation in
the lives of the study interviewees. In Chapters 7 and 8, students across the Region - Honiara, Tonga, Tarawa, - describe strategies for coping with inadequate learning support systems. Interviewee 12 from Honiara consults a more knowledgeable friend when he himself is 'stuck' and does not have a tutor to turn to. In Tonga, Interviewee 2 quizzes an on-campus student who had previously undertaken the course in question, 'checks out' and compares the material covered in the lectures and the performance of the student and uses this as a yardstick for her own progress. Interviewee 16 in Tarawa finds support among a group of friends and together they gather courage to approach a more senior student for help, in the absence of tutorial provision by the study Centre. In this respect, the ‘independence’ of the USP student is especially marked by the quality of artfulness, and is personality-related rather than a feature of cognition.

Another significant feature of the typical USP vocational student is his preference for courses that allow him to apply the knowledge and/or information gained in his courses. In fact, opportunities for application in real-life situations, particularly at work, are, for this group, an important learning situation, a trait which they share with adult learners in general (Knowles, 1990, pp 9-10). Considering the intra-job objectives of the younger members of the group, it is likely that the programme of study was chosen for its relevance to the work of the students. The ensuing complementarity of work and study provide immediacy of meaning to what is being learned and enhance the motivational levels of students inclined towards applications-learning. In this respect, the USP group share a universal trait among adult learners in being experience-oriented in their learning and deriving learning advantage from being able to apply experience gained from relatively more years of life and work to what is being learned. Interviewee 24 from urban Fiji claims that

In fact the management doesn't only relate to work type of management. It can relate to life as well - time management, how you manage your money at home - so that's helped me a lot too.

Also important to the issue of application is the matter of relevance. Again Interviewee 24 provided insight:

... the book that i'm using, I can't really relate to it because of the fact that it's more western, you know what I mean? Or the courses themselves they're more geared towards ... western ways, you know.
This comment provides an additional dimension to the issue of applicability for the USP students. With textbooks written for the western world and foreign course writers responsible for their learning materials, these students are dealing with concepts and information that have no (equivalent) referents in their life experiences. Furthermore, it is possible that foreign lecturers bring to their teaching expectations of students based on their experience abroad, and particularly in western contexts, that do not match the learning capacity and behaviour, as well as the ethos of South Pacific students. This can lead to alienating learning situations for the USP students.

It is also a possibility that the preference for applications is a reflection of the oral traditions of South Pacific cultures. Ong (1982, as quoted by Murphy, 1991), suggests that

> those who live in cultures with strong oral roots are likely to express themselves in terms of practical situations rather than in abstract terms.

The suggestion here is that, for the USP students, applications opportunities are attractive to them because they do not require as much use of the English language, particularly in terms of the sophistication required by abstraction as indicated by Ong above. This idea is developed further in the following section in relation to the need for group and tutorial assistance expressed by the USP students.

### 9.3.5 Disposition and preparedness to study

Attributes in this category are intra-personal traits in the students that deal with attitudinal and mental preparedness for their current educational involvement. In this study, the students' motivational levels, their self-perceptions and confidence as students, field dependence/independence, orientation to learning and learning style are examined in terms of their importance to successful studying at a distance. Gibson's (1990) examination of the literature showed that dispositional variables (attitudes and perceptions), as well as cognitive styles and learning variables were all good indicators of performance.
With respect to the USP students, aside from the degree of independence associated with level and experience of high school study, other dispositional variables and variables of preparedness to study are, on the contrary, not good predictors of performance. As a group, and also typically, students in this study indicated that they were well-motivated and confident as students towards their studies. Motivational theories range from those that focus on personal goals and objectives to those that see participation as motivated by available opportunities for further study (Lauffer, 1988). As seen earlier, circumstances in the USP students' personal lives such as family economics and work situations provided a strong push towards improving qualifications. Also significant was the fact that the USP's distance education programme was available and seen as the opportunity for some solution to problems in these areas. The data seemed to indicate that for the group of students under survey, confidence was derived from a combination of both personal and extraneous features such as past family support for education, supportive individuals in their lives both past and present, high school performance and post-secondary level experience and the relevance of their subjects to the work context. Lauffer describes such students as 'supplemental-confident', in that their participation in studies, although part-time and therefore can be broken when necessary, is purposeful, and they are assured of their ability to learn, look forward to educational challenges and have a positive attitude towards their learning. The fact that the USP students strongly expressed the need for the provision of at least some group learning and face-to-face tutorial support is also a feature of the 'supplemental-confident' student, in that they require support services to be available but will make their own decisions about using them.

The literature describes the need for personal contact associated with group and face-to-face learning as opportunities for dialogue and interaction (Daniel and Marquis, 1988) and sees them as a general need of all distance learners for a variety of reasons. Social participation, for instance, is conducive to academic success for adults (Houle, 1963; Garrison and Shaie, 1990); women have a specific need to meet other students as a specific learning strategy (Kirkup and von Prummer, 1990; Ross and Powell, 1989); and students coming from strong oral cultural traditions learn best in a group situation. With reference to this last point, literacy for the South Pacific is a relatively recent feature (Mangubhai, 1987) which might partly explains the tendency of the USP group towards group participation and opportunities for oral exchanges. Related to this feature, the second/other language status of English among the USP students
and the variant processes of its acquisition, especially through English language programmes in schools, have resulted in relatively poor reading skills in Fiji (Elley, 1980) and indeed throughout the USP Region that have prevailed throughout the formal school years and beyond (Tuimaleali’ifano, 1988). Students coming from such a background might feel inclined towards group situations in which they might feel more comfortable. This comfort is also derived from the fact that South Pacific cultures, including the culture of the Fiji Indians, are community-based where group activities are major features of life and living. Another significant cultural feature of the South Pacific which is possibly related to group learning tendencies, is the trait of deferment to authority figures for decision-making. This attitude has been nurtured through the teacher-dominated formal education system described by the interviewed students as a key feature of their educational background influencing their current attitude and approach to tertiary education. The same characteristics are ascribed to Indonesian and Turkish students by Dunbar (1991) and Murphy (1991) respectively. In addition, Turkish students exist within a system of patronage where reciprocal links of service and protection are established between individuals of unequal status (Murphy, p. 43). As a result, both groups of students are unable to meet the demands for autonomy and authority over their own learning progress. Likewise, to a large extent, the group and tutorial sessions serve the tendency and need by USP students to defer to knowledgeable and authority figures to endorse their own legitimacy and to provide whatever assurances are needed by the students in order to maintain their esteem and confidence as students. Daniel and Marquis (1988) point out that contrary to popular belief, adult learners may not have the information to make sound decisions about their education, or the skills and background knowledge needed to meet their educational goals. The group therefore allows the student some guideline in measuring the pace of his/her work. For Interviewee 24, the group provides her with the opportunity to check her progress against that of fellow students and more importantly to assess the quality of that progress against their performance. For Interviewee 16, the more experienced friend at the Centre was the authority figure she and her peers sought for the information and assurance they required. The same principle applied in the case of Interviewee 2 for whom the on-campus student represented the authority and information on the requirements and expectations of the course in which she was enrolled and about which she sought assurances. For Interviewee 6, no higher level study, even in the independent mode, was possible without tutorial assistance, and in the case of Interviewee 12, the adequate learning of Mathematics was not possible without a skilled tutor.
in whose absence a more knowledgeable friend posed as substitute. However, these latter cases may be symptoms of poor course packages and lack of appropriate support facilities and services rather than a reflection of the learning tendencies of the students under survey. This notion has already been mentioned and will be further explored later in this chapter.

With respect to the group as a special learning strategy for women, the interview data revealed this inclination among many of the women in comparison with the men who tended more towards tutorial assistance rather than the sharing of ideas among peers. As women constitute more than a third of the student population, this learning strategy is worthy of note by distance educators as one of the variety of learning needs represented by their adult clientele.

The need for support with study and cognitive skills was also a stated requirement which, in view of the gap of time since their last formal educational experience, and the novelty of university study, is not unexpected.

What is unexpected is that disposition and preparedness variables, aside from learning independence, are not good predictors of performance. This finding confirms for the USP group, as for distance students worldwide, that the ability to learn independently is an overriding need for successful studying at a distance. Although the USP students indicated that they had a preference for learning in and with a group, it would appear from their situational and study circumstances, that for many this was not the case. As has been seen, many students did not have access to Centre facilities including group and tutorial meetings for reasons of physical inaccessibility and/or other commitments. For even more students, Centre support left much to be desired. This left little alternative for the students but to become independent learners who were self-reliant with respect to learning responsibility. Independence, therefore, has become an overriding predeterminant for successful performance in the case of the USP student, and is associated with an initial exposure at high school and continued practice under the relatively adverse distance education circumstances that characterise the learning environment of USP distance students. The data and findings suggested that the confidence expressed by the students refers to their ability to continue to ‘improve’ on their levels of independence and self-reliance as they become more ‘mature’ distance learners. A significant element of this maturity is the ability to manage time more appropriately which also implies
the ability to place study high in priority over other involvements. Some of the interviewees had already achieved this state. Interviewee 5 from the Cook Islands describes the transition thus:

    this time, second time around it's been much better. I'm actually thinking about it and doing what I want to do or what is required of me, more prepared, better able to manage my time ...

