An Investigation Into The Implementation Of The Pamoja Model In Schools. How Effective Is Pamoja’s Model In Working With SBCs (Site-Based Coordinators, Functioning As On-Site Facilitators) In Motivating Sustained Learning In The Online Study Mode?

Thesis

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An investigation into the implementation of the Pamoja model in schools

How effective is Pamoja’s model in working with SBCs (site-based coordinators, functioning as on-site facilitators) in motivating sustained learning in the online study mode?

Doctor in Education (EdD)
The Open University, UK
October 2021

Jacob Solomon
Abstract

This work assesses the efficacy of the educational practice of school faculties supporting the motivation of their students studying wholly-online-delivered academic courses in the pre-university final two years of secondary school. Its focus is on the pioneering 2015-2019 work of Pamoja Education, an official provider of IB (International Baccalaureate) fully-online subject courses whose target clientele is the international school community served by the IB, and whose results during that period consistently paralleled the range of IB grades as a whole. In anticipating motivation issues in regular online study, this company requires and formally enables a student-support structure that includes the designation, training, and liaising with a faculty member of the student’s school serving in an on-site facilitator role as a site-based coordinator (SBC).

This study considers the contribution that this SBC arrangement makes to allow the virtual learning environment to rival formal classroom instruction in terms of academic standards achieved. It investigated the range of motivational challenges faced by online students within the framework of self-determination theory, particularly within the extrinsic domains of student autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Students (14), SBCs (4), and Pamoja staff (2) responded within semi-structured interviews on student motivation and the types of support that the SBCs provide. This data was classified into themes and codes using thematic analysis, which indicated that mainly due to their proximity and thus their relatedness to the student, the SBCs at Pamoja do substantially contribute towards promoting and maintaining sustained student engagement and optimal student performance within that virtual learning environment.
However, those findings strongly implied that the nature and intensity of the support needed varied from student to student.

The findings indicate that the motivational role of the SBC is recognized by a large body of students as well as SBCs and Pamoja staff as being crucial to student motivational well-being in the virtual environment and that with such support, online delivery could well be a viable means of enabling schools to widen their curriculum without having to employ additional staff.
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Chapter 1: Introduction and scope of this study

1.1 Background of the study, and my position as investigator

The scope of this introductory chapter extends to presenting the background and overall purpose of the thesis. I explain how my interest in researching student motivation in online educational practices as an enabler of consistent levels of student participation throughout the courses arose out my professional experiences as online teacher for Pamoja Education, a company whose work includes providing online education at pre-university level. In this chapter, I present the educational setting in which Pamoja operates, including reference to its track record in student academic achievements, which encompasses the particular practice that I am researching. That is the company’s deliberate and structured involvement in the school of each participating student in monitoring and thus motivationally supporting the students’ work week by week. My work aims to assess the efficacy of this practice as used by Pamoja, in terms of its contribution to sustaining motivation during the two-year duration of the programs.

With standard direct instruction practices no longer readily available to students during the Covid-19 worldwide pandemic due to the resulting temporary school closures, studying online under subject-teacher guidance has become an increasingly familiar, widely-adopted and accepted practice within secondary education (Tay et al., 2021). The term ‘secondary education’
includes the area of my study: pre-tertiary programs of the final two years of secondary school, with their typically high-content and conceptual-based courses of study that follow externally-set and examined syllabi as exemplified by Pamoja Education.

My research on pre-tertiary online education both pre-dates and post-dates this scenario. It predates by drawing on evidence I gathered in the academic year that subsequently turned out to be the one that preceded the outbreak. It postdates the scenario, as I view its contribution in the light of the increasing prevalence of online education that may well be the case at this level.

**Online education at Pamoja**

Online study in various forms has already been widespread in secondary education during the previous couple of decades (Barbour, 2018). Pamoja’s specialties include online academic courses that are part of the pre-tertiary International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. My work focuses on the mode of online delivery exemplified by Pamoja Education’s work with IB online study, which works in the following way. This company’s specialist academic staff prepares and presents course materials mostly asynchronously through the company’s online platform. IB online students are assigned to subject-specialist online teachers employed by Pamoja, whose work includes guiding and assessing the work of the students within their typically 20-25-strong groups. At the same time, the Pamoja School Services Department works together with the school of each student through its point of connection with the school: the SBC (site-based coordinator). The SBC is a designated member of staff in each student’s school whose general
purpose is to support the student in online study. All these parties have directly online access to the student’s work, course engagement levels, and progress.

It is through this setup that the student is therefore responsible to both Pamoja and, though the SBC, to the school. I am thus naming this triangular arrangement operated by Pamoja, the Online Partnership Model (OPM), which represents a symbiotic working relationship between course-provider, school, and student, with a key objective being to motivate consistent student progress as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: The Online Partnership Model (OPM)**
My research question is therefore: “How effective is Pamoja’s model in working with SBCs in motivating sustained learning in the online study mode?” This research question is designed to investigate, with the OPM model that characterizes Pamoja, the effectiveness of the school’s supportive and reinforcing role.

The impetus for this study grew out of my professional experience with Oxford-based online provider Pamoja Education rather than from the literature on online learning. The steps to involvement with Pamoja Education followed my appointment to my current teaching post at the Anglican International School in Jerusalem in 1992, being involved in the process of the school joining the IB as an IB school in 1997 and becoming an IB examiner in 1998. In 2011, I joined the then two-year-old Oxford-located social-enterprise-based Pamoja Education as a teacher of IB Economics, purveying online the same course to similar, mainly international students that I was teaching at school, whose total student population is predominantly international as well.

These online students were typically studying their other five chosen IB subjects in a conventional school setting (Pamoja does not offer the full IB Diploma online), but taking their sixth subject, in my case Economics, online because they chose to study it, and the school did not currently offer it.

As a professional teacher, I was initially skeptical about how effectively distance-learning could replace the traditional direct instruction model in the school situation. I suspected that 16-year old students would not yet have developed the essential sense of responsibility that was essential for success in online study. My initial doubts about their being able to bring the sustained motivation required for this online two-year program may be because of the requirements for effective motivation as explained through the motivational theory of self-determination theory.
(SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2020) which frames this research (see Chapter 2). Based on SDT theory, I suspected that the pre-university online students might lack the essential extrinsic motivators characteristic of direct instructional teaching that would sustain them during the phases of low levels of intrinsic motivation. A motivator is extrinsic where the activity is performed to attain some distinctive outcome rather than the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself (Ryan and Deci 2000, p.71), and is intrinsic where motivator comes from the “inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore and to learn” (Ryan and Deci 2000, p.70), giving a sense of achievement irrespective of external reward. I conjectured that these pre-university students, in view of the sustained motivation levels required for a prolonged course in a VLE (virtual learning environment), would find it difficult to maintain sustained regular working habits without the immediate reinforcement and feedback of the conventional classroom. I was skeptical of claims made of the studies claiming the ‘no significant difference’ in student outcomes between courses taught by direct instruction and courses taught online (Means et al., 2009; Russell, 2004; Phipps and Merisotis, 1999), feeling that the educational experience and outcomes in the online environment would fall under the heading of under what conditions does online learning work? (Ferdig, 2010). Could those in the VLEs indicating successful outcomes have been enjoying additional supporting elements that might favor student success?

I therefore had my initial doubts on whether Pamoja students would be obtaining substantially lower grades in so rigorous a program as IB Economics as would their counterparts in the conventional classroom setting.

However, I observed with some surprise on the publication of the May 2013 IB final
examination grades that the students in the online group that I taught (the only results I had access to) appeared to have performed at the same level in Pamoja-taught Economics as in their other face-to-face subjects in regular schooling; that being the only session that that these statistics were made available by Pamoja to the teachers. Moreover, and that was true for subsequent years, attrition rates were low. Only a minority of the Pamoja students did not complete the two-year program, which in most cases was due to the school making in-house provision of that subject subsequent to enrollment on the program, or due to a change of mind on the part of a student in favor of another subject offered by the school.

Subsequent experiences continued to arouse my curiosity. For example, over the years that I had been comparing the progress of students of my Pamoja classes with those I was currently teaching face-to-face at my own school, both followed the same syllabus at the same pace, and both appeared to have similar rhythms of difficulties and triumphs, as well as distribution of achievement grades.

I later found that the final IB grades achieved in my Pamoja classes largely mirrored not only those I was directly involved with at school, but those in the entire Pamoja yearly cohorts for Economics. Indeed, the level of achievement for 2013 was maintained for the succeeding five years, 2014-2018. Each IB subject at both higher level (HL) and standard level (SL), is academically assessed on a 7-point scale; 1 being the lowest and 7 being the highest, with a 4 denoting a satisfactory level of achievement. The average score over that period for Economics in the entire IB cohort is 5.1, with Pamoja students scoring just under 5.0. At SL, the average
score is 4.7, with Pamoja students averaging significantly higher at 5.0\(^1\). For Pamoja online courses in all subjects offered overall over the same period, their score was higher than the IB average: Pamoja students scored 4.78 against an IB global average of 4.66 (Interview with the Principal of Pamoja, Study International 2021).

This seems to support both the Pamoja model and practices as well as the more general notion that online education has the academic potential to rival traditional face-to-face teaching at pre-tertiary level at least as long as students are effectively supported by the school environment.

I was interested, therefore, in whether such professional practice of this online company might serve as successful models as enablers of learning in online education at pre-tertiary and possibly tertiary level as well. Could this model supply education, with its potential to reach far more people at a much lower cost per student, to the same degree of efficacy as the conventional face-to-face classroom setting? This question embraces the area of inquiry for this thesis.

Before exploring this area, I proceed to introduce the essential settings of entities that play parts in my research: Pamoja Education and the IB Diploma program. This is in order to present coherently the context of my research.

1.2 The educational context of my inquiry: Pamoja and the IB

At this point, I present the workings of both Pamoja as an educational provider and the IB curriculum for contextual purposes: in order to identify and clarify the roles of both in the

\(^1\) All these figures are from internal statistics kept by Pamoja and available to the teaching faculty; quoted with Pamoja’s permission.
student’s pre-tertiary academic program. This is vital, as a Pamoja two-year course taken by the student is but one out of nine components in the student’s otherwise direct-instruction-taught, pre-tertiary two-year experience. The nine comprise the six academic subjects considered in the next paragraph plus the three IB compulsory core programs (Theory of Knowledge, Extended Essay, and Community, Action, and Service). Apart from one, or rarely more than one subject studied online at Pamoja, the remaining components of the program are predominantly taught through the conventional direct instruction of the classroom. Online study thus belongs to the all the other components that comprise the online student’s IB Diploma curriculum. However, its role is potentially all-embracing, as a failure in any one component, including the subject studied online, means that the full IB Diploma is not awarded.

The six academic subjects referred to above comprise of three which are at Higher Level (240 teaching hours) and three at standard level (150 teaching hours), the choice of subjects and at what level usually being made by the student. The six subjects, each within a different one of the six subject groups as shown on Figure 1 are: (1) studies in language and literature, the student’s mother tongue, (2) language acquisition, a foreign language, (3) individuals and societies, (4) sciences, (5) mathematics, and (6) the arts. Students may offer an additional science or individuals and societies subject in lieu of the arts.

All nine courses are designed to be taught concurrently, whereby students are progressing simultaneously through their six academic subjects and their three core subjects. It is with the understanding that the total two-year educational experience is more valuable than the sum of its component parts, as students build interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary as well as subject-
specific understandings, with both the students and teachers making links between the three assessed core components and the six academic subjects, as illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: The IB diploma program.** The above shows the three core components and the six academic subjects. Source: International Baccalaureate Organization: The IB Diploma Program.
Pamoja Education works in close collaboration with the IB in order to deliver courses in an online working environment, with economics, business and management, and psychology being the most popular. Until 2018, it was the only online provider of IB courses officially approved by the IB (IB official website, accessed February 12th, 2019) and thus until very recently had the monopoly of that service, based on the formal approval of the IB. Its growing community “currently includes 757 schools, 143 teachers, and 4,975 students located around the world” (Pamoja official website, accessed 31st October, 2021).

In the words of the IB:

“Pamoja works in close collaboration with the IB to develop and deliver authorized online Diploma Programme courses, and is dedicated to supporting the IB in their efforts to increase global access to the Diploma Programme. Pamoja continues to develop innovative ways to provide students and teachers with a collaborative and dynamic online learning environment and to support students in achieving their academic potential. Hundreds of schools work with Pamoja in order to provide additional course choices for students, build more flexibility into student timetables, provide students with a broader educational experience, and accommodate students who transfer from another school” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2021[1]).

In developing “innovative ways to provide students and teachers with a collaborative and dynamic online learning environment and to support students in achieving their academic potential”, Pamoja’s working position is effectively closely connected with the students’ schools. Students take a subject (or more rarely more than one subject) that their schools do not offer which they have chosen as subject-components of their diploma program. For example, a student may take English, mathematics, history and physics at school, and study economics and film studies online with Pamoja, as those subjects are not offered in that school. In many, probably
most cases, that is a choice that students make as they could take other subjects that the school teaches for the IB. Thus the online courses offered by Pamoja have the realities of being part of the entity of the IB Diploma program that in toto (not merely blended) is mostly delivered by conventional face-to-face secondary schooling. Whereas a failure in one A Level subject does not impact A Level passes gained in other subjects, a failure in an IB subject, by contrast, means non-award of the diploma however good the results in other subjects. Thus the situation of the Pamoja course student is that the online program is a vital component in entire diploma, with lack of success having the potential of undermining the student’s entire two-year program. Therefore the prospect of failure in the IB is likely to be a regular and powerful extrinsic motivator to study not necessarily present in other online programs and may be conjectured as being a possible explanation for the higher than my initially expected rate of student success.

It may follow that students should be motivated to complete their IB program to their highest possible standard regardless of whether they are in conventional classrooms or on online Pamoja courses during the same two-year period program of study. However, the consistency in student application that is needed for course and final exam success is only likely to be achieved with the inclusion of elements to sustain student motivation throughout the program, one of which is introduced in the next section. These elements would address the reality that students are essentially studying online by themselves, outside the familiar classroom environment.
1.3. Collaborating with schools: the SBC (site-based coordinator)

I have already introduced the point in the OPM model that one of Pamoja’s salient practices is partnering with the school of each student through working actively with a member of the school’s regular teaching faculty in the capacity of on-site facilitator, referred to as the site based coordinator (SBC). This means that Pamoja works directly with the school to facilitate motivating consistent student engagement with the keeping up with the weekly quotas of reading, blogs, class online discussions, and teacher-assessed written assignments. It is the nature and relative importance of that company-school collaboration that I would like to assess in this study. Does the SBC component reinforce student motivation for prolonged, consistent, and successful online study routines and outcomes? Does the SBC input contribute significantly to Pamoja’s successful outcomes for its students?

The academic literature focusing on the online scenario at Pamoja Education is currently limited to two published studies, neither of which focus on these questions. One, by Lowes, Lin, and Kinghorn (2015) explores the connections between online behaviors and course performance in Pamoja VLE. It bases its evidence on Learning Management System streams of data for some 700 students Pamoja in the then 12 courses offered by that company (including IB Economics) with a view to providing insights into student behavior in the VLE, concluding inter alia that higher grades were associated with higher levels of performance, but it did not investigate what the SBCs might have contributed to motivating levels of performance. The other, by Oliver et al. (2014) focusing on students that previously studied at Pamoja and were currently at university, investigated the contribution of the experience of the Pamoja VLE in preparing them to cope with virtual learning demands at university. This study interviewed online teachers (but not
SBCs), whose evidence (p.64) included the claim that student success was to a considerable extent related to the organizational and communication skills of the SBC. However, neither study investigated the work of the SBC in motivating student online performance. It is that dimension that I seek to research, and thus contribute to what is currently known.

Pamoja defines the role of the SBC as the person with the specified task of fulfilling the role described as “Schools designate a member of staff to be our first point of contact and to keep track of student progress” (Pamoja Education official website), meeting with the students on a regular basis to monitor progress and their motivational methods, as well as to encourage and enable them to build up and sustain a positive working relationship with the Pamoja teacher and other students in the course who are scattered throughout the world’s timezones. In other words, the SBCs are perhaps acting as an extrinsic source of motivation for keeping students on track by using face-to-face support. The frequency of meetings will depend on their engagement levels with the course (ibid). As such, the SBC system is designed to promote effective detection and address of barriers to learning when and where they occur. It may be loosely compared to supportive private tutorial by the school, but it cannot be taken too far as the SBC is not expected to have expertise in the student’s online subject.

To this end, Hannah Senel-Walp, Principal of Pamoja, claims that SBCs “support students in a number of ways. They monitor students’ progress throughout their course, helping them whenever necessary. The SBC also regularly catches up with their students and ensures ongoing communication between students, our teachers and our School Services Team. SBCs also encourage students to take ownership of their learning by supervising rather than tutoring, providing support in the creation of a term-time planner to promote effective time
management. Plus, they also set time aside with each student to evaluate their individualized study method, suggesting improvements where appropriate” (Study International, Interview, 29th April 2020).

To complete the picture of the SBC scenario: following a Pamoja-supplied short online training course for SBCs that is designed to enable the navigation of the Pamoja online campus and its workings, the SBC is given full access to the student’s work, progress, and online-teacher feedback at the Pamoja platform: in line with the SBC being “a member of staff to be our first point of contact and to keep track of student progress… and provide face-to-face support if needed” (Pamoja official website). Pamoja does not specify the position held by that school member of staff: my respondents indicated that role belongs to a subject teacher (most usual), an IB program school coordinator, a librarian, and in one case, the school principal. SBCs do not necessarily have specialist knowledge relevant to the student’s chosen online course: the Pamoja’s ‘face-to-face support’ role descriptor stresses inputs that tend to the pastoral rather than the academic. To be able to do this, SBCs can regularly and instantly obtain the information required to monitor their students’ engagement, such as the number of student logins, on a weekly basis. By viewing the electronically updated dashboard, the SBC can, at a glance, determine whether or not the student has been fulfilling the weekly Pamoja work requirements.

At this point, it is important to observe that school faculty’s support of students studying online is not a practice that is exclusive to Pamoja: it is more widespread in the secondary-school online educational world. There is a relatively small, but fast-growing body of research on the ways in which conventional schools work to sustain the student’s online study that forms part of their curriculum, including considering the work of the school staff in motivating and supporting
students in the capacity of online facilitators, and this is a more general phenomenon that I explore in Chapter 2. Such on-site facilitators form a generic function whereby school faculty support online study provided by outside bodies in diverse ways that include SBCs, as well as other set-ups that may be accommodated by the OPM model. These other scenarios feature similar though not identically-designed structures to support online student motivation.

With the successes of my own Pamoja students over the last six years, I decided to investigate to what extent this SBC system has been involved in motivating students to the degree that they achieve equivalent scores as those students in the conventional classroom, as encompassed in the research question for this study: “How effective is Pamoja’s model in working with SBCs (site-based coordinators, functioning as on-site facilitators) in motivating sustained learning in the online study mode?”

This research question is grounded in the following two elements already observed: Pamoja’s low student attrition rates, and the final examination results being comparable with those of courses taught face-to-face, as presented in the opening paragraphs of this chapter.

The efficacy of incorporating the supporting staff of the student’s home institution as a means of motivating learning within the VLE is a field of inquiry that, though small, has in the last decade received increasing academic attention at secondary school level including pre-tertiary. My work aims to examine and assess what the particular characteristics of the SBC system as promoted and maintained by Pamoja can contribute towards building a workable and sustainable model towards effectively motivating students to study effectively in VLEs at this level, and that can be more widely applied to online delivery for this age group.
1.4 The scope and procedures of this study

As the focus of this study requires the examination of enablers in online learning, the investigation takes the following form:

Following this introductory Chapter, I present in Chapter 2 the SDT-grounded theoretical framework informing this study’s research question. I chose to frame my research in SDT on basis of its capacity to accommodate in a systematic manner the very wide range of motivators likely to be present among the Pamoja student body. With a view to explore the motivators for online progress, this chapter considers the range of motivation challenges to such learning frequently faced by students, and it reviews a selection of the associated literature with the purpose of representing the existing research on the degree of success that online facilitators, working in similar roles to Pamoja’s SBCs, have achieved. That is essential for the consideration of the promoting-motivation-role efficacy of the Pamoja’s partnering with the SBCs, whose work in both preempting and addressing motivation-based issues is explored there, and through my research, in the later chapters.

In Chapter 3, I attend to the investigative paradigms and methodologies for this study. Using a qualitative approach, I focus on devising and operating the investigative tool, which is a semi-structured questionnaire that is designed to elicit information on motivation issues faced during the course, and the details of the students’ experiences of the enabling-designed SBC arrangement as a means of overcoming them. My participants are not only students, but also SBCs and Pamoja staff: the SBCs due to their motivator role, and the Pamoja staff due to their observations on how the motivators work. Chapter 3 also presents the ethical issues of the study, and how I have sought to address them.
Chapter 4 presents the results, analysis, and evaluative discussion of the findings of the study.

Chapter 5 draws the conclusions from the study. It considers the contribution that the findings of the research has made, and how those findings may inform the nature of provision and policy of online providers of education at pre-tertiary level. The stakeholders concerned are education authorities, online providers of online education, schools, and students where they have the choice. It also considers this study’s limitations and how, in following up this work, they may be resolved.

I therefore proceed via the literature review to present the framework to identify and examine the motivation issues involved in online learning in secondary education in general and at the Pamoja, pre-tertiary scenario in particular. The arguments in the ensuing discussion have the purpose of informing the context in which the SBC motivation-enabler system operates, and the importance of the purpose of this research: assessing how effective the SBC motivating element of the Pamoja model is.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction: setting, scope, and sequence

In the previous chapter, I put forward my observation that Pamoja’s distribution of the end-of-course achievement levels of their online students in IB Economics has been academically comparable with those taught by conventional instruction. I also outlined the nature of that provider’s practice of its school services department working together with a member of the students’ school staff, the SBC (site-based coordinator), according to its structured guidelines. The aforementioned prompted me to speculate that the online Pamoja-SBC-student triangle support system, already introduced as the OPM (online partnership model), may be a crucial factor that sustains and develops students motivation, whose impact and results may be reflected by the end-of-course IB-awarded grades of students taught online rivaling those of students taught by conventional instruction. It was this conjecture that has prompted me to investigate whether that indeed is the case: how effective is Pamoja’s practice in working with SBCs in motivating the learning process in the online study mode?

As already introduced in Chapter 1, the literature in this chapter is focused on evidencing the phenomenon of the more general practice of the school faculty supporting the motivation of online students in the capacity of online facilitator, a role that has “emerged as important adult support to the… online learner” who is typically present in the classroom (Agostinelli, 2019, p.21).
However, the degree that specifically SBCs whose specific role is not tied down to the classroom do support and sustain student motivation at Pamoja is not known this stage. Supporting motivation per se is not even explicit in the Pamoja SBC job description, which details their input under three headings: monitoring student progress, building and maintaining communication channels, and promoting independent learning (Pamoja Education, SBC Job Description, p.2). However, the role of SBCs in sustaining motivation appears to underpin all three: the monitoring element motivating through student need to be accountable directly to the school and more indirectly to Pamoja, the communication channels element enabling that monitoring and through it motivation, and the independent learning element promoting a suitable level of motivation that online students may work on their own.

Nevertheless, although the degree that SBCs assist online student motivation is unknown at this stage, the literature as will be discussed in this chapter does direct towards supporting the conjecture that SBC involvement in practice could have vital roles at a number of motivational levels, whose more precise natures I explore in my research which is documented and discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

And even at this early stage, the OPM model initially proposed on the basis of Pamoja’s SBC situation may be more generalized as being suitable for embracing learning situations broadly similar to Pamoja: online learning scenarios where an outside body provides the learning program, and the school (whether on its own initiative or encouraged by the online provider) endeavors to supports the student’s motivation in regularly engaging and progressing in it. Thus within the OPM model, it is important to observe that the school faculty’s support of students studying online is not a practice that is exclusive to Pamoja. It is this broad commonality with
similarly-administered online programs that enables the literature on this phenomenon to inform the scenario that I am investigating. The literature, as we shall see, does indicate that on-site facilitator support from the school’s faculty for students studying online is fairly widespread in the secondary-school online educational world, including at pre-tertiary level. It is these other and more-researched scenarios that feature OPM-similar though not identically-designed structures with the objective of supporting online student motivation.

This chapter has three foci.

Firstly, to review the literature on the role of the school’s online facilitator in promoting and in sustaining student motivation, in order to present the contours of what is known about the role of on-site facilitator as motivator. Though there have been many academically well-supported models of motivation that may be applied to online study at secondary school level, I have chosen to frame the findings contained in the literature within self-determination theory (SDT) due to its complex and all-embracing nature with the capacity to accommodate the anticipated different categories of online student motivators with which the online facilitator (and in the case of Pamoja, the SBC) would interact.

Secondly, given the potential range of motivating services indicated in the literature, how far does Pamoja’s OPM support their being provided for Pamoja online students? What are the bases for conjecturing that the Pamoja OPMs may be providing such motivating services? Is there evidence in the literature on Pamoja for the extent that this may be happening?

Finally, and on the strength of the above, the chapter seeks to identify gaps in the relevant literature. These gaps are the uninvestigated areas for which this case study could supply
evidence, in examining and assessing the contribution that the SBCs, Pamoja’s on-site facilitators, might be making towards motivating students. It is the evidence generated from these areas within the Pamoja experience that forms the basis of my research in investigating how effective Pamoja’s practice in working with SBCs is in motivating the learning process in the online study mode.

On a wider level, given that the evidence does inform on Pamoja’s using the OPM model as being crucial and pivotal to student success, this research has the potential of indicating directions for the introduction and use of various on-site facilitator practices that may successfully and consistently motivate online education at pre-tertiary level; to the degree that it could be as effective a provider of positive educational outcomes as conventional instruction in terms of the final examination results and the educational experiences leading to them.

It should be pointed out at this stage that the evidence marshaled in this chapter is chiefly based within the relatively small field of pre-university education and has tended to avoid input from the much larger field of tertiary education. In taking that line, I based my approach on the argument exemplified by Kennedy and Ferdig (2018) claiming that the difference between adult and younger learners brings uncertainly in applying findings in tertiary education to younger students.

2.2 Student motivation and the role of the on-site facilitator

I proceed to examine literature on the nature of online students’ motivators when operating at their most effective levels, the challenges those students face in realizing them and maintaining
them, and the ways in which on-site facilitators may assist. I seek to do that by bearing in mind that online learning at pre-university level is rapidly evolving and yet to reach its full potential (Borup and Kennedy, 2017). As presented in the next section (2.2.1), I introduce and then employ the framework of SDT as applied to studying online for its potential in accommodating the range of motivating elements and issues as expanded in the next section, and then move on to consider the evidence provided by research studies on the different means in which online facilitators might interact in motivating positive outcomes for the students. In the next section (2.2.2), I move from the potential to the actual: in what ways does the literature itself actually evidence the motivating work of on-site facilitators, so that it may in turn inform the supportive role of the SBCs?

2.2.1 Introducing SDT (self-determination theory) as theoretically applied to online learning.

I proceed to introduce SDT at this level with two objectives. Firstly, to present the three psychological motivational dimensions that need to be satisfied in optimizing motivation, each of which in turn identifies possible ways in which SBCs are able to support motivation. Secondly, to place the wide range of motivators likely to operate in the Pamoja VLE situation within a coherent theoretical framework. And in using SDT, I have borne in mind that its designers Edward Deci and Richard Ryan have incorporated considerable development of the original SDT in the 1980s based on subsequent research, and I am therefore basing this section chiefly on their developed 2020 version of the theory, which I consider below.
Self-determination involves a quality of human functioning that embraces “behaviors… initiated and regulated by choices… awareness of one's… needs and integrated goals” (Deci and Ryan 1985, p.149), with applications to many areas in life including education. It is a macro-theory applicable to endeavors in human behavior that considers individuals as being active organisms that by nature strive to interact with their environments through proactively tackling challenges with view to their outcomes, which they desire. SDT holds that healthy psychological development occurs where individuals feel that they are sustained in the basic psychological needs related to those challenges, and that motivation can be damaged when suitable support is not present (Ryan, Ryan, Di Domenico, and Deci, 2019).

These psychological domains are needs for autonomy, need for competence, and need for relatedness. Autonomy involves a sense of personal initiative in one’s actions, and a personal sense of owning that action rather than it being a product of an outside determinant (Ryan and Deci, 2020). People feel autonomous in situations where they can take the initiative, make personal important choices, and feel congruent with their actions and values (Lynch et al., 2020). That autonomy can in turn be supported by experiences that are valuable and interesting. Competence involves sense of being able to succeed, achieve mastery, and attain desired outcomes which can be supported by challenges that are suitably demanding, and with encouraging feedback. Relatedness involves a sense of “belonging and connection” (ibid), which can be promoted with the sense that one matters as an individual, that one is part of a community that cares. Motivation may well be thwarted when one or more of these psychological needs are not met.
Striving to achieve levels of performance within the extremely wide range of human endeavors of which consistent participation in VLE setups exemplified by Pamoja is just one, is likely to interact and be powered by a wide range of specific motivators which *in toto* can fall within all those three domains, as introduced in the next paragraphs. However, within autonomy competence and relatedness, the range of motivations that students could bring to their work and that may need to be supported can be both extrinsic and intrinsic.

Intrinsic motivation, as shown in Figure 3 showing SDT’s taxonomy of motivation, is entirely internal, related to activities done for their own sake or for their inherent interested and enjoyment (Ryan and Deci, 2020). In online study, it would include motives that are personally internal as coming from the student, such as interest in the course, interest in employing the tools of the online environment, being able to decide when and where to interact, personal satisfaction in mastering elements of the course, and enjoying the sense of feeling at home in the online community. Although some Pamoja VLE students may be able to identify with those intrinsic motivators, is unlikely that the motivators for course participation fall entirely under the intrinsic motivation heading.
Figure 3: Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self determination theory perspective.


In contrast, extrinsic motivators are elements that drive behaviors that are done for reasons other than inherent satisfaction (ibid). These not only include the influence of reward and punishment, which would be purely externally regulated, but the somewhat but not completely external introjected regulation: extrinsically-motivated behavior that has been partially internalized, such as the ego seeking to gain approval from teachers and peers and avoiding the sense of negative self esteem though under-performance.

Though the desire to sense approval from the school and online teacher may be among the motivators of Pamoja students, they could well be more volitional, characterized by identified regulation whereby the individual feels motivated out of personally valuing the activity; an element that is still extrinsically-motivated, but more internally than externally driven. In the
Pamoja case, that could arise out of the student’s choice to study Economics online, and as a crucial part of the overall plan to obtain a good IB diploma with an eye on a desired place at university. Extrinsic motivators further extend to integrated regulation, where the motivation is internal, for example the student is studying the subject out of interest with a feeling of its being congruent with core values and interests such as valuing an understanding of Economics, but does not qualify as intrinsic motivation as the studying is not based purely on interest and enjoyment, but on a sense of value: the work being worthwhile even if not enjoyable.

Having considered the framework of SDT as applied to online study at Pamoja, we proceed to consider how SBCs could support Pamoja’s VLE students in the areas of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

**SBC potential in autonomy support**

Autonomy needs satisfaction in the VLE is vital so that the students can avoid frustration by being able to self-direct their participation in the learning process as its setup gives the students the choice of where and when to interact, as long as, in the Pamoja case, required weekly quotas are completed to the Tuesday midnight deadline. As explained below, lack of autonomy needs satisfaction can theoretically frustrate all Pamoja students, irrespective of whether they have been intrinsically internally motivated into studying the program out of interest in Economics at one extreme, or out of the introjected-regulation-motivated desire to obtain approval from teachers, peers, and the examination system, but with limited interest in Economics at the other extreme. Conversely, as Deci and Ryan evidence in a specifically educational (though not
specifically VLE) context, autonomy-supportive strategies are likely to foster improved quality engagement, performance, and experiences on the program. Autonomy motivational support that a school (and by extension, a SBC in the Pamoja setting) may provide include listening to students, acknowledging signs of improvement and mastery, offering progress-enabling advice when students seem to be stuck, acknowledging students’ experiences and perspectives, and being responsive to students’ questions and comments (Ryan and Deci, 2017). In addition, it may be claimed that the second and third type of support could support competence, and the final two could support relatedness.

The roles of such autonomy support for VLE students facing the need to achieve the necessary autonomy, including the essential control of the learning environment making it possible to strike out successfully in this area, was identified as a key function of an on-site facilitator together with assisting students in developing fluency in online skills (Harms et al., 2006). This point is supported with the findings of later studies such as de la Varre, Keane, and Irvin (2011), which supported the reality that the online facilitator at pre-university level may well be suited for this task due to possibility of previous teaching experience with the student prior to taking on that role.

In addition, the online student’s autonomy could be challenged with difficulties in handling asynchronous communication from the online provider (Hartnett, 2015), and where the pressing deadlines (ibid.) of other commitments may push the online routines, tasks, and timeframes to second place (de la Varre et al, 2014); situations which can severely reduce the sense of autonomy when facing backlogs spiraling out of control, and one that requires a high level of self-direction and internal (viz. internally-motivated, both extrinsic and intrinsic) motivation to
avoid (Schott et al., 2003). This can be exacerbated with the sense that the course provider is, unlike the school, a relatively remote entity, and even further when students are required to work with other online students within that community who do not contribute sufficiently (Van Etten et al., 2008, in the more general context of group assignments), thus interfering with individual student autonomy, as well as the competence and relatedness discussed below. In addition, Moore (2007) explains that there is a need for support to enable the student to exercise higher levels of autonomy in online than in face-to-face learning scenarios as it could well involve a sense of distance (and possibly ambivalence) towards the online provider and towards that online environment. Moreover, there is a possible that suitable online facilitator guidance could also ease the student towards the autonomy of being able to develop a realistic plan to fit in the online component with its aforementioned possible autonomy-challenging shortcomings without jeopardizing other parts of the workload. Though I have encountered many IB students who complain regularly about work overload, I have not found any study in the pre-tertiary literature that directly considers it as a threat to student autonomy. It thus appears to be unknown how the online facilitator may support the students’ autonomy in balancing the workload within which the online studies form a vital component. This warrants the case for further investigation: a gap that I intend to address on the basis of evidence found in the data of this study.

At Pamoja, the SBCs can access updated information on the students’ progress and engagement levels. This facility might well provide a window into the autonomy the students are exercising as they are given access to their course engagement levels, which are rated as ‘engaged’ ‘insufficiently engaged’ and ‘not engaged’, as well as their assignment-by-assignment progress.
To what effect and to what extent they actively use information from that source to motivationally guide students is an unknown that I intend to investigate in this study. This is important, as being insufficiently engaged might be a red flag for difficulties in exercising the autonomy required for regular course participation.

**SBC potential in competence support**

Competence involves feeling confident that a particular task can be achieved, feeling effective in being able to interact with the environment (in this case, the VLE) and extend and exercise one’s capacities (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Like autonomy, competence needs satisfaction in the VLE is vital so that the students can avoid frustration arising out of not being able to understand and relate to the often complex course concepts and skills with consequent under-achievement in assignments, tests, and examinations. As with lack of autonomy, lack of competence can frustrate all students, irrespective of whether they have been intrinsically, internally motivated into studying the program out of interest in Economics at one extreme, or out of the introjected-regulation-motivated desire to obtain approval from teachers, peers, and the examination system, but with limited interest in Economics at the other extreme.

In terms of online study in Pamoja-type environments, information on competency levels may well be indicated through patterns of academic achievement and performance in handling, for example, previously unseen scenarios in the online summative assessment and test situations. Like engagement levels, the student’s achievement levels in all assignments are readily accessible to SBCs at Pamoja. Less-than-reassuring achievement levels, whether for
assignments, tests, or summative term grades, could be reflecting student difficulties in being able to meet the course’s specifically academic requirements, which in turn may be addressed by SBC support in ways that can help the student to build competence.

The sense or lack of sense of competence, this second key element of psychological self-determination whereby the student finds it challenging to effectively bring their learning skills to the VLE environment and its proffered subject material, may be argued to be twofold.

Firstly, competency in handling the material itself, as exemplified by online Economics. Economics’ complex conceptual content at this level regularly challenges students and their teachers in the formal classroom environment, particularly when applying its principles to real life situations (Strober, Cook, and Fuller, 1997); a dimension that is fundamental to the IB program in that subject (IBO Economics Guide 2013, p.7). Such problems arising from difficulties in comprehending and suitably applying the material are likely to be exacerbated in the asynchronous online setting where the teacher and colleagues are not instantly available, and indeed the student might well perceive the online teacher as a relatively remote figure (Borup, Chambers, and Stimson 2019; Borup, Graham, and Drysdale 2014).

Secondly and more generally, competency in handling the Pamoja-type environment where all materials are online requires a degree of proficiency in the specialized online learning skills (Harms et al., 2006): online coordination especially when working with the blogs, wikis, and discussions connected to the theory and application of the material prescribed week by week. As Lowes and Lin (2015, p.18) expressed in their research that included Pamoja, online students do “not only need to learn a subject online, but need to learn how to learn online”. Indeed, learning and applying the computer skills specific to the online learning platform are not necessarily the
same as used in the more familiar “living” social and leisure environment; these skills do not always transfer automatically (Hosein et al, 2010). For example, feeling comfortable using email does not imply expertise in rigorous online discussion (Kirkwood and Price, 2005). Thus the developing of routines for support from the online community, including instructors, peers, and technical assistance (Mills, 2003) depends on the competence as well as the confidence of the individual student. At the instructor level, that can include regular constructive feedback using an informational style that can enhance student’s perceptions of competence in the area of study within the framework that progress is being consistently monitored for engagement and performance (Reeve and Jang 2006, Xi et al. 2006). Those involved with instructing the course, as well as the general social and cultural environment experienced by the student (Jarvela, 2001) to which suitable on-site facilitator guidance could richly contribute, may or may not supply the ‘nutrients’ for the development of a sense of competence.

The SBC/on-site facilitator input in the above scenario might well vary from individual to individual in tackling the range of issues faced by different students, in terms of pre-existing knowledge, conceptual understanding, and needs in coming to terms with the content and procedures of the online environment, as, to quote from the pre-online learning age, it is “unlikely that one single medium is best fitted to perform all the functions of learning” (Gagne 1970, abstract). This same could well be the case in online study: it is unlikely that course materials at any level, however sophisticated in multimedia presentation, are tailored to individual student in terms of the needs and pre-existing knowledge of the individual student (Segedin et al., 2018; Gagne, 1970), indicating a gap in the literature on the function and range of skills that the SBC/on-site facilitator needs to apply at the individual level. It follows that student competence issues in handling online material may be more readily identified by the
more physically-proximate presence of the on-site facilitator than by the online teacher, as the former’s detailed knowledge of the student can assist in finding ways of coming to terms with them. The online facilitator might also help students to enhance meaning (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski, 2000) in their work; being able to fit in the subject matter and study routines into their existing perspectives in values, where it fits in to what they already know and have experienced, which in turn can support needs satisfaction, and help the students to manage anxieties which can adversely affect motivation to study in this way (Reeve, 2009). Thus creating those links in the students’ minds can help students develop a sense of self-efficacy whereby online they can successfully master the concepts and carry out the tasks, attributing any less-than-encouraging experiences to elements within their control (Hartnett, 2018).

