Exploring first-year students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance academic writing skills in an ODeL institution in South Africa

by

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Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: DR K. SEVNARAYAN

2023

ABSTRACT

This study explored first-year students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcast to enhance academic writing skills. Academic writing challenges faced by first-year students at an Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) institution in South Africa (Unix) are multifaceted. These challenges arise from insufficient writing skills developed in high school, the need to adapt to new writing standards, and limited language proficiency, especially for students who speak English as an additional language (EAL). The impact of these challenges includes higher dropout rates, increased failure rates, and delays in completing qualifications. Specific issues include understanding citation and referencing, developing the voice of the writer, producing appropriate academic text, paraphrasing, summarising, and adhering to academic writing conventions. The online nature of Unix further compounds these challenges and intensifies learning difficulties. Considering the existing gaps and challenges, this study implemented podcasts and vodcasts as supplementary tools, with the goal of decreasing transactional distance and enhancing academic writing support, for the large student population in ENG101 of approximately 18,000 students. The objectives included exploring student perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts, identifying challenges related to accessing these resources, assessing the impact of podcasts and vodcasts on academic writing skills, and developing guidelines to leverage these tools to enhance academic writing in the module under study.

This study utilised qualitative action research methodology, drawing upon Moore's theory of transactional distance (TTD) and Garrison et al.'s community of inquiry (CoI) framework. By combining these frameworks, the study aimed to facilitate collaborative online interactions and meaningful engagement between lecturers and students, culminating in the construction of new knowledge. The implementation of podcasts and vodcasts within the research design proved suitable, as it involved a pragmatic and collaborative approach to systematically explore and improve on the challenges faced by students in academic writing. Through methods such as online open-ended evaluation discussions, focus group discussions, and document analysis, the study gathered data that highlighted improvements in participants' comprehension of academic writing skills and positive perceptions of podcasts and vodcasts, which were found to be instrumental in aiding comprehension of prescribed and recommended

textbooks. Furthermore, these tools helped address the challenges associated with traditional study materials. The ENG101 students demonstrated improved skills in referencing, argumentation, logical organisation of ideas, adherence to grammar rules, and editing after the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts. These findings indicate that the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts has led to a reduction in transactional distance. Furthermore, they have contributed to an enhancement in the teaching, social, emotional, and cognitive presences in the module. Integrating digital multimedia files that cater to diverse learning styles and provide flexibility beyond traditional teaching styles is recommended for lecturers Furthermore, the study's findings informed the development of guidelines to create high quality podcasts and vodcasts in the context of distance education universities.

DECLARATION

First name and surname: Ntshimane Elphas Mohale

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Qualification: Doctor of Philosophy in Languages, Linguistics, and Literature

I declare that the doctoral thesis: 'Exploring first-year students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance academic writing skills in an ODeL institution in South Africa' is my work and all sources used are acknowledged and cited accordingly.

I further declare that this doctoral thesis has not been previously submitted to another institution for any other qualification programme.

Signature   Date: 25 May 2023

DEDICATION

"Speak to your children as if they are the wisest, kindest, most beautiful, and magical humans on Earth, for what they believe is what they will become"

- Brooke Hampton

This thesis is dedicated to my esteemed parents, Mr. JL Mohale Senior (MaJeff) and Mrs. SR Mohale (Mmina), the matriarch, whose unwavering love, remarkable support, profound wisdom, invaluable teachings, heartfelt prayers, and embodiment of the spirit of Ubuntu have left an indelible mark on my being. Throughout my childhood, I was blessed with an abundance of cherished memories that shall forever be etched in the depths of my heart. Through your exceptional guidance and nurturing, I have emerged as a formidable force, a triumphant individual, a beacon of blessings and, above all, a devout child of God. I express my sincere gratitude for the countless meaningful conversations, unwavering motivation, and precious moments we shared that have propelled me to this very moment. Indeed, the Almighty has bestowed upon me the most invaluable guardians, who have accompanied me on this arduous journey to the present day. Your tireless efforts and unwavering principles will forever be held in my highest regard and deepest affection. I will forever cherish your immeasurable contributions, even when the passage of time obscures the recollection of other memories.

"Family is not an important thing, it's everything"

- Michael J. Fox

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This PhD thesis is indeed a labour of love and stands as a testament to the unwavering support and guidance provided by numerous individuals throughout the laborious journey. I am deeply grateful to each of you.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to the Alpha and Omega…Jehovah (the God of all creation) for bestowing countless blessings on my life. Your boundless love remains an enigma for which no words or actions can suffice. I am forever devoted to you, as your grace and mercy reveal themselves anew with each passing day.

To my esteemed supervisor, Dr Kershnee Sevnarayan, my appreciation knows no bounds. Your unwavering dedication, support, tireless efforts, and unwavering passion for academia have been instrumental in shaping this research endeavour. Your remarkable expertise, intellect, and pioneering contributions to the field are truly commendable. Under your guidance, I have been empowered to reach new heights. I express my deepest gratitude for everything you have done.

I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to the University of South Africa, which has provided an invaluable platform to conduct this study. The university's commitment to promoting diversity and authenticity has created an ideal environment for academic pursuit. The abundant resources available have greatly contributed to the successful execution of this research.

A heartfelt acknowledgement is also due to the ENG101 students and lecturers who graciously participated in this study. Your genuine insights and contributions have laid the foundation on which this work rests. Without your invaluable input, this study would cease to exist.

To my dedicated critical reader and editor, I extend my sincerest thanks for refining and enhancing the ideas and concepts within this work. Your meticulous attention to detail and keen eye has been invaluable in ensuring the quality of the final product. Your expertise has been an unwavering source of reliability and trustworthiness.

I am immensely grateful to my family and friends for their unwavering support, endless patience, and deep understanding throughout this journey. A special mention goes to my beloved brother, Mr John Thabo Mohale, whose love knows no bounds.

To my beloved late aunt, Mrs. Paulina Mokgaetsi Tshabalala, who departed from this Earth during my study, I express my profound gratitude. Thank you for your unwavering prayers, boundless love, and genuine interest in my academic pursuits. Your absence leaves a void, especially in those moments when I seek someone to intercede for me in prayer. I trust that, in time, God will raise another family member to assume the prayerful responsibilities you carried out with such grace. Mmane Mpoli, your memory will forever be cherished, and my love for you remains eternal.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my esteemed former undergraduate lecturer, Dr ML Mphahlele. Your unwavering belief in me and dedication to instilling essential values, pride, dignity, and a profound love for academia have been instrumental in shaping the person I am today. Your guidance and encouragement have left an indelible mark on my journey, and I am deeply appreciative of the knowledge and wisdom you have imparted. Thank you for being an exceptional mentor and for inspiring me to strive for excellence in both my academic pursuits and personal growth. I truly didn't know my own strength…

Peace and prosperity to you all!

EDITOR'S LETTER

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

EDITING OF THESIS: MR. N.E. MOHALE

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TITLE: EXPLORING FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES OF USING PODCASTS AND VODCASTS TO ENHANCE ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS IN AN ODeL INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

I hereby confirm that I have undertaken a rigorous and comprehensive critical review of the above-mentioned thesis. This review involved in-depth analysis and editing of various elements, encompassing the preliminary pages, chapters, references, and appendices. All edits and discussions were conducted using onscreen markup, ensuring meticulous attention to detail.

Throughout this editorial process, I provided valuable guidance on multiple aspects, including:

- Substantive and structural matters, ensuring the coherence and logical flow of ideas.

- Paragraph and sentence structure, enhancing clarity and coherence in the presentation of arguments.

- Language proficiency, encompassing the use of academic language, appropriate phrasing, and accurate labelling of figures and tables.

- Formatting concerns, encompassing font size, clarity, referencing format, verbosity, circumlocution, voice and tone, grammar, spelling, repetition, and punctuation.

- Contextual considerations, ensuring that the content is appropriately situated within the relevant academic framework.

- Presentation of content, optimizing the overall visual and textual appeal of the thesis.

It is important to emphasize that throughout the editing process, the core research and the student's original intentions were upheld and remained unaltered. The student's has full discretion to accept or reject any comments or suggestions presented in the edited document. For any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at the provided contact information: Ann1@gmail.com

Yours faithfully,

Ann-Marie De Villiers (Copyeditor)   04 August 2023

STILL I RISE

by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise?
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation and acronyms	Meaning
1. BA	Bachelor of Arts
2. B.Ed.	Bachelor of Education
3. ODeL	Open Distance e-Learning
4. CoI	Community of inquiry
5. COVID-19	Coronavirus disease discovered in 2019
6. DE	Distance education
7. EAL	English as an additional language
8. EFL	English as a foreign language
9. ENG101	Pseudonym for English for Academic Purposes
10. ESL	English as a second language
11. E-Learning	Electronic learning
12. FTEN	First-time entrant
13. HE	Higher education
14. HEIs	Higher education institutions
15. ICT	Information and communication technology
16. LMS	Learning management system
17. MOI	Medium of instruction
18. MOOCS	Massive open online courses
19. OER	Open education resource
20. Podcast	Digital audio multimedia compressed file
21. TD	Transactional distance
22. TTD	Theory of transactional distance
23. TUT letter	Tutorial letter
24. TUT letter 501	Tutorial letter 501 (study guide)
25. Unix	Pseudonym for the university under study
26. Vodcast	Video file or clip that is distributed in a digital format
27. XMO	Examination system which stores results of students

CHAPTER 1

Enhancing academic writing skills through podcasts and vodcasts: An introduction, background, and context

"Education is the key to unlocking the world, a passport to freedom"
-Oprah Winfrey

1.1 Introduction

This research study explores students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance academic writing skills at an Open Distance e-Learning[1] (ODeL) institution in South Africa, Unix (pseudonym of the university under study). Although previous research has extensively investigated the implementation of various online supplementary learning tools, such as audio and video podcasting, live streaming, screencasts, radio and television, there remains a significant gap in the scholarly literature regarding students' perspectives and challenges specifically related to the use of podcasts and vodcasts for enhancing academic writing skills within a distance education (DE) context (Bharuthram & Kies, 2013; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Kajee, 2006; Kannan & MackNish, 2000; Njenga & Fourie, 2010; Palloff & Pratt, 2005; Pretorius & Machet, 2004; Stanz & Fourie, 2002). It is crucial to emphasise that the mastery of academic writing skills assumes a pivotal role in achieving academic excellence within the ODeL institution (Al-Handhali, Al-Rasbi & Sherimon, 2020; Anderson & Rivera-Vargas, 2020; Hobbs, 2020; Sancho-Gil, Rivera-Vargas & Miño-Puigcercós, 2020). However, the current understanding of how podcasts and vodcasts can effectively contribute to the development of such skills in this specific educational context remains limited. By addressing this research gap, this study aims to shed light on the unique perspectives and challenges facing students in utilizing podcasts and vodcasts to enhance their academic writing abilities within the ODeL institution under study. Consequently, the findings of this research effort will

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[1] E-Learning [digital learning or online learning] refers to the use of technology to support and facilitate learning. In e-learning, the delivery of educational material is through digital or electronic [web-based] resources such as smartphones, videos, Microsoft Teams, computers, PDF documents, etcetera. E-Learning requires the use of the internet to optimally function.

contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge and provide valuable insights for educators, instructional designers, and policymakers in effectively leveraging technology-enhanced learning tools to foster academic writing excellence in online distance learning contexts.

The issue of academic writing among first-year university students in South Africa is a matter of significant concern, encompassing multiple hurdles that hinder their progress (Barton, 1994; Bharuthram, 2012, 2007; Boughey & McKenna, 2016; Gee, 2000; Lee, 2020; Leibowitz, 2004; Lentz, 2020; Street, 1984, 1995). These challenges cover various aspects, including the composition of essays, the effective application of subject content, and the attainment of linguistic proficiency. Hassan (2021), Fomunyam (2019), and Ma (2021) unequivocally assert that students enrolled in South African universities consistently face difficulties in completing their academic programmes within the expected timeframe due to a lack of preparedness.

Moreover, the research by Hassel and Ridout (2018) sheds light on alarming statistics in South Africa, where a staggering 40% of students entering Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) eventually drop out due to inadequate preparation. Shockingly, only a mere 15% successfully manage to graduate within the designated time frame, leaving a significant 45% of students grappling with persistent challenges in progressing through their academic qualifications. Consequently, this persistent struggle creates substantial impediments in their academic journeys, resulting in a profound impact on their overall educational attainment and prospects.

> …enhancing and ensuring student academic support, success, and retention in [HEIs] is a matter that requires [our] urgent attention. Despite numerous governmental and institutional interventions, first-year student success and retention rates remain a challenge (Pelletier, 2019: 60).

Effectively addressing these issues is imperative both on a national and institutional level, as the issue of 'student unpreparedness' is widely acknowledged as a significant hindrance to the academic success rates of first-year students (Hassel & Ridout, 2018). This sentiment aligns with the observations put forth by Roodt (2018), who contends that a substantial number of students entering South African universities lack the necessary intellectual rigour required for university-level studies, largely due to subnormal standards in primary and secondary education. In support of this point of view, Mhlanga and Molio (2020), Mthimunye and Daniels (2019) and Wentzel and De Hart (2020) argue that students' struggles with writing and linguistic proficiency persist

due to various factors, including feelings of isolation. The use of the English language as a medium of instruction (MoI) and physical separation from the traditional classroom environment exacerbate the sense of detachment (Bolton et al., 2023; Sahiruddin, Junining & Prawoto, 2020; Sevnarayan & Mohale, 2022; Xie & Peng, 2021). It is essential to note that the current study was conducted within the framework of ODeL, using technology to teach English academic writing skills to first-year students.

According to the University of South Africa's Open Distance Learning (ODL) policy (2015), digital media such as podcasts, vodcasts and streaming have been recognized as viable tools for the dissemination of academic content and information, facilitating the teaching and learning process. In addition, students are expected to engage and utilize the English language, even if English is not their first language. English serves as the MoI at Unix; however, students may encounter difficulties expressing themselves in writing or comprehending information effectively, as their mastery of the English language may be somewhat partially developed (Boughey & McKenna, 2016; Leibowitz, 2004). Overseeing recent empirical studies, Bond et al. (2020), Faramarzi et al. (2020), Lee (2020), Pan (2020), Toquero and Talidong (2021), and Veletsianos and Houlden (2020) have focused on the use of podcasts and vodcasts within HEIs. Their studies revealed that podcasts and vodcasts have emerged as integral components of DE, facilitating interactive and informative content delivery that bridges the gap between remote students and their lecturers. Moreover, the use of podcasts and vodcasts is advantageous and captivating in online teaching and learning, particularly given the virtual nature of the current student cohort. Given the academic writing challenges faced by ENG101 students, podcasts and vodcasts may enhance [beneficial] academic writing skills of first-year students. Consequently, it is paramount to examine the perceptions and challenges associated with the utilisation of podcasts and vodcasts as a means of enhancing the academic writing skills of first-year ENG101 students within the ODeL institution under study. Furthermore, this research study seeks to address the barriers posed by geographical distance and the prevalent feelings of isolation that often accompany distance learning.

According to Crofts et al. (2005:1), the term 'podcast' refers to digitally compressed multimedia audio files that can be downloaded and played on personal devices. One of the many applications of podcasts is in education, where they can be used to

provide various educational offerings (Beniamini, 2020; Rime, Pike, & Collins, 2022; Rajar, 2020; Sherrill, 2020). On the other hand, Kay (2012) defines vodcasts as digital video files or clips that are distributed via the Internet and can be accessed on personal devices. Vodcasts serve as the visual counterpart to podcasts, incorporating additional visual elements (Gerber, 2022; Suroviec, 2023; Tadena & Salic-Hairulla, 2021; Tecson et al., 2021). For instance, vodcasts can be used to transmit lectures. Various scholars argue that regular utilization of podcasts and vodcasts as pedagogical tools can mitigate feelings of disconnection and isolation (Mhlanga & Molio, 2020; Mthimunye & Daniels, 2019; Wentzel & De Hart, 2020) experienced by students enrolled in HEIs. The simultaneous use of podcasts and vodcasts may be advantageous for several reasons. First, this approach acknowledges and accommodates diverse learning style preferences and individual needs in terms of academic writing skills is concerned (Chien et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2020). By offering both formats, content becomes more accessible and appealing to a broader range of students (Casares, 2022; Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2022; Sevnarayan & Mohale, 2022). Moreover, the combination of podcasts and vodcasts provides a versatile and dynamic platform for presenting information (Bonk & Kubinski, 2023; Caratozzolo, Alvarez-Delgado, & Hosseini, 2022; Tour & Barnes, 2022). While podcasts excel in delivering rich auditory content, vodcasts complement this by incorporating visual elements such as graphics and demonstrations (Bouradji & Hattab, 2022; Haiken & Furman, 2022; Dwivedi, 2022). This multimedia approach enhances the overall learning experience, making it more engaging, interactive, and conducive to knowledge retention (Huang, Hwang & Jong, 2022; Lee & Hwang, 2022; Zhang & Zou, 2022). Furthermore, the integration of lecturers' voices into recorded digital multimedia files helps to humanize the learning process and module content. By hearing the voices of lecturers, students establish a more personal and relatable connection with the educational material (Harrington & Zakrajsek, 2023; Joseph-Jeyaraj, 2023; Prodgers, Travis & Pownall, 2023). This human touch fosters a sense of connection, empathy, and improved comprehension. Lastly, by employing podcasts and vodcasts, the value of a module's content can be maximised through content repurposing (Doi, Lucky & Rubin, 2022; Kenna, 2022; Prodgers, Travis & Pownall, 2023).

The audio content from podcasts can be extracted and repurposed into standalone episodes, while the visual components of vodcasts can be adapted for various

platforms or repackaged as supplementary resources. This strategic repurposing ensures that educational content reaches a wider cohort of students and remains relevant across different formats and contexts. In addition to exploring the perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students, this study aims to provide students with a platform [voice] to express their experiences by examining the challenges they face in accessing and understanding these audio-visual resources.

1.2 Contextual focus

According to Faramarzi, Tabrizi, and Chalak (2019), Lindgren, (2022), Spotify (2021), the Swedish Internet Foundation [Internetstiftelsen] (2021) and Skolverket (2020), the utilisation of podcast and vodcast technologies represents a burgeoning technological advancement that holds potential for enhancing academic writing skills within HEIs. Podcasts and vodcasts appear to offer permanent accessibility to educational materials, flexibility in content delivery, and the promotion of integrative skills such as note-taking and active learning (Faramarzi, Tabrizi, & Chalak, 2019). Faramarzi, Tabrizi, and Chalak (2019), Lindgren, (2022) and Spotify (2021) highlight notable benefits of incorporating technological digital files, namely podcasts and vodcasts, to improve students' academic writing abilities. Poor academic writing skills, inadequate comprehension of subject content, and insufficient linguistic proficiency present obstacles that may impede students' progress in English-medium academic programmes. Within the context of the current study, podcasts and vodcasts potentially play a crucial role in facilitating the development of academic writing skills among students participating in ODeL. Specifically, these multimedia platforms have significant potential within the framework of English for Academic Purposes (referred to as ENG101 for this study). Their potential lies in the capacity to customise subject-specific content, thereby enhancing accessibility and catering to the unique academic writing requirements of first-year students.

Unix is a comprehensive ODeL South African university and is recognised as one of the largest mega-distance universities worldwide, being part of a select group of 11 such institutions. The university's ODL policy (2015:5) explicitly states that the delivery modes encompass a wide range of approaches, including digital media, broadcasting,

online content distribution through the learning management system called myUnix[2], as well as the use of audio and video podcasting, radio, and television to facilitate teaching and learning processes. Several scholars have emphasised the importance of selecting specific universities for research purposes (Keržič, 2021; Ng, 2021; Ramı́rez-Hurtado et al., 2021; Rahm et al., 2021; Shahzad et al., 2021; Zalat et al., 2021). This deliberate selection allows researchers to achieve a deeper contextual understanding and gain a unique insight into the factors that can significantly influence research outcomes. By conducting studies within specific university settings, researchers can improve the practical relevance of their investigations and contribute to the existing body of literature by bridging knowledge gaps.

With that said, it is worth noting that Unix functions as an ODeL institution and includes an Academic Writing module at the first-year level. Given this context, conducting the study within the specific Unix ODeL environment is particularly apt. This choice allowed for a comprehensive examination of the unique challenges associated with academic writing within this setting. By focusing on Unix as an ODeL institution, the current study focused on the specific factors that influence academic writing challenges for first-year students and student support initiatives. Investigating academic writing challenges in this context provided valuable information on the challenges of writing skills. Furthermore, by selecting Unix as the research environment, the study generated knowledge that is directly applicable to similar ODeL institutions. As academic writing may present distinct challenges, examining these challenges within Unix contributed to the understanding and enhancement of academic writing practices in ODeL settings more broadly. Furthermore, the choice of Unix as an ODeL institution aligns with the objective of the study to gain a comprehensive understanding of academic writing challenges within a specific educational context and other similar DE contexts.

This study specifically focuses on podcasts and vodcasts as tools for instructional purposes. DE, as adopted by Unix, offers a distinct opportunity for people seeking to advance their education but who cannot attend traditional residential institutions due to personal circumstances or professional commitments. As mentioned by Makanda

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[2] The online platform known by the pseudonym "myUnix" functions as a robust interface fostering seamless interaction between students and lecturers. It offers a diverse array of engaging features and tools, such as discussion forums and interactive platforms. Through these, myUnix facilitates not only effective communication but also encourages collaboration among students and lecturers. This digital space is dedicated to fostering meaningful academic discourse and facilitating the sharing of knowledge.

(2021:1), Unix has registered a significant number of 77,840 first-time entrants (FTEN) students for the academic year 2020, illustrating the considerable demand and enrolment in DE programmes.

The enrolled student body of the ENG101 module consists of individuals hailing from various home locations, primarily throughout South Africa and several international regions, including Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Namibia, Ethiopia, and Nigeria (Fynn, 2021). This is due to Unix's status as an open distance institution with global recognition. A significant portion of ENG101 students use English as an additional language (EAL), given the heterogeneous ethnic and racial backgrounds represented within the group. Regarding age composition, South African FTEN typically fall within the 18-32-year range, while students from other countries mentioned above tend to be between 35-60 years of age, signifying a comparatively older demographic in comparison to the general Unix student population (Fynn, 2021). Furthermore, a substantial proportion of FTENs come from middle to low socioeconomic backgrounds, many of whom are first-generation university entrants in their families. Some students also manage part-time employment in various professional fields. Due to their employment commitments, a significant number of students dedicate their academic efforts to weekends, public holidays, leave days, and commuting to and from work. While some students are employed full-time, the majority work part-time. Furthermore, a notable percentage of students rely on the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NFSAS), a South African government initiative that provides financial support in the form of loans and bursaries to eligible students who pursue tertiary education at public universities and technical vocational education and training (TVET) colleges. The primary aim of NFSAS is to enhance accessibility to higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, thereby facilitating the pursuit of their academic aspirations (De Villiers & De Villiers, 2023; Ndebele, Masuku, & Mlambo, 2023).

Unix offers a diverse range of educational offerings, including formal qualifications, short-learning programmes, and recognition of prior learning opportunities (Unisa, 2016). The university is structured into distinct colleges, namely the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES), the College of Sciences, Engineering, and Technology (CSET), the College of Accounting Sciences (CAS), the College of Education (CEDU), the College of Economics and Management Sciences (CEMS), the College of Law (CLAW), and the College of Human Sciences (CHS). Within the CHS, the Department of English Studies, located in the School of Arts, is of

particular interest for study. Specifically, the study aims to focus on the ENG101 module, which is a first-year Academic Writing module about a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 5, that includes a credit value of 12 (Ndlangamandla et al., 2020). ENG101 is designed to cultivate the critical reading and academic writing skills of students, which are crucial to achieving academic success. The module provides a foundation in English grammar and usage, fosters the ability to critically comprehend and analyse texts, and equips students with the necessary academic reading and writing skills at a tertiary level. Upon completion of the module, students should demonstrate proficiency in applying effective writing principles within different contexts and for various purposes by employing writing processes and genre approaches (Ndlangamandla et al., 2020). Students enrolled in the ENG101 module pursue degrees such as Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Bachelor of Arts (BA). Additionally, the ENG101 module is designed for students from various departments, including law, mathematics, accounting, economics, and other relevant disciplines.

The inclusion of the ENG101 module in this study is of significant relevance due to its focus on first-year students who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL), and who may encounter challenges in academic writing. Moreover, the ENG101 module stands as one of the most expansive academic offerings at Unix, boasting a substantial enrolment range of approximately 10 000 to 18 000 students per semester in the 2022 academic year. The motivation for conducting this study arises from the observation that the pass rate for the ENG101 module tends to hover around the 50% mark. This pass rate not only indicates a substantial number of students falling below the passing threshold but also implies a potential increase in the number of students needing to repeat the module. Consequently, exploring the use of podcasts and vodcasts as instructional tools for teaching academic writing skills becomes relevant, as it may offer a promising avenue to enhance the pass percentage of the ENG101 module. Table 1.1 shows the ENG101 performance history over four years: Table 1.1 shows the ENG101 performance history over a period of four years:

Table 1.1: ENG101 performance history over four years (2018-2021).

YEAR	2018		2019		2020		2021	
Semester	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2
Number of students admitted to the examination	13004	9800	15000	19000	20000	21000	22453	16500
Percentage passed	47%	51%	69%	55%	66%	51%	69%	55%
Percentage Failed	53%	49%	31%	45%	34%	49%	31%	45%

The data presented in the table above were extracted from the Unix exams system and raises concerns regarding the failure rate observed in the ENG101 module, which consistently ranges between 31% and 53%. Analysis of failure rates for both the first and second semesters in 2018 reveals a range of failure rates between 49% to 53%, while failure rates in 2021 show an increased range of 31% to 45%. These figures suggest a lack of significant improvement in failure rates over the years. Considering this, exploring the potential of using podcasts and vodcasts as instructional tools becomes crucial, as they may hold promise in addressing persistently high failure rates within the ENG101 module. Scholars such as Ferdousi (2022), Han et al. (2021), Iqbal et al. (2021) and Mthimunye and Daniels (2019) emphasise the significant role of technology in enhancing academic writing skills among first-year students, highlighting its potential to contribute to improved outcomes in this context.

1.3 Rationale of the study

The motivation to conduct the current study stems from the researcher's first-hand experience in teaching, as well as assessing and moderating assignments and examination scripts within the ENG101 module. Through this involvement, the researcher has observed the academic writing challenges experienced by first-year ENG101 students, despite the provision of support mechanisms such as live

streaming[3], feedforward[4], and feedback[5] tutorial letters (which due to time constraints and the limited scope, will not be the main focus). In addition, the motivation for this study arises from the recognition that the ENG101 module, which is a first-year English Academic Writing module, exhibits a pass rate range of approximately 50%. The relatively low pass rate potentially results in a considerable number of students having to repeat the module. This situation can arise from students grappling with expressing themselves in writing or effectively extracting information from their studies, due to their limited proficiency in the English language and the English MoI at Unix. Consequently, it becomes crucial to explore the use and implementation of podcasts and vodcasts in enhancing the academic writing skills of first-year students at Unix. This exploration aims to address the challenges posed by physical distance and feelings of isolation commonly experienced in DE, while also providing a platform for students to express their perceptions and articulate [give voice] the challenges they encounter in accessing and comprehending these audio and visual resources. physical distance and feelings of isolation commonly experienced in DE, while also providing a platform for students to express their perceptions and articulate [give voice] the challenges they encounter in accessing and comprehending these audio and visual resources.

It should be noted that before the commencement of the current study, only podcasts were used in the module under study, without the inclusion of vodcasts. However, since the commencement of the current study, the integration of both mediums may yield significant findings that can prove beneficial to first-year students, potentially leading to an improvement in the pass percentage of the ENG101 module. As elucidated by Makina (2020), Moore (2022), Oliinyk, Gaman, Chaikovska, Bezzubova, and Paustovska (2022), Sevnarayan and Mohale (2022) Vergara (2022), and Yeganeh

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[3] Livestreaming is an online streaming media method whereby content is transmitted in real time over the internet, allowing users to access it instantaneously and continuously. It provides a means for individuals to engage with and consume media content without the need for downloading or storing files locally. Livestreamed content remains accessible for users to view or interact with at their convenience, ensuring the permanence of the media's availability.

[4] A feedback tutorial letter is a document that provides assignment guidelines and serves as a valuable source of academic support for students. Its purpose is to assist students in understanding the requirements and expectations associated with their assignments.

[5] A feedback tutorial letter can be defined as a written communication that serves multiple purposes in the context of academic support. It encompasses an analysis of the challenges encountered by students, identification of academic gaps that require further improvement, and the provision of a memorandum outlining the assignment requirements. This document serves as a mechanism for addressing the specific difficulties faced by students and offers guidance on areas that need development.

and Izadpanah (2021), students perceive online technologies as a strategic advantage, given their utility, convenience, and capacity to enhance collaboration between students, lecturers, and the subject matter. Additionally, podcasts and vodcasts are effective at enhancing students' vocabulary, active learning, communication, and academic writing skills (Bueno-Alastuey & Nemeth, 2022; Sheerah & Yadav, 2022; Jovanović-Nikolić & Stojković-Trajković, 2022). The primary objective of this study is to understand the perceptions and challenges of first-year students in using podcasts and vodcasts to supplement their academic writing skills within the Unix context. The resulting recommendations from this research endeavour have the potential to establish guidelines for the use of podcasts and vodcasts in the enhancement of academic writing within ODeL. Furthermore, this study may provide valuable insight to lecturers and tutors, both in distance and face-to-face HEI, on strategies for enhancing the academic writing capabilities of first-year students through the effective use of multimedia resources.

1.4 Problem Statement

Students enrolled at HEIs, such as Unix, hail from diverse cultural, financial, and linguistic backgrounds. It is essential to acknowledge that the traditional mode of teaching and learning in South African high schools primarily takes place within face-to-face learning environments, where immediate tutoring and prompt feedback from teachers are the norm (Dawson et al., 2021; Fricker & Alhattab, 2021; Maree, 2022; Waghid, 2021). However, first-year students transitioning to Unix may encounter challenges, as the institution operates within an ODeL framework. Unlike the conventional face-to-face setting, Unix students are confronted with an isolated learning context, where self-study becomes imperative. This change in learning dynamics may be particularly demanding for students who are used to direct interactions with teachers and peers. Consequently, their command of the English language may not be fully developed, hindering their ability to effectively engage with academic writing tasks at the university level (Jiang, Horta & Yuen, 2022; Pun, Thomas & Bowen, 2022; Sun, & Zhang, 2022). Numerous reports and research studies corroborate the notion that EAL students often exhibit insufficient writing skills and encounter challenges in producing academic work (Cushing & Snell, 2022; Evans et

al., 2020; Jones, 2011; Van Dijk et al., 2019; Welply, 2022, 2023). Moreover, the challenges of academic writing are compounded for first-year EAL students in an ODeL context (Alsahafi & Shin, 2019; Rapillard, Plexico, & Plumb, 2019; Spiltzer & Aronson, 2015; Smith, 2021; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021; Tikly, 2022; Von Esch et al., 2020).

According to Maboe (2019), achieving academic success among first-year students in ODeL institutions requires consistent academic support from lecturers. The absence of such support can undermine pedagogy in ODeL contexts, resulting in high attrition rates and low success rates. In this sense, collaborative and interactive student support becomes imperative. Lecturers and students must collaborate to harness innovative technologies, thus improving online teaching and learning experiences. Mere technological proficiency is insufficient if there is a lack of meaningful online interaction. Makina (2020) posits that the assessment of podcasts within ODeL institutions requires a continuous and iterative approach. Additionally, Makina (2020) emphasises the significance of cultivating valuable and effective educational materials through the medium of podcasts. Consequently, this study explored the perceptions and challenges faced by first-year students when using podcasts and vodcasts as tools to improve academic writing skills within the context of Unix. The ENG101 study guide states that the module aims to:

> …Develop [students' abilities of critical reading and critical writing which are essential academic skills, and to improve [their] academic English competence. The module will help [them] develop [their] ability to read and write academic genres, such as argumentative essay writing, research-based essays, research articles, and lectures, and using appropriate academic conventions, such as citation [s] (Ndlangamandla et al., 2020:6).

The objective of the ENG101 module implies that students are required to produce well-structured, cohesive, and academically appropriate written texts, adhering to established conventions of academic writing (Ndlangamandla et al., 2020). However, extensive research has underscored the challenges students face in mastering writing skills. AlMarwani (2020) notes that students are expected to analyse academic texts and effectively translate their ideas into coherent written form. Challenges faced by students in academic writing include expressing ideas clearly in written texts, accurately paraphrasing and summarising, deficient grammar skills, limited vocabulary, proper referencing, and the construction of well-formed sentences. It is pertinent to highlight that, based on the experience of assessing and moderating the

ENG101 module, the academic writing challenges faced by ENG101 students align with those identified by AlMarwani (2020), Hassan et al. (2021), Lentz and Foncha (2021) and Maphoto (2021).

As a potential solution, existing research highlights that students actively seek support from online resources, while also recognising the importance of feedback from lecturers as a valuable source of support, thus emphasising the significance of scaffolded feedback (AlMarwani, 2020). Boyle, Ramsay, and Struan (2019) propose a pedagogical rationale for implementing a mandatory writing skills program within a virtual learning environment. Schwenger (2016) asserts that online learning has the potential to introduce new avenues for improving students' learning experiences. Online learning can potentially contribute to the improvement of first-year students' academic writing skills (Ahmed & Osman, 2020; Nácher, 2021; Xiuhan & Samuel Kai Wah, 2020). However, it is crucial to note that "simply providing access or utilizing digital technologies does not guarantee improved academic outcomes" (Escueta et al., 2017:14). Unix students, enrolled in a distance institution, experience additional challenges in their academic pursuits. However, according to Peterson et al. (2018), digital tools can enhance student learning when used in conjunction with traditional teaching methods. Despite the recognised importance of online academic support, there is limited research on the specific use of podcasts and vodcasts to improve the academic writing skills of first-year students in ODeL institutions, particularly within the South African DE context.

The current study posits that the concept of literacy, depending on the perspective of the student, encompasses the skills and dispositions necessary for students and lecturers to participate effectively in academic tasks within higher education (HE). The objective of this study is to explore the perceptions and challenges of first-year students about the use of podcasts and vodcasts to enhance academic writing skills in the ENG101 module. The study aims to improve the 'ways of being' of students concerning academic writing (Gee, 1990). Makina (2020) advocates for a deliberate emphasis on the design and promotion of podcasts to facilitate teaching and learning, as there is a connection between 'ways of being', as explored by Gee (1990) and the pedagogical methods and practices employed in HEIs to address the design of academic writing instruction. By incorporating podcasts and vodcasts into the educational process, this study intends to address the writing difficulties commonly

encountered by first-year students while providing accessible, enduring, and tailored content material. The anticipated results of the current research include improving the academic writing abilities, elevating the pass rate of ENG101 students, and establishing guidelines to use podcasts and vodcasts to improve academic writing within the context of ODeL.

First-year students are expected to adhere to the academic literacy standards established within the ENG101 module. However, the concept of literacy extends beyond a simple focus on the technical aspects of reading and writing or refers to as the 'technology of the mind' (see Goody, 1968, 1977). Instead, literacy is understood as a social practice (Gee, 2000; Barton, 1994; Street, 1984, 1995). Consequently, it is crucial to differentiate between two models of literacy: the autonomous model and the ideological model (Street, 1984). According to Street and Colin (1984), the autonomous model of literacy is based on a predefined set of skills that are independent of social context. In this model, students are expected to follow the academic writing norms prescribed by the module. On the contrary, the ideological model of literacy recognises the contextual nature of literacy. Students in this model are socialised into new social norms, wherein literacy practices are influenced by the surrounding social and cultural environment. The current study, along with the works of Horn (2016) and Street (1995), aligns with the autonomous model of literacy within learning spaces. This model perceives literacy as a neutral and technical skill set that leads to the acquisition of academic skills. Street's (1984) autonomous literacy model and the ideological literacy model of literacy are compared and summarised below.

Table 1.2: The differences between the autonomous model of literacy and the ideological model of literacy (Maphoto, 2021:25)

Autonomous Model of Literacy	Ideological Model of Literacy
• Set of self-contained decontextualised skills.	• Context-dependent and embedded in sociocultural practices and situations.
• Teacher-centred, 'school-centric' reading and writing.	• Literacy is a social process, something we do to make sense of our lives.
• Subskills - learn about literacy as a subject. Product-orientated.	• Process-focused with purpose and intentionality.
• Predetermined and easily measurable.	• There are multiple literacies and use of multiple texts depending on place, purpose, and context.

The autonomous model of literacy recognises that literacy encompasses both cognitive and social dimensions. This model emphasises the acquisition and mastery of core academic practices that are essential for successful engagement in HE contexts (Horn, 2016). By focussing on the cognitive aspects of literacy, the study acknowledges the importance of developing specific skills and competencies that are valued within academic settings. However, the ideological model of literacy offers a culturally sensitive perspective on literacy practices across different contexts (Baker & Street, 1994). This model highlights the influence of social, cultural, and ideological factors on literacy development and use. It underscores the notion that literacy is not only a set of technical skills but is shaped by the sociocultural context in which it is situated. By considering both models, the current study acknowledges the critical role of student support within the ODeL context and aims to investigate the impact of podcasts and vodcasts on enhancing the academic writing skills of first-year students. In addition, the study aims to capture the multifaceted nature of literacy in higher education. It recognises the significance of developing cognitive skills associated with academic practices while also acknowledging the influence of cultural and contextual factors on students' literacy experiences. This dual perspective allows for a comprehensive understanding of literacy as it relates to academic writing skills and provides a foundation for exploring effective strategies to improve literacy development in the module under study. By identifying the literacy model that best characterises the ENG101 students' approaches to academic writing, this study can contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interaction between individual cognitive development, sociocultural influences, and academic literacy practices. Furthermore, such insights can inform the design of targeted interventions and support mechanisms tailored to the specific literacy needs of the ENG101 students, thus facilitating their academic success and enhancing their overall learning experience within Unix.

1.5. Significance and contribution of the study

Within the South African educational landscape, universities grapple with a pronounced challenge characterized by diminished [low] throughput rates. A mere fraction of students successfully attains their qualifications within the stipulated

minimum timeframe, thereby precipitating a notable delay in academic progression. This protracted trajectory is frequently attributable to students falling short of the requisite academic standards necessary for advancement from one academic year to the next. Consequently, this academic setback manifests deleteriously in the form of depressive symptoms and precipitates an elevated incidence of attrition among first-year university students (DHET, 2021; Dyomfana, 2023; Fiock, 2020; Moosa & Bekker, 2022; Seaman et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated this situation when universities transitioned to remote teaching and learning, creating concerns about the lack of face-to-face contact between lecturers and first-year students (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Mostert & Pienaar, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020).

Adding to these challenges is the high enrolment volume of 18,000 [first semester, 2022] students in the ENG101 module and a high failure rate, as indicated in Table 1.1. Thus, the current study aimed to explore the perceptions and challenges of first-year students using podcasts and vodcasts to improve academic writing skills in a South African ODeL institution. Building on previous research conducted by Moosa and Bekker (2022) at the University of the Witwatersrand, some participants expressed the benefits of recorded video lessons to review content and the organization of resources facilitating effective teaching and learning (Moosa & Bekker, 2022). Some participants in Moosa and Bekker (2022) revealed the following:

> What made learning easy for me was the ability to repeat content that I did not understand in a recorded video lesson and take notes as much as possible. Additionally, the organisation of resources in subjects makes it necessary to go back and revise accordingly (Moosa & Bekker, 2022:7).

> . . . they [lecturers] prepared us lecture recordings that made me feel closure, even though there was a physical distance between us (Moosa & Bekker, 2022:7)

The above findings reveal that students experience difficulties in understanding the module content, which is further compounded by the large volume of online content. However, the presence of online resources proves beneficial (Moosa & Bekker, 2022). Thus, the significance of this study lies in the guideline's creation of podcasts and vodcasts and the implementation of supplemental tools to enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students enrolled on an Academic Writing module.

The contribution of this study is reflected in the guidelines for creating podcasts and vodcasts presented in Chapter 6. These guidelines aim to inform current and future

lecturers about the intricacies of producing high-quality supplementary tools with practical skills, which essentially benefit the ENG101 first-year students. By implementing these tools, academic writing skills can be enhanced, transactional distance can be reduced, different learning styles (audio and audio-visual) can be catered to, and education can be made more engaging for tech-savvy first-year students. This aligns with existing literature that emphasises the importance of using supplemental tools to teach academic writing to first-year students of diverse educational backgrounds (Aagaard & Lund, 2020; Bergdahl et al., 2020; Brevik et al., 2019; Dalgarno, 2014; Faramarzi et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2021; Hollister et al., 2022; Ifedayo et al., 2021; Langer, 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Johnston et al., 2021; Ma, 2021; Meletiou-Mavrotheris, Mavrou & Rebelo, 2021; Noetel et al., 2021; Pan, 2020; Raes et al., 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020; Sanchez et al., 2020; Simanjuntak & Panjaitan, 2021; Schöbel et al., 2021; Tobin & Guadagno, 2022).

1. 6 Aim of the study

The purpose of the study is to explore the perspectives of first-year students and the challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance academic writing skills within an ODeL institution in South Africa. This study acknowledges and recognises the critical role of student support within the ODeL context and aims to bridge the instructional distance between lecturers and ENG101 first-year students. Furthermore, by focusing on real experiences and perceptions, the study aims to create guidelines that will enhance the use of audio and audio-visual media as a pedagogical tool for academic writing instruction.

1. 7 Objectives of the study

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1.7.1 To explore students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module.

1.7.2 To determine the challenges students encounter when accessing podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module.

1.7.3 To establish how the use of podcasts and vodcasts enhances the academic writing skills of students.

1.7.4 To create guidelines for using podcasts and vodcasts toward enhancing academic writing in an ODeL context.

1. 8 Research questions

The following research questions were borne out of the above research objectives:

1.8.1 What are the students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?

1.8.2 What challenges do students encounter when accessing the podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?

1.8.3 How does the use of podcasts and vodcasts enhance the academic writing skills of students in ENG101?

1.8.4 What guidelines can be created for the use of podcasts and vodcasts to assist lecturers towards enhancing academic writing in an ODeL context?

1.9 Definition of key concepts

1.9.1 Academic writing

According to Frye (2022), Khalo (2022), Mitchell (2021), Teng (2022) and Poe (2022), academic writing encompasses a distinctive mode of written expression employed within academic contexts, notably in universities and colleges, to present research, theories, and arguments. It is characterised by its use of formal language, the adhesion to the coherent structure, and a pronounced emphasis on substantiating claims through evidence and analysis. This form of writing adheres to established conventions, such as the inclusion of citations and references, to ensure precision and scholarly integrity. Academic writing demands meticulous attention to various essential elements, including the target audience, the overarching purpose, the organisation of ideas, stylistic considerations, logical coherence, and the overall presentation, to effectively convey complex concepts and advance knowledge within the academic sphere. The latter statement echoes an earlier study by Pineteh's (2014) findings that "academic writing plays a critical role in socialising students in the

discourse of subjects and disciplines in universities". Additionally, first-year English second language (ESL) students in Academic Writing modules experience challenges ranging from mastering organisational conventions, such as developing a clear thesis statement, introduction, signposting, argumentation, counter argumentation, application of subject content, linguistic proficiency, referencing, paragraphing, and grammatical conventions, to producing reasonable conclusions and recommendations (AlMarwani, 2020; Hawari, 2022; Hirano, 2014; Kilfoil, 2021; Lea & Street, 2006; Mendoza, 2022; Maphoto, 2022; Nenotek, 2022; Pineteh, 2014; Wang & Xie, 2022). Academic writing challenges are exacerbated by using English in HEIs (Ali, 2022; Cilliers, 2022; Luvuno, 2022; Moeiniasl, 2022). Furthermore, it should be noted that English serves as the predominant MI in most South African universities. Consequently, this circumstance gives rise to increased challenges regarding the comprehension capacity of first-year students in terms of academic writing challenges.

1.9.2 Academic writing instruction

Academic writing instruction encompasses a range of teaching strategies and techniques aimed at developing students' proficiency in academic writing (Gay, 2022; Wang & Xie, 2022). This instructional approach, as noted by Ofte (2022) and Johnson and Mercer (2019), emphasises collaborative teaching and encourages meaningful engagement between students and lecturers to enhance their understanding and mastery of academic writing. Recognising the importance of improved academic writing, Courtney et al. (2022) emphasise the need for lecturers to regularly update and adapt their teaching strategies, moving away from repetitive exercises and monotonous activities that fail to motivate students.

In line with these perspectives, the current study advocates for an effective academic writing technique that encourages shared meaning-making: the integration of podcasts and vodcasts as supplementary tools to enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students. By utilising these audio and video resources, students can engage with the course content dynamically and interactively, facilitating their comprehension and application of the principles of academic writing.

1.9.3 Academic writing challenges

Numerous studies, including those of Akhtar et al. (2020), Hinkel (2020), and Khadawardi (2022), shed light on the challenges students face in academic writing within HEIs. These challenges primarily revolve around the struggle to adhere to the established conventions and standards set by universities related to academic writing. Notable difficulties encountered by students include grammar and punctuation, inadequate usage of linking words and phrases, challenges in expressing their thoughts and ideas while composing academic texts, incorporating quotations effectively, and the failure to cite and reference sources properly, resulting in direct plagiarism. Furthermore, as argued by Mahmood (2020) and Rafikova (2022), students also grapple with challenges related to maintaining cohesion and coherence in their writing, selecting compelling topics, and combating language errors.

The absence of appropriate remedial strategies to address these academic writing challenges exacerbates the situation, leading to a higher failure rate, prolonged university stays, and increased dropout rates among students. It is crucial to recognise the detrimental consequences of neglecting these challenges and the need for proactive measures to alleviate them.

1.9.4 Podcast

A podcast is a versatile form of a digital multimedia file that offers audio or video recordings of information, which can be conveniently downloaded and played at any time convenient to the content consumer (Brinson & Lemon, 2022; Shavkatovna & Ganiyevna, 2022). The term 'podcasting' itself is derived from the combination of 'iPod' and 'broadcasting' (Kendrick, Scott & Gobran, 2023; Saidvalieva; 2023). Podcasts are pre-packed and come in time-limited episodes. Podcasts can be uploaded and downloaded through web syndication or streamed online to a computer or mobile device (Griffith & Sweet, 2022; Sevnarayan & Mohale, 2022). To reduce transactional distance, the current study adopts the implementation of podcasts as are user-friendly, pre-packaged with subject content, and come in time-limited episodes. The creation of podcasts mainly requires a recording device, internet connectivity, and a computer or mobile device.

1.9.5 Vodcast

A vodcast is a dynamic e-learning tool that delivers pre-recorded lectures or educational content in the form of video files. Vodcasts are easily accessible on the Internet and can be downloaded or streamed on various devices, such as laptops or smartphones (Roziboyovich, 2023; Sagge & Divinagracia, 2023). Vodcasts are 10 to 15 minutes in duration, vodcasts provide a versatile platform for teaching and learning. The term 'vodcast' is short for 'video on demand cast' that represents a video version of a podcast (Javier, 2021; Kiberg & Spilker, 2023). It serves as a valuable resource for incorporating audio-visual learning styles into educational settings. Therefore, the inclusion of vodcasts is crucial for the current study, as it satisfies the needs of students who benefit from audio-visual content.

1.9.6 ODeL

Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) is a dynamic and comprehensive concept that aims to overcome barriers such as time, geographical barriers, and other constraints, connecting students and multiple stakeholders within the higher education domain (UNISA, 2008:2015). This innovative model is gaining widespread recognition as an effective approach to improving access to educational opportunities for students from diverse global regions, contexts, and backgrounds (Kaliisa & Picard, 2017; McNaught, 2005). The current study takes place within an ODeL institution, where the dissemination of the ENG101 module is based on online platforms to deliver subject content.

1.9.7 Student support

Student support encompasses the provision of high-quality services to students of diverse educational backgrounds. Previous scholars have widely recognised the importance of student support in enabling HEIs to thrive in increasingly competitive environments today (Butt & Rehman, 2010; Lapina et al., 2016; McLeay et al., 2017; Paul & Pradhan, 2019). Consequently, lecturers in HEIs must offer academic support. Wong and Chapman (2023), Kakada et al. (2019), and Arco-Tirado et al. (2019) emphasise the necessity of enhancing student support programmes and initiatives. The encouragement of interaction between students and lecturers is crucial to the

effective implementation of student support programmes. Student support plays a vital role in the ENG101 module due to the concerning pass rate associated with it.

1.9.8 Student success

The bulk of earlier research primarily focused on measuring student success through academic achievement, which was commonly assessed using the Grade Point Average (GPA), a grading system used by universities to evaluate student academic performance (Bunce & Hutchinson, 2009; Choi, 2005; Finn & Rock, 1997; Parker et al., 2004). However, student success encompasses more than just grades. It also involves active participation in educational activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, achievement of educational results, and post-college performance (Kuh et al., 2006; York et al., 2015). Recognising the importance of student success as a metric for institutional performance, recent studies by Alyahyan and Düştegör (2020), Gamlath, (2022) Hooda et al. (2022), and Moussa and Ali (2022) echo the fundamental basis of this definition. In line with the definition, this current study endorses the idea that student success is crucial and relates to student support, opportunities for academic empowerment, growth, and excellence to succeed academically and beyond. To progress academically, ENG101 students must complete their Academic Writing module and achieve the specified module outcomes.

1.10 Literature review

As stipulated in Unix's ODL policy (2015:2), the notion of student support encompasses a wide range of services and initiatives that are designed to assist students in achieving their academic goals. Lumadi (2021:114) agrees with this viewpoint, recognizing 'student support' as a widely recognised term used in educational institutions to facilitate students in attaining their learning goals, improving their knowledge, and completing their studies. Bantjes et al. (2020), Harkavy et al. (2020), Tait (2014), and Van Staden and Naidoo (2022) similarly posit that student support plays an integral role in the learning process, aiming to foster knowledge acquisition and facilitate satisfactory completion of academic programmes. Drawing on the definitions of student support provided by Unisa (2015), Lumadi (2021) and Tait

(2014), the current study adopts a comprehensive understanding of student support that aligns to enable students to achieve academic success in their studies. Furthermore, Makoe and Nsamba (2019:135) underscore the importance of student support by emphasizing that a lack of such support can contribute to high dropout rates in ODeL institutions. By considering these perspectives, the current study acknowledges the critical role of student support within the ODeL context and aims to investigate the impact of podcasts and vodcasts on enhancing the academic writing skills of ENG101 students.

In this regard, the literature review in Chapter 2 engages with the perspectives of both the global and local literature that underpin interventions aimed at supporting students, providing the reader with comprehensive information on the case under study. The review of the literature will primarily focus on student support in improving the academic writing skills of first-year students in ODeL contexts. Furthermore, Chapter 2 undertook a comprehensive review of the relevant literature related to the use of supplemental tools, specifically podcasts and vodcasts, by first-year students in HEIs, focussing on their perceived challenges (AlMarwani, 2020; Alsahafi & Shin, 2019; Maboe, 2019; Mhlanga & Molio, 2020; Mthimunye & Daniels, 2019; Rapillard, Plexico, & Plumb, 2019; Wentzel & De Hart, 2020). Furthermore, the chapter explored the latest trends in e-learning that contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning in DE, the utilisation of technology to support academic writing challenges in such institutions, including the integration of podcasts and vodcasts in HEIs, and an exploration of students' perceptions regarding podcasting and vodcasting within the context of distance learning. It emphasised the significance of incorporating technology to address the academic writing difficulties faced by first-year students and investigated their perceptions of podcasting and vodcasting in the DE context (Bumblauskas et al., 2021; Derakhshan, 2021; Kyaw et al., 2019; Radianti et al., 2020; Sevnarayan, 2022; Sevnarayan & Mohale, 2022). By synthesising the findings of prominent researchers, the comprehensive review of the literature established a solid foundation and provided substantiated justifications for the importance of supplemental tools in enhancing the academic writing skills of first-year students. The existing body of literature examined within the review demonstrated a consensus among numerous studies, including those conducted by Faramarzi et al. (2020), Noetel et al. (2021), and Pan (2020), which collectively argued for the indispensability

of supplemental tools in distance HEIs. However, it is important to note a notable gap in the existing literature concerning the integration and utilisation of vodcasts within HEIs, primarily due to technophobic tendencies and the reluctance of lecturers to engage in vodcast recording (Ifedayo et al., 2021; Meletiou-Mavrotheris, Mavrou & Rebelo, 2021; Rapanta et al., 2020; Simanjuntak & Panjaitan, 2021).

1.11 Theoretical frameworks

The current research study incorporates a student support framework that encompasses two theoretical perspectives: the theory of transactional distance (TTD) (Moore, 1972) and the community of enquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). The TTD is valuable for promoting successful online learning and is particularly relevant for ODeL institutions like Unix. It emphasises the importance of reducing the psychological and communication gaps between students and lecturers to improve the quality of online learning experiences (Devkota, 2021; Iqbal et al., 2021; Kgabo, 2021; Krishnan et al., 2021; Mokina & Khoronko, 2020; Sevnarayan, 2022). Complementing the TTD, the CoI framework addresses the significance of collaborative learning and meaningful interaction in online environments. It recognises the importance of building a sense of community among students and lecturers, promoting engagement, and promoting deep learning through active participation and social presence (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000; Lee et al., 2021; Timonen & Ruokamo, 2021; Ochieng & Gyasi, 2021). By incorporating the CoI, the current study seeks to address the collaborative learning needs of first-year students at Unix and explore the potential of podcasts and vodcasts to enhance their academic writing skills. The adoption of both TTD and CoI within the current research study provides a robust theoretical framework that recognises the importance of reducing distance barriers and promoting collaborative learning in the context of DE institutions.

1.11.1 The theory of transactional distance (TTD)
Moore's (1972) TTD is based on the ideas of John Dewey (1938), who posited that an individual's experience is shaped by the transactions that occur between themselves and their environment. In the context of distance learning, Moore and Kearsley (1996)

defined the TTD as the communicative gaps and potential misunderstandings that arise from the separation between lecturers and students. The TTD recognises that distance learning is not solely a matter of geographical separation but a pedagogical concept that encompasses the complex dynamics of learner-instructor relationships affected by space and time. According to Moore (1997), the concept of TTD highlights the inherent challenges posed by the separation of students and lecturers in DE. This separation can significantly impact the teaching and learning process. In the context of the current study, Unix students are enrolled in the ENG101 Academic Writing module, which is delivered through a distance learning university. First-year students often encounter difficulties developing academic writing skills and may require a targeted intervention in this area. Therefore, the current study seeks to explore the potential of using podcasts and vodcasts as interventions to improve academic writing skills in this context, considering the distinctive dynamics of distance learning and the impact of transactional distance on the teaching and learning process. The nature of studying at a distance university such as Unix can present additional challenges for first-year students who may be more accustomed to face-to-face instruction. The switch to online instruction can further disrupt the teaching and learning experiences of these students. By acknowledging the implications of the TTD, this study recognises the unique challenges faced by first-year students in an ODeL institution such as Unix.

The selection of the TTD as a conceptual framework for the current study is well justified due to its relevance in addressing the distance gap and enhancing academic support and teaching and learning in the context of Unisa students. The inherent nature of online learning can often engender feelings of isolation among students and presents challenges in the delivery of digital content effectively. By adopting the TTD, the study aims to establish effective interaction spaces that bridge the distance between the researcher and the research participants. The TTD provides a valuable framework to understand and promoting successful online learning experiences. It recognises the significance of meaningful interaction and communication in DE settings, mitigating the potential for transactional gaps and misunderstandings that can hinder effective teaching and learning. By integrating the TTD framework into the study, the research seeks to address the unique challenges faced by Unix students in their online learning journey and to promote more engaging and interactive learning experiences. Furthermore, the study also acknowledges the complementarity of the

CoI framework, which emphasises collaborative learning and meaningful interaction within online learning environments. By incorporating the CoI perspective alongside the TTD, the research aims to address not only transactional gaps but also foster a sense of community and collaborative learning among the participants.

1.11.2 Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework

Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) developed the CoI framework, which serves as a valuable conceptual framework for understanding and promoting effective online learning environments. Shea and Bidjerano (2010) introduced the concept of the fourth presence, known as learner presence, to the existing framework proposed by Garrison et al. (2000). The CoI framework consists of four interrelated elements, namely cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. The first element, cognitive presence, focuses on the intellectual engagement and critical thinking of students within an online community. It encompasses activities that stimulate meaningful learning, such as challenging discussions, problem-solving tasks, and reflective inquiry. The cognitive presence encourages students to actively construct knowledge, engage in higher-order thinking, and develop a deep understanding of the subject matter. The second element, social presence, addresses interpersonal and emotional connections between students and lecturers in an online setting. It emphasises the development of a supportive and collaborative learning community where participants feel a sense of belonging, trust, and mutual respect. Social presence is facilitated through various means, such as icebreaker activities, group discussions, and collaborative projects, which foster interpersonal relationships and create a positive online learning environment. The third element, the presence of the teacher, focuses on the role of the lecturer in facilitating and guiding the learning process. It encompasses instructional design, facilitation, and direct instruction to ensure that learning objectives are met effectively. Teaching presence involves designing and organising online learning activities, providing clear instructions and guidance, and providing timely and constructive feedback to students. The lecturer's active presence and engagement in the online learning environment are crucial to creating a supportive and effective learning experience. By incorporating the CoI framework, the current study recognises the significance of these four interconnected elements in promoting a rich and engaging online learning environment. Cognitive

presence encourages deep learning and critical thinking, social presence promotes a sense of community and collaboration, and teaching presence ensures effective instructional design and facilitation. Together, these elements contribute to the overall success of online learning experiences by promoting active participation, meaningful interaction, and the achievement of learning outcomes.

This approach aligns with the needs and goals of Unix, where creating a supportive and interactive learning environment is crucial for student success. The adoption of TTD as a guiding framework in the current study serves to bridge the distance gap, enhance academic support, and facilitate effective teaching and learning in the context of Unix students. The focus on interaction and communication is complemented by the CoI perspective, enabling the study to address the challenges of online learning and promote collaborative and meaningful interactions among participants. Together, these theories offer a balanced approach to ODeL by emphasising the need for meaningful interaction, collaborative learning, and deep engagement, while also recognising the challenges posed by physical separation. By leveraging both theories, the current study sought to create a conducive online learning environment that supports higher-order thinking, deep learning, and meaningful reflection, ultimately enhancing the learning experience and outcomes in ODeL institutions.

1.12 Research methodology

1.12.1 Positionality and identity as a researcher

As an academic lecturer at Unix, a significant aspect of my role revolves around lecturing first-year students on the development of academic writing skills. Through my teaching experiences, I have observed that students face challenges related to academic writing, the application of subject content, and linguistic proficiency. This realisation has sparked my research interest, leading me to embark on a study aimed at comprehensively understanding this phenomenon. In doing so, I have critically examined the challenges faced by students, particularly in the domains of academic writing, subject content application, and linguistic mastery, to alleviate these challenges. My direct involvement with the ENG101 module has provided me with valuable insights into the academic writing struggles faced by first-year students. Consequently, I believe that my experiences and interactions with ENG101 students

are highly relevant to this research endeavour. Furthermore, my passion for incorporating technology into teaching and learning environments, as well as my strong interest in student support, particularly in enhancing academic writing skills among first-year university students, further motivate my participation in this study. It is important to acknowledge that despite my role as an academic lecturer for ENG101 students and my participation as a research participant in this action research study, I have implemented various strategies to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings. Quality measures were employed to maintain the rigour and validity of the study. By combining my first-hand experience with student challenges and my commitment to using robust research methodologies, this study aims to make a meaningful contribution to the field of academic writing instruction.

