

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

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## Abstract

Many variables can impact a student's experience during the transition to university from high school. Hence, the objective of this study was to determine the non-academic variables that impact on the overall study experience of second year Hospitality Management students at selected higher education institutions in South Africa. In order to identify the non-academic variables that could influence on the study experience of students, 228 participants from five selected universities completed a questionnaire. To determine the variables that impacted on the study experience, cross tabulations between categorical variables were tested for significance using Chi-square tests at the 5% level of significance. Results revealed statistically significant non-academic relationships for the social adjustment of students when starting university ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the fear students had towards unemployment after graduation ( $p < 0.04$ ). Higher education institutions are therefore increasingly challenged with ways to prepare students for success at university by assisting them to become part of the educated population, by providing support to improve the determination of students to successfully complete their learning programme.

**Keywords:** South Africa, Hospitality Management students, Hotel Schools, study experience, non-academic variables

## Introduction

During the past two decades, the sector of Higher Education in South Africa, has undergone profound changes. There are considerable achievements that higher education can claim to have accomplished such as increased student integration from the fragmented past, greater access and a radical change in the demographics of students, more attention paid to student support and the allocation of financial aid to more students than 20 years ago (Bajjnath,

2016:ix). However, despite the higher education achievements, the student protests in the past several years have given expression to underlying omissions. The pressures of worsening underfunding in the context of enrolment growth, and increased student expectations and vexations with regards to access and financial aid, have led to widening fractures in the system (Bajinath, 2016:ix). In addition, the growth in student numbers (Bunting, 2006:96; Wolhuter, 2014:280) have led to a vastly diverse student population with different needs (McKenzie & Gow, 2004:107-108) due to the diverse cultural backgrounds, languages, social classes and educational backgrounds (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012:31).

The first-year transition into the university lifestyle may be one of the most difficult challenges students will encounter in their lifetime (Feldt, Graham & Dew, 2011:92). Many variables can impact on the students experience when they transition from high school to university as the students are obligated to adjust to a new social network, new living arrangements, financial concerns and the pressure of a different academic environment (Oguz-Duran & Yüksel, 2010:470). The satisfaction with university facilities and services will furthermore influence the satisfaction with academic and social aspects of university which in turn will impact on the overall satisfaction levels of the student (Sirgy, Grzeskowiak & Rahtz, 2007:358). Therefore, it is critical for tertiary institutions to assist students in facilitating the transition (Feldt, Graham & Dew, 2011:92) to prepare them for success in higher education and to become part of the educated population (Landrum, 2001:196; Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali & Pohlert, 2004:255).

In order to control the retention of students, a comprehensive understanding of the reasons why a considerable number of students terminate their studies is essential (Bennett, 2003:124). Termination of studies before graduation has severe consequences for the individuals involved as well as for the society that finances most of the cost of service delivery. Identifying students which are more likely to terminate their studies is important in maximizing the use of resources allocated to education and in supporting the development of retention strategies that help to improve the graduation rate of students (Lassibille & Navarro Gómez, 2008:89). Therefore, higher education institutions are also investing in support programmes to improve the determination of students to complete their studies (Allen, Robbins, Casillas & Oh, 2008:648).

According to the literature there are numerous post-enrolment non-academic variables such as, *inter alia*, successful social integration, the emotional support students receive when they start university and students' safety on campus that could impact on the study experience of students. In addition various health behaviours such as alcohol consumption, weight perception, the amount of sleep during the academic week and the concern of unemployment after graduating from university could have an influence on students' decision to persevere, or terminate their studies, impacting on their overall study experience.

Successful integration of a student into the social structures of an institution would contribute to an effective learning environment (Fraser & Killen, 2003:262). The camaraderie students build on campus will help them with the successful integration into the new environment at university and present important sources of support, advice and information (Fischer, 2007:136). Valuable friendships and social networks may have a positive influence on students considering terminating their studies, as peers may provide support to overcome difficult situations (Thomas, 2002:435). The challenge when entering university for the first time is to find a balance between the academic demands and a social life (Womble, 2003:27; Skosana, 2012) as a demanding social life could impact negatively on the academic performance of students (Womble, 2003:27).

South African universities claim to be relatively safe for students and staff members, with insignificant crimes such as cell phone and laptop thefts attributed to the victims' negligence. However, students claim that much more need to be done to ensure safety on campuses in South Africa (Mtshali, 2013). Higher Education Institutions are obliged to create a safe campus environment for all individuals and promote an environment sensitive to cultural diversity by implementing activities where students are exposed to various cultures setting a benchmark for acceptable campus community behaviour among all individuals (South Africa. Department of Education, 1997).

