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Massachusetts Adult Basic Education and ESOL Distance Learning Programs: How to Assess Student Readiness for Distance Learning?

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The CENTER *for* SOCIAL POLICY

**MASSACHUSETTS ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND ESOL
DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS:
HOW TO ASSESS STUDENT READINESS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING?
FINDINGS FROM THE PILOT SCREENING PROCESS**

**PROJECT FUNDED BY
ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING SERVICES (ACLS)
MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY
AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

**By
THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL POLICY
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Submitted June 30, 2009



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I. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from the pilot screening process prepared by the Center for Social Policy (CSP) and implemented during December 2008-March 2009 by the adult basic education (ABE) online learning programs in MA which are funded by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE). The purposes of the pilot process were:

- To determine the effectiveness of screening tools in assessing participant characteristics, such as the skills, demographics, and life circumstances that are associated with success in online learning;
- To identify supports and interventions which students need in order to persist and succeed in online learning.

At the end of the first round of research during April-August 2008, CSP research team determined that readiness and success of adult students in online learning are embedded indeed in multiple factors both at the individual and the contextual level and these multiple factors are inter-connected with one another. The individual factors include various demographic variables, social characteristics, life situations, learning styles, motivation, computer skills, and cognitive and meta-cognitive skills. The contextual factors include the role of the instructor, the variability and access to the materials and technology being used, the type of program, i.e. GED, Pre-GED and ESOL, the specific requirements of the course being taught and the curriculum design (Petty, Johnston, & Shafer, 2004). CSP researchers developed the Interactive-Constructivist Model of ABE Distance Learning (DL) based on the findings of the first round of research. The Interactive-Constructivist approach conceives learning as a social process. Learning does not happen in a vacuum, but rather in a social context¹ (Kahraman, Mallona, Friedman, Platt, & Kahan, 2008).

¹ The findings of this first round of research can be found in the first report prepared by Kahraman, Mallona, Friedman, Platt, & Kahan, (2008). An illustration of the Interactive-Constructivist Model of ABE-DL is included in Appendix A.

During August-November 2008, the CSP continued its research which aimed to identify the tools which would best assess adults' readiness for online learning. The research team developed an interview tool and designed an online survey to be piloted at the Department-funded online ABE programs. In order to pilot online journaling as a support tool, the research team also developed sets of online journaling questions to be implemented weekly with a sample of online learning students. Also, during this period, having received the necessary permissions from the UMass Boston Institutional Review Board, the research team provided a systematic screening process which the pilot agencies used with their program participants.

All the tools developed for the pilot process were customized for the GED and ESOL programs. The CSP team prepared a pilot screening handbook which was also customized for the two programs. During November 2008, researchers conducted two trainings for the implementation of the pilot screening process, one with the online GED programs and the other with the online ESOL programs.

In addition, in April 2009, the research team conducted two focus groups, one with GED and the other with ESOL students, for the purpose of identifying students' perspectives of the challenges and supports needed for persistence in online learning. The CSP team continued, also during this period, to conduct literature reviews and research experiences of other programs nation-wide in order to develop a framework of support.

Throughout the pilot screening, the CSP team maintained communication with the implementers of the screening in order to ensure quality of the data being gathered, to solicit continuous feedback on questions and tools, and to address the challenges of implementation along the way.

In the end of the pilot process, in April 2009, the research team gathered all the data that were collected during the pilot, along with the SMARTT data which included the demographic and other background information of those who participated in the pilot. The researchers completed a final round of gathering feedback from implementers on the

tools and the implementation process. The CSP team analyzed data from the pilot during April and May 2009. Based on the analyses of the data and feedback from implementers, the team revised the screening instruments and developed *the handbook of screening* and *the handbook of support* for use by the online ABE programs. These handbooks were once again customized for the ESOL and GED programs. These handbooks are presented alongside with this report.

Throughout the research, the research team also used observations to learn about contextual factors, such as the type and structure of the program, curriculum and technology, and their connectedness with individual level factors.

The report is comprised of nine sections. The second section of the report begins by explaining the methodology, and includes a description of the methods, the research and the pilot process. The second section also describes the data analysis techniques which were used. The third section of the report provides a description of the participants in the study. The fourth section presents the findings from the pilot process including findings from the online survey (the revised Meta-Cognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI)), the interviews, online journaling, and the focus groups with students of the online ABE programs. The fifth section provides an overall discussion of these findings. The sixth section presents the findings in the light of the Interactive-Constructivist Model of ABE-DL². Section seven presents the final recommendations and section eight presents the references.

1.1. DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

Success in the context of this research has been defined as persistence in the GED and ESOL programs, which leads to attaining a GED for the GED students and increasing the English assessment scores for the ESOL students. Persistence in the context of this research has been defined, along the lines of the other studies in this area, as continued attendance in programs and, when a need to stop out of the program arises, having a plan

² Ibid.

to return as soon as that reason has been eliminated. (Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, 1999).

II. METHODS AND THE PILOT PROCESS

2.1 METHODOLOGY

The present research is based on a mixed method approach in which quantitative and qualitative data and techniques complement each other and data are collected from multiple sources. This approach provides a holistic view of the participants in this study, students of the ESE funded online ABE programs. Students' socio-economic background characteristics and meta-cognitive skills are examined together with their perceptions and experiences in the programs. The multiple data sources are used for validation and strengthening of the main findings from the study.

2.2 METHODS AND THE INSTRUMENTS

2.2.1 Online Survey: Revised Meta-Cognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI)

Background on MAI

One of the purposes of this research was to assess the meta-cognitive awareness of online ABE students. Online learning is a relatively new educational venue in the field of Adult Basic Education. It provides the opportunity to expand services to learners who, for a range of reasons, are unable to engage in traditional instructional environments. However, it is a distinctive way of learning and teaching in comparison to traditional face to face learning environments.

Being 'self-directed' has been identified by scholars as necessary for succeeding in online learning. This ability involves the acquisition and practice of meta-cognitive skills alongside other skills and qualities. Meta-cognition has been defined as "the ability to reflect upon, understand and control one's own learning." (Schraw & Dennison, 1994).

Meta-cognitively aware learners have knowledge about what strategies they use when performing a task, which strategies are appropriate for which tasks and which strategies to use for planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning (Schraw & Dennison, 1994). Some research shows that meta-cognitively aware learners perform better in solving problems than learners who are unaware (Schraw & Dennison 1994).

MAI is a 52 item inventory which aims to measure adults' meta-cognitive awareness and was developed in 1994 by Gregory Schraw and Rayne Sperling Dennison. Previous research supports a two component model of meta-cognition (Schraw and Dennison 1994). These two components are:

- 1) Knowledge about cognition: Encapsulates students' knowledge about themselves, strategies, and conditions under which strategies are most useful (Schraw & Dennison, 1994);
- 2) Regulation of cognition: Refers to knowledge about the way students plan for their learning, the way they manage the information they gather and monitor and correct comprehension errors, and evaluate their learning (Schraw & Dennison 1994).

Choice of MAI over other self-report instruments

In the first round of research, the CSP team examined different instruments that could be useful for finding out about prospective students' meta-cognitive and other skills. One of the findings was that the existing instruments have been mainly created for assessing students who are interested or are already studying in traditional learning environments (Kahraman et al., 2008). Furthermore these different instruments were developed based on different theoretical cognitive views (Kahraman et al., 2008).

A Project IDEAL Study (Wolters, Karabenick, Johnston, & Young, 2005) which attempted to assess motivation and strategy use of GED distance education students relied on the self-regulated learning models of a K-16 research framework (Boekarts, Pitrich & Zeidner, 2000). This construct took into account motivation and strategy use aspects of learning. The IDEAL researchers found that the motivation items in their

instrument did not produce sufficient results as answers were highly polarized on the positive side of the scale (Wolters et al, 2005). This meant that students assessed their motivation as being high or very high. However the strategy-use items exhibited more variation in responses (Wolters et al, 2005). Learning from the findings of this study, the CSP research team chose to rely on a self-report instrument which concentrated solely on strategy use. MAI, among other instruments, stood out in terms of its reliance on a meta-cognitive theoretical framework. The CSP research team chose to assess other factors, such as motivation, which might contribute to success in DL using a more qualitative approach and an interview instrument which is presented in the next section,

2.2.1.1 Revising the MAI

The CSP team obtained permission to use the MAI from its original authors.³ MAI was revised and condensed with the purpose of making the instrument more accessible to students of ESOL online learning programs who have limited English skills. The revised instrument included some non-MAI statements as well. These non-MAI items have been included in the table below. These items are included in Part I of the instrument. The revised MAI is included in Appendix C.

The MAI items included in Part I of the instrument correspond predominantly to items which are related to the “knowledge of cognition” and Part II items correspond to regulation of cognition.

Non-MAI items can be grouped in three categories as statements that assess:

- Dependence-independence—these items assess students’ ability to work on their own (adapted from Grasha-Reichmann Student Learning Style Inventory, Grasha & Riechmann-Hruska, 1994).
- Preferred conditions for learning—these items assess students’ preferences for the presence of others and communications with others when they are learning (adapted from Bernard, Brauer, Abrami & Surkes, 2004).

³ Gregory Schraw’s permission to use MAI is included in Appendix B.

- Preferred mode of learning—these items assess students’ preference to study in traditional learning environments with face to face interaction.

Non-MAI Items:

Part I-Question 7: Trying to decide what to study makes me uncomfortable.	Part I-Question 8: I frequently need information from teachers on how I am learning.	Part I-Question 9: I feel confident about my ability to learn on my own.	Part I-Question 10: I prefer to study alone.	Part I-Question 11: I prefer learning face to face in a classroom.	Part I-Question 12: Discussions with other students are a necessary part of my learning.	Part I-Question 13: I need to see the teacher to get feedback for my assignments.
Dependence-Independence (Adapted from Grasha-Reichmann Student Learning Style Inventory)	Dependence-Independence (Adapted from Grasha-Reichmann Student Learning Style Inventory)	Dependence-Independence (Adapted from Grasha-Reichmann Student Learning Style Inventory)	Preferred Conditions for learning	Preferred Mode of learning	Preferred Conditions for Learning (Adapted from Bernard, Brauer, Abrami & Surkes, 2004)	Preferred Mode of Learning

The CSP contracted Dragana Bolcic-Jankovic, a consultant from the Center for Survey Research (CSR) of University of Massachusetts, Boston, whose expertise is survey design. The role of this researcher was to help CSP researchers in the process of revising the MAI and other instruments which were being developed.

During the revision process of the MAI, the CSR researcher facilitated a focus group with ESOL students. The purpose of this focus group was to gather information from students about their experience with the revised MAI and their understanding of the statements, through examining and discussing with students their responses to the survey items.

The focus group was conducted in October 2008 before the actual piloting process began. A convenience sample of seven ESOL students enrolled at the Notre Dame Education Center participated in this focus group; each participant received \$50 for his or her participation. All participants were adults aged 18 or older. The site coordinator sent an e-mail to enrolled students inviting them to participate in the focus group. The e-mail explained the purpose of the study. It also emphasized voluntary participation and the availability of \$50 and a parking voucher as compensation for participation. Students

willing to participate in the focus group contacted the site coordinator. Prior to participation, the participants signed an informed consent form⁴ giving their permission to audio tape the group session. The CSR session facilitator asked the participants to complete a few sampled questions from the questionnaire to assess their understanding of these questions. Students were also asked to indicate how easy/difficult these questions were for them to answer.

Subsequent to the focus group, the online survey was revised to incorporate suggestions drawn from analysis of focus group participants' responses. In finalizing the instrument, the CSP team also incorporated feedback from the coordinator of the ESOL program and one of the instructors at the site.

All enrolled ABE online learning students as well as new applicants were encouraged to complete the online survey through e-mails which were sent by the Hub coordinators. The purpose of broadening the participation to already enrolled students was to increase the number of students piloting the instrument.

2.2.2 The Interview Instrument

The CSP team identified the most common readiness factors across different studies and instruments which tried to assess students' readiness for online learning. The team then developed the interview relying on these factors. The original interview instrument included six sections. These sections gathered information on students' past schooling and studying experiences, goals and motivation, perceptions and expectations of online learning, understanding of success, strengths and weaknesses, time management strategies and perceptions on unforeseen challenges and support when studying online.

Although all the sections were part of the GED and ESOL interview instruments, each section had fewer questions in the ESOL protocol. The wording of the ESOL questions was also simpler. The ESOL Hub coordinator and an ESOL instructor provided feedback in simplifying the wording of questions during the development of the interview

⁴ The consent form is included in Appendix D.

instrument. The CSR researcher also assisted with cognitive aspects of the interview questions, including their wording, sequence and the use of probes.⁵

2.2.3 Guiding Online-Journal Questions for Students of ABE-DL

Online journaling has been identified as a learner support method which has the potential to enhance the learning process. Scholars point out that it has especially been useful for helping students *learn how to learn* by asking questions about their learning process (Porter & O'Connor 2003; McLoughlin & Marshall 2000).

The CSP team developed a set of guiding questions for online journaling, one set for each of 16 weeks, and piloted these questions with a sample of GED and ESOL students. The students were asked to write their journals every week using the guiding questions.

The journal questions covered a variety of topics ranging from, life goals and motivation, to use of learning strategies, study habits, time management and feelings about reading or writing. The weekly questions followed a deliberate sequence and had a progression. Some questions were revisited after a period of time. The questions aimed to spark a reflection process which can lead to self knowledge, knowledge of strategies used in learning and knowledge about the application of these strategies. The questions aimed also to initiate a process whereby students are thinking about planning, monitoring and evaluation of their learning processes. Used this way, the online journaling constitutes another instructional resource for supporting and monitoring students' progress in their knowledge of the subject matter, communication and awareness of their meta-cognitive skills. It can help students enhance their abilities to take charge of their learning processes.⁶

Students were recruited through the assistance of the Hub coordinators who sent all students in their programs an e-mail explaining online journaling and the opportunity to

⁵ Please see the Handbook of Screening (Kahraman & Mallona, 2009a) for a final version of the interview instrument which was revised after the pilot process.

⁶ Please see the Handbook of Support (Kahraman & Mallona, 2009b) for final versions of the online journaling questions which were revised after the pilot process.

participate in the pilot for a period of 16 weeks with a compensation of \$160. The e-mail stated also: participation was voluntary; the number of places was limited; and selection would be on a first come first serve basis. The students gave consent to participate in the study by replying to an e-mail asking students to read an attached consent form and to reply to the e-mail by indicating an understanding of what was written in the consent form and a willingness to participate in the study. Both the students and teachers who participated in online journaling provided informed consent. These forms are included in Appendix D.

Students who participated in the pilot were asked to share their reflections via e-mail with their teachers at the end of each week. The teachers who agreed to be a part of this study supported students in ways the teachers saw fit on the challenges that students identified or on issues or concerns that they raised.

2.3 OTHER DATA COLLECTION METHODS

2.3.1 Focus groups: Learning About Students' Experiences in Distance Education

The CSP conducted two focus groups during April 2009 to gather ABE online students' perceptions of and experiences in studying online. The focus groups were semi-structured and questions focused on supports that would help students during their online studies.

The students were recruited through the assistance of the Hub coordinators who sent an e-mail to all students enrolled in their programs inviting them to participate in the focus group. Participating students were provided a stipend of \$25 for their time. Selection was made on a first come first serve basis.

Six students from the GED and seven from the ESOL programs participated in two separate focus groups to share their experiences in studying online. Students' written

consent to participate in the study and to audio-tape the session were gathered before the focus group discussion started.⁷

2.3.2 Literature Reviews

Extensive reviews of the literature on support and interventions in the context of online ABE programs were conducted with the purpose of creating a table of supports/interventions to be used by the Department funded online ABE programs. A list of the search terms used for researching the literature is included in Appendix E.

2.3.3 Statistical Analysis of Student Data from the SMARTT System

The ESE uses the “System for Managing Accountability and Results through Technology” (SMARTT) for Adult Basic Education. This system enables the ESE to collect, track, manage and create reports on students’ demographic background and performance. It is also a tool to assist ABE programs to plan funds and project needs, and to create and follow-up assessment and performance reports (ESE/ACLS, 2007; ESE/ACLS).

The CSP coordinated with ESE to retrieve from SMARTT the demographic and performance data of all students who were active participants of the distance learning programs in FY 2009, as well as the incoming applicants who would be the participants of the pilot research project. The CSP analyzed the demographic data of the overall distance education population for FY 2009, as well as the participants of the pilot study.⁸

2.4 THE PILOT PROCESS

The CSP facilitated a workshop for teachers and administrators who were going to participate in administering the interview and the online survey with applicants of online ABE programs. The research team also provided a handbook to each participant with detailed explanations about the research purpose of each of the instruments and how to administer them.

⁷ The consent form for this focus group is also included in Appendix D.

⁸ Analyses of the participants of the DL programs for the years 2000-2008 was conducted and presented in the first report prepared for the Department by Kahraman et al., 2008.

The table below presents the two coordinating sites or Hubs and their respective partner agencies that participated in the workshops and administered the instruments for the pilot study.

ABE program	ESOL program
Hub: Quinsigamond Community College	Hub: Notre Dame Education Center, Boston
The Literacy Project, Inc.	Cambridge Community Learning Center
Webster Adult Learning Center	Jamaica Plain Community Center, Inc.
Worcester Adult Learning Center	Notre Dame Education Center, Lawrence
	Somerville Public Schools (SCALE)

Survey:

The online survey took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. Students were asked to complete the survey either immediately at the program site they were applying or later at their homes. The survey was conceived of as a new administrative tool and activity to identify and understand the learning needs and past experiences of prospective students for online courses.

The teachers contacted enrolled students via e-mail asking and encouraging them to complete the survey online. They explained the aim and the process of the study. In contrast, already enrolled students needed to give their consent to participate in this new task. Thus the survey included a statement about consent in the introduction section. By pressing the submit button the students were also giving consent for their results to be included in the research.

At the end of the piloting period, the Department provided the CSP team with a list of individual answers to the online survey together with demographic information for each student, the pre- and post- test results and the records of their attendance or participation. All the data received from the Department were masked to guarantee confidentiality of

students' individual identities. The CSP team analyzed the results of the online survey along with the supplemental information on the students. The research team explored how students responded to the items on the online survey, taking demographic factors into account.

Interviews

The interview data were gathered from all the students who were applicants during the piloting period. Interviews were conducted on-site by the teacher or administrator responsible for the screening process, and they lasted approximately 20 minutes to half an hour. Interviews were conducted as part of the routine screening process in these DL programs.

The teachers and administrators jotted down notes on the interview forms of their impressions of new applicants and the usefulness or limitations of questions. The Department provided the CSP team with demographic information for each student, the pre- and post- test results and the records of their attendance or participation. The Department collected this information for every student-applicant as a part of their routine administrative process. Researchers received these data from the Department as a package, together with records of the interviews. All the data were masked to protect the participants' identity and to guarantee confidentiality. The CSP team analyzed the results of the interview instrument along with supplemental information, such as demographics, on the students.

Online Journaling

Seven ESOL and six GED students participated in online journaling. They were asked to take 15-30 minutes each week for a period of 16 weeks during December 2008 to April 2009 to reflect and record their online learning process. This included issues related to their motivation, challenges, learning strategies, time management and evaluation of their own learning (what has worked or not worked for them, how have they applied their learning to their everyday life and work).

In the end, student reflections along with a documentation of the interaction with the teacher, i.e. specifically how the teacher addressed student's concerns or needs, were shared with the researchers. The information shared was removed from identifying information. The researchers synthesized this information and included it in the findings section of this report.

2.4.1 Limitations of the research

Research timetable

The research timetable has been very restricted in general; in particular four months of piloting time was insufficient to gather enough post-test or participation information from participants. This could have been useful for observing the relationship (if any) between prospective students readiness and academic success. However, a scan of data SMARTT data across longer time periods reveals that programs are not getting students to post-test.

Sampling

Time constraints also affected the possibility of having a larger piloting sample. Sample design of the focus groups and online journaling participants was also more limited than is optimally desired. Targeted sampling and recruitment, over a longer time period, could provide a wider diversity of participants. However the use of such an approach was not possible under the scope of this project.

Sampling design issues related to the online survey are discussed in more detail in the findings section.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

2.5.1. Online Survey: Revised Meta-cognitive Awareness Inventory

Data were cleaned and variables such as education, gender, employment were quantified by transforming them into dummy variables. Basic descriptive statistics, cross tabulations, analyses of covariate relationships were conducted. The survey items were

analyzed through examining items frequencies. Tests of significance were used to make comparisons within and across groups for the survey. The alpha reliability test was performed to test the reliability of the survey instrument for the whole sample and for sub-groups in the sample. Response rates were calculated for the survey. Sampling design issues were investigated comparing characteristics of the two groups who participated and those who did not participate in the pilot.

2.5.2. Interview Instrument

All the participants' information was entered into an Excel spread sheet. The information was organized by agency, program and students' answers to each question. In so doing, the data were organized in a broad code system making it possible to follow up individual students' patterns of responses. This coding system made easier the comparison between students. The qualitative data were also matched with the demographic data provided by the ESE through the SMARTT web-based system.

The data were entered as they were received from each of the participating agencies of the ESOL and GED distance learning programs. This early input of the data allowed the research team to conduct a preliminary examination looking at potential gaps in data collection. It also helped to address questions from the interviewers and keep track of number of interviews per agency.

2.5.3. Online- journaling Instrument

A similar procedure as described above was used to analyze the data from the online journaling. The Excel spread sheet was organized by columns containing the entries of each of the 16 weeks of the online journaling tool, and rows containing the participants ID and demographic data. This organization allowed the research team to look at the pattern of responses of each student as well as the similarities and differences between participants. The topic of each week was conceived as the broad category of the column which also allowed the team to identify emergent themes.

2.5.4. Focus Groups: Experience in Distance Education

Two focus groups were facilitated by the CSP research team, one in each of the Hub's sites of GED and ESOL programs. Immediately after each focus group, the researchers debriefed and complemented their notes. Prior to their analyses, the team created an initial list of thematic codes based on the guiding questions for the focus groups. The initial list of codes allowed the researchers to create a preliminary organization of notes taken during the sessions. Some of these codes were: reasons for studying in DL, length of the program, experiences in DL, challenges, support received, experience asking for help, communication with peers, experience with computers, and recommendations to new applicants. The initial list of codes facilitated filling the gaps in information and having a preliminary perspective of the students' experiences in distance education.

III. DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC AND OTHER BACKGROUND

CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE PILOT STUDY

The number of participants in each of the project's data collection components varied depending on the interest of students to participate or the purpose of collecting a particular set of data. For example, whereas all new applicants to GED and ESOL programs were interviewed during the pilot study, the online survey participation was a self-selected sample and included both new applicants and already enrolled students. Participation in focus groups was also voluntary and the number of participants varied.

Primary area (GED/ESOL) and gender of students who are part of the pilot screening process and of students who were active during FY 2009 have been presented in Table I below. There are a total of **73** students who were interviewed by Hubs and partners as part of the pilot screening process. **Ninety nine** students filled out the online survey.

There were **181** active students for fiscal year 2009: These are the students who had some hours of attendance defined as the sum of course hours and orientation hours.

Forty six of the “active” FY-2009 students had intake dates which corresponded to years prior than FY 2009. **One** of these students had an intake date for 2006 and **eight** had an intake date for 2007; the rest had intake dates before June 2008.

Appendix F includes detailed graphs and tables on other background characteristics of students who participated in the pilot screening process in a comparative way: for the total population of students, for students who were interviewed during the pilot, and for students who completed the survey.⁹

Please note that: Data from the SMARTT system are not always complete; there are missing observations across variables. Hence some of the statistics reported will not perfectly match the population or the sample numbers.

Table I: Gender and Primary Area of Students in the Distance Learning Pilot Study

By Primary Area Gender	Number of Students who were interviewed during the pilot	Number of students who completed the online Survey	Number of students who had some attendance in FY 2009
GED	36	47	81
Female	17	30	53
ESOL	37	51	86
Female	30	40	59
No Primary Area	0	1	14
Female	0	1	10
Total	73	99	181

⁹ Eleven students who either completed the online survey or who were interviewed during the pilot screening process were reported as “never enrolled”. The research team also identified 8 students who were interviewed and another 12 students who filled out the online survey, but were not part of the active FY-2009 student list. The team was able to acquire some of the SMARTT data for these students from the Department. (Seven of these students turned out to be non-DL students and the rest were DL students who were not active for FY 2009.) Hence a total of: $181 + 11 + 8 + 12 = 212$ **students comprised the overall population.**

Division by primary area (GED vs. ESOL) was nearly even across groups as presented in the Table I above. **Thirty** of the **37** ESOL students who were interviewed were female. Females comprised the majority across all groups in line with the findings from previous years and statistics from distance learning programs in other states. Their participation was higher especially in ESOL groups. Overall, **67** percent of the distance learning students in FY 2009 were females

Age

Graphs 1, 2 and 3, and Tables 1 and 2 in Appendix F, illustrate the division of participants across age groups. The '**25-44**' age category is the largest both for the population and the pilot samples with close to or above **60** percent. The second largest age category is '**45-99**'. For GED and ESOL, the same pattern repeats itself for the largest category of students. However, among ESOL students, the second largest is the '**45-60**' age category, while for GED students '**18-24**' is the second largest category.