1.12.2 Research approach

The current study adopted a qualitative research approach to thoroughly explore the contextual nuances and underlying perceptions of the research participants. This approach aligns with the principles of naturalistic and interpretive inquiry, as emphasised by Denzin and Lincoln (2018) and Tomaszewski et al. (2020) who assert that qualitative research involves a deep exploration and interpretation of phenomena based on their inherent meanings. By employing qualitative research methods, the study sought to understand the complex issues being investigated. Busetto (2020), Coleman (2022), and Hammarberg, Kirkman, and Lacey (2016) highlight the reliability of qualitative research methods, particularly when there is a comprehensive representation of contextual factors and when the experiences of the participants are meaningfully captured. In this study, the qualitative approach enabled an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of the participants, allowing rich and nuanced insights into their perceptions and experiences. By embracing the qualitative research approach, the study aimed to go beyond surface-level descriptions and go deeper into the underlying meanings and interpretations that participants attribute to their experiences. This approach enabled a comprehensive exploration of the academic writing challenges faced by first-year students and shed light on the contextual factors that influence their perceptions. Ultimately, the qualitative research approach facilitated a robust and holistic understanding of the research topic, contributing to the existing body of knowledge in the field of academic writing instruction.

The current study gathered qualitative data by investigating the perceptions and challenges of students as they utilize podcasts and vodcasts to improve their academic writing skills. Creswell (2009) underscores the importance of employing an explicit, disciplined, and systematic qualitative research approach that focuses on the meanings and insights surrounding the phenomenon under investigation. Through this approach, the study seeks to contribute to the field of academic writing instruction by providing valuable insights into the effective integration of podcasts and vodcasts into HE. Emphasizing real experiences and perceptions, the study aims to create guidelines that will improve the use of audio and visual media as a pedagogical tool for the instruction of academic writing. In alignment with this perspective, the researcher adopted a qualitative approach to explore the authentic experiences of the research participants. Using a qualitative research approach, the study aimed to attain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the perceptions and challenges encountered by the ENG101 students. This approach recognises the value of capturing the participants' lived experiences of participants, allowing the researcher to gain valuable information on their perspectives. Furthermore, the qualitative approach facilitated the development of guidelines that can support lecturers in effectively utilizing audio and visual media. The researcher's goal is to generate meaningful and contextually grounded knowledge by engaging with the research participants in a way that fosters open dialogue and a deep exploration of their experiences.

1.12.3 Research design

Research design denotes the comprehensive schema or arrangement that directs the procedural facets of data collection, analysis, and interpretation within the context of a research study. It serves as a meticulous blueprint demarcating the methodological framework for the execution of research, thereby facilitating the efficient realization of researchers' objectives. The meticulous construction of a research design assumes paramount significance in safeguarding the veracity and dependability of the study's findings. With that said, the current study adopted the action research exploration. Action research, as described by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009:142), is a systematic cycle of inquiry that involves formulating research questions, gathering data, testing strategies, evaluating their effectiveness, and engaging in reflection to inform subsequent actions. This approach can be undertaken by individual researchers or collaboratively. It focuses on effecting change in practice, improving student

outcomes, and empowering lecturers (Mills, 2017: n.p.). The essence of action research lies in its cyclical nature, whereby researchers engage in ongoing inquiry and reflection to address issues within their practice. By positioning lecturers as scholars and knowledge producers, action research challenges the prevailing paradigms of educational reform that diminish the professional autonomy of teachers (Elliot, 1976; Kincheloe, 2003; McNiff, 2016). It is particularly suited for the current study as it promotes the development of first-year students' writing skills, collaboration, and teaching practices that benefit students. Action research design encompasses several key stages, including identifying problem areas, collecting and organizing relevant data, interpreting the data, implementing an action plan, and reflecting on the entire process. This cyclical nature of action research allows for continuous improvement and adaptation based on the insights gained from each iteration. By engaging in action research, the researcher identified and addressed the specific challenges experienced by first-year students in their academic writing journey, leading to improved teaching practices and improved student outcomes.

Action research proved highly valuable for this study, as it sought to address the quest for knowledge around improving academic writing skills among ENG101 students and seeks to provide viable solutions. This research design offered the researcher to explore the perceptions and challenges about the utilization of podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module, shedding light on the contextual factors, conditions, and realities that contribute to academic writing. The incorporation of Moore's (1997) TTD and Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) CoI framework within action research is both reliable and significant as challenges of content subject delivery modes are reduced through the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts. In addition, students' feelings of isolation are reduced as lecturers engage with students via podcasts and vodcasts that cater to audio and visual learning styles. These frameworks offer essential guidelines for conducting research within a distance learning institution like Unix. In addition, they provide a framework for understanding and addressing the cognitive, social, and teaching presence required in distance HEIs. By promoting interactive discourse and collaborative learning, these frameworks contributed to creating a conducive learning environment and facilitated deep learning among students.

By employing action research in conjunction with the TTD and the CoI framework, the study aimed not only to gain insights into the challenges faced by students but also to generate practical guidelines and interventions to improve academic writing skills. This comprehensive approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of DE and provides a basis for improving teaching and learning practices in the context of ENG101 and similar modules.

1.12.4 Research paradigm

The research paradigm is shaped by the scholar's perspective on knowledge and truth (Hughes, 2010; Mukherji & Albon, 2015). Each researcher has a unique understanding of what constitutes knowledge and truth, interpretivist researchers emphasise the participants' interpretations, backgrounds and experiences, while positivists focus on social influences and prefer quantitative methods (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2011). Within the interpretive paradigm, researchers can explore and interpret the world through the lens of participants' experiences and perceptions (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). In this study, the use of action research and the qualitative research approach align with each other and provided the researcher with the means to enquire and gather real-life data from students in their natural settings. This approach facilitated a deep understanding of the perceptions and challenges in using podcasts and vodcasts to improve academic writing skills in the ENG101 module. Embracing an interpretive paradigm, the researcher used the experiences to interpret and construct their understanding based on the collected information. Interpretivism supports researchers in exploring and interpreting the world from the perspective of individuals and acknowledges that reality is socially constructed (Willis, 2007). In this study, the researcher actively participated in the process of making sense of the challenges and realities surrounding the use of podcasts and vodcasts to improve academic writing skills among first-year students. By adopting an interpretive paradigm, the researcher aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic and contribute to the existing knowledge base in the field.

1.12.5 Population

According to Johnson, Adkins, and Chauvin (2022), Mack et al. (2011) and Xu et al. (2022) the term 'population' encompasses key informants who have distinctive

connections to the study and refers to the pool of individuals from which research participants are selected. Within the context of this study, the research population includes an estimated range of 18,000 students who were duly registered for the ENG101 module throughout the first semester of the 2022 academic year. The primary objective of the ENG101 module is to develop students' proficiency and competence in academic writing. Therefore, this population of students had significant value as key informants who were able to provide insight into the academic writing challenges they experienced, and the unique contextual realities experienced as DE students. Their perspectives and experiences with the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts greatly contributed to understanding the phenomenon under investigation in the study.

1.12.6 Sample

According to Kenton (2019), a sample refers to a subset of a larger group, representing the characteristics of the population. The sample needs to be representative and free from any bias toward specific attributes. Initially, a cohort of 50 students was invited to participate in the study; however, only 20 students responded to the invitation and actively participated in the research process. A sample of 20 ENG101 students represents key informants. For qualitative research studies like this one, there are a variety of recommendations regarding the appropriate sample size. Dworkin (2012) highlights that numerous articles, book chapters, and books provide guidance and suggest that anywhere from five to 50 participants can be considered adequate. Additionally, Bernard and Ryan (2000:178) states that 36 participants are typically appropriate for most ethnographic studies, while Bertaux (1981) argues that a minimum of 15 participants are acceptable in qualitative research.

1.12.7 Sampling

Yates (2004) acknowledges that studying the entire relevant population is impractical due to constraints of cost and time. Therefore, for this study, a sample size of 20 students was considered adequate, given the specific nature of the ENG101 module as an Academic Writing module. This sample size was selected to represent the larger student group enrolled in the module. Purposive sampling, as described by Rubin and Babbie (2005:247), involves a judgemental, selective, or subjective approach. Grinnell and Unrau (2008:153) and Monette et al. (2005:148) emphasise that this sampling

method relies on the researcher's judgment to include elements that possess the most relevant characteristics or representative attributes of the population, serving the purpose effectively. In this study, a purposive sampling approach was considered appropriate, as it enabled the inclusion of participants who possess relevant knowledge, experience, and a willingness to share their insights with the researcher. The 20 identified students in the ENG101 module were purposively selected based on their registration in a writing module such as ENG101. Qualified students were invited to participate in the study through LMS and Microsoft Teams discussions were conducted to gather data from the participants.

1.13 Data collection instruments

Kabir (2016:3) defines data collection as the systematic process of collecting and measuring information related to variables of interest to address research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes. In this study, qualitative research instruments were used to explore the in-depth experiences of students. The research instruments selected for this study included open-ended online evaluation discussions, focus group discussions, and a document analysis schedule. Open-ended online evaluation discussions were used to address the first research question, while focus group discussions provided information for the second research question. Additionally, the document analysis schedule was used to address the third research question. Table 1.3 below aptly demonstrates the instruments and the corresponding research questions:

Table 1.3: Research questions and instruments used in the study

Research questions	Research instruments
• What are the students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?	• Open-ended online evaluation discussions
• What challenges do students encounter when accessing the podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?	• Focus group discussions
• How does the use of podcasts and vodcasts enhance the academic writing skills of students in ENG101?	• Document analysis schedule

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Participation in the study was limited to 18 000 students who were registered for ENG101 during the first semester of 2022. It is crucial to recognise the global COVID-19 outbreak that has affected the world. As stated by the Department of Health (2021:1), Coronavirus (COVID-19) is transmitted through close human contact, such as breathing, coughing, and sneezing infected air. In South Africa, there have been a total of 4,055,656 confirmed cases of infection (Department of Health, 2023:1), at the time of data collection, and it is important to note that these statistics will increase. These COVID-19 statistics are mentioned to underscore the importance of adhering to established protocols. Therefore, the data collection for this study was not conducted in person but through online platforms such as the Learning Management System[6] (LMS), XMO[7] assignments and exam results, and Microsoft Teams. Focus group discussions were conducted using Microsoft Teams to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants.

1.13.1 Open-ended online evaluation discussions

McLeod (2018) describes an open-ended online evaluation discussion as a qualitative research instrument that enables the collection of detailed and descriptive responses from participants. This method can be implemented through various means such as face-to-face interactions, telephone conversations, or email correspondence. Evaluation forms provide a valuable tool to assess the preferences, attitudes, behaviours, opinions, and intentions of many participants in a time-efficient and cost-effective manner (Sevnarayan, 2022). In the context of the current study, using an open-ended online evaluation discussion was considered suitable, as it allowed participants to freely share their unique experiences without imposed limitations or constraints. This approach ensured that participants could provide comprehensive and unrestricted information related to the research objectives.

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[6] LMS (Learning Management System) refers to myUnix system that allows students and lecturers to interact online, and students-to-student (peers) to interact online.

[7] XMO (Exam Marks Online) is a software programme developed for retrieving exam marks online. Module's pass and failure rate are available on XMO.

The evaluation discussions in this study have been carefully designed to gather relevant and targeted information to address the first research question: 'What are the students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?' The questions in the open-ended online evaluation discussion, as outlined in Appendix A, focus on specific areas that require further exploration. Using a structured approach, this study aimed to mitigate the limitations associated with open discussions, ensuring that the questions are relevant, well-organised, and not randomly generated. Moreover, this approach enabled student participants to authentically express their true feelings, thoughts, and attitudes regarding their experiences with podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module. Open-ended online evaluation discussions comprised five questions and have been developed by the researcher to systematically investigate and capture students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101.

1.13.2 Focus group discussion

A focus group, as described by Stewart (2018:687), is a valuable qualitative data collection instrument that aims to uncover the hidden experiences of participants within a small group setting. It can be further defined as "a type of small group discussion about a specific topic facilitated by a skilled group moderator" (Stewart, 2018:687). Its origins can be traced back to the concept of group interviewing (Merton et al., 1956), with the focus group occupying a middle ground between a structured meeting, characterised by pre-planned organisation and structure, and a conversation, allowing for spontaneity and dynamic interaction among participants (Agar & MacDonald, 1995:78). One potential challenge associated with focus groups is that introverted participants may hesitate to express their opinions or ideas. To address this limitation, the researcher in this study took proactive measures. Specifically, introverted participants were identified, and the researcher made a deliberate effort to engage them directly and encouraged active participation by inviting them to share their thoughts and perspectives in response to the questions posed during the focus group discussions. In doing so, the researcher aimed to create an inclusive and supportive environment that ensured that all participants, including introverts, could contribute their insights and experiences to the study.

The use of focus groups in the current study is appropriate as it aligns to address the second research question, namely, the challenges encountered by students when accessing podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module. By employing focus group

discussions, the researcher aimed to gather comprehensive and nuanced data on the specific difficulties students experienced in accessing these audio-visual resources. Appendix B provides a sample of the focus group discussions that were posed to the ENG101 students. In compliance with COVID-19 safety measures, focus groups with ENG101 students were conducted electronically via Microsoft Teams. The sessions were recorded to ensure accurate and reliable data transcription. Dividing the 20 selected students into four groups of five participants each facilitated manageable and qualitative data collection. According to Busetto et al. (2020:3), smaller and more manageable group sizes are vital for researchers to maintain control and encourage active participation from all members. Each focus group discussion lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. To distinguish between the groups, they were labelled as follows: focus group 1 (comprised of participants who have failed the module once), focus group 2 (comprised of participants who have failed the module twice), focus group 3 (comprised of participants who have failed the module three times) and focus group 4 (comprised participants who have failed the module four times). Conducting interviews on different days ensured that each group received individual attention and an opportunity to provide insight based on their unique experiences. The selection of ENG101 students as participants is justified due to their direct involvement in the use of podcasts and vodcasts within the module. Their first-hand experiences, knowledge, and insights contributed significantly to the study's findings and provided valuable perspectives on the research topic.

1.13.3 Document analysis schedule

Document analysis, as defined by Bowen (2009: 27), involves a systematic and rigorous process of reviewing and evaluating various types of documents, including both printed and electronic materials. This qualitative research instrument enables researchers to interpret documents, giving them voice and meaning within the context of the assessment topic under investigation. Strauss and Corbin (2008) emphasise that document analysis involves a careful examination and interpretation of the data contained within the documents, to extract meaningful insights, deepen understanding, and generate empirical knowledge. In the current study, document analysis served as a valuable tool to address the third research question (What are the implications of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101 for enhancing students'

academic writing skills?). By scrutinising relevant documents, the researcher gained access to valuable information and insights about the impact of using podcasts and vodcasts on students' academic writing skills. The analysis involved a thorough examination of both printed and electronic documents, encompassing various sources such as academic literature, official reports, curriculum materials, and student assignments. Through the interpretive process, the researcher uncovered significant patterns, themes, and understandings embedded within these documents, contributing to the general empirical knowledge, and understanding of the topic. Bowen (2009:31) maintains:

> There are many reasons why researchers choose to use document analysis. First, document analysis is an efficient and effective way to collect data because documents are manageable and practical resources. Second, documents are commonplace and come in a variety of forms, making documents a very accessible and reliable source of data. Obtaining and analysing documents is often far more cost-efficient and time efficient than conducting your research or experiments.

Document analysis, while a valuable research instrument, is not without limitations. One such limitation is the potential lack of interactivity and responsiveness inherent in the process. However, these limitations can be mitigated through careful adherence to a predetermined set of guidelines and questions, ensuring that the analysis remains focused and avoids the generation of irrelevant or extraneous data. Despite its limitations, document analysis offers several advantages that make it suitable for the current study. Document analysis provides an opportunity to obtain information and achieve broad coverage of the data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Duan, Zhang, Gong, Brown & Li, 2020; Wilkinson & Dokter, 2023). In the context of the study, document analysis served a dual purpose. Firstly, it sheds light on the pass and failure rates of ENG101 students, offering insight into the performance of students in the module. Secondly, it addressed the third research question by investigating how the use of podcasts and vodcasts has influenced the academic writing skills of students. To collect data for document analysis, the researcher accessed marked assignment and exam scripts through the XMO platform, as well as other relevant documents available within the ODeL system at Unix. By carefully analysing these documents, the researcher gained an in-depth understanding of the manifestation of pass or failure rates and evaluated the impact of using podcasts and vodcasts on students' academic writing skills. Appendix C contains the predetermined questions that guided the document analysis process.

Copies of the analysed assignment and exam scripts are securely stored for future reference and verification.

1. 14 Guidelines for the use of podcasts and vodcasts to enhance academic writing

The current study employed the use of qualitative research instruments, namely open-ended online evaluation discussions, focus group discussions and document analysis, to gather data. The findings derived from these instruments played a crucial role in the development of guidelines that are intended to support and inform lecturers who are involved in teaching academic writing. Research instruments were designed to elicit valuable information on various aspects related to academic writing. For example, open-ended online evaluation discussions explored the major challenges that students face in their academic writing endeavours. The focus group discussions provided insights into the perceptions regarding the use of podcasts and vodcasts in their academic writing journeys. In addition, the study analysed marked and moderated assignments, exam answer scripts, and XMO results to determine whether there have been noticeable improvements in students' academic writing skills following the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts. Lastly, compatibility and accessibility issues related to the utilisation of multimedia resources in academic writing were explored. Based on the findings, the study developed guidelines that specifically target the enhancement of academic writing skills among first-year students in the ODeL context. These guidelines are presented in Chapter 6 and will serve as a valuable resource to assist lecturers and tutors in their instructional practices, providing support and guidance on integrating multimedia resources effectively to foster improved academic writing abilities among students.

1.15 Research procedure

The researcher employed a random selection process to assign four ENG101 lecturers in the 2020 academic year, first semester, with the task of creating podcasts and vodcasts specifically focused on academic writing. These recordings were uploaded to the myUnix system, allowing students to access and download them for

educational purposes. To ensure variety and engagement, each lecturer uploaded a maximum of four podcasts, each with a duration of no more than 10 minutes, on different dates. Similarly, a maximum of four vodcasts were uploaded, also with a duration of no more than 10 minutes each, on different dates. According to Zanten, Somogyi, and Curro (2010), students are generally interested in podcasts; however, lengthy recordings can be difficult to download and may become monotonous. Therefore, shorter podcasts ranging from 5 to 10 minutes are considered more effective. Additionally, Cebeci and Tekdal (2006) recommend that podcasts should not exceed a length of 15 minutes, as longer recordings tend to lead to reduced attention and comprehension. To provide ENG101 students with ample opportunity to utilise, internalize, and reflect on content related to academic writing skills, podcasts and vodcasts were uploaded on various dates throughout the academic year. This approach was designed to facilitate student access to the information at different stages of their learning journey and allow ongoing engagement with the materials.

1.16 Triangulation

Tisdell (2016), Denzin (2009), and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasise the importance of triangulation in research, which involves the use of multiple methodological instruments to improve the validity and reliability of the study. Triangulation serves to address potential weaknesses in qualitative research findings and strengthen the overall methodological rigour of the study. In the current study, three qualitative research instruments, namely open-ended online evaluation discussions, focus group discussions, and document analysis, were utilized. Each instrument has its unique purpose and contributes to the overall research inquiry. By following pre-established questions for each instrument, the study aimed to maintain consistency and comparability in the data collected. The integration of these three qualitative data collection instruments supports and complements each other, forming a triangulation approach. This triangulation strategy allowed for the convergence of findings from different sources, perspectives, and methods, leading to a more comprehensive and robust understanding of the research topic. Triangulation improved the credibility and trustworthiness of the study's findings since it provided multiple angles to examine the research questions and reduced the potential bias associated with relying on a single method or data source.

1.17 Trustworthiness of the research

According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), trustworthiness in qualitative research can be established through four criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. In this study, the researcher used several strategies to ensure these criteria are met. To enhance credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, the researcher documented all information and data collected throughout the study. This includes recording all Microsoft Teams meetings and interactions on the LMS during focus group sessions and open-ended online evaluation discussions. These recordings served as a comprehensive record of participants' intended meanings and their engagement with the English module under investigation. Regarding document analysis, copies of the analysed scripts are securely stored for verification and referral purposes. This enables the researcher to ensure the dependability and confirmability of the findings derived from the document analysis. To further enhance the credibility of the study, triangulation was employed, whereby information obtained from the open-ended online evaluation discussions, focus group discussions and document analysis were analysed and compared. This triangulation of multiple data sources and methods provided a more comprehensive and reliable understanding of the research topic. Lastly, the researcher was meticulous in ensuring that only key participants who possessed the relevant knowledge and experience completed the open-ended online evaluation discussions and participated in the focus group discussions. This careful selection of participants contributed to the authenticity and validity of the data collected. By adhering to these strategies, the researcher aimed to establish trustworthiness in the study by addressing the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The following subsection focuses on specific details on how data were analysed, providing a comprehensive explanation of the analytical techniques and processes that were employed.

1.18 Data analysis framework

Data analysis is a crucial step in research, involving the systematic organisation and synthesis of collected data to extract meaningful insights and establish a coherent structure (Brink and Van der Walt, 2006; De Vos et al., 2005; Burns & Grove, 2009; White, 2005). In this study, a thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data gathered from open-ended online evaluation discussions, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2021:2), is a methodological approach that systematically identifies, organises, and provides insights into patterns of meaning, known as themes, across a dataset. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the data, facilitating the identification of recurring patterns, concepts, and ideas that emerged from the responses and documents analysed. During the data analysis process, themes were formulated to create a logical interpretation and presentation of the data. This involved closely examining the data and identifying recurring ideas, concepts, and patterns that were relevant to the research questions and objectives. The researcher engaged in a rigorous and systematic process of coding, categorising, and grouping the data to develop meaningful themes that captured the essence of the participants' perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to the use of podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101.

1.19 Ethical considerations

Morris (2006) emphasised the importance of ethical considerations in research and highlighted the need for researchers to inform their participants about all aspects of the study to avoid any breaches of agreements. In the current study, ethical principles such as anonymity and confidentiality were upheld to protect the rights and privacy of the research participants. To ensure transparency and informed consent, an information leaflet containing background information on the study objectives and procedures was distributed to the research participants. Along with this, a consent form was provided, explicitly explaining issues of confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were assured that their personal information was secure and that their identities were protected and would not be revealed in any study-related reports or publications. Inclusivity and non-discrimination were paramount in this study. No participant was marginalised based on gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or cultural background. Refer to Appendix D for the information leaflet and the student consent form. The researcher applied for research ethics approval

before conducting the study, demonstrating a commitment to conducting research ethically. The participants had the opportunity to fully understand the objectives of the study through telephonic explanations. They were then asked to read the information leaflet carefully and provide their voluntary consent by signing the consent form. It is important to note that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw at any time without facing any consequences. To ensure data security and confidentiality, open-ended online evaluation discussions, focus group discussions, and XMO results of ENG101 students, as well as the analysed documents, are stored securely for five years. After this period, they will be appropriately destroyed. It is crucial to reiterate that the names of the participants were not linked to the study in any way to maintain their anonymity and confidentiality. According to the ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence by Singh (2017), the researcher did not engage in any form of manipulation or exploitation of the research participants. Furthermore, participants were exposed to any risks or harm throughout the study. Adherence to these ethical considerations ensured the well-being, rights, and privacy of the research participants, and upheld the highest standards of ethical conduct in the current study.

1. 20 Limitations of the study

Maltrerud (2001) emphasises that no research, regardless of the methods employed, can yield universally transferable conclusions. It is important to note that the findings of the current study may have limitations and may not be applicable in all contexts. One potential limitation is the possibility that some students did not participate in the study due to technophobia and technology-related anxiety. These concerns arose from a lack of familiarity or discomfort with advanced technology. However, considering the significant number of first-year students available, alternative participants were sought. Efforts were made to encourage participation and address any concerns that potential participants had. Another limitation of the study is its focus on a single South African university. Consequently, the findings are specific to the context of that institution. However, the study generated insightful findings and formed a valuable research foundation for the effective utilisation of multimedia digital resources among South African students. Recognising these limitations, the study

aimed to provide valuable information within the specific context of the chosen university while recognising the need for further research to explore the generalisability of the findings across different settings.

1. 21 Planned chapter outline

Chapter 1: Introduction and background - This chapter introduced and orientated the reader with the background of the study under investigation. Research objectives and questions, methodology, and ethical considerations were specified.

Chapter 2: Literature review - This chapter engages global and local literature perspectives. It offers the reader with information regarding the case under study. The literature focuses on student support in terms of improving the academic writing skills of first-year students in an ODeL institution.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework - This chapter discusses two theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, the TTD framework and CoI.

Chapter 4: Research methodology - This chapter discusses the research methodology. This is qualitative research action research. Action research permitted the researcher the opportunity to explore the realities of the case of EAL academically struggling students. This chapter discusses three qualitative research instruments to gather information and interpret data.

Chapter 5: Research findings and discussion - This chapter deals with the research findings obtained from open-ended online evaluation discussions, focus group discussions and document analysis. The research findings of the study aimed to answer pre-set research questions. In addition, Chapter 5 discusses the research findings.

Chapter 6: Guidelines for the creation of podcasts and vodcasts - In this chapter, the researcher presents the guidelines for the creation of podcasts and vodcasts to inform current and future lecturers when producing supplemental tools [podcasts and vodcasts].

Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations - In the last chapter, the findings are summarised. All the data obtained are placed into perspective.

1. 22 Summary

The researcher established the study context, rationale, problem statement, aims and objectives, research questions, literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, research design, research paradigm, population, sample, data collection instruments, research procedure, triangulation, research trustworthiness, data analysis framework, ethical considerations, limitations, and an outline of the subsequent chapters. The literature review presented in Chapter 1 briefly discussed the importance of academic writing initiatives for student support purposes in HEIs. Recognizing the significance of academic writing, student support, online teaching using multimedia files has emerged as a vital approach to cater to students' needs. Chapter 2 will discuss pertinent scholarly literature related to student support such as the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts in distance HEIs, trends in eLearning to enhance teaching and learning in distance HEIs; using technology to support academic writing challenges in distance HEIs, and students' perceptions of podcasting and vodcasting in distance HEIs.

CHAPTER 2

An investigation of supplemental learning tools to enhance academic writing skills

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow"

-John Dewey
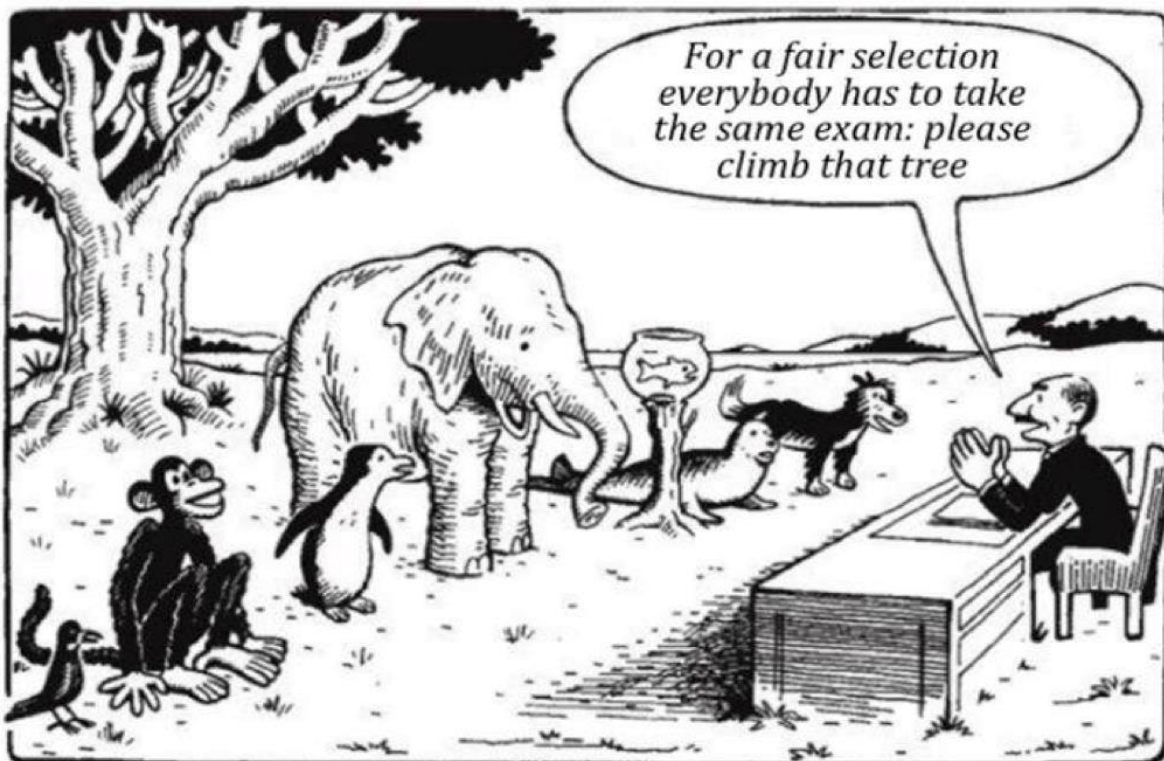
Source: https://windmillsofmymind.weebly.com/everybody-is-a-genius.html [Accessed: 2023, April 19]

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 outlined the contextual focus of the study by providing motivation and justification for exploring first-year students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts in enhancing academic writing skills in an ODeL institution in South Africa. According to Fomunyam (2019), Mbambo-Thata (2020), and Osabwa (2022), most first-year students in South African universities struggle to complete their qualifications in record time due to "unpreparedness". Academic writing skills are essential for the academic success of first-year students (Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Ilham, Musthafa, & Yusuf, 2020; Khalo, 2021; Sağlamel & Aydoğdu, 2022). However, South African first-year university students struggle with academic writing such as constructing sound essays, topic sentences, paraphrasing, voice, grammatical rules, summarising, in-text references [citing] and writing a reference list in full (AlMarwani, 2020; Alsahafi & Shin, 2019; Maboe, 2019; Mhlanga & Molio, 2020; Mthimunye & Daniels, 2019; Rapillard, Plexico & Plumb, 2019; Wentzel & De Hart, 2020). According to the Honourable Minister of Higher Education and Training, Mr Blade Nzimande (2022, cited in Dyomfana, 2023), the dropout rates among South African universities are reportedly alarmingly high, with a substantial proportion of first-year students, estimated to be between 50-60%, opting out of their academic pursuits. The latter statistics are alarming as it has significantly increased when compared to statistics provided by Hassel and Ridout (2018). In South Africa, 40% of students who enter HEIs end up dropping out due to unpreparedness and only 15% finish their degrees in record time. The remaining 45% struggle to progress through their qualifications (Hassel & Ridout, 2018). Thus, initiatives that garner support from students hold significant value. Therefore, the current study aims to explore first-year students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts in enhancing the academic writing skills of first-year students in the university under study.

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the existing literature on diverse facets related to the perceptions and challenges encountered by first-year students in remote HEIs concerning the utilization of podcasts and vodcasts to augment their academic writing skills. Furthermore, it aims to furnish compelling arguments that underline the pivotal role of student support in Academic Writing modules offered by

remote HEIs. In so doing, the chapter draws upon the findings of prior studies to establish a firm theoretical framework, generate a cogent rationale, and identify research gaps, which this study addresses. To substantiate the claims, the researcher conducted an extensive literature review on the topic of first-year students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts in online HEIs. To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the topic of enhancing academic writing skills in distance HEIs through supplementary learning tools, such as podcasts and vodcasts, this chapter is structured thematically as follows:

- Podcasting and vodcasting in distance HEIs;
- trends in e-learning to enhance teaching and learning in distance HEIs;
- using technology to support academic writing challenges in distance HEIs; and,
- students' perceptions of podcasting and vodcasting in distance HEIs.

The themes and sub-themes for the current study were carefully selected to reflect and capture the prevailing conditions of HEIs in South Africa and across the globe. By incorporating sub-themes that illuminate pertinent developments at both the local and international levels, the study seeks to present a holistic examination of the current online landscape and the challenges confronting HEIs. The investigation of these sub-themes seeks to provide valuable insights into the emerging trends in e-learning that have the potential to enrich pedagogical practices and enhance academic writing skills in the context of DE. Ultimately, the e-learning trends elucidated in this study serve as a reflection of the most recent advancements in digital technology and present viable strategies for navigating the intricate and ever-evolving online landscape of HEIs. By staying abreast of the latest developments and trends in e-learning in HEIs, institutions can continue to equip their students with a superior educational experience. To establish a robust contextual framework for the study that encompasses a global perspective, the researcher has conducted an exhaustive analysis of both past and current literature. To gain a clearer understanding of the study's objectives, the researcher has placed a particular emphasis on investigating the perceptions and challenges encountered by first-year students in remote HEIs who are exposed to podcasts and vodcasts to enhance their academic writing skills. This meticulous approach ensures that the study offers a well-defined and comprehensive overview of the topic at hand. It is crucial to highlight that before the initiation of the current study, podcasts were employed as a supplementary tool within the ENG101 module.

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2.2 Podcasting and vodcasting in distance HEIs

2.2.1 Historical background of podcasting in HEIs

The historical background of podcasting in HEIs can be traced back to the early 2000s when universities began experimenting with audio recordings of lectures (Azizi, 2022; Morris, 2019; Peters, 2022; Taylor, 2009). However, it was not until the mid-2000s that podcasting started gaining momentum as a tool for educational content delivery. Today, podcasting has become an integral part of many HEIs' digital learning strategies, with institutions leveraging the technology to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Aljameel, 2022; Barari, 2022; Camilleri & Camilleri, 2022; Shrestha, 2022). Since the 1970s, lecturers in HEIs have been gradually integrating the use of technology [podcasts in particular] in their academic curriculum (Harasim et al., 1995, as cited in Roschelle et al., 2000). A study conducted by Makina (2020) at the University of South Africa (Unisa), an ODeL context, highlighted the critical role of providing lecturers with practical guidance to effectively employ support technologies such as podcasts and achieve desired learning outcomes for students. Previous research by Abdous, Facer, and Yen (2012), Auais (2023), Copley (2007), Chaves-Yuste and de-la Peña (2023), Lee, McLoughlin, and Chan (2008), Omonboy (2023) and Reed (2005) have indicated an upward trend in podcasting initiatives for educational purposes across multiple nations, with several universities adopting podcasting as a means of disseminating lectures and information. The literature supports the notion that podcasts have great potential to add value to the educational sphere, as they offer flexibility, encourage active engagement among students, and eliminate spatial and temporal constraints (Ahmad, 2020; Chan & Lee, 2005; Frydenberg, 2008; Martzoukou, 2022; Peters, 2022).

According to several studies, podcasts have been shown to have several positive effects, including reducing anxiety levels and increasing student satisfaction when combined with other supplemental tools such as blogs[8] or wikis[9] (Abdullah, 2022; Chan & Lee, 2005; Chan, Lee, & McLoughlin, 2006; Ip et al., 2007; Karing, 2022; McGill & Hobbs, 2007; Skiba, 2006; Tobin & Guadagno, 2022; Wang, 2010). Furthermore, researchers such as Crofts et al. (2005), Kay (2012), Meng (2005), and McLoughlin and Lee (2007) have defined podcasts as digital multimedia files that are compressed, audio-based, and can be synchronized, streamed, and downloaded onto personal devices for educational purposes. The current study asserts that a podcast is an audio-based multimedia digital file that focuses on specific subject content. To further highlight the benefits of using podcasts in education, it is worth noting that podcasts can also facilitate mobile and self-paced learning. As noted by Kemp, Mellor, Kotter, and Oosthoek (2012), and Lee, Tan, and Goh (2004), podcasts can be accessed at any time and place, allowing students to learn on the go and at their own pace. This feature is particularly useful for DE and online learning, where students may not have access to traditional classroom settings. Furthermore, podcasts can provide students with a more personalized eLearning experience, as they can select and customize the content that they find most relevant to their learning needs. The use of podcasts in education has been shown to have a positive impact on student engagement, learning outcomes, and satisfaction, and is a promising tool for enhancing teaching and learning in DE contexts. Gönülal (2020), Lindgren (2022), Skolverket (2020), Tavales and Skevoulis (2006), Yugsán-Gómez et al. (2019), concur and maintain that podcasts are helpful and essential tools for independent learning, acquire new skills and improve academic achievement. Yugsán-Gómez et al. (2019), concur and maintain that podcasts are helpful and essential tools for independent learning, acquire new skills and improve academic achievement.

According to Adebola, Tsotetsi, and Omodan, (2020), Stone, Cooke, and Mitchell (2020), Zhuhra, Wahid, and Mustika (2022) maintain that the implementation of

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[8] Blogs are dynamic online platforms that are frequently updated, comprising websites or web pages administered by individuals or small groups. They often adopt an informal or conversational writing style, allowing authors to engage with their audience in an interactive manner.

[9] Wikis refer to online platforms or databases that are collaboratively developed by a community of users, facilitating the inclusive contribution, and editing of content by any user. This communal approach empowers individuals to actively participate in the creation and modification of information, thereby promoting a dynamic and evolving knowledge base.

podcasts has proven to yield significant advancements in achieving desired academic outcomes. The latter findings align with a prior study conducted by Evans-Waughen (2012) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Walden private online University, which investigated the effects of podcasts in higher education [Walden University located in the United States, Minneapolis, Minnesota] on the achieving of learning objectives. According to Evans-Waughen's (2012) findings, podcasts were found to contribute to the attainment of first-year students' academic objectives established by the faculty, albeit not as a standalone source of information (Grose-Fifer & Helmer 2020; Stefancik & Stradiotová, 2020; O'Connor et al., 2020). The podcast with supplemental information and brief notes from the lecturer significantly improved students' academic performances. Evans and Waughen's (2012) findings echo Cebrian's (2009), Kulik's (1994) and Schacter's (1999), views by pointing out that when technologies such as podcasts are used for educational purposes in distance HEIs, students learn more in less time and that there is positive impact on students' attitudes towards the use of technology in distance HEIs.

Until now, DE relies on digital platforms and technologies [e-learning] such as podcasts to connect and interact with students. Mooney (2019) maintains that podcasting in distance HEIs have evolved from a unidirectional platform for delivering academic lectures into an interactive, generative medium for engaged, experiential student learning and socio-constructivist co-creation. Several studies maintain that podcasts have become common in HEIs as the COVID-19 pandemic has forced online teaching and learning on students (Flores, 2022; Kulikowski, Przytuła & Sułkowski, 2022; Moustakas & Robrade, 2022; Teodorescu, Aivaz, & Amalfi, 2022). Podcasts allow students to have access to information within the COVID-19 restrictions and context. Audio podcasts may also be complemented by video podcasts [vodcasts] to facilitate the dissemination of module content (Bashshur, 2020; Crouch & Gordon, 2019). It is vital to point out that even before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ENG101 module implemented podcasts for educational purposes. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a shift towards online learning, and podcasts have emerged as a valuable tool for providing students with access to information and learning resources within the constraints imposed by the pandemic. It is worth noting that the ENG101 module exclusively employed podcasts without utilizing vodcasts.

2.2.2 Historical background of vodcasting in HEIs

The use of vodcasting in HEIs has its roots in the early 2000s, when universities began experimenting with video recordings of lectures (Faramarzi, 2020; Javier, 2021; Winn, 2020). However, it was not until the widespread availability of high-speed internet and video-sharing platforms like YouTube that vodcasting became a popular method for delivering educational content. Today, vodcasting is used in HEIs as a tool for enhancing student engagement and providing flexible learning options. According to International Podcast Day (2017) and Indiana University Knowledge Base (2016), University of Port-Harcourt, undergraduate university students, the word 'podcast' is a combination of 'iPod' and 'broadcast,' as it was initially popularized by Apple's iPod and its podcasting software. The term 'pod' in podcast stands for 'Portable on Demand', indicating that these audio or video files can be downloaded and listened to at any time (Business Dictionary, 2017; Sevnarayan & Mohale, 2022). Podcasts are episodic online audio or video files that can be downloaded by users to their personal computers, media players (such as MP3 players), or mobile devices through web syndication (Merriam-Webster, 2012). There are two main types of podcasts: audio podcasts, which consist solely of audio content, and video podcasts (also called vodcasts or vidcasts), which include both audio and video elements (Copley, 2007; Van der Ziel, 2005). A vodcast comprises video clips whereas a podcast comprises audio clips. There is a significant growing body of research that indicates the implementation of vodcasts in HEIs due to their effectiveness and flexibility in enhancing the performance outcomes of students (Bolliger et al., 2010; Bos et al., 2016; Cheng et al., 2011; Faramarzi et al., 2019; Faramarzi et al., 2020; Guzdial & Turns, 2000; Sadeghi & Ghorbani, 2017; Taylor & Clark, 2010; Wells et al., 2008; Winn, 2020). The use of vodcasts as a technology for delivering educational content has become popular to enhance learner engagement in an online environment (Bongey et al., 2006; Edwards & Clinton, 2018; McGarr, 2009). Vodcasts are essential in ensuring equivalence of online learning opportunities, meeting the ever-changing demands of contemporary higher education, enhancing students' interests and self-efficacy (Concannon et al., 2005; Capranos, Dyers & Magda, 2022; Evans, 2008; Faramarzi et al., 2019; Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018; Kwan et al., 2008; Ragusa & Crampton, 2017). It is worth noting that the ENG101 lecturers have introduced vodcasts to better serve audio-visual learners. Until recently, only podcasts were used

to teach academic writing. However, despite these efforts, the pass rate has remained significantly low. Therefore, the introduction of vodcasts aims to provide both audio and audio-visual students with supplemental tools to aid in their learning.

Academic researchers such as Bolliger et al. (2010), Capranos, Dyers and Magda, (2022), Hollister et al. (2022), Scutter et al. (2010) and Wang and Huang (2018), maintained in their studies that vodcasts meet the needs of students with a variety of learning styles, offer temporal flexibility, a faster way to review subject content and offers the opportunity to review lectures before examination (Cramer et al., 2007; Evans, 2008; Taylor & Clark, 2010). Baird and Fisher (2005), Bolliger et al. (2010) and Lambert et al. (2019) maintain that vodcasts are effective in enhancing engagement, reflection, and motivation. Several studies report that the availability of vodcasts in HEIs is associated with students' high performance and engagement (Chao et al., 2018; Faramarzi et al., 2019; Morris et al., 2015; Perera & Richardson, 2010; Safari et al., 2017; Traphagan et al., 2010). But some studies claimed that the use of vodcasts in HEIs brings about no change to students' academic empowerment (Babb & Ross, 2009; Brotherton & Abowd, 2004; Stephenson et al., 2008; Wieling & Hofman, 2010). However, earlier research by Hartnett et al. (2004), and Jackling and Keneley (2009) have established that vodcasts are effective in helping off-campus students overcome physical barriers and can also enhance academic performance by promoting passive collaborative learning in modules with large cohorts of students. This is particularly relevant for ENG101, where a significant number of students are registered for an Academic Writing module in an asynchronous[10] the recorded subject material may be accessed by students at any time convenient to them (Holtzblatt & Tschakert, 2011). Although vodcasts have been a relatively recent addition to HEIs, there are currently a multitude of trends in podcasting and vodcasting, including platforms like YouTube, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Google Podcasts. Developing a comprehensive understanding of emerging digital trends is imperative for distance HEIs to remain competitive and to meet the evolving needs of their student population.

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[10] Asynchronous refers to interaction [delayed or flexible timeframe] between lecturer and students at different times for instance listening to a recorded podcast or watching pre-recorded visuals.

2.2.3 Emerging digital trends as supplemental tools

Emerging digital trends are being increasingly used as supplemental tools in DE to enhance the learning experience for students. These trends include gamification, virtual and augmented reality, and artificial intelligence, among others Bhugaonkar et al., 2022; Lampropoulos et al., 2022). By incorporating these technologies, DE providers can create immersive and interactive learning environments that can improve student engagement and retention. According to Bergdahl, Nouri, Fors and Knutsson (2020), Dalgarno (2014), No isolation (2020) and Raes et al. (2020), the use of digital technologies [synchronous[11] and asynchronous] across multiple platforms is beneficial and critical for student engagement in an online educational landscape. With that said, it is essential to understand previous digital trends.

Berk et al. (2007) investigated the development [process] of using podcasting as a tool in the provision of information literacy in an academic library. Berk et al.'s (2007) study revealed that it is possible to create exciting podcasting [complementary tool] series with minimal expense and simple production methods. Bert et al. (2007) created a series of exciting, funky, stylish, and trendy short and concise [five minutes] audio podcasts by incorporating music in the background and presenting it in a radio show format, creating a catchy and captivating product. The main aim of incorporating music was to create interest and for easy absorption by the listener [first-year students]. Berk et al.'s (2007) finding echo De Vos's (2006) assertions that demographically those who are downloading podcasts are in the same age bracket as twenty-something first-year students. In addition, Hansen (2006) maintains that an ever-increasing number of first-year students [millennials] are the first generation to grow up fully wired and technologically fluent and whose electronic devices are seamlessly woven into their daily lives. Millennials thrive on catchy and exciting digital technologies. Building upon the body of previous research, a recent study conducted by Toquero and Talidong (2021), an alumnus of Mindanao State University-General Santos City (MSU-GSC), in the Philippines, maintains that digital technology has been highly vital for the widespread dissemination of information in HEIs. Supplemental digital tools may be essential in teaching and learning as in the ENG101 module. First-year students are adept at technology and embrace the use of digital supplemental tools in their learning.

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[11] Synchronous refers to online interaction in real-time for instance listening to a live radio programme.

Antonucci et al. (2017), Daniel (2020), Mnkandla and Minnaar (2017), Napoleon (2020), Pokhrel (2021) and Toquero (2020) maintain that the global COVID-19 pandemic opened opportunities to upgrade modes of delivery and transfer to emerging remote teaching digital technologies such as Facebook. Further, Skype, Google Hangouts, mobile apps such as WhatsApp, blogs and Wikis are some of the current digital technologies that were used during the COVID-19 pandemic. To overcome the COVID-19 restrictions and overcome learning barriers (gaps), emerging digital technologies were used to effectively facilitate learning, collaboration, co-create and disseminate knowledge and interaction to enhance deep learning while maintaining social distancing regulation (protocols). The ENG101 lecturers in this study implemented digital multimedia files such as podcasts and vodcasts as supplemental tools to disseminate knowledge and increase collaborative learning. Another study by Toquero and Talidong (2021), at Mindanao State University-General Santos City (MSU-GSC) in the Philippines, investigated the use of emerging technologies and the effect of these technologies to fulfil the social and educational needs of the stakeholders in times of crisis or emergency. Toquero and Talidong's (2021) study revealed that educational videos were shared through the TikTok app, and infographics posted a myriad of pictures and videos on educational Facebook pages, and YouTube (to appeal to virtual groups/communities). Social media can increase student engagement in terms of behavioural, affective, and cognitive domains (Bond, Buntins, Bedenlier, Zawacki-Richter, & Kerres, 2020). In addition, Pan (2020) in the Department of Sociology, Zhejiang University, China maintains that many university students (98%) accessed online lessons [podcasts and vodcasts] by using mobile phones and their laptops. Pan's (2020) study revealed that most students access their educational content through mobile phones [smartphones]. The implementation of podcasts and vodcasts as supplementary digital tools in DE can potentially serve as a viable solution to bridge the instructional gap. By offering an innovative and convenient approach to learning, these technologies may be embraced by students to enhance their academic experience. Therefore, exploring the potential benefits and drawbacks of such technologies is a vital step in designing effective DE programs.

A similar recent study by Williamson, Eynon and Potter (2020) in a DE institution investigated emerging digital technologies in DE amid the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK. Williamson, Eynon and Potter's (2020) study links to the current study in terms of exploring digital supplemental tools amid the COVID-19 pandemic as student support

initiatives. Williamson, Eynon and Potter's (2020) study revealed that leading emerging digital trends amid COVID-19 are YouTube, Apple, Zoom, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft. Further, online innovative, and context-appropriate digital technology are essential and provide required support for low and high-tech students. Not all students are digitally savvy [digital natives]; however, there is a significant variety in the way students can access and navigate digital platforms for education purposes (Beckman et al., 2018). Hillman, Bergviken and Ivarsson (2020) maintain that digital platforms and tools [podcasts and vodcasts] are increasingly becoming platform-based systems that exhibit a high degree of usage in HEIs. Thus, it is important to determine the benefits of using podcasts and vodcasts in HEIs. According to Williamson, Eynon and Potter (2020), digital access to learning tools mobilises resources and increases the quality of online learning. Therefore, by providing digital access to learning tools, first-year students can access educational resources from anywhere, anytime, mobilizing a wealth of information and diverse perspectives. This leads to an increase in the quality of online learning, as learners can personalize their education, access multimedia content, and engage in collaborative activities.

2.2.4 Benefits of podcasting and vodcasting in distance HEIs
Podcasting and vodcasting have several benefits for DE. These technologies provide students with flexible and accessible learning options that can be accessed anytime and anywhere. Additionally, podcasting and vodcasting can enhance student engagement and retention by presenting educational content in an interactive and visually appealing format. According to Heshmat (2018), MacKenzie (2019), Segarra (2020), and Thoma (2020), podcasts are gaining popularity in HEIs because of vital benefits such as dissemination of academic knowledge, accessibility, tacit and explicit aspects of academia, ameliorate social boundaries, and does not require visual attention. A recent study by Quintana and Heathers (2021), in a public research university, University of Oslo, Norway, investigated the benefits of podcasts in distance HEIs. Quintana and Heathers' (2021) study revealed that podcasts can help normalise academic experiences, convenient and accessible and democratise access to hidden knowledge. The current study aims to promote the normalization of academic experiences within the context of DE. This will be achieved by enhancing access to module content through the utilization of supplemental tools, namely podcasts and vodcasts. By incorporating these multimedia resources, the study seeks to facilitate a

more inclusive and engaging learning environment, enabling students to effectively access and engage with the content of the modules. Similarly, Gonulal (2020) maintains that podcasts enhance listening skills and encourage overall second language listening skills. Podcasts allow students to self-practice and learn at convenient times (Le & Sa, 2020). Podcasts have revolutionized the way that students can learn by providing the flexibility of self-practice and learning at their own pace. With the ability to listen to educational content at any time and any place, students can fit learning into their busy schedules and retain information more effectively.

Marunevich et al. (2021) in the Department of Rostov State Transport University, Russia, investigated the impact of podcasting on English students' motivation in an asynchronous e-learning environment and found that podcasting is an effective language-teaching tool that improves English language skills and provides students with the flexibility to access module material at any time and location. Additionally, prior studies have demonstrated that podcasting can enhance learner motivation, engagement, and control (Dale & Povey, 2009; Riddle, 2010; Salmon & Nie, 2008). While podcasting offers numerous benefits, some studies have suggested that video podcasts, or vodcasts, may be even more effective at enhancing teaching and learning (Bernardo, 2020; Faramarzi et al., 2019; Quinones, 2020). For example, Javier (2021) in Suba National High School Gagalot Annex, investigated the use of vodcasts as a teaching aid for English language lessons in a remote district of the Philippines, finding that vodcasting can improve students' perceptions and performance in language learning. Similarly, Faramarzi et al. (2020) in the English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran, indicate that vodcasting is positioned as a pioneering method in DE, facilitating remote learners' access to captivating and enlightening content, thus bridging the gap between students and their lecturers. The utilization of vodcasts, along with other forms of asynchronous lecture recordings, has demonstrated notable advantages in the context of online learning (Cook et al., 2010; Lee, 2020; Veletsianos & Houlden, 2020). The latter research finding supports the present study by underscoring that the incorporation of podcasts within the ENG101 module holds the potential to reduce transactional distance and high failure rate.

Noetel et al. (2021) in an Australian Catholic University, North Sydney, investigated the effectiveness of vodcasts in HEIs. Their findings showed that swapping traditional

learning methods with videos only had a minor impact on students' learning but adding vodcasts to existing teaching methods led to significant improvements. Vodcasts provide unique perspectives, allowing students to see skills through the eyes of their lecturers, and can improve academic performance (Kyaw et al., 2019; Radianti et al., 2020). Additionally, Noetel et al. (2021) noted that vodcasts enable students to engage with module content at their own pace and on their schedule, but they are most effective when combined with interactive student-teacher and student-student interactions. Students prefer vodcasts to traditional lectures because they foster independence, intensify knowledge acquisition, and present topics interestingly and engagingly (Khasanova, 2020). However, it is important to note that every digital multimedia tool has its weaknesses and challenges. While digital multimedia tools offer numerous benefits, it's crucial to recognize that they have inherent limitations and obstacles that can impact their effectiveness. To make informed decisions regarding the integration of digital multimedia files into educational settings, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of their inherent limitations and challenges. By doing so, lecturers can select the most suitable tools and strategies, and optimize their potential for enhancing academic writing skills and positive outcomes.

2.2.5 Challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts in distance HEIS

Despite their benefits, the use of podcasts and vodcasts in HEIs is not without challenges. One of the main challenges is the time and resources required to create high-quality content, which can be a barrier for some institutions (Admiraal, 2022; Dave et al., 2022; Dhiman, 2023; Vachkova, 2022). Another challenge is ensuring that the content is accessible to all students, including those with disabilities or who may not have reliable access to the Internet (Gunderson & Cumming, 2022; Jackman, 2022; Mulki & Ormsby, 2022; Yearby, 2022). Lastly, there may be resistance to change among lecturers who are not yet familiar with these technologies or how to incorporate them effectively into their teaching. According to the studies conducted by Asmi et al. (2019), at Sriwijaya State University in Indonesia, and Nadhianty and Purnomo (2020) at Universitas Islamic Negeri Malang, a DE institution, podcasts and vodcasts are convenient digital learning mediums used to bridge the distance instructional gap and play a significant role in implementing or carrying out distance learning processes through Android smartphones, computers, and laptops. Nadhianty

and Purnomo (2020) point out that even though audio podcasts play a significant role in distance learning; the absence of visuals displayed in the audio podcasts hinders understanding. In addition, audio podcasts require internet access, plenty of device storage, network connectivity and compatibility. On the contrary, the accessibility of video podcasts, commonly referred to as vodcasts, poses challenges for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who may lack consistent internet or network connectivity. This necessitates a significant data quota, thereby exacerbating the obstacles faced by these individuals in accessing such content. Previous studies indicate that even though audio and video [vodcasts] podcasts can be transferred for free; a lack of data and internet connectivity play a major devastating role in epistemological access (Fadilah et al., 2017; Gikas & Grant, 2013). However, Dewi (2020) maintains that digital media may be used as educational innovation [supplemental] developments to bridge instructional [gaps] connectivity challenges. However, recent studies indicate a myriad of digital challenges that exert a profound influence on the psychological and physiological well-being of both students and lecturers within online teaching and learning (Fawaz, 2021; Fraser, 2022; Phanphech, 2022, Serhan, 2020). These challenges encompass the abrupt transition from traditional face-to-face instruction to online modalities, as well as the pernicious effects of burnout, anxiety, and depression. In addition, podcasting and vodcasting create double the work for lecturers as content creators, erode the quality of instruction, create feelings of isolation, and exacerbate a sense of identity loss, as students are removed from a cohesive community of learning (Besser et al., 2020; Singer, 2020; Kotera et al., 2020).

Newman et al. (2021) in the professional development of healthcare professionals, in Australia, investigated the challenges associated with developing and distributing podcasts of medical education and remote learning. Newman et al.'s (2021) study revealed that the process of developing podcasts can be a challenging experience, as it requires repeated-routine practice of recording quality sound podcasts that are worthy of release. In addition, some challenges included limitations around meaningful granular metrics, and single-click access to prevent password fatigue. A similar study by Hall and Jones (2023) maintains that learning how to create innovative podcasts with new digital tools and technicalities of technology in a digital environment can be challenging. "Many digital natives may be adept at consuming digital content but not

nearly as proficient in producing it" (Evans & Robertson, 2020:168). Unix faces a digital divide between students and lecturers. It would be interesting to see how lecturers respond to creating podcasts and vodcasts.

Yumnam (2021), a researcher from the Department of English Language Education at the English and Foreign Languages State University in Shillong, Northeast India, investigated the integration of diverse e-learning practices, such as vodcasts, YouTube, WhatsApp, Google Meet, and Webex, to enhance the efficacy of English as a second language (ESL) instruction within a distance learning institution amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Yumnam's (2021) study revealed that to be able to record and use vodcasts, lecturers and students need digital competencies. Some challenges indicate the use of e-learning tools like internet connectivity and lack of effectiveness of peer interaction. Brown (2018) asserts that vodcast creation requires technological complexities and abilities. Noetel et al. (2021) point out that vodcasts are asynchronous and therefore immediate interactivity may be delayed and less effective as compared to synchronous teaching methods. It is worth pointing out that even though vodcasts are asynchronous and have been used in HEIs; there is a lack of significant evidence on the simultaneous use of vodcasts in podcasts in a single study has not been extensively researched, leaving a gap in the available evidence. Further investigation is needed to better understand the potential benefits or drawbacks of combining these two mediums.

2.3 Trends in e-learning to enhance teaching and learning in distance HEIs

E-Learning has become increasingly popular in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. E-Learning offers a flexible, innovative, and convenient way to teach and learn, especially for distance education. With the advancement of technology, e-learning platforms are now able to provide interactive and engaging content that enhances teaching and learning. As a result, lecturers are incorporating e-learning trends such as podcasts, vodcasts, YouTube, Spotify, Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Meet, WebEx, OpenStax, MOOCs and e-textbooks. E-Learning trends make it convenient for lecturers to disseminate subject content that offers personalised teaching and learning that aims to improve student engagement and overall academic success in DE.

2.3.1 Students' learning styles[12]

Understanding students' learning styles is crucial for effective teaching and learning. By identifying students' individual learning preferences, lecturers can tailor their teaching methods to better suit the needs of each student. It is widely acknowledged that students have different learning styles, including visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic, and accommodating these styles can lead to better academic outcomes. According to Almeda et al. (2021), in Metro Manila, HEIs have engaged in online learning to continue teaching students due to the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, students have different learning styles [visual, auditory, reading and writing and kinaesthetic] that may not necessarily be catered for in an online context (Cabual, 2021). A learning style refers to a student's preferred method of receiving, processing, and retaining information. Learning styles relate to visual learning (learning through images and graphics), auditory learning (learning through sound and speech), kinaesthetic learning (learning through movement and touch), and reading/writing learning (learning through reading and writing). To enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students, it is crucial to cater to all learning styles instead of relying on just one. By acknowledging the diversity of learning preferences, lecturers can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment that supports the development of strong writing abilities. Balakrishnan (2014), in an HEI in Malaysia, revealed that students with different learning styles approach learn differently. In addition, the use of digital technologies in HEIs is on the rise. However, it cannot be assumed that all students benefit from the use of digital technology due to their different learning styles. According to previous studies by Bandura (1971), Felder and Silverman (1988), Junco et al. (2011), Kim (2001), Marriott (2002), Shaw and Marlow (1999) and Umrani-Khan and Lyer (2009), learning styles describe a person's preferred way of learning; how students interact, acquire knowledge, and respond to stimuli in their learning environment or context.

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[12] A learning style is a term used to describe an individual preferred method of learning and processing information. Additionally, it refers to the unique methods in which a student absorbs, processes, comprehends and retains information. The learning styles include visual [images, diagrams, and videos], auditory [through spoken words, lectures, and discussions], and kinaesthetic [learn best through hands-on activities and physical experiences].