**SBC potential in relatedness support**

Relatedness needs satisfaction in the VLE is vital so that the students feel connected with the virtual environment in terms of human relationships, by feeling linked to others in that setting (ibid.), and through absorbing ‘‘nutrients” (Chen and Jang 2010, p.743) from the social interactions that provide support for relatedness as well as for autonomy and competence. In the Pamoja VLE situation, unlike autonomy and competence, relatedness may well be less crucial to the situation of intrinsically, internally motivated students who have already developed their own self-sustaining sense of relatedness, stemming from their interest and enthusiasm for Economics. But in contrast, relatedness could be a crucial element in influencing the level of motivation of a student that is participating out of motivations that are extrinsic, such as the introjected-
regulation-motivated desire to obtain approval from teachers, peers, and the examination system, but with limited interest in Economics at the other extreme.

In the Pamoja setting, the need for relatedness may be indicated to the SBC indirectly, through the online student’s pattern of interactions in course activities (such as group assignments and online classes using the Zoom facility built into the Pamoja platform) with the Pamoja course instructor and fellow online participants. Lack of interaction in such activities may indicate that the student is missing out on relatedness-supporting activities. However, these elements will typically be virtual as they involve participants in other schools and even on other continents. The SBC on the other hand is known personally to the student, and may well have been long before starting the course. It is quite likely that the student has a positive working relationship with the SBC whose very support reinforces the student as being a familiar element in an otherwise strange and relatively intangible situation.

In addition, the sense of relatedness in its SDT-defined sense would involve the student’s relationships with people; those connected with Pamoja including the online course teacher, fellow online-students, and more proximately, the on-site facilitator in the capacity of SBC. It may be claimed that the latter’s input could well assist the student when facing issues in working proactively and effectively to achieve these ideals in an environment that the students sense as being virtual rather than real. This can include establishing inclusion (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski, 2000), whereby students and teachers feel respected and connected to each other; feelings of belonging and connection via interaction in online environments have been shown to have a positive motivational effect on learners (Xie et al., 2006). As soon considered in more detail in this chapter, the literature indicates that promoting inclusion is typically harder for the online
teacher than for the on-site facilitator teacher to establish, even though the on-site facilitator will be less likely to have the course content expertise than the online teacher. Even so, we do not know whether in the case of Pamoja, the interaction between students and their online teacher and SBC are similar in nature or whether they tend towards characteristics of their own, and if so, how those characteristics might vary. Thus, the course on-site facilitator with an even rudimentary working understanding of the structure of the course content and the working of the course platform may well have the relatedness connection that can effectively assist the student navigate when issues arise out of, for example, having to face misunderstandings of what is being discussed and thus consider the course of action to take (Hartnett, 2018).

In support, there is evidence that where basic relatedness needs are satisfied, individuals become more assured and self-determined. For example the work of Ryan, Stiller, and Lynch (1994) found that children internalize their school’s extrinsic regulations when they feel secure and cared for by parents and teachers: that their needs are being supported. The same may be argued as applying to on-site facilitators, which, as we shall see, is an example of a teacher figure interacting with student motivation at both a class level and an individual level. To this end, in the field of online study, the on-site facilitator framework has been claimed to have the strengths of enabling “researchers to examine the mechanism through which contextual factors, such as instructor behaviors or social interactions, enhance or dampen motivation of online learners” as well as improving strategies for online learner support (Chen and Jang 2010, p.743).

Moreover, the on-site facilitator may redress the probability that students may more readily associate formal learning with the face-to-face that the SBCs afford rather than with the online environment, especially given indications that not all teachers fully accept the value and
legitimacy of online education (Picciano and Seaman, 2009), although this is likely to be less true following its wider use in the Covid era.

In the specific context of the research of Pamoja Education’s practice of working together with SBCs in enabling online study, relatedness could be extended to embrace relevance: the importance of this program to the student’s overall academic curriculum. It may well be a strong motivating force in that the student, having already decided to study for the IB diploma, would be more likely to see success in Economics studied online as a vital contributor to the final overall score; arguably an extrinsic, external identified regulation motivator as well. This contrasts with the situation of many school-level courses which may be perceived in being part of a less tightly coherent curriculum: which may well be reflected in the reality that they have lower pass rates and standardized test scores that similar material covered by conventional instruction (Heppen et al., 2017). In addition, the choice to study online may have been in a situation when other Humanities subjects were available, but rejected by the student in favor of studying Economics online and as such, feeling a member of the Economics community, and the Pamoja community: motivation thus having an element of integrated as well as identified regulation. The experience of having the school support, at best with a suitable SBC, could well reinforce the student’s sense that he or she is not studying online “on the side”, but that the online component is related in being a crucial part of the student’s integrated IB Diploma program.

Thus the student deciding to study online at Pamoja is embarking on online study in a position that relates to a personal academic situation where the stakes are high: failure in Economics
means failure in the entire IB Diploma program, and a lower level of pass could jeopardize a coveted place at university.

Deci and Ryan argue that teacher motivation in the context of schools (and could apply by extension to SBC motivation) becomes undermined under the pressure of high stakes testing, arguing that education should have broader objectives than academic achievement and should include the intellectual and personal flourishing of students (Ryan and Deci, 2017), an approach typified by studies such as Mulvedon, Stegman and Ritter (2005) that argue that an environment dominated by high stakes testing is likely to counter-motivate rather than motivate. It may, however, be argued that the ‘relatedness nature’ of the high stakes of the IB are not counter, but pro-extrinsically motivating, given that students that follow that program are likely to be particularly motivated at identification regulation level, in seeing the value of the entire program as an essential stage towards quality prospects in higher education and future career. This possibility is conjecture at this stage, which I will revisit in Chapters 4 and 5 in the analysis and discussion of the data.

On having considered the nature of psychological motivators of autonomy, competence, and relatedness that may operate in the VLE in general, I move towards considering the roles that they could play in the specifically Pamoja student scenario. At this stage, it might be conjectured that within the SBC’s potential interaction in the Pamoja environment, the access to information on student autonomy levels that Pamoja gives them would indicate the extent, at different stages in the program, that the students are suitably managing their time and energies for online study. On the basis of such data and pre-existing professional experience of the student, SBCs could
advise suitable strategies for supported autonomy of student progress where issues and trends of unease do arise. SBCs might also put similar strategies into place for areas of concern within the competence dimension, which would also vary at different stages in the program, especially when students face difficult new concepts and assignments, as well as before and in the wake of important tests and examinations. Relatedness levels would consider the third dimension of their experience with Pamoja: do they feel that they belong and are enjoying some attachment or at least rapport with other people involved in the program, including online teachers, fellow online students, and SBCs? SBCs might well be able to bridge the gap where student find the VLE as a strange situation in its requirements for fitting in with an online teacher and fellow students that are geographically and socially beyond the familiar school community.

It should be observed that the SBC role and skillset-to-be-applied is not precisely the same in all aspects of motivation. The SBC is likely to be applying pastoral skills in supporting autonomy and relatedness motivators, whereas those used in motivating competence that involves the content and concepts of the subject are likely to be closer to academic skills. Pamoja’s guidelines, as I detail later in this chapter, stress skills that are pastoral rather than academic. Whether in practice this limits the support SBCs can give students, and whether such limitations are indeed desirable is something that needs to be explored.

At best, the Pamoja student would be putting in an autonomous, self-managed consistent application, reaching a highly-reassuring competence level of understanding and achievement together with a sense of encouragement to continue at the same or even higher performance level, and relatedness-wise feeling fully functional and regarded by those connected with the online community. And that would be supported by identified regulation extrinsic motivators
such as desire to achieve high grades at the end of the course: the high stakes argument. A student condition fitting those descriptors may be the ideal, but is unlikely to be the case all the time with any one student. It is, in conclusion to this section, the gaps between those ideals and the student’s current performance that the SBC could support the student in tackling, and whose scope and efficacy we can consider later on in this chapter.

It may well follow from this conjecture that, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, serious lack of any one of these psychological needs could derail success in online study. It also follows that the potential exists for on-site facilitators to support students’ shortcomings in one or more of them, and also to prevent them from becoming problems in the first place. For though SDT recognizes a general level that people are proactive with a natural desire to maximize their potential towards growth, development, and integrated functioning, it also accepts that the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are not realized automatically (e.g. Ryan and Deci 2020; Vansteenkiste et al, 2004), and may indeed be thwarted where contextual support (in this case, from the on-site facilitator) is lacking.

Having discussed the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators to which on-site facilitators on an ongoing basis can nurture and develop, I proceed to consider the evidenced forms such in-school support in self-determination in online study may take, and the evidence of the influence that they have in student performance.
2.2.2 Online students’ progress: the contribution of online facilitators in assisting motivation in online study

Having considered possible ways in which SBCs might support student motivation in the VLE, in what ways does the literature itself actually evidence the work of on-site facilitators, so that it may in turn inform the supportive role of the SBCs?

Though the use of online learning has expanded alongside online technology, my surveying the literature on online learning indicates that it has been continuing to lag behind its growth, a claim made by Barbour (2010). This seems to be particularly true for online learning at high school level (Rice 2006). Within this relatively small field of literature, little has been indicated about how on-site facilitators work to support online students, and how students perceive the support provided by their on-site facilitators (Borup, Chambers and Stimson, 2019). This is despite the increasingly frequent practice of schools providing their students who are enrolled in online courses with an on-site facilitator who regularly interacts with the students (Borup and Stimson, 2019; Borup and Drysdale, 2014). The purpose of this section is review existing studies on the work of on-site facilitators in order to consider the extent that they inform and create a context for this study whose focus is on how far practices within the Pamoja SBC scenario as presented within the OPM model may enhance student psychological motivators and thus progress in the virtual learning environment.

I have kept this part of the literature review to schools, and as far as discernable to the literature on high schools, though that has not always been possible when considering relevant research that embraces the entire school spectrum, extended from kindergarten to the end of secondary school including the final two pre-tertiary years, referred in the United States as K-12.
(kindergarten to final year 12; equivalent to year 13 in the UK). I have done this in order to avoid the problems involved in transferring findings about one age group to another. For this reason, I have not focused on research in higher education even though Pamoja students are age-wide closer to tertiary education than to most of the K-12 population. But in contrast to tertiary education, pre-tertiary students are unlikely to have first-hand experience of university routines and the higher levels of responsibility in organizing their work. Rather, they have been spending nearly all their years in the various stages of the K-12 environment, with the IB program taking place in a setting and within a school establishment that is likely to be shared with younger, but not older students.

In the overall K-12 scenario, the majority of students who study online enroll in only one or two online courses to supplement their more traditional face-to-face programs of study (Watson et al., 2013, in the US context). This parallels Pamoja, which currently offers IB component subjects online, but not the entire IB Diploma program. But despite the program supplier being outside the school, it is the on-site facilitator, and in the case of Pamoja the SBC, that brings the online study further within the orbit of the school.

For while building relationships with the online teacher has been critical, the findings of Borup and Stimson (2019) indicate that on-site facilitators more easily developed relationships with students, partially because they shared the same school culture and attended the same extracurricular events. The earlier research of de la Varre, Keane and Irvin (2011) indicates that student support is maximized where on-site facilitators coordinate their work with online teachers, with the work of one being designed to complement the work of the other. That is at least theoretically the practice at Pamoja, whereby both the online teacher and the SBC are meant
to carry out different, but complementary Pamoja-defined roles, with both working in conjunction with the Pamoja School Services staff.

The practice of creating a triangle OPM-type (online partnership model described in Chapter 1) arrangement whereby the school proactively supports the online work of the students by assigning a faculty mentor figure is not new, but has its roots in the pre-Internet correspondence courses that would send learning materials to the school and thus relate to students within the context of their schools (Russell, 2004). It has been continuing to evolve in virtual form. As we shall see, the research later in this chapter indicating the prevalence of students asking on-site facilitators rather than online teachers for help in even content issues rather than in just how to manage in online learning indicates how essential and pivotal their roles are. As Lowes and Lin (2015) summarize, online learning can be especially difficult for students where they are simultaneously attempting to master the content and learn how to learn online. As a result, such students require strong support systems in order to be successful in online study, which are likely to include the input of the on-site facilitator.

The importance of the on-site facilitator’s role may be exemplified in the research of de la Varre, Keane, and Irvin (2011) which drew attention to pre-tertiary support in online studies at Advanced Placement (AP) level* (US-based pre-tertiary-level external subject-based examinations by which high school students may obtain college credits, and unlike Pamoja has many online course providers), whereby facilitators have to help students to handle issues of autonomy and competence. As Moore (1980, p.29) stated, “a learner cannot learn effectively if the educational transaction demands more autonomy than he is able to exercise”. While Moore

* Designed broadly for the same age and ability range as the IB Diploma, based on my experience of teaching Economics at both AP and IB levels.
was writing of autonomy over the conventional learning path, the same could be applied in the Internet Age to students’ ability to exercise autonomy over their online learning place, time, and pace (Borup, Chambers and Stimson, 2019). In the above researched example of AP online, it included the creation of strategies to avoid the possible demotivating elements of being overwhelmed by the psychological needs for support in competence and autonomy: situations where students find themselves facing the content rigor of the program and the grading, the time taken to get used to the virtual environment, the lack of face-to-face communication, and the absence of immediate response and feedback from the online teacher. All this was despite AP students being among their school’s high achievers. And the extent to which the on-site facilitators took responsibility for the social, organizational, and technical areas of the course depended on their learner-centeredness, professional training, perception of the facilitator role, and the needs and characteristics of their students.

Subsequent research has found that students fail to persist in online learning courses for several reasons that span the desire for needs satisfaction in sustaining motivation in online learning, which promote student autonomy, student competence, and in the case of lack of motivation, even student relevance. These include facing rigorous academic standards, lack of motivation per se, technological problems, and a lack of teacher immediacy (de la Varre et al. 2014). These challenges are compounded by students’ low self-regulation and meta-cognitive abilities, which can make it especially difficult for them to learn and persist in a highly autonomous learning environment lacking face-to-face student-instructor interactions (Cavanaugh et al., 2007; Rice, 2006). It is these issues that on-site facilitators may well be able to address, and I proceed to discuss evidence from the literature for the range of ways and with what effect they do so. I do so in the context of the already-presented arguments in SDT: the psychological motivator domains
of autonomy support, competence support, and relatedness support, and the extrinsic motivators. With each in mind, I consider the contributions of the literature to five different means of supporting student motivation in the VLE environment. Although all but the last one have already been mentioned, they need to be revisited in their capacity as being supported by research studies rather than theory. These are:

(a) Upskilling students for autonomy

(b) Supplementing instruction for competence

(c) Proximity

(d) Personal working relationship

(e) Training for on-site facilitators

**Upskilling students for autonomy**

As the research of Lowes and Lin (2015, p.18) focused on Pamoja indicated, online courses are especially challenging for adolescents because “students not only need to learn a subject online but need to learn how to learn online”. This can threaten students’ needs satisfaction regardless of the nature and level of motivation the students originally brought to the course. It is being able to learn online that can support the autonomy-level-determined self-regulation that the student needs in order to successfully interact with VLE setting’s realities. Being thwarted in this area is likely to overwhelm students irrespective of their particular motivators. It is also competence in
the basic skills that is required to effectively access and interact with the course content, concepts, and assignments. Thus getting accustomed to the VLE may be argued as being a skill-set that the online learner needs to develop as a pre-requisite for regular, sustained online study. For students used to the classroom and library, but unaccustomed to the online scenario as a setting for study have an additional challenge of learning to learn that way, of acquiring the skills to study online. While learning the actual course content can prove challenging, more frequently it appears that it is the flexible nature of online learning that is very difficult for students at school who tend to lack self-regulation abilities (Rice, 2006), very likely leading to decreased motivation due to perceived lack of autonomy. To that end, Roblyer et al. (2007, p.11, quoted in Borup, Chambers and Stimson, 2019) explain: “Students’ ability to handle distance education courses appears to depend more on motivation, self-direction, or the ability to take responsibility for individual learning”. As a result, they claim, many students fail online courses, not because they cannot learn the course content but because they may have support needs that are challenging their being motivated to exercise their autonomy with consistency. These have to be satisfied in order for the student to apply necessary self-determination to the course materials, concepts, and tasks, which in the case of Economics at IB level as in many other programs of learning, become increasingly complex week-by-week.

In the light of this argument, it follows that the online facilitator would have a vital role in supporting student mastery of working with the VLE, including the competence-demanding technicalities of the online platform and the autonomy-demanding optimum self-regulation of online study time. Whilst not forgetting that different providers do give induction programs for students to learn and practice the necessary skills before tackling the course content; a point that I return to later on in this chapter in the context of Pamoja, research exemplified by Harms et al.,
(2006) indicates that in practice, coaching students towards fully-effective online skills forms part of the work of the online facilitator. This would include addressing the gaps between the skills that the student managed to acquire from the online provider and the level where the student senses the security that prompts the psychological motivators of autonomy and competence needed to regularly deal with the system and its routines. In addition, it may be claimed that supervisory support from on-site facilitators may well promote the disciplined atmosphere (Staker, 2011) where students seeking to learn those skills are less likely to have to deal with distracting and ultimately motivation-sapping elements from less-involved students in the same room. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the online facilitator is likely to know the student personally, potentially enhancing intrinsic motivation at the relatedness level; people with such roles being seen as problem solver, mentor, and friend (Borup and Stimson, 2019). They are therefore likely to find themselves being approached by students for assistance in dealing with the mechanics and protocols of the VLE with which they are familiarizing themselves, especially when as on-site facilitators they are also responsible for operating the access to and use of technology (Keane et al., 2008).

In addition, on-site facilitators may also support self-generating relatedness, by initially motivating students to become involved with the course online community including the online course teacher, whereby course participants develop the skills and the confidence to “project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as ‘real people’” (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999, p.89). This, highlighted by the more recent research of Thomas, West and Borup (2017), makes use of asynchronous audio and video media as well as text to that end. And in this process, Garrison et al. (above) argues that teaching presence (which in this case is the on-site facilitator) is the crucial element for this
to happen, viewing it the “binding element” of the framework (p. 96): a claim that also links with the second contribution of on-site facilitators: that the students engage regularly with the course.

Supplementing instruction for competence

The literature seems to indicate the existence of two streams of thought: should on-site facilitators confine themselves to pastorally supporting the environment and motivation that enable the student to independently make the most of the program and resources set by the online provider? Or should they also be ready to academically assist the students to master the material, as they would in a conventionally-taught class lesson? Taken a step further, should school involvement ideally include support in mastering the course content from a school subject specialist rather than non-subject specialist acting as online facilitator?

This question is particularly applicable to the area that I address in my case study: the role of the SBC in supporting and sustaining motivation for competence in understanding Economics within Pamoja’s VLE. Irrespective of the nature of motivations that the students initially bring to the program: whether predominantly introjected regulation, identified regulation, integrated regulation, or even intrinsic motivation, it may be conjectured that students studying Economics are particularly likely to need academic support unlike students studying many other online courses for the following two reasons:
(a) Economics is likely to be an initially unfamiliar subject as relatively few schools teach Economics below this level*. Students choosing Economics may feel more vulnerable as they are unlikely to bring grounding from previous subjects studied. This can immediately raise apprehensions in being able to achieve the competence to master the course content: a situation where face-to-face subject-specialist on-site facilitator can address immediately, and with credibility.

(b) Economics taught at this level is considered to have a vertical subject structure (Young and Muller 2013; Bernstein 1999), its systematic theory being hierarchically organized. It follows that failure to achieve a working understanding of the rudimentary principles of Economics at the base of this vertical structure that is presented in the first few weeks will make subsequent progress in the more sophisticated topics extremely difficult, as those concepts continue to represent themselves in increasingly complex forms. Motivation towards successfully facing competence challenges in tackling new concepts of increasing sophistication may be more readily supported by a specialist on-site facilitator that personally knows the student than a member of the online faculty who is outside the school and is less likely to be readily available. However good the online textbook, material, and teacher may be, the student typically faces the reality of the lack of teacher immediacy (de la Varre et al. 2014).

Pamoja takes the first view, that subject specialism is not required or even desirable as quality in an SBCs in any of the fully-only courses that they offer. Its job description informs the SBCs that

* For example, for UK GCSE level in 2019 with the AQA, there were 2461 candidates who took Economics, compared with a very much higher 165,600 taking Geography and 90,378 taking History. The OCR had 3942 taking Economics, with 26,107 taking Geography, and 22,228 taking History. However, for the same examination session at A Level, comparable to the IB, the AQA had 12,415 taking Economics, with an only slightly more 13,162 taking Geography, and 22,689 taking History. Similar trends were present with the OCR: 3,100 taking Economics, compared with 4969 taking Geography, and 11,019 taking History.
their work involves ‘encouraging students to take ownership of their learning by supervising rather than tutoring, providing support in the creation of a term-time planner to promote effective time management’ (Pamoja Education, SBC Job Description, 2019, p.2). The words ‘rather than tutoring’ reflect the findings of Borup and Stimson (2019), whose study on the responsibilities of on-site facilitators in high school courses shows the reality that typically these adults are not acting in the capacity of subject specialists, but they are there to help the students attain the skills to progress though using the online materials rather than supplement those materials with their own inputs.

In support of Pamoja’s discouragement of SBC offering students report in mastering course content, there is support for the possibility that such intervention will be seen by online teachers as interfering and undermining their role. This may be exemplified by de la Varre, Keane, Irvin and Hannum (2011) whose research, in the context of online study in US rural high schools, found instances of tensions arising where online teachers felt that student support by facilitators was seriously adversarial to their own roles as online teachers in that they were protecting students from what in their perspectives were sub-optimal online teaching style, excessive work quotas, and over-severe assessment.

In contrast to the implications of Pamoja’s policy, the literature shows considerable support for the second view: that the ability of online facilitators to provide contextual, subject-specialist support can indeed support student motivation. Hendrix and Degner (2016) whose research focuses on US-based Advanced Placement online courses taken by a similar pre-tertiary age group, summarizes that although on-site facilitators are not expected to provide direct instruction, the reality is that some of them do: their being known to the student supporting
intrinsic motivation through relatedness, and their subject expertise supporting intrinsic motivation through competence. That is in line with the considerable degree of support for what seems to be at least de facto the second view; that on-site facilitators assisting in mastering online course content is fairly widespread, though in fairness this may be expected where the approach is blended and where the research involves younger learners. Thus Barbour and Hill (2011), in contrast to Pamoja guidelines recommended practice, observe that on-site facilitators frequently answer students’ content-related questions, which is supported by the more recent research of Oviatt, Graham, Davies and Borup (2018) that indicates the strong tendency of students turning to known teachers at their school rather than online teachers. The research of de la Varre, Keane and Irvin, (2011) goes further, indicating that online teachers underestimate the levels of direct instruction (and thus reducing the possibility of falling into demotivating backlogs on non-understood fundamental concepts) that on-site facilitators may provide. How prevalent the practice of SBCs assisting and thus motivating students in this way is in the case of Pamoja, despite that company’s recommendations to the contrary, we shall explore in later chapters on the basis of the self-reporting interviewing responses of students and Pamoja staff.

Despite Pamoja’s strong implication that facilitators should not engage in instructional content support on the grounds of motivating self-regulated learning, the research of Hendrix and Degner (2016) on pre-tertiary programs with similar objectives indicates that it is unlikely that on-site facilitators would stop instructing their students, especially where facilitators have developed close professional relationships them (which can support the relatedness dimension of psychological motivation), often long before they embarked on the course. In fact, several studies (Barbour and Hill, 2011; Barbour and Mulcahy, 2004; and O’Dwyer et al., 2007) point to the common practice of online students asking their on-site facilitators for tutoring help
irrespective of whether they have the content expertise necessary to teach the course. To that end, de la Varre et al. (2011) found that on-site facilitators not only engaged in instruction design and direct instruction, but would increase their tutoring activities or even attempt to interfere by modifying learning activities and due dates if they perceived weaknesses in the course itself or the course teacher.

Overall, the literature indicates evidence that on-site facilitators providing contextual, specialized, academic support towards motivating competence in online studying does occur. Whether this is the case at Pamoja despite its recommendations to the contrary, and if so, how effective it is in sustaining student motivation, should be investigated further.

**Supporting relatedness: proximity of the on-site facilitator**

It could well be that it is the physical proximity of the on-site facilitator that enables avenues of student support that would be normally out of the direct reach of the course provider. Such an argument would apply irrespective of initial motivation level of the student: sooner or later they are likely to be in a situation where they need help beyond what the online teacher can provide. Without students’ recourse to their on-site facilitators’ cooperation and assistance, online teachers would have few effective avenues to address student arrears in work and course participation.

One way their proximity can motivate towards regular engagement is extrinsically, by operating regular online laboratory periods scheduled in the school timetable and thus operationalize the relatedness motivational element: familiar school procedures supporting students working in a
relatively remote VLE. Online students who study regularly in a structured lab environment with an on-site facilitator are significantly more likely to pass their courses than students who have more flexibility in when and where they work; indeed the qualitative evidence included in the more recent research of Borup and Stimson (2019) points at regular lab time with students being a critical element of facilitators’ success. As one of that study’s interviewed students explained, in terms pointing to the facilitator functioning as an extrinsic motivator: “I think it’s important for you to have a set amount of time to work on your class. If you’re not a self-motivated person, then [lab time] is set right there for you. Maybe it’s not perfect for everybody. For me it’s really good.” Another reported: “The lab is good because you’re under the eyes of the facilitator and your fellow classmates. You just kind of feel the drive [that you] need to be working on it”. A third claimed that the lab atmosphere of work worked as a motivator: “Seeing other people doing their work makes you want to” (Borup and Stimson, 2019, p.39): this argument may be explained in motivation terms, with the sense of autonomy and competence, as well as relatedness motivators being prompted vicariously: with the student thinking along the lines of “If they can do it, I can. I’m not on my own; I belong to that community”.

This links to the next, associated way: the on-site facilitator presence can be an externally-regulated extrinsic motivator for the students to optimally engage, at least during the lab periods. Extrinsically motivating students at that level to more fully engage in learning activities is a key way that an on-site facilitator can support student progress in the VLE (Borup and Stimson, 2019). Though accepting that there are well-motivated and highly competent students that can be relied upon to work quite independently, the online facilitator respondents in Borup and Stimson’s high school-based study indicated that most students needed assistance from the school to keep on track. Extrinsic motivators of school discipline were indicated as being the
online teacher’s first line of structuring motivation, in making sure that students are as productive and successful as possible (ibid, p.41); in the Pamoja situation the SBCs’ position is enhanced as that company gives them full access to their students’ engagement records as well as achievement records. Teacher respondents in this study described their work as requiring skills ranging from cheerleader to drill sergeant. These included an assortment of externally-regulated extrinsic motivators including on one side, praise and privileges for those whose progress was encouraging, such as being excused from an online laboratory period if it was the first or last period in the timetable. For those with less satisfactory records there was extra time, variously referred to as academic detention, homework lab, with a special Saturday session in extremis. 

The report observes that frequently online teachers would contact on-site facilitators to ‘light a fire’ (p.39), with one declaring: “I don’t think I could do my job without [facilitators] … just because they are in the classroom every day, they’re there. They’re my eyes and ears.”

On-site facilitators are also in a position to motivate the students’ competence in mastering and applying the subject concepts and materials by giving immediate feedback at crucial and potentially demotivating situations; in contrast to online teachers whose time schedules are unlikely to synchronize with the school (Rice and Carter, 2016), and with whom students could be waiting a day or more for a response to a query. This appears to be true for older students: in qualitative research that included 40 rural high schools, Keane et al. (2008) found that facilitators were especially important when online instructors were unavailable to students. This point may also be supported by the online facilitator being more proximate and probably better known to the student, the basis of an argument considered in its own right later in this section. To this end, the research of Borup, Chambers and Stimson, (2019) supports the view that students particularly appreciate this aspect of the work of on-site facilitators, claiming that it encourages
them to engage more effectively in the online course activities.

Finally, on-site facilitators through their relatedness-motivational capacities help to motivate both autonomy and competence in regular study by helping students to reflect as part of the self-regulation online study process. This involves meta-cognitive skills requiring forethought in planning how to tackle the item when setting goals and anticipating problems, performance in handling it using diverse ranges of strategies, and self-reflection in what went well and how things could be improved in a similar learning situation. The latter engages the student in having to self-assess his or her understanding, motivating to make changes when unsuccessful or when personal goals shift (Ayres and Paas, 2009), and by extension, when particularly the intrinsic motivators of autonomy and competence have come under stress, for example on receiving a less-than-encouraging end-of-topic test result.

It is important to bear in mind that the degree that an on-site facilitator can assist reflection may depend on the information made available by the course provider. For example at Pamoja, the course content includes specific assignments that require reflecting on progress and achievements in a critical and proactive manner, with view to challenges in the course content and routines that lie ahead. The SBC can access the student’s work and progress records including the reflections in order to develop the reflection process further. This, however, is not always a possibility in similar online scenarios: many course providers give insufficient access to on-site facilitators to assist for them to track and gauge student progress (Freidhoff et al., 2015).

**Supporting relatedness: personal working relationship with the online facilitator**
Do students typically gravitate to a school staff member functioning as on-site facilitator who they see as part of their school community, rather than to the designated specialist teacher that comes together with the online course content and assesses the students’ competence in engaging with it through a series of various assignments? It may well be that able and more intrinsically-driven student will require considerably less personal interaction with the on-site facilitator, whereas at the other extreme, the amotivated and the extrinsically, introjected-regulated student will be dependent on the on-site facilitator if any progress will be made at all.

The research of Borup, Chambers and Stimson (2019) claims that this area of inquiry had hardly been explored prior to their investigating this issue, whose investigation focused on the interviewing online teachers and online facilitators, but not, as in my study, students.

Their work indicated that though students may well experience a high level of support from their online teachers when it came to course content, they felt that it was the input from their on-site facilitators that was most valuable them: they wanted the support of someone that they knew personally. One of their student focus-groups on which they based their study reported being motivated by the association of the on-site facilitators’ non-verbal cues, personal interactions, and knowing that they could turn to them for immediate feedback. This, they claimed, was preferred to the inevitable day or longer wait for online-asynchronous guidance from someone outside their bricks-and-mortar community, something whose very nature could frustrate students irrespective of levels of motivation. Students also reported that the relationships they developed with their on-site facilitators were fundamentally caring, sustained by regular communications that often interacted with their social and personal issues, again, something that could well be independent of the motivation levels of the individual students. As one student in
that study put it: “Since he is so invested in our lives...you respect him in that way. You also want to do your work, just naturally want to do it” (ibid, p. 267). Thus on-site facilitators contributed to supporting their extrinsic, identified-regulation relatedness motivators in their being accountable to them in their engagement and progress in the course, as well as satisfying their needs for a sense of relatedness in supporting their extrinsic, integrated-regulation motivation.

This claim is supported by the earlier work of Singh and Dika (2003) in the context of rural high school students, which indicated that a combination of academic and social support from adults had an important role in motivating positive outcomes in sustaining educational aspirations, academic effort, and academic self-concept, all of which are likely to be put to the test in online courses requiring consistent and long-term application. It could also be argued as motivating competence (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski, 2000), whereby the knowledge that they have the support of, and are accountable to, their on-site facilitators can significantly motivate them to develop a sense of being able to study successfully in this way.

In addition to promoting a motivational sense of relatedness in online learning, the on-site facilitator can help the students develop the habit of reflecting on online task performance in terms of what went well and how things could be improved in a similar learning situation. This engages the student in having to self-assess his or her understanding, and to work towards autonomy in determining how to make changes when unsuccessful or when personal goals shift. In some VLEs, for example at Pamoja, the course content includes specific assignments that require reflecting on progress and achievements in a critical and proactive manner, with view to challenges in the course content and routines that lie ahead. The on-site facilitator, however,
would need to be able to access the student’s work and progress records to effectively motivate the reflection process where necessary, which although fully provided for at Pamoja together with training for the SBC, is a far from universal practice. As brought in the previous section, course providers give insufficient access to on-site facilitators to assist on the basis that they can accurately track and gauge student progress (Freidhoff et al., 2015).

**Training for on-site facilitators: to enable SBCs to support their VLE students in their competency, autonomy, and relatedness**

I am considering this element that appears in the literature for the following reason. The literature indicates that the on-site facilitator having the professional skills to best support student motivation in the VLE is not something that can be taken for granted. Pamoja, as we shall see later in this chapter, does provide training for SBCs, which is pre-requisite to Pamoja approval for service in that capacity. It is the training of SBCs that may enable them to able to deliver the psychological and extrinsic motivational elements to optimally support student progress in the VLE.

This contention is supported by studies exemplified by Hannum et al. (2008) whose data, obtained by using a cluster-randomized control trial, indicated that online students with a trained on-site facilitator had higher pass rates than those students who had been assigned a facilitator who was untrained in that role, echoing “facilitators are made, not born” (Roblyer, 2006, p.34). In addition, online facilitators who were trained seem to have a wider range of strategies for engaging with the student over the extended period of the course, typically for an academic year,
including those addressing the need to motivate the student course routines when experiencing senses of being overwhelmed at the start of the program (de la Varre, Keane, and Irwin, 2011). The role of training is something I return to in later sections of this chapter in the Pamoja SBC context, which, as already mentioned, requires SBCs to complete their orientation course before accepting their students and allowing them to serve in that capacity.

In summary, the literature indicates that on-site facilitators support motivating online students in five different ways.

1. They help students to acquire the fluency in the necessary range of skill-sets to study online: motivating autonomy and competence.

2. They may supplement instruction in course content and concepts: motivating competence and relatedness.

3. Their proximity can support students to engage regularly with the course: promoting autonomy, competence, relevance, and extrinsic motivating forces.

4. They may place the course into the framework of a pro-active personal working relationship: promoting autonomy, relevance, and extrinsic motivating forces.

5. They may be more significantly more effective in motivating students if they are suitably trained for their task. This can in turn positively affect their capacities to motivate students under all three domains.
Having explored these five arguments based on the themes emerging in the literature reviewed, I proceed to consider the situation of the SBCs at Pamoja for the purpose of conjecturing how far it enables them to motivate student progress. That is with view to the main part of this thesis: investigating how effective the contributions of SBCs at Pamoja to student motivation are, and thereon the extent that the Pamoja experience can be generalized through the OPM (online partnership model) as an effective structure for the provision of online education at pre-tertiary level.

2.3 Student motivation at Pamoja: the conjectured role of the SBC

This section leads to the essential point of this review: what does the previous discussion contribute to informing the likely motivational role of the SBC at Pamoja? Whether these conjectured roles are supported by evidence needs to be examined.

In this section, I firstly hypothesize the likely motivation levels of Pamoja students in Economics based on the afore-considered theory and literature. This is for the purpose of indicating the mainly-externally-driven and mainly-internally-driven motivation characteristics that the students are likely to be bringing to the online program and with which the motivating capacities of the SBCs will be interacting with at stages in that program. This includes recognizing that student motivators are not necessarily consistently strong throughout the two-year program: there could well be situations where optimal SBC involvement could avoid the derailing of a student’s motivation in toto. The student motivation levels in which the SBCs operate have to be considered for the purpose assessing the degree that findings in this entire study can be
transferred to informing practice in pre-tertiary online study in general, bearing in mind that similar patterns of student motivation are unlikely to be universal, even within the 16-18+ age group. All this is necessary as I then proceed to consider the Pamoja guidelines and training offered to SBCs in terms of the five motivation-connected themes identified in the literature review: how far does that company’s guidelines promote motivation in those ways?

2.3.1 The motivational situation of students at Pamoja

At this stage I conjecture the motivational situation of students at Pamoja on the basis of what is known about motivational situations of pre-tertiary students who are facing similar challenges. I am not aware of a study that directly addresses the factors that motivate Pamoja students to study online. However, the research of Hertberg-Davis and Callahan (2008) which focuses on both the IB and the US Advanced Placement curricula indicates that students’ motivation to study these programs in general has characteristics that are largely extrinsic, identified regulation with high stakes, in terms of the belief, supported by the experience of past students, that it will strongly assist their chances of being accepted at high-tier universities and give them the tools to succeed there (ibid. p. 207), and thereon into desired careers. It may therefore be argued by extension that tertiary education plans and career ambitions in Economics-related fields can also help to explain why students are attracted to and are motivated to continue with IB Economics online when other more familiar IB-eligible studies are available at the school by direct instruction. Whether these perceived pay-offs are actually crucial motivating factors is investigated in Chapter 4, when exploring evidence for motivating reasons for online study among Pamoja Economics students.
The argument for enhanced future prospects in higher education and eventually career can also support conjecturing the idea that there is something much larger than the prospect of success on the single online course in Economics that is motivating the student motivation to study at Pamoja. It is the awareness that the online program is not something that stands by itself, but is merely a component, a vital part of something much larger. The studies at Pamoja in Economics belong to the IB Diploma program that they have committed themselves to full time for the final two years of their secondary education. It is the overall score out of 45 that may well determine the nature and terms of their higher education opportunities, to which Economics contributes a maximum of 7 points (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2021 [1]), out which they would want as many points as possible, alongside with five other subjects plus the core Theory of Knowledge and Extended Essay in the same package. And it follows from this argument that students could view the less familiar VLE of Pamoja as one more addition, with high stakes, to many other things currently unknown (such as Theory of Knowledge), but to become familiar in the duration of the IB program.

On the basis of arguing that motivators for online study at Pamoja are essentially the same for other components of the IB program, we could conjecture that the motivations to succeed in the Pamoja VLE are similar to those of all the components in the IB program. The aforementioned study drew attention to elements that could drive psychological motivation, a chief one being the relatedness motivating force stemming from the sense that the schools cared about their progress. There was a perception among such students that they were tending to get the best support that the school had to offer from the best teachers together with the feeling of being treated as adults and responsible individuals that those teachers were genuinely interested in advancing. It follows that they may accordingly see themselves as extrinsically motivated at the identified regulation
level in that they are answerable to those teachers that they respect, and psychologically (relatedness) motivated in that they wish to satisfy the expectations of those teachers, both of which by extension could similarly apply to the SBC who, whilst not being the teacher, has full access to the student’s records at Pamoja.

Despite the strongly positive motivators above, the same study drew attention to likely motivation issues arising out of such highly-demanding pre-tertiary programs, and as a result may need autonomy support. The sheer weekly workload of the entire IB program was highlighted by an IB student focus group as frequently being patently overwhelming, typified by a participant claiming: “It seems like there’s just not enough hours in the day sometimes. I’ve got so much work to do” (p. 202). This echoes the resilience-demanding, heightened levels of academic stress frequently experienced by pre-tertiary students striving to cope with such advanced curricula demands (Suldo, Shaunessy, Thalji, Michalowski and Shaffer, 2009; Suldo, Shaunessy and Hardesty, 2008), and is recognized as being characteristic of the program by the IB Organization (IBO) as such, declaring that “Schools should recognize that resilience plays a key role in determining student success in the [IB] Diploma program” (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2021 [1]). Yet the student participant indicated that students were both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to persist: “Yes, it’s a lot of hard nights. And yes, you may not get a lot of sleep. And yes, you may not have a social life. But the point of the program is to get you ready for the future and to challenge you. And for you to challenge yourself and find out who you really are and what you really can do and what your body can take and not take” (Hertberg-Davis and Callahan, 2008, p. 202).
Thus, this study supports the conjecture that the environment in which the Pamoja SBC is likely to be interacting with is one that in motivation terms is already high-stakes charged, and likely to be repeatedly challenged by heavy and sometimes simultaneous pressures from different elements of the IB Diploma of which VLE Economics at Pamoja is just one, albeit a crucial one. However, the same study, whilst supporting the view that many students’ motivations emanated from prospective post-secondary school ambitions, also acknowledged that some students sensed the intrinsic value of their work even when facing the full rigors of the program, as exemplified by one focus-group participant claiming: “I enjoy what I do, and it just like seems the challenge is worth taking”, from which it might be inferred that some students are, in addition, psychologically (autonomy, competence) motivated in terms of a sense of internal-regulation striving for personal achievement and fulfillment in success with the program.