    

Other interviewees were in varying positions on the way to this maturity level. Many talked about the need to give up their sports, cut down on family and community socials and even be able to say no to the invitations of well-meaning relatives and friends to participate in other things.

7.4 The Study Questions

7.4.1 USP distance students and characteristics of adult learners

A key question of this study is related to the extent to which adult distance learners at USP portray characteristics universally typical of adult distance learners as identified by the literature. In particular, this study sought to find out if USP distance learners were independent and self-directing; if they were highly and intrinsically motivated; the extent to which they were confident in their self-perceptions as students and whether, like other adult learners, they preferred experience-based and applications learning. An important objective of this question is to find out the extent to which extra-contextual research and findings are appropriate to the USP context and therefore the extent to which they can be used to inform the distance education process at USP.

From the discussion of the data and its various treatment in this study, the indications are that the students under survey had some form of independence acquired through their high school experiences and developed further as distance students. As a significant predictor of performance for the USP students, this finding appears to confirm yet again the importance of being an independent learner in distance education, whatever the learning context. However.
the degree and quality of this independence might vary according to context as has been seen with respect to the USP Region. The USP students under survey came by their independence because adverse educational conditions forced them into it. Consequently, the question needs to be asked whether, indeed, this independence involved acquiring the appropriate learning skills that would lead to their ‘liberation’ as learners that will ensure that once equipped with self-learning capabilities, learners will become their own best teachers and will not be dependent upon the provision of a school and a teacher to acquire knowledge (Sharma, 1989, p. 18).

The USP students under survey admitted to being tutor-dependent for much of their learning and many saw their poor quality performance as a direct result of inadequate or lack of tutor support. It is also clear from the interview data that tutorials were more an opportunity for the further enhancement of the learning materials than they were for teacher-student interaction and dialogue. In this respect, the USP students cannot be said to be self-directing in the degree to which they saw their tutors as providing the guidance they needed to progress satisfactorily through their courses. A complementary view of this situation would be to do with whether or not the distance teaching materials of the USP are conducive to independence and self-reliance for the students with regard to their teaching strategies and resource provision. Sharma summarises these as notions thus:

It is clear that the distance education materials, tools and technologies chosen must suit the needs of the learner - not the preferences of the teacher. ... Distance education informs learners that learning depends on themselves, on their own motivation to learn, on their commitment to learn the lessons on their own, with guidance and support from tutors and learning materials (ibid, p. 23).

There was no doubt from the survey and interview data that the USP students were prepared to work independently and to seek help whenever it was necessary, from limited sources within their study environment. That it is highly possible that the nature of the help they seek is related to their cognitive, learning and study skills inadequacies is borne out by their own admission of needing assistance in these areas. That this assistance was rarely forthcoming, also by their assessment of learning support available to them, suggests that persistence in their study for this group was aided by more personal attributes such as motivation and self-esteem.
That the USP students were highly motivated there could be no doubt from the evidence of the data to hand. The questionnaire responses indicated the strong economic push factors that provided the extrinsic motivation for these students. However, in conjunction with the interview data, it becomes clear that these difficult economic conditions are essentially barriers to the self-determination and the emergence of the self-identity of these students. Motivation to study is therefore destiny-related once the economic barriers are removed. In this sense, the USP students are indeed intrinsically compelled to seek qualifications towards a better way of life and an improved self-image. Interviewee 2 from Western Samoa represents it thus:

... and we just realised how really important - you had to have a degree to get to the top and like around here if you don’t have a degree people just really look down on you. And so we really regret what we did during our school years so that really made me want to take some more courses through extension.

Formal studies are associated with high self-esteem (see Rubenson and Boshier, as cited by Cross, 1981), and the return to it by the USP students reflects the self-expressed confidence in their ability to be involved successfully. This confidence is also a reflection of having arrived at an appropriate ‘teachable’ moment in their lives where, according to Cross’ COR model (see Chapter 2), motivation is spurred on by the perceived importance of the educational involvement to the achievement of the student’s goals. When this perception is accompanied by the expectation of successful performance and achievement, student self-esteem is high. Interactionist theory indicates that the strength of the combination of positive and negative forces within the individual and the environment determine the strength of the individual’s motivation (Cross, p. 116). In the case of the USP students, the desire for improved economic status and self-determination, as inhibited by a negative economic environment has culminated in the decision to seek the solution in further education.

Another feature of adulthood displayed prominently by the USP group is that of being inclined towards learning situations that are experienced-based and applications-oriented. Analysis of data has shown this to be a learning orientation of the majority of the students in the study through which much of their learning is achieved. A number of possible reasons for this have been discussed in previous sections of this chapter.
9.4.2 Personal, situational and study environments: do they shape and influence disposition and preparedness to study?

The literature, both theoretical and empirical, is rife with indications of the significance of the context of the student and environmental variables in predisposing and preparing students to study. Dispositional variables in this study refer to personal attributes that relate to attitudes and perceptions, in particular the student's confidence and self-perception as a student and his/her motivation to study. Preparedness to study is measured largely by learning orientation and styles, field dependence/independence and by language skills.

With regard to the USP group, the discussions above and previous presentations of data analyses results have covered much of the connection between contextual variables and their degree of influence on the disposition and preparedness of the students to study. Results of data analyses have shown, for instance, that personal and family variables loading on the demographic factor were significant predictors of performance. Furthermore, family and personal variables, particularly those associated with the economic situation of the students, provided the major reasons for studying.

Motivation and confidence levels were related to the extent to which these educational goals of the students were expected by them to be achievable. Also related to the economic situation of the students were the amount of study hours they were willing and able to make available for study daily. Those bearing a higher proportion of financial responsibility in relation to income were not able to put in the amount of study time associated with successful performance, and vice versa.

Factor 10 associated with educational background, combined variables which were the most significant performance predictor, in particular the variable of last school form attended. This variable was associated with the disposition of learning independence. Educational background also played a part in the kind of attitudes to independence and self-reliance brought to further education by the students. Circumstances of high school were also seen to have had some influence on the degree of self-directedness of the USP students in that, although many students were able, because of adverse study conditions and circumstances to work
independently, the availability of a tutor would have made a difference in the quality of their learning and achievement.

In terms of the social disposition of the students and their socio-cultural environment, several features here were suggested by data analysis results to influence approach and attitude to study. There was a suggestion that heavy socio-cultural commitments predisposed students to applications learning particularly at work as an alternative to other learning strategies such as attending tutorials or using the library that might be time-consuming. Circumstances that promoted more frequent use of the English language provided opportunities for improving the level of English language usage which was more conducive to successful learning at a distance.

Clearly, these contextual circumstances indicate that, for this study, variables within the personal, situational and study environments of the students are associated in varying degrees with their motivation and confidence levels, and with cognitive and study skills that characterise the USP distance learners.

9.4.3 Are dispositional and learning preparedness variables good predictors of performance by the USP students?

The most unexpected results of the multiple regression exercise has been the indication that the disposition and learning preparedness of the student measured by the variables cited above, are not predictors of performance. In the previous section, the strength of the environmental variables in determining the attitude, approach and cognitive preparedness of the adult distance learner at the USP is quite evident from the study data. These variables predominate as significant performance indicators, suggesting that in the case of the USP group, the contextual dynamics of the USP students' hold much more sway over the performance levels of the students than the personal traits derived from these dynamics. In other words, positive attitudes, strong motivation and appropriate study skills are not as necessary preconditions to successful distance learning by the USP group as are the features of the environment peculiar to them. This is a significant finding for the USP with strong implications in particular for course development and support services and facilities that comprise their distance learning programme and the policies that govern them.
9.4.4 Inferential analysis: who performs best and why

The results of cluster analysis produced four large groups of students from the study sample on the basis of a combination of characteristics unique to each one. Using an analysis of variance procedure, the mean aggregate score for final course examinations for each group was investigated. Cluster 6 was found to have significantly outperformed both Clusters 1 and 8, with comparative results to Cluster 10. Features of Cluster 6, particularly those that differentiate it from other Clusters, were described in detail in Chapter 6.

With regard to the discussion presented in this chapter, several of the features that were associated with successful performance, and attributable to Cluster 6 students, confirm the research findings. This group of students, for instance, lived in extended families with the largest number of people, had the largest number of children of mixed ages and supported the most people with their income with the assistance of one other person. These circumstances make for the economic and financial pressures that were seen as the dominating external reason for the involvement of the USP student in further education. Cluster 6 students displayed some typical demographic features, namely, being Fiji Indian male in the age category of 21-40 years and being married. The economic reasons for studying might also be a reflection of generational differences within the wide age cohort. Some students were keen to gain qualifications that would contribute towards improving economic activities, presumably older students in the group, while younger students might be associated with requiring qualifications to improve their intra-employment opportunities.

In terms of educational background, the fact that many Cluster 6 students did not pass all of the subjects in their public examination in Form 6, reinforces, from a different angle, the finding that it was the exposure to independent learning associated with senior high and not the level and achievement factors, that was important to successful tertiary study at a distance. Cluster 6 students were different from students in the other clusters in being the only group to assess themselves as independent learners, confident in their ability and preparedness to meet the challenges of the return to formal education. However, as with the majority of students in the study sample, they were inclined towards tutor direction and support, most likely a reflection of high school experiences. It is also important to note that Cluster 6 students were
the only group with a commercial studies high school background, a feature which was associated with the factor of demography that was a significant performance predictor. This feature, plus the level of high school achieved, probably made up for the fact that many of the students in Cluster 6 did not do any post-secondary study which is a significant performance predictor.

