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6 Inhibiting factors

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, the second category of coding, namely the *Process of Affective Development* was discussed. In Chapter 6, the third category, *Inhibiting Factors*, will be discussed and the literature control for this category conducted. Findings include quotes from the transcripts of the focus group interviews, e-mail text messages that the students sent to each other and their lecturer during the time that the module was active, as well as some of the synchronous conversations on *Yahoo! Messenger*.

The inhibiting factors discussed in this chapter may not specifically pertain to feelings or experiences of an affective nature, but these factors identified by the participants undoubtedly affected their emotions/feelings/experiences with regard to the module. Some of these factors identified by the participants were issues of concern with reference to not only the *CyberSurfiver* module, but also the MEd(CAE) degree as a whole.

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Although the third category is called Inhibiting Factors, it must be emphasised that this study does not focus on such factors. This category rather addresses the intensity of the volition of the participants who stayed and completed the module regardless of experiencing many inhibitors.

6.2 Inhibiting factors

During the coding process, *Inhibiting Factors* was the third category of data that was created from the transcribed focus group interviews. To understand what is meant by the concept inhibit/-ed/-ng/-ion/-or, definitions are provided in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Definitions of the concepts *inhibit*[20]

Source	Inhibit*
Collier's Dictionary (1977:529)	**Inhibit:** To hold back; check; restrain.
Yahoo! education (2005)	**Inhibit:** To hold back; restrain.
South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (2002: 593)	**Inhibited, inhibiting: 1** Hinder, restrain, or prevent (an action or process). **2** Make (someone) unable to act in a relaxed and naural way
Stedman's Pocket Medical Dictionary (1987:377)	**Inhibition: 1** Depression or arrest of a function. **2** In psychoanalysis, the restraining of instinctual or unconscious drives or tendencies, especially if they conflict with one's conscience or societal demands.
Stedman's Pocket Medical Dictionary (1987:377)	**Inhibitor:** An agent that restrains or tetards physiologic, chemical, or enzymatic action.

Some of the definitions above provided by the above sources contain the word **restrain.** To further make the explanation of the category *Inhibiting Factors* understandable, the definition of *restrain* is considered. To understand what is meant by the concept *restrain*, definitions are provided in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Definitions of the concept *restrain*

Source	Restrain
South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (2002: 997)	Prevent from doing something – deprive of freedom of movement or personal liberty.
Collier's Dictionary (1977:851)	To prevent from acting; hold back.
Yahoo! education (2005)	To hold back or keep in check; control.

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[20] The asterisk (*) after the word allows for its declension, e.g. inhibited, inhibiting, inhibition, inhibitor.

Chapter 6: Inhibiting Factors

The concept *factor* for this chapter is defined as explained in Chapter 4 under Section 4.2. Derived from the above definitions, Inhibiting Factors, for the purpose of this study, imply the circumstances or elements that contributed to restraining or holding the participants back from completing the *CyberSurfiver* module. Criteria, and inclusion or exclusion criteria denoting Inhibiting Factors are found in the second column of Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Denotations of Inhibiting Factors

	Inhibiting Factors
Criteria	When indicated that their knowledge, skills and access to technology inhibited their actions, interactions and performance.
Inclusion in cluster	☻ If participants indicated that the requirements of the module inhibited their actions, interactions and performance. ☻ If participants indicated that technology inhibited their actions, interactions and performance.
Exclusion from cluster	When participants indicated that they coped with the challenges of the online module or did not experience any problems with regard to requirements of the module.

Factors that inhibited the participants during the module include negative experiences with regard to voting, insufficient information, lack of computer skills, groups (tribes) and interactive issues, language problems, time and work overload, and financial demands. These issues are discussed below.

6.2.1 Negative experiences with regard to voting

The *CyberSurfiver* module required of the participants to, once a week, vote off the person whom they thought was the 'weakest' or who contributed the least to the tribe's group assignment. According to the course coordinator, the voting off rule was specifically created to limit the possibility of group members taking a 'free ride'. To stay on the module the *CyberSurfivers* had to actively participate and make meaningful contributions to collaborative assignments. This rule seems to have assured that the 'free-riders' indeed discontinued the course after the first two weeks. This requirement of the module created tension for some of the participants. The statements from various participants, which are presented below, reflect the tensions created by the voting aspect of the module.

The first statement, referring to e-mail, shows that the voting aspect of the module had a negative effect on the participants. From this quote, it is also evident that the tension was not openly expressed but that it was reflected in undertones. The participant said:

Quote FG 6.1:

'Die afstem, dink ek, het 'n baie negatiewe effek gehad. Jy kon dit agterkom aan die – jy kon tussen die lyne lees. Die mense voel nie lekker nie.'

[Translation]
I think the voting off had a very negative effect. You could sense it – you could read it between the lines.   The people do not feel good.

This opinion was confirmed by another participant:

Quote FG 6.2:

'Dis iets wat jy tussen die – dit was nie in die woorde as sulks nie. Ek weet nie, dit was 'n gevoel net wat jy gekry het in die boodskappe, dat die mense is bitter ongelukkig.'

[Translation]
'It was something between the (lines) you could – it was not the words as such. I don't know, it was a feeling you got in the messages, that the people are extremely unhappy.'

Another participant, who was not voted out, had the opinion that it would not have been pleasant to be voted off. What he said can be read as Quote FG 4.139 in Chapter 4.

Hendrik indicated that he was voted off, but did not want to join the tribe consisting of evictees. This could have been due to the fact that most of the evictees were voted off due to their inactivity and/or lesser skills and knowledge. Hendrik, on the other hand, had sufficient skills and knowledge that would allow him to be an active participant in the tribe compiled of evictees. His reluctance to be in the 'evictee' tribe may have been due to his reluctance to become the only or one of the few active members of the new tribe. He said:

Quote FG 6.3:

'Ek is later afgestem. Ek dink ek en Erika is saam op 'n stadium afgestem, en ons het besluit – dit was nou heelwat later – het ons besluit, ek het besluit ek gaan nie deel van daai groep word nie, …'

[Translation]
'I was voted off later. I think at one stage Erika and I were voted off together, and we decided – that was now much later – we decided, I decided I was not going to become part of that group, …'

Chapter 6: Inhibiting Factors

One participant, who voted herself off, noted that nobody else in the tribe had voted. This was a clear indication that the voting system did probably not realise as intended by the lecturer. The participant said:

> **Quote FG 6.4:**
> *'Ek het gedink in die 'tribe' waarin ek was, het ek myself uitgestem. En toe't ek gaan kyk wie het gestem, en toe sien ek maar niemand het gestem in die laaste…'*
>
> [Translation]
> *'I thought, in the tribe where I was, I voted myself off. And then I checked who did vote, en then I saw that nobody has voted during the last …'*

A participant felt that the relationships that developed between members of a tribe influenced the voting process. Her quote can be read as Quote FG 5.37 in Chapter 5. Difficulty in accepting responsibility for voting is reflected in the following quote of a participant who said:

> **Quote FG 6.5:**
> *'For me, I never even voted once.'*

Being voting off was perceived as a clear indication that the person was not competent and this could have had consequences for feelings of self-efficacy and self-confidence.

Tribe members who were voted off had to form their own tribe. These participants were voted off because of being inactive in their own tribes. This trend continued in the newly-formed tribe consisting of evictees. This also resulted in some tribes not meeting the requirements of the module. The following quotes confirm that members who were perceived as competent were not voted off:

> **Quote FG 6.6:**
> *'Niemand wou my uit*vote *nie, want daar was niemand om uit te* vote *nie. Verstaan jy, dit was, ons was net twee aktiewe lede in daardie span gewees, met ander woorde, elke ronde is van die onaktiewes uitge*vote*, en jy moes aanhou met daardie ongelooflike frustrasies wat …'*
>
> [Translation]
> *'Nobody wanted to vote me off, because there was nobody to vote off. You understand, it was, we were only two active members in that team, and, in other words, during each round some of the inactive members were voted off, and you continued to have these unbelieveable frustration which …'*

The activities of active members may have been related to their computer literacy skills. This is evident in the following quote that links to the previous quote. The participant said:

Quote FG 6.7:

'Ja, hulle wou nie die competent mense afstem nie, want dan gebeur daar niks meer in die span nie.'

[Translation]
'They did not want to vote the competent people off, because then nothing would happen in that team.'

A participant emphasised how demotivating it was to be voted off and having to form part of a tribe without any evident competencies:

Quote FG 6.8:

'Ja, so hulle het in 'n groep gesit waar daar niks gebeur nie. Niemand weet nie. Niemand kan mekaar help nie. So ek dink dit het 'n baie destructive uitwerking gehad op die groeplede. Dit was baie onmotiverend.'

