Key Drivers That Influence the Provision and Sustainability of Executive Education

A case study of the London Academy of Management and Finance

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Abstract

Executive Education (EE) courses are designed for middle to senior managers as part of their continuous professional development (CPD), offering high revenue with courses ranging from a few days to several weeks. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, these courses were primarily campus-based, but travel restrictions necessitated a shift to hybrid or online delivery.

Existing literature on EE largely assumes classroom-based learning led by practitioners, with location being a key factor in course selection. However, the pandemic has prompted a transition to technology-dependent, hybrid or remote formats, raising concerns about the relevance and reliability of conventional EE theories. Additionally, there is limited research on how EE supports career progression for individuals with disabilities or spent criminal convictions.

This research, based on applicant data from a UK private EE provider (391 applications between 2019 and 2021) and seven semi-structured staff interviews, provides a unique perspective on how COVID-19 reshaped EE. It examines learner characteristics such as gender, age, education, location, future aspirations, disabilities, and criminal convictions.

While existing theories were largely affirmed, the study revealed novel insights into EE's links with international migration, disability, criminal history, gender, age, and career aspirations. It also shed light on how participants plan to use the knowledge gained after returning to their home countries. The impact of COVID-19 on course delivery and learner expectations was particularly noteworthy.

This research contributes to the fields of EE, international student mobility, and equal opportunities for career progression. It offers recommendations for EE providers and raises questions about the UK’s national policy on English literacy, specifically how it selectively impacts certain countries.

Glossary of Terms

ACCA	The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
AD	Academic Director
APC	Academic Planning Committee
ASTD	The American Society for Training Development
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BREO	Brunel Research Ethics Online
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CAO	Chief Academic Officer
CEFRL	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CMA	Competition and Markets Authority
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
C-Suite	Highest-ranking senior executives in an organisation
CVF	Competing Values Framework
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Check
DSO	Delegate Support Officer
EAL	English as an additional language
EdD	Doctor of Education degree
EE	Executive Education
EEA	European Economic Area
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EMBA	Executive Masters in Business Administration
ESOL	English as a second or foreign language
EU	European Union
FE	Further education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPA	Grade Point Average
HE	Higher Education

HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institute
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute
HESA	The Higher Education Statistics Agency
HR	Human Resources
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISM	International Student Mobility
IT	Information Technology
LAMF	London Academy of Management and Finance
LDP	Leadership Development Programme
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MD	Managing Director
NQF	National Qualifications Framework (UK)
NTS	National trading standards
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
OfS	Office for Students
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PCS	Professional Contextualised Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
POE	Proof of English language proficiency
PSW	Post-study work
Q&A	Question and Answer
QAA	Quality Assurance agency
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RQF	Regulated Qualifications Framework
SBU	Strategic Business Unit
SM	Student mobility
SMT	Senior Management Team

TLG	The Language Gallery
TOEFL	The Test of English as a Foreign Language,
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UCAS	The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
Ulaw	The University of Law
UK	United Kingdom
USP	Unique selling proposition
USA	United States of America
WAEC	The West African Examinations Council
WP	Widening participation

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Chapter 1 - Introduction:

Since I started my academic career in 2007, I have been a part of the "*for-profit*" education sector where I have held roles of responsibility within Higher Education (HE), Vocational Education, and professional training. In 2017, I was appointed as the lead academic in charge of Executive Education (hereafter referred to as EE) for one of the UK's largest private higher education providers. This company also has a significant global presence. Having worked with students (mostly from underprivileged backgrounds) who were enrolled in qualifications that cost approximately £6000 per year in the past, this new portfolio that I was responsible for, commanded between £1950 - £2550 for a *four-day* on-campus course. These short courses do not carry any academic credit, even when each course is aligned with achieving a set of learning outcomes (which is usually the prerequisite for earning academic credits), as defined by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The definition states: "*Credit is awarded to you when you have shown, through assessment, that you have successfully completed a module or a programme by meeting the specific set of learning outcomes for that module or programme*" (QAA, 2021, p2).

Notwithstanding the above, there is a high demand for EE courses worldwide and top Universities in London charge an average course fee of £6000 to £7500 for a five-day EE course. The extremely high price bracket makes these courses exclusive and prohibitive rather than inclusive for most individuals who are in a lower income bracket. EE courses are highly specialised and are aimed at current or aspiring senior executives who wish to gain essential skills required to run functional units or entire organisations within either a localised or globalised context. While the academic prerequisites are minimal, the financial commitment is a notable deterrent for interested students who come from underprivileged backgrounds. As these courses offer up-to-date technical and conceptual skills and fantastic networking opportunities (which are essential in today's business world), these invisible barriers to accessing such courses may act as a "*glass ceiling*", preventing such underprivileged individuals from achieving top positions or remain competitive within their current workplace.

1.1 Introduction to Executive Education

The value of the global executive education market in 2019 was close to US$ 2 billion (Carlsson-Wall and Richtnér, 2021) but the COVID-19 pandemic led to a 25% drop in global revenue. According to Knowles (1980), the primary aim of EE is to equip senior executives, managers and aspiring managers with specific technical, conceptual or soft skills through short seminars, masterclasses, workshops or short courses. Typical executive education courses last for around 2-12 days. Some general features of EE include factors such as courses pitched at the postgraduate level (with a degree or a comparable amount of industry experience as part of its standard entry criteria); non-credit bearing, with the final award being a certificate of attendance or completion; a delivery style of a few days of rigorous, focussed, intensive study blocks; a very high level of learner input and a "*hands-on*" approach to modern scenario/case study based discussions; a lecturer (an industry practitioner) who is usually a facilitator of stimulating, thought-provoking discussions; a high level of focus on real-life application–NOT entirely theory based (Conger and Xin, 2000).

The use of experiential learning methods is particularly relevant in an EE context, where learners usually comprise mature individuals with commercial experience and a high understanding of organisational realities and management practices (Garvin, 2007; Newman and Stoner, 1989). Fry, Ketteridge, and Marshall (2008) suggest that individuals acquire knowledge by continuously building and refining mental structures and constructs as they integrate new experiences. Learning will not take place if these structures do not change. The constructivist perspective capitalises on the use of reflection, understanding and experiential learning as opposed to more traditional teaching methods that may focus on passive learning and memorisation (Vygotsky and Cole, 1980).

EE is considered an important tool in gaining access or performing within either the "*C-suite*" (highest-ranking senior executives in an organisation) jobs or at other corporate leadership jobs (Groysberg, Kelly and MacDonald, 2011). The Alan Turing Institute (ND) claims that the benefits of EE are twofold. It provides training and informs employees of critical skills in highly specialised areas while providing executives (senior managers) with a strategic perspective of the sector using best practice workshops. Thus, the lack of EE for a senior executive or an aspiring executive may act as a barrier to gaining access to top-level careers within the modern workplace. Globally, EE providers include both public and private universities (mainly based around main cities), private higher education providers and specialist training providers. In addition, companies such as Facebook (FB Blueprint) or Amazon (AWS academy) may run programmes around their field.

This research project which critically looks at the key drivers that influence the provision and sustainability of EE has been conducted at my place of employment. Hence, the findings and recommendations have a real possibility of championing change in organisational policy, practice or improvement of quality or compliance. In addition, it may inspire sector-wide change in terms of learner mobility and equal opportunities to EE.

1.2 Personal Interest

Growing up in a remote town in Sri Lanka, I experienced major educational challenges, including a lack of electricity in schools and classrooms that flooded during the rainy season.

These difficulties were deepened by a civil war (1980–2009) and political unrest (1989–91), which disrupted access to a structured education. As a former British colony, Sri Lanka has long viewed British education as the benchmark; those who accessed it often secured prestigious roles upon returning home.

After nearly a decade of working, I relocated to the UK to pursue a master's degree in hospitality studies, facilitated by a recruitment agent. This journey provided firsthand insight into the agent-led university admissions and visa processes. The student body at my UK university was largely international, with many focused on finding part-time work, bringing family members to the UK, or transitioning to long-term residency. My own path differed from this trend, I returned to Sri Lanka after graduation to work at an offshore education support centre, eventually returning to the UK to serve my employer in London.

In 2014, I joined LAMF (pseudonym) as a lecturer and manager of vocational programmes, advancing to Academic Head of Executive Education (EE) in 2017. Initially unfamiliar with EE, I was surprised by the high fees associated with such programmes. My role involved assessing applicants' personal statements, managing lecturers, and approving course content, despite not being a subject expert in many of the courses delivered. The global pandemic in 2020 required me to lead the transition from on-campus EE provision to an online model, reshaping the school's delivery strategy. Following a corporate restructuring in early 2023, I was made redundant after nine years with the school.

My personal experience in the sector led to a curiosity about the true motivations of EE participants. Were they genuinely interested in professional development or did other factors drive them, including taking a break from work, travel opportunities, or obtaining a CPD certificate? Some colleagues speculated that certain overseas participants used the courses as a means to remain in the UK.

This research aims to explore how the pandemic has transformed executive education; address the stigma attached to international applicants from specific regions; and identify strategies for EE providers to penetrate diverse market segments, while implementing best practices in the sector.

1.3 Case Study of London Academy of Management and Finance (LAMF).

Owned by a global consortium comprised of private Universities and institutes of higher education, LAMF (pseudonym) is a London-based market leader that provides professional, higher and vocational education in the UK with branches that are located overseas and online. Teaching methods include on-campus, blended and online learning with a diverse portfolio of courses that are aligned with England's level 4 – 7 framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ). It is accredited by EU-based Universities and UK-based professional accreditation bodies. LAMF's Holborn (London) campus is home to its Executive Education (EE) department. It runs over 40 different EE courses that range from two days to 24 weeks, with the most popular being its four-day specialist short courses. LAMF's EE portfolio includes courses in data sciences, design thinking, blockchain, management consulting, project management, digital marketing, business strategy, management finance and entrepreneurship. Some courses are offered in partnership with industry-leading brands including IBM, Amazon, Tableau, Salesforce and Google. Course prices range from £850 to £5200 per course, per person.

The faculty are all industry experts with at least 10 years of leadership experience, within their relevant area of specialisation. To maintain this competitive stance, the hierarchy is designed in a way that the teaching faculty acts as part-time contractors or suppliers of the department. This allows the tutors to share their expertise with both LAMF and its competitors simultaneously. The school's core team includes two directors and delegate support staff. All other support functions including recruitment, sales, HR, payroll, quality assurance, IT infrastructure, career services, disability services, campus facilities and marketing are handled by large, specialised, independent departments that report directly to the Senior Management Team (SMT) of LAMF's parent company.

In 2020, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the school had to change its business model from being a 100% campus-based provider to a provider that offers online-live EE courses. Due to travel restrictions, there was a notable drop in demand from overseas applicants and in the Summer of 2020, the management decided to change its short course format from four consecutive days to eight weekly evening sessions per course. The underlying rationale was to attract primarily UK-based working professionals with the assumption that they finish work before 6 pm. Another market segment that the school was attempting to attract were those who were either being furloughed or made redundant as a result of the pandemic. This was under the assumption that such individuals would attempt to gain new skills before applying for new jobs, as unemployability soared due to the pandemic (IMF, 2022). This change in direction resulted in LAMF losing candidates from other geographic regions, including Asia and Africa, due to online class delivery times being unsuitable to some global regions.

LAMF's organisational structure as illustrated in Figure 1.1, comprises a Managing Director (MD) who reports directly to the Global CEO. Academic and Delegate Support functions report directly to the Academic Director, who in turn reports to the Managing Director. All other specialist functions are overseen by centralised team directors, who manage these areas across all schools and universities within the parent company. For example, marketing for each entity is handled by a central marketing department, although specialist teams within this department may be assigned responsibility for individual business units or schools.

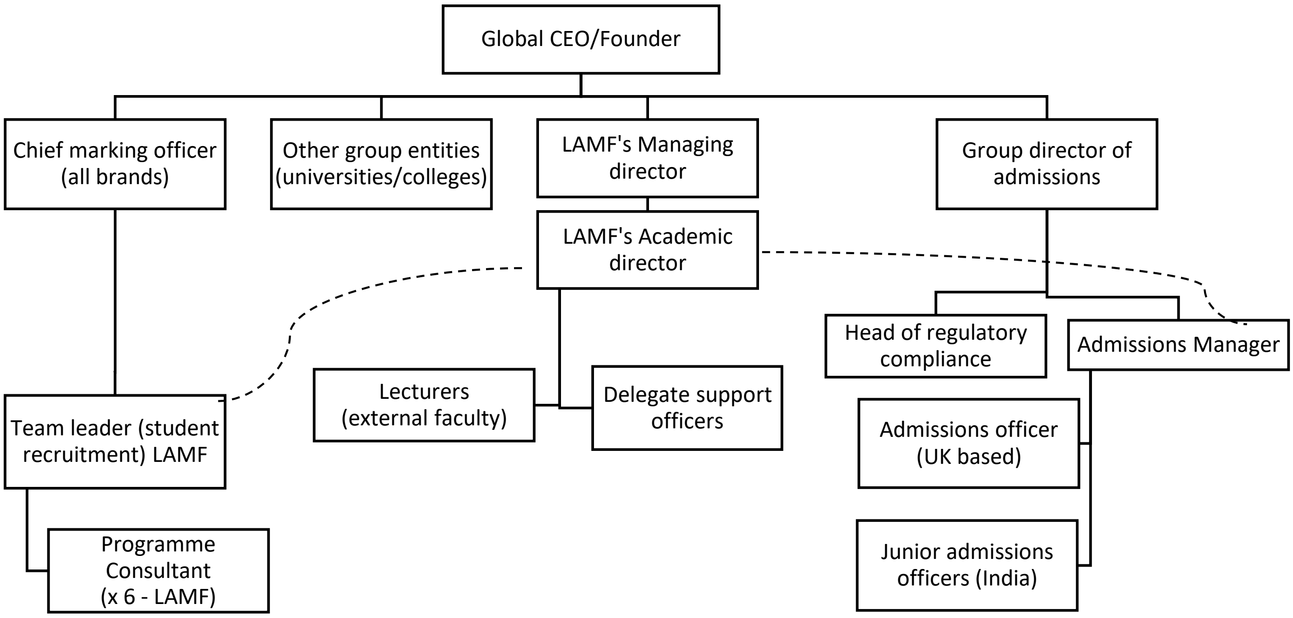


Figure 1.1: LAMF's organisational structure including shared support services

1.3.1 LAMF's Current Admissions Criteria for Executive Education Courses

All of the EE courses offered by LAMF (except the summer school which is aimed at those who are currently in university), are in line with England's higher education framework's level 7, which implies that the generic entry criteria includes an undergraduate degree in any discipline. Those who do not have a degree can apply via the school's "*mature entry route*" evaluation pathway (Appendix 1). Applicants who apply via this route are required to provide evidence, including a detailed CV and an employer's letter, to demonstrate their capability to study at the postgraduate level, typically with a minimum of five years of relevant work experience. In addition, they need to write a personal statement to demonstrate their motivation to study a specific EE course, and how the course relates to their current job and future aspirations. The admissions officer evaluates this personal statement against the learning outcomes of the course for which they are applying.

As 100% of LAMF's EE courses are taught in English, the entry criteria include "*Proof of English*" where each applicant is required to demonstrate English language proficiency at Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) B2. There are various options to fulfil this criterion. These include a current IELTS score of 5.5, a Cambridge ESOL (B2) test report, evidence of a degree that was studied in English or a passport from a majority English-speaking country as outlined on the UK government's website. It is worthwhile mentioning that IELTS test scores expire within two years of certification. Those who do not have any of these documents may be able to gain entry by providing an employer's letter, confirming the applicant's ability to read, write, speak and understand English, effectively. Others may opt for an online English test that is administered by one of LAMF's associate colleges. For applicants whose proof of English proficiency is insufficient, such as a brief employer's letter or a test score with marginally low achievement, an English language interview with a member of LAMF's academic staff, along with the interview transcript, is used as supplementary evidence of language proficiency (see appendix 2).

1.3.2 LAMF's Admissions Process

Applications can be made online or by using a printed application form (Appendix 3) and can be sent to the recruitment team either directly by the applicant or via agents/overseas representatives. An online version of the same application form is also available for applicants to complete and submit their applications entirely online. An online shopping basket is under development and will be used for a selected number of non-assessed courses, where the applicants will declare that they already fulfil both the academic and English language requirements of the course they are applying for. The fees paid will be held in a suspense account until the admissions team verifies their credentials against the entry criteria for the course. In the case of an application being rejected, the fees paid will be promptly refunded to the credit card which was used for payment.

When the application form is received by the recruiters, it is checked for accuracy (phone consultation, email correspondence) and checked against the supporting documents provided. Once the recruiters are confident that the application is complete, it will be sent to the admissions team for registration. The admissions team registers the applicant's information on the student database, together with copies of their certificates and other supporting documents, and a student number is generated. At this point, the application is sent to the school's academic management for formal approval where criteria such as entry qualification (degree), English language proficiency and personal statement are checked, and a final admissions decision is made. This could be an unconditional acceptance, a conditional acceptance or rejection of the application. Typical conditional acceptance criteria include the supply of further evidence of study, work, English language proficiency or compliant copies of documents (colour passport copies, translation of degree, letter from employer or sponsor letters). Reasons for rejection include the submission of fraudulent documents, inability to provide proof of English or not having at least five years of verifiable and relevant work experience. All of the above stages are documented on the school's data management system, with colour-coded commentary made by different staff members and any supporting documents uploaded on the system for safe and regulatory-compliant storage and retrieval.

1.3.3 LAMF's Quality Assurance and Change Management

At the end of each term, LAMF's policies and practices are reviewed by the Academic Planning Committee (APC), chaired by the academic director. The committee includes representatives from the student body, the group's quality and compliance department, and occasionally external observers to ensure transparency and share best practices. Reports approved by the APC are submitted to the school's advisory board, which meets annually, allowing LAMF to quickly implement any necessary quality enhancements or policy changes in response to industry needs, maintaining its competitive edge.

If an urgent change is needed between APC meetings, it can be addressed through "*Chair's action*". In this process, the policy owner, academic director, and another APC member review and implement changes, which are later formally approved at the next APC meeting. This system proved particularly effective during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, enabling the school to rapidly transition to a virtual environment and adapt policies in response to the new operational realities.

Since 2018, a group-wide initiative brings together academic heads from over 30 institutions within LAMF's parent company every four months via conference call. Chaired by the group's Chief Academic Officer, this forum facilitates the exchange of good practices, innovative ideas, and solutions to common challenges. Additionally, ongoing market research by the parent company keeps schools informed of global political, social, and academic trends via an interactive market intelligence newsletter.

These processes help LAMF maintain a high-quality, innovative approach to executive education. This research will evaluate the key drivers that influence the sustainability and success of executive education at LAMF. Despite high course fees, most students at LAMF are either self-funded or employer-sponsored, with only a small number receiving overseas government scholarships. These students, particularly those in the 12-week postgraduate certificate programme, are highly motivated and have clear academic goals.

1.3.4 LAMF's Current Course Portfolio

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the short four-day courses were developed and timetabled in a manner that allows the learners to participate in the course and experience London and other cities during their 7 – 9 day stay. Additionally, the summer business school includes up to three corporate visits, giving participants the opportunity to experience various corporate cultures within London's diverse and multicultural business environment. The 12-week postgraduate certificate programmes and the 24-week postgraduate diploma programmes are developed for a market segment that comprises less experienced graduates who wish to upgrade their CVs while learning from industry specialists. LAMF's flagship course is the Executive miniMBA which is always oversubscribed. One of the reasons for its popularity is the similarity between the terms miniMBA and MBA. Some participants study this course as a stepping stone to an 18-month MBA. Others who have completed MBAs in the past tend to participate to upgrade their existing knowledge of current trends and industry norms. Another notable reason for the course's popularity is that it provides networking opportunities for like-minded delegates from similar professional backgrounds.

Other specialist courses such as finance for non-finance managers or management consulting and project management attract niche audiences based on their requirements. Overall, based on delegate feedback, the subject contents offered by the school usually meet or exceed their expectations. Another noteworthy observation is the fact that the newly introduced technology-based courses such as artificial intelligence, data science and cybersecurity were not well received by prospective applicants. One reason could be that LAMF has mostly been associated with subjects such as leadership, accounting, management and finance. However, no formal market research has been conducted to investigate the actual reason behind such lack of demand for technology-based courses.

1.3.5 LAMF's Marketing Strategies

Within the education market, LAMF can be positioned as a market adapter where Kotler (2019:281) defines an adapter as "*The adapter takes the leader's products and adapts or improves them. The adapter may choose to sell to different markets, but often it grows into the future challenger*". According to the definitions provided by Kotler (2019), LAMF can be further identified as a provider that adopts a geographic specialist approach, promoting its offerings exclusively in specific geographic regions or countries. LAMF acts as a service specialist, where business developers offer specialist services where the school may offer targeted value-added services (VAS) such as payment plans or customised certificates to suit a specific market's appeal.

1.4 Research Rationale

Notwithstanding LAMF's ability to adapt its course portfolio to industry needs, its courses are not always fully subscribed, and it is not widely regarded as an industry leader in EE. This raises a need for further research into how specific EE providers can better position themselves by capitalising on their strengths and addressing weaknesses in an increasingly competitive market.

Existing theories in adult learning and professional development suggest various reasons why individuals enrol in CPD or EE courses. However, there appears to be limited empirical evidence specifically examining the motivations behind EE enrolment, especially when factors such as funding (self-sponsored vs. company-sponsored), gender, age, education level, country of origin, and employment status are considered. Understanding these diverse motivations is crucial for tailoring EE programmes effectively.

Additionally, EE learners occupy a complex role as both students and consumers. The existing literature does not sufficiently address this dual classification, particularly in the context of EE, where learners may be subject to consumer protection laws while also being engaged in structured academic study. There is also a gap in understanding how the relationship between the learner and the sponsoring organisation shapes the experience, especially when the company, rather than the individual, is the paying customer.

Prior to 2020, EE courses were predominantly classroom-based, supporting direct interaction, networking, and group discussions. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, forced providers to rapidly transition to online or blended learning formats. While there is some research on online learning, the specific impact of this shift on EE participants' experiences, motivations, and programme outcomes has not been fully explored. This study will investigate how changes in participant profiles post-pandemic may require adaptations in programme delivery and marketing strategies, identifying new opportunities for EE providers to engage emerging market segments

1.5 Research Aim

The primary aim of this research is to evaluate the main characteristics of executive education students at the London Academy of Management and Finance (LAMF), addressing key themes related to LAMF's offerings, delegate motivations, and institutional sustainability, as explored through the research questions that follow.

1.6 Research Questions:

1. What are the characteristics of LAMF as an executive education provider?
2. What motivates delegates to study an EE course?
3. How can EE delegates be characterised?
4. What recommendations for sustainability and growth can be made to LAMF?

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduces EE as a specialised area of adult learning, focusing on industry-relevant, intensive content delivered by experts. The chapter first outlines the broad landscape of EE, followed by an introduction to the case-study organisation, LAMF, detailing its background, structure, admissions process, course portfolio, and unique selling proposition (USP). The rationale for this research is presented, along with the research aim and research questions.

Subsequent chapters are structured as follows:

Chapter 2 presents literature review covering the history and evolution of EE, teaching and learning strategies, the role of e-learning, experiential learning theories, curriculum development, and the competing values framework (CVF). The chapter also explores EE learner classification, admission criteria, marketing strategies, and the impact of globalisation and financialisation of education. The chapter concludes by identifying a literature gap and proposing a theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 explains the research methodology, including the conceptual framework, epistemological and ontological stance, reflexivity, and positionality. The chosen exploratory case study approach is justified, followed by descriptions of data collection methods (document collection and semi-structured interviews), sampling strategies, and discussions on reliability, validity, ethical considerations, and limitations.

Chapter 4: data collection and analysis are presented, focusing on research questions. Thematic analysis and quantitative findings from student applications are discussed, with particular attention to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on EE programme delivery. The chapter addresses misconceptions about student mobility, equal opportunity, and characteristics of EE students, including gender and age-related factors.

Chapter 5 provides an in-depth discussion of each research question, contributions to knowledge, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. It ends with a bibliography and appendices, including thematic diagrams based on qualitative data.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter looks at Executive Education (EE) and how it has evolved into its current form, taking examples from different countries and contexts. Furthermore, it evaluates the link between the industry and EE providers and the importance of having input from the industry to shape EE programme delivery. The chapter discusses the importance of EE for a University as a form of a serious revenue stream. From a participant's perspective, the chapter looks at what a participant expects to gain from EE, the aspects they would consider in selecting an EE provider and the key components that participants would value in an EE programme of study.

The chapter also discusses the different types of participants of EE, and whether their sponsors or employers evaluate improvements in performance after their employees undertake EE courses. The chapter also examines the marketisation and financialisation of education with a focus on the impact of Western educational approaches and the global perception of Western education. Furthermore, it includes a general discussion of inward student mobility and the major countries that send students to the UK including China, India and Nigeria.

2.2 Characteristics of Executive Education

2.2.1 History of Executive Education

The history of Executive Education (EE) can be traced back to the late 19th century with organisations requesting EE and business schools providing EE courses in different formats to cater to such demand (Jacobson *et al.*, 2017). Initial offerings by some of the leading business schools including Harvard were for inexperienced executives who wanted to improve their professional expertise. Amdam (2016) suggests the institutionalisation of business training within the university sector happened as an outcome of the transformation from the world of practice to the academic world. Jemison (1983) argues that EE in its present form started in the 1960s mainly as professional development courses. Such courses were subscribed by current or potential business leaders (Bruner, 2001). Course content was mainly based on intensive lectures, case studies, and functional knowledge which were applied across multiple business sectors (Garvin, 2007). In the 1980s EE underwent a paradigm shift where the focus shifted towards a cohort model of active and applied learning. This was based on "*real-life problems the company faced*" (Jacobson *et al.*, 2017:43). A diverse portfolio of non-degree executive education courses was developed to cater to this increased demand. Lorange (2002) claims that expectations from executive

MBA courses to customised specialist courses were jointly authored by business schools and their industry partners.

The primary assumption behind manager education was to train managers so the managers could improve worker productivity by efficient and effective utilisation of the workers who reported to them. This in turn, resulted in the organisation making higher profits (McNay, 2013). Amdam (2016) argues that at the start of the 21st century, manager education was transformed into EE where the primary focus shifted to preparing these executives for their future leadership roles. However, the availability of many different management and leadership theories has created a notable level of confusion as to which theories need to be integrated within EE courses that will help EE providers achieve their delegate development goals (Garvin, 2007).

Non-degree short course provision that was offered by universities in the USA were pioneered by Harvard University in the 1920s (Amdam, 2016). Such courses were aimed at top executives. Kyvik (2004) claims that systems of higher and vocational education differ from one country to another. Each of these systems has gone through many forms of change over time. Before the 1960s, higher education was predominantly offered by universities and specialised colleges which can be comparable to universities (Kerr, 2001). Short courses which were aimed at occupations (such as teaching, engineering and nursing) would usually be developed autonomously from the mainstream universities and such courses were not considered part of higher education (Kyvik, 2004). Amdam (2016) suggests the advanced management programme (short course) which was introduced by Harvard University after World War II can be arguably considered as the starting point of modern-day executive education.

A notable outcome of the managerial revolution is the establishment of management hierarchies within organisations, allowing for clear identification of authority levels among postholders (Burnham, 2021; Chandler, 1977). A distinct separation emerged between ownership and control (Stewart and Duncan-Jones, 1956). Solomon (1985) highlights that the 1960s saw a noticeable increase in learners due to shifts in the market's demand for skilled workers, prompting a notable expansion in the university sector and the creation of non-university higher education institutions (Trow, 1974). Kyvik (2004) notes that these institutions primarily aimed to provide vocational courses tailored to local economic needs, whereas in some countries, vocational education became part of traditional universities (Clark, 1983). Kyvik classifies post-secondary education into five categories: (a) university-dominated systems; (b) dual systems; (c) binary systems; (d) unified systems; and (e) stratified systems.

The university-dominated systems, prevalent in Western Europe until the 1960s (excluding Italy), were characterised by a model where only universities and specialised colleges offered higher education programmes (Kyvik, 2004). In contrast, the dual system combines universities and other educational institutions, with universities as the dominant players (Deissinger, 1997). Blossfeld (1992) identifies the non-university sector as consisting of specialised vocational course providers. Maurer and Gonon (2014) add that these courses lack a direct connection to one another. Marsh (2002) identifies challenges for learners with vocational qualifications seeking to obtain a university degree. The UK and Australia implemented a binary system, characterised by formalised vocational qualifications and multidisciplinary centres supporting local economies (Mahony, 1994; Kyvik, 2004). Tylor (2003) contrasts this with a unified system, where both higher and vocational education coexist within universities, exemplified by the new universities formed from former polytechnics in the 1990s (Brennan and Shah, 1994). A Stratified system features a hierarchical structure of higher education providers, with elite universities at the top, followed by traditional universities, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, and vocational colleges at the base (Hauser, 1970; Davies and Zarifa, 2012).

Conger and Xin's (2000) views are closely aligned with Jacobson *et al.*'s (2017) where they point out that in the pre-1980s what was perceived as EE was predominantly taught at universities or by specialist training bodies. Teaching was done by an academic faculty who developed curricula consisting of MBA components, with course content that was mainly theory and case study based. The course focus was mainly on strategy and functional skills in areas such as finance or marketing. Beer (1997) observes a paradigm shift in EE offerings in the 1980s which accelerated in the 1990s due to organisational challenges brought forward by factors including:

- Global corporate rivalry
- Advances in technology;
- Cross-border acquisitions and mergers;
- A renewed need to cut organisational costs;
- The realisation of the benefits of alliances and cross-culture partnerships.

Lippert (2001) also argues that EE is moving away from the approaches taken by centuries-old university-based, restrictive methods aimed at a selected set of high academic achievers to an integrated approach that involves the use of a combination of learning techniques that are available to a wider audience.

In the first few decades of the 20th century, the terms executive and manager were used interchangeably to refer to middle-level managers (Koontz, 1961). Their titles reflected on the level of responsibility they held within their organisations or functional units as argued by McNay (2013). However, the title "*executive*" transformed in a way that at present, it refers only to upper-level positions within a modern-day organisation. They are responsible for an organisation or a business unit's strategy, accountability, profit and growth (Hura, 2003).

Pre-2020 executive education (which was referred to as the old model) is where small groups of learners would use a high-quality, physical learning space to engage in proactive discussions with trainers and other learners (Carlsson-Wall and Richtner, 2021). The unique nature of this approach is, learning from other participants who are actively contributing to the discussion on an ongoing basis, within an academically conducive and stimulating learning environment (Argyris, 1991). Jones and Pfeffer (2003) argue that not only learning, but the concept of being part of a unique, transformative experience becomes core success factors (learning and feeling) for EE offering, which they referred to as being part of a unique and partly exclusive group.

Pfeffer (2007) observes that with the turn of the century, organisational expectations from EE have had a paradigm shift. Conger and Xin (2000:73) discuss executive trends, where a majority of respondents stated: "*The executive education programmes in my organisation are designed to enhance overall leadership and change management effectiveness*". Garvin (2007) suggests that modern EE courses are far more innovative, learner-centred, and applicable to immediate organisational needs than ever before. This is especially in the area of strategic organisational transition. Argyris (1991) claims this is different to the earlier view of an EE course being either a reward for high performing management staff members or a way of renewing an individual manager's subject knowledge. From this point, EE was not considered only as a benefit to the learner but was viewed as added value to the company as the main benefactor.

The role of EE has grown considerably, with Amdam (2016) asserting that it acts as an important factor in developing the business elite, influencing corporate strategies and policy formation on a global scale. Garvin (2007) further supports this view, highlighting that leading executive teams in major companies frequently engage in EE programmes offered by top-tier business schools, evidencing the link between EE and corporate power dynamics. As EE evolves, it increasingly integrates practical applications and real-world relevance, ensuring it addresses today's organisational needs while also challenging traditional views on career advancement within the corporate structure. The following section discusses different teaching and learning strategies that are used across EE programme delivery.

2.2.2 Teaching and Learning Strategies Adopted by Executive Education Providers

Vygotsky (1978), known for his instructional strategies in cooperative learning, claims that learning constructs new knowledge based on what a learner already knows. In contrast, Novak and Gowin (1984) argue that learning in such courses should be rooted in constructivism. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered, although discovery is integral to creating new knowledge. Novak and Gowin (1984:4) state, "*The construction of new knowledge begins with our observation of events or objects through the concepts we already possess*". The principle of constructivist learning emphasises active involvement in resolving issues and critical thinking about educational tasks, according to Piaget (1973). Here, learners "*construct*" knowledge by examining ideas based on their existing knowledge and experience, applying it to new scenarios and assimilating what they learn with pre-existing intellectual constructs, as noted by Vygotsky (1978). Novak and Gowin (1984:5) refer to this as "*meaningful learning*", which aligns with Ausubel's (1978) assimilation theory. Ausubel (1978) claims that meaningful learning occurs when learners assimilate new information into their broader cognitive structure, creating an integrated, hierarchically organised cognitive framework. Ausubel and Robinson (1970) claim this theory applies broadly to verbal learning. The learning approaches in EE appear to align with the assimilation hypothesis.

EE can be viewed as a set of non-standardised short courses that do not lead to a degree, developed and offered by business schools, training companies, consultancy firms and freelance practitioners (Garvin, 2007). Argyris (1991) also argues that EE is based on the premise that an executive executes an order and EE is an amelioration (improvement) of that process of an individual (executive) executing an order given by their superiors. Regardless of the stated purpose of EE courses, all EE courses are based on the underlying principle of improving the company's (sponsor) competitive advantage within the marketplace it operates, to boost productivity (Jones and Pfeffer, 2003). Amdam (2016) claims EE can be seen as an important pillar in the making of the business elite. This type of education can be seen as a main contributor in shaping the strategies and policy formation within major corporations around the world, as the top executive team of such firms receive EE from good business schools, argues Garvin (2007).

Lippert (2001) states that such EE courses are both concept and content-heavy while focusing on relevant theories, and rely on contextualisation for practical application. Amdam (2016) compares the type of learner who enrols on a degree course to a learner who participates in executive education. Amdam (2016) observes the formerly enrolled students based on their grades or admissions assessment while the latter based on their hierarchical status within a corporation. Welch (2005) suggests such EE courses are somewhat exclusive to participants who comprise of mid to senior-level managers. Participating in an EE course attracts a notable amount of opportunity cost using time away from work. McNay (2013) states that EE courses address focussed developmental skills. They deliver "*insight skills*" to a group of professionals who are already savvy (know what they want to achieve), smart (already have knowledge and know how to apply the said knowledge) and insightful (learn and grow from their experiences).

Mento and Jones (2002) argue that many learning activities in EE focus on real-world application. Mento and Jones (2002:40) state that "*learners must choose to learn meaningfully but that the teacher can do much to encourage and facilitate meaningful learning*". Furthermore, Ausubel (2000) explains that for meaningful learning to occur, three conditions must be met: the content must be conceptually accurate and relatable; the learner must have relevant prior knowledge; and the learner must engage with the material in a meaningful way.

Professional development can be defined as a series of pre-planned learning practices or interventions aimed at achieving lasting transformation in an individual's knowledge, as defined by Margulies and Gregg (2013). Training, as a method for employee professional development, is a formal process that organisations may use to align staff skills with organisational goals and objectives (Feldman, 1989). Taylor and Hamdy (2013) emphasise that understanding adult learning theories is crucial for designing effective professional development, as these theories support the development of strategies that promote meaningful and lasting knowledge transformation. Choi and Hannafin (1995) further highlight the importance of creating learning environments that facilitate situated cognition, where learners actively engage with the material in context, enhancing their understanding and retention. Consequently, professional development, including EE, should be systematically offered to encourage long-term improvements in both knowledge and its application.

In leadership training, the intended audience primarily consists of junior-level managers and supervisors on the path to becoming future business leaders (Conger, 1993). King (1990) notes that individuals in small groups utilise guided reciprocal questioning, fostering higher levels of critical thinking and deeper engagement with the material. However, as Geraki (2014) argues, teaching outdated management theories is counterproductive in a rapidly evolving business environment. By the time these aspiring leaders apply what they have learned, the knowledge may have become obsolete, disadvantaging them in their future roles. Hence, effective training programmes need to focus on modern day challenges, equipping learners with relevant insights and skills.