As an applications-oriented group, Cluster 6 students stood out from the rest as the group doing most learning from work experience. In addition, they complemented this learning skill with more study hours daily than any of the other clusters. In combination, these two variables, as high predictors of performance, must ensure the success of Cluster 6 students to a large extent.

With access to and use of USP Centres being variable for this group, and work and community facilities being largely inadequate, much of their study is done at home where facilities are rated as very good. Considering the possibility of overcrowdedness as a feature of family life associated with Cluster 6, it is possible that within the large household there are compensating factors among the numbers and household generations involved. It is suggested, for instance, that older generations within Cluster 6 households relieve the students of their household management and maintenance responsibilities which allows the students to invest the time saved in study hours. As much of their study is done after hours (see interview data, Chapters 7 and 8) overcrowdedness may not be an issue.

A crucial finding of this study with regard to its implications for the USP distance education vocational programme, is the fact that the typical student enrolled in the Accounting and Management programmes does not share a number of key features with students in Cluster 6. Notably, the typical student lives in a nuclear family consisting of fewer people including fewer and younger children. He also supports proportionately fewer people. Considering the significance of family circumstances in providing the economic push towards economic solutions associated with further studies, it would appear that for the typical student, motivation to study may not have the strength of that attributable to students in Cluster 6 who were associated with more difficult, family-related economic circumstances.
With regard to educational background, the typical student comes from a mixed science/commerce background as against the concentration of Cluster 6 students on commerce subjects. This latter situation has stood the Cluster 6 group in good stead in terms of successful performance in their current vocational programmes, and the likelihood that they had a good subject area background preparation is strong.

In terms of their current study, the typical student does not put in as many hours of study as those in the Cluster 6 group. Again, study time is a significant predictor of performance, more hours being associated with success. In addition, the typical student does not appear to be sufficiently prepared for and disposed to distance learning. His motivation to study as determined by relevant circumstances, has been questioned above. Consequently, his confidence level, seen in previous discussions to be related to motivation, must also be questioned. The typical student does not see himself as an independent learner with an expressed preference for group learning and tutor-direction. With regard to learning style, although the typical student is inclined towards application-type courses, only up to 50 percent of his learning comes from experience at work compared to as much as 75 percent for Cluster 6 students.

9.5 Concluding comments

From the results of the profile exercise and the various statistical analyses of the data, the significance of the variables within the personal, situational and study contexts of the student in influencing his ability and study capacity is clear. This significance is seen, in real life terms, in the analysis of the interview data and especially in the case studies. To some extent, the USP data confirms the generalisability of certain features of adult and distance learning to the USP situation, although in other respects, the USP students are unique in their attributes and characteristics as adult distance learners. Certain of the variables within the student's environment and attributes of the students were identified by regression analysis as significant predictors of performance. Through the process of cluster analysis, these study features gained confirmation with regard to their association with the highest performing cluster of students. By comparison with this cluster of students, the typical distance vocational student at USP appears to be different to some degree with respect to select significant performance predictors.
This finding would have important ramifications for the way distance education is approached and operated in the USP context.

9.6 The Chapter in Summary

In this chapter the results of all the various statistical procedures used to analyse the data and render it meaningful with respect to the study objectives and questions, were discussed. Wherever possible and relevant, interview data was used to bring 'real life' to statistical outcomes. In this respect, the USP student in his environment was able to be compared, as well, to distance students elsewhere and questions regarding the universality of certain features of adult and distance learning confirmed or rejected with regard to the USP situation. Finally, the results of inferential analyses and their implications for the USP distance education programme were also covered in this chapter.
CHAPTER 10 : CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Chapter Outline

This chapter begins with a discussion of the limitations of the study and the extent to which outcomes may be adversely affected by them. It then goes on to discuss the implications that the outcomes of the study have for adult learning and distance education theory, and for practice at the USP. This discussion focuses especially on ways in which these outcomes show the USP group and situation to be comparable with or different from adult distance learners in other contexts. In so doing it is able to recommend practice and research specifically for the USP group, as well as the use of research findings from abroad whose relevance and applicability for the USP context have been previously determined. In conclusion it confirms the usefulness of the data in spite of the limitations of the study.

10.2 Introduction

This study was generated out of the general concern that, in the absence of firsthand knowledge and information about the students studying at a distance at the USP, it was possible that the teaching and learning objectives of the USP distance learning course packages did not match the learning requirements of its targeted students. Related to this concern was the idea that alternative sources of information about distance education, and in particular about the student dimension might not be relevant and applicable to the USP situation. This would be especially so if this information was derived from empirical and theoretical studies of distance education in other contexts, particularly those of the western world and culture. The situation, too, that University Extension did not appear to have a defined philosophy of education nor a development policy for the growth of University Extension (see Chapters 1 and 2) might well be partly attributable to the lack of knowledge about its students, current and potential, and their educational needs and goals. The preoccupation of the University with meeting the training needs decided by the national and economic growth policies of the countries of the Region might well continue to dominate its functional direction and draw it...
away from addressing necessary initiatives and developments in the area of the students and learning. Because knowledge of the learners is crucial to the provision of appropriate learning opportunities, the lack of such constitutes a serious deficiency for any educational institution. These broad-based thoughts and concerns led this study its research questions and objectives couched within the framework of principles of adult learning and the psychological perspectives from which they were derived. The overall objective of the study to examine the extent to which variables within the personal, situational and study environments of the students under survey influence their disposition and preparedness to study by distance, is an approach much recommended by adult educationists and researchers. It recognises the significant role of the environment, and the student’s place within it, in moulding and shaping the adult learner’s perception of and attitude to education, his/her motivation and confidence levels, and preparation for undertaking further studies.

The fact that research on distance learning in the USP context on a regional basis was almost non-existent at the time of this study necessitated this project be conducted on an exploratory basis into this area. Studies that are exploratory in nature usually serve two general purposes: they seek to discover new information and knowledge and, from this, they look for useful and relevant directions for future research and practice. For this study there can be no question that the area to be explored in both the physical and conceptual sense was vast and beset with challenges for the research project envisaged. The nature and effect of some of these challenges were seen in the relevant preceding chapters of this study. The overriding challenge was to undertake a regional survey in spite of the logistical difficulties affecting the research process. The exploratory nature of the exercise brought difficulties associated with the need for the researcher to arrive at best-informed assumptions under the circumstances, about the area to be studied and to make decisions about how best to make an exploration into these assumptions as close to reality as possible. These requirements were influential in the methodological approach to the study and in the design and development of the study questionnaire which, in turn, defined in various ways the data that was returned. The qualitative dimension added to this data by the interviews helped to provided ‘real world’ contexts for the results of the statistical analysis of the questionnaire data. Some notable results have been achieved from the analyses of both the questionnaire and interview data which have implications for existing
theory of adult and distance learning and especially for the effective practice of teaching adults in the distance mode at the USP.

However, given the challenges envisioned at the outset for studies of such scope and magnitude, some research limitations were to be expected both foreshadowed and unexpected at the time of the undertaking, with regard to the framing of the study, its realisation in the field and resulting outcomes. The following section focuses on these limitations and discusses them in relation to their effect on the findings of the study.

10.3 Limitations of the Study

One of the major limitations of the study concerned the degree to which the characteristics and features of students who returned questionnaires were representative of those of the population under study. Many of the problems related to this representation issue were touched on in Chapter 3. In addition, the regional nature of the study and its related magnitude meant that the whole process of questionnaire distribution and return had necessarily to be assisted by many people and thus was dependent to a large extent on the commitment and goodwill of these assistants. Given that the most appropriate and effective assistants were Centre Directors and staff, the required assistance for the study was an encroachment into their already full work schedules. It was anticipated, as a result, that the amount and quality of assistance would vary in relation to the amount of time available to Centre staff to commit to this requested support. This would, consequently, lead to bias in the study sample.

It was envisaged at the outset that because of the popularity of the diploma programmes under study, one way of offsetting this likely bias was to increase the chances of a high number of responses and thereby the chances of an acceptable level of representation of each USP country as well as of student characteristics. With respect to the latter, the prohibited access to the student database at the USP by the researcher meant that there was no opportunity to compare characteristics of the respondents with those of the study population. Conclusions in this study on student characteristics were thus subject to this limitation and presented with a rider on caution in their wider application.
The response rate of 23 percent was disappointing, although the high number of responses this represented enabled the study to be continued. Not all countries were adequately represented in terms of the proportion of returned questionnaires to their total enrolments (see Table 4.1). For these countries, in particular, (Tonga, Vanuatu, Western Samoa), the statistical evidence and conclusions of this study must be applied with added caution and tentativeness.