[Translation]
'Yes, so they sat in a group where nothing happened. Nobody knows. They couldn't help each other. So I think it had a very destructive effect on the group members. It was very demotivating.'

It is therefore evident that the voting process was perceived and experienced as a negative event, mainly because the participants did not like it, it did not always work as intended, it influenced the group and intergroup dynamics, some people did not participate in the process, it was perceived as demotivating and it influenced the distribution of competencies in the groups.

The next inhibiting factor that is discussed is the lack of information regarding the importance of sufficient preparation and the correct application of skills.

6.2.2 Insufficient information

In this subsection it is shown that the participants were of the opinion that they did not receive sufficient information with regard to the requirements for the module and that they were ill prepared for what was required of them. This feeling prevailed, regardless of an introductory session of one hour, which was presented before the commencement of the module. The participants indicated that they were unaware that they lacked the technological information and skills required to do the module before they started with it. The participants' experiences of being ill prepared and informed are evident in the quotes presented in this subsection.

The first quote, which was also presented in Chapter 4, relates to not knowing what to expect:

Qoute FG 6.9:

'Because we didn't know what to expect. About not knowing what was going to happen. Never having done this before.'

Another participant confirmed this by indicating that the lecturer did not inform them of what to expect. She said:

Quote FG 6.10:

*'But she (*the lecturer*) didn't really tell us what exactly, we didn't know what to expect, even when we had the encounter with her, we didn't know what to expect when we went online.'*

A third participant attributed the drop-out rate to this lack of information. He said:

Quote FG 6.11:

'Dit was vir my een van die grootste negatiewe goed wat gemaak het dat studente nie kon klaarmaak nie.'

[Translation]
'That was the one of the biggest negative things that caused students not to finish.'

One participant expressed her frustration with regard to the lack of information during the initial period. She also indicated that the introduction of *Yahoo! Messenger*, which allowed communication with all participants, alleviated this problem to a large extent. The quote below reflects her feelings on the lack of information and communication difficulties:

Quote FG 6.12:

'Then I'll say, at times it was quite difficult for me. Well, I'll agree about what he said about the first two, three weeks, because I didn't know what was expected of me: what must I do? In what format must I do it? So the whole communication during the first two, three weeks was a little bit difficult for me, but later on when we had the **Yahoo! groups***, and I could speak to everybody. Is that what she means? Is that what we have to do now? Ja, but…'*

The participants made suggestions with regard to the information needed by future students. These suggestions indicated the information they were not provided with. The following quotes highlight the specific areas in which they felt they needed more knowledge and skills:

Quote FG 6.13:

'So hulle moet sê, om hierdie kursus te doen, moet jy hierdie en hierdie vaardighede hê, en dan kan jy dit doen (die kursus).'

[Translation]
'So they have to indicate that, to do this course, you have to have these and these skills, and then you can do it (the course).'

Quote Fg 6.14:

'Jy moet HTML ken, hoor.'

[Translation]
'Listen, you have to know HTML.'

Quote FG 6.15:

'PowerPoint moet jy kan doen.'
[Translation]
'You have to be able to use PowerPoint.'

Quote FG 6.16:

'PowerPoint, Excel.'

Quote FG 6.17:

'Jy moet Word-vaardig wees. Jy moet Internetvaardig wees. Jy moet 'n rekenaar hê, 'n ou se eie persoonlike rekenaar, gekoppel aan die Internet.'

[Translation]
'You have to be competent in using Word. You have to be competent in surfing the Internet. You have to have a computer, your PC, connected to the Internet.'

Quote FG 6.18:

'Where they should say: BEd (Computers).'

The participants also made suggestions with regard to the personal characteristics needed by students to be able to cope with the module:

Quote FG 6.19:

'You must do something that will get you up to that level that you require. But then they shouldn't allow people onto the course if they don't have that. They should have an entry exam.'

Quote FG 6.20:

'...everything, you know, I mean, in terms of changing, in terms of absorbing, ...'

Quote FG 6.21:

'Ja, jy moet 'n sekere vlak hê, soos as jy wil universiteit toe gaan, moet jy matriek hê, met Wiskunde en Wetenskap, of wat ookal.'

[Translation]
'You should have reached a specific level, like when you want to go to university, you have to have matric, with Mathematics and Science, or whatever.'

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Quote FG 6.22:

'Yeah, but I think, ja [yes], but then there should be some bridging course towards that.'

Quote FG 6.23:

'Ja, daar (vir 'n oorbruggingskursus) is ook sekere voorwaardes.'

[Translation]
'Yes, (for a bridging course) there are also prerequisites.'

The above discussion and quotations indicate that the participants felt that there was a definite gap in their knowledge and skill levels at the onset of the module. This led to frustration and even caused some people to quit the module. Suggestions with regard to specific computer skills needed included HTML, Power Point, Excel and Word. In addition, it was suggested that students should have their own personal computers with access to Internet. It was also suggested that the students themselves should have reached a specific level to gain entry into the module, that an entry examination is set and that a bridging course is provided. Some participants suggested that the name of the module should clearly indicate that it is an educational subject with a strong computer focus. The following subsection addresses specific computer skills required for the module.

6.2.3 Lack of computer skills

The participants indicated that some of their problems were related to a lack of computer hardware as well as a lack of knowledge with regard to how to use computer software. The lack of equipment, such as a home computer, posed a problem to some participants. One participant made a comment about this by saying:

Quote FG 6.24:
'I don't know if the two of you have computers at home, but I know that some of the other … ladies don't have computers at home.'

Anette posted the following message on *Yahoo! Messenger* with regard to computer problems:

Quote EM 6.1:

Hi Linda, … Ek het vandag begin met 'n ander (effe beter) rekenaar en dinge lyk vir my baie vreemd, …
Anette

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[Translation]
Hi Linda, … Today I have started with another (slightly better) computer and things look very unfamiliar, …
Anette

Participants acknowledged that they did not have knowledge about the software and that they did not have adequate technical skills. This is evident in the following quotes obtained through the focus group discussions:

Quote FG 6.25:
'Jy weet jy moet sekere goed doen, en jy weet as jy net, net 'n dag ekstra tyd het om daaraan aandag te gee, of êrens 'n dummyboek te gaan opsoek, dan gaan jy dit dalk regkry, maar jy't nie daardie tegniese kennis om dit wat jy moet doen, te doen nie.'

[Translation]
 'You know you have to do certain things, and you know if you had just, just one day extra to attend to that, or if you could go consult a dummybook somewhere, then you might get it right, but you do not have that technical knowledge you need to do what you have to do.'

Quote FG 6.25:
'Om byvoorbeeld daardie scrollbar wat ons moes maak – ek kan nie vir jou sê hoeveel ure het ek daaraan spandeer nie. En ek weet dat as jy, as iemand net vooraf vir my gewys het hoe om dit te doen, het ek dit binne minute gesnap en dit gedoen. So daar was tegniese goed van 'n ou gevra om dit te kan doen – ek wil amper vir jou sê software applications wat jy moes hanteer, wat ek geen, geen benul van gehad het nie. Dit was vir my 'n groot frustrasie.'

[Translation]
'For example, to make the scrollbar that we had to – I can't tell you how many hours I spent on that. And I know that if you, if someone could show me beforehand how to do it, I would have grasped it within minutes and have done it. So there were technical things required of one to do it – I almost want to say software applications which you had to manage, of which I had no, no clue. That, to me, was a huge frustration.'

Quote FG 6.27:
'Die tegniese- en my software kennis, was nie genoegsaam gewees om my die vrymoedigheid te gee, en om die ding vir my lekker te maak nie. Ek dink as ek als-en-als so bietjie van geweet het, dan het ek, miskien het dit 'n klompie deure vir my oopgemaak. Wat vir my ook sleg was, is dat baie van die goed wat ek eventually reggekry het, met probeer en weer probeer en weer probeer, en uiteindelik kry jy dit reg, sal ek nou nie weer kan doen nie, want ek weet nie hoe't ek daar uitgekom nie. Ek het ure daaraan spandeer, dit uiteindelik genadiglik reggekry – niemand weet hoe nie, en ek sal dit nie weer kan regkry nie.'

[Translation]
'The technical and my software knowledge was not sufficient enough to provide me with the confidence to make it enjoyable. It think that if I knew a little bit of everything, maybe then a few doors would've opened for me. Something else that was bad for me, is that many of the things that I tried over and over again, and eventually mastered, I will not be able to do again, as I am not sure how I eventually got it right. I spent hours on it, and finally, by mercy, managed to do it – nobody knows how, and I will not be able to do it again.'