In distinguishing academic courses and EE, Amdam (2016) claims while the logic behind degree programmes is constructed around academic knowledge, the logic behind EE is constructed around industry experience. Margulies and Gregg (2013) claim that EE providers will employ a blended mix of products including public courses, custom programmes, custom consortia, short seminars, certificates, special events, and conferences. However, most EE providers will not be able to offer all of these products, mainly due to limitations in staff expertise (Garvin, 2007). Ryan (2013) cautions that allowing for flexibility within EE programmes should only be done within a set number of parameters as allowing for too much flexibility within a programme will lead to other complications and loss of focus. One of the methods to achieve this is by finding out specifically the participant's expectations from the course before the EE course commences, claims Brinkerhoff (2006). Farris *et al.* (2003:784) also stress that the teaching faculty of EE courses need to address critical business issues on an ongoing basis. They need to explicitly addressing the "*how to*" and demonstrating realistic "*outcomes*".

The learning journey of an EE delegate differs from that of those in non-EE programmes, as noted by Jensen *et al*. (2003) who suggest that an EE delegate's ownership of their learning process begins before attending the course, starting with discussions about their intentions for enrolling. This helps the delegate's managers understand the necessity of attending a high-level strategic development course, allowing for evaluation of both the delegate and the learning outcomes, as well as the EE provider. It also clarifies the delegate's intentions and the potential benefits for the employer. Phillips and Phillips (2016) point out that delegates may have personal motivations for enrolling, ranging from individual development to complex organisational strategy. Brinkerhoff (2018) highlights the importance of documenting the purpose of studying an EE programme and tracking progress. Garvin (2007) observes a trend in EE pedagogy towards greater delegate engagement, particularly through action learning activities, a view supported by Stopper (1998), who emphasises a focus on action-learning-based projects.

Any form of learning includes the acquisition of knowledge, skills or attitudes and any educational theories should address these three domains as argued by Taylor and Hossam (2013). Marquardt (2004) claims the most popular teaching method would be action learning where EE will employ improvisation, role-playing, interactive simulations and real-time pilot projects. Lippert (2001) states that demand for different EE courses will depend on three factors: corporate demand, technology and what is being learned and where. Revans (1982) suggests that action learning focuses on various management-education methods where corporate managers address issues that arise in their organisations as the basis for learning. Such courses usually integrate team-based experiential group activities to solve business problems directly linked to the organisation.

Tichy (1989) also mentions that classroom-based action learning projects can be considered strategic initiatives for resolving business problems and effectively implementing organisational change strategies. Action learning, where teams work in groups, enhances mutual trust and friendships among team members, potentially resulting in support for achieving corporate objectives, claims Marquardt (2004). Seaman and Fellenz (1989) observe that when adult learning is considered, course participants are typically more motivated to study when actively engaged in the learning process, allowing them to apply and discuss issues relevant to their lives and work-related situations. In line with this, Novak

(2002) highlights that meaningful learning empowers learners by promoting a connection between new information and existing knowledge structures, which is essential for effective engagement in action-learning contexts. Traditionally, this face-to-face engagement and active discussions with other like-minded learners are mostly possible in traditional learning environments compared to e-learning. It can be argued that traditional classroom-based EE incorporates action learning without difficulties.

Examining teaching and learning strategies in EE reveals a complex approach distinct from traditional educational frameworks. According to Garvin (2007) and Amdam (2016), EE programmes prioritise practical applications and real-world relevance. These programmes play a critical role in developing managerial staff. This view is supported by the assimilation theory of learning proposed by Ausubel and Robinson (1970), which emphasises the need to align new knowledge with pre-existing understanding for meaningful learning. The shift towards a more participatory approach is evident, with a growing emphasis on action learning techniques, which not only enhance delegate engagement but also facilitate the immediate application of skills to organisational contexts (Mento and Jones, 2002; Garvin, 2007). However, the effectiveness of these programmes is subject to a clear understanding of the delegates' motivations and the contextual factors influencing their learning experiences (Phillips and Phillips, 2016; Jensen *et al*., 2003). The evolving nature of EE addresses modern organisational challenges. However, programmes must continuously adapt their content. This ensures relevance and applicability in a rapidly changing business environment (Geraki, 2014; Revans, 1982). This relationship between theory, practice, and participant profile appear to shape the effectiveness of EE in developing strategic leadership capabilities within organisations. How such approaches can be facilitated through e-learning and how EE delegates respond to e-learning is discussed in the following section.

2.2.3 e-learning and Executive Education

The growing popularity of online EE courses is attributed to the ability of training providers to deliver content flexibly and at reduced costs, making such offerings more attractive to corporations (Lippert, 2001). Rose (2015) notes that this demand has increased as nations shift towards knowledge-based economies, with technological advancements reducing barriers to physical distance. Lippert (2001:6) argues that "*The internet is the instrument for democratizing intellectual capital*", changing the EE landscape by enabling new entrants reliant on online delivery. Garvin (2000) claims that internet-based EE providers can leverage global resources to offer courses with minimal geographic restrictions. Despite the rise of independent providers, Farris *et al.* (2003) suggests they often bring specialised trainers and financial support to compete in the EE market. Additionally, Moren (2015) suggests that for countries like Syria and Iran, the ability to participate in online courses is necessary for bypassing restrictive travel measures due to international sanctions imposed since 2012.

Vicerey (2001) argues that many EE delegates prefer high-touch, low-tech interactions, viewing online learning as less engaging. Farris *et al.* (2003) argue that while a notable majority expressed satisfaction with online learning, only a fraction were "*very interested*" in it. The research highlighted convenience, just-in-time training, and reduced travel costs as primary motivators for online EE participation, but only 23% believed that the online medium was superior to traditional methods. Stanton *et al.* (2017) further point out that although online EE is gaining traction, it has not notably replaced traditional classroom experiences. In the wake of the pandemic, Manzoni (2022) argues on the impact of technology-based interactions in EE, proposing that these tools will play an important role in determining future learning experiences. Williamson *et al.* (2020) agree with this sentiment, suggesting that the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies, redesigning pedagogies and requiring adaptations in course delivery. As EE providers adjust to the changes, incorporating technology can enhance engagement and accessibility, allowing for a more flexible and tailored approach to learning. This transformation requires a re-evaluation of pedagogical strategies to meet the demands of a post-pandemic world (Manzoni, 2022).

Research by Dowling *et al.* (2013) indicates that while EE courses are often customised and hands-on, online methods can feel impersonal. However, Finkelstein (2006) argues that a project-based approach can take advantage of the benefits of online teaching, facilitating a more impactful learning experience. Jacobson *et al.* (2017) identify three core value propositions for project-based training: identifying competencies linked to learning outcomes, demonstrating competency acquisition, and facilitating learner performance. Burke and Burke (1989) highlight that competency-based education and training can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring that learners can transfer their skills to real-world scenarios effectively.

Despite a trend towards online offerings, Wolverton (2018) asserts that learner satisfaction is highest with interactive, engaging formats, further arguing that while asynchronous learning may reduce engagement, synchronous communication enhances it. Salmon (2004) identifies participation, commitment, financial investment, and effort as critical components of learner engagement in online EE.

A blended learning approach, integrating online components with in-person instruction, is argued by Marquardt (2017) to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of EE, while Davidow (2011), argues that this method minimises time away from work while maximising engagement through collaborative online tools. Jacobson *et al.* (2017) highlight the historical importance of EE within business schools, noting that although these institutions were early adopters of online delivery, few have successfully integrated it with EE. Marquardt (2011) supports a blended or project-based teaching approach, while Klotz and Wright (2017) support modular designs to enhance engagement. Kendall and Kendall (2017) highlight the effectiveness of storytelling in fostering engagement, linking it to higher learner satisfaction. Smith and Keaveney (2017) argue that a balanced mix of course structure, content, assignments, and assessments must align with learner expectations.

Gibbs (2006) cautions against misconceptions in developing online content for blended courses, while Malamed (2015) notes the challenges of creating impactful short courses with meaningful assessments. Beatty *et al.* (2001) propose a differentiated approach to instructional design, focusing on unique challenges posed by short EE courses. Beatty *et al.* (2001) also emphasise the importance of accommodating learners who may prefer live components by ensuring that asynchronous materials effectively convey intended learning outcomes. Klotz and Wright (2017) suggest incorporating interactive elements, as active learners tend to achieve better outcomes. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) advocate for a cognitive approach where the instructor's role evolves from directive to facilitative as the course progresses.

Ultimately, the shift towards online EE necessitates an emphasis on participant experiences and storytelling to create a communal learning environment (Kendall and Kendall, 2017). Beatty *et al.* (2001) highlight the potential of storytelling to enhance engagement and retention, similar to case study discussions in physical classrooms. Clark and Mayer (2016) compare online storytelling to traditional case studies, suggesting it can deepen understanding and make learning experiences more realistic. Furthermore, Geraci *et al.* (2018) argue that broadband internet access plays an important role in facilitating social capital, which can enhance the effectiveness of online learning. With a stable internet connection, learners can share their discussions more freely, promoting healthy debate and connection among them. This interconnectedness improves the learning experience and develops a supportive community across geographical boundaries. Pratama *et al.* (2020) further support this, noting that online meeting applications have become essential tools in connectivity and engagement in virtual learning environments, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. While these applications have improved accessibility, Pratama *et al.* (2020) caution about potential drawbacks such as digital fatigue and inconsistent levels of access, which may affect participation and equity in EE programmes.

The evolution of online EE has gained momentum, primarily due to the flexibility and cost-effectiveness offered by training providers (Lippert, 2001). This shift aligns with the transition towards knowledge-based economies, where technological advancements have challenged barriers related to physical distance (Rose, 2015). As Lippert (2001) argues, the internet has democratised access to intellectual resources, resulting in a situation where online delivery is increasingly relied upon. Despite the growing popularity of online courses, many EE delegates still appear to prefer high-touch interactions, perceiving online formats as less engaging (Vicerey, 2001). While the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies, reshaping pedagogical approaches (Williamson *et al*., 2020), it has also emphasised the importance of maintaining learner engagement in virtual settings. Research suggests that while online methods can often feel impersonal (Dowling *et al*., 2013), project-based and blended learning approaches can effectively bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application (Finkelstein, 2006; Burke and Burke, 1989). However, potential drawbacks, such as digital fatigue and inconsistent access, raise concerns about equal access in participation (Pratama *et al*., 2020). Hence, the ongoing challenge for EE providers is to create engaging, communal learning environments that utilise technology while prioritising meaningful interactions and the unique experiences of learners in a post-pandemic world. Experiential learning, along with adult learning theories, will be addressed in the upcoming section.

2.2.4 Experiential Learning

Student disengagement and passivity in a traditional classroom setting are discussed by Kolb (1984), who states that students are not just learners but also purchasers of qualifications and skills. Boredom and disengagement significantly affect traditional, tutor-led studies within a traditional classroom setting, whereas a high level of trust and hope is placed in experiential learning. Yardley, Teunissen, and Dornan (2012) emphasise the advantages of experiential learning and suggest that it enhances engagement and retention by providing hands-on experiences that a learner can relate to. Jakovljevic *et al.* (2008) outline several advantages of this approach compared to the conventional lecture model: it prioritises student engagement over teacher-led instruction; encourages active participation; minimises passivity; livens up the subject matter; motivates learners; and transforms concepts into practical experiences. Techniques employed in adopting active learning usually involve breaking into smaller groups, debates, simulation, and role-playing, which are common delivery methods for EE courses.

The enhanced academic gains of experiential learning are achieved as a result of the nature of engagement and thus are not due to the additional time spent discussing a specific topic (Redish *et al.*, 1997). Redish *et al.* (1997) further point out that active engagement methods outshine traditional teaching in terms of enhancing conceptual understanding of basic concepts while better addressing misconceptions made by learners. However, Stopper (1998) argues that experiential learning is mainly based on an array of management-education methods. Business executives practise real-life issues arising at their firms as the basis of class discussions (Revans, 1982). Such courses usually encompass experiential group work, to find solutions to real-life issues that have an immediate significance to the organisation. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) claim that delegates in EE courses may be highly motivated in the event where the applicability of the newly gained knowledge to their own career and/or organisation's requirements is demonstrated. There are quite a few well-established theories which are based on experiential learning and the most prominent theories were defined by Kurt Lewin, John Dewey and David Kolb.

Kurt Lewin

Kurt Lewin (1946) argues that learning is most effective when there is tension between concrete experience and reflective analysis. His field theory, which emphasised the interaction between individuals and their environment, formed the basis for experiential learning (Lewin, 1946). Lewin also linked learning to social action through his action research model, showing that reflection on experience drives informed change. Kolb (2014) builds on Lewin's ideas, suggesting that combining industry experience with theoretical expertise fosters a dynamic and creative learning environment. Knowles (1970) further develops Lewin's (1946) concepts, shifting adult education from lecture-based methods to experiential, self-directed approaches.

Prince (2004:223) states: "*any teaching method that engages learners in the learning practice*". Experiential learning requires learners to undertake meaningful educational activities and reflect on their actions. Roberts (2006) suggests this may include traditional tasks like homework. However, experiential learning typically involves actions introduced into the classroom, promoting learner activity and engagement. In contrast, Collard (1994) claims that traditional lectures often involve learners passively listening to the teacher. Hattie (2009) argues that engaging learners in small groups positively impacts academic achievement, while self-directed learning may slightly hinder it. Prince (2004) concludes that collaboration improves academic attainment, learner attitudes, and retention. Since EE teaching and learning are based on experiential and collaborative approaches, Prince's (2004) claims are foundational to EE programme delivery.

Dewey's Model of Experiential Learning

Dewey (1938) argues that learning is a process where impulses, feelings, and desires from concrete experiences are transformed into purposeful and reflective encounters. Dewey (1938) views reflection as central to learning, beginning with an instinctive, unplanned examination of one's experiences that leads to deeper understanding. This reflection is not only about recalling past experiences but involves critically engaging with them, leading to new insights and more informed actions. Dyer and Hurd (2016) expand on this belief by emphasising the development of reflexivity within management education, supporting a shift from surface learning to deeper, more meaningful engagement. Dyer and Hurd's (2016) research highlights that fostering an environment where learners can critically reflect on their experiences not only enhances their understanding but also prepares them to navigate complex managerial challenges. This continuous cycle of action and reflection aligns with

Dewey's (1938) experiential learning process, ensuring that knowledge is not only gained but applied to future situations.

The Lewinian Model of Action Research and Laboratory Training

Kolb (1984) developed an experiential learning model (The Lewinian Model of Action Research and Laboratory Training, Figure 2.1) which allows a methodology to develop learning and teaching strategies that can be aimed at adult learners.

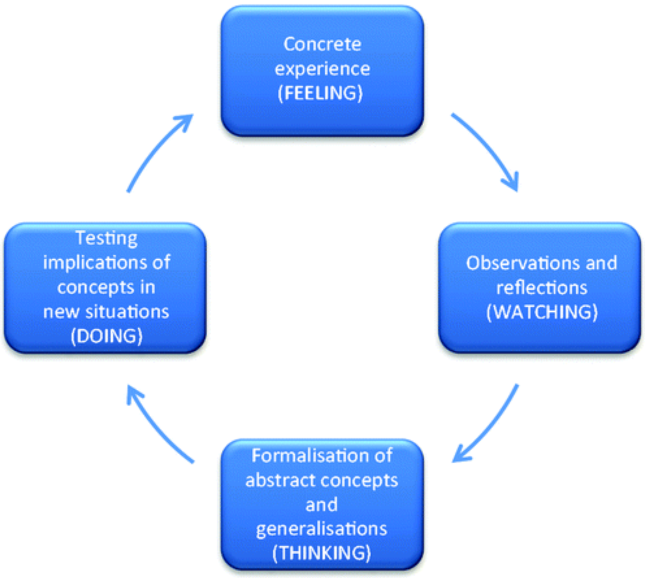


Figure 2.1: The Lewinian Experiential Learning Model. Source: Kolb (2014)

Kolb (2014) claims that learning, change, and growth can be considered as being ideally enabled using an integrated process which starts with a here-and-now experience. The next step is the collection of data and observations regarding the experience. The third step is data analysis, which is followed by the conclusions of the analysis being fed back to the learners. Such conclusions can be used by the learners to consider in the process of altering the learner's behaviour and selection of new experiences. Kolb (2014) asserts that knowledge is therefore formulated as a four-stage cycle where the learner's prior experience becomes the foundation for observation and reflection. Such observations can be incorporated as a theory where fresh suggestions for action can be determined. EE, which is primarily based on adults learning through experience and peer collaboration, will be able to benefit from the four step process defined by Kolb (2014).

2.2.5 Curriculum Development

For a management education provider to succeed, they must develop programmes and curricula (Drucker, 1994). Key considerations include evaluating client needs, identifying aligned learning outcomes, designing suitable course resources, and selecting effective delivery methods (Quinn, 1998). Additionally, incorporating strategies to improve knowledge transfer and evaluating course effectiveness are important for continuous curriculum and programme improvement, as highlighted by Varner *et al.* (2013). Not having these characteristics can negatively impact the quality control of the EE provider. Cameron and Miller (2004) emphasise that community-based approaches are essential for facilitating effective learning transitions, enhancing the experience through social networks and support systems. Furthermore, Bjørnåvold (2000) highlights the importance of recognising non-formal learning, which enriches curriculum development by integrating diverse learning experiences. This recognition broadens the definition of valuable knowledge and aligns with the need for adaptability to meet varied learner backgrounds and competencies. Such inclusivity can enhance the quality and relevance of programmes, ensuring they address the evolving needs of both learners and the market.

When designing and delivering EE programmes, providers must allow for flexibility in content and discussion (Ryan, 2013). Cormier and Siemens (2010) state that the main advantage of open courses is the ability for participants from diverse backgrounds to engage, debate, and share experiences. They argue that open courses can notably impact the broader area of study through participant contributions. Siemens (2013) adds that open courses enable full engagement in the learning process, enhancing commitment, collaboration, and responsibility. In contrast, Flynn (1986) suggests that custom courses facilitate collaboration between training providers and industry players in curriculum design, focusing on the technical needs of specific industries and the training needs of skilled workers. However, Flynn (1986) cautions that custom training may limit the transferability of skills across industries and could become too narrow, focusing excessively on an individual company's needs. Jahera (2013) further highlights the importance for EE teaching faculty to maintain their professional development and stay updated on relevant laws and regulations that may impact their teaching.

Varner *et al.* (2013) suggest when developing curricula, characteristics of adult learning should be a primary point of reference. Quoting an example, Varner *et al.* (2013:28) claim "*A person knowledgeable in adult learning knows that adults learn best when they perceive a need to learn and are involved in the learning process".* Hence, courses which are developed with this viewpoint will include exercises which will identify the "felt" needs of the delegates and provide them with a "*hands-on*" experience in employing the skills or knowledge being taught. Whiddett and Hollyforde (2003) explain that schools should be able to adapt to the requirements of the industry. It can be elaborated as having the perseverance, patience, acceptance and competence to bridge the gap between corporate and education. Additionally, EE providers should be able to consider different viewpoints, compromise, and exercise flexibility in their views. Garvin (2000) also states that this can be a difficult task as quite often, EE providers may not fully grasp the subtleties of the corporate sector, while corporates do not necessarily recognise the "*way we do things*" at educational establishments (which includes EE providers).

Similar to Varner *et al.'s* (2013) views, Hura (2003) writes that the most common EE courses are based on similar core characteristics: flexible and modern curriculum; teaching staff with functional expertise; and a partnership between the business school and industrial partners. These factors collectively contribute to a reduced developmental learning curve for the programme. Garvin (2007) also claims that there are significant benefits of EE courses to corporations. Hura (2003) suggests such courses would enable corporates to implement meaningful change to organisational processes and develop leadership potential amongst their staff. Alternatively, Margulies and Gregg (2013) define EE programmes as extension-based programmes aimed at business leaders, managers, entrepreneurs, and persons of similar stature with fast-paced, thought-provoking learning experiences.

Taylor and Hossam (2013) state that modern EE courses are increasingly viewed as opportunities to recast the worldviews of organisational management teams and align organisational pathways to new directions. Beer (2009) claims that C-suite executives will be able to communicate and apply new corporate strategies to develop strategic unity across all levels and produce a team of change agents. Conger and Xin (2000:76) discuss this further by stating that EE has the potential of transforming into a strategic tool within organisations where EE could "*actually be turned into interventions that were capable of building key organisational competencies*". Amdam (2016) also points out that EE has transformed from being university-based standardised courses to more customised courses and in-company training. The EE syllabuses have also moved away from functional subjects to strategic-level content such as change management (Garvin, 2007). Delivery changed from teacher-based to learner-based, while discussions changed from case studies to real-life corporate problems (Edmondson, 2018).

Writing along a similar view as Varner *et al.* (2013), Conger and Xin (2000:78) claim that EE should be guided/driven by three objectives:

1. To build awareness and support for strategic transitions,
2. To facilitate large-scale organisational change necessary to realise new strategic directions, and
3. To build depth of leadership talent.

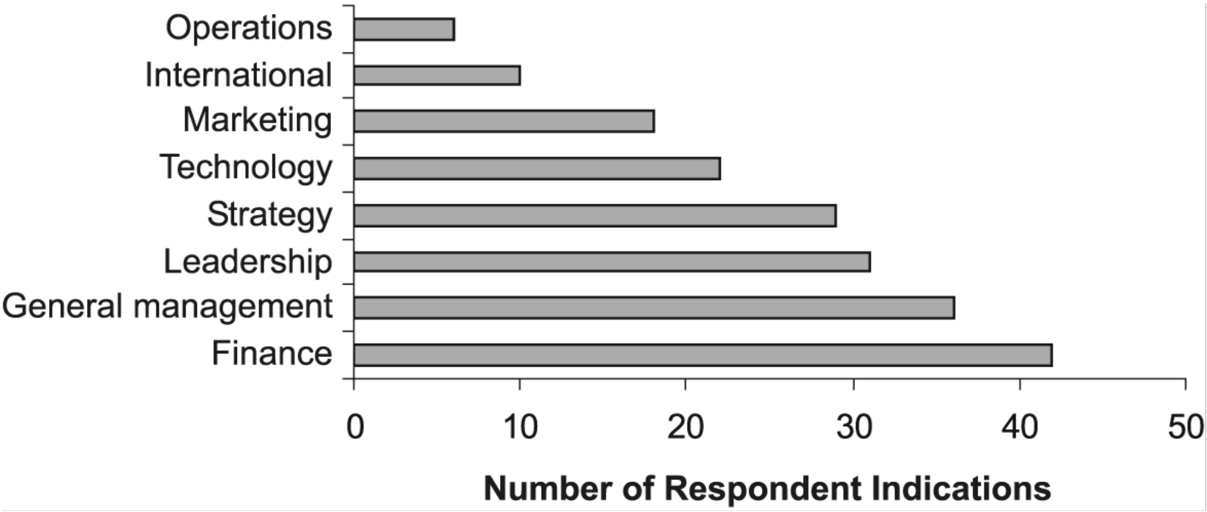


Figure 2.2: Topics EE participants would like to learn about. Source: Farris et al. (2003:793)

As illustrated in Figure 2.2 above, it is evident that most participants want to study the "*financialisation*" aspect of EE. Altbach and Balan (2019) explain that when EE courses are offered by universities or other HEIs, the teaching staff (academics) and school management will usually have different viewpoints. Marquardt (2017) suggests that academics view the offering of more EE courses as an increased workload, which in turn results in a reduction in value perception.

Jahera (2013:6) states the main success factors of EE providers as:

- Strong academic leadership
- Competent and reputable faculty
- Innovation in delivery and programming
- Quick response ability
- Effective marketing and promotion of programmes
- Willingness to take risks

On the other hand, school management sees a higher number of EE courses as an improvement in the school's reputation and increased revenue levels for the school. Brinkerhoff (2018) recommends an optimum level of EE courses would be the intersection point of a graph that represents both academics' opinion in terms of the increased workload, and management's opinion on the number of EE courses that are offered by the school. Jahera (2013), also argues that regardless of all other factors, the key success factor for any EE provider is its people, and recommends a combination of highly qualified and motivated faculty; a strong team of administrators; a wide pool of potential delegates; an excellent team of support staff for successful sustenance and growth of an EE provision. Jacobson *et al.* (2017) argue that a modern-day business school is not only expected to disseminate knowledge, but to remain competitive. The EE provider needs to make a real-life impact for those who are enrolled. McNay (2013) emphasises that modern EE courses have three objectives: To create awareness and support for strategic transitions; to encourage major change in organisations which are required to action new strategic directions; and to build depth of leadership talent.

Margulies and Gregg (2013) suggest that the type of curricula offered by EE providers will depend on the perceived strengths and interests of these providers and the specific areas of expertise demonstrated by their faculty members. While some providers may choose to offer generic courses, more renowned EE providers may offer specialist courses based on their reputation and faculty interests. Billing *et al.* (2021) emphasise the need for EE providers to adapt their course portfolio in response to changing workforce requirements, particularly in light of the COVID-19 crisis. In this context, Ellingrud *et al.* (2020) note that many employees have faced considerable difficulties during the pandemic, which creates the necessity for EE programmes to address these difficulties.

The pandemic's broader impact on learning methods is further highlighted by Taylor *et al.* (2021), who examined older individuals' experiences of at-home exercise during lockdown. Their findings reveal that, while remote sessions offered accessibility, they did not have the social connection and routine which are usually associated with in-person participation. This insight is important for EE providers moving to online formats, as it highlights the potential for disengagement and reduced motivation among participants. Powell and Francis-Divine (2022) also explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the labour market, prompting a re-evaluation of the skills and competencies that EE programmes should emphasise to prepare learners effectively for an evolving workplace. Billing *et al.* (2021) argue that building workforce skills at a high rate is essential for both individual and organisational success during and after such disruptions.

The examination of curriculum development in EE reveals a shift towards more flexible, relevant, and strategically focused programmes, as highlighted by several scholars. Hura (2003) and Varner *et al*. (2013) note that successful EE courses share core characteristics such as modern curricula, expert teaching staff, and collaboration with industry partners, which collectively enhance the learning experience and reduce developmental learning curves. Additionally, Garvin (2007) claims that EE courses provide substantial corporate benefits, enabling meaningful organisational change and leadership development. Modern EE is increasingly viewed as an important tool capable of transforming management abilities and enabling alignment within organisations (Taylor and Hossam, 2013; Conger and Xin, 2000). However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a re-evaluation of course content and delivery methods. As Billing *et al*. (2021) argue, the crisis emphasises the importance of adapting curricula to meet evolving workforce requirements, while Ellingrud *et al*. (2020) highlight the challenges faced by employees during this period. This context demands that EE programmes address these issues to maintain participant engagement and motivation, particularly in an increasingly online learning environment (Taylor *et al*., 2021).

The success of EE depends on a combination of factors, including qualified faculty, adaptable curricula, and an awareness of the changing educational setting, as emphasised by Jahera (2013) and McNay (2013). The next section discusses how EE providers assess both participant and corporate training needs.

2.2.6 Assessing training needs

Within a traditional university structure, if a particular university is offering EE, EE will be a sub-department of the continuing education department (Varner *et al.*, 2013). However, Varner *et al.* (2013) go further to claim there are notable differences in features of mainstream continuing education and EE. Accordingly, the boundaries are in the target audience where EE equips middle to senior corporate managers, while continuing education provides skills such as human resources, problem-solving and computer skills to a wider audience, claims Garvin (1993). In developing EE curricula, Varner *et al.* (2013) recommend a modular approach. They recommend splitting the curriculum into smaller components which can be re-assembled based on the needs of learners and their corporate sponsors.

Organisational cultures can be extensively diverse and inclusive in scope, as argued by Cameron and Quinn (2011). They suggest that training providers must be able to identify correct dimensions to ensure that they can diagnose and accurately assess the needs of organisations. Because of the diverse factors involved with organisations and associated culture, employing a theoretical framework is recommended as a method of assessment, claims Schein (2010). By offering a modular approach, the EE provider benefits as the approach enables the provider to evaluate its existing modular course resources and either reuse such resources or develop new modular content, based on the client's needs. Varner *et al.* (2013) further recommend it is beneficial to develop modular content in coordination with the EE provider's industry partners, to provide courses that are a close fit to the industry's needs.

Varner *at al*. (2013) point out the benefits of such a modular approach under six areas:

1. **Flexibility** – Modular curricula will enable a bespoke approach to address needs of learners and organisations where modules can be selected based on skill or knowledge requirements. This enables a personalised approach to learning.

2. **Focus on specific competencies** – Individual modules can be tailored to focus on a competency or area of expertise. This ensures that the competency is directly linked with the learner's role or responsibility within an organisation.

3. **Ease of integration** – Modular approach enables the integration of practical exercises, online learning components and face to face sessions. A more engaging and effective blended learning experience is achieved as a result.

4. **Scalability** – Modular programmes can either be scaled up or down based on the required depth of discussion or the number of participants.

5. **Continuous improvement** – Individual modules can be updated or removed instead of revising the entire programme. This enables updating of modules based on delegate feedback or industry requirements.

6. **Focused learning** – The modular approach enables delegates to deeply engage with the topic of discussion and reinforce learning and retention.

Cameron and Quinn (2011) argue no one framework can assess all dimensions of organisational culture and its needs. The Competing Values Framework (CVF) distinguishably identifies eight different roles of a manager as shown in Figure 2.3. Cameron and Quinn (2011) argue the CVF can accurately diagnose and enable changes to an organisation's culture. Varner *et al.*(2013) suggest training organisations can use the above framework to develop targeted curricula for EE courses that are offered to corporates, to closely match their (clients') requirements. There is a strong set of arguments presented as to why the CVF can be considered as a robust framework to identify corporate client needs for an EE provider as discussed below.

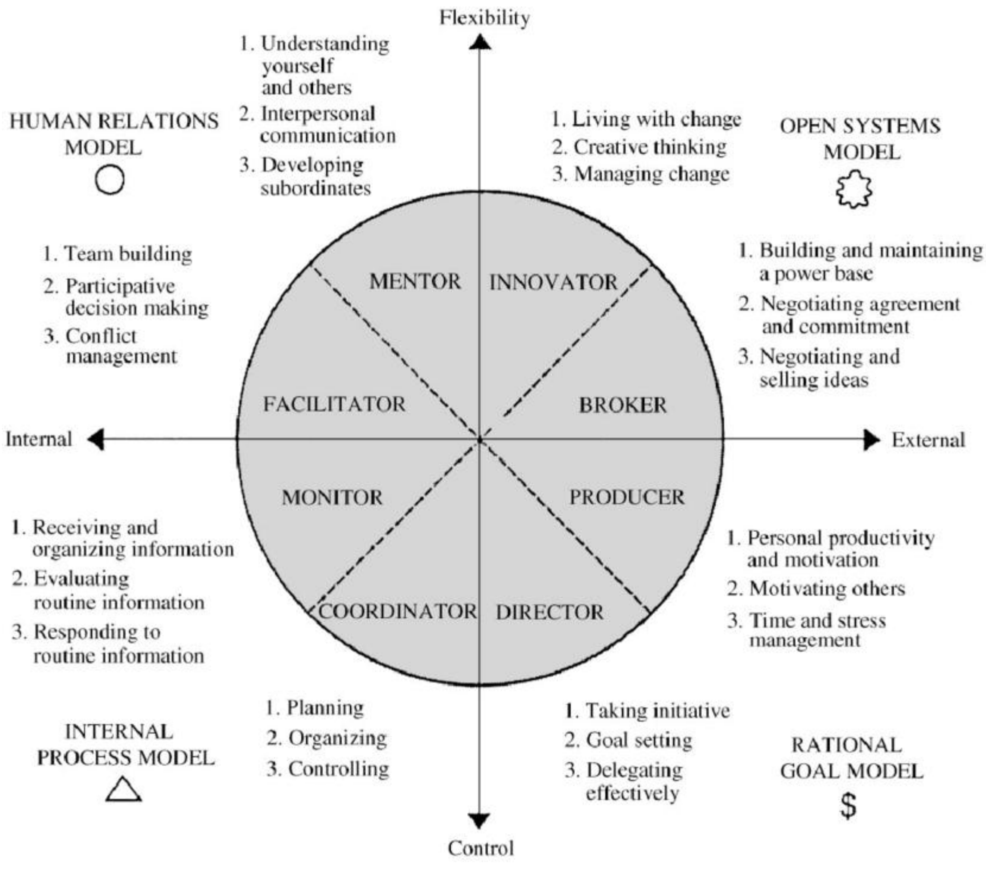


Figure 2.3: Competing Values Framework (CVF). R. E. Quinn (1988:86) Beyond Rational Management.

The Completing Values Framework (CVF) has gained prominence in defining leadership profiles due to its multi-dimensional nature, which Geraki (2014) argues makes it more robust than similar frameworks. Supporting this, Hartnell *et al.* (2011) argue that studies based on the CVF demonstrate higher reliability and validity, as the framework employs a multi-trait–multi-method analysis. Cameron and Quinn (2019) explain that the CVF indicates how various cultural types are linked to specific effectiveness criteria. Denison (2020) adds that the CVF aligns well with other categorical schemes, aiding in understanding how individuals within an organisation think and process information. As illustrated in table 2.1, each quadrant of the CVF represents a distinct model of organisational and management theory, allowing for connections between models and their perceptual opposites (Geraki, 2014). For instance, the quadrant associated with adaptive leadership represents an adaptable structure and an external focus, contrasting with the stability leadership quadrant that prioritises a steady structure and inward focus. This duality in the CVF provides a comprehensive lens for analysing leadership dynamics in organisational contexts.

An EE provider primarily has two customer segments: individuals and corporates. Out of the two segments, the corporate sector has strong training budgets and tends to offer lucrative training contracts to training providers on an ongoing basis. By using the competing values framework (CVF), an EE provider can work in tandem with their corporate clients in designing and developing a bespoke training solution that can successfully address the required change or improvement in the client's management staff, claims Denison (2020). By doing so, the client's spending on training will be better utilised in a targeted manner as opposed to sending their staff on off-the shelf training programmes which may or may not offer the intended outcomes.

Leadership quadrants	Brief description
Task leadership (rational model)	Producing results
Producer	Focus on results and achievements Motivate people Initiate action
Director	Set goals Give instructions Clarify priorities Provide clear direction
Stability leadership (Internal process model)	Managing processes
Coordinator	Coordinate activities and people. Maintain the structure and the flow of the system Provide Stability and continuity Handle crisis
Monitor	Disseminate information regarding policies and procedures. Monitor the progress Control projects Develop measures and checkpoints
People leadership (Human relations model)	Relating to people
Facilitator	Facilitate the consensus and negotiate the compromise. Create a cohesive organizational climate Manage the conflict effectively
Mentor	Take a personal interest in employees Engage in the development of people with care and empathy Acknowledge personal needs
Adaptive leadership (Open systems model)	Leading change
Innovator	Come up with ideas for improving the organization. Encourage the creativity Initiate significant changes
Broker	Negotiate and require needed resources Nurture contacts with people external to the organization Exert lateral and upward influence in the organization.

Table 2.1: CVF model approach for leadership. Source: Geraki (2014:50)

Thompson (2018b) argues that the participants' (executives) sponsoring companies want to equip them with the ability to make their companies more competitive in local, regional and global markets. Koontz and O'Donnell (1968) differentiate between managers and executives by stating the title "*manager*" can be used for persons in charge of technical processes such as production, while the title "*executive*" can be assigned to those most highly paid and most senior ranking official within the enterprise, in charge of directing the company to generate profit. Amdam (2016) argues that modern-day EE can challenge the perception that a university degree is required to climb to the top of the corporate ladder in terms of career progression.