With regard to assessing how well the student characteristics of the study sample represented known characteristics of the study population, there were certain limitations. On the one hand, the USP student database did not encompass a wide range of student information and was confined to mainly demographic data, the location of the students (by postal address, which posed a problem for students who were to be reached by postal boxes), gender, educational background and admission criteria. In addition, at the time of the survey, print access to the information was not available due to problems associated with newly installed software which was still being trialled. For reasons of confidentiality and software access, the researcher was not permitted direct access to the electronic database by the USP. Because of this, the researcher was unable to obtain much of the information that would have enabled the comparison of the sample population data with that of the study population. The student list released to the researcher prior to fieldwork contained, apart from names and registration numbers, the postal addresses of the students which could not be used with accuracy because of the large number of postal box addresses given. The generalisability of information and attributes of the respondents to the students enrolled in the DACS and DMS is therefore based solely on chance representation associated with the high number of questionnaires returned, and must therefore also be treated with caution.

Limitations related to the interview process also posed problems for the study although in a less significant way. All but one of the interviewed students were in full-time employment and at the time of the visit of the researcher to their respective countries the only convenient times available to most for interview were lunch breaks. The breadth and depth of the interview data was therefore constrained in a temporal sense and affected by how quickly rapport could be achieved between interviewer and interviewee. As the latter varied according to the individual student, this reflected on what and how much was able to be extracted during the interview and resulted in variations in the comprehensiveness and detail of the information obtained.
Conclusions on some issues in the interview data analysis may therefore have been reached on information of insufficient depth and detail.

10.4 Implications of Research Findings for Theory and Principles of Adult and Distance Education

The overriding aim of this study was to determine the extent to which environmental variables mediated the performance of students in both direct and indirect ways. It had also to confirm or reject the increasing current acceptance that distance education was in fact concerned only with the teaching of adults. The USP data did confirm that distance education in the South Pacific Region was indeed about adult education in that the bulk of the students in the study were 21 years old and over, falling mainly in the age category of 21-40 years.

Interactionist theory claims that for adults, life, and aspects of it including attitudes to learning, is directed and motivated by how they perceive and balance positive and negative forces in their environment (Cross, 1981). Data from the USP students generally confirmed the influential role of the environment on their personal, situational and study milieu and on their disposition and preparedness to learn in both direct and indirect ways. In so doing, it not only confirmed interactionist theory but supported as well the recommendation in the literature (Gibson, 1990) for the inclusion of environmental variables in models of distance education as significant determinants of effective adult learning.

However, findings from this study also indicated that environmental dynamics were context specific to a fairly large extent, and this must also be accounted for in models of adult learning in any mode of education. It was seen for instance, that demographic variables were more significant predictors of performance for the South Pacific students than they were for students in the western world in particular. Demographic variables, and age in particular, signalled the variety of family conditions and circumstances associated with various age categories, that provided strong economic reasons for the return to formal study. This was associated with the upgrading of qualifications as the prerequisite for improving economic situations. Because they were strongly related to various cultural features of the South Pacific such as the focus on the...
extended family, communal/cultural obligations as well as socio-religious commitments, economic pressures tended to increase with age. This is quite unlike the situation in western contexts where maturity was associated with stable (and by implication, more comfortable) economic situations. Thus, throughout the wide age range of 21-40 years, USP distance students were mainly driven by economic reasons. Students in western contexts on the other hand, were largely clustered in the 35-40 year age group (Lauffer, 1988). As, by this stage, life would have relatively stabilised economically for this latter group, it would be logical to assume that while economic reasons were important motivational factors for them, these reasons were not driven by the same kind of economic pressures peculiar to the USP students. It might also be logical to assume that western culture, being more oriented towards the nuclear family fostering values of independence and self-sufficiency, would not bring to bear the same kind of cultural pressures on the individual as would the more communally-oriented cultures of the South Pacific Region. In addition therefore to economic commitments specific to students in this study, it was seen that cultural, communal and religious obligations also made their demands on the USP student in ways unique to the way of life in the South Pacific.

It was implicit as well, in the discussion about economic motivation that the adult distance students at USP, like their counterparts abroad, were in full-time employment and were therefore studying on a part-time basis. Moreover, their priority attention was directed towards family and work, and studies were in heavy competition with commitments in these areas. These features are becoming increasingly accepted as generic characteristics of adult distance learners and confirmed for the USP group by the findings of this study.

An equally important aim of this study was to find out the extent to which learning attributes of the distance student in the South Pacific compared with those of distance learners in various other contexts. This aim was driven by the concern that in the absence of information and knowledge about the learner and learning in the USP Region, the course development process at the USP was necessarily guided by extraneous information in this area. This raised the question of the relevance and suitability of the information and knowledge gained by this process for the USP Region and its students, and more specifically of the theories and principles on which they were grounded. Little, if any attempt has been made to date towards finding answers to this question and it is therefore a possibility that the course development
process of the USP is founded on inaccuracies as far as its students and their learning requirements are concerned.

Aside from features long under survey and now recognised by the literature as generic to adult and distance learning such as the need for some form of interaction and dialogue in the learning process, the use of technology to assist this communication in distance education, and the need for some form of mediation in the learning process either through the local tutor or by artificial means, there is on-going debate about the universality of other attributes closely associated with the teaching and learning of adults in the distance mode. Significant in this debate is the issue of independence and self-learning, found to be essential to learning at a distance and associated with the adult learner in particular. However, recent studies have challenged this association and have specified instead that independence in learning is more a human trait associated with learning need and preference across all age groups. A significant feature in determining the development of this trait is the attitude of society towards the way its members learn (Jarvis, 1987). Thus, because adults have been expected to rely less on a teacher and more on themselves in the learning process, they have come to be seen as independent learners. In the case of the USP students under survey, the data appeared to confirm this perspective. Close examination of the last school form variable as a significant performance predictor pointed to its strength being in the learning independence forced upon students by adverse school conditions (Chapter 9). In addition, the interview data showed that those students who went abroad for high school studies were exposed to a great deal of independence in both their personal and school lives and returned with an appreciation of the requirements of independent study which was later transferred to, and even partly motivated their distance study. That their performance in their public examinations in this last school year, and any post-secondary undertaking were not associated with their performance as distance learners, also lent support to the conceptual perspective represented by Jarvis. However, data from students in this study, as well as from the on-campus USP students interviewed by Landbeck and Mugler (1994), appeared to indicate that the state of independence was acquired by the synthesis, in stages, of its various characteristics. Students in this study who were exposed to an independent life understood that it came by appropriate time and self-management. Students who were forced to learn on their own associated it with learning and study skills that ensured that they passed their final examinations. These were
usually surface learning skills involving the memorisation of information and its regurgitation at the examination. Yet others saw successful self-study as the willingness and ability to pursue and seek help when it was needed. In view of the limited human and material resources within the environment of the USP distance learner, this task could very well require certain personality traits such as a personable approach and the art of persuasion. All of these students saw their partial experience of independence as the ability to study alone, but conceded the need for tutorial and group support in their learning endeavours. It is proposed that this tendency might be an indication of the partial nature of the independence of USP distance learners still yet to acquire aspects of the trait that would make for holistic independence. Continued experience as a distance student plays a part in the acquisition and development of all of the skills required for complete independence. However, if this persistence is to be assured then the perspectives of independence represented by the “independent” students in this study must be considered in the discussion and definition of the qualities and concept of independence as presented by theory. This definition is important because distance learning, by its very nature, is about learning on one’s own, and if education is to be appropriately geared towards independent learning then both teacher and learner must be properly informed as to their individual roles in such a scheme.

Adult distance learners have also been deemed in theory and principle to be more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated. Thus their studies are geared towards self-actualization in a holistic development sense. Relative to the USP group, adult learners in the Western world in particular, and on whose development western theory and principles of adult learning have been derived, are older. This group of students can therefore be expected, generally, to be at stage of their lives where careers have either been made or are being consolidated. Study can therefore be expected to be more interest-driven and intrinsically stimulated than can be said for a group of younger adults still striving to prove themselves and their capacity for a career to an outside world. At face value, it does appear that adult distance learners in this study were driven largely by external forces in their quest for solutions to demanding economic circumstances. However, on close examination, it also became clear that the process of increasing their ability to cope with economic conditions increased also their opportunities for realising personal growth. Aside from economic reasons for studying, the USP students also cited interest and improved qualifications as popular motivating factors. In the interview data
these reasons were articulated in terms of the development of chosen careers. In this regard, motivation can then be seen to be more personally related and driven by the students themselves rather than imposed from without. Hence the 'teachable moment' for the USP student came as a combination of external forces coupled with a personal disposition towards learning and development. The combined attributes of this 'teachable moment' were also responsible for the claimed confidence by the USP students to return to and continue formal studies. It is a shortcoming of this study that the definition of confidence was left to the subjective interpretation of the students. In this event, therefore, variations in the perception of the concept by the student, were expected. However, there was some consistency in the answers given to questions that could well be related to confidence levels such as the willingness to work independently and the realisation that extension study meant a commitment to proper time management and the prioritisation of study over other time-consuming and less important activities. Taken together, these answers provided a fair indication of how confidence might have been interpreted by the USP students in relation to the requirements of distance study. In this context it is possible to say that the USP students were a confident group of students. Whether this confidence is the same feature attributable by the literature to adult distance learners in general needs to be ascertained.