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Not only did the participants explain their lack of software knowledge during the focus group interviews, but they also made comments to that same effect in e-mail messages they sent to the Elearn Yahoo! groups. Quotes EM 4.13, EM 4.17, EM 4.18, EM 4.19, EM 4.24, EM 4.25 and EM 4.35 from Chapter 4, and Quotes EM 5.14 and EM 5.19 from Chapter 5, as well as the following e-mail messages are evident of this:

Quote EM 6.2:

Hi Joanita
Ek weet nie wat om met die URL van my eie web site (Individual Assignment 2) te maak nie. As dit op die tribe se web moet kom vir 'n link …
Hendrik

[Translation]
Hi Joanita
I do not know what to do with the URL of my own website (Individual Assignment 2). When it has to go onto the tribal website for a link …
Hendrik

Quote EM 6.3:

I am experiencing some problems with the uploading of my files.
Please have patience. I am not giving up yet!!!!
Camilla

Quote EM 6.4:

ek kry nie jou pdf file oor die powerpoint oop nie. kan jy dit dalk weer stuur?
Dankie
anita

[Translation]
I cannot open your PowerPoint pdf file. Can you please send it again?
Thanks
anita

Quote EM 6.5:

Hi Anita
PDF is Adobe Acrobat files. Jy moet Acrobat Reader hê om dit oop te maak.
Powerpoint kan dit nie lees nie. Laat weet as jy 'n Acrobat CD soek.
Groete
Gérard

[Translation]
Hi Anita
PDF is Adobe Acrobat files. You need Acrobat Reader to open them. Powerpoint can't read them. Let me know if you need an Acrobat CD.
Regards,
Gérard

Some participants mentioned their lack of knowledge with regard to specific software as well as to markup language. In the following quotes, the participants explain how they have attended to their problems.

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Quote FG 6.28:

'You had to e-mail…because who knows Dreamweaver*?'*

Maria asked for help by posting a message on *Yahoo! Messenger* that read as follows:

Quote EM 6.6:

Need to send my report to the Webmaster to be linked. How should i [sic] go about [sic]?
Maria

The participants also experienced technological problems during their preparation for the *Interwise* session. They specifically referred to communication problems, which resulted from technological difficulties encountered with *Interwise*. The following quotes are indicative of the problems experienced by participants.

Quote FG 6.29:

'Well, I would like to say, at that point, I hadn't install …, so from my corner, there was no – I could hear everyone, I couldn't see at all. So that – and I talk about it, because that's a question. You have a class, a normal class, where a student puts up his hand all the time, but nobody wants to listen to him. What's that? And it's not only because – well, the thing is, it's a very nice instrument, but the communication lines are not ready for that.'

Quote FG 6.30:

'But the technical stuff, how do I do this?'

Quote FG 6.31:

'For me it was a technical problem.'

Quote FG 6.32:

'Everybody doesn't have the same technology. Everybody doesn't have the same computers.'

Quote EM 6.7:

This should work – others have had no problems, I think. It's my server so I hope I have the address correct [sic]. Case sensitive though and the site may be a little slow!
Bob

The following quotes from the focus group discussions and *Yahoo! Messenger* group postings also address the technological problems participants experienced during the *Interwise* session:

Quote FG 6.33:

'But again, I would speak, and it would take three seconds before I could get something.'

Quote EM 6.8:

I could not participate because I experienced diffulties in testing. My apologies.
Beulah

Quote EM 6.9:

We were all however inerested [sic] to connect with the lecture and be part of the session but were barred by unforeseen technological testing problems. … Beulah

Quote EM 6.10:

… on the technical side, the session went well … with some exceptions, Maria had no microphone, Mindy's volume was too low, Rachel could not speak at all, because her connection was too slow. A few others were unable to get things set up at all. I guess if one were doing sessions regularly, such technical problems could be sorted out. In South Africa, bandwidth will be a problem for some time yet.
Bob

Juanita wrote e-mail to her peers, which explained the problems she had encountered.

Quote EM 6.11:

Due to a gremlin on my mail system all mail was returned to me unsent. It seems that e-mail is sometimes worst that [sic] snail mail. At least you have the Post Office to blame for the cheque that got lost in the mail.!
Joanita

At another stage Joanita experienced further technical problems. She wrote the following e-mail message:

Quote EM 6.12:

Hannes / of een van die ander bright sparks
Ek het nou ge-ftp tot ek blou is in die gesig en my moermetertjie hardloop al die pad in die rooi! As ek op my shelter double click hou dit aan om 'n error boodskap te gee. Dit was so van die begin af. Ek het probeer om die webblad in die 2001 folder te sit en het ook 'n 2002 folder geskep maar niks wil werk nie.
Ek is nou 'n geswore behaviouris! Ek soek nou na 'n spoonfeedkursus waar iemand vir my kan wys en ek die stappe kan neerskryf. Ek kan 'n boek skryf oor die afgelope 48 uur wat ek voor hierdie skerm deurgebring het. Daar is party dinge wat ek tot 20 keer oor en oor en oor gedoen het - elke keer op 'n ander manier en ander volgorde net om te kyk of iets nie wil werk nie. En lees mens die help file word daar dikwels soveel 'jargon' gebruik dat dit net sowel in grieks kon wees. Om dit verder ingewikkelder te maak weet mens dikwels nie wat jou probleem is nie - jy kan dit dus nie eers in die help file gaan opsoek nie. En ek weet dat dit net 'n klein dingetjie behoort te wees. Maar wat? en hoe?
Geluk aan al die ouens wat dit betyds op die regte plek ge-ftp gekry het.
Joanita

[Translation]
Hannes / or any of the other bright sparks
I have now tried to ftp until I'm blue in the face and my temper is now very short! When I double click on my shelter it keeps giving me an error message. It was like this from the beginning. I have tried to place the web page in the 2001 folder and have also created a 2002 folder, but nothing works.
I am now a sworn behaviourist! I am now looking for a spoonfeed course where someone can demonstrate to me and I can write the steps down. I can write a book on the last 48 hours which I have spent in front of this screen. Some things I have done 20 times over and over – every time in a different manner and different sequence just to see if something will not work. And when one reads the help file so much 'jargon' is used so often that it could just as well have been in greek. To

> *make it even more complicated, one often does not know what your problem is –*
> *you can thus not even look it up in the help file. And I know that it is probably just*
> *a small thing. But what? and how?*
> *Congratulations to all who, on time, got it ftp-ed to the right place.*
> *Joanita*

The following quotes indicate other occasions where participants had technological problems. Firstly, Bob's problem was that he did not have *Microsoft* software and could therefore not see what his assignment looked like when converted into MSWord. He posted the following message in the *Yahoo! Messenger*:

Quote EM 6.13:

Hi Linda … My essay as a MSWord doc. Im not sure what it will look like, since I
don't have word [sic] and have converted it.
Bob

Mindy also experienced problems that she mentioned in *Yahoo! Messenger*. She wrote:

Quote EM 6.14:

I posted my article @ about 16:00 on Friday afternoon – I even checked to see if it
was on the bulletin board and it was!! Now I can't find it! How is this possible? I
am sending it again, hopefully this one stays for a while longer than the previous
one!
Mindy

 Beulah experienced some software problems. She wrote:

Quote EM 6.15:

Linda, I have o [sic] idea what the problem is about my document. I compiled it in
Wordpad, first saved it on Word then saved it on HTML. Apparently some macros
are missing or lost. Have any solution? Anyone out there!??? Please help!
Beulah

Further statements were made about how the lack of computer hardware and software resulted in some students not continuing with the module. Though some of the participants who discontinued with the module were present during the focus group interviews, more remarks about this issue were volunteered by those who did complete it. This could be an indication that the unsuccessful participants' still did not feel comfortable enough about their knowledge to give meaningful input. The following quotes deal with the issue of discontinuation:

Quote FG 6.34:

'They gave up the first week.'

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Quote FG 6.35:

'I think the first week.'

Quote FG 6.36:

'Most people fall [sic] out the first three weeks.'

Quote FG 6.37:

'I think it's because they had to form a group on their own, and no one knew – nie een van hulle het geweet wat om te doen nie. [Translation] - not one of them knew what to do.'

Quote FG 6.38:

'I think it was a technical problem.'

Quote FG 6.39:

'…, the only thing that I think why most of them stopped, or whatever, is something maybe like HTML or whatever. They did not have that programming or technical know-how.'