Ethnicity

Whites and Hispanics/Latinos comprise the two largest categories of ethnic groups for distance learning students; both are over **30 percent**. Whites are the largest category for GED students while Asians and Hispanics are the two largest categories among the ESOL students. The interview sample included **17** Asian ESOL students. Graphs 4, 5 and 6 and Tables 3 and 4 in Appendix F illustrate the details.

Employment Status

Approximately **60** percent of total students and approximately **50** percent of students in the sample are employed. Unemployed-looking and unemployed-not-looking for work comprise the second and the third largest categories respectively. Graphs 7, 8 and 9 illustrate the division of participants across different employment categories.

Immigrant Status

Out of the **37** ESOL students who were interviewed during the pilot, **36** identified themselves as immigrants. Only four of the **36** ABE students who were interviewed

during the pilot identified themselves as immigrants. **Thirty eight** of the **91** survey students, for whom there was demographic information, identified as non-immigrants and **53 (58 percent)** identified themselves immigrants.

Educational Background

A majority of the GED students (**58 percent**) in FY 2009 had completed **10th or 11th** level of education. This was also true for applicants who were part of the pilot study and for all who completed the online survey. The distribution of GED students active in FY 2009 across grade levels is presented in Table 5 in Appendix F.

Approximately **73** percent ESOL students enrolled in ESE funded distance learning programs in FY 2009 had a high school diploma or some education beyond high school. About **40** percent of these students had some education beyond high school. The educational background of all ESOL students active in FY 2009 is presented in Table 6 in Appendix F.

Four of the ESOL students who were interviewed as part of the pilot had no high school diploma; **12** had high school diploma or equivalent of a high school diploma; **19** had education beyond high school. **Nine** of the ESOL students who completed the online survey had no high school diploma; **14** had a high school diploma or its equivalent; **23** had education beyond high school.

3.2 ATTENDANCE OUTCOMES OF ABE-DL STUDENTS

The mean number of weeks of all students in the fiscal year 2009 was approximately **22** with high variation among students (standard deviation: approximately **17**) in April 2009 when data were retrieved. However it is more meaningful to look at the attendance data for a sub-sample of students who had exited the program during this period in order to understand the duration students stay in the program. There are **51** students in this category and the mean number of weeks these students spent in the program is **26**, again with a high variation across students (standard deviation: approximately **21**).

The mean number of weeks in the program did not differ in a statistically significant way for GED and ESOL students. The percentile distributions for number of weeks in the program for students who had exited the program at the time of the pilot are included in Table 1 in Appendix G.

The benchmark for hours spent studying every week for students of DL is set by the ESE as **6-7** hours. On average the students spent **1.3** hours studying online per week (standard deviation: **1.7**) in FY 2009. **50** percent of students spent less than or equal to **.61 hours studying per week**. **Ninety** percent studied less than or equal to 3.3 hours per week. The percentile distributions for number of hours spent studying is presented in Table 2 in Appendix G.

Across the population and the pilot and survey samples mean hours of attendance per week for ESOL students was significantly higher than those for GED students; **1.76** hours vs. **0.78** hours, **n=101** and **n=90** respectively. The mean hours of attendance per week did not differ in a significant way for female and male students; this finding did not differ for the sub samples of GED and ESOL students.

ESOL students who had education beyond high school spent more hours on average per week studying than those whose education was less than or equal to high school; **2.57** hours vs. **1.60** hours, **n=32** and **n=57**.

The research team examined also the difference in hours per week for ABE students who had 7, 8 and 9 grade-level education vs. those who had 10, 11, and 12 grade-level education and found no significant differences between the two groups.

3.3 PRE AND POST TEST OUTCOMES OF ABE-DL STUDENTS

The pre- and post test information for the total population of students are included in tables below. This information was updated on June 26, 2009. At the time approximately 50 percent of ESOL students had post-tested. Twenty nine of these students kept or increased their initial score; 13 students decreased their initial scores. There might be

various explanations as to why some students dropped their initial scores. One possible explanation is a potential misalignment between the focus of the REEP test which places heavy emphasis on writing skills and the curriculum in the ESOL program. It is not clear how much emphasis there is on writing in the ESOL programs as opposed to other skills.

Overall, there were very few students who post tested in the GED program; 12 percent of those who took MAPT reading and none for those who took MAPT math. Ten students kept or increased their initial MAPT score while three students dropped their MAPT score. Once again, it is not clear how the skills, knowledge and framework which are covered by the current curriculum (McGraw Hill) are aligned with what MAPT attempts to measure.

Another way to assess students' outcomes might be to look at how students do on assessments built into the curriculum. This is also important for instructors in monitoring the progress of their students as well as teaching students to monitor their own progress.

Table II: ESOL-REEP Test Scores, FY 2009, n=92

(Data June 26, 2009)

# of students with <u>initial</u> REEP test scores (as percentage of total, in parenthesis)	92 (100%)
Mean initial REEP scores (Standard deviation in parenthesis)	3.73 (.76 sd)
# of students with <u>post</u>-REEP test scores (as percentage of those with initial scores, in parenthesis)	42 (46%)
# of students who kept or increased initial REEP scores	29
# of students who decreased initial REEP scores	13
Mean post-REEP test scores (Standard deviation in parenthesis)	3.96 (.65 sd)

Table III: GED-MAPT-Reading Scores, FY 2009, n=117

(Data June 26, 2009)

# of students with <u>initial</u> MAPT-reading scores (as percentage of total, in parenthesis)	112 (96%)
Mean initial MAPT-reading scores (Standard deviation in parenthesis)	569.8 (70.4 sd)
# of students with <u>post</u> -MAPT-reading scores (as percentage of those with initial scores, in parenthesis)	13 (0.12%)
# of students who <u>kept or increased</u> initial MAPT-reading scores	10
# of students who <u>decreased</u> initial MAPT-reading scores	3
Mean post-MAPT-reading test scores (Standard deviation in parenthesis)	549.8 (60.7 sd)
# of students with initial MAPT-math scores (as percentage of total, in parenthesis)	10 (9%)
Mean initial MAPT-math scores (Standard deviation in parenthesis)	545.2 (63.2 sd)

Table IV: GED-MAPT-Math Scores, FY 2009, n=117

(Data June 26, 2009)

# of students with <u>initial</u> MAPT-math scores (as percentage of total, in parenthesis)	10 (9%)
Mean initial MAPT-math scores (Standard deviation in parenthesis)	545.2 (63.2 sd)
# of students with <u>post</u> -MAPT-math scores (as percentage of those with initial scores, in parenthesis)	0
# of students who <u>kept or increased</u> initial MAPT-math scores	N/A
# of students who <u>decreased</u> initial MAPT-math scores	N/A
Mean post-MAPT-math test scores (Standard deviation in parenthesis)	N/A

3.4 GOALS SET AND MET FOR ABE-DL STUDENTS

Below is a table which illustrates the number of times and percentages of each goal which was set and met for ESOL and GED students for FY 2009.

Twenty-two online ESOL students set 73 goals for FY 2009. Forty-eight of these goals were met. Fifteen out of 22 students had at least one goal met. Among the goals most frequently set by ESOL students was “increasing computer literacy skills”.

Seventy-three GED students set 144 goals. Three of these goals were met. Three of the goals met for GED students were obtaining a GED. GED students set the goal of obtaining a GED most frequently.

Finally, it is not clear to the research team how some of the goals listed below can be achieved through enrolling in an online ABE program. For example, it is not clear whether the programs offer or are supposed to offer information to students which would help them achieve the goal of learning about or using community organizations or resources. The research team recommends revisiting use of the ‘goals set and met’, in its current form and in the ways this assessment is currently implemented, as a measure of students’ outcomes.

The goals list, as it currently stands, is too lengthy for any one person to be able to go through thoroughly. Also it is not clear how some of the goals listed can be met if the programs are not offering additional services or referring students to additional services. A more context-specific list for distance learning, and different ones for GED and ESOL, could prove useful. In addition, administration of this goal setting with students should be standardized if these lists will be used for future evaluations; we recommend that it be self-administered with or without staff assistance.

Table V: Goals Set and Met for ABE-DL students, FY 2009

	# of times each goal was set-ESOL	% of goals set-ESOL of total goals set	# of times each goal was set-GED	% of goals set of total goals set-GED	# of times each goal was met-ESOL	% of goals met out of goals set-ESOL	# of times each goal was met-GED	% of goals met out of goals set-GED
Apply for U.S. citizenship	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Complete occupational training > 12 mo.	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Create a resume	1	1		0	1	100	0	0
Enter employment	1	1	10	7	0	0	0	0
Get a drivers license	1	1	3	2	1	100	0	0
Get and Use library card	1	1	1	1	1	100	0	0
Improve personal health	1	1	0	0	1	100	0	0
Increase computer literacy skills	20	27	0	0	14	70	0	0
Learn about nutrition	1	1	0	0	1	100	0	0
Learn about or use community organizations or resources	2	3	0	0	2	100	0	0
Learn about US culture	18	25	0	0	14	78	0	0
Read, write, do mathematical problem-solving and/or help child with homework (30 minutes/wk or 2x/week for 4 consecutive months)	3	4	4	3	3	100	0	0
Receive certificate of citizenship at oath ceremony	1	1		0	1	100	0	0
Register to vote	3	4	1	1	3	100	0	0
Retain current employment	12	16	2	1	1	8	0	0

Volunteer in a program, community, school, daycare	3	4	1	1	2	67	0	0
Vote in federal, state, or local elections	3	4	0	0	3	100	0	0
Complete some adult HS credits and/or MCAS tests toward ADP	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Enter occupational training program > 12 mo.	0	0	5	3	0	0	0	0
Enter post-secondary education	0	0	13	9	0	0	0	0
Enter transitional education	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	0
Get a learners permit to drive	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	0
Get industry related certificate or license	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Improve health of children	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Increase earnings	0	0	11	8	0	0	0	0
Obtain GED	0	0	78	54	0	0	3	4
Obtain more satisfying/appropriate employment	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Open a checking or savings account	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Quit smoking	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	73	100	144	100	48		3	

IV. FINDINGS

Findings from each of the instruments used during the pilot study and other methods of data collection are presented below.

4.1 FINDINGS FROM THE ONLINE SURVEY

The Hub administrators reached out to all distance learning students in their lists multiple times (via e-mails) to ask for their participation in the survey. Hence the number of students who completed the online survey exceeded those who were interviewed during the pilot period. Furthermore, not all of the students who were interviewed during the pilot period filled out the online survey. The response rates for completing the online survey are presented below

Table VI: Response Rates for the Online Survey (In Parenthesis):

	Number of Responses/Response rates
Total Population of Students, N=212	99 (47%)
Pilot-Interviewed Students, n=73	47 (65%)

Due to problems with sample design, it is probable that there is *self-selection bias* in the survey meaning that the sample is not completely representative of the total student population. The attendance outcomes for those students who completed the online survey and those who did not were examined to identify the nature of this potential bias. The results have been presented in Table VII below. The students who completed the online survey had higher attendance per day than those who did not and the results were statistically significant. Thus one must take caution in generalizing the conclusions drawn from the survey results.

Table VII: Problems with Sample Design, mean hours of attendance per week for respondents and non respondents to the online survey

Mean attendance <u>hours</u> per week by respondents of the survey ¹⁰ , n=84	1.68
Mean attendance <u>hours</u> per week by non-respondents of the survey, n=107	1.00
Is the difference statistically significant?	Yes, at the 5% level.

Reliability Analysis:

The reliability¹¹ analysis produced excellent results for the revised MAI items in the survey; *the alpha reliability coefficient was above 90 percent* for the total number of surveys and the ABE and ESOL sub-groups. This finding is consistent with other studies which tested MAI (Schraw and Dennison, 1994).

Response Frequencies and Means:

The graphs of the frequency distributions of the items in the survey are presented in Appendix H. Also in Appendix H are summary statistics for items in the survey.

Twenty one out of the 38 items in the survey had means approximately 8 or above 8. In general, students' answers were polarized on the upper side of the scale. This means that students answered with confidence to statements related to their meta-cognitive awareness; they assessed their meta-cognitive skills highly. Seventeen items in the survey had means approximately 7 or below 7. Six of the non-MAI items in the survey had means below 7. These were the items that students responded with relatively less confidence.

The Non-MAI and revised MAI items with relatively more variation in responses are listed in Table II in Appendix H along with the categories in the original MAI they correspond to. Examining these items can provide insights about the meta-cognitive skill

¹⁰ Ninety nine students filled out the online survey however the number of students for whom the research team had attendance outcomes for was 84.

¹¹“Reliability is a measurement of variability of answers over repeated conceptual trials. Reliability addresses the question of whether respondents are consistent or stable in their answers.” (Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer & Tourangeau, 2004)

areas students might have difficulties in. Four of the MAI items that students respond to less confidently were related to information management strategies. Adult students might be having problems in translating knowledge in meaningful ways or might be having difficulties in applying their knowledge. The Handbook of Support (Kahraman & Mallona, 2009b) discusses the different ways in which instructors can utilize MAI to raise meta-cognitive awareness among their students.

When responses to non-MAI items are analyzed across groups, results show that female ESOL students respond in ways which are significantly different than their ABE counterparts. They are more dependent or they prefer more interaction with their peers and their teachers. Furthermore female ESOL students' average attendance per day is significantly higher than other groups. This finding implies that there might be cultural differences in the ways that people prefer to learn; some cultures prefer to learn face-face with ample opportunities to interact with and receive feedback from the teacher. Female ESOL students also show more persistence in distance learning than the others, an ingredient for success. Finally, these female ESOL students respond to the revised MAI items in the same ways as their ABE counterparts, providing some evidence that items in the online survey work equally as well for both student groups.

Further analysis across genders and educational background were conducted when subgroup sample numbers were sufficient; there were no other significant differences observed in the ways the students responded to the survey items.

Other Interesting Findings with Implications for Support:

Over 50 percent of students rated the statement **“I learn better when I am interested in the topic”** as 10 meaning that they completely agreed with this statement. The responses to the statement **“I learn best when the topic is related to my experience as a learner”** are along the same lines. These findings indicate the need for tailored instructional approaches for distance learning students. One of the suggestions in the table of supports presented in the Handbook of Support is that instructors should encourage and offer

innovative instructional materials and seek feedback from students on what materials and methods work best for them (Kahraman & Mallona, 2009b).

4.2 FINDINGS: THE INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

This section includes the major findings from interviews conducted at the ABE-DL programs with prospective students during the pilot screening process using the interview tool developed by the CSP team. The interview instruments included different sections: ESOL and GED instruments had both common and unique questions under each section. The findings will be presented in the order they appear in the instruments. Please note that not all the interviews were conducted in a most complete manner. Hence there are some missing responses to questions. Also, the interview is qualitative in nature and thus quantifying responses is not always possible.

Section A: Past Schooling and Studying Experiences

Scholars such as Quigley (1997; 2000) support the view that past negative experiences in high school have a lifelong influence. Under this view, it would be reasonable to expect a lack of interest in engaging in any learning activity for students who have had such experiences. One third of adult applicants of the online GED programs (12 out of 36) had negative experiences in high school, mostly due to “external factors” beyond their control. Examples of student responses included: “Didn’t have good relationship with instructors”; “Too many students, large classrooms”. Those with negative experiences in high school still seemed very confident in their ability to succeed in the online ABE program; they were highly motivated and were able to articulate their reasons for studying for the GED. Furthermore nine out of the 12 with negative experiences in high school expressed that they engaged in some form of self-study for the GED. Having negative experiences in high school does not necessarily deter one’s future studies nor hinder motivation; however this finding might be important in considering different ways of supporting students with less than positive educational histories.

Overall 20 out of 36 GED students indicated that they had studied for the GED on their own, meaning they studied without a teacher or without attending a program. Similarly,

30 out of 34 ESOL applicants had also engaged in self-study without attending a program. ESOL students reported reading books, listening to the radio or CDs, using online resources, and watching TV in order to improve their language skills. These findings are also consistent with other studies and suggest that most adults take the initiative to study on their own (Reder & Strawn, 2001).

When asked about what they liked about studying on their own, both GED and ESOL students expressed that the time flexibility and ability to study at their own pace suited their life styles. The following are some of the reasons students mentioned as to why they like self-study: “Go on my own pace, choose own time to study, do it in spare time”, “I can stop and go, control speed.” In addition, ESOL applicants expressed that the content of the readings and the sense of improving their listening comprehension by watching TV or listening to the radio kept them engaged in learning.

ESOL students shared three main reasons for disliking self-study which might also suggest potential barriers to their studying online. The first one was the lack of opportunity to practice their oral communication skills. Students said: “I can’t practice talking”; “I need to speak” or “I want to put theory into practice.” The second reason was the need to study with classmates. ESOL students expressed their wishes and concerns in the following quotes: “I want to learn with friends”; “It is more fun to work with others, I can’t practice using vocabulary, and “I feel lonely.” The third reason for disliking self-study was the need for prompt feedback which was expressed as follows: [referring to self-study] “No interaction, no one to correct”; “Need some feedback” or “Nobody checks my work.”

These findings point to two important aspects of adult learning: creating a community of learners in which adults can learn together and can socialize and support one another; and providing prompt and systematic feedback to students in order to enhance their confidence (Artino, 2008; Kerka, 2005).

Section B: Goals and Motivation

Adult learners seemed to be highly motivated and also confident in their abilities to learn. The top-listed motivational factors for both GED and ESOL applicants to engage in GED or ESOL programs were to find a job or a better job or to continue their education.

Another major motivational factor for ESOL students was to further their integration into the U.S. society. GED students, on the other hand, wanted also to set a good example for their children. Below is a tally of different reasons participants shared for engaging in an online ABE program.

Reasons for engaging in an online ABE program

Responses	ESOL	GED
Find a job	12	15
Continue studies	7	7
Integrate to society	14	
Other	1	
Good example for their children		9
Personal growth		2
Missing information	3	2

Applicants to online programs in the pilot study demonstrated readiness in terms of being able to articulate their reasons for studying. Comings, Parrella & Soricone (1999) note that adults who engaged in the learning process with the intention of accomplishing a goal were more likely to persist. In addition, according to some scholars, students whose motivation is self-improvement tend to engage in more challenging learning tasks and use meta-cognitive skills such as planning, monitoring and evaluation (Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Ames & Archer, 1988; Graham & Golan, 1991).

Commitment of time to a task is one of the indicators of motivation to accomplish that task (Graham & Weiner, 1996; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Artino, 2007). Below are the tallies of ESOL and GED applicants' responses to the question of how long they would take to finish their programs.

ESOL applicants' plans to stay in the program (n=37)

As long as it takes	One year	5 to 8 months	Don't know	Other
12	5	6	8	6

GED applicants' plans to stay in the program (n=36)

1 to 5 months	6 months to a year	As long as it takes	Other	Missing pages/notes
17	12	1	1 Don't know 1 Less than a month 1 No information	3

One third of the ESOL applicants indicate that they would stay as much as it takes to finish their programs. This finding is consistent with findings from the data that ESOL students have significantly higher attendance outcomes than GED students. On the other hand, more than half of the GED applicants expected to complete their programs in 1-5 months. Analysis of student data and instructors' experiences suggest that many students might be underestimating the time it will take them to finish the program. These findings suggest that focusing on setting the expectations right from the beginning is advisable.

A majority of the applicants in the study had plans for when they received their GEDs. Ten of the applicants wanted to engage in a specific trade and another ten wanted to work in a health care related or other field. This finding complies with adult learning theory which assumes that most adults set clear goals when engaged in learning, and has implications for the types of supports and services that can be made available for adults to advance in reaching their goals (Artino, 2007, Comings, 2007; Merriam, 2004; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baulmgartner, 2007, Pintrich & Shunk, 2002).

Section C: Perception and Expectations of Online Learning

Schunk (1989) explains that the confidence to do a learning task comes from a combination of a self-perception of having the ability, the level of task difficulty, the

amount of effort invested, the amount of help received, the number of times the learner failed and succeeded, the perception of similarity to models and the person persuading the learner to do the task. Applicants to online ABE programs showed very little or no knowledge about online learning and did not know what to expect when learning online. This is definitely an area that requires attention by program administrators and teachers and one that must be addressed very early on in the program—ideally at the orientation.

Almost all adult learners reported having experiences in using the internet on a daily basis for various purposes in their daily lives, such as e-mail, shopping, paying bills, chatting with overseas friends and so on. The findings suggest fertile ground for instructors. Adult learners could be directed towards online activities which could be of use to their studies such as external sites and information or online forums with other students. Such can be achieved by reminding students about their current knowledge and skills in internet use for everyday purposes; a transfer of these skills to their studies is both possible and useful (Gagne, Wager, Golas & Keller, 2005; Mayer, 2002).

Section D: Understanding of Success, Strengths and Weaknesses

ESOL students were asked about the things they wanted to do better after they completed the course. As the data below indicate, the majority of applicants had an understanding of success that is congruent with the learning objectives of the course. Misconceptions about what can be achieved in the course should be addressed early on in the learning process. Unrealistic expectations are likely to lead to dissatisfaction and increase the chances of dropping out of the program.

ESOL-Success (n=37)

Write better	Speak Better	Find a job	Don't know	Other
24	4	3	3	3

Research shows that learners who have confidence in their abilities are more likely to persist in challenging learning situations and use different or new strategies to solve

problems (Bandura, 1993; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991; Schunk, 1991). The GED students were asked about their confidence in their skills to succeed in an online course. This was asked as an open-ended question. The variety of students answers were as follows:

GED students' confidence in their skills to succeed (n=36)

Very Confident,	Pretty	Fairly/Somewhat confident	Hesitant
17	10	6	3

A majority of applicants indicated that they were very confident in their skills; this finding is striking since most students did not know anything or knew very little about learning online. This might suggest that students are really motivated to enter the programs, but they are not aware of the difficulties awaiting them which might hinder keeping their motivation high later on in the process.

Learners who have the ability to assess their strengths and weaknesses are better equipped to succeed in accomplishing their learning goals. Both GED and ESOL applicants were asked about their strengths and weaknesses. The responses of prospective ESOL students are as follows:

Difficulties for prospective ESOL students (n=37)

More in Writing	14
More in Reading	3
Both reading and writing	16
Skills are ok.	3

More in Speaking	11
More in Listening	1
Both listening and speaking	15
Skills are ok.	10

Prospective ESOL students' difficulties suggest the need for two areas of support. One is to include the practice of oral communication skills in the curriculum. Some examples include: "I fear speaking and making mistakes", "I don't know many words" and "I don't feel comfortable speaking English." The other area of support is to facilitate awareness about the learning strategies that worked or didn't work in their writing and reading efforts (Anderson, 2002). Here are some examples from interviewees' responses: "difficult to focus", "vocabulary, I don't know many words" and "grammar, vocabulary." In addition, their responses suggest the possibility of adding technological resources to practice listening comprehension and oral communication skills.

Difficulties for prospective GED students (n=36)

Math	24
Writing	10
Science	6
Grammar	4
Reading	6
Social Studies	3
English	1
Some students gave multiple answers, numbers will not add up.	

Strengths for GED students (n=36)

Reading	10
English	9
Math	8
History	6
Science	5
Social studies	3
Writing	2
Some students gave multiple answers, numbers will not add up.	

Section E: Time Management

Time management is a key factor of success in studying online. Artino (2008) explains that in online learning, control of the learning process is shifted from the instructor to the learners. Online learning, therefore, requires considerable discipline from the learner in organizing and using time effectively and efficiently.

The ability to plan study time is one of the building blocks of meta-cognitive skills (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998). For a majority of applicants in the pilot, being too busy or not having time were **not** identified as reasons for not studying. Moreover some applicants were able to clearly articulate the days and the times of days that they would be able to study. However, those who say they have the time to study will not necessarily put in the time. When one looks at the limited and the wide variations in actual times students spend studying, it may be that adult students have problems getting started or planning their time productively.

Kerka (2005) observed that the initial intake is the starting point of a connection process with prospective students. In this light, topics such as time management, a key to persistence, should be addressed all along the learning process beginning with the intake and orientation, and extending throughout their journeys in the program. For example, planning, monitoring and evaluation of using time effectively and efficiently could be a topic of reflection in assignments or in online journal entries.

Section F: Foreseen Challenges and Supports

Adult students like the flexibility and the ability to set one's own pace which is possible when studying alone. However almost all adults who have engaged in self-study said that what they dislike about studying on their own is the lack of help or support when they get stuck or when they have a question. Therefore, prompt and systematic feedback are motivating external factors which validate student efforts. Such timely support gives students the chance to learn about their progress or areas needing more attention, facilitates awareness about learning strategies which students have habitually employed, and helps students discover new ones which could be more appropriate (Artino, 2008).

Almost all applicants in the pilot study said they would have no problems in seeking help from their teachers when they needed it. Setting clear expectations about response times, communicating clearly the times and options for support in the beginning, and regularly throughout the course, might prove useful for these students

When asked about the prevalence of negative and positive forces in their life, prospective ESOL and GED students were able to articulate these forces and most cited the support and encouragement of their families. They expressed confidence that family members would support them by doing chores and/or communicating encouragement. Family support is important for student persistence in programs. Reminding adults about the positive forces in their lives and offering advice on how they can overcome the negative forces might prove useful.

4.3 FINDINGS FROM ONLINE JOURNALING

In general, students answered the online journal questions with enthusiasm and in detail. The writing style and communication effectiveness in the journal entries varies widely from student to student, as one might expect in a program with participants from a wide variety of backgrounds. A few students seem to particularly enjoy the writing process, while others find it more challenging. Most, however, do attempt to answer questions fully and honestly.