Sáiz-Manzanares et al. (2021) in the Department of Health Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, a public University of Burgos, Spain, investigated the teaching and learning styles of students on Moodle. Sáiz-Manzanares et al.'s (2021) study revealed that students are conditioned to learn in a manner that suits the lecturers' teaching styles and not according to how students interact, interpret, and acquire knowledge. Additionally, many students' learning styles are not catered for and overlooked. Aljawarneh (2020) and Sáiz-Manzanares (2017, 2019) maintain that the use of technology does not necessarily include different learning styles of all students and may not ensure effective teaching strategies. Teaching and learning depend on the instructional design the lecturer implements. López-Iñesta (2020) and Queiruga-Dios (2020) at a city-centre school in Northern Spain point out that the knowledge society of the 21st century is disseminated with technological teaching tools that vary. Longhurst et al. (2020) maintain that due to online educational limitations such as a lack of practical student sessions, some students' learning styles [kinaesthetic] are not considered. In addition, it is difficult to provide support to all students regarding their different learning styles. In addition, digital tools such as videos are considered a potential threat as it appeals to visual students only. Strielkowski et al. (2020) in the district of Prague City, Czech Republic University of Economics and Business, maintain that although digitization in HEIs is beneficial, some students fear technology and are not ready for online education. Recent studies emphasised the importance of boosting the quality of online education by supporting or appealing to students' learning styles (Aboagye et al., 2020; Aljawarneh, 2020; Gautam, 2020; Lara et al., 2020; Lizcano et al., 2020; Maatuk, 2022; Mukhtar et al., 2020; Radha et al., 2020).

A similar study by Baticulon et al. (2021) in a public Medical Education in the Philippines, Southeast Asia, explored barriers to online learning from the perspective of medical university students. Baticulon et al.'s (2021) study revealed that among barriers to online learning, students encountered difficulty adjusting to the learning styles projected by online pedagogy. In addition, the abrupt shift in curriculum delivery required a simultaneous adjustment in learning styles, which had been difficult for the students. Instead of giving a lecture, some lecturers provided PowerPoint files without voice narration. Previous studies by Fleming and Mills (2017) and Grunwald et al. (2006) suggest that students who are visual and/or auditory learners may face challenges in adapting to teaching and learning methods in HEIs. Furthermore, it is

recommended that multimedia learning tools be both engaging and free of unnecessary clutter and distractions (Grunwald et al., 2006). Aheisibwe, Kobusigye and Tayebwa (2021) in the Department of Foundations of Education, Faculty of Education, Kabale University, Uganda, and Kebritchi et al. (2017) maintain that considering students' learning styles [visualization/observation, audio, inquiry based] can enhance the affective domain of students. In addition, students' learning styles are challenges associated with HEIs.

To mitigate students' overlooked learning styles, Morze et al. (2021) in a Borys Grinchenko public Kyiv University, Bulvarno-Kudriavska, Ukraine, implemented adaptive[13] learning using Moodle. Morze et al.'s (2021) study revealed that although adaptive learning is beneficial for students in HEIs, it requires more time for implementation. The disadvantage of adaptive learning is that it does not solve the problem of knowledge usage in real life. In addition, adaptive learning can be implemented in recent digital technology such as Moodle. Adaptive learning allows the lecturer to attend to students' academic needs by scrutinizing prior knowledge gaps [weaknesses] and building on knowledge sequentially. Fleming (1995) maintains that in the process of adaptive learning, students' learning styles are to be considered. However, Morze et al. (2021) maintain that most HEIs have a unified learning material that does not consider students' learning styles, knowledge, time for module completion and individual needs. Incorporating podcasts and vodcasts [as supplemental learning tools] for both audio and visual students could be beneficial for students in HEIs. By incorporating various media formats, students can better engage with module material and improve their understanding and retention of information. The disadvantage of adaptive learning is that it does not solve the problem of knowledge usage in real life. In addition, adaptive learning can be implemented in recent digital technology such as Moodle. Adaptive learning allows the lecturer to attend to students' academic needs by scrutinizing prior knowledge gaps [weaknesses] and building on knowledge sequentially. Fleming (1995) maintains that in the process of adaptive learning, students' learning styles are to be considered. However, Morze et al. (2021) maintain that most HEIs have a unified learning material that does not consider students' learning styles, knowledge, time for module

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[13] Adaptive learning refers to a teaching methodology that accommodates various students' learning styles by incorporating configuration of learning resources, activities, and assessment.

completion and individual needs. Incorporating podcast and vodcasts [as supplemental learning tools] for both audio and visual students could be beneficial for students in HEIs. By incorporating various media formats, students can better engage with module material and improve their understanding and retention of information.

2.3.2 Using podcasts as a supplemental learning tool

Using podcasts as a supplemental learning tool can be an effective way to enhance students' understanding of a particular topic. Podcasts allow students to learn at their own pace and convenience, as they can access the material anytime and anywhere. Additionally, podcasts often feature engaging and informative content that can help students grasp complex concepts in a more relaxed and enjoyable manner. Marunevich et al. (2021) in the Department of Rostov State Transport University, Russia, point out that in the recent decade, the application of podcasts witnessed rapid growth in educational domains. Graham and Dutton (2019), Lee et al. (2019), Rice and Barman-Adhikari (2014) and Rhoades et al. (2017) maintain that digital technology has profoundly changed means of interaction, communication and has caused HEIs to rely upon digital technologies to facilitate core functions of HEIs.

Hitchcock (2021) explored the outcomes of an assignment in which social work undergraduate students at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, USA and the State University of New York at Buffalo, New York, USA create podcasts for consumption by people besides the instructor. Hitchcock's (2021) study revealed that podcasting as an assignment is replicable and favourable across various levels and is potentially a good way to introduce students to technology. Blakemore and Agllias (2020) point out that the use of episodic podcasting as a supplemental tool is beneficial for students in distance HEIs. Podcasts offer students a platform to engage with academic content, build students' problem-solving skills, and dissemination of knowledge across a variety of disciplines such as education (Kapoor et al., 2018; Melkers et al., 2017; Smith-Stoner, 2018).

According to McNamara et al. (2020), at a public University of Iowa, United States, and Nielsen et al. (2018), at a public University of Western Attica, Greece, podcasts as a supplemental tool to increase flexibility, accessibility and affords students the ability to be in control [pause, rewind] of their learning at their discretion by

concentrating on key points. In addition, podcasts are useful, relevant, and helpful within the overall learning process. McNamara and Haegele (2021) the Midwestern Public University, Wichita Falls, Texas, explored how listening to a podcast could influence how undergraduate students from the Midwestern University, United States, understand inclusion and integration within a physical education setting. McNamara and Haegele's (2021) study reveal that open-access podcasts are a viable tool to teach complex issues to preservice physical educators. Podcasts as supplemental tools are effective, favourable, and useful as supplemental tools. In addition, podcasts as a supplemental tool enable lecturers to build meaningful relationships with students given their personalized nature, podcasts offer a distinctive advantage as the human voice conveys warmth and presents module content in a simplified manner. McNamara and Haegele's (2021) study reverberate prior studies by Abate (2013), Back et al. (2016), Kennedy et al. (2016), Sweller et al. (2011) and Talbert (2014) that podcasts are preferred and useful learning supplemental tool among students as they help to prevent cognitive overload.

Similarly, a study by Johnston et al. (2021) at Ohio State University, USA, explored the use of podcasts in higher education and their effectiveness in enhancing students learning. Johnston et al.'s (2021) study revealed that podcasts as a supplemental tool show overall positive effectiveness and enhance students' motivation and usefulness in graduate students' learning. Podcasts allow students to fully grasp, understand and continue learning. In addition, podcasts help students engage with the content and think critically about how to apply content. Participants believed that listening to podcasts is an effective learning tool. Further, podcasts as a supplemental tool are useful due to their flexibility, accessibility, length, and content. Students can learn at their own pace. Recent studies concur with Johnston et al.'s (2021) and maintain that podcasts empower and transform a sense of agency in students (Aagaard & Lund, 2020; Brevik et al., 2019; Lucas, 2016). Schöbel et al. (2021) in a public University of Kassal, Germany, maintain that students in the age of digitisation use a variety of learning materials. Students use digital media such as podcasts for acquiring knowledge, online lecture slides, web-based knowledge, and examination. In addition, video podcasting [vodcasts] is another vital supplemental tool for attending lectures as it expands the teaching of the curriculum to digital spaces. The ENG101 module has incorporated vodcasts as a supplementary tool to address different learning styles,

especially audio-visual learners. Prior to this study, the module only used podcasts to bridge the instructional gap, which limited the teaching approach to audio-based learning styles. It is crucial to note that the inclusion of vodcasts has provided a more comprehensive learning experience for the students.

2.3.3 Using vodcasts as a supplemental learning tool

Using vodcasts as a supplemental learning tool can provide several benefits to students. Vodcasts can help to increase engagement by presenting content in an interactive and visually appealing format. Additionally, vodcasts can provide flexibility in learning, allowing students to review material at their own pace and convenience. Spector (2014) indicates that vodcasts are a type of podcast that includes video content. However, Meng's earlier study (2005) defines vodcasts as a combination of audio and video podcasts, with the 'VOD' acronym standing for 'video-on-demand.' Although vodcasts are not widely used in HEIs, several previous studies have reported positive outcomes from their use (Beard, & Britt, 2011; Fukuta, & Gordon, 2010; Griffin et al., 2009; O'Bannon et al., 2010; Vajoczki et al., 2010; Wieling & Hofman, 2010). In addition, it is important to emphasize that vodcasts are gaining popularity in HEIs and can serve as a valuable tool to enhance academic engagement and foster communication skills using multimedia. The vodcasting technology allows for the creation of engaging video content that can effectively deliver educational content to students (Litchfield et al., 2010; Tripathi & Kumar, 2010).

Oordt and Mulder (2016) explored the implementation of e-learning tools [vodcasts, podcasts and voice-over-PowerPoint slides] as supplemental and substitutional tools in an undergraduate module. Oordt and Mulder's (2016) study revealed that students perceive vodcasts as helpful study aids and prefer synchronous, substitutional tools. The use of vodcasts encouraged students to engage with the module content efficiently. However, it is important to point out that there is limited research on the use of vodcasts in HEIs, especially in ODeL academic writing contexts which this study aims to fill. Oordt and Mulder's (2016) study adds to the limited body of literature that vodcasts may be used for content delivery methods to undergraduate South African students. Jovanović (2021) in the Department for Business Studies, a public university in Leskovac, Serbia, explored first-year students' familiarity with vodcast technology at a higher institution of learning in Serbia. Jovanović's (2021) study revealed that first-year students are not familiar with vodcasting and are not informed of the value of

using vodcasts for language learning. Students are more familiar with podcasts as a supplemental tool. More importantly, there is low exposure to vodcasts in teaching and learning (Jovanović, 2021). Although podcasts offer clear advantages in higher education such as low production costs, accessibility to a wide range of topics, and requiring only a low to medium level of digital literacy, it is important to acknowledge that podcasts cater to a specific learning style - auditory learners. Therefore, it is essential to provide a variety of teaching materials and methods to cater to the different learning styles of students.

Dolch et al. (2021) in a public HEI in Germany explored the lack of vodcasting as a flexible, location-independent supplemental tool in HEIs from 2012 to 2018. Dolch et al.'s (2021) study revealed that there is a high demand for vodcasting in HEIs in Germany. It must be noted that German students in HEIs desire the use of lecture vodcasting for learning beneficial purposes. However, there is a high frequency of insufficient vodcasts implemented in HEIs. HEIs have not met students' wishes in implementing vodcasts. The lecture recording dropped from 2012 to 2018, a deficit in the provision of vodcasts symbolises a lack of students' learning styles [visual] consideration. In addition, Bond et al. (2020) in the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences (COER), Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, Germany, maintains that the provision of vodcasts in HEIs increase engagement with subject content and therefore students should be provided with sufficient vodcasts. In the current COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of vodcasts in HEIs may be beneficial for ENG101 first-year students (Hodges et al., 2020; Skulmowski & Rey, 2020).

According to Bos et al. (2016), Bolliger et al. (2010), Faramarzi et al. (2019), Lambert et al. (2019), and Wang and Huang (2018), vodcasts as a supplemental learning tool are beneficial as being effective in enhancing engagement and learning in several ways; reflection, developing a sense of social presence for the lecturer, motivation, and cater for visual learning styles' needs. A longitudinal study by Castro et al. (2021) in the Department of Accounting, a public Deakin University, Australia and New Zealand explored the efficacy of vodcasting as a means of advanced lecture recording using disruptive technology for international and domestic students Castro et al.'s (2021) study revealed that students who are struggling with the English language may benefit from the opportunity to engage in multiple viewing of vodcasts and repetitive listening to recorded material to improve their understanding of the topic learned. The

use of vodcasting as a supplemental learning tool assists in developing knowledge and achieving higher performance. Further, vodcasts are suitable not only for overcoming physical barriers but for improving performance outcomes in modules. Vodcasts are valuable for reusable [revisits and revisions] knowledge creation and sharing of information. Prior studies by Chao et al. (2018), Morris et al. (2015), and Safari et al. (2017) assert that the use of vodcasting enhances academic writing and active engagement with module content for students who prefer a visual type of learning. Vodcasting has the potential to revolutionize the way students learn and engage with academic writing. By incorporating video elements into the traditional academic writing process, students can create more dynamic, engaging content that can enhance their understanding of the subject matter.

2.3.4 Enhancing academic writing through online multimedia

Enhancing academic writing through online multimedia can be an effective way to engage students and improve their writing skills. By incorporating multimedia elements such as videos, images, and interactive exercises, students can develop a deeper understanding of the writing process and improve their critical thinking skills. Furthermore, online multimedia can provide a more dynamic and stimulating learning experience, making academic writing more accessible and enjoyable for students. Prior research suggests that HEIs aim to equip students with the skills to write proficiently in academic contexts, including essays, scientific papers, and academic books (Lea & Street, 2006). However, many students face difficulties with language and academic writing upon entering HEIs (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). Specifically, students encounter various challenges in Academic Writing modules, ranging from mastering organizational conventions, such as developing a clear thesis statement, introduction, signposting, argumentation, counter argumentation, referencing, paragraphing, and grammatical conventions, to producing reasonable conclusions and recommendations (AlMarwani, 2020; Kilfoil, 2021; Lea & Street, 2006; Pineteh, 2014). It is worth noting that to ensure students' success in Academic Writing modules, lecturers must reflect on their teaching practices (Lea & Street, 2006). Particularly, lecturers who teach academic writing at the first-year level should provide students with appropriate academic writing support, addressing their difficulties effectively to prevent unnecessary failure rates (Leibowitz et al., 2009). Therefore, for the current

study, the ENG101 lecturers have introduced supplemental e-learning tools such as podcasts and vodcasts to support students and improve their academic writing skills. By leveraging the pedagogical potential of podcasts and vodcasts, widely embraced and recognized by students for their technological fluency, these supplementary resources effectively facilitate [bridge] the instructional gap and establish an environment conducive to learning. The use of English exacerbates academic writing challenges, especially for students who are EAL (English as an Additional Language). Boughey and McKenna (2016) suggest that many South African students who come from under-resourced and previously disadvantaged high schools have trouble expressing themselves in writing. EAL students struggle with academic writing, which is a significant challenge for South African students in HEIs (AlMarwani, 2020; Alsahafi & Shin, 2019; Castro et al., 2021; Derakhshan, 2021; Dolasinski & Reynolds, 2023; Eynon & Gambino, 2023; Leibowitz, 2004; Maboe, 2019; Mhlanga & Molio, 2020; Mthimunye & Daniels, 2019; Rapillard, Plexico & Plumb, 2019; Sofi-Karim, Bali, & Rached, 2023; Wentzel & De Hart, 2020; Winkelmes, Boye, & Tapp, 2023). Therefore, to combat academic writing challenges, it is important to invest in academic support initiatives. Furthermore, in the current study, there is a need to integrate e-learning technologies within the ENG101 module to enhance academic writing skills. The ENG101 module sets expectations for first-year students to adhere to established academic literacy standards. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that literacy encompasses more than just the technical aspects of reading and writing, often referred to as the 'technology of the mind' (Goody, 1968, 1977). Instead, literacy is widely recognized as a social practice (Gee, 2000; Barton, 1994; Street, 1984, 1995). Adopting an autonomous model of literacy in this study is rooted in the understanding that literacy involves both cognitive and social dimensions. This model prioritizes the acquisition and mastery of core academic practices, which are integral to successful engagement in higher education contexts.

According to Aboagye et al. (2020), Gautam (2020), Lizcano et al. (2020), and Mukhtar et al. (2020), e-learning ensures academic writing benefits and accessibility of teaching material in an online environment. In addition, despite spatial challenges, the implementation of multimedia files through digital technological platforms assists in transferring subject content. It is worth pointing out that e-learning has gained great popularity amid the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Aljawarneh (2020),

Lara et al. (2020), and Lizcano et al. (2020) maintain that the provision of multimedia files such as podcasts and vodcasts is still a major challenge for HEIs in developing countries in terms of weak content developed, poor internet connectivity and insufficient knowledge regarding the creation of multimedia files. A study by Bumblauskas et al. (2021) at the State University of Northern Iowa explored problem-based learning in teaching academic writing by incorporating learning scenarios and activities that can measure learning objectives. Bumblauskas et al.'s (2021) study revealed that students benefited extraordinarily from synchronous and/or asynchronous multimedia files and indicated preferred scenario activities to teach academic writing. In addition, digital multimedia files improved participation [active] and interaction, as students were less nervous behind a keyboard. Synchronous and/or asynchronous digital multimedia files stimulate learning, improve learning outcomes, and critical thinking and enhance the students' learning experience. Bumblauskas et al.'s (2021) study share similarities with the current study in terms of implementing both synchronous and asynchronous multimedia files. However, it is important to note that while the ENG101 module focuses on providing practical guidelines for academic writing, scenario-based activities are not utilized. Interestingly, emerging digital platforms such as Zoom with webcam offer solutions it mimics traditional face-to-face learning and respectively increase participation.

A similar study by Encarnacion et al. (2021) at Oman Tourism College in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, investigated the impact and effectiveness of e-learning on teaching and learning in an undergraduate module and General Foundation Program. 75% of the students indicated that online learning accommodated their learning styles. In addition, the use of vodcasts assisted students tremendously in understanding English writing activities [analysing, solving problems, and answering online quizzes] or module content. E-Learning helped lecturers with the organisation of learning material and accessibility of learning material. Online teaching of academic writing is effective and interesting to both students and lecturers alike. The integration of technology made students feel comfortable exploring more academic writing ideas and enriched students' knowledge. Above all, students can study at their own pace and become independent. Web-based technology encourages and advances self-study skills in students (Radha et al., 2020). According to Jianu and Vasilateanu (2017) and Sanchez et al. (2020), integrating e-learning tools [videos] in HEIs customises

opportunities for learning styles in teaching academic writing and increases interest and focus.

On the contrary, a study by Lee et al. (2021) in a distance HEI in a Malaysian university determined the factors that underpin undergraduate students' satisfaction with e-learning experiences. Lee et al.'s (2021) study revealed that employing a CoI approach by Garrison and Anderson (2000) is beneficial for teaching academic writing. Social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence appeal to students in HEIs as it eliminates feelings of loneliness and creates e-learning satisfaction, which stems from collaboration. However, cognitive presence has more influence on e-learning satisfaction than social presence does. Students construct meaning and gather knowledge from an online environment than through interaction with other students. Academic writing is challenging for students; however, incorporating CoI as an approach is beneficial and enhances academic writing. However, it is worth pointing out that besides the implementation of CoI as a tool, other multimedia files such as vodcasts and podcasts may be implemented to teach academic writing (Bumblauskas et al., 2021; Encarnacion et al., 2021). By incorporating multimedia files like vodcasts and podcasts into the curriculum, lecturers can provide students with engaging and interactive learning experiences that promote the development of critical writing skills. These digital tools allow for a more diverse and flexible learning environment that caters to different learning styles and preferences.

2.4 Using technology to support academic writing challenges in distance HEIs

2.4.1 EAL context and challenges in HEIs
English as an Additional Language (EAL) students face unique challenges in HEIs. These challenges can include language barriers, cultural differences, and difficulties adapting to the academic culture. EAL students may also face challenges which can further impact their academic success. Academic writing skills are a prerequisite in HEIs. To complete an Academic Writing module, students are required to make use of English as an MoI in many universities. However, many first-year students face academic writing challenges such as grammar, cohesion and coherence, paragraphing, and lack of linguistic competence (Alostath, 2021; Aripin & Rahmat, 2021; Demirçivi, 2020; Rabadi & Rabadi, 2020; Zeiger, 2021). The utilization of

English for academic purposes, particularly in the case of first-year students, presents an additional hurdle to overcome in their Academic Writing module, especially for those whose native language differs from English and falls under the category of English as an additional language (EAL). Previous research indicates that 'academic English is no one's first language' and is not part of the native speaker's inheritance, consequently, the acquisition of academic writing skills through formal education becomes imperative for every aspiring academic writer (Badenhorst & Guerin, 2016; Doyle et al., 2018; Hyland, 2016; Schmitt, 2005). A study by Ma (2021), in the Department of International Studies, a public Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, aimed to investigate challenges encountered by EAL students in HEIs. Ma's (2021) study revealed that EAL students faced language difficulties such as translating ideas from their first language (L1) to English and thinking and organising ideas in L1 before writing in English. The most frequently mentioned challenge in writing was L1–second language (L2) rhetorical differences. Another commonly reported challenge was the need for an ample amount of time to write in English, which often led to a slow writing process compounded by difficulties in grammar and vocabulary. Some participants revealed the following:

> They (native speakers) have got better vocabulary; it is helpful for them to write better. So, it would be an extra challenge for me to improve my vocabulary, which is a necessary tool to write better and after that maybe grammar…er is another tool. Maybe it's an extra challenge for me as well. (S8, Persian) (Ma, 2021:1183).

> For the natives, it's (English is) their language, but then it's my second language, they have the advantage of thinking it in the right way. But I have the problem of thinking, try to think in English instead of in Chinese when I write (S10, Cantonese) (Ma, 2021:1181).

> S23 had to use a dictionary to search for words when writing. She said she had many grammatical errors, especially in using the present tense, the past tense, and the commas (Ma, 2021:1183).

Ma's (2021) research provides results that are consistent with the findings of Alostath (2021) regarding the difficulties faced by EAL students in understanding the nature of academic writing. Academic writing presents a significant challenge for EAL students, who often struggle to achieve academic rigour[14]. Moreover, EAL students experience a range of academic obstacles, including expressing their voice, paraphrasing, achieving coherence and cohesion, and using appropriate vocabulary. Hassan et al.

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[14] Rigour denotes the application of rigorous academic standards that engender a heightened cognitive capacity among students, compelling them to engage in critical analysis, thoughtful interpretation, and advanced performance that transcends their prior levels of achievement.

(2021) in a public Polytechnic University in Malaysia, highlight the complex nature of developing writing proficiency, which requires students to master specific rules and acquire specific skills. These complexities often dampen students' interest in language learning and eventually negatively impact their comprehension and performance. Moreover, EAL students experience a range of academic obstacles, including expressing their voice, paraphrasing, achieving coherence and cohesion, and using appropriate vocabulary. Hassan et al. (2021) in a public Polytechnic University in Malaysia, highlights the complex nature of developing writing proficiency, which requires students to master specific rules and acquire specific skills. These complexities often dampen students' interest in language learning and eventually negatively impact their comprehension and performance.

The extant literature attests to the difficulties encountered by EAL students in HEIs when using English for academic purposes, which hinders their learning progress (Crawford & Candlin, 2013; Lum et al., 2015; Morris & Maxey, 2014; Mulready-Shick, 2013; Onovo, 2019; Weaver & Jackson, 2011; Zheng et al., 2014). EAL students are required to invest additional time and effort in mastering English and may even have to undergo English proficiency exams as a prerequisite for admission, yet they may still struggle with language acquisition (Beiler & Dewilde, 2020; Onovo, 2019; Kelly & Hou, 2022). While digital technology presents potential opportunities for language learning and support, it can also pose significant challenges for EAL students in HEIs as research participants, identified as P27, revealed that during their classes, the internet frequently disconnects, which negatively impacts their ability to listen and learn. In addition, the participant stated, "If our professor plays something for us, we can't hear it well, so our listening skills won't get better" (Derakhshan, 2021:66). Derakhshan's (2021) investigation into the role of Emergency Distance Education (EDE) in English language writing skills development among EFL Bachelor of Arts students in a public Golestan University, Iran, revealed several challenges that EAL students encounter in learning English language skills such as writing in the digital environment, including inadequate feedback, slow response time, poor audio quality, and lengthy lectures. Derakhshan's (2021) findings align with those of Maphoto (2021) and, Gau and Zhang (2020), who reported that students are dissatisfied with the feedback received, and that language lecturers require improved skills and knowledge to overcome writing challenges, respectively. Experienced markers are aware that

feedback must target a specific student's weakness (Maphoto (2021) cf. Henry, 2020 interviews). Additionally, Sithole (2019) suggests that distance language education lecturers should be aware of the challenges and opportunities inherent in such an educational context, and Fathi and Rahimi (2020) contend that flipped classrooms can yield better writing performance than non-flipped classrooms. Incorporating supplemental learning tools into DE may aid students in achieving their academic objectives.

2.4.2 Supplementary learning tools to support academic writing in HEIs

Supplementary learning tools can be effective in supporting academic writing in HEIs. These tools can include digital multimedia resources such as podcasts, vodcasts, writing guides, tutorials, and online interactive exercises. Studies indicate that although academic writing and critical thinking are considered key objectives of students in HEIs, there are many obstacles to achieving these objectives such as the lack of student support initiatives and academic writing challenges (Alexander, 2014; Borglin & Fagerström, 2012; Guo et al., 2022; Rotar, 2022; Teng et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2003; Newman et al., 1997; Sachs, 2002; Zhang & Toker, 2011). Academic writing and critical thinking are higher-order thinking skills that are essential to lifelong learning and are still a major challenge for students in HEIs (Dwyer & Walsh, 2020; Strobla et al., 2019). A study by Ahmed et al. (2021) at a private South Valley University in Egypt, and a Tokyo public University of Agriculture and Technology in Japan, investigated the effects of synchronized and asynchronized e-feedback[15] interactions on improving academic writing, achievement motivation and critical thinking. It is important to define synchronize and synchronize. Synchronize relates to online interaction in real time through digital technology while asynchronize refers to online interaction [lecturer and student] at different times. Hrastinski (2008) points out that synchronous interaction decreases ambiguity in learning experiences because it provides immediate interaction and e-feedback. In contrast, asynchronous interactions lead to an increased reflection on the learning activities because they have better

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[15] Electronic feedback, also known as e-feedback, refers to feedback that is provided to students through digital or online tools, such as learning management systems, email, or other electronic means. E-feedback can include various forms of feedback, such as written comments, audio or video recordings, and automated feedback generated by software.

flexibility in scheduling and allow a prolonged individual interaction with the learning resources (Roblyer et al., 2007). Ahmed et al.'s (2021) findings reveal that synchronous feedback is more effective in increasing the quality of academic writing and achievement motivation. Using synchronous e-feedback within Learning Management System (LMS) forums, using Google Docs, audio, Skype, emails, and chat software helps students to propose solutions and evaluate them critically, engage with academic writing activities effectively, be flexible and help to achieve academic writing goals. Different types of feedback impact the accuracy of the writing efficiency and students' motivation differently (Papi et al., 2020). Some participants in Ahmed et al.'s (2021) study were revealed to still favour face-to-face interaction with their lecturers. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented demand for turning to remote learning and using technology for improving learners' skills and knowledge (Carpenter, Krutka & Kimmons, 2020; Weldon et al., 2021).

Mirkholikovna (2020) points out that supplemental tools and platforms in distance learning exceed the effectiveness of the existing system and that soon conventional methods of teaching in HEIs will be completely replaced by remote ones. Mirkholikovna's (2020) study links to the current study in that distance institutions should invest in digital supplemental tools to bridge the instructional gap and increase teacher and student presence and collaboration. A study by Pakhomova et al. (2021) at a National State University, Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine theoretically investigated ways of transforming the pedagogical process in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic that has prompted the implementation of rigorous regulations about stringent quarantine. Pakhomova et al.'s (2021) study revealed that supplemental digital tools and technologies such as Telegram, Viber, Zoom, Moodle, group video calls, Hangouts Meet, Google Drive, Webex, Virtual Class, Google Classroom and WhatsApp are beneficial and advantageous in instructional delivery of teaching writing in higher institutions of learning. Online supplemental tools provide lecturers and students with the opportunity to access information, use and reuse content material, process and assimilate educational material in a comfortable emotional state, optimal pace of processing and assimilation of educational material and ability to provide knowledge of higher quality. However, many students lack a sufficient basis for the development of communication skills and show signs of technological dependency on the educational process of information. On the contrary, online supplemental tools and

platforms in HEIs increase the interest in studying the discipline and positively impact its efficiency (Starykh, 2018). In addition, Langer (2021) points out that online supplemental tools such as virtual classrooms, webinars, links, simulations and online one-on-one coaching through Microsoft Teams and Zoom are some of the leading tools and platforms that can be used to teach academic writing.

Prior studies maintain that writing interventions through supplemental tools such as short videos and podcasts on academic writing is necessary for first-year students to receive suitable guidance that promotes independent writing skills. Mobile learning is a suitable approach for promoting individuality in learning and catering to students' needs (Bonner & Reinders, 2018; Karasu, 2018; Meyer et al., 2019). As part of a current study aimed at enhancing the academic writing skills of first-year students in an ODeL institution, ENG101 lecturers have implemented digital multimedia supplemental tools, such as podcasts and vodcasts, to reduce transactional distance and improve the learning experience. By providing access to different types of content delivery, including audio and video, these tools cater to various learning styles, allowing students to engage with the material in ways that are best suited to their individual preferences and needs. The use of podcasts and vodcasts has the potential to facilitate greater student engagement and success in Academic Writing modules.

A study by Lentz and Foncha (2021) at Cape Peninsula Public University of Technology (CPUT), Cape Town, South Africa explored lecturers' views on using blended learning as an intervention programme for teaching English language academic writing to first-year students. Digital platforms provide a space for students who might struggle with academic writing to learn at their own pace and convenience. Lentz and Foncha's (2021) study revealed that first-year students are only able to structure a basic piece of writing as they were taught in high school. First-year students need guidance with structuring their writing, paragraphing, and other grammaticality, as they would muddle points in an illogical manner. The absence of adequate assistance provided to most first-year students would likely exert a detrimental impact on their academic performance across various subjects. Lentz and Foncha (2021) utilised supplemental digital tools such as a WhatsApp group chat and Blackboard to engage with students on some of their challenges. First-year students were able to raise their concerns, which were dealt with either by the lecturer or peers. In addition, the WhatsApp group chat provided a conducive environment for collaborative learning.

Lentz and Foncha's (2021) findings correspond with Bakla (2020); Davies et al. (2020) and Romero-Ivanova et al. (2020), in that supplemental digital tools and platforms are invaluable in sustaining a sense of connectedness and flexibility in an otherwise isolated situation. With that said, it is essential to explore core e-learning challenges in HEIs to help relieve the academic challenges of first-year students. Exploring core e-learning challenges in HEIs is crucial to alleviate academic difficulties faced by first-year students. This can provide insights on how to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of core e-learning tools and resources to improve student engagement and success in the Academic Writing module under study.

2.4.3 Core e-learning challenges in DE institutions

DE institutions in South Africa and overseas face significant challenges in implementing effective e-learning strategies. One of the core challenges is ensuring access to reliable and affordable technology and internet connectivity for both students and lecturers (Aryal & Balan, 2023; Bukola, 2022; Maatuk, 2022; Ndebele & Mbodila, 2022). Another challenge is the need to design eLearning programs that are engaging, interactive, and can facilitate social interaction and collaboration among learners (Archambault et al., 2022; Baber, 2022; Namboodiri, 2022; Saleem et al., 2022). Online student support platforms and digital spaces are essential for first-year students for academic enrichment purposes. Recent studies by Boubekeur (2021), Dilmac (2020), Maphalala and Mpofu (2020), Mutezo (2021), and Pratiwi and Ariani (2020) assert that online student support programmes such as e-tutoring[16] enhance student success, reduce student dropouts, increase qualification completion, and motivate lifelong learning. In addition, e-tutors play a significant role in providing online lessons and supporting the smoothness and flexibility of learning. e-Tutors are held in high esteem in terms of their abilities to deliver content knowledge and are the driving force that facilitates learning. Digital technology plays a vital role in connecting e-tutors with students and allows sharing of useful information, which goes beyond tutorial sessions. However, Sedio (2021) at the Unisa, an ODeL university, investigated how the e-tutors' content knowledge influences their effectiveness in the teaching and learning of the design process from the perspectives of their students. Sedio's (2021) study revealed that e-tutors lack the content knowledge to teach in distance-learning

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[16] E-tutoring is the delivery of teaching and learning online via the Internet.

contexts. e-Tutors should be provided with advanced training to cater for DE students' needs. In addition, the findings highlighted a need for competent e-tutors who are competent in the skills of delivering content knowledge. HEIs employ e-tutors that are seemingly capable of delivering content knowledge as well as a firm understanding of the subject content; however, Sedio's (2021) study revealed a significant lack of skills in disseminating content knowledge in DE. E-Tutors' teaching skills in DE should enhance students' academic challenges and provide academic support, interaction, peer learning and a conducive learning environment (Hubers, Endedijk & Van Veen, 2020; Wrigley & Straker, 2015).

Similarly, a study conducted by Mapitso (2021) in South Africa, Unisa, investigated challenges experienced by lecturers in supporting students in an ODeL institution in South Africa. Many lecturers in HEIs have not received training and guidance to effectively design, develop, deliver, and teach in distance online contexts (Mbatha & Naidoo, 2010; Tait, 2017). Mapitso's (2021) study revealed that there is a lack of formal induction and orientation of newly appointed lecturers on the delivery of their core functions. Lecturers' service delivery to students should be greatly improved by capacitating them in all ODeL skills and strategies of teaching and learning. The institution needs to devise radical technological means to reach students in remote villages where technology is not readily available and accessible. The study recommends that further research be conducted on how to support and empower lecturers to give students leading-edge digital multimedia student support. Simpson (2018) points out that the key to success lies in identifying and building on the existing talents of lecturers and seeing how these talents can be transferred to the skills that are required for effective teaching and learning in ODeL institutions to guarantee student success. Further, Nyawo (2021) and Van de Heyde and Siebrits (2019) point out that to improve teaching and learning in HEIs, academics should use valuable innovative educational technologies to support students in a digital space to ensure the best outcomes for students.

However, many rural universities struggled with less-than-optimal digital learning platforms and students without devices and data (Myende & Ndlovu, 2020). Further, HEIs in South Africa experience network connectivity issues, isolation and disconnection from lecturers and peers, data problems, lack of devices and lack of skills to use devices to access content online (DHET, 2020). Di Pietro et al. (2020)

point out that poor Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure and resistance to change miserably challenge the use of digital technology. A study by Adarkwah (2021) investigated critical factors that affect online learning in Ghana's rural school students who are excluded from the e-learning platforms. Bean et al. (2019) point out that students may be part of online learning but may not actively [or effectively] use online services or follow the tutor. Adarkwah's (2021) study revealed online learning is not effective enough and is fraught with many challenges. Online learning comes with many barriers such as costs [expensive data], electricity cuts or shortages, lack of internet access, lack of online prior knowledge, un-downloadable study material and lack of ICT integration and support. Some research participants revealed:

> Oh ok, I think this online learning is not that effective. Let me take campus for example, on campus you go for lectures, you meet the lecturer, you will have this interaction, like face-to-face, that makes you comprehend what the lecturer is putting across, and aside from that you even have the teaching assistants who are willing to help you understand or if you have any difficulty, they are able address that issue. [Lucy-University] (Adarkwah, 2021:1672).

> The student outcome of online learning as compared to the traditional approach is very sad and heart-breaking. Let me take the quiz for example, you will take a quiz online, and the system gets jammed, you've learnt, not that you didn't learn, you've really learnt, and you go, and you're able to answer the questions, let me say if it is out of 20, you can get 15 or 10 correct, and then you get an F, it just saddens my heart [Ellen-University] (Adarkwah, 2021:1673).

> The intercommunication between lecturers and students is very poor. Communication is not good. You will be having a class, and then the network starts misbehaving, meanwhile, the teacher is talking! How do you retrieve the words he has already said? What if the words he has said are the steppingstone to understanding the next sentences? [Sandra-Nursing training] (Adarkwah, 2021:1673).

Adarkwah's (2021) research findings are similar to DePaul's (2020) as he points out that a lack of internet access and computers in homes in rural areas affect the progress of online learning. Online learning is contextualized, and students from developing countries score lower in online learning and are likely to withdraw from the online module compared to their colleagues in developed countries (Kizilcec & Halawa, 2015; Lembani et al., 2019). However, prior studies maintain that students who engaged in online learning performed better than those in face-to-face sessions, benefit from the integration of ICT in education and limitless access online learning, bridge the instructional gap, and promote social mobility (Arthur-Nyarko & Kariuki, 2019; Dessalegn & Dagmawi, 2018; Lembani, Gunter, Breines, & Dalu, 2019; The Council

of Independent Colleges, 2016; Liebenberg, Chetty & Prinsloo, 2012). Although there are many challenges for online learning in rural places and areas where there is poor infrastructure, online learning is beneficial to students and thus arises a need for digitisation during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-COVID-19 (Arthur-Nyarko & Kariuki, 2019). Online learning provides students with a flexible and convenient way to access educational materials and interact with lecturers and peers. This highlights the importance of digitization in HEIs to ensure that students have the necessary tools and resources to succeed in the digital age.

2.4.4 The need for digitisation during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need for digitization across various sectors, including education, healthcare, and businesses. With physical distancing measures in place, digital technologies have allowed for remote communication and online learning. The adoption of digitization has not only enabled continuity of services during the pandemic but also improved efficiency, accessibility, and convenience for users. COVID-19 has caused organisational upheaval at a massive scale in HEIs such as workflow disruptions and connection challenges (Filip, 2022; Brem et al., 2021; Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2021; Marks & Al-Ali, 2022). However, there has been an increase in flexibility and intensification of digitization across many sectors such as HEIs (Chearavanont, 2020; Hollander & Carr, 2020). On the other hand, according to Dua, Mahajan, Oyer and Ramaswamy (2020), many HEIs struggled to adapt to performing in digital spaces as digital disruptions are usually unexpected occurrences and oddities (Steele, 2020). A study by Faraj et al. (2021) at McGill University, Canada investigated fundamental challenges in digitalization and what the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed about digitization. Faraj et al.'s (2021) study revealed that there is uneven access to digital infrastructures [depends on location], the persistence of the analog[17] in digitalization, the brittleness of unchecked digitalization, and panoptical[18] surveillance. Lane and Pittman (2020), Ramsetty and Adams (2020), Walden (2020) maintain that instructional digitization in higher institutions is essential as it facilitates core fundamental teaching and learning methods; however, lack of digital access, lack of internet connectivity and lack of expertise or ability to shift services to the digital realm exacerbates online learning challenges. Thousands of

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[17] Process of converting existing data or information into digital format
[18] Refers to something that is barely visible to its users

students fell behind and in effect disappeared from the educational system (Flanagan, 2020). In addition, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Yuan (2020) asserts that HEIs were exposed to the incomplete and limited nature of digitization where higher institutions switched overnight to virtual spaces such as Zoom and cloud video communication platforms. However, digitization has many benefits such as the use of online anti-cheating detection software and lecturer's online presence (Harwell, 2020). Walden (2020) maintain that instructional digitization in higher institutions is essential as it facilitates core fundamental teaching and learning methods; however, lack of digital access, lack of internet connectivity and lack of expertise or ability to shift services to the digital realm exacerbates online learning challenges. Thousands of students fell behind and in effect disappeared from the educational system (Flanagan, 2020). In addition, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Yuan (2020) asserts that HEIs were exposed to the incomplete and limited nature of digitization where higher institutions switched overnight to virtual spaces such as Zoom and cloud video communication platforms. However, digitization has many benefits such as the use of online anti-cheating detection software and lecturer's online presence (Harwell, 2020).

According to García-Morales (2021), in the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Granada, Spain, online teaching is here to stay; has gained relevance [ensured continuance] and has a plethora of technological tools and platforms to support the use of online learning: web-based learning platforms, video-conferencing tools, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), streaming conferences, instant messaging tools, and educational apps. The integration of supplemental digital multimedia tools, such as podcasts and vodcasts, within modules like ENG101, is warranted due to their potential to enhance and enrich the learning experience. By incorporating these multimedia resources, students can access a diverse range of educational content, engage with dynamic and interactive materials, and foster a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Moreover, the utilization of podcasts and vodcasts aligns with the technological proficiency of contemporary students, promoting their active participation and facilitating the acquisition of crucial skills in the digital age. Therefore, integrating such tools into modules like ENG101 represents a compelling pedagogical strategy that can effectively enhance the educational outcomes of students. HEIs should develop appropriate digital learning platforms [Moodle, Microsoft Teams, and Blackboard] that sustain virtual workload [tools and

systems] within an online learning context (Krishnamurthy, 2020). Kalimullina et al. (2021) at the St. Petersburg State University of Telecommunications, Russia analysed the studies devoted to lecturers' experiences in interacting with digital environments and reviews digital learning systems, environments, and tools. Kalimullina et al.'s (2021) study revealed that there are many online applications [MOOCs and LCMS (learning content management system)] and automated digital environments but none of them can, to a greater or lesser extent, do without the lecturers' supervision. In addition, despite the diversity of digital learning tools, lecturers' negative attitudes [leads to low effectiveness of online teaching method] towards digitization of online learning affect the whole learning process. In addition to lecturers' negative attitudes, Mishra et al. (2020) point out that a major challenge in online learning relates to technical problems. Not all lecturers are comfortable in an online setting because they have never used technological tools in an advanced manner and the anxiety of teaching students who are more adept with newer technologies prevails (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2020). Therefore, sufficient training is essential to obtain the required competence. Moreover, previous studies point out that there is limited research on the digital competence of lecturers in higher institutions. In addition, digital disruptions affect the smooth flow of teaching and learning processes (Cuban, 2013; Håkansson-Lindqvist, 2015; Glover et al., 2016; Islam & Grönlund 2016; Jenkins et al., 2011; Pettersson, 2018; Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history (Aiyedun and Ogunode, 2020). COVID-19 has adversely affected the academic expectations of college lower-income students, as they are more prone to experience online-learning challenges, consider dropping classes, and delaying graduation than their higher-income peers (Aiyedun & Ogunode, 2020; Aucejo et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Planas, 2020). A study by Olatunde-Aiyedun, Eyiolorunse-Aiyedun and Ogunode (2021) in a Nigerian University investigated the post-COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of digitalization on university lecturers. Olatunde-Aiyedun, Eyiolorunse-Aiyedun and Ogunode's (2021) study revealed that there is a need for adequate availability of digital resources. Further, there is a lack of e-learning facilities to enable lecturers to interact with their students for effective teaching and learning during and post the COVID-19 era. This is in line with the results by Aiyedun (2020) which showed that lecturers are getting prepared to teach with new instructional strategies to minimize the impact COVID-19 may pose on undergraduate students. Like the ENG101 module, the lecturers utilized

supplementary tools to bridge the transactional distance gap between students and lecturers. As the Moodle LMS system was unstable and other online platforms experienced technical glitches due to load shedding, podcasts and vodcasts. The surge in digital platforms replacing physical classrooms highlights the need for universities to ensure that any digital transition is not solely driven by technology companies but rather incorporates input from lecturers, students, governments, civil society representatives, and privacy advocates. Furthermore, higher institutions must ensure that their digital facilities are adequate in both quantity and quality to support effective teaching and learning (Aiyedun & Ogunode, 2021; Olatunde-Aiyedun et al., 2021). According to Ojelade et al. (2020) and Aiyedun (2020), the integration of digital technologies such as podcasts and vodcasts in HEIs has been found to generate greater learning interest among students. Considering the significant role of digital technologies in modern higher education, it is imperative to conduct a rigorous investigation into students' perceptions regarding the utilization of podcasting and vodcasting in distance HEIs, and the potential impact of these technologies on student engagement and retention in online modules. Such an inquiry will provide valuable insights for education stakeholders seeking to implement innovative digital teaching tools to enhance the quality of higher education. This is in line with the results by Aiyedun (2020) which showed that lecturers are getting prepared to teach with new instructional strategies to minimize the impact COVID-19 may pose on undergraduate students. Like the ENG101 module, the lecturers utilized supplementary tools to bridge the transactional distance gap between students and lecturers. As the Moodle LMS system was unstable and other online platforms experienced technical glitches due to load shedding, podcasts and vodcasts. The surge in digital platforms replacing physical classrooms highlights the need for universities to ensure that any digital transition is not solely driven by technology companies, but rather incorporates input from lecturers, students, governments, civil society representatives, and privacy advocates. Furthermore, higher institutions must ensure that their digital facilities are adequate in both quantity and quality to support effective teaching and learning (Aiyedun & Ogunode, 2021; Olatunde-Aiyedun et al., 2021). According to Ojelade et al. (2020) and Aiyedun (2020), the integration of digital technologies such as podcasts and vodcasts in HEIs has been found to generate greater learning interest among students. Considering the significant role of digital technologies in modern higher education, it is imperative to conduct a rigorous investigation into students' perceptions

regarding the utilization of podcasting and vodcasting in distance HEIs, and the potential impact of these technologies on student engagement and retention in online modules. Such an inquiry will provide valuable insights for education stakeholders seeking to implement innovative digital teaching tools to enhance the quality of higher education.

2.5 Lecturers' perceptions of podcasting and vodcasting in distance HEIs

Perceptions of podcasting and vodcasting in DE have evolved. While some lecturers view them as effective tools for delivering content and engaging learners, others see them as a supplement to traditional teaching methods. Additionally, there are concerns about the accessibility of podcasting and vodcasting, as not all learners have access to the necessary technology or internet connectivity. The effectiveness of podcasting and vodcasting in DE largely depends on the context, goals, and preferences of both lecturers and learners. According to Hornby and Lea (2020:1), the denotative meaning of the word 'perception' is the way one notices [experiences] things, especially with the senses [perception of reality and visual perception]; the ability to understand the true nature of something or someone and an idea, a belief, or an image you have because of how you see or understand something. For the current study, it is important to explore lecturers' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in HEIs to determine how the use of technology affects learning.

2.5.1 Lecturers' perceptions of using podcasts to enhance academic writing skills in HEIs

The use of podcasts to enhance academic writing skills in HEIs has gained increasing attention from lecturers. While some lecturers see podcasts as valuable tools for delivering writing instruction and providing feedback, others view them as a supplementary resource rather than a replacement for traditional teaching methods. Furthermore, the effectiveness of podcasts in enhancing academic writing skills may depend on factors such as student engagement, the quality of the podcast content, and the level of integration with other learning activities. Previous research indicates that many HEIs have adopted e-learning or virtual learning methods by incorporating multimedia files such as podcasts into traditional teaching mechanisms as part of a

blended-learning approach (Evans & Fan, 2002; Evans, 2007; Evans & Gibbons, 2007; Evans et al., 2004; Kurtz, Fenwick, & Ellsworth, 2008; Malan, 2007). However, universities [distance and contact] around the world were forced to implement emerging and innovative methods of teaching [content delivery] due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Lentz (2020) and Raaper and Brown (2020) maintain that traditional face-to-face teaching and learning for contact universities were challenged by social distancing regulations brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, distance universities faced many challenges such as poor internet [network] signal and students' reluctance to embrace new technologies. Thus, the importance of access and digitalising educational platforms to relieve challenges of distance and accessibility.

Although access and digitisation of educational platforms are important, they may come with new or unexpected challenges. Meletiou-Mavrotheris, Mavrou and Rebelo (2021) conducted a study in the Department of Education Sciences, European University Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus that aimed to determine lecturers' attitudes and levels of use of learning and communication technologies, factors encouraging or inhibiting the adoption and effective use of learning and communication technologies in higher education. Meletiou-Mavrotheris, Mavrou and Rebelo's (2021) study revealed that most lecturers have a positive attitude towards the educational use of technology [podcasts in particular]. However, lecturers did not view the use of technology as a tool for transforming teaching and learning but rather as an aid for module content delivery. In addition, some lecturers lacked confidence and appreciation of the true potential of technology for transforming the nature of higher education, restricted their use of technology to representation tools such as PowerPoint and made minimal use of interactive technologies (educational software) that can promote student-centred, collaborative, and inquiry-based learning environments. Even though some lecturers were reluctant to use interactive technologies, significant literature of the last decade highlights and maintain the importance and benefits of implementing emerging and innovative technology because it increases students' motivation and engagement, efficient delivery of module content, improved knowledge retention, personalization and differentiation of learning (Bishop & Verleger, 2013; Eick & King, 2012; Ford et al., 2012; Gill, 2011; Guy & Marquis, 2016; Taplin et al., 2011; Tobolowsky, 2007; Yousef et al., 2014). It is

alarming and worth pointing out that even amid the COVID-19 pandemic, some lecturers were reluctant [resistant] to use interactive technologies to increase students' motivation and engagement. Meletiou-Mavrotheris, Mavrou and Rebelo (2021) point out that the COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly forced lecturers in HEIs to digitize their teaching practices to a full online learning experience, however, that may create teaching and learning challenges. In a survey by Fox et al. (2020), a high volume of lecturers reported that they struggled with online technologies; adjust their teaching to the new methods of delivery and instruction. In addition, they also had to acquire new knowledge and skills in distance teaching, all within a very short period.

On the contrary, a study in Austria and German conducted by Feldhammer-Kahr et al. (2021) titled 'It's a Challenge, not a Threat: Lecturers' Satisfaction During the COVID-19 Summer Semester of 2020' focused on how lecturers in DE successfully adjusted to the novel teaching and learning situation arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Feldhammer-Kahr et al.'s (2021) study revealed that lecturers obtained a sense of satisfaction with the online teaching [podcasts] situation and how they implemented their online teaching concept. However, Feldhammer-Kahr et al.'s (2021) study does not explicitly reveal at length the teaching situation challenges experienced by lecturers during the COVID-19 pandemic. As with the current study, certain lecturers expressed hesitancy towards producing podcasts and vodcasts due to perceived lack of expertise, and instead favoured more conventional methods of delivering module content. Additionally, the COVID-19 restrictions created obstacles that impeded the seamless distribution of the module's material. The implementation of supplemental tools, such as podcasts and vodcasts, is essential. Additionally, it is crucial to understand how lecturers have successfully overcome challenges related to online or remote content delivery. It is worth pointing out that the COVID-19 outbreak challenged the teaching and learning in HEIs as Kroisleitner (2020) and Neuhauser (2020) maintain that universities closed almost immediately, creating a new normal for teaching and learning in terms of switching to distance learning strategies. In addition, educational technologies are an indispensable impetus during a pandemic period (Ben et al., 2020).

To remedy the content delivery challenges imposed by COVID-19 on higher institutions of learning, Ifedayo et al. (2021) investigated the use of podcasts for educational purposes in three Federal Universities in Nigeria. The main aim of Ifedayo

et al.'s (2021) study was to investigate the levels of podcast performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions among lecturers. Ifedayo et al.'s (2021) study showed that the podcast performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating condition among lecturers were at a low level. Lecturers were not used to adopting podcasts for their teaching, as their initial pedagogical approaches did not entail the introduction of podcasts to enhance students' academic performance. Likewise, the lecturers for ENG101 lacked confidence in recording podcasts and vodcasts, as they felt that these mediums lacked the personal touch that they could provide in person. Furthermore, they felt that their voice skills were not sufficiently eloquent to sound professional. Lecturers encountered numerous obstacles [inadequacies] that deter the use of podcasts and felt podcasting activities were insufficient towards promoting students' academic performance. Lecturers viewed podcasts to be difficult to use, believed that podcasts acceptance is not easy, and did not view podcasts as an educational technology for convenient pedagogical activities. Ifedayo et al.'s (2021) study revealed that lecturers lacked confidence in the use of podcasts and were unenthusiastic and reluctant to consider the many benefits that podcasts could bring. Bondarenko et al. (2019), Teo and Huang (2019) and Okeke and Ihenacho (2019) maintain that there are low-level [inadequacies] of capabilities and interest in employing educational technologies for pedagogical purposes among lecturers in higher institutions of learning. On the other hand, Mertala (2019) and Thompson (2016) point out that educational technologies such as podcasts are valuable resources that offer an unlimited avenue for lecturers to tailor instructions that fits students' needs, promote academic performance, allow students to learn on an individual basis [active participants] and allow lecturers to deliver instructions to students when there is restricted movement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, in an earlier study by Sutton-Brady (2016), an English lecturer in an Academic Writing module indicated and acknowledged that podcasts are useful for students whose first language is not English.

> I am facing students who are struggling with English and being able to podcast means… they can go home; they can listen to it repeatedly until they get the concepts (Sutton-Brady, 2016:227).

The incorporation of podcasts within the Academic Writing module holds the potential to bolster students' proficiency in academic writing, owing to their ability to revisit and engage with the module's content repeatedly. By offering the opportunity for repeated

listening, podcasts facilitate a deepening of understanding, reinforcement of key concepts, and the development of crucial writing skills necessary for academic success. Shiang et al.'s (2021) study support Sutton-Brady's (2016) earlier findings that lecturers view podcasts as an efficient and easily accessible tool that can be used independently by students and can improve their productivity. In addition, podcasts are an underutilized asynchronous remote learning tool [resource] that can help overcome current challenges of social distancing [decrease connection barriers] and more importantly, address the diverse preferences and needs of students. Fhloinn and Fitzmaurice's (2021) study is consistent with Shiang et al.'s (2021) study by maintaining that podcasts [short podcasts] are beneficial and not overwhelming, easy to use and provide students with the option to 'pause and replay' the material [as an advantage]. Based on the literature consulted for the current study, it may be concluded that even though lecturers lack confidence and technical skills to use and implement podcasts in their teaching at higher institutions of learning; a significant volume of research indicates that lecturers have in general a positive perception [attitude] of using podcasts in HEIs, particularly since the COVID-19 outbreak. Podcasts [audio podcasts] are not the only means lecturers utilized during the COVID-19 pandemic. Vodcasts were also implemented as supplemental tools to bridge the isolation gap (Gottlieb et al., 2020; Rotoli, 2020). Vodcasts have been used to provide a sense of connection and community for those who may be isolated or unable to attend in-person events. They can be accessed at any time, providing flexibility for viewers to engage with the content at their convenience.

2.5.2 Lecturers' perceptions of using vodcasts to enhance academic writing skills in HEIs

The use of vodcasts in HEIs has also gained attention from lecturers, with some seeing them as a powerful tool for delivering engaging and interactive module content. Vodcasts can enable lecturers to incorporate multimedia elements such as graphics, animations, and demonstrations to enhance the learning experience. However, some lecturers may have concerns about the time and resources required to produce high-quality vodcasts and the accessibility of vodcasts for students with limited internet connectivity or visual impairments. The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the landscape of teaching and learning in HEIs from a face-to-face setting to an online interactive [open and flexible] environment that enhances efficiency and convenience, (Masrom et al., 2020; Matthew & Chung, 2021; Megat-Abdul-Rahim et al., 2021;

Rahiem, 2021; Sim, Sim & Quah, 2021). To adjust and comply with the COVID-19 rules of isolation [social distancing], vodcasts were adopted as supplemental tools to bridge the isolation gap. Kamble et al. (2021) and Tang et al. (2021) point out that remote learning gives a sense of isolation [loss of connection] to lecturers and students through the teaching and learning process. However, it is worth pointing out that previous studies of the last decade by Albanese (2005), Balslev et al. (2005), Bishop and Verleger (2013), Evans et al. (2016) and Pierce (2012) maintain that the use of vodcasts to supplement content delivery has gained popularity in higher institution of learning, adds to students' satisfaction and performance because of its potential to increase active students-centred learning. A recent study by Bordes et al. (2020) in the Department of Biochemistry, St. George's University, St. George, Grenada, investigated the optimal use of video recording [vodcasts] to support content delivery of first-year medical students in an online flipped classroom. Bordes et al.'s (2020) study revealed that lecturers viewed the creation of video [vodcasts] as a daunting [overwhelming] task and were apprehensive to use vodcasts. However, lecturers revealed that through the introduction [training] of user-friendly technology, recording vodcasts is relatively straightforward when provided with access to the appropriate tools and training. In addition, lecturers may post vodcasts before encouraging peer-learning discussions, online interaction, interpretation, and reflection of module content. Tang (2018) and McLean et al. (2016) concur and maintain that vodcasts released in advance enable students to prepare themselves adequately when faced with challenging topics.

Like the study by Bordes et al. (2020), Simanjuntak and Panjaitan (2021) in the English Education Department, Faculty of Teachers Training and Educational Sciences, Universitas Advent Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia, investigated the perceptions and experiences of English lecturers regarding the surge in virtual teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of Simanjuntak and Panjaitan's study indicate that the lecturers had a positive perception of the inevitable increase in online learning. Furthermore, the lecturers reported that with the help of workshops and training, they became more tech-savvy, making it easier to produce, operate, and post vodcast recordings. Although connectivity issues were a challenge, the majority of lecturers adopted a blended learning strategy that incorporated both virtual classes and vodcast

recordings. In the interviews conducted by Simanjuntak and Panjaitan's (2021), the lecturers revealed:

> I taught mostly grammar subjects. Most of the time when I explained the lesson via virtual meeting, some of the students couldn't follow because the internet connection was poor. I finally created my tutorial videos [vodcasts]; they can access them anytime whenever the internet connection was available and uninterrupted. I shared the drive and YouTube links, so they could access those links and download them (Interviewee 2) (Simanjuntak & Panjaitan, 2021:365).

> Support for online teaching is excellent at my university. The Office of Digital Learning and Instructional Technology (DLiTT) provides technical support for the use of online teaching applications. In addition, to support online teaching, they provide training on using the various features of Moodle (the learning management system we use). The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence hosts regular (weekly and monthly) seminars and workshops on effective teaching/learning delivery. Since we transition to remote learning, the Center has arranged for 'shared experience' workshops and seminars (Interviewee 4) (Simanjuntak & Panjaitan, 2021:366).

Simanjuntak and Panjaitan's (2021) study revealed that English lecturers who have attended workshops, seminars, and training on making use of online virtual classes and vodcasts recordings gained confidence and skills on how to use the vodcast [content delivery] effectively. Zaharah et al. (2020) concur and maintain that the use of technology as content delivery [vodcasts in particular] is currently viewed and adopted as a major focus in adapting to the COVID-19 restrictions and isolation challenges. Technology [vodcasts] may be used to improve the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs. This is a clear indication that English lecturers need technological support to navigate supplemental tools successfully.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that English lecturers are not technologically experts and, yet they are expected to navigate and manoeuvre through technology successfully. Lecturers may not be equipped to handle technological challenges, accordingly, as revealed by Simanjuntak and Panjaitan's (2021) study that English lecturers may need constant workshops and training to adapt to the demands and ever-changing content delivery technologies. Guan et al. (2020), point out that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced all lecturers without exception, to provide makeshift access to instruction and instructional support to their students regardless of technological skills and knowledge being honed or insignificant. Earlier researchers such as Chang (2007), Gosper et al. (2008), Joy et al. (2014), and Kay (2010), confirm Simanjuntak and Panjaitan's (2021) research findings and maintain that lecturers express negative attitudes [perceptions] towards vodcasts as they do not possess

relevant technical skills and reluctant to adopt vodcasts because of the perception that the benefits are minimal or unknown. Lecturers require a safe [comfortable] and supportive environment to develop technical skills in recording and using vodcasts to enhance first-year academic writing skills. Further, lecturers are self-conscious of their presentation skills and fear that certain concepts may be viewed or understood negatively.