Only one participant who did discontinue the module provided information with regard to why she discontinued the module. She said:

Quote FG 6.40:

'Actually, because I failed the computer assuming the human element, you know. I failed instantly, and, I asked myself, now we're in this module, this type of module, where key things would be. But now it was still there, you know, it was like going to class, and at some stage I just felt there's no support. There is not enough support.'

This particular participant did not mention technological shortcomings but rather referred to the 'human element'. She was not prompted by the interviewer to explain what she meant by the 'human element'. Read Quote FG 5.29 in Chapter 5 for more information on the time that she dropped out of the module.

It is clear that this participant experienced a fair amount of frustration with a number of aspects of the module. Asked whether she discontinued before or after *Yahoo! Messenger* was introduced, she replied:

Quote FG 6.41:

'Definitely I was frustrated by work as a team, definitely. And when we were writing a test, you know, people are busy writing, the time, you're struggling. You know, it's like… My test was with a team, here, not a test inside, so I mean, by the time you reach the test, how agitated are you?'

A discussion around the discontinuation of participation in the module only took place during the first focus group interview. None of the participants who discontinued attended the second focus group interview.

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It is clear that the participants experienced frustration due to technical problems and a lack of technical know-how. These problems were aggravated by the use of unfamiliar software. The next inhibiting aspect that is discussed relates to the selection and compilation of groups (tribes).

6.2.4 Groups and interaction issues

Some participants found the manner in which the groups/tribes were selected troublesome to the extent that they saw it as an inhibiting factor in their performance on the module. One participant described how the tribes were formed, while another participant alleged that many of the participants experienced the first grouping into tribes as chaotic. Refer to Quotes FG 5.34 and FG 5.35 in Chapter 5.

The following e-message, sent by Anette to the tribe to which she belonged, reflected the chaotic situation. Anette wrote:

> **Quote EM 6.16:**
>
> *Hi, they say I have been added to your ranks, but I dont [sic] know who you guys are. We were supposed to create some games around an agreed topic, does anyone have any ideas? pls let me know.*
> *Anette*

The following quote illustrates that some of the participants were unhappy about the presence of students, who were not Master's students, during the first contact session with the lecturer. They also believed that some students who did attend, were not genuinely interested in the course. One participant remarked:

> **Quote FG 6.42:**
> *'… daar was tweedejaarstudente wat hoegenaamd nie belang gestel het om die kursus te doen nie. Ouens wat daar gesit het, wat regtig in hulle hart geweet het. Patsy het geweet sy wil nie deel wees van daai groep nie. Maar die ouens is so half gedruk gewees om daar te wees, en om deel te word van 'n groep.'*
>
> [Translation]
> *'… there were second-year students who were not at all interested in doing the course. Guys who sat there, who really knew in their hearts. Patsy knew she did not want to be part of that group. But the guys were half pressurised to be there, and to become part of a group.'*

One of the Afrikaans-speaking participants referred to the students who did not really want to participate as "hang-onners" (people who hung on - refer to Quote FG 5.113 in Chapter 5), while another participant explained that some members of his tribe had 'disappeared'.   It could be assumed that these were the 'hang-onners' who

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discontinued the module, as all participants in this study were registered as MEd students. The participant remarked:

> **Quote FG 6.43:**
>
> *'Ons was net twee aktiewe lede in die span gewees. Ons span was so saamgestel dat binne die eerste twee weke, het al die ander lede gedisappear.'*
>
> [Translation]
> *'There were only two active members in the team. Our team was compiled in such a way that, within the first two weeks, all the other members disappeared.'*

Participants were also of the opinion that the voting system adversely affected the performance of the participants who were less skilled. The suggestion was made that the competition should rather have been between the tribes and not between tribe members. This feeling is evident in the following quotes:

> **Quote FG 6.44:**
>
> *'Ek dink die swakkeres sou beter gedoen het as dit nie 'n speletjie was nie, as ons in ons tribes gebly het die heeltyd, en as dit 'n kompetisie onder die spanne was, en nie spanlede onder mekaar nie.'*
>
> [Translation]
> *'I think the weaker ones would have done better if it was not a game, if we could stay in our tribes all the time, and if it was a competition among the teams, and not among team members.'*

> **Quote FG 6.45:**
>
> *'Maar dan moes ons so gebly het, dink ek.'*
>
> [Translation]
> *'I think we should then have stayed like that.'*

The uneasiness with the module being a game and the fact that only one person could win a prize appeared to have had a debilitating effect on some participants, as they knew that they could not win due to a lack of technical skill. It appears that these aspects resulted in further uneasiness with regard to group interaction. One participant remarked:

> **Quote FG 6.46:**
>
> *'En ek dink ook in 'n mate, ek meen, ek het dit van die begin af gedink, en ek dink ek het dit vir jou ook op 'n stadium genoem, is, ek weet verseker, die persoon wat gaan wen, is 'n persoon wat as 'n beginner, 'n Web master, as 'n Web master gekies is. 'n Persoon met al die, met die meeste tegniese kennis, gaan die persoon wees wat…'*
>
> [Translation]
> *'And I also think to a certain extent, I mean, I thought so from the beginning, and I think I also mentioned that to you during one stage, I know for sure, the person*

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> *who is going to win, is the person who, in the beginning, was chosen as Web master, a Web master. A person with all the, with the most technical knowledge, would be the person who …'*

A participant who was a Web master for his tribe responded to the previous comment as follows:

Quote FG 6.47:

'Ons het gevra wie kan 'n Web site maak, en ek het vir hulle gesê: wel, ek kan Front page *gebruik, en toe't ek, toe sê hulle okay, great, fine. Jy's Web master. So eintlik was dit 'n geluk by die ongeluk, want dit was baie ekstra werk.'*

[Translation]
'We asked who could make a Website, and I told them, well, I can use Front page, and then I, and then they said okay, great, fine. You are the Web master. It was actually good and bad, because it was a lot of extra work.'

When asked whether he felt that he worked harder than the others, this participant indicated that he did not feel it was a good idea that these types of questions were asked and he gave his reason for saying that:

Quote FG 6.48:

'Ek dink net dit is nie goed vir my dat die vrae net gestel word, want die van ons wat hierso sit, was meeste van die mense wat aktief was. Ek dink dis belangrik dat daar 'n aparte groep moet wees, eintlik, wat bestaan net uit die wat onaktief was.'

[Translation]
'I just think it is not good that these questions are put (to us) only, because the people who sit here, were the people who were most active. I think it is important that there must be a separate group, actually, which consists only of those who were inactive.'

It is evident from the above discussion that the participants could have experienced some of the questions relating to groups and group interaction as less acceptable, as they made them feel uneasy. The quotes noted in this subsection show that the selection of group members, the choatic manner in which groups were formed, the lack of participation, the voting system and the predictability of possible winners, were perceived as inhibiting factors.

The following inhibiting factor under discussion is concerned with the use of language and the fear of being misunderstood.

6.2.5 Language problems

Participants found it difficult to communicate in English, as it was not one of the participants' mother tongue. The participants communicated mainly in English when

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they sent e-mail messages. Communication by means of *Yahoo! Messenger* proved to be less of a problem. A participant specifically mentioned that their mother tongue was used for communicating via Messenger and English for communication via e-mail. He said:

> **Quote FG 6.49:**
> *'Wel, ek het maklik gesê: Ag damn, ek kry nie iets reg nie, waar jy nou met die normale e-mail jou spelling sal check en seker maak dat jy alles…Ek dink ook dat die ander ding was, met* Messenger *het jy in jou eerste taal gekommunikeer; op die e-pos het jy in Engels gekommunikeer.'*

> [Translation]
> *'Well, it was easy to say: Dammit, I don't get it right, where with the normal e-mail you will check your spelling and make sure that you (have) everything…I also think that, the other thing was, with Messenger you communicated in your first language; with e-mail you communicated in English.'*

When participants communicated with a specific person via e-mail, in some instances they preferred to use their mother tongue, even though the message was available to everyone to read.

The following quotes support this finding:

> **Quote EM 6.17:**
>
> *hallo [21]Rolf*
> *ek kry nie jou pdf file oor die powerpoint oop nie. kan jy dit dalk weer stuur?*
> *Dankie*
> *Anita*

> [Translation]
> *hello Rolf*
> *I can't open your pdf file about powerpoint. Can you send it again please?*
> *Thank you*
> *Anita*

> **Quote EM 6.18:**
>
> *Hi Anita*
> *PDF is Adobe Acrobat files. Jy moet Acrobat Reader hê om dit oop te maak. Powerpoint kan dit nie lees nie. Laat weet as jy 'n Acrobat CD soek.*
> *Groete*
> *Gérard*

> [Translation]
> *Hi Anita*
> *PDF is Adobe Acrobat files. You need Acrobat Reader to open them. Powerpoint can't read them. Let me know if you want an Acrobat CD.*
> *Regards,*
> *Gérard*

---

[21] Rolf is a pseudonym for the lecturer who was responsible for the additional module which was presented at the same time as *CyberSurfiver*.

