

**Information Sheet**

**Study Title:**

International Distance Education and African Students (IDEAS)

**What is the purpose of the study?**

You are invited to participate in a research survey that examines student experiences while studying higher education at a distance. The survey has been designed to study academic and social adjustments and integrations of students studying with the University of South Africa (UNISA).

**Why have I been asked to take part?**

You were selected to participate in this survey because you are a UNISA student using online study.

**Do I have to take part?**

No. You are under no obligation to complete the survey and participation is entirely voluntary. If you change your mind about taking part in the study, you can withdraw at any point up to 30 days after the session by contacting the lead researchers of this project (contact information below). If you decide to withdraw, all your data will be destroyed and will not be used in the study. There are no consequences to deciding that you no longer wish to participate. If you agree to take part you will be asked to demonstrate consent by providing your name, student number and email address.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You will gain insight into how a research project is conducted and what it is like to be a participant in such a study. It is also envisioned that the findings of this study will help UNISA improve the online environment and support services for students. After you complete the survey, you will be sent individualised feedback about your survey results so that you may compare your academic and social integration with other students studying at a distance. Finally, students who complete the survey will be entered into a prize drawing for one of ten 1GB mobile data vouchers.

**What happens during the study?**

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to complete an online survey, which will take around 20 minutes of your time. The survey will ask you questions about your academic and social experiences while studying with UNISA. By taking part in this survey, you agree to being contacted by a member of the research team to take part in a recorded interview about your experiences. You are, however, welcome to refuse to participate in an interview.

**Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

The project will be carried out in line with current guidelines relating to ethical research practice. No personally identifying information will be shared.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

Results of the questionnaire will feed into UNISA policies in their attempts to improve students’ adjustments to university life. The findings from this study also form part of the International Distance Education for African Students (IDEAS) project deliverables. The research findings are likely to be published in working papers for the funding body, academic journal articles and books.

Data will be available to all members of the IDEAS project team. Deanonymised data will not be shared other than within the project team. Pseudonyms will be used in reporting, and any identifying information mentioned in the survey or interviews will be redacted.

The data will be kept in full for the duration of the project, and afterwards will form part of a secure data archive. Data will be stored in a password protected file in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act in South Africa and the Data Protection Act in the United Kingdom.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research team is made up of: Professor Parvati Raghuram and Dr Bart Rienties (The Open University, UK), Dr Clare Madge (University of Leicester), Dr Ashley Gunter, and Professor Paul Prinsloo (University of South Africa, South Africa). The research is based at the Open University in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the Department of Geography and the University of South Africa, South Africa, Department of Geography, College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. The research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) and the National Research Foundation (South Africa). The project is guided by a Professional Advisory Group (PAG) with members drawn from organisations that include African Community Fund for Education (ACEF) Group, University of Pretoria, African Network for the Internationalization of Education (ANIE) and MIET Africa.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been ethically approved by the CAES Ethics Committee (UNISA), Open University (UK), and University of Leicester (UK). Prior to this, and in order to secure funding, the research was reviewed for the ESRC and NRF by anonymous academic peer reviewers.

**Contact for Further Information:**

Should you have any questions regarding the ethical aspects of the study, you can contact the chairperson of the CAES ethics committee Prof Kempen at kempeel@unisa.ac.za. Alternatively, you can report any serious unethical behaviour at the University’s Toll Free Hotline 0800 86 96 93.

For other questions, please contact:

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