However, even though some lecturers' perceptions of the use of vodcasts to enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students is somewhat negative, a significant volume of recent research indicate a positive view [perception] of the use of vodcast amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Babelyuk et al., 2020; Bordes et al., 2020; Cutting & Larkin, 2021; Orange et al., 2018; Ravishankar, Epps, & Ambikairajah, 2018; Wolstencroft & de Main, 2021). To emphasise the latter, one recent study by Scholtenhuis, Vahdatikhaki and Rouwenhorst (2021) titled 'Flipped micro-lecture classes: satisfied learners and higher performance', revealed that vodcasts reduced the discomfort of traditional lecture settings, increased control over learning [student-centered] and better knowledge retention. In addition, shorter vodcasts yielded positive outcomes and were less overwhelming. A participant in Scholtenhuis, Vahdatikhaki and Rouwenhorst's (2021) indicated:

> Yes, it is also about the length of the video. It is for ten minutes and not two hours. I found it pleasant that the videos were just around five minutes and not fifteen or so. Because if it is just five or ten minutes, it is very easy to watch. It is done quickly, and you will watch it back more easily (Participant 1) (Scholtenhuis, Vahdatikhaki & Rouwenhorst, 2021: 464)

Shorter vodcasts are appealing to lecturers and students alike, minimising the boredom factor and burden of watching long vodcasts that are loaded with information. Further, shorter vodcasts are manageable in terms of information processing and reflection. Szymkowiak et al. (2021) maintain that traditional methods of teaching are no longer suitable for the 21st century and that today's generation prefers the use of modern technology to support and direct learning in a less overpowering manner. Modern education means applying suitable pedagogical eLearning [podcasts and vodcasts] tools via mobile devices in less-overwhelming chunks. With that said, a need arises to explore the importance of e-learning pedagogical scaffolding in higher institutions of learning can be extended by identifying different scaffolding techniques used and evaluating their effectiveness, as well as analysing challenges faced by

educators and exploring its impact on student outcomes such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and retention rates.

2.5.3 Importance of e-learning coaching pedagogy to enhance academic writing skills in HEIs

The importance of e-learning coaching pedagogy in HEIs lies in its ability to support learners in achieving their academic goals through personalized guidance and feedback. E-Learning coaching can promote student engagement, motivation, and self-directed learning, which are essential skills for success in the digital age. Moreover, e-learning coaching can enhance the quality and effectiveness of eLearning programs by providing ongoing support to learners and promoting continuous improvement in the teaching and learning process. Many universities around the world solely focused and relied on e-learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Kim et al., 2019; Reinhold et al., 2020). Hillmayr et al. (2020), Chi et al. (2018) and Murphy (2020) assert that the integration of digital technology in HEIs bears high potential to create cognitively engaging opportunities. Online learning provides flexible opportunities for different forms of study and facilitates continuous learning (Oosi et al., 2019).

However, for e-learning to be effective, academic support and coaching [mentoring] that encourage interaction and collaboration regarding core academic content is crucial. Timonen and Ruokamo (2021) in the Faculty of Education, at the State University of Lapland aimed to investigate what kinds of synchronous collaborative online coaching pedagogy ODeL have been used in previous research and proceeded to construct a preliminary pedagogical ODeL for a coaching pedagogy for synchronous collaborative online learning. Timonen and Ruokamo's (2021) study revealed that the pedagogical framework that is best suitable for synchronous collaborative online learning in higher institutions is the CoI by Garrison et al. (2000). Fundamentally, CoI comprises four types of elements namely: cognitive presence, social presence, teacher presence and learner presence by Shea and Bidjerano (2010). The four elements foster active collaborative learning where students are active agents in the teaching and learning (Garrison, 2016, 2017; Garrison et al., 2000; Shea & Bidjerano, 2010). CoI significantly complements problem-based learning (PBL) because learning in a distance environment [online learning] may be challenging, therefore, PBL

involves a collaborative construction of meaning through interaction [student-to-teacher or teacher-to-student] and is characterised by a joint commitment to a shared goal (Aarnio, 2015; Garrison et al., 2000; Littleton & Hakkinen, 1999; Nerantzi & Gossman, 2015). In addition, Lieser et al. (2018) point out that CoI may also be coupled with the 4E Learning Cycle (engagement, exploration, explanation, and extension) for webinars. In terms of the preliminary pedagogical framework for a coaching pedagogy for synchronous collaborative online learning, Timonen and Ruokamo's (2021) study indicates a scarcity of research on synchronous coaching pedagogy in online education. However, a coaching pedagogy for synchronous collaborative online learning was introduced to formulate a new perspective regarding webinar pedagogy. Consequently, online coaching pedagogy enables and enhances active collaborative learning and knowledge construction.

Timonen and Ruokamo's (2021) research findings echo Versteijlen et al.'s (2017) research finding that online learning coupled with suitable advanced technological tools such as webinars make distance learning possible. Online presence and access to learning in the higher institution is vital at higher institutions of learning; however, interaction enhances active learning (Byun, Sooyeon, & Slavin, 2020; Mohalik & Sahoo, 2020; Pellegrini et al., 2020; Shivangi, 2020). Even though online interaction is important [beneficial to students] in HEIs, it is important to discuss the e-learning challenges at HEIs to determine challenges that may hinder interaction.

Mahyoob (2020) in the Department of Languages and Translation Science and Arts College-Alula, Madinah Taibah State University, Saudi Arabia, investigated the challenges of eLearning during COVID-19. Mahyoob's (2020) study revealed that there were some technical challenges [disruptions] that delayed and discouraged online interaction. Online classes, Blackboard tools, audio and video tools, and downloadable class material were often unavailable and unclear. Lecturers and students relied on other platforms such as email, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, Google, and Zoom platform for online interaction purposes. Most students came from remote towns where the network challenges were a real crisis. Many students were confronted with some difficulties in accessing online lessons, and materials downloading and could not even open their online examination on their mobile phones because of incompatibility [format] issues or extensions not supported by their devices. In addition, many students lacked digital skills in using Blackboard platforms and

English language jargon for other ICT systems [tools]. It is worth pointing out that online learning challenges are still problematic for many HEIs. Mahyoob's (2020) research corroborates with recent research findings on the same issues regarding concerning [significant] worries about the technical issue and forced use of alternative online platforms [sometimes-social media applications] for learning purposes (Alturise, 2020; Bataineh et al., 2020; Kaid & Bin-Hady, 2019; Rajab et al., 2020). The technical issue remains a constant challenge as they challenge online interaction and learning in higher institutions of learning. Baird et al. (2020) point out that interaction is mandatory across disciplines and is best [beneficial] for online learning. However, Mamun et al. (2020) maintain that even in online learning, it is important for lecturers to subdivide learning material and content into manageable chunks when providing academic support to students to avoid overwhelming information overload. Manageable chunks encourage online interaction that is self-regulatory. A study by Chen (2021) in a public Southwest University, Chongqing, China, explored international students' use of embedded digital scaffolding[19] materials to promote and facilitate autonomy in online Chinese Foreign Learning. Learning (CFL) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chen's (2021) study indicated that scaffolding materials facilitated and enhanced international students' autonomous in online language learning. Scaffolding also created students' independent approach to online language learning. Chen's (2021) study is consistent with previous research by Mojarrabi Tabriziet et al. (2019), Stockwell and Reinders (2019) that embedded digital scaffolding is not static but [encourages] a dynamic process in online language learning. Chen (2021) used notes, suggestions, and scripts in his embedded digital scaffolding material. Some of Chen's (2021) research participants revealed the following: [20] materials to promote and facilitate autonomy in online Chinese Foreign Learning. Learning (CFL) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chen's (2021) study indicated that scaffolding materials facilitated and enhanced international students' autonomous in online language learning. Scaffolding also created students' independence approach in the online language learning. Chen's (2021) study is

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[19] Scaffolding is an instructional strategy that embraces planning, arranging, monitoring, and adjusting teaching and learning related issues like content progress and evaluation to improve students' learning challenges

consistent with previous research by Mojarrabi Tabriziet et al. (2019), Stockwell and Reinders (2019) that embedded digital scaffolding is not static but [encourages] a dynamic process in online language learning. Chen (2021) used notes, suggestions, and scripts in his embedded digital scaffolding material. Some of Chen's (2021) research participants revealed the following:

> When I was learning about this text, I found its sentences were long and difficult. I was considering asking you for help until I noticed there were many analyses in the Notes part (Zhang in Tutorial 3) (Chen, 2021:5).

> I used the Notes and Scripts parts to learn the polyphonic characters in this part. They were quite clear., & I feel I am much more aware of them now (Chen in Tutorial 3) (Chen, 2021:5).

> I was quite confused with the meanings of "协助" (assist) and "援助" (aid) in this week's reading task. But soon I found in the Notes the learning had provided a very detailed comparison (Gao in Tutorial 3) (Chen, 2021:5)

To echo the importance of scaffolding in online learning, recent studies by Adolphs et al. (2018), Stockwell and Reinders (2019), O'Neill et al. (2019), Vurdien and Puranen (2020), and Yeh and Wan (2019) maintain that scaffolding plays a vital role in online learning processes. The integration of digital scaffolding materials helps students achieve productive outcomes in autonomous language development.

To emphasise the importance of digital scaffolding in teaching and learning, Bayrak and Yurdugu (2018), and Taskiran (2019) maintains that online telecollaborative activities that are well-designed and supported by ICT contribute significantly to the e-learning processes and context, motivation [self-intervention perceptions], metacognitive awareness, and intercultural communicative competence of the English language to English as a foreign language (EFL). A study by Abdelaziz and Zehmi (2021) at a distance Hamdan Bin Mohamed Smart University, UAE, aimed to design e-activities based on cognitive scaffolding and measure their impact on underachieving students' grammar competencies. The focus was to utilise technology tools in providing underachieving students with the support necessary to help them improve their usage of English grammar. Abdelaziz and Zehmi (2021) employed the quasi-experimental research design [pre-test-post-test] to measure the impact of e-activities on students' performance [poor writing skills and grammar usage]. It is important to highlight that regardless of students' plentiful exposure to grammatical exercises and practice; they still lack grammatical competence [deficiencies] and are uncertain about the use of grammatical rules (Singh et al., 2017). Abdelaziz and

Zehmi's (2021) study revealed a positive effect of using e-cognitive scaffolding with underachieving students. Many students were more enthusiastic and motivated to use the e-activities that were broken down into manageable chunks appropriate for their level of understanding, which is to the findings of Cooper and Robinson (2014), Flick (2000), and Mbogo et al. (2014). Cognitive scaffolding allows lecturers to break down content into manageable pieces and minimise cognitive load. Using videos, PowerPoint presentations and pictures increased [stimulated] interactive practices. In addition, underachieving students scored higher on the post-test despite short-period lessons delivered. The language usage was straightforward, which made it easier for students to understand. To that end, it is essential to provide students with explicit chunks that foster e-collaborative spaces, promote interaction, and focus on different yet important types of presence [cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence] as developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000).

2.5.4 Creating a community of inquiry through digital media tools in HEIs

Creating a CoI through digital media tools is a valuable approach to promoting collaborative and interactive learning in HEIs. Digital media tools such as online discussion forums, social media platforms, and video conferencing can enable students to engage in meaningful dialogue, debate, and reflection. Furthermore, a CoI can enhance critical thinking, problem-solving, and knowledge construction among learners, ultimately leading to a more engaging and effective learning experience. Historical studies by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), Garrison (2016) and Garrison (2017), provide the basis and importance of online learning by promoting collaboration and interaction in digital spaces. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) developed CoI which aimed to build a solid foundation on multiple types of online learning platforms. CoI represents processes that embody deep and meaningful [collaborative-constructivist] learning experiences through four interdependent elements: social, cognitive, learner and teaching presence. In addition, Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) assert that CoI greatly reduces e-learning challenges in higher education and provides a critical foundational base for online learning in higher institutions of learning. However, communication, interaction, and collaboration in distance learning may be challenged using social media, and behaviour during modules including those, which adopt the distance learning approach (D'Aquila et al., 2019; Holmes & Rasmussen, 2018; Voivonta & Avraamidou, 2018). A study by

Ochieng and Gyasi (2021) in an African Population and Health Research Center, in Nairobi, Kenya, aimed to investigate and analyse contribution to Open Educational Resources (OERs) and social justice (SJ) to determine research productivity [potentials and implications] in higher educational institutions. A scoping review was adopted for this study to gather extant literature from relevant available databases to obtain as much evidence as possible to make a clearer and more succinct conclusion. Ochieng and Gyasi's (2021) research study revealed that the advent of Open Education (OE) has led to mass student retention, use/re-use, redistribution, revision, and remix of open educational resources (OERs) thereby transforming the learning and research landscape in higher learning institutions. In addition, there are many open and free-to-use resources and websites existing on the internet.

Ochieng and Gyasi (2021) maintain that OERs positively influence the production of research outputs in HEIs by promoting the use of novel methods of learning for the current generation, promoting teachers/lecturers' professional development and participation, regulating educational costs in both public and private institutions, broadens the dissemination of superior quality educational materials and alleviating inhibitors to opportunities of learning. Further, OERs such as MOOCs, OpenLearn, Impact Map, E-grid, Open Learning (OL), e-textbooks, FutureLearn, OpenStax, Open Textbook and edX were implemented amid COVID-19 pandemic as digital platforms or tools (Ochieng & Gyasi, 2021). The latter OERs promote advanced online learning and teaching [innovative pedagogy] that creates a plethora of communal digital information that is readily available. Digital technology plays a key role in advancing education and permeates all spheres, enabling the metamorphosis of online educational landscapes [technology-led and driven strategies]. However, the fundamental challenge relates to attitudinal change towards OERs among students, academics, and scholars among other stakeholders if its optimum uptake is to be realized. Further, inherent challenges in actualizing OERs relate to infrastructural challenges, technical skills gap challenges, economic challenges, social challenges, and legal challenges. Even though there are many online challenges to the implementation and navigation of OERs, online learning is crucial for information access and usage purposes.

Similarly, a study by Baytiyeh (2021) in the Department of Education, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, a private American University of Beirut, Lebanon investigated the use

of social media tools for educational sustainability. Baytiyeh's (2021) study revealed that social media tools provide students with access to online education and opportunities for interactive learning in the comfort of their homes at their own pace. In addition, social media is cost-effective and can maintain teaching and learning standards. Further, social media tools or platforms are beneficial and reliable when used with caution. Baytiyeh (2021) pointed out that many universities of higher institutions implemented the following social media platforms for teaching and learning: Edmodo, Google Drive, Instagram, Google Apps for Education (GAFE), Wikis [synchronously and asynchronously], Diigo, Facebook, Twitter, Blogs and Voice Thread. Social media platforms or tools are advantageous for online learning because they provide real-time communication, sharing of files [videos and pictures], documents, and resources, repositories for learning materials or as means for students to collaborate on projects both synchronously and asynchronously, bookmarking and tagging of websites. In addition, social media applications contribute to the enhancement of distance learning processes and the creation of online learning communities. The advancement of educational technologies and social media applications has revolutionised access to information, making it faster, easier, and affordable. Pokrovskaia (2021) concurs and points out that the implementation of the online module with the use of mixed digital communication tools of social media, messengers and video conferencing meets the interest, expectation, capabilities and satisfactory level of students and lecturers alike. Digital tools such as VKontakte, Facebook, Instagram, Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram, WeChat, Zoom, Discord, TrueConf, Teams, Moodle pedagogical platform, Google forms, Typeform, learning apps and emails are currently being used by many universities around the world in dealing with the isolation factor imposed by COVID-19 (Pokrovskaia, 2021).

According to Zarzycka et al. (2021), COVID-19 in a public Medical University of Lodz, Poland has led to an increase in the use of distance learning and social media for educational and communication purposes. Zarzycka et al. (2021) aimed to investigate the factors that impact communication and collaboration in a distance learning environment in and outside of the virtual classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic and the role of social media in this process. Zarzycka et al.'s (2021) study revealed that the increasing use of Facebook (FB) for professional [academic] purposes improve students' communication and collaboration during distance learning modules.

High activity on FB and LinkedIn (LKND) is important for communication with lecturers. To that end, there are multiple benefits of social media usage for learning and teaching, such as improved performance, the convenience of learning and higher engagement (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018; Ajayi et al., 2019). By incorporating a variety of multimedia elements such as images, videos, audio, and interactive tools, students can engage with content in multiple ways, leading to deeper understanding and retention. This allows for a more dynamic and effective online learning experience that caters to the current cohort of students' needs for online multimedia files in HEIs.

2.5.5 The need for using online multimedia files to enhance academic writing skills in HEIs

The need for using online multimedia files in HEIs stems from the increasing importance of multimedia in contemporary society and the potential benefits it offers for teaching and learning. Online multimedia files such as videos, audio recordings, and images can facilitate student engagement, promote active learning, and provide opportunities for creativity and expression. Moreover, online multimedia files can cater to different learning styles and preferences, enabling learners to customize their learning experience and enhancing accessibility for learners with disabilities. According to UNESCO (2020), COVID-19 caused serious changes and challenges in the educational landscape affecting 94% of the world's student population in more than 190 countries. Academic endeavours and/or activities switched to remote delivery, even in institutions in which online learning was not widely used (Toquero, 2020; Sangster et al., 2020). This emergency transformation involved various obstacles in remote learning (Crawford et al., 2020), such as, among others, lack of internet access or appropriate equipment, lack of a quiet space of access to computers, and learning resource access issues. Distance learning faces a considerable number of technical and social challenges. Some lecturers and online institutions are still challenged with how to design learning content in a remote format to develop students' skills and engage them in the modules, (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Fujita, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020; Kaliisa et al., 2019; Selwyn, 2020). However, Qiu et al. (2021) point out that to ensure the effective and efficient operation of teaching and learning in an online environment, colleges and universities should make full use of the existing high-quality online resources [MOOCs, live broadcasting, SPOC (Small Private Online Module)] developed by leading academics and widely available and

free on different platforms. Knowledge sharing is essential for online teaching and learning.

Saputra (2021) in a public University of STIT Al-Hilal Sigli, Indonesia investigated the implementation of online learning using online media, during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has rapidly increased the use of social media/internet, and the existence of a distance learning system (online) proves that this pandemic has focused on learning shifting from conventional to distance or online (Wahid, 2020). Saputra's (2021) study revealed that online education is flexible and encourages independent active learning and motivation. In addition, long DE urges students to explore online learning enthusiastically. Saputra's (2021) study echoes Oknisih and Suyoto's (2019) findings that online education also has the advantage of being able to increase learning independence, due to the use of online applications. The use of online technology benefits students and lecturers regarding direct contact and access to learning material and interaction (Naserly & Meter, 2020; Prasasti, 2019). In addition, online learning [smartphones and laptops] helps improve students' participation and the absence of space limitations (Anggrawan, 2019; Nugroho et al., 2019). However, the weakness of online education is limited internet services [lack of internet signals, high (expensive) quota payments] and poorly understood lecturer instructions on the part of students (Astuti & Febrian, 2019; Naserly & Meter, 2020). In addition, Tanveer et al. (2020) assert that students faced diverse struggles in adjusting to virtual learning and that lecturers "have, almost overnight, been asked to become both designers and tutors, using tools which few have fluently mastered" (Rapanta et al., 2020:926).

However, Arguel et al. (2019) posit that in an environment of fast dissemination of information and concepts, the application of digital learning covers a range of fields and industries. More importantly, World Bank (2020) affirms that a high-speed internet connection alleviates frustration and minimises disruptions to learning programmes, online assessment, and digital library services. Correspondingly, Rapanta et al. (2020) maintain that lecturers can acquire updated online pedagogical content knowledge that may reduce anxiety and technophobe tendencies. A study by Alghamdi et al. (2021) at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal Public University, Saudi Arabia, investigated challenges in DE in higher institutions during the COVID-19 era. This study employed a descriptive-qualitative research design. Alghamdi et al.'s (2021) study revealed the positive and negative impacts of emergency DE. Positive impacts include insignificant

online learning disruptions, positive experience with distance learning, professional work ethic by lecturers [prior ad-hoc training], the emerging importance of distance learning [independent learning skills], essential soft skills developed [IT skills, self-directed learning skills, time management], and alternatives learning strategies [access to online digital platforms such as libraries]. The negative impacts include poor internet traffic [congestion] infrastructure and lack of on-site lab work and practicums. Even though there was a lack of on-site [physical] lab practicums, students were provided with visual online content material for observation and exploration purposes. Safonov et al. (2021) concur with Alghamdi et al.'s (2021) study and maintains that online learning has indeed proved to be an indispensable tool in teaching and the assimilation of knowledge. There is a need for using online multimedia files in DE because the strengths of online learning are feasibility, information security, learning process analysis, customized and structural e-learning teaching better and faster experience of communication to students. In addition, online learning accelerates learning and acquiring skills of self-assessment.

Similarly, a study by Maphalala and Adigun (2021) sought to explore the experiences of academics with the use of e-learning to support teaching and learning at Unisa, an ODeL university. Maphalala and Adigun's (2021) study revealed that lecturers believed that the use of e-learning platforms such as the LMS is important for knowledge transference and that lecturers were willing to teach via e-learning despite the challenges faced. Further, lecturers believed that e-learning played an important role in enhancing students' performance. In addition, lecturers indicated that students' success would undoubtedly increase if technical support and training were provided regularly. A participant in Maphalala and Adigun's (2021:6) study named 'Academic I' said:

> Whilst some of us see the value of e-learning, our downfall is the lack of technical support. We face several system failures, and we get stuck, sometimes you get lucky through trial and error, you manage to get through or ask another colleague to assist (Maphalala & Adigun,2021:6).

Even though lecturers believed that e-learning played an important role, ICT infrastructure and internet accessibility were noted as leading challenges in e-learning. However, infrastructure and internet accessibility were due to capacity issues. Further, reliable, and faster wireless connectivity was implemented. IT specialist A had the following to say:

> The availability of Wi-Fi around the institution has increased over the years, especially around the office areas and the lecture rooms. There is still a huge need for more hot spots though because some areas still don't have access to Wi-Fi (Maphalala & Adigun, 2021:6)

Senel and Senel (2021), Nguyen et al. (2020), Vlachopoulos and Makri (2019), and Koneru (2017) maintains that it is essential to use online multimedia files in DE because of instant feedback opportunities, ease of submitting/responding, potential to enrich assessment tools and products, provide student participation and motivation, re-use content material, ease of editing based on feedback and control and storage. Araka et al. (2020), Nyachwaya (2020), and Koh and Kan (2020) pint out that multimedia files such as video conference tools like Zoom, Skype and Adobe Connect, Canvas, Blackboard, Edmodo, Moodle, Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams provide integrated functions like communication, interaction, storage, and advantages for assessment in DE.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter argued that the challenges faced by first-year students in HEIs can be ameliorated through student support initiatives relating to academic writing interventions. Notably, one of the significant findings is that supplemental tools, including podcasts, play a vital role in teaching and improving academic writing skills among first-year students in HEIs. However, vodcasts, despite their unique advantages, are not widely implemented in many HEIs due to perceived complexities associated with their creation. An apparent gap in academic literature arises from the hesitancy of lecturers to produce vodcasts, owing to the perceived exigency of this mode of instructional delivery. Nevertheless, existing research suggests that vodcasts provide a unique perspective that enables students to view writing skills through the eyes of their lecturers and ultimately leading to improved academic performance. Additionally, vodcasts offer flexibility and independence, which are preferred by many students over traditional lectures as they facilitate knowledge acquisition more engagingly and interestingly. However, it is worth noting that the challenges faced by first-year students in academic writing are further exacerbated by the implementation of English as the medium of instruction in academia. Despite the potential benefits of podcasts and vodcasts for enhancing academic writing skills, EAL first-year students encounter unique challenges in HEIs. Academic writing poses a significant hurdle for

EAL first-year students as they often struggle to attain the necessary academic rigour. Additionally, EAL first-year students encounter various academic obstacles, such as expressing their voice, paraphrasing, achieving coherence and cohesion, and utilizing appropriate vocabulary. These complexities can diminish students' interest in language learning and ultimately impede their comprehension and performance. However, considering the isolation engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic situation, digital tools and platforms can serve as invaluable resources for promoting connectedness and flexibility. Therefore, to address the e-learning challenges and realities encountered by EAL first-year students, HEIs lecturers must reassess their digital scaffolding curricula. Notably, EAL first-year students have expressed a preference for supplemental tools such as podcasts and vodcasts as they facilitate comprehension by breaking down subject content into manageable segments appropriate for their level of understanding. More interestingly, some lecturers are technophobic and reluctant to record podcasts and vodcasts. The latter remains a challenge for many lecturers' HEIs. Be that as it may, the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts significantly enhances students' academic writing skills. The next chapter, Chapter 3 discusses two theoretical frameworks underpinning the current study, the TTD and CoI.

CHAPTER 3

The Theory of Transactional Distance and Community of Inquiry underpinning the basis of the study

"Condemnation without investigation is the height of ignorance"

-Albert Einstein

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 undertook a comprehensive review of pertinent literature concerning the perceptions and challenges faced by first-year students when utilizing supplemental tools, specifically podcasts and vodcasts, in HEIs to improve academic writing skills. Furthermore, Chapter 2 incorporated a global perspective, presenting arguments that underscore the importance of support initiatives for students in Academic Writing modules within distance learning in HEIs. In alignment with these scholarly investigations, the present study aims to explore the perceptions and challenges encountered by first-year students as they engage with podcasts and vodcasts to enhance their academic writing skills within the context of an ODeL institution. Hence, the literature review chapter was meticulously structured to address several key aspects related to the use of podcasting and vodcasting in distance HEIs. These aspects encompassed trends in e-learning aimed at enhancing teaching and learning within the context of distance HEIs, the utilization of technology to support academic writing challenges, and an exploration of students' perceptions regarding podcasting and vodcasting. In essence, the comprehensive synthesis of prominent researchers' findings established a solid foundation and provided substantiated justifications for the significance of supplemental tools in enhancing the academic writing skills of first-year students. The existing body of literature examined within the review presented a consensus among numerous studies, such as those conducted by Faramarzi et al. (2020), Noetel et al. (2021), and Pan (2020), which argued for the indispensability of

supplemental tools within distance HEIs. Nonetheless, a notable gap persists within the existing literature regarding the integration and utilization of vodcasts within HEIs, primarily due to the presence of technophobic tendencies and reluctance among lecturers to engage in vodcast recordings (Rapanta et al., 2020; Ifedayo et al., 2021; Simanjuntak & Panjaitan, 2021; Meletiou-Mavrotheris, Mavrou & Rebelo, 2021). Building upon the insights garnered from Chapter 2, which emphasized the indispensability of supplemental digital tools in promoting the enhancement of academic writing skills among first-year students, Chapter 3 focuses on a comprehensive examination of two influential theoretical frameworks which underpin the current study. Specifically, the discussion in this chapter centres around the following theoretical frameworks:

- The theory of transactional distance (TTD) posited by Moore (1972), and,
- The community of inquiry (CoI) framework was put forward by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000).

The TTD and CoI provide a theoretical foundation for investigating the dynamics of distance learning and the significance of engagement within virtual learning communities.

The ENG101 module represents an online instructional offering that leverages digital platforms to effectively deliver module content and engage students within diverse learning environments. Within this context, the current study aims to fulfil several objectives: to explore students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts, to determine the challenges students encounter when accessing these tools, and to establish how their use enhances the academic writing skills of students. Through these objectives, this study endeavours to shed light on the pedagogical benefits and potential obstacles associated with the incorporation of podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of how these digital resources can effectively enhance EAL students' proficiency in academic writing. Thus, the current study acknowledges the inherent significance of the TTD (Moore, 1972) and the CoI framework developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) in facilitating successful online learning within ODeL contexts. These frameworks assume pivotal roles in promoting and enhancing the efficacy of online learning experiences by providing essential support mechanisms and actively promoting meaningful collaborative interactions among students. Moreover, these

theories serve as instrumental frameworks for embracing and endorsing diverse student support initiatives within ODeL contexts. Their comprehensive and holistic approaches ensure the establishment of a conducive and engaging learning environment, thereby enhancing the overall educational experience for students engaged in online modalities.

3. 2 Theory of transactional distance (TTD)

It is imperative to acknowledge that the ENG101 module is situated within the context of a DE HEIs, wherein unique challenges arise due to the absence of face-to-face interaction. In this DE setting and context, the ENG101 module exclusively relies on online platforms as the primary means of disseminating module content. Therefore, the transactional distance between lecturers and students emerges as a significant and recurring challenge within the DE context. According to Sevnarayan (2022) and Sevnarayan and Mohale (2022), without reducing the transactional distance between lecturers and students in DE institutions, effective teaching and learning becomes almost unattainable. The latter statements echo shared sentiments by Abuhassna (2022), Keskin, Çinar and Demir, (2022), Lowe (2000), and Swart and Macleod (2021), in that the concept of transactional distance has brought about a paradigm shift by redefining "distance" as a social and communication gap that exists within educational contexts. With that said, it is important to explore the significance of the TTD by Moore (1972). Moore's (1972) TTD draws its underpinnings from John Dewey's (1938) assertion that an individual's experience is shaped by the transactions occurring between oneself and the surrounding environment. In the context of DE, Moore, and Kearsley (1996) define transactional distance as a theory that addresses scenarios where the physical separation between lecturers and students can result in communicative gaps and the emergence of psychological space, potentially leading to misunderstandings between the instructional behaviours of lecturers and students' responses. However, Moore (1973) posits that the TTD places greater emphasis on pedagogy rather than the geographical separation between students and lecturers. TTD places greater emphasis on pedagogy rather than the geographical separation between students and lecturers.

According to Moore's (1997) TTD, ODeL transcends being solely a geographical separation between students and teachers; it is a pedagogical concept that encompasses the intricate dynamics of distance learning, encompassing the relationships between students and lecturers constrained by space and/or time. The physical separation of students and lecturers can have disruptive effects on the teaching process, necessitating careful considerations and strategies to bridge the transactional distance to promote effective learning experiences. It is important to point out that developing academic writing skills poses inherent challenges for first-year students, necessitating the implementation of academic writing interventions that incorporate supplemental tools, such as podcasts and vodcasts. These interventions, which align with the principles of TTD, cater to the unique needs of DE students and provide valuable support in their academic writing endeavours. By leveraging supplemental tools like podcasts and vodcasts, the ENG101 students were afforded opportunities to bridge the transactional distance gap between themselves and their lecturers and their academic writing content and enhance their engagement with academic writing concepts and practices. The application of the TTD plays a crucial role in reducing the instructional divide and promoting effective implementation of academic writing interventions, facilitating meaningful connections between lecturers and students. This framework's relevance becomes evident concerning the first research question, which explores students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module, as well as the third research question, which investigates how the use of podcasts and vodcasts enhances students' academic writing skills in the ENG101 module. By drawing upon Moore's (1972) TTD, the study aligns itself with a valuable framework that addresses the research questions in the context of an ODeL institution, specifically focusing on alleviating transactional distance for optimal student engagement and success.

According to a study conducted by Swart and MacLeod (2021), there is a growing recognition that modern technologies offer a viable solution for reducing transactional distance in DE settings. The traditional approach of investing in multiple workstations, each equipped with a networked personal computer and a large screen, is no longer deemed necessary. Instead, the integration of modern technologies allows for a cost-effective alternative. Students can now engage in learning activities with minimal requirements, simply needing access to a laptop or cell phone with data connectivity. This shift towards leveraging modern technologies presents an opportunity to bridge

the transactional distance gap and enhance educational access and flexibility. To enhance the academic writing skills of students, the ENG101 lecturers implemented a pedagogical approach whereby digital multimedia files, including podcasts and vodcasts, were uploaded on the ENG101 Moodle learning management system (LMS) site. While students were provided with the option to utilize their prescribed texts and study guide, the utilization of podcasts and vodcasts emerged as a significantly preferred choice. These supplemental tools facilitated an enriched learning experience, allowing students to engage with the module content dynamically and interactively, thereby promoting a deeper understanding and application of academic writing principles. The application of the TTD enables the researcher to explore the complexities of reducing the transactional and communication gap that exists between students and lecturers in distance HEIs. This framework offers a comprehensive lens through which factors such as the accessibility and comprehensibility of supplemental tools, namely podcasts and vodcasts, employed within the ODeL institution can be examined. By utilizing the TTD, the researcher can assess the extent to which students had sufficient access to supplementary resources and their ability to grasp the concepts conveyed through these tools. Furthermore, the framework facilitates an evaluation of the ease with which the ENG101 students could navigate and comprehend the supplemental tools, shedding light on their effectiveness in bridging the gap. Ultimately, the application of the TTD in this context provides a structured and rigorous approach to investigating the impact of supplemental tools on reducing transactional distance, with the potential to yield valuable insights and enhancements in the development of academic writing skills within distance HEIs.

The TTD serves as an appropriate and relevant framework for the present study, as it establishes a foundation and framework for engaging with DE students in an educational context. Furthermore, this framework provides valuable guidance in navigating the intricate process of implementing supplemental tools, specifically academic writing interventions such as podcasts and vodcasts, and facilitating the retrieval and assessment of marked and moderated scripts. Given the unique challenges faced by first-year EAL students in a distance university like Unix, who may still be accustomed to traditional face-to-face tutoring, the transition to online instruction can present significant disruptions to teaching and learning. However, Moore's (1997) TTD proves indispensable in addressing and managing the complexities of teaching and learning in a DE environment. By enabling interaction

between lecturers and students through various communication media, such as podcasts and vodcasts, the framework effectively bridges the physical distance, thereby facilitating meaningful engagement and collaborative learning experiences. Figure 3.1 below represents the TTD:
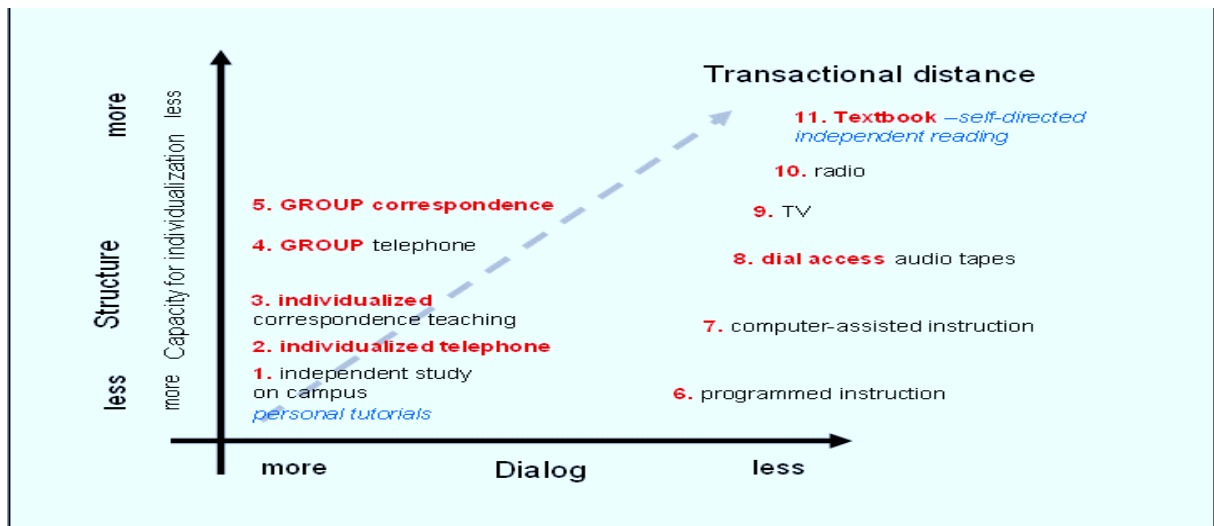
Figure 3.1: Typical TTD learning scenario (Bornt, 2011:01)

Moore's (1997) framework comprises three variables: instructional dialogue, programme structure and learner autonomy. Figure 3.2 below represents Moore's (1997) three variables.
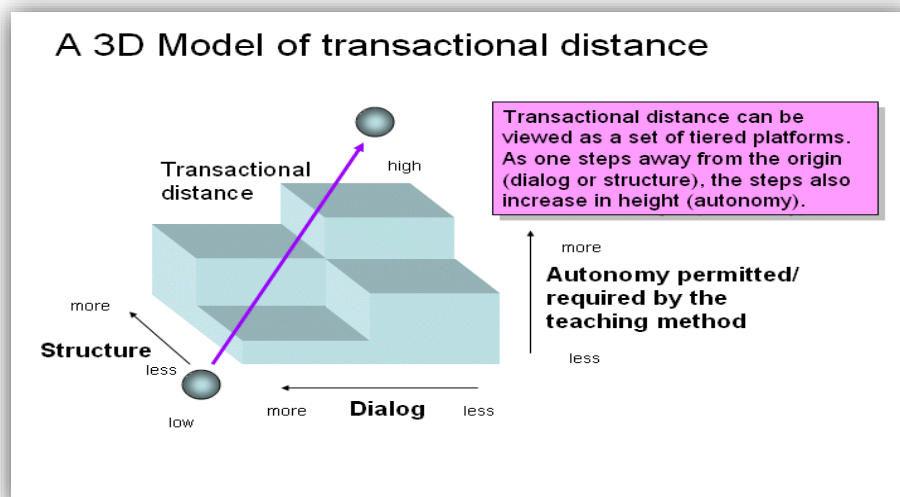
Figure 3.2: Overview 3D of TTD (Bornt, 2011:01)

Instructional dialogue encompasses a series of interactions characterized by positive qualities, wherein each participant actively listens, contributes, and builds upon the contributions of the other person. According to Charles and DeFabiis (2021) and Giossos et al. (2009), dialogue extends beyond mere two-way communication and encompasses various forms of interaction within the framework of well-defined educational objectives, teacher cooperation, and understanding, ultimately resulting in the resolution of students' challenges. As the level of instructional dialogue intensifies, the corresponding reduction in transactional distance becomes more pronounced. Instructional dialogue, although it can have negative aspects, emphasizes the synergistic relationship between the parties involved. The purpose of this dialogue is to enhance the student's understanding, and its direction is driven by this intentional objective. In the context of the ENG101 module, the lecturers implemented a strategy to foster instructional dialogue by integrating podcasts and vodcasts into their teaching methodology. These tools were aimed at streamlining the module content, presenting it in a simplified and concise manner that prioritized essential points. Alongside these supplemental tools, virtual classes and tutorial letters remained integral components of the learning experience. Exploring the impact of implementing podcasts and vodcasts into the ENG101 module on transactional distance provides a captivating opportunity for analysis.

Moore's second variable of transactional distance pertains to the concept of program structure. Program structure encompasses the fundamental components within the module design, specifically the way the teaching program is organized and disseminated through diverse communication media. In the context of the ENG101 module, the lecturers initially introduced podcasts as a supplementary pedagogical tool. However, they soon discerned that this approach was only conducive to a limited array of learning styles. To overcome this constraint and facilitate a more comprehensive learning experience, the lecturers decided to incorporate vodcasts. Careful consideration was given to the design of the module content in both the podcasts and vodcasts to ensure mutual reinforcement and foster a cohesive and well-rounded grasp of the subject matter. Furthermore, recognizing the significance of cultivating academic writing proficiency for student achievement, podcasts and vodcasts integrated guidance on various strategies for academic writing. The implementation of podcasts and vodcasts within the ENG101 Academic Writing module holds the potential to enhance pass rates and promote higher student

retention (Dolasinski & Reynolds, 2023; Eynon & Gambino, 2023; Sofi-Karim, Bali, & Rached, 2023; Winkelmes, Boye, & Tapp, 2023). Through the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts into their instructional approach, coupled with a deliberate emphasis on academic writing strategies, the lecturers sought to cater to the diverse learning requirements of their students. This multifaceted approach furnished students with multiple pathways to access and engage with module materials, accommodating distinct learning preferences and promoting a more inclusive educational milieu. The incorporation of these supplementary tools and the emphasis on academic writing strategies yielded a more comprehensive learning experience for ENG101 students, thereby promoting their overall triumph and persistence in the module. Notably, programme structures assume a pivotal role in shaping the educational encounter by delineating the degree of rigidity or flexibility in educational objectives, teaching methodologies, and assessment modalities. Rigidity within a programme structure denotes a standardized and fixed approach, characterized by predetermined objectives, teaching methods, and evaluation criteria with limited room for adaptation. Conversely, a flexible programme structure affords greater adaptability, accommodating diverse educational objectives, innovative teaching strategies, and varied evaluation approaches. The choice between rigidity and flexibility in programme structures hinges upon various factors, such as the nature of the subject matter, desired learning outcomes, and target audience. Striking an appropriate equilibrium is imperative to establish an effective and captivating educational milieu that satisfies the needs of students while aligning with the overarching goals and objectives of the programme.

Student autonomy, as the third variable, pertains to the degree to which students, rather than lecturers, assume responsibility for setting goals, determining learning experiences, and making evaluation decisions within the learning program. Batita and Cheng (2022) and Giossos et al. (2009) posit that student autonomy is contingent upon the preceding variables, namely instructional dialogue, and program structure, as it encompasses both a sense of independence and interdependence perceived by students during their module engagement. Student autonomy is closely intertwined with a student's self-direction and self-determination, which can be significantly influenced by the nature of dialogue, the level of rigidity or flexibility inherent in module design and delivery, and the extent to which students exert control over the learning process (Giossos et al., 2009). This concept, as discussed by Moore (1972),

emphasizes the importance of students taking ownership of their educational development.

According to Garrison (2000:3), Moore's TTD "is invaluable in guiding the complex practice of a rational process such as teaching and learning at a distance", while Jung (2001:527) comments that it "provides a useful conceptual framework for defining and understanding DE in general". In distance HEIs like Unix, lecturers must adopt a pragmatic framework that serves as a foundation for accessing the module's content and facilitates a comprehensive conceptual understanding of DE and the challenges it entails. By integrating relevant frameworks, lecturers can provide students with a solid foundation for comprehending the complexities and nuances of DE. These frameworks serve as guiding principles that shed light on various aspects, such as transactional dialogue, learner autonomy, and instructional design, that are integral to the distance learning context. Through the application of these frameworks, lecturers can navigate the unique challenges and dynamics inherent in DE, ensuring that students grasp the underlying concepts and principles effectively. Moreover, the use of frameworks facilitates critical thinking, as students can analyse and evaluate the DE landscape from multiple perspectives.

Moore's (1997) framework is relevant and appropriate to the current study as it proposes that the critical distance in DE is transactional and not spatial; secondly, because teaching and learning at Unix is characterised by a limited number of face-to-face interactions. The absence of face-to-face interaction in DE poses significant challenges for students, especially those accustomed to physical engagement with their lecturers. This absence results in a detrimental impact on the learning experience, as students lack immediate access to ask questions or seek clarifications in real time. This limitation is particularly pronounced for South African students, as many schools in the country heavily rely on face-to-face interactions as the primary mode of instruction. The geographical separation compounds these challenges, as students may struggle to adapt to the shift from physical to virtual interactions. Moreover, in the context of South Africa as a developing country, the already existing obstacles are further exacerbated by a lack of reliable internet connectivity and access to up-to-date technologies. This digital divide hampers the effectiveness of online learning, hindering students' abilities to fully engage with educational resources and participate in virtual classrooms. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from educational institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders to bridge the

digital divide and provide the necessary infrastructure and support to ensure equitable access to quality DE for students in South Africa. However, online, or virtual communication through the MyModules platform allows transactional dialogue and [21]podcasts, emails queries, discussion forums and the correction of written assignments and final written exams); lastly, because the framework helps to quantify and qualify the quality of the delivery applied to teaching and learning. helps to quantify and qualify the quality of the delivery applied to teaching and learning.

The TTD is appropriate for framing the current study as it aims to bridge the distance gap in the academic support and teaching and learning of Unix students. Online learning may create feelings of isolation and intensify the delivery challenges of digital content material. The TTD frames the study by creating effective interaction spaces between the research participants and the researcher. Transactional distance promotes successful online learning and may be complemented by a CoI framework as it addresses issues of collaborative learning through meaningful interaction for ODeL institutions such as Unix.

3.3 Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant disruptions to the landscape of traditional learning which prompted numerous HEIs to swiftly transition to online learning as an alternative mode of instruction. However, the adoption of online learning methodologies presents distinct challenges that necessitate careful consideration. These challenges encompass student isolation, issues concerning accessibility, and a higher risk of student dropout stemming from limited interaction and engagement opportunities (Fiock, 2020; Seaman et al., 2018). The aforementioned factors have garnered attention as significant concerns in the context of online learning. According to Martin, Wu and Xie (2022), Chen et al. (2019), Galikyan and Admiraal (2019), and Caskurlu et al. (2020), it is essential for distance HEIs to incorporate Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) four elements [cognitive presence, social presence, teaching presence and learner presence]. Shea and Bidjerano (2010) posit that in online teaching and learning methodologies, lecturers possess the capacity to ameliorate sensations of isolation and alleviate the prevailing

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[21] MyModules refers to discussion forums where lecturers -to student and student to student meet for academic support purposes, discussions, and exchange of information.

sense of distance among students. Like numerous universities globally, Unix also encountered formidable challenges during the pandemic. Even though the ENG101 module operates within an ODeL institution, it became imperative to fortify online platforms. To accommodate diverse learning style preferences, a shift from solely utilizing podcast materials to incorporating vodcasts, enabling audio-visual learning experiences, was deemed essential for the ENG101 lecturers. This adaptation aimed to enhance instructional delivery and provide students with a more comprehensive educational experience. Within the context of online learning, the CoI framework by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) holds substantial significance, as it facilitates a collaborative and interactive environment between the ENG101 lecturers and students, students and students and students and their module content. This concept underscores the value of promoting a sense of community, engagement, and active participation among participants in the online learning setting. By nurturing a CoI, lecturers can cultivate an environment conducive to meaningful dialogue, critical thinking, and knowledge construction, thereby enriching the overall learning experience for all stakeholders involved.

The CoI framework, formulated by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), establishes a framework that encompasses four distinct elements, namely cognitive presence, social presence, teaching presence and learner presence by Shea and Bidjerano (2010) These components collectively contribute to the establishment and maintenance of an effective online learning environment. Below see the characteristics and definitions of each element elucidating their respective roles and significance within the CoI framework below:

Table 3.1: CoI coding template (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000:89)

Elements	Categories	Indicators
(a) Cognitive presence	• Triggering Event • Exploration • Integration • Resolution	• Sense of puzzlement • Information exchange • Connecting ideas • Apply new ideas
(b) Social presence	• Emotional Expression • Open Communication • Group Cohesion	• Emotions • Risk-free expression • Encouraging collaboration

(c) Teaching presence	• Instructional Management	• Defining and initiating discussion topics
	• Building Understanding	• Sharing personal meaning
	• Direct Instruction	• Focusing discussion

The CoI framework served as a valuable support system for facilitating successful online learning experiences among first-year students enrolled in ODeL contexts within HEIs such as the ENG101 students. The primary objective of this approach is to foster deep learning and higher-order thinking skills by promoting interactive engagement and cultivating a conducive climate for discourse in the online learning environment. The CoI framework operates as a regulatory mechanism, overseeing and optimizing the process of online learning by adhering to established academic standards and encouraging collaboration among students. It clarifies the mechanisms through which effective online learning transpires within the context of small student groups, emphasizing the significance of educational experiences and the interplay of cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. Given that students in Unix are immersed in an ODeL environment, they may encounter challenges associated with self-directed learning, further highlighting the relevance and potential benefits of the CoI framework in supporting their educational journey. However, CoI provides Unix, ENG101 students with a unique opportunity to promote a positive online distance learning experience by encompassing the interconnected dimensions of social, cognitive, and teaching presence. In the context of the present study, the CoI framework is closely associated with the second research question, which investigates the challenges experienced by students when accessing the ENG101 podcasts and vodcasts. Through an exploration of cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence, a comprehensive understanding of the encountered challenges can be obtained, particularly concerning the implementation of the CoI framework.

Cognitive presence directs attention to students' cognitive engagement and critical thinking skills, illuminating their active participation and intellectual involvement in the learning process. In addition, cognitive presence focuses on higher-order thinking through collaboration, peer facilitation, and constructing meaning through critical reflection and discourse and is defined as exploration, construction, resolution, and

confirmation of understanding through collaboration and reflection in a Community of Inquiry (Chen et al., 2019; Galikyan & Admiraal, 2019; Garrison, 2007; Fiock, 2020).

Social presence, on the other hand, pertains to interpersonal interactions and the development of a cohesive online community, ensuring a sense of belonging and shared learning experiences. Social presence is multidimensional and includes affective expression, open communication, and group cohesion (Martin, Wu, Wan, Xie, 2022). Additionally, it has a connection to teaching and learning element tools and supports cognitive engagement in online modules (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, et al., 2010; Xie & Ke, 2011; Xie et al., 2017).

Lastly, teaching presence encompasses the design, facilitation, and support provided by lecturers, aiming to guide and enrich students' educational journey. It focuses on instructor interactions with students (Anderson et al.,2001; Martin, Wu, Wan, Xie, 2022). Additionally, primary studies have found a positive relationship between teaching presence, and student perceived learning (Arbaugh, 2008; Kranzow, 2013; Shea et al., 2005). Shea and Bidjerano (2010) expanded the existing framework proposed by Garrison et al. (2000) by introducing the concept of the fourth presence, known as learner presence. Learner presence encompasses elements of self-efficacy, active participation, and self-regulation within an online environment (Bonk & Heo, 2023; Stephen, Rockinson-Szapkiw, & Dubay, 2020). Essentially, learner presence plays a vital role in facilitating online learning in an ODeL institution. By comprehensively examining the complexities and interplay among these four forms of presence, valuable insights can be gained regarding the barriers and intricacies encountered in the implementation of the CoI approach, particularly in the context of accessing podcasts and vodcasts. Such insights enable lecturers to develop effective strategies to overcome these challenges, ultimately promoting a more meaningful and productive online learning environment for students.

Considering the aforesaid statements, it is important to acknowledge that first-year students enrolled in the Academic Writing module (ENG101) can be viewed as a community of practice, encompassing individuals with relevant experiences and valuable data regarding the challenges encountered when accessing podcasts and vodcasts. Given that the predominant mode of information exchange, collaboration, and focused discussion occurs online, the CoI framework was particularly appropriate for the present study. The CoI framework comprises four interrelated elements: social

presence, cognitive presence, teaching presence and learner presence. These elements align with essential educational purposes and practices, including but not limited to risk-free expression, shared meaning, collaboration, building understanding, exploration, and integration. By leveraging the CoI framework, lecturers can forge an environment that facilitates these vital educational processes, thereby promoting effective learning outcomes within the online context. The CoI framework offered a valuable lens through which to investigate and address the challenges experienced by first-year students accessing podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101. By recognizing the community of practice nature of the student cohort, as well as the interplay between social, cognitive, teaching, and emotional presences, the researcher was able to gain deeper insights into the nuances of the learning experience and implement strategies that enhance the overall effectiveness of the online learning environment. Figure 3.3 below illustrates the CoI:
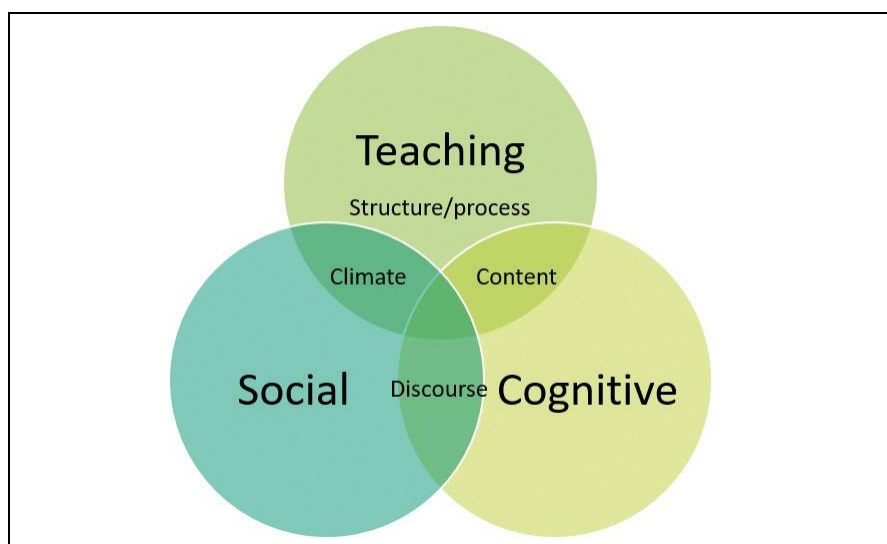
Figure 3.3: CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2000:88)

It is worth noting that Shea and Bidjerano (2010) introduced the concept of the fourth presence, known as learner presence, to the existing framework proposed by Garrison et al. (2000). The four interdependent elements delineated above encapsulate key facets such as meaning-sharing, self-efficacy, academic exploration, and intellectual enrichment. However, Shea and Bidjerano (2010) examined the CoI framework by Garrison, Anderson, & Archer (2000) and suggested that the CoI framework be enhanced through a fuller articulation of the roles of online learners and incorporated the fourth presence [learner presence]. According to Shea and Bidjerano (2010), a positive relationship exists between elements of the CoI framework and between

elements of a nascent theoretical construct that they label "learning presence". Learning presence represents elements such as self-efficacy as well as other cognitive, behavioural, and motivational constructs supportive of online learner self-regulation (Chen & Hwang, 2019; Doo, Bonk & Heo, 2023; Stephen, Rockinson-Szapkiw, & Dubay, 2020). Active participation by online learners can significantly enhance the understanding of knowledge construction in technology-mediated environments, thereby augmenting the descriptive and explanatory capabilities of the CoI framework. This contribution is reflected in the concept of learning presence, which encompasses self-efficacy, self-regulation, and the development of communities of inquiry within online and blended learning environments. Figure 3.4 below illustrates the revised CoI framework including "learner presence":
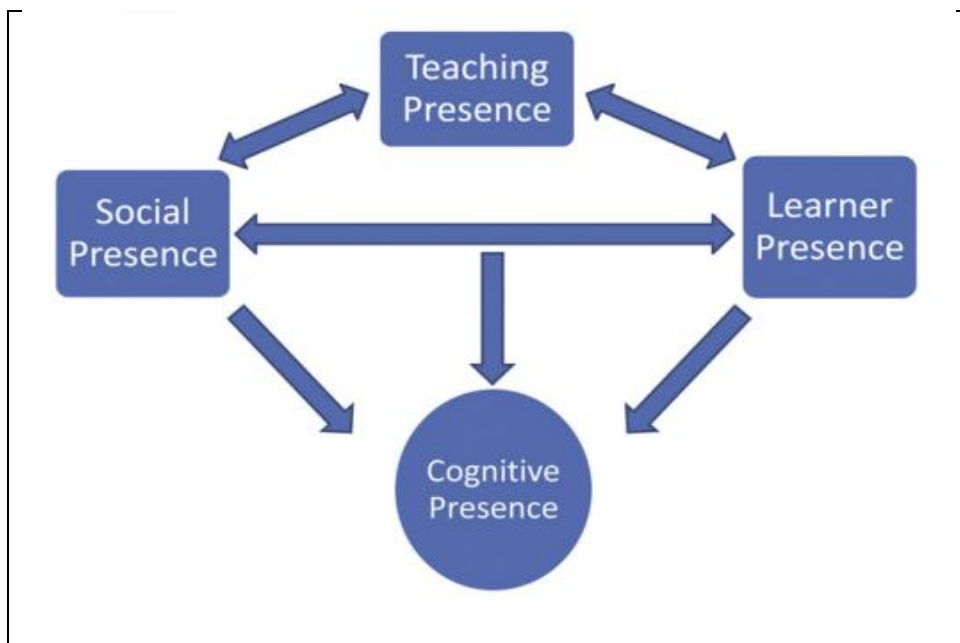
Figure 3.4: CoI including 'learner presence' (Shea & Bidjerano, 2010: 1727)

The fundamental assumption of CoI is that learning can be accomplished over the collaboration of the four interrelated elements. Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) and Shea and Bidjerano (2010:1727) concur that the difference between facilitation and direction also must be clear from a design perspective. The researcher agrees with the aforesaid statement as the clarity of instructions plays a crucial role in promoting a deeper understanding of the module's content and promoting student engagement. When instructions are clear and well-defined, students are better equipped to grasp the objectives and requirements of the learning materials. This clarity enables them to approach the content with confidence and a sense of direction (Corbett, 2022;

Kukulska-Hulme, 2022; Nussli, Oh, & Davis, 2022; Rapanta et al., 2020). Additionally, clear instructions reduce ambiguity and confusion, allowing students to focus their energy on comprehending the subject matter rather than deciphering what is expected of them (Bens, 2022; Cate, Ward, & Ford, 2022; Khair, & Misnawati, 2022; Reimer, 2022). Moreover, explicit instructions facilitate active engagement by providing a framework for meaningful participation and interaction (Brown, 2022; Hayashi, 2022; Roman et al., 2022; von Gillern, Gleason, & Hutchison, 2022). By emphasizing the importance of clarity in instruction, lecturers can create an optimal learning environment that enhances comprehension, encourages active involvement, and supports students in achieving their learning goals. Teaching presence must contemplate the dual role of both moderating and shaping the direction of the discourse (Horn & Garner, 2022; Shea, Richardson, & Swan, 2022; Trischler, & Li-Ying, 2023; Zhao & Sullivan, 2017). Both teacher presence and student participation are necessary for a successful CoI approach. Majeski et al. (2018), Richardson et al. (2017) and Caskurlu et al. (2020) articulate that the CoI framework ascertains elements that are essential to a successful learning experience. All four elements intersect to purposefully strengthen each other.

The CoI framework is highly applicable to the present study as it encompasses an integrated approach to teaching and learning, which is particularly desirable for DE. Additionally, conducting document analysis of marked and moderated assignments and exam scripts will offer a comprehensive perspective in capturing the essential aspects of the phenomena under investigation. Majeski et al. (2018) assert that the CoI framework provides a comprehensive and explicit approach to teaching and learning, offering a true reflection of the challenges encountered by students clearly and coherently. Furthermore, the CoI framework aligns with the TTD as they complement and mutually reinforce one another. Both frameworks advocate for higher-order thinking, deep learning, meaningful interaction, collaborative learning in ODeL contexts, and the application of knowledge to real-world contexts, culminating in meaningful reflection. By embracing these frameworks' perspectives, lecturers can create an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning practices in the DE context.

3.4 Merging the TTD and CoI Framework

Within the context of ENG101, an Academic Writing module situated in an ODeL institution in South Africa, first-year EAL students encounter a multitude of challenges that impede their learning journey. These challenges encompass a sense of isolation, limited opportunities for meaningful interaction and collaborative learning, unfamiliarity with technological tools, technical disruptions, and inadequate access to data resources (Chokwe, 2022; Lasagabaster, 2022; Manashe, 2022). This confluence of obstacles accentuates the transactional distance experienced by students (D'Cruz, 2022; Krishnannair, 2022; Nyns & Schmitz, 2022), resulting in feelings of desolation and a pervasive sense of being adrift in a state of uncertainty (Al-Maskari, Al-Riyami, & Kunjumuhammed, 2022; Jandrić, 2021; Siles, 2022). Furthermore, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly amplified the prevailing sense of isolation among students, as stringent restrictions were implemented to curb the spread of the virus. Moreover, South Africa grappled with the challenge of load shedding, further exacerbating the disruption of online activities in HEIs, and hindering effective communication across various sectors, including education.

In addition to the challenges, first-year students in HEIs encounter significant difficulties in Academic Writing (Gosai, Tuibeqa & Prasad, 2023; Noman, Kaur, Mullick & Ran, 2023; Tsang, 2023). Extensive scholarly research, both past and current, highlights an array of challenges faced by students in Academic Writing modules. These challenges encompass aspects such as referencing, argumentation, paragraphing (including topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences), voice, and adherence to grammatical conventions (AlMarwani, 2020; Aripin & Rahmat, 2021; Lea & Street, 2006; Pineteh, 2014, Zeiger, 2021). Moreover, many South African students who hail from under-resourced and previously disadvantaged high schools experience challenges in expressing themselves effectively through writing. This issue is particularly pronounced among EAL students, posing a substantial hurdle for South African students in HEIs (Boughey & McKenna, 2016; Leibowitz, 2004).