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Quote EM 6.19:

LINDA-lief,
Sal dink daaraan sodra ek bevestiging kry dat ek nie alleen in die groep sit nie. …
Tjeers
Hank

[Translation]
LINDA dear,
Will start thinking about it as soon as I receive confirmation that I am not alone in the group. …
Cheers
Hank

Quote EM 6.20:

Hi Anita
Myne maak oop. Hoop jy kom reg.
Gérard

[Translation]
Hi Anita
Mine opens. Hope you succeed.
Gérard

Quote EM 6.21:

Hannes,
Kan ek ook maar asseblief 'n dak oor my kop kry anders gaan niemand weet waar om my te soek nie as hulle moet punte gee nie.
Groetnis
Joanita

[Translation]
Hannes
Could I please also get a roof over my head otherwise nobody will know where to look for me when they have to give marks.
Regards
Joanita

When the participants communicated in general with the tribe members or with their peers they seemed to use English as medium of communication. This is evident in the following quotes. Note that no individual is indicated at the top of the e-mail message. It was merely assumed that the communication was directed at all the participants.

Quote EM 6.22:

At last! Working on tribal as well as own site! I don't even want to think what my blood pressure is at this moment.
http://www.geacities.com/barthoza/
Camilla

Quote EM 6.23:

Due to a gremlin on my mail system all mail was returned to me unsent. It seems that e-mail is sometimes worst that [sic] snail mail. At least you have the Post Office to blame for the cheque that got lost in the mail.!
Joanita

Quote EM 6.24:

Maybe Group 2 should adopt Joanita if she is going solo in this group! Would this be possible?
Groetnis [regards]
Mindy

Quote EM 6.25:

It is working!!
Hendrik

Difficulty in communicating in a language other than their mother tongue may have prevented some participants from participating in online discussions and may even have prevented them from asking for assistance.   These aspects are evident in the following quote:

Quote FG 6.50:
'… en ek is oortuig daarvan dat baie mense nie deelgeneem het op die e-pos nie, omdat die taal 'n probleem was …'

[Translation]
'… and I am convinced that, because language was a problem, many people did not participate via e-mail …'

One participant was of the opinion that, because they had to communicate in English, the communication that took place was not on a high academic level.

Quote FG 6.51:

'Dis op 'n baie laer vlak, die kommunikasie, waar ek dink as, in die eerste plek dink ek dat as 'n mens dit in jou eerste taal gedoen het, en in die tweede plek dat jy 'n klein bietjie meer tyd gehad het, sou daar dieper, op 'n hoër vlak, akademiese goed uitgekom het. Dat 'n mens meer issues sou bespreek het, en meer akademiese kommunikasie gehad het.'

[Translation]
'It was on a much lower level, the communication, wheras I think, in the first place, if one could do it in your own language, and in the second place, if you had a little bit more time, academic stuff on a deeper, and higher level, would have emerged. That one would discuss more issues, and would have more academic communication.'

Bob made the following comment on *Yahoo! Messenger* with regard to the use of language during the Interwise session:

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Quote EM 6.26:

… Synchronous sessions need to be used when we need interactivity, when learning and feedback need to happen together. I found some literature to support points made during the session about native language. Liereature (sic) suggests that interactive sessions are best conducted in the native language of the participants, otherwise the activity tends to be dominated by native language used (which was to some extent true in our case). …
Bob

Mindy expressed her concerns about correct grammar usage with regard to the *Interwise* session:

Quote EM 6.27

*… I was very sceptic about the online session (**Interwise**). What if the mic [sic] doesn't work, do I speak too load [sic] or too soft, will I remember the tenses, what if my dear computer starts with his tricks again…*
Mindy

A low proficiency in English is evident in the poorly constructed quotes obtained from the focus group interviews, e-mail messages and messages posted on *Yahoo! Messenger.* This may also have been due to the pressure associated with time. As participants were, to a certain point, obliged to use English, it may have improved the ability of some of them to use the language during social and academic interaction. The inability to communicate well in English inhibited free participation in electronic discussions and resulted in a lower level of academic discourse. The next factor that was perceived as inhibiting performance on this module was a lack of time and a feeling of being overloaded with work.

6.2.6 Time and work overload

As all the participants had families and full-time jobs, and were part-time students, it can be assumed that they expected to be engaged in their academic activities after working hours. It could also be assumed that they knew that they would have to sacrifice time that was normally spent with the family or on social activities. An analysis of the quotes reveals that time and money were inhibiting factors. When asked by the interviewer how they coped, one participant answered as follows:

Quote FG 6.52:

'No, I coped quite well, except for the time and the finance. That was not something I could cope with.'

The limited amount of time available and pressure due to limited time were issues of concern mentioned by participants. This is evident in Quote 4.82 in Chapter 4 as well as quote FG 6.53 given below:

Quote FG 6.53:

'Tyd, en ek dink jy't baie gedoen om te probeer en weer probeer maar jy't nie 'n clue wat het jy so gedoen, omdat daar soveel tyddruk was.'

[Translation]
'Time, and I think you have done a lot to try and try again but you do not have a clue of what you have done, because of all the pressure on time.'

It seemed that the lack of time was mentioned quite often. This is evident in Quotes FG 4.17, FG 4.59, FG 4.60, FG 4.61, FG 4.65, FG 4.91 and FG 4.106 from Chapter 4 as well as the following quotes:

Quote FG 6.54:

'…, because there was just no time for a tribal council. And I think that's a pity.'

Quote FG 6.55:

'But if it was only the mark as they put it - it was time that was going…'

Quote EM 6.28:

… in any event, I don't have the time at present to retype everything or to try and find whatever I responded to. …
Mindy

Quote EM 6.29:

A greater understanding of both synchronous and asynchronous tools requires more time than what we are able to have in this course.
Rachel

Quote FG 6.56:

'You do get some subjects that you had to do summaries…because nobody…but because you were in press of time [sic] to do the next thing.'

Quote FG 6.57:

'Om byvoorbeeld daardie scrollbar wat ons moes maak – ek kan nie vir jou sê hoeveel ure het ek daaraan spandeer nie.'

[Translation]
'For example, that scrollbar we had to make – I can't tell you how many hours I spent on that.'

Quote FG 6.58:

'So eventually I didn't have time to do the individual things, because I was now so trying to get the group, you know, trying to do my part for the group thing.'

Sanet requested extra time from the lecturer in order to complete assignments. Her communication indicated that she had read the messages posted by other participants and was aware that time was a problem, not only to her, but also to her peers. She wrote:

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Quote EM 6.30:

Hi All
Linda, I'm in the dark too. I had problems connecting and staying connected with the Net- resulting in changing to a new service provider ABSA*. Reading all the comments, and between the lines, I think I'm not the only one who would like more time this time round. Please, isn't it possible to postpone all these assignments to next week to give all dof [dense] people like me a chance to find my feet. …*
Please help!
Sanet

In the following quote, the word 'rushing' indicates that time played a significant role in the life of the specific participant:

Quote FG 6.59:

'I really had to, sometimes between two classes, in an hour's time, get back to work. …. It was horrendous. So it really meant rushing.'

For the first three weeks of the *CyberSurfiver* module, the participants had to attend classes for another course, which was presented at the same time. This placed more demands on the time available to the participants. The second module was discontinued and one participant was convinced that the added responsibility and workload were responsible for their increased stress levels. More than one participant addressed the issue of the additional module. This is evident in Quote FG 4.54 in Chapter 4 as well as the following quotes:

Quote FG 6.60:

'We sat here for three weeks, and every time there was a … We were supposed to make a database together with the survivor thing. The second part of the module, the second part of the mark, would be an online portfolio of ourselves.'

Quote FG 6.61:

'Yes, on something completely different, which we worked in Dreamweaver *and* Access *databases. It didn't work. It never worked, because the lecturer couldn't get it to work. So that was a lot of stress, because you knew that half of your mark now hung in the balance, because of something that doesn't work.'*

Limited time seemed to have impacted on the participants' sleeping patterns as well. This is evident in Quote FG 4.24 in Chapter 4, Quotes FG 5.58 and FG 5.62 in Chapter 5, as well as the following quotes:

Quote FG 6.62:

'… soos iemand al gesê het, om drie-uur in die oggend te sit, en te weet daar's vier ander ouens ook daar.'