How correct the conjecture that Pamoja students typically operate within this motivational framework is a vital point that will investigated on the basis of the qualitative data provided by Pamoja students and SBCs in the remaining chapters. This is of key importance, as the motivational scenario has to be taken into account when generalizing the findings of this study in later chapters to similar motivational levels, and at the same time informing on the possibilities of including online study in the curriculum as a means of widening the number of options in the curriculum beyond what the school can provide by means of conventional tuition.

Bearing in mind the conjectured motivational situation for Economics students in the Pamoja VLE, I now consider the elements that Pamoja’s SBCs can bring to supporting students in terms of their Pamoja-defined and Pamoja-trained duties, taking into account the foregoing arguments based on the more general research concerning the more generic on-site facilitators. Whether
what now follows happens or does not happen is no more than informed speculation at this stage. Thus the remaining chapters focus on gathering and interpreting my collected evidence for how Pamoja’s SBCs actually do or do not support student motivation in the VLE, comparing with the foregoing support for these hypotheses based on the literature.

2.3.2 What the SBCs can contribute towards supporting the motivation of Pamoja students.

In considering how SBCs can motivate students, we are able to go beyond informed conjecture to considering information within Pamoja’s published guidelines and practices regarding how that company envisages that may happen. We can do this by considering their published guidelines in the light of the five arguments supported by the literature that delineate the work of online facilitators: developing fluency in online skill-sets, promoting regular engagement in the program, helping students to master content when needed, enabling students to work in a setting that they can relate to personally, and making sure that they can optimize their services by providing the SBCs with training and support. The fifth and final argument in this list is directly addressed: all SBCs are trained by Pamoja to provide their Pamoja-designated inputs.

But all of this remains speculative, however, in how far the guidelines represent the realities of students’ experiences. SBC motivating support in practice may or may not follow the guidelines of Pamoja. These includes monitoring “…student progress in ‘Student Orientation’, ensuring that they may acquire the information needed to fully prepare them for their course” (Pamoja Guidelines: Site-based coordinator, Job Description p.2), thus developing autonomy and competence in the skills of being able to interact effectively with the Pamoja platform and online
teacher, fellow online students, and other Pamoja personnel as necessary; in other words to “project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as ‘real people’” (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999, p.89). Such developing fluency in online skill-sets, argued earlier on the basis of the literature as a key way in which an on-site facilitator may support the motivators of autonomy and competence, should continue to be promoted once the student is on the course by “promot(ing) effective time management… developing a self-management approach that works” for the student (Pamoja Guidelines: Site-based coordinator, Job Description p.2).

In addition, Pamoja’s guidelines for SBCs appear to be in line with two more of the literature-based arguments earlier in this chapter: that SBCs should support the motivation of the students to continually engage on the course, and that they should promote a relatedness-dimension motivator whereby students feel they are working in a situation that is tangible and nor merely virtual. The first appears in the guidelines as “scheduling supervised time” (ibid), which would be supported by the research supporting regular lab times as a vital externally-driven, extrinsic motivator for students (Borup and Stimson, 2019). In the guidelines, the scheduling of supervised time is connected to the broader “Encouraging students to take ownership of their learning…” (Pamoja Guidelines, Site-based coordinator) for which those guidelines state is the purpose of the supervision: which may be construed as students taking responsibility for their own progress including striving to master the course content and concepts on the basis of the materials provided and completing the assignments week by week. And the second: promoting a relatedness-dimension motivator, is indicated by the SBCs being recommended to “Follow students’ progress through their Pamoja courses by encouraging them to regularly update you” (p.2) echoes the previously stated argument that students highly value the support of someone
they know when they are educationally interacting in a virtual environment (Borup, Chambers and Stimson, 2019).

It appears to be solely the third argument, that SBCs may motivate students by helping them to master content that is creating difficulties, that stands at poles apart to Pamoja’s emphasis that SBCs should be “supervising rather than tutoring… promot(ing) independent learning” (Pamoja Guidelines, Site-based coordinator). This proposition has been discussed at some length earlier on in this chapter at both the generic on-site facilitator and the particular Pamoja levels. It included claims to the reality of on-site coordinators with suitable academic background providing support in mastering content (Hendrix and Degner, 2016; Barbour and Hill, 2011), thereby supporting the student’s competence-based self-motivating capacities. Whether or not the SBC with the specialist course-content who can help the student in that way follows the Pamoja guidelines in practice will be considered in later chapters on the basis of evidence supplied from the interviews with the participating online students and SBCs.

And more generally, at this stage, it is open to speculation whether the SBCs motivate students in the ways envisaged by Pamoja. Though the SBCs are required to complete a training module before their students may start the course, their subsequent duties are not enforceable by Pamoja. SBCs are not Pamoja employees and their situations could vary from their duties being a timetabled and a paid part of their duties to work depending on their goodwill without any additional compensation from the school.
2.4 The focus of the investigation in light of the literature review

The emergent questions from this discussion in the context of Pamoja are: what does the SBC contribute to online student motivation within the characteristically high-pressure IB Diploma setting, and how significant are those SBC inputs? We have considered the five arguments supported by the afore-considered literature on how on-site facilitators in general and by inference, SBCs at Pamoja may significantly support student intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. But the word ‘may’ is operative, as the discussion on what SBCs may or may not be contributing at this stage is based on no more than supposition that is inferred from the literature. How far the information from the student, SBC, and Pamoja staff participants in this investigation on the input of SBCs as specifically student motivators supports these conjectures forms the investigative focus of the remaining three chapters. In doing so, as I explain in Chapter 3, I have chosen the qualitative approach in order to capture the students’, SBCs’, and Pamoja staffs’ detailed recollections of motivational challenges and experiences experienced within their respective roles within the Pamoja VLE: methodologically broadly in line with studies reviewed in this chapter such as de la Varre, Keane, Irwin, and Hannum (2011) on the effects of on-site facilitator’s involvement with the actual teaching of the material, Harms et al., (2006) on their role in assisting the acquisition of the necessary online working skills, and Rice and Carter (2016) in their dealing with situations such as lack of immediate feedback from the online teacher. Within a qualitative approach, I found the use of thematic analysis to be suitable for this investigation, for reasons discussed in that chapter.

On the basis of this chapter, what is unknown in the Pamoja situation is:
1. How far do the conjectured motivation characteristics of the students within which the SBCs interact represent the Pamoja students’ reality?

2. In supporting students’ online study, how far do SBCs follow Pamoja guidelines?

3. How far do the SBCs contribute towards motivating the students in the following areas?

(a) Supporting the upskilling of students towards their achieving autonomy within the VLE.
(b) Supporting the students’ autonomy through encouraging them to take ownership of their online studies.
(c) Supporting students in the mastering of the difficult academic concepts that they meet in the Pamoja VLE for IB Economics, promoting competence in course content and concepts. (Unlike the others, this academic rather than pastoral objective is not a Pamoja objective).
(d) Supporting study by making provision for and supervising study time within the school setting, promoting relatedness insofar as some of the VLE study takes place in a familiar environment with familiar people.
(e) Supporting the development of autonomy needed in handling the high pressure and high stakes position of the course given its place within the student’s IB Diploma program?

Addressing these gaps in the literature might well have significant consequences. The findings about SBC inputs to student motivation could inform possible modifications of the OPM (online partnership model) at pre-tertiary level. That Pamoja’s examination results rival that of the IB has been established in Chapter 1. The evidence or lack of evidence for SBCs as student motivators can help to assess how far they might be contributing to the reality of Pamoja’s
success rate, and more generally what the Pamoja experience can inform on how pre-tertiary online education may be optimally conducted.

2.5 Summary

The literature cited and discussed indicates that the studying of the efficacy of the involvement of school faculty members as online facilitators in their support of their VLE secondary and pre-tertiary students’ levels within the various categories of extrinsic motivation has been attracting a small, but growing body of research. While implicitly and sometimes explicitly recognizing that a large body of online students face a range of potential motivation-thwarting issues that undermine their capacities to exercise optimum levels of autonomy and competence for success, the consensus indicates that online facilitator involvement, suitably and competently applied, is able to promote the relatedness-motivation necessary through proximity and personal working relationships in order to bridge between the school curriculum and VLE, rendering the latter as an extension of the former in the students’ perceptions and academic commitment. It is that relatedness support with its on-site facilitator - student communications that in turn enables motivation issues grounded in autonomy and competence to receive suitable support from the school, which can include, for example, the need to upskill the student for autonomy or even making it possible to supply direct instruction in content when challenged in mastering the same through the materials provided by the VLE.
Pamoja’s approach to student support is distinctive within VLE environments in two ways: that the role of the online facilitator as SBC is formally defined and supported through direct training by the company, and that the students involved are likely to bring a high level of motivation to the VLE being in their pre-tertiary years within a program whose outcomes are likely to determine their next stages of their education. How far do the conjectured motivation characteristics of the students within which the SBCs interact represent the Pamoja students’ reality, and what can the findings of the Pamoja experience contribute towards optimizing the role of SBCs and by extension, on-site facilitators? The remaining chapters of this research consider the SBCs’ inputs in terms of the range support services and their effectiveness in promoting and supporting student motivation.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the literature review. At the end, I highlighted a gap in the literature on student motivating elements in online courses at pre-tertiary level: the need to investigate the supporting-motivation role of the face-to-face school as represented by Pamoja Education’s SBC (school-based coordinator) system described in Chapter 1.

I aim through this chapter to present the methodology that I used in order to elicit, in student motivational terms, the student experience with the SBC system at Pamoja, knowing that the SBC system is a key element in its online teaching model, as explicitly described in ‘Pamoja Guidelines, Site-based coordinator’, focused on in the last chapter. My objective is to assess the SBC system’s effects as a source of motivation and support within what, in final external exam results terms, appears to be the overall successful outcome experience that I presented in Chapter 1. I thus put forward the methodology for the purpose of exploring the role of the OPM (online partnership model) presented in Chapter 1 together with the case for its being suited to focus on investigating the range of SBC practices including those discussed in the previous chapters.

In this chapter, I consider the methodology for investigating the previously-introduced research question: “How far is Pamoja Education’s model of working together with a designated faculty member of the student’s school (SBC, site-based coordinator) an effective means of motivating regular engagement in online study?” To that end, I outline the rationale and justification for the paradigms, approaches, and investigative methods used to explore this research question.

Methodology as heading this chapter does not relate specifically to the product of the inquiry, but
to the actual process. And its final product, as processed in the next chapter, is the data obtained from the interview schedules for participating students, SBCs, and Pamoja personnel whose work includes monitoring the SBCs.

This study therefore seeks to consider online students’ experiences of SBC support, and to examine its role in motivating regular student engagement. As discussed in the previous chapter, the unexplored, yet plausible possibility that third party SBC-type involvement can be demonstrated to successfully support regular engagement in online study including avoiding or negotiating barriers to sustained learning has provided a rationale for my research to investigate the extent that SBC involvement can influence engagement in the online learning process.

3.2 The position and direction of the study’s approach

As considered in Chapter 2, in this study, I have been taking the overall position that the motivating contribution of the SBC system may be explored by means of eliciting from the individuals participating in the study (a) the specific student needs in the domains of autonomy, competence, and relatedness discussed in the previous chapter, and as the key focus of the study (b) the extent that the SBC system has been succeeding in satisfying the VLE students by motivating those needs.

The individuals who participated in the study were chosen as representing the three bases of the OPM model: students (IB first year Pamoja students in Economics), schools (SBCs), and online course provider (Pamoja staff from School Services and senior administration). It is the individuals from those three parties talking of their realities, experiences, and perceptions that
enabled me as interviewer and researcher to work on co-constructing the realities of what the SBC system contributes to motivationally-supporting the online study learning process in terms of autonomy needs satisfaction, competence needs satisfaction, and relatedness needs satisfaction. I examine their roles more precisely later in this chapter.

Ontologically, I take the position in this study that the realities of the online students’ motivation, engagement, and progress can, like any challenging situation, be realistically explored and constructed using their narratives (Cantrell, 2011), including when recounting critical learning incidents where they felt they needed to turn for support, an approach that I explore in the next section. For the purpose of this research, I present critical incident as an event that makes ‘a significant contribution, either positively or negatively to the general aim of the activity’ as raw data that affords scope for critique and analysis, (Flanagan, 1954, p.338).

My ontological position thus includes the dimension of relativism: an acceptance of the view that we mediate the realities that we encounter by our senses (Crotty, 1998), which differ from person to person (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Moreover, the stories from SBCs and those at Pamoja that direct and liaison with them may shed further light and context in estimating the SBCs’ contributions to student motivation online where their perceptions as professional educators may or may not compare with the students, and where they can inform motivationally-relevant information and perspectives that are not accessible to the students. This is important as, for example, SBCs and Pamoja staff are likely to have had previous professional experience in their respective roles and can thus fit in the motivational position of their current students in the context of their experience with previous students. It is also likely that much of their motivational inputs are taken for granted, not fully
recognized by the students, the students having a different perception of the role of SBCs than the SBCs themselves (c.f. Lee et al., 2006).

Epistemologically, it is this personal and interactive-with-interviewer source of collected rich narrative data presented by the participants that enables me as interviewer and researcher to access and comprehend the role of SBCs and the nature of interactions with SBCs as experienced by their online students.

For it is the participants’ stories that can serve as a window to the input of the SBCs and their possible contribution to students’ levels of motivation and regular engagement with the program. This is also designed to afford an emic approach, one that investigates “how local people think” (Kottack, 1996, p.47), which applied to this study would include “how the participants experience things”. Indeed, this approach involves exploring the meanings that the participants place on their experiences from the reality of their own perspectives (McCormick and James, 2018), enabling me as researcher to work towards forming judgments on how students’ SBC interactions might have assisted their motivation and course engagement. To this end, qualitative researchers (for example Mason, 2006) argue that such qualitative data can enable and accommodate this exploratory approach through its ability to generate data representing complex patterns of social interaction. And in using the qualitative approach to the specific case of Pamoja, I am aiming to obtain quality-response data that should enable deep understanding (Creswell, 2002), in this case of the nature and effects of the motivational inputs of the SBCs. In addition, the degree that SBC-provided motivating inputs may be crucial for regular engagement may be investigated through prompting the participants to include narratives flowing from particular situations that students could not handle themselves (Hughes, 2012 p.11).
In so-making use of that essentially relativist approach, I have applied an interpretive approach to this study, as I wish to include the details in the insights gathered from the evidence of the data rather than find a set of principles that can be generalized and applied to similar VLE situations irrespective of their distinct characteristics (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The qualitative and interpretive dimensions of this study should accommodate the detailed, though subjective, semi-structured interviewing-based data to realistically examine the SBCs’ motivating contribution to sustained study that could be leading to an outcome that is already supported in Chapter 1: that the Pamoja final grade distribution was fundamentally similar to the IB over a five-year period, and that by such a criterion, online study achieved similar results to the traditional face-to-face classroom. It is important, though, to clarify at the outset that any such claim however well-supported by the data would not demonstrate that it is the SBCs’ motivation role that is necessarily causing it, but such data could well indicate and support the possibility that they are richly contributing towards it.

I thus chose the interpretive approach as it creates the space for the individuals interviewed to present their personal interactions through their perspectives (Creswell 2009, p.8): in this study, focusing on situations where SBC involvement as motivating in terms of student needs might have been relevant and even crucial, or conversely where SBCs deliberately did not become involved, including where the interests of the student were at heart of the SBC.

Exemplifying the scope of the interpretive approach for these purposes could be, at this stage, hypothetical cases of reported lack of SBC involvement from academically and technologically highly-able and well-self-disciplined student participants who had immediately established and continued to self-motivate their own autonomy in mastering the Pamoja-website-associated
technology and organizing their online study schedules. Their SBCs might realistically perceive that their students are fully integrated into their online community that takes care of their motivation support needs, which indicated little requirement for motivation needs-support inputs on their part. Their autonomy is evidenced in a series of quality engagement level ratings, which, as awarded by the Pamoja platform, instantly show up on the SBC data dashboard. Moreover, they have also succeeded in self-sustaining their motivation in competence by building up their conceptual understanding and application of Economics through use of the weekly-released Pamoja-supplied course materials, interaction with their online teacher and peers, and when in difficulties consulting printed and online resources. Their competence has been evidenced by series after series of reassuring grades from their Pamoja teacher which, as engagement levels, show up on the SBC data dashboard. In addition, their relatedness needs are well-sustained by their involvement with their online peers and their online teacher in numerous activities, including online class discussion blogging, group projects, voluntary weekly face-to-face sessions with Pamoja Economics teachers, and longer weekly assignments with regular feedback from their online teacher.

It is this type of anticipated-in-this-study situation that descriptive data characteristically used in the interpretive approach can present the student’s course motivation position and what the SBC could do and conversely, might be better not doing. In the above example scenario, the students’ motivational needs satisfaction flows from their participation, as a by-product of the consistent levels of interaction. The minimum SBC support as reported by such students may not necessarily indicate apathy on the part of the SBCs, but their perception that their involvement beyond an occasional relatedness-supporting encouraging word is unnecessary and possibly counterproductive, a finding that might readily lead itself to support through evidence from the
rich data characteristic of the interpretive approach. And as such, this approach appears suited to this study.

This interpretive position and approach is exemplified by Tobin (2009) who in investigating teacher “waiting time” on enabling student participation found the considerable complexity of the social realities involved unsuitable for a positivist, multi-variable analysis and needed to focus on the reality being studied and the arising theory rather than applying pre-formulated theory. In applying the principle developed by Tobin to the very different scenario of my own research, the purpose here would still be to elicit, in motivational needs satisfaction terms (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), what is happening and why it is happening. This position and approach is also exemplified by other examples closer to my research, such as Rosenkranz, Wang and Hu, (2015) which uses a qualitative follow-up to the quantitative data to explore and identify in depth what, within the domains of the SDT framework, motivates and demotivates medical students to pursue an academic careers in research, and Bentzen, Lemyre and Kentta, (2014) which uses a solely qualitative approach framed within SDT-thwarted psychological domains to explore how work-related demands can lead to burnout among professional sports coaches. A third example would be Keipi and Oksanen (2014), which uses an SDT psychological needs domains framework using thematic analysis in exploring youth behavior online, in terms of the participants’ narratives of Internet risks and opportunities brought about by user anonymity. In addition, several studies reviewed in Chapter 2 use elements of this approach, including the qualitative analysis applied by de la Varre, Keane, Irwin and Hannum (2011) to their end-of-course interviews data from online instructors and course facilitators in identifying the in-practice roles of the latter, Harms et al., (2006) on their role in assisting the acquisition of the necessary online working skills, and Rice and Carter (2016) in
their dealing with situations such as lack of immediate feedback from the online teacher. It is important to point out that my using SDT is not pre-determined theory about why phenomena might occur, which would invalidate the Tobin parallel, but a framework within which to classify and organize the diverse findings that emerge from the data in a useful manner.

My research paradigm is similar to the above studies to the degree that using the interpretive approach does allow complex realities to be explored: in the case of my research, that different schools and SBCs are likely to relate to the school supporting of students in different ways and possibly not always practicing their role according to the Pamoja guidelines, as well that the position and thus the motivational needs of the online students might vary from student to student and from school to school. I bear this point in mind when applying the interpretive approaches’ academically-compatible thematic analysis (Vaismoradi and Snelgrove, 2019) in the next chapter.

In addition, considering participants’ narratives opens opportunities for yielding information that is unexpected or even counter-intuitive: Creswell’s argument that the interpretive paradigm enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of what is being investigated including effectively dealing with unforeseen complications (Creswell and Tashakkori, 2007) would also justify its use in driving this study.

Moreover, by using such data obtained through interpretive methodology, I was able to compare experiences from different participants and from different angles (for example the students’ and the SBCs’) that, put together, had the potential of indicating trends in convergence of perceptions, or conversely indicate trends in differences of perceptions. This included the opportunity to investigate the degree of similarity between comparable points from different
participants by asking them for clarification during the interview (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). I also kept in mind that the interpretive approach used also helped the understanding of phenomena from the respondent’s perspective on phenomenological bases (the study of direct experience without interference of preconceptions) and hermeneutical bases (deriving hidden meaning from language) (Scotland, 2012): in this study, though the windows that were opened by the respondents’ transcripts that sought to communicate their subjective experiences of being part of the motivation needs-support services provided by the SBCs.

In viewing and investigating through the interpretive paradigm, however, I endeavored to keep in mind that the emerging data would likely to be contextual to what is being investigated (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). This point, already considered in Chapter 2 in considering the particular realities of the Pamoja scenario, had to take into account possible difficulties with this study’s external credibility: in transferring the findings of this study to any other online educational provider operating, or considering operating an OPM VLE model featuring the SBC-type system: an area focused on in Chapter 5. For that reason, at the end of this study, I reiterated the context of Pamoja in terms of ability levels, motivation levels, age range, and position of their online course(s) within their wider framework of the IB diploma and its total range of core and optional subjects. However, this limitation does not exist solely because of the chosen paradigm. A different set of data on this area of research, for example findings quantitatively generated from an underlying positivist paradigm would have similar strengths and limitations when generalizing them to other contexts.

Additionally, I am aware that the interpretive paradigm’s being grounded in a subjective rather than objective ontological view (Mack, 2010) placed a heavy responsibility on me as researcher
to tackle possibilities of bias, in terms of the study’s credibility, which I consider later in this chapter, and develop in more detail in the final chapters. As I am also responsible for the data analysis as well as the data collection, I endeavored to minimize researcher bias as well as the respondents’ inputs being influenced by demand characteristics (Merriam, 2002), subjective individual constructions (Scotland, 2012, Erickson and Wittrok 1986), and also misunderstanding arising from the researcher not being familiar with the context of the student respondent. Thus my task of exploring the participants’ experiences and concerns with support in online learning needed to aim for as accurate as possible a description of what was being investigated (Groenewald, 2004) whilst having to bear in mind the considerable difficulties of maintaining a detached perspective which in turn could have been partially dependent on my skills, awareness, and experience as an interviewer acting as researcher (Patton, 2002). I also had to reckon with the possibility that two respondents in relating to experience though their own subjective worlds might communicate different impressions and nuances when recalling essentially similar situations (Gage, 1989). These points put me into the situation of having to adjust the prompts during the data collection process so that they would elicit data on both how the participants engaged with online learning, and on how they saw and experienced the motivational input of the SBC in terms of their needs support.

These issues put require considering the trustworthiness of the data, in terms of both representing the nature and prevalence of the various SBC inputs in promoting student motivation, and in assessing the extent that the findings may be transferred to similar operating and projected set-ups. This can only be done at the end of this thesis, on the basis of the findings from the data presented in Chapter 4 and discussed in the light of previous research and the amended OPM model in the earlier parts of Chapter 5. In this study, trustworthiness indicates the extent that the
findings from the sample of respondents are not only most suitably interpreted, but also in how far they represented the academic range of characteristics of students in the 2019-2021 Pamoja VLE cohort studying Economics. I explain how I endeavored to select a sample towards meeting that objective later, in Section 3.4 of this chapter, and how I endeavored to tackle potential issues such as bias and reflexivity in this and later chapters. In contrast, transferability indicates the degree that, in this study, the findings and recommendations from the Pamoja experience on SBCs optimizing the effectiveness of their motivation potential in supporting needs in autonomy, competence, and relatedness may be transferred to informing and suggesting policy for similar pre-tertiary and even secondary VLE environments. This transferability raises a very different sets of issues (Maxwell, 2020), which I explore in the discussion in Chapter 5.

3.3 Methods used in the study

Having chosen the interpretive approach for the study, it seemed that the qualitative nature semi-structured interview would have the capacity to activate the necessary prompts to elicit information from the participants, including their viewpoints.

The interviewing process

Given that the nature of the study invited the interpretive approach, I chose the semi-structured interview as the data-collection and investigative tool, as that would make it possible for me to drill deeper for further details relevant to the research when required (Cridland et al., 2015; Krauss et al., 2009; Whiting, 2008), whilst at the same time keep the research focused on the objective of the research, the contribution of the SBCs to student motivation. The questions
would form a check list rather than a prescribed order: a loose list rather than an ordered schedule of questions (Dearnley 2005, Åstedt-Kurki and Heikkinen 1994,) which was to enable the directing of the conversation towards the research topic during the interview (Cridland et al., 2015; Krauss et al. 2009) in such a way as to foster dialogue (Whiting 2008) and bring out the respondents’ perceptions in their complexities (Barriball and While, 1994).

The development of the semi-structured interview guide followed the pre-requisites for devising such a tool: including formulating the preliminary interview on the basis of the previous knowledge (as put forward in Chapter 2), pilot testing it, and then using the complete semi-structured interview (Kallio et al., 2016) through the practice that I gained in using it, whilst at the same time modifying it by making adjustments for different learning and working situations as reported by each different participant.

As used in this study, working from such an interview guide would enable the participants to inform me through their narratives about their experiences of issues they may have been facing in sustaining motivation towards regular, quality engagement in online learning, and the role of their SBCs in sustaining their motivational needs support within the three domains of SDT. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview would involve exploring the meanings that the participants placed on their experiences from the reality of their perspectives (McCormick and James, 2018), with the semi-structured interview data-gathering tool being sufficiently flexible to provide the sought-after depth-level of information including expressed feelings and clarification of points made by the participants (Drew, Hardman and Hosp, 2008).
Approach to the interviews

In operating the interview schedule, I constantly kept in mind that as long as it was being used to gather data, it was still a work in progress, subject to reiterative change in dialogue with my still growing experience from the topic as put forward in the literature review which created a pre-determined conceptual base for the interview (Barriball and While, 1994), and from using it in the field. As information began to accumulate, I found myself making some adjustments that were aimed towards best bringing out the information sought after (Galletta, 2013), in this case, the experience of SBC input in context of motivating the online learning experience. In addition, I took into account that unpredicted, but highly relevant avenues of relevance not considered in Chapter 2 might open up: the semi-structured nature of the interview did give me the scope to adjust and accommodate to those possibilities that might take me beyond the scope of the literature review.

Eliciting critical incidents: the expanded critical incident approach

As the semi-structured interviews aimed to elicit the motivational position as seen by the participant, I included in the interview schedule a question that used the expanded critical incident technique to prompt the participants to share, in anecdotal form, their stories of working with their SBCs or as SBCs/involved professionals. A critical incident differs from a critical event, in that whereas a critical event (such as the formal meeting a student might have with an SBC before the program) is planned and expected, a critical incident (exemplified in the next paragraph) is something that is vivid, impacts and illuminates suddenly, is unexpected and
outside the control of the student (Descombe, 1999, Woods 1993), and is sufficiently significant to prompt the participants interviewed to concern and reflection on the incident (Denscombe, 1999). The critical incidence could solicit the element of surprise; as it is a scenario that is sufficiently complete in itself to act a window to the person (in this case the SBC as motivator) who is involved (Flanagan, 1954). Thus at that stage, I could hypothesize that critical incidents may comprise anomalies and even paradoxes that could put the SBC system to the test during moments and situations that are crucial to student success throughout the program, and thus inform on nature of the SBC experience.

In order that the analysis would be suited to the nuanced (as opposed to binary-type) data that I have been working with, I used the modified, expanded dimension of the critical incident approach, which is a qualitative approach relying on obtaining rich data that is suited to a relatively small participant group that can explain ‘why’ as well as address ‘how’ and ‘what’ (Hughes, 2012), and at the same time lend itself to thematic analysis (ibid) which is the method I have been using to examine, interpret, and present the findings from the data.

This method of analysis supports the iterative processes within the theoretical framework established in the previous chapter between the five elements forming its protocol (Hughes, 2012): planning (as in the conceptual structure of the literature review in Chapter 2), data collection (as explained in this chapter), data analysis involving thematic categorization and analysis (representing the participants’ experience as carried out in the next chapter), and data interpretation and reflection on that data (as brought together in the next chapter and discussed in the final chapter) for the purpose of this study, interpretation, and reflection on the data (Hughes, 2012; Butterfield et al., 2005). The expanded critical incident approach was overall preferred to
critical incident technique in order to better create the opportunity to examine and interpret what turned often complex and subtle reported incidents from my participants within the conceptual frame of SDT and its various domains.

It was all those arguments that persuaded me to choose the expanded critical incident approach for this study, as I thought that it could be a valuable source of evidence and window that could inform on the SBC-VLE student motivational working relationship. The evidence cited in, for example, Denscombe’s 1999 study of the health behaviors of young people appears to have been obtained by essentially using the expanded approach, although he does not state that explicitly despite the nuanced nature of his data. Its findings supported the view that sudden vivid and shocking events can prompt and shape changes in behavior; in the case of that study in deciding whether to smoke or take recreational drugs. It was that study that opened for me the analogous possibility that similar vivid and maybe even shocking events in the Pamoja VLE may have been bringing the student together with the SBC and impacting on the subsequent working of the SBC-VLE motivational relationship and consequent changes in behavior, even throughout the course. My rationale was that it was through those anomalies and critical situations that the students would have been likely to explore their options available for help and support. My hope was that by using the expanded critical incidence interview approach in this project, I would be able to focus on such outlying and contextually complicated situations rather than routine situations, which many, if not most students may well have faced at some point in the course. For example, there could have been uncertainties and even periods of despair in grappling for the first time with completely unfamiliar key subject concepts that appeared to be extremely complex. There could have been initial fears in studying online for the first time, feelings of helpless through exasperation in dealing with the Pamoja platform which, with its red alerts for
missed deadlines may give the sense of acting as the Orwellian Big Brother, or difficulties in general organization and fatigue such as after a long face-to-face school day. And it might have been that the nature of the SBC motivational input at such critical junctures could well have been crucial at that point and indeed set the tone for the entire series of student/SBC interactions involving motivational reinforcement throughout the two-year program.

Conducting the interviews

I incorporated the critical incident element into my interview schedule in the following way. Once a participants agreed to take part and the time of the interview was fixed, I asked them in my advance email to consider a particular situation in which they felt they had needed help (or in the cases of SBC participants and Pamoja staff, when they felt that the student needed help) and what SBC-based support followed.

I started each interview with non-mentally-demanding warm-up questions designed to help the respondents feel comfortable in their roles, such as why they are studying Economics online, what they hope to achieve on completing the course, and how they were feeling about their progress so far. Those questions gave them the opportunity to bring in ideas and modes of discourse that came naturally to them (Eder and Fingerson, 2002), with the purpose of prompting simple narrative responses that were familiar to the participant and yet, as insights to their Pamoja motivational context, central to my study focus (Whiting, 2008). This was also done in order to comfortably establish a communicative, story-telling environment focused on my area of research within the first five minutes. At approximately that point, I moved to transition as
smoothly as possible into greater depth (Cridland et al., 2015; Baumbusch, 2010; Whiting 2008), having sought to ease that transition into the in-depth critical incidence element by picking up the topic already introduced in the interview email communication above. The key question of the study in the interview guide was on the lines of: “As you saw in the last e-mail I sent you, can you tell me about any particular situation or incident that exemplifies your experience of the SBC system? For example, in a situation of being stuck in some aspect of your course (academic/technical/organizational). What help did you get from your SBC? Please tell the story.”

I did not ask this question at once, but I broke it up in order to, stage by stage, prompt their recollections of the critical incident(s) and how SBC support might have, or might not have contributed to supporting their motivation needs, and to reflect on how effective they found that support and how it might have impacted their subsequent motivation patterns on the course.

From there, I added questions in order to obtain a picture of the motivators that Pamoja students sense within the online environment in which they work, whose nature has been conjectured in Chapter 2. These were designed to give context to the role of the motivation-supporting SBCs in terms of the specific needs satisfaction of the student. It is within this background motivational framework that I explored the nature of the SBC’s interaction with the student: how far (if at all) was that working relationship enabling the student to maximize academic potential on the course? To that end, I designed the semi-structured questions to be flexible enough to elicit information on the SBCs’ roles in supporting students’ intrinsic motivators in terms of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. I chose those questions in order to elicit from the participants an understanding of the elements explored at a more general level of on-site
facilitator in Chapter 2: the working relationship between student and SBC, the nature of the SBC’s input, and the students’ assessment of the efficacy of the SBC arrangement in motivating optimum engagement, which furthermore may have been necessary in identifying and overcoming motivational-grounded challenges to learning.

Overall, the interview questions were designed to obtain information whereby the participants may inform on the motivating experiences of the SBCs (and in the case of the SBC and Pamoja staff interviews, their experience of working in such a capacity directly and indirectly respectively with the students) and as well, give a context to the student’s overall position with Pamoja learning, which in turn would supply a context to the narrative information on the SBCs. The range of questions is detailed in the interview schedule that forms an appendix to this chapter.

The analysis of that data forms the subject of the next chapter. There, I interpret the raw data that this study obtained from the interviews though the thematic analysis of the results, following the view that thematic analysis can indentify, analyze, organize, and report themes found within a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This gives a voice to the data and the facility of allowing the analysis to flow from the data without it being channeled and selectively analyzed within a pre-existing theoretical framework.): a process I examine and carry out in Chapter 4 and whose findings I discuss in Chapter 5.
3.4 Research design for the study

In view of the interpretive and qualitative nature of the study discussed in the previous section, I followed a qualitative framework using the following categories of participants, selected according to the sampling criteria detailed below, with the purpose of maximizing the study’s internal validity. They included:

1. Fourteen Pamoja students, selected from the first-year international student population studying IB Economics (one of the most popular Pamoja subjects available) at Higher Level, online at Pamoja Education. One reason for choosing that subject was convenience: they shared the characteristic of having been the easiest for me to reach (Henry, 1990) as I had access to the records of the entire IB Economics Higher Level cohort at Pamoja. In addition, Economics is a specialized subject that many schools do not offer because of the cost of employing an additional specialist teacher. Thus the findings in this study could have the potential of informing schools in such a situation by opening the possibility of offering Economics and similarly specialized subjects online at what would almost certainly be a lower cost where just a few students are involved. In support of the internal validity of this study (Maxwell, 2021) which in this research means its credibility, participating students fulfilled the eligibility criteria of being Pamoja students and faced the same elements on their academic program, including the conceptual content, activities and assignments, and the vertical structure of the course described in the previous chapter. The viewpoint claiming that inferences from the convenience sample may only be applied to the sample itself rather than the general population (Bornstein, Jager, and Putnick, 2013) of Pamoja students may be countered by the stratified nature of the sample, taking into
account ability level, gender, and whether or not personally-know to the researcher. The sampling frame is explained below.

2. Four SBCs, selected from the Pamoja database, currently working with Pamoja IB Economics students in Year 1.

3. Two Pamoja School Services staff that liaison with the SBCs.

For the Pamoja participating students, I carried out the selection for the qualitative-interview sample for students on the following basis. I first selected the particular categories of individuals that I considered that they should have been purposively included in the sample (Robinson, 2014), as I proceed to explain.

Theoretically, all the students in the entire cohort numbering several hundreds could have been interviewed, but such a number would have been excessively time consuming and at the same time probably counterproductive as it is highly unlikely that all would have agreed to have been interviewed, and patterns could well have emerged of students willing to be interviewed and students that would not have wanted to take part. I therefore took a purposive and stratified sample of students, on the basis of the particular categories of students (that were studying this program at Pamoja) that needed to be represented (Robinson, 2014, p.8). Based on my knowledge of the cohort as a whole, I indentified the following three categories for this study:

(a) Performance level in the program in the first semester: above average, average, and below average relative to the standard of the cohort. As I carried out the interviews in the March-June period of the first year of the program, I categorized by referring to the most recent achievement grades issued at the end of Semester 1, issued the month before in February. In so doing, I
hypothesized that the nature of support for needs satisfaction in the three SDT motivation domains offered by the SBCs might be contingent on the students’ academic achievement level.

(b) My students and not my students: students for whom I was the online study teacher and those with other online teachers simultaneously following the same program. This was in order to strengthen the study’s credibility given the possibility that students in my group might have still felt that I was still their online teacher, despite my specifying that I was interviewing specifically as a researcher. Their input thus could have been affected by demand characteristics, for example that telling me what they thought I would like to hear might influence more generosity in future grading. On the other hand, I felt that it was possible that students that have already been working with me might be more frank in talking about their SBC-motivational species experiences than those for whom I was a complete stranger. For these reasons, I judged that students from both my group and other groups (permission to interview having been obtained from their online teacher) needed to be represented in the sample.

(c) Gender: I bore in mind research indicating that female participants might be more likely to show a higher tendency towards self-disclosure in females than males (Dindia and Allen, 1992), and thus sought to counteract by using a mixed-gender purposive sampling frame that would ensure male and female representation (Robinson, 2014).

As a result, I needed a minimum of one participating student for each possible combination of students as in the table below for the purpose of achieving rigor in the adequacy of the sample: bearing in mind that could be worked towards ‘not in terms of size but in terms of its ability to supply all the information needed for comprehensive analysis’ (Yardley, 2000, p.221).
Details of the student participant sampling frame, and ethical issues are in Appendices 2 and 3.

Participants: the overall picture

Of the 20 interview participants making up the total number for this investigation, there were 14 students and 6 adults. Of those adults, 4 were SBCs and 2 were Pamoja staff. As detailed above, the student participating body was selected as being as representative of the Pamoja cohort of 2019-2021 that was studying Economics wholly online; in terms of level of academic performance and gender. If, for example, I selected an above-average female student in a group that I did not teach and did not wish to take part, I would select another student with the same descriptors to fit into the sampling frame.

Of the 6 adults, 4 were SBCs and 2 were Pamoja staff concerned with school support. 2 of the Pamoja staff had three or more years as SBCs, and the other 2 were in their first or second year in that role. I felt that having both experienced and relatively new such professional participants served two roles. Firstly, they would be more representative of the varied degrees of experience that different SBCs would bring to their work. Secondly, both the experienced and the relative newcomer may well have been able to contribute different insights into the nature and impacts of their roles.

And similarly, one of the Pamoja staff concerned with school services was very senior and experienced, and the other was in the first year in that role.

All participants were approached by email, and all interviews were held online, using a Skype program specifically set up for this study. The virtual nature was not due to Covid, but because
they were all outside the country in which I was living. Skype appeared to serve well for its purposes, and did not appear to adversely impact the frankness of the responses.

The shortest time for any interview was 26 minutes. 30-40 minutes was the typical range, with the adult participants tending to be longer (in one case a full hour) in view of the amount they had to contribute.

3.5 Reflexivity issues

Reflexivity involves the researchers’ constant self-awareness of how their own background, position, and possible biases might affect research practice: based on the notion that researchers do form part of the world that they study (Ackerly and True, 2010), which in turn could filter out information that does not resonate with the objectives of the research. My task as researcher was to identify my own position and simultaneously constantly self-reflect on how personally-held values might impact the professional interpretation of data (Jootun, McGhee and Marland, 2009), especially when sub-consciously or even unconsciously tempted to make the findings appear more positive than their supporting evidence.