During the period of transition into university the drinking patterns of students may increase significantly (Read, Wood, Davidoff, McLacken & Campbell, 2002:61). Students have to adapt to a new social environment and increased alcohol consumption can encourage new social interactions (Beck, Arria, Caldeira, Vincent, O'Grady & Wish, 2008:427). Attending university can also lead to anxiety and stress causing higher alcohol consumption to relieve the symptoms (Cooke, Bewick, Barkham, Bradley & Audin, 2006:514). In addition, academic success can be affected by high alcohol intake, as it can result in class absence or struggling to focus and concentrate during class times (Howland, Rohsenow, Greece, Littlefield, Almeida, Heeren, Winter, Bliss, Hunt & Hermos, 2010:662).

The transition from school to university is an important period in the lives of students as many are faced with the challenge of adapting their dietary and physical activity patterns. In addition, environmental influences such as the lack of family support and absence of established routines impact negatively on the dietary and physical activity habits (Cluskey & Grobe, 2009:327). Therefore, reported weight gain among students has become more problematic in recent years (Nelson, Lust, Story & Ehlinger, 2009:235). According to research students who perceived themselves as being overweight, demonstrated inferior academic performance (Xie, Chou, Spruijt-Metz, Reynolds, Clark, Palmer, Gallaher, Sun, Guo & Johnson, 2006:120) experienced higher levels of stress (Xie *et al.*, 2006:120), depression (often derived from peer mockery) (Xie *et al.*, 2006:120; Haring, Montgomery & Hardin, 2010:45) and anxiety (Young-Hyman, Tanofsky-Kraff, Yanovski, Keil, Cohen, Peyrot & Yanovski, 2006:2252-2253).

Adequate sleeping patterns are necessary for students to perform academically well, reducing the chances of study termination leading to successful graduation (Gaultney, 2010:95). However, on the contrary, poor quality of sleep is related to numerous health risk behaviours among students such as physical aggression, suicide contemplation, smoking and alcohol and drug usage (Vail-Smith, Felts & Becker, 2009:927), anxiety and depression (Orzech, Salafsky & Hamilton, 2011:617). Difficulty staying wakeful while driving, high levels of food consumption and engaging in social activities have been indicated as consequences of the poor sleeping quality of students. Numerous researchers have reported that the sleeping habits of students do have a negative impact on their academic performance (Trockel, Barnes & Egget, 2000:129; Ansari & Stock, 2010:520; Gaultney, 2010:93; Orzech *et al.*, 2011:616). The effect of poor quality of sleep in the academic dominion on students includes a reduced ability to focus, concentrate and remembrance of the academic work (Orzech *et al.*, 2011:616).

It can be assumed that the non-academic variables that could influence the study experience of students are complex and interrelated with one another. Successful social integration at university is necessary as social support is important to stay motivated and succeed academically. In addition, family support is important, but students also need the support from peers who experience the same difficulties at university to stay motivated and feel supported in

their university environment. The study experience of students could furthermore be affected by various health behaviours that can have an impact on stress levels, academic success and health conditions.

### **Problem statement**

Many students are pursuing a university education as a way of transforming their lives, providing them with better opportunities and hopes for a career after graduation. In addition, the hospitality industry is looking to employ hospitality management graduates who possess a set of skills and competencies and who will succeed and excel in their careers. However, certain students do not adjust well to higher education as they have to adapt to numerous changes that could have a major influence on their intentions to complete their studies successfully. Additionally, a fairly large proportion of students terminate their studies due to a complex interplay of non-academic variables that impact negatively on the financial well-being of the institution. Thus, a study was envisioned to determine the variables that could possibly impact on the overall study experience of Hospitality Management students at selected South African Higher Education Institutions. The results could assist these institutions in developing appropriate strategies to address these issues. These strategies may contribute towards students' needs being met, encouraging them to successfully complete their learning programme, supporting a lifetime learning experience and student development.

### **Research objectives**

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

- To determine the non-academic variables that could possible impact on the study experience of students as indicated by literature
- To determine the influence of non-academic variables on the overall study experience of students
- To make recommendations to higher education institutions regarding the identified issues of non-academic variables that could impact on the study experience of students

### **Research methodology**

The entire population of registered second year Hospitality Management students enrolled for a National Diploma in Hospitality Management at seven public universities in South Africa were decided upon for this study. The universities selected to participate in this study included all the universities of technology and comprehensive universities that offer a National Diploma in Hospitality Management. Second year Hospitality Management students were selected as the aim was to receive objective feedback regarding their first year as a student.