Researchers including Alostath (2021), Demirçivi (2020), and Rabadi and Rabadi (2020), have highlighted that many first-year students possess misconceptions about the nature of academic writing. This lack of understanding becomes a significant obstacle as students grapple with challenges related to grammar, voice, coherence and cohesion, paragraphing, citation, and overall linguistic competence. The transition to distance learning further exacerbates the academic writing challenges faced by first-

year students, as they may not be accustomed to the self-study and self-efficacy required in such learning environments.

Given the aforesaid students' challenges, it became imperative for the current study to address the pressing issues by reducing transactional distance, as well as feelings of isolation and despair, experienced by ENG101 students. To tackle these challenges effectively, it was essential to integrate two prominent frameworks: TTD introduced by Moore (1972) and the CoI framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). This approach finds support in the work of Makina (2020) conducted at Unisa. Makina (2020) emphasizes the significance of providing lecturers with practical guidance to enhance their abilities to support students effectively. Furthermore, it is crucial to leverage digital technologies across diverse platforms to promote student engagement and cater to the specific needs of first-year students. This assertion aligns with the findings of Bergdahl, Nouri, Fors, and Knutsson (2020), Dalgarno (2014), and Raes et al. (2020), emphasizing the importance of utilizing digital tools for instructional purposes and enhancing student learning experiences.

The TTD by Moore (1972) and the CoI framework as discussed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) complement each other. Moore's (1972) TTD was essential in the current study as it provides a conceptual framework to analyse and understand the psychological and communication gaps that occur in DE. It further allows researchers to examine the factors influencing student engagement, interaction, and learning outcomes in distance learning environments. Additionally, researchers can develop strategies to reduce the perceived distance and enhance the effectiveness of DE programs. The CoI framework demonstrates its adaptability to the evolving needs of modern learning environments. This framework serves the purpose of defining, describing, and evaluating data associated with digital learning communities. By employing this framework, not only are the underlying processes identified, but also the essential behaviours necessary for constructing knowledge in digital settings through the four dimensions of presence. Members of a CoI engage in dynamic interactions that encourage critical thinking and facilitate the attainment of cognitive and learning objectives within the community (Akyol & Garrison, 2011; Sun, & Yang 2023; Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2019). Through collaborative efforts and meaningful interactions, the construction of new knowledge is facilitated. In addition, the inclusion of the CoI framework may assist in reducing transactional distance as interactions are achieved through the intricate interplay of the four key elements of the

CoI framework, which, with the mediation of technological tools, contribute to the creation of an enriching educational experience.

The integration of the TTD and CoI frameworks represents a significant fusion of influential frameworks in the domain of online and DE. This integration aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the complex factors that impact the effectiveness of academic writing in online and distance learning contexts. It highlights the importance of providing transactional support and promoting social, cognitive, teacher and learner engagement within a collaborative learning community. In essence, meeting the needs of ENG101 students in Academic Writing necessitated interactive online engagement collaboratively, aiming to alleviate feelings of isolation and discouragement within the context of distance institutions such as Unix. This goal was accomplished by ensuring the active presence of lecturers in the teaching and learning process. Through their guidance, support, and active participation, a sense of connection and assistance was nurtured among students struggling with academic writing challenges.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, an overview of the framework informing the study is presented, comprising the TTD as discussed by Moore (1972) and the CoI framework developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000). The TTD posits that distance learning settings may engender communication gaps and feelings of isolation. However, these gaps can be bridged using supplementary tools such as podcasts and vodcasts, which help minimize instructional and communicative barriers. On the other hand, the CoI framework promotes deep learning through interactive engagement facilitated by four key types of presence: cognitive presence, social presence, teaching presence and learner presence. In the context of DE, students enrolled in remote programs often require additional resources and tools to enrich their academic experience. By merging these framework perspectives, the researcher aimed to gain a better understanding of the unique difficulties faced by students and the potential ways to address them. The subsequent chapter, Chapter 4, discussed qualitative action research study. It employs three qualitative research instruments, namely online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis, to gather and interpret data. These methods allowed for a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon

under investigation, providing valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants in the study.

CHAPTER 4

Enhancing academic writing skills through a qualitative action research approach

"Podcasting might be thought of as a form of academic gift"

-Les Back

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 explored a comprehensive examination of two key frameworks that underpin the present study: the TTD framework, as introduced by Moore (1972), and the Col framework as discussed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000). These frameworks provide valuable conceptual lenses through which to analyse and interpret the research findings, shedding light on the dynamics of DE, learner engagement, and the cultivation of meaningful online learning communities. By drawing upon these frameworks, the study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and advance our understanding of effective online teaching and learning practices. The TTD posits that the nature of distance learning can give rise to communication gaps and a sense of isolation among learners. Nonetheless, the detrimental effects of instructional and communicative gaps can be mitigated through the strategic incorporation of supplementary resources, such as podcasts and vodcasts. By leveraging these tools, students can engage with audio and visual content, thereby bridging the transactional distance and enhancing their overall learning experience. The Col framework offers a pathway toward promoting deep learning through interactive and collaborative engagement, facilitated by four interconnected forms of presence: cognitive presence, social presence, learner presence, and teaching presence. Both the Col and transactional distance theories play a pivotal role in the current study, providing a solid framework foundation for comprehending and enhancing the online learning experiences of first-year students in ODeL HEIs. Moreover, to cultivate meaningful interactions and promote favourable learning

outcomes, ENG101 lecturers can design module content that specifically caters to the academic writing needs of first-year students. By integrating accessible supplemental tools such as podcasts and vodcasts, the instructional gap can be minimized, and students can acquire enriched academic writing skills.

Chapter 4 presents a comprehensive account of the methodological framework employed in the current study. Notably, the study adopts a qualitative research approach, which proves instrumental in providing valuable insights into subjective experiences, social processes, and contextual factors, thereby augmenting, and broadening our comprehension of the surrounding world. Moreover, a qualitative research approach enables researchers to explore complex phenomena in great depth, facilitating a profound understanding of the subject matter. The methodological advantages of qualitative research, including its flexibility in data collection methods and emphasis on participant voices and perspectives, further support its appropriateness for this study. The chapter is organized as follows:

- Positionality and identity as a researcher

- Research approach - Qualitative

- Research design - An action research study

- Research paradigm - Interpretive paradigm

- Population

- Sample and sampling

- Data collection instruments - online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, document analysis schedule

- Research procedures

- Research trustworthiness

- Data analysis framework

- Ethical considerations

Chapter 4 discusses qualitative research action research that employs three qualitative research instruments; namely, online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis, for data collection and interpretation purposes. These instruments are deemed suitable as they facilitate the acquisition of information and opinions from students regarding their perceptions and challenges in

utilizing podcasts and vodcasts to enhance their academic writing skills. The online open-ended evaluation questions were designed to address the first research question, about the students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101. The focus group discussions addressed the second research question, exploring the challenges students encounter when accessing these audio-visual resources. Lastly, document analysis was employed to address the third research question, examining how the utilization of podcasts and vodcasts contributes to the enhancement of students' academic writing skills in ENG101. Figure 4.1 below provides a visual presentation of the methodology used in the study:

Figure 4.1: The research methodology used in the study

Figure 4.1 visually presents Chapter 4. The first section of Chapter 4 centres on the researcher's positionality and identity within the study. This section elucidates how the researcher's positionality and identity are informed by the study's contextual framework. By elucidating these aspects, readers are provided with a deeper comprehension of the underlying motives and justifications that underpin the subsequent sections of the chapter.

4.2 Positionality and identity as a researcher

Massoud (2022) defines positionality as the conscious recognition and disclosure of the researcher's own social, class, cultural, and personal identities, experiences, and privileges that have the potential to influence the research process and outcomes. Incorporating a statement of positionality within a research article serves to augment the robustness and trustworthiness of the empirical data and strengthens the theoretical contribution of the study. By acknowledging and transparently addressing the potential biases and perspectives stemming from the researcher's identity, the researcher firmly promotes transparency and allows readers to critically engage with the study's findings considering the researcher's position and potential influence. Presently, I hold a position as a lecturer at Unix. Unix functions as a reputable ODeL institution and not a face-to-face university, accommodating a diverse student body from across the globe. For more information on the diverse student body enrolled in the ENG101 module at Unix, please refer to Section 1.2, page 7. To ensure effective engagement with academic materials and foster academic progress, enrolment in an Academic Writing module is compulsory for numerous first-year students. Moreover, Unix provides an invaluable platform for researchers to explore the perceptions and difficulties that students face regarding academic writing, particularly from the standpoint of remote HEIs.

Prior to joining Unix, the researcher served as a junior lecturer at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), where I completed my master's degree titled 'Higher order thinking verbs in academic literacy: a study of third-year students at a University of Technology in Pretoria'. Notably, the findings of my master's degree study revealed

that a significant majority of participants, approximately 90%, encountered difficulties comprehending the terminology employed in questioning, particularly higher-order thinking verbs such as 'discuss,' 'critique,' 'analyse,' and 'synthesise' (Mohale, 2014). Moreover, it became evident that students' critical thinking skills were not adequately developed during their first year, hindering their ability to engage with higher-order thinking verbs proficiently. Upon my arrival at Unix, a key aspect of my role and personal interest involved teaching academic writing skills to ENG101 first-year students. Through the process of marking and moderating the scripts of these students, I have observed persistent challenges relating to academic writing proficiency, effective application of subject content, and linguistic mastery. Alostath (2021) asserts that the task of academic writing presents a substantial hurdle and impediment for university students. The proliferation of challenges associated with academic writing necessitates immediate attention and intervention. Consequently, students enrolled in ENG101 (pseudonym) must acquire proficient academic writing skills to navigate subsequent levels and complete their university studies. To complement prescribed textbooks, such as TUT letter 501, feedforward letters, e-tutor support, email and telephonic inquiries, and collaborative engagement on the myModules Moodle site, ENG101 students may benefit from additional academic support. Empirical studies conducted by Papen and Thériault (2018) and Quynn and Stewart (2021) demonstrate the effectiveness and utility of academic writing interventions, such as writing retreats, for students in HEIs. Within the context of the present study, the provision of supplementary academic support emerges as a critical factor with significant potential for assisting first-year students.

The implementation of supplementary learning initiatives, specifically the integration of podcasts and vodcasts, could alleviate the academic writing challenges encountered by first-year students. By harnessing the potential of these technological tools, it is conceivable to enhance their writing abilities and cultivate a more effective learning atmosphere. As an ENG101 lecturer, I have adopted various strategies to ensure the integrity and trustworthiness of the investigation. By employing a triangulation approach, I utilize multiple data collection instruments, including online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis. This methodological choice facilitates validation and cross-referencing of findings, thereby minimizing the influence of any individual perspective. To uphold ethical

standards, informed consent was sought from participants, ensured confidentiality, and treated with respect and fairness. Furthermore, I remained mindful of bracketing personal perspectives during data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Transparent documentation and reporting of data was rigorously upheld, which ensured the impartial presentation of findings. Through these rigorous practices, I intended to maintain objectivity and mitigate any potential bias that may arise from my position or role as a lecturer.

4.3 Research approach

Aspers and Corte (2019) argue that a research approach is an iterative process. Through this process, the scientific community achieves an enhanced understanding by making new and significant distinctions, which emerge as they explored the phenomenon under study. This iterative approach allows researchers to progressively get closer to the essence of the subject matter, thereby advancing knowledge within the scientific community. Slevitch (2011) and Mohajan (2018) assert that the primary objective of employing the qualitative research method resides in the collection and interpretation of non-numeric data. This method is employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of various aspects, such as concepts, thoughts, and experiences, purposefully and systematically. By employing qualitative research, researchers strive to obtain genuine explanations of the phenomenon under investigation and subsequently analyse the data in a manner that aligns with this objective. According to Creswell (2009), Denzin and Lincoln (2002), Kandel (2020), and Mogalakwe (2006), the fundamental difference between qualitative and quantitative research are shown in Table 4.1 below:

Table: 4.1 Fundamental distinction between qualitative and quantitative research (Kandel, 2020:3)

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
• Naturalistic and uncontrolled observation.	• Controlled and obstructive observation.
• Subjective in nature, findings can be influenced by the researcher's attitude and interest.	• Objective in nature, no chance of influence by the researcher.

• Emphasis is on causes, meanings, interpretations, and implications.	• Emphasis is on precision in describing events, quantitative scores, management, and statistical and mathematical analysis.
• Conducted on a small scale, which means a small number of the population.	• Conducted on a larger scale i.e., a large number of the population.
• Focuses on words, behaviour, and natural setting.	• Focuses on numbers, meaning, and a controlled setting.
• Process and meaning oriented.	• Product and result oriented.
• Flexible and holistic.	• Rigid and specific.
• Discovery-oriented, and the approach is inductive.	• Verification-oriented, and the approach is deductive.
• Analysis proceeds by extracting themes or generalisations from evidence and organizing data to present a coherent and consistent picture.	• Analysis proceeds by using statistics, tables, charts, and analysis, to show the variables' relations to hypotheses.
• Examples: phenomenological, ethnographical, heuristic, case studies, historical studies, philosophical studies so on.	• Examples: experimental, quasi-experimental, surveys, co-relational studies so on.

Table 4.1 above provides a comprehensive overview of the fundamental differences existing between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Notably, one noteworthy distinction is that qualitative research emphasizes actual expression, human behaviour, and natural setting, thus prioritizing the examination of processes and meanings (Le et al., 2023; Savin-Baden, & Major,2023; Quitmann, 2023). Considering that the current study aims to explore first-year students' perceptions and challenges in using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance academic writing skills in an ODeL institution in South Africa, it becomes evident that the study seeks to explore the genuine meanings ascribed by participants within their natural context. Consequently, the current study adopted the qualitative research approach as it explores contextual underlying perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students in an ODeL context. Denzin and Lincoln (2002) maintain that qualitative research involves a naturalistic and interpretive approach. Qualitative investigators attempt to interpret and make sense of the matter under investigation in terms of meaning. The qualitative research methodology is suitable for the current study as Unix is a distance higher institution of learning and offers contextual realities for learning in a distance environment. Hammarberg, Kirkman, and Lacey (2016) argue that qualitative research

methods are reliable particularly when there is an adequate representation of the description of context and recognisable towards participants who share the experience.

The current study aims to gather qualitative data by exploring the perceptions and challenges of first-year students in their use of podcasts and vodcasts to enhance their academic writing skills. According to Creswell (2009), Denzin and Lincoln (2005), Levitt et al. (2017), Rahman (2017), and Strauss and Corbin (2008), a qualitative research approach is an explicit, disciplined, and systematic approach that explores meaning and insights of the phenomena. I used the qualitative approach for collecting data as it allows me to explore the research participants' real contextual experiences and realities in their natural setting. With an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts the ENG101 students will assist in the creation of guidelines that would support lecturers in their use of audio and visual media.

4.4 Research paradigm

According to Ganiyu (2021), Rehman and Alharthi (2016), Scotland, (2012), and Schwandt (2001), a paradigm can be defined as a fundamental set of common beliefs, systems, and framework that encompasses various assumptions regarding ontology methodology. Essentially, it represents a different approach to comprehending the true nature of reality and exploring it through study and analysis. A research paradigm has four different characteristics: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods. According to Richards (2003:33), ontology refers to "the nature of our beliefs about reality". Patton (2002: 134) "A singular, verifiable reality and truth [or] …. socially constructed multiple realities". Ontology refers to a philosophical discipline that is concerned with the study of reality. Adhering to an ontological belief system (explicitly or implicitly) guides one to certain epistemological assumptions. The second characteristic of a research paradigm is epistemology. Epistemology refers to "the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge and the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003:13). It is concerned with "the nature and forms [of knowledge], how it can be acquired and how communicated to other human beings" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007:7).

Epistemology seeks to understand the nature, limits, and validity of knowledge, and it plays a fundamental role in philosophy, science, and the study of how we understand and interacts with the world. Additionally, epistemology encompasses various theories and approaches, including rationalism, empiricism, scepticism, and pragmatism. The third characteristic of a research paradigm is a method. Research method refers to specific approaches or techniques employed to gather and analyse data, such as the utilization of questionnaires or conducting open-ended discussions. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the adoption of specific methods does not inherently imply or presuppose any underlying ontological or epistemological assumptions.

There are three research approaches: positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory. According to Hutchinson (1988), Gall et al. (2003), and Rehman and Alharthi (2016), positivism entails the foundational assumption that reality possesses an inherent existence beyond human perception. It posits that reality is not subject to sensory mediation and operates under unchanging laws. Positivists adopt a realist ontological stance, striving to comprehend the social world in a manner akin to the natural world. In nature, phenomena exhibit a cause-effect interrelation, and once discerned, they can be precisely forecasted in subsequent instances (Bieler & Morton, 2018; Jarvie, 2003; Lindberg, 2020). Positivists contend that an analogous approach can be applied to the social domain, wherein similar causal relationships govern the dynamics of human behaviour and social phenomena. The second research approach is interpretivism. Interpretivism is a "response to the over-dominance of positivism" (Grix, 2004: 82). Interpretivism rejects the notion that a single, verifiable reality exists independent of our senses. Interpretive ontology is anti-foundationalist. It refuses "to adopt any permanent, unvarying (or foundational) standards by which truth can be universally known" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005: 204). Contrasting positivism, interpretivism encompasses the perspective that multiple realities are socially constructed. According to interpretivists, truth and reality are products of human creation rather than objective discoveries. Given that our understanding of reality is invariably shaped by our sensory perceptions, it becomes implausible to ascertain reality in its unmediated form. Interpretive epistemology maintains subjectivity, as external reality remains inaccessible to observers without being inevitably influenced by their subjective worldviews, conceptual frameworks, personal backgrounds, and other relevant factors. The last research approach is critical thinking. According to Patton

(2002), the objective of critical educational research extends beyond the mere explication or comprehension of societal dynamics; it strives to effect transformative change within it. Rehman and Alharthi (2016) concur and maintain that critical ethnography serves the purpose of inquiring into and scrutinizing deeply ingrained assumptions about race, culture, gender, economy, politics, and other related aspects. Its primary goal is to foster a transformative awareness by challenging and critiquing these assumptions. In critical discourse analysis, researchers undertake investigations to examine how language is employed by individuals in positions of power to uphold and reinforce their authority.

While both the positivism paradigm and critical theory provide distinct advantages in terms of transformative awareness and uncovering inherent realities, it is the interpretive paradigm that proves to be particularly suitable for a qualitative study of this nature. The interpretive paradigm is highly suitable for the current study as it provides contextualised and multifaceted perspective derived from the ENG101 students. Thus, the interpretive paradigm offers participants with critical reflection on their experiences and facilitates thorough investigatory procedures, ultimately leading to the development of practical and effective solutions to the matter being investigated. With that said, the current study is firmly rooted within the interpretive paradigm, drawing on the insights of Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) as well as Khaldi (2017). The interpretive paradigm provides researchers with a means to achieve a profound comprehension of data by actively engaging with the experiences and perspectives within a specific social context and subsequently interpreting the acquired insights. Rather than aiming to offer a definitive, universally applicable viewpoint that disregards key factors and variables, interpretivism strives to embrace the richness of diverse perspectives (Saunders et al., 2012; Myers, 2008; Bhattacherjee, 2012). Furthermore, Mukherji and Albon (2015) alongside Hughes (2010) emphasize that research is inherently influenced by a particular epistemological framework through which scholars perceive and understand the world. Each researcher possesses a unique conceptualization of knowledge and truth (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). In the interpretive paradigm, as delineated by Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2011), researchers seek to comprehend reality by exploring the interpretations, personal backgrounds, and experiences of the participants, while positivists prioritize the influence of society on individuals and tend to favour quantitative research methods. Thanh and Thanh (2015)

assert that the interpretive paradigm allows researchers to interpret the world based on the experiences and perceptions of the participants involved.

The current study adopts an action research design, aligning with a qualitative research approach, to establish meaningful connections between these methodologies. This combined approach provides the researcher with the opportunity to explore and acquire authentic, real-life data from students in their natural educational setting, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions and challenges concerning the utilization of podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101. In pursuit of research objectives, the researcher, who subscribes to the interpretive paradigm, employs participants' experiences as a primary resource for interpretation and knowledge construction. Interpretivism, as a framework, supports researchers in their endeavour to explore and interpret the world based on individuals' subjective understandings. As Willis (2007) posits, interpretivism seeks to comprehend specific contexts and fundamental tenets of the interpretive paradigm, emphasizing that reality is socially constructed. In this study, the researcher actively engages in the process of comprehending the challenges and realities associated with the integration of podcasts and vodcasts in the enhancement of first-year students' academic writing skills within an ODeL context. Through the implementation of online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis, the researcher endeavours to gain insights into the perceptions and challenges faced by first-year students when utilizing podcasts and vodcasts as tools for enhancing their academic writing abilities. Interpretivist researchers aim to attain a profound understanding of a specific case by constructing subjective meanings that yield high-quality and reliable responses (Biggam, 2008; Easterby et al., 2008; Creswell, 2002).

4.5 Research Design

According to Creswell (2014) and Kerlinger (1986), a research design encompasses the comprehensive blueprint that establishes the connection between conceptual research problems and the practical [plan, structure, and strategy of investigation] execution of empirical research. It serves as an investigative framework that offers specific guidance for the implementation of research procedures. Figure 4.2 below summarises different research design types:
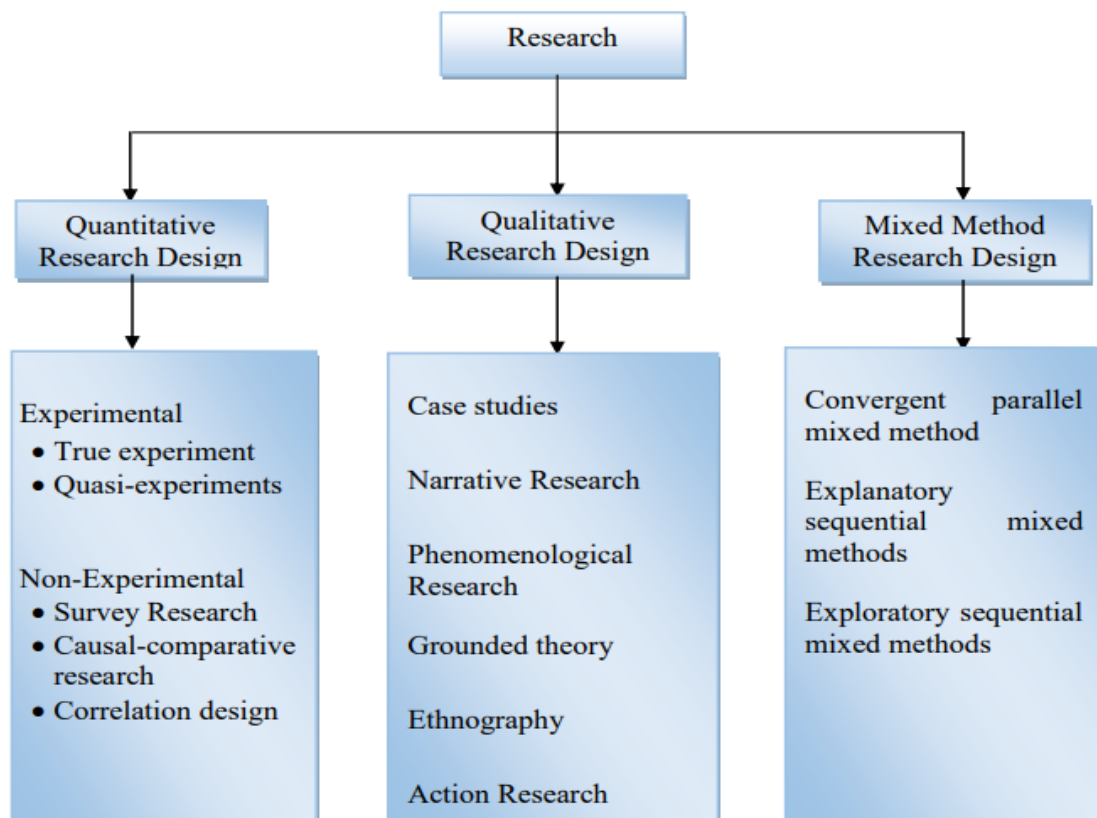
Figure 4.2: Summary form of research design types (Asenahabi, 2019:78)

The current study adopted an action research design. Action research, as outlined by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and Winter (1989), is a research methodology that involves participants engaging in self-reflective inquiry within social contexts. Its primary objective is to enhance the rationality and fairness of participants' social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which they occur. Furthermore, action research offers a framework for developing criteria to evaluate and articulate actions taken in educational settings. It aims to address the immediate concerns faced by students in problematic situations while contributing to the broader body of knowledge (Evered & Roger, 2022; Rapoport, 1970).

Earlier scholars have emphasized the benefits of action research, asserting that it enables lecturers to engage in systematic reflection on their pedagogical practices, continuously monitor students' learning progress, and evaluate the impact of their teaching approaches (Rawlinson & Little, 2004; Parker, 1997; Calhoun, 2002; Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Action research can be conducted by individuals or in collaborative

settings, with a primary focus on effecting positive change in practice, improving student outcomes, and empowering educators (Mills, 2017).

In line with a cycle of inquiry and reflection, action researchers engage in the collection and analysis of data about specific issues within educational practice. By positioning lecturers as scholars and producers of knowledge, action research brings about a transformative shift in the culture of contemporary school reform, countering efforts that diminish the professional status of teachers (Elliot, 1976; Kincheloe, 2003; McNiff, 2016). In the context of the current study, action research is an appropriate research design as it facilitates the advancement of first-year students' writing skills, promotes collaboration, and enhances teaching practices for the benefit of students. Action research involves the identification of problem areas, systematic data collection and organization, data interpretation, implementation of action, and reflective analysis of the entire process. These steps are depicted in Figure 4.3 below:
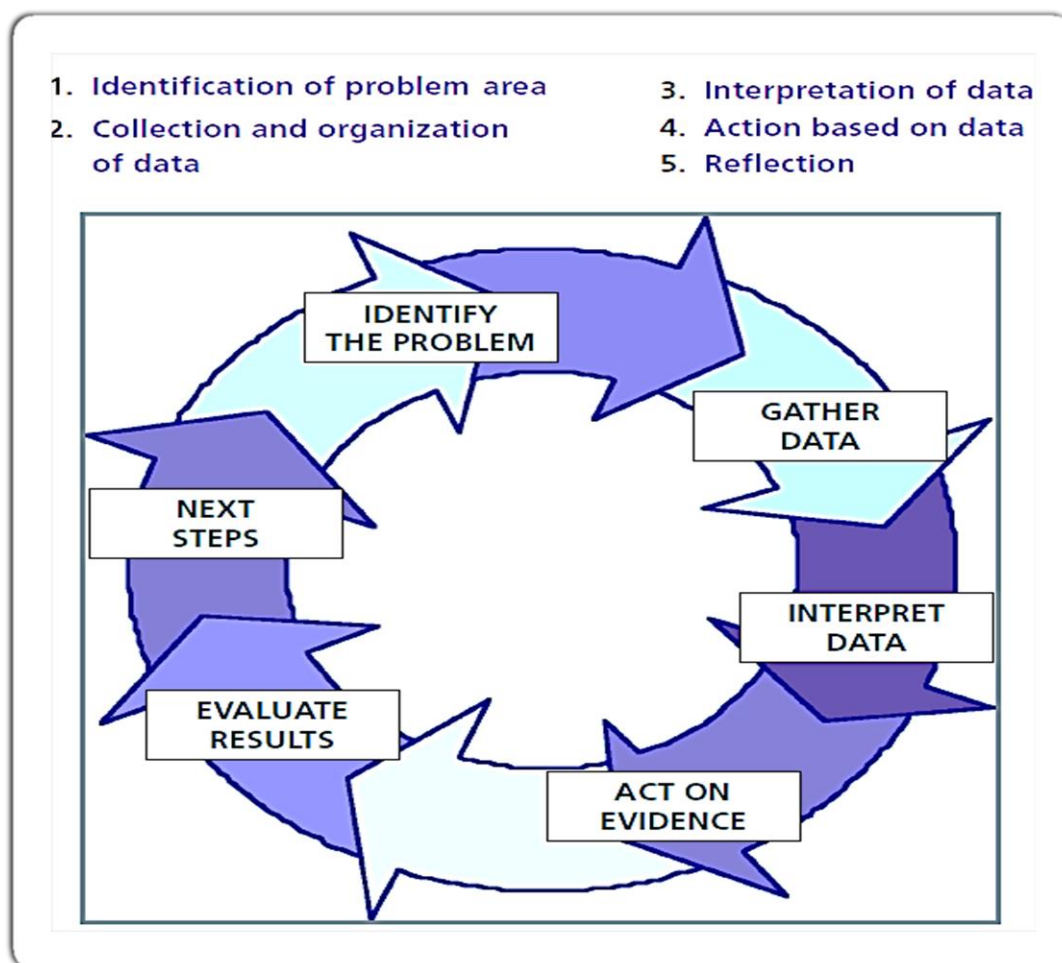
Figure 4.3: Steps in action research (Ferrance, 2009:9)

According to Manfra (2019), action research serves to revolutionize the prevailing paradigm of educational reform by prioritizing inquiry and placing lecturers at the forefront of research endeavours focused on practical implementation. By positioning lecturers as active learners, action research offers a systematic and intentional approach to transforming pedagogical practices. When engaged within a community of practice, action researchers partake in sustained professional learning activities, enabling them to explore issues encountered in everyday teaching and strive for positive and effective improvements. Furthermore, action research breaks down the barrier between research participants and researchers, promoting practical and critical transformations within communities. In qualitative research within distance HEIs, Lufungulo, Mambwe, and Kalinde (2021) assert that action research is highly regarded, as it encompasses problem identification, taking purposeful action, and systematically examining the outcomes of those actions. According to Beard, Dale, and Hutchins (2007), Gunbayi (2020), and Ivankova (2015), action research is associated with numerous advantages outweighing its disadvantages. The advantages include reliance on practice rather than theory, the establishment of direct connections between research and problem-solving, the reflective engagement of the researcher as a participant in both the action and the change process, the utilization of sequential and concurrent data collection methods similar to mixed methods research, and the incorporation of a wide range of data collection techniques encompassing both qualitative and quantitative approaches, thereby enhancing complementarity and triangulation of data. However, it is important to acknowledge the potential disadvantages of action research. These include the potential for an additional workload for practitioners due to their involvement in research activities, the limitation of research scope and scale resulting from the necessary participation of practitioners, and the challenge of establishing researcher objectivity within the context of action research (Ashworth, 2005; Research Zone, 2020; Zuber-Skerrit, & Fletcher, 2007). To mitigate the potential disadvantages associated with action research, the researcher in this study intends to address them by adhering to pre-determined research questions. This approach serves to prevent an excessive workload for researchers by providing clear guidance and structure. Furthermore, by strictly adhering to the research scope, the study aims to ensure a focused and manageable investigation. These strategies are employed to minimize the potential challenges and

limitations associated with action research, thereby optimizing the research process and outcomes.

Currently, the ENG101 lecturers employ the practice of posting podcasts and vodcasts and providing feedforward letters (assignment preparatory guidelines) prior to assignment deadlines or examinations to support students in their academic writing endeavours. Both multimedia formats will serve the purpose of disseminating relevant information and knowledge about academic writing, while also offering students the necessary tools and opportunities for reflection on their usage and experiences with these supplementary resources. Moreover, the study involves the analysis of students' written assignments (marked and moderated), exam answer scripts, and XMO (external moderation) results. This analysis aims to ascertain whether the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts as supplemental tools has led to improvements in addressing academic writing challenges faced by students. By examining the outcomes of this implementation, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of multimedia resources in enhancing students' academic writing abilities.

Action research proves to be highly advantageous for the current study as it aligns to acquire knowledge to enhance the academic writing skills of ENG101 students and find suitable solutions to address the identified challenges. By employing this research design, the researcher can engage in an exploratory investigation of students' perceptions and challenges regarding the utilization of podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module. Additionally, it facilitates an in-depth understanding of the contextual factors, conditions, and realities surrounding academic writing difficulties. Moreover, the incorporation of Moore's (1997) framework of the TTD and Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) CoI framework holds significant value within the action research approach. These theories serve as reliable and comprehensive guidelines for conducting research in a distance learning institution like Unix. They provide essential insights into establishing cognitive, social, and teaching and learning presence, regulating online learning environments, and creating a conducive climate for collaborative and discursive learning. By leveraging these frameworks, the action research process can facilitate meaningful engagement and foster deep learning experiences among students in distance HEIs.

4.6 Population

According to Mack et al. (2011) and Pilot and Hungler (1999), the concept of population holds multiple dimensions within the research context. Further, population refers to the identification of key informants who possess unique connections or expertise relevant to the study under investigation. These individuals are selected based on their specific knowledge, experiences, or roles, which make them valuable sources of information or perspectives. Furthermore, the population also encompasses a broader definition that pertains to the entire pool of individuals, objects, or subjects that meet a defined set of specifications. This aggregate or totality of entities represents the larger group from which research participants are ultimately drawn. The selection of participants from the population involves careful consideration of relevant criteria and sampling techniques to ensure the representativeness and generalizability of the findings. By acknowledging these perspectives on the population, researchers can effectively identify and engage with both key informants who possess specialized insights and a broader population from which research participants are selected. This comprehensive understanding of the population aids in conducting rigorous and meaningful research studies.

The research population for the current study consists of approximately 18 000 first-year students who were enrolled in the ENG101 module during the first semester of the 2022 academic year at Unix. The primary objective of the ENG101 module is to equip students with the necessary skills and proficiency in academic writing. This population of students represents a valuable resource as potential key informants who can provide insights into the distinctive challenges, they encounter in their academic writing journey within the context of DE. By engaging with this population, the study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the specific academic writing challenges and contextual realities faced by DE students. Their experiences and perspectives will offer valuable insights that can contribute to the identification of effective strategies and interventions to enhance academic writing skills in this unique educational setting. Therefore, the inclusion of this population in the study provides an opportunity to gather in-depth and meaningful data that can inform future improvements in academic writing support for DE students at Unix.

4.7 Sample

According to Brink (1996) and Kenton (2019), the term 'sample' denoted a reduced-scale subset extracted from a larger collective, specifically chosen to partake in a study. It comprised distinct attributes that differentiate it from its entirety. It is imperative that a sample adequately represented the entire population and abstains from exhibiting any predisposition towards attributes. Furthermore, in qualitative research, particularly in the case of a significant student body such as the present scenario involving 30, 000 students, a small sample is deemed adequate to represent the entire population (Dworkin, 2012:1).

To fulfil the objectives of this research, a sample of 10 students enrolled in ENG101 was purposively selected as key informants. The study deems the population of ENG101 registered students during the first semester of 2022 as relevant for the current investigation as registered for an Academic Writing module in an ODeL institution. Furthermore, to capture the breadth of student failures and effectively represented the severity of academic writing challenges and recurring high failure, the sampling techniques in this study included individuals who had failed the ENG101 module once, twice, thrice, and even four times. By incorporating participants from a range of failure experiences, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the various academic writing difficulties faced by students.

In the context of qualitative research, a considerable body of literature consisting of numerous articles, book chapters, and books provides recommendations and guidance on participant numbers, with suggested ranges varying from five to 50 individuals (Dworkin, 2012:1). Bernard and Ryan (2000) assert that a participant count of 36 is generally deemed suitable for ethnographic studies. Conversely, Bertaux (1981) argues that a minimum population of 15 is considered acceptable in qualitative research, specifically in action research. The current study opted for 20 participants who have failed the module once, twice, thrice, and four times to represent the whole group of EAL first-year students registered in the ENG101 module.

4.7.1 Sampling

De Vos (1998) and Yates (2004) assert that researching the entire relevant population is often impractical due to constraints such as cost and time limitations. The sheer magnitude of the population makes it unfeasible to contact, identify, and study every single individual. As a result, researchers often resort to sampling techniques as a pragmatic approach to studying a subset of the population. In the current study, due to the nature of the ENG101 module focusing specifically on academic writing, a sample size of 20 students has been deemed sufficient. This sample size was chosen to represent the larger group of students enrolled in the module. By selecting a smaller yet representative sample, the study aims to capture the diverse perspectives and experiences of students within the ENG101 module. It is important to note that sampling is a deliberate and reasoned choice when the complete identification of all members of a population is unattainable. Through this strategic sampling approach, the study seeks to generate valuable insights into the academic writing challenges and experiences of students within the larger population of ENG101 module participants.

Purposive sampling, as described by Bhardwaj (2023) and Rubin and Babbie (2005), involves a judgemental and selective approach to sampling. Grinnell and Unrau (2008) and Monette et al. (2005) emphasize that this sampling method relies on the researcher's expertise and discretion in selecting elements that possess the most relevant characteristics or attributes of the population under study. In the context of this study, the use of purposive sampling is deemed appropriate as it enables the inclusion of participants who possess the necessary knowledge, experience, and willingness to contribute valuable insights to the research. According to Bhardwaj (2023), purposive sampling offers several advantages. Firstly, it saves time and resources by working with a smaller sample size compared to the entire population, leading to faster results. Additionally, the involvement of trained and experienced investigators in the sampling process enhances the accuracy of the findings. Purposive sampling is particularly useful when dealing with large populations, as it allows for estimates of sampling errors and provides information about specific characteristics of the population. Moreover, researching samples requires less space and equipment, making it more feasible, especially when resources are limited. However, it is important to acknowledge that there is a potential for bias in the sampling process. In the current study, a manageable sample size of 20 first-year students from

the ENG101 module has been selected. These students were purposively selected based on their enrolment in a writing-focused module such as ENG101. The researcher-initiated contact with the assignment and exam department through a formal email, seeking access to data about students who had encountered a failure on a single occasion as well as those who exhibited recurring high failure rates. Subsequently, a purposive selection process was implemented, deliberately handpicking individuals who had failed the module once, twice, thrice, and even four times. This meticulous approach ensured the inclusion of participants representing a spectrum of failure experiences, thereby enhancing the study's ability to comprehensively investigate the severity of academic challenges associated with repeated failures in the ENG101 module. The identified students were contacted via email and invited to participate in the study, given their suitability as candidates. Subsequently, a Microsoft Teams interview was conducted to gather data from the selected participants.

4.8 Data collection instruments

Kabir (2016) defines data collection as a systematic process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, to address research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes. In alignment with this definition, the present study employed qualitative research instruments to explore the rich and nuanced experiences of first-year students. The chosen research instruments for this investigation include online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and a document analysis schedule. The utilization of online open-ended evaluation questions enabled the exploration of the first research question, while the focus group discussions provided insights to address the second research question. Lastly, the document analysis schedule facilitated the investigation of the third research question. By employing these qualitative research instruments, the study aimed to capture detailed and comprehensive data that would shed light on the perceptions, challenges, and experiences of the participants about the use of podcasts and vodcasts in enhancing academic writing skills. In addition, the study employed a variety of data collection methods to ensure triangulation, as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (1993). Triangulation involves the cross-validation of data from

different sources, data collection strategies, periods, and frameworks. By incorporating triangulation, researchers aim to enhance the robustness of data collection and analysis, as well as showcase the complexity and diversity of the social context being studied (Neuman,1997). As argued by Durrheim and Wassenaar (1999), triangulation plays a crucial role in bolstering the credibility of the research. By seeking out divergent evidence and continuously examining the developing hypothesis, researchers strive to produce a comprehensive and trustworthy account of the phenomenon under investigation. Since each data collection method possesses its strengths and limitations, combining complementary methods became essential to address these limitations and strengthen the credibility of the findings. By employing multiple methods of data collection, the study sought to triangulate the research instruments to enhance the overall credibility of the study. This approach enabled a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and provided a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena being examined. Below see the data collection instruments and the corresponding research questions:

Table 4.2: Research questions and instruments used in the study

Research questions	Research data collection instruments
• What are the students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?	• Online open-ended evaluation questions
• What challenges do students encounter when accessing the podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?	• Focus group discussions
• How does the use of podcasts and vodcasts enhance the academic writing skills of students in ENG101?	• Document analysis schedule

Only students currently enrolled in ENG101 were eligible to participate in the study. It is essential to acknowledge that the research was conducted during a period marked by a COVID-19 outbreak. The Department of Health (2022) states that COVID-19 is transmitted through close human contact, primarily through breathing, coughing, and sneezing. In South Africa, during the time of this study, there were 3,996,904 confirmed cases of infection (Department of Health, 2022:1). It is important to note that these statistics are subject to change. The inclusion of COVID-19 statistics serves to emphasize the significance of adhering to established protocols. Given the circumstances, stringent measures were taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Consequently, data collection activities were not scheduled for face-to-face interactions but were conducted through online platforms such as the LMS, the XMO for assignment and exam results, and Microsoft Teams for focus group discussions. By utilizing these online platforms, the researcher ensured the safety and well-being of all participants while maintaining the integrity of the data collection process.

4.8.1 Online open-ended evaluation questions

According to McLeod (2018), the utilization of online open-ended evaluation forms serves as a valuable qualitative research instrument, enabling the collection of in-depth and detailed descriptions from participants. These forms can be administered through various mediums, including face-to-face interactions, telephone discussions, or email correspondence. Moreover, Billy (2021) asserts that online open-ended evaluation forms facilitate the collection of significant data, thereby identifying avenues for future process enhancements. These forms offer a convenient and efficient approach to capturing the preferences, attitudes, behaviours, opinions, and intentions of a large participant pool. Consequently, this method proves advantageous in terms of its expeditious, cost-effective, and comprehensive nature. In the context of the present study, the implementation of an online open-ended evaluation form aligns aptly with the research objectives. By adopting this approach, respondents are granted the freedom to openly share their distinct experiences without any imposed limitations. This format allows participants to divulge authentic and individualized information reflective of their unique encounters. According to Afolayan and Oniyinde (2019), the utilization of an open-ended format in research allows investigators to capture authentic attitudes, experiences, and perspectives directly expressed by participants in their own words.

> The open-ended format [is] used by the investigator when aiming for actual attitudes, experiences, and ways of being divulged by the research respondents in their own words. In addition, the open-ended format offers the investigator the opportunity for correcting ingrained practices and beliefs in the minds of the respondents by way of intervention studies (Afolayan & Oniyinde, 2019:56).

This format enables researchers to gain insights into the genuine beliefs, practices, and ways of being of the participants. Furthermore, the open-ended format provides an avenue for researchers to challenge entrenched notions and beliefs held by participants through intervention studies, thereby potentially influencing positive

change. In the context of the current study, an online structured open-ended evaluation form proves to be a fitting choice. By employing this approach, the researcher acquired detailed and comprehensive descriptions that contributed to a deeper understanding of podcasting and vodcasting. Given the persisting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the decision to administer the structured open-ended evaluation questions online, through LMS to prioritize the safety and well-being of the ENG101 students, ensuring adherence to health guidelines and mitigating the spread of COVID-19. Initially, a cohort of 50 students was invited to participate in the study; however, only 20 students responded to the invitation and actively took part in the research process. The 20 students who participated in the focus group discussions were subsequently provided with an online open-ended evaluation. All 20 students duly responded to the evaluation questions, thereby contributing valuable insights to the study. The analysis of the evaluation questions served to address the first research question of the study, which aimed to explore the students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101. The comprehensive nature of the evaluation questions allowed for the collection of relevant and targeted information, focusing on specific areas that require further investigation. By examining the responses provided by the participants, valuable insights were gained, shedding light on the students' perspectives regarding the utilization of podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module. For specific examples of the evaluation questions employed in the study (refer to Appendix A).

To address the limitations associated with structured open-ended evaluation questions, such as response bias, limited depth of response, and lack of clarification, the current study implemented strategies to mitigate these challenges. Firstly, the questions included in the evaluation were carefully crafted to ensure relevance and structure, avoiding randomness. This approach promotes focused and meaningful responses from the ENG101 students, enabling them to express their genuine feelings, thoughts, and attitudes regarding their experiences with podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module. Moreover, the pre-set questions aimed to minimize socially desirable responses by providing unambiguous questions. By doing so, participants were encouraged to provide authentic and honest feedback, reducing the likelihood of biased or socially influenced responses. Furthermore, in cases where the researcher encountered ambiguity or uncertainty in the participants' responses, efforts

were made to seek clarification from the participants directly. This approach ensured that the data collected accurately reflects the participants' true thoughts and experiences, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. By employing these strategies, the study aimed to overcome the limitations associated with structured open-ended evaluation questions, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of the students' perspectives on the use of podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module.

To ensure efficient and meaningful data collection, the researcher implemented several measures during the administration of the online open-ended evaluation questions. Firstly, a designated time frame [40 to 60 minutes] was set for participants to respond to the questions. This approach aimed to prevent lengthy and laborious discussions that may lead to participant fatigue or disinterest. By adhering to the specified time limit, the researcher sought to maintain participants' engagement and maximize the quality of their responses. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to express their ideas and provide specific examples to support their claims. This approach aimed to discourage superficial or vague responses and promote in-depth and thoughtful insights from the participants. By emphasizing the importance of substantiating their perspectives, the researcher sought to ensure that the collected data would be rich and meaningful, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions regarding the use of podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module. However, it is important to acknowledge that despite these efforts, there may still be limitations associated with online open-ended evaluation questions. Some respondents may not fully adhere to the prescribed format or instructions of the research instrument (Kabir, 2016). To mitigate this, the researcher emphasized the importance of following the provided guidelines and format to ensure data consistency and standardization. By communicating the significance of adhering to the research instrument's requirements, the researcher aimed to minimize any potential deviations that could affect the quality and reliability of the collected data.

Although online open-ended evaluation questions have their limitations, they offer valuable qualitative insights and perspectives in the current study. The researcher took measures to optimize data collection by setting a time limit, encouraging elaborative responses with supporting examples, and emphasizing adherence to the prescribed format. By implementing these strategies, the study aimed to gather high-quality data

that would contribute to a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts.

4.8.2 Focus group discussions

According to Stewart (2018: 687), a focus group is a [qualitative] data collection instrument that aims to disclose concealed experiences of participants in a small group setting and can be defined further as "a type of small group discussion about a topic under the guidance of a trained group moderator". In addition, Tümen-Akyıldız and Ahmed (2021) assert that a focus group is collaborative and inspires a framework [platform] for concerned stakeholders to express their feelings, opinions, and group synergy. Merton et al. (1956) maintain that focus group has its origins in an approach to group interviewing. Agar and MacDonald (1995) further maintain that a focus group lies somewhere between a structured meeting (reflecting the fact that it is specifically organized in advance and has a structure) and a conversation (reflecting the fact that the discussion has nonetheless a degree of spontaneity, with individuals picking up on one another's contributions). One noteworthy challenge associated with conducting focus groups is the potential silencing of introverted individuals, as they may struggle to actively participate and express their viewpoints. To address this limitation, the researcher implemented a strategy to specifically identify introverted participants who might be less inclined to spontaneously respond to posed questions. Through targeted probing, these individuals were directly encouraged to contribute and provide their perspectives in response to predetermined questions.

The utilization of focus groups is deemed appropriate for the present study due to its alignment to address the second research question: "What challenges do students encounter when accessing the podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?" This method facilitates the acquisition of in-depth and comprehensive data concerning the difficulties faced by students when accessing podcasts and vodcasts. To explore this phenomenon, a series of questions related to the challenges experienced by ENG101 students in accessing podcasts and vodcasts were posed during the focus group discussions. A sample of five questions posed during these discussions can be found in Appendix B. In adherence to the strict regulations of preventing the spread of COVID-19, the focus group discussions with ENG101 students were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams. These meetings were recorded, and the resulting data was transcribed to ensure the acquisition of reliable, accurate, and rich data. At the

outset, a total of 50 students were invited to partake in the study; nevertheless, merely 20 students responded to the invitation and actively engaged in the research process. The researcher developed a set of four specific focus groups and purposively selected 20 ENG101 students who possessed first-hand experiences, knowledge, and insights about the use of podcasts and vodcasts within the ENG101 module. To ensure manageability and facilitate qualitative analysis, these students were divided into four distinct groups, with each focus group consisting of five participants. This approach aligns with Busetto et al.'s (2020) assertion that smaller and manageable groups are essential in qualitative studies, as they afford the researcher greater control over the group dynamics and encourage active participation from all members. Each focus group session lasts between 40 to 60 minutes. The four focus groups were categorized as follows: focus group 1, comprising participants who failed the module once; group 2, consisting of participants who failed the module twice; group 3, comprising participants who failed the module thrice; and group 4, consisting of participants who failed the module four times. Significantly, the discussions were meticulously scheduled on different days, spread over a month, with one focus group held per week. This approach was implemented to uphold the integrity of each focus group session. It is worth noting that during the focus group discussions, a few technical glitches were encountered, lasting no longer than 2 minutes at maximum. However, the participants remained on the platform as they had been informed beforehand about the possibility of such technical issues. Additionally, there were instances where the participants' voices were delayed by approximately 5 seconds when responding to the questions. To ensure accurate capture of their responses, the researcher requested participants to kindly repeat their answers.

4.8.3 Document analysis schedule

Dalglish et al. (2020) and Bowen (2009) highlight the significance of document analysis as a systematic approach to reviewing and evaluating various types of documents, including both print and electronic materials such as computer-based and Internet-transmitted content. The primary objective of document analysis is to extract meaningful information and interpret the actual contents of the documents by identifying and verifying key themes credibly. As a qualitative research instrument, document analysis enables researchers to give voice and meaning to an assessment topic through the interpretation of relevant documents. According to Corbin and

Strauss (2008), this approach involves a thorough examination and interpretation of data to extract meaning, enhance understanding, and generate empirical knowledge. Bowen (2009) further supports the utilization of document analysis by enumerating several reasons why researchers opt for this method. Firstly, document analysis offers an efficient and effective means of data collection due to the manageable and practical nature of documents. Secondly, documents are readily accessible and available in various forms, making them a reliable and easily obtainable source of data. Analysing existing documents is often more cost and time efficient compared to conducting original research or experiments.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in document analysis, particularly the lack of interactivity and responsiveness associated with this method. In the context of the current study, efforts were made to address these limitations and ensure the validity of the findings. To mitigate the potential shortcomings, rigorous adherence to a set of predetermined questions and guidelines was followed during the document analysis process. This approach helped prevent the generation of irrelevant or extraneous data, thereby maintaining the focus and relevance of the study. Furthermore, document analysis offers distinct advantages in terms of obtaining information and achieving broad coverage of data. By examining existing documents, the researcher gained access to a wealth of pre-existing information, which provided valuable insights and a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

The utilization of document analysis was deemed appropriate for the current study due to its alignment with the research objectives. The study sought to examine both the pass rate and failure rate of ENG101 students, as well as explore the impact of using podcasts and vodcasts on their academic writing skills, as outlined in the third research question. Through document analysis, the researcher was able to explore relevant sources such as XMO data, marked assignment papers, and examination scripts. This approach provided valuable insights and a comprehensive understanding of the manifestation of pass or failure rates among the ENG101 students, facilitating a deeper exploration of the research topic. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis offers a means of tracking changes and developments over time. In the current study, this method allowed the researcher to analyse various drafts of documents, such as assignments and examination papers, to identify any modifications or improvements made. By comparing different versions, the researcher

gained valuable insights into the evolution of students' work and the potential impact of podcasts and vodcasts on their academic writing skills.

It is worth emphasizing that the institution under investigation, Unix, is an institution that operates under the ODeL model. Initially, a cohort of 50 students was invited to participate in the study; however, the response rate was limited, with only 20 students actively engaging and taking part in the research process. Following their participation in the online open-ended evaluation questions and focus group discussions, assignments, and examination scripts the same group of 20 students was analysed offering valuable insights that greatly contributed to the study. Consequently, the marked assignment and exam scripts utilized for document analysis were retrieved from the XMO system specific to Unix. These documents were carefully examined and analysed following the research objectives. Detailed questions for the document analysis can be found in Appendix C, providing a structured framework for the evaluation and interpretation of the relevant documents. To ensure the integrity and reliability of the research, copies of the analysed assignment and exam scripts are securely stored for future reference and verification purposes. This practice aligns with the principles of research transparency and allows for potential audits or cross-referencing of the findings.

The research commenced by formally retrieving assignments and examination scripts from the XMO system. Subsequently, a meticulous analysis of the assignments was conducted, focusing on detailed pre-set questions in Appendix C. The data obtained from these sources were then systematically organized into thematic categories, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the patterns and trends within the data. In the second phase, the examination scripts were subjected to rigorous analysis to ascertain any significant improvements or evidence of distinct challenges encountered by students. This process involved detailed assignments and examination interpretation to uncover valuable insights into the academic performance and potential obstacles faced by the students. The comprehensive findings and outcomes of the document analysis can be found in Chapter 5 of this research report. This chapter provides a detailed account of the thematic analysis and presents the key findings derived from the examination of the assignments and examination scripts, offering valuable insights into the research questions and objectives.

4.9 Research procedure

According to Singh (2021), the research procedure alludes to interlinked steps and/or stages in conducting research. The research procedure allows the researcher to systematically layout and implement the research plan in logical stages. The researcher randomly delegated four ENG101 lecturers to record podcasts and vodcasts with a specific focus on academic writing and upload them on the myUnix system for downloading (access) purposes. The lecturers uploaded a maximum of four podcasts (a maximum of 10 minutes each) on different dates and a maximum of four vodcasts (a maximum of 10 minutes each) on different dates. "Students are intrigued by podcasts; however, long podcasts are costly to download and tedious. Shorter podcasts ranging 5-10 minutes are effective" (Zanten, Somogyi & Curro, 2010:1). Cebeci and Tekdal (2006) recommend a length not longer than 15 minutes, as long podcasts result in loss of attention and a decline in understanding. Podcasts and vodcasts were uploaded on different dates throughout the year and provided the ENG101 students with the opportunity to utilise, internalise and reflect on information about academic writing skills. The table provided below serves as a linkage to the procedure employed in the study, as it showcases the lesson contents encompassed within the podcasts and vodcasts. This table serves as a visual representation, illustrating the specific topics and themes covered in the podcast and vodcast materials. It aids in highlighting the alignment between the research procedure and the instructional content delivered through these mediums. Below see aptly demonstrated key academic writing topics:

Table 4.3: Key academic writing topics

Podcasts	Vodcasts
First lesson • Purpose of academic writing • The organisation of academic writing • Establish your position • Writing in your voice • Using academic language Self-assessment activities in the first lesson	**First lesson** • Purpose of academic writing • The organisation of academic writing • Establish your position • Writing in your voice • Using academic language Self-assessment activities in the first lesson
Second lesson	**Second lesson**

• Paragraph (concise and precise) • Topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences • Citations Self-assessment activities in the second lesson	• Paragraph (concise and precise) • Topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences • Citations Self-assessment activities in the second lesson
Third lesson • Arguments developed by evidence and argument structure • Paraphrasing, summarising, and quoting • Signposting • Plagiarism • Example of good writing and bad writing (comparison) Self-assessment activities in the third lesson	**Third lesson** • Arguments developed by evidence and argument structure • Paraphrasing, summarising, and quoting • Signposting • Plagiarism • Example of good writing and bad writing (comparison) Self-assessment activities in the third lesson
Fourth lesson • Editing and proofreading Self-assessment activities in the fourth lesson	**Fourth lesson** • Editing and proofreading Self-assessment activities in the fourth lesson

4.10 Triangulation

Triangulation, as discussed by Tisdell (2016), Denzin (2009), Crick (2021), and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), serves as a methodological approach that involves the utilization of multiple research instruments to enhance the validity and reliability of findings. In the current study, the researcher employed three distinct qualitative research instruments, namely online open-ended evaluation questions, focus groups, and document analysis, to mitigate the weaknesses typically associated with qualitative research and to validate the strengths of each method. By adhering to predetermined questions for each instrument, the researcher ensured consistency and comparability in data collection and analysis. The integration of these three qualitative data collection instruments in the study serves as a form of triangulation. Triangulation entails the combination and mutual reinforcement of different methods to corroborate and enhance research findings. In this case, the three instruments employed in the

study mutually complement and support one another, providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research topic. By triangulating the findings derived from these distinct sources, the researcher strengthened the validity and reliability of the study's outcomes.

4.11 Research trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), to develop trustworthiness in qualitative research, four criteria are presented: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. When conducting the study, the researcher documented all information or data. To maintain creditability, dependability, confirmability, and transferability the researcher consistently recorded Microsoft Teams meetings and LMS online platform during the focus group meetings and structured open-ended evaluation forms to capture the participants' intended meanings and engagements with the respective English modules. In terms of document analysis, copies of analysed scripts were kept in a safe place for verification and referral purposes. To enhance the credibility of this study, triangulation was used to analyse the information elicited during the structured open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Lastly, the researcher was persistent that only key participants [active ENG101 students] complete the structured open-ended evaluation questions and focus group discussions to validate authentic data.

4.12 Data analysis framework

According to Brink and Van der Walt (2006), De Vos et al. (2005), Burns and Grove (2009), and White, (2005), data analysis is a systematic organisation and synthesis of research data to give structure and elicit meaning from the data collected. This study endorses a thematic analysis approach to analyse open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2021), thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into, patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. For the current

study, themes were formulated to create logical interpretations and presentations of data. Below see Braun and Clarke's (2021:2) six-step thematic analysis procedure:

Table 4.4: Six-step thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2021:2)

Phase	Examples of procedure for each step
1. Familiarising oneself with the data	Transcribing data; reading and re-reading; noting down initial codes.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the dataset, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for the themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Involved in reviewing the themes	Checking if the themes work about the coded extracts and the entire dataset; generate a thematic 'map'.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme; generation of clear names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	Final opportunity for analysis selecting appropriate extracts; discussion of the analysis; relate to the research question or literature; produce the report.

The following subsections discuss how data were analysed.

4.12.1 Online open-ended evaluation questions

According to Braun and Clarke (2021) and Creswell (2003:192), researchers need to follow logical steps to accurately transcribe online qualitative data. For the current study, the researcher categorised themes from the online open-ended evaluation questions. In addition, the researcher developed categories and themes when analysing evaluation questions' data according to pre-set questions. Lastly, the researcher sought clarification from participants when certain aspects were not thoroughly understood to deduce meaningful data regarding students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts.

4.12.2 Focus group discussions

The focus group discussions were recorded via Microsoft Teams in response to the emergence of the Coronavirus. The researcher diligently took notes while the respondents articulated their views. Clarification was sought by the researcher in

instances where participants' responses were ambiguous or difficult to comprehend. Ultimately, the research data were systematically arranged to ensure coherence and comprehensibility. Furthermore, in line with the methodology employed for structured open-ended evaluation questions and semi-structured one-on-one in-depth discussions, the analytical process for the focus group discussions adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2021:2) six-phase thematic analysis framework.

4.12.3 Document analysis

According to the scholarly insights of Dalglish, Khalid, and McMahon (2020), document analysis can be guided by the rigorous READ approach, which ensures the validity and reliability of the data analysis process. The READ approach serves as a systematic procedure for collecting and extracting information from documents, ensuring a thorough and meticulous analysis. The steps consist of four approaches, namely: (1) read the subject content materials, (2) extract relevant data (3) analyse data effectively and (4) distil your findings accordingly.