Thus my position in conducting the analysis of the results in the next chapter needed to keep in mind possible researcher bias in the desire to contribute to the online educational scene: demonstrating that the co-opting of a SBC-type figure can be a crucial element in motivating success in online education, which could promote this element as professional practice at pre-tertiary level and beyond. I consider the areas of possible bias in terms of how researchers have approached them and how that could inform my analysis of the data in the next chapter.
3.6 Summary

In common with much of the research in this field, I have presented the approach to my research as being qualitative in nature, as I sought to recapture through semi-structured interviews the SBC motivational-inputting experiences and their direct and indirect academic impacts through the extended responses of those directly involved: Pamoja students, SBCs, and Pamoja staff. All were necessary not merely for triangulation purposes, but to capture the different perspectives of those three stakeholders from the viewpoint of their particular roles. In designing the interviews, I bore in mind that SBC contributions of significant importance were not always perceived as being consistent inputs, but could flow from significant experiences and events: to that end, I incorporated the critical incidence dimension within the interviews. The raw data the questionnaires sought to elicit was designed to be in a form that could be interpreted through the application of thematic analysis, whose findings are presented and analyzed in the next chapter.
Chapter 4. Presentation and analysis of the data

4.1. Introduction

Following on from considering the methods for obtaining information through the semi-structured interviewing discussed in the previous chapter, I now proceed to present the findings that I obtained from my interviews with Pamoja students, SBCs, and Pamoja staff working with SBCs. These interviews were designed to elicit their experiences in order to inform on what SBCs have been contributing within the IB VLE setting. These SBC inputs in turn may well have continued to be reflected in the students’ externally-assessed performance levels at Pamoja in the years 2015-2019 (the five most recent years with available data) which rivaled those of students taught the same course conventionally, as introduced in the opening chapter.

The chief purpose of this chapter is to present, examine, and interpret the findings from those interviews for the purpose of evaluating the extent that the work of the SBCs within the OPM (Online Partnership Model) assists in motivating and thereby promoting and maintaining the autonomy, competence, and relatedness needed for the consistent engagement that is the norm of conventional direct instruction and indeed the explicit expectation at Pamoja. Within the SDT framework bearing in mind the evidence discussed in Chapter 2, I apply thematic analysis (very briefly introduced in Chapter 3, but considered in more detail in Section 4.2 of this chapter) to the data, whose findings on the contribution of SBCs to student motivation indicate varying degrees of consensus and divergence between the 14 students interviewed, and also between students and 4 SBCs and 2 Pamoja staff that were also interviewed.
In this chapter, I focus on the thematic analysis of the data and the findings emerging, which I consider largely on its own merits. In the next and final chapter, I include the more detailed discussion where I re-examine and assess the findings in the light of the existing literature, as well as this study’s validity, and its capacity to inform the design and operation of similar online programs.

In presenting the findings, I prefer to focus on the themes and the information that the students, SBCs, and Pamoja staff contributed to them, rather than to conduct separate thematic analyses of what each party contributed. This may be justified by numerous pieces of information found in the data analysis from the different parties that complement each other, sometimes viewing essentially similar scenarios from different angles.

Thus information can be more readily and effectively handed and placed in context by considering the inputs from the various parties together, theme by theme, and systematically under the specific codes. Otherwise, it can be easy to miss the complementary and sometimes conflicting nature of the information elicited from each party on particular themes and issues.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I conducted the thematic analysis with the purpose of identifying patterns and themes within the qualitative data. I chose this method rather than, for example, grounded theory, as thematic analysis allows for flexibility in application as it is not tied down to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective (Maguire and Delahunt 2017, p.3352). This gives a voice to the data and the facility of allowing the analysis to flow from the data without it being channeled and selectively analyzed within a pre-existing theoretical framework. This, as Braun and Clark claim, indicates that it may be more accurately called a method than a methodology (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As such, thematic analysis addresses my purposes in
that in giving the data a voice, it allows for considering and accommodating the diverse ways in which the contributions of the SBCs in terms of student motivation and student enabling are perceived by those involved in the Online Partnership model: students, SBCs, and Pamoja staff.

4.2 Applying thematic analysis to the data

In carrying out the thematic analysis, I followed Braun and Clarke’s six-steps guide: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and the ensuing write up that forms most of this chapter. My approach to the analysis was inductive, whereby I allowed the data to speak for itself in suggesting and prompting the emerging codes and themes that were strongly linked to it (Boyatzis, 1998) with the proviso that what they were informing lay within the scope of the research question. Emerging is a perhaps a misnomer: in practice, the codes were used to generate the themes as to they were not lying within the data or any pre-existing analysis that was awaiting retrieval (Braun and Clarke, 2019)

I preferred this rather than the deductive approach where the data is considered in the framework of pre-existing themes within an a priori template of codes (Crabtree and Miller, 1992) that in hindsight, in view of the codes and themes that were generated, would not have always been easy to predict. In applying this inductive approach, I had to take into account that SDT’s framing my research had the potential of biasing my interpretation of the findings. To that end, after conducting my own analysis, I engaged a professional statistician conversant with this method to carry out the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts with the aim of coming to a consensus
in identifying themes and codes, as explained below (pp.107-108). I also endeavored to quote enough from the transcripts for readers to judge my interpretations for themselves.

The inductive approach used was thus data-driven (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Though at first instance this seems to take the findings outside the autonomy, competence, and relatedness domains of SDT theory presented and developed in earlier chapters, I would argue that the data would be able to communicate more authentically if it was not instantly placed in one of the three SDT domains, but allowed to speak for itself and then according to its findings, classified under one, two, or even all three domains, with the possibility of extending SDT to add further domains apropos to this study. Thus I used this means of analysis to supply primary information to answer the focus of the research question: the role of SBCs in helping to motivate student progress in a wholly VLE environment, with existing theory to serve as a basis and reference points for subsequently interpreting and framing the findings as presented by the respondents. That theory would have the potential for extended development if the data findings appeared to support it.

Though the research question focuses on how and how far the SBCs’ inputs support student motivation, it is not intended to imply that it is assumed that their work has been supporting students in any operative and meaningful sense. Any such claims would wholly depend on the data volunteered by the parties in their interviews.

In generating the themes, I prioritized credibility: my aim being that they would most accurately represent the information given by those interviewed. This involved using thematic analysis in a reflexive way (Braun and Clarke, 2019), striving to engage with the data in a reflexive and thoughtful way with view to building themes on the basis of individual codes identified in the
data, and also bearing in mind the danger of biases already referred to. However, using reflexive thematic analysis did mean that the six-step procedure was not a linear, but rather a highly reiterative approach. For it constantly required returning to the data to see how accurately the codes and developing themes captured the interview information at both the face-value semantic levels, and the deeper implied latent levels. It was thus less of following a standard procedure, and more of a messy journey that went backwards and forwards in identifying small, relevant pieces of information as codes and then using them to build themes, with the focus on their capacity to inform the research question. Thus I found that these six phases overall blended together as the journey through analyzing the data became increasingly recursive, as typical when the thematic analysis is applied in reflexive way (Braun and Clarke, 2020).

It is this use of thematic analysis that allowed the emergence of unexpected themes from the data that were able to address what I wanted to know (Braun and Clarke, 2006): the themes in this study being those that can inform the contribution of the SBCs to the online learning process. That showed itself to be particular suitable in view of the unexpected nature of some of the findings that would not have been easily accommodated by pre-existing theory and speculations explored previous chapters, as discussed later in this chapter.

Thus I started with the data from the interviews, moving at the coding stage to broader generalizations, and finally, through the themes, seeking to enable the theory to emerge insofar that it was relevant to the informing on the contribution of the SBCs to the online study process. As Patton emphasizes, going from precise data to emerging theory enabled the themes to link to the data (Patton, 1990). Once the supported theory was present, I moved to assess it in terms of where it fitted, or did not fit, in with SDT as I presented it in earlier chapters.
In order to demonstrate the credibility of the findings, I have presented the phases through which I have processed the data, with view to enabling the reader to follow the process from the raw qualitative data to the often-complex findings, stage by stage, so that the reader may “audit the events, influences and actions of the researcher” (Koch, 1994, p.976) in being able to follow the decision trail, with the objective “to disclose the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible” (Nowell et al., 2017, p.1).

In addition, I have also sought to take into account various categories of bias possibilities that have the potential to influence my findings and interpretations; tackling and evaluating them forms part of the content of this chapter.

In line with the above, the journey from the raw primary data gathered in the interviews to indentifying and classifying the findings under the themes will now be examined. The whole task at this stage, using thematic analysis to extrapolate from the data the contribution of SBCs to the student’s online study experience, included the elements of the following stages:

(a) Familiarization with the data.

My working through the data bore in mind the practice emphasized by Braun and Clarke (2006) of reading through all of it at least once before beginning to code. In my case, more than a week had elapsed between transcribing the interviews and reading through them for that purpose. This meant that I encountered the data on more than one occasion: firstly in the interviewing process itself, and then at post-interview engagement level: reading through the data several times enabled a much better grasp of the content and the connections between the participants’ ideas as
they were discovered through the data (Alhojailan, 2012). In addition, repeatedly coming back to the familiarization-with-the-data stage prompted me to tackle the possible issues of bias in contextualizing and coding the information, as is now outlined, and developed later on in this and the final chapter.

In doing so, I returned to this initial stage following the first time I carried out the analysis, in order to examine and strengthen the validity and credibility of the findings, aiming for a fit between the respondents’ views and the researcher representation of them (Tobin and Begley, 2004). The issues with bias that were increasingly concerning me as a single researcher are considered in more detail later on in this chapter, as well as in the discussion in the final chapter.

By way of introduction as representing my concerns at this and later stages of analyzing my data, among the means of achieving credibility enumerated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I chose researcher engagement, and investigator triangulation. As a researcher, I had my work as an online teacher at Pamoja since 2011 to draw upon. I thus approached the data with the pre-existing experience at teaching Economics online at Pamoja that could be brought to bear in the task of interpreting information from the interviews in the context of the challenges and pitfalls commonly experienced by Pamoja VLE students in Economics. This on one hand allowed me to bring a more informed perspective to the process of coding and developing themes, but on the other hand I was aware that over-familiarity with handling Pamoja student and sometimes SBC issues at first hand could well carry the possibility of researcher bias. This was despite my carrying out the thematic analysis on two separate occasions, separated by a month, resulting in some reduction and simplification of the codes and themes. I therefore also used investigator triangulation (Decrop, 1999) by collaborating with a qualitative data-analyzing specialist to whom I explained my research and her role as co-investigator at this stage following my initial
analysis in order for her to undertake an independent thematic analysis of my data. In preparing her for the task, I briefed her in detail on the nature and scope of my research question and particularly on the OPM (Online partnership model), the assessment of whose contribution I collected the data.

This person was a researcher known to me from a mutual acquaintance. Employed as working in that field by the local municipality, she was conversant with the iterative procedures and skills needed to carry out the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts for the purpose of identifying themes and codes. In around 30 minutes, I verbally explained the research and themes that I wished to address from the transcripts, which were stressed as being confidential and to be returned to me for ultimate destruction on finishing the project. With that data, she independently classified the information under themes and codes, passed the findings to me, and then I compared them with my own categories. I found that although most of the analysis was similar to my own, it did differ in several respects as exemplified below, and I took those discrepancies into account when revising the themes and codes that were finally used in classifying the findings of this research on pages 112-114.

My reflexive approach to thematic analysis facilitated accommodating her findings when comparing them to mine, which was to result in some changes in the research codes and in several cases, modifications of the initial themes, prior to presenting the final coding in this chapter. For example, there were instance of codes for roles that I viewed as being part of the direct SBC contribution that she categorized as background elements contributing to an effective VLE environment in which the SBC operated, as discussed later in this chapter. Also, the researcher had considered placing the various barriers to online study under separate themes,
where I felt it would be simpler and more effective to use the more general “SBCs support their students in negotiating various barriers to online study” as a theme and identify that admittedly wide range of challenges as codes under the same theme. I have endeavored to re-examine these and other differences that occurred, taking them into account in the generating of codes and themes used in this final analysis of the material. I touch on the concerns of possible bias here as representing my ongoing awareness about its potential dangers from the outset of data analysis.

(b) Generating initial codes

In using a data-driven approach, I used largely open coding: I did not pre-set codes prior to the coding process, but used the practice of developing and modifying the codes as characteristic of an inductive (and at the same time reflexive) thematic analysis in carrying out the coding process (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). This enabled me to observe the perspectives of the participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In coding, I went through each segment of text of the 20 transcripts (14 students, 4 SBCs, and 2 Pamoja staff) and highlighted whatever appeared to inform on the motivational role of the SBCs, adding new codes as new categories of information could be identified in the text at a semantic or latent level. I listed the codes once I had worked through the transcripts as tabulated below.

The words “whatever appears to inform on the motivational role of SBCs” needs to be qualified. Some themes are direct, representing what SBCs directly do in actively supporting students in their VLE environment. Other themes are more indirect, representing the nature of the
environment and circumstances in which the SBC contributes, such the student’s motivating factors for choosing to study IB Economics online when there are usually other IB direct-instruction subject options provided by the school. Both are important. The first, the direct contribution of the SBCs is the focus of this study. The second, the context in which they typically operate is also vital: not only to give a educationally-environmental context for their contribution to be assessed, but, as discussed in the final chapter, to evaluate how far the findings in the Pamoja study on the contribution of SBCs may be potentially transferable to the future design of VLE environments for the pre-tertiary age group.

As emerging from the raw data of the interview electronic transcripts, the following initial codes emerged. At this stage, I allowed them to speak for themselves, and only at the interpretation stage represented in Table 2, worked on viewing them in terms of SDT-based theory.

Initial codes emerging in the data analysis include, for example, SBCs sustaining motivation when students find certain parts of the course creating tension, particularly with the three IAs (Internal Assessment coursework, together accounting for 20% of the final grade), in clarifying their stipulations and the expectations of Pamoja, and the online student’s emotional challenges given the importance of those tasks. Another example is finding the proximity position of the SBC particularly supportive because they know the students personally as well as their progress in other subjects. The full list of initial codes forms the content of Appendix 10.

(c) From codes to themes, reviewing themes, and defining themes

I have purposely placed stages 3, 4, and 5 together, as I found myself going back and forth in tentatively building themes only to find flaws particularly where the experience of the SBC input
could more simply and accurately be represented by rebuilding the codes into fewer themes. Thus those stages were reiterative, tending to go in a circular rather than linear direction.

Having identified the codes, I proceeded to search for codes that together would form series of patterns which would build up into themes that would inform the research question. I bore in mind the role of each theme as encapsulating something important that could not always be obtained by quantifiable measures, but could combine individual units of information captured in the codes in a more coherent manner (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Indeed, in defining themes for this purpose, I have been working on the basis that their purpose is to link substantial portions of the data together (DeSantis and Ugarizza, 2000) in what appears to best capture the information supplied by the respondents within the scope of the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

This on first reading appears to invite bias in selecting data that might support my research hypothesis that the work of SBCs is a crucial determinant in enabling the Online Partnership Model (OPM) to deliver end-of-course final grades that rival direct instruction. Though I discuss my seeking to minimize bias later in this chapter at a more comprehensive level, I need to include that to confront bias possibilities at this stage, I strove to include information from the interviews relevant to the themes that would show the relative importance of sources of support to online students other than SBCs. For one of the strengths of thematic analysis is that it can summarize the key features of the data as a whole as it “forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling the data” (King, 2004, p.268). This makes it possible to avoid the overemphasis on material that would support the SBC role whilst underemphasizing or even ignoring elements other than SBC involvement that promoted student success, none the least being the direct input from Pamoja, including course materials, fellow students, online teachers,
and administration.

I also sought to carried out the process of coding and deriving themes inductively and reflexively. As explained earlier in this chapter, this was designed to enable the themes, via the codes, to be data-driven and emerge from the data, even where they would not necessarily appear to be a report of the specific questions at the interviews (Nowell et al., 2017). In doing so, I also bore in mind the possibility that the development of themes that initially were of less direct relevance to the research question might nevertheless contribute to understanding the phenomena under investigation (King, 2004). This was particularly important in getting a picture of the range of non-SBC-associated pre-existing and course-ongoing motivating elements with which the SBC was interacting, usually on a regular basis, as explained above.

I carried out the process of collating the coded data by writing each code on a separate card, and then placing each card next to the one(s) that it had the most in common forming a series of patterns or strands, and then named each strand according to the theme that best seemed to fit the chain of coded data. I carried this process on two separate occasions separated by three weeks; long enough to repeat the task with an open mind, as considered in Section 1 of this chapter. On each occasion, I collated all the coded data relevant to each theme (Clarke and Braun, 2013). In the minority of cases where they differed substantially, I compared the groupings of the two occasions, with the second generally being the more coherent especially when finding one code being more suited to theme than the one it was originally assigned to. Also, the first time placed the codes into 8 themes, which were reduced and simplified into 6 in the second coding. In both rejections, the codes appeared to more readily create already identified themes which more directly addressed the research question. I then compared my findings to those of the
independent researcher, resulting in the set of themes and codes below.

The grouping of the codes defined in the previous table are presented in the table below. As I used an inductive approach, the themes and codes are what emerged from the data. I did not attempt to place them into the SDT framework as they emerged, but classified them on the basis the findings within the data, on the basis of the content of the data. Once the themes and codes were classified, I then proceeded to examine the findings in terms of the focus of this research: the role of the SBCs in supporting motivation of the three needs-satisfaction domains: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

**Themes and codes used in the data analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme background:</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Code names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The students come to online learning with positive motivating forces within which the SBCs interact</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1. Economics interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2. School curriculum online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3. Flexible study time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4. SBC confidence in Pamoja’s work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5. SBC confidence in Pamoja materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6. Student confidence in Pamoja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7. Risk acceptance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Theme 1: SBCs in conjunction with their schools provide facilities for online students within the school framework | 5 | 1. Enable direct student engagement |
| | 6 | 2. Administrative functions |
| Theme 2: SBCs support their students in negotiating various barriers to online study | 8  | 1. Input - technical/introductory |
|                                                                          | 11 | 2. Input – Pamoja interactive activities |
|                                                                          | 10 | 3. Input - time management |
|                                                                          | 9  | 4. Input - troublesome course content |
|                                                                          | 13 | 5. Input – instant feedback |
|                                                                          | 12 | 6. Input – student distress |
|                                                                          | 7  | 7. Input plus for student engagement |
|                                                                          | 14 | 8. Inputs - non-SBC connected people (moderating code) |

| Theme 3: SBCs are in a proximate position to support students as motivation issues occur | 15 | 1. SBC perceived as a real person |
|                                                                                           | 16 | 2. Immediate access position of SBC |
|                                                                                           | 17 | 3. Liaison position of SBC |

| Theme 4: Being readily and regularly accountable to their SBCs motivates students | 18 | 1. Reinforcement input of SBC |
|                                                                                   | 19 | 2. SBC audience effect |

| Theme 5: The efficacy of the SBC depends on the SBC level of engagement | 23 | 1. SBC level of engagement |
|                                                                         | 24 | 2. Common goals for all parties |
As the table shows, five of the themes directly address the contribution the SBCs make to supporting the students’ motivation in studying within the Pamoja virtual environment: provision of facilities for online study within the school framework, support in negotiating various barriers to online study, ease of access for support when issues occur, student sense of accountability to the SBCs, and the over-arching claim that the efficacy of the SBC depends on the SBC level of engagement (Themes 1-5). In the framework of those themes and respective codes, I proceed to examine the motivating contribution of SBCs in terms of the degree that they motivate the students through supporting their needs satisfaction in the three domains of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. I do so on the basis of the information that the participants shared with me at interview.

The remaining theme that I have named ‘Theme background’ considers what the students bring to the VLE situation at the outset of, and during, the two-year program. Overall, the findings indicated that students already come to this particular VLE situation with positive motivating forces within which the SBCs interact. It is important that the detailed background information volunteered by the participants is explored, for two reasons. Firstly, it informs this study by giving a context, a beginning-of-the-program starting point, in which to place the contribution of the OPM and the work of the SBCs. Without that context, it is possible to undermine the study’s credibility by exaggerating the SBCs’ part in the student’s progress: it is unlikely, for example that students who decided to study Economics at IB level entered the program completely unmotivated and the SBCs motivated the students in the three domains to highly-functional achievement and engagement levels. Secondly, this motivational context has to be taken into
account when transferring the findings for the OPM to virtual environments where these background elements are substantially different.

This chapter now proceeds to explore the findings under each theme in terms of the codes used to label the findings in the transcripts, the input of the participants, and the motivation theory considered in Chapter 2. The purpose is to examine the multi-faceted inputs of the SBCs and assess for each of those elements the contribution of SBCs towards motivating students in the Pamoja environment.

4.3 Findings from the analysis of the data.

Having classified the findings from the participants as themes and associated codes, I proceed to consider the detailed findings from the thematic analysis of the data contributed by online students, SBCs, and Pamoja administrative staff in terms of answering the research question: “How effective is Pamoja’s model in working with SBCs in motivating the learning process in the online study mode?” I look first at the motivation dimensions of the background setting in which this particular VLE typically operates, and then, within that context, explore in turn each theme that focuses on the SBC contribution to developing, sustaining and enhancing that motivation.
Theme background: The students come to online learning with positive motivating forces within which the SBCs interact.

This background theme presents the contextual environment within which SBC involvement occurs. The codes forming the components theme indicate that the landscape of motivating elements that students bring to the program is multi-dimensional and complex, as I proceed to explore.

A. Students chose to study economics online because that is what they wanted to study as a pre-tertiary subject (Code 1: Economics interested).

10 out of the 14 students interviewed reported studying Economics online out of interest: explicitly interested, as academically interested in Economics as a subject in its own right, and/or implicitly interested, as using their Economics as a basis of a career which interests them; their future ambitions lying in the field of Economics. Economics interested is thus used to indicate intrinsic motivation as personal involvement and desire to commit to studying it by available means, including if necessary those other than direct classroom instruction. Typical comments for explicit interest in Economics per se included the more general:

“Economics is a subject that I'm super-passionate about.” [Student, M, above average performer, not in my group]

“I wanted to do Economics because it has been something that I have always been interested in.” [Student, M, average performer, not in my group]

“What was driving me was that I had an interest in Economics, and I really wanted to learn it.” [Student, M, average performer, not in my group]
And more specifically:

“For me, the Macro-economics is something that I’m quite interested in, since the year before I entered… there was a trade war, and I wanted to investigate the reason behind it.” [Student, M, above average performer, in my group]

Implicit interest including further academic and career trajectories where they perceived that Economics would be a key component was represented by:

“I want to pursue Economics at University.” [M, above average performer, my student]

“I did Economics because I’d like to do accounting, it’d be very helpful.” [Student M, below average performer, not in my group]

Against the Economics interested intrinsic motivation, a minority of three students reported that they chose to study Economics online out of parental guidance or lack of choice within the IB program. For example:

“My Dad had an Economics education at university. My Dad said: “You will be learning this”. My whole life he told me how important Economics was, how practical it was in real life. I couldn’t understand him, because I had no idea what Economics was… I wasn’t interested in any of the choices [that the school offered by direct instruction], which were Chemistry and Geography [the options for those periods in the timetable].” [F, below average performer, in my group]

In sum, the motivation levels that students initially brought to the program ranged from externally-regulated compliance and possible introjection-regulated desire for family approval in the “My Dad said you will be learning this”, through the more commonly reported identification-regulated personal importance of the “I’d like to do accounting” genre, to the intrinsically-
motivated taking the opportunity of studying IB Economics online out of personal interest: “Economics is a subject that I’m super-passionate about.” Thus the range of motivational attributes those students brought to the program is generally positive in terms of initial commitment and desire for success in the program, but complex, with a range of regulatory styles and motivators that are both extrinsic and intrinsic.

In addition, the “I’d like to do accounting” genre of response indicates having chosen to study online Economics with the relatedness of a particular goal content in mind: qualifying for entry into the desired higher education towards professional qualification. If that goal content is the student’s own choice, it would be intrinsically motivating, which is likely to enhance the motivation for deeper engagement and greater persistence in conceptual learning (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006).

B. Students already committed to studying Economics chose to study it online at Pamoja because learning in a VLE forms part of their school curriculum (Code 2: School curriculum online).

A minority of schools bring the VLE into their curriculum by positively encouraging or even mandating an online study component within its own provision of the IB curriculum, with the subject-to-be-studied that way chosen by the student. This is an important element as in such cases the VLE, and by extension the SBC work, takes a core role within the school curriculum, rather than in the more typical scenario where it involves a minority, and sometimes only a few members, of the student body. This was the position for 2 students and 1 SBC. As that one SBC reported:
“In [name of the SBC’s school]… where students are [currently] required to take one subject online as part of their school policy at IB Diploma level. Of those two first two [IB student] cohorts that were… online (2014-2015) - they were real delinquents, those kids, we got just about those kids all through. The first cohort was 14, the second cohort, I think it was about 30, was a lot bigger and even they did really well. They did the humanities ones [Econ, B&M, Psychology, Information Technology]... They worked twice a week with me in the classroom.” [SBC, F, very experienced. Also currently works as a Pamoja online teacher]

The above implies at least some external regulation requiring the attribute compliance on the part of the student, the pressure coming from the likelihood that a teacher-team innovating with outside-provided VLE at this level will be determined to do its best to turn it into a success story, including the above-reported close contact with students that otherwise might be academically at risk in such an environment. In this case it is VLE support from the whole school environment that is serving as one of the positive extrinsic and wholly externally regulated motivating forces within which the SBCs interact, in this case by operating in the front line directly with the student.

However, the motivating attributes that the students coincidentally might be bring to the program appear to have been considerably more internalized: neither of the two respondents indicated ambivalence to studying online at IB level as part of school policy. This was typified by:

“In terms of online study, my school did not give me a choice whether to study online or not however I was more than happy to study online. This was because with technology becoming more and more widespread and easy to use, I figured that Economics would not be the only online class I would ever have to take so I figured it best to try and get my head around it now, and as recent events have proved, I believe I made a good decision.” [Student, M, below average performer, in my group].

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This albeit minority VLE background scenario indicates the existence of positive alignment between the School and the parties involved in the OPM model as motivating background force within which the SBCs can interact and seek to sustain. However, it is important not to over-exaggerate this form of support, as only a minority of those interviewed experienced SBCs in such an externally regulated setting: in most cases, online study was used as a resort where direct instruction for Economics was not provided by the school. But even where online study is externally regulated, the responses from the two students indicated that the regulatory style that such online students bring to the program could well be more internalized, even if still essentially extrinsic. This is exemplified by the student identifying with and integrating with the opportunity to gain experience in being an online student, with objective of developing the skills to access education and training in the future.

C. Flexible study time: Appreciation of the change from school direct instruction, with the flexibility of study hours. (Code 3: Flexible study time)

5 student participants reported that they appreciated that the Pamoja VLE was giving them flexibility during each study week. It was providing them the autonomy to decide when and where to study, with the weekly as opposed to more frequent deadlines affording them more autonomy in their studying in terms of organizing their work, exemplified by:

“It certainly helps me a lot in discipline and organization, and being able to manage myself and stay consistent with the work. I also think that it gives me a bit more flexibility in terms of being able to arrange the work the way I wanted it to be. I am not tied down to a classroom where getting through the work
would take longer. I can to go at my own pace. I can also get my work for the week done much quicker at Pamoja than in other classes.” [Student F. above average performer, not in my group]

And:

“And actually, I think I made a lot of progress, seeing how I deal with my own work and manage my own work... I think it helps me a lot for University. University is going to be very much independent, you know, and I think this is really helping me for that. And for six months, I have focused on achieving my deadline with very strict time management. I never missed any of the deadlines for which I’m very grateful for…” [Student F. above average performer, not in my group]

One student implied that she was being helped by the VLE facility of being able to study at her own pace rather than being held back by direct instruction:

“I think having one of my IB subjects online lets me control what I study, that is perfect because... sometimes I thought that the teaching in class kept me back just a little bit.” [Student, F, above average performer, not my student].

In contrast, none of the participants reported on the greater student autonomy making itself an obstacle in that it allowed for more opportunities for procrastination than direct instruction; something that could lead to student disorganization and challenges for the SBCs. On the contrary, the data indicates that students regard flexible time study as an asset rather than a challenge to their VLE working practices, thus another background factor in assisting the SBCs and the students to the shared goal of student success. Thus it appears at this stage that sustaining
autonomy in motivation might well be an element that flows from the Pamoja setup per se, rather than a motivation needs satisfaction that needs to be supported by SBC input.

D. SBC confidence in Pamoja as a VLE supplier: (Code 20: SBC Confidence in Pamoja’s work, Code 21, SBC Confidence in Pamoja’s materials)

This code addresses the SBC’s confidence in online study on the basis of their past experiences of student successes at their school through Pamoja, and on Pamoja’s materials and practices. These have been developing since Pamoja’s first year of full operations in 2009: and some schools have been involved since the outset. There has thus been an ongoing buildup of trust between VLE supplier and school, expressed in:

“I’ve been doing it for 8 years… I think [Pamoja’s] doing a better job than when I first joined them. Then they only had those kids who were desperate to do a particular course. Now, Pamoja is getting quite a wide range of students, and their average is still high. Which I think proves the quality of the courses. At [name of school, where the SBC previously worked] we had all the kids [in entire year cohort] doing those courses in humanities [subjects] and I had plenty of parents asking how they’d be coping with this online stuff if they were just an average student. In some ways the course is better delivered than a face-to-face teacher that isn’t well-organized. In fact, the material is of excellent quality, put together by experts in the field [with the collaboration of the IB], and the student can actually be getting a better deal that way. And financially it makes better sense than to employ a teacher who is not that well organized. In my present School [in NZ], I wish Pamoja did some of that [teaching] rather than employing a teacher. With our [named previous school]… even those kids who were forced to take Pamoja courses, with very few exceptions they still did extremely well. Especially some Indian kids who want chalk and talk, and it took them quite a long time before they came to grips with it, they did just as well (if not better) on those Pamoja
courses than in their face-to-face subjects. Which is interesting, because for those kids, I often wondered if they would” [SBC, F, very experienced, NZ as above].

The above indicates that the SBC’s experience in collaborating with Pamoja’s OPM method of delivery has been building up confidence and a track record of successful, quality, and from the school’s point of view economic VLE, which the SBC has been communicating to the students directly and in some instances also through parents. In fact all SBCs interviewed indicated confidence with Pamoja’s work including those with less experience, exemplified by:

“I tell them that Pamoja is an educational company that wants you to pass, and they haven’t scheduled you something you can’t do or more than you can do…” [SBC, M, UK origin, serving in Japan, second year working as SBC]

It should be added that confidence between SBC and VLE provider could well have been enhanced during Covid-19 days, building up a track record of mutual trust and confidence that can be positively conveyed in reassuring students that they can succeed in this VLE environment:

“We’re following the pandemic, the students [in Year 1, June end-of-year Pamoja exams] were able to remote-test… Our connections with the SBC helped to enable this: when it first happened in China we were working with the SBCs there working out how they could support students going into lockdown… and it was this continued back and forth… on the discussions with the SBCs and our academic teams to find solutions to the big obstacles that came up this year. It’s our relationships with the SBCs that seems to have got our students through this particularly disruptive period in their studies” [Pamoja staff working with SBCs, M second year]

This development of an ongoing symbiotic working relationship between the SBCs and Pamoja may well be a crucial background confidence-building factor, in its affording the SBCs a sense
of being not merely a stakeholder, but an active participant in Pamoja’s work especially in a period of educational uncertainty reinforcing the SBC’s confidence which they pass on to the students. SBC input to student motivation can, by its very nature, only be as good as what the SBCs are willing to input, which is likely to be stronger where they have confidence in the Pamoja set-up and program, as expressed by the participating SBCs. SBCs sensing Pamoja as being a serious, experienced, and professional setup that enjoys their confidence may thus encourage them to support motivation according to the individual needs of the student: for example the relatedness (and possibly autonomy) needs-support of those students that sensed some measure of disorientation when they were in the no-longer-familiar chalk and talk environment.

E. Student confidence in Pamoja as a VLE supplier: (Code 22: Student confidence in Pamoja)

This code addresses the student’s confidence in online study on the basis on Pamoja’s materials and practices. None of the students reported having chosen to study at Pamoja on the basis of recommendation from past Pamoja students. However, as students progress through the program, there is evidence of their gaining confidence in their VLE supplier and their Pamoja teacher for reasons other that their school’s and their SBC’s trust in the system. This would enlarge the theme of “The students come to online learning with positive motivating forces within which the SBCs interact” to include “The students are sustained by the Pamoja system with positive motivating forces within which the SBCs interact”. Among the supportive elements was the
reported user-friendly design of the Pamoja platform, which none of the participating students disagreed with, as exemplified by:

“Pamoja is quite easy to understand the way the website works and you just click on the assignment you see what to have to do.” [Student, F, average, in my group]

The students also appreciated that the website arrangement gave them the opportunity to go back to content not understood first time:

“If I don’t understand anything, I’ll go through the lesson again… You know that you can go through the lessons [course materials] again and again and again.” [Student, M, below average, not in my group]

Furthermore, students found their Pamoja teachers to be caring and approachable, in both academic and organizational aspects, with no participating student indicating otherwise:

“I felt that I could message… the online teacher if I had the need.” [Student, M, above average, in my group]

“If I need an extension with the assignment, I’ll most likely be turning to my Pamoja teacher” [Student, M, below average, not in my group]

“I would ask a question [to my Pamoja teacher] and get an answer a bit later.” [Student, F, above average, not in my group]

Thus students appear to have been building their sense of autonomy through their interacting with the Pamoja website and materials, and through their ease of access to the Pamoja faculty which they perceive as effective and caring. They see that setup as nurturing a student-friendly rather than alienating environment within which they work. These findings would appear to considerably reduce the importance of the SBC as motivation sustainer, as the student need for
assistance in both autonomy (ease in using platform, ability to negotiate an extension directly with Pamoja), and competence (able to master concepts at one’s own pace, being able to ask a question to the Pamoja teacher when in difficulties) is likely to come from the Pamoja platform and teaching faculty, rather than from the SBC. However, as we shall see, the reported patterns of student support under other themes and codes indicate a more complex overall picture in SBC support within the different motivation needs-support domains.

F. Acceptance of risk and associated apprehensions in studying online: (Code 4: Risk acceptance)

This code encompasses the acceptance of risk at the time of making the decision to study Economics within the available VLE environment, when (other than in one case where VLE was part of the mainstream curriculum) it was possible to study another subject in this cluster by direct instruction in the school classroom.

All but three students reported at least some degree of apprehension when making their choice to study this way. For example one combined that doubt with feeling unsure as to whether her choice to study online was indeed compatible with the IB program as a whole:

Student: I was kind of hesitating to study online because I have not done that… and I didn’t know that technology has improved this much…

Interviewer: Did you feel doubtful at the time?
Student: Yes, I did. A lot. Since I didn’t have a close relationship with Pamoja and the IB, I thought that they were separated systems, so that can’t be working together. So I thought it was a bit like getting a textbook online. [Student, F, average performer, my student]

One student claimed that feelings of uncertainty prevented students that she knew to follow her path. This would support the possibility that those electing to study this way are a self-selected student population who are prepared to take the risk of being able to succeed in the previously-not-experienced VLE environment:

“I know there’s a lot of students who were considering taking an online course at the time, but decided against it, and some of them have actually regretted it since then” [Student, F, above average performer, not my student].

In addition, the common situation of late, post-September starts to Pamoja, happen because the risk of VLE learning was one that the student initially did not wish to take:

“At the very beginning, I rejected the idea because I was scared of doing it online, because I thought it would be hard. But I made this decision in December, like the last minute, when I told my teacher that I would do the idea, although I rejected it in September.” [Student, F, average performer, my student].

Despite the unknown degree of risk in studying this way, students’ responses indicated their bringing a degree of courage and resilience to the situation, as represented by:

“I didn’t know how challenging it would be, but I know that whatever comes my way, I will deal with.” [Student, F, below average performer, my student]
Summary of findings on the theme: “The students come to online learning with positive motivating forces within which the SBCs interact”.

Despite initial apprehensions in studying this way, Pamoja’s VLE IB Economics students bring to the program the determination to study Economics at pre-tertiary level online where other IB-compatible direct-instruction subject courses are available with the belief that studying Economics will be interesting and useful. The data suggests that the students who choose to study online are not a random group of people within the school population or indeed within the IB cohort of candidates, but are to at least some extent a self-selected population, with a propensities towards the following characteristics that already positively support motivation, interacted-with by SBCs who are themselves confident in the quality and operations of that particular online environment. They are likely to appreciate the freedom through which they are able to exercise autonomous behaviors in Pamoja’s perceived flexible environment compared to the more controlled characteristics of the direct instruction environment, while at the same time having a sense of the school being supportive of their online program and engagement therein. They also sense early in the program that the entire setup of the Pamoja environment is conducive to their progress and issues that they might face. Their internally-driven motivation to succeed may well be enhanced by the relatedness of their personally-important higher education and professional goals’ contents.

Thus in the light of the data, the motivation driven by the regulatory style that the students bring to the VLE appear to have the attributes of identification with the attributes of consciously valuing the course and its activities, with a predominantly internal locus of causality. The data
from both students and SBCs also evidences an internally-driven integrated regulatory style of motivation in the students’ finding congruence between what is personally important to them and their progress through the program. It also indicates that the experiences that both the students and the SBCs report with the Pamoja site and community do support motivations needs within the three domains of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. However, there are still gaps in motivational needs support with a view to a needs satisfaction outcome that SBC input can be important, as I consider within the analysis of the next themes.

It follows that the SBCs, the contours of whose detailed roles I will examine in the next sections, are interacting with neither a random IB population nor an inexperienced VLE supplier. In the wider online world, any initiative that seeks to relate the findings from those of the SBCs at Pamoja to, for example, a school considering whether to offer online a range of subjects of interest to only a small number of students for the purpose of economizing on staff, will have to take into account the evidence explored here on the type of students choosing to study by this method, and the extent that the online teachers, platform, and materials are of similar standing. On the basis of the data explored in the previous or forthcoming sections, none of it seem to be random, but indicates pre-existing motivational congruence between the three components of the OPM model: Pamoja, SBCs, and online IB Economics students.

Theme 1: SBCs in conjunction with their schools provide facilities for online students within the school framework

I have considered the evidence indicating the contours of typical academic settings within which Pamoja’s SBCs operate, emphasizing the motivating-supporting characteristics that both the
students and Pamoja tend to bring to the VLE. This is especially important when contemplating transferring the recommendations for practice in this study (discussed in Chapter 5) as support for hypothesizing motivation levels present in other VLEs that do not share similar characteristics. Thus, any initiative that seeks to relate the findings from those of the SBCs at Pamoja to, for example, a school considering whether to offer online a range of subjects of interest to only a small number of students for the purpose of economizing on staff, will have to take into account the evidence explored here on the type of students choosing to study by this method, and the extent that the online teachers, platform, and materials are of similar standing. On the basis of the evidence explored in this section, none of those seem to be random.

Students and SBCs both emphasized that online study is not consigned to after-school hours, but it typically forms part of the school day and is given similar importance to the other subjects taught by direct instruction, under the codes examined below.

A. SBCs assist in promoting regular student online engagement within periods timetabled by the school, during the school day (Code 5: Enable student direct engagement).