Adult distance learners are also expected, in principle, to be oriented towards group learning. The literature has cited this orientation in terms of the special needs of groups of students studying at a distance. Culturally, some students, particularly those coming from traditional and oral cultures, learned best this way as it is a key feature of their cultural background. It was also a feature of the working class whose associated low esteem as students inclined them towards learning by sharing and comparing. Women were a group of students who needed to be in a social context to be motivated to learn. A key feature of the USP group was their strongly declared need for group and tutorial assistance. In the probe for further detail in the interviews, every one of the reasons cited above appeared to hold true for the USP group. In this respect, the USP data can be said to contribute to and confirm the social learning tendencies of adult distance learners universally, and for the various reasons cited. In addition, it can also be seen as related to the isolation factor of the distance mode and is an opportunity for each student to find in one another and in a tutor a means for measuring his/her own progress and performance, in the physical absence of the course teacher.
Finally, the tendency of adults towards applications and experience-based learning is well established as a feature of adult learning. One of the most frequently cited reasons for adult persistence in their learning is the immediacy of application of what is being learned to aspects of everyday living and to the work situation. The USP students were no different in this inclination. Learning from work experience (and by implication the ability to apply newly learned knowledge and information to carry out the requirements of their work) was a strategy used most frequently by the highest performing cluster of students (Chapter 6). Relevance to their work was also cited by interviewed students as a highly appreciated opportunity to learn. In addition, some students also acknowledged the applicability of the knowledge and information to their personal lives as a factor in their motivation to continue.

In the above section, the discussion clearly shows that the USP group have both features unique to itself as a group, and those that they share universally with other adult distance learners. In this respect, it contributes towards a general implication for theory by pointing out the need for caution in applying extraneous evidence to new contexts. It is well-advised that theories are examined for relevance and suitability prior to being accepted and operationalised in a new context.

10.5 Implications and Recommendations for Practice at the USP

The second purpose for the exploration undertaken here into the world of the adult distance learner at the USP was the search for guidance towards more effective practice and towards appropriate and relevant research. Being the first extensive study of its kind on learning and the learning attributes of the students in the USP Region, many of the outcomes of this study represent new information which will have implications for the way the USP approaches the teaching and learning support of its adult distance learners. Major implications are discussed below including recommendations for the institution where these are judged to be appropriate from the data concerned.
10.5.1 Implications for teaching and learning at a distance

1. Matching teaching and learner features

One of the more outstanding features of Cluster 6 students which set them aside not only from students in the three other study clusters, but from the typical vocational student as well, was their application of three hours and more to their daily study. Data analysis revealed that this feature was highly likely to be the reason for their high performance in their final examination in comparison to the other students. The implication that this had for the USP is that the work entailed in a vocational diploma course required this amount of time for successful completion and pass in the examination. However, the University Extension blueprint for the design and development of distance education courses recommends that students allocate between six to ten hours of study each week. This "mismatch" was found by Lockwood (1987) to have existed at the USP in 1987 and it would appear that his suggestion of reconciling the amount of teaching materials produced with the need to package them for periods of study time did not receive serious attention. For the USP the problem might have its roots further back in the process in that course content for the distance students was often produced by overseas staff. It was suggested in Chapters 1 and 2 that such staff might well bring with them expectations of their students which did not match the realities of the Region.

In addition, it was also possible that for many staff at the USP writing for the distance mode was an unfamiliar exercise in which they had limited or no experience.

In the course of assisting with the implementation of the COL and CFTC recommendations in 1993, Thomas (Wah and Thomas, 1993) noted that instructional design staff at University Extension did not all have the experience and training to undertake their work effectively, and by implication therefore, could not offer appropriate instructional design advice towards course development. The implications of inadequacy for the basic course development team at the USP made up of teaching staff and instructional designers, coupled with University Extension’s possible lack of
accurate and appropriate information, could well lead the course development process on an errant path.

This study has several recommendations for this situation: firstly, that University Extension ensure the training and upgrading of its instructional design staff as an integral part of its role in the course development process at the USP. This can be done on a regular basis within University Extension itself with assistance from qualified personnel from within and outside the University Region, as well as on a needs basis as in the case of specialist training such as proficiency in relevant computer software. That a number of the staff at the Distance Education Unit are currently enrolled in postgraduate diplomas in distance education is indicative of the awareness of University Extension of the problem, and a step in the right direction.

Secondly, University Extension should make the running of course development seminars and workshops a regular feature of its operations, in order to provide the USP teaching staff with guidelines necessary for the development of effective distance courses. This recommendation was also proposed by the COL Review report which now gains additional substance with the research evidence of this study. These training sessions can well be run by properly qualified and experienced staff within University Extension, or with external assistance.

Thirdly, it is recommended that University Extension put into place an appropriate formula to determine the right amount of course workload consistent with the recommended hours for study by the students. In arriving at this formula, it will be important to take cognisance of the fact that courses can become difficult for many reasons other than their length and depth of demand. In particular, for the ESL students of the USP Region, a heavy dependence on print material and insufficient and/or inadequate instruction and opportunities for dialogue might constitute two such reasons. For the students in this study, their inclination towards group and applications learning and the general low level of proficiency in English prompt the further recommendations that effort be put into providing opportunities for a variety of learning opportunities to
include various kinds of group support, and learning applications and multi-media approaches in place of total print packages.

2. **Socio-cultural demands on the USP students**

Significant to the implications and recommendations above is the revelation by the data that most students in this study were not able to allocate three hours to their study daily, with the typical student managing between two and three hours. It is also surmised very strongly from the data that this situation was a reflection of the student’s socio-cultural environment and its demands on the time available to the students outside of that committed to work and family. Furthermore, there were inequities in this demand in that the ethnic cultures of the Region were found to be more responsive to socio-cultural obligations than the Fiji Indian students. The latter group of students were therefore, as the dominating group in Cluster 6, able to do a lot more studying daily. For the USP then, increasing the expected hours of study per course might not be the solution for the bulk of its students in vocational programmes as revealed by this study. The recommended solution is the improvement and upgrading of course support facilities which is discussed in detail in the following section.

3. **Distance learning support and assistance**

Cluster 6, as the highest performing group of students in this study (see Chapter 6) was the only group of students able to allocate more study hours than recommended by University Extension to their extension courses. In addition, with regard to the algorithm used in the computation of their examination results, the average aggregate score of 2.25 by Cluster 6 students (Table 6.1) represented a pass at the C grade. For the rest and majority of the students in this study, therefore, the average aggregate score of under two represented fail grades. This finding implies that those students doing less than three hours of study daily are predicted to be unsuccessful in their efforts.

The allocation of three study hours daily was shown in the data as possibly an alternative study strategy making up for the unavailability or lack of adequate teaching/learning support and assistance for the extension courses. For instance, the typical student made limited or infrequent use of his USP Centre whose facilities were
described by most students as just satisfactory to inadequate with respect to supporting their courses and learning. The situation was a little worse with respect to work and community facilities, with most students having no other option but to study and support themselves at home. Often, opportunities at home were no more than the bare minimum. For the USP, this has two possible implications: that either the course package must be totally self-sufficient so that no help outside of it is needed for its successful completion, or that the USP must upgrade and improve its learning support facilities at its USP Centres if these are to be part of the total learning exercise. University Extension claims to have in place a ‘standalone’ policy which ensures the self-sufficiency of course packages. However, even if this were the case, a ‘standalone’ policy in itself cannot fully account for the dominant learning orientations indicated by the students in this study towards some group learning and tutorial assistance. As has been suggested in previous Chapters, these orientations might well be a reflection of inadequate course packages so that group and tutorial support were supplementary rather than real needs. Further study is needed to clarify this situation. In any event, two recommendations are made with regard learning materials and support: that courses continue to be produced as standalone packages so that the isolated students for whom the policy was originally intended, are able to complete the courses successfully; secondly, it is recommended that University Extension place in priority the upgrading and improving of its Centre support facilities. In so doing, it would allow Centre staff to be able to help students make up for shortcomings in their courses by providing additional and supplemental assistance, as well as accommodate different learning orientations and needs among the students. Furthermore, given the indication by students that Centres were inclined to be reactive rather than proactive to their learning needs, it is also recommended that the USP put in place a policy which will extend the ability and authority of the Centre to take the initiative in finding out what learning needs were best taken care of locally and to respond to them accordingly. This recommendation would be in keeping with the original vision and purpose behind the setting up of the local Centre (see Chapter 1).
4. **Implications of the economic situation**

It was strongly suggested by the data in this study that access to the USP Centre by the students was partly related to affordability. Although the average income of $F5,000 to $F9,999 was seen to be adequate for a comfortable living by South Pacific standards, a fairly large proportion of it was absorbed by obligations to the community and extended family. In this event, then, part of USP’s commitment to the support and maintenance of its distance learning programme and students should also include an attempt at meeting the affordability levels of its students. The location of support services and facilities, for instance, is crucial in this accessibility issue. Many students indicated that the physical distance of the Centre was a problem not just for the isolated students but in the case of centrally located students as well. For the many students in this latter group this ‘distance’ was a function of either poor and irregular public transport, or inability to afford public transport or both. Much of the USP’s efforts at providing support services and facilities could therefore be wasted if students were not able to reach them.