The head of department from each hotel school was approached for permission to conduct the research at their hotel school. Five universities agreed to participate in this study and two universities declined the offer. The participating universities are referred to as Universities A, B, C, D and E. The actual university names are not disclosed due to ethical/confidentiality reasons.

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

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

The data were scrutinised using SAS/STAT software version 9.3 for Windows, ©2010, SAS Institute. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic characteristics of the data that were collected and was a source of summarising the variables. The aim was to present quantitative descriptions in a controllable and understandable manner (O'Leary, 2010:237). The results were portrayed by means of frequencies and percentages. As the variables that impacted the study experiences of students were to be determined, the applicable variables were measured against the participants' overall study experience. Cross tabulations between categorical variables were tested for significance using Chi-square tests at the 5% level of significance. Where the dependent variable was continuous, the influence of categorical independent variables was tested with one-way Analysis of Variances (ANOVAs) and post-hoc Scheffé tests.

**Table 1: Response rate per university**

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

## Results and discussion

The results of the non-academic variables that could possibly affect the study experience of second year Hospitality Management students are presented (Table 2) and discussed below. Additionally, it was determined whether or not the variable had an impact on the study experience of the participants.

The non-academic variables include the social integration and the emotional support participants received when they started university. Additionally, the participants' safety on campus and various health behaviours such as alcohol consumption, weight perception and the average amount of sleep during the academic week are discussed. Lastly, the concern of unemployment after graduating from university is conversed.

Table 2 suggests that the majority of participants reported fairly high levels for the ease of social integration (68.5%) when they started university while most (81.8%) received emotional support from family and friends when they started their university career. Emotional support is important as it can assist students in making the transition to university and to successfully adjust (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak & Cribbie, 2007:270). It was interesting to note that 74.6% (n=164) of the participants in this study did not feel that their new friends at university were a better support system when compared to family and old school friends. It was expected that new friends would be a better support system at university as Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld (2005:713-714) established that new friendships that were formed at university usually replaced the support from family and friends back home. New friendships helped students to overcome anxiety and loneliness and became a primary source of support during term-time. The main reasons recorded by the 25.5% (n=56) of participants that implied that new university friends were a better support system are: students were going through the same things at university and could relate better (7.9%; n=18), new friends had a better overall understanding of university life including the course work (4.4%; n=10) and they were also more available to help, motivate and support (7.5%; n=17).

Despite the majority of the participants who "always" felt safe on campus (63.4%), it was a cause of concern that 23.2% of the participants "sometimes" felt unsafe on campus and 13.4% "never" felt safe on campus (Table 2). Similar to the findings of a USA study, most students reportedly felt safe on campus (Baker & Boland, 2011:689). However, according to an investigation that included multiple countries regarding campus safety, South Africa was rated as one of the few countries where many students indicated that they felt unsafe on campus (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy & Foy, 2007:275). Violent incidences should be prevented as it only takes one incident to have a lasting effect on an individual (Baker & Boland, 2011:695-696). It is interesting to note that the participants who "sometimes" or "never" felt safe on campus, mainly indicated that they felt unsafe on campus during night time (58.1%). The primary reasons presented by means of an open question for feeling unsafe on campus were reported as: being afraid of theft, being robbed or mugged on campus (38.9%), lack of security guards on campus (20.3%) and the easy access of non-students to campus (15.2%).

Although a large percentage (40.4%) of the participants indicated that their alcohol intake increased since they started their university career more than half of the participants (59.6%) believed that their alcohol consumption did not increase. Previous research suggests that the transition from high school to university is associated with increased alcohol consumption (Read *et al.*, 2002:61) and therefore it is consistent with about 40% of the findings of the current study.

Approximately 54% (53.8%) of the study participants indicated that they consumed alcoholic beverages at least 1-2 times per week and 33.5% of the participants reported never using alcohol. In terms of quantity, approximately two thirds (67.6%) of the participants indicated consuming between 1-4 drinks at a sitting and 32.4% reported engaging in binge drinking (five or more drinks at a sitting).