2.2.7 Marketing Strategies and Sales of Executive Education Courses

Thompson (2018a) writes about the relationship between business schools that provide executive education and the significant wealth and pay inequality between top management and staff of commercial corporations. Thompson (2018a) believes that university-based executive education is also tailored to sanction the same inequalities. In his discussion, Thompson (2018a: i) defines EE as "*a sheltered process of educating in-role corporate* *executives*". In general, EE operates at a relatively high price point compared to most other short courses due to specialised content, target audience and the level of expertise required, argues Solomon (2018). This works on several assumptions where an EE provider believes that potential clients will associate high price with high quality. Furthermore, an EE programme generally comes with a higher cost, which includes enhanced facilities such as venue hire and catering, as well as increased payments for facilitators, who are usually industry experts in their fields. This higher investment reflects the quality of resources and expertise that learners can expect from such programmes. EE programmes adopt a premium pricing strategy where the flagship EE courses will become a main revenue stream to the EE course provider (Petit, 2013). Marketing and sales strategies of EE providers need to ensure that the provider attracts the right categories of customers (both individual and corporate) who can afford the premium price tag.

Taking an example from Cranfield University (in the UK), Thompson (2018a) claims that the non-accredited EE portfolio brings in a similar amount of revenue and student numbers compared to the accredited degree courses the university offers. Amdam (2006) also claims the income stream generated by providing EE can be seen as sustainable and important, especially to top-ranking business schools. Thompson (2018a) characterises common features of EE where Van de Vliert (1999) argues that a common size of each cohort will be around 20 where the areas of discussion are mostly around management disciplines (leadership, strategy, finance, supply chain, marketing and organisational culture change).

Pricing strategies adopted by organisations have transformed recently, primarily due to technological advancements and because of the millennial generation's approach towards the way products and services are consumed (Kotler, 2019). Twenge (2014) claims that millennials tend to bring new attitudes and values to the process of consumption. Botsman (2014) calls the emergence of a sharing economy where consumers share not only products but also skills. In a shared economy, the concept of "*ownership*" is taken over by "*access to assets*". Kotler (2019:512) identifies that "*traditionally, price has operated as a major determinant of buyer choice*", where fierce competition can result in severe discounting and price wars amongst competing organisations or products. Due to the availability of internet-based price comparison tools, a consumer can instantaneously compare prices of competing products or services. Armstrong *et al.*(2014) observe that many organisations and individuals have produced internet-based content that is free to use, open source or includes a Creative Commons licence. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) suggest that organisations should monitor the offers within the market and tailor their product or service offerings to suit individual consumer's requirements. Furthermore, Keller and Kotler (2022) recommend offering special exclusive prices to certain consumers to attract them.

The price of an EE course plays a prominent role at the stage of selecting an EE course rather than at the stage of searching for such a course as argued by Petit (2005). Petit (2013) further reports that applicants are willing to spend a premium price if the EE provider has a high level of reputation in the industry, coupled with the course delivery style being suitable for their work patterns. Gratton (2011) argues that the flagship course of most EE providers can be suggested as a mini-MBA and the programme generates a high level of revenue stream for the provider where it becomes a net contributor to the EE provider's overall revenue. Furthermore, such programmes are still in the growth stage of the product lifecycle (PLC).

Kotler (2019:10) states "*The heartbeat of modern marketing is a technology focused on data activation, personalisation, building a digital culture and having an integrated simplified technology operating model*". Agreeing with this viewpoint, Bahman *et al.* (2020:i) suggest that artificial intelligence tools can be used within marketing efforts to offer "*personalisation, marketing automation, neuromarketing, viral marketing, voice recognition, and conversion optimisation*". Friedman (2005) states that the ongoing assimilation of global commercial enterprises and interrelations between global economic superpowers has enabled corporations to market across boundaries. This has been achieved by advancements in technology, communications and transport. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) claim this has increased the convenience for consumers to purchase goods and services from across the globe. (EE) providers can take on a technology based, personalised marketing approach in penetrating identified market segments in order to appeal to potential customers from various geo-demographic segments, claim Keller and Kotler (2022).

"*Setting the price 'correctly' will not only bring satisfactory returns but will also help strengthen sales and accurately reflect the value provided to customers*", Kotler (2019:514). Cotterill *et al.* (2020) suggest when selling a heterogeneous product, a relationship between market share and the price of the product can be identified. Nagle and Müller (2017) state that a company will not be able to simply identify an ideal price by only concentrating on the relevant direct and indirect costs incurred in the product or service offering. Kotler and Armstrong *et al.* (2010) claim, a company's prices cannot be set simply by referring to prices charged by its competitors, for a similar product or service. Hence, the development of a pricing strategy may be based on establishing the correct value of a product or service offered by an organisation to its consumers (Armstrong *et al.* 2014).

When purchasing a product or service, most consumers will compare the price with a "*reference price*" which they may remember by observing different prices (Kotler, 2019). Sellers may choose to position their products or services amongst expensive competitors which will give the consumer an idea that the company's products or services are on par with such expensive competitors. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) claim the above will result in changes in the consumer's "*reference price*" for what is being offered by the company (Table 2.2). Jahera (2013) also implies that for an EE provider to achieve continuous success within the market, they need to not only have high-quality programmes and institutional reputation but also allow a good level of flexibility in delivery to suit the needs of working professionals.

Fair price (what the product should cost)
Typical price
Last price paid
Upper-bound price (reservation price, or what most consumers would pay)
Lower-bound price (lower threshold price or the least consumers would pay)
Competitor prices
Expected future price
Usual discounted price

Table 2.2: Consumer reference prices. Source: R. S. Winer (1988) Behavioural perspectives on pricing: Buyers' subjective perceptions of price revisited in Kotler (2019:516)

Schmitt (2003) writes about creating a customer experience where, instead of marketing the core benefits of a product or service, a broader experience is pitched at the customers. This encourage a spontaneous or emotion-driven purchase, which is based on a desired experience. Based on this approach, Armstrong *et al.* (2014) argue that a brand's identity also becomes more than a name and a logo to something that is associated with the experience. The current economy is also being shifted towards an experience economy. In agreement, Jahera (2013) claims that having such high-quality courses will result in a group of alumni that can act as brand ambassadors that will attract referrals to the EE provider while becoming subscribers to other programmes offered by the EE provider.

Marketing extensively contributes to organisational strategy by clearly communicating the company's marketing capabilities (Weerawardena, 2011). Kotler (2019) claims that identifying a competitive strategy is essential for marketing products or services. Keller and Kotler (2022) categorise each offering as a market leader, market challenger, market follower, or market niche. Porter (1985) defines market followers as those who imitate rather than innovate, offering similar products or improved versions without incurring initial development costs. However, while these theories provide useful frameworks, focusing solely on positioning may neglect the need for sustained innovation and adaptability amid rapid market changes. Classifying a company as a "*market follower*" suggests an advantage in imitation, but it may overlook drawbacks in brand perception and long-term growth limitations. This view is especially relevant in volatile sectors with shifting customer preferences, indicating that Porter's (1985) approach, though cost-effective short term, may not apply universally across diverse industries.

Kotler (2019) argues that market followers possess strategies for retaining and attracting customers. Evaluating this perspective, Jahera (2013) notes that technological advancements have intensified competition for EE providers, particularly from business schools and training institutions in different regions. Masie (2002) highlights that distance education enables these providers to penetrate the EE training market, helping universities establish a solid reputation in a competitive landscape. Jahera (2013) emphasises the importance of identifying a flagship course, which can enhance recognition in media and attract customers from diverse segments, ultimately boosting sales and profitability.

To counter price-based competition in a mature industry, Parrish *et al.* (2006) recommend a niche marketing strategy. According to Kotler (2019), a market niche offers a pathway to eventually become a market leader without directly competing with established leaders. Armstrong *et al*. (2014) describe a niche strategy as one that allows organisations to focus on overlooked segments. Even large organisations may adopt niche strategies to maximise profits by offering premium prices or low-cost models tailored to regions. Parrish *et al*. (2006) argue that understanding target customers' needs is important to succeed in niche marketing. Kotler (2019) notes that ROI from niche markets can reach 27%, compared to just 11% in larger markets. Keller and Kotler (2022) further explain that niche organisations succeed by focusing on specific client needs, while market leaders may neglect these segments, a strategy relevant to training providers offering specialised EE courses tailored to particular demographics or industries.

In recruiting delegates for EE courses, Margulies and Gregg (2013) argue that providers typically employ a mixed-method approach, using mass media channels such as newspapers and brochures to market public enrolment programmes. Morrison and Mezentseff (1997) observe that EE providers often treat students as customers throughout this process. Custom courses are tailored to corporate clients' unique training needs, while strategies to attract Generation Z may require adaptation, as Francis and Hoefel (2018) emphasise the importance of authentic, digital engagement over traditional methods. Both public and custom courses are delivered by academics and practitioners, sometimes featuring notable contributors.

Jahera (2013) warns against the risk of becoming a "*diploma mill",* suggesting that a strong institutional reputation can be maintained through transparent assessment strategies and quality assurance, as recommended by Crotty and Soule (1997). Hura (2003) identifies lack of institutional reputation as a major barrier to entering the training market. Ryan (2013) highlights that when selecting an external EE provider, factors such as prestige, the validity of knowledge, alternative business methods, and varied management perspectives play significant roles compared to in-house training. Allan (2007) argues that this alignment can help employers integrate training with core business goals. However, employing external EE services incurs higher costs than developing similar in-house programmes.

The marketing strategies employed by EE providers play an important role in their success and credibility. Margulies and Gregg (2013) emphasise the effectiveness of a mixed-method approach, utilising mass media for public enrolment while tailoring custom courses to meet corporate needs. The necessity to engage with Generation Z through authentic digital channels (Francis and Hoefel, 2018) highlights the evolving landscape of marketing within EE. As corporates weigh the benefits of external providers against the costs of in-house training (Ryan, 2013), effective marketing strategies become essential for attracting and retaining delegates while ensuring alignment with organisational goals. This focus on strategic marketing is important for navigating the competitive EE sector. The next section will discuss Corporate Partnerships and post-course evaluations, further exploring their impact on marketing and recruitment strategies.

2.2.8 Corporate Partnerships and post-course evaluations

Pre-1980s corporates used to employ off-the-shelf psychological tests which helped them decide on the training needs of staff (Saari *et al*, 1988). Farris *et al.*(2003) who conducted an industry-wide research project involving 80 corporate executives, looked at the main factors that influenced the executives who enrolled on EE courses. The main findings were a desire for more EE program experiences; the criticality of host institutions and instructor's reputation in attracting executives; and a willingness to trade off some learning potential for convenience with online alternatives. Thomas *et al.*(2013) also observe that EE courses must be designed with the corporate customers in mind, instead of having you design it, they will buy it (off-the-shelf) approach. Corporate clients are no longer shoppers or buyers of existing EE courses but act as inspectors, design partners and general contractors of EE courses. They focus on relevancy and returns for their investments from the EE courses they helped create and requested their staff to participate, claim Shepherd and Huhmann (2003).

However, with the shift to action learning, less emphasis is placed on the assessment of corporate staff who undertake EE courses. Quoting a study which used a sample of 1,000 corporate executives, Saari *et al.* (1988) reveal that 42% of companies that sponsor their managers to do mini-MBAs never conducted any assessments after completing the course to evaluate skill acquisition and return on investment (ROI). Referring to this study, Saari *et al.* (1988) further point out that assessment should not be confused with the post-programme evaluation form required by 92% of companies, which usually consists of either filling in a simple form or a short discussion. Cameron (2001), in their work on monitoring standards for professional education, highlights that regular and rigorous assessment processes are necessary for ensuring the quality and effectiveness of professional development programmes (including EE). Cameron (2001) argues that merely gathering superficial feedback fails to address deeper educational impacts, a critique aligning with Saari *et al.*'s (1988) findings on the limitations of post-programme evaluations. Cameron (2001) advocates for more robust monitoring practices to measure learning outcomes and long-term professional growth, further emphasising that without structured assessment, organisations may overlook important factors in employee development. This can also lead to a lack of insight into the broader ROI of such programmes.

Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) also claim that the use of feedback forms either at the point of concluding the EE session or at a later stage may not always reflect on the session is valuable and effective in the application. This is because the delegate will provide positive feedback if he has enjoyed the session, regardless of the subject being discussed, state Donovan *et al.* (2007). Furthermore, due to the complex nature of the subjects discussed under EE, an immediate increase in the delegate's performance at work may not be evident as problems at work which are based around the area of the EE course may not arise immediately. However, as the majority of EE courses are based around strategy and change, one way of evaluating a course's impact on a delegate would be by evaluating the delegate's level of involvement with the company's strategic goals. On the contrary, Gee (2017) suggests that only a minimal number of organisations would conduct such post-course evaluations.

Companies that wish to form a partnership with EE providers do so, not because of costs, profits, or any other tangible benefits, but other intangible benefits including prestige, reputation, status, and recognition of the EE provider's brand. This viewpoint was argued by Todeva and Knoke (2005). Morrison and Mezentseff (1997) suggest that key success factors for companies to face the future are linked to their aptitude to understand, generate knowledge, and cultivate new opportunities. Ryan (2013) points out that by forming a partnership with EE providers, the type of training can be transformed from responding to change to training based on anticipated changes.

Evaluating the value of EE training received will depend on the corporate sponsor as different corporations will evaluate the value proposition of EE received by its staff, argues Ryan (2013). In general, the reflection will be linked to the corporate objectives and strategic requirements of a company. Other factors including the company's level of commitment to EE, the provider's resource allocation and the course's learning outcomes (and how such outcomes were achieved) will also have a bearing in terms of a company's evaluation of an EE programme or provider. Todeva and Knoke (2005) state that competency assessments of the delegates against the objectives of the programme can be used as a way of assessing the value of EE training to the company. Other non-quantifiable indicators would include improvement in staff morale, improvements in working as part of a team, improved confidence levels and cross-departmental cooperation. Furthermore, Crotty and Soule (1997) argue there can be contributions made using improvements to the corporate knowledge base and the amount of innovative/novel ideas that have emerged either during or after the EE course.

Winsor *et al.* (2013), quoting research carried out using 240 companies point out that the highest-performing organisations usually allocate a significant amount from their budgets to training their leaders. They focus on developing management skills, and using external career coaches as well as conducting training programmes. Winsor *et al.* (2013) state that in the USA, the annual average cost of training a high-level employee within a large-scale organisation is approximately US$8,000, which is mostly spent on leadership development and management training. Based on this alone, Ryan (2013) argues that the amount of money allocated for EE within the corporate sector is substantial, although it can be economical in terms of time investment and costs of courses that require long-term commitment.

Most major corporations have ongoing partnerships with higher education institutes that provide executive education, and as a percentage, the number is over 50 (Ryan, 2013). The objective is to utilise these existing partnerships to provide EE to the said corporation's management staff. One of the reasons for such partnerships is to ensure that skill shortages are managed effectively from within the existing workforce (Crotty and Soule, 1997).

Ryan (2013:57) highlights six benefits to corporations in terms of forming partnerships with EE providers or universities in general:

- To partner with an education organisation to obtain a combination of theory and practice drawing on up-to-date education and curriculum.
- To enable the organisation to have a point of difference from other organisations and competitors.
- To bring people with leadership potential from the organisation's offices around the world together to discuss issues in an open forum and achieve a university qualification at the same time.
- To deliver a leadership program and develop future leaders from within.
- To be consistent with national trends to professionalize the industry and to recognise the status of people and the study they undertake.
- To facilitate an organisation restructure and provide an accredited process for managers to develop their skills.

The American Society for Training Development (ASTD) that evaluated training budgets allocated by major corporations around the globe (that included 400 companies across 47 countries and over 500 companies in the USA) has presented three main findings:

- USA-based corporations spend mostly on training when the measurement used is spent per employee
- When the measure is changed from spend per employee to a percentage of overall payroll, Europe-based organisations were the biggest spenders
- Asia-based organisations spent the least amount on training amongst the companies researched, based on both per employee and as a percentage of payroll.

As some EE participants are sponsored by their employers, this research allows EE providers to allocate their marketing budgets according to the likely return on marketing spend in regions where conversion from prospect to delegate can be higher. Winsor *et al.* (2013) argue that if a US or European EE provider is attempting to penetrate the Asian market in terms of offering EE or management development courses, they can expect to face either economic or cultural corporate resistance. This can happen especially if the training methodologies are different to the methods used across regions in Asia.

2.2.9 Financialisation of Education

Epstein (2005) defines financialisation as a factor that reshapes economic life in industrialised societies by extending the reach of financial markets, logics, and actors into new and varied domains. Charlie *et al.* (2016) claim that evaluating the influence of financialisation is a multi-faceted process. At a primary level, financialisation can be defined as the growing use of monetary transactions to assign capital. When actors experiencing financialisation assume a different role in financial transactions, which includes that of (i) an investor, (ii) a borrower, or (iii) an investment recipient, each stakeholder can assume or function in more than one of these roles. In terms of education, private or public colleges and universities make their revenue by using a combination of sources which includes government grants, teaching, charitable donations, capital gains, as well as other commercial activities.

Jena and Reilly (2013) highlight the importance of visa policies in shaping international student demand from developing countries, suggesting that financialisation influences not only the costs associated with studying abroad but also the broader accessibility of education. King and Sondhi (2017) claim that global higher education has been commodified, where, due to pre-existing global processes, higher education is offered for sale within a global market context. While both studies point to the globalisation and marketisation of higher education, they do not fully address the complex socio-economic barriers that students from developing countries face in accessing international education. For example, visa policies and financialisation are critical, but other factors such as limited access to information on scholarship opportunities or cultural adjustment challenges may also significantly impact a student's ability to study abroad. This gap indicates a need for a more detailed understanding of accessibility, one that examines how visa policies, financial barriers, and socio-cultural factors collectively shape student mobility.

Mulcahy (2011) claims that a person who has received liberal education is viewed as a being employment-ready, and is widely regarded as a person who displays characteristics of an educated person who is ready for further education. In short, it is viewed as a system that enables the creation of a free (to think) individual with a broad spectrum of transferrable skills. Jakovljevic *et al.* (2008:71) argue that personal needs expected from liberal education are becoming more obscured by financialisation and its material demands where one's financial future plays a more prominent role over "*the life of the mind*". Adorno (2005) highlights the concept of fungibility, or the comparability of individuals, suggesting that people's entire existence is often reduced to a single trait that serves the functional demands of a particular system.

Jakovljevic *et al.* (2008) suggests that any person who is skilled in such an aspect is principally comparable to another person in possession of the aspect. Hence the persona is "*not in themselves, but for others*"(Jakovljevic *et al.*, 2008:72). In simple terms, Jakovljevic *et al.* (2008) suggests that within an organisation, there are a set amount of tasks or jobs that need to be done and a pay scale to do it, and if a worker is not willing to do the assigned tasks, then someone else will be able to take on the role. Hence, instead of free-thinking individuals, a mechanised approach may be taken by organisations in order to fulfil job tasks based on a fixed pay scale and a person's ability and willingness to carry out a set of pre-defined tasks within certain types of jobs. As pointed out by Mulcahy (2011), EE will enable the creation of free-thinking individuals by means of enabling creative discussion and learning from each other. But the relatively high price point of EE courses may be viewed as a deterrent for some aspiring individuals who has the capability but not the financial means to participate in EE and acquire relevant skills to perform a higher level job.

Dahlquist and Hasseltoft (2020) discuss the relationship between economic momentum and currency returns, which is relevant within the financialisation of education, focusing on EE. As educational institutions increasingly function within market-driven frameworks, such institutions must adapt to economic fluctuations that have an impact on funding sources and student demographics. This shift aligns with Epstein's (2005) definition of financialisation as a factor that impacts economic factors, including higher education. King and Sondhi (2017) discuss the commodification of education and demonstrate this trend, with EE programmes marketed as valuable investments for individuals seeking career advancement. Furthermore, Jena and Reilly (2013) point out that economic conditions and visa policies shape international student demand from developing countries, suggesting that financialisation not only impacts revenue streams for institutions but also affects accessibility for diverse learner populations. These characteristics raise questions about the accessibility and fairness of EE, particularly for under-represented groups who may encounter systemic barriers in accessing these financialised educational resources. Understanding the implications of financialisation is therefore necessary for addressing potential inequalities within EE. The next section discusses the various types of learners who engage with EE programmes and outlines their distinct characteristics.

2.3 Learner Characteristics

When a company staff member repeatedly performs the same task and makes similar decisions, their expertise and performance become automatic, even in creative or complex problem-solving contexts (Weiss, 1990). This lowers mental strain but introduces a challenge: once decision rules are set, mistakes are no longer self-correcting, which restricts the ability to "*think outside the box*" when new problems arise. Mahon and Cantlon (2011) suggest breaking this pattern by introducing intensive, conscious novelty to disrupt routines. Borge and Carroll (2014) argue that this promotes critical thinking and knowledge acquisition. Within an EE course, participants engage with facilitators and peers from diverse fields, discussing case studies and industry challenges. This environment enables them to step away from routine and explore unfamiliar scenarios in a supportive setting.

EE's intended audience is the top 5% of an organisation's management while EE's goal is to equip participants with the required skills to achieve organisational goals, some of which may be critical for an organisation's future as argued by Bolt (1993). Donovan *et al.* (2007) state that for EE to be successful in achieving such goals, the CEO of companies need to be fully involved with EE as the CEO is the person who champions the articulation and definition of their organisation's strategic direction. Carlsson-Wall and Richtnér (2021) explains that the CEO should be willing to take on board recommendations made by the management team after engaging in EE courses. While this perspective highlights the importance of CEO involvement in EE, it may overlook other key factors essential to the successful application of learned skills and strategies within an organisation. As an example, even with strong leadership support, the translation of EE insights into actionable results can be hampered by complexities within organisational structures or how such instructions are received by middle management, who are mostly responsible for implementing change. This brings into question whether EE's impact can be maximised solely through senior management's support. A more comprehensive approach, involving various management levels and fostering a supportive organisational culture, may be essential to align EE goals with broader operational realities.

Arguing along this line of thought, Bolt (1993:5) defines the intended goals for EE programmes as follows:

- Establishing corporate identity
- Improve Leadership
- Communicate and Implement Corporate Strategy
- Shape, Manage and Modify a Culture
- Develop Critical Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills
- Create Strategic Unity
- Identify and Address Key Business Issues
- Build Teamwork and Networks

With regards to creating a global executive, Gallagher and Schuler (2013) state that while no one model fits all, to become a global executive, one must possess a mixture of essential personal characteristics. These include having a global mindset (the ability to adapt to different cultures, form various types of relationships, and recover rapidly after experiencing difficult circumstances). Gallagher and Schuler (2013) suggest that such a mindset can be built through a systematic process of exposure, training, and experience. Bolt (1993) identifies short-term education (mainly EE) as one of the main elements of this equation, claiming that one-third of successful global executives attribute their developmental success to this aspect. Gallagher and Schuler (2013) further assert that learning becomes successful only if individuals can continuously apply the lessons learned to different scenarios, contexts, and circumstances: "*Global leaders learn from experiences that alter or refine their perceptions about the world*" (ibid:3). Bernon and Mena (2013) also claim that EE needs to equip executives with leadership and strategic decision-making techniques for them to succeed in conducting business within a globalised context, allowing them to make accurate and timely business decisions. In this context, Ellingrud *et al.* (2020) highlight the challenges employees faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, further suggesting that developing a global mindset must consider the unique difficulties these individuals encounter. This emphasises the importance of adapting executive education programmes to improve global leadership skills while providing necessary support for employees.

In reviewing the characteristics of EE learners and the strategic objectives of EE programmes, it is clear that while EE aims to equip high-level executives with the skills needed to drive organisational success, its impact is influenced by several complex factors. The literature indicates a strong focus on leadership, strategic alignment, and adaptability as core outcomes of EE. Furthermore, while a global mindset is positioned as central for learners, the path to developing such a mindset is neither uniform nor straightforward. Gallagher and Schuler (2013) highlight the role of systematic exposure and training, yet this does not fully account for the unique challenges learners may face, such as those discussed by Ellingrud *et al.* (2020) linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, while EE offers valuable tools, a one-size-fits-all approach may limit its effectiveness. To maximise the potential of EE, programmes must incorporate flexible, context-sensitive strategies that accommodate diverse learner needs and address structural barriers within organisations. This approach could enable EE participants to translate acquired knowledge into meaningful, context-driven actions that align with the evolving demands of global business environments.

2.3.1 Learner Classifications

In terms of characterising the learners within EE, Lomer (2018) defines students as consumers, where international students are compared to consumers (exchange) who have a choice between products (where to study, which programme to study, which country to study). Findlay *et al.* (2017) suggest the UK's policies on international students or pulling power does not play a major role in a student selecting the UK as a study destination, while Alberts and Hazen (2013) state that it is mostly the host country's *push* factors that will make learners seek overseas education where they will consider the UK as one of their destinations of choice. Arguing further on this point, Lomer (2018) suggests that as consumers, student satisfaction is linked with the quality of education they receive. Furthermore, educational establishments tend to market to prospective students, attempt to manage their (students) expectations and compete for their business. Alden *et al.*(1999) explains that students as consumers tend to make economically rational choices, and may base their decisions on rankings which they may perceive as an indicator of superior (product) quality.

McClure, Wells, and Bowerman (1986:183) state that those at work and-study as part-time learners "*would be operating in an entirely different environment from full-time students—that is, the first priority is often job rather than school".* Thus, learners who follow management development courses while in full-time employment for a long period will display a different set of success factors in contrast to those who engage in management development study straight after their undergraduate degree, without a substantial amount of prior work experience. Holton (1996) claims that a specific learner's performance within a course of study is a function of learning outcomes, that will be shaped by motivation to study and the learner's ability. Alberts and Hazen (2013) claim that when considering this in terms of management education, a learner's performance within the course of study can be seen as an instantaneous learning outcome and hence, will be able to be foreseen by several precedent variables including the learner's previous performance in an academic course of study, their level of motivation, and their overall ability to learn.

Gallagher and Schuler (2013:5) discuss the *immersion experience,* arguing that getting international exposure in a "*major economic and financially growing city*" and/or a "*cultural or historic city*" as part of a group of multi-cultural learners, facilitated by a group of cross-functional, interdisciplinary academic team members will enable them to overcome preconceived notions and stereotypes about working internationally and across cultures. Gallagher and Schuler (2013:18) conclude by stating that the integrating immersion experience within EE will result in an executive forming *"a global mindset by challenging and altering executives' perceptions about international business*" which enables them to think critically about expanding their business overseas. This becomes a key success factor for companies considering cross-border expansion as only one in six global expansion bids becomes a success. Alden *et al.* (1999) argue that the best way to learn about a different culture will be through direct experience.

The relationship between a university and a student is similar to that of a consumer and supplier. They are entitled to consumer rights, including the right to complain and provide feedback, which reinforces Lomer (2018) and Marginson *et al.*'s (2010) argument that such learners are consumers. The Office for Students (OFS) has a similar view about students on their 2023-24 business plan. The plan defines students as "*Students receive the academic experience they were promised by their provider and their interests as consumers are protected before, during and after their studies*" (OFS, 2023A:4). In this statement, the OFS protects consumers of universities and other higher education institutions (HEI's) in the UK. This is based on what they were sold when they enrolled on a course of study, across all stages of the transaction including before, during and after the study experience. The report further claims that the students are protected by the UK's consumer protection laws, National Trading Standards (NTS) and Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). The OFS also clarifies the same definition in their response to the House of Lords Industry and Regulatory Committee inquiry by stating that "*Universities and colleges are subject to consumer law, and failing to comply with the law could result in enforcement action by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) or local authority trading standards services*" (OFS, 2023B:12).

Connelly and McMahon (2007) discuss the Chartered Teacher initiative in Scotland, which aims to enhance the professionalism of educators through accreditation. Connelly and McMahon (2007) argue that such recognition promote a culture of continuous professional development and supports teachers in reflecting on their practice. This approach is relevant to EE, as it highlights the importance of formalising professional standards and qualifications. By establishing clear benchmarks for excellence, similar approaches could be beneficial in ensuring that EE programmes maintain high quality delivery and relevance to industry needs.

In discussing the importance of gender representation in EE, Kelan and Jones (2010) highlight the specific challenges women face in MBA programmes. Kelan and Jones (2010) argue that despite efforts to promote inclusivity, gender bias persists in the classroom and networking opportunities. Mott (2022) emphasises that promoting gender equality in higher education is not only a matter of social justice but is also essential for using the full potential of diverse talent pools. By ensuring that women and other under-represented groups can access educational opportunities, institutions can promote innovation and improve overall academic performance. Rosa and Clavero (2022) argue that addressing gender disparities in global higher education and research is crucial for creating a balanced and inclusive environment that benefits all students and enhances the education sector.

The exploration of learner characteristics within EE appear complex, impacted by various influences on international students' experiences and decision-making processes. Lomer's (2018) interpretation of students as consumers highlights the significance of satisfaction tied to educational quality, yet this perspective must be expanded to consider how factors such as work experience and motivation can alter learning outcomes, as discussed by McClure *et al*. (1986) and Holton (1996). The transformative role of immersion experiences, as noted by Gallagher and Schuler (2013), demonstrates the value of direct engagement in promoting a global mindset among learners, which is crucial for success in international business contexts. Furthermore, the Office for Students (OFS) perspective supports the importance of recognising student rights, positioning them as stakeholders entitled to a comprehensive academic experience. This complex relationship of consumer rights, cultural experiences, and institutional responsibilities requires that EE providers develop adaptive strategies that address the diverse needs of learners, supporting their integration into a global educational setting. The next section examines the process of admitting prospective students to EE courses. This includes criteria for application, evaluation of qualifications, and the role of interviews in assessing suitability.

2.3.2 Learner Admission to an EE Course

In terms of admitting a learner to a specialist short course, EE providers need to apply a broader admissions criterion rather than only considering undergraduate degree grades, claims Fisher and Resnick (1990). Carver (1994) states that providers need to consider other factors including recommendation letters, work experience, the type of university the learner had attended previously, and grades obtained for specialist subjects within a degree course. The primary objective of using such a combination of criteria is to find a good mix of variables that can successfully determine or predict the success factor (completion rate) of those being admitted to such programmes. It will further enable the school to identify "*high-risk*" applicants who will need additional support including a preparatory course before fully enrolling on a high-level specialist course of study. Fisher and Resnick (1990) concludes by stating that the age of a learner does not have a significant impact on the outcome of course success.

There is a positive correlation between a learner's performance in an Executive MBA (EMBA) course and their work experience, in comparison to their undergraduate degree GPA or grade (Adams and Hancock, 2000). In support of this view, Dugan *et al.* (1996) suggest that often, there is a stronger correlation between their work experience and specific subject matter within a course. Gropper (2007) suggests that the number of years of work experience should not be used as a good indicator of learner performance in an EMBA, as the link is closely associated with the level of job the learner has held over time. Gropper (2013) suggests the learners who have held mid to upper-level managerial jobs performed better in an EMBA than learners who held either lower level jobs or those at the highest level of their careers. Hobbs and Gropper (2013) suggest that to be successful in an EMBA course, attributes including discipline, effective management of time and commitment will become more relevant than a learner's intellectual competence. Contrary to business schools preferring those with work experience to those with higher GPAs as people with work experience are seen as contributing and engaging well with the group. However, Cresswell (2006) points out that accrediting agencies will have a preference in incorporating degree grades or a way of demonstrating intellectual ability. This is in addition to having a minimum number of years in terms of managerial experience. This may be the same reason why EE applications prescribe a minimum level of education and work experience in order to be accepted on to an EE course. The next section discusses international student mobility and the effects of globalisation on learners. This exploration focuses on the trends in student mobility, examining how globalisation has facilitated greater access to educational opportunities across borders. Factors influencing this mobility include the search for higher quality education, cultural exchange, and the search for professional opportunities in diverse international environments.

2.3.3 Student Mobility

An emphasis on mobility is vital to gaining a good understanding of the varied reasons for undertaking higher education: spatial considerations have a major impact on the participants' decision-making and can be linked with their social class (Findlay *et al.*, 2017). Brooks and Waters (2011) claim that middle-class learners were prepared to relocate to a foreign country to enrol in a higher education programme of their choosing. In contrast, those from working-class backgrounds often engage in "*investing in the familiar*" opting for local universities where the student body mirrors their community (Waters, 2006). This approach mitigates the financial, social, and cultural risks associated with transitioning to a new educational environment.

The for-profit education sector has become an integral part of the education sector in England (Ball, 2015). Ball (2011) argues that both new labour and conservative governments have focussed on ways of enabling a legal and administrative framework that enables profit orientation using government policy changes. Woods *et al.* (2007) states that there is increasing evidence that for-profit enterprises have a significant impact on policy formulation itself. In addition, policy "*texts*" and ideas are fed into government by such corporations using various roles and avenues of influence. This is including but not limited to acting as "*advisors, evaluators, service deliverers, philanthropists, researchers, reviewers, brokers, contract writers, 'partners', committee members, consultants and auditors*" (Ball, 2015:2). Gunter and Forrester (2010) argue that the line between public and the for-profit private education sector is consistently becoming blurred. Promoters of for-profit education argue that such an approach leads to better service and improved outcomes. Ball (2012), quoting an example from Sweden argues that a method of reducing teaching costs (which accounts for approximately 85% of turnover within an academic establishment) was to introduce blended learning where some parts of traditional "*teacher-led*" parts of education have been replaced with technological tools. Brooks and Waters (2011) states that such profit-oriented, business-minded approaches can lead to ethical slippage where the school may prioritise high-performing students with high "*worth*" to the school and "*low value*" students may receive a differentiated level of focus. This raises critical concerns about the ethical implications of prioritising profit over fair educational access and outcomes. As the boundaries between public and for-profit education continue to blur, it is essential to scrutinise whether the intended benefits of for-profit models actually translate into improved educational experiences for all students, or if they eventually support existing inequalities within the education system.

Ball (2011) claims that when profit-oriented private providers get involved with mainstream public education, the interests of students and parents have lesser emphasis than cost-effectiveness and shareholder interest. Findlay *et al.* (2017) argue that immediate and sustained research is required to evaluate the monetary practices, values and interests of such education establishments and the occupations and obligations of the said establishments' personnel and leaders. Beech (2014), based on an analysis of the Times higher education guide, argues that top-ranking universities tend to consistently attract a higher number of international students compared to any other UK-based university or HEI (Higher education Institute). Gropper (2007) argues that international students have a deep-rooted imaginative perception of the UK's higher education sector, which is primarily linked with quality education, based on a few elite universities as benchmarks.

Discussing predominantly non-EU-based international students, Mellors-Bourne *et al.* (2013) suggest that a country-based approach is taken by the UK's policymakers who tend to generalise students' learning routines, occupation patterns, experiences and decisions based on a set of pre-conceived notions about their country of origin. Rizvi and Lingard (2010:194) mention that due to such attitudes towards international students from certain countries, most of the students from such countries are "'*trapped within a set of nation-centric assumptions*". There is a possibility that overseas applicants who apply for EE courses in the UK may be subject to the same assumptions based on their country of origin.

When it comes to international student mobility (ISM), the global south is considered the origin of students, while the global north can be regarded as destinations (King and Sondhi, 2017). The global south includes countries such as India, Pakistan, and China, while the global north includes the USA, UK, Germany, and France. Brooks and Waters (2011) argue that historically, the global north has been seen as the default location for theory and knowledge. ISM is viewed by students as a career-enhancing investment, as they perceive receiving such education as a means to gain a competitive advantage when they return home and enter the domestic labour market. Alternatively, overseas study can be regarded as the first step towards lucrative employment abroad or emigration. Cresswell (2006) also argues that travel-related adventure is generally not perceived as a natural activity by non-white travellers. However, the emerging middle class in some non-white countries increasingly engages in such activities, which were previously associated with Western travellers. In this context, Jena and Reilly (2013) highlight that the demand for UK student visas from developing countries is influenced by factors such as economic conditions and institutional reputation. Studying an EE course from a provider in the global north may be seen as a pathway to acquiring specialised skills and competitive advantages by applicants from global south countries. Furthermore, Holloway, O'Hara, and Pimlott-Wilson (2012) suggest that cultural capital plays a crucial role in shaping international student flows, particularly between Central Asia and the UK.