GED Students' Journals

A number of themes emerged in the GED students' online journals, both in response to questions and naturally as part of the writing process. These themes were related to motivation to study online, time and study habits, learning strategies and challenges faced, including asking for help. Comments on these themes, along with illustrative quotes from students' journals, follow. The quotes are presented exactly as they were written by students. The students' initials were changed in order to respect their confidentiality.

Motivation: Why am I doing this?

Most students were able to articulate their future goals and identify the way the program would help them to achieve those goals. Two overarching responses about their motivation to study online emerged: continuing their education and being a role model for their kids. Four of the six students who finished their journal entries, shared their plans to pursue higher education. The other two expressed an interest in vocational studies.

Two out the six students expressed that their motivation also is based on their desire to show their kids the way to a better future. “It is important for me to complete this program because I need to better myself and my daughters’ life, and I can’t do that without an education,” one students wrote (OJ/CP). Another student shared her sense of regret about dropping out from high school and expressed her desire to show her kids that “amendments to mistakes are necessary and possible” (OJ/FC).

Time and Study Habits

Students answered the questions about planning their time and studies with candor. In response to the questions about setting goals and making lists of things to do each day one student replied in the following way:

“Actually I chose distance learning for completely the opposite, even though I set goals on when to have things done, the pace of which I do them is completely chaotic and scattered. Sometimes I’ll set a goal and complete it in one setting, other times it’ll take me all week. It depends on the kids and my work schedule and how I’m feeling physically.”

Another student mentioned her disability and said:

“I m' not going to set goals if I set goals on how much I want to do in a day and then don't complete the work I could be seting my self up and get disscouraged so I just going to do what ever I can do. Being bipolar I'm going to

have days I can't do anything and days I can do a lot”
(OJ/LM).

Setting very specific but overly-ambitious goals might be problematic for these students; it is important for teachers to work with students to set achievable goals that will ultimately help build confidence and a sense of accomplishment.

Challenges Faced

As indicated earlier, some students discussed their families as sources of support and inspiration for completing the program. Students also mentioned the demands their family lives placed on them and their need for flexibility as reasons for choosing distance learning. One student cited a problem with her son as the reason she was unable to keep up with journal entries for a while. Another student discussed serious issues with her son's health after returning from some time away from the program. Her experiences illustrate how family circumstances are important factors in adult students' lives and a cause them to stop out from their programs. She wrote:

“Things have been horribly hectic for me. I've been working 30 hours a week and I don't get off until between 1am-2am. The last two months have been rough with the house fire last month and then we had a death in the family and a few days after we got back we had a family friend die. More recently I have been in and out of the hospital with my eldest son who has been having multiple blood tests and tests with his digestive system because he's barely putting on weight. I found out yesterday we have to take him to see a Pediatric Cardiologist at UMass because he has to have tests done on his heart” (OJ/FC).

Such family circumstances and other issues are categorized by scholars as “negative forces” (Comings et al., 1999). Other negative forces mentioned in student journals include physical health and job demands. Adults have complex life circumstances and it seems that when one unfortunate circumstance occurs, studying becomes a lower priority.

Many students also discussed problems they encountered with their software or their computers, although most were able to work through them with the help of the program or with outside help. In the midst of their busy lives, computer problems become an additional limitation in their efforts to accomplish their goal. This insight illustrates how contextual factors in the learning process (program, curriculum, role of the instructor, requirements and technology) interact with students' individual characteristics enhancing or limiting their persistence.

Supports

Students mention a variety of supports that they use. Again, family is the primary support mechanism mentioned. Students also expressed their appreciation for the feedback and support they got from the instructors. A student, for example, expressed in one of the entries: "I feel much more comfortable with this program than anything. This is where I get full support" (OJ/MM). This comment highlights the importance of instructor involvement in the journaling process, though as the literature indicates, instructors need determine ahead of time their level of involvement and how they will interact with students on their journal entries. This decision is related to the objective of journaling as a mean of support to help students develop the ability to reflect, monitor and evaluate their learning process.

Several students mentioned very simple ways they find help with their studies, ranging from using a dictionary to using the local library or simply using the internet. In at least one case a community based organization provided additional support for a student as well.

Use of Learning Strategies

As mentioned before, one of the purposes of the online journaling entries was to foster students' awareness of effective or ineffective learning strategies. In several instances, there is evidence of applied knowledge that students demonstrate through their journal entries—for example, one student discusses her realization that building her math skills helps her with cooking and baking. Other students shared specific learning strategies that

have helped them to acquire or retain knowledge. An example can be found in the following quote:

“What i sometimes do is, i try to memorize what i'm learning and then later i will do some exercise on my own and see if i have mastered the topic or i could read a topic then later give it to somebody to ask me questions then i can answer them if i say something wrong he or she can correct me this is the way try to learn things” (OJ/JP).

Another student reflecting back about changes made in her learning strategies said that she was making an effort to go to environments where she would be more likely to study. She mentioned that she was using the library as a space for studying.

Feelings about Online Journaling

One GED student expressed her thoughts about online journaling in the following way:

“Online Journaling has actually helped me keep track of my progress. I can see when i'm getting off track and when I'm working strongly” (OJ/FC).

ESOL Students' Journals

The topics that stand out from ESOL students' journal entries are similar to GED students. As indicated before, a number of themes emerged, both in response to questions and naturally as part of the writing process.

Motivation: Why am I Doing This?

The journal entries show students' diligence in addressing the guiding questions, as well as their efforts and level of motivation in improving their English skills. Most of the students wrote that they were studying English for two reasons: to improve their communication skills and find a job or obtain a better one. A student expressed her reasons for studying English as follows;

“The reason is important for me to attend this program is because the first thing I'd like to speak English very well, and

the second thing is to take my PMA. If my English level grows up, it would be easier for me to attend my goal” (OJ/AC).

Challenges Faced

Similar to GED students ESOL students’ efforts to study online are limited by the challenges they encounter in their daily lives. One of the students described the circumstances that brought him to the U.S. and what sustained him working towards his goal despite his hard life circumstances. He stated:

“When I was younger my goal was study hard to be someone special in my environment to learn a profession to help my poor family. My country doesn’t give opportunity for a future life. My dad helped me to get a travel to live in the USA. After one year in the USA my dad dead. I make quick to be citizen in this country to enter my mom. When I received my certificate for citizen my mom makes a terrible stroke. Now she is paralyze. They are six children I am the first. I don’t have supporter here. Now I have my own family in America I have a wife two children to take care and a lot people have hope on me. I don’t have a good job for these responsibilities. Some times I am frustrated about my family. But, I know and I hope God has several ways to help his children. That pushes me to continue my studying one day my goal will realize” (OJ/AF).

The English skills of ESOL students were varied and this reality seemed to have affected their experience with the curriculum. A student whose English skills were better mentioned that the course could be a little more challenging whereas less advanced students needed more support with current assignments. Students stated also that writing was more challenging when they did not know anything about the topic.

Learning Strategies

Some students were very clear about the learning strategies that helped them the most in improving their acquisition of vocabulary. The examples they provided consisted of: memorizing new vocabulary; making summaries of required readings; watching TV and

listening to the radio; using the dictionary; using colors, maps; and keeping very organized. Students' reflections show their initiative in looking for additional resources to acquire new vocabulary or improve their grammar. One of them wrote,

“When I have a doubt about grammar I use old books from courses I have done in English or a new book that I got from this program called “Basic grammar in use” I like it because I can find the explication and examples about everything” (OJ/JF).

Support

Many students indicated using the web for studying and some of them mentioned the following web sites as helpful resources for their studies: <http://www.mansioningles.com>, www.manything.org, www.dictionary.com, www.dailygrammar.com, www.esl-lab.com.

Interactions with Other Students

Students nearly unanimously said they had not developed relationships with other students in the program, either in person, by phone, or via chat rooms or other networking tools. Several students had a specific concern that they were not able to get enough conversational practice through the program. They said that communication with other students could help them in many ways. One benefit would be to share and consult with other students about ways to navigate in the new culture, as well as to decipher the cultural values of the American society. It seems that they had gone through culture shock in isolation.

Feelings about Online Journaling

ESOL students in particular enjoyed writing their journals. They mentioned that “free writing” was a good opportunity to practice their writing skills, but that they would have liked to have feedback on their grammar.

“The only think that I would change about this program is to have more journals like this and receive feedbacks from the journals. Not so much the grade, but feedback to see where the mistakes were made.....It [online journaling] had affected me because I am not afraid to write. Before I felt that I needed to really

write more than once and ideas never came to my mind like they are coming now.. The online journaling experience--it had been a wonderful experience for me. The only inconvenience is that I want the journal to be corrected and I want comments. The way that had being useful to me is that I am not afraid to write anymore. This free writing is very good” (OJ/RM).

4.4 FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

Two focus groups were held in April 2009, one at the GED site, and the other at the ESOL site with current students of distance learning. The ESOL group consisted of seven students; one male and six female. Two of the female students were from China, one from Japan and the others from Haiti and Poland. The ESOL students were diverse in terms of the duration of their participation in the program. At the GED site, there were six students; two female and four male. Most of these students had started the program two months earlier with the exception of one who had been in the program for a year.

The important themes around support that emerged during the discussions have been outlined separately below for GED and ESOL students.

Focus Group with ESOL students:

The ESOL students all highly valued learning English, among the reasons cited for learning English were applying for college, applying for a masters degree, better integrating into the US society and perceiving the importance of the English language in the global world.

The students mentioned that one of the most difficult things about studying online was the response time for their assignments and questions. Research indicates indeed that one of the most difficult aspects of distance learning is the lack of immediate feedback. Some of the ways suggested in the literature to remedy this problem are to set clear guidelines and realistic expectations at the start of the program.

Students were in agreement that their teachers were very helpful. One of the students said that one time her teacher helped her to fix the problem with her computer for six hours. Students also mentioned that it was difficult to ask for help from teachers no matter how encouraging the teachers are. Students agreed that part of this was cultural. “I am shy,” said one woman. “It would be great if there is a forum that we could post questions to in order interact with other students instead of asking our teachers every time we falter.” One student said, no matter how well she/he learns English, there are things that are difficult to understand, for example idioms and colloquial language. She suggested that there be a separate lesson as such or more opportunities for raising these kinds of questions, for example, in an online forum where students can help one another.

Students also indicated that some topics are just difficult. One such example cited was the assignment on “taxes”. One student explained that this is a very difficult topic to write about since taxes in the United States are new to her. In these instances, the teachers might post additional strategies to cope with these difficulties. Additional assignments, those other than that are on EFA would help them to move faster. “I wish there were alternative topics to write on”, said one student.

Pronunciation, understanding accent and speaking better were major goals for a lot of these students. If the program does not have a strong speaking component, students can be referred to other resources to practice these skills.

Focus Group with GED Students

The topics that GED students elaborated the most were their struggles with technology and feedback from instructors. One interesting case of “hybrid learning” was revealed also during the focus group (discussed below).

Students suggested that the program should make sure that the software used in the curriculum was tested. One student found out that the software was incompatible with her computer and she lost a lot of time trying to figure out how to make it work instead of investing the time in studying.

Students experiences with smooth communication with teachers varied. All of them agreed that the program should explain from the start about the course requirements and support they could expect from the teachers. For example, they suggested that teachers should inform students, at the beginning of the program, when and how often to expect the teacher's feedback. This conversation would help them to keep motivated, to persist and to learn about their learning progress and gaps.

One of the students in this focus group is enrolled in both a face to face classroom and an online learning program. When asked how she felt about attending both programs at the same time, the student said that perhaps this hybrid model is the best way to serve adult learners. She explained that studying Math online and the rest of the courses in a face to face environment worked perfectly for her. However not all students agreed with this sentiment. Male students in the focus group seemed to prefer studying on their own, using the online venue.

In terms of peer relations, not all students wanted to connect with others in the program via various online means. Female students felt more enthusiastic about peer to peer communication through technological means. They also mentioned Moodle as a means to communicate with one another in order to help one another.

When asked about the curriculum, they expressed their satisfaction with it. One of the students explained that the software provides different ways to address solving problems. She indicated that this helped her to use a range of learning strategies.

V. OVERALL DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

It is difficult to link the findings from the survey and the interviews with student outcomes. The almost non-existence of post test results both due to the timeline of the study, but also the general lack of post-testing in programs makes it difficult to link characteristics of students with their success or lack of success in the programs. Attendance, one measure of persistence in learning, is the only outcome that one can observe with program participants. In this regard, **ESOL students are putting more hours into their studies than the GED students. High attendance was also significantly correlated to being an immigrant and a majority of ESOL students are immigrants.** This finding also confirms other findings which show that immigrants are usually more consistent in ABE programs than others (Comings, 2007).

Nevertheless comparing ESOL and GED students' attendance outcomes might not really be meaningful. ESOL and GED students have different backgrounds and their needs and goals might be different. The pilot study showed that ESOL students come from educationally diverse backgrounds; there are ESOL students who have advanced degrees in their countries, but who have difficulties because of their limited English speaking abilities. ESOL students come to the program with the expectation of improving their English. For GED students, on the other hand, as seen from the analyses of the 'goals set and met' data, the primary reason for engaging in an online program is to obtain the GED. It is probable that ESOL students feel a more continued or pronounced sense of accomplishment or progress than the GED students while they attend their programs. For GED students such might not be possible as the ultimate goal is a long term goal. Thus the benchmark for success for GED students might be set higher from the beginning. It is especially important for GED instructors to keep students motivated by identifying short-term milestones and acknowledging accomplishments along the way as suggested in the Handbook of Support (Kahraman & Mallona, 2009b).

Some studies predict students' retention in online college programs as a function of demographic factors (Simpson, 2003). Studies in the adult basic education area which

attempt to do the same are limited and results are inconclusive (Comings, 2007). Furthermore, screening applicants in or out of programs, based upon the probabilities of success relative to demographic and other background factors, presents ethical dilemmas.

The analyses of the demographic information and information from the interviews and the journals show that adult learners are very diverse and they may bring different cultural values to their studies. The survey results coupled with focus group results demonstrate that female ESOL students would prefer more face to face interaction than their GED counterparts. **On the other hand female ESOL students' levels of attendance are also significantly higher than their GED counterparts.** This finding implies that there may be cultural differences in the ways that people prefer to learn; some cultures prefer to learn face-face with ample opportunities to interact with and receive feedback from the teacher. However, based upon study findings, ESOL students persist in distance learning programs even when they are not offered face to face learning opportunities. Second, ESOL students clearly indicate in the interviews, focus groups and online journals that they would appreciate more opportunities to practice their oral communication skills. Both of these explanations have implications for instructional approaches that ESOL programs might adopt for their students' benefits.

There are also different sub-groups of students in the ESOL program: students with lower literacy skills who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and another group of students who are highly educated and technology savvy. The needs and outcomes of these students will differ, as will their expectations and effective instructional approaches. For example, the students with lower literacy skills and less experience with computers might need more hands-on support in getting started with and in using the online curriculum.

Students' journal entries and the responses to the interviews demonstrated that students are highly motivated to finish their online studies and have plans to go beyond their GED. This finding is also in line with the Project IDEAL Study finding in which students rated their motivation very highly (Wolters et al., 2005). The IDEAL study draws attention to the presence of self-report bias with regard to this finding. However having found the

same results using multiple data collection techniques in qualitative ways, the CSP research team has considered alternative interpretations to a self-report bias concern.

Online ABE students may *indeed* be motivated to do their studies; nevertheless due to many factors concerning their own life challenges and factors related to the context of online learning, they are not able to sustain their motivation and thus are not able to complete their programs.

The Interactive-Constructivist model of ABE-DL offers a definition of motivation which is dynamic. According to this definition motivation is not only intrinsic; it is also impacted by multiple outside factors. Furthermore motivation can be constructed and fostered (Kahraman et al., 2008). The finding that students might indeed be motivated for their studies, but might be facing daunting challenges along the way provides some evidence in favor of the Model's constructivist conception of motivation.

Interviews and responses to online journaling illustrated that alongside being motivated **students can clearly identify their goals and reasons for learning English or obtaining their GED. Students also exhibit confidence in their abilities to succeed in the program.** However these factors alone are not determinants of how well students will fare in their programs. Interviews and online journaling has shown that **adult life circumstances are really difficult and complex.** These factors do get in the way of adults' online studies. Hence supports which will reinforce and sustain motivation when other factors intervene are important.

The other interesting finding related to learning challenges is students' **lack of knowledge about what learning online entails.** It points to the importance of providing clear information about the nature and process of online learning and the program at the very beginning. **Most students interviewed had some self-study experience.** Students' knowledge about self-study and traditional learning can be compared and contrasted with information about online learning. In this way, students can better understand the context of online learning.

As indicated earlier, **most adult learners are very articulate and open about their life goals and the driving forces which lead them to these programs.** The driving motivational force represents also a fertile ground for online teachers. They can assist students in refining their planning skills and strategies to apply to higher education and vocational institutions. Teachers are also in a position to connect students with other organizations that could help them realize their aspirations.

Findings from the interviews and the online journaling indicate that contextual factors (e.g. curriculum, response time) do matter. **There seem to be problems associated with the inflexibility of the curriculum particularly in the ESOL program** according to findings from focus groups with students and online journaling. Students complain about not having enough options for topics they write on or topics included in the curriculum being difficult or not very interesting. A fixed curriculum environment also hinders teachers' ability to tailor instruction in ways that support students' efforts at self-direction.

Both GED and ESOL students indicated that one of the most difficult aspects of studying on their own is delayed feedback. In both GED and ESOL programs, delayed feedback could influence students' motivation, confidence and persistence. Providing students with prompt (to the extent possible) and systematic feedback is important. Regardless of how often feedback is given, there should be clearly established understanding between the student and the instructor as to when the feedback will be given right from the start of the program.

Findings from the interviews, journaling and the focus group suggest the need to build a community of learners especially for students in the ESOL program.

Encouraging and facilitating students' communication online with other peers could serve several purposes; it could help foster a sense of belonging to the program and maintain student interest and motivation. The program may want to explore ways to help students make these connections and in particular, to help ESOL students to gain experience in conversation or dialogue, perhaps using tools like Skype.

Findings suggest that most students take the initiative to find additional resources which will help with their studies on their own. While participants may uncover a plethora of online resources, the quality may be questionable; teachers can guide students towards the better and useful resources on the internet.

Online journaling and interviews have showed that family is both a strong positive factor in adults' lives, but family demands and crisis can also interfere with program participation and completion. **Adults may need to stop out of their programs due the demands of their lives.** Recognizing this reality, scholars suggest supporting at risk students in creating a plan for returning to their studies when their life circumstances allow them. Keeping in contact with students helps to continue to motivate them to resume their studies. Kerka (2005) suggests that these actions imply an institutional cultural change which is related to Comings' et al (1999) idea of perceiving success from adult learners' point of view and life experiences. Kerka adds that in so doing, the institution will represent a safe environment in which students feel acknowledged, respected and understood.

The survey results showed that students responded less confidently to items which were related to the management of time. **On the other hand, in the interviews adults reported that being too busy or lack of time are not the reasons for their lack of studying.** Some students were able to clearly articulate the times that they would be able to study. This finding does not imply that those who say that they have the time to study will actually put in the time. When one looks at the variation in actual times student spend studying the finding does suggest that adult students might be having problems in getting started or in planning their time. Time management is an area that needs more attention and students should be continually supported in this area.

Although in general students responded to the survey showing confidence in their meta-cognitive skills; there were skills in the survey in which students felt relatively less confident. The online survey responses are a productive ground for supporting students in

acquiring and practicing the meta-cognitive skills in which they felt unconfident. With the teacher guidance, students can develop awareness and practice new meta-cognitive skills. **The research team recommends that MAI can be used as support tool for enhancing students learning process (as described in the Handbook of Support, Kahraman & Mallona, 2009b).**

GED and ESOL students' entries show that the online journaling helps to foster students' reflections about effective and ineffective learning strategies. It can also help students keep better track of their progress. It is also effective in supporting students to practice their communication skills. The online journaling constitutes another instructional resource for supporting and monitoring students' progress in their knowledge of the subject matter and communication and awareness of their meta-cognitive skills (as described in the Handbook of Support). Online journaling will enhance students' abilities to own their learning processes.

For data collection purposes, the interview instrument was designed and executed in a way that would gather more pure information about the characteristics of adults and their thoughts and perceptions. For this reason, the researcher team constrained interviewers to interact with prospective students. Some of the feedback the research team received from the interviewers on the interview instrument was related to the non-interactive nature of the interview process as executed during the pilot. The interviewers felt restricted and the process did not seem natural. The final interview instrument has been revised and execution of the instrument has been re-designed in ways that will allow for ample interaction between interviewers and the prospective students.

VI. LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD: SCREENING AND SUPPORT

According to the Interactive-Constructivist Model of ABE-DL readiness and success of adult students in online learning are embedded in multiple factors both at the individual and the contextual level (Kahraman et al., 2008). These multiple factors are inter-connected with one another. The pilot study has also provided some evidence for the existence and inter-connectedness of these factors in adult students' online learning experiences.

The final screening instrument and the handbook were revised and re-designed on the basis of major findings that emerged from the study and on the basis of the feedback researchers received from instructors and the staff of the agencies. The interview approach and the instrument intend to engage adult learners in the process of decision-making as to whether online learning is appropriate for them or not. This strategy requires time, effort and commitment from the programs and the interviewers.

Nevertheless findings from this research indicate that **a sound screening process is the first step to getting students ready and setting the foundation for an effective orientation.** Such an approach involves the dedication of more resources in the initial connections with students. With adult learners, such an approach is likely to pay off in the long run, leading to program completion and cost savings as fewer adults stop out or drop out of programs.

A major finding of this research is the potential for a range of student supports to prepare them for their programs and to help them persist; availability of such supports requires capacity building, appropriate channeling of resources, continued effort, a clear division of labor and collaboration among different stakeholders. Also, types of support will vary for students in different phases of the program. Having a clear plan as to what supports will be available at particular points in the learning process might prove useful.

The supports included in the Handbook of Support that the CSP recommends are built on the basis of findings from the pilot with regard to individual characteristics of adult learners and also the characteristics of the context of learning (Kahraman & Mallona, 2009b). Listed below are the researchers findings about adult learner characteristics in relation to the recommended supports which will help them persist in their programs.

Adults are motivated and confident in their skills however they know little about online learning and the difficulties it might entail: Hence establish a solid foundation with a sound screening and orientation.

Adult learners value connections with other adult learners for multiple reasons, but may not know how to connect or may lack confidence: Hence help to build a community of learners and help to sustain it by encouraging adults and ensuring a respectful and inclusive environment.

Adult learners have diverse needs that go beyond education which may interfere with their studies: Hence help learners connect with local learning and other institutions that can provide diverse services.

Adult learners may need extra encouragement and continued monitoring of their progress: Hence monitor progress via multiple modes of communication and help adults set goals and identify milestones.

Adult learners most often lack the educational background which will help them acquire skills to direct their education: Hence teach adults to direct their own education using online journaling, the revised MAI and other methods.

Adult learners appreciate and can benefit from flexibility in the curriculum and other learning materials: Hence help teachers use innovative media and creative instructional strategies in order to provide adaptive learning in a fixed curriculum environment and accommodate different learning styles and needs.

Adult learners are diverse (in terms of age, ethnicity, race, gender, cultural backgrounds,) and bring a wealth of experiences to their learning: Hence build culturally inclusive materials and acknowledge this diversity as a resource.

Adult may have very difficult life circumstances and thus may need to stop out their programs: Hence provide timely interventions for students who are especially at risk for stopping out and help adults to return to their studies after the reasons for stopping out are discarded or are under control.

Adult learners value being engaged in decisions related to their own education: Hence measure student satisfaction mid-course and at the end of the course

Based on the findings of this study the research team has determined that supports can be built in ways which will help to make better connections with the characteristics of adult learners and the context based factors. Please see Figures 1 & 2 in the next page for an illustration.