Students universally reported that the hours of the school day that they were timetabled to study online were the same periods that other students in their year were attending direct instruction classes in IB courses in alternative subjects on the same option line. This indicates school support for online studies at times when students may well be more receptive to study than when there are competing out-of-school activities and tiredness at the end of the school day. The degree of ongoing and direct SBC involvement, however, varied considerably, as reported by
both SBCs and students. Students pointed out that they valued this timetabling arrangement, as exemplified by:

“My school gave me school time, you know class time for Economics. I tried my best to finish all the work in those class times as I knew that I would not really be working at home. So I try that, and if I am not able to finish my work during class time, I try to finish at home…” [Student, F, average, in my group].

In a minority of cases these sessions were formalized with physical supervision from the SBC or another delegated member of staff, ensuring that there was maximum and enforced engagement. As one SBC reported:

“I’ve got a psychology student who’s not good at managing his time… I told him there, in the library: ‘You’re going to sit there, in the library, with your back to me so that I can see your laptop. You just need to do the work for one hour. We didn’t need a discussion…’ He can’t give me a BS answer, because he knows I am tracking him on Pamoja.” [SBC, M, second year].

A minority of students and SBCs reported similar rigorous supervisory support. More typically, the school is less directly involved in how the students structure the time even though it provides the facilities for VLE study:

“We have an IB Diploma Center, where we’re supposed to work, but it sometimes get too loud between students, so sometimes I find it easier to work after School on Pamoja.” [Student, F, above average, in my group]

At the other extreme, a number of students, but none of the SBCs reported little or no SBC involvement in studying online during the school day. For example:
“Personally, there has not been a lot of communication between me and my SBC. Yes, at my school people do have meetings with a SBC, but if everything is going well, there is not a lot of contact with the SBC.”

[Student, F, above average, in my group].

Overall, although the SBC and associates-in-the-same task are very much part of the force that enables online study during school time and on school premises, the degree that their impact directly influences the student to make the most of the available time varies considerably. The ready access that SBCs have to students’ online progress means that they can promptly address concerns that appear in their records. In the example of the student showing lack of autonomy in managing to organize working time to keep up with the program, the SBC extrinsically assists motivation through external regulation by imposing a supervised set-up based on compliance in attending and being supervised in the timetabled sessions. No students reported themselves as resenting such formalized motivation structured within the school disciplinary framework: on the contrary, in motivational terms they saw it as giving them a structure for study rather than leaving them with a degree of autonomy that they may well have not been able to use effectively.

This echoes the argument put forward on the basis of the literature in Chapter 2, that it is the proximity of the on-site facilitators that enables them to support motivation extrinsically where online students lack sufficient autonomy in managing their studies. The online facilitators’ running a lab setting requiring compliance which in itself can create an atmosphere that can promotes purposeful online study: exemplified by Chapter 2’s: “The lab is good because you’re under the eyes of the facilitator and your fellow classmates. You just kind of feel the drive [that you] need to be working on it”. (Borup and Stimson, 2019, p.39).

However the majority of student participants reported little SBC direct involvement, beyond the
school’s timetabling periods within the school day. The students exercised their autonomy in keeping within the weekly requirements both within the timetabled parts of the school day and time at home, their motivation for autonomy appearing to come from sources other than direct intervention of the SBCS.

B. SBCs deal with the administrative logistics of the students’ VLE studies as determined by Pamoja (Code 6: Administrative functions), which can impact the SBCs work as motivators.

In being Pamoja’s first point of contact with the student’s school, SBCs have responsibilities for supervising end-of-semester examinations and IB externally-moderated coursework assignments, as well as handling individual issues raised by, or with Pamoja. Though typically unnoticed by students, it can prove quite onerous, particularly where the SBC is new and unacquainted with the routines. In addition, lapses in student engagement invariably prompt communications from Pamoja School Services to the SBC, requiring immediate follow-up and provisions for catching up. As one SBC pithily put it:

“The admin side… demanding to deal with, though it can be overwhelming at times… also takes time”

[SBC, M, also school librarian]

And as another expanded on the handling the logistics:

“Much of the work is administrative, not difficult, but needs being absolutely accurate… Last year, I had an e-mail that the students hadn’t done all the exams they should have done. I knew that I’d done everything right. But I was still unclear”. [SBC, M, second year]
In contrast, no student commented on the work of the SBCs behind the scenes: at times demanding onerous duties that all have to carry out in order for students to be allowed to continue and complete the two-year online program. The students were, as we shall see in the next themes, able to comment on their SBCs’ inputs that were open and visible to them, but their position of their being students did not enable them to view the considerable amounts of structuring on their behalves that were happening under the hood, such as the hours involved in communicating with Pamoja School Services over issues such as end-of-year and trial final examinations which are set by Pamoja, but administered at all stages by the school.

This point emphasizes the responsibilities of the SBCs to both Pamoja and the student, which both actively engage the SBCs in the students’ studies and ongoing progress. If, for example, a student’s IB internal assessment assignment is not delivered in accordance to the precise stipulations of the IB (for example accompanied by the wrong form, nor form, or an inaccurately completed form), Pamoja will immediately contact the SBC before forwarding their internal assessments on to the IB examiners, which could involve some rather exhaustive follow-up. These types of Pamoja-SBC contacts may well have the value of preventing student attrition during crucial, but tense stages in the course, as the administrative pressures prompt the SBCs to do what they can to get maximum cooperation from the students and within the relatedness domain arising out of SBC proximity, motivating them when necessary, doing what they can to ensure that they meet Pamoja administrative deadlines. This links to the next theme, which explores a range of barriers to study.

**Theme 2: SBCs support their students in negotiating various barriers to online study**

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The data implied that some students were being challenged at crucial stages of the program. As a group of student participants, individuals reported SBC input in helping them with the technicalities of grasping the workings of the Pamoja platform at the beginning of the course, and also their support in the following at later stages during the course: unfamiliar Pamoja routines, time management issues, troublesome course content, getting instant feedback, and student disengagement for non-Pamoja-related factors. In addition, one third of the students reported SBC input of a nature that was beyond that prescribed by Pamoja, and a similar number mentioned receiving substantial supportive input from people other than their SBC. I proceed to examine the nature and relative importance of the SBCs in helping student address their barriers to online studies. As one SBC observed:

“If the students are the type that are going to love the online experience, then it [SBC support] is less crucial, except for the exam routines. However, there are students who are struggling… I had to work with the kids and the Pamoja teacher to keep things together. The connection is really critical. I think it’s the make or the break for kids that would succeed or fall away from the Pamoja-type setting.” [SBC, F, very experienced, NZ as above]

This SBC’s judgment was made on the basis of both working at a SBC at a large school, and later experience as an online teacher, so she was contributing the experience of the Pamoja setting as both an inside worker facing the logistics of responsibility for online students, and as an outside collaborator, as an SBC who knew other Pamoja students personally, on a day-to-day basis. She puts forward her impression that with a substantial number of students, it is the efficacy of the SBC that is crucial for ‘keeping things together’ implying but for that, many students would find themselves in critical arrears with their engagement, and thus workflow, and progress. This point was also supported by Pamoja staff:
“What we often find is that when the SBC is engaged, so is the student… That might be with a particularly high achieving student, or less so. It doesn’t necessarily link to attainment, but it does link to engagement. So in those cases, there’s definitely that link… It’s the SBCs that don’t chase the kids that are struggling…”

[Pamoja staff working with both SBCs and Pamoja teachers, M]

Another Pamoja staff member went further, claiming that it is SBC collaborating with Pamoja in dealing with student problems that is crucial for keeping students on track:

“When the SBC isn’t as cooperative and really actioning our request, then the student feels as if he’s got away with it. But if the student sees the communication between the Pamoja and the SBC, the student feels more cooperative, it often sees a turnaround and they begin to submit outstanding assignments. I think it’s essential that there’s someone that’s in School that can meet face-to-face with the students, to make it a little more real for the students.” [Pamoja staff working with SBCs, M second year]

This implies that initial alerts for the need for SBC intervention do not just come from students or SBC observations, but that they appear on Pamoja’s dashboard and are actioned by their school services communicating directly with the SBC, and that subsequent student “turnaround and submitting outstanding assignments” is prompted by the SBC taking action. In addition, at a more general level, this Pamoja staff member is recognizing a fundamental issue applicable to online teaching in general: that however students are familiar with computers, it takes an SBC to make the online experience more real, less virtual in nature, and more on par with classes taught by direct instruction.

These participant observations appear to be very much in harmony with three key arguments developed in the literature review. Firstly, the on-site facilitator, at Pamoja personified by the
SBC, is proximate, and can therefore take direct action where student motivation is lacking, with the option of being able to obtain the support of the school organizational structure to motivate the student towards developing autonomy (as considered under the Theme #1). Secondly, the on-site facilitator has the capacity to develop a personal working relationship with the student through that proximity: that relationship with a familiar person helping the student to satisfy the motivational need to relatedness. Thirdly, the effectiveness of any such intervention depends on the SBC’s being capable (as well as willing) of giving the necessary support, which in the Pamoja scenario is addressed by the company’s stipulation that every SBC completes a training program to that end.

The next stages appear to consider the SBC roles in motivation-supporting students when facing the particular issues that they reported.

A. SBCs help with the initial stages of mastering the mechanics of working to the requirements of the Pamoja online platform (Code 8: Input technical/introductory)

The SBCs’ job description holds that their work includes monitoring student progress in Student Orientation, which the students are required to successfully complete before starting their main course. This is to ensure “that they acquire the information needed to fully prepare them for their course” (Pamoja Education, SBC Job Description, p.2), which includes the working of the Pamoja platform, the importance of academic integrity, and the weekly work routines and deadlines.
But by the time the students participated in this study they were already in their second semester of the program, so getting accustomed to the Pamoja platform was a memory rather than a current pressing matter. However, one participant who started when the course was already several months in progress reported finding Pamoja’s orientation course introducing the routines rather time consuming and was grateful to her SBC for reassuring her that it was vital despite her concern in catching up with the material as quickly as possible. Another reported that her SBC introduced her into the system and how it worked, which had helped her with initially familiarizing her with the mechanics of the platform. This concurs with an SBC who reported considerable involvement at this beginning stage as per the job description, which became less as students become more familiar with the online setup:

“I had a couple of students who were not sure what they were supposed to do, during the first couple of weeks of the class course… getting used to the format and platform, in tasks getting to use the platform… It was at that stage, before they got on [to Week 3 and their assignments] that they had a lot of questions… It also helped that I could [at this stage] share their screen with them, and so I could help them. So that I can see what they’re doing when they log in. This was only with the first few weeks of the course. Afterwards they got the hang of it, and I didn’t have to sit around with them.” [SBC, M, first year, Taiwan]

However, an internal task with my new first-year IB group whereby they were required to reflect on their progress as new Pamoja students did not elicit even one mention of problems in interacting with the online platform, which could indicate that online platform issues requiring SBC support are relatively infrequent (or perhaps quickly forgotten). It also implies that the initial training is sufficiently clearly presented by Pamoja for the student to quickly achieve the necessary autonomy and competence to work in its VLE, without any SBC input needed to support any motivational needs in acquiring the required online skills. That could be attributed to
students’ familiarity with working with increasingly widespread school online platforms in their direct instruction experience, such as with Managebac, a program designed for specifically IB schools whereby IB teachers and students interact. These points are supported by the student respondents’ reported satisfaction with the ease of interacting with the website, exemplified with:

“I think the platform is well organized, because I was able to adapt to the platform type immediately after starting to work with Pamoja.” [Student, M, above average, in my group]

B. SBC support in participating in online interactive activities with which they felt initially ambivalent (Code 11: Input Pamoja interactive activities).

The course online activities include several major assignments where students have to collaborate with one another, often asynchronously, as they live in different time zones. In addition, a minority reported apprehension in the unexpected nature of some of the tasks set by Pamoja and their appreciation of the support of the SBC. As one student stated:

“… sometimes the exercises on Pamoja are a bit not my type of exercises that I enjoy doing. [Such as] making presentations… or make a video. I spoke to X [my SBC]… she encouraged me to do it… she said that it’s something new, so you shouldn’t be discouraged or de-motivated, and that you are brave for doing it” [Student, F, above average, in my group].

More frequently, students claimed that it was such types of exercises that helped to extend their support network beyond the SBC. Typically:
“I’ve made a friend in Chicago based on Pamoja courses… very remarkable actually. Especially with 8-hour time difference… she was also very dedicated to her studies… the groupwork we did together, it worked out quite well.” [Student, F, above average, not in my group]

Other students told of forming WhatsApp groups for collaborative tasks that continued to serve as assignments in subsequent weeks presented themselves. This illustrates the fairly common reported situation of the background support of the SBCs promoting engagement that can result in students forming bridges to one another, thus enlarging their support team to include fellow-students that they find themselves working with online through collaborative assignments and beyond, even though they never meet in person. As one student explained:

“SBC is like a bridge, connecting myself and my classmates [other students studying the same Pamoja course who are at the school]. We have three students in our school doing Economics… online… It is our SBC that is brings us together. It gets us to form a small community where students can discuss Economics-related topics. That pretty much helped me with oligopoly and monopolistic competition. Through that, I teach my [online] classmates about [other topics, such as] consumer surplus, taxes, and subsidies. SBC actually helped me to create a platform for me and my [online] classmates. Without the existence of SBC, I believe that I will be finishing all Pamoja coursework [but] not collaborate with my [online] classmates.” [Student, M, above average, in my group].

This would suggest that it can be the SBC that creates the conditions where online students are prepared to reach out and assist one another. The SBC’s input could be deliberately or inadvertently setting off this chain reaction, increasing the range of support for the online student.
C. SBC assistance in planning the division of the study and work quotas, to avoid getting to the last minute in meeting weekly deadlines (Code 10: Input time management).

Again, the guidelines with the SBC job description in having a role in student planning and organization apropos to the needs of the program are quite explicit. They are required to be “providing support in the creation of a term-time planner to promote effective time management,” setting “time aside with each individual student to evaluate their individualized study methods and suggest improvements where necessary” and also “work with… student(s) to develop a self-management approach that works for them” (Pamoja Education, SBC Job Description, p.2).

The above stipulation appeared to be reflected in the realities and logistics of keeping up with the weekly Tuesday night deadlines in the week’s portfolio of tasks, reported by most students to be very demanding, particularly in view of the competing demands of other subjects, and also, as many of them reported, their procrastinating from time to time. Support in keeping up with the deadlines is one of the SBC functions that the VLE students most commonly reported. The nature of the SBCs involvements varied from proactively preventing student lapses occurring, to the student perception of their presence in the background as a spur to keep to the course’s requirements, even though, in contrast with the job description, the SBCs were not actually doing anything. And from their part, the SBCs that I interviewed recognized that student procrastination was one of the greatest barriers to success, and that motivating students towards recovery from such lapses was often very difficult.
In some cases, the SBC’s extrinsic motivational input to prevent procrastination was active and ongoing. As one informed me:

“The Pamoja students are required to be punctual to the library for their allocated study time, and remain studying to the end of the period… I constantly reinforce that Pamoja time is for Pamoja studies only. It is not for working on school assignments or revision for non-Pamoja exams… I go online each week to monitor the Pamoja progress, and if work is not submitted I go [to the student] and ask why”. [SBC, M, also school librarian]

In a similar vein, a student reported SBC-intervention as motivating, towards satisfaction of need for autonomy, with the SBC helping him to organize his work:

“I don’t think that without her I’d be doing as well as I’m doing right now… She [SBC] gives me a structure where I can study. And I’d be procrastinating more because there wouldn’t be anyone checking on me… One lesson the teacher is with me and the other hour we do the Pamoja assignments. There are 12 in the class [doing Pamoja HL Economics], and our teacher and that class are supporters from the school.”

[M, below average, not mine]

Most of the students interviewed, however, did not report intervention at this level. Despite Pamoja requirements to the contrary, most students did not recall their SBCs paying close attention to their study methods, but they were nevertheless keeping in touch by following the student levels of engagement and the degree that they were completing their assignments within the allotted time frames. As one student recounted:

“For me, I think that the pressure you get from a schoolteacher [in the SBC role] at school who’s checking up on you, seeing how you’re doing, is different from having a distance teacher making sure that everything’s alright. I do think that it has some impact…” (F, above average performer, not my student)
However, half the students interviewed claimed that they were able to pursue their own online studies without any regular active involvement of SBCs in motivating their studies. Nevertheless, knowledge that they were constantly being updated about their progress by Pamoja was helping them to keep up:

“As far as progress is concerned, [SBCs are of] marginal importance at the most. But I would be procrastinating more [without the support of the SBC]. That is what the School would be contributing. If they were not there, I would be procrastinating more.” [Student, M, average, not in my group]

Here, even though the student minimized the SBC role, he did acquiesce that the very presence of such a figure in the background was preventing excessive time-wasting, thus satisfying a motivational need for relatedness: a sense that his performance was being taken notice of by an authority figure at his school. Another student reported that whilst the SBC presence made little different in her case, there fellow students where there was indeed an impact:

“I think if I didn’t have the SBC, I’d be still doing as I am... I’m an independent worker, so I can work without someone checking up on me. But one thing that I’ve come to realize with other people doing Pamoja is that sometimes when they’re not on their deadlines, that the SBC does follow up with them and make sure what they are actually doing, things like that.” [Student, F, above average, not in my group]

In getting into proportion of the role of SBC helping students in organizing their work, it should be taken into account that it is not just the SBC but Pamoja’s course design including careful breaking down of task into weekly portions that actually was helping to reduce procrastination:
“I think I’m more likely to fall behind on schoolwork, because Pamoja has more expectations and activities. In school, you do a whole unit and have a test on it. So there are no real deadlines. Pamoja breaks things down more, so there’s less a problem of procrastination [there] than at School.” [Student, M, average, not in my group]

However, despite Pamoja’s regulations, the reality is that some students required SBC input for time management and organizational skills more than others. None of the students complained that they were receiving too much input, and none that they were not getting enough, even when what they received was very little. As one experienced SBC / Pamoja teacher opined:

“If the students are the type that are going to love the online experience, then [SBC involvement] is less crucial... [for other students] the SBC, had to work with the kids... to keep things together. The connection is really critical. I think it’s the make or the break for kids that would succeed or fall away from the Pamoja-type setting.” [SBC, F, very experienced, NZ as above]

In summary, whilst SBCs are certainly reported to be motivating students towards exercising suitable autonomy in time management, the level of support varied considerably notwithstanding Pamoja stipulations. And any claim that the SBCs are actively helping students to meet the weekly course demands must also take into account that their work is assisted by the quality of the course design, as one student observed above. His observation was supported by the experienced SBC/teacher above, who reported that Pamoja’s courses are designed by a team of educators who break the program down into portions in a way that is not always matched by direct instruction. As she considered, in a general context:

“In some ways the course is better delivered than a face-to-face teacher that isn’t well-organized. In fact, the material is of excellent quality, put together by experts in the field [with the collaboration of the IB], and the student can actually be getting a better deal that way.”
However, one must bear in mind that all students participating indicated awareness that the SBC was at least at some level keeping an eye on the students’ progress, even minimally through the constant updates generated through the Pamoja website on the students’ progress. The SBC presence at some level indicated a live, personally-known personality making student accountability more tangible and less virtual. In that way, it appears that the SBCs have added a dimension of relatedness to the student of motivational experience, at least by their presence.

D. SBC assistance in dealing with parts of the course that students find stressful (Code 9: Troublesome course content).

During the course, the findings from both participating students and participating SBCs indicated that if Pamoja students turn to their SBCs for course-content-associated reasons with thus a need for satisfaction in course competence, it will most likely happen in the following three relatively stressful situations: the Internal Assessments, understanding the concepts of difficult topics as they occur, and dealing with unexpectedly disappointing test results. Each of these, as the forthcoming data indicates, is in harmony with the arguments explored in Chapter 2: that the on-site facilitator’s input is important by virtue of being proximate to the student, which in turn can support student motivator that are grounded in relatedness. They are explored below.

(a) The Internal Assessment (IA)

In all IB subjects, a percentage of the final grade is awarded on the student’s coursework, called the IA. In the case of Economics at Higher Level, the IA comprises of three commentary assignments on current economic issues, each one based on different parts of the syllabus. These
in total contribute 20% of marks available for the assessment of the final IB grade, the other 80% coming from IB externally set and assessed examinations at the end of the course. They are first assessed by the school using the IB’s published criteria, which at Pamoja is the Pamoja Economics department including primarily the student’s Pamoja teacher, and then moderated externally by the IB’s moderating team. At Pamoja, the first IA is carried out in February of Year 1, the second in June of Year 1 and the third in November of Year 2. The first IA can be particularly stressful as it is the first time the students carry out this type of work, with the sense that their final external examination result depends on it. Despite official IB policy allowing the student to produce one draft for, in the case of Pamoja, the Pamoja teacher’s feedback before submitting the final version for assessment, students commented that it was then when they felt the need for more tangible as opposed to virtual support. This was exemplified by one student, less-than-optimally-organized at the time, reporting:

“I think it was when I was learning on my first IA [Internal assessment]. That was… my first IA in the whole IB process, but just, I was in the darkness… I didn’t know what to do. So I was - should I stop doing Pamoja? [nervous laugh]… It came to the week before the IA [deadline] where I didn’t have my website sorted for anything. I e-mailed my [online] teacher… it didn’t completely work out, but I managed to get on with it, with help from my Pamoja teachers and SBC… I turned both to Pamoja and to my SBC. I went to my SBC because I needed immediate feedback before approaching Pamoja, because I thought it would be a bit useless contacting my teacher at Pamoja telling I didn’t know what to do when I knew, but just needed a bit more support. I was a bit behind. I submitted three plans for three different possibilities of work that would form my IA. I e-mailed it straight to my [SBC] teacher telling him what happened, and he was completely OK with it [the plan] and he said that I could carry on [with the IA].” [F, average performer, not my student]
This illustrates the fairly common situation whereby the student, feeling stress and even despair in the face of the unfamiliar ground and importance of the task, turned to and received the home-ground SBC-reassurance of competence-motivating and relatedness-motivating “just a little more support” which may well have been the crucial support before uploading the item on to the Pamoja platform, even though the SBC was not a subject specialist. It supports the observation that was frequently reiterated or implied by nearly all student participants: they are aware that the school as represented the SBC is partnering in their online studies and is both a potential and real-life supportive entity in not only a pastorally-motivating, but in a general academic motivating sense, even where insufficiently knowledgeable about the subject’s concepts to supply detailed support.

(b) Difficult topics

Though the IA tasks and deadlines were times when tension was felt, students reported other course-content related areas of concern and even despair, particularly with difficult topics exemplified by the Theory of the Firm, taught between February and April, Year 1, shortly after their first IA. The Pamoja teaching team does give weekly Zoom voluntary online lessons on this and other topics, which are recorded and accessible to those who for time zone and other reasons are not attending. However when faced with a difficult-to-grasp topic, many students feel in the need of support within a more familiar and real-life setting, even if it is moral and organizational support rather than specialized academic support.

“My SBC is like a bridge, connecting myself and my classmates [other students studying the same Pamoja course, and at the school]. We have three students in our school doing Economics HL online and we’re not exactly collaborating together. It is our SBC that brings us together. It gets us to form a small community
where students can discuss Economics-related topics. That pretty much helped me with oligopoly and monopolistic competition [part of the Theory of the Firm, above]. Also I teach my classmates about consumer surplus, taxes, and subsidies. SBC actually helped me to create a platform for me and my classmates. Without the existence of SBC, I believe that I will be finishing all Pamoja coursework [but] not collaborate with my classmates.” [Student, M, average, in my group]

This also illustrates Pamoja policy in action, in that SBCs are to be “encouraging students to take ownership of their learning by supervising rather than tutoring…” (Pamoja Education, SBC Job Description, p.2). In this case, the SBC motivates the autonomy needed for students in the same VLE to tackle and review demanding topics together by bringing them together, in order to promote student-group-generated concept and topic competence in a more familiar and personally-related environment than found in the online setting where students are typically working asynchronously and in different time zones.

However, whilst recognizing the course content’s inherent conceptual difficulties, it seemed to be the more able students that were using non-SBC-related resources when tackling difficult concepts, perhaps implicitly recognizing the limitations of the specifically non-specialist nature of the SBC role. As such a student reported:

“… the theory of the firms. I personally find that unit quite challenging… I cannot clearly distinguish between monopolistic competition and oligopoly. My first attempt to solve this question will be to ask the [Pamoja] teacher for clarification. However, Pamoja is an online class, meaning that I cannot ask my question to my teacher whenever I want. I realized that the ability of self-learning was quite important for student learning via online platforms. I searched on Google about the differences between monopolistic competition and oligopoly, I successfully found the answer and is able to list out the key characteristic of
both market structure… I realized that the ability to self-learn is crucial for an online learning environment.” [M, above average, in my group]

This seems to be well in line with the previously quoted SBC’s observing that in her experience, SBC support was less crucial for students who were most at home in the online experience. Their level of motivation in autonomy in online study was able to employ online resources other than those provided by Pamoja rather than turning to their SBCs for support.

(c) Unexpected disappointments with grades after tests

Students and SBCs reported particular concerns with test and internal examination results as they are the major contributors to the Pamoja end-of-semester grades, reported to the school, and typically taken into account when predicting grades for university entrance purposes. This overlaps with Code 12, student distress. For being new to pre-tertiary standards as defined by the IB, first tests based on final examination style and marked at that level are likely to show poorer-than-student-expected results, even though they receive detailed feedback and obtain access to the markschemes via their Pamoja teacher. Again, in such situations some participants reported a need for support closer to home, including SBCs, exemplified in:

“After the first test …I went to [my SBC]. I told her that in my opinion I did really bad, and then she sat with me and she said that it would not be such a big deal in the end, and that those online courses, not just Economics, are really challenging and she said that she was proud of me just because I chose it. Because I’m doing it. She kind of really helped me… She told me of other students before that had been on Pamoja, especially the one that has been in Economics and how in the beginning he was really bad, he was not submitting his assignments on time, but then he got a really good mark on a test and he motivated himself so much that he started being on time, doing the assignments, and so on. She told me that it is challenging at it will be, and that I have to be prepared. But also I don’t have to give up, because it is something that
will give me a lot of knowledge. It will help at university and in how things will be in the future... I will always go to see my SBC in something [i.e. situation] like that.” [Student, F, average, in my group]

Though this student clearly highly valued the SBC input which was no doubt crucial in giving her vital confidence in her subsequent progress, the motivational support her SBC gave her to improve her competence flowed from the SBCs pastoral experience as a supervisor and not as an economist. It once again seems to indicate that such support through this particular role can be a pivotal element in survival as well as success in VLE study.

E. SBCs are on hand to give immediate guidance (Code 13: Instant feedback).

Generally, course content issues are handled through Pamoja teachers, and course administration issues are handled through SBCs, but in practice the mere proximity and familiarity of SBCs can leave them open to being approached to give immediate (if non-specialized) feedback on important tasks that students seek reassurance before submitting, and take suitable immediate action on sensing that the student is not suitably applying him/herself to the work. SBS support being close at hand was reported by one student as

“Normally, I drop in. There isn’t a fixed time” [M, above average, not in my group].

This can be in situations involving troublesome course content exemplified by the IA scenario (Code 9), but also fulfilling a supportive role by being real and proximate:

“There’s just that little bit of pressure that’s lacking from Pamoja. I think that the pressure you get from a schoolteacher [in the SBC role] at school who’s checking up on you, seeing how you’re doing, is different
from having a distance teacher making sure that everything’s alright.” [Student, F, above average, not in my group]

“My SBC knows me better, because she sees me every day, basically, and has a better idea [of how I’m doing]... and she also knows about my progress in my other IB subjects as well.” [Student, M, average, not in my group].

The latter point is crucial: the SBC can follow student’s position with the VLE element in the wider context of his or her progress within the whole curriculum, and the accompanying overarching challenge of keeping up with the diverse elements comprising the whole program. As such, they can extrinsically motivate through their relatedness more effectively than the more distant and virtual Pamoja staff. [As a Pamoja teacher, I frequently receive SBC-supported requests for task extensions when the student is also facing a surfeit of deadlines in other IB components.]

SBCs for their part also report that they value the proximity that is lacking in the VLE environment, exemplified by:

“If I find a students whose grades have been improving, I send them an e-mail that I’ve spotted an improvement. With a ‘Hey, good job’. Students say they really like it.” [SBC, M, also school librarian]

This crucial proximity in immediate accessibility was also emphasized by another SBC, in not merely supportive terms, but in some cases being critical:

“I think it’s [the SBC role] the make or the break for kids that would succeed or fall away from the Pamoja-type setting. If you’ve got an SBC whose following it through, checking every so often, in touch with the Pamoja teacher / Pamoja service. It’s the SBCs that don’t chase the kids that are struggling…” [SBC, F, very experienced, NZ as above]
It is important to emphasize that reports on the supportive role of SBCs from students, SBCs, and Pamoja staff alike, indicate that SBC involvement arising out of institutional proximity to students is happening in a setting of mutual cooperation, to the common goal of optimum motivation for student success. No-one in this study reported a feeling of conflicting goals. At the very least, some students spoke of their SBC’s immediate input being minimal in scope and marginal in relevance, but most sensed relatedness motivational needs-support in there was someone they knew who supported them in working in a VLE environment of strangers.

F. SBCs are on hand as a resource for students experiencing distress (Code 12: Student distress).

The contribution of SBCs in tackling areas tending to cause concern to students, such as the first IA, conceptually-difficult topics, and test results below expectations, have been considered under Code 9: Troublesome course content. However, there was a minority of students who reported issues affecting their VLE studies that arose for reasons other than course content, course routines, and course expectations. These include personal anxieties in studying this way, individual circumstances contributing to a disadvantaged position with the program such as a December start to course that had already commenced in September (which Pamoja allowed in that particular student’s situation), unrealistic academic expectations, and personal problems unrelated to the course but nevertheless impacting progress on the course. Each of these will be explored in turn.
Common to those situations is the SBC’s on-the-spot position that places them in a considerably better motivation-support position than the relatively remote and virtual Pamoja staff. Thus the SBC would be more likely to be able to pick up on the various apprehensions, stresses, and the degree of academic and emotional resilience that the student is bringing to the situation, and work with the student within that framework.

As one SBC reported:

“I had one student who joined the course late [December], and she was quite overwhelmed as she joined late, trying to balance her work assignments [in her other subjects] as she faced the task of having to catch up… Our main concern with her was that she was a very late entry to the course [and the support she would need]. We discussed it with the parents on several occasions before she made the move into Economics… she has this extra tuition with this teacher [who knows Economics and acted as a tutor, already on the school’s staff] as it is very tough to join the course at such a late state. Pamoja has very clear instructions about the various units and what’s required on a week-to-week basis. …we and the Economics teacher kind of created a plan for her to catch up, as well as keep up with the topics that [her class] in Pamoja were [currently] studying. That was a very specific plan, with several people supporting her, and me coordinating the plan. We divided it: 50% past topics and 50% what the group was studying now. I arranged the connection with the Economics tutor… At the beginning she was not too confident - she was really nervous as she found out how hard she has to do it, but she became more and more successful as she got into the course” [SBC, F, UK, second year]

The student concerned was in my group with a consistently above-average academic record, but without having interviewed her SBC, I would have known nothing about the quite elaborate coordination of vital school facilities put into place to motivate and support her studies. It appeared to be the faith and support of her SBCs and school in both a pastoral role and proxy-academic role that motivated her in all three domains (autonomy, competence, and relatedness)
to integrate herself into the course at a very late stage, find her way, and subsequently maintain her progress.

SBCs also reported having to maintain students’ motivation levels following frustrations arising out of unrealistic expectations, although this element could be argued as being non-specific to the VLE environment. As the same SBC (above) reported:

“We see a lot of anxiety and a lot of students that crumble. Once they’ve seen the reality and they’re in the [IB] program. Many students set their sights on Oxford and Cambridge because they believe they can get 40 points (an extremely high performance) in the IB. But they don’t understand what a 7 (the highest possible grade in a subject) means in Economics. Once they realize, wow! I may just get a 4 (a bare pass) in Economics. So that’s when they really struggle with their internal assessment and with the subject generally.”

Though not specific to online study, the proximate position of the SBC as typified by the above can pick up the problems of the falls of the unrealistically-ambitious and help them come to terms with their position with the program; something again probably beyond the reach of the online provider and the Pamoja teacher. No students reported the tribulations of over-expectations over the long term contributing to underperformance, but I might well have interviewed them at too early a stage in the course for them to come to terms with the strengths and limitations they were bringing to the program. SBCs can access the entire two-year program through their experience with previous students. In addition, they can readily identify stresses and issues that take their time to filter to Pamoja as they tend to show only after a period of non-engagement. As that same SBC reported:
Interviewer: “Do you ever find that, as a SBC, you are supporting a student who is working very hard, but just can’t keep going because of that pressure?”

SBC: “Even though I’m working with very privileged students… I think resilience is the key in the IB Diploma program and in online study… Sometimes that can involve knowing who to ask for an extension, for example if there’s a clash between an [online] Economics deadline and a [direct-instruction taught] Physics deadline. We also have the issue with USA universities when they give students unconditional offers. This has been a real problem as the students then take the attitude that they only need to pass the Diploma. So they lose their motivation. That makes motivation harder, with a ‘you have to do it, you have to do it, just keep going… We have had to face [mental health] issues such as depression, which happens in this school… They may not even show up to the school. We have to call them to persuade them to come to the school… and we do all the arrangements to support the students.”

Thus the SBC’s proximity enables motivational support in not just academic issues, but in the individual student’s entire position vis-à-vis point of entry to the course, problems in managing the entire IB program in which the online component is but a part, frameworks of unreasonable expectations from online study, and through individual issues of coping difficulties including depression. It is not clear from the evidence I collected how prevalent these problems are among the VLE student body. It was not the intention of this study to consider the social and health issues that the SBC might be able to assist with, but the contribution from the SBC above indicates that these points of student distress are associated pastorally-based motivational issues that SBC may face in practice, which are not included in the IB job description. And as in the above example, their motivational impact in the domain of relatedness can be crucial to whether the student continues with or drops out of the program.
G. SBCs provide input beyond their Pamoja job description (Code 13: Input plus for student engagement).

The Pamoja job description for the SBC states that they should be “encouraging students to take ownership of their learning by supervising rather than tutoring, providing support in the creation of a term-time planner to promote effective time management” (Pamoja Education, SBC Job Description, p.2).

However, 3 students and 1 SBC (out of the 14 students and SBCs participating) reported support going beyond this descriptor; beyond and sometimes in contrast to Pamoja policy. The extent of the assistance varied, from the SBC supplying resources in Economics not directly available through the Pamoja platform, though helping the student access specialist tuition, to actually providing face-to-face direct specialist tuition. Despite this means of support being beyond that recommended by Pamoja, all four participants felt that those inputs were worthwhile. (This contrasted with 2 students that reported that the SBC input in total was minimal with neither of them claiming that their online studies were the worse for it.)

Despite these practices being contrary to Pamoja’s descriptors, I have included them to give a picture of the realities in the work of some SBCs, including in motivating students. In fairness as we shall see, some of these interventions occurred due to atypical realities of the student (i.e. late entry into the program) rather than ignoring Pamoja guidelines.

One student reported difficulties in studying from the computer screen and getting support from his SBC in removing a potential demotivator:
“He will help me with printing textbook since Pamoja provides me with electronic textbook. It is hard for me to study out of an e-book, so our school will help us. There are three textbooks involved, that really helps.” [Student M, above average performer, in my group]

The same student also reported that his SBC would go beyond his call of duty to ensure that students would not fall behind, very likely avoiding an autonomy-based (where the student can be overwhelmed in catching up with missed assignments) and competence-based (where the student can be overwhelmed in mastering material that the rest of online class has already covered) demotivating situation:

Also (a fellow-Pamoja student at the school) stay in hospital, we have a group discussion about working for tests. He contacts his parents so that he will be able to study the Economics courses and prepare for the tests. I think that really helps.

An SBC whose student was a late entry to the program reported helping in the following way:

[One of our online students doing Economics is mentored by her] “as she knows Economics, but not the IB Economics. That does give her extra support. We work together, just checking, OK… Our main concern with her was that she was a very late entry to the course and the support she would need. We discussed it with the parents on several occasions before she made the move [from another IB subject which she dropped] into Economics. I had to put a lot of things in place with Pamoja for her to be allowed to join the course. And she has this extra tuition with this teacher as it is very tough to join the course at such a late state. I [the SBC] arranged the connection with the Economics teacher [connected with her school] - it’s like an external tutor for Economics… because only Pamoja is not going to be enough. At the beginning she was not too confident - she was really nervous as she found out how hard she has to do it, but she became more and more successful as she got into the course. And now her confidence and self-esteem in Economics has grown. She tells me that I need less and less tuition because I’m more and more comfortable with the subject” [SBC, F, UK, second year].
Both this and the previous quotation indicate that the SBCs may well go beyond the job description in supporting autonomy and competence-based motivation in student circumstances that are not the norm. However, there were also participating students reporting that such extra-job-descriptor support was being given in circumstances that appeared to be normal. This was not common, but I have included it as it occurred more than once among the respondents, which suggests the possibility that receiving such help might be the experience of a small, but significant proportion of the Pamoja cohort even though this practice is not supported by Pamoja:

“It's kind of weird but my principal [acting also as SBC, as the student reported, it was a very small school] helps me because he used to teach Economics as well and recently I've been after asking for meetings with him after school… that and I feel that has helped me with [improving] my current scores in Economics...

And if [participant and fellow Pamoja Economics student] don't understand specific topics, we ask the principal, since he used to teach Economics he is able to clarify everything for us and he has even given us special time to meet with him after school. I feel very lucky that I have an on-site coordinator as a principal and he used to teach Economics, which I feel has been a great contributor to my success. [Without this] I feel that my learning would be slow” [Student, M, average, in my group].

No student supported in such ways beyond Pamoja-recommended guidelines reported anything other than the experience being positive in motivational terms.

H. People other than SBCs support the students in their online studies (Code 14: Inputs non-SBC-connected people).

In interviewing the student participants, I included asking in what ways people other than their SBC and Pamoja teachers supported their online studies. For as this research focuses on the work
of the SBC as a motivator, it is vital to consider the SBC’s input in the context of any other inputs the student may be receiving. This is not to minimize the SBCs’ inputs, but to view their work in the context of this code: the overall support network that the students may access when negotiating various barriers to study of which the SBC is part, accepting at the same time that much of the support may be outside the specific nature of the SBC role.

Students reported receiving significant support from (a) their Pamoja teachers, (b) fellow online students on the course, and (c) other people with some experience of Economics, although this was to a great degree specific to tasks rather than purely ongoing motivational. On the whole, the type of one-to-one support given by those individuals was in mastering the academic concepts and details; quite beyond the job description of the SBC though vital in assisting the student’s build up of subject-related conceptual understand and also a feeling of trust and security in working with the Pamoja setup. We will consider each source of support in turn.

(a) **Pamoja teachers:** 8 out of the 14 student participants felt comfortable turning to their Pamoja teacher, and none of the other 6 reported feeling unable to make such a request should they have felt the necessity, other than lack of proximity. As one student put it:

   “Pamoja is an online class, meaning that I cannot ask my question to my teacher whenever I want”

   [Student, M, above average, in my group].