The UK government's policy since 2010 has focused on reducing net migration, identifying international students as a category of concern, as suggested by Lomer (2018). Although it is not explicitly stated in the policy, Bacchi (2009) argues that the student visa route (Tier 4) has been exploited by students from certain countries to access the UK's labour market or as a pathway to residency. Supporting this viewpoint, Philo *et al.*(2013) note that the attitude of the UK public has turned increasingly negative and dehumanising towards immigrants, including international students. Beech (2018:620) claims, "*the perception of coming to study and the welcome that they get in the UK has changed*", suggesting that Indian students' perception of the UK as a study destination has significantly shifted, which in turn influences their overall experience. Adding to this discussion, Owusu-Kwarteng (2021) explores the experiences of West African students in the UK, showing how cultural changes and financial pressures contribute to their challenges. The notion of "*wahala*" (troubles or problems) summarises their struggles, highlighting the unique pressures faced by these students during a changing socio-political landscape. Owusu-Kwarteng's (2021) analysis underlines the need for UK higher education institutions to adopt more inclusive practices that address the specific challenges faced by international students, promoting a more supportive environment for their academic and social integration.

Making references to the reduction of students from India since the changes in student visa characteristics, King and Sondhi (2017) claim there is a reduction in interest to study in the UK by Indian students, labelling the UK as a less desirable study "*destination*". Using *destination* in student mobility indicates that students who travel to another geographic location, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary. This may associate with tourism or movement. In terms of policy or literature on the UK's contemporary international student migration, there is no evidence to suggest that students are classified based on religion, social background, wealth, prior education, disability, gender, or age. However, there may be a tendency to assimilate such learners into categories based on nationality or region, such as "*East Asian*" students (Lomer, 2018:316). In terms of EE, those who wish to follow a short course while exploring the UK as a tourist destination may be persuaded to enrol on an EE course as it would enable them to study and tour the country on a short-term visitor visa. Anand (2021) adds that India's L&D (learning and development) sector is also adapting rapidly, with programmes designed to meet the knowledge economy's demands, potentially reducing the appeal of overseas study by offering attractive domestic options. This shift in learning and development may contribute to Indian students' changing preferences regarding international education destinations.

However, based on the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA-UK) data that is published on students who were studying in the UK, Lomer (2018) notes that the UK's student market is dominated by China and India. But HESA data for 2021-22 notes a shift in the UK student market. In the 2021/22 academic year, students from India overtook China, predominantly at the postgraduate level. There were over 101,000 Indian students, compared to approximately 88,000 from China. Further, the number of Nigerian students also exceeded those from the EU. This trend appears to suggest an increase in international enrolments from countries outside of Europe. Lomer (2018) further suggests that in terms of India, one of the main *pull* factors was the colonial ties and the perception that UK education is superior. Supporting this argument, Börjesson (2017) commented that most of the countries including India, Pakistan, Hong Kong and Canada have historic ties or are ex-imperial territories. This may suggest that the level of attraction from students that arrive from such countries may not be entirely attracted to marketing or pull factors. King and Sondhi (2017) state that students belonging to the elite or upper-middle class tend to enrol at prestigious Western universities to differentiate themselves from the expanding middle-class students who also travel overseas for higher education. However, Lomer (2018) also suggests in terms of Chinese students, the *pull* factor of highest consideration was the degree itself. These push and pull factors that appear to be evident across overseas student mobility may have common characteristics with EE recruitment as well.

Chakravarthy (2022) emphasises the pandemic's impact on re-evaluating EE programmes, encouraging institutions to adopt flexible and adaptable methods to meet changing demands. Beech (2018) highlights that influences from family and friends often play a role in selecting overseas study options. Cresswell (2006) adds that obtaining an overseas qualification is increasingly seen as essential for job market entry within certain societal sectors. Focusing on India and China, Beech (2018:617) classifies these countries as agent-led, where students frequently apply through agents. Accordingly, UK universities relying on these agents expect a steady influx of student applications. Collins (2012) notes that agents hold significant influence over students' destination choices based on commission, leading to what is termed incentivised recruitment. In contrast, King and Sondhi (2017) assert that countries like Nigeria often do not utilise agents for university admissions. Beech (2018:618) also points out that in the USA, using agents for university admission is illegal due to ethical concerns regarding commissions, which constitute incentivised recruitment. Similarly, EE providers have employed recruitment agents around the world, exhibiting characteristics discussed by Beech (2018) in recruiting candidates for EE courses.

While the data suggests notable trends in student mobility, it is essential to consider the effects of these shifts on the entire sector. The dominance of Indian and Chinese students could lead to a homogenisation of the student experience, where diverse cultural perspectives are sidelined in favour of a more uniform educational model that prioritises particular nationalities. Further, the reliance on historical ties as a pull factor may lead to sustainability of these trends. If the colonial narrative of superiority continues to shape perceptions of UK education, it may weaken efforts to promote more inclusive and just educational environments. As the dynamics of international student recruitment develop, it is important to tackle these complexities to ensure that educational providers adapt to and incorporate a truly diverse student base. The following section explores the impact of globalisation on student mobility.

2.3.4 Impact of Globalisation on Student Mobility

Nordtveit (2010:321) defines globalisation (a pro-market agenda) in education as a "*unified capitalist educational discourse*" and suggests that a capitalist–development approach is mainly recognised in many local and traditional societies around the world. Beck (2010) claims that the downsides of the approach towards a system which is based around a unified capitalist market were revealed by academics who appraised the concepts of justice and power relationships in defining Western societies as the only universalisable civilisation. Philips and Ochs (2004) claim that policies that are linked to education consistently interact with policies from other areas and state that globalisation is currently considered within an economic policy dimension. Thus, it is viewed as a method to gain a competitive advantage within the global educational arena, which results in ensuring the economic stability of the country. In this scenario, education is viewed as a producer of high-quality human capital. This approach has led to the development of a reliable set of comparative methods of measuring specific academic outcomes. This enables a country to evaluate its position in comparison to other countries that are offering similar educational products. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) suggest the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's

(OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) can be viewed as an influential tool in evaluating this position. The same assumptions may be true for EE providers.

Patterson (1998) argues that flexible accumulation can be used to characterise the radical shift in economic activity that has taken place over the last few decades where national boundaries have been blurred in terms of production and human resources availability. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) suggests this has resulted in employee insecurity, quality being unpredictable and finally, an increased pace at which people do things. Edwards (1994) argues that due to the rapid evolution of culture and economy, the nature of knowledge itself can change. Lowe (2020) argues that employees may perceive job insecurity in terms of their current job and how vulnerable they are in their present job. This may be linked with deindustrialisation, deunionisation, and financialisation. However, these factors are not directly related to labour market insecurity, which may be positively linked with national-level labour market insecurity, argues Lowe (2020). Such characteristics may be evident in terms of EE course participants as well.

Kuraev (2016:183) who compared the soviet education model to Western education claims that the traditional approach to university education can be linked to the "*European tradition of an Academic Corporation delivering education and producing research*" and the term "*university"* implies something distinctive and innovative. Griffin, MacEinri and Brock (2014) write that the dominant paradigm of Western education has transformed into unconcealed racial policies and discriminatory practices, or insufficient provision or indifference within national education systems with unspoken and hidden messages transmitted through mainstream curricula. However, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue that the values which are portrayed by national systems of education are no longer dictated by a particular country's educational policy but are influenced by a complex array of attributes that stem from the global and transnational educational processes and networked spaces. When it comes to EE courses and EE providers, a similar approach is evident where such providers are minimally influenced by national educational policy.

Lebaking and Mina-Batho (2001) have pointed out that although westernisation is viewed as progress by the Western world, there are negative consequences. This was claimed quoting an example of a family in Nigeria and how westernisation of education has impacted on social aspects of the country. Rotimi (2005) unpacks this by claiming that family systems have shifted from an extended, supportive family structure to a nuclear family. This has resulted in family members receiving less support from their extended families, which results in the loss of economic and social safety nets. Furthermore, as both spouses within a family become career-focused, domestic functions tend to be distributed equally between the spouses. Akinmoladun (2002) identifies that as both parents work away from home, there is a tendency for the children to socialise with the wrong type of friends and exhibit deviant behaviour. Rotimi (2005) concludes by stating that those who incorporate Western values into such societies should try to integrate the positive elements of Western education into traditional families in their journey to becoming a modern family. As suggested by the World Bank, the levels of male and female participation in Western education are often comparable, with female participation in higher education often topping that of males. The arguments presented can be applicable to various forms of post-secondary education, including EE.

Göçek (1993) taking an example from the Ottoman social transformation, argues that Western education causes ethnic segmentation where those who were educated in the West tend to have different cultural interpretations and political viewpoints. This has resulted in the introduction of various political movements. Arguing along a similar theme, Wang (2007), quoting an example from China pointed out that there is a social value transformation within college-educated young adults from China due to the influence of Western education. Young (2003) highlights that these include individualism, materialism and moral crisis amongst those who undertake Western education. Chen (2004) argues that the result may include a collective inferiority complex and disruption of cultural identity. Wang (2007) concludes by stating that the education system should include the host country's history, conventional values and a meaningful perspective of the Western approach to education. Wang's (2007) conclusion and recommendations are similar to Rotimi's (2005) recommendations about the impact of Western education on Nigerian families. Although EE courses are usually short-term, individuals from the countries discussed by Wang (2005), Rotimi (2005) and Göçek (1993) may still be experiencing a collective inferiority complex when enrolling on EE courses that are provided by western EE providers. However, UNESCO (2024) notes the current trend in Western education is toward inclusivity, diversity and cross-cultural competency, with an effort to reduce cross-cultural tensions. This may mitigate the issues highlighted by Chen (2004) and Rotimi (2005).

These arguments raise questions about the complex relationship between Western education and local cultural identities. While the integration of Western values into traditional systems may offer certain advantages, it often comes at the cost of eroding local cultural practices. The emergence of a collective inferiority complex among students from developing countries indicates a broader issue of identity and belonging, especially when engaging with educational models that may not fully agree with their local cultures. While initiatives designed to promote inclusivity and diversity within Western education systems appear to be viable, they must be implemented with a genuine commitment to understanding and valuing the unique historical and cultural backgrounds of all students. Without this, the risks of further alienation and social fragmentation will continue, keeping the need for a more holistic approach to education that respects and incorporates diverse perspectives. The following section discusses learner motivating factors, considering both online and campus based learners.

2.3.5 Learner Motivating Factors

Different individuals may be motivated by different factors or reasons. There may be several interpretations to motivation and one of the well-known classifications was developed by Abraham Maslow and it is called Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow and Lewis, 1987).

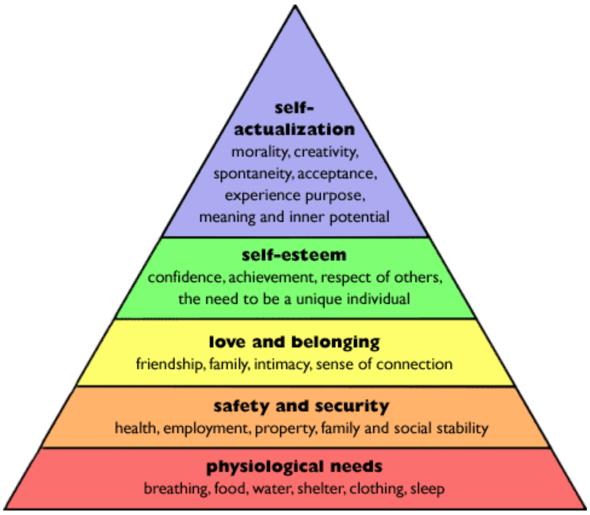


Figure 2.4: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (source: Maslow and Lewis, 1987)

Maslow (1943) argues that human needs can be broadly categorised into five levels and can be further classified into deficiency needs and growth needs (Figure 2.4). Maslow (1943) further suggests the desire to fulfil such needs becomes more intense with time if the needs are not fulfilled. Maslow (1943) claims that, typically, an individual needs to satisfy lower-level needs before progressing to higher-level growth needs within the hierarchy, further arguing that unlike lower-level (hygiene) needs, growth needs do not usually arise due to lack of something but will be evident as an individual's desire to develop and grow within society. However, Maslow (1943) also states that an individual's progress within the hierarchy is not always unidirectional. One may fluctuate between adjacent levels within the hierarchy due to life events including personal or professional. Building on the views of Maslow (1943), Kenrick *et al.* (2010) claim that as individuals are unique, they may be motivated by different factors and may select different pathways in terms of progressing towards self-actualisation within the hierarchy of needs. EE, which is subscribed by those holding a higher level job can be viewed as a need that belongs within higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy, either within love and belonging, self-esteem or self-actualisation.

In applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs to adult learning, Maslow and Lewis (1987) suggest that students need to feel valued and respected within the classroom environment. Furthermore, before engaging in meaningful discussions, one should ensure that the student's basic needs such as food, warmth and a well-organised class environment are provided. This is also reflected in Herzberg's two-factor theory (Figure 2.5) where Herzberg (2017) claims that work-related factors such as salary only act as a hygiene factor (extrinsic) that would only prevent dissatisfaction. On the other hand, Herzberg (2017) claims that other intrinsic factors would act as motivating factors for employees. These include having meaningful work, recognition and responsibility at work.

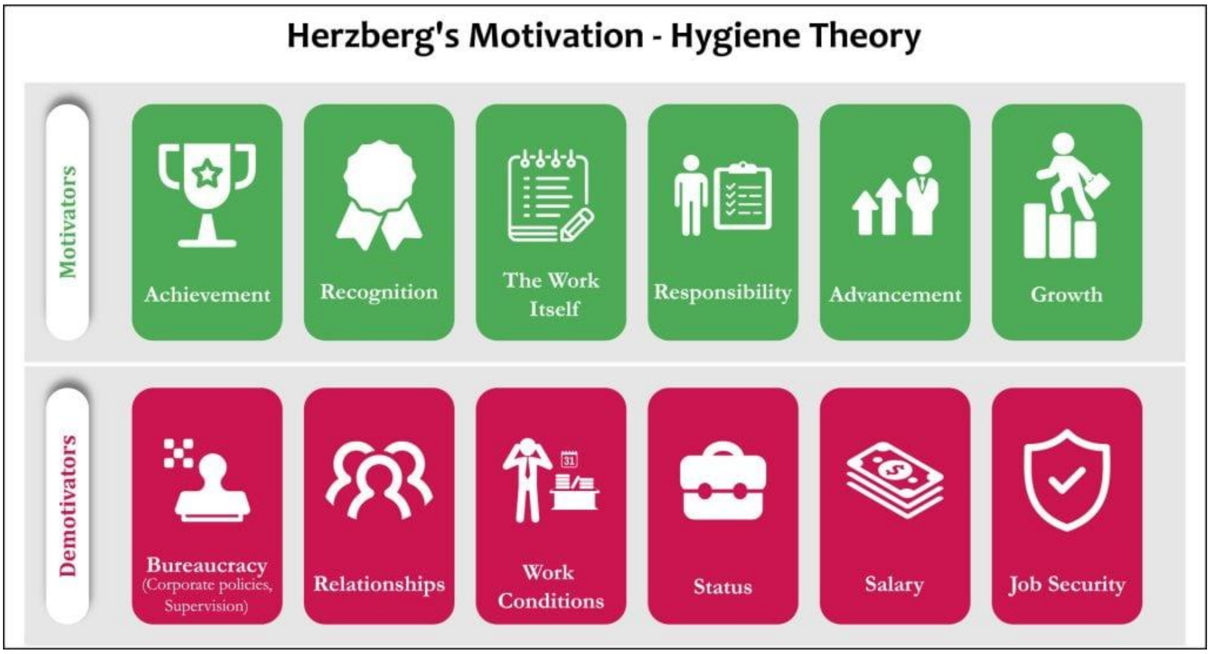


Figure2.5: Herzberg's two-factor theory (source: Simply Psychology, 2023)

Intrinsic motivators:

Ryan and Deci (2000) explain these aspects further by claiming that for management level employees, intrinsic motivators will include engaging in activities that provide inherent satisfaction and personal reward. Using examples, Ryan and Deci (2000) explain intrinsic motivators as:

1. Passion about work itself – will happen when the individual is highly passionate about the field/sector they work in. Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that such passion can lead to sustained engagement, job satisfaction and inherent enjoyment. Amabile (1993) argues that innovation and creativity are also important intrinsic motivators for management level staff.

2. Sense of achievement – includes solving complex problems or attaining challenging work targets will lead to a sense of personal accomplishment. When it comes to management level employees, Ryan and Deci (2000) point out that they will be

motivated by witnessing the positive outcomes from their decisions and strategies.

3. Autonomy and control – Hackman and Oldham (1976) suggest that autonomy plays a key role in terms of job satisfaction amongst senior level employees. Ryan and Deci (2000) state that senior managers can be motivated by their authority to make decisions without being supervised. This includes having control over their work environment (business unit) and independent decision making. This becomes an intrinsic motivating factor as the environment will result in fulfilling self-determination and competence.

Extrinsic motivators:

Herzberg (1968) discusses extrinsic motivators as work related activities that a worker may perform to either receive external rewards or avoid punishment (or negative outcomes. In terms of management level employees (that EE providers target), extrinsic motivators will include:

1. Financial rewards – including salary increases, bonuses and company stock options. Herzberg (1968) argues that such remuneration is important for financial sustenance and recognition of employee contributions. However, such remuneration will not lead to long term satisfaction. Herzberg (1968) elaborates this by claiming that such financial remuneration is important for job security and addressing basic needs.

2. Title and recognition – For management level employees, this can include recognition by peers and senior management. Further, Herzberg (1968) suggests factors such as awards, public recognition and enhancing their professional reputation can act as extrinsic motivators for management level staff. Further, these can be linked to social and esteem needs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. They further enhance the employee's social identity within the organisation. Employees will form part of their social identity by means of being members of groups, and for senior employees, recognition and awards will reinforce their status, enhance their belonging and self-esteem, argue Ashforth and Mael (1989).

3. Stability and job security – Job security including predictable retirement benefits, re-assurance of a sustainable financial future and job security can act as extrinsic motivators (Herzberg, 1968). Judge *et al.* (2011) recommend that financial incentives should be linked to performance goals. In contrast, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) argue that job insecurity can result in poor job satisfaction and stress. Meyer and Allen (1991) suggest that job security will enable affective commitment where staff will identify with corporate goals and values, leading to higher performance and motivation.

Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that intrinsic motivating factors lead to long term satisfaction which is based on personal growth and enjoyment. Judge *et al.*(2011) argue that although extrinsic motivators can bring short term motivation but without intrinsic motivating factors, long-term commitment from management level staff will not be possible using extrinsic motivators alone. This is important as managerial staff are expected to lead by example and demonstrate high levels of performance.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) suggest providing management-level employees with a blend of extrinsic and intrinsic motivators to obtain sustained commitment and performance. Ryan and Deci (2000) caution that the blend will vary based on individual employees and their priorities, as some employees will prefer work autonomy and problem-solving while others prioritise financial stability and peer recognition. Expanding on this, Amabile (1993) introduces the concept of "*motivational synergy*" which emphasises how intrinsic and extrinsic motivators can work together rather than at odds. Amabile (1993) argues that when extrinsic motivators, such as recognition or financial incentives, are aligned with employees' intrinsic interests, they can enhance intrinsic motivation rather than undermine it. This suggests that EE programmes could benefit from designing support mechanisms that recognise both personal growth and external incentives, which may optimise learner engagement and long-term impact. Amabile's (1993) view further strengthens the idea that effective EE programmes must consider individual motivation types to support sustained commitment.

Hence, it may be argued as being counterproductive to send any ad-hoc employee on EE training. If the employee's extrinsic (hygiene) factors are not addressed by the employer, EE training (which may be classified as a motivating factor) may become ineffective for those whose hygiene factors are not addressed (King-Hill, 2015). The course facilitators need to create a supportive learning environment and suggest that students who have a low level of self-esteem may not progress in the lesson as much as their counterparts until their self-esteem needs are addressed and resolved (McLeod, 2018). In terms of EE, course facilitators have a responsibility to ensure that every participant's hygiene requirements are fulfilled in order to successfully carry out EE training. This may also become a factor when selecting a venue and catering choices for EE training as such hygiene factors appear to play a contributing factor in terms of participants selecting an EE course.

In terms of different attributes, a potential EE delegate would consider when searching for a particular EE course, Petit (2013:5) has identified five main areas (in order of preference).

1. Programme Format, 2. Brand Value of Institution, 3. Programme Location, 4. Length of Programme and 5. Programme Price. The same research revealed that career service offerings were perceived as the least important factor at the initial searching stage for an EE course of study. Petit (2013) argues that the order of priorities of the above attributes changes when the delegate progresses to the actual course selection stage.

1. Programme Format

2. Brand Value of Institution

3. Programme Price

4. Programme Location

5. Length of Programme and

6. Cohort Format.

Petit (2013) argues that regardless of the application stage (search or selection), prospective delegates would prioritise on programme format and brand value of the EE provider over other key attributes such as price and location. Based on Keller's (1993) argument, it can be suggested that prospective applicants are willing to pay a premium price for an EE course, regardless of the level of corporate sponsorships, based on the brand value of the provider and programme format.

Thompson (2018a) defines a typical executive education delegate as someone who receives and gives orders, typically within a large multinational organisation; male, between mid-thirties and fifty years of age; doing a well-paid job. Lippert (2001:5) claims that most EE delegates are already highly educated or experienced, with broad conceptual skills and highly conversant with the technical skills required within their industry of choice and the company they work for. Those delegates are usually high performers within the organisation. With EE courses, some of the common objectives will be to boost their current skill set, assertiveness and strategic thinking whilst enhancing their analytical skills, communication and leadership potential. Frankl (1963) claims the underlying major fear that is common to every corporate executive is the fear of remaining meaningful and relevant regardless of the changes in their professional environment. Ryan (2013) suggests EE participants tend to seek more meaning for their work. In addition to developing their skills and knowledge, the participants will improve their prospects of future employability (both internal and external to their organisation), mainly in the case of declining job security and learn how to embrace innovation.

McCall and Hollenbeck (2002) write about developing a global leader where they point out that executives become highly successful in an international context if they possess a global mindset. A global mindset would incorporate factors such as the ability to:

- adapt to different cultures;
- accommodate multidimensional relationships; and
- recover from difficult situations while incorporating the ability to hold several, competing perspectives or conceptions within a global context.

Such a global mindset may be developed using a systematic process of exposure, training, and experience. Gosling and Mintzberg (2003) claim most global executives identify engaging in short-term educational experiences as an important aspect of their professional development.

Most EE participants are not CEOs or top-tier managers as the latter acquire training from top-tier business schools, as argued by Margulies and Gregg (2013). Most EE delegates are mid- to upper-level business executives who hope to build their professional careers by gaining an understanding of current best practices while building a network of executives with similar professional profiles who aim to gain a higher position within a company. Applying the arguments presented by Kotter (1996) to EE, Margulies and Gregg (2013) point out that participants in EE courses want value, however, they also want high-quality course resources that have traction. If the delegate's expectations are not met by the EE course provider, they will not return and this will result in the EE provider not being able to build a base of returning customers or a name within the industry, thereby restricting expansion.

When attempting to understand the motivations behind enrolling on an EE course, a study conducted by Farris *et al.* (2003:787) revealed that three main factors lead to executives getting enrolled on an EE course:

- to further functional specialisation;
- to enhance understanding of their company's strategic challenges; and
- to prepare for a new position or assignment

McCall and Hollenbeck (2002) suggest that EE providers consider factors including thematic and in-depth functionally oriented EE courses; customised EE courses which emphasise, investigate, and focus on organisation-based strategic challenges, opportunities and ideas that can be implemented; and EE courses which explicitly focus on and discuss matters that are of importance in career transitions when designing EE courses.

Farris *et al.* (2003) who conducted a research amongst senior executives who participated in EE courses found out that the executives placed equal importance on time (duration), money (cost spent on the course) and relevance of the course to their professional practice. The respondents also indicated that they need more courses that are relevant and of interest to them. Based on this finding, Farris *et al.* (2003) argue that individual EE providers are yet to offer a proper mix of courses that fully match the needs of corporate executives. The respondents also indicated that they want to enrol on courses that equip them with the required skills to deal with current business issues they are faced with.

Figure 2.6 illustrates the main influences of a participant enrolling on an EE course, based on the responses of corporate executives across multiple industries (Farris *et al.* 2003:787).

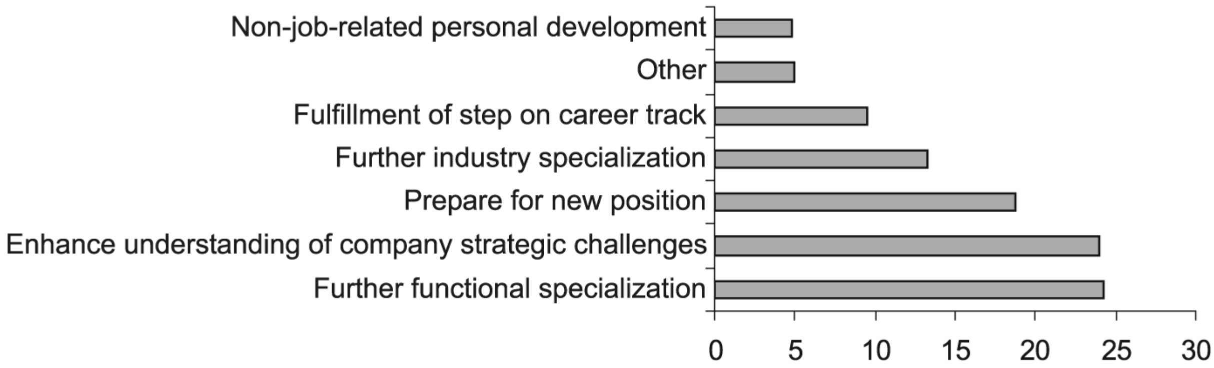


Figure 2.6: Reasons for attending EE courses. Source: Farris et al. (2003:787).

The same group responded to Farris *et al.* (2003) about the main contributing factors when deciding on an EE course.

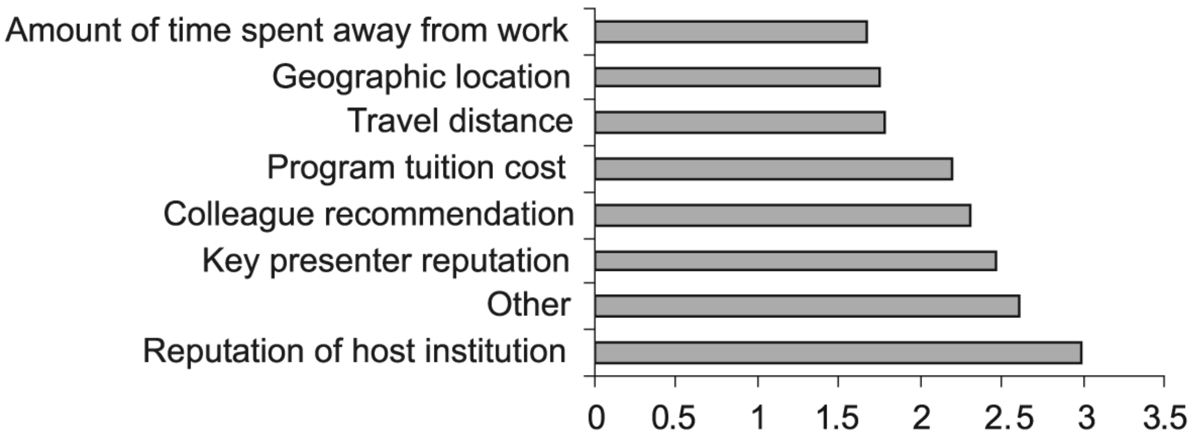


Figure 2.7: Contributing factors when selecting an EE course. Source: Farris et al. (2003:788).

It is noteworthy to mention that from the categories above (Figure 2.7), the least emphasis placed was on the amount of time spent away from work, reiterating that EE course participants do not perceive the time spent on the course as time lost in terms of being away from their regular jobs. In contrast, the cost of the course was given a considerable level of importance, thus, suggesting that EE providers need to be mindful when setting pricing points for their courses when marketed across regions.

Based on the above, Farris *et al.* (2003) discusses desired venues for EE courses: (Figure 2.8).

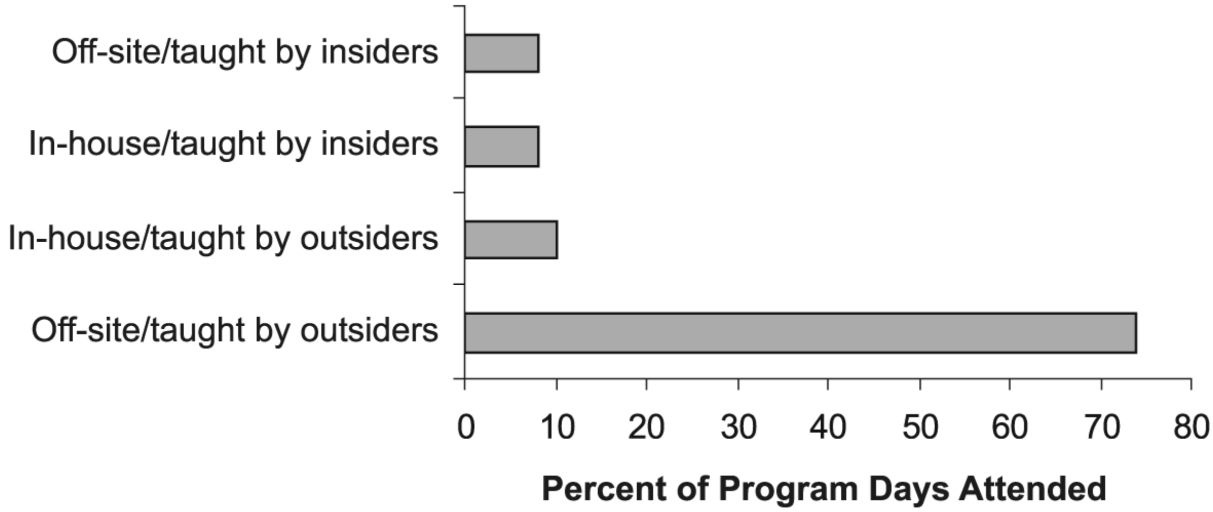


Figure 2.8: Preference of programme venue. Source: Farris et al. (2003:790)

Krapels *et al.* (1998) suggest that participants prefer to be taught by practitioners who are outside of their organisation regardless of whether the actual training takes place within their organisation's premises or outside. However, there may be a tendency for some delegates to prefer for the actual training to take place using the facilities available on-site at their organisation's premises. However, with the global threat of COVID-19 from 2020 onwards, there is a notable shift to online teaching and learning. This is evident across all types of education including EE. As a result, EE providers have shifted to either live online education or asynchronous self-learning with limited tutor assistance to economically sustain and respond to the changes in its environment (Farris *et al.*, 2003). This shift has implications for the labour market, as it reflects broader trends in education that align with changing demands in the workforce (Foley *et al.*, 2021).

Conger and Xin (2000) report on large-scale research amongst corporate executives at Philips offices around the world with a sample size of 120 managers, 400 supervisors and 30,000 staff members from around the world about who should be the trainers/instructors on EE courses. Popular choices were 'corporate trainers from the industry' and using a variety of instructors for a course, while the least popular choice was 'corporate trainers from within the organisation'. The survey also revealed that the type of staff who participated in EE courses were company executives and company managers or staff with specialised knowledge. Mintzberg (1992) observes that organisations have moved from a hierarchical to a lateral structure over the years which has resulted in a higher need for better coordination between various parts of the organisation. To capitalise on the organisation's strengths and respond promptly to environmental changes, Peters and Waterman (1982) suggests the entire executive team should take up training to improve coordination and a coordinated effort in changing strategy.

In terms of choice of courses for overseas study, Beech (2018) suggests that in the past, students predominantly travelled overseas to pursue an MBA or a general business degree. However, this trend has shifted towards highly specialised courses, even at the undergraduate level. A similar trend may be evident in EE course enrolments, where participants seek specialised skills or aim to gain a competitive advantage over their peers. Additionally, as Fredman (2023) notes, awareness of discrimination against women and various ethnic groups may motivate individuals to pursue these courses, seeking to better understand the complexities of equity and diversity in the workplace. Lyness and Grotto (2018) further highlight that addressing the gender gap in leadership can be a critical motivator for women in pursuing EE programmes, as they aim to develop the necessary skills to overcome systemic barriers. This need to address social justice issues can drive learners to acquire knowledge and skills that will empower them to create more inclusive environments within their organisations. The theoretical framework that underpins these learner characteristics and the characteristics of EE will be explored in the next sub-section, providing further context for the discussion.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework below (Figure 2.9) outlines how literature was evaluated and analysed based on two main areas that this research is based on.

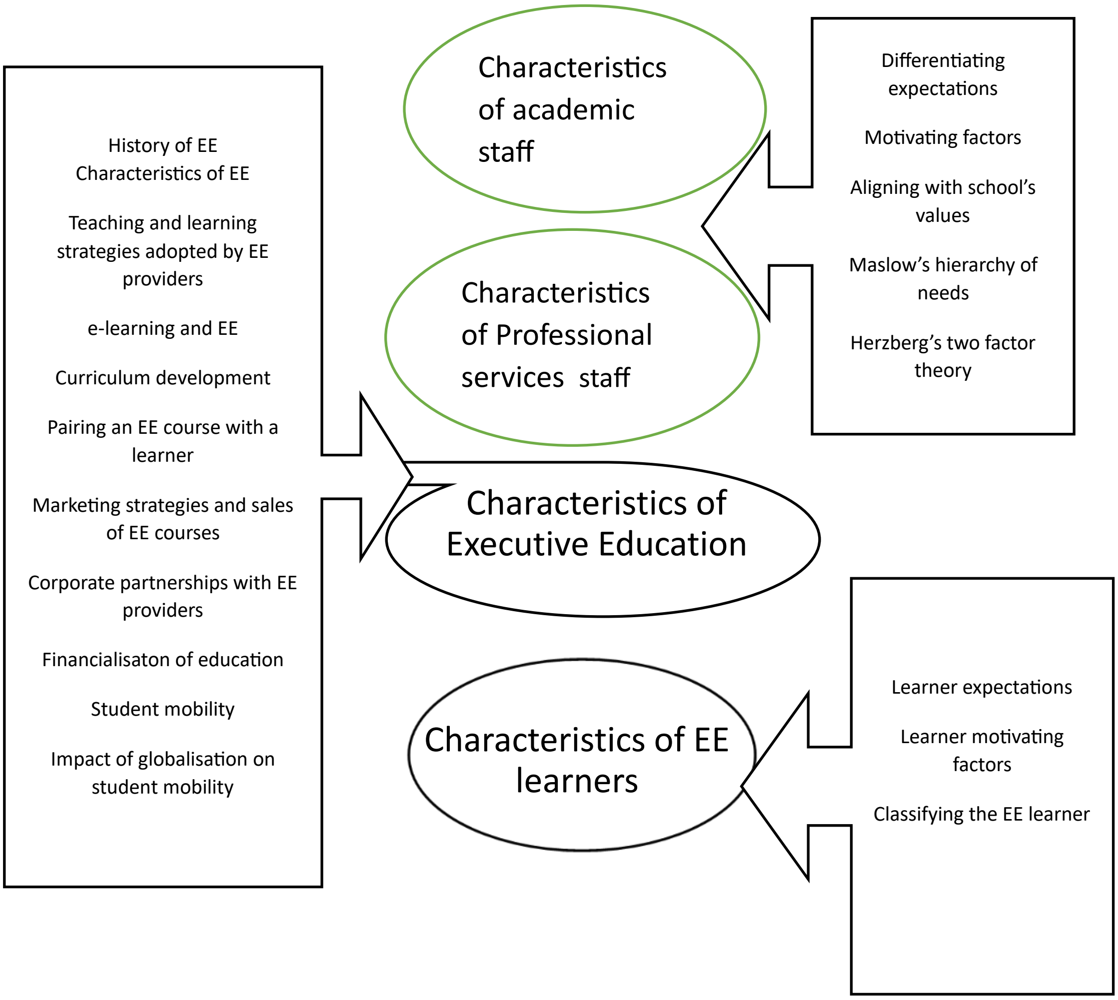


Figure 2.9: Theoretical framework

The chapter presented a theory-focused discussion around the characteristics of executive education and the characteristics (including motivational factors) of learners. It also evaluates the characteristics of academic and professional staff perspectives.

Based on the theoretical framework, these topics have been subdivided further into smaller areas of discussion and have been presented throughout the literature review chapter.