Figure 1: The Interactive Constructivist Model of Adult Basic Education Distance Learning:

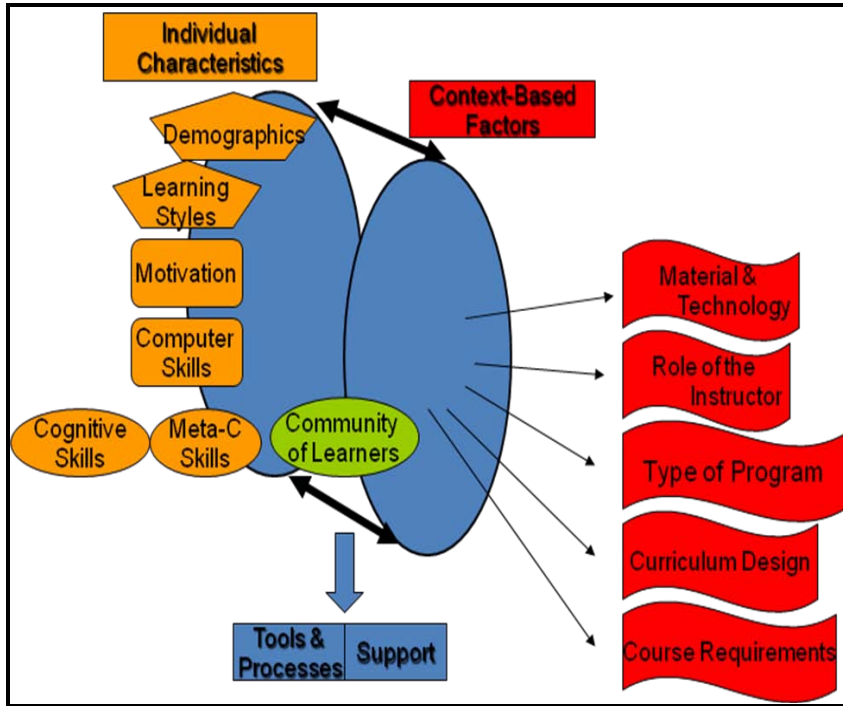
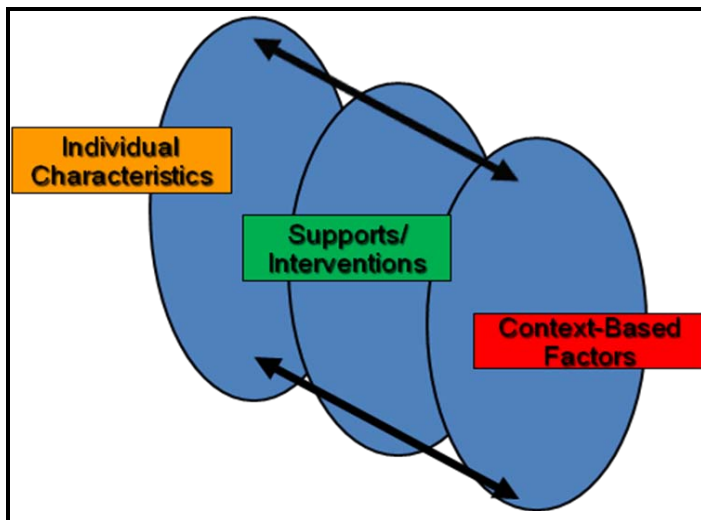


Figure 2: The Interactive Constructivist Model of Adult Basic Education Distance Learning Revisited:



VII. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the study, the research team used observations to learn about contextual factors, such as the type and structure of the program, curriculum and technology, and their connectedness with individual level factors. Although these factors have not been the focus of this research, the research team has included below some recommendations based on these observations. The majority of the points listed below call for a more in-depth analyses and further research.

Type of Distance Education Program adopted in ESE funded ABE-DL Programs:

There seems to be some lack of clarity or inconsistency on how different actors understand “Blended Learning”. Some programs seem to rely more on a combination of face to face and online approach than limiting interactions to online. A range of interpretation of the definition of distance learning implies different needs, costs, and instructional practices. The hybrid model --combining face-to-face and online learning-- is something to take in consideration when expanding online learning across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Students, who may be fearful in engaging in a new educational venue, would have the opportunity to start “small” by trying with one course and expanding to other subject matters as they their confidence increases. As mentioned earlier, there was one student in the focus group who was attending regular face to face GED classes and who was also taking one course in the online program. She explained that studying Math online and the rest of the courses in a face to face environment worked perfectly for her.

Division of responsibilities between the Hubs and agencies: Especially during the implementation of the pilot process it became clear that agencies were having difficulties in committing the required time for the screening. They did not feel that enough resources were allocated for them to be able to administer other responsibilities and tasks and the screening process. Responsibilities around recruiting and screening prospective students, completing the intake forms, inputting the data in the SMARTT management system, and organizing an orientation do not seem to be clearly defined. Effectiveness of

implementation of the screening and orientation which are the foundation in students' retention in the programs depend on an effective division of tasks and clear and continuous communication between different partners.

Compensation for staff time in Hubs and agencies: The current incentive structure seems to be problematic as staff is compensated on an hourly basis. There seems to be different conceptions around which tasks can be completed in the allocated hours. The incentive structure could be re-designed to better serve the needs and purposes of the online ABE programs. An outcome based compensation system, e.g. one that is based on the number of referrals or number of successful referrals could work better.

Hub-Agency Model: The relevance and effectiveness of the Hub-agency model could be further investigated when the decisions to scale up online learning in Massachusetts are being made. The decision to adapt a certain model should be *strategic* and should involve the consideration of multiple factors. First, the purpose of ABE-DL in Massachusetts can further be clarified. To select a specific target population is one way to define the purpose of DL in Massachusetts; however there are many other factors to consider. Changing demographics and socio-economic factors affect populations' needs. Furthermore, there are rapid changes in the landscape and the geography of cities and towns and in how people live and work. Once these factors are identified and goals are crystallized, the Model of DL could also be customized to better serve these goals.

The points with regard to compensation and the Hub-agency model were discussed at the Distance Learning Summit in May 2009. Continuing open discussions with all the actors involved will be further helpful in informing the Department's strategic decisions.

Student Eligibility: The acceptance criteria for admitting prospective students in the ESOL distance learning program are not very clear. It seems that there were different levels of English competency in the same intermediate course. This might not be a limitation if human resources were adequate to tailor instruction according to students' learning needs. Also related to eligibility criteria, is the level of education of prospective

students. According to the literature, those who have more education are likely to be more aware of their learning strategies as well as having the ability to look for and use new strategies. This implies that they are more likely to monitor and evaluate their learning. Hence, prospective students with less education need different and possibly more support than more highly educated prospective students. A third case of eligibility that could be considered for the GED program is the acceptance of students who are enrolled for the most part in a face to face classroom and are accepted to take a course online (e.g. Math).

Curriculum: The research team recommends that gaps in the curriculum currently being used be investigated, paying attention to the alignment of the curriculum with the assessment tests. Also, it is important that instructors are provided with the necessary training for executing the curriculum they are currently using. Once the gaps in the core curriculum are identified, the instructors should also be provided with the flexibility and resources to supplement the curriculum in ways that will fill these gaps. The instructors should also be encouraged to make their instruction more engaging and interesting for students by using supplemental resources. These should take place in a *documented and systematic* manner. The evidence that can be generated through ongoing, systematic documentation is a significantly important foundation, should expansion of DL to additional communities across Massachusetts take place in the future.

Technology: Technology can be used more effectively in online ABE programs in many ways from building an online community of learners to engaging learners using different forms of media. Programs should be supported to adapt innovative technology as well as being trained in using these technologies.

Peer learning and support: Programs in their current form are not doing much in terms of encouraging connections among learners. Such opportunities are especially important for the ESOL programs where students express the need and willingness to interact with others in the program.

Professional development for teachers/instructors: Both curriculum and technology are content areas for which professional development and supports are needed. Teachers should have the necessary knowledge and training for the main and supplemental (if any) curriculum they are teaching to be able to help their students make progress. Furthermore teachers should be offered the opportunities for professional development in other areas, such as the technology, especially in terms of connecting with students in various ways and connecting students with other students.

Distance learning program development and evaluation: The above observations could be considered in articulating a strategic plan with an evaluation component of goals and outcomes intended to be accomplished. Regular analysis of the data inputted in the SMARTT system is useful for understanding the students' backgrounds and characteristics and continuously tailoring program features to meet different needs. Such information should feed into adjustments made to administrative and instructional practices. Evaluations of the GED and ESOL programs should be kept separate. It is not relevant to compare ESOL and GED programs since they serve different populations and address different learning needs.

Still, the existing ESOL and GED programs can learn from one another in terms of implementing the Hub-agency model, including exploration of different ways of sharing responsibilities between Hubs and partners. Building a culture of learning from practice will be useful. The last distance learning summit was promising in facilitating such learning. Also, there are other **non-ESE funded programs** in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts with which experiences can be shared. ESE could invite these other agencies to be part of the next Summit in order to share what does and does not work in administering GED and ESOL distance learning programs. This initiative could help the ESE in elaborating a strategic plan for the next years.

Definition of Success: There is some confusion about the definition success in the program. Some students stay in the program for long periods of time, sometimes two to three years. If the students are not illustrating that they are making learning gains during

the time they stay in the program, should attendance be still considered as success?
Given the fact that adult students may stop out of their programs and come back, how long should the programs continue to serve the same students? It will be easier to answer some of these questions once the programs start collecting more post-test data. Programs should be encouraged to post-test their students.

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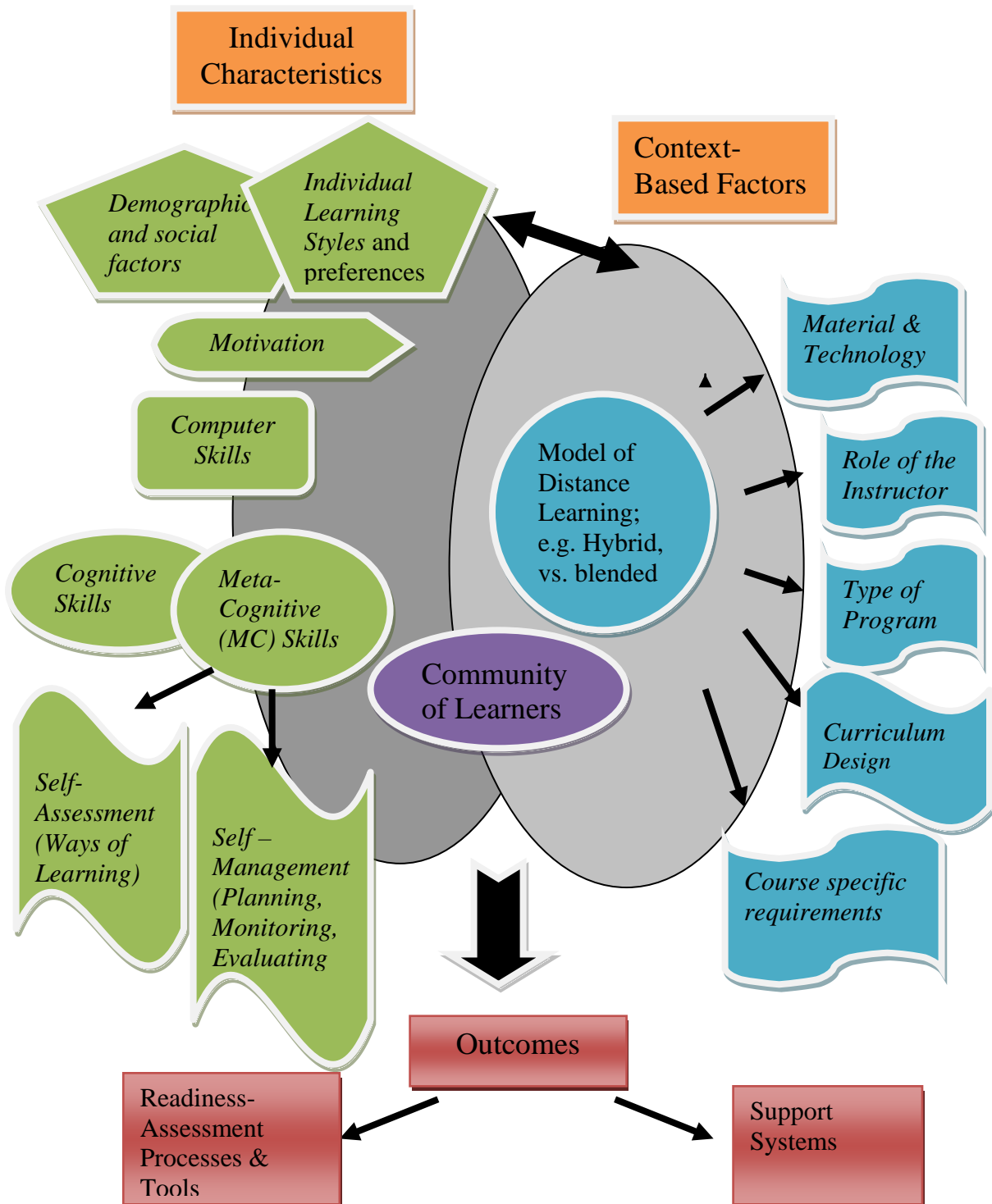
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APPENDIX A: An Interactive-Constructivist Model of Adult Basic Education Distance Learning:



APPENDIX B: PERMISSION TO USE THE MAI

From: gschraw@unlv.nevada.edu [mailto:gschraw@unlv.nevada.edu]

Sent: Tue 9/9/2008 3:14 PM

To: Berna Kahraman

Cc: gschraw@unlv.nevada.edu

Subject: Re: Using MAI

Berna,

Feel free to use the MAI. There is not a scoring manual; however, I'm attaching the validation article. Many folks have used a 1-5 Likert scale successfully.

Gregg

Quoting Berna Kahraman <Berna.Kahraman@umb.edu>:

> Dear Professor Schraw,

>

>> I work as a researcher at the Center for Social Policy at University of
> Massachusetts Boston. Right now, we are working on a project funded by
> the Massachusetts department of elementary and secondary education which
> includes putting together an online questionnaire that Adult Basic
> Education-Distance Learning staff in community programs will be using
> with applicants to their programs. We are trying to get at the
> participant characteristics (skill, demographic, life circumstances and
> meta-cognitive skills) associated with success in DL. We will be
> piloting the questionnaire tool both with enrolled students and with new
> applicants to the program throughout 2008 and 2009. We would like to use
> the MAI* for assessing the meta-cognition piece. I wonder if the tool is
> free to use, and had some questions on how to use it if you give us
> permission to do so. I have listed these below.

>>> * Is there a handbook or guideline that goes along with the MAI?

> * Is there a shorter version of the MAI which has been tested by
> you or other researchers which we could use?

> * Is it possible to use a different response scale when using the
> MAI? (Hammann and Stevens (1998) seem to have used the MAI with a 1-5
> likert type scale in their article titled: Meta-cognitive Awareness
> Assessment in Self-regulated learning and performance measures in an
> introductory educational psychology course.)

>

>> Thank you very much for your time and I am looking forward to hear from
> you.

>>

> Best regards,

>>> Berna

>> Berna Kahraman

> Research Fellow

> Phone (office): 617-287-5537

> Center for Social Policy

> McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies

> University of Massachusetts Boston> 100 Morrissey Blvd Boston, MA 02125-3393 (617) 287-5550;
fax: (617) 287-5566

APPENDIX C: THE REVISED MAI INSTRUMENT

“THINGS I DO WHILE I AM LEARNING”* Part 1

The Center for Social Policy and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education are working together on a research about adult learners and distance learning.

Below is the survey "Things I do while I am learning." We would like you to participate in filling out the survey. The statements in the survey are about how you learn. In the survey, 1 means "never true" and 10 means "always true". Please click on the number which best represents your opinion. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers.

By submitting the survey, you agree that your responses can be included in the research project. We thank you in advance for your participation.

PART 1 OF 2

No.	Statement	Circle/Fill In Answers
1.	I know my strengths and weaknesses.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
2.	I am able to separate more important from less important information.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
3.	I am a good judge of how well I understand something.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
4.	I learn best when I am interested in the topic.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
5.	I learn best when the topic is related to my experiences as a learner.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
6.	I change the way I study depending on the assignment.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
7.	Trying to decide what to study makes me uncomfortable.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
8.	I frequently need information from teachers on how I am learning.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always

9.	I feel confident about my ability to learn on my own.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Always
10	I prefer to study alone.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Always
11	I prefer learning face to face in a classroom.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Always
12	Discussions with other students are a necessary part of my learning.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Always
13	I need to see the teacher to get feedback for my assignments.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Always
14	I try to learn in the same ways that have worked well in the past.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Always
15	I am good at remembering information.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Always
16	I am good at organizing information.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Always
17	I am good at organizing my time.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Always
18	I can tell how much time an assignment will take for me to complete.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Always
19	I organize my time to best accomplish my learning goals.	Never True True 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Always

Quinsigamond Community College, QCC-HUB The Literacy Project Inc. Webster Adult Learning Center Worcester Adult Learning Center Notre Dame Education Center, Boston-HUB Cambridge Community Learning Center Jamaica Plain Community Centers Inc. Notre Dame Education Center, Lawrence Somerville Public Schools (SCALE)

“THINGS I DO WHILE I AM LEARNING” Part 2

Below are a few more statements. Again, when you read each statement imagine yourself doing a task at school, but this time please think about how often the statement is true. Please rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means none of the time and 10 means all of the time.

PART 2 OF 2

No.	Question	Circle/Fill in Answers
Before I begin a task...(questions 1-4)		
1.	I read instructions very carefully.	None of the time 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All of the time
2.	I think about things I need to do to get the task done.	None of the time 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All of the time
3.	I ask myself: what do I need to learn?	None of the time 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All of the time
4.	I think of different ways of doing it and choose the best one.	None of the time 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All of the time
While I am learning...(questions 5-13)		
5.	I ask myself if what I'm reading is related to what I already know.	None of the time 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All of the time
6.	I try to break studying down into smaller steps.	None of the time 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All of the time
7.	I find the overall meaning rather than specific information.	None of the time 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All of the time
8.	I think of examples when I try to learn.	None of the time 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All of the time
9.	I try to translate new information into my own words.	None of the time 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All of the time
10.	I draw pictures or diagrams to help me remember.	None of the time 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All of the time
11.	I stop and ask myself if I am meeting my learning goals.	None of the time 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All of the time

12.	I look for many possible answers when solving a problem.	<div>None of the time</div> <div>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</div> <div>All of the time</div>
13.	I go back and review the material to check how well am I doing.	<div>None of the time</div> <div>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</div> <div>All of the time</div>
When I don't understand something...(questions 14-16)		
14.	I stop and go back over information that is not clear.	<div>None of the time</div> <div>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</div> <div>All of the time</div>
15.	I change the way I study when I have a problem.	<div>None of the time</div> <div>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</div> <div>All of the time</div>
16.	I ask others for help.	<div>None of the time</div> <div>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</div> <div>All of the time</div>
Once I finish a task...(questions 17-19)		
17.	I ask myself if there was an easier way to do things.	<div>None of the time</div> <div>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</div> <div>All of the time</div>
18.	I ask myself how well I accomplished my goals.	<div>None of the time</div> <div>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</div> <div>All of the time</div>
19.	I go back and check how much I have learned.	<div>None of the time</div> <div>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</div> <div>All of the time</div>
20.	If you have an ID number, please enter your ID number in the space provided below.	
21.	Please enter your first name and last name in the space provided below.	<div>First Name</div> <div>Last Name</div>
22.	Program	

Quinsigamond Community College (QCC)-HUB The Literacy Project Inc. Webster
Adult Learning Center Worcester Adult Learning Center Notre Dame Education Center,
Boston Cambridge Community Learning Center Jamaica Plain Community Centers Inc.
Notre Dame Education Center, Lawrence Somerville Public Schools (SCALE)

*The survey has been condensed and adapted from the Meta-Cognitive Assessment
Inventory developed by Gregory Schraw and R.S. Dennison. (Schraw, G., and Dennison,
R.S. (1994). Assessing metacognitive awareness. Contemporary Educational
Psychology, 19, 460-475.) Thank you for your feedback.

Your responses are important to us!

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORMS

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT READINESS AND IDENTIFYING SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

*Center for Social Policy within the McCormack Institute
University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Blvd.
Boston, MA 02125-3393*

You have been asked to take part in a research project which is looking to understand student readiness for distance learning and identify supports which can facilitate distance learning students' successful completion of their programs.

Please read this form and feel free to ask questions any time something is not clear. If you have questions later, you can call **Berna Kahraman**, Project Manager, and she will discuss them with you. Her phone number is: (617) 287-5537.

This study aims to uncover the participant characteristics (skill, demographic, life circumstances, including meta-cognitive skills) associated with success in distance learning. In identifying the participant characteristics associated with success the study aims also to identify supports which can facilitate participants' successful completion of the distance learning program. If you decide to participate in this study, you will participate in a group discussion with 8 to 10 other participants. You will be asked to complete a short questionnaire which includes questions about your preferred conditions for learning and discuss your reactions. You will receive a \$50.00 honorarium as a thank you for your help. You will also be offered a parking voucher. The entire process will take about 1.5 to 2 hours.

This focus group will be audio taped, so that others on the research project can benefit from what you say.

The only cost to you from participating in this study is the time and effort you spend to discuss the issues we raise. There is a slight risk that participants will share focus group material outside the focus group discussion. You may speak with **Berna Kahraman** to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation. You may indirectly benefit from participating as the results of this study will help us to identify the areas that students need support to be successful in their DL programs.

The process is confidential; neither your name nor any other identifying information will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study. No one but the researchers will ever see or listen to the tapes. The tapes will be stored in locked cabinets and destroyed as soon as the tapes are transcribed which is within 8 weeks of the study.

The decision whether or not to take part in this study is voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not want to answer, both in the questionnaires and in the group discussion. You may terminate your participation at any time during the focus group without consequence.

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative at the Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. **You may also let someone on the IRB know if you do not like the way the project happens or you feel you have been hurt in any way by participating.** The IRB at the University of Massachusetts Boston watches over projects that gather information from people. The IRB may be reached at the following address: IRB, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Quinn Administration Building, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. Or you can contact the Board by telephone at (617) 287-5370.

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Printed Name of Participant

Typed/Printed Name of Researcher

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT READINESS AND IDENTIFYING SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

*Center for Social Policy within the McCormack Institute
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Please read this form and feel free to ask questions any time something is not clear. If you have questions later, you can call **Berna Kahraman**, Project Manager, and she will discuss them with you. Her phone number is: (617) 287-5537.

This study aims to uncover the participant characteristics (skill, demographic, life circumstances, including meta-cognitive skills) associated with success in distance learning. In identifying the participant characteristics associated with success the study aims also to identify supports which can facilitate participants' successful completion of the distance learning program. If you decide to participate in this study, you will participate in a group discussion with 8 to 10 other participants. You will be asked to answer questions about your online learning experience. You will receive a \$25.00 honorarium as a thank you for your help. The entire process will take about 1.5 to 2 hours.

This focus group will be audio taped, so that others on the research project can benefit from what you say.

The only cost to you from participating in this study is the time and effort you spend to discuss the issues we raise. You may indirectly benefit from participating as the results of this study will help us to identify the areas that students need support to be successful in their DL programs.

The process is confidential; neither your name nor any other identifying information will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study. No one but the researchers will ever see or listen to the tapes. The tapes will be stored in locked cabinets and destroyed as soon as the tapes are transcribed which is within 8 weeks of the study.

The decision whether or not to take part in this study is voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not want to answer, both in the questionnaires and in the group

discussion. You may terminate your participation at any time during the focus group without consequence.

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative at the Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. **You may also let someone on the IRB know if you do not like the way the project happens or you feel you have been hurt in any way by participating.** The IRB at the University of Massachusetts Boston watches over projects that gather information from people. The IRB may be reached at the following address: IRB, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Quinn Administration Building, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. Or you can contact the Board by telephone at (617) 287-5370.

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Printed Name of Participant

Typed/Printed Name of
Researcher

ONLINE-JOURNALING CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT READINESS AND IDENTIFYING SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

*Center for Social Policy within the McCormack Institute
University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Blvd.
Boston, MA 02125-3393*

You have been asked to take part in a research project which is looking to understand student readiness for distance learning and identify supports which can facilitate distance learning students' successful completion of their programs.

Please read this form and feel free to ask questions any time something is not clear. If you have questions later, you can call **Berna Kahraman**, Project Manager, and she will discuss them with you. Her phone number is: (617) 287-5537.

This study aims to uncover the participant characteristics (skill, demographic, life circumstances, including meta-cognitive skills) associated with success in distance learning. In identifying the participant characteristics associated with success the study aims also to identify supports which can facilitate participants' successful completion of the distance learning program. Online-journaling has often been cited as a support tool in distance learning which helps students reflect on their learning experience and hence helps to enhance the learning process.

Eight distance learning students have been asked to take 15-30 minutes each week for a period of 16 weeks to reflect and record their online learning process including issues related to their motivation, challenges, learning strategies, time management and evaluation of their own learning (what has worked or not worked for them, how have they applied their learning to their everyday life and work). If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to read these journals and offer support to these students on issues that they might be raising related to their learning when you feel it is necessary to do so. In the end, the research team will ask for students' reflections along with a documentation of your interaction with the students, i.e. specifically how you have addressed your students' concerns or needs. The researchers will then analyze this information to prepare a report on whether and how online journaling can be utilized as a way to enhance the learning process in distance learning.

The only cost to you from participating in this study is the time and effort you spend to record your reflections. According to other studies you might directly benefit from participating in this study as e-journaling is a strategy that enhances the learning experience and might improve the effectiveness of your teaching.

The process is entirely confidential; neither your name nor any other identifying information will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study. We will ask that any information we receive from you is masked and students are given an identification number and no other information such as contact details or social security numbers are used in the documents.

The decision whether or not to take part in this study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may terminate participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, you should contact Berna Kahraman at the above number.

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative at the Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. **You may also let someone on the IRB know if you do not like the way the project happens or you feel you have been hurt in any way by participating.** The IRB at the University of Massachusetts Boston watches over projects that gather information from people. The IRB may be reached at the following address: IRB, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Quinn Administration Building, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. Or you can contact the Board by telephone at (617) 287-5370.

*I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED.
MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN
THIS STUDY.*

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date	Signature of Researcher
_____		_____
Printed Name of Participant		Typed/Printed Name of Researcher

ONLINE-JOURNALING CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT READINESS AND IDENTIFYING SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

*Center for Social Policy within the McCormack Institute
University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Blvd.
Boston, MA 02125-3393*

You have been asked to take part in a research project which is looking to understand student readiness for distance learning and identify supports which can facilitate distance learning students' successful completion of their programs.

Please read this form and feel free to ask questions any time something is not clear. If you have questions later, you can call **Berna Kahraman**, Project Manager, and she will discuss them with you. Her phone number is: (617) 287-5537.