The initial step in the research process involves retrieving a total of 20 marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts from the designated platform, Unix's XMO. These documents serve as the primary data source for the study. In the subsequent phase, the researcher undertook a meticulous data extraction process to isolate and extract solely the relevant information about academic writing. This focused approach ensures that the analysis centres on pertinent data points aligned with the research objectives. Data analysis was conducted by employing the pre-set document analysis questions as a guiding framework. The researcher systematically examined the retrieved documents, paying particular attention to the predetermined questions. This approach enables the identification and organization of categories and themes, which are assigned distinct numerical references. The overarching aim of the document analysis is to ascertain the effectiveness of employing podcasts and vodcasts in teaching academic writing skills. By scrutinizing the marked and moderated assignment and exam scripts, the researcher seeks to uncover valuable insights and evidence about the impact of these multimedia resources on students' development of academic writing competencies.

4.13 Ethical considerations

Morris (2006) emphasizes the importance of researchers providing comprehensive information to research participants regarding ethical considerations and ensuring the absence of any breaches of agreements. Anonymity and confidentiality play crucial roles in protecting participants' identities and safeguarding their private information. Anonymity pertains to the situation where data cannot be directly or indirectly linked to the identity of individual subjects. On the other hand, confidentiality ensures that the researcher effectively manages and safeguards the private information shared by the participants. In the current study, research participants were provided with an information leaflet containing background information about the research aims and the study's scope. This leaflet aimed to ensure that participants were fully informed about the research process. Additionally, a consent form was administered to participants, explicitly explaining the principles of confidentiality and anonymity. It is important to note that no research participant in the study experienced marginalization based on factors such as gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, cultural background, or practices. The researcher acknowledged and respected the diversity and individuality of the participants. Furthermore, prior to the commencement of the study, the researcher sought research ethics approval to ensure adherence to ethical guidelines and principles. The application and subsequent approval of research ethics are crucial components in promoting the ethical conduct of the study. For further details on the information leaflet and student consent form, refer to Appendix D, where these documents are included.

The study's objectives were thoroughly communicated to potential participants through telephonic conversations, enabling them to make an informed decision regarding their participation. Once participants expressed their willingness to take part, they will be requested to carefully review the information leaflet and provide their signature on the consent form, signifying their agreement to participate. To ensure the security and confidentiality of the data, the structured online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and the analysed documents obtained from XMO's ENG101 students' results will be securely stored for five years. Subsequently, these materials will be appropriately destroyed. It is important to note that throughout the study, the participants' identities were strictly protected, and their names will not

be referenced or disclosed. No monetary incentives or gifts were offered to the participants, and no harm was caused to them as a result of their involvement in the research. Participants had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any repercussions or negative consequences. By Singh's (2017) principles, the researcher is committed to upholding beneficence by prioritizing the well-being of the participants. Additionally, non-maleficence was strictly adhered to, ensuring that the researcher did not intentionally cause harm or expose participants to any form of harm. The researcher did not engage in any form of exploitation or coercion, promoting an ethical and respectful research environment. It is vital to emphasize that the research participants were not subjected to any type of exposure or harm throughout the study's duration.

4.14 Conclusion

This chapter provided an extensive exploration of the methodologies employed for data collection. It commences by discussing the qualitative approach, wherein a research design centred on action research is adopted. Additionally, it examines the research paradigm, the targeted population of the study, and the research instruments employed, which encompass structured online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Ethical considerations that were considered during the study are also addressed. To ensure a rigorous and systematic analysis, the study adopts the six-step thematic analysis procedure developed by Braun and Clarke (2021). This procedure enables the creation of coherent themes and facilitates the interpretation of the collected data. Furthermore, the study employs triangulation to validate the research instruments. This methodological approach not only mitigates the limitations inherent in qualitative research findings but also validates their strengths, as evidenced by the utilization of predefined questions for each instrument. The subsequent chapter, Chapter 5 discussed the research findings obtained through the aforesaid research instruments. These findings are aimed at addressing the predetermined research questions, thus contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the study's subject matter.

CHAPTER 5

Findings and discussions on first-year students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts

"Your podcast content should not be about you, but about solving your prospects' problems"

-Steve Luberkin

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 discussed the methodology implemented to collect qualitative data. Specifically, Chapter 4 discussed the qualitative research approach, research design (action research), research paradigm, population of the study, and the research instruments used, which included structured online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions and document analysis schedule. Additionally, ethical considerations for the study were discussed. The study further employed Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step analysis procedure to establish logical themes and interpret data methodically and consistently. Moreover, to validate the research instruments, triangulation was employed to curtail the limitations of qualitative research findings and to authenticate its strengths by following pre-set questions of each instrument. The literature review identified renowned scholars from various contexts who observed that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted teaching and learning in HEIs. Distance universities encountered several challenges such as poor network signals and students' reluctance to embrace new technologies. Furthermore, despite the benefits of digitization in HEIs, some students are technophobic and are not prepared for online education. Nevertheless, supplementary tools and platforms in distance learning surpass the effectiveness of the existing system and are viable tools to teach complex issues (Lentz, 2020; McNamara & Haegele, 2021; Mirkholikovna, 2020; Raaper & Brown, 2020; Strielkowski et al., 2020). In this chapter, Chapter 5, the obtained data from online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis schedule will be thoroughly discussed, analysed, and interpreted. A comprehensive and insightful discussion of the findings shall be undertaken with a

critical approach, thereby augmenting the academic value of this chapter. The researcher begins by narrating the themes obtained from the findings, discusses, and interprets the findings.

Action research was chosen as the appropriate methodology for this study as it provided a systematic approach to document the challenges and perceptions surrounding the use of podcasts and vodcasts in enhancing academic writing skills among first-year students. By evaluating and moderating the scripts of the ENG101 students, I was able to identify persistent challenges related to academic writing proficiency, effective application of subject content, and linguistic mastery. It was crucial to develop an action plan to improve the academic writing skills of first-year students, which led to the creation and uploading of podcasts and vodcasts on the MyUnix LMS platform as supplementary tools for academic writing. Subsequently, the data collection process began, utilizing online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis schedules. When analysing the obtained data, Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic analysis framework was employed. This chapter will present the data and discussion, aligning with the principles of action research. Finally, at the end of this chapter, in line with action research studies, the findings will be reflected upon, and the subsequent chapter will be introduced.

To ensure clarity and focus, it is essential to reiterate the research questions before discussing the findings. The following are the research questions addressed in this study:

- What are the students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?

- What challenges do students encounter when accessing the podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?

- How does the use of podcasts and vodcasts enhance the academic writing skills of students in ENG101?

- What guidelines can be created for the use of podcasts and vodcasts to assist lecturers towards enhancing academic writing in an ODeL context?

The findings of the study were obtained from the online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions and documentary analysis. Further, to gather data, the study employed two student support frameworks: 'TTD' by Moore (1972) and 'CoI' by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), which have gained immense traction in the context of DE. In essence, the TTD framework serves as a critical precursor to promote successful online learning, and CoI complements it by addressing issues of collaborative learning through meaningful interaction, particularly in the context of distance learning institutions. Moore's (1972) TTD comprises three vital variables, namely, instructional dialogue, program structure, and learner autonomy. Figure 5.1 below illustrates the three variables in Moore's (1997) framework.
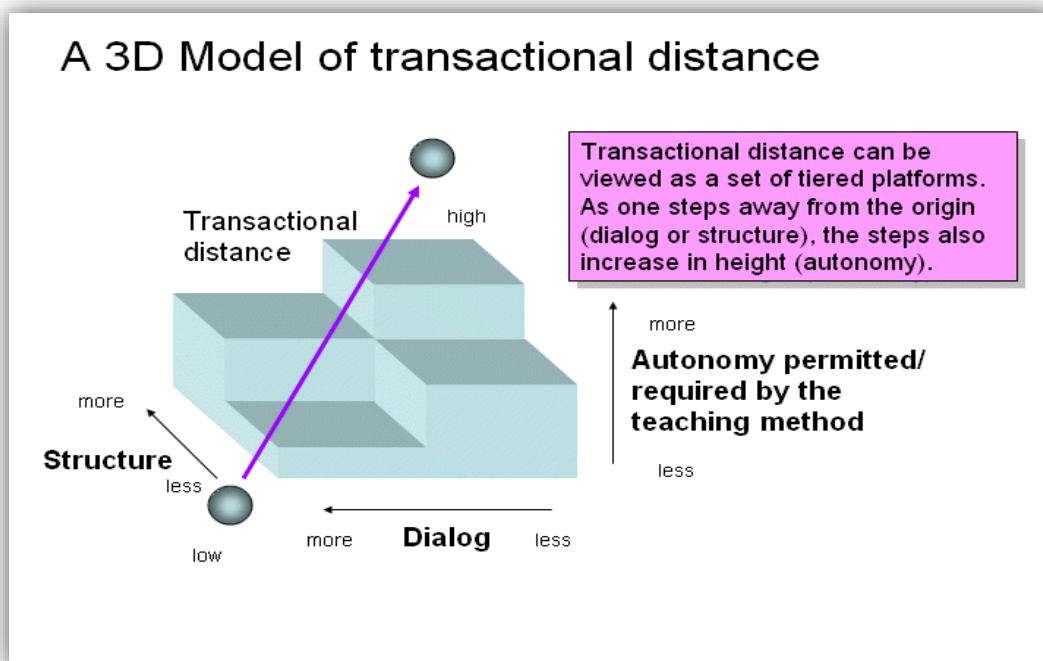
Figure 5.1: Overview 3D of TTD (Bornt, 2011:01)

TTD is a valuable guide for the intricate practice of rational processes, such as teaching and learning at a distance (Garrison, 2000; Moore,1997). Similarly, Jung (2001:527) observes that it "offers a valuable conceptual framework for defining and understanding DE in general." Moore's (1997) framework holds great relevance and applicability to the current study, primarily because it emphasizes that 'distance' in DE is primarily transactional, rather than spatial. Secondly, given that teaching and learning at Unix is characterized by a limited number of face-to-face interactions, this framework is particularly relevant. On the other hand, Garrison, Anderson, and

Archer's (2000) CoI framework support successful online learning experiences of first-year students in ODeL and HEIs. The primary objective of this approach is to promote deep learning and higher-order thinking through interaction by creating a conducive climate, promoting discourse, and regulating online learning. CoI permits academic discipline standards and is inherently collaborative. CoI comprises four elements, namely, (a) cognitive presence, (b) social presence, (c) teaching presence and learner presence, as discussed by Shea and Bidjerano (2010). Table 5.1 highlights coding elements by Garrison et al. (2000):

Table 5.1: CoI coding template (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000:89)

Elements	Categories	Indicators
(a) Cognitive presence	• Triggering Event • Exploration • Integration • Resolution	• Sense of puzzlement • Information exchange • Connecting ideas • Apply new ideas
(b) Social presence	• Emotional Expression • Open Communication • Group Cohesion	• Emotions • Risk-free expression • Encouraging collaboration
(c) Teaching presence	• Instructional Management • Building Understanding • Direct Instruction	• Defining and initiating discussion topics • Sharing personal meaning • Focusing discussion

It is worth noting that Shea and Bidjerano (2010) introduced the concept of the fourth presence, known as learner presence, to the existing framework proposed by Garrison et al. (2000). The four interrelated elements of cognitive presence, social presence, teaching presence (Garrison et al., 2000) and learner presence (Shea & Bidjerano 2010) are intricately connected and overlap with each other, serving crucial educational purposes and practices such as promoting risk-free expression, facilitating the sharing of meaning, promoting collaboration, building understanding, encouraging exploration, and promoting integration. Figure 5.2 below illustrates the CoI:
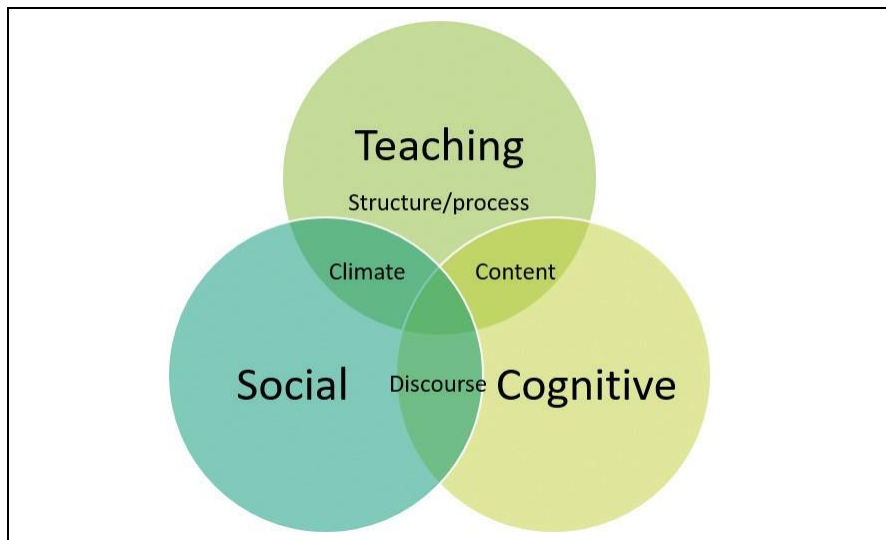
Figure 5.2: CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2000:88)

The study emphasizes the fourth presence, referred to as 'learner presence' by Shea and Bidjerano (2010), which can be found on page 133 of this research. This chapter's discussions will reflect on the two theories outlined in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2, along with Table 5.1. As highlighted in Chapter 3, Majeski et al. (2018) contend that the CoI framework identifies essential elements necessary for a successful learning experience. Meanwhile, Garrison (2000:3) asserts that Moore's TTD is an invaluable guide for navigating the intricacies of distance learning.

The chapter is organised in the following manner:

- Research question(s)
- Findings and discussion of themes emerged from each research instruments
- Conclusion.

5.2 Findings from the online open-ended evaluation questions

- **What are the students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?**

To address the first research question, students were given evaluation questions to answer on the discussion forum.

What are the positive perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of the ENG101 module and why?

❖ *Accessibility, understanding of the module content and improved listening skills*

A high percentage of the participants in the online open-ended evaluation questions indicated that the positive perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of the ENG101 module are accessibility, understanding of the module content and improving listening skills. Participants elaborated by indicating that they can access [download] podcasts and vodcasts at any time convenient to them (Melus, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions); podcasts and vodcasts help them to understand the module's content as challenging topics are unpacked significantly and assist to facilitate knowledge gain and focus (Sib, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions); and that podcasts and vodcasts help improve participants' listening skills because lecturers explain the module content in detail (Mag, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions). Below see some verbatim responses from the participants:

Table 5.2: Participants' verbatim responses based on accessibility, understanding of the module content and improved listening skills from online open-ended evaluation questions.

1. Melus 2022-Online open-ended evaluation questions
_____

Podcast and vodcast

by ██████████████ - Sunday, 22 May 2022, 9:17 PM
1. The positive perceptions are that when you using podcast and vodcast you can gain listening skills, you can access it at any time even after the actual time and also understand better.

2. Sib 2022-Online open-ended evaluation questions
_____

POSTCAST AND VODCAST EVALUATION

by ████████████ - Sunday, 22 May 2022, 12:40 PM
1. POSITIVE PERSPECTIVES:
(a) It helps to unpack the module clearly.
(b) It is easily accessible during learning units and assist in preparation for assessments.
(c) It strengthen communication between Lectures and Students.

3. Mag 2022-Online open-ended evaluation questions
_____

Podcast and vodcast evaluation

by ██████████ - Saturday, 21 May 2022, 11:15 AM
1. It's almost the same as face to face learning, improves listening skills and the lecturers give more time explaining into detail everything we struggle with.

The findings above indicate that participants in the study hold a positive perception towards the utilization of podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of the ENG101 module (Melus, Sib, Mag, 2022, online open-ended evaluation questions). These findings align with previous research by Blakemore and Agllias (2020), Hitchcock (2021), Marunevich et al. (2021), and Schöbel et al. (2021), which highlight the growing popularity of podcasts and vodcasts in educational settings. It is evident that students in the age of digitization readily embrace the use of technology in their studies, and podcasts and vodcasts serve as effective platforms for engaging with academic content and disseminating knowledge across various disciplines. The positive perceptions towards the use of podcasts and vodcasts suggest that first-year students in the ODeL institution under study not only accept but also embrace these multimedia digital tools as valuable resources for teaching and learning. Furthermore, the participants expressed that they encountered no technical glitches or online challenges while downloading the podcasts and vodcasts. They also acknowledged the significance and value of these resources in enhancing their understanding of the ENG101 module's content (Melus, 2022, online open-ended evaluation questions). Several participants shared that podcasts and vodcasts not only bring enjoyment but also spark interest in learning, build confidence, and create an interactive online space where students feel encouraged to reach out to their lecturers for further discussions on challenging topics. These findings align with research conducted by Bumblauskas et al. (2021), Castro et al. (2021), Dolch et al. (2021), Johnston et al. (2021), Mukhtar et al. (2020), and Schöbel et al. (2021), which emphasize the high demand for supplemental tools in ODeL institutions. Moreover, participants expressed that podcasts empower and provide significant benefits to students. They greatly appreciate the use of synchronous and/or asynchronous digital multimedia files and indicate a preference for interactive activities that enhance the teaching of academic writing. Additionally, the integration of podcasts and vodcasts in teaching and learning

encourages a sense of agency among students and enhances their comprehension of the subject matter being taught. The findings of the study suggest that the incorporation of podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module reduced transactional distance, a concept introduced by Moore (1972), as evidenced by the active engagement and perceived helpfulness reported by students (Melus, Sib, Mag, 2022, online open-ended evaluation questions). Notably, the implementation of these supplemental tools contributed to a reduction in feelings of isolation as students could access the uploaded supplemental tools, understand the module's content, and improve their listening skills. These findings align with the theoretical frameworks of autonomous literacy put forth by Horn (2016), Street (1995), and Street and Colin (1984), as they highlight how the acquisition and mastery of essential academic writing skills among first-year students in the ENG101 Academic Writing module were enhanced through the integration of podcasts and vodcasts. It is important to note that the predetermined set of skills outlined in the ENG101 module was effectively attained through the utilization of these multimedia resources. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that all four elements identified by Garrison et al. (2000) and Shea and Bidjerano (2010), namely cognitive presence, social presence, teacher presence, and learner presence, were embraced by both lecturers and students. These elements were manifested through visible active participation, collaborative learning, and an environment where students played an active role in the teaching and learning process. As a result, a sense of joint commitment towards a shared goal created a community of inquiry between students and lecturers.

What are the negative perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of the ENG101 module and why?

> ❖ *Poor network coverage, technical issues, and inability to ask questions*

The majority of the participants in the online open-ended evaluation questions revealed that the negative perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of the ENG101 module are poor network coverage, technical issues and not being able to ask questions [no interaction] (Kat, Mathew, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions). Participants revealed that the poor network [bad connection] coverage is not linked to the ENG101 online platform [Moodle LMS] but to their local or home broadband coverage causes technical glitches when downloading podcasts and vodcasts. This resonates with studies by Aljawarneh (2020), Lara et al. (2020),

and Lizcano et al. (2020) who assert that developing countries have poor internet connectivity and as a result student turn to experience challenges when downloading multimedia files. Additionally, participants revealed that not being able to ask questions directly and immediately to lecturers after watching and listening to podcasts and vodcasts is a major setback as these tools ignite a passion for engagement and further discussions. Below see some verbatim statements by the participants:
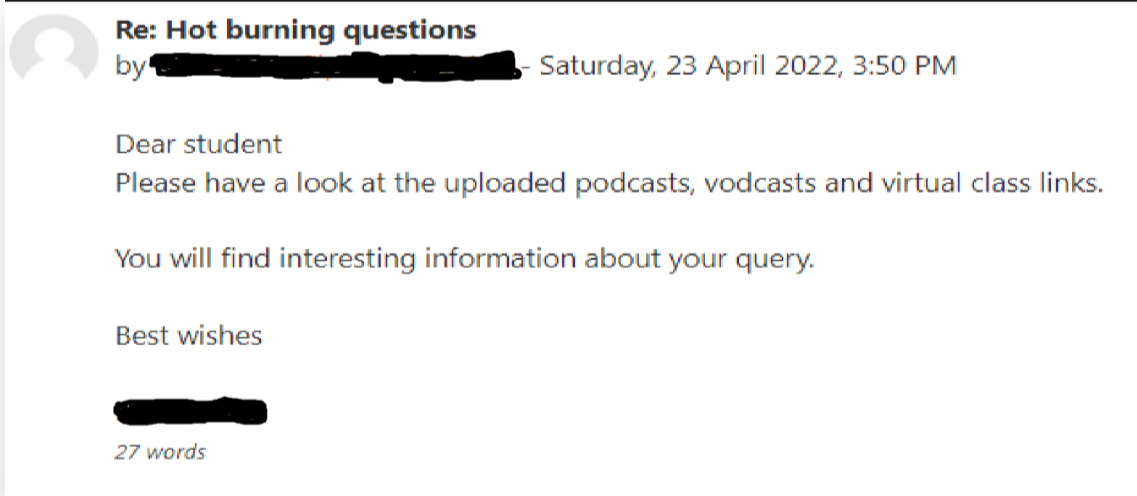
Table 5.3 Participants' verbatim responses based on poor coverage, technical issues, and inability to ask questions from online open-ended evaluation questions.

4. Kat 2022-Online open-ended evaluation questions
by ███████████████ - Monday, 23 May 2022, 12:48 AM 2 (a)The problem is that we don't communicate with lectures face to face. (B)Sometimes it's has technical issues (C)Bad connections
5. Mathew 2022-Online open-ended evaluation questions
by ██████████████ - Tuesday, 24 May 2022, 10:38 PM 2 Network problem , Bad connections and we can't ask questions

The verbatim statements above are consistent with DHET (2020), Lentz (2020), Myende and Ndlovu (2020), Nadhianty and Purnomo (2020), and Raaper and Brown (2020) who argue that network connectivity creates challenges for students who came from disadvantageous [rural] backgrounds where there is no smooth internet or network connection. To add to poor network coverage are technical glitches [issues] such as prolonged [delayed] and incomplete downloading progress. According to Alturise (2020), Bataineh, Alsmadi and Shikhali (2020), Mahyoob (2020), and Rajab et al. (2020), technical glitches are caused by downloading overload as many students are on the online platform at the same time. However, technical glitches in this case may also be caused by environmental factors such as poor network coverage

[disruptions] in rural or disadvantaged backgrounds as Kat and Mathew, (online open-ended evaluation questions) revealed. Besides poor network coverage and technical glitches maintained by geographical areas, participants revealed that not being able to immediately ask questions directly to lecturers after watching and listening to podcasts and vodcasts is a major setback. This finding corroborates with studies by Ahmed et al. (2021), Bumblauskas et al. (2021), Byun, Sooyeon, and Slavin (2020); Pellegrini, Mirella, Vladimir, Uskov, and Casalino (2020) and Shivangi (2020) in that synchronous and/or asynchronous [podcast and vodcasts] digital multimedia files stimulate active learning, critical thinking and enhance students' overall learning experience. However, even though participants were not able to ask questions directly to the ENG101 lecturers after watching and listening to podcasts and vodcasts, the ENG101 lecturers were active in the discussion forum (Lecturer Moh, Noh, 2022 discussion forum interaction with students). Below see a few email responses by lecturers through the discussion forum:

Table 5.4 Lecturers' email responses through the discussion forum

Lecturer Moh 2022-discussion forum interaction with student

> **Re: Hot burning questions**
> by ████████████████ - Saturday, 23 April 2022, 3:50 PM
>
> Dear student
> Please have a look at the uploaded podcasts, vodcasts and virtual class links.
>
> You will find interesting information about your query.
>
> Best wishes
>
> ██████
>
> *27 words*

Lecturer Noh 2022-discussion forum interaction with student

Re: Telegram
by ████████████████████ - Wednesday, 20 April 2022, 4:36 PM

Dear ████
You simply need to access your Play Store to be able to download Telegram.
Best wishes
████████

20 words
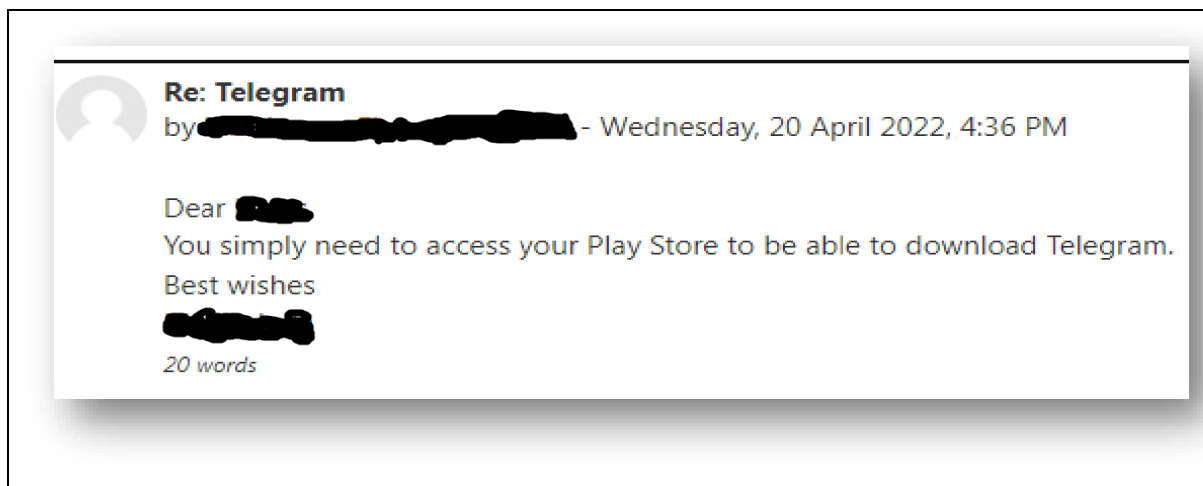
The ENG101 students had the privilege to utilise e-tutor services, discussion forums, make telephonic enquiries and lecturers' email addresses for further discussions. Hubers, Endedijk and Van Veen (2020) and Wrigley and Straker (2015) point out that students in distance HEIs are encouraged to interact with e-tutors and lecturers for further academic purposes and enrichment. However, a great number of students are reluctant to initiate correspondence with their lecturers. Additionally, students could interact with other students [peer learning] on the discussion forum and Telegram App dedicated to peer engagement. The ENG101 lecturers encouraged students to approach them for any academic queries. Lecturers and students may use other platforms such as email, Microsoft Teams, Telegram, WhatsApp, Google, and Zoom platform for online interaction purposes (Mahyoob, 2020). Baird et al. (2020) concur with Mahyoob's (2020) study and points out that interaction is mandatory across disciplines and is best [beneficial] for online learning. Furthermore, it is important to point out that the ENG101 lecturers conducted virtual classes through a Microsoft Teams meeting. 15 minutes before the virtual class adjourns, lecturers reserved time for a question and answer (Q&A) session to allow students to interact with lecturers for clarity purposes. Then the Microsoft Teams' meeting link was posted on the ENG101 module site for access purposes. The availability of the Q&A session and posting of the virtual class links provide access to information and knowledge gain. Moore's (1972) TTD highlights the challenges posed by physical and psychological separation between lecturers and students in ODeL, however, in the current study, providing students with access to virtual class links and opportunities to interact with lecturers during Q&A sessions significantly decreased transactional distance as the

ENG101 module content reached students in different locations. In addition, those who could not attend the virtual class had the privilege of using the link for their academic enrichment at their convenience. In addition, the interaction between students and lecturers at the Q&A session reduced transactional distance as feedback was immediate and increased dialogue. Thus, Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) and Shea and Bidjerano (2010) elements [cognitive presence, social presence, teacher presence and learner presence] were successfully implemented in the virtual classes and posting of the links thereof. CoI emphasizes the importance of promoting active and deep learning in an online platform.

As a first-year student, what are your academic writing challenges and why?

❖ *Citations [referencing], writing skills and grammar*

Most of the participants in the online open-ended evaluation questions revealed that their academic writing challenges include citations [referencing], writing skills and grammar. Studies by AlMarwani (2020), Lea and Street (2006), and Pineteh (2014) indicate that first-year students in Academic Writing modules face an array of challenges such as referencing, argumentation, paragraphing, and grammatical conventions. Participants revealed that they struggled with in-text referencing and compiling a reference list because citations were not emphasised in high school (Joh, Thand, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions). In addition, participants struggle with academic writing skills such as paragraphing [topic sentences, supporting sentences and concluding sentences], essay structure [introduction, body, and conclusion], voice and paraphrasing. Participants indicated that their writing tends to be wordy and does not reflect a neutral academic tone as well as a lack of adherence to academic writing conventions (Thand, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions). In addition, participants revealed that they have challenges with grammar. Below see some statements from the participants provided during the online open-ended evaluation questions:

Table 5.5: Participants' verbatim responses based on citation [referencing], writing skills and grammar from online open-ended evaluation questions

6. Thand 2022 Online open-ended evaluation question

Podcast and vodcast evaluation

by ██████████████████████   Sunday, 22 May 2022, 10:10 AM

3a. Referencing, it takes a while to get used to doing it and I was usually confused by what referencing style to use.
  b. Being wordy, my paragraphs are usually very long.
  c. Finding the right voice. I struggle with making my academic essay sound more professional and less like a story as I am a writer so it makes it difficult to separate those two voices.

_____

7. Joh 2022 Online open-ended evaluation question

PODCAST AND VODCAST EVLUATING

by ███████████████   - Monday, 23 May 2022, 8:06 PM
3when it comes to citing

how to write the work because it is different from how we used to write in high school

These findings indicate that a copious amount of the first-year students who enrol at HEIs possess partial [limited] knowledge gaps (Thand, Joh, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions). These findings significantly affirm studies by Alostath (2021), Aripin and Rahmat (2021), Demirçivi (2020), Rabadi and Rabadi (2020), and Zeiger (2021) in that many first-year students misunderstand the nature of academic writing, and that academic writing is a major obstacle as students lack academic rigour and face challenges such as grammar, voice, coherence and cohesion, paragraphing, citation, and lack of linguistic competence. The latter findings resonate with the current studies' problem statement that argues that first-year students do not have the necessary academic writing skills required of them at the university level and lack linguistic mastery as they come from different linguistic backgrounds. First-year

students' academic writing challenges are exacerbated by distance learning as students are not accustomed to self-study and efficacy. Therefore, to enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students, lecturers and students ought to engage in collaborative and interactive learning to improve online teaching and learning. Academic writing and critical thinking are higher-order thinking skills that are essential to lifelong learning and are still a major challenge for students in HEIs (Dwyer & Walsh, 2020; Strobl et al., 2019). In addition, findings indicate that first-year students require academic support intervention, support, and guidance on how to write academically. The absence of academic writing support interventions in ODeL can lead to a high failure rate and students experiencing difficulties in completing their qualifications within the desired timeframe, potentially resulting in academic exclusion and exhaustion. The digitization of HEIs during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in exhaustion among students who were less accustomed to online learning (Strielkowski, 2020; Zawacki-Richter, 2021). In addition, according to a recent study by Lentz and Foncha (2021), first-year students are only able to structure a basic piece of writing as they were taught in high school. Students enrol in HEIs with language issues (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). First-year students lack academic rigour and need guidance with structuring their writing, paragraphing, and other grammaticality, as they would muddle points in an illogical manner (Pantuso, 2022; Row, 2022; Williams, 2022). It is important to point out that proficient writing enables lecturers to comprehend students' arguments and thought processes clearly, including the logical progression of ideas (Leibowitz, 2004; Pineteh, 2014). These findings also indicate the importance of implementing multiple supplemental tools to aid first-year students and lessen high failure rate pressures in first-year Academic Writing modules. According to Castro et al. (2021) and Derakhshan (2021), students who struggle with academic writing, referencing and grammar may benefit tremendously from multiple supplemental tools with activities that aim to improve their academic challenges and understanding of topics instead of giving many assignments. By incorporating multiple supplemental tools in the teaching and learning process, ODeL institutions can provide students with plentiful opportunities for online education and promote a more engaging and inclusive learning environment. In particular, the use of multiple supplemental tools with activities can significantly benefit students in developing their academic writing skills, such as those in our ENG101 module. By embracing these tools, ODeL institutions can enhance the quality of their teaching and learning experience and meet

the needs of their diverse student population., 2020; Zawacki-Richter, 2021). In addition, according to a recent study by Lentz and Foncha (2021), first-year students are only able to structure a basic piece of writing as they were taught in high school. Students enrol in HEIs with language issues (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). First-year students lack academic rigour and need guidance with structuring their writing, paragraphing, and other grammaticality, as they would muddle points in an illogical manner (Pantuso, 2022; Row, 2022; Williams, 2022). It is important to point out that proficient writing enables lecturers to comprehend students' arguments and thought processes clearly, including the logical progression of ideas (Leibowitz, 2004; Pineteh, 2014). These findings also indicate the importance of implementing multiple supplemental tools to aid first-year students and lessen high failure rate pressures in first-year Academic Writing modules. According to Castro et al. (2021) and Derakhshan (2021), students who struggle with academic writing, referencing and grammar may benefit tremendously from multiple supplemental tools with activities that aim to improve their academic challenges and understanding of topics instead of giving many assignments. By incorporating multiple supplemental tools in the teaching and learning process, ODeL institutions can provide students with plentiful opportunities for online education and promote a more engaging and inclusive learning environment. In particular, the use of multiple supplemental tools with activities can significantly benefit students in developing their academic writing skills, such as those in our ENG101 module. By embracing these tools, ODeL institutions can enhance the quality of their teaching and learning experience and meet the needs of their diverse student population.

Since using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101, what noticeable academic writing improvement can you identify?

> ❖ ***Academic writing skills, in-text referencing, and writing the reference list in full***

Most of the participants in the online open-ended evaluation questions identified academic writing skills [paragraphing, topic sentences, and essay structure] in-text referencing and the reference list as noticeable academic writing improvements (Tebo, Noel, Jade, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions). Below see some statements from the online open-ended evaluation questions:

Table 5.6: Participants' verbatim responses based on academic writing skills, in-text referencing, and writing the reference list in full

8. Tebo 2022 online open-ended evaluation question

Podcast and vodcast evaluation

by ███████████████████ - Monday, 23 May 2022, 9:48 PM

4.The improvement on my writing skills.

9. Noel online open-ended evaluation questions

Podcast and Vodcast Evaluation

by ██████████████ - Monday, 23 May 2022, 5:19 PM

4) Improvement on my English writing skills,my vocab.New skills on editing and referencing my work.

10. Jade online open-ended evaluation question

podcast and vodcast evaluation

by ██████████████████ - Monday, 23 May 2022, 4:08 PM

4. How to cite and reference

These findings indicate that the use of supplemental tools such as podcasts and vodcasts improved students' academic writing challenges, in-text referencing and writing a complete reference list (Tebo, Noel, Jade, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions). Lea and Street (2006) point out that for students to succeed in Academic Writing modules, lecturers of academic writing need to reflect on their teaching practices. The ENG101 lecturers adopted supplemental tools to teach academic writing skills to first-year students. These findings corroborate with earlier studies by Chao et al. (2018), Safari et al. (2017) and Morris et al. (2015) who assert

that the implementation of supplementary tools significantly enhances students' academic writing skills. However, studies by Aboagye et al. (2020), Gautam (2020), Lizcano et al. (2020), and Mukhtar et al. (2020) indicate that the provision of supplemental multimedia files is still a major challenge for HEIs in developing countries in terms of weak content developed and insignificant knowledge regarding the creation of multimedia files such as podcasts and vodcasts. The findings in the current study refute statements by Aboagye et al. (2020), Gautam (2020), Lizcano et al. (2020), and Mukhtar et al. (2020) as Tebo, Noel and Jade, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions identified academic writing skills [paragraphing, topic sentences, and essay structure] in-text referencing and the reference list as noticeable academic writing improvements in the ENG101 module. Thus, the autonomous model of literacy as discussed by Horn (2016) and Street and Colin (1984) is relevant for this study because the acquisition and mastery of the ENG101 module was successfully attained by students as they were able to in-text reference, write the reference list in full as well as show signs of improved academic writing. Further, Encarnacion et al. (2021), Radha et al. (2020) and Lee et al. (2021) maintain that the integration of technology makes students feel comfortable to explore academic writing ideas and enriched students' knowledge. Undoubtedly, e-learning has been identified as a promising strategy for teaching academic writing. Further, the ENG101 lecturers exemplified the implementation of the CoI framework by actively engaging and being available on the ENG101 online platform, providing academic support, and employing teaching strategies aimed at enhancing students' writing skills and cognitive abilities. Additionally, they created a conducive and risk-free learning environment that fostered collaboration and interaction among students indicating that the provision of supplemental multimedia files is still a major challenge for HEIs in developing countries in terms of weak content developed and insignificant knowledge regarding the creation of multimedia files such as podcasts and vodcasts. The findings in the current study refute statements by Aboagye et al. (2020), Gautam (2020), Lizcano et al. (2020), and Mukhtar et al. (2020) as Tebo, Noel and Jade, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions identified academic writing skills [paragraphing, topic sentences, and essay structure] in-text referencing and the reference list as noticeable academic writing improvements in the ENG101 module. Thus, the autonomous model of literacy as discussed by Horn (2016) and Street and Colin (1984) is relevant for this study because the acquisition and mastery of the ENG101 module was successfully attained

by students as they were able to in-text reference, write the reference list in full as well as show signs of improved academic writing. Further, Encarnacion et al. (2021), Radha et al. (2020) and Lee et al. (2021) maintain that the integration of technology makes students feel comfortable to explore academic writing ideas and enriched students' knowledge. Undoubtedly, e-learning has been identified as a promising strategy for teaching academic writing. Further, the ENG101 lecturers exemplified the implementation of the CoI framework by actively engaging and being available on the ENG101 online platform, providing academic support, and employing teaching strategies aimed at enhancing students writing skills and cognitive abilities. Additionally, they created a conducive and risk-free learning environment that fostered collaboration and interaction among students.

Which of the two multimedia digital files (podcasts and vodcasts) are you in favour of and why?

  ❖ *Multimedia digital files [podcasts and vodcasts]*

Numerous students in the online open-ended evaluation questions revealed that they prefer both multimedia digital files [podcasts and vodcasts] as they are helpful, easy to understand and alleviate the isolation factor by providing a face-to-face visual simulation reality (Earl, Flo, Def, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions). In addition, a participant indicated that she favours vodcasts as she is a visual learner (Sala, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions). While podcasts and vodcasts aimed to inform and share information with students, it is important to point out that discussions, examples, illustrations and demonstrations were incorporated to significantly highlight and emphasise the important points of each topic or subject. Below see some verbatim responses the participants provided in the online open-ended evaluation questions:

Table 5.7: Participants' verbatim responses based on multimedia digital files [podcasts and vodcasts]

11. Earl online open-ended evaluation question	

PODCAST AND VODCAST EVALUATION

by ▬▬▬▬ - Saturday, 21 May 2022, 2:49 PM

5. Both are helpful but the vodcast is great because it contains visual work and through this distance learning creates a connection between student and lecturer which is nice.

12. Flo online open-ended evaluation question	

Podcast and vodcast

by ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ - Sunday, 22 May 2022, 9:17 PM

5. I prefer both because it helps in different ways podcast is good on listening skills and can repeat it as many times as I can until I understand and the vodcast helps a lot because it is more like face to face class and even examples are shown easily that makes it easier to understand.

13. Def online open-ended evaluation question	

Podcast and Vodcast Evaluation

by ▬▬▬▬▬ - Monday, 23 May 2022, 5:19 PM

5) Both Podcast and Vodcast, because they assist me in all sorts of formats . They have great guidelines.

14. Sala online open-ended evaluation question	

Podcasts and Vodcasts

by ██████████ - Thursday, 26 May 2022, 10:28 AM

5. Vodcast because I am a very visual learner so it is easier when I can see what we're being taught.

These findings reveal that ample of the participants favoured podcasts and vodcasts equally. According to studies by Longhurst et al. (2020), López-Iñesta (2020), Sáiz-Manzanares et al. (2021), Strielkowski et al. (2020), and Queiruga-Dios (2020), students are conditioned to learn in a manner that suits the lecturers' teaching styles and not according to how students interact, interpret, and acquire knowledge. Many students' learning styles are not catered for and are overlooked. However, the ENG101 lecturers utilised supplemental tools that appealed to audio (podcasts) and audio-visual (vodcasts) learning styles. It is important to point out that before the commencement of the current study, the ENG101 lecturers only posted podcasts on the ENG101 module site. This is confirmed by the findings of Longhurst et al. (2020), López-Iñesta (2020), Sáiz-Manzanares et al. (2021), Strielkowski et al. (2020), and Queiruga-Dios (2020) who indicated that students' learning styles were previously overlooked. In addition, a lack of kinaesthetic learning style is not considered (Longhurst et al., 2020). However, the ENG101 module is an Academic Writing module that does not incorporate practical students' sessions [hands-oriented practical work] such as other qualifications like fashion designing, music and art, and mechanical engineering. Even though the ENG101 module does not incorporate hands-oriented practical work, Strielkowski et al. (2020) maintain that digitization in HEIs is beneficial, however, some students may fear technology and are not ready for online education. It is important to note that the ENG101 module is offered in an ODeL institution that utilises online learning platforms and engagements. Additionally, Almeda et al. (2021) point out that HEIs have engaged in online learning to continue teaching students due to the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.3 Findings from the focus group discussions

- **What challenges do students encounter when accessing the podcasts and vodcasts in eng101?**

To address the second research question, a series of focus group discussions were conducted using through Microsoft Teams meeting platform.

The data collected under this question revealed the following issues:

What challenges do you encounter when accessing podcasts and vodcasts?

❖ *Technical challenges [glitches]*

Several participants from the focus group discussions revealed that they did not encounter any challenges when accessing podcasts and vodcasts. Instead, they found podcasts and vodcasts beneficial. In addition, participants revealed that they sometimes missed or could not attend the virtual classes due to employment reasons or travelling back home but were happy to listen and watch the uploaded podcasts and vodcasts. Some participants indicated:

> I honestly did not experience any challenges when downloading the podcasts and vodcasts. But I remember being frantic when I missed a virtual class. I was on a bus when the class was on. Fortunately, I saw email announcements that spoke about podcasts and vodcasts and links posted (Sizwe, 2022 focus group discussions).

> I find podcasts and vodcasts beneficial and wish they could be longer. Also, I like podcasts and vodcasts because I can rewind and listen to the recordings over and over again until satisfied (Brink, 2022 focus group discussions).

> I could not download the podcasts and vodcasts as soon as they were posted simply because I didn't visit or check my emails for announcements. However, as soon as I realised or saw the automated email announcements in my email, I then downloaded podcasts and vodcasts into my laptop (Lesetja, 2022 focus group discussions).

These findings indicate that the participants did not encounter technical glitches when downloading supplemental tools (Sizwe, Brink, 2022 focus group discussions). Additionally, a participant revealed that he could not immediately download podcasts and vodcasts as soon as they were uploaded on the ENG101 site [online platform] due to delays in checking emails for announcements updates (Lesetja, 2022 focus group discussions). These findings corroborate with research findings by Evans and Robertson (2020), Blakemore and Agllias (2020) and Dolch et al.'s (2021) study in that the current cohort of students is

adept at consuming digital content, desire the use of lecture vodcasting, enjoy online learning and do not fear technology. According to Strielkowski et al. (2020), although digitization in distance HEIs is beneficial, some students fear technology and are not ready for online education. The ENG101 students through the focus group discussions indicated appreciation for the use of podcasts and vodcasts (Brink, Sizwe, 2022 focus group discussions). Still, many recent studies indicated that online learning during COVID-19 came with technical challenges [disruptions] that delayed and discouraged online interaction (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020). It is important to indicate that the use of podcasts became common in HEIs as the COVID-19 pandemic has forced strict online teaching and learning (Crouch & Gordon, 2019; Bashshur, 2020). As a result, the ENG101 students also embraced the use of digital teaching and learning. Furthermore, the present study demonstrates that incorporating compatible podcasts and vodcasts can effectively minimize transactional distance in the current ODeL institution, as initially theorized by Moore (1972). This is achieved by enabling ENG101 students to conveniently access the module's content via uploaded supplementary resources. These supplemental tools not only support ENG101 lecturers in disseminating academic writing knowledge but also serve to overcome online limitations, thereby enhancing the overall learning experience for students by providing a more comprehensive approach. By offering students convenient and readily accessible avenues to interact with academic content, ODeL institutions can elevate the standard of their teaching and enhance the overall learning experience. In the case of ENG101 students, their ability to effectively engage with the academic content uploaded by their lecturers encouraged a collaborative and inclusive ODeL environment. This highlights the significance of integrating compatible podcasts and vodcasts to diminish transactional distance and foster more meaningful and effective online learning experiences. Such an approach not only facilitates student learning but also encourages active participation and a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Is the format of the podcasts and vodcasts compatible with your personal device's format?

❖ *Compatible format [Podcasts and vodcasts]*

Most of the participants in the focus group discussions revealed that the format of the uploaded podcasts and vodcasts is compatible with their laptops and that they could easily download the multimedia files onto their laptops. Students revealed that they downloaded their podcasts and vodcasts onto their laptops because laptops have space [storage] capacity and not their smartphones as they associate smartphones with leisure and entertainment. In addition, participants revealed that the visual and sound quality of the podcasts and vodcasts was clear. Some participants indicated that:

> When I attended the virtual classes, I would not see the presented PowerPoint slides or hear sound due to poor network coverage caused by load shedding. But, when I downloaded the podcasts and vodcasts into my PC. I could hear and see everything as well as learn from the recorded podcasts and vodcasts (Tshabalala, 2022 focus group discussions)

> I never had problems with downloading or compatibility issues maybe because I downloaded the podcasts and vodcasts directly into my computer (Lethabo, 2022 focus group discussions)

These findings indicate that the format of the podcasts and vodcasts was compatible with the student's devices (Lethabo, Tshabalala, 2022 focus group discussions. However, these findings are not consistent with Asmi et al. (2019), Nadhianty and Purnomo (2020), and Mahyoob (2020) who maintain that audio podcasts have high compatibility challenges as students cannot open their multimedia files due to incompatibility [format] issues and that podcasts and vodcasts require plenty of device [smartphone or laptop] storage. A respondent revealed that the sound and picture quality of the podcasts and vodcasts was clear (Tshabalala, 2022 focus group discussions. In addition, it is important to indicate that the ENG101 students did not download the podcasts and vodcasts into their smartphones but laptops (Lethabo, 2022 focus group discussions. This finding corroborates Pan's (2020) findings in that 98% of the students access online lessons by using laptops and mobile phones. However, the ENG101 students mainly downloaded their podcasts and vodcasts to their laptops. Interestingly, students pointed out that they associate the use of smartphones with leisure and entertainment and not for educational purposes. This statement disapproves a finding by Pan (2020) that most students access their educational content through mobile phones [smartphones]. Students could either use

laptops or smartphones. However, with that said, it is important to reveal that previous studies maintain that online learning [smartphones and laptops] helps improve students' participation and the absence of space limitations (Anggrawan, 2019; Nugroho et al., 2019). The current study has shown that uploading compatible podcasts and vodcasts, which can be easily accessed on students' laptops and smartphones, has been instrumental in reducing instructional distance, as originally argued by Moore (1972). By eliminating technical barriers and ensuring that all students can easily access the supplemental tools, ODeL institutions can effectively reduce transactional distance and promote more meaningful engagement with subject material. The participants found it easy to download and access the supplemental tools, and they reported that these tools were instrumental in their academic enrichment, creating learner presence amongst the ENG101 students. This emphasizes the importance of ensuring that all supplemental tools are compatible with students' devices and can be easily accessed, as this can significantly improve the quality of ODeL instructions. This finding corroborates with Pan's (2020) findings in that 98% of the students access online lessons by using the laptops and mobile phones. However, the ENG101 students mainly downloaded their podcasts and vodcasts to their laptops. Interestingly, students pointed out that they associate the use of smartphones with leisure and entertainment and not for educational purposes. This statement disapproves a finding by Pan (2020) that most students access their educational content through mobile phones [smartphones]. Students could either use laptops or smartphones. However, with that said, it is important to reveal that previous studies maintain that online learning [smartphones and laptops] helps improve students' participation and the absence of space limitations (Anggrawan, 2019; Nugroho et al., 2019). The current study has shown that uploading compatible podcasts and vodcasts, which can be easily accessed on students' laptops and smartphones, has been instrumental in reducing instructional distance, as originally argued by Moore (1972). By eliminating technical barriers and ensuring that all students can easily access the supplemental tools, ODeL institutions can effectively reduce transactional distance and promote more meaningful engagement with subject material. The participants found it easy to download and access the supplemental tools, and they reported that these tools were instrumental in their academic enrichment, creating learner presence amongst the ENG101 students. This emphasizes the importance of ensuring that all supplemental tools are compatible with

students' devices and can be easily accessed, as this can significantly improve the quality of ODeL instruction.

Are you satisfied with the length of the podcasts and vodcasts?

❖ *Podcast and vodcast length satisfaction*

Many of the participants in the focus group discussions revealed that they were satisfied with the length of the podcasts and vodcasts. In addition, participants revealed that they enjoyed the podcasts and vodcasts and that they found them helpful and satisfying. Some participants indicated that:

> At first, I found them long because my internet connection was very weak. But, I bought a new network system and I am now satisfied with the length of the podcasts and vodcasts (Thomas, 2022 focus group discussions).

> Poor or weak networks disrupted the downloading progress. At first, it seemed long but once they were downloaded, the length was good (Lekau, 2022 focus group discussions).

These findings reveal that many of the participants in the focus group discussions were satisfied with the length of the podcasts and vodcasts (Thomas, Lekau, 2022 focus group discussions. The recorded ENG101 podcasts and vodcasts ran for 5-10 minutes. This finding corroborates with a participant from Scholtenhuis, Vahdatikhaki and Rouwenhorst's (2021: 464) study as indicated below:

> Yes, it is also about the length of the video. It is for ten minutes and not two hours. I found it pleasant that the videos were just around five minutes and not fifteen or so. Because if it is just five or ten minutes, it is very easy to watch. It is done quickly, and you will watch it back more easily [Participant 1].

This finding suggests that shorter podcasts and vodcasts are appealing and interesting to students and that it reduces feelings of anxiety with watching long multimedia files that are loaded with information. Szymkowiak et al. (2021) assert that traditional teaching methods, considered outdated in the 21st century, are no longer ideal for today's generation of students. Instead, this tech-savvy generation prefers the incorporation of modern technology to facilitate and guide their learning process in a less imposing manner. Even though participants were not asked about their satisfactory level of the use of podcasts and vodcasts, participants divulged that they enjoyed the podcasts and vodcasts and that they found them helpful and satisfying. This indicates that students enjoyed learning academic writing with the use of multimedia files such as podcasts and vodcasts. The participants were satisfied with

the length of the supplemental tools that were uploaded by their lecturers. This is an important factor in reducing transactional distance, as originally posited by Moore (1972), as shorter, more focused tools can be more effective in promoting meaningful engagement with the subject matter. In this study, simplified and shorter content in the uploaded podcasts and vodcasts contributed to an improvement in the participants' academic writing skills. By simplifying the module content, lecturers can help students better grasp the material and engage more deeply with the subject matter. Academic writing is complex and requires students to actively engage in the activities (Mitchell et al., 2021). Therefore, recording shorter podcasts and vodcasts may improve students' academic writing skills as academic writing is complex. With that said, it is pivotal for ODeL lecturers to record supplemental tools that are less overwhelming to avoid confusion particularly when dealing with complex academic writing topics.

Would you recommend further use of podcasts and vodcasts in your ENG101 teaching and learning and why?

❖ *Podcasts and vodcasts recommendation*

Many of the participants in the focus group discussions revealed that they would recommend further use of podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of the ENG101 module because podcasts and vodcasts are supplemental tools that are helpful, valuable, useful and complement the prescribed textbook, recommended textbooks, TUT letter 501 (study guide), and virtual classes. Some participants indicated that:

> I would recommend further use of the podcasts and vodcasts because it helped me a lot. I was struggling with referencing and it was well explained in the podcasts and vodcasts (Yolanda, 2022 focus group discussions).

> I could not understand how to structure an essay but now I have a better understanding and believe that I will do well in my examination. I now understand a lot (Mbatha, 2022 focus group discussions).

> Thank you for the podcasts and vodcasts. I can keep watching them and repeat them as I want. I am now confident that I will perform much better in the upcoming assignments and exams (Greg, 2022 focus group discussions).

Two follow-up questions were asked, "Had we not posted podcasts and vodcasts, would the TUT letter 501 (study guide) be enough?" Do you think just reading on your own would be beneficial and enough? Some participants indicated that:

> I tried my study guide and tutorial letters. I couldn't understand. Some students are visual or audio learners. Podcasts and vodcasts helped me to better

understand the module's content more than the study guide (Mpho, 2022 focus group discussions).

In my opinion, if lecturers did not post the podcasts and vodcasts, I would not have made it in my assignments. Podcasts and vodcasts opened my eyes. They serve as face-to-face and provide us with information that is easier to interpret. Podcasts and vodcasts helped me more than the study guide (Margaret, 2022 focus group discussions).

These findings show that participants from the focus group discussions benefitted immensely from the use of supplemental tools [podcasts and vodcasts] and that they would highly recommend further usage of the podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 teaching and learning (Yolanda, Mbatha, Greg, Mpho, Margaret, 2022 focus group discussions. The reasons provided by participants for recommending further usage of podcasts and vodcasts allude to a better understanding of the module's content, improved referencing skills, structure of the essay, benefit (ability) of repeating [replay] multimedia files, appeals to students' learning styles [visual and audio] and that podcasts and vodcasts serve as face-to-face benefit (Yolanda, Mbatha, Greg, Mpho, Margaret, 2022 focus group discussions). These findings corroborate with recent studies by Aboagye et al. (2020), Blakemore and Agllias (2020), Castro et al. (2021), Gautam (2020), Lizcano et al. (2020) and Mukhtar et al. (2020) who argued that episodic podcasting as supplemental tools offer numerous benefits for students in distance higher institutions of learning. In addition, some educational benefits may be realised from video podcasts [vodcasts] (Marunevich, 2021). Previous studies indicate that podcasts and vodcasts offer students a platform to engage with academic content, build students' problem-solving skills, and dissemination of knowledge across a variety of disciplines such as education (Kapoor et al., 2018; Smith-Stoner, 2018; Melkers et al., 2017). Participants' willingness to recommend the further use of supplemental tools in their learning indicates that the transactional distance, as defined by Moore (1972), was greatly reduced in terms of students' autonomy where self-directedness and self-determination are concerned in that the recommendations to the use of podcasts and vodcasts influence and creates instructional dialogue [extends beyond mere two-way communication and encompasses various forms of interaction] among first-year students. Additionally, transactional distance is reduced as the design of module content in both the podcasts and vodcasts ensures mutual reinforcement and fosters a cohesive and well-rounded grasp of the subject matter. The students found that podcasts and vodcasts improved their understanding of the module's content, referencing skills, and essay structure, and appealed to their learning styles.

Additionally, participants appreciated the ability to replay multimedia files. These findings indicate that there was a sense of community between students and lecturers, as argued by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), where students did not feel isolated but experienced cognitive, social, and teaching presence. Interestingly, participants preferred the use of podcasts and vodcasts over prescribed text and other tutorial materials, as revealed in the focus group discussions (Mpho, Margaret, 2022 focus group discussions.

In your opinion, what should be done to decrease accessibility challenges? Substantiate your answer.

❖ *No accessibility challenges*

Plenty of the participants from the focus group discussions revealed that they did not experience accessibility challenges when downloading podcasts and vodcasts. Some participants indicated that:

> Since I did not encounter any challenges. I am not sure how to lessen the accessibility challenges. I was able to download the podcasts and vodcasts (Mbali, 2022 focus group discussions).

> I didn't have any issues when downloading podcasts and vodcasts. I used both my laptop and smartphone to access the podcasts and vodcasts. I truly did not struggle and don't have anything to fault. I am happy with the accessibility that I had, and I did not struggle with the network at all. I was able to find the information (Thuso, 2022 focus group discussions).

> I did not experience any accessibility challenges and recommend not to change anything because everything that I needed was there in the podcasts and vodcasts. I struggled to attend the virtual classes because most of us are working during virtual classes, but I could access my podcasts and vodcasts (George, 2022 focus group discussions).

These findings indicate that participants from the focus group discussions did not experience any accessibility challenges as they could not provide reasons on how to lessen accessibility challenges (Mbali, Thuso, George 2022 focus group discussions). These findings corroborate with recent studies by Aagaard and Lund (2020), Brevik et al. (2019), Johnston et al. (2021), and Schöbel et al. (2021) who indicate that podcasts as supplemental are useful due to their accessibility, length, and simplified content. In addition, podcasts enhance students' motivation and allow students to fully grasp, understand and continue learning. Podcasts help students to engage with the content and think critically about how to apply content. Further, these findings suggest that participants are familiar with exploring and navigating online platforms (Mbali, Thuso, George 2022 focus group discussions. The reduced transactional distance, argued by

Moore (1972), was evident in the ease with which students accessed the uploaded supplemental tools. Furthermore, the availability of these tools facilitated interaction and community building between students and lecturers, creating opportunities for cognitive presence, social presence, learner presence and teaching presence as advocated by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) and Shea and Bidjerano (2010). A participant's comment during the focus group discussions that "anything that is needed to pass the ENG101 module was found in the podcasts and vodcasts" (George, 2022 focus group discussions) further supports the effectiveness of these tools in reducing transactional distance and improving students' academic performance. The latter statements by George (2022 focus group discussions are consistent with a participant from a study by Scholtenhuis, Vahdatikhaki and Rouwenhorst (2021:464) who indicated:

> Yes, it is also about the length of the video. It is for ten minutes and not two hours. I found it pleasant that the videos were just around five minutes and not fifteen or so. Because if it is just five or ten minutes, it is very easy to watch. It is done quickly, and you will watch it back more easily [Participant 1].

Students embraced the implementation of supplemental tools to enhance their academic writing skills. Supplemental tools eliminate the boredom factor that comes with traditional methods of teaching academic writing.

5.4 Findings from the document analysis schedule

- **How does the use of podcasts and vodcasts enhance the academic writing skills of students in ENG101?**

To address the third research question, a comprehensive analysis of assignments and examination scripts through document analysis was conducted.

The data collected under this question revealed the following issues:

What are the positive academic writing skills that may be identified in the marked and moderated assignment and examination?

❖ *Academic writing skills*

The majority of the marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts in the document analysis schedule revealed that the positive academic writing skills are

in-text referencing, writing up reference lists and the ability to accurately respond to given instructions. Below see assignments and examination scripts samples:

Table 5.8: Assignments and examination script samples based on academic writing skills from the document analysis schedule.

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1. Assignment sample A (2022 DA): <u>in-text referencing and accurate response</u>

Sterne (2021)   *edit your work before submission!*

According to (Sterne,2021), South Africa has ~~the is~~ one of the most unequal education systems in the world. The gap in test scores between the top 20% and the rest is wider than in most countries. On the one hand, there are functional, rich [2.1] schools on the hand, but ~~The~~ majority of our students attend schools that are poorly funded and don't function well. The state of the _worse_ schools is something that deserves our attention. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education in *According ......(2018)...* 2018, among the 23,471 public schools, 20,071 had no laboratories,18,019 had no [2.2] libraries,16,897 had no internet, and 37 didn't have access to electricity, and 37 *avoid contractions!* didn't have access to sanitation facilities. What is interesting to note is that schools do not succeed or fail based on their resources. Culture is more important than anything else. Documentary filmmaker Blank, _Found_ that having an inspirational *found...* figure at the head of the school was the best way to create a community of learning and hold teachers accountable. [2.3] *Did not cite accordingly...Blank (2021) maintains that...*

Lacks research evidence. No referencing of any reading!   *Where did you find this information?*

Language usage compromises clarity ⬆

---

2. Assignment sample B (2022 DA): <u>in-text referencing and accurate response</u>

Facebook and Twitter, is the ease of access users have to information and how easy it is to share information. We have reached an age where information is readily available *The world has reached an era where...* in abundance, and news travels at incomprehensible speeds across the globe. The *Good!* speed at which information travels internationally has made it possible for countries to react swiftly ahead of time at the start of the pandemic, to slow the spread of Covid-19 (Wong, et al., 2021). Conversely, one of the major disadvantages of social media is the amount of false information on the web, and how it is difficult to distinguish between what is fact and what is false (Blackman, 2022). *Correct*

You have linked the two paragraphs accordingly!