A summary of the four theoretical dimensions identified by the above mentioned theoretical framework is discussed below.

Characteristics of Executive Education (EE)

Executive education (EE) has evolved notably over the last few decades, adapting to industry demands, technological advancements, and globalisation. Understanding the key characteristics of EE is essential to contextualising its role in professional learning and corporate development.

- History of EE – EE originated as an extension of traditional higher education, tailored for business professionals and executives seeking leadership development. It has grown from exclusive, in-person training to more accessible, modular, and technology-driven formats.
- Characteristics of EE – EE differs from conventional education through its flexibility, industry relevance, and focus on applied learning. Courses are often designed in collaboration with corporate partners to ensure practical outcomes.
- Teaching and Learning Strategies in EE – EE providers adopt experiential learning, case-based teaching, and peer learning to engage professionals in real-world problem-solving. Customised corporate training is also a key feature.
- E-learning and EE – The digital transformation of EE has led to the integration of online platforms and hybrid delivery models. E-learning has made EE more scalable and accessible to a global audience.
- Curriculum Development – EE curricula are structured to align with industry trends, focusing on skills such as strategic leadership, digital transformation, and innovation management. Flexibility in curriculum design allows for rapid adaptation.
- Pairing an EE Course with a Learner – EE providers utilise learning analytics, psychometric assessments, and career progression frameworks to match executives with relevant courses, ensuring personalised learning experiences.
- Marketing Strategies and Sales of EE Courses – EE providers adopt targeted marketing strategies, including corporate partnerships, executive referrals, and digital marketing campaigns. The shift towards subscription-based and on-demand learning models has also influenced sales strategies.
- Corporate Partnerships with EE Providers – Strong university-industry collaborations ensure EE remains industry-relevant and financially sustainable. Many EE programs are co-designed with corporate partners, offering customised learning solutions.
- Financialisation of Education – EE has become a revenue-generating arm of universities and business schools, often structured as profit-driven programmes. The rise of private sector involvement, venture capital funding, and executive coaching markets has further commercialised EE.
- Student Mobility – EE programs are increasingly attracting international participants, facilitated by online education, transnational partnerships, and modular global programs.
- Impact of Globalisation on Student Mobility – Globalisation has increased the demand for cross-border executive education, with many programs now incorporating global leadership perspectives, multi-campus experiences, and international networking opportunities.

Characteristics of EE Learners

EE learners differ from traditional university students in terms of motivation, learning expectations, and professional backgrounds. Understanding their needs and behaviours is crucial for designing effective EE programmes.

- Learner Expectations – EE learners seek practical, high-impact learning experiences that provide immediate workplace applicability. They expect flexibility, networking opportunities, and cutting-edge content relevant to industry challenges.
- Learner Motivating Factors – Motivations include career advancement, leadership development, skill enhancement, and industry recognition. Many learners are sponsored by employers, reinforcing the importance of ROI-driven learning outcomes.
- Classifying the EE Learner – EE learners can be segmented into categories such as mid-career professionals, senior executives, career switchers, and entrepreneurs. Each group has distinct learning needs, engagement levels, and expectations.

EE operates within a broader institutional ecosystem, where academic staff and professional (non-academic) staff play critical roles in shaping the learning experience. Therefore, integrating theories related to staff expectations, motivation, and institutional alignment provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding EE.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Executive Education Staff

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs suggests that human motivation operates in a tiered structure, progressing from physiological needs to self-actualisation. While traditionally applied to individuals, this theory also applies to academic and professional staff within EE:

- Physiological & Safety Needs: Academic and professional staff require stable employment, fair compensation, and a safe working environment. In EE, financial stability and job security impact retention and engagement.
- Belongingness & Esteem: Staff motivation is influenced by organisational culture, recognition, and opportunities for professional growth. EE providers must encourage collaboration and acknowledge contributions to improve staff engagement.
- Self-Actualisation: For academic staff, this involves research, innovation in teaching methods, and thought leadership in EE. For professional staff, it may involve strategic planning, industry engagement, and operational efficiency.

Thus, Maslow's theory aligns with the motivational factors of EE staff (including academic and professional staff), reinforcing the need for institutions to create an environment that supports both personal fulfilment and organisational goals.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory: Differentiating Staff Expectations

Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory divides workplace motivation into hygiene factors (which prevent dissatisfaction) and motivators (which drive satisfaction). This theory explains why academic and professional staff have different expectations within EE:

Academic Staff Motivation:

- Motivators: Intellectual freedom, research opportunities, industry collaborations, and student engagement.
- Hygiene Factors: Workload management, administrative support, and institutional funding for EE programs.

Professional Staff Motivation:

- Motivators: Career progression, leadership roles, and contributions to institutional strategy.
- Hygiene Factors: Organisational policies, job stability, and clear role definitions.

Herzberg's theory strengthens the framework by highlighting that EE staff motivation is not solely financial; rather, it is influenced by professional growth, institutional culture, and recognition.

The Competing Values Framework (CVF) and Organisational Alignment

The Competing Values Framework (CVF) (Cameron and Quinn, 2011) provides a structural lens to analyse how academic and professional staff align with institutional priorities in EE. CVF identifies four organisational cultures that shape decision-making:

- Clan Culture (Collaboration-Focused): Academic staff align with this when encouraging mentorship and student engagement. Professional staff contribute by facilitating student services and corporate partnerships.
- Innovation-Focused Culture : EE thrives on entrepreneurial approaches. Academics contribute through new course designs, while professional staff support market expansion and industry integration.
- Market Culture (Performance-Focused): EE is revenue-driven, requiring both academic staff to attract learners and professional staff to drive financial sustainability.
- Hierarchy Culture (Process-Focused): Compliance, accreditation, and structured administration rely on professional staff, ensuring institutional integrity while allowing academic staff to focus on teaching.

By integrating Maslow, Herzberg, and CVF, the theoretical framework accounts for the institutional factors that influence EE. This ensures a holistic understanding of how academic and professional staff contribute to the learner experience, institutional sustainability, and the evolving landscape of EE.

Relationships between my findings and the theories discussed will be presented in chapter four.

2.5 Literature Gap

From the critical review of existing literature, it is evident that the primary assumption within EE-based literature is that knowledge transfer occurs in a face-to-face setting, where a facilitator engages participants to encourage two-way interaction. Additionally, a fundamental aspect of EE is the notion that participants learn from each other through direct engagement. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted this approach, resulting in a rapid shift to online learning formats. Despite this notable change, there is minimal evidence of formal research investigating the impact of the pandemic on EE and how participants have adapted to online studies, which goes against their long-standing preference for in-person learning. Furthermore, existing literature often lacks differentiation between adult learning principles and EE, with industry-based research primarily focused on US companies rather than post-Brexit UK-based EE providers. Lydon and McIndoe-Calder (2021) highlight that saving behaviours during the pandemic have influenced consumer choices. But, there may be a notable gap in understanding how this shift to online learning has affected the quality of education and overall learner experience in the UK context. Additionally, the current research does not adequately explore the effectiveness of online formats in encouraging the networking and relationship-building opportunities that in-person programmes have traditionally offered. Addressing these gaps is essential for identifying best practices and ensuring that the new delivery strategy of EE meets the diverse needs of learners.

Welter and Urbano (2020) argue that relevance in doctoral research is important in today's fast-moving academic world. Welter and Urbano (2020) highlight the disconnect between research outputs and the practical needs of industries, emphasising that many doctoral programmes fail to equip candidates with skills applicable to real-world challenges. This gap is particularly evident in EE, where programmes often lack alignment with current organisational needs. By encouraging a stronger link between academic research and practical application, Welter and Urbano (2020) suggest that future doctoral studies based around EE should not only contribute to theoretical knowledge but also address pressing issues within EE.

While there appears to be a lack of available literature on whether individuals with disabilities or criminal convictions can access EE, barriers related to gender and ethnicity in professional settings may similarly impact access. Sunder (2021) highlights instances where job candidates experience bias, including discriminatory behaviours such as being “ghosted” after interviews, indicating that discriminatory practices may still exist in workplaces. For potential EE participants, such as women or ethnic minorities, these barriers may lead to them acquiring additional qualifications or certification as a way to overcome professional discrimination. This trend suggests that EE may be perceived as a tool for addressing workplace biases, but it remains unclear if programmes are effectively accessible or inclusive. Additionally, lack of disclosure regarding personal circumstances on EE applications could be linked to fears of discrimination, particularly for those with backgrounds that may be socially stigmatised.

Sunder's (2021) arguments bring attention to another gap in EE literature: the absence of studies on corporate sponsorship impartiality. If workplace biases restrict opportunities for certain demographics, perhaps similar inequities influence corporate sponsorships and learner support within EE. These gaps point to the need for research that investigates both structural inclusivity within EE and potential disparities in employer-sponsored pathways. Furthermore, Armstrong (2020) highlights concerns regarding the impact of funding cuts on the quality of education. This raises important questions about how COVID-19-related corporate funding cuts may affect the availability of sponsorships and support for diverse learners in EE programmes. Additionally, there appear to be a literature gap regarding how these funding cuts influence employee performance and overall organisational effectiveness.

Looking from another lens, almost every piece of literature available about student mobility and migration assumes that students are pursuing long-term courses at higher education institutions. Although it is generally assumed that any course can be part of an immigration plan for some nationalities, there is a notable absence of dedicated studies addressing this issue, particularly regarding those who travel overseas for EE. As Spivak (2009) argues, traditional comparative frameworks (such as UNESCO education reports or OECD indicators) often overlook the specificities of cultural and educational contexts, leading to a one-size-fits-all understanding of student motivations and experiences. This lack of detailed analysis means that the unique characteristics of short-term executive courses remain underexplored. Therefore, further investigation, particularly through primary research, is essential to uncover the underlying motivations and implications of such educational choices.

2.6 Chapter Conclusion

The chapter begins by tracing the evolution of manager education, which was later known as EE, outlining its transformation into its current form. Relevant literature on adult learning, including teaching and learning strategies, was reviewed to establish links with practices at LAMF as an EE provider, and to identify characteristics of learners engaged in adult education. However, much of this literature originates in the USA and predominantly addresses undergraduate or postgraduate programmes rather than short-term, niche management training. EE literature often omits non-credit-bearing courses and offers limited insight into participants' valuation of academic credit for their study hours in EE. Furthermore, finance remains the most popular area of study within EE. Yet, as technologies like artificial intelligence and big data emerge, recent data on participants' subject preferences is lacking, and the impact of COVID-19 on subject specialisation remains unexplored in current EE literature.

Some literature suggests an overlap between continuous professional development (CPD) and EE, with the terms occasionally used interchangeably. However, Margulies and Gregg (2013) indicate there may be a distinction between these forms of education. Particular attention was given to Quinn's (2011) competing values framework and its relevance to EE. Regarding the intended audience for EE, definitions vary: while some argue it targets an organisation's senior executives, others propose it is aimed at junior leaders being prepared for advanced roles. Consequently, the classification of EE learners' seniority remains somewhat ambiguous, as authors present differing views across various studies.

In existing literature, overseas learners studying in Western countries are often assumed to be enrolled in long-term courses, with expectations that students from countries like India will engage in part-time work or view student visas as a pathway to migration. However, this assumption may not fully apply to EE, where distinct factors alter this outlook. Additionally, no HESA data is collected on EE learners to offer a national perspective on their mobility. This study is uniquely positioned, having begun in 2019 when the school operated as a campus-based EE provider. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a global shift to online education across all study durations and levels. By 2021, new trends emerged in adult education, leading to innovations in blended learning, shifts in student mobility, and advancements in online course delivery, assessment, and collaboration tools.

The following chapter outlines my exploratory case study approach, detailing the use of two data collection methods: document collection and semi-structured interviews with seven staff members (using pseudonyms). Thematic analysis of interview data was conducted using Nvivo, while Excel processed the application data. Ethical considerations guided the research, adhering to BERA's guidelines and approved by Brunel's ethics committee (BREO).

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1. Chapter Introduction

In light of the literature reviewed, this study has been framed around the research questions below.

3.1.1 Research Questions:

1. What are the characteristics of LAMF as an executive education provider?
2. What motivates delegates to study an EE course?
3. How can EE delegates be characterised?
4. What recommendations for sustainability and growth can be made to LAMF?

Primary research was undertaken using semi-structured interviews with different staff members who belonged to different departments within LAMF and data from delegate satisfaction surveys and learner applications from 2019 (campus-based) to 2021 (online) were collected. The data was analysed and the results discussed in the proceeding chapters of this study.

The chapter identifies the ontological and epistemological stances taken during the current research project. This is followed by an explanation of the steps taken in terms of data collection, sampling, pilot testing, ethical considerations, trustworthiness of the human instrument, limitations and transferability.

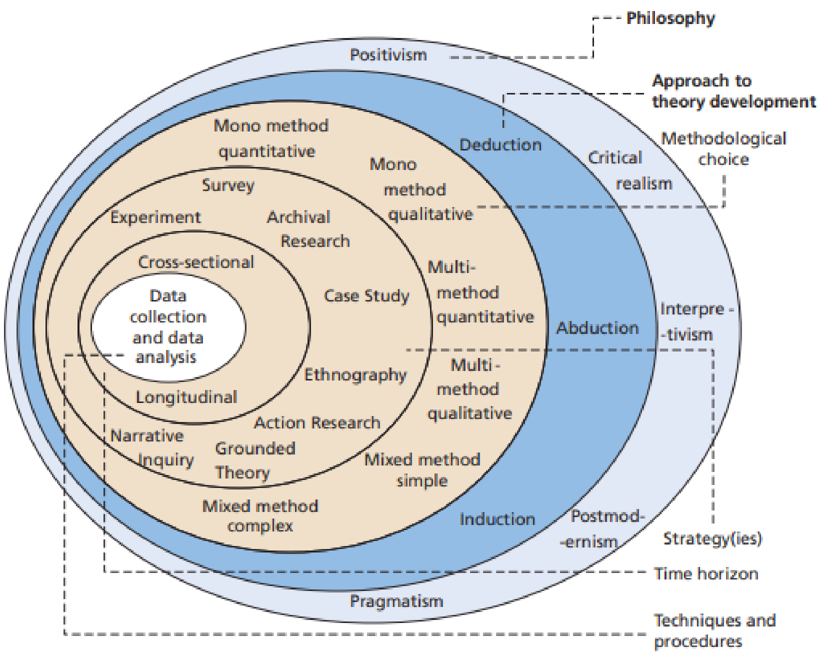


Figure 3.1 : The research onion (Source : Saunders et al. (2009:174)

A systematic research design helps in answering the research questions effectively. A structured and well-planned approach ensures clear objectives are defined to address these questions. Further, such an approach would ensure that suitable data sources are identified and good methods of data collection and analysis are identified. Saunders *et al.* (2009) recommends using the research onion approach (Figure 3.1) in order to systematically accomplish this task. Saunders *et al.* (2009) recommends that by using this approach, the researcher can address ethical considerations and mitigate any pitfalls that the researcher may encounter when conducting the research project. The research onion approach was utilised by me in planning the structure of my research project that is based around LAMF, a London based private EE provider.

3.1.1 Ontology

Philosophy can be unpacked as an individual's view about the world (Saunders *et al*, 2009). Quinlan (2011) further point out that every research undertaken is underpinned by the researcher's philosophical outlook. This philosophical view can be evidenced throughout the research project. Crotty (1998) argues that the assumptions made by the researcher in viewing the world is based on the individual's reality (world view, focussing on ontology) and how knowledge is acquired (epistemology). Arguing along the same lines, Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) argue that philosophy is a dynamic phenomenon that changes with time and hence there should be no set standard. However, Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) suggest that understanding the world view is important as it improves legitimacy and informs the direction of the research.

When discussing ontology, the starting point can be identified as "*what we take as the reality*" (what makes up reality), argues Rallis and Rossman (2012:7). Ontological assumption can be defined as what the researcher considers to be the shape and type of "*reality*" (Ridder 2020:62). Ridder contends that the assumptions will depend on whether the researcher believes in whether a reality exists (realism) or whether a reality is interpreted or constructed by persons (relativism) differently. Berger and Luckmann (1966) emphasise that if we assume the existence of an objective reality, our focus is on understanding the nature of this world and the mechanisms that drive it. Equally, if we consider the world as constructed through meaning (relativism), our interest changes to understanding how individuals construct their reality, share their meanings, and act based on these shared meanings.

Considering my research project is based on the London Academy of Management and Finance (LAMF), my interpretations of the characteristics of executive learners and EE are more inclined towards relativism than realism. This is because participants' expectations, understandings, assumptions and execution are based on each stakeholder's assumptions as to what is executive education, and my biases that may exist as an industry practitioner, along with my opinions about the field and its actors. Furthermore, it takes into account, societal perceptions and the approach will consider culture-linked interpretations of different parts of society (Crotty, 1998).

3.1.2 Epistemology

In research, epistemology reflects how individuals perceive the world, guiding whether they view it as governed by objective laws or shaped by individual interpretations (Ridder, 2020:62). If a researcher assumes that reality exists independently with its own mechanisms and laws, they would adopt an objectivist stance. Conversely, if they believe that understanding is constructed through human interpretation, they would follow a subjectivist approach. Since my research explores how executive education is understood by LAMF's staff and delegates, this study is grounded in a subjectivist epistemological perspective.

Epistemology enables the provision of a philosophical grounding in terms of deriving the types of knowledge that will be possible and how this may have an impact on research and how research is conducted in society, as defined by Crotty (1998). Rallis and Rossman (2012:7) explain epistemology as "*how we know the reality which was identified by ontology*", and suggest that one's assumptions about truth or knowledge that is generally accepted within a subject area of interest, topic or an issue, is a result of cultural norms or socialisation. This leads those with alternative worldviews to seek confirmation from existing authorities or beliefs (e.g.: religious texts) where exploration and discovery of alternative realities or truths can be overwhelming. Berger and Luckmann (1967) consider knowledge to be a result of social interaction as well as an element that impacts changes in societal beliefs. Piaget (2001) elaborate this viewpoint by stating that knowledge is constructed both as individual and social constructs, amongst many possible truth realisations.

If the researcher assumes that the world comprises of construction of meaning, then the inclination of the methodological question leans towards accordant methods such as methods that involve collaboration with participants (Ridder, 2020). My own philosophical assumptions and how it informs this research project is discussed further under positionality in the next section. I have reflected on my professional and educational history and my own world view in discussing positionality and how it impacts on this research project.

3.1.3 Positionality

"*Within positionality theory, it is acknowledged that people have multiple overlapping identities. Thus, people make meaning from various aspects of their identity*." (Kezar, 2002:96). Bourke (2014) argues that both the researcher and the respondent's identities will have a potential impact on the research process. Smith (2021) argues that the term positionality is a person's interpretation and the position, the person has chosen to adopt with regards to the research project. Savin-Barden and Major (2013) suggest that self-reflection is a mandatory process that needs to be taken in to account throughout the research project. Such reflection enables the researcher to recognise, construct and reflect on their own stance within the project. While acknowledging the impact my own biases can have on this research project, my identity as a research student and as the academic head of LAMF and a former international student from a third world country, I have to derive meaning based on my own characteristics that underpin my own world view. I also have to acknowledge (and minimise) the impact my own biases and pre-conceived notions may have on this research project.

There are three dimensions of positionality within a research project, argue Savin-Barden and Major (2103). The researcher's location in relation to the subject of the research, the researcher's position in relation to the respondents and the researcher's position in relation to the context and the process of the research. Reflexivity and positionality are related and even interconnected concepts (Lather, 1991). They refer to positionality as the researcher's worldview and the position a researcher has opted to adopt within a research project. They argue that it reflects where the researcher is coming from, in terms of their epistemological and ontological assumptions. However, Cohen *et al.* (2017) point out that reflexivity is where the researcher acknowledge and disclose him/herself within the research project and identify their own role or how their own personality traits would impact the project.

The role of reflexivity can be defined as "*understanding the positioning of the researcher in respect of what is being researched and concerning the intellectual field in which the research is located*" (Rawolle and Lingard, 2013:118). Savin-Barden and Major (2013) further explain reflexivity as a method of critical thinking that incorporates addressing the issues of identity and positionality using the researcher's explicit assumptions and finding methods to question such assumptions.

Justification of Methodology and Researcher Positionality

The selection of a qualitative case study approach for this research is driven by its suitability for capturing complex, context-specific experiences in executive education. Case studies facilitate an in-depth exploration of real-world phenomena within their unique environments (Stake, 2000). Given the underexplored nature of executive education (EE), an exploratory case study provides a structured yet flexible framework to examine participant motivations, organisational compositions, and professional outcomes (Robson, 1993).

The research questions were developed iteratively, informed by a combination of existing literature, professional experience, and emergent themes from the field. As an insider researcher, I had prior exposure to EE settings, allowing for the identification of key issues and gaps in existing knowledge (Fleming, 2018). This aligns with the argument that insider researchers possess pre-understanding of the research context, enabling them to formulate relevant and meaningful research questions (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007, in Fleming, 2018). However, to ensure rigour and neutrality, I engaged in peer debriefing, thematic analysis, and external validation of the research questions to avoid assumptions of shared understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Insider-Outsider Positionality in Research

Researcher positionality plays a crucial role in qualitative research, shaping the study's design, execution, and interpretation (Holmes, 2020). My role as a researcher in this study is complex, as I navigate both insider and outsider perspectives at different stages of the research. Holmes (2020) evaluates the traditional insider-outsider perspectives, arguing that positionality exists on a continuum that shifts over time, based on researcher-participant relationships and evolving contexts.

The Insider Perspective

As an insider, my prior professional engagement in EE provided a nuanced understanding of institutional structures, programme design, and participant experiences. This familiarity granted access to rich, context-specific data, a recognised strength of insider research (Fleming, 2018). Insider researchers can craft research questions that align with real-world institutional challenges, ensuring practical relevance and depth of inquiry.

However, Fleming (2018) also warns of key challenges in insider research, including:

- Potential bias, as researchers may unconsciously frame findings in alignment with their experiences.
- Over-familiarity, which may lead to assumptions that go unchallenged.
- Ethical concerns, particularly in participant recruitment and power dynamics.

To address these concerns, I adopted several strategies to maintain research integrity, including:

- Triangulation of data sources to validate findings (Denzin, 2012).
- Critical reflexivity, acknowledging my position and mitigating its influence through structured self-analysis (Holmes, 2020).

- Use of an audit trail, documenting decision-making processes for transparency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The Outsider Perspective

While my insider status provided access to deep institutional insights, my positionality also evolved over time, allowing for a critical outsider perspective. Holmes (2020) highlights that researchers may shift between insider and outsider roles, depending on their relationship with the research setting. Over the course of this study, I transitioned from an EE practitioner to a researcher with analytical detachment, enabling a more objective evaluation of organisational policies and participant experiences.

As suggested by Holmes (2020), this dual perspective strengthens the study by integrating both insider insights and external perspectives, ensuring a balanced and rigorous methodological approach. By actively negotiating my positionality, I ensured that my research remained both contextually informed and analytically robust, drawing from the strengths of both insider and outsider research.

As discussed in Chapter One, my current professional background is in executive education and the overall field of adult learning. This includes both teaching and school management within higher and vocational education in the UK. While this precludes me from taking an entirely outsider perspective in this research (as suggested by Mercer, 2007), the impact my knowledge and experience would have on this research has to be taken into account to ensure that my viewpoints and understandings will not impact on the research and interview processes in a disadvantageous manner. This assumption is in line with the argument of Bourdieu (1990) who claimed, the researcher must evaluate their position in the academic field and the research field.

During discussions with research participants, pseudonyms were used throughout to maintain anonymity. In some instances, participants sought my agreement or input on topics or referenced events where both they and I were present in a decision-making capacity. Additionally, as I was either the line manager or held indirect authority over all interview respondents, it was challenging to reassure them that our discussions would have no bearing on their job performance or professional rapport with me. For example, some sales staff were hesitant to openly discuss certain (mal)practices or directives they had received from managers aimed at meeting sales targets. Similarly, academic staff showed reluctance to provide feedback on areas where they felt the school could improve. Although there were exceptions, such as Manuela, who was particularly forthcoming with her views, it was evident that several respondents approached the interview cautiously, mindful of the student-researcher role I occupied as their line manager. This aligns with Mercer's (2007) observations on the impact of organisational power-distance relationships. To mitigate these challenges, I emphasised that the interviews were conducted solely for my research as a student and that the transcripts would remain anonymised, ensuring no link between interviewees and their perspectives on the school.

It was convenient to gain approval for accessing anonymised student data, as an existing foundation of trust and assumed confidentiality was already established within the school. While I have unrestricted access to school data as an employee, I ensured that, in my capacity as a student researcher, I accessed only the anonymised data approved for this project. I remained particularly mindful of social desirability bias, acquiescence bias, and confirmation bias, which, as noted by Hammersley and Gomm (1997), could impact truth and objectivity. The transcribed interview notes illustrate my reflexive approach, allowing me to maintain awareness of my academic perspective and position throughout the research. These notes further reflect my role as a student researcher rather than as a member of the school's management team, with a keen awareness of how my presence as a colleague might influence responses.

A common perception among recruitment consultants is that applicants from certain Asian and African countries primarily apply to EE courses as a way to obtain UK visas. As a staff member at LAMF, I have observed cases of visa rejections linked to falsified financial or employment documents, particularly during my management of a degree programme, which led me to believe this issue was prevalent. However, since March 2020, LAMF has offered only online courses, eliminating any travel component. Thus, the widespread assumption among staff that applicants from certain countries use EE as a pathway to enter the UK holds no validity regarding applications received from these regions since 2020.

Staff at LAMF, myself included, held the view that many overseas participants see an EE course as an opportunity for a brief escape from work. Staff have observed that delegates often arrive in London over the weekend, attend classes from Monday to Thursday, and then spend Friday and Saturday sightseeing and shopping before returning home on Sunday. Prior to COVID-19, all four-day LAMF courses were scheduled from Monday to Thursday, with an underlying assumption that this arrangement suited the preferences of overseas participants. However, this motivation was not strongly reflected in interviews or personal statements (though it is understandable that applicants may not disclose such intentions on application forms).

Another aspect that I can reflect on is the actual personal statements (statement of intent). Before undertaking my research project, I had only looked at such personal statements to do a quick evaluation to see whether the participant's intentions match the course. However, during the current research project, I was able to deep-dive into these personal statements, carefully evaluating the underlying meaning behind each sentence and each keyword. This has made me think about the applicants as individuals with career aspirations, clear plans on what they wish to gain and a clearer idea about their own "*world view*". The shift towards deeper understanding of the applicants' needs enabled me to ask questions from the sales staff in order to ensure that the school is offering a course that closely matched each individual's needs. This included instances where I have specifically asked the sales staff to email a full programme outline including intended learning outcomes and ask for their confirmation before enrolling them on the course.

In conclusion, the process of critically reflecting on my positionality throughout this research has been fundamental to understanding how my multiple and overlapping identities shape the research process. As both an academic leader and a former international student from a developing country, my experiences unavoidably inform my interpretations of data and discussions with participants. I acknowledge that these positional dimensions offer me distinctive understandings into the lived experiences of my participants, particularly those who share similar backgrounds or career paths. However, it is important to acknowledge the potential for these same aspects of my identity to introduce biases that could slightly influence the research process, from the framing of research questions to the interpretation of responses. By using a reflexive approach, I have made a conscious effort to critically examine how my professional role, cultural background, and academic lens shape my understanding and analysis of the data. This reflexivity has allowed me to be aware of the power dynamics that exist between myself, as the researcher, and the participants, given my position of authority within the organisation. Furthermore, my positionality has encouraged a deeper understanding of the context within which the research is situated, in particular, the organisational structures and assumptions that may have an impact on both participant responses and my interpretation of those responses. Acknowledging the ways in which these factors intertwine has been central in ensuring that the findings of this study remain valid and nuanced, while maintaining the integrity of the research process. Eventually, this self-awareness and reflexivity will not only serve to minimise the impact of my biases but will also contribute to the ongoing development of a more inclusive and critically engaged body of research in the field of adult education.

3.2 Choice of Methodology

A research strategy is a plan of action that the researcher will implement in order to answer the research questions. A research strategy acts as a methodological conduit between the research philosophy, research methods, data collection and data analysis. Saunders *et al.* (2009) point out that different research traditions have paved way for the development of different research strategies. Such research strategies can be linked with quantitative, qualitative and mixed research methods. Further, Bryman and Bell (2011) suggest that particular research strategies can be aligned with different research philosophies and either deductive, inductive or abductive research approach. However, Taylor and Bogdan (2015) state that there are no firm boundaries between philosophies, strategies and methods.

Denzin (2012) suggests that a key element a researcher needs to consider when deciding on a research strategy is ensuring coherence throughout the research. Saunders *et al.* (2009) have identified eight different research strategies that a researcher may consider in carrying out a research project:

1. Experiment;
2. Survey;
3. Archival and documentary research;
4. Case study;
5. Ethnography;
6. Action Research;
7. Grounded Theory;
8. Narrative Inquiry.

The first two strategies are exclusively recommended for quantitative research design while 3-4 can be used for both quantitative and qualitative research design (or a mixed methods approach) while the rest (5-8) can be used for qualitative research design (Saunders *et al*, 2009). However, Denzin (2012) cautions that there is a tendency to have blurred genres between the research strategies. Based on the arguments presented above, a case study based research strategy is considered to be the most appropriate way forward in order to answer the research questions based on LAMF.

An exploratory case study methodology was chosen as the approach allows for the researcher to take into account, the opinions, ideas and arguments presented by the participants as they would understand and interpret the world around them. This is in line with the suggestions made by Stake (2000) where they argue that a case study approach will provide the views of real persons who operate within real working environments while enabling the understanding of how ideas and principles can be fused while sharing lived experiences, perceptions, thoughts and feelings about situations, events and their environment. Furthermore, as Cohen *et al.* (2000:181) suggest, this approach will enable a researcher to "*penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis*".

Case study methodology is not restricted to a specific field or discipline (Stake, 2000). Robson (1993) defines exploratory case study-based research as a strategy for conducting research that involves an empirical investigation of a series of specific current events. This is within a real-life context using a multitude of source datasets as evidence. This can be applied to my current research as it is based on the opinions, expectations and attitudes of staff members and prospective learners who wish to study at LAMF, in terms of identifying their perceptions and views on EE and the school. I have reassured the interview respondents that, while the management of LAMF will receive a report including recommendations, it will not contain any personally identifiable information about them.

Case study research can be broadly categorised into three types:

Intrinsic case studies focus on understanding a specific phenomenon, with the researcher aiming to identify what makes it unique. Yin (2011) supports this approach when the primary interest lies in the case itself, while Stake (2000) recommends it for cases that are unique, unusual, or possess distinct characteristics requiring exploration.

Instrumental case studies aim to gain a broader understanding of an issue or phenomenon within a specific case. For example, Bartlett and Vavrus (2016) advocate for this approach to investigate wider issues, theories, or phenomena. Additionally, Stake (2000) recommends instrumental case studies for generating insights that can extend beyond the individual case, especially in the context of policy implementation or theory development, as noted by Bassey (1999).

Collective case studies evaluate multiple cases simultaneously to enhance understanding of an issue (Stake, 2000). This method facilitates the identification of patterns, allows for comparisons, and enables findings to be applied in a broader context.

According to Stake (2000:437), an "*instrumental case study*" can be classified as a case study aimed at providing insights and a thorough understanding of a particular issue. In the current research, this may include both identifying characteristics of EE delegates and exploring the motivations behind a person studying an EE course. Moreover, as Cohen *et al.*(2002) suggest, within a case study methodology, a case is "*bounded*" where boundaries can be defined for the case study in question. In this instance, the case is geographically bounded around LAMF, which is a private HE provider in London and demographically, from applicants across the globe, who want to study a short executive education course.

However, Robson (1993:56) suggests a case study as a *soft* option where Robson (1993) claims "*the case study is not a flawed experimental design; it is a fundamentally different research strategy with its designs*". Bryman and Bell (2011) also criticise the case study-based approach as an approach that can be carried out carelessly or inefficiently. Cohen (2000) claims that using this approach allows for bias and there may be challenges in cross-checking the results obtained from such studies. Stake (2000) also points out the difficulty in generalising the findings of an exploratory case study.

The use of qualitative research methodologies facilitates the gathering of information that enhances understanding by interpreting spoken or written words for specific patterns or tendencies (Egbert and Sanden, 2013). This approach involves a higher level of subjectivity on the part of the researcher. In my research, the semi-structured interviews enabled me to engage in constructive discussions about respondents' viewpoints on EE and LAMF. I recognised that my subjectivity regarding LAMF and my role could influence the outcomes, and I was consciously aware of this throughout the interview process, aiming to minimise such bias. I achieved this by refraining from sharing my views and recommendations and by avoiding leading questions. Silverman (2000) notes that subjective bias may arise when attempts are made to expand or explain answers. Furthermore, as Shah (2004, cited in Mercer, 2007) states, a social insider is often better positioned as a researcher within their organisation, as they possess an understanding of social interaction patterns that aids in gaining access and deriving meaning.

The distinction between quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis primarily occurs at the methods level (Crotty, 1998). This is based on the argument that data is collected and analysed differently, rather than reflecting the researcher's subjectivity or objectivity. In my research, this remains applicable, as the quantitative data was analysed separately using Microsoft Excel, while the qualitative data was processed using the data-organising software NVivo, alongside a manual thematic analysis. Adamson *et al*. (2004) advocate for a mixed-method approach that integrates both methodologies to focus on individual circumstances.

Case study research can be used to explore new trends built on beliefs which arise from existing experience or knowledge (Ridder, 2020). Taking my own experience of LAMF into account, my approach is to investigate LAMF with an exploratory case study research approach. A case study can be defined as "*a tool for doing evaluation where evaluation is considered as a particular type of research that is intended to assess and explain the results of specific interventions*" (Yin, 2011:55). Bassey (1999:24-26) identifies it as a generic term that refers to the investigation of an individual, group or phenomena and refers to such research as theory-seeking and theory-testing case study where a "*case study consists in the imagination of the case and the invention of the study*". Stake (1995) elaborates his argument by explaining that the approach would enable contribution towards theories using fuzzy generalisation.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) further explain that educational case study research should concentrate on an educational issue or problem. Bassey (1999) asserts that case studies facilitate generalisation from a specific instance to a broader class. However, Bassey (1999) also notes that further research may be necessary before making any fuzzy generalisations based on findings from a single case study. Additional benefits include evaluative data being available in a more publicly accessible format, serving as an archive of detailed content that is rich enough to warrant reinterpretation at a later stage. Cohen *et al*. (2000) suggest that a case study researcher observes the characteristics of an individual unit, such as a school, and seeks to probe deeper, analysing the factors that constitute that unit to generalise about the broader population to which it belongs.

A theory can be defined as an understanding of the relationships between phenomena that were either poorly understood or not understood at all in the past (Ridder, 2017). Yin (2011) highlights that a significant advantage of single case study research is its ability to seek answers to how and why events occur. In relation to theory creation, Stake (1995) hypothesises that single case study research, including the current project, can expand constructs and connections within a clearly identifiable setting. Eisenhardt (1989) asserts that creativity and inspiration are essential for interpreting observations into concepts, thereby providing an outline for a tentative theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) indicate that single case study research is often identified as a category that contributes to the construction of new theories within an exploratory framework. Ridder (2017) adds that this approach facilitates both theory-building and the development of tentative theories.

Discussing further case study method, Bassey (1999) suggests they encompass gathering and recording data about a case and compilation of a report (or a presentation) regarding the case. Stenhouse (1985) identifies four categories of case study; ethnographic. Evaluative, educational and action research. Stenhouse (1985) elaborates further by stating that a single case is studied in depth by observing participants, coupled with interviews. In explaining an evaluative case study, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggest that either a single case or a collection of cases is studied in detail to provide decision-makers in the case organisation with information that may be necessary for evaluating the effectiveness of policies or procedures.