However, most student respondents stated that they were quite comfortable approaching their Pamoja teachers for help despite the asymmetrical nature of the interaction and the fact that they did not know them personally, even though they might take this step only after exercising their autonomy in working with online resources first. As one student reported in detail:
“One incident will be the time when I’m learning about different market structures. I personally find that unit quite challenging as each type of market structure is complicated. While learning, I cannot clearly distinguish between monopolistic competition and oligopoly… they look very similar at first glance. However, Pamoja is an online class, meaning that I cannot ask my question to my teacher whenever I want. I realized that the ability of self-learning was quite important for student learning via online platforms. I searched on Google about the differences between monopolistic competition and oligopoly, I successfully found the answer and am able to list out the key characteristic of both market structures. Yet I raised the question with [the] Pamoja teacher… The teacher answered my question coherently. Otherwise, if I finish all the work by myself, I… might come to a misunderstanding. Knowing how to collaborate with your [online] teacher… is very important” [Student, M. above average, in my group]

In that case, the student was motivated to exercise autonomy with his subsequent contact with his Pamoja teacher, which appears to have reinforced that motivating force in terms of supporting autonomy needs and competence needs. Another student, for practical considerations of competence motivational support:

“But because Pamoja is where I do my exams, I’d have to go to my Pamoja teacher to ask for further feedback, because he’s marking my work, not my school-based teacher” (Student, F, average, not mine).

These comments were typical in that students tended to turn to their Pamoja teachers when in need of detailed academic motivational support, despite lack of proximity.

(b) Fellow-students on the course: In addition, the smaller number of 6 out of 14 reported turning to fellow students on the program, though for mainly academic reasons. As one student recounted:
“Within one or two months of the course we were getting together in groups on social media. Students have been able to get together, talk about the assessments, clarify things with each other… form study groups… But students ask questions to each other, clarify cool issues with each other, and course [talk about] logistics with each other. That includes the recent exam, which was quite helpful.” [Student, M, above average, in my group].

This particular student, unlike most of those reporting peer support, was one of the small minority that claimed that he viewed the input of his SBC as marginal, declaring that much of his needs satisfaction support came from interacting with his peers on the course: forming study groups motivating competence, with an increasingly familiar online circle of colleagues, relatedness.

(c) Other people with knowledge in Economics as a source of support was less common, they related to (1 student) or otherwise known to the student (1 student), in the later case stating:

“… my first IA [Internal assessment]. That was my first IA in the whole IB process, but just, I was in the darkness. I didn’t know what to do. So I was - should I stop doing Pamoja? [nervous laugh]. My first IA is done, and I actually did ask some people who majored in economics about those concepts, and I was able to overcome the challenge” [Student, F, above average, in my group].

Thus overall it appears that help other than from the SBC was reported as being chiefly academic, tending to augment the areas beyond the job description and locus of the SBC, and thus leaving the student feeling more motivated in terms of course competence. Such support was never described as arising out failure to obtain such help from the SBC when asked for. It was also, as the source of the quotations indicate, generally the more successful students that interacted with their Pamoja teachers and peer group.
I have considered the diverse ways in which SBCs motivate their students in negotiating barriers to online study and we have briefly looked at other contributors. The data indicates that their respective inputs do not necessarily overlap, but supplement one another with SBCs contributing on a more general, pastoral level with their accessibility and their being proximate and known to the students making them the most readily available resource when facing particular learning barriers. These include helping them to address the initial unfamiliarity and continued stresses of the academic pre-tertiary online environment. The SBCs also supports during critical times, such as the first test, exam, or IA, though what they can offer tends to be general rather than subject-specific in nature. All this occurs in a setting where the students know that they are being observed to a greater or lesser degree by the SBC, who has access to all their work, marks, and feedback from the Pamoja online teacher.

Theme 3: SBCs are in a proximate position to support students as motivational issues occur

SBC proximity and easy accessibility to students has already been considered within themes and codes previously discussed. Under this heading, I explore the theme “SBCs are a proximate position to support students as motivation issues occur” as a theme in its own right, notwithstanding overlap with some ideas already met in analyzing the association of proximity with other themes.

There is evidence in the data reported by participating students, SBCs, and Pamoja staff that can support the proposition discussed in the on-site facilitator literature (Chapter 2) that the SBCs’ motivational support within all three domains is a crucial driver for the online study journey of
many students, by virtue of that support coming from a real rather than a virtual person (Code 15), easily accessible (proximate, ‘real’, and immediate access position of SBCs: Code 16), and perceived as authentic and effective, as the SBC is in frequent touch with Pamoja (liaison position of SBC; Code 17). The evidence cited under the codes below shows support for the SBCs motivating students when facing critical incidents, situations, and concerns with demotivating potential, by virtue of the SBCs communicating in the capacity of real people who know their students and their circumstances.

A. SBCs are readily able to motivate in their being perceived as real rather than virtual people easily accessible to students (Code 15: SBC perceived as a real person).

A minority of student participants commented on their perceiving the SBCs as being real rather than virtual people that know their working contexts and personal situations as members of the school community, and into which fits their supporting motivation in their consistent participation in the online program. Unlike the Pamoja online teacher, the SBC is known personally to the student, and in some cases, long before starting the course. Some students emphasized their positive working relationships with their SBCs, whose very support was perceived as a real and familiar relatedness source of motivation in an otherwise strange and relatively intangible academic landscape, exemplified by:

“I would be more likely to talk to my SBC than to my teacher at Pamoja… My SBC knows me better, because she sees me every day… and has a better idea of how I’m doing… and she also knows about my progress in other IB subjects” [Student, M, below average, not in my group], though also stating that for specific things like asking for an extension for an assignment, he would turn to his Pamoja teacher.
“After the first test… I went to her [SBC]. I told her… I did really bad, and then she sat with me and she said that it would not be such a big deal in the end and that those online courses, not just Economics, are really challenging and she said that she was proud of me just because I chose it… She kind of helped me… told me of other students that had been on Pamoja… Economics, and how in the beginning it was really bad, but then he got a really good mark on a test… And she often explained to me that that it’s hard, but I will do it. Gave me mentally the courage that I could do it” [Student, F, average, in my group].

Both examples claim that the SBCs are in a particularly good position to support student motivation through the domain of relatedness by virtue of their being real people that are known to them, and in the second example, to support motivation through the domain of competence as well. These can be all the more effective as these “real people” have undergone Pamoja training prior to starting to work as SBCs, and would have subsequently been gaining experience in that environment.

One SBC saw her real-life relationship with her students as enabling her to carry out what she saw as a primary function of her work: the need to support student resilience at critical points during the course. She reported that despite “working with very privileged students”, they often approached her with mental health issues such as depression, a situation that commonly resulted in prolonged student absence whereby she had “to call them to persuade them to come to school…” [SBC, F, second year] Her observation that such interventions have been crucial to prevent serious arrears and even course dropout emphasized that it is her intimate knowledge of the students and their trust that they put in her that has been crucial in her motivating students in such positions to effectively re-engage with the program. That motivation is likely to primarily be in the domain of relatedness: the student is, as discussed in Chapter 2, likely to have a positive working relationship with the SBC who is a familiar, related element in an otherwise strange and
rather intangible milieu. By contrast, the virtual rather the real-person relationship between the student and the online teacher may well lack the degree of intimacy, trust, and detailed knowledge brought to handling a student position of arrears in work whose roots may be academic, but in reality lie in deep personal issues that may well not be apparent or within the virtual teacher’s reach to handle effectively.

Not all students reported this level of support from SBCs, and those that did also mentioned having at least some initial apprehension in studying a course of this importance entirely online. However, no student interviewed claimed that their “real-life person” SBC related to them in any way that would have undermined their motivation. Far more widely reported, especially among the above-average students, were the senses of feeling at home in the online community. They dealt with issues as they occurred not with their SBCs, but directly with their Pamoja teacher, fellow online students, and by consulting materials on the Internet.

**B. SBCs are able to motivate by virtue of being readily available (Code 16: SBC immediately accessible)**

Several students stressed their knowing that they could approach their SBC synchronously rather than through the typically asynchronous contact on the Pamoja platform:

“Normally, I just drop in. There isn’t a [fixed] time” [Student, F, above average, not in my group].

[The SBC is] “the one person that is in real life with you who you can always contact... For course content, I ask the Pamoja teacher, but for other things like handling the course, it’s the SBC… She just tells me to come by my office at the end of the day” [Student, F, in my group, average].
“I was able to get the help in Economics that I needed without having to turn to the [online] Pamoja teacher (the SBC in this case had sufficient specialist knowledge to assist in that capacity)… I can’t get face-to-face feedback from Pamoja, so I’d have to e-mail it to my [Pamoja] teacher instead of having a conversation where I can ask questions” [Student, F, average, not in my group].

These student participants’ comments are in line with the research of Borup, Chambers and Stimson (2019) about on-site facilitators in Chapter 2, which indicated that though students may well experience a high level of support from their online teachers when it came to course content, they felt that it was the contribution from their on-site facilitators that was most valuable to them: they wanted the motivational support and input of someone that they knew personally.

Their findings reported the positive relatedness-domain motivational effects of the on-site facilitators’ non-verbal cues, personal interactions, and knowing that they could turn to them for immediate feedback. This, they claimed, was preferred to the inevitable day or longer wait for online-asynchronous guidance from someone outside their bricks-and-mortar community, something whose very nature could frustrate students irrespective of levels of motivation.

Similarly in this study, some participating students reported the immediate and synchronous nature of the student-initiated SBCs contacts as something that they want, that they perceive as being useful to them, and by inference that they find motivates them even if they are subject non-specialists.

C. SBCs are perceived by students as being able to serve as a bridge with Pamoja (Code 17: Liaison position of SBC)

Serious problems with studying at Pamoja can include, for example, the sudden, unexplained, and potentially highly demotivating non-appearance of the online teacher responsible for the
student’s progress. Such a critical situation did occur once in the first semester, when it transpired that the online teacher had, without Pamoja’s knowledge, not been in touch with any student or marked any work online for three weeks:

“I’m in... [X’s] class in Pamoja, so I probably had the most ‘issues’, considering he was away for a while… So for a month or so he could not contact us and we could not contact him. So what I did then was that I asked my onsite coordinator [SBC] if she could contact Pamoja and ask what’s happening. And so she was able to do that for me…” [Student, F, above average, not in my group]

Another critical situation occurred where Pamoja’s dates for the end-of-semester examinations did not fit in with the calendar of the school that the participating student attended:

“They [SBCs] are quite good with the examinations. The SBC was able to contact me and the other student doing this course online. And discuss the best possible time for us both to be able to take the exam… Arrange a time and a place on the specific date [with Pamoja] that was convenient for the students.” [Student, F, above average, not in my group].

In both instances, the students concerned turned to their SBCs when they were in positions beyond their control: in the first, with prolonged not getting submitted work graded and returned. In the second, not being able to take their report-grade-determining end-of-semester examination within the dates set by Pamoja owing to date incompatibility.

This points to the students sensing that their SBCs are on their side, and are able to handle practical, online-study-associated situations that they perceive as being beyond their negotiating capacities. The security that they sense following such critical incidents (“she was able to do that for me”, “the SBCs are quite good with examinations”) may well motivate the students in the relatedness domain in that they do not feel alone, but that they have the services of a competent
support team, of which the SBCs are key members. Though it seems very likely that such critical situations are common to all online providers, I have not found the on-site facilitators’ capacity to take effective action discussed in the literature in terms of being a background motivating element.

**Theme 4: Being readily and regularly accountable to their SBCs is likely to motivate students**

As previously mentioned, all SBCs have been trained by Pamoja, as a result of which they may access the Pamoja platform and instantly view their students’ progress in terms of work submitted, marks and feedback, and levels of engagement with the program. There is a color light system for each student supervised on immediate view to the SBC as well as to the student, which indicates green for each work item handed in on time and for engagement levels that are satisfactory, and defaults to red where not the case, such as work submitted past the deadline. As one SBC explained:

“One thing that Pamoja’s done well over the years… when they brought in the traffic lights [in 2014], all of a sudden the students could see progress. I think that made a huge difference. As an SBC, I can see the difference in the kids’ uptake to those online courses when these traffic lights came in… it also means that the SBC can take one look at the traffic lights and can then see instantly what’s happening. As SBC you can go from the weekly, monthly, and year… look and get the whole picture” [SBC, F, very experienced, NZ].

Thus as long as SBCs appear to the students to be working conscientiously (a theme explored in the next section), they know that their progress or lack of progress will soon come to their
attention. The extrinsic motivating factor of their accountability to the SBCs was one that was most frequently commented on, including participating students that reported themselves as having minimal contact with their SBCs throughout the two-year program.

The motivating evidence of student accountability on the basis of the data may be subdivided under two codes: Reinforcement input of SBC, and SBC audience effect. Each will now be considered.

A. Students know that their progress is being regularly monitored by their SBCs and that they are accountable to the SBCs (Code 18: Monitoring input of SBC)

All but two out of the 14 students claimed that their awareness that their SBC could at any time access and check their progress helped to motivate them to study, as exemplified by:

“There’s just that little bit of pressure that’s lacking from Pamoja. I think that the pressure you get from a schoolteacher at school who’s checking up on you, seeing how you’re doing, is different from having a distance teacher making sure that everything’s alright. I do think that it has some impact…” [Student, F, above average, not in my group].

“Pamoja’s very independent, and without the school support keeping us on track we could get behind on work… they are keeping an eye on things, and if things are falling behind they let you know, but they’re not necessarily going to be chasing you up all the time if everything’s good” [Student, F, average, not in my group].

Interviewer: “I’d like you to imagine you were just by yourself… Would you find that you would be in a better position, the same position, or in a poorer position?”
Respondent: “Personally, I’d say that I’d be in poorer position… Because while I may not get that more motivation, I guess the idea that there is someone there watching my grades in the first place.” [Student, M, average, not in my group].

“I’d be procrastinating more because there wouldn’t be anyone checking on me. My Pamoja teacher at school [SBC] does this for me…” [Student, M, below average, not in my group].

Three other students claimed that the known presence of SBC surveillance motivated them when inclined to procrastinate.

The importance of student accountability was stressed by SBCs as well as students, for example:

“If you’ve got an SBC whose following it through, checking every so often, [and] in touch with the Pamoja teacher / Pamoja service. It’s the SBCs that don’t chase the kids that are struggling…” [SBC, F, very experienced, NZ].

This indicates that the student’s confidence in the SBCs’ use of the Pamoja platform to track progress with ease functions as a key motivator in online study. Being personally accountable to the SBCs is the motivator that was most frequently reported by the students, with only 2 out of the 14 participating students claiming that they would be working just as well without an SBC in their support team. On the evidence of the data, that accountability appears to function as an antidote to student procrastination through the sense that their studying is being closely watched and monitored by the SBCs as authority figures who know them personally and are part of their school system. In SDT terms, this motivator is extrinsic and relatedness in domain, as it brings online study within the accountability orbit of the school. It is externally regulated, as it is the
SBCs that are perceived by the students as likely to follow-up on any indicated work pattern that is less than reassuring. In addition, this motivating force is likely to be based on the students’ perception of relatedness: the school-based consequences for non-compliance with the online program’s requirements, to supplement the above-reported “just that little bit of pressure that’s lacking from Pamoja”.

B. Students see their SBCs as their audience, which in itself motivates them to study and achieve (Code 19: SBC audience effect)

The data showed 4 participating students claiming that they are motivated by their SBCs who regularly check their work and make encouraging comments. They sense their SBCs as being their cheerleaders, whose support they desire and enjoy, exemplified by:

Interviewer: “Does the fact that you know that they know you’re doing well give you more motivation to succeed?”

Respondent: “I think so… it supports my progress and improvements.” [Student, M, above average, not in my group].

“Sometimes if my SBC sees that I did something good, she will tell me: ‘I’m proud, I saw your test result, you’re doing good’… If I didn’t get support, I could be much more uncomfortable with what I’m doing, because me personally I need loads of support. Because if I’m really good at something, and I’m not getting my support I’ll be demotivated and discouraged and say I’m really bad at this even though I’m not, so I think support really matters [Student, F, average performer, in my group].
In that sense, the SBCs create a cheerleading audience, socially facilitating the students’ work. The research of Wolf et al. (2015) indicates that the achievement level of adolescent performance on a high-level cognitive task is significantly sensitive to the identity of the person observing and evaluating their performance, which in this case (as the SBC is a supervisor, rather than a peer who could well be a rival) appears to function as an extrinsic motivator with the motivation being in the domain of relatedness.

However, the data indicated that the SBCs service as a motivating audience may have culture-bound limitations, as reported by one student respondent in a Taiwanese school:

“I think that is not what the SBC is for. Most teachers will not congratulate the students if he got a great score. They think it’s that student’s responsibility to get that great performance. That actually kinda cultural issue here, inside Chinese culture. Teacher see student responsible for getting good grades” [Student, M, above average, in my group].

Overall, the findings from this theme are well in line with the literature review, which at a more general level considered the importance of the personal working relationship between the on-site facilitator and the online student in terms of student success in that environment. Pamoja seeks to structure and standardize the input of its SBCs working in a similar capacity by first training the SBCs and secondly by facilitating their any-time entering their website and viewing their students’ progress trends at a glance. Data reported at both student-participant and SBC-participant level indicates that SBCs can, and are very likely to, follow student progress regularly and instantly with a minimum of effort. This means that the students themselves are likely to find themselves extrinsically motivated in sensing that the relatedness of being constantly responsible
to their SBCs. It is this accountability to the SBCs that appears to be the single most universally agreed source of student motivation, and where their functioning makes a difference, compensating for, as one student felt: “There’s just that little bit of pressure that’s lacking from Pamoja.”

**Theme 5: The efficacy of the SBC as motivator depends on the SBC level of engagement**

Student participants reported considerable differences in the both the forms and quantities of SBC inputs into their online program, ranging from minimal to the very comprehensive extreme of going well-beyond Pamoja requirements by considerably supplementing the content-provider work of Pamoja and the Pamoja online teacher. I considered the latter under Theme 2, Code 7 (Input plus for student engagement). I briefly considered the former under Code 8 (Inputs - non-SBC connected people, a moderating code), but there was a minority of 4 students that reported being able to progress with minimal or even zero SBC motivational support, as exemplified by:

“Personally, there has not been a lot of communication between me and my SBC. Yes, at my school people do have meetings with a SBC, but if everything is going well, there is not a lot of contact with the SBC.”

[Student, F, above average, not in my group]

Interviewer: “Does just knowing that your SBC has access to your studies progress record in any way influence your work online? Or would it be the same even without that system?”

Respondent: “I think it would be the same without having the SBC” [Student, F, average performer, mine].
However, the data gives space to substantiate a claim that the optimal level for SBC motivational intervention does vary from student to student, and as indicated by the data quoted under previous themes, most participating students value the motivating assistance or at least the motivating presence of their SBCs. There were individuals who reported obtaining considerable SBCs motivating support in getting started (and particularly when beginning late and having to catch up), in dealing with critical expected issues such as Internal Assessment assignments, tests, and extended items requiring working asynchronously in groups, where finding the virtual environment not easily conducive to study compared to the more familiar direct instruction, and more mundanely, in building motivation to fight procrastination and get the work uploaded in time.

All these SBC-emanating motivators are only likely to be effective where the SBCs themselves are engaged (Code 23: SBC level of engagement), and where they, their students, and Pamoja staff see themselves aligned to the common goal of motivating optimal progress and achievement (Code 24: Common goals for all parties). Where the SBCs and Pamoja mutually work in harmony in order to support the student to optimize the online educational experience (as in the OPM model presented in Chapter 1).

A. SBCs are effective where they are suitably and consistently engaged in suitably motivating students according to their individual needs (Code 23: SBC level of engagement)

One SBC in his first year acting in this capacity describes his work and input:
“Each week I set aside time… look at each [Pamoja student’s] schedule and find out when they’re supposed to be studying. During that block [time period], they sit in the library, and work on [their assignment]. I check in week-to-week… once a week I go on to the [Pamoja platform] and check the scores… and see [if they’re] missing assignments… I’ll talk to them specifically about that… those bubbles [i.e. the traffic lights] make it easy to see where they’ve been doing their work and where they haven’t… Check it out informally and find out how it’s going.

“One student is doing a Pamoja course who is new to us… and another… not always the best at time management. I was very concerned about the two of them at first. I think they handled it immaculately… I think being able to follow with them [makes a difference]… They know that I know instead of my having to ask them what they know. I don’t know whether it’s contributed to their success… It took about a month before I figured out how to check everything on Pamoja. Because first I would look at the weekly summary to see if the student did right or not. But then I learnt how to check the feedback. Once I figured that out, then I felt a lot more knowledgeable about the system… I think the hardest part [in that area, for the students] and the part their came to me was in the orientation course, I had a couple of students who were not sure what they were supposed to do, during the first couple of weeks of the course… getting used to the format and platform… It was at that stage… they had a lot of questions… It also helped that I could [at this stage] share their screen with them, and so I could help them. So that I can see what they’re doing when they log in. This was only with the first few weeks of the course. Afterwards they got the hang of it, and I didn’t have to sit around with them. It was just that first time… Right now they’re all doing the same level or better [as in their other IB subjects]… I’m not sure [that student X is doing better] is because he’s more comfortable working online, or simply the subject matter” [SBC, M and also school IB coordinator, first year as SBC].

This gives an insight into the diverse motivating contribution of the SBC, and types of skills the SBCs have to master to function and motivate effectively in that capacity; in order to
consistently engage in suitably motivating students according to their individual needs. In the example of this respondent, the SBC induction program appears to have been insufficient to completely support easy checking-up and interaction with the online students, and it required a few post-induction-course weeks to develop the necessary conversancy. Not all SBCs have been able to reach that level, as a participating Pamoja staff member reported:

“Sometimes takes longer for the SBCs [than students to adapt to the online program] as they’re not always in to it as often as the students. For example, we had a case of an SBC who only looked at the one-line comments [on the platform] and concluded that the teacher was not giving enough feedback. But in fact the teacher was writing on his work, and the only way the SBC could have found the comments was by actually opening up the work. The student is probably aware of it, but the SBC isn’t using the platform in the full way” [Pamoja staff, M, very senior].

Thus there is a possibility that other SBCs may be less successful in using the platform in fully tracking their students due to the learning curve that they have not yet found time to work at, and thus not achieve the full competence level needed to optimize student motivational guidance. This is supported by studies represented by Hannum et al. (2008) (Chapter 2), which indicated that effectively trained online facilitators were more likely to achieve higher quality student outcomes than untrained facilitators, and in the Pamoja case that would include the SBC that was not fully conversant.

In addition, this also indicates an additional SBC support-requiring critical area for some students: initially learning how the Pamoja tools and platform work, during and following the initiation course. Unlike this SBC respondent, students overall did not report on this aspect of
commencing the program as being challenging, as a critical area in which they had needed motivational support. It is possible that they may well have needed and received it (autonomy, competence) from SBCs, but that it would have been a distant memory by the time I interviewed them during the second semester of the program, when they were facing more recent and immediate urgent matters.

Yet, it would be spurious to assume that SBCs having a full mastery of the Pamoja system would in itself lead to optimum SBC-student motivational interaction, which varies from student to student. No student participant reported lack of SBC support arising from SBC difficulties with the program. However, both SBCs and Pamoja staff strongly supported the view that effective SBC-student motivational interaction was a deciding element in student success in the program, exemplified by the following:

Interviewer: “You stated that you felt that the likelihood of student success depends a great deal on the quality of interaction with the SBC. Could you tell me more?”

SBC participant: “If the students are the type that are going to love the online experience, then it is less crucial, except for the exam routines. However, it there are students who are struggling, both as a Pamoja teacher and an SBC, had to work with the kids and the Pamoja teacher to keep things together. The connection is really critical. I think it’s the make or the break for kids that would succeed or fall away from the Pamoja-type setting. If you’ve got an SBC whose following it through, checking every so often, in touch with the Pamoja teacher / Pamoja service. It’s the SBCs that don’t chase the kids that are struggling… so there is “a third spoke in the wheel” who knows the student…”

Interviewer: “You’ve told me… you see that regular quality supervision, regular interaction with the SBC and the student, and the traffic lights [traffic lights are task not done by deadline
shows up red on SBC screen, and one submitted on time shows as green] are crucial elements in the reality of students year achieving in online learning to the degree that they’re doing in face-to-face subjects. Do you see this is particularly vital for students that are not naturally suited to studying online in this way?

SBC participant: “Yes, and also Pamoja has got much better over the last few years. School services has got better in connecting with the SBCs over the last two or three years. And I think that’s also very important” [SBC, F, very experienced, NZ].

The above also indicates a key feature in the OPM model: the claim that Pamoja school services support the SBC’s work enabling more effective SBC motivation of the student. This observation was also exemplified from Pamoja School Services, who, without prompting, answered in terms of the OPM model which they named the ‘triangle of support’:

“What we often find is that when the SBC is engaged, so is the student. Or vice versa. That might be with a particularly high achieving student, or less so. It doesn’t necessarily link to attainment, but it does link to engagement. So in those cases, there definitely that link.

“I think certainly, there’s been times where if student has things going on outside school that has led to non-engagement, and we’re able to work with the SBCs, putting plans in place where there’s more regular meetings…When I have contact with the SBCs, it’s serious, and yes, they’re representing their students, so they’ll want what’s best for them. So we normally start there and see what we can do, really. We see the whole operation as a partnership between Pamoja and the School… One phrase I’ve constantly been using in the training of new [online] teachers is the triangle of support. If the SBC is engaged we find that’s the school were the students are engaged. It’s a pretty strong correlation. Of course you get outliers: students who are engaged on their own and we never hear from the SBC. But for most part there definitely is that link. Because ultimately we’re working with 16-17-18 year olds who are students. In a school, a teacher
can support a student face to face. We require that level of support from the School. Without it, it wouldn’t work. In this year’s 1,600 students, the vast majority are engaged” [Pamoja staff, M, very senior].

And conversely, less effective SBC involvement leading to a less effective triangle of support is less likely to motivate progress:

“When the SBC isn’t as cooperative and really actioning our request, then the student feels as if he’s got away with it. But if the students sees the communication between the Pamoja and the SBC [through the cc], the student feels more cooperative, it often sees a turnaround and they begin to submit outstanding assignments. I think it’s essential that there’s someone that’s in school that can meet face-to-face with the students, to make it a little more real for the students, making it clear to the students that these deadlines have to be met if they wish to be successful” [Pamoja staff, M].

In addition, these Pamoja staff observations support the preceding SBC claim that for a large body of Pamoja students, effective motivation-creating interaction between SBC and student appears to be what can make and whose absence can break effective student progress online.

B. SBCs are likely to be most effective where they, their students, and Pamoja staff are aligned to the common goal of motivating optimal progress and achievement.

This point was strongly emphasized by both Pamoja staff participants, who by virtue of coordinating and overseeing both the work of SBCs and their students were able to effectively view the students progress in terms of the motivational triangle of support for each online student. As one Pamoja staff participant explained his work:

Interviewer: “Can you tell me something about what your work [at Pamoja] involves?”

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Pamoja staff member: “In terms of what I do within our School Services area: I’ll be… monitoring online engagement, attendance, outstanding assignments… with the SBCs…. And just basic queries day in and day out about the academic week from Pamoja.”

Interviewer: “Do your queries tend to be predominantly the students, predominantly the SBCs, or predominantly Pamoja teachers?”

Pamoja staff member: “Mostly from the SBCs. The students: they will often get in touch on the back of an engagement follow-up; we have an automated messaging system that goes to the students… and they sometimes communicate back, but it’s usually through the SBC.

Interviewer: “Can you tell me of any situation that exemplifies where you put your skills as a Schools Service Officer to the test - in your work in supporting the program of online study?”

Pamoja staff member: “So recently we had the deadlines for the IAs and in the Psychology* course there was a group factor in the internal assessment. In one particular school where there was a group of three students, collusion was flagged and we had together with the SBC and with it being the IA, emotions were high because it had such a heavy weight on the final grading, and working together with the SBC, we were able with quite a quick turnaround because IB deadlines were fast approaching, get the students on board, accept the responsibility and understand, even though in the beginning they didn’t see how collusion had happened… to revise their IAs and meet the standard that the teacher was able to authenticate and submit to the IB. In that process… thankfully the SBC was very understanding and they were in the firing line of the students. We were the online service; he was getting a lot of the heat from the students. That interface with the SBC, we had video conferences, we were able to resolve it before the deadlines passed, and the students were able to submit their IAs authentically. [More generally] we get good feedback from the students. Some never seem to get on top of their studies, but for most part they do.” [Pamoja staff, M]

This is an extreme instance of where suitable Pamoja staff intervention via the SBCs can generate student motivation, without which the student would fail the course, as the IA is a vital

* The Pamoja staff work as a team for all subjects that Pamoja offers. Though this incident took place on the IB Psychology rather than the IB Economics program, I have included it as an example of how Pamoja staff intervention through the SBCs can generate vital student motivation in potentially highly emotive and highly consequential situations.
assessment component. It is important to observe, as in this example, that neither the SBC nor any other element in the OPM support triangle can go any further than motivate the student to work, whether directly through personal interactions or indirectly by enabling the use of school facilities and environment: they cannot do the work or the learning for them.

And more generally, the Pamoja staff see the OPM as fundamental to their online educational system, with the ideal that all three parties are working towards a common goal of motivating student progress:

“Overall, the SBCs have had a pivotal role in the students’ progress, which in turn is a reflection of the degree to which the SBCs have been involved, and that I feel that Pamoja is able to match the face-to-face-taught general IB distribution of grades is because of the online partnership situation. It has to have the school’s input to succeed as well as it does [Pamoja staff, M, very senior].

4.4. Summary of the findings of this study

I conclude this chapter by briefly summarizing the findings from the data that I collected from students, SBCs, and Pamoja staff about the ways in which SBCs support online Pamoja students. In doing so, I revisit the key ideas grounded in the literature in Chapter 2 as I applied them to the Pamoja situation at the end of that chapter. This is in order to compare the possible findings about SBC motivation hypothesized at the end of the literature review with the findings of this study that emerged from the data.

These findings may be divided into two categories: those supported by the literature reviewed to various degrees, and those that emerged independently of the literature review. What follows is
a brief summary, whose implications in terms of the focus of the research on SBCs input on student motivation in the online learning situation I discuss in Chapter 5. Most of their impact seems to be pastoral and in the relatedness motivational domain but there were also elements of academic support not supported in the Pamoja literature.

As hypothesized in Chapter 2, the evidence gathered indicates that the SBCs are inputting into a reality where students at Pamoja seemed to be well motivated to succeed, as conjectured in Chapter 2. No student participant stated or implied otherwise, and only one mentioned feeling unsuited to learning online rather than by direct instruction at the time of the interviews, six months into the course. However, the data indicates that not all SBCs strictly followed Pamoja guidelines with regard to the nature of the support given. At one extreme, there were SBCs whose direct input was mentioned by the participating students as being minimal and having little or no direct effect, and at the other extreme, several students reported subject-specialist tuition support directly from the SBC or arranged by the SBC, beyond, and in contravention of, the Pamoja guidelines to SBCs: academic intervention rather than pastoral. This seemed to be most prevalent where students faced the more difficult concepts in the course.

Most students reported themselves as being motivated in the relatedness domain through feeling answerable to their SBCs through the course. This seems to indicate that for the majority of those interviewed, the SBCs were perceived as regularly checking their progress and engagement levels, as well as making themselves available and demonstrating a regular interest in their work.

Among the minority of participating students that perceived little SBC supervision, none indicated a wish for more SBC motivational involvement. This could at least partially be due their being mostly above-average students and that their self-reported support was grounded in
other sources, chiefly from within the Pamoja community. And, surprisingly, none of the
students reported over-involvement or over-interference by the SBCs, despite several examples
of their working beyond the boundaries of their role guidelines.

In contrast with Chapter 2, which emphasized the need for students to master how to learn online
as being crucial to progress, no student participants reported difficulties adversely dampening
motivation in coping with the mechanics of handling the course platform, in using the course
materials, and in making contacts with Pamoja teachers and participants as long as they were
cooperative. As suggested earlier in this chapter, it is possible that by the time I interviewed the
students, initial difficulties where the SBCs’ help was crucial had become distant memories; one
SBC detailed that it was at this initial stage that he was most heavily involved. However, there
were many instances of SBCs (as well as the school) actively intervening to extrinsically
motivate students to take ownership of their studies including issues of lack of engagement and
not meeting deadlines at a one-to-one level, and passively intervening by contributing towards
disciplined environments for online studies timetabled within the school day: as reported by
participating students, teachers, and Pamoja staff. Nevertheless, some students reported working
outside this timeframe and being motivationally supported by their SBCs in exercising suitable
autonomy in time-management issues. And in contrast to the conjectured, only small minority
reported themselves turning to their SBCs when they were not getting the necessary support from
Pamoja or where they had difficulties in projecting themselves suitably in the Pamoja
community.

As hypothesized in the literature review, the data indicates that many SBCs work with their
students in a proactive, mutual-respect, ongoing, and readily-accessible setting of motivating the
best for their students in a professional atmosphere of relatedness: trust and support from the school. In terms of the Pamoja job description (Pamoja Guidelines: Site-based coordinator, Job Description, p.2), this embraces supporting student motivation through its four key roles: through monitoring student progress in the initial student orientation (promoting autonomy and competence), through assisting in time management within the school day (promoting autonomy and relatedness), through regular meetings with the online students (promoting relatedness and also possible issues involving autonomy and competence), and through helping them develop a self-management approach that works for them (promoting autonomy).

In addition, the findings from Pamoja appear to indicate SBC motivational support in areas that emerged from the data of this study rather than from the literature:

Firstly, the students sensed that their SBCs had confidence in Pamoja as a course provider and operator. This reassuring and relatedness motivator encouraged them to enter and sustain effort in the program, within the double unknown of a new method of study and a new subject.

Secondly, the students sensed that their SBCs were readily in contact with Pamoja and were effectively operating as a support triangle for them: giving a stronger dimension to the relatedness domain of motivation. This could be seen as a product of Pamoja’s standardized training of the SBCs, and in their regular interactions in not only following up students, but in cooperative endeavors, such as the school’s operating Pamoja end-of-semester examinations.

Thirdly, the students sense of accountability to the SBCs, the most commonly student-reported aspect of SBC motivational involvement, seems to be heightened and supported by Pamoja’s
upgrading of its reporting system whereby the SBC is clearly informed in the act of viewing a simply-communicated picture of the students’ current academic and engagement positions.

Fourthly, though I designed the sampling frame to take into account differences in performance levels, gender, and whether or not I taught the student online, I did not find any discernable pattern within the thematic analysis suggesting that any of the reported elements might be gender-specific or being-their-online-teacher-specific. However, of those of the 4 who tended to minimalize the importance of the SBC, 3 were performing above average, and 1 at an average, competent level. There were no instances of below average performers reporting that SBCs were of little importance in supporting their progress. This indicates that SBC support is less crucial for able students who feel at home in the online environment, but such students were in the minority in this study.

And finally, and most importantly, both the SBCs and Pamoja staff commented on their observing a positive relationship between the level of SBC motivational activity and the level of student progress within the Pamoja VLE. This served at a minimum of “just that little more pressure not coming from Pamoja” to proactive support which could well have been of pivotal importance in supporting success in the program. For whilst acknowledging that there were some students for whom active SBC involvement was of relatively marginal importance, there was full agreement about the existence of a large body of Pamoja students for whom suitable SBC involvement could be the motivating factor towards success optimizing, and whose motivating absence would lead to sub-optimal performance at best and dropping-out at worst. Though apparent within the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, it appeared to be the strongest and most frequently made observation by Pamoja staff, exemplified by the Pamoja staff member with
responsibility for all the courses (not just Economics): “Overall, the SBCs have had a pivotal role in the students’ progress, which in turn is a reflection of the degree to which the SBCs have been involved, and that I feel that Pamoja is able to match the face-to-face-taught general IB distribution of grades is because of the online partnership situation. It has to have the school’s input to succeed as well as it does”.

Having stated the findings, the final chapter reviews the overall picture of the findings of SBC activity more closely in the framework of SDT, and considers the validity of the data in this study together with its strengths and limitations. From there, I move on to consider the professional practice implications of this work, by firstly discussing the implications of the findings at Pamoja level, and then ending by assessing how far those implications may inform the nature of provision and value of online education at pre-tertiary level in similar settings.
Chapter 5: Conclusions, discussion, recommendations, and reflections

5:1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the question proposed at the start of this research: how effective is Pamoja’s model in working with SBCs in motivating sustained learning in the online study mode? On the basis of the findings used in responding to that question and the conclusions drawn, this chapter moves on towards and to considering the implications of the findings with Pamoja in informing the use of online provision instead of direct instruction in pre-tertiary school situations in general where the latter is not readily available. It thus employs the data and its analysis in this study in enabling a more refined OPM online partnership model to emerge as an advance on the simpler OPM model described at the beginning of the thesis. Its objective is to represent the contribution of this research: a device that adapts the experience from Pamoja as grounded in the literature review and explored in this work to enable schools to consider the option of incorporating whole-course online programs within the school curriculum, with benefits to both students and schools as discussed in this chapter. It should also inform online providers of the potential of working closely with the institutions of students they serve, when considering directions in enhancing their existing programs, as well as to new providers entering the field.

In this chapter, I re-examine and assess the findings in the light of the existing literature, as well as this study’s validity, and its capacity to inform the design and operation of similar online programs.
5.2 Evidence for SBC support motivating online pre-tertiary students

The main student motivation issues at Pamoja level were conjectured to have much in common with the wider pre-university level online study situation reviewed in Chapter 2, in that they challenge motivating forces within all the three domains: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These include maintaining suitable levels of engagement week-by-week, facing difficulties in handling particularly demanding concepts forming the subject’s content and associated complex tasks with high assessment weightings, the need for buoying up flagging enthusiasm with a range of extrinsic motivators, and the feeling of a need for a bridging: the sense that working with a course provider in almost always in a different part of the world and inputting as a member of the Pamoja community is being consistently supported by the school community. In view of the possibility of these motivation issues, I identified the gaps in Chapter 2 which I proceeded to investigate in Chapters 3 and 4: what degree of success might the SBCs within the Pamoja-specific OPM model be having as personnel for motivation in the VLE, and what specifications within the Pamoja model might have to be adjusted to optimize motivation at both Pamoja and as a model to similar pre-University level online learning situations?

Chapter 2 has posited that it is through self-determination towards success that the IB Diploma student’s chiefly extrinsic motivating elements are able to combine to promote the optimal application of personal capabilities to the studying of Economics online. It continued by indicating that the literature on online study in general, and connected with Pamoja in particular, implicitly and sometimes explicitly recognizes that expecting the student to bring and maintain the essential ideal levels of self-determination extending through a two-year conceptually-
demanding course of study scenario is unrealistic, however well-motivated the student might be at the onset. The literature review identified and examined challenges to such self-determination commonly experienced by students, and it considered ways that a school support system though the online facilitator in general and as a Pamoja SBC for Economics in particular may assist individual students in maintaining levels of motivation towards optimum levels throughout the different points of the course, and in situations where the student faced potential and actual demotivating elements.

In investigating on-site facilitators and SBCs as motivators through the framework of self-determination theory as presented in Chapter 2, the detailed evidence from members of the Pamoja community considered in Chapter 4 strongly supported the presence and varied nature of motivation-promoting and motivation-sustaining inputs from the SBCs, and that they were viewed as being positive and productive by the students (most of), SBCs (all), and Pamoja staff (all) who participated in this study.