False information can often spark debates on social media platforms, some of which can become hostile that contain hateful content and turn into cyberbullying, making the risk of these two factors a disadvantage of social media (Lennon, 2022). It is not all *Brilli*

---

3. Assignment sample C (2022 DA): Reference list

Reference list :
5.1

1. Antonini, M. V., Ho, Serene., Lyness, D., Olusanya, O. & Wong, A . (2021) The use of social media and online communications in times of pandemic COVID-19. *Journal of the Intensive Care Society.* 22(3), 255-260.

2. Blackman,M. 23rd May 2022. Village people-if only social media was more like friendly local coffee shop.
   Publication, URL and date accessed missing! 5.2

3. Lennon, A. 17th January 2022. Does social media impact mental health? What we really know. *Is this an article or a book. See TUT letter 501 (study guide) f* *further information on how to reference!*
   5.3

No need to create ordinary numbers by writing the superscript "th" as in 17th.
Or the month as in January. It should be: Lennon, A. 2022. Does....

---

4. Assignment sample D (2022 DA): Reference list

Reference list :

Where and what is the name of the title?

1. Agbanusi, A. 2018. Nnadiebube Journal of Philosophy. 2(1) 65-67.

2. Felter, C. ~~30TH June~~ 2021. Africa's `Leaders for Life`. [6.9] *list publication, date access*

3. Mironga, A. 2022. Corruption and its negative governance output in Africa: An analysis of the drives of corruption. IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). 27(5)(2) 12-13. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publucation/360550202 [accessed 10th may 2022] *The M in "may" should be in caps!*
[6.10]

---

5. Examination script sample A1 (2022 DA): in-text referencing and accurate response

2.

Correct

According to De Wet and Jacobs (2014), one possible way in which

Correct

workplace bullying can be resolved is to find appropriate "coping

Correct

strategies" to deal with the negativity of bullying itself as a victim. That

means finding ways to deal with the stress and reaching out to others

second...

that can help. A Second solution is to join a relevant union or to

Correct

unionise within the workplace (Carbo, 2011). This creates collective

action that reduces workplace bullying in general and unions have the

power to hold the workplace, as well as, the perpetrators accountable.

Correct

Thirdly, if all else fails, one should seek outside legal advice (National

C=6,L=2,P=2

=10

---

6. Examination script sample B1 (2022 DA): Reference list

7. Examination script sample C1 (2022 DA): Reference list

The document analysis of examination sample scripts reveals a significant improvement in in-text referencing, reference list and correct answers (Assignment sample A, B, C, D, and examination samples scripts A1, B1, C1, 2022 document analysis schedule). The assignment and examination script samples reveal that the use of podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module has enhanced the academic writing skills of first-year students. This finding corroborates with studies by Aheisibwe, Kobusigye and Tayebwa (2021), Bumblauskas et al. (2021), Noetel et al. (2021) and

Radianti et al. (2020), who emphasize that the use of podcasts and vodcasts enhance students' academic writing skills, stimulate learning, encourage active engagement with course content at students' own pace and time, improve learning outcomes, critical thinking and enhance students' learning experience. According to Ahmed et al. (2021), quality academic writing skills may be improved by the implementation of supplemental tools. First-year students are only able to structure a basic piece of writing as they were taught in high school" (Lentz & Foncha, 2021: 88). According to Boughey and McKenna, students who come from educationally under-resourced and historically disadvantaged high schools, and their struggle with writing is compounded by their status as speakers of an additional language, as they find it difficult to express themselves effectively in writing. It is important to point out that in the assignment samples, participants' reference lists were incomplete as students left out certain information such as the title of the article, URL links and publishing place. In the in-text referencing, a fair attempt was made in the assignments and the participant partially responded effectively to the given instructions as students simply in-text referenced but did not attempt to use their voice to indicate understanding of the topic. However, in the examination samples, the in-text referencing, reference lists and participants' responses indicate that through consistent use, exposure, and implementation of podcasts and vodcasts that taught in-text referencing and writing the reference list in full, academic writing skills improved significantly (Assignment sample A, B, C, D, and examination scripts samples A1, B1, C1, 2022 document analysis schedule). However, vivid academic writing challenges in the assignment sample reveal a lack of editing skills, plagiarism, use of contractions, spelling errors, poor punctuation, and grammatical usage (Assignment sample A, B, 2022 document analysis schedule). The ENG101 lecturers recorded and uploaded podcasts and vodcasts on assignment editing. Even though lecturers recorded podcasts and vodcasts on the importance of editing, students did not take advantage of the information discussed in the supplemental tools. The lack of attention paid by certain students to the importance of editing, as discussed in the uploaded supplementary resources, suggests a potential lack of awareness among students regarding the significance of editing stemming from their prior educational experiences (Castro et al., 2021; Derakhshan, 2021; Lentz & Foncha, 2021).To promote deep learning and conscientize students on the importance of editing, lecturers could enhance interaction based on cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence as discussed

by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000). In addition, lecturers could create more podcasts and vodcasts that focus on the significance of editing assignments and examination scripts, which may improve the overall quality of student work and minimize errors in syntax, grammar, and logic. First-year students are only able to structure a basic piece of writing as they were taught in high school" (Lentz & Foncha, 2021: 88). According to Boughey and McKenna (2016), students who come from educationally under-resourced and historically disadvantaged high schools, and their struggle with writing is compounded by their status as speakers of an additional language, as they find it difficult to express themselves effectively in writing. It is important to point out that in the assignment samples, participants' reference lists were incomplete as students left out certain information such as the title of the article, URL links and publishing place. In the in-text referencing, a fair attempt was made in the assignments and the participant partially responded effectively to the given instructions as students simply in-text referenced but did not attempt to use their voice to indicate understanding of the topic. However, in the examination samples, the in-text referencing, reference lists and participants' responses indicate that through consistent use, exposure, and implementation of podcasts and vodcasts that taught in-text referencing and writing the reference list in full, academic writing skills improved significantly (Assignment sample A, B, C, D, and examination scripts samples A1, B1, C1, 2022 document analysis schedule). However, vivid academic writing challenges in the assignment sample reveal a lack of editing skills, plagiarism, use of contractions, spelling errors, poor punctuation, and grammatical usage (Assignment sample A, B, 2022 document analysis schedule). The ENG101 lecturers recorded and uploaded podcasts and vodcasts on assignment editing. Even though lecturers recorded podcasts and vodcasts on the importance of editing, students did not take advantage of the information discussed in the supplemental tools. The lack of attention paid by certain students to the importance of editing, as discussed in the uploaded supplementary resources, suggests a potential lack of awareness among students regarding the significance of editing stemming from their prior educational experiences (Castro et al., 2021; Derakhshan, 2021; Lentz & Foncha, 2021). To promote deep learning and conscientize students on the importance of editing, lecturers could enhance interaction based on cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence as discussed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000). In addition, lecturers could create more podcasts and vodcasts that focus on the significance of

editing assignments and examination scripts, which may improve the overall quality of student work and minimize errors in syntax, grammar, and logic.

What are academic writing challenges that may be identified in the marked and moderated assignment and examination?

❖ *Academic writing challenges*

The academic writing challenges that were identified in the marked and moderated assignments and examination in the document analysis schedule are unedited assignments and examination scripts [full of grammatical errors], direct plagiarism mainly from the internet and lack of own voice in the participants' essays. Below see assignments and examination scripts samples:

Table 5.9: Assignments and examination scripts based on academic writing challenges from the document analysis schedule

Personal life

Long sentence

Edit your work before submission!

Curfew currently lifted (2022)

restrictions

No academic vocabulary usgae

I remember the time when people walked freely on the street without curfew and face masks being a mandatory and going on vacation was always what people would always consider their resting moments from educa [3.4], work and running business's , but now between March 2020 and 2021 places like Kruger national parks, table mountain and other places of entertainment have been so empty, and now TV and internet turned out to be their place of refuge, also weddings and party celebrations have been missed so much, because covid-19 replaced everything that used to make us feel alive and now without vaccine you are not permitted in certain places which violates our humanly rights. According to (WHO,2020) "the covid-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to the public health, food systems and the world of work" which surely prove to us that it will seriously take some few years before we can say that we are ready to go back normal, because as of now covid-19 is the new normal.

app

Cap M

Cap Park no s

COVID-19

COVID-19

human

This quote does not relate to p personal lives

Paraphrase!

Some of your references are incorrectly listed; use

Your conclusion should wrap up the points of

_____

10. Examination script sample D1 (2022 DA): underedited and plagiarism

during the corona virus working conditions becomes harder in the production process
protocol increases and discourage employees, they now take temparatures, sanitize and
wear face musk anywhere in the workplace. during covid-19 they take temparatures and
social distancing anywhere in the workplace. work become more and more since firms and
companys was forced to retrench employees at the begining of covid-19 as a results
production sacks employees are not treated fair by supervision by forcing them to use
protocols in the production and employees feels unhappy with protocols of corona virus
during production process production will be very poor becouse employees do not feel
comfortable with face musk during worktime on sports work or warehouse. the owners of
companys or firms give their internal control power to dismiss employees if they do not
follow the protocols. during covid-19 employees work overtime they are forced to work
everyday. firms have comparative advantage on producing goods or services using the
same number of unit compared to other countrys. in the workplace there is no
communication between staff and management this lead to no legal relationship between
employer and employees. during covid-19 protocols rises in the workplace the company do
not provide employees with face musk and sanitize but they need it by force during
production

[Handwritten annotations in red: "According to who?", "Who is they?", "Covid-19", "How do you know this?", "These are not your own ideas!", "How can you predict this?", "You own voice is important!", "Your sentences are wordy!", "Every sentence begins with a capital letter", "Whose ideas are these?", "How do you know so many facts about Covid-19 since you have never conducted a study on the facts you are presenting?"]

---

11. Examination script sample E1 (2022 DA): unedited, plagiarism and own voice

[Handwritten annotation: "This is not your own work. We need to hear your own voice and see your arguments." / "edit your work"]

Africa started 2020 with a positive economic outlook, however the Covid-19 pandemic has had significant effect on economies in several countries as trade, tourist, remittances financial markets and consumer and business sentiment are all disrupted. Tourism, an important sector of the economic activity for many countries was heavily affected by Covid-19 as countries began to place restrictions on travel and encourage social distancing.

[Handwritten annotation: "C=0", "L=1", "S=1"]

https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus-/2020/03/18/strategies-for-coping-with-the-health-and-economic-effects-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-in-africa/amp/

[Handwritten annotation: "Incorrect referencing style", "You have simply copied and pasted the information from a reliable source."]

The majority of the marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts revealed unedited assignments and examination scripts [full of grammatical errors], direct plagiarism mainly from the internet and lack of own voice (Assignment sample E, F, and Examination script samples D1, E1, 2022 document analysis schedule) are

some of the academic writing challenges students experience. These findings corroborate studies by Abdelaziz and Zehmi (2021), Alostath (2021), Hassan et al. (2021), Lentz and Foncha (2021), Ma (2021), and Singh et al. (2017) in that first-year students' written work reflects major grammatical errors such as muddled points in an illogical way and that regardless of students' plentiful exposure to grammatical exercises and practice; assignments and examination scripts still lack grammatical competence [deficiencies] and are uncertain about the use of grammatical rules. In addition, students face academic challenges such as expressing their voices, and, as a result, they just copy and paste [plagiarise] or lift information from websites and present it as their own. Students must acquire and master specific grammatical rules. In the examination script sample D1 (2022), the participant did not start sentences with capital letters and copied directly from the internet. In addition, the examination script sample E1 (2022) indicates an incorrect referencing style where links are posted to denounce plagiarism. However, the information discussed or presented does not belong to the participant. This finding suggests that the ENG101 lecturers need to emphasise the importance of editing, plagiarism, and their voice. According to Hassan et al. (2021), developing academic writing skills is a complex task that can be attained and honed through guidance and grammatical exercises and practice. The prevalence of unedited assignments and examination scripts, direct plagiarism and lack of own voice indicate a lack of cognitive presence and teacher presence as explained by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000). The ENG101 lecturers were unsuccessful in conscientizing students regarding the importance of editing, writing in their voice and plagiarism as well as creating a successful CoI that shares the same goals when it comes to editing, using their voice and plagiarism. To reduce the transactional distance as argued by Moore (1972), it is crucial to address the issue of students not effectively implementing the information on editing, using their voice, and avoiding plagiarism in the supplemental tools. To do so, lecturers could consider providing step-by-step guidelines that include detailed and explicit descriptors for each process. This could help students better understand how to implement the information and reduce the potential for confusion or misunderstanding.

Is there a significant improvement in students marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts?

❖ *Major significant improvements*

The majority of the marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts in the document analysis schedule reveal that participants were able to in-text reference and write the reference list in full. In addition, the participants' written essay reveals that some participants min-mapped or structured their ideas before attempting to discuss the given topic. Below see assignments and examination scripts samples:

Table 5.10: Assignments and examination scripts based on major significant improvements from the document analysis schedule.

12. Examination script sample F1 (2022 DA): <u>in-text referencing</u>

other. Facebook allows people to keep up to date with what is happening in the world through newspaper articles and social groups which is important during the COVID 19 pandemic. Wong et.al. (2021: p1) substantiates this claim by stating: "Such content, typically comprising important articles, useful educational links, guidelines/protocols, etc. with updates as the pandemic evolves, is active". Facebook creates awareness through forum groups which allows people to feel some sense of comfort. This is echoed by Lennon (2022: p1) who writes: "those who use social media more also report feeling more social support". The support

Handwritten annotations: allow — its users to stay abreast — ...(2021:1) 'p' stands for page number however placing p and 1 is redundancy! — This finding echo claims made by Lennon (2021:1).... — see earlier comments!

_____

13. Examination script sample G1 (2022 DA): <u>reference list</u>

Lennon, A., 2022. *Does social media impact mental health? What we really know.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/does-social-media-impact-mental-health-what-we-really-know [Accessed 31 May 2022].

Petrus, T., n.d. *EDUCATION VERSUS INDOCTRINATION: CONTEXTUALISING THE.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.journals.ac.za/index.php/sajhe/article/view/2919/2114
[Accessed 31 May 2022].

Quraysha Ismail Sooliman, R. M. V. R., 2022. [Online]
Available at: https://upjournals.up.ac.za/index.php/jdd/article/download/3969/3662
[Accessed 31 May 2022].

Handwritten annotations: [Accessed 31 May 2022] should be placed here — https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/does-social-media-impact-mental-health-what-we-really-know — Write the titile in sentence case! — See earlier comments! — Quraysha, R.M.V.R. 2022. Title?.... — Where is the title? — Incomplete!

_____

14. Examination script sample H1 (2022 DA): <u>mind map</u>

The findings reveal significant improvements in participants' marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts as participants were able to in-text reference and write the reference list in full (Examination script samples F1, G1, 2022 document analysis schedule). In addition, the participants' written essays reveal that some participants mind-mapped or structured their ideas before attempting to discuss the given topic (Examination script sample H1, 2022 document analysis schedule). These findings reveal that the ENG101 lecturers emphasised and discussed the importance of in-text referencing, writing the reference list in full and mind-mapping skills. However, even though participants were able to write the reference list, there were challenges with punctuation within the reference list (Examination script sample G1, 2022 document analysis). Being able to mind-map is a clear indication that the participants were mindful [conscious] of writing challenges [cohesion and coherence] that may emanate from a lack of planning. Mind mapping as a technique has propelled participants to argue points or ideas succinctly and skilfully. In addition, planning has allowed students to successfully satisfy the requirements of the given topic. However, despite the errors in the examination script sample H1 (2022-document analysis), which included no in-text referencing and grammatical mistakes, the paragraph is skilfully written. The participant discusses the benefits of social media and starts by highlighting its advertising potential. Then, the participant proceeds to relate

advertising to audience demographics. In addition, the participant incorporates the connectivity factor and further indicates that social media was used effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic for work and educational purposes while adhering to the COVID-19 protocols. These findings corroborate with studies by Bumblauskas et al. (2021), Derakhshan's (2021), Kyaw et al. (2019) and Radianti et al. (2020), in that students benefit extraordinarily from synchronous and/or asynchronous [podcast and vodcasts] digital multimedia files which enhance students' academic performance. The ENG101 examination script samples reveal major significant improvements in students' marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts (Examination script samples F1, G1, H1, 2022 document analysis schedule). The findings of this study strongly indicate that students' proficiency in in-text referencing and creating comprehensive reference lists had a substantial impact in reducing transactional distance, aligning with Moore's (1972) initial discussions. This notable improvement in citation skills was a result of conscientious drilling and integration of citation practices into students' learning activities. The improvement in academic writing skills not only reduced instances of plagiarism but also fostered critical engagement with the subject content, thereby promoting deeper learning. The impact of incorporating synchronous and/or asynchronous digital multimedia files, such as podcasts and vodcasts, on students' academic performance is evident in the pass percentage of the ENG101 2022 semester 1 results, as shown below. These innovative learning resources have significantly contributed to enhancing students' academic achievements. The ENG101 examination script samples reveal major significant improvements in students' marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts (Examination script samples F1, G1, H1, 2022 document analysis schedule). The findings of this study strongly indicate that students' proficiency in in-text referencing and creating comprehensive reference lists had a substantial impact in reducing transactional distance, aligning with Moore's (1972) initial discussions. This notable improvement in citation skills was a result of conscientious drilling and integration of citation practices into students' learning activities. The improvement in academic writing skills not only reduced instances of plagiarism but also fostered critical engagement with the subject content, thereby promoting deeper learning. This is reflected in the pass percentage of the ENG101 2022 semester 1 results as shown below.

Table 5.11: Improved pass rate in the ENG101 module

YEAR	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
Semester	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2
Number of students admitted to the examination	13004	9800	15000	19000	20000	21000	22453	16500	18000	10000
Percentage passed	47%	51%	69%	55%	66%	51%	69%	55%	70%	74%
Percentage Failed	53%	49%	31%	45%	34%	49%	31%	45%	30%	26%

Table 5.11 provides compelling evidence supporting the argument that the incorporation of both podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module has resulted in a significant improvement in student performance. The pass rate has demonstrated a remarkable increase, surging from 55% during semester 2 of 2021 to an impressive 70% in semester 1 of 2022. Even more noteworthy is the continued growth, with the pass rate further elevating to 74% in semester 2 of 2022, which is outside the study's primary scope but remains a noteworthy observation. Undoubtedly, the adoption of supplemental learning tools has played a pivotal role in enhancing the academic writing skills of students. Drawing from Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's earlier discussions (2000), it is evident that the availability of these tools fostered a sense of CoI between students and lecturers. This sense of community, in turn, has contributed to the development of cognitive presence, social presence, learner presence, and teaching presence. As a result of these enriched interactions and connections within the learning environment, student engagement and active participation in the educational process have significantly improved. Consequently, this heightened engagement has directly contributed to the noticeable surge in the module's pass percentage. The incorporation of podcasts and vodcasts has proven to be a successful approach in bolstering student achievement and academic success in the ENG101 module. This data-driven argument underscores the importance of embracing innovative teaching methods and incorporating technology into pedagogy. The results clearly illustrate how a thoughtful integration of multimedia resources and supplementary learning tools can create a more vibrant and supportive learning atmosphere, benefitting both students and lecturers alike. Moving forward, these

findings should serve as a compelling case for the continued implementation and exploration of diverse teaching strategies to maximize student potential and success across various academic disciplines.

Are the academic writing challenges expressed by students evident in the marked and moderated assignments and exam scripts?

❖ *Identified academic writing challenges*

The academic writing challenges expressed by students are evident in the marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts. According to the findings obtained from the online open-ended evaluation questions and the document analysis schedule of marked and moderated assignments and exam scripts samples, the academic writing challenges are citations (lack of in-text referencing and lack of reference list that breads direct plagiarism), grammatical errors (capitalization, use of contractions, spelling and punctuation errors and illogical meaning) and academic writing skills such as paragraphing, essay structure, own voice, unedited assignments and examination scripts, (Joh, Thand, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions) and (Assignment sample E, F, and Examination script samples D1, E1, 2022 document analysis schedule). Below see assignments and examination scripts samples:

Table 5.12: Assignments and examination scripts sample on identified academic writing challenges from the document analysis schedule

Joh 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions
PODCAST AND VODCAST EVLUATING

by ███████████ - Monday, 23 May 2022, 8:06 PM
3when it comes to citing

how to write the work because it is different from how we used to write in high school

_____ |
| **Thand 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions** |

Podcast and vodcast evaluation

by ████████████████████   Sunday, 22 May 2022, 10:10 AM

3a. Referencing, it takes a while to get used to doing it and I was usually confused by what referencing style to use.

b. Being wordy, my paragraphs are usually very long.

c. Finding the right voice. I struggle with making my academic essay sound more professional and less like a story as I am a writer so it makes it difficult to separate those two voices.

Assignment sample E (2022 DA): unedited

Social media

Edit your assignment before submitting!

Social media has become a big part of our daily lives in now days [*nowadays*] as we truly depended on it in so many ways as it's [*avoid contrations*] the fast way of communicating. Social media has it own pros and cons to be aware of [*beware*] along the the way Advantages of social media is that we communicate , learn and promote. Disadvantage of it , it full of con artist [*social media are...*] , it can be a source of bullying break through . [2.1] [*it is*] [*Punctuate accordingly*]

Social media it's a great platform for communication as people use different types of social media channels to angage with others no matter how far you might be , it easy fast and fun and it can be addicting . Social media have such a good impact on my life and my studies for instance in ENG1503 we using social platform to communicate with our lectures and students in which I found it so useful, Khanna " believe education around the internet will help". We are getting used of new normality of doing things at Unisa using technology in our studies [2.2]

It is vital to edit your work before submission. You have lost precious marks based on this. You did not in-text reference to justify your stance!

Unclear, lacks clarity of ideas and expression!

Furthermore,...

Futhermore social media it's not only for communication but they are lot of activity in there that keep lot of people busy such as chatting , playing games , gossiping you [*not academic vocabulary*]

Assignment sample F (2022 DA): unedited

Personal life

I remember the time when people walked freely on the street without curfew and face masks being a mandatory and going on vacation was always what people would always consider their resting moments from educa, work and running business's , but now between march 2020 and 2021 places like Kruger national parks, table mountain and other places of entertainment have been so empty, and now TV and internet turned out to be their place of refuge, also weddings and party celebrations have been missed so much, because covid-19 replaced everything that used to make us feel alive and now without vaccine you are not permitted in certain places which violates our humanly rights. According to (WHO,2020) "the covid-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to the public health, food systems and the world of work" which surely prove to us that it will seriously take some few years before we can say that we are ready to go back normal, because as of now covid-19 is the new normal.

Examination script sample D1 (2022 DA): underedited and plagiarism

during the corona virus working conditions becomes harder in the production process protocol increases and discourage employess. they now take temparatures, sanitize and wear face musk anywhere in the workplace. during covid-19 they take temparatures and social distancing anywhere in the workplace. work become more and more since firms and companys was forced to retrench employees at the begining of covid-19 as a results production sacks. employees are not treated fair by supervision by forcing them to use protocols in the production and employees feels unhappy with protocols of corona virus during production process production will be very poor becouse employees do not feel comfortable with face musk during worktime on sports work or warehouse. the owners of companys or firms give their internal control power to dismiss employees if they do not follow the protocols. during covid-19 employees work overtime they are forced to work everyday. firms have comparative advantage on producing goods or services using the same number of unit compared to other countrys. in the workplace there is no communication between staff and management this lead to no legal relationship between employer and employees. during covid-19protocols rises in the workplace the company do not provide employees with face musk and sanitize but they need it by force during production

These findings reveal that ENG101 students have major challenges with citation, academic writing skills, and grammar. This is a clear indication that citation, academic writing skills, and grammar are aspects that were not thoroughly taught and honed at the high school level. In addition, these findings reveal that there is a huge gap between high school and higher institutions of learning in terms of rigour. Some of the academic writing challenges expressed by students and evident in the marked and moderated assignments and exam scripts are basic for instance spelling and punctuation errors, use of contractions and editing (Assignment sample E, F, and Examination script samples D1, E1, 2022 document analysis schedule). These findings corroborate with studies by Alostath (2021), Hassan et al. (2021), and Ma (2021) in that first-year students lack academic rigour, face major obstacles, misunderstand the nature of academic writing, struggle to express their voice, paraphrase, coherence and cohesion and vocabulary. In addition, developing writing proficiency is complex, as students need to master specific rules and acquire certain skills. This complexity often obstructs students' interest and eventually affects their comprehension and performance in language learning. According to previous studies by Boughey (2012) and McKenna (2012), the issue of language remains highly contentious in South African HEIs. Perhaps the ENG101 students may tremendously benefit from a bridging module on citation, academic writing skills and grammar or continues usage of podcasts and vodcasts. Studies by Boughey (2012) and McKenna (2012), the issue of language remains highly contentious in South African HEIs. Perhaps the ENG101 students may tremendously benefit from a bridging module on

citation, academic writing skills and grammar or continues usage of podcasts and vodcasts.

What are the persistent or recurring academic writing challenges in the marked and moderated assignment and exam scripts?

❖ *Persistent and recurring academic writing challenges identified*

The persistent and recurring academic writing challenges identified in the marked and moderated assignments and examinations in the document analysis schedule scripts are poor grammatical usage, unedited assignments and exam scripts, and plagiarism. Below see assignments and examination scripts samples:

Table 5.13: Assignments and examination scripts sample on persistent and recurring academic writing challenges identified from the document analysis schedule

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15. Examination script sample I1 (2022 DA): Poor grammar usage and unedited

One of the most common disadvantages of social media is the impact it has on ones `[2.1] user's`

mental health. People are being told that they need to look and act a certain way in `told by who? Reference this!`

order to fit in, this is more common ~~for~~ younger people. This can cause low `[2.2] This is on social media...be precise` `in`

self-esteem issues as well as anxiety and depression. Another reason why social `related` `[2.3] citation needed`

media can be dangerous ~~is because~~ it s easy for others to steal your identity. There `pertains to identify theft` `[2.4] avoid using your!` `[2.5] No flow of ideas!` `social media acounts...`

are many ways in which people are able to hack into accounts and steal personal

information. Another issue according to Ro Khanna is that in the real world we allow `[2.6] abb` `Khanna (2022) is...`

one another to speak, we listen and are very respectful towards the person

speaking, we give them the opportunity to say what they need to say before we add

or share anything however, he then goes on and states that virtually these ¨social

practices are simply thrown out of the window¨ (Daily Maverick, 2022, 3). `[2.7] Italics`

`Edit your work before submission!`

---

16. Examination script sample J1 (2022 DA): Plagiarism and unedited

Comparing leadership in African countries: *Comparing what in leadership?*

state president of...for a 37 years.

Robert Mugabe was the longest serving leader in Zimbabwe, he served his country

where did you find this information?

[3.5] with a total of 37 years whereas Mobutu Sese Seko, who was the longest serving

leader in Democratic Republic of Congo only served his country ~~with~~ a total of 31

President Robert Mugabe ...   *???*

years. Mugabe passed away in Singapore in 2019 two years after his ouster

Cite where the information was retrieved from or who oganised this information   Use surname and cite accordingly

whereas Mobutu passed away in Morocco in the year 1997. [3.6] ~~Claire~~ mentions that the

Democratic Republic of Congo suffered from gross corruption, embezzlement as well

Punctuate accordingly!

as neglect of public infrastructure and in Zimbabwe they suffered from underfunded

and dysfunctional departments and programs which were linked to Mugabe´s misuse

What was the main aim of this paragraph? What were you aiming to achieve through your

of federal funds. *discussions?*

---

17. Examination script sample K1 (2022 DA): Poor academic writing skills, grammar usage and unedited

There are various characteristics that every leader should posses not only will this

Who?   *grow the country's economy*   *As political leaders...*

help them with personal growth but growth within a country. As leaders the country

[4.7] are   *[4.5] Punctuate!*   *[4.6] Needed*

and the people is your responsibility Some of these traits are decision-making skills,

Recommendation?

every country needs a leader who is capable of making good decisions so that

Who is they?

everyone can benefit. They need to be open to new ideas instead of just doing

[4.8] They   *[4.9] Point of view should agree!*

whatever you want it is important that you listen to the needs of those around you

Edit your ideas for sense purposes!

therefore it is important that as a leader you are open-minded. Another trait that

every leader should have is problem-solving someone who will be able to solve any

challenge amongst the people. *Edit your work before submission*

---

18. Assignment sample F (2022 DA): unedited

Weak introduction Unclear and lack clarity of ideas expressed!
users connect with other users across the globe

Facebook is one of the largest ~~sites~~ in the world where we are only allowed, but encouraged

Meta platform

to connect with everyone. Anyone can take advantage of **Facebook to maintain a good**

?? ??

relationships with others who identify with certain tastes or products. ~~This~~ is very important

edit your work!

Not a unified whole!

because as a business you can sell or promote a product/service to a highly targeted audience,

Simplistic generalisations

thus increasing the possibilities of making money on the internet. Facebook allows the ~~estab8of~~

4.5 What is the main idea expressed here?

partnerships between various projects.

These findings indicate that persistent and recurring academic writing challenges in the marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts samples are poor grammatical usage, unedited assignments and exam scripts, and plagiarism (Examination scripts samples I1, J1, K1 and Assignment sample F, 2022 document analysis schedule). These findings indicate that students' grammatical foundation is insignificant and that further practical exercises may strengthen and enhance grammatical usage in assignments and examinations. Further, episodic podcasts and vodcasts may greatly conscientize students with the importance of editing assignments and examinations. Plagiarism is a major challenge for first-year students who are not equipped with citation skills, however, the ENG101 lecturers uploaded podcasts and vodcasts that discuss citations in detail. This finding suggests that perhaps if the ENG101 lecturers used an actual script sample that was plagiarised and identify plagiarism approaches and tendencies then students would have a firm idea of what plagiarism entails. In addition, a developed plagiarism checklist with descriptors may greatly benefit students and lessen plagiarism tendencies.

5.5 Reflection of the findings

In this chapter, the action research approach (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Winter, 1989) was employed to address the significant academic challenges faced by ENG101

students in their writing skills. The four steps of action research (Ferrance, 2009; Lufungulo, Mambwe, & Kalinde, 2021; Manfra, 2019) - planning, acting, observing, and reflecting - were crucial in the process of implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of podcasts and vodcasts as supplemental tools to enhance academic writing. Before the commencement of the current study, it was evident that students struggled with various aspects of academic writing, including articulating points concisely, maintaining an appropriate academic and neutral tone, citing, and referencing correctly, understanding the usage of linking verbs, and ensuring cohesion and coherence in their work. These challenges were identified through the marking and moderation process, and it became clear that immediate attention was required to improve students' academic writing performance.

The planning phase involved identifying and analyzing the specific challenges faced by students in ENG101. This step allowed for the development of a targeted intervention strategy. The action taken was to implement podcasts and vodcasts as supplemental tools, in addition to the existing teaching resources, such as prescribed and recommended texts, feedforward and feedback tutorial letters, and virtual classes. During the acting phase, podcasts and vodcasts were integrated into the ENG101 curriculum and the Moodle LMS, and students were encouraged to utilize the supplemental tools to enhance their academic writing skills. In addition, lecturers provided support and guidance to ensure that students could benefit from these supplemental learning tools to enhance their academic writing skills. The observing phase involved closely monitoring the impact of the intervention. The researcher assessed the students' marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts after the incorporation of podcasts and vodcasts. The findings demonstrated a significant improvement in academic writing skills, with students showing enhanced abilities in in-text referencing and crafting full reference lists. Additionally, their accuracy in responding to given instructions improved noticeably. However, the reflection phase indicated that certain challenges persisted, such as poor grammatical usage, unedited assignments, exam scripts, and instances of plagiarism. These findings indicate that while podcasts and vodcasts were beneficial, they were not a comprehensive solution to all the academic writing challenges faced by the students.

The study's results also validate the importance of adopting a student-centered approach by creating a CoI, where students are actively involved in their own learning process and provided with diverse resources to support their development. The integration of action research approach allowed for a systematic and effective way to address the academic challenges faced by ENG101 students. It is evident from the data that the integration of podcasts and vodcasts as supplemental tools into the module's resources has resulted in a more enriched and effective learning environment and complement the existing curriculum. The lecturing team's proactive approach to embracing innovative teaching methods has proven to be a resounding success, as reflected in the improved module results in the semesters following the intervention (see Table 5.11). Nevertheless, the research also revealed areas that require further attention and support, highlighting the ongoing nature of action research and the need for continuous improvement in pedagogical practices. Follow-up studies could be conducted to monitor the progress of ENG101 students over subsequent semesters to determine if the improvements in academic writing are sustained and transferable to other courses or academic disciplines.

5.6 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter reveal the significant benefits that ENG101 students derived from the incorporation of episodic supplemental tools, such as podcasts and vodcasts. These digital multimedia resources proved to be accessible, easy to comprehend, and greatly enhanced their listening skills. Students expressed their positive experience with downloading podcasts and vodcasts, finding them helpful, valuable, and complementary to the prescribed textbook, recommended textbooks, study guide (TUT letter 501), and virtual classes. On the contrary, students faced challenges in understanding the prescribed and recommended textbooks, study guide, and other tutorial letters like the feedforward and feedback letter. However, the integration of podcasts and vodcasts positively impacted their academic writing skills, raised awareness about the importance of editing assignments and examinations, and encouraged increased active participation and interaction, as students felt more at ease expressing themselves behind a keyboard. Consequently, students expressed their enthusiasm for further utilization of podcasts and vodcasts in their studies,

recommending their continued incorporation. Furthermore, this chapter thoroughly discussed, analysed, and interpreted the findings gathered from online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis schedules. This study adopted the autonomous models of literacy, recognizing the significance of student support within the context of ODeL and aiming to explore the influence of podcasts and vodcasts on enhancing the academic writing skills of first-year students. In the next chapter, Chapter 6, guidelines are presented to inform current and future lecturers and e-tutors on how to create high-quality, accessible, engaging, and educational podcasts and vodcasts that can effectively improve the academic writing skills of first-year ODeL students using multimedia files.

CHAPTER 6

Guidelines for the creation of podcasts and vodcasts in an ODeL context

"Problems are guidelines, not stop signs"
- Robert H. Schuller

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter 5, research findings from online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis were analysed and discussed. The findings alluded to the challenges and perceptions of first-year students regarding the use of podcasts and vodcasts to improve their academic writing skills in the ENG101 module. The findings revealed that the use of supplemental tools such as podcasts and vodcasts was beneficial to students, as it improved their skills in in-text referencing, paraphrasing, writing topic sentences, structuring essays appropriately, and creating reference lists. Additionally, students did not encounter any accessibility issues when downloading podcasts and vodcasts, and digital multimedia files enhanced participation and interaction, as reported in the focus group discussions and document analysis (Sizwe, Brink, Mbali, Thuso, George, 2022 focus group discussions); (Examination script samples F1, G1, 2022 document analysis); (Tebo, Noel, Jade, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions); and (Assignment sample E and F, and Examination script samples D1 and E1, 2022 document analysis). This chapter, Chapter 6, builds on these findings to provide guidelines for present and future lecturers on how to create high-quality, accessible, engaging, and educational podcasts and vodcasts that improve the academic writing abilities of first-year ODeL students using multimedia files.

Fox et al. (2021), Moore (2022), Rajar (2020), Turner et al. (2020), and Wyld (2021), suggest that podcasts and vodcasts are popular and effective pedagogical tools in higher education that promote interaction and interest, critical thinking and analysis,

and knowledge communication. However, there is a need to improve how lecturers develop, design, and disseminate these multimedia files to better cater to the needs of students. The current study addresses this need by providing guidelines for creating effective and engaging digital content for ODeL students. The themes of these guidelines are discussed in detail, followed by a summary of the guidelines.

6.2 Podcast and vodcast guidelines

Creating high-quality and engaging podcasts and vodcasts is crucial for lecturers, as it can greatly benefit ENG101 students in terms of accessibility, education, and engagement (Casares, 2022; O'Connor et al., 2020; Vergara, 2022). To achieve this, current and future producers need to prioritize the specific academic needs of students and develop effective guidelines to ensure that their content meets high standards. The following guidelines are based on findings obtained from online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis and are specifically designed to improve the academic writing skills of first-year students in ODeL settings.

6.2.1 Discuss and focus on outlined topics in the assignment(s).

❖ **Create podcasts and vodcasts that focus and discuss on topics outlined within the assignment(s)**

Lecturers need to offer practical [relevant] academic support that focuses on the topics outlined in assignments. According to Mpho and Margaret from the 2022 focus group discussions, if lecturers did not post podcasts and vodcasts that focused on the topics outlined in their assignments, they would not have passed their assignments. Further, students have expressed that podcasts and vodcasts are helpful as the information presented caters for different learning styles [audio and visual], is easier to follow, and facilitates further learning. Therefore, to provide effective academic support that bridges the knowledge gap, lecturers should select topics that are applicable and relevant to the given assignments. Provide guidelines on how to unpack [breakdown] meaning embedded in instructions and guidelines on how to determine if the given response is correct. It is important to remain focused on the topic and avoid being side-tracked by irrelevant information. It is essential to review the recordings and identify weaknesses [redundant and irrelevant information], then edit accordingly to

ensure that the presented information outlines topics in assignments. In addition, it is important to repeatedly highlight key points. For academic writing purposes, it is essential to adequately discuss the following: the purpose of academic writing, organisation of academic writing, establishing your stance, own voice, signposting, academic vs biased [emotive] language, paragraphing, topic sentences, supporting sentences and concluding sentences, citations, credible arguments developed, paraphrasing, summarising, plagiarism, editing and proofreading.

6.2.2 Focus on a single topic!

❖ **Treat each topic as a distinct subject unless topics are connected**

For facilitation of knowledge acquisition purposes, it is crucial to focus on a single topic as it helps to avoid misunderstandings, information overload, and potentially negative experiences with academic writing. Mag, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions revealed that the module's content become easier as it was explained in detail. Academic writing in its nature is systematic; therefore, lecturers are encouraged to follow a gradual approach. To focus on a single topic, lecturers may: start by determining which topic is particularly challenging to students and why. Identify and outline a unique topic to avoid information overload. Gather relevant information on the chosen topic and use it to create a framework that provides clear key steps and organise the material in a cohesive and structured way. In the first twenty seconds of each recording, explain what each recording entails and link each episodic (series) podcast and vodcast systematically by noting at the end of each presentation what the next topic will entail. You may number your episodic podcasts and vodcasts as '1 of 5' or '3 of 5' for clear systematic purposes.

6.2.3 Simplify the module's content effectively

❖ **Create podcasts and vodcasts that simplify the module's content**

A significant number of first-year students experience difficulties with academic writing. Therefore, simplifying the subject content may be beneficial as it makes information accessible, easy to understand, clear, increase engagement, effective and better retention of information. Some students revealed that the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of academic writing has helped to understand the module's content better as challenging topics were unpacked significantly and assisted to facilitate knowledge gain and focus. In addition, podcasts and vodcasts help improve participants' listening skills because lecturers explain the

module's content in detail [thoroughly] (Sib, Melus, Mag, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions). Moreover, students indicated that they understood the module's content better than the study guide and prescribed text and that the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts improved referencing skills, the structure of the essay, benefitted from repeating [replay] multimedia files, appeals to students' learning styles [visual and audio] (Mpho, Yolanda, Mbatha, Greg, Mpho, Margaret, 2022 focus group discussions). Thus, to simplify the module's content, lecturers are advised to do the following: identify key concepts, unpack complex concepts by breaking down the concept into smaller components [more manageable and digestible chunks], explain and clarify details to the fullest, create a step-by-step guideline on how to complete a task, focus on the module's core details, ideas and concepts, provide realistic examples and illustrations, use plain [everyday language] when explaining concepts [avoid using technical jargons or complex vocabulary], avoid unnecessary long sentences [verbosity], explain the glossary of terms in simply language and to make content relatable use visual aids that complement your content and make it easier to understand.

6.2.4 Explicit vs implicit

❖ **When discussing topics, be explicit and avoid ambiguity**

To ensure that ODeL students comprehend the information being conveyed in podcasts and vodcasts, and stay engaged with the content, it is crucial to adopt explicitness when discussing topics. Being explicit in teaching academic writing helps to prevent confusion that may arise from using implicit methods, convey information clearly, and aids presenters to avoid tendencies of committing ambiguity, assumptions, or inferences. In ODeL institutions, where students primarily study independently, the explicitness of information is particularly important because students do not have direct access to lecturers. Explicitness in podcasts and vodcasts enhances comprehension and leads to better outcomes. In addition, students may engage more fully with the content. To achieve this, lecturers can introduce the topic of discussion explicitly, use visuals that clarify points, include relevant images, use active language, and repeat key points to ensure clarity. Additionally, the utilization of simplified English, as a form of language awareness, can be employed to cater to the needs of EAL and ESL students.

6.2.5 Provide relevant examples and illustrations that are context-specific

❖ *Create podcasts and vodcasts that comprise relevant examples and illustrations that are specific to the context and can be easily understood by first-year students*

Given the challenge that academic writing poses to ENG101 students, there are various ways in which lecturers can support their students. One approach is to prepare a lesson plan that includes key examples and illustrations, which are aligned with the subject matter and learning outcomes to increase comprehension and retention of the topic. To create interest and engagement, lecturers could use captivating examples and illustrations that clarify complex ideas and make information more accessible, while encouraging critical thinking and connecting ideas to real-life situations. Using easy-to-remember examples and illustrations that encourage analysis can also help improve students' academic writing skills. Create a connection between subject matter and meaning as well as create a positive learning experience with relevant examples and illustrations that are context-specific, relatable and can be easily understood by first-year students. By utilizing relevant examples and illustrations, lecturers can effectively communicate complex ideas, engage their students, ensure that the message is clear, easily understood and enhance academic writing.

6.2.6 Use a calm [tempo] and neutral tone of voice

❖ *Speak in a calm and neutral tone of voice*

Having an engaging and captivating voice is just as significant as the topic being discussed. To capture the attention and interest of students, it is crucial to speak in a calm and neutral tone of voice. This can be accomplished by projecting one's vocal muscles effectively to be audible. Several strategies can be employed to achieve this goal, such as speaking at a pace that allows students to easily comprehend, absorb and digest the subject matter, speaking in a friendly and welcoming tone, and incorporating appropriate pauses. Conversely, it is recommended that presenters avoid speaking too quickly, employing jargon or slang, and using lengthy sentences. To ensure a clear and understandable voice, presenters should listen to their recordings and review their vocal projections accordingly. Moreover, to maintain students' interests and engagement, the inclusion of background music instrumentals as a deliberate strategy to captivate and maintain the attention and interest of the students can be considered with the aim of providing a soothing auditory experience

as well as reducing the perceived academic hostility associated with the delivery of academic content.

6.2.7 Maximum recording time-fifteen minutes!

❖ ***Create podcasts and vodcasts that are a minimum of five minutes and a maximum of fifteen minutes***

The principle of 'less is more' applies when producing podcasts and vodcasts in higher institutions of learning. Some participants in the focus group discussions revealed that they were satisfied with the length [5-10 minutes] of the podcasts and vodcasts (Thomas, Lekau, 2022 focus group discussion. Even though participants indicated a preference for 5-10 minutes of podcasts and vodcasts, an additional 5 minutes may be allocated as a grace period in case lecturers are dealing with heavy content and may need to go overboard by a minute or so. To effectively record [produce] podcasts and vodcasts that are a maximum of 15 minutes, lecturers are advised to do the following: plan the subject content effectively by focusing only on the main points and relevant information [to avoid information overload be succinct], practice your presentation, time yourself during the trial run/rehearsals by using a stopwatch to measure the length of your trial run [set a time limit], and listen to the final product. Lecturers must distribute their recorded material to colleagues for review purposes. In addition, by seeking feedback, lecturers can enhance the quality of their recordings and subsequently release them timeously on diverse online platforms.

6.2.8 Hype creation and post periodically

❖ ***Generate hype [interest and anticipation] when sharing podcasts and vodcasts and release them periodically***

To facilitate teaching and learning, and smooth dissemination of information within an ODeL institution, lecturers must generate excitement [hype] and bring attention to their podcasts and vodcasts. A student expressed that "I could not download the podcasts and vodcasts as soon as they were posted because I did not check my emails for notifications" (Lesetja, 2022 focus group discussion. Therefore, it is recommended that lecturers create a buzz around the release of their podcasts and vodcasts, post recordings regularly with eye-catching headlines, and effectively utilize automated email announcements on Moodle, and other online platforms or channels to reach students who may not frequently check their emails regularly. In addition, lecturers could offer exclusive content such as bonus episodes to further pique students'

interest and employ social media platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram and Facebook to better connect with their students. pique students' interest and employ social media platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram and Facebook to better connect with their students.

6.2.9 Building a community of practice by reducing the transactional distance

❖ ***Importance of adherence to podcast and vodcasts guidelines***

To mitigate challenges encountered during the development of podcasts and vodcasts, it is imperative for lecturers to rigorously adhere to the prescribed guidelines. These guidelines have been devised to cultivate increased dialogue between students and lecturers, as well as among lecturers themselves, as creators of podcasts and vodcasts. By meticulously following these established guidelines, lecturers can effectively reduce transactional distance, as elucidated by Moore (1972) and Moore and Kearsley (1996) and create a community of practice by augmenting their presence. Additionally, the work of Street and Colin (1994) and Baker and Street (1994) posits that the ideological model of literacy extends beyond technical skills, as it is profoundly influenced by the sociocultural context in which it operates. Moreover, this ideological model offers a culturally sensitive perspective on literacy practices within diverse contexts. Essentially, students in this model are socialized into new social norms, where literacy practices are profoundly shaped by their surrounding social and cultural milieu. Therefore, the development of supplemental tools specifically tailored to the needs of students enrolled in Academic Writing modules (Ahmed et al., 2021; Aboagye et al., 2020; Blakemore & Agllias, 2020; Castro et al., 2021; Gautam, 2020; Lizcano et al., 2020; Mukhtar et al., 2020) holds promise in enhancing their academic writing skills, thus warranting the implementation of high-quality supplementary resources.

6.3 Summary of the guidelines

Table 6.1 below represents a summary of the guidelines that aim to inform current and future lecturers on how to record podcasts and vodcasts of high quality.

Table 6.1: Summary of guidelines for the creation of podcasts and vodcasts

Guideline's descriptive themes	Checklist
6.3.1 *Create podcasts and vodcasts that focus and discuss on topics outlined within the assignment(s).* - Did you focus on and discuss topics that were outlined and relevant in the assignment(s)? - Did you highlight your main ideas outlined in the assignment(s)? - Did you unpack [breakdown and explain] the meaning embedded in instructions and provide guidance on how to determine the correctness of responses? - Are there any instances of redundancy or irrelevant information in your presentation? - If yes, did you edit your podcasts and vodcasts? - Did you thoroughly discuss core academic writing features such as the purpose of academic writing, organizing academic writing, establishing your position, using your voice, using signposting, distinguishing between academic and biased [emotive] language, paragraph structure, topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences, citing sources, developing credible arguments, paraphrasing, summarizing, avoiding plagiarism, editing, and proofreading?	Yes/No
6.3.2 *Treat each topic as a distinct subject unless topics are connected.* - Did you identify which topic is challenging for students and why? - Did you gather pertinent information on the selected topic? - Did you concentrate on one topic at a time? - Did you present the topic in a coherent and well-organized manner? - For episodic podcasts and vodcasts, did you explain what each episode of the podcast and vodcast would cover within the first 20 seconds? - At the end of each podcast and vodcast, did you indicate the topic that will be discussed in the next episode? - Did you systematically number each episode of the podcast and vodcast, for instance, '1 of 5' or '3 of 5'?	Yes/No
6.3.3 *Create podcasts and vodcasts that simplify the module's content.* - Did you explore all possible methods to simplify the module's content? - Did you identify the key concepts? - Did you unpack [breakdown] complex concepts into smaller components to make them easier to understand? - Did you provide a thorough explanation and clarification of the key concepts?	Yes/No

▪ Did you offer a step-by-step guide on how to complete tasks? ▪ Did you focus on the core details, ideas, and concepts of the module? ▪ Did you provide realistic examples? ▪ Did you use plain language to explain complex vocabulary? ▪ Did you eliminate lengthy sentences in your presentations? ▪ Did you explain the glossary of terms using simple language? ▪ Did you use relatable visual aids that support the concept being discussed?	
6.3.4 When discussing topics, be explicit and avoid implicit connotations ▪ Did you state the objective(s) of your presentation clearly and explicitly? ▪ Did you discuss the concepts to convey information without ambiguity? ▪ Are there any assumptions, and/or inferences that could result from your presentation? ▪ Did you use relevant infographics to clarify your points? ▪ Did you repeat the key points to ensure clarity and a better understanding of the module's content? ▪ Did you use simplified English as a form of language awareness to cater for EAL and ESL students?	Yes/No
6.3.5 Create podcasts and vodcasts that comprise relevant examples and illustrations that are specific to the context and can be easily understood by first-year students. ▪ Did you create a lesson plan that includes key examples and illustrations specific to the context, increasing comprehension and retention of the topic? ▪ Are your examples and illustrations aligned [appropriate] for the subject matter and learning outcomes? ▪ Did your examples and illustrations help clarify complex ideas, make information accessible, encourage critical thinking, and connect ideas to real-life situations? ▪ Do your examples and illustrations help improve students' academic writing skills by being memorable and applicable? ▪ Did your examples and illustrations connect with the subject matter, and are they relatable and easy to understand for first-year students?	Yes/No
6.3.6 Speak in a calm and neutral tone of voice. • Did you use a calm [energetic, friendly, and engaging] tone of voice to captivate students' attention? • Is your voice clear and audible? • Did you speak at a pace that allows students to understand the topic? • Did you incorporate appropriate pauses in your presentation to aid understanding?	Yes/No

• Have you reviewed your podcasts and vodcasts to assess your vocal projections and delivery? • Did you incorporate background music instrumentals as a deliberate strategy to captivate and maintain the attention and interest of the students?	
6.3.7 _Create podcasts and vodcasts that are a minimum of five minutes and a maximum of fifteen minutes._ ▪ Did you ensure that your podcasts and vodcasts adhere to a minimum of five minutes to a maximum of fifteen minutes? ▪ Did you effectively plan and organize the content of your presentation within this time frame? ▪ Did you prioritize the main points of your discussion to fit within the given time constraints? ▪ Did you practice and time your presentation to ensure it fits within the recommended length? ▪ Did you review and edit your final product before sharing it with others? ▪ Did you seek feedback from colleagues and incorporate it into your final product before publishing or releasing it?	Yes/No
6.3.8 _Generate hype [interest and anticipation] when sharing your podcasts and vodcasts and release them periodically._ ▪ Did you create a buzz around your podcasts and vodcasts before posting them, to build excitement and anticipation? ▪ Did you share your podcasts and vodcasts at regular intervals [periodically], using attention-grabbing titles? ▪ Did you take advantage of all possible online platforms to share your podcasts and vodcasts? ▪ Did you offer special or bonus episodes exclusively on social media platforms like WhatsApp or Facebook to engage with hard-to-reach students and generate more interest?	Yes/No
6.3.9 _Building a community of practice by reducing the transactional distance_ _Importance of adherence to podcast and vodcasts guidelines_ ▪ Did you adhere to the set guidelines when creating podcasts and vodcasts? ▪ In the event of encountering challenges during the creation of podcasts and vodcasts, did you seek guidance from fellow lecturers to obtain additional advice and insights? ▪ Are there any elements within the recording that have the potential to mitigate feelings of isolation and loneliness?	Yes/No

- Were the podcasts and vodcasts you recorded specifically designed to stimulate dialogue and facilitate interaction between yourself and your students?
- Did you take into consideration the socio-cultural context of your students while creating the podcasts and vodcasts?
- In the delivery of the module's content, were the diverse contexts of your students taken into consideration?
- Was the module's content custom-tailored to address the specific needs of your students?

6.4 Conclusion

The primary focus of this chapter was to present comprehensive guidelines to both current and future lecturers and e-tutors on how to create compelling podcasts and vodcasts that effectively enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students in an ODeL context. To achieve this goal, a well-defined set of guidelines was outlined, including keeping the recording time limited to 15 minutes, employing simple language in the content, adopting a neutral tone of voice, providing explicit introductions to topics, concentrating on the subjects covered in assignments, incorporating relevant and context-specific examples and illustrations, and generating excitement prior to publishing the podcasts and vodcasts. In the subsequent chapter, Chapter 7, a concise summary of the study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations is presented, based on the data gathered from online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions, and document analysis schedule. For each research question addressed in Chapter 5, specific and practical recommendations are provided, offering valuable insights and actionable suggestions for further improvement and implementation.

CHAPTER 7

Summary of findings, recommendations, implications, future research, and conclusion

"A podcast is a great way to develop relationships with hard-to-reach people"

-Tim Paige

7.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore first-year students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance academic writing skills within the context of an ODeL institution. The study found that ENG101 students benefitted significantly from the use of episodic supplemental tools such as podcasts and vodcasts, as these multimedia files were accessible, easy to comprehend, and improved listening skills. Students revealed that they did not encounter any difficulties in downloading these files and found them to be helpful, valuable, and complementary to the prescribed textbook, recommended readings, study guide [TUT 501], and virtual classes. Additionally, students revealed that they struggled with understanding the prescribed and recommended textbooks, study guide, and other tutorial letters, such as feedforward and feedback letters. However, the incorporation of podcasts and vodcasts enhanced their academic writing skills, raised awareness about the significance of editing assignments and exams, improved participation and interaction, and reduced anxiety levels as students were behind a keyboard. Thus, students indicated that they would recommend further use of podcasts and vodcasts in their studies. Consequently, the study developed guidelines for present and future lecturers on how to create high-quality, accessible, engaging, and educational podcasts and vodcasts that improve the academic writing abilities of first-year ODeL students using multimedia files. Further, to understand contextual e-learning realities [challenges and restrictions], the study recommends continuation of the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts as students benefitted significantly, cater for different learning styles [audio and audio-visual], lecturers record detailed podcasts and vodcasts within a time

limit] that are systemic to enhance students' academic writing skills. Lecturers should continue to record and upload podcasts and vodcasts that are accessible, and compatible with the students' personal device's format, considering the TTD framework of by Moore (1972) and Garrison and Anderson (2000) and Moore (1972) as both alerts and inform online [distance] teaching and learning realities. Lecturers should also record multiple podcasts and vodcasts focusing on persistent academic writing challenges identified in marked and moderated assignments and exam scripts, such as poor grammatical usage, unedited work, and plagiarism.

Primarily, the motivation for this study emerged from the premise that ENG101 is a first-year English Academic Writing module within a 50% pass rate range. This low pass rate could lead to a high number of students repeating the module. It was observed that some students may struggle with expressing themselves in writing or comprehending and deducing information due to their limited proficiency in English and the language of instruction being English at Unix. In addition, first-year students who enrol at Unix may not have the necessary skills required of them at the university level for self-study as Unix is an ODeL institution. Unix students' learning challenges may be intensified as students are accustomed to direct or face-to-face teaching and learning and not learning in an isolated environment or context. In addition, lecturers at Unix face several challenges, including coping with a high number of students, limited or no opportunities for face-to-face interaction with students, restricted teaching time, and demanding workloads. These challenges have been identified by scholars such as Boughey and McKenna (2016), Leibowitz (2017a), and AlMarwani (2020). Their English linguistic mastery may not be fully developed to a level where they can tackle or engage with academic writing tasks successfully. Thus, the study aimed to explore students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101 to enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students in an ODeL context. To address the challenges of DE, including feelings of isolation, podcasts and vodcasts were implemented to cater for various learning styles. The study revealed that the ENG101 students benefitted significantly from the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts as their academic writing skills improved. Therefore, it was essential to develop guidelines for present and future lecturers on how to create high-quality, accessible, and educational podcasts and vodcasts that may improve the academic writing abilities of first-year ODeL students using multimedia files. Leibowitz (2017a),

and AlMarwani (2020). Their English linguistic mastery may not be fully developed to a level where they can tackle or engage with academic writing tasks successfully. Thus, the study aimed to explore students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 to enhance academic writing skills of first-year students in an ODeL context. To address the challenges of DE, including feelings of isolation, podcasts and vodcasts were implemented to cater for various learning styles. The study revealed that the ENG101 students benefitted significantly from the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts as their academic writing skills improved. Therefore, it was essential to developed guidelines for present and future lecturers on how to create high-quality, accessible, engaging, and educational podcasts and vodcasts that may improve the academic writing abilities of first year ODeL students using multimedia files.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction and orientation to the writing challenges encountered by first-year students within the specific context of a South African ODeL institution. Moreover, it sheds light on the pass and failure rates of ENG101 first-year students during the period spanning from 2018 to 2022. The chapter further zooms into the contextual framework of the study, the research questions posed, the problem statement addressed, the rationale underlying the study, the researcher's positionality, and the methodology employed for the current research exploration.

In Chapter 2, the literature related to the use of supplemental tools such as podcasts and vodcasts in HEIs by first-year students was reviewed, along with their perceived challenges. Chapter 2 discussed local and global theories that form the basis of interventions designed to support students. These interventions make use of various multimedia tools to improve the academic writing skills of first-year students in ODeL institutions. Additionally, the chapter covered the latest e-learning trends that enhance teaching and learning in E, including the integration of podcasts and vodcasts in HEIs. It highlighted the importance of incorporating technology to address the academic writing difficulties faced by first-year students and explored their perceptions of podcasting and vodcasting in DE.

Chapter 3 discussed two frameworks [TTD framework by Moore (1972) and Col by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000)] underpinning student support interventions that incorporate various digital multimedia tools to improve the writing skills of first-

year students. The two theories are crucial as they build a framework that helps improve online learning experiences for first-year students and facilitate meaningful engagement and improve learning outcomes. Col and the TTD as frameworks help bridge the instructional gap and reduce accessibility challenges. TTD and Col build the premise, and justification for creating and designing module content that supports the ENG101 students enhances the academic writing skills of first-year students accordingly and reduces the instructional gap.

Chapter 4 discussed three qualitative approaches to obtaining reliable data. Specifically, the three qualitative research instruments [online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions and document analysis] were endorsed to gather and interpret data. The research instruments used for collecting data in the current study are suitable because they allowed the researcher to obtain facts and opinions from students regarding their perceptions and challenges in using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance their academic writing skills. The online open-ended evaluation questions answered the first research question [What are the students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?]; the focus group discussions answered the second research question [What challenges do students encounter when accessing the podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?], and document analysis answered the third research question [How does the use of podcasts and vodcasts enhance the academic writing skills of students in ENG101?].

In Chapter 5, the researcher analysed and discussed data using the qualitative approaches discussed in Chapter 4. Moreover, to validate the research instruments, the current study employed triangulation to minimise qualitative research findings' weaknesses and validated strengths by following pre-set questions of each instrument. The findings obtained from all research instrument confirmed a common theme in that students benefitted tremendously to the use of podcasts and vodcasts. Thus, triangulation in the current study played a significant role. A critical and in-depth discussion of the findings was carried out. The researcher began by narrating the themes obtained from the findings, discussed, and interpreted the findings. Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic analysis method was endorsed. The thematic analysis method by Braun and Clarke (2021) comprises identifying, organising, and offering insight into, patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. For the current study, themes were formulated to create logical interpretations and presentations of data.