Research is a creative activity and each project has its characteristics that may be unique from another (Bassey, 1999:66). Discussing further, Bassey (1999) states that it is a systematic activity that can be categorised into stages. Explaining further, Bassey (1999) recommends a seven-stage approach to case study research:

Stage 1: Identifying the research as an issue, problem or hypothesis

Stage 2: Asking research questions and drawing up ethical guidelines

Stage 3: Collecting and storing data

Stage 4: Generating and testing analytical statements

Stage 5: Interpreting or explaining the analytical statements

Stage 6: Deciding on the outcome and writing the case report

Stage 7: Finishing and publishing

In terms of my research project, Bassey's (1999) approach can be applied to find answers to the identified research questions and finding answers to the identified issues at LAMF.

3.3 Sampling

Sampling can be defined as the process of selecting a subset of a population to make assumptions or estimate characteristics of the entire population based on the observations made from the analysed sample (Thompson, 2012). Cohen *et al*. (2017) note that researchers often opt for sampling rather than using the entire population due to constraints such as time, funding, and accessibility. For a sample to accurately represent the population under observation, it is essential to accurately identify the sample size, the method for selecting the sample, the types of observations to be recorded, and the types of measurements (scales) to be used. Cohen *et al.* (2017) elaborate that a larger sample is likely to produce outcomes that more closely reflect the characteristics of the population being researched. Additionally, Saunders *et al*. (2009) propose a systematic approach for determining sampling method(s) for non-probability sampling (see Figure 3.2). This approach was utilised to determine the sampling method for this research.

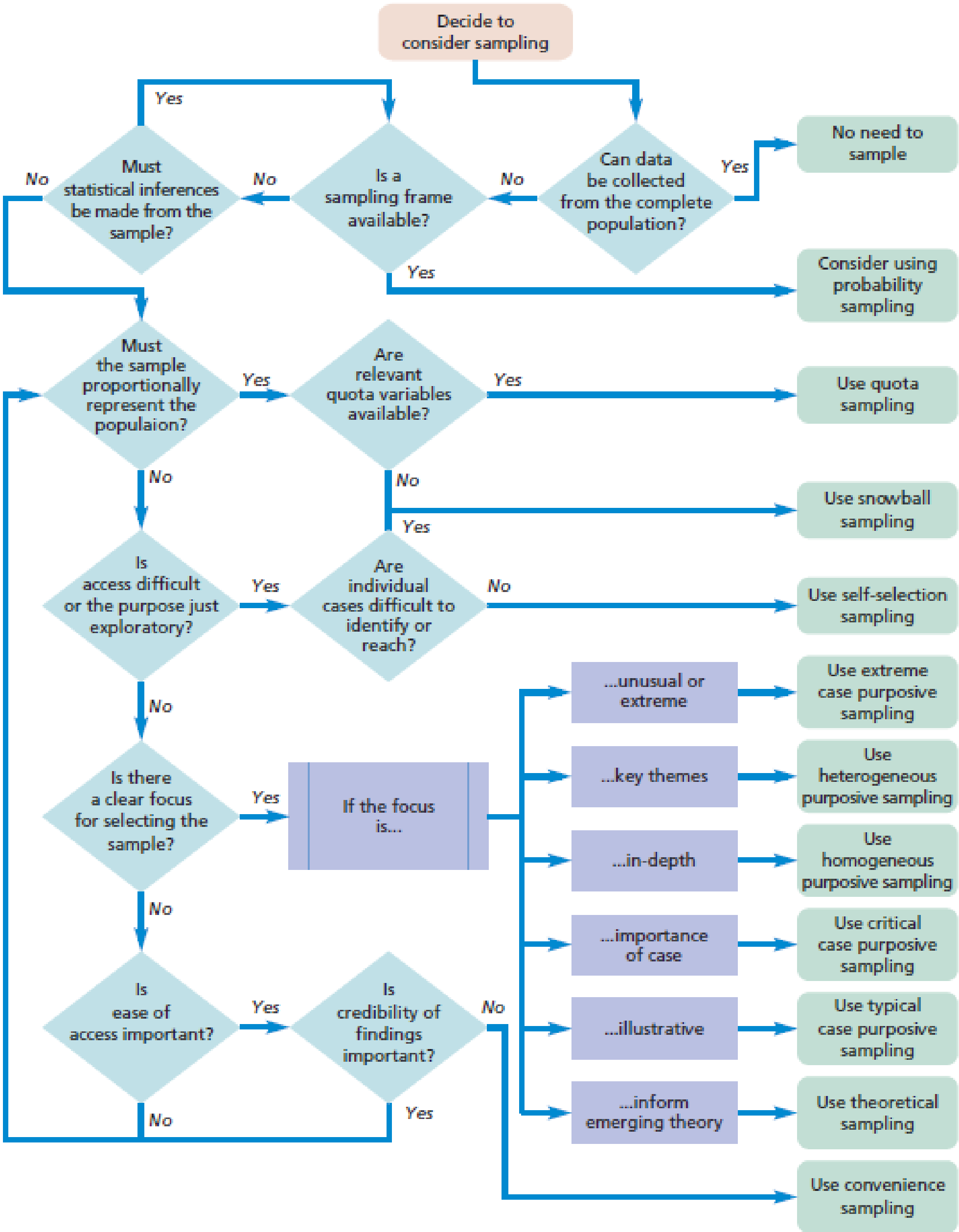


Figure 3.2: Selecting a non-probability sampling technique. Source: Saunders et al. (2009:282)

3.3.1 Sampling of Interview Respondents

Purposive sampling can be defined as a qualitative sampling method where researchers select examples for the sample based on their judgement and specific characteristics (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). This method is particularly useful for interviewing respondents who possess in-depth knowledge of relevant issues, taking into account factors such as their role within the organisation, access to information, authority, experience, or expertise, as recommended by Ball (2012). Ball (2012) further argues that using a random sample may lead to respondents who are either unaware of the issue being researched or unable to provide meaningful responses. Patten *et al*. (2018) concur with Ball's (2012) viewpoint, stating that purposive sampling allows researchers to select individuals they believe will be valid sources of information. Thus, Patton (2015) summarises that the purpose of purposive sampling is to obtain in-depth information from respondents who can provide the necessary information accurately and promptly.

Saunders *et al*. (2009:283) recommend a sample size of 5-25 for semi-structured or in-depth interviews, claiming that purposive sampling allows researchers to exercise their judgement in selecting participants who will best help answer their research questions. In this study, seven respondents were chosen based on their roles within the school. This group included sales consultants (commission-based full-time staff), an administrator (a full-time staff member responsible for non-academic support for delegates throughout the course), and members of the teaching faculty (hourly-paid external consultants who instruct on the miniMBA, postgraduate certificates, and specialised short courses). This selection enabled me to present the same set of interview questions to participants with different functions within the school and the delegate journey, allowing for a diverse range of perspectives on the same questions and resulting in a rich dataset for analysis. Furthermore, the pool of knowledgeable respondents was limited due to staff redundancies that occurred in 2020 as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, only one administrator (delegate support) and two sales consultants remained at the school during the interview period.

3.3.2 Interview Participant (respondent) Profiles/Pseudonyms :

The use of fictional names of people will enable the researcher to preserve the anonymity of the sources while retaining the human touch (Bassey, 1999). As suggested by Bassey, pseudonyms were assigned to each of the respondents. However, their actual job roles are mentioned to indicate that they have relevant knowledge, understanding and experience to answer my interview questions.

Tom is an associate tutor at LAMF. Tom has worked across different continents and has a high degree of awareness of different cultural norms, training methods and corporate governance structures. He has spoken at top international forums. Tom has continuously demonstrated his ability to provide insights into what top managers of modern organisations desire as executive education.

Manuela has been an expert trainer in various management disciplines. She has trained executives around multiple continents for over two decades and she is considered a well-known subject matter expert within her areas of expertise in Europe. Manuela is capable of providing her views on LAMF's approach to Executive Education, general portfolio within the area of EE and an overview of corporate training as a whole.

Michael is a marketing expert who teaches in the UK and abroad. In addition to LAMF, Michael teaches several university and corporate training programmes, specialising in subjects that are perceived as highly desirable in the current global training arena. Michael made it possible to provide a discussion on LAMF's approach, response to the pandemic and shaping the future of EE.

Mills has been the head of human resources for a major financial entity in the UK and currently, he is a specialist trainer in management. Mills is relatively new to LAMF but has engaged with many training programmes that were offered by the school, both as postgraduate certificate programmes and corporate training programmes. Mills was instrumental in providing me with views on what a corporate client may desire in terms of training expectations, budgeting, personnel development and addressing corporate strategy needs.

Vera is a senior sales consultant. Vera has worked for many years with the school, predominantly selling EE courses, Vera has a wealth of knowledge in terms of the clientele of LAMF, and what various applicants desire in terms of EE. Vera also knows about marketing strategies and promotional campaigns that are carried out by the school to attract both individual and corporate clients for their programmes. Vera has first-hand experience in how the Covid pandemic shaped the LAMF and its approaches to EE.

Selvam is a recruitment consultant at LAMF. Selvam has extensive experience in recruiting suitable candidates for open courses and he is well-versed with the school's course portfolio.

Luxmi is an administrator of the school. Luxmi also looks after delegates when they attend campus-based courses, do their registrations, verify their documents such as passports etc. She also prepares delegate satisfaction surveys and presents findings at the weekly operations meeting. She is also a member of the academic planning committee and the assessment board.

3.3.3 Sampling of Course Applications

Any sample used by a researcher must be representative of the population from which the sample is drawn and a researcher can't derive an "*off-the-shelf*" sampling strategy or design using a mechanistic approach (Cohen *et al*, 2018). Hence, to use a deliberative approach with the researcher's judgement and a reflexive attitude towards the assumptions made by the researcher. Uprichard (2013) suggests that unless it matters to the researcher, both sampling error and sample size can become meaningless. Patten *et al.* (2018) suggest homogeneous sampling as a method of identifying a sample that has similar characteristics with one another from a much larger and diverse sample. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that the sample size for a qualitative researcher is usually smaller than that of a quantitative researcher.

To select a sample of delegate application forms from 2019 for data analysis, I received a list of student applications that may include applications for an EE course. This list also contained incomplete, rejected, or withdrawn applications. Consequently, I employed purposive sampling to collect anonymised student applications for EE at LAMF for the year 2019, covering three semesters. This sampling method ensures that all applications analysed are valid, relevant, and current. Teddlie and Yu (2007) argue that purposive sampling provides depth to research that surpasses that of probability sampling methods, which often lack breadth. However, in the context of LAMF, this disadvantage does not apply, as the selection process will exclude any applications that are not related to students who studied an EE course with the school in 2019 or those that are incomplete.

Saunders *et al.* (2009:265) emphasise that determining sample size involves both judgment and calculation. For each of the three semesters (Spring, Summer, and Autumn) in 2019, I collected 75 delegate applications for analysis. These applications were selected using the intake-based application list. While a sampling method was applied to the 2019 data, the total number of applications received by the school was utilised for the 2020 and 2021 delegate application forms due to a decline in applications due to the pandemic.

Even with a well-defined sampling frame, sampling error can arise (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Cohen *et al*. (2018) note that sampling error refers to the difference between the sample mean and the population mean, which results from selecting different individuals rather than errors made by the researcher during the sampling process. In my research, the sampling frame consists of the total number of applications received for EE courses at LAMF from 2019 to 2021. While sampling error is possible in the 2019 data, the complete population was used for data analysis in 2020 and 2021.

Saunders *et al.*(2009) also suggest that when using electronic databases, there may be other errors such as inaccuracies of the data itself that is held within the database or some of the data being incomplete or out of date. In my research, the database is created using delegate application forms where there are built-in checkpoints (eg: automatic validation of date of birth, not allowing to proceed unless educational details and nationality are entered), thus, ensuring that the applicant data is not incomplete. Further, every application is manually checked by a sales consultant of LAMF, and manual corrections are made after calling the applicant, in case the sales consultant suspects an inaccuracy. This minimises inaccuracies. The data used was for a specific period (2019-2021), hence, the question of the database being obsolete does not apply.

Sampling bias is where the researcher may underrepresent some categories when selecting a sample (Patten *et al*, 2018). There is a tendency for this to affect the result of the overall research as the number of respondents who applied for specialist short courses such as financial planning and analysis is lower than the number of those who applied for a highly popular course such as the miniMBA. As the sample may include more applicants from highly popular courses, a slightly distorted outcome may be evident when the anonymised applicant's general motivation and future aspirations are analysed.

Cohen *et al*. (2018) suggest a minimum sample size of 30 as a rule of thumb, with a larger sample leading to more accurate results. Saunders *et al*. (2009) agree, recommending a sample size of 30 for populations greater than 30, while advising to use the entire population if it falls below this threshold. However, Bryman and Bell (2011) argue that there is no definitive answer regarding sample size, as it often depends on time and cost considerations. They also indicate that increasing the sample size can enhance the accuracy of the findings and suggest that the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the sample should be a key factor in determining the sampling frame.

In my research, it can be assumed that the applicants exhibited a degree of homogeneity, given that their professional profiles are relatively similar, resulting in less variation. Purposive sampling was employed to select 75 applications from each semester in 2019, generating a total of 225 applications from a semester-based population of 163, 163, and 238 applications, respectively. Among these, 73, 73, and 74 applications were deemed valid from each semester. This represents a sample of 225 applications out of a total of 364 for 2019, which exceeds the sample size recommended by both Cohen *et al.* (2018) and Saunders *et al*. (2009:266), who suggest a sample of 217 for a population of 500. However, five applications were later excluded as invalid since, although they used EE application forms, the applicants intended to apply for a full postgraduate degree course (MBA). Due to the impact of COVID-19, the total number of applications received across all three semesters in 2020 was only 68, and 103 for the Spring and Summer of 2021, leading to the decision to use the entire set of applications without any sampling for 2020-2021.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

In understanding the difference between research design and tactic, it can be pointed out that while research design address the overall plan of the research project, tactics are focussed on a micro level set of points. Such tactics include data collection techniques such as interviews focus groups or document analysis. Tactics also include discussions that surround data analysis methods (Saunders *et al*, 2009). Silverman (2017) further discuss qualitative data collection methods by claiming that if a research uses only one qualitative data collection and analysis method, the research can be referred to as a mono method qualitative study. On the other hand, a multi-method qualitative study will incorporate the use of multiple data collection methods (semi-structured interviews and document analysis) and use qualitative data analysis procedures (Denzin, 2012). For my research based on LAMF, a multi-method approach may be the most appropriate method as it will lead to a robust set of data for analysis.

Two data collection methods were identified for this study and approval was gained from the managing director of the LAMF to capture and retain anonymised data for the duration of this project. These include collecting anonymised application forms (2019-2021) from those who applied to study an EE course at LAMF and interviewing key staff members that included both academic faculty members and non-academic personnel such as sales consultants and administrators. Parts of the application form would provide me with geo-demographic information that would allow me to classify the applicants into various groups. The personal statements would enable me to dig deeper into each individual's reasons for selecting an EE course at LAMF. Combining these insights with the semi-structured interviews with LAMF's staff that interact with the delegates at different points of the delegate journey would enable me to capture different perspectives and viewpoints. The combined data would be an extensive collection of statements that would enable me to conduct a multi-layer thematic analysis. Using thematic analysis of a rich data set would enable me to draw useful conclusions and see relationships between various data points and theories that were discussed in Chapter 2.

Due to strict data protection laws, the amount of data that I could gain access to was extremely limited, and although as the academic head of the school, I had access to the students' data, I ensured that all of the documents that I have obtained for this research were anonymised by a colleague before I obtained such information. This is in line with the recommendations made by Lincoln and Guba (1985) about anonymised data. Ideally, I would have preferred to interview the participants (students) as part of my data collection. However, the participants are typically on campus (or online) for between 28-36 direct contact hours (4 days or 8 weekly evenings). This is a very short period compared to a student who study a degree course at a university. It is worthwhile mentioning that a typical EE participant has no direct interaction with me during the entire student journey unless there is an academic misconduct hearing. Because of this, I did not have an opportunity to get to know them personally and develop a professional link with any of the participants. Hence, it was logistically impossible for me to administer a lengthy questionnaire or an interview without harming their overall study experience, bearing in mind, that the participants fill in a time-consuming delegate satisfaction survey at the end of their course. Hence, I had to use application forms, survey summaries and interviews with seven staff members.

3.4.1 Method 1 - Document Collection – Delegate Application Forms and Satisfaction Surveys

Rationale for Using Internal School Documents.

The use of pre-existing reports in conjunction with interviews is a method of creating a rich set of data (Punch, 1998). Seale (2004) also indicates that the pre-existing documents are agents of their own accord, and how such documents are created, used and function within an organisational setting plays a pivotal role in the research process. In agreement, Atkinson and Coffey (2004) recommend, that if the researcher intends to understand an organisation and how people within an organisation function, gaining access to their internal documents will enable the researcher to gain a proper understanding of these aspects. Although Denzin (2012) also argues that internal documents should not be automatically assumed to be accurate. Jupp and Sapsford (2006) take another step and claim that such documents may even be intentionally misleading. Although such concerns exist, the original purpose of creating delegate satisfaction surveys by the school is to ensure that delegate satisfaction is maintained at a high standard, and the anonymised survey summaries are based entirely on either physical or emailed survey forms that are collected without any involvement by the teaching staff. Hence, the delegates do not get an opportunity to provide subject-specific critical feedback to the faculty members in a structured and timely manner. Grandy *et al.* (2018) define archival research as the study of a collection of documents and suggest that before commencing archival research, the researcher needs to know *what* they are collecting, *why* and *how*. In terms of what, for this research, internal data from two data sources have been collected as anonymised forms. In terms of *why*, I expect the documents to provide quantifiable and insightful data about delegate profiles and their satisfaction levels about different aspects of the course. *How* is by retrieving anonymised raw information from the school based on a pre-agreed search criteria (2019-2021).

3.4.2 Course Application Forms (2019-2021)

Delegate applications from pre-pandemic (2019), and 2020-2021 were anonymised and collected. Furthermore, delegate satisfaction survey results from across different types of courses from 2019 – 2021 were collected. In terms of *how and why*, this data makes it possible to conduct an analysis based on delegate demand, changes in expectations, geo-demographic changes in course demand, and study how changes to the medium of study from a strictly campus-based provider to an online live (online synchronous) course provider have impacted on meeting delegate expectations and satisfaction levels across different categories of executive courses that are offered by the school. Yin (2011) argues that internal data sources should always be considered as a first choice for any research project as such data sources are generally the most economical, fastest and most convenient source of information available. Myers (2013) stresses that internal data is usually available only to those within the company that produced it, suggesting that such data will not be available in the public domain or published elsewhere. Whalley (2011) however cautions that internal data may not be complete, out of date, and/or may not be directly relevant. In terms of my research, as I will not be able to directly interview course participants as part of my research or be able to contact them directly after their course to evaluate whether their intended outcomes were fulfilled by the course, the data I need to rely on is limited to existing documents that are held within the school's database.

To find out information regarding LAMF, I had to look at different types of data that were available to me. As the research was mostly about EE delegates, I identified delegate application forms as the starting point. Within each highly detailed application form, in addition to geo-demographic data, I had a particular interest in their statement of intent (personal statement). In the personal statement, applicants talk about their career, aspirations, challenges, why they found a particular course attractive, and why they think the course would benefit them in achieving their future goals. The statement of intent can be as short as a few lines, but some statements can be as long as two pages. Initial data collection involved an analysis of delegate applications from 2019 (pre-pandemic), 2020 (transition period) and 2021 (new normal). Delegate applications from 2019 were collected using quota sampling as recommended by Vogt *et al.* (2017) while for both 2020 and 2021, all accepted applications were collected due to the low number of applications received as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, all delegate satisfaction survey results from across all courses and all three years were collected for analysis.

Data was initially typed into Excel spreadsheets where each application represented a row (with five spreadsheets for the five data sets). Each spreadsheet had columns as illustrated in Table 3.1 below:

Intake	Course name	Year of birth	Gender	Country of birth	English first language (Y/N)	Degree or experience	Highest qualification	Personal statement	Sponsored (Y/N)	Special needs (Y/N

Table 3.1: Template for applicant data collection

A second spreadsheet with multiple tabs was created to process the data which was on the initial set of spreadsheets. While some data was analysed entirely using Excel, some had to be analysed manually for cross-checking. For this analysis, the entire portfolio was divided into five categories. Postgraduate certificate and diploma courses, mostly appeal to recent graduates or those seeking a formal postgraduate qualification that will enable them to get a better job or a promotion. The school's flagship qualification, the Executive miniMBA and the leadership development programme were analysed on their own, while all other specialised short courses were analysed collectively. The summer and winter business schools that are aimed at those who are currently attending university or recent graduates were analysed separately. Personal statements from the sample of applications made between 2019 and 2021 were analysed to find any recurring patterns or themes. 1609 narrative excerpts were identified and coded into themes / sub-themes from the personal statements using NVivo qualitative data management software. Word clouds were created as suggested by Bazeley (2013) using the number of times a specific word recurred and included synonyms and a minimum word length of 3 characters to ensure that the system would omit connecting words such as "is, an, a, as" etc. These *stop words* are less meaningful and may not carry a substantial meaning or significance within qualitative research, claims Silverman (2017). A word cloud with 200 most used words was created, initially for 2019, followed by 2020 and 2021.

3.4.3 Delegate Satisfaction Survey Summaries

As a short course provider that provides specialised executive education courses, LAMF works under the assumption that delegates are not retained after they complete a course. This means, unlike a university or a further education college, the students do not return for another academic year/semester as these courses do not lead to another higher level course or a long-term qualification such as an undergraduate degree. Thus, the final goalpost in terms of delegate journey and feedback can be considered as the delegate satisfaction surveys where they benchmark the school's offering under different categories (out of 5 using a traffic light system) and in addition, the delegates provide a brief feedback about what they enjoyed during their studies and what could have been improved. This serves as input in terms of evaluating various aspects of LAMF and its course offering, and the school takes this report seriously in terms of enhancing its educational products. An example of a delegate satisfaction survey summary (term-wise) can be found in Appendix 4.

3.4.4 Method 2: Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews can be identified as a strong tool which enables the interviewer to understand others and gain the interviewee's perceptions, meanings and constructions or interpretation of reality (Punch, 1998). Rapley (2015) comments that in comparison to other methods, interviews can be perceived as a simple method which involves an interviewer asking questions and the respondent providing answers. Silverman (2017) suggests the type of interview should be aligned with the identified purposes of the study and its core research questions. Creswell and Poth (2018) define a structured interview as a set of planned, standardised questions with pre-coded categories for responses.

Conducting interviews with teachers in sociological research focused on education has been common practice since the 1930s (Ward and Delamont, 2020) and is recommended as a method for exploring aspects of progressive or outstanding educational settings.. A distinct advantage of qualitative research is that it is based on the inherently subjective nature of social relationships (Silverman, 1993). Individuals interpret other people's behaviour through their subjective lens of perception, and others' behaviour is framed within their own subjective and discursive frame. Kvale (1994) claims that the act of interviewing is the meeting of two subjectivities. As the interviewer is part of the social setting of the interview, they are not independent of the participant's answers. Rose and Grosvenor (2013) note that interviews provide the interviewer with the opportunity to validate and further investigate information that was already derived using other forms of data collection in more detail. They also recommend this as a method of collecting in-depth information from a small number of participants.

The use of interviews as a research method can be viewed as appropriate to capture the respondent's lived experiences, opinions or understanding of a specific phenomenon as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013). McKinley and Rose (2020:279) agree with this viewpoint and further suggest that interviewing can be used to produce conversational data and will enable social construction of knowledge. An interview is a social event, an exchange, part of what Kushner (2017) referred to as *the social conversation*. Kushner (2017) explains that interviews inherently involve roles and relationships, are guided by rules and rituals, and must follow a defined structure. Denzin (2006) also discusses binocular vision – replacing qualitative/quantitative with experiential/criteria and using a combination of the two methods which will enable a more comprehensive understanding of the research parameters. Kushner (2017) argues that an evaluation must lead to a particular type of conclusion – one about merit, worth, or significance, usually expressed in the language of good/bad, better/worse, well/ill, elegantly/poorly etc.

Interviews can be broadly categorised into three categories, and each category has its own merits and drawbacks (Mueller and Segal, 2014). An unstructured interview (discovery interview) can be used as a free-flowing/informal discussion. This enables a respondent to dig deeper into a discussion and generate a rich set of data. Lambert *et al.* (2019) suggest as there is no structure, there is a tendency for the discussion to go astray or deviate from the topic. Another drawback is the discussion might not cover every area the interviewer wanted to cover. A structured interview comprises of a set of standardised questions (Rapley, 2015). The respondent is required to answer in sequence. Advantages include the assurance that all of the areas that need to be addressed can be addressed using the set of questions (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Uniformity amongst all respondents is another plus point. However, there is no possibility to cross-examine or interrogate in order to gain an in-depth understanding. The discussion may take a mechanised approach as well. In contrast, a semi-structured interview will allow for the respondent to provide detailed responses and the interviewer can ask follow-up questions, claims Rapley (2015). Semi-structured interviews will also have a set of base questions that will allow for a degree of structure within the interview process (Silverman, 2017).

On the other hand, Kvale (1994) suggests that during an unstructured interview, the interviewer does a minimal amount of talking while the respondent does most of the discussion. However, Punch (1998) suggest that conducting this type of interview requires skill, as the interviewer should be able to steer the discussion in a way to gain responses that are linked with the interview questions. An unstructured interview could have provided an in-depth discussion but as a disadvantage, there will be no time limit and the interview may stray from the original discussion into other areas that may or may not be important for the current research. Moreover, as all of the respondents were busy professionals with limited time availability, this method may be extensively time-consuming, which may lead to the respondents having an opinion that the interview process was a waste of their time.

Ward and Delamont (2020) write semi-structured interviews allow for a deeper examining of research concerns and can become a collaborative effort between the interviewer and the respondent to explore deeper meaning. In terms of semi-structured interviews, Lambert *et al.* (2019) assert that the method encourages two-way discussion and interaction between the interviewer (researcher) and the interviewee, and in comparison to a structured interview, will provide a more informal setting where it will allow each party to revisit things that were discussed previously, and either reflect or offer further elaboration on some of the points discussed previously. Hence, I have decided that a series of semi-structured interviews with individual staff members of LAMF would provide me with the required insights.

In a qualitative research project, rigorous data collection processes can be the prominent factors that impact quality and trustworthiness and this can critically impact the outcomes of the research project, as argued by Kallio (2016). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that while interviews are the most popular qualitative data collection method, semi-structured interviews can be classified as being the most preferred interview technique when it comes to qualitative research. Silverman (2017) highlights one of the distinct advantages of semi-structured interviews as the reciprocity between the interviewer and the respondent, which enables the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions depending on the interview participant's responses. Bell (2018) suggests, that taking a semi-structured approach will improve rapport between the two parties and this will lead to the participants feeling more comfortable in discussing more insights as they will feel comfortable, confident and connected with the interviewer as this will reaffirm the perception that the interviewer is genuinely interested in the respondent's opinions. Silverman (2017) recommends this will lead to the creation of enriched datasets that would not have been possible using a structured interview approach.

3.4.5 Rationale for Using Semi-structured Online Interviews

A focus group would have been more time-efficient, in the current context, and a healthy debate amongst participants may have led to the generation of a set of rich data. But it has many disadvantages including the discussion being dominated by one or a few participants (Fontana and Frey, 2000), the difficulty of scheduling the focus group as not all staff members are present (including on-line) at the same time and some respondents' reluctance to discuss their ideas in front of a group. This may include their line managers or staff members from other departments. Furthermore, some staff may be privy to confidential information such as sales techniques which other members of staff including the academic staff may not be privileged to have access to. Also, as Gubrium and Holstein (2002) point out, during the transcribing and data analysis stages, it will be a challenge to analyse multiple voices at times when more than one participant speaks at the same time.

In terms of online interviews, Bryman and Bell (2011) identify many advantages over physical interviews. Online interviews can be administered from a place of convenience, where both the interviewer and the interviewee can participate from home or office. O'Gorman and MacIntosh (2015) agree by stating that online interviews offer convenience in comparison to face-to-face interviews. This eliminates travel and meeting room hire costs and saves on travel time. They also argue that because of advanced features such as live video streaming, an online interview can be nearly as interactive as a face-to-face interview. Further, the online interview platform (zoom) features automatic transcribing and voice recording. While the transcribing tool saves the researcher time that would have been taken for taking manual notes and transcribing a recorded interview, the voice recording serves as evidence of the interview. This serves as a reference point in case the researcher needs to listen to the recording for clarification. Savin-Baden and Major (2023) also suggest that online interviews will reduce desirability bias compared to physical interviews.

However, Fontana and Frey (2000) caution that an online interview may not last for as long as a physical interview due to interviewee fatigue. Bryman and Bell (2011) also suggest that personal interviews are better suited to discuss sensitive topics. Further, technophobic respondents may not be comfortable with online interviews. Technological / internet/ power failures may result in disruptions to online interviews. O'Gorman and MacIntosh (2015) claim that another limitation of online interviews is the respondent's level of attention given to the interview, and it is comparatively difficult to build rapport and see some of the physical gestures (such as hand movement) during online interviews. It is noteworthy to state that all of the teaching staff use Zoom for their teaching activities and the other respondents were also highly conversant with Zoom meetings as they regularly use it for meetings and interviews. All of the respondents have reliable laptops with batteries that hold a charge, reliable and high-speed broadband connections and stable computer systems as they regularly use the same systems for teaching or work.

A set of semi-structured interview questions was developed (as recommended by Silverman, 2017), and these were shared with the interviewees with the participant information sheet (appendix 5) and consent form (appendix 6). This allowed the participants to prepare themselves ahead of the interview, to enable them to reflect upon the questions to come prepared for the interview. Lambert *et al.*(2019) suggest this acts as an *aide-mémoire* (ensuring that mandatory areas of discussion/ themes are not ignored by either party).

Once the respondents returned their consent forms, they were sent a meeting invite with a link to a Zoom video meeting using Brunel University's student Zoom account. The interviews were recorded on Brunel University's Zoom cloud account which complied with the UK's General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and other data security policies that applied to Brunel University. Participants were made aware of the fact that all interviews were being recorded and the transcripts were being anonymised. This was communicated to them ahead of the interview and at the beginning of each interview. Recorded interviews were initially transcribed using Zoom's transcribing tool and manually anonymised before the transcripts were saved for data analysis. Minor corrections to the transcript were made as the automated tool made spelling errors during transcribing. A copy of the final transcript was emailed to each participant for confirmation of accuracy. This is in line with the recommendations made by Lincoln and Guba (1985) who claimed that revealing the information that was captured for research to the participants will ensure an accurate depiction of the interview, especially the participant's viewpoints. The participants were informed that the recording would only be retained until December 2021 but some parts of the anonymised transcripts may be published or used as part of a wider research.

By using this approach for the seven semi-structured interviews, I was able to gain many insights into various aspects and viewpoints about EE and LAMF from the participants. Probing questions allowed for a lengthy discussion with each participant and each interview lasted for between 40 minutes and one hour. Although time-consuming, the data collection method allowed me to gain in-depth information and a substantial amount of qualitative data for the data analysis. After inquiring about the availability of each participant, I was able to create a timetable for the interviews. However, due to some of the participants being furloughed, and as I only had access to their work email, which the participants were not legally permitted to check while being furloughed, I had to use the professional networking platform, LinkedIn to initiate contact with two of the participants. Later on, all of the participants returned to work and the interviews were successfully conducted between February and June 2021.

Researchers should be aware of their prejudices and assumptions - suggests McKinley and Rose (2020). In terms of the current research, I had the presumption that all sales staff work on commission and although their official job title is "*educational consultant*", their main priority was to sell a course which may or may not be the ideal course for an applicant, in order gain commission. Hence, they may be providing advice that may not be in the best interest of the applicant. However, I was consciously aware of this personal prejudice and ensured that such views did not cloud my judgement or discussions during and after the interviews. As Braun and Clarke (2013) recommended, I ensured that I remained neutral (by self-reflecting, active listening and by not using leading questions) with a non-judgemental interest during all parts of the interviews. This also ensures consistency, openness and minimising of respondent bias and will result in a set of authentic data and rich insights, claims Braun and Clarke (2013).

3.5 Trustworthiness of the Human Instrument

Terms such as reliability and validity are more closely aligned with quantitative research (Agar, 1986). Agar (1986) suggested that the accuracy and trustworthiness of qualitative data need to be assured to preserve the quality of research findings. Forero *et al.* (2018) who based their research on the works of Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four dimension criteria to improve the trustworthiness of research projects: truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality.

In terms of truth value, Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that it evaluates whether the scholar has established confidence in the results for the subject or the interviewees and the context in which the research project has been carried out. Merriam (2009) explains that truth can be assessed using how the researcher has managed threats to the internal validity of the project in question and the validity of the research instruments as a measure of the phenomenon of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that internal validity tends to assume that there is only one reality in existence, but in the case of qualitative research, multiple realities may exist and the researcher needs to reveal all such realities that are revealed by the respondents. Saunders (2009) suggests lack of standardisation of semi-structured interviews may result in concerns about reliability as it will not be possible for another researcher to replicate the same interview elsewhere.

Applicability can be defined as how the findings of a research study can be applied to other organisations or contexts, thus, generalising the findings to a wider population (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that when it comes to transferability, the primary responsibility is with the researcher who is attempting to transfer the findings to another context or population. Hence, as long as the researcher who published the study has presented an adequate amount of descriptive data to enable comparison, the researcher has addressed the problem of applicability (Merriam, 2009). In my research, I have included all of the thematic diagrams, anonymised survey results and anonymised applicant statements as part of the research report (or as appendices). Further, a large sample of geo-demographic data was collected for 2019 (as recommended by Creswell and Poth, 2018) while all of the applications for 2020-21 were used as part of my data collection. As LAMF shares many characteristics with other EE providers, such as an executive education course portfolio, the use of external consultants as facilitators, recruiting both UK-based and international delegates and having their own sales team, many of the findings may be applicable towards the wider industry.

Consistency can be defined as whether the results of a research project would be identical if the research was replicated within a similar context (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Comparing the characteristics of qualitative research with quantitative, Silverman (2017) argues that when it comes to qualitative research, achieving such results will become complex due to unconnected and unexpected variables. Merriam (2009) argues that the main objective of qualitative research is to learn from the interviewees instead of controlling the narrative of the discussion. Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out that the instruments that are evaluated for consistency within a qualitative research context are the researcher(s) and the respondents. As this will be a unique situation that cannot be replicated identically, focus is drawn in terms of achieving variation in experience instead of identical repetition.

Guba (1981) discusses dependability as trackable variability which can be attributed to distinguishably identifiable sources. Guba (1981) argues that qualitative research looks at a range of experiences rather than an average of experiences, thus, covering even any anomalies (atypical) within the findings as part of the discussion. Silverman (2017) suggested that other variabilities may include increased insights in terms of the researcher, interviewee fatigue and changes in the interviewee's life situations. In terms of my research, due to COVID-related redundancies and furlough schemes, several staff members who were selectively identified for the interviews were no longer available. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue about neutrality as the fourth criterion in terms of trustworthiness. In a qualitative context, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the focus of neutrality needs to be on the data itself instead of the researcher. Patton (2015) suggests that when truth value and applicability are achieved, confirmability becomes the criteria for neutrality. In my research project, transcribed interview transcripts were emailed back to the interview respondents to ensure that the transcript accurately captured what they had discussed at the interview. Further, delegate applications were used without editing where the personal statements were directly used, without any amendments, whereby ensuring that neutrality is ensured within the research project.

Krefting (1999) discuss strategies that can be used by researchers to improve the trustworthiness of the human instrument. Krefting (1999) divides this aspect into four areas based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Krefting (1999) further discusses these sections under different sub-categories which may form part of one or more of the four main areas indicated above.

To improve the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of my research project, methods suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and others were applied throughout the project.

3.5.1 Credibility

Reflexivity and Bias

As suggested by Bassey (1999), to improve the reliability of the report, a suitably competent and independent person can review the project at different intervals and provide feedback as a critical friend. Stenhouse (1985) further suggests that such an independent person can provide a letter declaring that they have witnessed my research's progress and has adhered to research ethics and ensured transparency. Since the project commenced, my progress was discussed with a senior lecturer at another higher education institute who acted as a critical friend who challenged my findings. Peer debriefing was offered at pre-agreed intervals and critical feedback was provided to enhance the transparency, ethical aspects and overall academic integrity of the report. Once the conclusions were written, a letter was provided (Appendix 7), confirming that the work was done in line with the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) guidelines.