In Chapter 4, the summarized evidence indicates that SBC support is a vital factor that extrinsically strongly motivates most Pamoja students in all three domains, primarily in relatedness, but also in autonomy and, where a student struggles academically with the material, in competency. SBC inputs in motivating students are viewed by most student participants as having effects that are positive, ranging from degrees of being decisively important to relatively marginal, and never reported as being counter-productive.

In short, SBC motivating inputs appear to work and as such may be justified, though not without room for further optimization as proposed in the next section.
5.3 Conclusions: what this study adds to what already is known.

On the evidence of the data, the findings of this study contribute the following in answering the research question: “How effective is Pamoja’s model in working with SBCs in motivating sustained learning in the online study mode?”

1. This practices contained within the model are effective. The SBCs at Pamoja are substantial elements in motivating student engagement and student performance in that VLE environment and community. Their presence and inputs frequently elevate the fully online learning experience to the levels of being tangible and real-life rather than distant and virtual, and of being an integral and vital part of the students’ pre-university curriculum on par with its other components.

2. It is the SBCs’ position of proximity to the students and the trust that they typically have with their students often predating the current working relationship that enables them to support the motivation of the students in their diverse range of VLE challenges to the extent that they do.

3. The success of the motivational work of the SBCs is likely to be a result of constant support by Pamoja: Pamoja trains and updates the SBCs, which facilitates their work the following ways. First, actively: through emphasizing the importance of meeting regularly with the students and by being available at critical points in the program. Secondly, passively: by the students’ very cognizance that their SBCs are following their progress and engagement levels and that they thus are accountable to them. For Pamoja supports the SBCs to that end by giving them full access to their students’ progress through the site, with instant color-coded summaries, as well as direct communications from that company’s school service personnel when necessary.
4. The importance of SBC motivational support where necessary is reflected in the instances of long-standing student motivational issues within the VLE being frequently traceable to sub-par levels of SBC input.

5. SBC motivational input is of pastoral rather than academic nature. However, supplementary academic input within the domain of the SBC does occur with a minority of students, and it is seen by those directly involved as a plus.

6. SBC motivational support is a crucial element in enabling schools to widen their choice of specialist subjects with successful outcomes that they would otherwise would not have the resources to provide.

7. The optimum level of SBC motivational input varies from student to student, determination of which falls within the professional judgment of the SBC.

8. The nature of the SBCs’ motivational support is mostly extrinsic, and chiefly within the relatedness needs domain (e.g. proximity to student, instant availability), though their work can also extend to the other domains of autonomy needs (e.g. procrastination issues) and competence needs (e.g. mastering complex material in a VLE rather than a classroom).

9. Neither my data, nor the literature review revealed instances where SBC-type support was sensed as being counterproductive or resented by any party involved.

10. Though it cannot be concluded with certainty that it is the SBC’s work that enables Pamoja results at IB to rival direct classroom instruction, the evidence collated and discussed strongly supports the likelihood that it is a substantial and operational factor.
In sum, the setup shown in the OPM at Pamoja level appears to do what it aims to do: it supports the students in their online studies. Taken as a whole, all parties claim that the SBC inputs (SBC Domain in the diagram below) within that model make a difference. That in itself seems to justify the inclusion of SBC inputs in the OPM model.

As summarized by the diagram below, this applies at both the passive level, whereby students perceive their being regularly accountable to their SBCs who are checking their instantly-accessible performance and engagement levels, and at the active levels, whereby SBCs support their work in various ways mostly, but not always, in harmony with the Pamoja’s SBC guidelines.

The OPM model as enhanced by the findings summarized above and in Chapter 4 takes the form illustrated in Figure 4 below.
Figure 4 – OPM (Online partnership model) modified. The SBC contribution appears in black.

Virtual support appears in blue. Direct support appears in red. Broken line shows suggested line of support not currently incorporated within Pamoja policy.
On the basis of the various student support functions that were mentioned by participants in this study, I have replaced the original OPM model’s ‘Pamoja Staff’ (Chapter 1) with ‘Pamoja Domain’, which I have split into three elements: ‘School Services Support’, ‘Pamoja Online Teacher support’, and ‘Online Student Colleagues support’. I have also replaced ‘SBC’ with ‘SBC Domain’: student motivational support from within school, signifying SBC and student access to other motivational-supportive elements within the school community, such as the school timetabling online study periods during the school day. The domains in the diagram that appear in red represent the focus of this study: the motivational inputs of the SBC. This diagram illustrates the directions of student support from both Pamoja and the SBC, but whereas Pamoja’s support, represented in blue, is virtual, the SBC’s support is shown in red as the SBC access to student work and progress is real life, and typically grounded in the student-familiar school environment. The latter’s vital significance is supported by evidence from the data in this study, and its importance is supported at a more general level by the literature in Chapter 2. In essence, student accountability and real-life interaction with the SBC as in the diagram would fall under extrinsic motivation grounded in the relatedness domain within the regulatory styles of external regulation and introjection (Figure 3 in Chapter 2). Motivation services and inputs would also generally fall under extrinsic motivation though under all the motivation domains of autonomy and competence as well as relatedness, involving up to all four regulatory styles: external regulation (e.g. student behind with deadlines), introjection (e.g. source of real-life approval for progress), identification (e.g. SBC showing alignment with the online student goals), and integration (e.g. motivating the student to overcome integration-threatening hurdles with content as they occur). In contrast, at the blue level on the diagram, the support is virtual:
students from their Pamoja teacher online, from their fellow online students, and more exceptionally directly, but still virtually from Pamoja Domain when in serious arrears in work and course engagement. While recognizing the influence of elements from the Pamoja Domain that support and motivate online, the representation of the motivational inputs from the SBC domain (which in turn receives inputs from Pamoja at the SBC training, support, and administrative levels) shown in red appears from this study’s data to be crucial in promoting and sustaining student motivation.

The diagram also shows a connection between the online teacher and the SBC as a broken rather than a continuous line, as current Pamoja policy does not promote direct connection between the Pamoja teacher and the SBC, although its platform does make such communications possible. The reason, together with a suggestion to encourage such contacts is considered on the basis of the findings of this study in the next section of this chapter.

In addition, on the basis of the findings and conclusion of this study, the diagram suggests how the OPM at Pamoja level may be applied to informing the enhancing of student support in existing and planned broadly-similar VLE provision at pre-tertiary level. The diagram shows this with the parallel ‘VLE Provider’ and ‘The School onsite facilitator’ as generalized extensions of ‘Pamoja Domain’ and ‘SBC domain’, respectively. These areas of support and accountability are summarized in the diagram below. I consider the issues involved in such applications in the next section of this chapter.
Figure 5 - Generalized diagram of key interactions, support, and accountability in the modified OPM model.

5.4 Discussion

In the final section of the previous chapter, I summarized the findings in terms of those supported by the literature review to various degrees, and those that emerged independently of the literature review. As demonstrated in that chapter, most of the SBC impacts seems to be pastoral: to the greatest extent in the relatedness motivational domain, but as emphasized there, were also reported elements of academic competence support that were not supported in the Pamoja literature. At this stage, I revisit the key ideas grounded in the literature in Chapter 2, including those that I applied to the Pamoja situation at the end of that chapter: in order to
compare the possible findings about SBC motivation hypothesized at the end of the literature review with the findings of this study.

As hypothesized in Chapter 2, the evidence gathered indicated that the SBCs are inputting into a reality where students at Pamoja are in a high stakes situation in terms of striving to perform as well as possible, and thus seemed to be well-motivated notwithstanding that the initial enthusiasm for the program can flag, and the data shows evidence of such flagging, at various points in the program. Despite the high stakes in the particular online program, the data did not support its demanding nature per se as being counterproductive, in contrast to Mulvenon, Stegman and Ritter (2005). On the contrary, the findings indicated that the high demands of the specifications of the IB curriculum seemed to be met with suitable online student adaption to the program’s demands and increasing development of the essential resilience as evidenced in the research of Hertberg-Davis, and Callahan (2008), and in Suldo, Shaunessy and Hardesty (2008), which in the case of Pamoja, most participants (students, SBCs, and Pamoja staff) attributed considerably to effective SBC support.

Any claim from this study’s data indicating that the SBCs successfully address student motivational issues grounded in autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs must be tempered by a substantial body of students reporting that SBC input is relatively minor, going little further than the SBC presence rather than SBC input, enhanced by the students knowing that SBCs have very easy access to their progress at all times. It is that presence with typically minimal input that nevertheless gives the sense of being accountable to a member of the school faculty which they recognize as being more substantial than the personnel of an organization that is virtual. This is also supported by participating SBCs and Pamoja staff recognizing that many online students
quickly master the skills needed to satisfy their autonomy and competence needs, which become regularly supported by regular virtual interactions with online teachers and fellow-online students rather than SBCs, reducing and even obviating the need for the SBC to ‘set time aside with each student to evaluate their individualized study methods and suggest improvement where appropriate’ as stated in Pamoja’s SBC job description (Pamoja Education, SBC Job Description, 2019, p.2).

However, that in no way undermines this study’s findings which indicate that for a considerable class of online students, SBC input is crucial for their success. Pamoja staff and SBCs interviewed were unanimous that a large spectrum of online students greatly depended on their SBCs. They were particularly crucial in promoting motivation in so far as their presence indicated relatedness: the familiar school being a dimension of an otherwise outside, virtual experience. As detailed in the previous chapter, in sum the motivational issues reported by participating students in which SBC help made a positive difference included the whole range of motivational challenges covered in the literature review. That included addressing challenges in relatedness, such as sense of initial alienation form the virtual community (Ginsberg and Wlokowski, 2000), advising and even intervening in misunderstandings between the student and the online provider staff (Hartnett, 2008), and the initial sense that the online community was not on par with the student-familiar face-to-face teaching (Picciano and Seaman, 2009). It was also the SBC’s proximity and thus, in motivational terms, relatedness-supporting that those students reported as being crucial to address issues that would have beyond what would have been reasonably expected of any online provider (Ayres and Paas, 2009), such as counseling and reassuring students who were overwhelmed at various points of the program.
These findings do address a key gap identified in the literature review, as they evidence that it is the SBCs’ and by extension the online facilitators’ proximity and commitment to personally supporting student motivation that is successful and even crucial in promoting effective student engagement and subsequent progress. Indeed, they emphasize the importance of the reality that the SBCs’ motivation-supporting inputs are typically grounded in a professional personal relationship that would be quite unrealistic to expect to be matched, or even to attempt to be matched, by Pamoja teaching staff.

It is that relatedness dimension that in turn enables the SBCs to support motivation within the autonomy and competence domains. Their relatedness-based proximity was reported by both SBCs and students (more by the former than the latter) as having the capacity to upskill students to achieve their own autonomy (Harms et al., 2006), though relatively rarely within the disciplined environment emphasized by Staker (2011): the timetabled periods for online study during the school day involved the use of facilities such as the school library, but not personally supervised by the SBC or even another member of the school faculty. In such environments, students would need to be considerably motivated in the domain of autonomy to be able to keep up with the weekly assignments, the observance of the degree of it being achieved being highly facilitated by SBC ease of access to the program (Friedhoff et al., 2015) and Pamoja’s introduction of the ‘traffic light’ student engagement indicators reported within previous chapter’s data.

Student autonomy motivation, however, needs to be satisfied for online progress. In line with the literature review, participating Pamoja students and SBCs reported instances of where that was challenged. These included student anxiety, in line with Reeve (2009) and particularly in dealing
with asynchronous and even temporarily dysfunctional communication with the online teacher (Hartnett, 2015), and with fellow online students not cooperating in group projects (Van Etten et al., 2008). And at a more general level, the data included comments that paralleled Moore (2007), where students reported that study online had been challenging their autonomy levels of motivation far more than in direct classroom instruction, particularly when facing issues of coping with the realities of facing weekly large quantities of material on the course (Schott et al., 2003), and competing school deadlines pushing online study into second place (de la Varre et al., 2014). Thus the spectrum of motivational challenges to autonomy faced by Pamoja students, any one of which could adversely affect their interaction with the program, was matched by the range of the same explored in the literature review, with the data in this research indicating the prevalence of SBC support at Pamoja being effective where the students were unable to resolve autonomy issues. However, students and SBCs reporting that it was the support of SBCs that enabled the students to overcome particular autonomy-based challenges to motivation does come with the reservation that in some instances they might have found other means such as their own persistent efforts or communications and support from members of the online community.

Similarly in the student competence domains, both in effectively adjusting to the online environment and in handling the materials, the data found in this study was strongly echoed in the literature review. As the data showed, some students did have difficulty in initially adjusting to the online environment, including coming to terms with the reality that unlike the SBC, the online teacher as well as community was available asynchronously only (Borup, Chambers and Stimson, 2019; Borup, Graham and Drysdale, 2014), with the need for the students to compensate by developing rigorous online discussion skills (Kirkwood and Price, 2005), as well as, more generally, the need to develop the online learning skills early during the course when
sensing that adapting to the Pamoja environment was not coming naturally. Few students included the last point in reporting their experience, but SBCs did. This apparent contradiction may be indicating the possibility that the participating students were suitably adjusted to the workings of the Pamoja environment by the time that I interviewed them (at least six months into the program), with competence-threatenng motivation issues in that area by then a distant memory for them, but less so for SBCs, some of whom dealt with students facing these challenges every year.

It may be additionally argued that the reported effective SBC levels of competence-motivational support within the data have been achieved as a positive consequence of Pamoja’s requirement that all SBCs undergo training before commencing that role (as well as updates as changes occur), a point emphasized in a more general context in Chapter 2 by Harms et al. (2008), and by de la Varre, Keane, and Irwin (2011), the latter also emphasizing their being in a position to help students at the start of the course when many are overwhelmed with the difficulties of learning online (including rigorous discussion activities that are designed to function in a similar role to class discussion in the more familiar direct instruction environment), as well as handling the content of what they are learning online (Lowes and Lin, 2015).

However, and as considered in Chapter 4, the data included evidence that some SBCs were employing their real life availability by using direct instruction as a means of motivating, promoting, and supporting student competence in the often complex subject material, which took them beyond their Pamoja-bounded job description. Though this practice had some positive support in the literature (Oviatt, Graham, Davies, and Borup, 2018; Hendrix and Degner, 2016; Barbour and Hill, 2011), it was sharply criticized by studies such as de la Varre, Keane, Irwin
and Hannum (2011) on the evidence-supported grounds of interfering with the work of the online teacher. In this study, though, several participating students reported regularly receiving such academic support from their schools with SBC involvement (rather unexpected given the high quality of the Pamoja materials prepared by a team of subject-specialist educators), participating Pamoja staff did not report this aspect of extra-job description SBC activity as being an element that impinged on the work of Pamoja’s own teaching staff that reported to them and for whom they were responsible. This picture does not support a case for Pamoja recommending SBCs such functions within their job description, as inter alia SBCs might well not agree to serve in such a role in the first place unless they are reassured that no subject-specialist knowledge is necessary for their work, but on this evidence there could be a case for Pamoja making a subtle change from “Encouraging students to take ownership of their learning by supervising rather than tutoring” (Pamoja Education, SBC Job Description, 2019, p.2) to a simpler “Encouraging students to take ownership of their learning by supervising”, omitting the explicit “rather than tutoring”. By doing so, they would be implicitly, though not complicitly, accommodating the student who needs some direct instructional input, recognizing that however professionally prepared their own online materials, any medium of education is unlikely to be suitable to the entire range of students (Segedin et al., 2018).

The picture that emerges from the evidence considered in this discussion strongly supports this study’s conclusion that SBCs make substantial and operating inputs to motivating student online progress within a large body of that population. The Pamoja experience thus indicates that for a large class of students, the SBC input is an indispensible component of the motivational support triangle. As Pamoja staff claimed, their experience was that there is a strong correlation between the student level of engagement and the level of engagement of their SBC, implying that lack of
progress could indicate a lack of SBC support. However, in this study, among the minority of participating students that perceived little SBC supervision, there were none who indicated a wish for more SBC motivational involvement. This could at least partially be due their being mostly above-average students and that their self-reported support was grounded in other sources, chiefly from within the Pamoja community.

Nevertheless, with hindsight the fact that this study did not identify one case of student lack of engagement due to lack of SBC support may be a limitation: an extension of this work might redress this by deliberating seeking students who are in chronic serious difficulties who have been under-engaging, justifying their situation as stemming from lack of SBC motivational support. It could be argued to have been beyond the boundaries of this study whose data was collected during the second semester, as such students might well have dropped out soon after the beginning of the course and therefore inaccessible to me in my capacity as researcher.

And, surprising, none of the students reported over-involvement or over-interference by the SBCs, despite several examples of their working beyond the boundaries of their role guidelines, again within the evidence cited in the literature review which might be exemplified by Borup, Chambers and Stimson (2019) whose research in the more general context of on-site facilitators indicated online students’ highly valuing the input from their on-site facilitators. That study indicated that students appreciated the support of someone that they knew personally, being motivated by the association of the on-site facilitators’ non-verbal cues, personal interactions, regular communications, approachability, and knowing that they could turn to them for immediate feedback. As cited in the literature review: “Since he is so invested in our lives...you respect him in that way. You also want to do your work, just naturally want to do it” (ibid, p.
Thus on-site facilitators contributed to supporting their extrinsic, identified-regulation motivators in their being accountable to them in their engagement and progress in the course, as well as satisfying their needs for a sense of relatedness in supporting their extrinsic, integrated-regulation motivation. And therefore the Pamoja experience indicates that for a large class of students, SBC input is an important and possibly crucial component of the motivational support triangle. As Pamoja staff claimed, their experience was that there was a strong correlation between the student level of engagement and the level of engagement of their SBC.

However, and in concluding the discussion emanating from comparing the findings of this study to the literature review, it must be stressed that although the literature reviewed was designed to inform on the pre-tertiary high school student, most of the available studies referred to included younger online students than at Pamoja, and none exclusively involved IB online students which, following the findings in Chapter 4, tend to come into the program with relatively high pre-existing levels of motivation and self-efficacies. In that sense, the Pamoja situation may well tend towards the unique. It may also be relatively unusual as SBCs reported themselves as having considerable confidence in Pamoja as online course provider and operator, a reassuring and relatedness motivator encouraging the students to enter and sustain effort in the program, within the double unknown of a new method of study and in this case of IB Economics, a new subject. All this raises the question of the extent that this can inform other pre-tertiary online study situations and possible initiatives, which will be considered within the next sections of this chapter.

With all those reservations, though, the detailed discussion must not lose sight of the much reported SBC role being reported as a success by participating students, SBCs and Pamoja staff:
supporting the reiterated Pamoja senior staff member’s claim that “Overall, the SBCs have had a pivotal role in the students’ progress, which in turn is a reflection of the degree to which the SBCs have been involved, and that I feel that Pamoja is able to match the face-to-face-taught general IB distribution of grades is because of the online partnership situation. It has to have the school’s input to succeed as well as it does”.

The credibility of the study may be discussed on two levels: internally in terms of the how well the study was conducted and how far its findings represent the motivational contributions of SBCs at Pamoja, and externally, in terms of the extent that the findings and conclusions of this study can inform the design and running of similar online programs with view to optimizing student motivation in the online environment. In addition, the question remains: how important is the SBC motivational-input in terms of making a positive difference in the students’ final, externally assessed, IB grade? Though a reading of the evidence moves towards a persuasive ‘substantial difference’, such a claim may only be made on the basis of informed speculation, the verification of which is beyond the scope of this work. There is insufficient evidence for holding that it is solely SBC support that accounts for the range of the final external grades for Economics (or any other subject) at Pamoja online being similar to that of the entire IB cohort over the 2015-2019 period primarily taught by direct instruction, although the findings in this study considerably raise the likelihood of SBCs having a major role in helping students obtain higher externally-awarded exit grades than they would otherwise have achieved: minus that support, student performance levels at Pamoja online would be substantially poorer.

As to method, I strove to establish trustworthiness in this qualitative study as a means of persuading my readers as well as myself that the findings were worthy of attention (Lincoln and
Guba, 1985) from both internal and external standpoints. At the internal level, this involved the data analysis stages constantly attending to this study’s credibility, dependability, and confirmability (ibid).

Credibility sought to address the correspondence between the participants’ data and the way I represented them in the data analysis (Tobin and Begley, 2004). As explained in the previous chapter, I did that by first carrying out the thematic analysis myself and then handing the raw data from my interviews to a colleague with professional experience in that form of qualitative research (to whom I explained the nature and purpose of my research). This was in order for the study to undergo elements of peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba, 1985): to that end my colleague carried out an independent thematic of the data (Decrop, 1999), which very much corresponded to my own, with differences needing to be taken into account before coming to the final analysis which I documented in Chapter 4. In this study, the differences were between myself and my colleague on the main substance of the themes and codes generated from the data were marginal, typically when it came to grouping codes into themes rather than on the main substance of the findings and trends, and also in considering areas that might or might not have required more detailed descriptions. This also helped to support the study’s dependability, my colleague being able to examine the research process in terms of it being traceable and clearly documented (Tobin and Begley, 2004).

In addition, I sought to establish confirmability of my findings by first quoting the data relevant to the points being made, and secondly showing the steps between how I derived the findings and based judgments, in such a way that the readers should be able to follow that process and assess for themselves the series of reasonings influencing the conclusions, discussions, and
ultimately the recommendations of this study.

This leads to the external dimension of this study: its transferability. This term means the extent that the findings of this case study may inform other cases (Tobin and Begley, 2004), which in this research is the degree that the findings on the Pamoja experience of SBCs including the OPM are a model that should be taken into account by other providers of online pre-tertiary and even secondary education for younger students. In this study, I have sought to establish and reiterate that this study is essentially a case study of an online education provider bringing to the center of its operation a motivational student support triangle with considerable emphasis on working with the students’ schools. It is up to readers to compare their situations with Pamoja’s, consider the data and judge how far the proposed OPM may inform their current or planned online education programs.

As a final issue in the discussion: in recognizing that this study was not designed to determine how far SBC inputs to student motivation were substantial and operating contributors to the Pamoja success level’s similarities to the entire IB cohort, it is important to recognize that this is a further area of inquiry that may well involve a quantitative and longitudinal study of students of similar ability ranges in one subject (not necessarily Economics) that is experimental in design. The provider, unlike Pamoja, would not have school support built into their system. The control group would receive SBC-type support, and the test group, hypothesized to perform substantially more poorly, would not. Such a study would have to face the highly formidable problems of obtaining ethical approval, as those not receiving that support might well be relatively disadvantaged, albeit their situation would not necessarily contravening any conditions stipulated by the provider of that VLE set-up. It would also have to establish academic-ability,
match-pair similarities between the two groups at the start of the course, which may subsequently lose validity due to the different rates of progress between the student participants over the subsequent two-year period.

Notwithstanding, the data’s strong support for SBC involvement being beneficial to student progress and participation as viewed by participating students, SBCs, and Pamoja staff is intrinsically valuable. As I carried out the thematic analysis of results by using a data-driven inductive approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as presented in the previous chapter, I was able to identify and group the themes and codes as they emerged from the data and then apply SDT theory, rather than attempt to classify the data at emergence stage within an initially pre-existing theoretical framework. I felt that throughout the total of 20 interviews, ethical principles were observed and maintained, which in retrospect was not unduly difficult as the exchanges seemed to be in a relaxed, conversational atmosphere, where frankness was easily established in the first five minutes, and most noticeably after the participants recounted the critical incidents, which in retrospect appeared to be excellent ice-breakers as well as sources of information. It is the having allowed the data to speak for itself in Chapter 4 that should enable transparency, making it possible for readers to view the transcribed-verbatim evidence, and thereon follow my interpretations and assess their validity for themselves. It should also let readers arrive at their own conclusions in considering how far the findings and claims of this study might be relevant to the particular VLE situations with which they are familiar.

Thus, though the recommendations that follow with the findings in the next section are at a general level, they are areas to be considered when applying the findings of this study. It is on the readers to keep a careful eye on the realities and exigencies of their own interactions with
online study at pre-tertiary, or any other level, as to how far the findings of this study address the specifics of their VLE situations. In doing so, it is important to bear in mind that the findings from this Pamoja-focused study support the following takeaways apropos to the following stakeholders: online providers, schools, and pre-tertiary students.

Online providers at pre-tertiary level should strongly consider the benefits of the extra efforts required in working together with the schools rather than merely providing online teaching, making the inclusion of a named and practicing on-site facilitator a prerequisite for accepting any online student within their programs. In addition they should only grant the student access to the program when the student’s on-site facilitator has successfully completed the training that the online provider provides and oversees, and also undertakes to ensure student support according to the provider’s guidelines. The provider should designate specific staff akin to Pamoja’s school services to monitor the student progress week-by-week, enabling any issues to be identified and followed up and involve the online facilitator where necessary. Finally, providers should ensure that the site is designed so that the online facilitator can, on logging in, obtain an instant overview picture of the progress and engagement levels of their students.

Schools should be reassured by the providers using that model that students can achieve comparable outcomes to face-to-face teaching as soon as the providers do have a supportive track record. The schools should thus view the Pamoja-type online option as a viable and credible alternative to employing a specialist teacher when offering a subject on the curriculum that is not taught throughout the school, but could well be in demand among older students, such as Economics, Business Studies, Psychology, and Film Studies. The online facilitator making SBC-type interactions should thus be a pedagogically specialized function within the school.
faculty. It is this role that can give the predominantly relatedness pastoral-type (as opposed to subject-specialist) support to a variety of subjects, which following the evidence in this study, is the area bounding the students’ most typical need for support. For example, one person could carry out that function with all four of the subjects listed above, which could be considerably cost effective and also quality effective, given the reality that the individual specialist teacher’s resources are unlikely to rival those of the team-of-experts-produced Pamoja-type platform.

And like the schools, pre-tertiary students should be aware that studying this way in a Pamoja-type environment is a viable option even when the subject is, as Economics, completely outside their current educational experience. They should be reassured that the school is formally and actively supporting their studies and progress by effectively partnering with the provider even as they venture into unknown waters and an unknown virtual environment. (And, although not directly supported by this study, this method could give them valuable experience in studying this way in higher and further education.)

5.5 Recommendations for school motivation-supportive practice: in the pre-tertiary online environment

On the basis of the findings, takeaways, discussions, and enhancements of the original OPM model all contained within this research, I am placing my recommendations flowing from the findings of this study for SBC/on-site facilitator practice under three headings. The first considers the potential benefits to schools of online education at pre-tertiary level as provided by Pamoja and motivationally supported by its SBCs. From there, the study goes forward to
consider how Pamoja might improve its existing model to optimize SBC motivational support on the basis of the data in this study. The third, more complex venture, is to suggest how far the OPM, SBC-based practices that Pamoja initiated and used may be effectively generalized to informing practice to other providers of VLEs in the light of the findings at the Pamoja.

**Online study as an option for pre-tertiary students at Pamoja**

The findings of this study as concluded in the previous section indicate that SBC inputs do substantially motivate student engagement and student performance in the Pamoja VLE environment, and that the externally-awarded end-of-course grades are similar in distribution to those of the cohort. This would support online education at pre-tertiary level at Pamoja as being a viable alternative to direct instruction-taught courses. It could have the further benefit of developing the students’ online study skills for operations beyond pre-tertiary level where academic and professional training is frequently delivered online. It might well also enable schools to provide a cost-effective, wider range of options for its pre-tertiary students: the subjects in which Pamoja’s student cohorts are particularly large are those which are not taught at all schools: including IB Economics, Business and Management, and Psychology. It is likely to be more cost effective in smaller schools to have one SBC that operates on the Pamoja-specified pastoral level who is already employed by the school, than to employ specialist teachers for these subjects.
In addition, Pamoja’s academic materials are prepared for large numbers of students by a team of subject specialists at a quality and variety that direct-instruction teachers working by themselves would find hard, if at all possible, to achieve.

**What Pamoja could do to optimize the SBC input for their students**

The key word is optimize. Pamoja, as we have stressed, places the SBCs in the framework of partnering with that company through the three main responsibilities of monitoring student progress, building and maintaining communication channels, and promoting independent learning. These are all essentially pastoral inputs focused on academic work: the students’ progress in (this study) Economics in the typically unfamiliar VLE, with all three centering on motivating students as previously discussed. Pamoja supports the SBCs their work by training them and by giving them user-friendly instant at-a-glance access to students’ progress.

However, the data indicates that the school can support the academic content of the course by, for example, subject-specific academic input. However expertly designed and communicated on the Pamoja website, the data in this study indicates students who had been supported in this way being very appreciative of academic input from the school. This does not mean that Pamoja should stipulate that the SBC should be a subject specialist, but it could consider emphasizing the SBC pastoral role without deliberately de-emphasizing any SBC/school academic input: rather drawing attention to the comprehensive and inclusive nature of Pamoja’s provision of the course materials on its platform.
In addition, Pamoja’s policy does not link the students’ online teacher with the SBCs, as shown by the broken line in Figure 2. On the basis of the data, there may be case for doing so, possibly in the form of series of brief 10-minute sessions using Skype/Zoom whereby the SBC briefly meets the Pamoja teachers of their students at the start of the program. That could increase the relatedness motivational role of SBCs’ intervention, as the students may well perceive their SBCs as better connected with the Pamoja teacher, rather than being not being intrinsically part of the Pamoja set-up. Especially if they know one another by name.

The elements of the optimized SBC-support system that could inform pre-tertiary online study in general.

The study supports the view that schools can use online providers as an effective alternative to direct instruction to fully deliver courses at even pre-university external examination level provided that the provider and school collaborate in supporting the student on the lines summed up in Figure 4, the OPM (modified) model.

As introduced in Chapter 1, Pamoja defines the SBC’s main roles as falling under three headings: monitoring student progress, building and maintaining communication channels, and promoting independent learning. This is expressed by the supporting revised OPM model presented earlier in this section, which as already shown, has gone beyond Pamoja in presenting the idealized support triangle based on the evidence in Chapter 4 and the literature review. In motivation terms, it is through the communication channels for the monitoring of student progress that SBCs may effectively support student motivation, with the objective of optimizing
independent online learning. This model is only likely to suitably inform other pre-tertiary online situations at the online facilitator level in a situation where both the provider and the on-site facilitators share a similar commitment to promoting independent online learning.

This section reviews the Pamoja-designated SBCs in light of the evidence of their efficacy in motivation researched in previous chapters. Its importance is to use that experience to inform online course providers at that level what may be learnt from Pamoja, and to consider applying a similar model to optimize efficacy as an online course provider.

It assumes similar confidence in the provider by school and students. It also assumes that students come in to the course with comparable levels of motivation.

In order for those three main SBC roles to be realized, Pamoja’s policy is to only accept students where they are supported by their school. This at least theoretically secures each student within a support system from the very start. The school designates the on-site facilitator who has SBC function, who in turn is required to complete a Pamoja-type designed orientation course for authorization by the company in order to be eligible to work in that capacity. That training program, renewed and updated annually, is designed to familiarize the SBC with the skill-set needed for viewing the platform the student is working with, including grades and missed deadlines. Thus likewise, at the more general level, the online provider’s platform should be designed so that the on-site facilitator can get the picture of the student’s progress at a glance. It should also provide a base for communications between course provider and the online facilitator. This, as supported by the SBC participants in this study, should put the on-site facilitators in a position to monitor student progress with ‘action where necessary including suitable motivators through having access to constantly updated, first-hand information on the
student’s levels of engagement and progress. As the majority of student participating reported, it is this informed pre-existing source of data that informs the content and objectives of on-site facilitator-student meetings.

This means that like at Pamoja, the on-site facilitator has received the vital training from the provider to keep on the same pages as the student if needed, and is intimately familiar with the detailed nature of the VLE within which the student interacts. This contrasts with the literature reviewed where the potential support of online facilitators is likely to be more limited, in their lacking that background and therefore the detailed picture in which the student is working, as they are not involved to the same desirable degree as the SBCs in the Pamoja model. Conversely, as evidenced in the SBC interviews in the previous chapter, detailed familiarity with the VLE as exemplified by Pamoja means that the teacher, knowing the student’s approach to study and the culture of the school, can help to support motivation in needs satisfaction, through bridging the gap between the position of the student and the course provider.

This leads to the next point: with that access to detailed information, the on-site facilitator’s role is should be to promote independent learning: supporting students’ autonomy by enabling them, as Pamoja put it, ‘to take ownership of their learning by supervising rather than tutoring’ and ‘promote effective time management’. As evidenced by the SBCs in their reports in the previous chapter, professionals in such a role are in a unique position as they are familiar with competing pressures on the students from other direct-instruction-taught components of the IB program, which are experienced differently and elicit different coping strategies with different individual students. To this end, Pamoja emphasizes that the SBCs’ task in monitoring student progress should keep in mind the need for students to develop self-management approaches suited to their
own individualities: “a self-management approach that works for them” (Pamoja Guidelines: Site-based coordinator, Job Description p.2), thereby avoiding a situation where the student despite being academically able, feels intrinsically demotivated in not having developed individuality-suited strategies to succeed in online study. For Pamoja’s emphasis on self-management implies, at the more general on-site facilitator level, giving the student the autonomy of bringing individuality to the learning situation, whilst at the same time setting ‘time aside with each student to evaluate their individualized study methods and suggest improvements where appropriate’. This last part of that sentence recognizes that the degree of support is likely, and should, vary depending on degree of effective autonomy the student brings to the program. The collective evidence that the students brought in their interview supports this: with the tendency of most, but not all, of the more able students requiring less support in time management than those for whom keeping up with the Pamoja routines week-by-week was a significant problem.

Thus the Pamoja model would have the potential of informing other online providers of the case for promoting a similar course-provider partnership with on-site facilitators, all of whom they train, with the latter’s function being motivating the students in the three domains discussed. In considering instituting such a set-up, readers would have to take into account the extent that their overall situation parallels that of Pamoja students, for example in the pre-existing level of student motivation that the student brings to the course.
5.6 Reflections

Following the recommendations above, I end this work by considering what went well, and what in hindsight might have been improved.

What went well

I was particularly gratified with the cooperation from those I interviewed at the three points of the OPM model: the students, the SBCs, and the Pamoja staff. Though I planned the research to focus on the student experience of SBC support, I found that the insights offered by both SBCs and Pamoja staff on the contribution of SBCs to student motivation were invaluable as, unlike those they supervised, their observations were typically grounded in years of working with cohorts of Pamoja online students. They were collectively able to report, for example, that they observed that a large body of Pamoja students depended on the support of people that knew them personally at first hand, that they tended to perform considerably better when they knew that provision was there, and that they understood that their SBCs were constantly monitoring their progress. No student participant, in contrast, gave or would have been likely to give, an insight into the whole cohort as did the Pamoja staff. It was the latter’s experiences over the years in this role that appears to have enabled them to see trends in the strengths and limitations of SBCs as student motivators that would have beyond the locus of the students.

The study did seem suited to the qualitative approach. I found that behind almost all respondents was a story, or a range of stories that indicated the online studying context, which were more readily elicited by the prompting of anecdotes and impressions of SBC support than would have
been obtained by use of a questionnaire and then attempting to join the ‘dots’ created by a series of ticked checkboxes. No two students responded completely identically as to why they enrolled on the course (or even why they chose to study Economics), to what critical incidents presented themselves, to how their SBCs supported or did not support their various categories of difficulties (whether in working towards autonomy or competence), and to how effective any SBC support that they were receiving was being. In addition, the qualitative approach in several cases seems to have encouraged students to reconsider their answers after probing. Typically, students would initially minimalize the SBC role in motivation, and only after gentle prompting concede that the very presence of a SBC checking on their progress helped them to combat procrastinating working habits.

I was also pleased that I allowed for the data to speak for itself and then examine it on its own terms within the SDT framework, rather than frame the questions and immediately classify the responses within the SDT setting of different categories of extrinsic and intrinsic motivators, within the three domains of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This allowed the picture of the participant-experienced SBC role to emerge, and to be viewed on its own merits as a story of the experience of an involved individual before attempting to analyze and identify the motivating elements within the SDT theory.

I also found that once past the first five minutes, all respondents were eager to talk and share their experiences, which generally conveyed a sense of the VLE in their eyes being something new, enterprising, and daring, and also something that engendered a sense of achievement in having been able to come to terms with. In addition, it seemed that the idea of e-mailing the critical incidence question prior to the interview was effective in encouraging the participants to
reflect on past experiences at interview. My commonly-encountered confident responding tone indicated student participants’ recent thinking over issues that had created concern, and the SBC support they may or may not have received to develop coping strategies.

Though assuring all participants of researcher confidentiality, I was alert for questions that might elicit a note of tension from the respondents as something needing caution particularly given my direct connection with Pamoja as online teacher and, through Pamoja, with the SBCs. An example was the critical incidence question, to which the response might have included information that would have adversely reflected on the SBC and the school. However, I did not sense this being the case in any interview. On the contrary, all participating parties seemed to have communicated frankly and at ease. This was especially true of the two Pamoja staff, even though I did let them know that because of their relatively unique position, their responses could theoretically be traced to them.

And finally, I think that the practice of categorizing the students interviewed within the descriptors of the sample frame presented in Chapter 3 generally maximized the range of individuals taking part. This appeared to have elicited the information needed to trace the contours of the range of ways and degrees in which SBC presence and SBC activity impact student motivation, which I have sought to present in this and in the previous chapter. The use of the word generally implies exception, which in this study were the students who dropped out soon after the beginning of the program, none of whom took part: a situation I consider in the next section.
What could have been better

One surprising finding of this study was that there were no claims from any of the participating students that SBC intervention was overbearing to the degree of being counterproductive. This does seem to fit in with the absence of such claims in the literature about on-site facilitators: students had claimed that their inputs placed pressure and demands on their time, but they reported them as necessary for motivating their progress.

There is the possibility that the lack of negative reports on SBCs occurred because my research only contacted students who were active in Pamoja at the time I carried it out, which was between March and June of their first year. It did not include any students who dropped out of the course before the study took place. In hindsight, interviewing such students might have been of value, as it could have informed on whether such dropouts occurred despite the SBCs support, because of the wrong type of SBC support, because of lack of SBC support, or because the student subsequently preferred to learn a different IB subject offered by direct instruction at the school. There would have been considerable practical difficulties in reaching those individuals, as once out of the program, their point of contact would have been removed from Pamoja records accessible to teachers, making researcher contact difficult, if not impossible. However, this does indicate the possibility that SBC involvement considered in this work does not encompass the whole spectrum of student progress or lack of progress within the Pamoja VLE despite the comprehensive nature of the sampling frame designed to achieve that objective, although it could also be argued that the reason for student dropout at such programs is a separate research area of inquiry.
Another way, in retrospect, that this study could have been strengthened was by asking student participants to view their experiences of SBC motivational support in context of the teacher and school motivational support that they were receiving in other subjects that they were studying by direct instruction. This arguably could have been addressed by an additional question, on the lines of: “In what way do you find your challenges/levels of motivation in VLE study similar/different to the direct instruction environment?” However, it could be equally or more strongly claimed that the focus of this research is on the role of the SBC in motivating student progress in specifically the virtual environment, and that the degree that motivation in the VLE parallels and differs from the traditional classroom setting is a different research area.