Approximately two-thirds of the participants (Table 2) felt positive about their weight (69.0%) while the remaining participants (31.1%) felt negative about their weight. It is interesting to note that the greater part of the participants had a normal self-perceived body weight (67.1%) and 21.6% reported being slightly overweight. Additionally, 84.8% of the participants reported that their self-perceived body weight did not influence their academic performance. Table 2 furthermore suggests that just under half of the participants reported sleeping between 5 and 6 hours (46.2%) per night during the academic week and a further 33.0% of the participants slept between 7 and 8 hours. Nearly 15% of the participants (14.9%) acknowledged sleeping less than 5 hours per night and approximately 5.9% of the participants slept 9 hours or more per night during the academic week. The results in Table 2 prove that a large number of Hospitality Management participants (65.8%) were afraid of unemployment after graduation and 34.2% were either not in distress or were unsure about their employment prospects after graduating from university.

**Table 2: Non-academic variables of the participants (n=228)**

	n	%	Total
<b>Was social integration easy?</b>			
No	69	31.5	
Yes	150	68.5	219
<b>Was emotional support received?</b>			
No	41	18.2	
Yes	184	81.8	225
<b>Friends better support than family?</b>			
No	164	74.6	
Yes	56	25.5	220
<b>If yes, why are friends a better support system?</b>			
Going through the same situation, can relate	18	7.9	
Availability to help, motivate, support	17	7.5	
They understand the academic work	10	4.4	
Other	7	3.1	n#228
<b>Safety on campus</b>			
No	30	13.4	
Yes	142	63.4	
Sometimes	52	23.2	224
<b>If no or sometimes, when do you feel unsafe on campus?</b>			
Night	43	58.1	
Day	2	2.7	
Both	29	39.2	n#228
<b>If no or sometimes, what causes you to feel unsafe on campus?</b>			
Being robbed, mugged and thieves	23	10.1	
Lack of security	12	5.3	
Strangers on campus	9	4.0	
Other	15	6.6	n#228
<b>Alcohol consumption</b>			
No	134	59.6	
Yes	91	40.4	225
<b>Times per week alcohol is consumed?</b>			
I never used alcohol	71	33.5	

1-2 times	114	53.8	
3-4 times	18	8.5	
5-6 times	4	1.9	
7 or more times	5	2.4	212
<b>If alcohol is consumed, how much per sitting?</b>			
1-2 drink	56	39.4	
3-4 drinks	40	28.2	
5-6 drinks	18	12.7	
More than 7 drinks	28	19.7	n#228
<b>Feel about weight</b>			
Negative	68	31.1	
Positive	151	69.0	219
<b>Perception of weight</b>			
Very underweight	1	0.5	
Slightly underweight	17	7.7	
Normal weight	149	67.1	
Slightly overweight	48	21.6	
Very overweight	7	3.2	222
<b>Does perceived body weight influence academic performance?</b>			
No	184	84.8	
Yes	33	15.2	217
<b>Average amount of sleep during academic week</b>			
Less than 5 hours	33	14.9	
5-6 hours	102	46.2	
7-8 hours	73	33.0	
9-10 hours	9	4.1	
More than 11 hours	4	1.8	221
<b>Unemployment</b>			
No	56	25.2	
Yes	146	65.8	
Unsure	20	9.0	222

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

Table 3 summarises the statistical significance of non-academic variables on the overall study experience of the participants. At a 5% level of significance, the social adjustment of students when starting university and the fear students had towards unemployment after graduation had a significant impact on the study experiences.

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

	Not satisfied		Satisfied		Very satisfied		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
<b>Study experiences of participants and social integration</b>								
No	26	38.8	23	34.3	18	26.9	67	
Yes	30	20.3	66	44.6	52	35.1	148	
Total	56		89		70		215	( $p < 0.01$ )*
<b>Study experiences of participants and the emotional support received from family and friends</b>								
No	14	35.0	12	30.0	14	35.0	40	
Yes	44	24.3	81	44.8	56	30.9	181	
Total	58		93		70		221	( $p < 0.19$ )
<b>Study experiences of participants and safety on campus</b>								
No	7	23.3	11	36.7	12	40.0	30	
Yes	40	28.6	53	37.9	47	33.6	140	
Sometimes	11	22.0	27	54.0	12	24.0	50	
Total	58		91		71		220	( $p < 0.29$ )