This study aims to uncover the participant characteristics (skill, demographic, life circumstances, including meta-cognitive skills) associated with success in distance learning. In identifying the participant characteristics associated with success the study aims also to identify supports which can facilitate participants' successful completion of the distance learning program. Online-journaling has often been cited as a support tool in distance learning which helps students reflect on their learning experience and hence helps to enhance the learning process.

If you decide to participant in this study, you will be asked to take 15-30 minutes each week for a period of 16 weeks to reflect and record your online learning process including issues related to your motivation, challenges, learning strategies, time management and evaluation of your own learning (what has worked or not worked for you, how have you applied your learning to your everyday life and work).

You will be asked to share your reflections with your teachers at the end of each week. Your teacher will be ready to support you in any way they can on the challenges that you identify. In the end, your reflections along with a documentation of your interaction with the teacher, i.e. specifically how your teacher has addressed your concerns or needs will be shared with the researchers. The researchers will then analyze this information to prepare a report on whether and how online journaling can be utilized as a way to enhance the learning process in distance learning.

You will be presented with 160 dollars for your participation in the end of this study.

The only cost to you from participating in this study is the time and effort you spend to record your reflections. According to other studies you might directly benefit from

participating in this study as online journaling is a strategy that enhances the learning experience.

The process is confidential; neither your name nor any other identifying information will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

The decision whether or not to take part in this study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may terminate participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, you should contact Berna Kahraman at the above number. Whatever you decide will in no way affect your status as a student.

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative at the Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. **You may also let someone on the IRB know if you do not like the way the project happens or you feel you have been hurt in any way by participating.** The IRB at the University of Massachusetts Boston watches over projects that gather information from people. The IRB may be reached at the following address: IRB, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Quinn Administration Building, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. Or you can contact the Board by telephone at (617) 287-5370.

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date	Signature of Researcher
_____		_____
Printed Name of Participant		Typed/Printed Name of Researcher

APPENDIX E: SEARCH TERMS FOR SUPPORT

Distance learning

Academic One Source

Search terms

*Distance learning *Adult basic *student support [No results]

*Distance learning *Adult basic [1 result, not relevant]

*Distance learning *student support [7 results, one relevant, unavailable in full text; Granger and Benke]

*Adult education *support [123 results, some relevant]

*Adult education * student support [1 result]

*Distance education *student support [11 results, two relevant, one available]

*Distance education *adult *support [9 results, 1 relevant]

*Distance learning *Learner persistence [0 results]

*Adult education *support [123 results, some relevant]

Academic Search Premier [Ebsco]

*Distance learning *Adult basic *student support [No results]

*Distance learning *Adult basic [3 results, 2 relevant]

*Distance learning *student support [17 results, 5 relevant]

*Adult education *support [EXCLUDED-too many results]

*Adult education * student support [9 results, 0 relevant]

*Distance education *student support [31 results, 5 relevant]

*Distance education *adult *support [81 results, many duplicates, many not relevant, many duplicates]

*Adult education *support [EXCLUDED-too many results]

*Distance learning *Learner persistence [0 results]

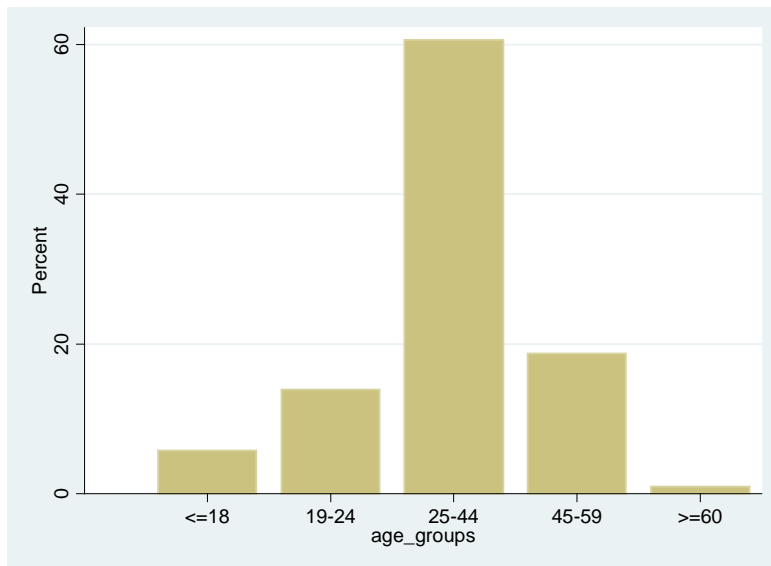
*Distance education *Learner persistence [0 results]

Google for other programs:

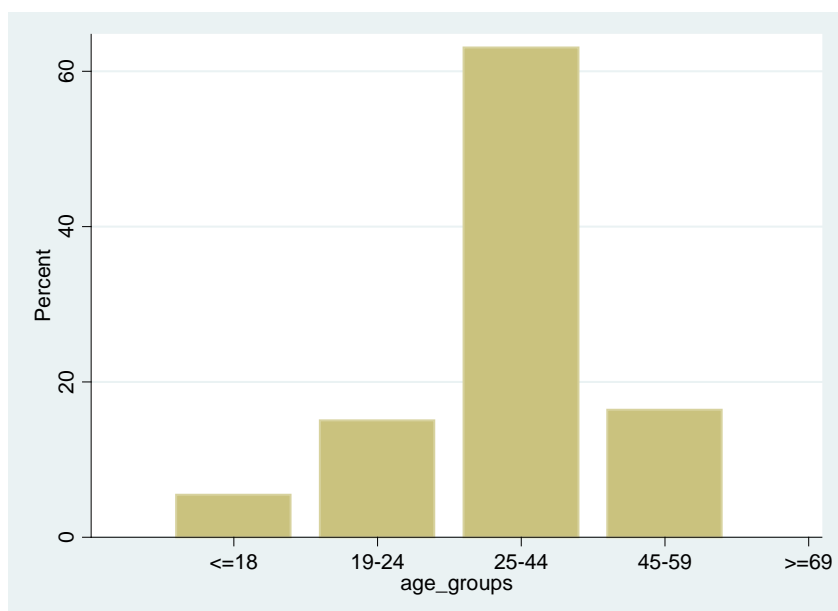
Support for students of ABE and online learning

APPENDIX F: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ABE-DL STUDENTS

Graph F1: MA-ABE-DL All Students inc. Pilot
Age Groups, n=208



Graph F2: MA-ABE-DL Pilot-Interviewed Students
Age groups, n=73



Graph F3: MA-ABE-DL Pilot-Survey Students
Age groups, n=95

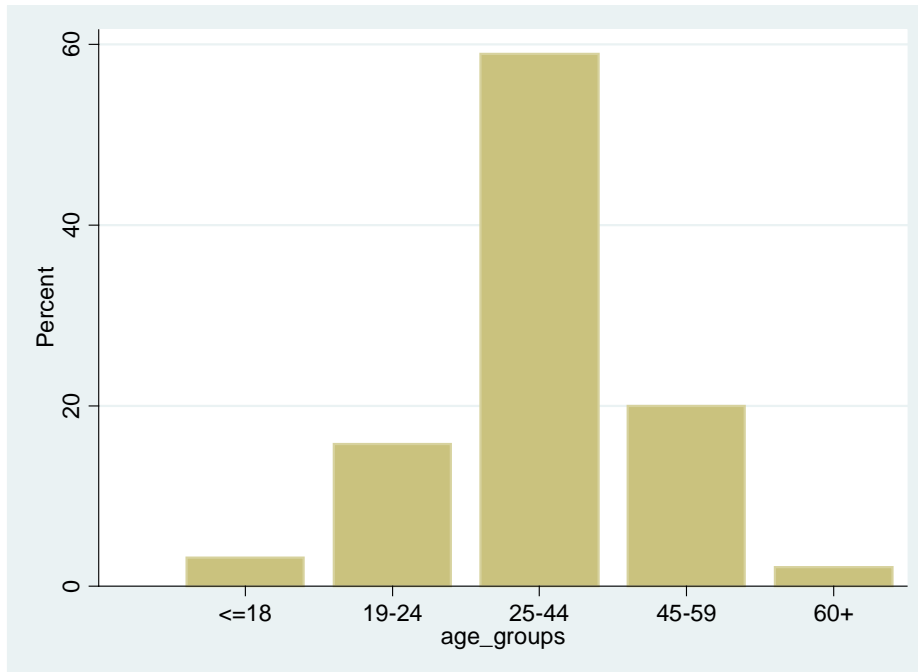


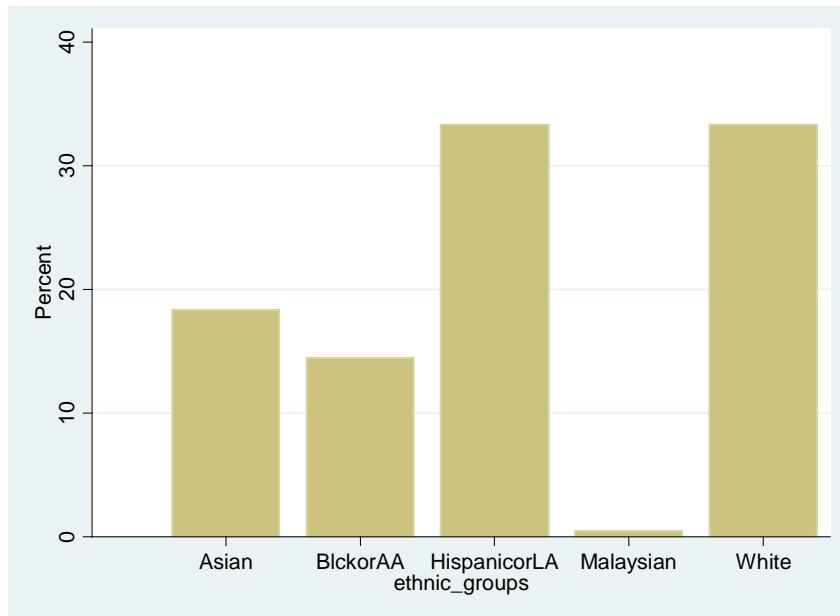
Table F1:

ESOL Age Groups	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
19-24	10	9.71	9.71
25-44	66	64.08	73.79
45-59	25	24.27	98.06
60+	2	1.94	100.00
Total	103	100.00	

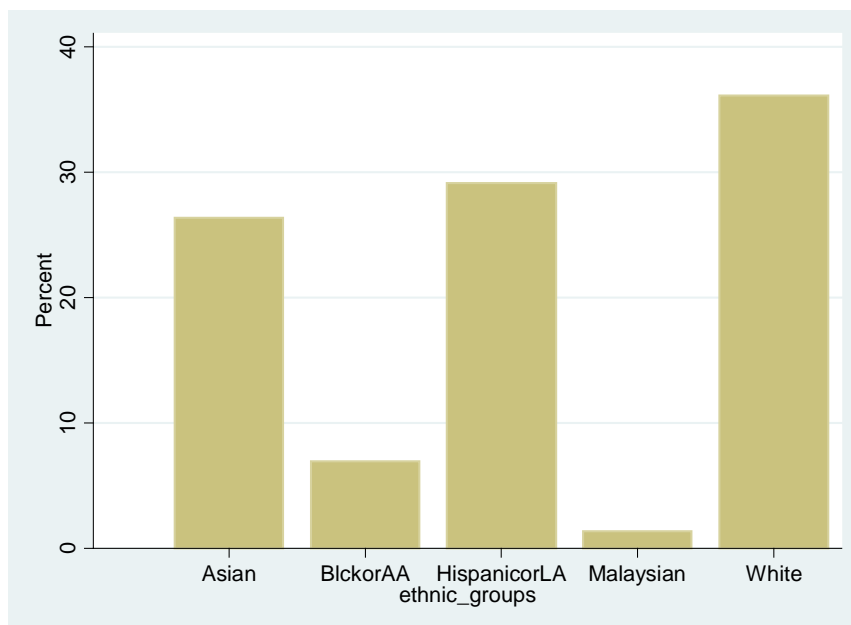
Table F2:

GED Age Groups	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
<=18	12	12.90	12.90
19-24	17	18.28	31.18
25-44	54	58.06	89.25
45-59	10	10.75	100.00
Total	93	100.00	

Graph F4: MA-ABE-DL All Students inc. Pilot
Ethnic Groups, n=207



Graph F5: MA-ABE-DL Pilot-Interviewed Students
Ethnic Groups, n=72



Graph F6: MA-ABE-ESOL Pilot-Survey Students
Ethnic groups, n=94

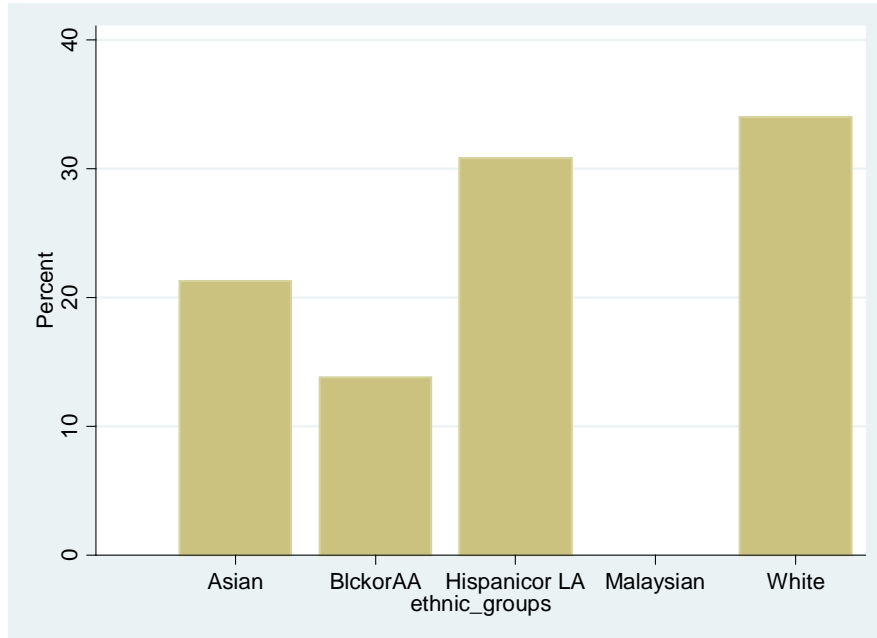


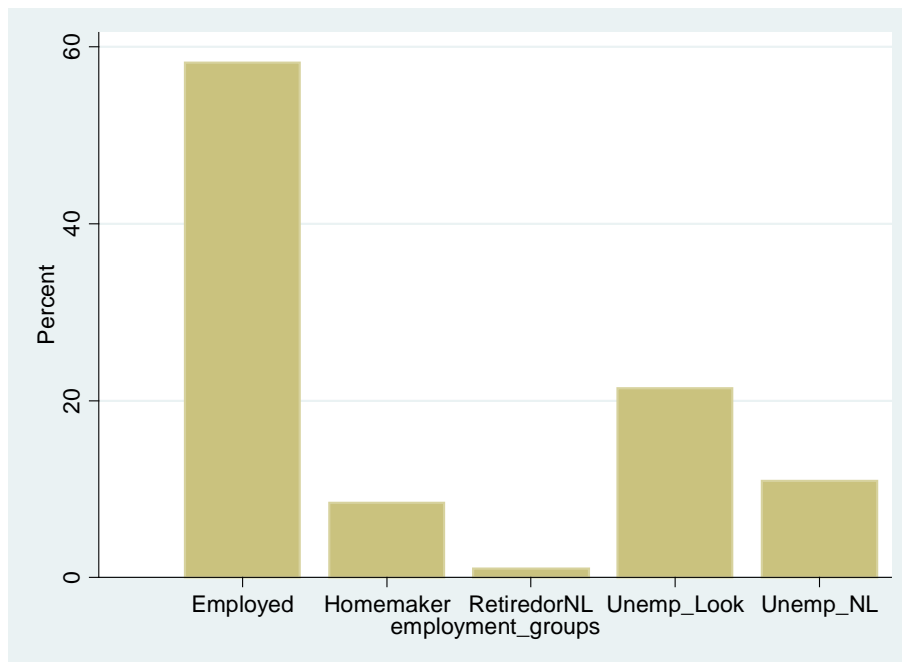
Table F3:

ESOL-ETHNICITY	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Asian	34	33.33	33.33
Black or African American	17	16.67	50.00
Hispanic or Latino	38	37.25	87.25
Malaysian	1	0.98	88.24
White	12	11.76	100.00
Total	102	100.00	

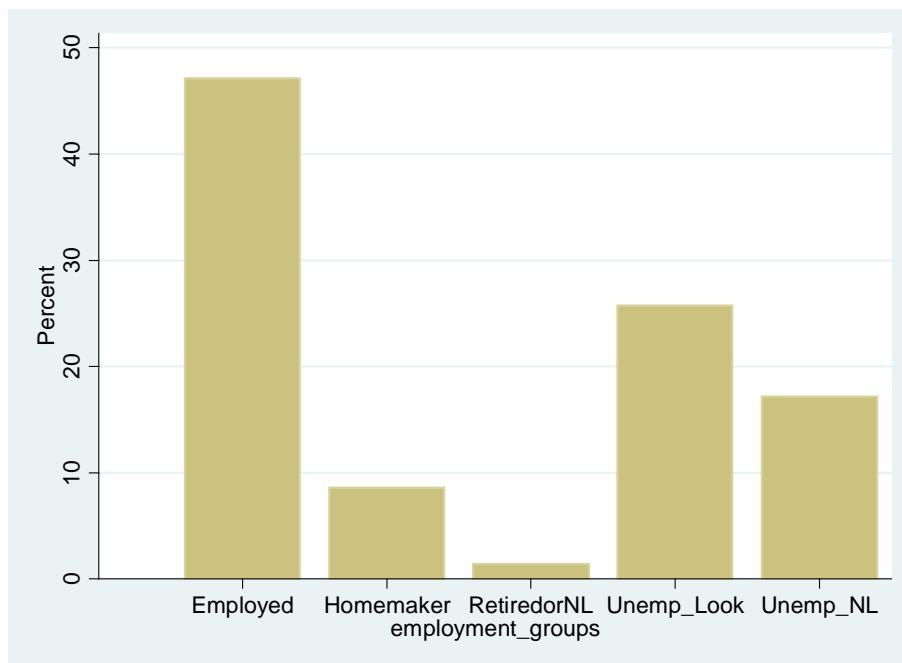
Table F4:

GED- ETHNICITY	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Asian	4	4.30	4.30
Black or African American	10	10.75	15.05
Hispanic or Latino	27	29.03	44.09
White	52	55.91	100.00
Total	93	100.00	

Graph F7: MA-ABE-DL All Students inc. Pilot
Employment Status, n=201



Graph F8: MA-ABE-DL Pilot-Interviewed Students
Employment Status, n=70



Graph F9: MA-ABE-DL Pilot-Survey Students
Employment Status, n=91

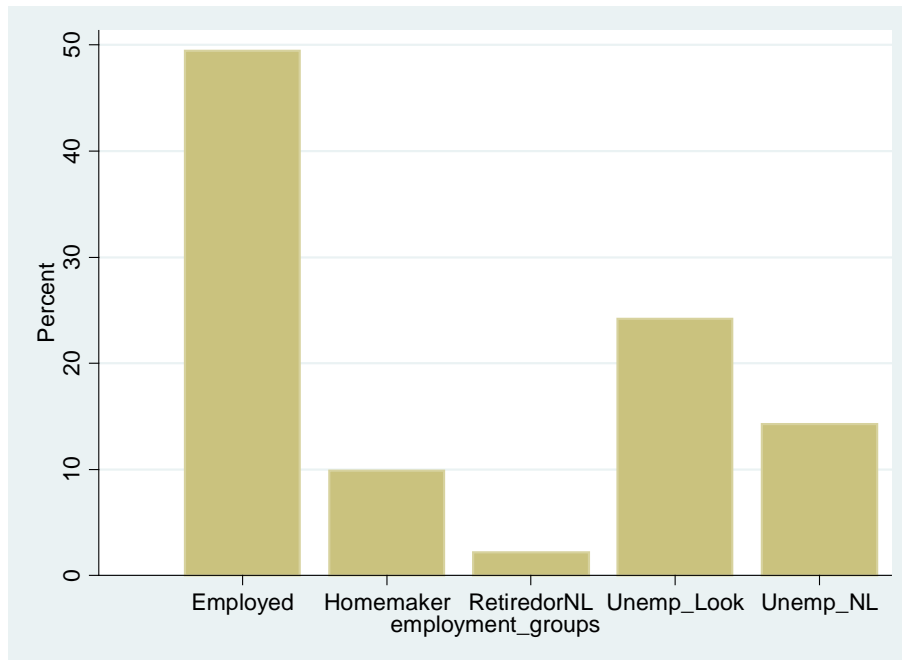


Table F5:
LAST GRADE COMPLETED IN US | GED students, FY 2009

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0	7	7.61	7.61
7	2	2.17	9.78
8	9	9.78	19.57
9	19	20.65	40.22
10	31	33.70	73.91
11	22	23.91	97.83
12	2	2.17	100.00
Total	92	100.00	

Table F6:
SCHOOLING COMPLETED | ESOL students, FY 2009

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Associate Degree (2 years beyond HS)	6	6.25	6.25
Bachelor Degree (4 years beyond HS)	19	19.79	26.04
Doctorate	2	2.08	28.13
Equivalent of HS Diploma from Another C	30	31.25	59.38
GED	2	2.08	61.46
Masters Degree (1 or more years beyond)	11	11.46	72.92
No High School Diploma	23	23.96	96.88
US High School Diploma	3	3.13	100.00
Total	96	100.00	

APPENDIX G: ATTENDANCE OUTCOMES OF ABE-DL STUDENTS

Table G1:

Percentile Distribution for # of Weeks in the Program for Students Who Had Exited Program When Data Was Retrieved (April 2009)

	Percentiles	Smallest		
1%	4.285714	4.285714		
5%	7.142857	7.142857		
10%	9.142858	7.142857	Obs	51
25%	14.71429	7.142857	Sum of Wgt.	51
50%	21.85714		Mean	26.26331
		Largest	Std. Dev.	20.65824
75%	33.42857	50.85714		
90%	42.85714	65.71429		
95%	65.71429	96.57143		
99%	113.5714	113.5714		

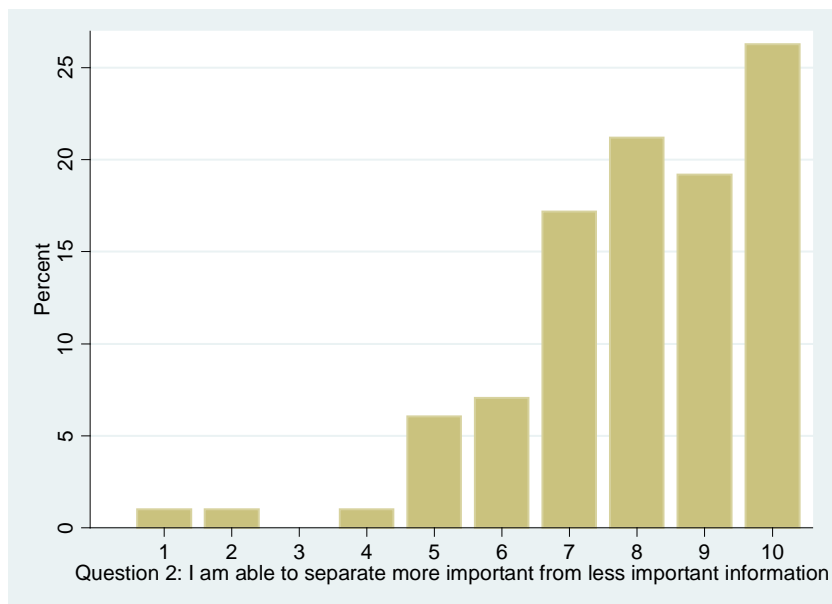
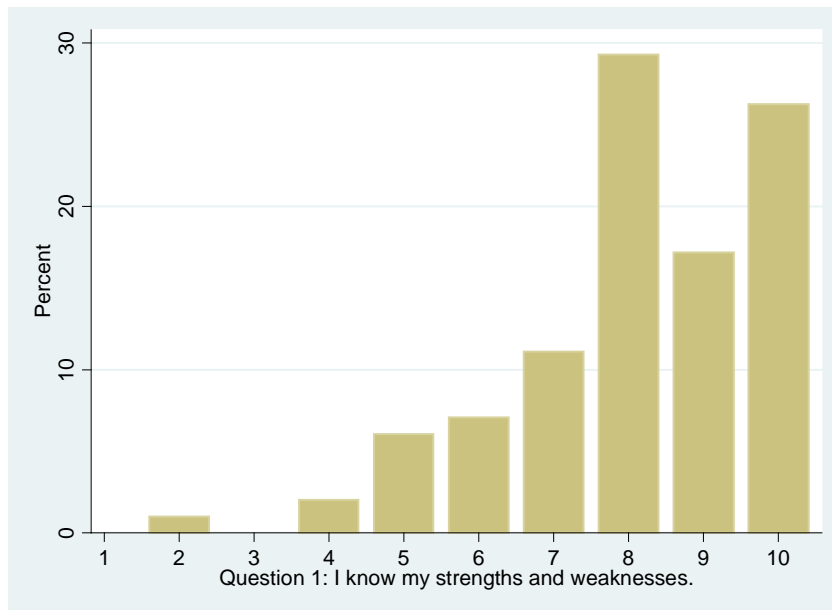
Table G2:

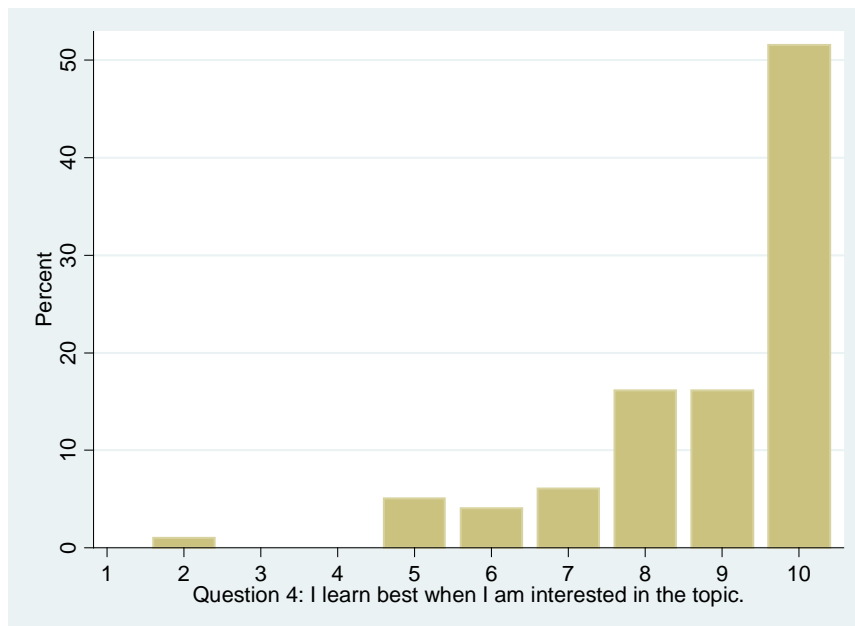
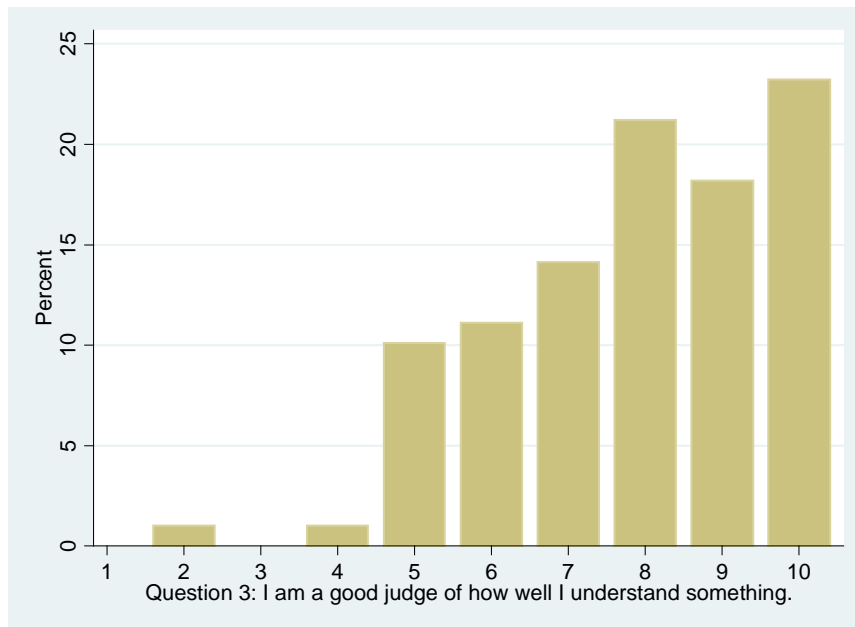
Attendance Average Hours Per Week, All students, FY 2009

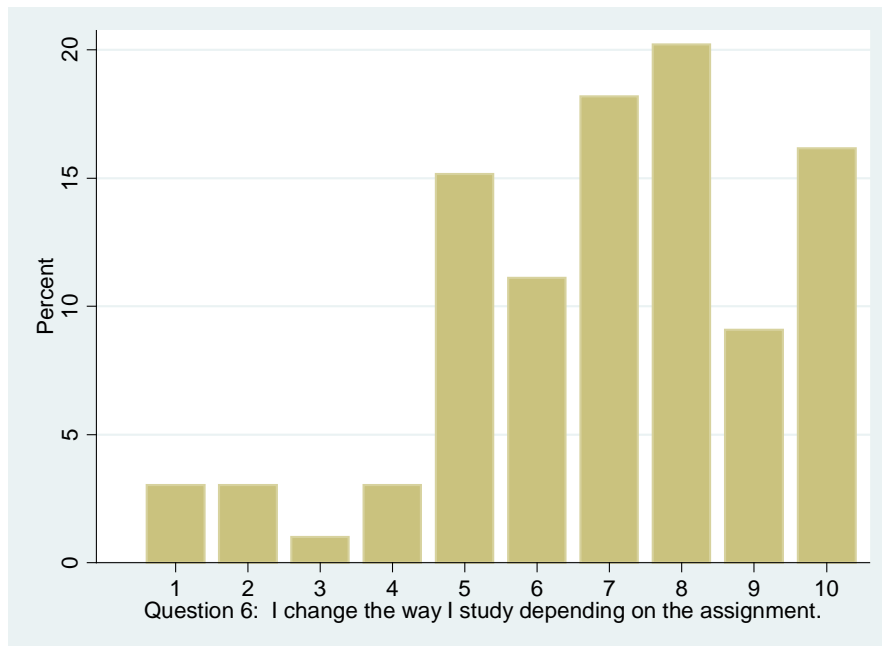
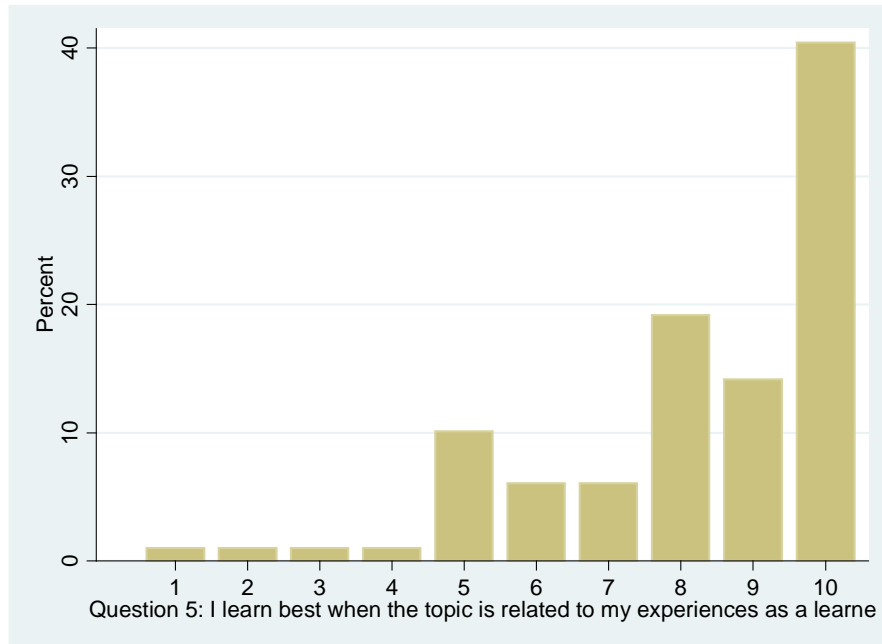
	Percentiles	Smallest		
1%	0	0		
5%	0	0		
10%	0	0	Observations	191
25%	.1538462	0	Sum of Wgt.	191
50%	.6086957		Mean	1.30184
		Largest	Std. Dev.	1.73035
75%	1.68	7		
90%	3.342014	7.669117		
95%	5.6	8.181818		
99%	8.181818	9.851852		

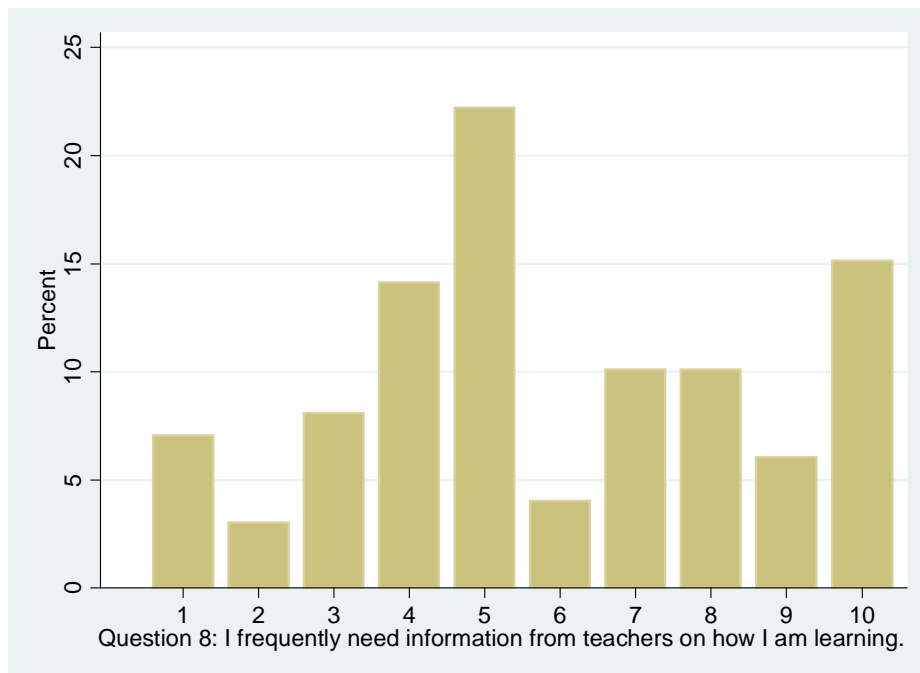
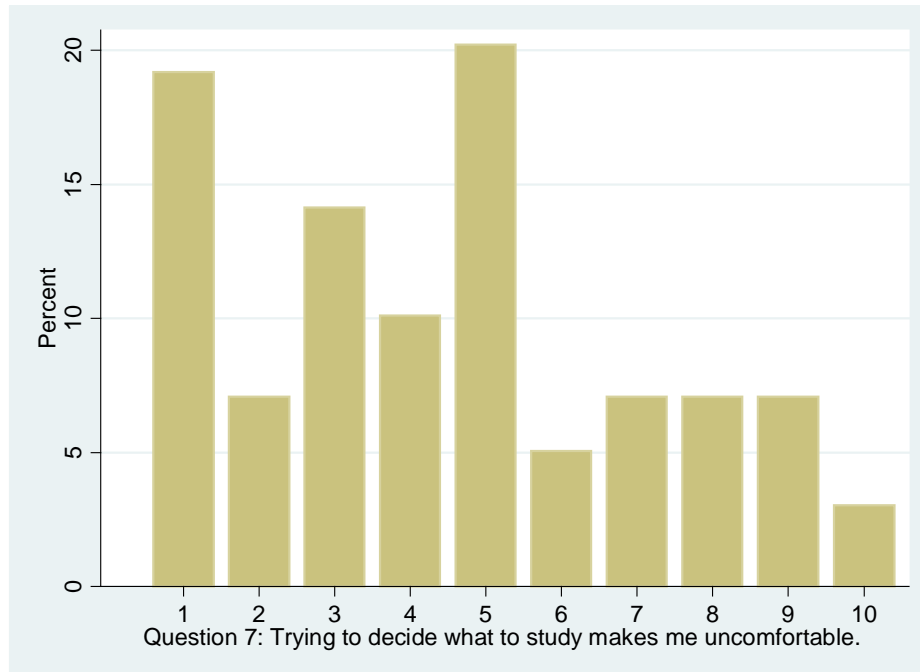
APPENDIX H: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS OF ITEMS IN THE MAI

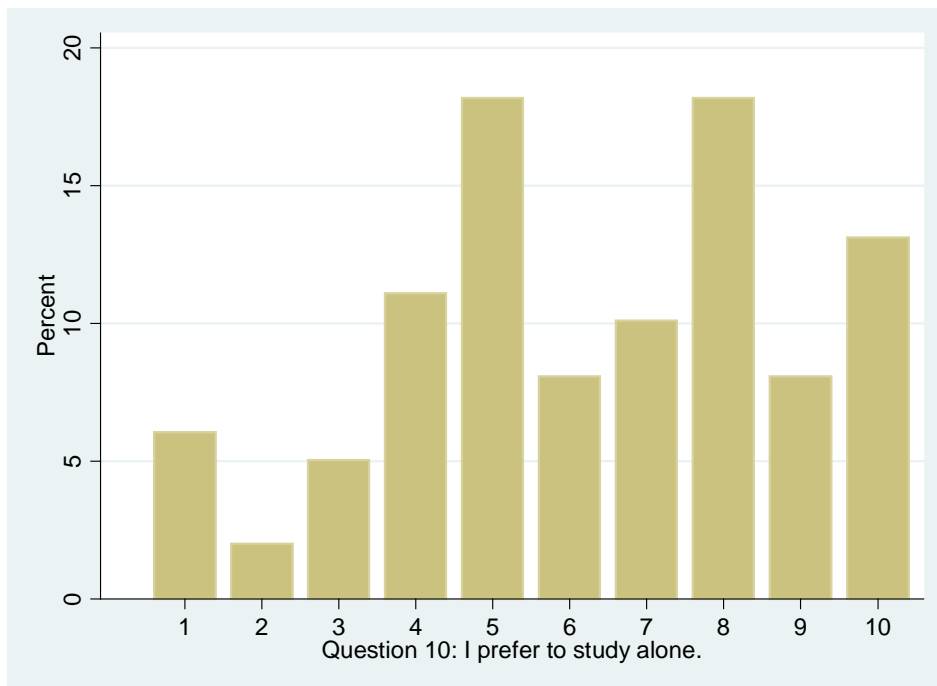
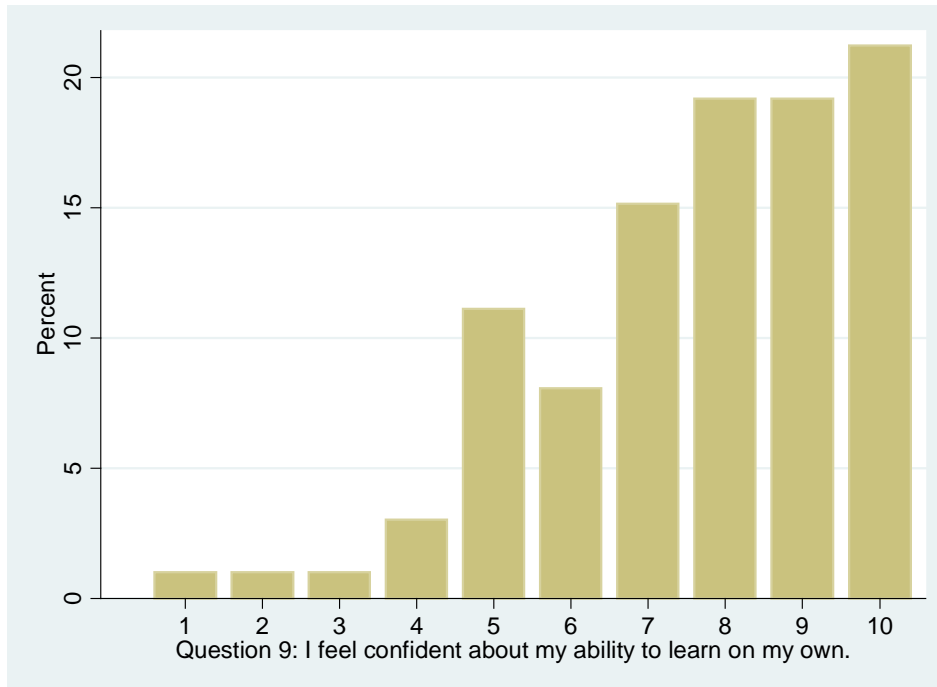
PART I

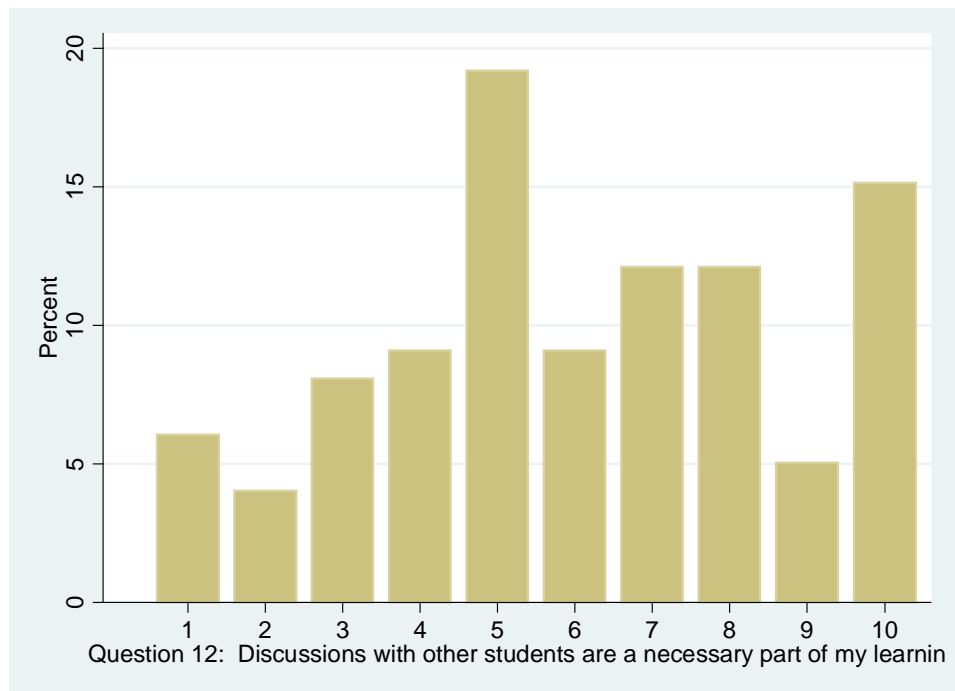
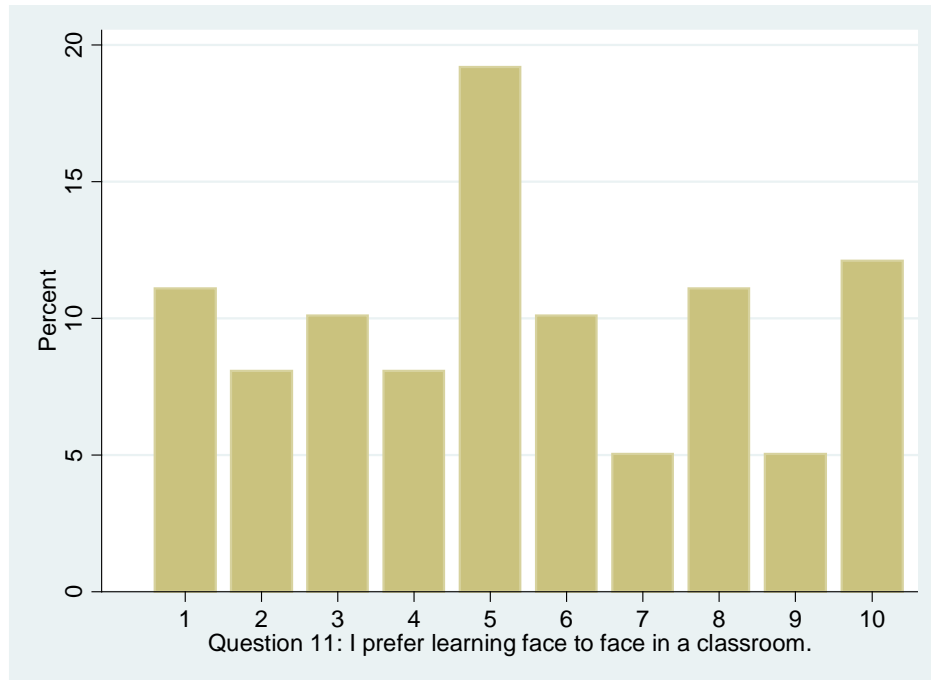


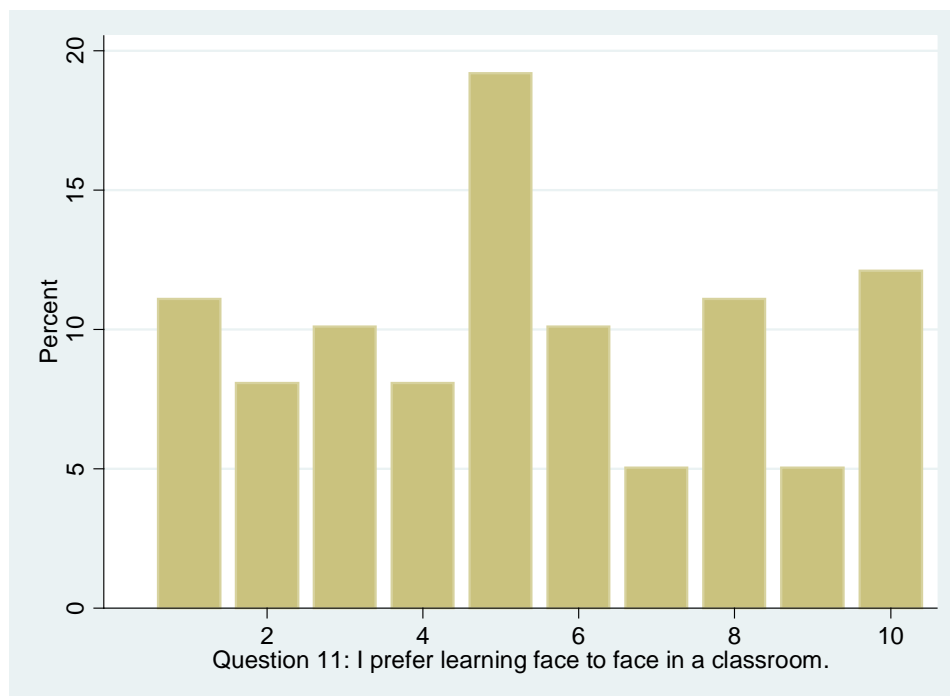
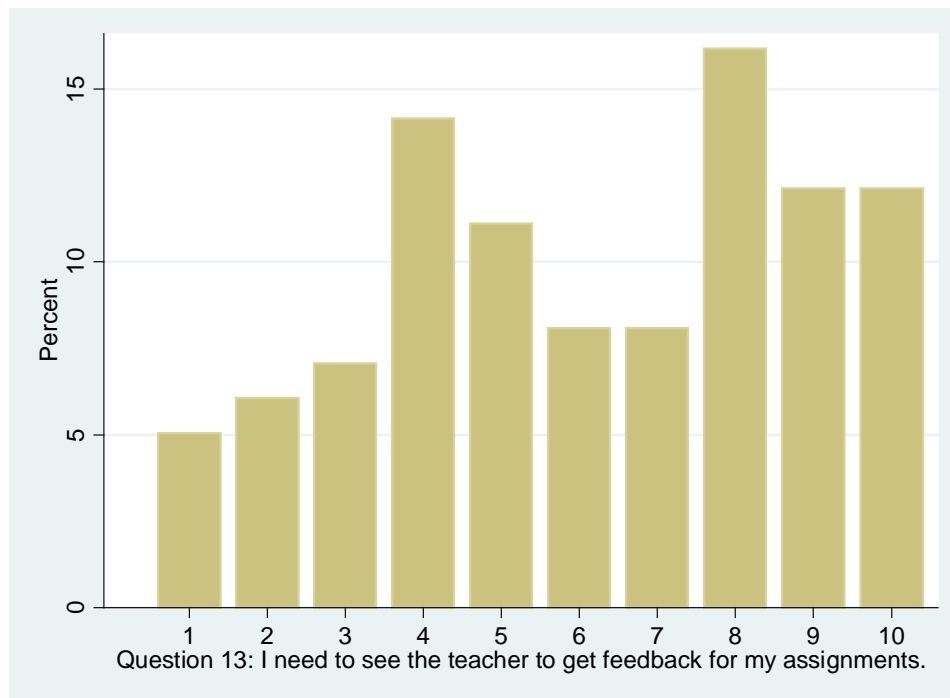