And thirdly, in retrospect, the study might have considered the working and salary conditions of the SBCs in terms of where their duties to their Pamoja students stood in relation to their other duties. No SBC reported, or was reported by a student, to be a full-time employee in that job, even in the case of where the school was large and all students took one course at Pamoja because the school required each student to thus incorporate online skills as part of their curriculum. All SBCs were part of the school faculty in capacities including teacher, librarian, student counselor, IB coordinator, and in one case school principal, who were supporting VLE students as one of their many duties. With hindsight, the study could have sought a way of looking at, for example, whether the SBCs worked unpaid, as an item added to their existing duties, or whether they were allocated hours within the timetable for which the school paid them pro-rata. There is thus a possibility that the SBCs that showed minimal interest were poorly paid or even unpaid for their services, and SBCs would not be working to potential unless suitably recompensed. As Pamoja does not directly employ the SBCs, that company is not in a position to negotiate salary with the schools.
With these reservations notwithstanding, I am giving the last words that sum up the contribution of this study to the observation of the participating Pamoja senior staff member:

“Overall, the SBCs have had a pivotal role in the students’ progress, which in turn is a reflection of the degree to which the SBCs have been involved, and that I feel that Pamoja is able to match the face-to-face-taught general IB distribution of grades… because of the online partnership situation. It has to have the school’s input to succeed as well as it does”.

SBCs at best are highly effective motivators for students working in the VLE environment at Pamoja in harmony with their individual needs: this is the over-arching finding of the study as evidence-based practice, which I may well seek to present in condensed form in a publication such as the International Journal of E-Learning & Distance Education or the American Journal of Distance Education, and at a professional rather than academic level in, for example EdTech UK Magazine and, to reach a wider audience, as an article in The Times Educational Supplement. The focus would be on the application of OPM (Figure 4) model to enable online education to rival the direct instruction of the classroom in terms of academic outcomes. Moreover, in the current Covid-19 climate, students have studying online through Zoom and other platforms to a degree that would have been inconceivable at the time I began to conduct the interviews. How far pre-tertiary level online education will persist in that form in the post-Covid era is speculative at the time of writing, but the findings of this thesis presenting the positive findings and amendments to the OPM model based on the Pamoja experience should increase confidence in online education by involving school faculty pastorally rather than specialist-academically, obtaining the benefits of economies of scale, and also accustoming students to study this way given the expanded use of the VLE for higher education and professional training. Indeed, at the
wider practice level of VLE pre-tertiary education current and future initiatives, this research puts and substantiates the case for the VLE provider to initiate, design, and operate formal OPM-model-based student support systems. Their overarching purpose is to optimize the schools’ input through the training and engagement of SBCs to act in a student-motivational as well as administrative capacity.
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APPENDICES

The appendices contain the following 12 items:

1. Interview schedules for use in my research
2. Sampling frame details
3. Ethical issues
4. Invitation to prospective student participants
5. Invitation to prospective student participants – request for parents permission
6. Information sheet for participating students
7. Information sheet for parents of participating students
8. Consent form for participants
9. Consent form for parents of participating students
10. Initial codes generated from interviews
11. Pamoja Education: research integrity policy statement
12. HREC – Favorable opinion letter following application
1. INTERVIEW SCHEDULES FOR USE IN MY RESEARCH

This study will use a total of 20 semi-structured interviews to collect the data. 14 used for the participating students, 4 for SBCs (school-based coordinator), and 2 for Pamoja personnel.

The interviews are planned to be conducted via Skype or Conference, the Pamoja-used internal equivalent. Ideally they will be electronically recorded, though notes will be made if the participant prefers. Participants will be clearly informed of their rights of complete anonymity, withdrawal, and that the non-permanence of their data will be fully observed as required under HREC stipulations. They will also be familiarized with the additional HREC guidelines that apply when the researcher is their online teacher, and when the participants are under 18 years old: both on the information sheet and before the interview begins. Doing so clearly at those stages should reduce the possible influence of demand characteristics.

I intend to contact all students studying IB Economics at Pamoja irrespective of whether they are in my group or not and select 14 students: 7 from my group and 7 from other groups to reduce the possibility of researcher bias. I will make it clear to them that acceptance is not a guarantee of participation, as there will be a random element in the sample selection process. I will also obtain permission from the other teachers concerned before contacting their students.

As the students are aged 16-18, it will be necessary to obtain parental permission. The relevant draft documents are attached. I will liaise with Pamoja for the best way of contact as I am not directly in touch with the parents.

The target population is the first-year international student population studying IB Economics (one of the most popular Pamoja subjects) at higher level, online at Pamoja Education. Seven of the sample participants (males and females aged 16-17) will be my own students, but known to me in an online capacity only. The other seven will be from students in parallel groups.

The sample will be stratified on the basis of the end-of-semester examination mark for the first semester, including at least: 4 above-average performers, 4 average performers, and 4 below-average performers. That should be sufficiently diverse to enable a cross-section of the performance level throughout the cohort. Each performance level use will use random sampling, but will have at least one male and one female participant. That would represent the equal number of make and female students in the class. I am well aware of the extra ethical issues raised by the use of one’s own students who are also under 18, and I have addressed these i on the information sheet and invitation letter to students and to parents to allow the students to take part.

I will make it clear to the students that my role as researcher is entirely different to my role of online teacher. I will emphasize that their decision whether or not to take part will have no bearing on my professional relationship as a teacher, including assessment of their work. To that end, I am aiming to complete the interviews in by early April, before the grade-determining end-of-semester examinations are on the horizon.
The SBC sample will be selected randomly from the SBCs who are monitoring Pamoja IB Economics higher level students. The Pamoja staff sample will be randomly selected from those whose work at Pamoja includes liaisoning with SBCs.

On having negotiated a date for interview, I will send to all participants (students, SBCs, and Pamoja administration staff) the critical incident question contained in the interviews below to allow time for thinking it through before the interview.

STUDENT INTERVIEW (14 participants)

(i) Tell me a little about your IB studies and how you came to be an online Pamoja student of IB Higher Level Economics.

(ii) “I’d like to hear about your journey though Pamoja online IB Economics. Let’s go back to your first semester, and look at things that worked for you and things that created challenges for your regular engagement”:

- What do you think worked well at the start/after the first month/at present during the program?
- What do you think did not work so well at the start/after the first month/at present during the program?
- Now that you’re in the second semester, do you feel you are on top of things and manage quite on your own, or do you sometimes sense that you are struggling to cope? (Links with Chapter 2: SDT - autonomy, competence, reliability: prompt as necessary)

The rationale is to inform about the student’s progress and position with engagement in the course. It should give the context for the input of SBCs.

(iii) “Let’s look more closely at your progress at Pamoja. Tell me about one time when, at times, things were not working out and you needed help”. During the story, ask about where they turned to help, and focus on the SBC, which can be on the following lines:

Critical incident element of the interview

Can you tell me about any particular situation or incident that exemplifies your experience of the SBC system? For example, in a situation of being stuck in some aspect of your course (academic/technical/organizational). What help did you get from your SBC? What effect did it have on
your studies at the time? Has it had any further effects on the way you are studying online now? Please tell the story. …

This is the central focus of the study, using the expanded critical incident approach. It is possible that a respondent will give full, comprehensive information on the above without any of the prompts. The student may mention other elements that might give a window to the relative importance of the SBC by referring to other possible sources of support, which could be prompted by:

- The Pamoja platform design, and range of weekly study activities
- Other students in your school studying the same online program
- Other students on your online course who are not in your school
- Your Pamoja teacher of record, and any other Pamoja teachers on the course
- Pamoja teacher-led interactive video study sessions
- Pamoja School Services personnel
- Your school community other than SBCs
- Parents and family
- Others (please name)

The response to these questions should inform the relative importance of various factors as course motivators and as course facilitators. It should point to the relative importance of the SBC as facilitator of motivation in the domains of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

(iv) “And now we will look in more detail at the way that your school supports you in your online studies.”

- How do you decide when and where to meet?
- What is the format/structure of the meeting? What do you normally discuss with your supervising teacher?
- Are there things that affect your online learning that you cannot easily discuss with your SBC?
- Does your SBC work with your IB program coordinator / any other of your key school faculty members in any way?
- Who would you normally contact if you had a problem with your studies?
• These questions can be adjusted to further explore the responses where relevant. The word motivator is not mentioned, as it is possible that the respondents may not see the SBCs in such an overall frame, but they are likely be able to describe their interactions with their SBCs from which it should be possible to gauge the level of and level of motivating support from the SBCs.

(v) Has your overall experience of the SBC experience positively, negatively, or neither positively or negatively affected your online progress? Please give details.

• Use prompts that might include, but are not restricted to: Would you still do the online studies if you were at the start of your course, but had the same knowledge about the program that you have now?
• Overall, what has been keeping your motivation going during difficult times in the program?
• In practice, this question was held in reserve in case the responses to the previous questions do not elicit sufficient information on the overall SBC experience.

Any other comments?

SBC INTERVIEW (4 participants)

The main purpose is to compare the SBCs perception on how the OPM (online partnership model) model works for him or her with the student: both are stakeholders in the online learning process. This item is designed to elicit the SBC’s experience as a promoter of online student motivation and supporter of good online study practices.

(i) Please tell me how you initially became involved as SBC, as a partner in the students’ learning? How long have you been an SBC?

(For example, as IB coordinator, as part of my duties as school administrator / IB coordinator / timetabled teaching duties / school librarian)

(ii) What does your work involve? Both from the point of Pamoja’s expectations, and from your perception of the realities of your online student’s needs? [responses could be directed to focus on SDT/SRL theory and concepts]. Please tell me about your routine as a SBC over a week/month/semester etc.
Critical incident element of the interview

(iii) Is there any particular situation or incident that exemplifies your work as SBC in supporting the work of your online students? Please tell the story.

(iv) As SBC, how far do feel that your work contributes towards the students’ progress? [responses could be directed to focus on SDT theory and concepts, in its three motivational domains].

(v) Are there any other elements in the Pamoja system that you would commend or criticize in bringing out the best in the students? Please elaborate. [responses could be directed to focus on SDT theory and concepts; these could help to assess the relative importance of SBC input from the viewpoint of the SBC].

Any other comments?

PAMOJA SCHOOL SERVICES INTERVIEW (2 participants)

The main purpose is to investigate Pamoja’s perception of how its own OPM model works in practice: as an administrator of the online learning process. This item is designed to elicit the Pamoja School Services personnel’s experience in liaison with the SBCs, and where necessary, with the students directly. It is also more generally aimed at finding what their perception is of what the SBC role should be and how far it has been working in practice.

(i) Please tell me how you initially joined the Pamoja School Services staff, as a partner in the students’ learning? How long have you been in that role?

(For example, as a transfer from HR in industry, as a change from regular face-to-face school-teaching)

(ii) As part of School Services, in what ways do feel that your (both singular and plural) work contributes towards motivating and supporting students’ progress? What does your work involve?

The word ‘supporting’ was used in the context of addressing falls in motivation levels within the duration of the program.

Critical incident element of the interview
(iii) Is there any particular situation or incident which exemplifies your work with the Pamoja – SBC – student triangle? Please tell the story. Critical incidence element of the interview. If necessary, ask the participant to expand on particular details in order to obtain a picture in their roles in promoting and supporting student motivation in terms of working their with the SBCs.

(iv) What, in your experience do you think is the ideal type and level of input from SBCs? How well does it match up with their work in practice?

[There could be an issue with confidentiality, as Pamoja is small enough that mere anonymity may not be sufficient. I will consult with my supervisors on how to tackle this ethical issue. A possibility might be presenting the situation to the two employee interviewees and ask them if they wish to take part notwithstanding. If not, this element will have to be dropped from this piece of research.]

(v) Which elements on the online partnership system are you particularly happy with, and which elements would you like to change?

Any other comments
2. Sampling frame details

Figure 5: Student participant sampling frame for this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of student</th>
<th>Above average academic performance</th>
<th>Average academic performance</th>
<th>Below average academic performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My students, male</td>
<td>1 student</td>
<td>1 student</td>
<td>1 student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My students, female</td>
<td>1 student</td>
<td>1 student</td>
<td>1 student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not my students, male</td>
<td>1 student</td>
<td>1 student</td>
<td>1 student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not my students, female</td>
<td>1 student</td>
<td>1 student</td>
<td>1 student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As this table framework indicates, the 12 categories are discrete and non-overlapping, which distinguishes the sampling frame as accommodating a stratified sample rather than a cell-sample where categories can overlap (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In working towards finding suitable participants to this end, I did not invite all students, but only those who were single representatives of each category, 12 in all. Where, following a reminding request, a student did not wish to take part or did not reply, I contacted another student that would fit the same category, and repeated the process until I found a suitably eligible participant. In the event, 14 took part as there were two
instances of two students of the same category, where one had been contacted in the meantime and
the other who, though delayed in reply, also wanted to participate. I treated them as joint
representatives of a single category.

The key focus of the study was the students and their motivational support in the three SDT
domains that they sensed that they were getting from their SBC. However, I included SBCs (two
male, two female) mainly to get an idea of their role and their work as they saw it, allowing for the
possible trend that they saw their work different to their students. In addition, three out of the four
SBCs had served in that capacity in previous years, and thus they were able to contribute their
experience in supporting the motivation of students over a more extended period than the students
could.

I also interviewed two senior Pamoja staff working with the SBCs As far as I know, they were the
only two working in that field. I pointed out to each of them the ethical implications for lack of
anonymity; but they accepted that as inevitable, and I have therefore been able to include their
input in this study.

The interviews followed the ethical guidelines in Section 3.5 below, and the schedules in the
Appendix section of this work. They were conducted through a special Skype account. All were
recorded, and then transcribed.
3. Ethical Issues

Having obtained permission from the HREC to conduct the research and the interviews, I followed the BERA (2011) ethical guidelines, working within the legal framework of the Data Protection Act (1998). That involved making the initial approach with the objective of obtaining non-coercive voluntary informed consent, explaining the purpose of participation, the full rights of the participants including withdrawal at any time, how the data would be used, how it would be made anonymous, and also how the final results could be accessed by participants who so wished, and that the data that they contributed would be destroyed on completion of the project. Thus all potential interviewees were informed both in writing prior to their consent, and verbally on before the start of the interview, of the study’s aims, of what participation would entail, of the voluntary nature of their requested participation, of how their anonymity would be protected and any other information that would help them reach an informed, consensual decision to participate, prior to any agreement to participate (BERA, 2011).

As I intended the participants to also include my own online students, I paid special attention to the BERA guidelines to ensure that there was no conflict between my role as a researcher and my role as an online teacher, by making it clear in the initial email approach that their participation would be completely voluntary on their part and as they were under-18, with parents’ consent. As the student participants, including my own were under 18, I contacted their parents by email with information on the research and request for their consent. Parents were also informed that their child’s participation was entirely independent in all respects of my online teaching role in the Pamoja program. All the text of these documents are included in the Appendix.
However, there was the possibility of my being the participants’ regular online teacher coming in between my role as researcher, the dual role needing to be addressed (BERA 2011, p.5) I endeavored to tackle this issue by informing the participants in the initial communicating letter and reiterating during the interview that the roles of teacher and researcher are completely separate with neither having any bearing on the other, and that the responses would be stored and communicated as anonymous. Nevertheless in attempting to keep the meetings as informal as possible so that the student would feel comfortable in contributing, I cannot overlook the possibility that participant responses might have been influenced by demand characteristics, that collectively might convey a more positive picture of the SBC situation that is the case. Participants, whether they were students, SBCs or Pamoja staff may have withheld information, giving an only partially accurate picture of their interactions (Atkinson and Coffey, 2002) with Pamoja, especially if they had a conscious or subconscious fear that interested parties might trace negative information given to them. In that situation, they might been have guarded in reporting anything that could have created a negative impression of their working practices.

In taking these possibilities into account, I endeavored to conduct the online interviews by endeavoring to ask the questions clearly, keep the atmosphere as informal as possible, establish trust, and frame the prompts in particularly encouraging terms (Cohen et al., 2007; Drew et al., 2008). The interviews, transcripted and analyzed and discussed in the next chapter, sought to bear in mind these issues. I reminded participants of my research role at the beginning, on the lines of “as you read in my email to you, you are taking part in my research which is absolutely independent from our online-teacher working relationship” and stressed the confidential status of the information given. In the event of the interview straying into areas that would cross or even blur that boundary, I was prepared to ease the interview to as quick and natural end as feasible,
and destroy the findings from that participant. Though the scope of the interview was likely to be non-sensitive and unlikely to unduly influence any of the participants, I strove to be alert to any discomfort that might be taking place in the interview process (BERA 2011, p.7), for example possible reluctance in disclosing a poor relationship with the SBC.

In order to meet the stipulations of the BERA ethical guidelines, on the completion of each interview, I anonymized the interview recordings and also their subsequent transcripts in such a way that the names of participants, SBCs, and names and location of student’s schools would be not be traceable to the participants. Until then, the interview recordings and transcripts were encrypted and password-protected on my personal laptop computer. They were be archived for possible later reference until successful completion of the Ed.D program. At that point, the data is planned to be electronically destroyed.

Care was taken to minimize the risk of discomfort to participants following BERA ethical guidelines, particularly bearing in mind that participants were not yet over the age of 18. This was done by reiterating during the interview the relevant points presented in the letter of invitation and the accompanying information sheet, as well as during the briefing and debriefing stage. These are included in the appendix.

I informed the participants both verbally at the end of the interview and in the written information presenting the project that they had the right to withdraw their data at any time. On thanking them for their input, I also let them know that they could receive a copy of the results of this study on completion if they would like to see how their data was used.
4. Invitation to prospective student participants

Anglican International School,
82 Haneviim Street,
Jerusalem 91001,
Israel

ey: jacobsol@netvision.net.il
line: +972 2 673 7998

YOUR EXPERIENCE ABOUT ONLINE STUDY AND YOUR SCHOOL’S SUPPORT

Dear (name of student),

I am researching students’ experiences of online study as part of my doctoral research in education. I am particularly interested in learning about what encouraged you to study IB Economics online, what challenges you have been facing, and how your school has supported your online work.

Would you like to participate in my research?

It would involve my interviewing you about your experiences of IB economics online. The interview would last for about 20 minutes, and give you the opportunity to talk about your views and experiences. You may choose whether your input is noted down by hand or audio-recorded.

Please view the leaflet enclosed with this letter that describes the study in more detail.

Please also do understand that your participation is entirely voluntary and has no bearing whatsoever on our working together, your marks, or any other aspect of your studies. Indeed, in this respect I am requesting to interact with you in the role of researcher rather than teacher.

In participating, I will be in touch with you during this month to fix up a time for an interview which we can carry out by Skype.

If you have any questions or would like to know more about the research, you can contact me on e-mail jacobsol@netvision.net.il, phone +972 2 673 7998, or my supervisor, Dr. Anesa Hosein at a.hosein@surrey.ac.uk

Please find an information leaflet and the consent form attached.

With many thanks in advance,

Yours sincerely,

Jacob Solomon
5. Invitation to prospective student participants – request for parents permission

Anglican International School,
82 Haneviim Street,
Jerusalem 91001,
Israel

email: jacobsol@netvision.net.il
line: +972 2 673 7998

YOUR CHILD’S EXPERIENCE ABOUT ONLINE STUDY AND SCHOOL’S SUPPORT IN ONLINE STUDY

Dear Parents ________________ (formal name of parent)

I am researching students’ experiences of online study as part of my doctoral research in education at The Open University of the UK. I am particularly interested in learning about what encouraged your child to study IB Economics online, what challenges have and are being faced, and how the school attended by your child has supported the online work.

May your child ____________ (first name) participate in my research?

It would involve an interview of his/her experiences of IB economics online. The interview would last for about 20 minutes, and give the opportunity to talk about views and experiences. __________ (child’s name) may choose whether your input is noted down by hand or audio-recorded.

Please view the leaflet enclosed with this letter that describes the study in more detail.

Please also do understand that participation is entirely voluntary and has no bearing whatsoever on your child’s marks, or any other aspect of studies at Pamoja. Indeed, in this respect I am requesting to interact with your child in the role of researcher rather than teacher.

If participating, I intend to be in touch with your child at the end of January to fix up a time for an interview which we can carry out over a specially protected-for-research-purposes Skype account.

If you have any questions or would like to know more about the research, you can contact me on e-mail jacobsol@netvision.net.il, phone +972 2 673 7998, or my supervisor, Dr. Anesa Hosein at a.hosein@surrey.ac.uk. Please find an information leaflet and the consent form attached.

With many thanks in advance,

Yours sincerely,

Jacob Solomon
6. Information sheet for participating students

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH ON SCHOOL ASSISTANCE TO STUDENTS STUDYING ONLINE**

Tell us about your experiences and views of how your school’s input assists your online IB studies in Economics.

I am currently carrying out a study on how schools support student engagement in online study. This research particularly considers how any input from your school affects progress in online study. This leaflet gives you more information about the project.

Contact the Principal Investigator:

**Main Contact:** **Jacob Solomon**  
Email: jacobsoi@netvision.net.il  
Tel: +972 2 673 7998

**ADDRESS**  
Anglican International School,  
82 Hanevdim Street,  
Jerusalem 91001,  
Israel

Contact the Supervisor:

**Main Contact:** **Dr. A. Hosain**  
Email: a.hosein@surrey.ac.uk
Why do you want to interview me?

You have completed the first quarter of your IB Economics program at Higher Level, so you have immediate experience of studying this way. Sharing your experiences will be invaluable for the research process designed to help students adapt to effective online study.

What will the interview be like?

- The interview will take about 20 minutes, giving you the opportunity to talk about your views and experiences of your school’s work in assisting your online studies at Pamola Education.
- The interview will be a series of questions designed to enable you to share your experiences with the interviewer.
- Ideally the interview will be recorded so that all that you say is remembered correctly, but I can take notes by hand if you prefer.
- The interview will take place over a Skype program specially designated for research, and at an agreed time.

What sorts of things would the interview be about?

The kinds of issues I would like to talk to you about are:

- What encouraged you to study Economics online
- What challenges have you faced and how you have handled them.
- What support you have received from your school in your online studies including through the SBC (site-based coordinator) system and practice.

What will happen to the information I give?

The information that you give will be drawn together with what other people in the study tell me, in a report. Any personal information given will be confidential to the research team. Anonymity will be maintained within the report so individuals are not identifiable. If you wish, we can send you a copy of the final report.

Please understand that your participation or non-participation is entirely voluntary and has no bearing on our working relationship, your marks, or any other aspect of the course.

How will we arrange the interview? I will contact you, to arrange a time for the interview that is convenient for you.

My responsibilities to you:

- **Guarding your privacy**: your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Your contribution will be used for research purposes only. Individuals will not be identified in the final report. The data will be kept on a password-protected computer data stick, made available to the researchers and associates for a period recommended by the Open University of the UK.
- **Respecting your wishes**: participation in the study is voluntary. If you do not want to take part, just let the research team know when they contact you. In addition, you have the right to withdraw at any stage of the proceedings. Your decision to withdraw has no bearing on our working relationship, your marks, or any other aspect of the course.
- **Answering your questions**: I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.
7. Information sheet for parents of participating students

**INFORMATION FOR PARENTS ABOUT THE RESEARCH ON SCHOOL ASSISTANCE TO STUDENTS STUDYING ONLINE**

This is the participant information sheet distributed to the parents of the student participants.

**Contact the Principal Investigator:**

**Main Contact:** Jacob Solomon  
Email: jacobsol@netvision.net.il  
Tel: +972 2 673 7998

**ADDRESS**  
Anglican International School,  
82 Hanevim Street,  
Jerusalem 91001,  
Israel

**Contact the Supervisor:**

**Main Contact:** Dr. Anesa Hosein  
Email: a.hosein@surrey.ac.uk

Tell us about your experiences and views of how your school’s input assists your child’s online IB studies in Economics.

I am currently carrying out a study on how schools support student engagement in online study. This research particularly considers how any input from your child’s school affects progress in online study. This leaflet gives you more information about the project.
Why do you want to interview?
Your child has completed the first quarter of your IB Economics program at Higher Level, and so has had immediate experience of online study. Your child's experiences will be invaluable for the research process designed to help students adapt to effective online study.

What will the interview be like?
- The interview will take about 30 minutes, giving your child the opportunity to talk about views and experiences of the school's work in assisting online studies at Pamola Education.
- The interview will be a series of questions designed to enable your child to share experiences with the interviewer.
- Ideally the interview will be recorded so that all that is said is recalled correctly, but I can take notes by hand if preferred.
- The interview will take place over a Skype program specially designated for research, and at an agreed time.

What sorts of things would the interview be about?
The kinds of issues I would like to talk to you about are:
- What encouraged your child to study Economics online?
- What challenges has your child faced and with what degree of success?
- What support has your child received from your school in your online studies including through the SBC (site-based coordinator) system and practice?

My responsibilities to your child:
- **Guarding privacy:** participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Your child's contribution will be used for research purposes only. Individuals will not be identified in the final report. The data will be kept on a password-protected computer data stick, made available to the researchers and associates for a period recommended by the Open University of the UK.
- **Respecting your wishes:** participation in the study is voluntary. If you do not want your child to take part, just let the research team know when they contact you. In addition, your child has the right to withdraw at any stage of the proceedings. The decision to withdraw has no bearing on our working relationship, marks, or any other aspect of the course.
- **Answering your questions:** I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.

What will happen to the information given?
Your child's contribution will be drawn together with what other participants in the study tell me, in a report. Any personal information given will be confidential to the research team. Anonymity will be maintained within the report so individuals are not identifiable. If you wish, we can send you a copy of the final report. Please understand that your child's participation or non-participation is entirely voluntary and has no bearing on our working relationship, marks, or any other aspect of the course.

How will we arrange the interview?
I will contact your child, with view to arranging a time for the interview that is convenient for you.
8. Consent form for participants

Human Research Ethics Committee

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Consent form for participating in the research project below

YOUR EXPERIENCE IN ONLINE STUDY AND YOUR SCHOOL’S SUPPORT

Name of student participant: ___________________________________

Name of principal investigator: Jacob Solomon

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written statement in plain language to keep.

2. I understand that my participation will involve taking part in a one-to-one interview, and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.

3. I acknowledge that:
   a. the possible effects of participating in this research have been explained to my satisfaction
   b. I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project without explanation or prejudice and to request the destruction of any data that has been gathered from me until it is anonymized at the point of transcription point on June 1st, 2020. After this point data will have been processed and it will not be possible to withdraw any unprocessed data that you have provided
   c. the project is for the purpose of research
   d. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information that I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements
e. I have been informed that with your consent the data generated will be stored in a password-protected data stick, made available for those carrying out and using the research only, and destroyed at a time stipulated by the Open University of the UK.

f. If necessary any data will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research

g. I have been given contact details for the interviewer whom I can contact if I have any concerns about the way in which this research project is being conducted

h. I have been informed that a summary copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me, should I request this.

I consent to the interview being audio-taped/noted down (please delete as appropriate)

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings □ yes □ no (please tick)

Email or postal address to which a summary should be sent: __________________________________________

Participant’s signature

(electronic may be used): Date:

Contact details for the Principal Investigator (PI) and Research organisation and Faculty:

Principal Investigator: Jacob Solomon
Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology, The Open University, UK.
E-mail jacobsol@netvision.net.il
Telephone: +972 2 673 7998
Cellphone: +972 0547 837998

Contact details for an alternative contact if you have any concerns about the way the research project is being conducted:

Supervisor for Principal Investigator: Dr. Ansesa Hosein
University of Surrey
E-mail a.hosein@surrey.ac.uk

This research has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: 3465 (http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/).
9. Consent form for parents of participating students

Human Research Ethics Committee
CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY
Parent’s consent form for persons participating in the research project below

YOUR EXPERIENCE IN ONLINE STUDY AND YOUR SCHOOL’S SUPPORT

Name of student: ________________________________

Name of principal investigator: Jacob Solomon

1. I consent to allow my child to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written statement in plain language to keep.

2. I understand that my child’s participation will involve taking part in a one-to-one interview, and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.

3. I acknowledge that:
   
   i. the possible effects of participating in this research have been explained to my satisfaction
   
   j. I have been informed that my child is free to withdraw from the project without explanation or prejudice and to request the destruction of any data that has been gathered from me until it is anonymized at the point of transcription point on May 1st, 2020. After this point data will have been processed and it will not be possible to withdraw any unprocessed data that you son/daughter has provided
   
   k. the project is for the purpose of research
I. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information my child provides will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements.

m. I have been informed that with your child’s consent the data generated will be stored in a password-protected data stick, made available for those carrying out and using the research only, and destroyed at a time stipulated by the Open University of the UK.

n. If necessary any data from your child will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research.

o. I have been given contact details for the interviewer whom I or my child can contact if I have any concerns about the way in which this research project is being conducted.

p. I have been informed that a summary copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me, should I request this.

I consent to my son/daughter’s input to the interview being audio-taped/noted down (please delete as appropriate).

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings □ yes □ no (please tick).

Email or postal address to which a summary should be sent:

___________________________________________________________

Parent’s signature

(electronic may be used): Date:

Contact details for the Principal Investigator (PI) and Research organisation and Faculty:

Principal Investigator: Jacob Solomon  
Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology, The Open University, UK.  
E-mail jacobsol@netvision.net.il  
Telephone: +972 2 673 7998  
Cellphone: +972 0547 837998

Contact details for an alternative contact if you have any concerns about the way the research project is being conducted:

Supervisor for Principal Investigator: Dr. Ansesa Hosein  
University of Surrey  
E-mail a.hosein@surrey.ac.uk

This research has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: 3465 (http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/)
10. Initial codes used for the data analysis (Chapter 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code name</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Economics interested</td>
<td>Student is determined to study Economics at this level by any reasonable means available, because this what they wanted to study within their pre-tertiary education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. School curriculum online</td>
<td>At the school level rather than the IB level, there is a mandated online study component within its own provision of the IB curriculum, with the subject-to-be-studied that way chosen by student. This may be to train students for studying this way in the future, at tertiary level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Flexible study time</td>
<td>Appreciation of the change from school direct instruction, with the flexibility of study hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Risk acceptance</td>
<td>Accompanying acceptance of risk and associated apprehensions in studying online from the time of making the choice to studying online onwards through the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Enable direct student engagement</td>
<td>SBCs involved in provision of a variety of study enablers to promote regular student engagement (e.g. online study periods in the school timetable, enforcement to varying degrees of atmosphere conducive to study)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Administrative functions</td>
<td>Conducting the Pamoja-set and marked exams at the school according to Pamoja set procedures: typically more logistics-straining than where the program is being delivered entirely by the School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The administrative work is often complex and demanding, with the more complicated IB-stipulated procedures for students who are outside the framework of where the entire program is being delivered by the school: particularly with the IB externally-moderated internal assessments, and predicted grades.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. **Input plus for student engagement**

   Provider of resources not on the online platform and beyond Pamoja requirements (e.g. additional textbooks). Provider of services beyond Pamoja recommendations in circumstances, when, for example, there is a need of immediate clarification of a difficult point or topic, face-to-face supplementary instruction directly from SBC (who was assigned this task due to being a subject specialist) or from a specialist recommended by SBC (not necessarily in the school).

8. **Input technical/introductory**

   Help with the initial stages of mastering the mechanics of working to the stipulations of the Pamoja online platform. This phase can extend through the first weeks.

9. **Input troublesome course content**

   Help in dealing with particularly tense areas of the course, particularly with the three IAs (Internal Assessment, together accounting for 20% of the final grade), in clarifying their stipulations and the expectations of Pamoja, and the online student’s emotional challenges given the importance of those tasks.

10. **Input time management**

    SBC assistance in planning the division of the study and work quotas, to avoid getting to the last minute in meeting the weekly deadlines.

11. **Input – Pamoja interactive activities**

    Support in their online students’ participation in asynchronous group tasks spanning many time zones.

12. **Input – student distress**

    Support in getting a sense of proportion when things go wrong, e.g. disappointing result on first test.

13. **Input – instant feedback**

    Generally, course content issues are handled through Pamoja teachers, and course administration issues through SBCs, but there are exceptions: e.g. SBCs are sometimes approached to give immediate (if non-specialized) feedback on important tasks that students feel uneasy in submitting.
14. Inputs - non-SBC connected people

The SBC is not the only source of support; others non-connected with SBCs being Pamoja teachers, students in different schools often in different continents on the same Pamoja course (Whatsapp chat groups), students at the school on the same Pamoja course, parents with relevant knowledge. These elements are vital for the context of the student experience of support: the extent that the SBC input forms part of the total amount of support that the student experiences.

15. Proximity position of SBC

SBCs functioning as the first port of call because they know the students personally, and their progress in other subjects.

16. Liaison position of SBC

Perceived by students (and parents) as a bridge connecting to Pamoja. Issues with Pamoja can include, for example, the sudden disappearance of the online teacher responsible for the student’s progress, and more commonly, weaknesses in their delivery of the programs such as broken links, need for clarification of assignments, and insufficient feedback.

17. Immediate access position of SBC

Immediate availability (sometimes student can just ‘drop in’) in contrast to the generally (but not completely) asynchronous nature of interaction with Pamoja teacher (/fellow-students)

18. Reinforcement input of SBC

Offers welcome positive reinforcement on improving student progress

19. SBC audience effect

Student perception that the SBC may be watching as he or she has access to their work, helping to counter procrastination. Student perception that the SBC may watch their progress on any time, compensating for the reality of the Pamoja teacher being physically out-of-reach. Indeed, this has become easier to monitor with the Pamoja site’s post-2014 traffic light system whereby the SBC can view student engagement levels and progress with work at a glance.

20. SBC confidence in Pamoja’s work

SBCs convey to the students their confidence in online study at Pamoja on the basis of past online student success at their school.
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. SBC confidence in Pamoja materials</td>
<td>SBC expressed/implied faith in the high quality of jointly and professionally produced professional study materials that are unlikely to be equaled by a school department working on its own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Student confidence in Pamoja</td>
<td>Student confidence in the Pamoja system based on previous IB student success studying this way at the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. SBC level of engagement</td>
<td>Positive correlation observed between punctiliousness of the SBC and student progress, claimed by both experienced SBCs and Pamoja staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Common goals for all parties</td>
<td>Motivation of all parties in the OPM (online partnership model) positively influenced by the reality of sharing of the common goal of student success which in turn promotes working together in areas such as online engagement levels, outstanding assignments, (often logistically-demanding) exams, and (often laborious) administrative procedures connected with the IA. Not necessarily vital in the case very good students suited to this method of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. SBC student facilitation via Pamoja</td>
<td>Can alert Pamoja to weaknesses in their delivery of the programs that are working against student online progress, such as broken links, need for clarification of assignments, and issues with Pamoja teacher: non-reported absence, insufficient feedback.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. Pamoja Education: research integrity policy statement

RESEARCH INTEGRITY POLICY – PJE/RIP/1217/V1.0

POLICY STATEMENT

Pamoja Education (PJE), is committed to the highest standard of integrity in research. PJE expects all of its researchers and others conducting research within PJE to adhere to ethical principles in their research activities and will monitor conformity with those principles. PJE has therefore undertaken to define its policies and expectations with regard to integrity, in a manner consistent with encouraging the highest standards of research and scholarship.

This policy has been established to address any concerns about responsibility and accountability in research. It outlines procedures for promoting integrity among researchers and scholars and for investigating allegations of misconduct in research.

PJE regards any action that is inconsistent with integrity as misconduct. The misconduct may apply to misconduct in scholarly research, data collection, gathering and retention, authorship, responsibilities of principal researchers, conflict of interest, or other misconduct.

PRINCIPLES/GUIDELINES

PJE holds all researchers undertaking research projects responsible for upholding the following principles:

1. using rigour and integrity in obtaining, recording and analyzing data, and in reporting and publishing results

2. recognizing the substantive contributions of others, including co-researchers and students, ensuring that authorship of published work includes all those who have materially contributed to, and share responsibility for, the contents of the publication, and only those people

3. acquiring permission to use and acknowledging the contribution of others, whether published or unpublished

4. using archival material in accordance with the rules of the archival source

5. obtaining the permission of the author before using information, concepts or data originally obtained through access to confidential manuscripts
6. revealing to sponsors, universities, journals or funding agencies, any material conflict of interest, financial or other, that might influence their decisions as to whether the individual should be asked to review manuscripts or applications, test products or be permitted to undertake work sponsored from an outside source.

POLICY SCOPE

This policy applies to all individuals at PJE involved in research in any capacity whatsoever.

Anyone working under the aegis of PJE engaging in research, using PJE facilities, or seeking approval of PJE for research must adhere to the highest level of ethical standards.

This includes research conducted in other jurisdictions or countries.

All researchers, including employees, students and volunteers, are covered by this policy.

PJE will promote the understanding of integrity issues within the wider company through its liaison with the Pamoja Education Research Culture (PERC) initiative, to ensure that no conflict of interest is realised or condoned.

EXCLUSIONS

All research requests will be scrutinised by the PERC team heads to ensure that any overlap or conflicts are clear and therefore would be categorized as an exclusion at the discretion of the Senior Academic team.

SANCTIONS/APPEALS

The Vice President Product, Chief Academic Officer and Global Vice Principals are responsible for all Academic and Research, therefore shall deal with allegations of violations of this policy by initiating an inquiry where deemed appropriate.

Anonymous allegations will not normally be considered. However, if compelling evidence is received anonymously (by any of the above named responsible officers) the investigation process may be initiated.

Responsible Executive:

Title: Chief Academic Officer, Pamoja Education
12. HREC – Favorable opinion letter following application

Dear Jacob

This message confirms that the amendment to your research protocol for the following research project, as submitted for ethics review, has been given a favourable opinion on behalf of The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee

**Project title:** An investigation into the efficacy of online delivery of pre-university programs as exemplified by the Pamoja Education model (Main Study)

**HREC approval date:** 26/01/2020

As part of your favourable opinion, it is essential that you are aware of and comply with the following:

1. You are responsible for notifying the HREC immediately of any information received by you, or of which you become aware which would cast doubt on, or alter, information in your original application, in order to ensure your continued safety and the good conduct of the research.

1. It is essential that you contact the HREC with any proposed amendments to your research, for example - a change in location or participants. HREC agreement needs to be in place before any changes are implemented, except only in cases of emergency when the welfare of the participant or researcher is or may be affected.

1. Your HREC reference number has to be included in any publicity or correspondence related to your research, e.g. when seeking participants or advertising your research, so it is clear that it has been agreed by the HREC and adheres to OU ethics review processes.

1. Researchers should have discussed any project-related risks with their Line Manager and/or Supervisor, to ensure that all the relevant checks have been made and permissions are in place, prior to a project commencing, for example compliance with IT security and Data protection regulations.
1. Researchers need to have read and adhere to relevant OU policies and guidance, in particular the Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants and the Code of Practice for Research - http://www.open.ac.uk/research/governance/policies

1. The Open University's research ethics review procedures are fully compliant with the majority of research council, professional organisations and grant awarding bodies research ethics guidelines. Where required, this message is evidence of OU HREC support and can be included in an external research ethics review application. The HREC should be sent a copy of any external applications, and their outcome, so we have a full ethics review record.

1. At the end of your project you are required to assess your research for ethics related issues and/or any major changes. Where these have occurred you will need to provide the Committee with a HREC final report to reflect how these were dealt with using the template on the research ethics website - http://www.open.ac.uk/research/governance/ethics/human/review-process/final-report (HREC Final Report form)

Sent on behalf of the Human Research Ethics Committee

Dr Claire Hewson  Professor Louise Westmarland  Dr Duncan Banks
Chair  Deputy Chair  Deputy Chair