<b>Study experiences of participants and the alcohol consumption levels since commencing university</b>								
No	35	26.5	55	41.7	42	31.8	132	
Yes	23	25.8	38	42.7	28	31.5	89	
Total	58		93		70		221	( $\rho < 0.98$ )
<b>Study experiences of participants and the feelings towards their weight</b>								
Negative	20	29.4	28	41.2	20	29.4	68	
Positive	37	24.8	61	40.9	51	34.2	149	
Total	57		89		71		217	( $\rho < 0.70$ )
<b>Study experiences of participants and the amount of hours they slept during the academic week</b>								
Less than 5 hours	9	27.3	16	48.5	8	24.2	33	
5-6 hours	24	23.5	42	41.2	36	35.3	102	
7-8 hours	17	23.9	31	43.7	23	32.4	71	
9-10 hours	5	55.6	1	11.1	3	33.3	9	
More than 11 hours	1	25.0	2	50.0	1	25.0	4	
Total	56		92		71		219	( $\rho < 0.54$ )
<b>Study experiences of participants and the fear of unemployment after graduation</b>								
No	9	16.1	20	35.7	27	48.2	56	
Yes	43	29.5	64	43.8	39	26.7	146	
Unsure	6	30.0	9	45.0	5	25.0	20	
Total	58		93		71		222	( $\rho < 0.04$ )*

\* Indicates a statistically significant relationship between the study experience and the non-academic variable

According to the results in Table 3, the participants who reported an easy social integration when they started university were either “very satisfied” (35.1%) or “satisfied” (44.6%) with their study experiences. A statistically significant relationship was established between the ease of social integration in terms of making friends and the study experience ( $\chi^2=8.22$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $\rho < 0.01$ ). The relationship implies that social integration such as making friends when starting university had an impact on the participants’ study experience. As expected, relationships that students form once on campus, especially social relationships were closely related to high satisfaction levels with university (Fischer, 2007:145). Making friends during the transition period was very important (Wilcox *et al.*, 2005:711-712), as it was found that adjustment to university was crucial for future success (Fischer, 2007:130). Students who became more involved in campus life were more likely to perform better academically (Fischer, 2007:130). Social adjustment played a critical role in students’ decision to continue with their studies (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012:486; Gray, Vitak, Easton & Ellison, 2013:193).

As shown in Table 3, 35.0% of the participants who had no emotional support from family and friends when they started university were “very satisfied” with their study experience and 44.8% of the participants who reported receiving emotional support from family and friends were “satisfied” with their study experience. The relationship between the emotional support the participants received from family and friends and the study experience was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2=3.29$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $\rho < 0.19$ ). This indicates that the emotional support participants received when they started university had no effect on the study experience. It was, however, anticipated that emotional support would have an impact on the study experience of students as Awang, Kutty and Ahmad (2014:267-268) found that support from parents could positively affect a student’s university experience, because they provided encouragement, support and guidance. Support from family and friends was also reported as important because it assisted with the successful adjustment at university which had a positive impact on students’ academic performance (Credé & Niehorster, 2012:138, 140).

Table 3 shows that the participants who “never” felt safe on campus reported being “very satisfied” (40.0%) with their study experience. In addition, 54.0% the participants who “sometimes” felt safe on campus were “satisfied” with their study experience. Further data analysis indicated that no significant relationship was found between the safety on campus and the study experience of the participants ( $\chi^2=4.91$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.29$ ). The findings suggest that the perceived safety on campus of participants had no impact on their study experience. It was expected that the safety on campus would have an impact on the study experience of students as literature indicated that the focus on studies and academic performance of students were negatively affected when they feared their safety on campus (Baker & Boland, 2011:696; Mullis, Martin, Foy & Drucker, 2012:162) (The study conducted by Mullis *et al.* (2012:5) was an international assessment with 49 participating countries and directed in the USA). Further, a positive learning environment among students was created when the campus was safe and secure (Mullis *et al.*, 2007:275).