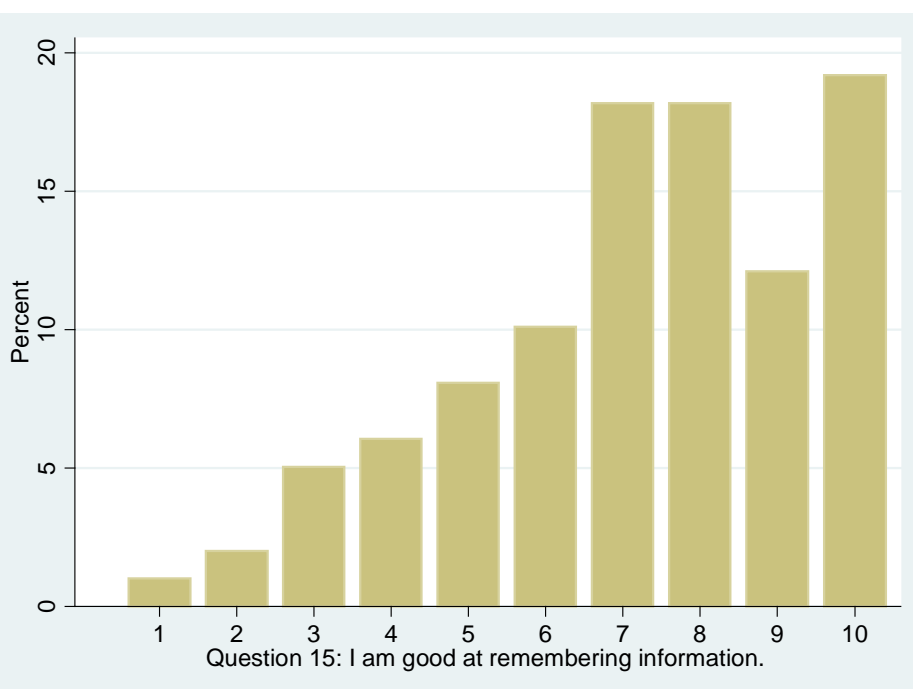
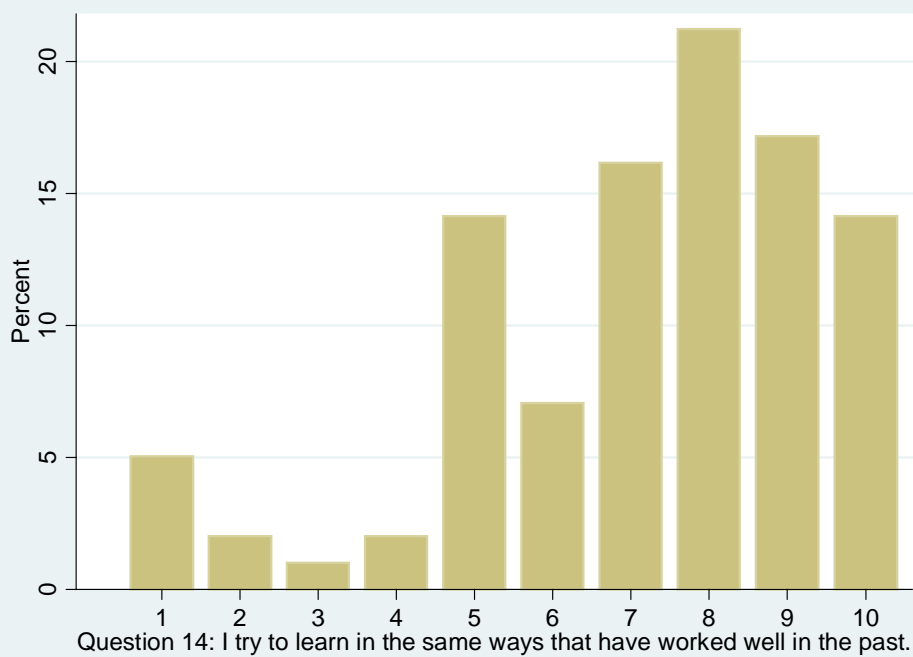


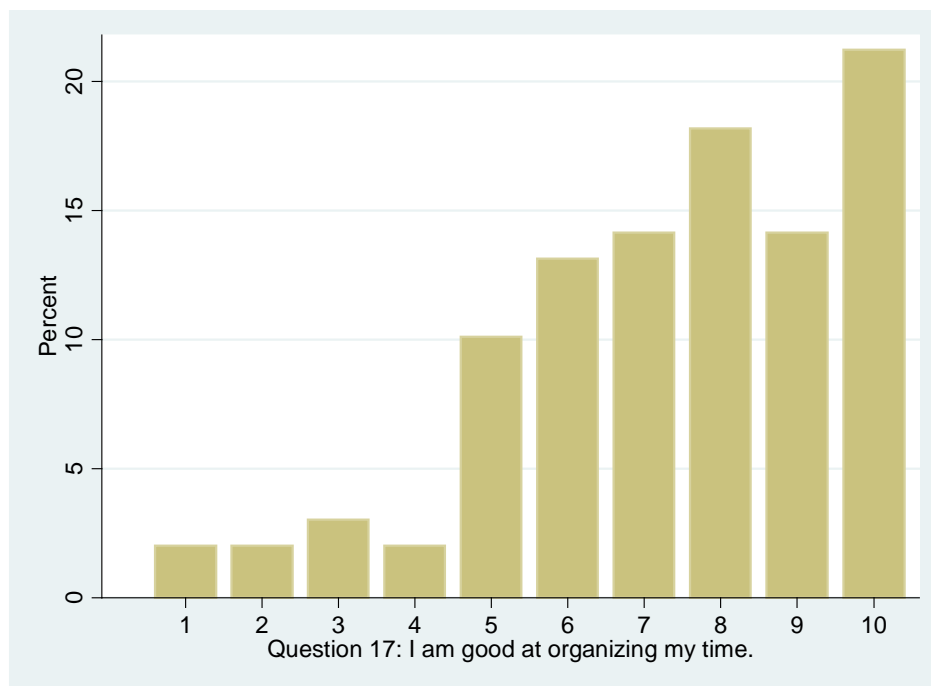
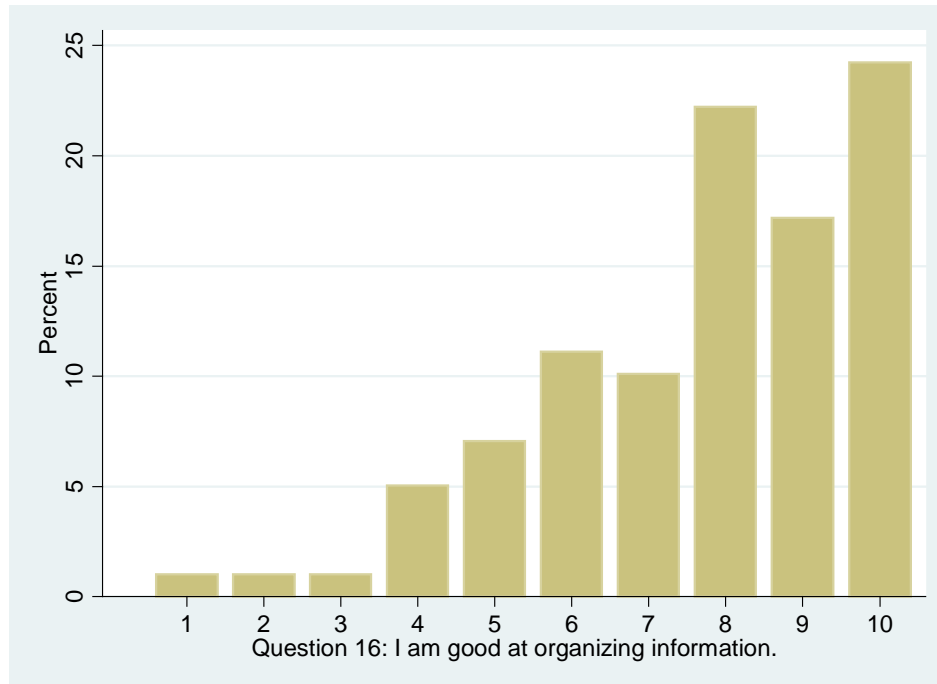




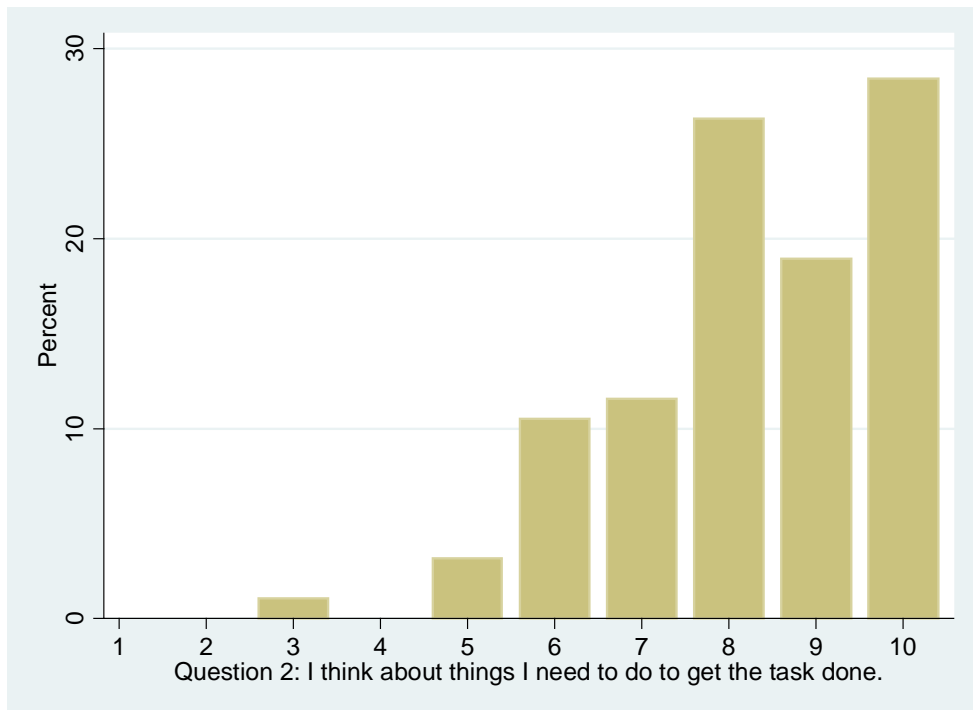
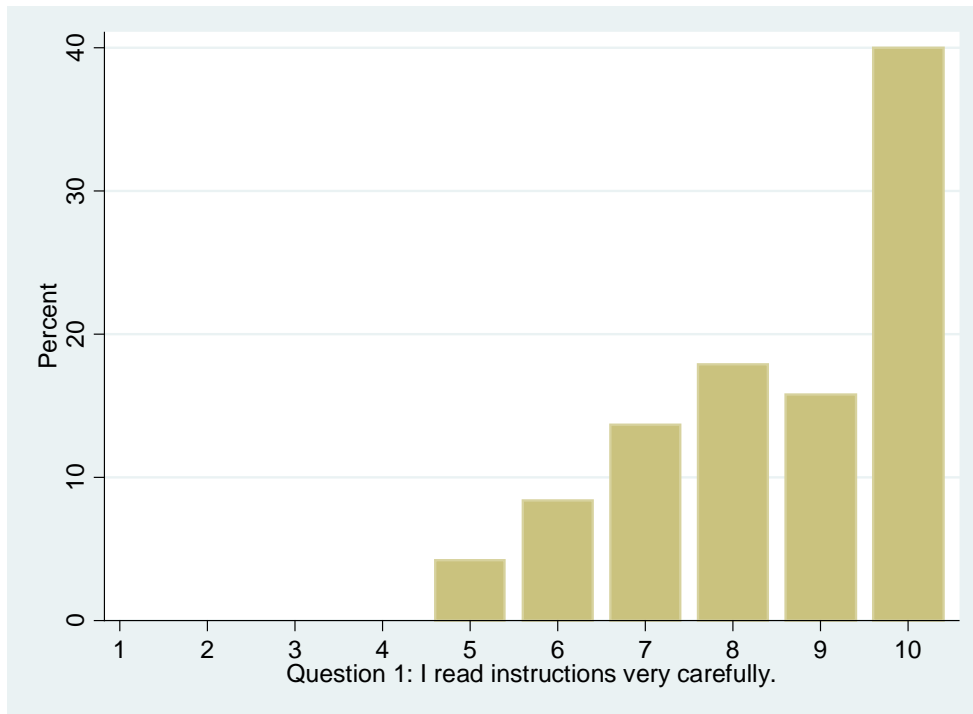


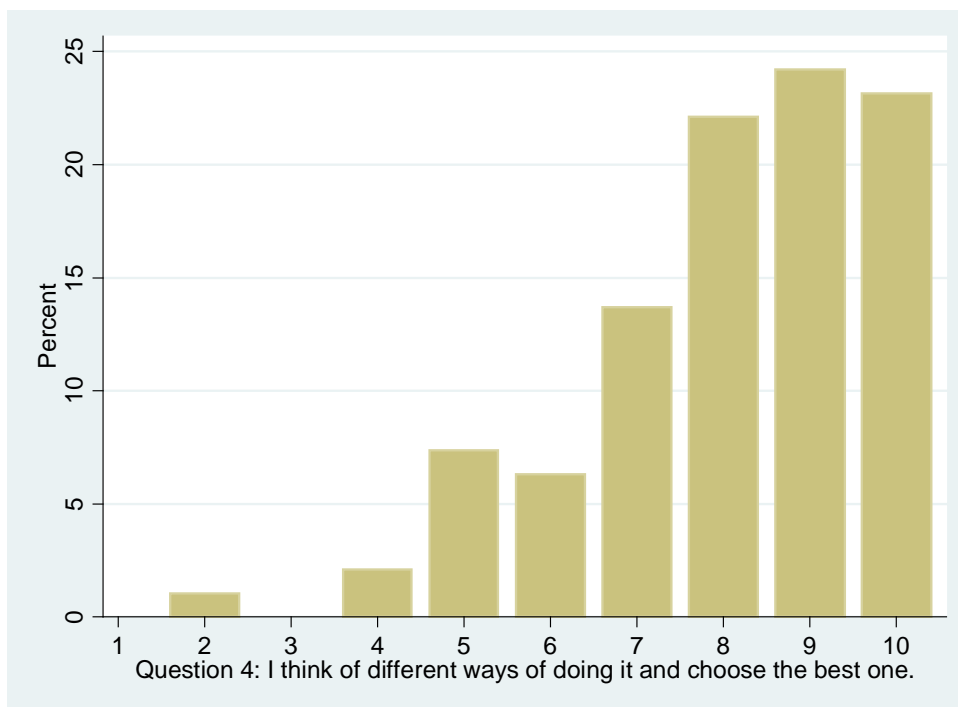
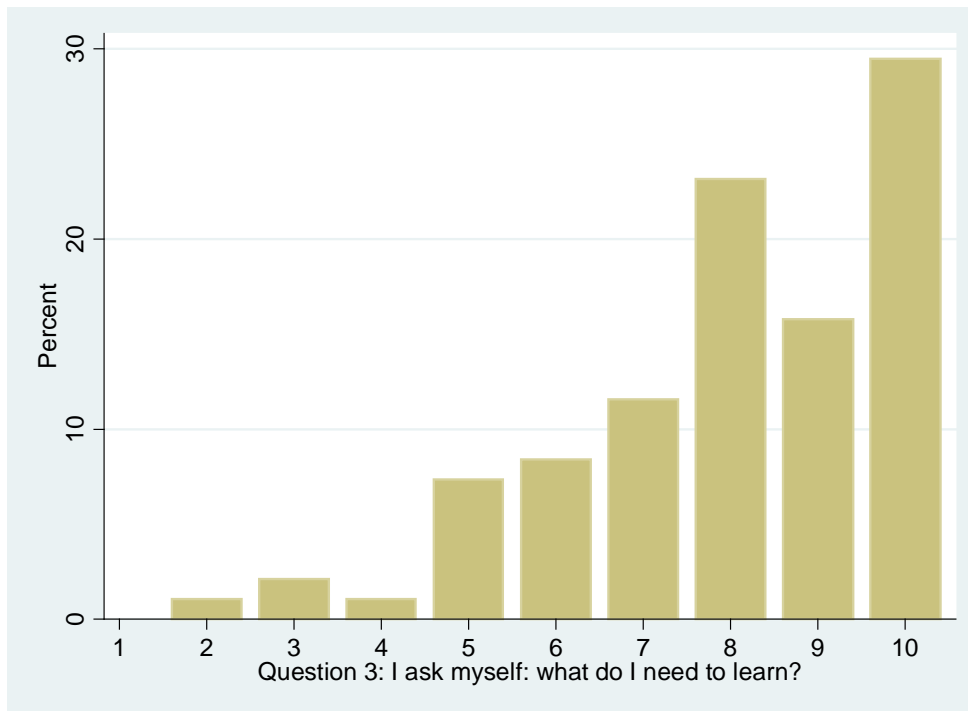


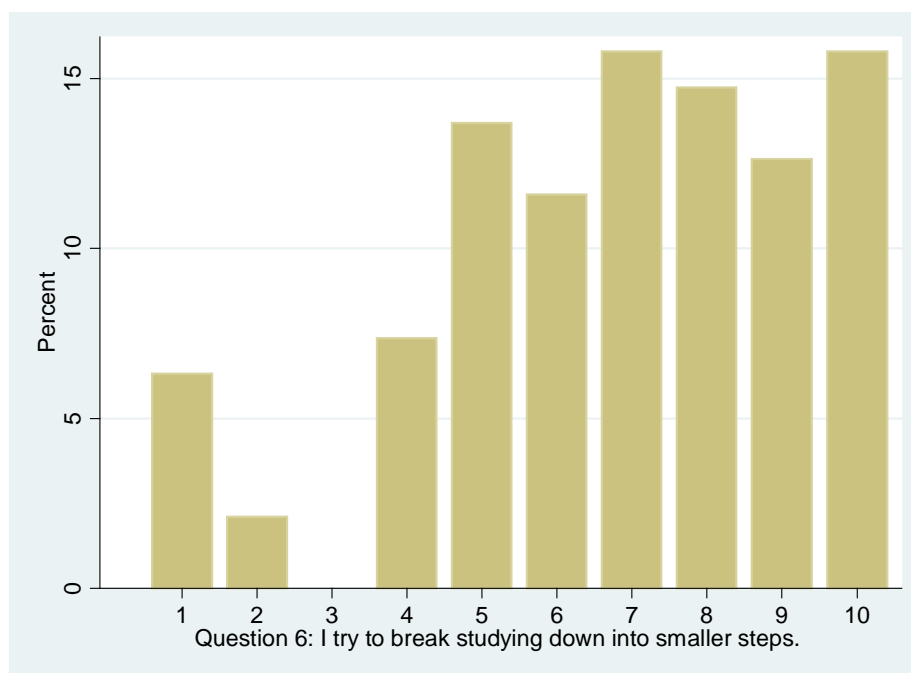
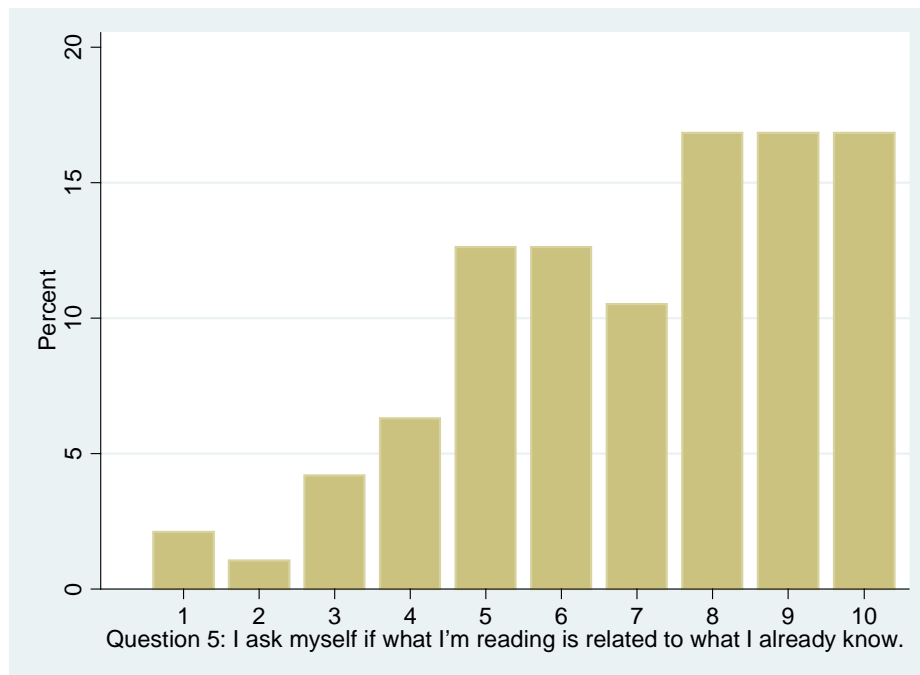


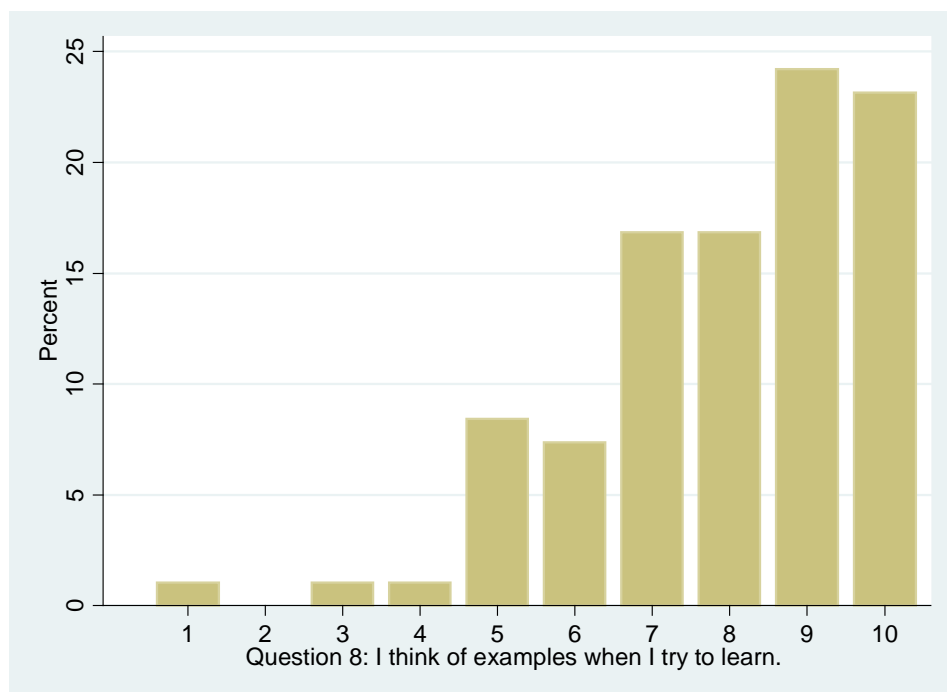
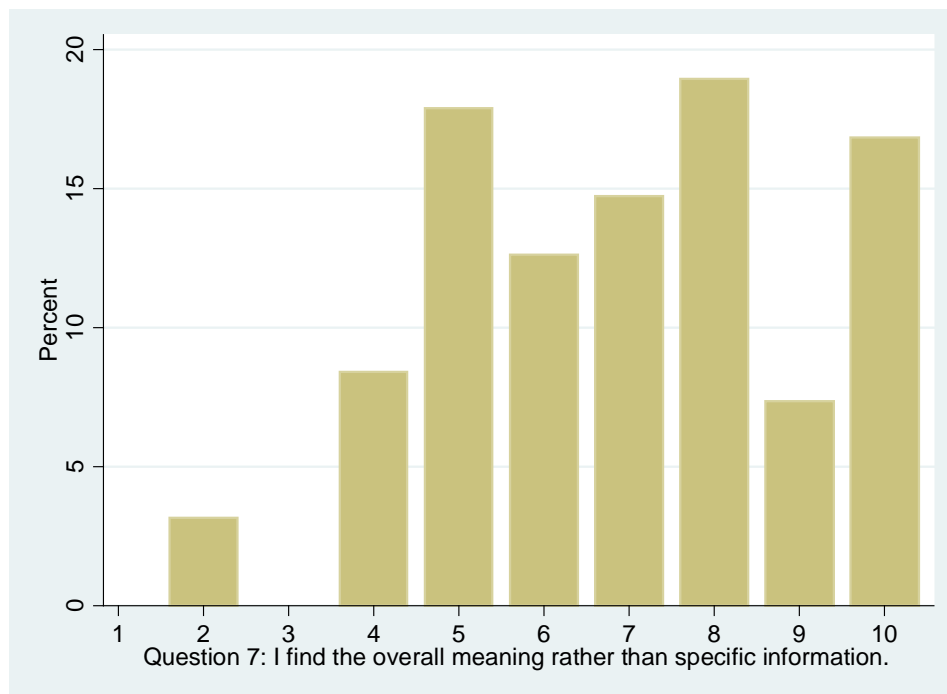