[Translation]
'… as somebody has said already, to sit at three o'clock in the morning and to know there are four other guys there (on the Internet) as well.'

Quote FG 6.63:

'No, I had to reschedule my life as well, around my baby and my wife as well, so I also started working at ten o'clock when they went to sleep.'

Limited time due to a full schedule also influenced the participants' decisions whether or not to read e-mail messages. Participants had the following to say in this regard:

Quote FG 6.64:

'I didn't really mind. I just didn't read them.'

Quote FG 6.65:

'I just didn't have the time to even open them. If I recognised that it's something that's, you know, that's got to do with me –'

Time was an important issue during the six-week period that the *CyberSurfiver* module was presented. Time constraints were aggravated by the fact that the participants had to do many activities for the first time, and that they had to figure many technicalities and procedures out on their own.

In addition to time constraints, the participants were also faced with financial demands.

6.2.7 Financial demands

Although it is generally considered to be quite expensive to register for a Master's degree at a university, none of the participants complained about that. Their complaints with regard to money as an inhibiting factor were mostly concerned with being on the Internet. Internet access in South Africa is expensive compared to that of other countries such as in the United States of America.

One participant indicated that he coped well with the module, but that he did experience financial and time constraints (refer to Quote FG 6.52). Another participant was of the opinion that they were not informed sufficiently with regard to the financial implications of doing this type of course (refer to Quote FG 5.113 in Chapter 5). Early during the module, a participant made known to her peers how money impacted on her activities related to the module. She wrote the following e-mail message:

Quote EM 6.31:

Hi
I would like to know how the rest of you feel, but we are not supposed to talk about it. But I do NOT have the time or the money (remember, I am a teacher) to play

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an online computer game where eventually, after 30 minutes of being online, the board for the scores are [sic] not reachable or offline! Please count me out on this one – or vote me off. I do have another problem – I do not watch TV, which means I have no idea what survivor is, hat [sic] is it all about?
Anita

During the second focus group interview and in some e-mail messages, participants mentioned the following financial issues related to a course of this nature. Note that some of the participants specifically referred to the financial impact the module had on their personal lives:

Quote FG 6.66:

'En jy moet 'n goeie salaris verdien. Jy moet uitkom aan die einde van die maand.'

[Translation]
'And you have to earn a good salary. You have to make ends meet at the end of the month.'

Quote FG 6.67:

'Jy moet 'n baie, baie goeie verhouding met jou bankbestuurder hê.'

[Translation]
'You have to have a very, very good relationship with your bank manager.'

Quote FG 6.68:

'Ek weet nie wie van julle het die probleem gehad nie, maar toe my eerste telefoonrekening kom, was dit tussen my en my vrou affektief nie goed nie.'

[Translation]
'I don't know if somebody else had the same problem, but when the first telephone account arrived, it was affectively not very sound between my wife and me.'

Quote FG 6.69:

'Miskien moet mens net gewaarsku word voor die tyd dat dit deel van die kostes is van die kursus.'

[Translation]
'Maybe one has to be warned beforehand that it is part of the costs of the course.'

Quote FG 6.70:

'Jy moet laat weet dat die kursus nie vyfduisend rand is nie, maar plus, plus, plus.'

[Translation]
'You have to let (students) know that the course is not five thousand rand only, but plus, plus, plus.'

Quote EM 6.32:

… The other problem is the time. 1 hour became 2½ hours – that is a lot of money online lecturing, …
Pedro

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Quote EM 6.33:

I enjoyed it very much, but still waiting for the phone bill. … Anita from Uno

Participants made the following remarks in e-mail messages, about the financial costs incurred by the *Interwise* session. The impact of high costs on their personal situations is evident in the following quotes. They wrote:

Quote EM 6.34:

… my wife is going to kill me if she sees this month's phone bill!!
Gérard

Quote EM 6.35:

Hi Camilla The sound of $$$$$ is haunting me as well!
Sanet

Quote EM 6.36:

Gérard, I agree with you. My wive [sic] is talking about divorcing me (money used for my child's clothes used for the discussion). You know, it is all well and said that if you take this course and see what you learn each day, mony [sic] musn't be a problem. What if you have R350 to survive with until the 23 August 2002? That's [sic] the facts!!!
Pedro

Quote EM 6.37:

As time = money, the presentation must be well planned and organized – ensuring you don't [sic] drift away from the topic and was time. …
Hendrik

Quote EM 6.38:

I tried to get the system going at home on the bread-and-butter-generating machine (money meant for housekeeping?) in the middle of the night, …
Anette

The direct and indirect financial impact on the participants led to many discussions among the participants. It also caused strong feelings and influenced the relationships the participants had with family members. The added time spent online as a result of poor technical skills and a lack of knowledge increased the financial expenses of the participants. Because they were not sufficiently informed with regard to the additional financial requirements for the module, such as fees for telephone and Internet access, they were caught unawares and could not plan sufficiently for these expenses. It is more expensive to the student in South Africa, than to students in the United States of America, to do a course of this nature. The last inhibiting factor identified is problems participants experienced with their service providers.

6.2.8 Problems with the service provider

There are many Internet service providers in South Africa, but the only way in which the Internet can be accessed is by means of a telephone line. As there is only one landline telephone company available to the average Internet user in South Africa, namely *Telkom*, service providers and participants are forced to use the services of this company. Broadband Internet services by *Telkom* in South Africa has been introduced in 2003, which is after the participants completed this module, and therefore they did not have access to broadband Internet services. If one considers the financial complaints of the participants and the cost of broadband services, it is unlikely that they would have obtained it, even if it was available during the time of the *CyberSurfiver* module. The problems the participants experienced with regard to *Telkom* are evident in the following quotes:

> **Quote FG 6.71:**
>
> '*Exactly. It's like telling us let's use all <u>Telkom</u> communication, and online, and one is not working with <u>Telkom</u>. It's not working.*'

> **Quote FG 6.72:**
>
> '<u>*Telkom's*</u> *the problem. Ja [yes].*'

> **Quote FG 6.73:**
>
> '*She lives in Silver Lake, so it's all the way out to town, and out of town. So she always had a problem with that. Even when I spoke to her on <u>Yahoo! Messenger</u>, she would break up. But then in town, it wasn't a problem.*'

> **Quote EM 6.39:**
>
> *I really think it went well. For me it was a new experience. I didn't think it can work so well in South Africa. There were a few problems with some people, thanx [sic] to the monoploy [sic] of <u>Telkom</u>. … , please can't we get a better telephone company in South Africa??????????*
> *Pedro*

> **Quote EM 6.40:**
>
> *I agree about* Telkom *– apparently the 'new' landline company is on the way! I'll be the 1ˢᵗ client! : -)*
> *Gérard*

Problems experienced with regard to Telkom was probably the one aspect of their experiences and exposure that the participants had no control over.

6.3 Literature control

The discussion on inhibiting factors relates as follows to the quotes in this chapter:

- Quotes FG 6.1 to FG 6.8 pertain to the negative experiences which the *CyberSurfivers* experienced with regard to voting;
- Quotes FG 6.9 to FG 6.23 relate to the participants' perception of the insufficiency of information provided before the onset of the module;
- Quotes FG 6.24 to FG 6.41 and Quotes EM 6.1 to EM 6.15 pertain to the participants' lack of computer skills;
- Quotes FG 6.42 to FG 6.48, as well as Quote EM 6.16, pertain to groups and interaction issues;
- Quotes FG 6.49 to FG 6.51 and Quotes EM 6.17 to EM 6.27 pertain to problems experienced with regard to language;
- Quotes FG 6.52 to FG 6.65 and Quotes EM 6.28 to EM 6.30 relate to problems with time and work overload;
- Quotes FG 6.66 to FG 6.70, Quotes EM 6.31 to EM 6.38 pertain to financial problems; and
- Quotes FG 6.71 to FG 6.73 and Quotes EM 6.39 to EM 6.40 pertain to problems experienced with regard to the service provider.