Table 3 indicates that participants who did not report an alcohol increase since attending university were “very satisfied” (31.8%) with their study experience and participants reporting being “satisfied” (42.7%) with their study experience had indicated an increase in their alcohol consumption. No statistically significant relationship was found between the participants’ alcohol consumption levels since commencing with university and the study experience ( $\chi^2=0.02$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.98$ ). This implies that the alcohol consumption of the participants did not impact their study experience. It was anticipated that alcohol consumption would impact on the study experience of the participants as it was found that heavy alcohol use could affect study habits and class attendance (Howland *et al.*, 2010:662). Brown and Venable (2007:2950) furthermore reported that high alcohol consumption could lead to sexual risk taking, which in turn could lead to sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies. Table 3 presents that 34.2% of the participants who were feeling “positive” about their perceived weight were “very satisfied” with their study experience and 41.2% of the participants who reported more “negative” feelings towards their weight were “satisfied” with their study experience. Results indicate that there was no statistically significant relationship between the perceived body weight of the participants and the study experience ( $\chi^2=0.70$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.70$ ). It was expected that the perceived body weight of students would impact on the study experience of the participants as Yanover and Thompson (2008:186-187) found that body dissatisfaction among students had a negative intrusion on academic achievement. It was found that students who perceived themselves as being overweight, normally leading to body dissatisfaction (Young-Hyman *et al.*, 2006:2252), experienced more academic stress, depressive symptoms and poorer academic performance than students who did not perceive themselves as overweight (Xie *et al.*, 2006:120). Being overweight and obese furthermore created a dangerous combination of increased health risks and mortality (Ratanasiripong & Burkey, 2011:21).

Table 3 reveals that 35.3% of the participants sleeping between 5 and 6 hours per night during the academic week were “very satisfied” with their study experience and half (50.0%) of the participants who slept more than 11 hours were “satisfied” with their study experience. There was no relationship between the amount of hours the participants slept during the academic week and the study experience ( $\chi^2=6.95$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p<0.54$ ). This suggests that the amount of hours slept during the academic week did not impact on the study experience. It was expected that the amount of sleep during the academic week would impact on the study experience of the participants as Orzech *et al.* (2011:616-617) reported that a lack of sleep affected the academic experience of students by reducing their ability to concentrate and remembering course work. The lack of sleep obstructed the student’s ability to effectively learn new material, negatively

impacting on their learning by reducing motivation to study (Gaultney, 2010:94). Anxiety and depression were also reported among students who indicated reduced sleep patterns. Students with a consistent sleep schedule and who received more sleep before classes reported better academic performance (Ansari & Stock, 2010:520; Gaultney, 2010:93-94). Additionally, students coped well with stressors encountered when they reported sufficient and good quality of sleep (Ari & Shulman, 2012:286). Sufficient sleep during the evenings led to reduced daytime sleepiness (Onyper, Thacher, Gilbert & Gradess, 2012:328) causing students to be more energetic and cheerful (Brand, Hermann, Muheim, Beck & Holsboer-Trachsler, 2008:202).

Table 3 reveals that participants who reported “no” fear of unemployment after graduation were “very satisfied” (48.2%) with their study experiences and participants who were “unsure” about how they felt reported being “satisfied” (45.0%) with their study experience. The relationship between the fear participants had towards unemployment after graduation and the study experience was statistically significant ( $\chi^2=9.77$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.04$ ). This implies that the fear of unemployment after graduation had a significant impact on the study experience. The fear of unemployment after graduation was expected to impact on the participants’ satisfaction with their overall study experience as Atay and Yildirim (2010:84-85) found that students’ satisfaction was mostly affected by the occupation considered to be done after graduation and the sufficiency of employment opportunities after graduation. A close relationship between the industry and the learning programme was found to increase employment opportunities for students after graduation that affected student satisfaction positively. In addition, students who were motivated with goals such as obtaining a good job after graduation were more likely to persist with university and not terminate their studies before graduating (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012:489).

## **Limitations**

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

## **Conclusion**

Enhancing the quality of the study experience of students has become a priority in most higher education institutions. Positive experiences not only shape students’ cognitive functions, feelings and behaviour, but also improve their satisfaction with the experience (Awang, Kutty & Ahmad, 2014:261). The study is of value to the higher education institutions offering the learning programme because it has established the non-academic variables that influence the study

experience of the students. The non-academic variables discovered were the social adjustment of students when starting university and the fear students had towards unemployment after graduation had a significant impact on the study experiences. All of the findings were contradictory to literature, except for the non-academic variables that had a significant impact on the study experiences of students namely 'the social adjustment of students when starting university' and 'the fear students had towards unemployment after graduation'. Literature indicates that the relationships students form on campus, especially social relationship are closely related to high satisfaction levels with university. Making friends during the transition period is very important as it is found that adjustment to university is crucial for future success. In addition, students' satisfaction is mostly affected by the occupation considered to be done after graduation and the sufficiency of employment opportunities after graduation. A close relationship between the industry and the learning programme is found to increase employment opportunities for students after graduation that affected student satisfaction positively. The results of this study could hopefully enhance the study experience of Hospitality Management students encouraging them to successfully complete their well-intended studies.

### **Recommendations for future research**

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

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