5. **Age-related study and learning implications**

From information elicited on post-secondary study, it was clear that for almost all of the students in this study, this current educational undertaking was their first attempt at university level studies. This obviously had implications for the disposition and preparatory states of the students for this endeavour. Considering the wide age range of the respondents, younger students could be expected to be able to recall high school and any other post-secondary experience more easily than older students. However, younger students would not have had the wider life and work experiences of the older age cohorts. In addition, family life experiences of the younger students in this group differed from those of the older students and these defined different kinds of learning barriers for the different age cohorts. All of these features, specifically related to age and demographic variables in the contexts of students across the 21-40 year age bracket have certain implications for the way they approach and deal with their tertiary studies. Because it is clear from the literature that the introductory years are important in determining the continuation of studies, USP is recommended to provide for its new intake in particular, as has been recommended for first year on-campus students.
(Landbeck and Mugler, 1994), an introduction and orientation programme which takes into account potential dispositional and preparatory problems and barriers to learning at the tertiary level, related to the demographic makeup of the vocational students studying at a distance. This programme will benefit also from the inclusion of information regarding the structure of the various programmes of study offered by the University which was indicated by a great number of the students to be unavailable to them. It should also include an introduction to cognitive and study skills crucial to successful studying at tertiary level focussing on the effective achievement of understanding, analysis and applications techniques which most students indicated in this study as being their greatest need in their transition to university studies. In addition, qualities of a good distance learner, such as independent learning and its requirements, and proper time and self-management should also be made known and taught in this orientation programme so that learners are offered the opportunity to ‘learn how to learn’ and in so doing, become more able independent distance learners.

6. Educational Background

A notable finding of this study was the association of learning independence with the attainment of upper high school levels, and that this independence was a significant predictor of performance. Given the USP’s mature entry policy, and given the data indication that many of the older students in particular might have gained entry in this manner, it was possible that a large group of students might not have been exposed to some form of learning self-dependence (see Chapter 4). It was also established that the students under survey were generally highly motivated and confident in their return to formal studies. However, these dispositional variables were not important in predicting performance and were overridden by the independence gained from having attained sixth form during which time, in various ways, they were exposed to some facet of self-dependence. It was thus also seen in Chapter 4 that students assessing themselves independent learners were, in fact, not independent in a holistic sense. It is recommended yet again, therefore, that the requirements of self-study be taught as a conscious effort by the USP to educate their distance students in learning how to learn. The literature has indicated that this is possible and recommended universally for distance study which is synonymous with self-study. In this educational endeavour, it
is possible that at least some of the problems currently being experienced by USP distance students will be taken care of.

10.5.2 Implications for further research

With all its limitations, this study has some useful recommendations for further research both into the world of the adult distance learner as well as in other aspects of distance education related to it.

1. Further and more detailed exploration into adult distance learning at the USP is recommended first and foremost, which would benefit from recognising the limitations associated with this study as well as its results. Such a study would serve to make research in this area as comprehensive as possible with the depth required to ensure a thorough investigation of the world of the adult distance learner at the USP. Part of this extension would be a further examination of the barriers to learning contained in the personal, situational and study contexts of the USP group identified in this research as more significant predictors of performance than issues of disposition and preparedness to study. The recommendation for additional research in this area is made in light of the outcome of multiple regression analysis that the 10 Factors of this study accounted for only 16.4 percent of the variance in final examination performance. Two things are suggested by this result: that this study did not explore the area fully enough, and that accountability for the balance of this variance is located elsewhere, most likely in the institutional and teaching dimensions of the distance education programme.

2. The second recommendation is therefore for research into the institutional and teaching dimensions of distance education at the USP. From the implications raised above in respect to both theory and practice, it is clear that a number of the shortcomings for the adult distance learner at the USP are related to and associated with the teaching, teaching support, maintenance and delivery of the courses. These matters fall outside of the learner's ability to overcome them on his/her own within his/her learning environment, and call for an educational policy by the institution that recognises and
promotes the partnership of institution, teacher and learner in the educational endeavour. In this regard, it is also recommended that such an educational policy, based on sound educational principles and philosophy especially of the teaching of adults in the distance mode, be put in place. Both such policy and philosophy were found by the COL Review (Renwick et al. 1991) to be missing; this study supports that finding.

3. In the course of this research, it was found that certain aspects of the learning and learner dimension needed more clarification and detailed investigation. One such area was mentioned above in the need for a further examination of the reasons for group and tutorial assistance tendencies by this group. It was suggested that this orientation was probably brought about more by gaps in the learning materials than by the real learning needs of the students.

Another area that will benefit from further study is the examination of various concepts such as confidence, independence, self-direction and dialogue associated with distance and adult learning, in more detail in the USP context, in the interest of ascertaining the degree to which these concepts have universal meaning. This exercise is important if University Extension is to benefit from ongoing empirical studies outside the Region given the difficulty that it has had in conducting its own research. In this case, ascertaining whether or not such research findings are relevant and useable for the USP context may mean that more time will be available for USP staff to spend on context-specific issues.

One such issue might well be the requirements of special needs groups among the adult distance learners at USP. One such group is women; data from the literature, confirmed in a limited way by findings in this study, showed that women have an approach to study different from that of men, in that they had a greater need for the social group. Another special interest group might be termed the socially-distanced; nursing mothers, physically handicapped, culturally-disadvantaged (eg. Interviewee 15 - Chapter 8) all fall into this category because they are not able to gain access to the institution and its services and facilities whenever they need or want to. Accommodating these groups of students will mean a special effort on the part of the institution to identify and meet
their special needs. As women alone form at least one-third of the distance student intake, this effort is necessary if USP is to attempt to ensure the successful performance of a large number of its distance students.

10.6 Chapter Summary, Conclusion and Final Statement

In this chapter, the limitations of the study were discussed in order to ascertain the extent of their influence on the final outcomes of the study. This was followed by a discussion of the implications that the findings of the study had for theory of adult and distance learning and for practice at the USP. Recommendations related to these implications were also proposed and found in conclusion to be sound in spite of the limitations of the study.

Questionnaire survey and complementary interview data provided an extensive insight into the world of the adult distance learner enrolled in two of USP's most popular vocational programmes of study. These programmes represented a large number of the total distance education intake. Although the findings of this study must be treated with caution in the areas of deficiency identified at the beginning of this Chapter, much of the information gained could be useful to the USP in two broad respects. Firstly, it has laid the foundation for future studies of its kind in nature and scope to be undertaken with respect to the adult distance learner and other dimensions of distance education at the USP. Secondly, it has identified several implications for the relevance of theory and the practice of distance education at the USP, and further research to assist in this. At the level of operation, new information about the USP distance learner in context has indicated that he/she operates largely under conditions peculiar to the USP Region and its various cultures. These conditions set individual USP countries, ethnic groups and special needs groups apart as much as they set the USP group apart from the rest of the world. In undertaking this study, the overriding intention of the researcher was to open up the world of adult distance learners at the USP in order to ascertain what their learning needs were and the environmental determinants of such. In so doing it was also intended that the information gained by this insight would contain useful implications and recommendations for the adult distance teaching/learning programme at the USP. Study limitations accommodated, these overall aims have been achieved and presented in the hope
that they have not only extended the boundaries of knowledge, they have done so by usefully informing and guiding practice. It is hoped and recommended that once the initial exploration is made into the three dimensions of learning, teaching and institution, research will not stop here. There will always be an ongoing need for evaluation and review not only at these broad levels but also at the level of operation where time and new information will bring about changes that will be of relevance to the effective development of the USP distance education policy, philosophy and operation.
Appendix 1: Map showing countries of the USP Region
Appendix 2: Programme course components and details of DACS and DMS

Diploma in Accounting Studies - 10 courses:

Core Courses:
AF101 Financial Accounting*
AF102 Cost Accounting*
AF201 Managerial Accounting
AF203 Corporate Accounting
EC101 Macro-economics I
EC102 Micro-economics I
MA101 Basic Mathematics
SE100 Social Survey Methods and Data Analysis

Electives:
Two other courses from any discipline at least one of which will be at the 200 or 300 level.

* Prerequisite courses for AF201 and AF203

Diploma in Management Studies - 10 courses:

Core Courses:
MG101 Introduction to Management*
MG102 Introduction to Operations Management *
MG205 Financial Management for Non-Accountants
MG206 Marketing for Developing Countries
- and one of
MG201 Organisational Behaviour (2), or
MG207 Personnel Management in the South Pacific

Electives:
Any 5 degree courses, at least 2 of which must be at the 100 level, and at least 2 at the 200 or 300 level.

* Prerequisite courses for MG206 and MG207

(Source: University Extension Handbook, 1994)
Appendix 3: Research questionnaire and introductory letter

C/- University Extension
The University of the South Pacific
P.O. Box 1168
Suva
FIJI

July 1983

Dear

My name is Eileen Tuimalealifano. Last year I was awarded an Australian IDP scholarship by the USP to begin work on a PhD programme at the University of New England in Armidale, Australia. As the substantive Co-ordinator of Instructional Design and Development at University Extension, USP, I have taken the opportunity afforded me by this award to conduct research in an area that has always been of priority interest to me as an educator, that of the adult distance learner. This area of research also addresses a significant aspect of course development work at USP.

Specifically, my research is focussed on the attributes, learning orientation and study disposition of adult extension students at USP, and through it I wish to achieve two things:
1. First, create a profile of the adult distance learner at the USP. Included in this profile will be a description of the many variables and factors that exist in adult distance students' personal and study environments right across the USP Region, that students have to contend with in deciding to undertake extension studies and right throughout their course(s) once they have enrolled.
2. Secondly, I will conduct an analysis of these variables and factors in order to find out how useful they are in predicting how students will perform in their course(s).