The first cluster under the category *Inhibiting Factors* deals with the participants' negative experiences with regard to voting. When one considers the quotes in Subsection 6.2.1 in this chapter, it is clear that the cluster addresses issues of group interaction. Such issues have already been discussed in Chapter 4 under Subsection 4.3.4. In an educational situation, groups usually work and stay together until they have obtained the outcomes set for them. However, this was not the case with the participants in the *CyberSurfiver* module. The voting off of tribe members was a unique situation for the participants. The kinship that developed in the *CyberSurfiver* tribes is evident in Chapter 4 under Subsection 4.6.1. One could reason that, due to feelings of altruism and collectivism, participants found it hard to vote others off. In addition, as individuals, most participants were not very competent in the Internet environment, as well as using the different types of software needed to complete their assignments. Therefore, they needed the combined expertise of all the group members, in order to complete all their tasks and assignments.

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As the number of group members diminished due to the voting process, remaining members' responsibility increased with regard to meeting deadlines and attaining outcomes. As a result, more resistance, especially by the third and fourth week, was shown for voting members off. It appeared that being voted off also affected participants' egos, which could be a reflection of the human need to maintain a positive self-image, at home and at work. At this level of education, participants perceived themselves as role models, who are supposed to set an example and be successful, and failure could lead to a decrease in positive self-image. Lastly, the mere act of voting another person out was in essence an act of securing one's place in the tribe.

It is important for the mental well-being of students to understand what is required of them before they start with any type of educational course. This is especially the case with distance education and more so when students are required to synchronously log in, for example, for online discussions. In addition, it has become clear that if students are not informed of the required hardware and software, and the necessary computer and other software skills they need, they are not able to plan and prepare themselves properly for the course. It then also becomes an additional financial burden to the student to acquire the necessary equipment and/or skills. Not being fully prepared for a course of this nature can be very demotivating to the student, and influence her/his plans for occupational advancement.

Hara and Kling (2000) refer to a student, who, during an interview, highlighted her frustration with not being adequately informed of the prerequisites required for the course she was registered for. They quote her as follows:

> 'First of all, inappropriate prerequisite statement. For example, there is nothing to say that you should know HTML, but our first assignment was creating a web site. Fortunately, I knew it. I'd explored learning how to do HTML by myself. If I didn't know, I just cannot imagine how to get through. … Third, accessibility to technology. This is related to the prerequisite. There is nothing that says we should have access to a web server. However, when we developed the web site as an assignment, we had to have the server access. Since I work for a school, one of the technical people helped me to connect to the web server. If I didn't have these resources here, I would have dropped this course (Hara and Kling 2000).'

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Salmon (1998:5) found that students, due to their lack of skill, knowledge, experience, and level of anxiety, found it hard to navigate even the most simplistic software. The students, who participated in the *CyberSurfiver* module, had similar complaints to that of the above-quoted student with regard to prerequisite information for the module. As can be seen from their quotes (FG 6.9 to FG 6.23), they made many suggestions with regard to information future students should be given when they do a similar course.

McVay Lynch (2001) studied the phenomenon of high dropout rates and the lack of re-enrollment in online courses. She found that an online student orientation course made a significant difference in student attrition as well as re-enrollment for online learning. McVay Lynch (2001) also found that many students lacked fundamental computer skills and were newcomers to the Internet. This was also the case with the students who participated in the *CyberSurfiver* module, and who expressed experiences that inhibited their efforts to adapt to the online learning environment as required for the *CyberSurfiver* module.

McVay Lynch (2001) suggests that orientation courses, which could simulate the actual environment that students will encounter in their registered course, should not be presented entirely online, as online learning is new to most students. According to McVay Lynch (2001), feedback from students indicated that it is not sufficient for the orientation course to focus on technology and the Web only, but that it should also allow for the following:

- Assist students in becoming aware of adult learning theory;
- Elicit self-awareness of personal suitability for the online learning environment;
- Analyse and discuss adjustments that students might have to make to increase success in their studies;
- Provide students with many opportunities to engage in extensive Web-based interaction and communication with their lecturers and their peers; and
- Allow significant time for student reflection on their new environment.

Wegerif (1998) is of the opinion that a preparatory course should be of such a nature that it brings all the students up to the same level of competence and knowledge. Galusha (1997) believes that students should at least be taught the fundamentals of the operating system of choice in online courses. It would imply that, for online learning to be successful, technological barriers must not be an issue. Students should, therefore, before they enroll for a course, be fully informed of the technical

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(hardware) requirements, as well as the knowledge and skills they will need to be successful.

If students contemplate enrolling for an online course that requires knowledge of computers, the students must first be taught the fundamentals of the operating system that will be used for the online course. Currently (January 2005), the information for the MEd (CAE) course on the website of the University of Pretoria contains very explicit information for prospective students, which was not the case in 2001/2002, when participants in this study were enrolled for the same course. In addition to these changes, an interview to assess the computer skills of the participants has been introduced as part of the selection process.

Smith (2002) and McDonald (2002:14) note that students experience a lack of training particularly with regard to technical issues. McDonald (2002:14) further notes that many '*adult students are not well versed in the uses of technology such as computers and the Internet*'. McDonald is of the opinion that students receive large volumes of electronic-based information, but that some students are not able to use it due to their lack of competence. It is therefore suggested that students must be taught how to manage the materials they receive.

In a study done by Muse (2003:255), it was found that, in order for students to feel that they are ready to start with an online course, they need to acquire resources right at the beginning of the course. This could include the downloading of files, the gaining of access to software and the download of plug-in software. Muse (2003:255) is of the opinion that, if this does not happen, students will discontinue the course while they may still register for another course, or educational fees are reimbursable.

Students not only need software knowledge and skills, but also need to know what the hardware requirements are. Galusha (1997) notes that a lack of the proper hardware may place undue financial hardship on some students. In addition, psychological exhaustion can be caused by their efforts to meet the requirements, which can contribute to the student having negative experiences with online learning.

Hara and Kling (2000) provide quotes, from a student's e-mail messages sent to her lecturer, which express frustration with struggling to download a file. The emotional exhaustion is evident in the words the student uses:

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> *I have spent one hour trying to follow your directions. I am getting an error message. The first time I tried to download it as a zip file, the error says, cannot access this file. I am getting extremely frustrated : (* (Hara and Kling 2000).

The following e-mail message, which was sent the next day, emphasises the negative emotions the student had. However, she was not going to quit the course. She wrote:

> *This computer is very frustrating. I would imagine it is like sitting in a class and only understanding some of what was said, then asked to answer a question. I have felt it… <u>panic… isolation… frustration… anger</u>. This has been a very good lesson. I will keep trying* (Hara and Kling 2000).
> [My emphasis]

According to McMahon, Gardner, Gray and Mulhern (1999:302), students perceive the lack of training in computers as '*the strongest inhibitor to computer use'*. The quotes recorded and presented by these authors are similar to those presented in Subsection 6.2.3 of this chapter.

Group interaction is a vital part of collaborative on-line learning. In Chapter 4, under Subsection 4.3.4, a discussion on group and interaction issues was presented, which contributes to a cluster under the third category of this study called Inhibiting Factors. Working together in groups does promote aspects of cognitive development and lead to a high level of student satisfaction (Van Ryneveld 2004:74).

Interactions within small groups may lead to disagreements, mild irritations and conflict between members (McNamara 1999). The conflict in the *CyberSurfiver* tribes may have been the result of personal incompetencies, such as when members became impatient with those who failed to meet the deadlines set for the groups. Green ([Sa]) is of the opinion that an individual's frustration may have an effect on the other members of a group. This effect may be positive or negative.

If two people feel the same about something they probably have the same attitude towards the event or object that elicits the feeling. Group competition may influence morale and cohesiveness, both within and between groups. This may lead to a feeling of antagonism, not only toward the members of the group, but also toward the group as a whole (Wood *et al.*1996).

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The participants indicated that they experienced communication problems in their groups due to not being able to converse freely in their mother tongue. Problems with regard to not being able to use their first language for online communication have been discussed in Subsection 4.4.4 of Chapter 4. Participants expressed a fear of being misunderstood by others, which they perceived as a constraining factor.

In a study done by McVay Lynch (2001), students had to integrate technology with human interaction in order to communicate effectively. Most students had no idea how to accomplish this objective. These communication problems made students feel disconnected from the campus, and reduced self-directed learning. It also affected their levels of motivation.

Hara and Kling (2000), in their study, referred to a participant who diligently gave attention to spelling and capitalisation. When another student posted a message with an apparent incorrect word, she quickly corrected it by remarking to the researcher, who was observing her, what the student actually meant. The first message read as follows:

> *I like the action of calling rows* (Hara and Kling 2000).

The first student immediately responded to this by remarking to the researcher as follows:

> *I think what she means is 'calling role.' Sometimes it's confusing, the half*
> *of the students are non-native speakers* (Hara and Kling 2000).