In discussing another strategy to improve the credibility of interview questions, Morse (1991) who discussed credibility (based on the work of May, 1989) claims that reframing questions or expansion of questions based on occasion can improve credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also claim that credibility is enhanced when interviews and observations are internally consistent. Based on this claim, my research used a pre-approved set of interview questions. Quantitative data was captured on a standardised template where every delegate application was treated equally and fairly. The same information was captured for all 391 application forms. Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggests another method of improving credibility. This is where structural coherence is established through the assurance that there are no structural inconsistencies in either the data or interpretations. While acknowledging any differences in opinions or data conflicts, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggests that providing explanations for such conflicts or deviants would enhance credibility. In my research, any anomalies, unusual data patterns or contradicting opinions are explained in detail to improve credibility.

The authority of the researcher can be identified as another way of improving the credibility and trustworthiness of the human instrument (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Four unique characteristics that can be attributed to such an assessment: (1) The level of awareness of the issue and/or case study; (2) a robust awareness of conceptual or theoretical knowledge and the capability to conceptualise large quantities of qualitative data; (3) the capability of undertaking a multidisciplinary style (to evaluate the issue/research problem through a series of dissimilar theoretical viewpoints; and (4) good exploratory and analytical (research) skills which have been advanced to a high level using review of existing literature, developed experience in qualitative research methods and course work. As a senior member of the staff of LAMF, I am fully aware of all of the operational aspects of the case study organisation. After undertaking a critical literature review, I have acquired the necessary theoretical knowledge and dissimilar theoretical viewpoints around the subject specialisation. Further, I have undertaken training in terms of working with both quantitative and qualitative data analysis software that enabled me to analyse large amounts of data and draw conclusions based on the themes and patterns that emerged from such data.

As I am employed at LAMF, in a senior management role, most of the interview participants may have been subjected to bias. According to Sarniak (2015), Acquiescence bias, also known as friendliness bias, occurs when a respondent exhibits an inclination to agree with and be positive about whatever the interviewer projects. Similarly, as pointed out by Larson (2019), social desirability bias can have an impact on the results of the interviews and recommends that control measures should be in place to ensure that the researcher minimises any impact of social desirability bias that may have an impact on the research results. This has been reiterated by Krumpal (2013) who suggests that respondents may have self-presentation concerns, particularly when a controversial topic is being discussed where the respondents may underreport their views on such areas of controversy while overreport on socially desirable topics.

In this case, the respondents believe that every idea is a good one and can see themselves liking and acting upon every situation that is proposed. Sarniak (2015) suggests that some respondents may have acquiescent personalities, while others acquiesce as they perceive the interviewer to be an expert. Acquiescence can be suggested as the easy way out, as it takes less effort than carefully weighing each option. In my research project, I informed the respondents of the purpose of my research and asked them not to take into account my role within the school during the interview. It was further clarified that the answers they provide will remain anonymous from the time it is transcribed, answers provided during the interviews will have no consequence to their work at LAMF and they should be open and honest when expressing their views. Information that was provided within the participant information sheet, which also included their right to withdraw from the study without providing any reason, acted as another layer of reassurance for the participants. This enabled me to minimise acquiescence bias during the seven interviews. For these interviews, I also clearly reiterated my role as a doctoral researcher rather than a subject matter expert in executive education or a senior employee of LAMF, in the hope that the respondents would be able to express their opinions more confidently as they would do with a student-researcher.

Another type of respondent bias that may have influenced the research is social desirability bias. Edwards (1957) argues that this type of bias encompasses respondents answering questions in such a way that they presume, will lead to being accepted and liked. Regardless of the research format, they will report incorrectly on sensitive or personal matters to project themselves in the best possible light. In line with BERA guidelines, a participant information sheet was given to all of the respondents before the interviews. This provided critical information to reassure them that there are no disadvantages related to their employment as a result of participating in this research. This ensured that social desirability bias was minimised during all of the interviews as recommended by Fisher (1993).

3.5.2 Triangulation

Triangulation can be recommended as a way of integrating research that has mixed methods (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Salkinds (2010) argues that using several data sources or different approaches to analysing data can result in enhanced credibility of a research study. Denzin (1978) suggests that triangulation can align multiple perspectives and can result in a broader understanding of the area of interest. Grandy *et al.* (2018) agree with this viewpoint and suggest that the use of more than one data source can enhance authenticity. Grandy *et al.* (2018) suggest that the use of multiple procedures to capture data will reduce the possibility of sources of error including missing data. While some researchers look at triangulation as very important to establish substantiating evidence, others focus on the possibility of providing more than one angle and different contexts to enhance the understanding of a research question. While its primary focus lies within qualitative research methods, triangulation usually consists of evaluating data generated from interviews, written documents, or similar data sources. Salkinds (2010) further states that triangulation is frequently used in research projects that employ quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Four different types of triangulation that can be used within social research are identified by Patton (1999):

- triangulation of research methods
- triangulation of researchers
- triangulation of theories
- triangulation of data sources

Within the current research, three of the four methods identified by Patton (1999) were employed by me. The only type of triangulation that I was unable to incorporate was the triangulation of researchers as this research is a single res earcher-based project. This works as a disadvantage when it comes to dependability as per Lincoln and Guba (1985). However, they also suggest that having an audit trail will improve the dependability of such research projects that depend on a single researcher. My research project has been reviewed by two research supervisors from Brunel University at 4–6-week intervals as part of my continuous progress monitoring and feedback during the entire project. As suggested by Bassey (1999), an external academic from a UK-based university has also reviewed the project at regular intervals and acted as a critical friend. As recommended by Liamputtong (2009), evidence of all data gathered is also available for inspection if required. Wilson (2014) argues that triangulation was initially undertaken as a way to increase the validity of research results. But Flick (2002:227) argues that "*triangulation is less a strategy for validating results and procedures than an alternative to validation which increases scope, depth and consistency in methodological proceedings*".

Denzin (1978) identified triangulation as a method of improving trustworthiness, focussing on credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest triangulation of data sources to cross-check the dataset and interpretation. This is reiterated by Patton (1999) where triangulation is discussed as a method of research credibility and data quality. Triangulation (discussed separately) was part of my research project where every type of triangulation (except the triangulation of the researcher) was implemented as a measure of improving credibility and trustworthiness. Denzin (1978) also suggests member checking as a method of improving trustworthiness. In this case, the data is shared with the interviewees to ensure that their experiences are accurately captured within the research findings as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This ensures that the interviewee's viewpoints are accurately translated into what was stated at the interview into research data. In my case, a copy of the interview transcript was shared with each of the interviewees to check for accuracy and consent. This ensures that any possibility of misrepresentation is minimised as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). As another method of improving trustworthiness, Patton (1999) suggests retaining copies of recordings and transcripts for future review which enables an examiner to evaluate the interpretation of direct quotes. In my current research, voice recordings were erased in December 2021 (as informed to the interview respondents) but copies of detailed transcripts of all interviews are maintained on an encrypted space at Brunel University's server.

In addition to scaling, enhancing reliability and convergent validation, using multiple measures can capture a more complete, contextual and holistic representation of the area that is being evaluated (Jick, 1979). Campbell and Fiske (1959) suggest that the use of multiple measures will enable the researcher to expose unique variances which would not have been possible if a single method-based research approach had been used. Guba and Lincoln (1989) argue that qualitative methods can play a prominent role by stimulating data and suggesting conclusions that may not have been picked up by other research methods. Jick (1979) further states that the effectiveness of triangulation will depend on the counterbalancing of one research method's weakness by the strengths of another method. Patton (1999) argues that triangulation will enable the researchers to be more confident of their research findings and conclusions due to its multi-method approach. It will also enable the researcher to explore a deviant or an off-quadrant dimension of a phenomenon. As it considers different viewpoints, it is likely to produce data that may not supplement a particular theory or model. However, Jick (1979) also reports some shortcomings of triangulation. Firstly, Jick (1979) argues that it is difficult to replicate the research, which was based on an organisation, while it can be seen as an important factor within scientific research. Qualitative methods can be problematic to replicate and multi-method research may not bear credible results if the research is not focussed either theoretically or conceptually. It is also recommended that triangulation should not be used to legitimise either a dominant or personally preferred research method. While replicating my current research project in its entirety may not be feasible, it is possible to draw noteworthy conclusions that could be applied to other similar EE providers or to the adult education sector more broadly.

3.5.3 Transferability

Transferability can be defined as "*The degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents. The researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through thick description*", Lincoln and Guba (1985:290). Considering the unique approaches and practices at LAMF, it may be difficult to directly link some of the findings or to generalise conclusions derived from this research to another organisation or context. There may be unique findings in terms of changes in demand due to the pandemic, and findings based on the transformation of class delivery to live-online instructional delivery across EE may be a possibility. As Bassey (1999) suggests, the results may be relatable to an educational establishment with similar characteristics.

In terms of transferability, LAMF is in a unique position where its support system and infrastructure are set up in a way which is uniquely different to most other business schools in the world. Furthermore, its history as a vocational school with a poor reputation and insufficient industry links, which Carlsson-Wall and Richtnér (2021) suggest are essential, makes it challenging to fully transfer the findings and conclusions to another organisation. However, there may be lessons to be learnt in terms of changes in approach to EE, responding to the effects of a global pandemic, surviving through financially and physically difficult times, business transformation and responding to market changes.

3.5.4 Pilot testing

Pilot testing is a way of obtaining preliminary information (Patten *et al*, 2018). As recommended by Kallio (2016), pilot testing can expose the preliminary interview questions to critique and scrutinise to determine whether any changes to the questions were necessary, and to see whether the responses will bring answers to my research objectives. Robson (2002) also suggests that pilot testing enables the evaluation of the feasibility of the data collection methods and the choice of data collection instruments such as interview questions. This allows the researcher to make any necessary amendments at an early stage. Silverman (2001) recommends pilot testing as a method of improving the reliability of the interviews. Patten *et al.* (2018) also recommend pilot testing to be a tool to test interview questions and make adjustments to the questions based on the flow and feedback from the pilot interview. Furthermore, as Cohen *et al.* (2002) suggest, the pilot testing phase will enable the researcher to practice interview skills at an early stage, and further claim that leading questions within a set of interview questions can be identified and adjusted during the pilot testing stage.

A pilot interview was done with the managing director of LAMF, who authorised the study, allowing for an hour for the discussion that enabled me to determine how the questions could be asked and to identify whether any questions were not relevant to the current study, or whether there were any questions that the respondents found to be intimidating or feel uncomfortable. This also enabled me to reassure the managing director about the type of questions being asked, and the type of data being collected. Following the initial pilot, it was determined that the interview protocol (set of questions) which was submitted to Brunel University's research ethics committee approval could be used without any changes for the remainder of the study. The responses from the pilot study were not included in the findings as the managing director's profile was not part of the sample of respondents selected.

Following the pilot testing phase, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted between February and June 2021 with a selection of key staff members across different departments of LAMF. Due to the prevailing global situation that revolved around COVID-19, many of the staff members were being made redundant or being furloughed. This posed a challenge of gaining access to the same staff members who participated in the professional contextualised study (PCS) in 2019. The PCS was a preliminary research project that was undertaken during year two of the EdD programme at Brunel University, where initial research was conducted with a selected number of interview participants using a set of research questions and objectives. Based on the strengths and weaknesses of my approach to the PCS (including lessons learnt), a more robust approach to the main EdD thesis was incorporated. Respondents in the current study included four executive education specialist trainers, two recruitment consultants including the recruitment team leader and a delegate support officer. As the number of respondents who were available for interviews was limited due to the pandemic, purposive sampling has been used to identify those who were qualified and willing to become respondents to this research project. All of the interviews were conducted as online interviews using the Zoom collaboration platform.

3.5.5 Coding of interview transcripts

To ensure a rigorous and transparent analysis of the interview data, I employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis.

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Table 3.2 : Phases of thematic analysis. Source: Braun and Clarke (2006:86)

This process was applied consistently across the seven respondents, which included four academic staff and three professional staff. Thematic analysis allowed for a systematic identification of patterns within the data, providing a structured yet flexible approach to interpreting participants' experiences linked to various aspects of EE programme delivery at LAMF.

Phase 1: Familiarisation with the Data

The first step involved immersing myself in the data by transcribing the interviews and repeatedly reading through the transcripts. This included sending back the transcripts to the respondents to check for accuracy. This process was essential for developing a deep understanding of the content. Initial notes were made to capture recurring ideas, patterns, and potential areas of interest. NVivo 12 was particularly useful at this stage, as it allowed for efficient organisation and retrieval of key excerpts.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Using NVivo 12 and Excel, I systematically coded the dataset, identifying meaningful segments of text and assigning initial codes. These codes were generated directly from the data. Consistency was maintained by ensuring that all responses were coded using the same framework.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

Once the initial codes were established, they were reviewed and grouped into broader potential themes. At this stage, thematic diagrams were created in NVivo 12 to visualise the relationships between codes and identify overarching patterns. Similar codes were clustered together, and preliminary themes began to emerge, reflecting key aspects of the participants' responses.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

The identified themes were then subjected to a rigorous review process to ensure coherence and accuracy. This involved cross-checking themes against the original data, refining them where necessary, and ensuring that each theme was supported by sufficient evidence. During this phase, I also considered alternative interpretations and examined any inconsistencies in the data. Some themes were merged or redefined to enhance clarity and alignment with the research objectives.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Following the review, I refined each theme to ensure clarity and distinctiveness. Each theme was given a descriptive name that captured its essence, supported by representative quotes from the interviews. The naming process aimed to ensure that themes accurately reflected the experiences and perspectives of both academic and professional staff.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

Finally, the findings were synthesised into a structured narrative, demonstrating how each theme was derived and supported by data. Selected quotes were incorporated to my findings chapter, in order to provide direct insight into participants' perspectives, ensuring transparency in the analytical process. An example of the final thematic structure is detailed in Appendix 18.

By explicitly following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, this analysis ensures methodological rigour while allowing for an in-depth exploration of the data. The integration of NVivo 12 and Excel further supported the organisation and visual representation of themes, contributing to a systematic and transparent thematic analysis. How I have addressed the ethical aspects of this research is discussed in the following section.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

> *"Nothing can be more important in educational research than it is ethical" (Wellington 2000:54).*

Ethical consideration plays an extremely important part in any research project. The British Educational Research Association's (BERA:2024) guidelines seek to strengthen the bond between researcher and researched by identifying four values (as identified by Bassey, 1999):

- respect for democracy
- respect for truth
- respect for persons
- respect for educational research itself

These guidelines acted as moral pillars of my research from the beginning of this project. In September 2020, an initial application was made to Brunel Research Ethics Online (BREO) with the approval of my research project supervisor. The application was accompanied by supporting documents including a sample interview protocol, participant information sheet, participant consent form (which included consent to carry out a research interview and recording of each interview) and an approval letter from the managing director of LAMF. BREO approval was given in October 2020 (Appendix 8). This step enabled me to conduct my research within their strict guidelines and under the research ethics guidelines stated by BERA.

In terms of conducting synchronous online interviews, there are three areas of ethical concern as identified by O'Gorman and MacIntosh (2015). Safeguarding of participants, confidentiality and consent. Prior consent was sought from all participants whom I have interviewed, with full details of their rights, what to expect during the interview, details about anonymity, their right to withdraw from the study without providing any reasons, and whom to contact in case further information is required about the research project. They were also provided with a set of interview questions at this stage as recommended by Patton (2015). This allowed them to be fully prepared for the online interview. They were also informed explicitly that refusing to participate or providing their honest opinions to me as a researcher would not in any way impact their work at LAMF. This is in-line with the recommendations made by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In terms of safeguarding, O'Gorman and MacIntosh (2015) recommend building a good rapport with the participants and exit mechanisms are methods that can be used by a researcher to mitigate such concerns.

All collected data was stored in an encrypted network location within Brunel's cloud-based network. A confirmation letter from Brunel University's IT department can be found in Appendix 9. As I am a member of the staff of LAMF, all necessary steps were taken to ensure that no forms of bias or conflict of interest would influence any part of the research project. This includes not asking any leading questions from the respondents, not sharing my views about the questions being asked. Further, not having any preconceived attitudes or opinions about the participants or assumptions in terms of how they would respond to each question, which is in-line with the recommendations made by Yin (2011). Furthermore, I have consciously ensured that any work-related matters or confrontational topics that would relate to LAMF were avoided at all times during the interviews. The latter part of this chapter addresses the limitations of this project and the transferability of the outcomes from this project.

Working in-line with BERA guidelines, I have assured that all respondents and the name of the school will remain anonymous at all times, and the data collection, processing and reporting will remain transparent, anonymous and based on individual consent. In terms of power relationships, some respondents reported directly to me at LAMF. As recommended by Shenton (2004), they were provided with clear instructions and guidance that either withdrawing from the invitation or refraining from responding to specific questions in their own right. As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), they were provided with information, stating that they do not need to provide an excuse for terminating an interview prematurely. This was provided at the invitation stage as part of the participant information pack and at the beginning of each interview.

While conducting research, the participants (respondents) may be exposed to different kinds of harm (Ward and Delamont, 2020). Wiles, Crow and Pain (2011) suggest that such harm is not limited to only physical or psychological harm but may include factors that impact their reputation, the reputation of their employer or the type of work they do. Other factors such as their interests, social standing and even prospects may be affected. Furthermore, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) point out that harm can even apply at an institutional level. As argued by Bassey (1999), fictional names of people and places can be used in reports to give anonymity to the sources while retaining the human touch. In line with Bassey's (1999) suggestions, all respondent names were replaced with pseudonyms and the school's name was replaced with "*London Academy of Management and Finance (LAMF)*" on all statements, collected evidence, forms and data sheets to ensure anonymity.

Following formal training in the qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo, all seven interview transcripts were processed using Nvivo to analyse the qualitative data to identify possible themes and most recurrent terms within all seven transcripts. This included coding interview transcripts and categorising them into different themes and sub-themes which enabled me to create word clouds, and decision trees and see relationships between different themes and sub-themes. These diagrams were created during data analysis which enabled me to link and identify different patterns, themes, relationships and recurrences.

No under-aged children (anybody below the age of 18 years) or vulnerable adults were involved in this research. Although actual student data was collected for the analysis, it was anonymised, and the raw applicant data will be destroyed upon project completion, as confirmed with the managing director of LAMF.

Another aspect of ethical consideration is around persons with disabilities or special needs. Ward and Delamont (2020) argue that sometimes, researchers tend to overlook this aspect at various stages of their research project. In terms of the current research, none of the interview respondents declared any special needs, reasonable adjustments or a disability. When considering delegate applications, LAMF has provided a section in their application form to declare any form of special needs either during the application stage or at any preceding stage of the delegate journey. It is worthwhile noting that no applicants between 2019 and 2021 identified themselves as having a disability or a special need that warranted reasonable adjustments.

Maintaining a good rapport and interpersonal relationships with the interview participants will result in a rich collection of information and maintaining a healthy working relationship between the researcher and the respondent (Guillemin and Heggen, 2009) and such relationships are important for ethical rigour within qualitative research. Hoogesteyn *et al.* (2023) claim that rapport building can be two-fold (verbal and non-verbal) and verbal methods of rapport building can include finding common ground and finding shared experiences with the interview respondents while non-verbal tactics include affirmation and displaying empathy. Hoogesteyn *et al.* (2023) point out that face-to-face interviews result in better rapport. Due to technological advancements related to internet-based communications and the COVID-19 pandemic, online communication is currently ubiquitous. It has become a preferred medium for different kinds of interviews and interactions. In my research, all of the academic respondents (tutors) have similar professional profiles and qualifications that are comparable to mine. Further, they work collaboratively with me regularly at work, and I have an excellent working relationship with the academic respondents where there is plenty of common ground and shared experiences among us. While the three non-academic respondents have professional profiles that are different to my own, they also have a good working relationship with me. As the online interviews were video-based, it was convenient for me to show empathy and affirmation as both verbal responses and gestures of affirmation. This is in-line with the recommendations made by

Kvale (1984) who claimed that empathetic engagement in promoting a trusting bond between the interviewer and respondent is important for effective qualitative data collection.

When conducting qualitative interviews, another aspect that is as important as maintaining rapport is maintaining neutrality to elicit unbiased responses from interviewees (Zhang and Okazawa, 2023). The challenge is to maintain neutrality while building a good rapport. Rapley (2012) argues that self-disclosure is a good method of obtaining the interviewee's trust and positive engagement. Blee (2002) suggests that verbally assuring neutrality while acknowledging ideological differences between the interviewer and the respondent will enable the building of rapport and ensure neutrality.

Methodological transparency is another area of concern. McKinley and Rose (2020) point out that the researcher should maintain transparency across all stages of the research project from the initial research conceptualisation, design, data collection, analysis and publication of findings. Within the current project, transparency in terms of collecting data, storing, processing, analysing and deriving conclusions was maintained, and supporting data is kept as anonymised data for verification. Steps within the project were discussed with my supervisory team, and critical friend. Evidence of how I intend to conduct the project was provided to Brunel University's research ethics committee to gain ethics committee approval before commencement of any data collection activities.

3.7 Limitations

> *"A limitation of a study design or instrument is the systematic bias that the researcher did not or could not control and which could inappropriately affect the results"*
>
> Price and Murnan (2004:66)

A few notable limitations were identified during the research process. One notable concern is the internal validity of the research instruments. Price and Murnan (2004) highlight that threats to internal validity may occur if participants do not respond truthfully to survey items. Creswell and Poth (2018) further note that the absence of an instrument's psychometric properties and the potential for misunderstanding interview questions can also compromise internal validity. Misunderstandings may lead respondents to provide contrived answers that do not accurately reflect their views (Kvale, 1994). Additionally, participant bias, as identified by Bourdieu (1990), could cloud results, as academic staff may provide responses tailored to what they believe the researcher wants to hear, particularly since I line manage them at LAMF.

Another limitation relates to the single-institution data collection approach. Research conducted in a single context may limit the generalisability of the findings (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The unique characteristics of the institution such as its organisational culture, demographics, and regional influences may not represent the broader landscape of executive education (Yin, 2018). This specificity can introduce contextual bias, affecting how participants interpret questions and respond based on their familiarity with the institution's norms (Stake, 1995). As a result, insights derived from this study may reflect the characteristics of LAMF rather than broader trends applicable to other executive education providers.

The sampling strategy employed, specifically quota-based convenience sampling, may have further restricted the depth of the data collected. While this approach enabled the inclusion of diverse applicants, it also meant that some detailed personal statements were not represented in the dataset. A systematic sampling strategy might have allowed for a more robust selection of applications, capturing a wider range of perspectives and experiences. Moreover, the drop in applications during 2020/2021 required the inclusion of all received applications instead of a larger sample from a more extensive pool. This smaller dataset limits the longitudinal insights and potentially affects the external validity of the research findings (Fink, 2003).

The pandemic also posed challenges, including staff redundancies, which prevented interviews with key personnel such as the head of admissions and compliance. Absence of such staff may have limited the breadth of insight into the sales and admissions operations of the school.

Lastly, while I am experienced with Microsoft Excel as a certified specialist, my lack of familiarity with NVivo 12 presented challenges in managing qualitative data. Understanding concepts such as nodes, codes, and trees was initially difficult. However, I received guidance from my supervisors and consulted with an NVivo specialist at Brunel University, allowing me to navigate the software effectively and conduct accurate thematic analysis.

3.8 Chapter Summary

Figure 3.3 provides an overview of the conceptual framework designed for this thesis where a holistic view of the entire project is presented, with a focus on the goals, research questions, theoretical framework, methods and validity are discussed under each heading.

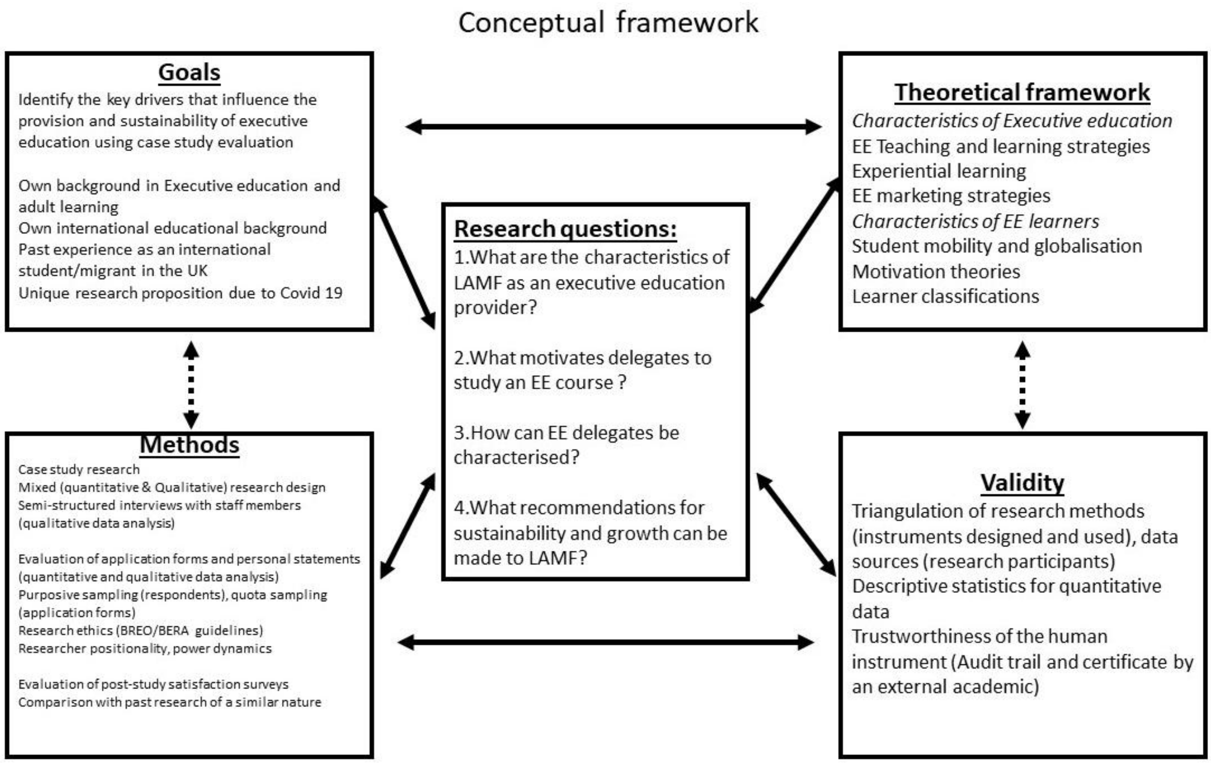


Figure 3.3: Conceptual framework

The first part of the chapter discussed my epistemological and ontological standpoints for the research project where a relativist ontological stance was justified. This was based on the views of Ridder (2020) who claims that if the world is constructed by meaning, we want to know how people construct their reality, share their meanings and act based on these meanings. In terms of epistemological approach, a subjectivist epistemological approach has been taken. As argued by Habermas (1986) who claims that if the primary belief is based on a world that is constructed by the interpretation of people, the researcher would need to engage in the development of such meanings and their effects.

Research methodology and justification of research instruments were discussed and a mixed method approach was justified as recommended by Denzin (2012). In terms of data collection, two data collection methods were used where a total of 391 delegate application forms, delegate satisfaction surveys (2019-2021), and seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff members of LAMF. An initial pilot test was conducted with the managing director of LAMF. Microsoft Excel was used to analyse the quantitative aspects of the collected data while NVivo was used to store, organise and process the qualitative data including interview transcripts and personal statements from applicants. A conscious effort was made in terms of ethical considerations and aspects of bias which were within my control. Finally, a discussion around the reliability, validity, transferability and limitations of the current research project has been presented.

Taking reasonable steps during data analysis and reporting to ensure that data does not end up in the public domain without intention, due to a failure in protecting data (Ward and Delamont, 2020). All collected data has been stored using an encrypted server as recommended by Brunel University and from the transcribing stage, all respondent names were anonymised. Furthermore, all applicant data had all identifiable fields removed before being stored, processed or reported, thus, minimising the risk of such impacts due to data leaks.

The following chapter discusses my findings and data analysis, structured according to each research question. It presents the results using graphs, charts, word clouds, and thematic diagrams. Additionally, it includes direct excerpts from interview respondents and applicants to provide an authentic representation of the data. Both quantitative and qualitative findings are discussed, with references to the existing literature covered in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4 - Findings and Data Analysis

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents core themes that were identified through the analysis of data that were collected using semi-structured interviews, application forms and delegate feedback forms. The information collected is reviewed against the research questions to find answers to some of the questions that have emerged during this research. This data analysis chapter will also make references to the theoretical framework identified in chapter two.

This chapter has been structured into themes based on the findings from both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the data collected. Characteristics include characteristics of LAMF, motivation of delegates and characterising delegates. It combines a series of graphs, tables, quotes and core trends as identified. It compares and contrasts findings with relevant literature which was introduced in chapter two and identifies areas in which this research contributes to new knowledge.

4.2 Research question 1.
Identify the Characteristics of LAMF as an EE Provider.

4.2.1 Introduction to Research Question One

This section evaluates various characteristics of the school (LAMF) as an EE provider, from the point of view of both academic and non-academic staff, prospective delegates and those who have completed an EE course at LAMF. Furthermore, the school's characteristics are evaluated against what is being said in the literature review to identify if the school's EE provision is comparable to the characteristics of an EE provider as outlined in the literature review. This research question also evaluates the expectations of delegates who want to study an EE course and an overview of the school's EE provision. Finally, the section evaluates the school's marketing and branding strategies, followed by its recruitment and selection processes that include equal opportunities for persons with a declared disability or a criminal conviction.

4.2.2 LAMF as an Executive Education (EE) Provider

The school has adapted to government policy changes, evolving from vocational courses to higher education programmes, including degrees for Tier 4 (student) visa holders. It has successfully transitioned into a recognised private EE provider and survived the COVID-19 pandemic, which many similar businesses globally could not maintain. This resilience suggests effective strategies for sustainability in a global context.

Founded in 2003, LAMF began its EE offerings in 2012 with a few short courses for corporate executives. A significant transformation occurred in 2017 with the appointment of a new Managing Director and Academic Lead, establishing a structured EE portfolio. The management team now collaborates with subject matter experts and sales consultants to maintain an evolving portfolio based at the London campus. The 2020 pandemic forced a shift to online-live teaching, and enrolments declined in some courses, leading to their permanent cancellation. Despite relying entirely on external consultants as faculty, the school upholds programme quality and relevance, aligning with Beech's (2018) findings on the necessity of subject-matter specialists in business schools. This dedication was evident in seven staff interviews conducted in 2021

What Does the School Do Well?

When asked what LAMF excels at, management tutor Michael noted that, as a faculty member, he lacks access to financial or enrolment data. However, he believes the school adapted well to the pandemic's challenges. Strategy tutor Manuela echoed this, adding:

> *"A really good effort between some people within the school, there has been a commitment to improving things".*

Reflecting Jahera's (2013) focus on continuous improvement, Manuela noted that the school has made considerable improvements since the pandemic, demonstrating a high level of collaboration across departments. Previously, the school ignored student complaints, which damaged its reputation, as she recalls:

> *"In the past, the school had many students, but they did not make an effort to look after their [students'] concerns, and as a result, they lost many students. The school's reputation was at risk".*

Manuela believes the school has transformed into a quality-oriented institution, which has been essential to its survival during the pandemic. This aligns with Margulies and Gregg's (2013) emphasis on courses that reflect modern-day organisational needs, providing a competitive edge. Manuela compared LAMF to other training providers:

> *"It's a bit more substantial than maybe the standard training companies that offer these sorts of things; there is something a little bit more of a deeper dive".*

In comparison to a university, however, she highlighted that:

> *"[the EE course in management consultancy] Course itself is sort of new, not stuff that's been told 20 years ago so it's got current best practices. A level of Tutoring that's going to include the latest research and best practices".*

Manuela also praised the new virtual learning platform, Canvas, describing it as sleek, modern, and user-friendly, with useful features like quizzes and course structures. This adds to its professional appearance.

LAMF's teaching methods aim to inspire intellectual curiosity by outlining content in advance, with classes focused on discussions and case studies. Subject matter experts present industry-based problems for students to tackle individually or in groups, followed by presentations and a Q&A session. Tutors then provide constructive feedback. Varner *et al.* (2013) argue that successful EE providers must design programmes that meet client needs and support knowledge transfer. Key factors include:

- Evaluating client needs
- Aligning learning outcomes
- Designing effective resources and delivery methods
- Implementing strategies for knowledge transfer
- Continually improving the curriculum

An overseas applicant applying for a postgraduate course affirmed the value of these practices, stating:

> *"At the end of this course, I would like to master all the business and leadership skills required to progress and grow in my current Company."*

Recruitment team leader Vera confirmed Manuela's views, noting that the school continuously improves processes, such as simplifying the application form. She highlighted the school's name and reputation as key advantages, adding that they're now developing an online shopfront where applicants can "*add a course to a cart and pay*" easily. This aligns with Schmitt's (2003) focus on enhancing customer experience from the first interaction.

However, Vera cautioned that this approach might not work for certain courses, such as the Postgraduate diplomas and the Executive miniMBA. Vera cited the school's fast adaptation during the pandemic when it transitioned to online live courses, as suggested by Lippert (2001) in terms of EE providers embracing technology-led, blended teaching methods. This transition enabled recording live lessons, offering an extensive set of teaching resources and allowing delegates to review lessons, which benefitted both the school and its participants.

Delegate support officer Luxmi added that modern content is key for a high-level learning experience, noting that an EE course provides participants with tutoring grounded in current research and industry best practices:

> *"A lot of times a new concept or new theories come into play so with the changing times lot of things have changed so it's a better way of I believe it's the best way of improving your knowledge and updating it according to the current trends".*

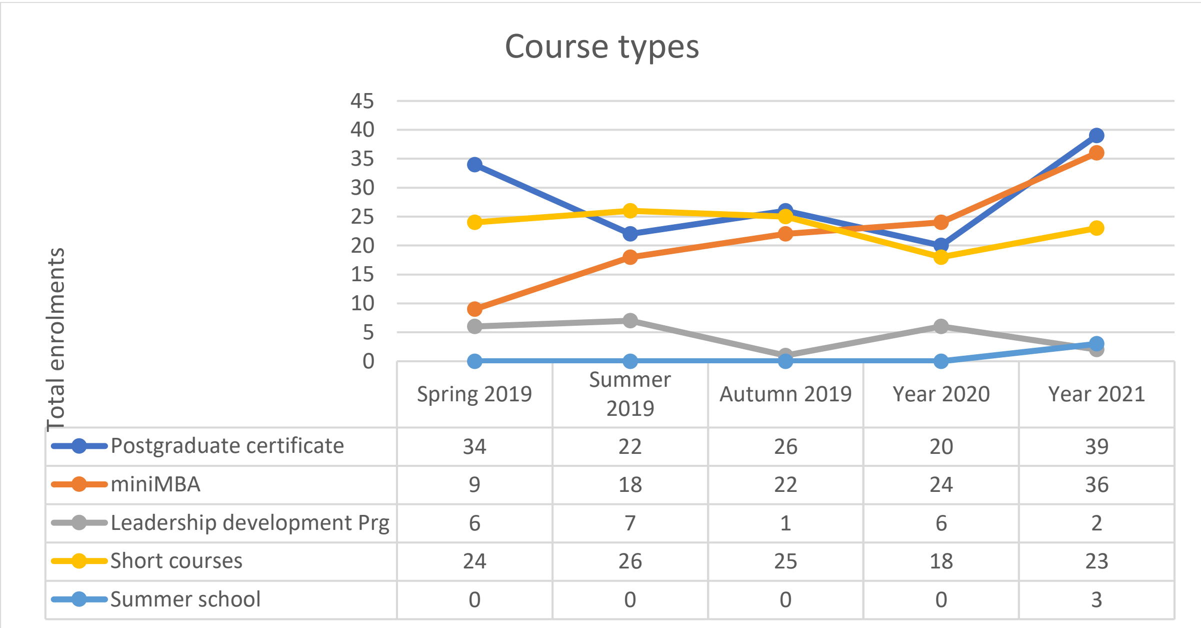
Figure 4.1: Word cloud – LAMF's reputation

Considering the most prominent words within word cloud (Figure 4.1), which was based on the personal statements. These were coded based on what was mentioned regarding the school's reputation. The word "*school*" was excluded and the most recurring words were: brand (16), London (12), people (11), location (8), business (7) and experience(4). This further evidences that the brand was associated with London and business studies. The school also associated its reputation with experience. The thematic diagram that corresponds to "*because of the school's reputation*" is available in Appendix 10.