With regard to course development work, both sets of information above are vital if extension courses and support facilities are to cater appropriately to the various needs of the students. I am hopeful that once this initial work has been done it will continue to be updated and expanded by Extension staff in the interest of providing effective distance courses, and useful and accessible support services.

I trust that this brief explanation will serve to convince you of the benefits of this study for USP extension students. I ask for your support and co-operation in providing me with the attached questionnaire. I apologise for the unavoidable length of the questionnaire and assure you that it contains only questions necessary to ensure that the study is as comprehensive as possible. In keeping with research protocols, your answers will be held in strict confidence and your name will not be mentioned in the final report without your permission and authorisation.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Tuimalealifano

Appendix Tuimalealifano (Mar)
RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

TITLE OF RESEARCH: Attributes, learning orientation and study disposition of adult extension students at the University of the South Pacific as determined and/or influenced by their personal contexts, educational background and study environments that assist or constrain persistence with and successful performance in distance study at USP.

The following questions have been designed in order to obtain from you information related to your personal context and the context in which you are studying as a USP extension student. The answers you provide will help the researcher to do two things: (a) draw up a profile consisting of characteristics and attributes of students currently studying by extension, and (b) from the data collected, identify those variables within your personal and study contexts that either assist or inhibit you in your studies. This information will be invaluable in drawing the attention of instructional designers at USP towards both your personal and study needs and how they affect you as a mature USP extension student. It is therefore intended that once this data base is established, it will be continuously updated for the ongoing improvement of course development at USP.

As many of these questions are of a personal nature, your answers will be confidential. Although you are required to give your name and other personal information, this is purely for the purpose of identifying you as a USP extension student; you will not be identified in person in any report(s) arising out of this research.

The researcher is Eileen Tuimalealiifano, currently on training leave from University Extension, USP, to undertake PhD. study at the University of New England, New South Wales, Australia. At USP, she was the Co-ordinator of Instructional Design and Development, and has a keen, professional interest in the learning needs of mature students studying at a distance through University Extension. She trusts that the outcome of this research will make a major contribution towards the effectiveness of instructional design and development at USP, and thereby be of benefit to extension students.

Your co-operation and support are deeply appreciated and acknowledged.

Eileen Tuimalealiifano
University of New England
Armidale, NSW.
1993.
SURVEY OF THE ATTRIBUTES, LEARNING ORIENTATION AND
STUDY DISPOSITION OF ADULT EXTENSION STUDENTS AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC.

INSTRUCTIONS: All answers to the following questions should
be provided in the spaces allocated within the questionnaire.
Where you are required to choose an option or options as your
answer, write the letter(s) of your choice in the space
provided in the right-hand margin. There is no time limit for
completion.

SECTION 1: PERSONAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. NAME ____________________________

2. STUDENT NO. ___________ 3. AGE ____________

4. SEX: (a) Male (b) Female (____)

5. MARITAL STATUS: (a) single (c) divorced
 (b) married (d) widow/widower (____)

6. NO. OF CHILDREN ___________

7. AGE(S) OF CHILD(REN) ______________

8. Residential Address ____________________________

9. What type of family do you have?

(a) **nuclear:** consisting of yourself, your spouse
and any children if you are married, or
yourself, your parents and brothers and
sisters;
(b) **extended:** includes other members of your
wider family (e.g. grandparents, uncles, aunts,
cousins) in addition to your nuclear family.

10. (i) How many people live in your household? ______

(ii) Please indicate the relationship of each
member to you and whether or not they are
economically dependent on you.
Relationship __________ Dependent/not dependent

Eg. Grandmother X

____________________

____________________
11. Work Address (if applicable) __________________

SECTION 2: CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

12. What ethnic group(s) do you belong to? You may choose more than one option if you are a child of a mixed marriage.

(a) Melanesian  (d) Asian/Fiji Indian
(b) Polynesian  (e) European
(c) Micronesian  (f) Other (indicate) ___

13. If you indicated in 12 above that you come from an ethnically-mixed background, does this mean that
(a) you are equally involved in more than one set of related cultural responsibilities?
(b) one culture dominates your family and you have only minor responsibilities in the other(s)?
(c) you are only marginally involved in cultural affairs?
(d) you keep completely away from any cultural involvement? ___

For questions 14 - 18, please give the information required in the tables provided. Examples are provided to guide you. To indicate the time that you spend on a weekly average, write the letter of your choice, from the following options, in the space provided in the right hand margin.

(a) less than 1 hour  (d) 11 - 15 hours
(b) 1 - 5 hours  (e) more than 15 hours
(c) 6 - 10 hours  (specify) ___ hours

14. This question is related to your socio-cultural responsibilities, i.e. the work that you do among your cultural community.

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<tr>
<th>Culture group</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Av. Tm.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Eg. Tongan</td>
<td>Leader of women's group</td>
<td>Village</td>
<td>(a)</td>
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</table>
15. Please indicate any responsible role you may have within your household and the average amount of time you spend on each every week. Eg. Full-time income earner

16. What is your religion (if applicable)?
   (a) Christian (Specify ________)
   (b) Hindu
   (c) Islam
   (d) Other (Specify ________)

17. Please indicate any special religious responsibilities you are required to carry out and the average amount of time per week for each task.
   Eg. Attend religious services

18. Please indicate any community responsibilities you may also have and the average amount of time you spend per week on each responsibility. Also include any Union responsibilities or other such activities related to your job or economic activity.
   Eg. Chairman, Save the Environment Committee
19. Have you attended, either locally or abroad, any conferences, seminars, short courses or group tours directly related to any of the cultural, social or religious roles that you mentioned above? Please list these below and give approximate dates of each.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>From</th>
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20. Indicate on the line below what your first language is, that is, the language that you were brought up in. For most people this would be their mother tongue.

__________________________________________________________________________

21. Please list below all the languages that you have some proficiency in, beginning with your mother tongue. Indicate your competency in each language by putting the letter of your choice from the scale given below, in the space provided in the right hand margin:

(a) Fluent (able to speak well) and literate (able to read and write competently) in both conversational and formal aspects of the language
(b) Fluent but not literate
(c) Literate but not fluent
(d) Competent in conversation only
(e) Able just to speak and understand a limited number of sentences, phrases and words.

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<thead>
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<th>Language</th>
<th>Competency</th>
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22. For this question, please choose one (or more) of the following options:

(a) mother tongue (if not English or French)
(b) English
(c) French
(d) Other (specify the language against the letter (d) in the right hand margin).

Which language did you, or do you use in the following contexts?

. at home
. at school
. at work
. at church
. at official functions
. at community functions

SECTION 3 : ECONOMIC CONTEXT

23. (i) If you are an income earner, indicate the letter of your main source(s) of income in the right hand margin.

(a) paid employment

(b) self-employment

(c) Other (please specify - eg. two main sources in the Pacific would be regular remittances from family living and working abroad, and income from lease of land)

(ii) If you answered (a) or (b) above, indicate your occupation or economic activity on the following line

24. How much money, in your local currency, do you currently earn a year?
25. What other jobs have you had, or economic activities have you been involved in, either within your own country or abroad, in the past? Please list the details in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
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26. (i) How many people, including yourself, do you support/help to support with your income? _____

(ii) How many other income earners are there in your household? _____

27. (i) Are you able to fully support your extension studies financially? (a) Yes (b) No (___)

(ii) If not, please indicate in the table below the source(s) of assistance that you have had access to in the past four years.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source of Assist.</th>
<th>Type of Assist.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>Reimbursement of fees when passed course</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
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<td>1992</td>
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<td>1990</td>
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</table>

28. (i) Will you be able to continue to rely on these sources of financial assistance? (a) Yes (b) No (c) Not sure (___)

(ii) If you answered no or not sure, please give reasons

29. (i) Is the USP Centre able to assist you in any way eg. time-payment system for fees, or textbook loan? (a) Yes (b) No (c) Not sure (___)
(ii) If yes, please specify the kind of assistance you have had access to:


30. Please make suggestions below about how you would like your centre to assist you economically:


31. In what way is your involvement in extension studies related to an improvement in your economic situation? You may choose more than one option.
(a) success will earn me one or more increments
(b) success will lead to a promotion
(c) better qualifications will help me improve the productivity, output or profit of my business or economic activity
(d) better qualifications will help me extend the range of my business/economic activity
(e) success will qualify me for a better-paying job than the one I currently hold
(f) success will qualify me for better employment opportunities in the future.
(g) Other (please specify)

32. (i) At what class, form, or year did you leave school?


(ii) What subjects were you studying then?


(iii) Did you sit for a public examination in that year? (a) Yes (b) No
(iv) If yes, what public examination did you sit?

(v) Indicate in the table below the subjects that you sat for and your performance in each in the examination.

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<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Fail</th>
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33. (i) Since leaving school, have you done any other programmes of study or courses either within your own country or abroad?
   (a) Yes  (b) No

   (ii) If yes, please indicate these below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme/Course</th>
<th>Institution/Location</th>
<th>Date From To</th>
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34. (i) Indicate in the space below what course(s) you were studying in semester 1, 1993, or are continuing on a year-long schedule.