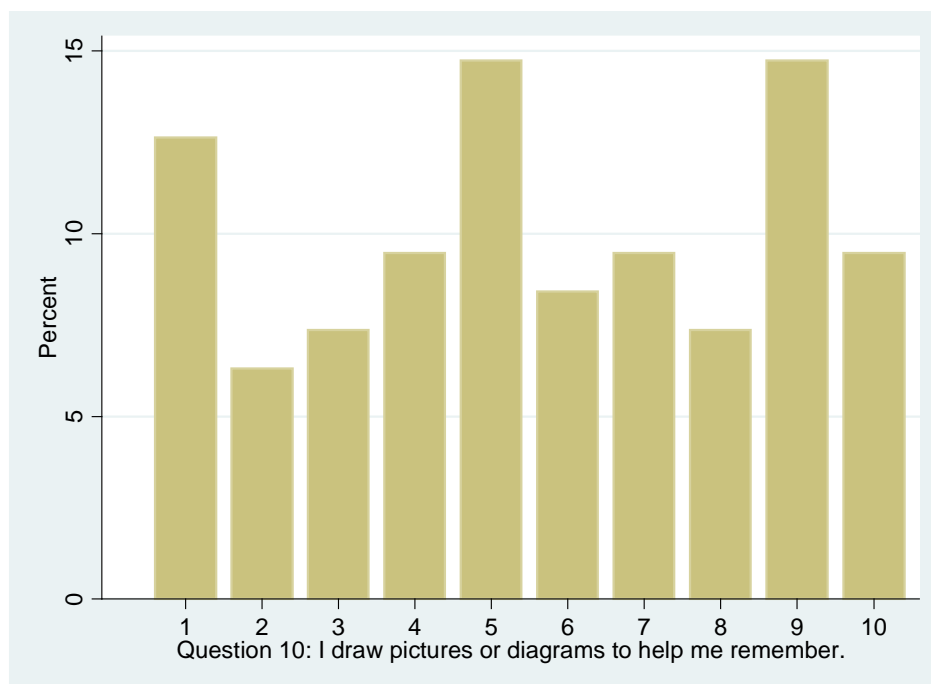
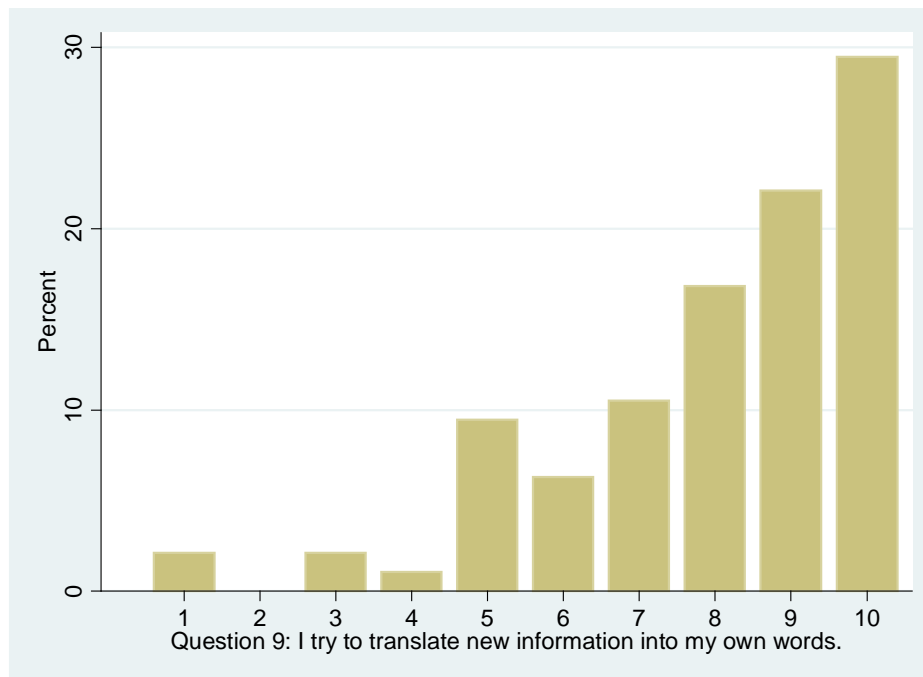
PART II

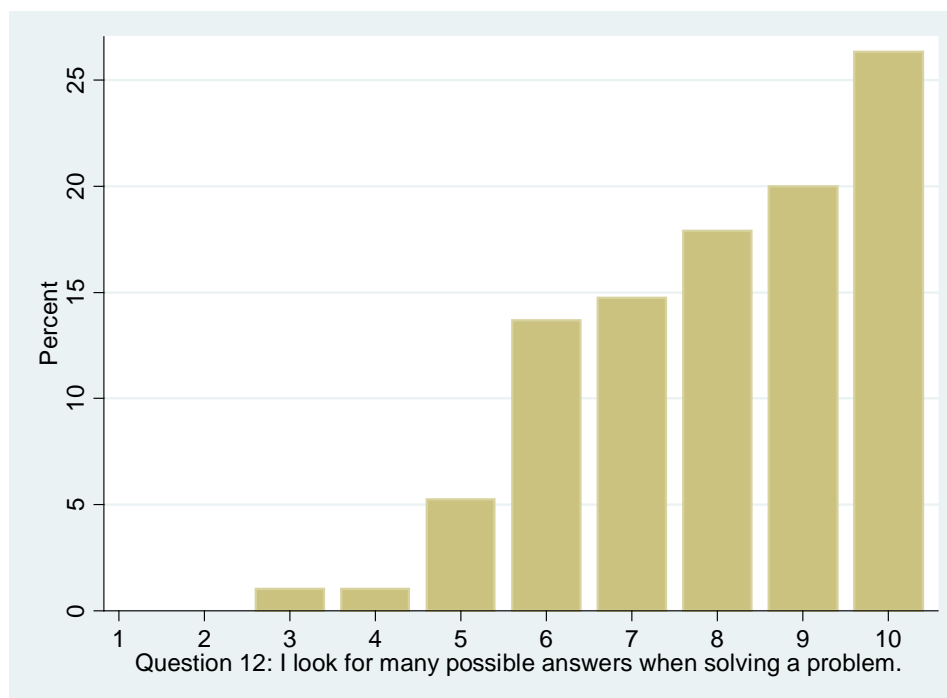
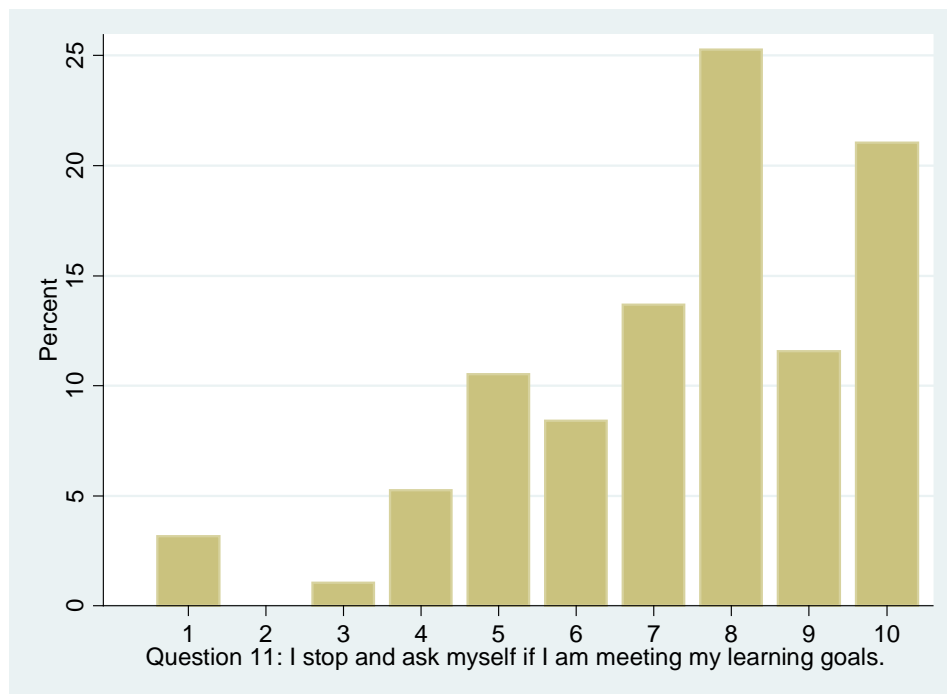


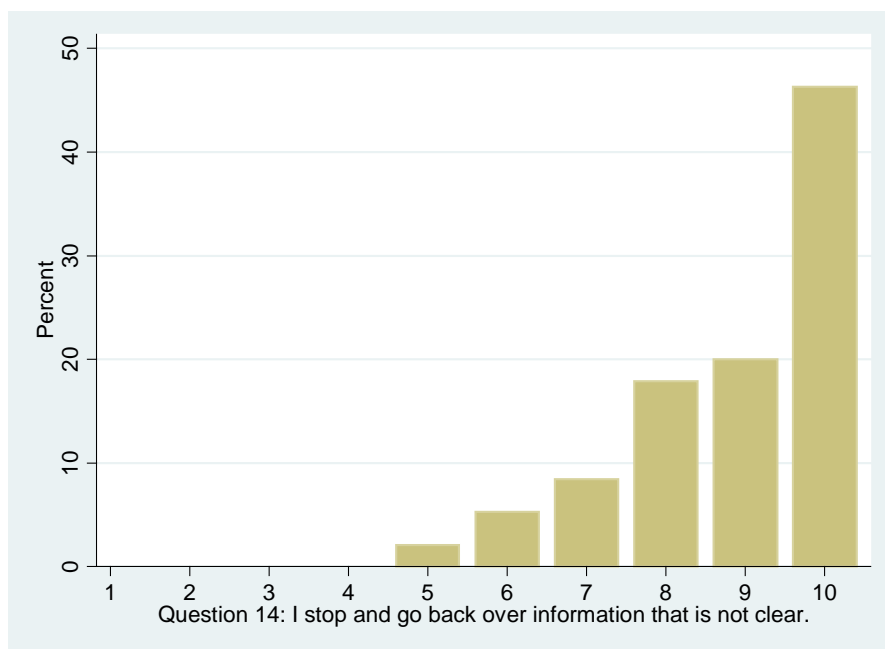
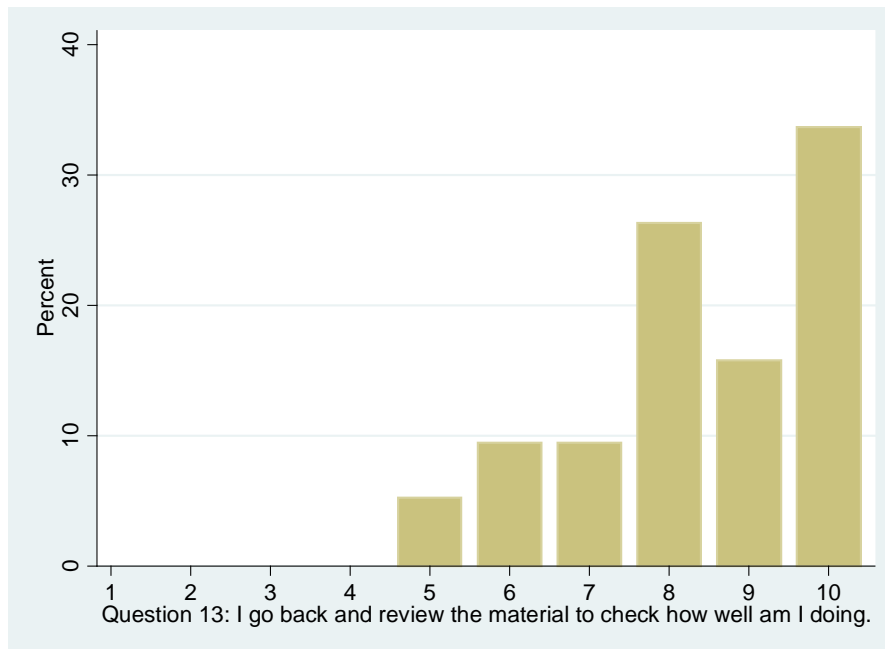


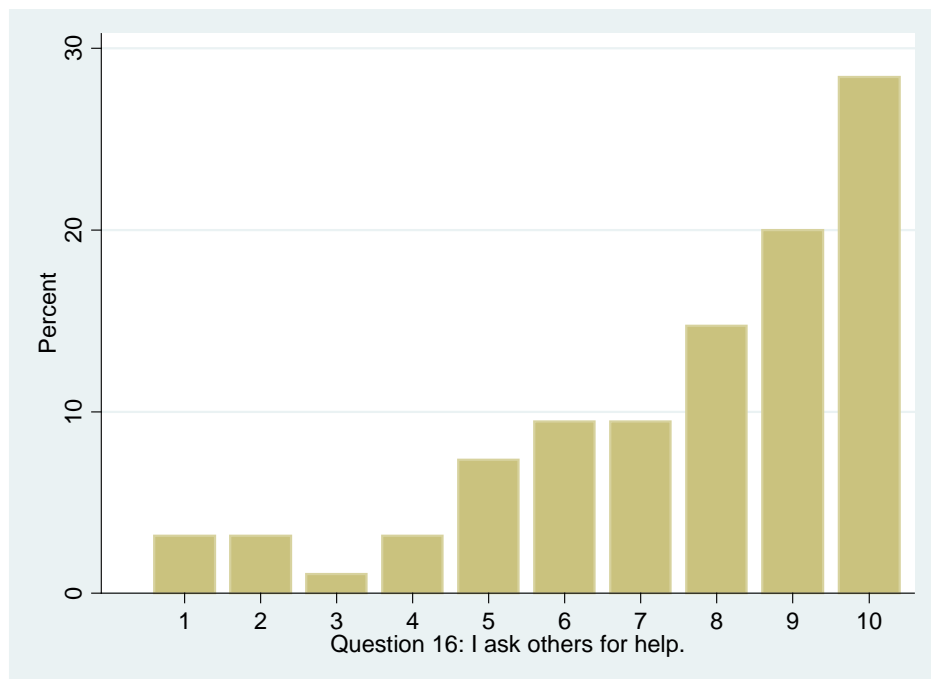
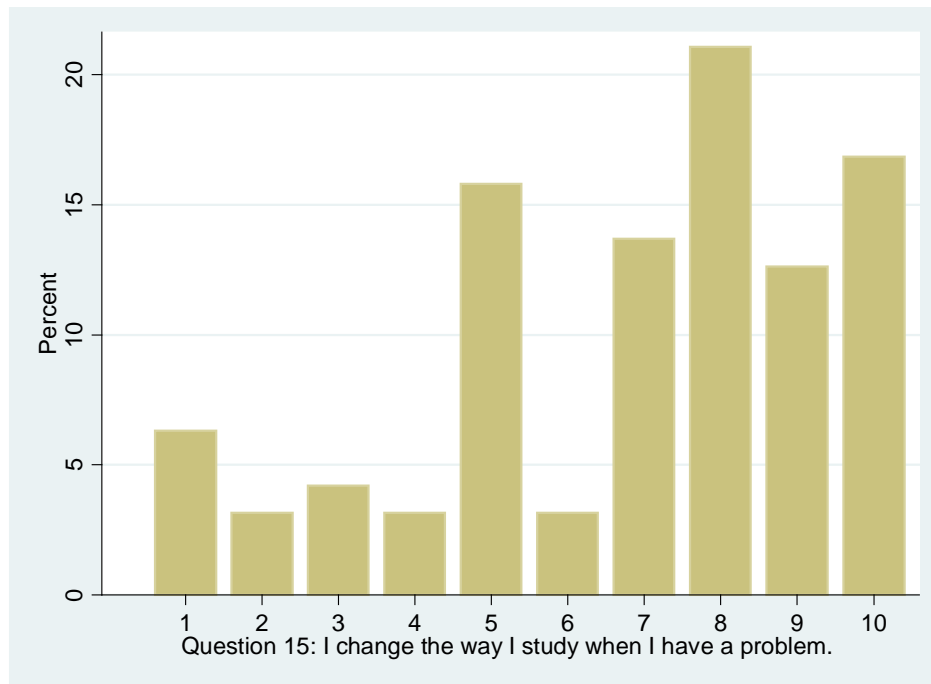


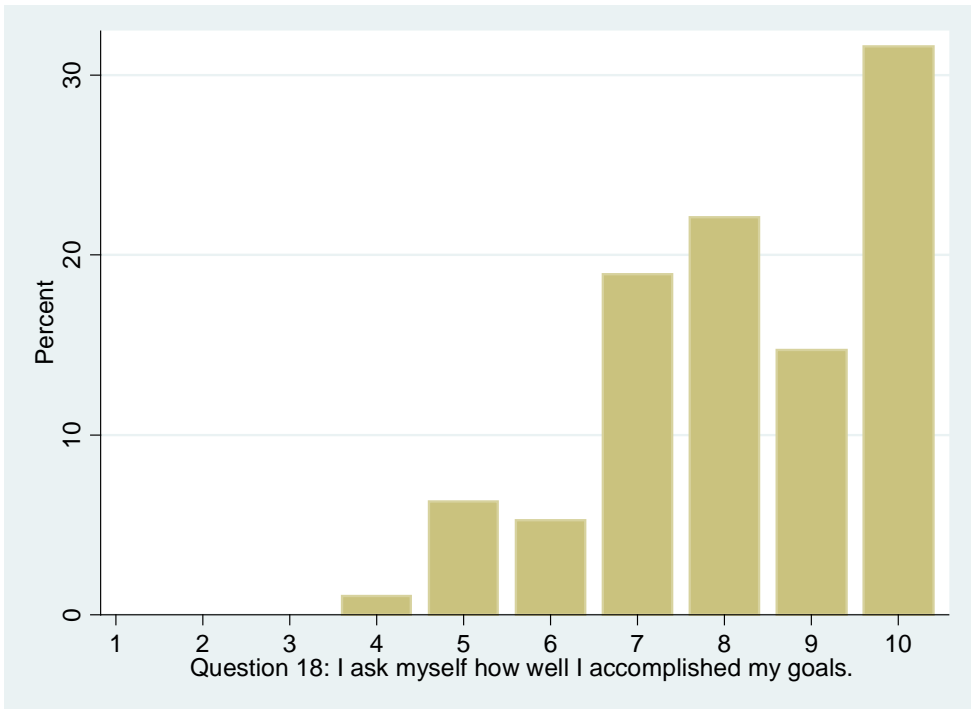
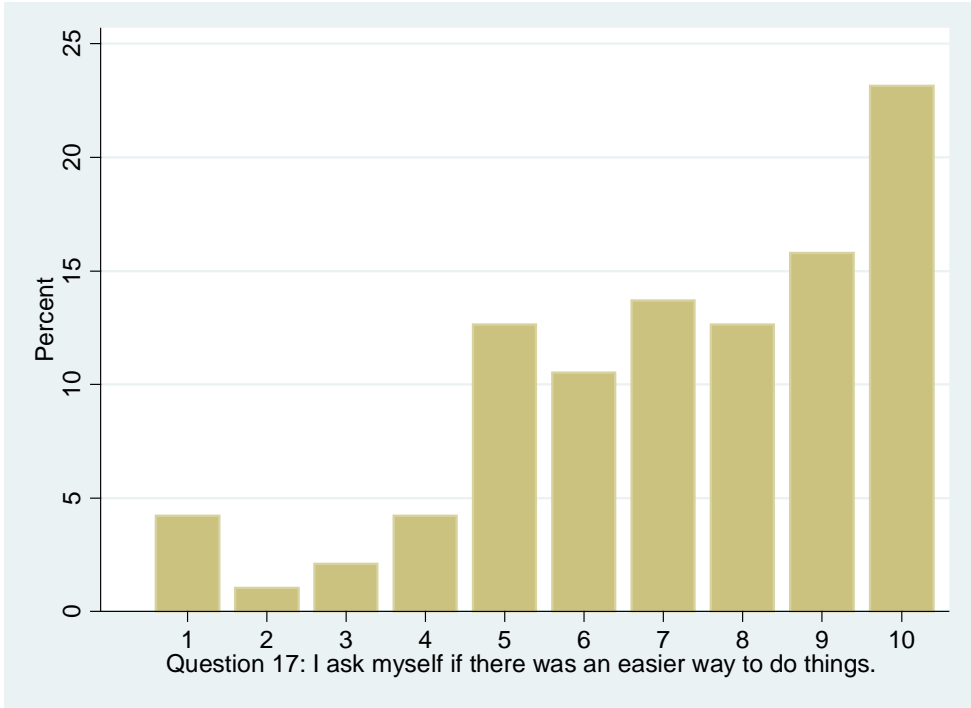












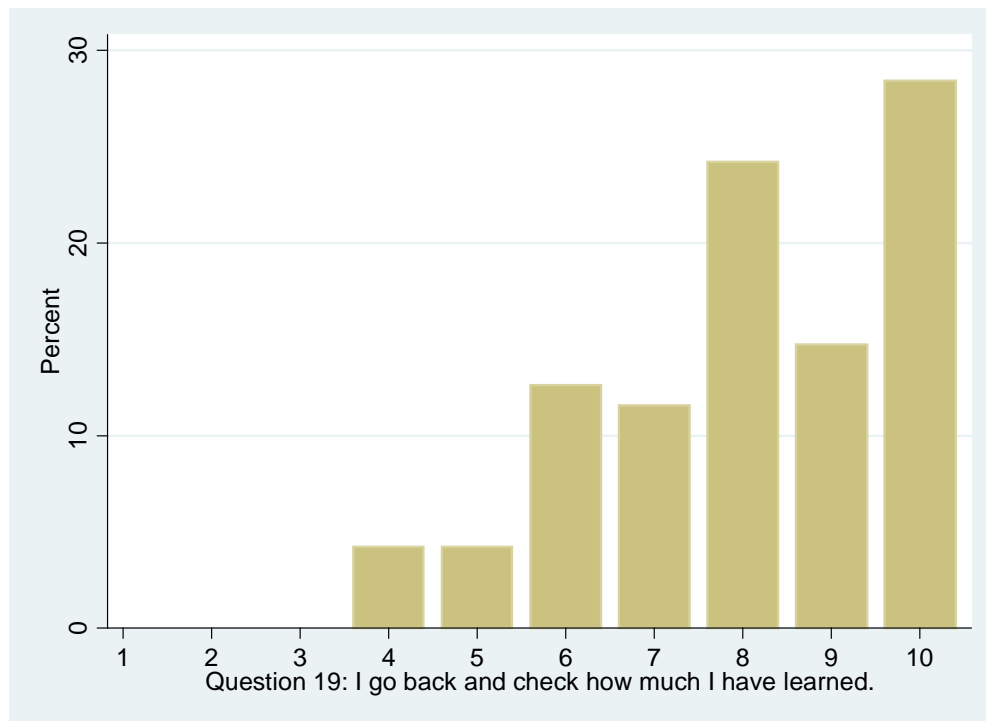


Table 1 : Summary of Descriptive Statistics of Items in the Online Survey:

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
PRTIQuestion1	99	8.121212	1.691954	2	10
PRTIQuestion2	99	8.050505	1.814757	1	10
PRTIQuestion3	99	7.878788	1.77438	2	10
PRTIQuestion4	99	8.838384	1.608061	2	10
PRTIQuestion5	99	8.242424	2.055808	1	10
PRTIQuestion6	99	6.989899	2.25196	1	10
PRTIQuestion7	99	4.474747	2.650928	1	10
PRTIQuestion8	99	5.868687	2.701649	1	10
PRTIQuestion9	99	7.666667	2.010178	1	10
PRTIQuestion10	99	6.292929	2.560503	1	10
PRTIQuestion11	99	5.373737	2.841334	1	10
PRTIQuestion12	99	6.040404	2.64544	1	10
PRTIQuestion13	99	6.151515	2.711892	1	10
PRTIQuestion14	99	7.121212	2.348568	1	10
PRTIQuestion15	99	7.191919	2.24825	1	10
PRTIQuestion16	99	7.737374	2.053299	1	10
PRTIQuestion17	99	7.363636	2.238141	1	10
PRTIQuestion18	99	6.525253	2.357547	1	10
PRTIQuestion19	99	7.464646	1.939457	2	10
PRTIIQuestion1	95	8.526316	1.53569	5	10
PRTIIQuestion2	95	8.284211	1.53445	3	10
PRTIIQuestion3	95	8.031579	1.887544	2	10
PRTIIQuestion4	95	8.073684	1.72122	2	10
PRTIIQuestion5	95	7.094737	2.302051	1	10
PRTIIQuestion6	95	6.778947	2.493306	1	10
PRTIIQuestion7	95	6.947368	2.105557	2	10
PRTIIQuestion8	95	7.968421	1.836119	1	10
PRTIIQuestion9	95	8	2.093556	1	10
PRTIIQuestion10	95	5.621053	2.921596	1	10
PRTIIQuestion11	95	7.431579	2.181414	1	10
PRTIIQuestion12	95	8.052632	1.697109	3	10
PRTIIQuestion13	95	8.389474	1.524933	5	10
PRTIIQuestion14	95	8.873684	1.3388	5	10
PRTIIQuestion15	95	6.821053	2.637612	1	10
PRTIIQuestion16	95	7.673684	2.425231	1	10
PRTIIQuestion17	95	7.263158	2.437345	1	10
PRTIIQuestion18	95	8.252632	1.584287	4	10
PRTIIQuestion19	95	8.052632	1.728167	4	10

Table 2: Items in the online survey with relatively less polarized responses by respondents:

Non-MAI items:		
• Trying to decide what to study makes me uncomfortable.	PartI-Q7	
• I frequently need information from teachers on how I am learning.	PartI-Q8	
• I prefer to study alone.	PartI-Q10	
• I prefer learning face to face in a classroom.	PartI-Q11	
• Discussions with other students are a necessary part of my learning.	PartI-Q12	
• I need to see the teacher to get feedback for my assignments.	PartI-Q13	
MAI Items:		
• I change the way I study depending on the assignment.	PartI-Q6	Conditional Knowledge
• I try to learn in the same ways that have worked well in the past.	PartI-Q14	Procedural Knowledge
• I am good at remembering information.	PartI-Q15	Declarative Knowledge
• I am good at organizing my time.	PartI-Q17	Planning time
• I can tell how much time an assignment will take for me to complete.	PartI-Q18	Planning time
• I ask myself if what I'm reading is related to what I already know.	PartII-Q5	Information Management Strategies
• I try to break studying down into smaller steps.	PartII-Q6	Information Management Strategies
• I find the overall meaning rather than specific information.	PartII-Q7	Information Management Strategies
• I draw pictures or diagrams to help me remember.	PartII-Q10	Information Management Strategies
• I stop and ask myself if I am meeting my learning goals.	PartII-Q11	Comprehension Monitoring
• I ask myself if there was an easier way to do things.	PartII-Q17	Evaluation