The findings alluded to the challenges and perceptions of first-year students regarding the use of podcasts and vodcasts to improve their academic writing skills in the ENG101 module. The findings revealed that the use of supplemental tools such as podcasts and vodcasts was beneficial to students, as it improved their skills in in-text referencing, paraphrasing, writing topic sentences, structuring essays appropriately, and creating reference lists.

In Chapter 6, findings obtained from Chapter 5 were utilized to create guidelines for present and future lecturers, and on how to create high-quality, accessible, engaging, and educational podcasts and vodcasts that improve the academic writing abilities of first-year ODeL students using multimedia files. In addition, Chapter 6 outlined a set of guidelines, including keeping the recording time limited to 15 minutes, using simple language in the content, adopting a neutral tone of voice, being explicit when introducing topics, concentrating on the topics covered in assignments, incorporating relevant and context-specific examples and illustrations, and generating excitement before publishing the podcasts and vodcasts.

Chapter 7 summarises the study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations based on data obtained from the online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions and document analysis. It provides specific recommendations for each research question that was answered in Chapter 5.

The current study contributed towards the use of multimedia digital files/tools [podcasts and vodcasts] that can be used to enhance first-year students' writing challenges in a South African ODeL institution and context. Academic writing is challenging for the ENG101 EAL students enrolled on a writing module that expects students to write and observe academic writing conventions. EAL students face many academic challenges as they are compelled to learn English [language] and through English, whereas native speakers are adept to utilize English as a home language [HL] at ease and have a higher chance to outperform EAL students as English mastery is closely linked to academic success. According to Ma (2021) and Hassan (2021), EAL students encounter language obstacles that include translating concepts from their first language (L1) into English and developing and arranging ideas in their L1 before putting them down in writing in English. In addition, this complexity often obstructs students' ultimately impacts their understanding and performance in

language learning. This finding corroborates with a participant from Ma's (2021:1183) study as indicated below: motivation and ultimately impacts their understand ding and performing in language learning. This finding corroborates with a participant from Ma's (2021:1183) study as indicated below:

> They (native speakers) have got better vocabulary; it is really helpful for them to write better. So, it would be an extra challenge for me to improve my vocabulary, which is a necessary tool to write better and after that maybe grammar…er is another tool. Maybe it's an extra challenge for me as well. (S8, Persian).

Proficiency in the English language at HEIs is a bonus. According to a previous study by Leibowitz (2004), the academic literature suggests that South African students who speak EAL face a significant challenge in expressing their ideas effectively through academic writing. This presents a notable generic gap that impedes their academic success in higher education. Therefore, there are several disadvantages and challenges students face when learning English language skills such as writing. However, language lecturers need to be equipped with writing skills and knowledge to take advantage of opportunities to solve writing challenges and incorporate supplemental tools in DE that may benefit EAL students in achieving their academic goals (Derakhshan, 2021; Fathi & Rahimi, 2020; Gau & Zhang, 2020; Zhang, 2020).

When analysing data, the findings revealed that the ENG101 first-year students embraced and appreciated the use of podcasts and vodcasts as supplemental learning tools to enhance their academic writing skills. In addition, the majority of the students indicated that they did not encounter accessibility challenges when downloading podcasts and vodcasts, benefitted from synchronous and/or asynchronous [podcast and vodcasts] digital multimedia files, recommended further use of podcasts and vodcasts and that since recorded podcasts and vodcasts are simplified in terms of module's content and brief presentation, it is easier to understand the ENG101 module's content rather than reading the study guide 501 by themselves. These findings corroborate with studies by Bumblauskas et al. (2021), Castro et al. (2021), Dolch et al. (2021), Encarnacion et al. (2021), Lee et al. (2021) and Marunevich (2021), who argue that podcasts and vodcasts are effective for e-learning on teaching and learning academic writing, beneficial for students who struggle academically, improve access to the module's content, not location specific or bound, increase listening skills, reusable, motivate learning as the multimedia files are contemporary, and encourage independence as students can learn at own pace. In addition, the

integration of digital technology appeals to audio and visual learning styles increases academic exploration, eliminates feelings of loneliness, and creates e-learning satisfaction, which stems from lecturer-to-student collaboration. Lecturers can share information with students and students with other students. The findings in this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge and increase value by highlighting the importance of incorporating both podcasts and vodcasts in HEIs and not just podcasts. Recently, there has been a deficit in the provision of vodcasts. A lack of the creation of vodcasts in HEIs symbolises no consideration for visual learning style (Al-Maroof et al., 2022; Bueno-Alastuey, & Nemeth, 2022; Sevnarayan & Mohale, 2022). Additionally, the creation of guidelines on how to record podcasts and vodcasts for current and future lecturers who teach academic writing skills to first-year students. The value is linked to the ODeL learner support framework by Moore (1972) and Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000). Moore's (1972) 'TTD' framework and Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) 'CoI' framework promote successful online learning and address issues of collaborative learning through meaningful interaction for ODeL institutions. The foundation of distance learning must be based on theories that reflect the realities and challenges faced by students in distance institutions. In addition, prominent authors in ODeL educational domains such as Makina (2020), Mhlanga and Molio (2020) and Wentzel and De Hart (2020) indicate that writing challenges within the ODeL contexts are exacerbated by factors such as isolation and feelings of separation. The TTD helped me to address the challenge of instructions and bridge the gap between lecturers and students by implementing academic writing interventions. CoI, on the other hand, facilitated deep learning through interaction across four types of presences: cognitive, social, learner and teaching. These frameworks were particularly relevant to my study, as they both promote successful online learning, encourage interaction and collaboration, and reduce feelings of isolation and delivery challenges of digital content. This study highlights the importance of incorporating such frameworks in online education to enhance student learning experiences. Thus, innovative technologies [podcasts and vodcasts] were implemented as supplemental tools to enhance academic writing skills and effective teaching and learning. The current study contributed to existing action research by including relevant [first-hand] research participants who experience academic writing challenges in an ODeL HEI and by creating guidelines that inform current and future lecturers and e-tutors on how to podcasts and vodcasts that can be used to enhance

first-years students' writing challenges in a South African ODeL institution and context.; Sevnarayan & Mohale, 2022). Additionally, the creation of guidelines on how to record podcasts and vodcasts for current and future lecturers who teach academic writing skills to firs-year students. The value is linked to ODeL learner support framework by Moore (1972) and Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000). Moore's (1972) 'TTD' framework and Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) 'CoI' framework promote successful online learning and addresses issues of collaborative learning through meaningful interaction for ODeL institutions. It is crucial that the foundation of distance learning be based on theories that reflect the realities and challenges faced by students in distance institutions. In addition, prominent authors in ODeL educational domains such as Makina (2020), Mhlanga and Molio (2020) and Wentzel and De Hart (2020) indicate that writing challenges within the ODeL contexts are exacerbated by factors such as isolation and feelings of separation. The TTD helped me to address the challenge of instructional distance and bridge the gap between lecturers and students by implementing academic writing interventions. CoI, on the other hand, facilitated deep learning through interaction across four types of presences: cognitive, social, learner and teaching. These frameworks were particularly relevant to my study, as they both promote successful online learning, encourage interaction and collaboration, and reduce feelings of isolation and delivery challenges of digital content. This study highlights the importance of incorporating such frameworks in online education to enhance student learning experiences. Thus, innovative technologies [podcasts and vodcasts] were implemented as supplemental tools to enhance academic writing skills and effective teaching and learning. The current study contributed to existing action research by including relevant [first-hand] research participants who experience academic writing challenges in an ODeL HEI and by creating guidelines that inform current and future lecturers and e-tutors on how to podcasts and vodcasts that can be used to enhance first-years students' writing challenges in a South African ODeL institution and context.

7.2 Summary of the key findings and recommendations

The purpose of the study was to explore first-year students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance the academic writing skills of

first-year students enrolled on an Academic Writing module. The main finding in this thesis was that most first-year students struggle with academic writing as it was not adequately taught, emphasised, practised, and prioritized during high school education (Joh, Thand, 2022 online open-ended evaluation questions) and (Assignment sample E, F, and Examination script samples D1, E1, 2022 document analysis). This finding corroborates with Castro et al. (2021), Derakhshan (2021) and, Lentz and Foncha (2021), in that first-year students are only able to structure a basic piece of writing as they were taught in high school. First-year students lack academic rigour and need guidance with structuring their writing, paragraphing, and other grammaticality, as they would muddle points in an illogical manner. However, to produce academic writing of a high standard, it is essential to hone and develop academic writing skills through continuous practice, guidance, and effort. Additionally, the ENG101 students benefitted from the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts as supplemental tools in their teaching and learning. Similarly, studies by Bakla (2020), Davies et al. (2020) and Romero-Ivanova et al. (2020) indicate that supplemental tools and platforms are invaluable in sustaining a sense of connectedness and flexibility in isolated settings [ODeL]. Thus, the results in this study revealed that 2022, first-semester cohort of students are adept at technology use, consume a lot of digital information from various platforms, and embrace multimedia files, and supplemental tools such as podcasts and vodcasts can be used to enhance academic writing skills of first-year students in distance HEIs. In addition, to further mitigate the academic difficulties faced by first-year students it is crucial to identify the primary e-learning obstacles in HEIs, it was essential to draw from student support frameworks such as Moore's (1972) TTD framework and Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) Col' data from online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions and documents analysis may be found below:

7.3 Findings from the online open-ended evaluation questions

- **What are the students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?**

The data collected under online open-ended evaluation questions revealed the following issues:

What are the positives perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of the ENG101 module and why?

❖ *Accessibility, understanding of the module content and improved listening skills*

The use of podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of the ENG101 module has garnered three main positive perceptions: accessibility, improved understanding of the module's content, and enhanced listening skills (Melus, Sib, and Mag, 2022, online open-ended evaluation questions). These findings align with recent studies conducted by Blakemore and Agllias (2020), Hitchcock (2021), Marunevich et al. (2021), and Schöbel et al. (2021), which highlight the rapid growth of podcasts and vodcasts in educational settings, as students increasingly embrace digital technology in their studies. Moreover, podcasts and vodcasts provide students with a versatile platform to engage with academic content and access knowledge across various disciplines. Another significant finding from the current study reveals that many students encountered no technical glitches when downloading the uploaded podcasts and vodcasts. Additionally, the interactive nature of podcasts and vodcasts fosters an online environment where students feel encouraged to reach out to their lecturers for further discussions on challenging topics. This finding is consistent with statements made by Bumblauskas et al. (2021), Castro et al. (2021), Dolch et al. (2021), Johnston et al. (2021), Mukhtar et al. (2020), and Schöbel et al. (2021), indicating a high demand for supplemental tools in ODeL institutions and emphasizing the empowering and beneficial aspects of podcasts for students.

What are the negative perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of the ENG101 module and why?

❖ *Poor network coverage, technical issues, and inability to ask questions*

Several students expressed negative perceptions regarding the use of podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of the ENG101 module. The primary concerns mentioned were related to poor network coverage, technical issues during downloading, and the absence of interactive elements, preventing students from asking questions and engaging in real-time interactions. It is noteworthy that the issues with network coverage causing technical difficulties were not attributed to the ENG101 online platform (Moodle LMS) but were rather linked to the quality of local or home

broadband coverage. This finding is consistent with previous studies by DHET (2020), Lentz (2020), Myende and Ndlovu (2020), Nadhianty and Purnomo (2020), and Raaper and Brown (2020), which have highlighted the challenges faced by students from disadvantaged rural backgrounds with limited internet or network connectivity. Technical glitches, such as prolonged and incomplete downloading progress, were attributed to less-than-optimal digital learning platforms that experienced constant crashes. Existing literature by Alturise (2020), Bataineh, Alsmadi, and Shikhali (2020), Mahyoob (2020), and Rajab et al. (2020) has also pointed out that technical issues in online learning often arise due to a high volume of downloads and concurrent platform access. Furthermore, the asynchronous nature of podcasts and vodcasts has posed a significant barrier to student enthusiasm for interaction, as they desire to engage with lecturers and seek clarification through real-time communication. Studies by Ahmed et al. (2021), Bumblauskas et al. (2021), Byun and Slavin (2020), Pellegrini, Mirella, Vladimir, Uskov, and Casalino (2020), and Shivangi (2020) support the idea that both synchronous and asynchronous digital multimedia files, like podcasts and vodcasts, can foster active learning, critical thinking, and enhance the overall learning experience for students. It is important to highlight that ENG101 students have access to various resources, such as e-tutor services, discussion forums, telephone inquiries, and email addresses for lecturers, which enable them to engage in further discussions and receive academic support. According to Hubers, Endedijk, and Van Veen (2020) and Wrigley and Straker (2015), DE students are encouraged to interact with e-tutors and lecturers to enhance their academic pursuits. To enhance the success rate of students in the ENG101 module, constant encouragement and support should be given to students to engage, cooperate, and collaborate with their lecturers regularly. Failure to interact with content and lecturers may result in negative outcomes, including poor academic performance, misunderstandings of content, limited support, and a lack of motivation.

As a first-year student, what are your academic writing challenges and why?

❖ *Citations [referencing], writing skills and grammar*

The majority of students who participated in the online open-ended evaluation questions revealed that they encounter several academic writing challenges, particularly in the areas of citation (referencing), writing skills, and grammar. In-text

referencing and compiling a reference list were cited as challenging tasks, attributed to the lack of emphasis on citations during their high school education (Joh and Thand, 2022, online open-ended evaluation questions). Additionally, participants expressed struggles with academic writing skills, including paragraphing (topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence structure), essay organization (introduction, body, and conclusion), voice, and paraphrasing. They noted that their writing tends to be wordy and lacks a neutral academic tone, with limited adherence to academic writing conventions (Thand, 2022, online open-ended evaluation questions). These findings are consistent with research by Alostath (2021), Aripin and Rahmat (2021), Rabadi and Rabadi (2020), Demirçivi (2020), and Zeiger (2021), which highlight the academic writing challenges faced by many first-year students, encompassing issues related to grammar, voice, coherence and cohesion, paragraphing, citation, and linguistic competence. It appears that there is an expectation that students should possess proficient writing skills and be adept at utilizing academic writing conventions in their modules. Lentz and Foncha (2021) argue that first-year students often exhibit basic writing structures they were taught in high school, lacking the necessary academic rigour and guidance for proper structuring, paragraphing, and grammaticality. Consequently, students may present their points in a disorganized and illogical manner. It is crucial to recognize that first-year students require academic support interventions and guidance to navigate these challenges effectively. The absence of such support may lead to high failure rates, students struggling to complete their qualifications within the expected time frame and potential experiences of academic exclusion and exhaustion. However, according to Castro et al. (2021) and Derakhshan (2021), students grappling with academic writing, referencing, and grammar can greatly benefit from multiple supplemental tools such as podcasts and vodcasts, which offer activities aimed at improving their academic skills and understanding of topics, rather than solely burdening them with numerous assignments. This suggests that ENG101 students could also significantly benefit from the implementation of multiple supplemental tools, offering activities designed to enhance their writing skills and overall academic performance.

Since using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101, what noticeable academic writing improvement can you identify?

> ❖ *Academic writing skills, in-text referencing, and the reference list*

Most students who participated in the online open-ended evaluation questions highlighted significant improvements in their academic writing skills, particularly in the areas of paragraphing, topic sentences, and essay structure, as well as in-text referencing and the ability to create a complete reference list (Tebo, Noel, and Jade, 2022, online open-ended evaluation questions). These findings strongly suggest that the use of supplemental tools like podcasts and vodcasts effectively addressed students' academic writing challenges and enhanced their in-text referencing and referencing skills. These findings align with earlier studies by Chao et al. (2018), Morris et al. (2015), and Safari et al. (2017), which have demonstrated the positive impact of using supplemental tools to improve students' academic writing skills. Furthermore, Encarnacion et al. (2021), Lee et al. (2021), and Radha et al. (2020) advocate that the integration of technology creates a comfortable space for students to explore academic writing ideas and enriches their knowledge. Incorporating e-learning can be considered one of the most effective strategies for teaching academic writing in the digital era. Moreover, perceiving pedagogy through the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model by Garrison and Anderson (2000) has proven to be beneficial for teaching academic writing. The four presences within the CoI [social presence, cognitive presence, learner presence, and teaching presence] appeal to students in HEIs as it eliminates feelings of loneliness and enhances e-learning satisfaction through collaboration. In the context of ENG101, lecturers effectively implemented the CoI model in their teaching strategy by being active and available on the ENG101 online platform, providing continuous academic support, and teaching in a manner that aimed to enhance students' writing skills and engage their cognitive abilities. This approach encouraged a conducive and risk-free online learning environment, encouraging collaboration among students. As a result, all three presences within the CoI model activated a fourth presence, learner presence, as learners enthusiastically embraced and engaged with the supplemental tools. Notably, the ENG101 students were receptive and not technophobes to the implementation of digital media files, as they found it easy to understand the module's content. This positive response underscores

the significance of learner presence, as it motivates active self-learning and further enhances students' overall learning experience.

Which of the two multimedia digital files (podcasts and vodcasts) are you in favour of and why?

❖ *Multimedia digital files [podcasts and vodcasts]*

Numerous students expressed their positive views on using both multimedia digital files, such as podcasts and vodcasts, as they found them helpful, easy to understand, and capable of reducing the isolation factor by providing a face-to-face visual simulation reality (Earl, Flo, Def, and Sala, 2022, online open-ended evaluation question). This finding suggests that participants embraced supplemental tools for their academic enrichment and did not ignore them based on their preferred learning styles: audio (podcasts) and audio-visual (vodcasts). Previous studies by Longhurst et al. (2020), López-Iñesta (2020), Sáiz-Manzanares et al. (2021), Strielkowski et al. (2020), and Queiruga-Dios (2020) have highlighted the issue that students often must adapt to lecturers' teaching styles, which may not align with their individual learning preferences and how they best interact, interpret, and acquire knowledge. In many cases, students' unique learning styles are overlooked and not adequately catered for.

However, the ENG101 lecturers took a different approach by incorporating supplemental tools that appeal to both audio (podcasts) and audio-visual (vodcasts) learning styles. It is important to note that before the current study, only podcasts were posted on the ENG101 Moodle module site. This observation aligns with the findings of Longhurst et al. (2020), López-Iñesta (2020), Sáiz-Manzanares et al. (2021), Strielkowski et al. (2020), and Queiruga-Dios (2020), indicating that students' learning styles were previously overlooked. The lack of consideration for kinaesthetic and visual learning styles was also evident (Longhurst et al., 2020). Nevertheless, since the ENG101 module primarily focuses on academic writing and does not include hands-on practical sessions found in fields like fashion design, music and art, and mechanical engineering, the integration of digitization in higher institutions has been advantageous (Strielkowski et al., 2020). However, it is essential to acknowledge that some students may have reservations or fears about technology and may not feel fully prepared for online education. It is important to recognize that the ENG101 module is offered in an Open and Distance Learning (ODeL) institution that utilizes online

learning platforms and engagements. Furthermore, face-to-face interactions were discouraged due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leading HEIs to embrace online learning to ensure continued education for students (Almeda et al., 2021).

7.4 Findings from the focus group discussions

- **What challenges do students encounter when accessing the podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?**

The data collected under this question revealed the following issues:

What challenges do you encounter when accessing podcasts and vodcasts?

❖ *Technical challenges [glitches]*

Most participants in the focus group discussions reported a positive experience with accessing (downloading) podcasts and vodcasts, revealing that they did not encounter any technical glitches or challenges in the process. They also expressed satisfaction with the availability of podcasts and vodcasts, especially when they could not attend virtual classes due to work commitments or travelling back home. Participants acknowledged that delays in checking emails for announcements and updates on the ENG101 Moodle site sometimes caused them to miss awareness of uploaded podcasts and vodcasts, but they were pleased that they could easily download and access these multimedia files. Moreover, participants found the podcasts and vodcasts highly beneficial, expressing a desire for longer content as they found the materials informative and engaging. These findings are in line with research by Blakemore and Agllias (2020), Dolch et al. (2021), and Evans and Robertson (2020), which highlight that the current cohort of students is proficient in consuming digital content, enjoys online learning, and does not fear technology. The participants' appreciation and desire for the use of podcasts and vodcasts align with recent studies showing that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online learning tools, including podcasts, in HEIs (Bashshur, 2020; Crouch & Gordon, 2019). However, it is important to acknowledge that while digitization in distance HEIs offers numerous benefits, some students may still be apprehensive about technology and may not feel adequately prepared for online learning, as mentioned by Strielkowski et al. (2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning presented technical

challenges and disruptions that affected online interactions (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the use of podcasts became increasingly common in HEIs as the pandemic necessitated strict online teaching and learning measures (Bashshur, 2020; Crouch & Gordon, 2019). The ENG101 students adapted well to this shift and embraced the use of digital teaching and learning methods, including podcasts and vodcasts.

Is the format of the podcasts and vodcasts compatible with your personal device's format?

❖ *Compatible format [Podcasts and vodcasts]*

The majority of participants in the focus group discussions reported that the format of the uploaded podcasts and vodcasts was compatible with their laptops (personal devices), and they could easily download the multimedia files onto their laptops. Interestingly, these findings contradict the results from studies by Asmi et al. (2019), Mahyoob (2020), and Nadhianty and Purnomo (2020), who highlighted high compatibility challenges with audio podcasts, where students faced difficulties in opening multimedia files due to format incompatibility. These studies also noted that podcasts and vodcasts required substantial device storage, which was not the case with the ENG101 students. The ENG101 students did not encounter compatibility issues when downloading podcasts and vodcasts onto their laptops. In contrast, they found that the visual and sound quality of the podcasts and vodcasts was clear and satisfactory. It is noteworthy that students preferred downloading podcasts and vodcasts onto their laptops rather than their smartphones, as they associated smartphones with leisure activities. This observation is consistent with Pan's (2020) findings, which revealed that 98% of students access online lessons using laptops and/or mobile phones. This result contradicts Pan's (2020) assertion that most students primarily access educational content through mobile phones (smartphones). Students had the option to use either laptops or smartphones for this purpose. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that previous studies have demonstrated the benefits of online learning, whether through smartphones or laptops, in improving student participation and overcoming space limitations (Anggrawan, 2019; Nugroho et al., 2019). The flexibility and accessibility offered by both devices contribute to enhanced student engagement in online learning.

<u>Are you satisfied with the length of the podcasts and vodcasts?</u>

❖ *The podcast and vodcast length satisfaction*

The focus group discussions yielded positive feedback from many participants, indicating their satisfaction with the length of the podcasts and vodcasts. Additionally, participants expressed their enjoyment of the multimedia content, finding it both helpful and satisfying. These findings align with a similar sentiment expressed by a participant in the study conducted by Scholtenhuis, Vahdatikhaki, and Rouwenhorst (2021:464), which is indicated below:

> Yes, it is also about the length of the video. It is for ten minutes and not two hours. I found it pleasant that the videos were just around five minutes and not fifteen or so. Because if it is just five or ten minutes, it is very easy to watch. It is done quickly, and you will watch it back more easily [Participant 1].

The ENG101 podcasts and vodcasts were designed to run for 5-10 minutes, adopting a shorter format that proved to be appealing and interesting to students. This approach successfully reduced feelings of anxiety often associated with watching long multimedia files that contain an overwhelming amount of information. As Szymkowiak et al. (2021) argue, traditional teaching methods are no longer suitable for the 21st century, and today's generation of students prefers the use of modern technology to support and direct learning in a more engaging and less overpowering manner. In the contemporary academic world, advanced digital technology plays a crucial role in facilitating students' comprehension of module content, enhancing accessibility, promoting interaction, and enabling collaboration. Today's students seek digital resources that provide convenience and distinctiveness, aligning with the appeal of the shorter and more focused podcasts and vodcasts implemented in the ENG101 module. Though the participants were not specifically asked about their satisfaction with the use of podcasts and vodcasts, they voluntarily expressed their enjoyment of these multimedia files, finding them helpful and satisfying. This positive feedback indicates that students thoroughly appreciated the learning experience facilitated by podcasts and vodcasts. The use of multimedia resources, such as podcasts and vodcasts, undoubtedly enhanced students' engagement and interest in the course material, contributing to a more effective and enjoyable learning environment.

<u>Would you recommend further use of podcasts and vodcasts in your ENG101 teaching and learning and why?</u>

❖ *Podcasts and vodcasts recommendation*

Most participants in the focus group discussions enthusiastically expressed their recommendation for further use of podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of ENG101. They identified these supplemental tools as highly valuable, useful, and complementary to the prescribed textbook, recommended textbooks, TUT letter 501 (study guide), and virtual classes. Two follow-up questions were posed to the participants, "Had we not posted podcasts and vodcasts, would the TUT letter 501 (study guide) be enough?" In response, the participants revealed that before the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts, they faced challenges in understanding the module's content. This indicates that the incorporation of these multimedia resources significantly improved the participants' understanding of the material, enhanced their referencing skills, and essay structure, and allowed them to replay the content, catering to their learning styles, both visual and auditory. The podcasts and vodcasts were also appreciated for providing a sense of face-to-face interaction and benefits in a virtual learning environment. These findings are consistent with recent studies by Aboagye et al. (2020), Blakemore and Agllias (2020), Castro et al. (2021), Gautam (2020), Lizcano et al. (2020), and Mukhtar et al. (2020), which highlight the numerous academic benefits that episodic podcasting as supplemental tools can offer students in distance higher institutions of learning. Additionally, some educational benefits can be derived from video podcasts (vodcasts) (Marunevich, 2021). The ENG101 students' positive experiences with podcasts and vodcasts can be attributed to the focused content on various aspects of academic writing, including essay structure, reference list creation, in-text referencing, paraphrasing, and writing topic sentences. Overall, these findings demonstrate the significant academic improvements resulting from the incorporation of podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of ENG101.

In your opinion, what should be done to decrease accessibility challenges? Substantiate your answer.

❖ *No accessibility challenges*

The focus group discussions yielded a significant finding, indicating that the participants did not encounter any accessibility challenges when downloading podcasts and vodcasts. This finding is particularly noteworthy as participants could not provide reasons or examples of how accessibility challenges could be lessened or decreased. These results align with recent studies by Aagaard and Lund (2020), Brevik et al. (2019), Johnston et al. (2021), and Schöbel et al. (2021), which emphasize the usefulness of podcasts as supplemental tools due to their high accessibility, manageable length, and simplified content. Furthermore, podcasts were found to enhance students' motivation and effectiveness in the learning process, allowing them to fully grasp and understand the course material. The interactive nature of podcasts encouraged students to engage with the content actively and think critically about how to apply their knowledge. Schöbel et al. (2021) mention that students of this digital age are accustomed to using various digital media for learning, including podcasts for acquiring knowledge, accessing online lecture slides, web-based resources, and examination preparation. The most intriguing aspect of the finding is that the ENG101 students expressed their satisfaction with the podcasts and vodcasts, indicating that they did not encounter any accessibility issues. They even suggested that no changes should be made to the content, as everything they needed to succeed in the ENG101 module was readily available in the podcasts and vodcasts. This positive feedback highlights the effectiveness and suitability of podcasts and vodcasts as valuable supplemental tools that effectively support the teaching and learning of ENG101.

7.5 Findings from the document analysis schedule

- **How does the use of podcasts and vodcasts enhance the academic writing skills of students in ENG101?**

The data collected under this question revealed the following issues:

What are the positive academic writing skills that may be identified in the marked and moderated assignment and examination?

❖ *Academic writing skills*

The document analysis of marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts revealed several positive improvements in the academic writing skills of the first-year ENG101 students, specifically in the areas of in-text referencing, writing reference lists, and accurately responding to given instructions. Upon comparing the assignment samples to the examination sample scripts, a notable enhancement in these skills was observed, indicating that the use of podcasts and vodcasts in the ENG101 module has positively impacted the students' academic writing abilities. These findings are consistent with studies by Aheisibwe, Kobusigye, and Tayebwa (2021), Bumblauskas et al. (2021), Noetel et al. (2021), and Radianti et al. (2020), which highlight how the incorporation of podcasts and vodcasts can improve students' academic writing skills, encourage active engagement with module content at their own pace and time, stimulate learning, enhance critical thinking, and improve overall learning outcomes. Despite the significant improvements seen in the marked assignments and examination scripts, it was observed that some students still struggled with certain aspects of academic writing, such as lack of editing skills, instances of plagiarism, use of contractions, spelling errors, poor punctuation, and erroneous grammar usage. Notably, the ENG101 lecturers had recorded and uploaded podcasts and vodcasts that addressed the topic of assignment and examination editing. It is possible that some students may have overlooked the importance of editing their assignments and focused primarily on the podcasts and vodcasts that discussed academic writing itself.

What are academic writing challenges that may be identified in the marked and moderated assignment and examination?

❖ *Academic writing challenges*

The document analysis of marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts revealed several prominent academic writing challenges faced by the ENG101 students. These challenges include unedited assignments and examination scripts riddled with grammatical errors, direct plagiarism mainly from internet sources, and a

lack of individual voice in the participants' essays. These findings are consistent with studies conducted by Abdelaziz and Zehmi (2021), Alostath (2021), Hassan et al. (2021), Lentz and Foncha (2021), Ma (2021), and Singh et al. (2017), which also highlight similar issues among first-year students, such as major grammatical errors and uncertainties in applying grammatical rules despite exposure to exercises and practice. In particular, the lack of students' voices in their writing is a notable concern, leading to instances of copying and pasting information from websites and presenting it as their work. To address these challenges, students must acquire and master specific grammatical rules. The ENG101 lecturers need to emphasise the importance of editing, plagiarism, and their voice. To support the students in developing their academic writing skills, a step-by-step editing guideline, guidelines on avoiding plagiarism, and a checklist for cultivating their voice with detailed and explicit descriptors could be beneficial. By providing clear guidance and exercises, students can gradually improve their writing and enhance their grammatical competence. According to Hassan et al. (2021), the development of academic writing skills is a complex task that can be achieved and refined through guidance and consistent practice. The findings underscore the need for targeted support and guidance in addressing the academic writing challenges faced by first-year students. By implementing specific guidelines and exercises, the ENG101 lecturers can play a vital role in helping the students improve their writing, refine their grammatical competence, and express their unique voices in their academic work.

Is there a significant improvement in students' marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts?

> ❖ *Major significant improvements*

The document analysis of marked and moderated assignments indicates that the participants demonstrated notable improvements in their academic writing skills, particularly in the areas of proper in-text citations and complete reference lists. Some participants also showcased their ability to organize their thoughts effectively by utilizing mind-mapping or structured approaches before zooming into the given topic. These positive results highlight the significant impact of incorporating podcasts and vodcasts as supplemental tools in the ENG101 module, which contributed to

enhancing students' in-text referencing, reference list creation, and mind-mapping skills. The ENG101 lecturers played a crucial role in emphasizing the importance of these skills, and the use of multimedia tools facilitated the learning process for the students. However, it was observed that some participants struggled with punctuation while creating their reference lists, indicating a potential area for further improvement and attention. The participants' use of mind mapping indicates their awareness of potential writing challenges, such as poor organization and lack of coherence. This technique proved valuable in helping them present their ideas and arguments clearly and effectively, enabling the successful fulfilment of the given topic's requirements. These findings align with previous studies conducted by Bumblauskas et al. (2021), Derakhshan (2021), Kyaw et al. (2019), and Radianti et al. (2020), which emphasize the significant benefits of utilizing synchronous and/or asynchronous digital multimedia tools like podcasts and vodcasts to enhance students' academic performance. The selected examination script samples from ENG101 further support the students' progress and marked improvements in their academic writing abilities. The results underscore the importance of developing podcasts and vodcasts that specifically address fundamental academic challenges faced by students. By focusing on these areas, such multimedia tools effectively bridge knowledge gaps, as evident in the enhanced writing skills of the participants showcased in their marked and moderated assignments. Podcasts and vodcasts as supplemental tools have proven to be valuable resources for students in the ENG101 module, assisting in their academic growth and skill development. The positive outcomes in in-text referencing, complete reference list creation, and increased awareness of mind mapping's importance further reinforce the effectiveness of these multimedia tools in enhancing students' learning experiences.

Are the academic writing challenges expressed by students evident in the marked and moderated assignments and exam scripts?

❖ *Identified academic writing challenges*

The academic writing challenges reported by the participants align with the observations made from the reviewed marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts. Based on the findings obtained from the online open-ended evaluation questions and the document analysis of marked and moderated

assignments and exam scripts, three main academic writing challenges emerged: citation (lack of in-text referencing and reference lists leading to direct plagiarism), grammatical errors (including capitalization, contractions, spelling, and punctuation errors resulting in unclear meaning), and academic writing skills such as paragraphing, essay structure, use of own voice, and presence of unedited assignments and examination scripts. These findings suggest that ENG101 students encounter significant challenges in citation, academic writing skills, and grammar. It appears that these aspects were not adequately taught and developed during their high school education. Consequently, there is a noticeable gap between the academic rigour of high school and that of HEIs in terms of academic writing proficiency. These findings are consistent with studies conducted by Alostath (2021), Hassan et al. (2021), and Ma (2021), which highlight that first-year students often lack academic rigour, face substantial obstacles in understanding the nature of academic writing and struggle with expressing their voice, paraphrasing, coherence, cohesion, and vocabulary. Developing writing proficiency is a complex process that requires students to master specific rules and acquire essential skills. This complexity can deter students' interest and eventually impact their comprehension and performance in language learning. To address these challenges, it is essential to consider implementing a bridging module that specifically focuses on citation, academic writing, and grammar to better prepare students for the academic demands of higher education. Alternatively, continued usage of podcasts and vodcasts, with a targeted emphasis on these aspects, could also prove beneficial in supporting students' academic writing development. By providing targeted support and resources, institutions can effectively address these challenges and facilitate students' academic growth and success.

What are the persistent or recurring academic writing challenges in the marked and moderated assignment and exam scripts?

❖ *Persistent and recurring academic writing challenges identified*

The marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts in the document analysis schedule reveal persistent and recurring academic writing challenges among students, notably poor grammatical usage, unedited assignments and exam scripts, and plagiarism. These findings suggest that students' grammatical foundation is weak, and additional practical exercises could significantly strengthen and enhance their

grammatical usage in assignments and examinations. Implementing episodic podcasts and vodcasts may play a crucial role in raising awareness among students about the importance of editing their assignments and examinations. Plagiarism emerges as a major challenge for first-year students, especially those who lack citation skills. However, the ENG101 lecturers have taken positive steps by uploading podcasts and vodcasts that provide detailed discussions on the Harvard referencing style. These supplemental tools contribute to students' knowledge gain regarding citation skills, and plagiarism awareness, and reduce the reliance on traditional instructional knowledge delivery. Regarding the structure of supplemental tools, lecturers must design and organize them effectively to cater to the students' needs and enhance their learning experiences. Open dialogue and interaction between students and lecturers are essential elements in distance learning, fostering a sense of autonomy among students to be accountable and self-directed in their learning process. Figure 7.1 illustrates the decrease in TTD because of the ENG101 lecturers discussing the Harvard referencing style in detail through the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts.
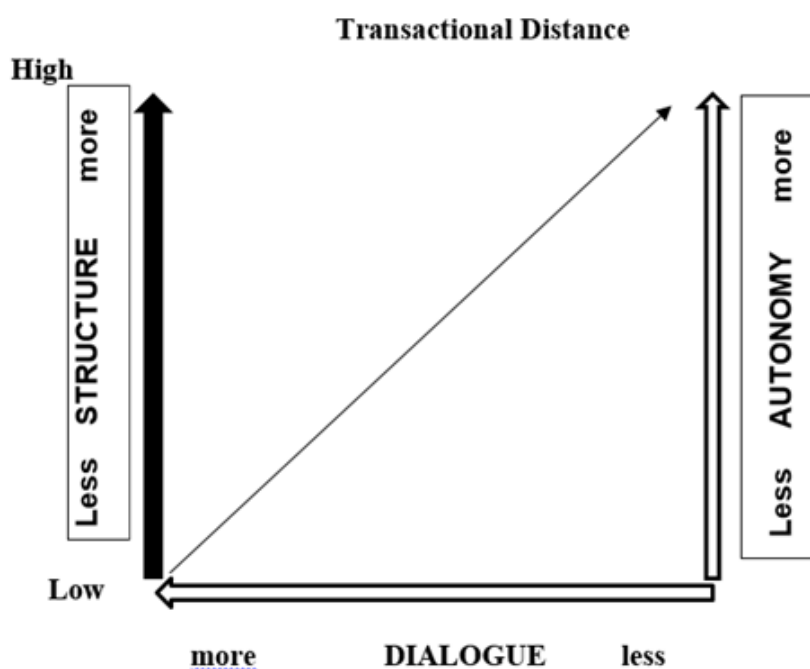
Figure 7.1: Illustration of Moore's framework of transaction distance (Sevnarayan, 2022)

In essence, a highly structured approach to teaching promotes meaningful dialogue between lecturers and students, effectively reducing transaction distance in distance

learning. One potential strategy for addressing plagiarism concerns is for ENG101 lecturers to use an actual script sample that exemplifies plagiarism, highlighting various plagiarism approaches and tendencies. This would provide students with a clear understanding of what plagiarism entails and the consequences associated with it. Developing a plagiarism checklist with detailed descriptors could further support students in recognizing and avoiding plagiarism, thereby fostering academic integrity. Academic writing in higher education follows specific guidelines that students must adhere to. However, the marked and moderated assignments have revealed a lack of editing and significant cases of plagiarism. Students need to grasp the severity of plagiarism in HEIs, as it constitutes a serious academic offence that can lead to penalties such as reduced grades, suspension, or even expulsion from the institution. Therefore, implementing the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework proposed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) could be highly beneficial in supporting the successful online learning experiences of first-year students in Open and Distance e-Learning (ODeL) institutions. The CoI framework promotes deep learning through interaction by fostering a conducive climate for discourse and regulating online learning. It encompasses four interrelated elements: (a) cognitive presence, (b) social presence, (c) learner presence, and (d) teaching presence. These elements are intertwined and overlap for vital educational purposes and practices, such as risk-free expression, meaningful sharing of ideas, collaboration, building understanding, exploration, and integration. The framework also encourages learner presence, which enhances active learning and engagement.

7.6 Implications and recommendations for improving academic writing skills

Based on the data that emerged from the online-open ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions and documents analysis of marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts, some results from the literature review, it is evident that the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts as supplemental tools in the ENG101 module has enhanced students' academic writing skills and are beneficial for students who fall under the ODeL context of learning. The ENG101 students expressed appreciation for supplemental tools and showed interest in receiving more digital multimedia files to enhance and enrich their learning. The implementation of

supplemental tools has aided students' comprehension of the module material, which was previously difficult to understand through prescribed books, study guides, and other tutorials as EAL students struggle with academic writing due to university academic writing standards and the use of English as MoI. Supplemental tools such as podcasts and vodcasts enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students who are obliged to use English for academic purposes, however, students may not possess academic rigour and other related necessary skills required of them at the university level such as self-study as Unix is an ODeL institution. The findings of this study suggest that many first-year students struggle with academic writing as it was not adequately taught, emphasised, practised, and prioritized during high school education. Thus, the implementation of supplemental tools that are accessible, is critical in promoting a sense of connection and flexibility, decreasing, or bridging the instructional gap for students from disadvantageous backgrounds affected by power outages [load shedding] and poor internet connectivity, particularly in isolated learning contexts like ODeL. Further, unpacking the ENG101 module's content and using everyday language has increased understanding, active learning, learner presence and pass rate percentages. Therefore, the implementation of supplemental tools is invaluable in sustaining a sense of connectedness and flexibility in isolated settings [ODeL]. Considering the 2022 cohort of students, who are technology-savvy and frequently use digital media, it is evident that supplemental tools such as podcasts and vodcasts can further enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students in distance HEIs.

Firstly, the study recommends that the ENG101 lecturers implement podcasts and vodcasts as supplemental tools because both cater for different learning styles [audio and audio-visual]. The ENG101 students should not be forced and conditioned to learn in a manner that suits the lecturers' teaching styles. As indicated by the findings, the ENG101 students benefitted from the use of podcasts and vodcasts. In addition, the ENG101 students did not fear technology and indicated a yearning for further usage of podcasts and vodcasts. This is consistent with recent studies by Aheisibwe, Kobusigye and Tayebwa (2021) and Morze et al. (2021) in that when lecturers consider students' learning styles [visualization/observation, audio, inquiry based], they can enhance the affective, emotional, and social presences of students. Most high institutions of learning have a unified learning material that does not consider

students' learning styles, knowledge, time for module completion and individual needs (Sáiz-Manzanares et al., 2021). With that said, the study recommends that lecturers who record digital Academic Writing module content for ENG101 students consider students' various learning styles [audio and audio-visual].

Secondly, the study recommends that the ENG101 lecturers record detailed podcasts and vodcasts [within a time limit] that are systemic [step-by-step] to enhance students' academic writing skills. The study revealed that the ENG101 students significantly learned, embraced, and enjoyed the incorporation of podcasts and vodcasts in their teaching and learning. A participant revealed that he/she could not understand the printed material [prescribed and recommended books, study guide and tutorial letters] but understood the module's content better with the incorporation of podcasts and vodcasts as supplemental learning tools. Thus, the use of detailed systematic podcasts and vodcasts may enhance students' academic writing skills and be used as an instrument to impart and disseminate knowledge gain. This is consistent with research studies by Johnston et al. (2021), McNamara and Haegele (2021), and Schöbel et al. (2021) who point out that podcasts are viable tools [effective, favourable, learn at their own pace and useful] to teach complex module's content. In addition, podcasts are preferred [enhance students' motivation and overall positive effectiveness] and are useful learning supplemental tools among students as they help to prevent cognitive overload. Podcasts and vodcasts empower and transform a sense of agency in students (Aagaard & Lund, 2020; Brevik et al., 2019; Lucas, 2016).

Thirdly, the study recommends that lecturers continue to record and upload podcasts and vodcasts that are accessible, and compatible with the students' personal device's format. The study revealed that students did not experience any technical challenges [glitches] when downloading the podcasts and vodcasts. In addition, participants revealed that the format of the uploaded podcasts and vodcasts was compatible with their laptops [personal devices] and that they could easily download the multi-media files into their laptops. These findings refute findings by Asmi et al. (2019), Mahyoob (2020) and Nadhianty and Purnomo (2020), who point out that audio podcasts have high compatibility challenges as students cannot open their multimedia files due to incompatibility [format] issues and that podcasts and vodcasts require plenty of device [smartphone or laptop] storage. The ENG101 participants did not download the uploaded podcasts and vodcasts into their smartphones [but laptops] by choice and

not because of compatibility issues. Therefore, the study recommends that the ENG101 lecturers should continue to record podcasts and vodcasts that are easily accessible and without compatibility issues. According to Pan (2020), 98% of students access online lessons by using laptops and mobile phones. However, with that said, it is important to reveal that previous studies maintain that online learning [smartphones and laptops] helps improve students' participation and absence of space limitations, (Anggrawan, 2019; Nugroho et al., 2019).

Fourthly, to understand contextual e-learning realities [challenges and restrictions], the study recommends that lecturers consider the CoI by Garrison and Anderson (2000) and Moore's (1972) framework of TTD when recording podcasts and vodcasts because both alert and informs online [distance] teaching and learning realities. CoI is beneficial for teaching academic writing and should be firmly understood because the four interrelated elements [social presence, cognitive presence, learner presence and teaching presence] overlap with each other for vital educational purposes and practices i.e., risk-free expression, sharing meaning, collaboration, building understanding, exploration, and integration. Interestingly, the four interrelated elements [social presence, cognitive presence, learner presence and teaching presence] have encouraged learner presence as students are now active participants in the teaching and learning environments. Learner presences promote and encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, rather than solely receiving information passively through lectures. In addition, leaner presence increases a deeper understanding of the subject matter and enhances their retention and application of the learned concepts. Moore's (1997) framework of TTD emphasizes that ODeL is not merely a physical distance between learners and lecturers, but a pedagogical concept that describes the challenges of distance learning in terms of the relationships between learners and lecturers, which are impacted by both temporal and spatial factors. The separation of learners and lecturers can significantly disrupt teaching and learning. However, incorporating a community of learning and considering the framework of transactional distance can help to mitigate these issues and improve content development and knowledge acquisition related to multimedia file creation, such as podcasts and vodcasts. By embracing these concepts, lecturers can create a more inclusive and effective online learning environment. This is consistent with recent studies by Aboagye et al. (2020), Gautam

(2020), Lizcano et al. (2020), and Mukhtar et al. (2020) in that e-learning requires action plan strategies that suit the e-learning contextual realities. The ENG101 lecturers should bridge the transactional distance gap between lecturers, students, and the subject content by incorporating and embracing frameworks such as CoI and TTD framework as the basis or foundation of their pedagogical concept. To put it more accurately, the lecturers teaching ENG101 ought to incorporate teaching approaches and techniques that are stimulating and interactive, while also promoting the presence of social, cognitive, and teaching aspects. This should be achieved through academic assistance and instruction that is geared towards improving students' writing abilities and stimulating their cognitive abilities, as well as creating a safe and collaborative online learning environment. Furthermore, it is essential to endorse pedagogical concepts that alleviate loneliness (isolation) and promote e-learning satisfaction through collaboration.

Lastly, the study recommends that the ENG101 lecturers record multiple podcasts and vodcasts about persistent and recurring academic writing challenges identified in the marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts i.e., poor grammatical usage, unedited assignments and exam scripts, and plagiarism. The ENG101 lecturers should record podcasts and vodcasts with practical exercises to strengthen and enhance grammatical usage in assignments and examinations. In addition, episodic podcasts and vodcasts may greatly conscientize students with the importance of editing assignments and examination scripts. Plagiarism is a major challenge for first-year students who are not equipped with citation skills; however, lecturers across disciplines should upload podcasts and vodcasts that discuss citing in detail. More importantly, lecturers should use an actual script sample that was plagiarised and identify plagiarism approaches and tendencies. This may provide students with a firm idea of what plagiarism entail. In addition, a developed plagiarism checklist with descriptors may greatly benefit students and lessen plagiarism tendencies.

7.7 Prospective research

Based on the findings in this study further analysis needs to be explored using this data. One such angle could be a comparative study to investigate how other Academic

Writing modules from specific distance institutions use technology to support or enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students. Further research is needed on the role of uniquely applied techniques in teaching academic writing skills through digital multimedia files in an ODeL context. This study and others reviewed did not explore the role of uniquely applied techniques in teaching academic writing skills through digital multimedia files in an ODeL context, instead, it explored students' perceptions and challenges of academic writing skills through supplemental tools such podcasts and vodcasts in DE. Feedback obtained from online open-ended evaluation questions, focus group discussions and document analysis provided sufficient data for the current research. However, this research did not go beyond understanding the role of techniques in teaching academic writing through multimedia files in an ODeL context. Therefore, there is a need for continuing research. Future research may investigate how other distance universities, teach academic writing, particularly, on the role of techniques applied through digital multimedia files. The following may be considered: what specific techniques were used to teach academic writing challenges through digital multimedia files? And/or which applied specific techniques were used to unpack and teach complex academic writing concepts? This study indicated that the use of digital multimedia files such as podcasts and vodcasts enhanced the academic writing skills of first-year students in an ODeL context. The implementation of podcasts and vodcasts is essential for first-year students who come from disadvantageous backgrounds, increased pass rate [67%], information accessibility, engagement, interaction, collaboration, and student retention.

Further, in the current study, it became evident that students would benefit from explicit techniques that aim to improve [unpack and teach complex] academic writing challenges of first-year students through digital multimedia files in an ODeL context. This may conscientize students of fundamental techniques of academic writing and reduce many challenges they commit when writing their assignments and examinations. In the current study, many students indicated enjoyment and recommended further usage of podcasts and vodcasts. With that said it would be interesting to observe how prospective studies could explore the role of uniquely applied techniques in teaching academic writing skills through digital multimedia files in an ODeL context. It would possibly benefit students throughout their studies to apply

academic writing skills that are sought in HEIs. In essence, the results of this study can be used as a baseline or fundamental basis to have similar research.

7.8 Concluding remarks

Numerous research studies that were consulted in this study alluded to the significance of using podcasts for teaching and learning in ODeL higher institutions of learning (Aagaard & Lund, 2020; Beniamini, 2020; Bergdahl et al., 2020; Bonk & Kubinski, 2023; Brevik et al., 2019; Caratozzolo, Alvarez-Delgado & Hosseini, 2022; Dalgarno, 2014; Faramarzi et al., 2020; Faramarzi, Tabrizi, & Chalak, 2019; Hassan et al., 2021; Huang, Hwang & Jong, 2022; Hollister et al., 2022; Ifedayo et al., 2021; Langer, 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Lee & Hwang, 2022; Johnston et al., 2021; Lindgren, 2022; Ma, 2021; Meletiou-Mavrotheris, Mavrou & Rebelo, 2021; Noetel et al., 2021; Pan, 2020; Raes et al., 2020; Rajar, 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020; Rime, Pike, & Collins, 2022; Sanchez et al., 2020; Simanjuntak & Panjaitan, 2021; Schöbel et al., 2021; Sherrill, 2020; Spotify, 2021; Tobin & Guadagno, 2022; Tour & Barnes, 2022; Zhang & Zou, 2022). However, podcasts only cater for a specific learning style [audio/listening]. In this study, both podcasts and vodcasts [audio-visual] were implemented in teaching and learning to enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students. Academic writing skills play a significant role as it enhances critical reading and evaluating skills that are essential for first-year students. In addition, academic writing develops a deeper understanding of the subject matter and is essential for success in higher education and beyond. This study revealed that students embraced and favoured the use of podcasts and vodcasts in their teaching and learning. In addition, students revealed that they struggled to understand the prescribed and recommended textbooks, study guide and other tutorial letters such as the feedforward and feedback letter as English is not their home language. However, understood the module's content better by listening to and watching podcasts and vodcasts as the content was simplified. On the contrary, recent studies by Fhloinn and Fitzmaurice (2021), Hall and Jones (2021), Mahyoob (2020), Mishra et al. (2020), Shiang et al. (2021), and Simanjuntak and Panjaitan (2021) indicated that students struggle with downloading podcasts and vodcasts due to technical glitches and that lecturers are not equipped in recording meaningful podcasts that can add value in the teaching and learning. This study disproves the claims made by the aforementioned

studies because the participants in the current study indicated that they did not experience any technical glitches on the Moodle module's site but poor network coverage from the local internet broadband. In addition, there is a significant improvement in the marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts. This is a clear indication that the ENG101 lecturers recorded podcasts and vodcasts that added value to the teaching of academic writing.

It is important to point out that during this research study, the world was going through the devastating COVID-19 pandemic and as a result, many institutions relied on technology to disseminate information. Many technological platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, PowerPoint files without voice narrations, WhatsApp, and podcasts gained traction. However, research indicates that some students were not ready for online learning and that online learning is not effective (Adarkwah, 2021; Almeda et al., 2021; Baticulon et al., 2021; Bean et al., 2019; DePaul, 2020; Meletiou-Mavrotheris, Mavrou & Rebelo, 2021). This study disproved claims made by studies indicated above because the ENG101 students embraced the use of multimedia files [podcast and vodcast] and indicated a wish for further usage as multimedia files are beneficial. This finding is consistent with research studies by Encarnacion et al. (2021), Eynon and Potter (2020), Kalimullina et al. (2021), Krishnamurthy (2020), Veletsianos and Houlden (2020) and Lee (2020) who point out that digital access to learning tools mobilises resources and increase the quality of online learning. In addition, online learning is here to stay; has gained relevance [ensured continuance] and has a plethora of technological tools and platforms to support the use of online learning: web-based learning platforms, video-conferencing tools, MOOCs, streaming conferences, instant messaging tools, educational apps, Moodle, Microsoft Teams, and Blackboard that sustain virtual workload [tools and systems]. Even though podcasts and vodcasts were used in the study, it is worth pointing out that the ENG101 lecturers used Microsoft Teams, PowerPoint slides, Telegram and Moodle to engage and interact with the students. Podcasts and vodcasts were used as supplemental tools to teaching and learning to enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students, and as a mitigation tool to accommodate students' overlooked learning styles. The use of supplemental tools developed writing skills such as critical thinking, clarity, conciseness, and coherence, which are valuable in academia.

The study has contributed to the existing literature that focused on student support with the use of technology to enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students. The online open-ended evaluation questions and focus group discussions provided participants with the opportunity to divulge experienced challenges with academic writing and how the implementation of podcasts and vodcasts has enhanced academic writing skills. In addition, document analysis of marked and moderated assignment and examination scripts were incorporated to confirm or refute the claims made by the participants and to determine whether there is any significant improvement in students' marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts. The study's findings indicated a significant improvement in the marked and moderated assignment and examination scripts. Students were able to in-text reference, write the reference list in full, respond to given instructions, logically mind-map their ideas, and edit their work. These findings corroborate with studies by Bumblauskas et al. (2021), Derakhshan (2021), Kyaw et al. (2019), Radianti et al. (2020), Sevnarayan and Mohale (2022), and Sevnarayan (2022), in that students benefit extraordinarily from synchronous and/or asynchronous [podcast and vodcasts] digital multimedia files and enhance students' academic performance. The ENG101 examination script samples reveal major significant improvements in students' marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts. In addition, the study developed guidelines to assist and inform current and future lecturers, practitioners, and e-tutors on creating podcasts and vodcasts that are helpful, accessible, clear, and audible and aim to enhance the academic writing skills of first-year students in a DE context.

It is important to explore academic writing challenges that may hinder first-year students to attain their academic achievements. Further, the implementation of episodic digital supplemental tools may eradicate accessibility challenges and reduce instructional gaps. Unix is an ODeL institution with a diverse student population who possess various academic writing challenges and may feel isolated. A diverse student population translate to increased academic writing challenges. Thus, there is a need to rethink better ways how to address academic writing challenges through innovative digital technology. Supplemental tools enhanced the academic writing skills of the ENG101 first-year students and offered numerous benefits such as writing in a coherent manner, intellectual growth, and abilities to engage with complex ideas and thinking critically. If ODeL institutions were to allocate resources towards

comprehensive student support initiatives and employ innovative supplemental tools aimed at enhancing the academic writing skills of first-year students, then a significant reduction in the high failure rates and transactional distance could be observed. Furthermore, by effectively utilizing these supplementary tools, students would experience decreased feelings of isolation and disconnection.

To God, the Sovereign Lord and Almighty Be the Glory…Amen!

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8. Appendices

8.1 Research instruments

Appendix A: Online open-ended evaluation discussions

These questions aim to answer the first research question:

- What are the students' perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?

1. What are the three main positive perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of the ENG101 module and why? Substantiate your answer.

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………

2. What are the three main negative perceptions of using podcasts and vodcasts in the teaching and learning of the ENG101 module and why? Substantiate your answer.

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3. As a first-year student, what are your three main academic writing challenges and why? Substantiate your answer.

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………

4. Since using podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101, what noticeable academic writing improvement can you identify? Substantiate your answer.

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………

5. Which of the two multimedia digital files (podcasts and vodcasts) are you in favour of and why? Elaborate on your answer.

………
………
………

Appendix B: Focus group discussions

These questions aim to answer the second research question:

- What challenges do students encounter when accessing the podcasts and vodcasts in ENG101?

1, What are the three main challenges you encounter when accessing podcasts and vodcasts? Substantiate your answer
2. Is the format of the podcasts and vidcast compatible with your personal device's format? Substantiate your answer
3. Are you satisfied with the length of the podcast and vidcast? Substantiate your answer
4. Would you recommend further use of podcasts and vodcasts in your ENG101 teaching and learning and why? Substantiate your answer.
5. In your opinion, what should be done to lessen accessibility challenges? Substantiate your answer.

Appendix C: Document analysis schedule

These questions aim to answer the third research question:

- How does the use of podcasts and vodcasts enhance the academic writing skills of students in ENG101?

1. What are the three main positive academic writing skills that may be identified in the marked and moderated assignment and examination?

2. What are the three main academic writing challenges that may be identified in the marked assignment and examination?
3. Is the significant improvement in students' marked and moderated assignments and examination scripts?
4. Are the three main academic writing challenges expressed by students evident in the marked and moderated assignments and exam scripts?
5. What are the persistent or recurring academic writing challenges in the marked and moderated assignment and exam scripts?

Appendix D: Information leaflet and consent form for students

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

SCHOOL OF ARTS

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_____

INFORMATION LEAFLET AND INFORMED CONSENT

Exploring first-year students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance academic writing skills in an ODeL institution in South Africa

Research conducted by: Mr NE Mohale
(012) 429 2167
mohalne@unisa.ac.za

Dear potential research participant,

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Mr NE Mohale to complete a PhD degree. This information leaflet provides you with information to help you to decide if you would like to participate.

The study is about students' academic support. The study aims to investigate academic writing challenges using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance students' academic writing skills. Academic support is crucial for first-year students who enrol at higher institutions with various academic challenges.

If you decide to take part in the study, you will be required to do the following:

- Read the information leaflet.
- Sign the informed consent form below.
- Participate in the focus group with fellow students. It should not take you more than 60 minutes to participate in the focus group discussions.

No research participant should experience any discomfort or inconveniencies when participating in this study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any stage without any

penalty or future disadvantage whatsoever.

Your answers are highly anonymous, and your identity will not be revealed while the study is being conducted or when it is reported.

By participating in the focus group and answering questions truthfully, you will bring about a sincere and positive viewpoint as well as a constructive contribution to the body of knowledge in terms of students' academic support. Your contribution may help to reduce the high failure rate for first-year university students.

The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. You will be provided with a summary of the findings on request.

Please contact my supervisor, Dr K Sevnarayan at esevark@unisa.ac.za if you have any questions or comments regarding the study

Your cooperation and participation in the study will be greatly appreciated. Please, remember to sign the informed consent below if you agree to participate in the study. In such a case, you will receive a copy of the signed informed consent from the researcher.

CONSENT FOR STUDENTS

I hereby confirm that I have been adequately informed by the researcher about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of the study. I have also received, read and understood the above-written information. I am aware that the results of the study will be anonymously processed into a research report. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study. I had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and of my own free will declare myself prepared to participate in the study.

Research participant's name: _____ (Please print)

Research participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's name: _____ (Please print)

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

8.2 University of South Africa: Approved Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNISA | university of south africa

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

14 December 2021

Dear Mr. Ntshimane Elphas Mohale

NHREC Registration #:
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference #:
90300599_CREC_CHS_2021

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 14 December 2021 to 14 December 2026

Researcher(s): Name: Mr. Ntshimane Elphas Mohale
Contact details: mohalne@unisa.ac.za
Name: Dr K Sevnarayan
Contact details: (012) 429 3111

Title: Exploring first-year students' perceptions and challenges of using podcasts and vodcasts to enhance academic writing skills: An action research study in an ODeL institution in South Africa.

Purpose: PhD

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for five years.

The *medium risk application* was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date **(14 December 2026).** Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **90300599_CREC_CHS_2021** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

Signature:PP

Prof. KB Khan
CHS Research Ethics Committee Chairperson
Email: khankb@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 8210

Signature: PP

Prof K. Masemola
Executive Dean: CHS
E-mail: masemk@unisa.ac.za
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8.3 Consent form

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the online open-ended evaluation questions through the Unisa's LMS (Learning Management System) and focus group discussions through the Microsoft Team.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname………………………………… (please print)

Participant Signature……………………………………………Date………………

Researcher's Name & Surname…Mr. NE Mohale…………… (please print)

Researcher's signature…………………………………Date…24/11/21………

8.4 Turnitin report

Proposal 1

ORIGINALITY REPORT

21%	15%	13%	4%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source	2%
2	olj.onlinelearningconsortium.org Internet Source	2%
3	Submitted to University of Witwatersrand Student Paper	1%