Communication situations, such as the above, may be problematic. None of the *CyberSurfiver* participants' in this study spoke English as a first language, as already mentioned in this study. Not only did they have to deal with their own inability to use English in a social and academic context, but also had to correctly interpret the second language English of their peers. Though language was perceived as a restraining factor, it did not have a marked influence on the performance of the participants, as most of them finished the module.

One *CyberSurfiver* participant, quoted in FG 6.50 in this chapter, was convinced that language was the reason why some participants did not use e-mail for communication purposes. Though it is accepted that language may be problematic and inhibit some students to communicate online, the situation could also have been perceived as an

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opportunity to improve one's communication skills. This was probably a benefit that the *CyberSurfiver* participants did not consider, as they were preoccupied with time pressures and work overload.

According to the American Association of University Women's (AAUW) Educational Foundation, '*multi-tasking is more that just a buzzword'*. AAUW (2001) found that online learning is increasing and that sixty per cent of the non-traditional online learners are women, who are employed and older than 25 years of age. By furthering their education, a '*third shift'* is added to these women's existing responsibilities as mothers and employees. Quoting their Executive Director, Jacqueline Woods, AAUW (2001) reports:

> '*Technology does not create more hours in a day, but leaves women—who shoulder most of the family and household responsibilities—improvising to squeeze in education.'*

This study did not focus on gender issues in online learning. However, the quote emphasises the fact that online learning opens new opportunities to people who previously might have been excluded from education due to the roles they fulfil.

According to Kramarae (2001:3), women and men are juggling work, family, as well as further education throughout their lives. She mentions that most mothers report that they study during late evening hours, and early morning hours. As the *CyberSurfiver* study indicates, there experiences are not unique to female students. When considering the quotes of the participants under Subsection 6.2.7 of this chapter, it is clear that the male students were also under pressure to manage their time with regard to the different roles they fulfil.

The participants in this study indicated that they often had to attend to coursework while their family members were sleeping. Similar results were obtained from Kramarae's (2001) study. One of the participants in Kramarae's study reported:

> '*I meet my deadlines at great cost. I lack sleep and lack personal 'fun' time for the time being'* (Kramarae's 2001).

Lefoe, Gunn and Hedberg (2002) also quoted a student who mentioned the huge impact online learning had on her/his personal life. The student said:

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'Well, I'm unhappy, I don't have a life. I don't go for a walk any more, I don't speak to my children...' (Lefoe *et al.* 2002).

Gabriel (2004:65) indicates that participants of her study experienced the asynchronous nature of online learning as both a challenge and an opportunity. She mentions that some students perceived the completion of online assignments early morning, while family members are still asleep, as convenient, whereas others perceived working late in the evening as convenient.

The CyberSurfiver participants found the limited time as a huge constraint. They specifically mentioned the large number of e-mail messages they received. In a study conducted by Gabriel (2004:65), participants also mentioned that the large amount of e-mail, which they received, was a burden on their time, while they also had to relate the content of the learning course to the online environment, and become comfortable with their peers.   She quotes one participant who said:

'The time glass was really disempowering for me, I guess' (Gabriel 2004:65).

Hara and Kling (2000) also report that students perceived the large amounts of e-mail as a problem, especially during periods of short and intensive discussions. They quote one student as follows:

Ah ... I cannot catch up with all of you : ((Hara and Kling 2000)

Note the emoticon that depicts frustration in the above quote. Hara and Kling (2000) quote a number of students who commented on the overwhelming number of e-mail messages they had to attend to. Below is one of these quotes:

'I don't really like turning on the computer and finding that I have eleven messages on my e-mail. It's a pain. I mean to answer that many things, just talking in conversation would be so much easier, rather than replying and doing all the stuff you have to do. So, that is just time-consuming, but it is a part of at a distance. I think if you are doing that, you have to be aware that you're gonna be spending more time with computer problems, not getting on-line, software freaking out, crashing, whatever it's gonna happen, it gonna take you a lot longer, ...' (Hara and Kling 2000)

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At some stage some *CyberSurfiver* participants requested more time to complete assignments. Curtis and Lawson (2001:30) quote a student, new in the online environment, who mentioned late submission of assignments. The student said:

> *'This was new to me and it took me a while to get my head around how it was going to work. I felt more time was spent chasing late submissions' (Curtis and Lawson 2001:30).*

The work overload, such as experienced by the *CyberSurfiver* participants, is also evident in the discussions of other studies as well. Burge (1994) quote two students who struggled to manage the large amounts of information in their online course. They said:

> *'(Laughs) That's right!! … Every time I logged on it was like "Here comes the wave." You know, I could see myself trying to build the castle before the water comes' (Burge 1994).*

> *'It was an inhuman amount of work' (Burge 1994).*

The suggestion is that online lecturers have to take heed of the effect of over-teaching and overloading online students. According to Kramarae (2001:17), students might find themselves working more with the technology than with the lecturer or the subject content.

Finances were another inhibiting factor for the participants in this study. Selwyn, Gorard and Williams (2002), as well as Kramarae (2001:14), are of the opinion that the most obvious obstacle most adult learners, who plan to study or do study, face, is cost. Cost is seen as a restrictive factor, as adult learners are often already faced with basic expenses related to childcare and other domestic responsibilities. According to McFadden, Marsh II and Price (1999), the cost of online learning is not an easy question, as the answer will depend on what the person wants and how s/he will use it.

Although Kramarae (2001:3) indicates that computer-related costs include a computer and the necessary hardware, the *CyberSurfiver* participants did not mention these as inhibiting factors. Instead, they specifically addressed the cost of Internet access. Kramarae (2001:3) mentions that some participants in her study had access to computers, e-mail and the Internet through their workplace. Others had to rely on

the availability of an Internet Café, but most had personal computers, connected to a modem by which they had access through a telephone line to the Internet. At the time that the *CyberSurfiver* module was active, broadband Internet access (ADSL) was not yet available in South Africa and the participants had to pay, as part of their telephone accounts, relatively high amounts of money for a very slow Internet connection.

Kramarae (2001:3) is of the opinion that, when determining who has or has not access to online learning, additional costs, such as Internet access fees and telephone fees, need to be considered in addition to tuition fees. Were they timeously informed of the expected extra expenses, participants in the *CyberSurfiver* module might not have mentioned money as an inhibiting factor. Due to the fact that many online learners are novice learners and novice Internet users, it could not be assumed that they would know beforehand that they would be obliged to communicate and do assignments online.

The participants also experienced problems with the 'service provider'. One can presume that, in online learning environments, 'service provider' may refer to the server at the university where the students is enrolled, as well as the student's personal Internet service provider, which can be any of a number of service providers in South Africa, or the telephone company who provides the telephone line for modem access. Smith (2000) mentions that disadvantages of collaborative online learning may include technical difficulties, slow access times, lack of training and unclear expectations.

Some points made by Smith are reiterated by Peters (2001), who mentions that students become frustrated by the periodic slowness of Internet connections or server problems. Peters (2001) states that slow connections, servers that are down and inadequate computer memory, may turn the computer experience into a hindrance to education. Also, students, who already lack confidence in computer equipment, may transfer their feelings of inadequacy to the learning experience.

Currently (2004/5), broadband Web access is available in South Africa. This facility will decrease online time as well as reduce Internet costs for online students. The establishment of new landline telephone companies may provide a more competitive market with regard to Internet fees. Gérard, one of the *CyberSurfivers* in this study, wrote the following e-mail message to the group during a time when many

participants were struggling (refer to Quote EM 6.35 in this chapter, as well as Quote EM 4.23 in Chapter 4).

> *I agree about* Telkom – *apparently the 'new' landline company is on the way!*
> *I'll be the 1st client!*
> *: -)*
> *Gérard*

6.4 Summary

In this chapter, the Third Category, namely *Inhibiting Factors*, which was identified during the data analysis and coding process, was discussed. The discussion commenced with explanations of the concepts identified in the three different clusters of Category 3. The concepts 'Inhibiting' and 'Factors' were defined and the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the concepts provided. Further discussions were based on the quotations obtained from the transcripts of focus group interviews, the printouts of synchronous conversations on *Yahoo! Messenger* and the e-mail text messages that students sent to each other and the lecturer during the time that the module was active. Literature applicable to the clusters of Category 3 was discussed in an effort to compare the experiences of the *CyberSurfiver* participants with findings of similar studies done.

The next chapter, Chapter 7, presents the conclusions of this study. A summary of the study design will be provided, as well as the main findings of the study. A reflection on this study will be included, as well as recommendations for future research. The research objectives will specifically be addressed.