   Course(s) Study Schedule

   ____________________________
   ____________________________
   ____________________________
(ii) Choosing from the following options, indicate whether you found/find your study schedule and the amount of time to complete your course(s) in (i) above:
(a) too short?  (d) a little long?
(b) a little short? (e) too long?
(c) just right?
Indicate your answer for each course in the right hand margin.

Course(s): ____________________________________________
                                             (___)
                                             (___)
                                             (___)

(iii) What is/are your reason(s) for choosing your course(s) in (i) above? You may choose more than one reason, in order of importance.

(a) interest
(b) gain first qualification
(c) upgrade qualification
(d) change qualification
(e) gain specific skills
(f) broaden education
(g) affordable
(h) leisure
(i) other (specify) ____________________________
                                             (___)

35. With regard to entering your current university programme of study, how would you describe the transition to USP from school, or the last course of study that you did?

(a) You were well prepared
(b) You needed a little additional assistance
(c) You needed a lot of assistance
(d) You were barely able to cope
(e) You were unable to cope
                                             (___)

36. If you answered (b), (c), (d) or (e) above, indicate from the options below, the area(s) in which you most needed assistance to facilitate your study. You may choose more than one area, in order of need.

(a) study skills
(b) cognitive skills (eg. ability to understand, analyse, assess, etc)
(c) motivation
(d) confidence
                                             (___)

37. How many hours do you spend studying on a daily average?
(a) less than 1  (d) 3
(b) 1  (e) More than 3
(c) 2
                                             (___)
38. What kind of courses do you feel are most suitable to your style of learning? You may choose more than one option, in order of preference.
(a) courses that require you to memorise new knowledge and information
(b) courses that require you to understand and assimilate new knowledge and information
(c) courses that expect you to apply this new knowledge and information to work or everyday life situations in a hypothetical or real way
(d) courses that expect you to be analytical and/or critical about new information or knowledge

39. Does/do the course(s) that you are currently enrolled in, or have just completed, meet your expectations with regard to your style of learning, and assistance that you received
(a) fully?
(b) satisfactorily?
(c) in a very small way?
(d) inadequately?

40. How much of your learning success, and ability to do the required course assignments and tests, would you attribute to your
(i) employment, and
(ii) practical experience in this area (specify

Use the following options
(a) less than 25%
(b) up to 50%
(c) up to 75%
(d) nearly all.

41. With regard to your learning orientation, do you learn more effectively if you study
(a) entirely on your own?
(b) with a group sometimes?
(c) with a group on a frequent and regular basis?
(d) with a group all of the time?

42. If you had a choice, would you prefer that what you learned was determined and directed by your course tutor
(a) right throughout the course?
(b) for most of the course?
(c) for some of the course?
(d) on your request only?
43. With regard to your current involvement in extension studies, how would you rate your confidence to study successfully at a distance?

(a) very confident  
(b) confident  
(c) a bit unsure  
(d) not sure at all

SECTION 5: STUDY ENVIRONMENT AND SUPPORT

44. Using the scale provided below, assess the quality of the study facilities and services that are available, and that you have access to, at home, in your community (e.g. town or village), at work, and from or at your USP Centre or sub-centre.

(a) excellent  
(b) very good  
(c) satisfactory  
(d) inadequate  
(e) not available

A. At home

(i) study space
(ii) study facilities - references
   - laboratory facilities
(iii) equipment - telephone
   - cassette player
   - video facilities
   - word processor/computer
   - other(s) (specify)
(iv) tutorial support
(v) moral support/encouragement

B. In the Community

(i) study space
(ii) study facilities - library
   - science laboratory
   - other(s) (specify)
(iii) equipment - telephone
   - cassette player
   - video facilities
   - word processor/computer
   - other(s) (specify)
(iv) tutorial support - resource personnel
   - peer tutorial
(v) moral support/encouragement
(vi) information related to your study
C. At work
   (i) study space
      (ii) study facilities - library
         - science laboratory
         - other(s) (specify)
      (iii) equipment - telephone
         - cassette player
         - video facilities
         - wordprocessor/computer
         - other(s) (specify)
      (iv) tutorial support - resource personnel
         - peer tutorial
   (v) moral support/encouragement
   (vi) information related to your study

D. At your USP Centre/Sub-centre (tick whichever is applicable to you)
   (i) study space
   (ii) study facilities - library
      - laboratory
      - other(s) (specify)
   (iii) equipment - telephone
      - cassette player
      - video facilities
      - wordprocessor/computer
      - satellite/radio terminal
      - other(s) (specify)
   (iv) tutorial support
      - local tutor
      - course tutor
      - satellite
      - peer group
   (v) information related to your study
   (vi) moral support/encouragement

45. Choosing one of the following options:
   (a) less than 5 kms
   (b) 6 - 10 kms
   (c) 11 - 15 kms
   (d) more than 15 kms. Please specify how many next to this letter, in the margin
   (e) on another island

   indicate the location of your USP Centre or Sub-centre
   (i) from your home
   (ii) from your workplace

   (If your Centre or Sub-centre is more than 20 kms away or on another island, do not answer 46 and 47).

46. (i) Do you have your own vehicle, or can you always borrow some means of transport to your USP Centre or location of support services?
   (a) Yes
   (b) No
(ii) If yes, please indicate what kind in the right-hand margin, from the following choices

(a) Car/van (c) bicycle
(b) motorcycle (d) other _____________

47. (i) Are you able to catch a bus to the location of your support services? (a) Yes (b) No

(ii) If yes, how regular is your bus service?

(a) 15 - 30 mins or less
(b) 30 mins. - 1 hour
(c) 1 - 2 hours
(d) more than 2 hours. Indicate how many next to this choice, in the margin.

48. (i) Given your answers to questions 46 and 47, how often do you use your centre facilities and tutorial services? Indicate the letter of one of the following options in the right-hand margin:

(a) always (d) rarely
(b) most of the time (e) never
(c) sometimes

(ii) If you answered (c), (d) or (e) above, give your reasons for infrequent- or non-attendance on the following lines:

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

49. (i) How much time do you spend travelling to and from work each day?

_______ mins. _______ hours.

(ii) How much time do you spend daily at work?

__________ hours.
For questions 50 and 51, use the following scale:

(a) anytime during office hours
(b) often
(c) sometimes
(d) extremely limited opportunity
(e) not at all

50. With regard to your working hours and conditions, how often can you have access to your study support facilities at
   - work
   - in the community
   - your centre/sub-centre

51. With regard to distance and/or transportation, how well can you access your
   - community facilities
   - centre facilities

52. Please use the following lines to make any comment(s) you may wish to, in support of your answer(s) to any question(s) above. Remember, your comments will be held in strict confidence.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

The questionnaire is now complete. Please hand it in to your USP Centre, or send it to the researcher using the stamped and addressed envelope, if you have been provided with one. Thank you for your invaluable assistance and co-operation.
15 October, 1993

Dear Student,

Some weeks ago I sent out to you a questionnaire, with a request that you fill it in and return it to me using the stamped return envelope provided.

If you have already done this, I thank you for your co-operation and ask that you ignore this letter.

If you have not completed and returned your questionnaire, please consider this a gentle reminder that it is now due and I would greatly appreciate receiving it back before the end of October, when I will be leaving Fiji. I appreciate also the pressure that you are undergoing at this time just prior to your final examinations and hope that you will be able to allocate half an hour to return to me information vital to this research project in the interest of making learning at a distance more effective than it currently is.

I look forward to hearing from you and wish you well in your preparations for your forthcoming exams if you are undertaking them.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Taimalealiifano
Appendix 5: List of interview questions

1. Personal Information

(a) Name, age, marital status, number of children, family (type, number, ages)
(b) Where do you live? How accessible to your USP Centre?

2. Socio-economic circumstances

(a) Employment
(b) Who else works in the family?
(c) Financial commitments eg. family support, education, church and community donations.
(d) Can you afford your extension studies?
(e) Do you have any community, cultural and/or religious obligations and commitments? In what way do you express these obligations/commitments?

3. Educational Background

(a) What level - secondary? post-secondary?
(b) Subjects?
(c) English use?
(d) Family attitude towards education?

4. Extension Studies

(a) When did you start?
(b) Why? short and long term goals.
(c) How prepared were you for independent learning?
(d) What kind of learning assistance did you need?
(e) Was your educational background helpful in preparing you for distance study?
(f) How motivated and confident were you to return to formal study? Describe.
(g) How helpful are your work and life experiences in your learning?
(h) How do you learn best? On your own, with a group, with tutorial assistance, in a classroom?
(i) Describe factors which were motivating or discouraging in your return to formal study.

5. Your local USP Centre

(a) What kind of study support do you receive from your Centre?
(b) Does it meet your learning requirements?
(c) What kind of support services and facilities would you like your Centre to provide for you?
(d) Do you feel that you a bona fide USP student and that your qualifications as an extension student are equal in quality to those obtained on campus?
Appendix 6: Factor loading matrix for 10 factor model and tables of bivariate and partial correlations

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<th>FAMILY</th>
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### Partial in off-diagonals and Squared Multiple R in diagonal

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### Partial in off-diagonals and Squared Multiple R in diagonal

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### Partials in off-diagonals and Squared Multiple R in diagonal

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### Partials in off-diagonals and Squared Multiple R in diagonal

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