4.2.3 LAMF's Executive Education Portfolio and course performance

LAMF offers a diverse EE course portfolio tailored to various audiences and geo-demographics. Its flagship course, the Executive miniMBA, is popular with UK-based and international middle-and senior-level managers. Originally a four-day, campus-based course, it transitioned to an eight-week evening online format in 2020, with no decline in demand. The school also offers a leadership development programme, extended from a five-day campus course to a ten-week evening format, which, though less popular than the miniMBA, remains in the portfolio.

Additionally, LAMF runs three ten-week postgraduate certificate programmes, typically attracting overseas participants like job seekers, recent graduates, or junior-level executives aiming to enhance their CVs. The school also offers specialised short courses, including project management, management consultancy, financial modelling, financial planning, business strategy, and marketing. While demand has declined for some courses, especially marketing, others, such as financial modelling, have remained steady. Lastly, the school offered a three-week summer school for overseas university students, which has since become obsolete due to the pandemic and global travel restrictions.



	Spring 2019	Summer 2019	Autumn 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
Postgraduate certificate	34	22	26	20	39
miniMBA	9	18	22	24	36
Leadership development Prg	6	7	1	6	2
Short courses	24	26	25	18	23
Summer school	0	0	0	0	3

Table 4.1: Course enrolments by category (2019-2021) LAMF

According to Table 4.1 above, the most popular course that attracted EE delegates at LAMF was the Executive miniMBA. This is followed by the three postgraduate certificate programmes in management, marketing and finance.

As demonstrated in Table 4.1, in terms of the postgraduate certificates, the set of courses has demonstrated a notable dip in applications in 2020 during the start of the global pandemic and the school's delivery changed to online- live delivery. Those who usually sign up for the 12-week postgraduate certificate qualifications has a weekly face-to-face commitment of at least 12 hours. They need to travel in to London and stay in temporary accommodation while they complete their qualification. In 2019, a total of eighty-two delegates signed up for the Postgraduate certificate courses. Since 2020, the course has been offered online where the total signups for the same set of courses dropped to 20. 2021 enrolment numbers suggest that the applicants have accepted the new norm of studying online. The enrolment numbers for 2021 have climbed up to 39 applicants. This may appear to be in-line with King and Sondhi's (2017) views on changes in the choice of destination countries for students who originate from the global south, who used to identify the UK as a desirable destination for student mobility. However, bearing in mind, the travel restrictions which were imposed in 2020-2021, it is not possible to arrive at a generalised conclusion about this aspect based on this dataset.

Speaking specifically about postgraduate certificate courses themselves, Manuela suggested that:

> "*It's a bit more substantial than maybe the standard training companies that offer these sorts of things, there is something a little bit more of a deeper dive*".

Manuela further elaborated by comparing the postgraduate certificate courses to Master's courses that are offered by universities by stating that:

> *"It is relatively affordable in comparison to a long-term degree qualification and it will help participants to gain up-to-date knowledge of the subject within a shorter period".*

This creates the competitive advantage which was identified by Lomer (2018) who discussed about affordability of non-degree courses that would improve the appeal of such courses to prospective customers. Another applicant who has expressed interest in the postgraduate certificate course had an overall view which was non-subject specific. The applicant claimed that:

> "*I believe going through this course can help me sharpen my critical thinking and problem-solving skills, to make sound financial decisions. I foresee that attaining financial know-how can prepare me to work in diverse business roles*".

Table 4.1 further shows that the 24 teaching hour miniMBA has demonstrated a steady performance from 2019 to 2021, regardless of mode of delivery, pandemic or any other factors. There was a total of 36 (online) applicants in 2021 from 24 (online) in 2020 and 49 in 2019 (on campus). One of the reasons behind this is because the miniMBA covers six core areas of organisational management. This enables seasoned managers to develop their skills in a short time. This is in line with the observations made by Conger and Xin (2000) in terms of the contents of EE courses being transformed from functional to strategic level content. Also, the course name, miniMBA has a high level of appeal to potential applicants. Selvam's opinion about the miniMBA was similar and he pointed out that:

> *"Even when it comes to a person's skill set, in some instances, they can be as strong as their weakest skill, and the miniMBA enables such practitioners to identify such areas of weakness within a very short amount of time while giving the confidence to approach challenges from different directions in a positive manner*".

Speaking specifically about the miniMBA that covers six core management subjects, Selvam pointed out that:

> "*It's condensed, concise and it's a great course because it tackles finance, it tackles leadership, marketing and tackles every core area and you're only as strong as your weakest link, right?*".

As demonstrated in table 4.1, the 35hr Leadership Development Programme has not attracted much interest throughout. Data suggests it is in decline where there were only 6 applicants in 2020 and this has further dipped to just two applicants in 2021. Possible reasons might be the fact that many leadership development and coaching courses are available at a much cheaper price. Those who require specialist skills can always choose from the broader portfolio of specialised courses that are available at LAMF or another EE course provider. As Selvam claimed:

> *"Executive education courses are concise, condensed and attempt to tackle a specified area within a broader subject such as finance, marketing or leadership".*

Based on table 4.1, specialist short courses have performed almost comparable to the postgraduate qualifications. In 2019 short courses had 25 applicants. This had a drop in demand in 2020 to 18 applicants for the whole year. For 2021, specialist short courses have demonstrated a slow but steady growth back to 23 applicants. This may be attributed to people searching for specialist qualifications that do not require a long-time commitment but enable them to gain the skills required to be competitive in the market. Thus, creating the potential to be appealing to new employers as pointed out by Jacobson *et al.*(2017).

Notably, the summer business school courses have not attracted even a minimal number of applications throughout the three years. The three sample sets of applications for 2019 have not included even a single application within this category. Considering the nature of this course, the intended audience is either those who are currently studying for an undergraduate degree or recent graduates who are within one year of graduation. One can assume the maximum age of a participant to be below 25 years of age based on UNESCO's report on global graduation age. This suggests that most participants enrolling in these programmes are Generation Z (millennials), who, as Franci and Hoefel (2018) highlight, are highly proficient in technology. Hence, it may be a possibility that none of those who signed up for these courses before the pandemic have given consent for their data to be used for research or marketing purposes. The application form itself allows for the applicants to opt out of using their data for such purposes.

Tutor Engagement with the school

When asked about the school's strengths, Mills responded that each course undergoes regular updates to incorporate the latest theories and ideas while giving serious consideration to feedback. This perspective aligns with Jahera's (2013) recommendations. Supporting this viewpoint, Luxmi noted that every tutor attempts to keep their course content current, reflecting changing trends. Mills further characterised the school as generally forward-thinking, highlighting its openness to innovative ideas from various stakeholders, particularly in reaching new student demographics and enhancing course attendance. He believes this proactive approach emerged following the COVID-19 pandemic. Mills also discussed how applicants approach course selection, stating:

> *"I get a lot of people like looking at the titles and go I fancy that one that one that one that one."*

Mills, who teaches Business Development, asserted that he enjoys the autonomy to develop course content, which allows him to influence the recruitment of students for his courses. He feels more engaged with the school, thanks to the flexibility provided in determining course content and the conduct of classes. This aligns with Ryan's (2013) recommendation for offering tutors flexibility in amending course content regularly. Mills is of the view that academic staff should be able to introduce new courses that are in demand among prospective students. He remarked that:

> *"Our tutors are not only academics but designers in their field of expertise so it's different from a lecturer from Queens University or London Business School."*

Michael's perspective on the necessity of industry knowledge corresponds with claims made by Hura (2003) and Jacobson *et al.* (2017), who emphasise that one of the key principles for successful EE courses is that the facilitator possesses up-to-date industry knowledge. Michael explained that since he teaches real industry practitioners, he must consistently engage with industry leaders to keep his knowledge current, allowing him to provide course participants with the latest industry trends.

While Mills feels integrated into the school's team, Manuela, who teaches project management and strategy, highlighted her lack of involvement in the recruitment process, stating she is "*just an external consultant*". Similarly, Tom, who teaches the flagship miniMBA course, expressed that it would be beneficial for tutors to have some influence in recruiting delegates. He acknowledged the necessity of ensuring that all participants in his course possess a minimum of 3-5 years of industry experience. This viewpoint echoes Stopper's (1998) emphasis on experiential learning and heightened learner involvement in the educational process. Tom elaborated, stating:

> *"They forge good partnerships during a course, I've been partly responsible, or involved in another commercial training operation and that's a good way forward as well".*

The differing attitudes of Mills, Manuela, and Tom indicate that tutors have varying perspectives on the recruitment and sales processes. Some feel they can contribute valuable insights, while others perceive themselves as simply delivering a prescribed course. Given that all of LAMF's tutors are external consultants, these differing opinions may stem from their desired level of involvement with the school and its staff concerning course development, committee work, delivery, and improvement suggestions. Luxmi observed that:

> *"Some tutors will just arrive on time, teach and go home, while others will come into the office to have a chat and see how we are doing".*

Michael believes that the involvement of academics in determining course learning outcomes indirectly influences the recruitment process. This aligns with the recommendations of Margulies and Gregg (2013), who stress that the strengths of the school's faculty should be factored into curriculum design and amendments. It is noteworthy that while some academic staff actively engage in curriculum development, others are assigned pre-developed courses. In this context, Mills noted that while delivering a well-established course may be convenient for academics, there can be occasions when an instructor feels disconnected from the prescribed material due to a lack of ownership of the course content.

The school should consider how to keep its academic staff motivated and engaged to foster success, as suggested by Herzberg (1968) in his two-factor theory of motivation. Herzberg (1968) proposes that intrinsic factors motivate individuals, while extrinsic factors serve as hygiene factors—necessary to prevent dissatisfaction but not motivational in themselves. According to Herzberg (1968), the three most satisfying aspects of a job that lead to motivation are a sense of achievement, recognition, and the nature of the work itself (intrinsic factors). LAMF compensates its academic staff with an hourly rate comparable to that of other business schools. Herzberg (1968) classified salary as a hygiene factor that does not motivate. Furthermore, LAMF seems to overlook motivating factors such as acknowledging academic staff contributions or providing challenging work.

Manuela emphasised that tutor professionalism and maintaining structured courses have been critical success factors for LAMF. This perspective aligns with Kotler's (2019) assertion that suppliers should tailor their products or services to meet individual consumer needs. Regarding her courses, Manuela stated:

> *"And because I tend to tailor my courses so there's a standard course with the pacing schedule, but I tend to tailor it in terms of delivery to who's there".*

In Manuela's view, the school has curated a strong portfolio of executive education courses, which she believes are currently highly sought after, a sentiment echoed by Jacobson *et al.* (2017). Manuela remarked:

> *"Executive education needs to even once we go back to campus, needs to continue to offer a hybrid of in-person training".*

Manuela's suggestion to provide online resources for future EE participants aligns with Beatty *et al.* (2001), who argue that instructional designers should consider the needs of those unable to attend live sessions when developing asynchronous content for blended EE courses. These learners should still achieve the intended outcomes through the available asynchronous components.

Manuela identified the practice of sharing anonymised student feedback with tutors as beneficial for enhancing teaching practices and enabling continuous course improvements. This suggestion echoes with Saari *et al.*'s (1988) recommendations regarding the importance of obtaining and sharing participant feedback. Manuela expressed:

> *"It would be an improvement for the school if the school could share the learner's details such as their profession, workplace and their background ahead of each course delivery so we can contextualise parts of the course and draw examples from those sectors during class".*

This approach would allow the school to align with the recommendations made by Taylor and Hamdy (2013), who discusses the advantages of grouping participants and how tutors can contextualise tasks or resources to bridge knowledge gaps. Manuela illustrated this point by stating that students from the state sector have different expectations than those from the private sector. She concluded by stating:

> *"People want to know that they're going to learn from teachers who can also talk from experience they're going to spend four days or eight weeks, whatever with somebody that's going to be worth their time".*

However, Mills believes that when launching new courses, the school must conduct market research to ascertain demand rather than investing in entirely new offerings and subsequently asking:

> *"We have this, is this what you are looking for? This is called a scattergun approach".*

This response aligns with Margulies and Gregg's (2013) claim that EE providers typically employ a diverse range of products, including public courses, custom programmes, custom consortia, short seminars, certificates, special events, and conferences. However, most EE providers cannot offer all of these products due to constraints in staff expertise.

These discussions suggest that LAMF may not be conducting sufficient market research to ensure effective allocation of marketing and promotional budgets toward targeted market segments. As Kotler (2019) pointed out, it is vital to clearly understand the products or services offered by a company and to develop marketing strategies that effectively reach the appropriate customer segments. The next section explores the school's marketing approach, including its branding and promotional strategies.

4.2.4 LAMF's Branding and Promotional Strategies

Founded as an ACCA tuition provider in 2003, LAMF has expanded its reach into various sectors of the UK's private higher education sector. The school is recognised for offering high-quality education both domestically and internationally, indicating its commitment to maintaining a positive institutional reputation. To sustain this reputation, it is essential for the school to effectively target its product offerings. A dedicated marketing team develops promotional campaigns and conducts market research to identify desirable programmes that align with LAMF's strengths. However, feedback from interview respondents suggests that the effectiveness of these strategies is not optimal, as they expressed limited confidence in the marketing team.

Manuela highlighted the school's proactive approach to safeguarding its reputation, noting the cleverness of its name. This observation aligns with Jahera's (2013) recommendation for institutions to uphold a positive reputation to avoid being perceived as diploma mills. She emphasised that LAMF is seen as a reputable yet affordable brand. The school's name strategically incorporates *"London"* and two business-related disciplines, enhancing its appeal. Moreover, Manuela pointed out that course pricing is competitive with leading business schools in London. This aligns with Petit's (2013) findings, which identifies brand reputation and pricing as critical factors influencing course selection among prospective delegates.

Furthermore, Manuela discussed the significance of student discussion boards, search engine rankings, and reviews in shaping LAMF's image. She asserted that the school is viewed as a desirable, modern business institution that fosters inclusivity for delegates from various backgrounds. This perspective echoes Findlay *et al.*'s (2017) assertion that the UK is globally regarded as an educational hub, attracting international learners.

Selvam shared a similar view, noting that the school's catchy name, though under 20 years old, resonates with London's heritage as a global educational hub. Tom agreed, stating that the school's main strength lies in its brand. This aligns with Schmitt's (2003) assertion that a name evolves beyond mere words and logos to create brand identity. However, Tom added that LAMF does not market its name effectively. He characterised LAMF as an established brand with credibility in the marketplace but suggested it lacks the prestige to attract top-end clientele. King and Sondhi (2017) argue that elite and upper-middle-class learners tend to enrol in prestigious Western institutions to distinguish themselves from the growing middle class seeking higher education abroad.

Manuela claimed that LAMF has a strong brand and that alone is sufficient for most delegates to associate themselves with, as identified by Margulies and Gregg (2013). Manuela stated that:

> "*Students from African countries and countries that recently joined the EU from Eastern European countries etc, for them, they feel it's a very strong thing to say, they've got a qualification from the LAMF, a strong brand*".

Although Manuela's view about brand association and reputation are as highlighted above, Börjesson (2017) pointed out that most of the countries including India, Pakistan, Hong Kong and Canada have historic ties or are ex-imperial territories. This may create a marketing pull factor for learners who apply to study from past British colonies.

Selvam suggested that business owners may undertake an executive course to gain an understanding of branding, marketing or acquiring the right team for their business venture.

This observation is in line with the claims made by Margulies and Gregg (2013) about entrepreneurs being a target audience of EE. Selvam stated that:

> *"It's more for business owners so maybe they need help with branding maybe they need help with marketing, maybe they need help in creating the right team".*

This is in line with Jacobson *et al.* (2017) who claim that such courses were subscribed by current or potential business owners or leaders and the course content was mainly based on intense lectures, case studies, and functional knowledge.

Michael's comment on discounting has suggested that some cultures might perceive a discount as something that needs to be incorporated in the purchasing cycle. He stated that:

> "*I think I'm going to be slightly careful how I answer this, I have seen some cultures think something's wrong if there isn't a discount. Let's just say they were already interested, but the discount helped them to continue their application and confirm it".*

However, Mills suggested that :

> "*Would a discount have made you choose anywhere else, and the answer to that surprisingly was not necessarily*".

This approach is linked to Kotler's (2019) recommendations claiming that pricing strategies have changed recently. This was mainly due to the emergence of modern technology. The millennial generation has changed the way products and services are consumed by bringing new attitudes and values to the process of consumption. Kotler (2019:512) points out that "*traditionally, price has operated as a major determinant of buyer choice*". Fierce competition can result in severe discounting and price wars amongst competing organisations or products. Kotler (2019) suggests that organisations should monitor the offers within the market and tailor their product or service offerings to suit individual consumer's requirements. Furthermore, Keller and Kotler (2022) recommend offering special exclusive prices to certain consumers to attract them. However, by looking at the results from the thematic analysis of personal statements, none of the applicants suggested or stated any indication of course prices or asked for any discounts within their statement of intent. This may suggest that EE participants may have to be approached with a marketing mix that is different from other similar services.

Luxmi believes that LAMF's courses are reasonably priced, and this allows the school to remain competitive and offer its executive education courses to both UK-based and overseas participants. However, this view is not in line with Petit's (2013) argument that EE courses usually carry a premium price tag. Luxmi stated that:

> "*I would like it not to be that heavily priced, all the courses are quite reasonably priced, which is quite affordable for your growth at the current time*".

Manuela's opinion about the subject of interest was:

> "*Existing course titles don't need to change, I think they are very good ones still and those are core subjects as our core competencies, that people need*".

Michael observed that a lot of delegates has enrolled on courses as a result of word-of-mouth recommendations. This observation is in line with the suggestions made by Beech (2018) in terms of friends and family having influence over a learner's decision to study overseas. Michael specifically emphasised the fact that this word-of-mouth recommendation can span across the world, regardless of the physical place a former student was located in, and claimed:

> "*satisfaction goes beyond the individual and his or her whole social network of people*".

This is in line with the findings of Farris *et al.* (2003) who conducted industry-wide research with 80 corporate participants where the respondents also believed that they tend to consider recommendations made by friends and co-workers.

Manuela suggested that opportunities to cross-sell other courses should be integrated at various points in the student journey. She proposed adding a slide at the end of each course to encourage participants to consider related courses taught by subject specialists, accompanied by a discount voucher. However, LAMF currently does not appear to utilise these opportunities to promote its portfolio of executive education courses. A similar view was expressed by Mills who suggested that:

> "*I believe if a delegate had a good experience, then they will come back. No doubt about it and I've seen that many times with people who will come back to do another course*".

Michael suggested that a positive study experience can lead to favourable word-of-mouth publicity among a delegate's colleagues, friends, and family. He emphasised that customer satisfaction extends beyond the individual to their entire social network. Luxmi echoed this, noting that when delegates are pleased with a course, they are likely to share their experiences, generating word-of-mouth advertising. This aligns with Kotler's (2019) assertion that word-of-mouth advertising is one of the most cost-effective and impactful methods of promoting a product or service. Tom also suggested that:

> *"I've seen Oxford University I've seen Cambridge University advertising on Facebook but they're going after the individual who is probably funding themselves".*

Selvam believes that LAMF's name, associated with finance, should enable its finance courses to rank among the best globally. He emphasised the importance of finance courses for non-finance managers, financial planning and analysis, and financial modelling. Selvam also stated that participants from developing countries should be able to enrol in marketing courses at LAMF to learn how products and services are marketed in developed nations. Additionally, technology-based courses like data science should attract interest. However, despite the global demand for such courses, as Michael claimed, the school has struggled to gain traction with these emerging subjects that are likely to be in demand for the next 10-15 years.

Tom emphasised the need for caution in selecting social media channels to attract the appropriate audience, aligning with Kottler's (2019) recommendations. He noted that executive education providers serve two distinct markets: corporate clients and individuals. Corporate clients typically disregard platforms like Facebook, favouring LinkedIn instead, where prestigious universities such as Oxford and Cambridge also advertise. While Tom acknowledges LAMF's strong brand as a London-based business school, he believes its marketing efforts are misaligned and insufficiently promote its offerings. He stressed that marketing should be prolific, and the school must carefully choose which social media platforms to engage with to ensure successful enrolment of delegates. Vera made a similar comment about aligning the interests of different departments within the school towards a common goal, by stating:

> "*Adapting to external scenarios, like the pandemic, although we are not ready, we never offered Online courses only on campus we managed to switch to deliver courses online quite quickly though these involve lots of different departments like marketing*".

A person who applied to study for a postgraduate certificate also expressed his/her opinion along the same lines by stating that the reason for making an application to study was based on the school's *"rich and modern prospectus published on its official website".* The applicant claimed that studying a postgraduate certificate at LAMF will not only enrich his/her career but will also benefit his/her country as well. This expectation aligns with Conger and Xin's (2000) assertion that pursuing education abroad allows students to contribute to the development of their home countries.

Tom claimed that after the pandemic, there will be a large influx of delegates who want to come back to studying in a classroom as they have missed interacting with each other for a long time. It will also enable them to learn from both the tutor and their peers in an academically conducive environment.

Tom elaborated on this point by stating:

> "*What the pandemic has shown us is we're going to get so many people who will want to come back into the classroom because they missed the interaction. They want to get back into a learning environment where they don't just learn from the tutor they learn from their peers, who were sat around them*".

This is in line with Yardley *et al.* (2012) statements regarding experiential learning which is supported by both Bruner's discovery learning theory and Piaget's theory of cognitive development.

Tom also sees the formation of new overseas partnerships as another success factor for LAMF and recommends looking into new partnerships with both corporates and overseas higher education providers. This opinion is closely aligned with the views expressed by Conger and Xin (2000) who claim EE providers should consider alliances and cross-culture partnerships as part of their expansion strategies.

As Tom noted, LAMF primarily targets individuals rather than corporate partnerships, which may limit the school's student recruitment strategy. Cameron and Quinn (2011) suggest that the school could address this issue by employing a framework like the Competing Values Framework (CVF). This approach would allow the customisation of courses to better align with the specific needs of corporate clients. The following section discusses the school's recruitment and selection process, which mainly focuses on individual applicants.

4.2.5 LAMF's Recruitment and Selection Process for Delegates

LAMF has a few primary recruitment channels. These include direct recruitment using a group of in-house educational consultants. Further, the use of contracted agents around the world, via partnerships with other organisations and using an online course brochure where applicants can directly register for courses. In terms of selection, the school's admission team evaluates the application and supporting documents to ensure that all of the documents are complete and accurate. If an applicant has declared a disability, the application is referred to the disability services team who ensure that the school can cater to the declared disability in terms of support needs. The application is sent to LAMF's academic director to review the personal statement. This step ensures that the course is a good match for the applicant's needs. Once payment is made (or a sponsor signs a declaration), the applicant is issued with joining instructions.

Selvam who works as a sales consultant confirmed that:

> "*As this is a private business school in London and we will have inquiries lead to interest from all around the world, every continent, it is my role to bring in the right students that fit in with the ethos of this school*".

The above statement may suggest that LAMF, as a private, for-profit school, "*hired me to sell*" as pointed out by Selvam who believes that his job is to find the right delegates who fit with the type of courses that are offered by the school. Selvam also pointed out that in addition to helping applicants with selecting courses with LAMF, he would give a gentle nudge to those [leads] who have shown interest in LAMF's competitors and make a justification as to why the study experience with LAMF was better.

Speaking about approaching prospective applicants, Selvam pointed out that they do not cold-call applicants. The marketing team runs campaigns to capture contact details of interested individuals and create a sales funnel. Such a database of interested leads is usually around 50,000 leads that get passed on to the sales consultants.

In discussing their influence on course recruitment at LAMF, Michael (who teaches Marketing) stated that he must teach whoever is assigned to him. Mills acknowledged that, while not directly involved in recruitment, he advises management on factors that could attract suitable students. He noted that delegates consider relevance, practical application, and course content to ensure alignment with their professional needs, even if they don't fully understand the course until participating. This aligns with Lippert's (2001) observation that non-standardised EE courses focus on relevant theories and contextualise practical application.

Individuals can be self-funded or sponsored, but since the pandemic, Tom has noticed that many individuals have taken up executive education courses by paying on their own. He pointed out that this has become a global trend. Speaking specifically about post-pandemic acquisitions, Tom reiterated that :

> "*Wherever they are in the world, there is going to be individuals who are prepared to do it [an EE course] from a distance so that requires a different type of marketing so there's two different markets and two different types of marketing*".

Vera suggests that those who enrol in the miniMBA are already accomplished professionals in senior positions, seeking to enhance their CV rather than acquire specific technical skills. She noted that some choose the miniMBA when they lack time for a full MBA. The entry criteria require applicants to have at least five years of work experience, indicating that miniMBA participants likely hold senior roles. This perspective aligns with Welch's (2005) assertion that EE courses target mid- to senior-level managers, yet it contradicts Conger's (1993) claim that EE participants are mainly junior managers or supervisors. Selvam remarked that the term "*miniMBA*" is creative and that the school effectively captures attention through its marketing, prompting potential participants to question why they should invest two to three years and substantial funds for an MBA when a miniMBA can be completed in days or weeks. Selvam claimed *"After all, the miniMBA does what it says on the tin*!".

The school primarily uses delegates' personal statements to match applicants with the most suitable courses. Each delegate completes a detailed application form, around eight A4 pages long, which includes a "*statement of intent*" answering questions such as "*What motivates you to do this course?*" and "*How will it help in achieving your future aspirations?*" Some applicants respond with brief statements, offering only a basic outline of their intent, whereas others provide comprehensive responses, referencing the programme syllabus, their CV, and relevant educational or professional experience.

Examples as given below;

> "*I am the head of a department. The department generates income and I am responsible for designing and implementing the strategy to achieve the financial targets".*
>
> "*To begin with, a reason of my choosing the course of Financial Risk Management has come to me the period of working at the central bank of Uzbekistan, department of Statistics. At this time, I'm responsible for the economic sectorization, valuation, and other accounting rules used in compiling data on the financial assets and liabilities of the financial corporations sector and all economic sectors of an economy. In addition, my department officials responsible for compiling monetary statistics. Maintaining price stability serves as a pledge of macroeconomic and social stability in the country and a prerequisite for promoting economic reforms and the success of the republic's socio-economic development programs. Furthermore, we analyse inflation and liquidity factors in the banking sector, compilation of balance of payments statistics in accordance with modern methods, improvement of forecasting tools and modeling of basic macroeconomic and monetary indicators. The Period of studying at the Institute I have achieved bachelor's degree in Banking and Finance. I'm planned to increase and get international knowledge to my professional development in the sphere of Financial system. I hope LAMF assists to achieve*

awareness and identity, develop talents and potential, build human capital and enhance quality of life".

The admissions and academic teams aim to align applicants' course selections with their expectations. If an applicant's understanding of the course differs from the actual content, an academic consultant contacts them to clarify, ensuring realistic expectations. This alignment process is evident at LAMF, as each course has specific entry criteria designed to ensure that applicants' motivations and intentions align with course outcomes, promoting active class engagement and meaningful contributions.

However, Selvam noted in interviews that "*speaking roughly, some of my colleagues act as travel agents*". This comment suggests that some recruitment personnel may occasionally bypass the school's quality assurance processes, enrolling delegates whose needs may not fully align with the chosen course. Michael has a different opinion about agents acting on behalf of a school, stating that :

"*a prospective applicant has the added benefit of talking to a human being, before applying for a course*".

Overall, there was no indication made by any of the interview respondents to suggest the authenticity of the personal statements of applicants, which tends to suggest there may be minimal concerns about the genuineness of personal statements of applicants who apply to study an executive education short course.

Contrary to Selvam's claims, Vera, who oversees the sales consultants, stated that he is responsible for ensuring that applicants for executive courses fully understand what each course entails. He ensures that applicants receive the course syllabus and that his team recruits only suitable candidates, with all applicants meeting the entry criteria. Vera emphasised that the sales team must align the course with each applicant's professional goals, reflecting the view of Varner *et al.* (2013) that EE providers should match courses to the professional needs of learners and industry requirements. However, Vera clarified that final admission decisions rest with the academic department, while his role involves clarifying course content and assisting applicants with the application process. In terms of the initial decision-making about an applicant's suitability for a course, Vera's team would consider their previous qualifications, personal statement and their motivation to follow the course, so a delegate with *a good fit* comes on board. Selvam is confident that his role is important in the decision-making process and summed up his opinion *in a nutshell:*

"Looking at it from a holistic point of view, it is sales".

Vera also pointed out the importance of approaching high-value corporate clients to offer highly profitable corporate training solutions and justified his argument by stating that :

> "*I think that LAMF has now established a name in the industry, we have continually improved our internal processes to make the application process more smooth. Always constantly evaluating our application process".*

This is in line with Farris *et al.'s* (2003) suggestions where they point out that EE courses must be designed with the corporate customers in mind, instead of having a "*you design it, they will buy it*" approach. Further, Vera has accurately pointed out a view similar to that of Cameron and Quinn (2019) who claim that a framework similar to competing values framework can be used by EE providers to work with corporates on an ongoing basis. This will enable the provider to develop EE courses to fill skill caps within each organisation they work with.

Feedback from interview respondents suggests that the school has a robust and fair recruitment and selection process, designed to provide applicants with the necessary information to make informed choices. However, the presence of a sales element is evident, with some consultants reportedly guiding applicants towards specific EE courses in need of enrolment, similar to what was suggested by King and Sondhi (2017). Moreover, there appears to be limited collaboration between LAMF and corporate partners, focusing more on individual applicants than on B2B relationships, which goes against the recommendations of Farris *et al.* (2003). It is also worth noting that no respondents referenced considerations for applicants with disabilities or past criminal convictions, a topic explored in the following section.

4.2.6 Equal Opportunities for Disabled Applicants and Applicants with a Past Criminal Conviction

According to UK law, all establishments are required to provide equal opportunities to everyone, including individuals with disabilities or a criminal record (Fredman, 2023). At LAMF, applicants for EE courses are asked to disclose any disabilities or criminal convictions during the application process. While procedures for handling disability disclosures are clearly defined, there is no outlined process or approval for cases involving criminal convictions, nor any distinction between spent and unspent convictions. Notably, LAMF's campuses do not host individuals under 18, and the school does not require staff or contractors to complete a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. This may mean that safeguarding concerns related to children and vulnerable adults are less relevant at LAMF compared to institutions that serve these groups.

Although I have reviewed and approved EE delegate applications for over five years, I had not considered the lack of applications from individuals with disabilities or those with criminal convictions until I began examining the applications from a researcher's perspective. There has never been a need for reasonable adjustments on any of the courses due to such declarations. However, through this research project, I explored the support available in the UK and beyond for individuals with spent convictions or disabilities (Unlock, 2022). I became aware of the challenges faced by people with disabilities, including comparably low incomes and limited career progression, often through no fault of their own, as suggested by Scope (2021).

While my research project does not primarily focus on this issue, I have utilised my research data to draw conclusions and make recommendations that could inform future studies in this area. Additionally, it became evident that, unlike mainstream higher education courses, no funding opportunities similar to those provided by Student Finance England (SFE) for degree programmes are available for EE courses. Yet, the knowledge and skills acquired through such courses can be as valuable, if not more so, than a traditional higher education qualification in progressing a person's career.

In terms of declared disabilities. The school's positive approach to disability was commended by the school's accrediting body, the British Accreditation Council, which stated in its 2021 full inspection report:

> *"The application form requires prospective applicants to state any special educational needs and/or disabilities. Wherever possible, the school accommodates these needs by making appropriate provision with a support plan. An inclusive practice handbook provides guidance on the processes and responsibilities of staff and is a reference manual for all departments that have responsibility for supporting participants with long-term conditions that may affect their studies".* BAC Institutional full inspection report 2021.

Regarding equal opportunities for disabled applicants or those with unspent criminal convictions, none of the applicants from 2019 to 2021 reported having either a disability or an unspent criminal conviction. This situation prompts the question of whether individuals with past criminal convictions have not progressed to higher-level positions within the corporate hierarchy, as suggested by Unlock (2022), which would typically necessitate executive education courses. Alternatively, it may be that they opted not to disclose a disability or conviction on their application forms, as indicated by Scope (2021). The UK government's guidance specifies that an unspent criminal conviction only needs to be disclosed if explicitly asked (GOV.UK, 2022). Additionally, the UK-based charity Unlock actively assists individuals with criminal records in finding employment. UCAS, which handles the majority of university applications in the UK, offers advice for those with convictions. According to UCAS (2021), disclosure of a criminal conviction is only required for courses related to teaching, social care, medicine, or similar fields where interaction with children or vulnerable adults is part of the curriculum.

Given that LAMF only caters to individuals aged 18 and over, no children are present on the school's premises. Additionally, none of the courses offered by LAMF, whether EE or non-EE, fall under the categories specified by UCAS. This raises an important question: is disclosing unspent convictions necessary for a short executive course application form at LAMF? The collection of such information may be viewed as unnecessary for assessing an applicant's suitability for an EE course.

Another perspective is that applicants may hesitate to declare a disability due to cultural factors or a misconception that doing so could place them at a disadvantage during the selection process. This aligns with the BBC's (2015) research titled "*Why are young people scared of disclosing their disability to employers?*" which surveyed 1,000 graduate jobseekers in the UK. The research revealed that three-quarters of respondents with a disability chose not to disclose it on their employment applications. Findings indicated that 77% of participants believed they would face discrimination, while 76% expressed concerns about informing employers about their disability. It is possible that EE applicants share similar reservations regarding the disclosure of a disability.

Another factor to consider is affordability. According to the disability charity Scope (2021), 27% of disabled individuals live in poverty, compared to 19% of non-disabled people of working age. As EE courses can be perceived as costly and not viewed as an essential investment, those facing financial challenges may not prioritise enrolling in such programmes. The same survey found that one in three disabled individuals believes society harbours prejudices against them. Additionally, a disabled person is twice as likely to be unemployed compared to their non-disabled counterparts. Sunder Mitra from the Financial Times (2021) estimates that there are around 4.4 million unemployed disabled individuals of working age in the UK. Furthermore, Value 500 and Tortoise Media (2021), a disability charity collaborating with FTSE 100 companies, analysed annual reports from the top 100 firms in 2020. Alarmingly, none of the senior executives or managers disclosed a disability. This does not necessarily imply that all executives are non-disabled; rather, some may simply "*prefer not to say*". It is possible that disabled candidates applied to study at LAMF but chose not to disclose their disability for the reasons outlined earlier.

The LAMF EE application process may be seen as exhaustive, given that the application pack consists of at least eight pages. Applicants might feel compelled to tick all the boxes by the time they reach the submission page. While the admissions department occasionally conducts a thorough verification process, this typically only occurs when fraud is suspected. The application for executive courses at LAMF mirrors that of a university, requiring multiple pages of personal information, including place of birth, term-time address, personal statement, and sponsorship details. In contrast, similar courses in the private training sector might allow applicants to simply select their preferred course from a list and pay via credit card, bypassing a comprehensive application process. Therefore, LAMF could potentially benefit from simplifying its application approach. As Vera noted, the school is currently developing a virtual shopfront with an "*add to cart and pay*" feature, which could significantly enhance overall satisfaction levels, which is aligned with the views of Keller and Kotler (2022).

Considering the above, it is clear that the school adopts a positive approach towards disabilities by offering reasonable adjustments. However, the necessity of inquiring about criminal convictions remains questionable. Additionally, there are concerns about whether individuals with disabilities or criminal convictions receive equal opportunities to advance in their careers within the corporate world. Further investigation or broader research involving multiple EE providers is needed to address these issues. The following section examines the motivating factors that might influence an individual to apply for an EE course at LAMF.

4.3 Research question 2.
What Motivates Delegates to Study an EE Course?

4.3.1 Introduction to Research Question Two

Executive education courses are generally shorter than degrees, diplomas, or vocational qualifications. However, the cost of EE is often higher when comparing course duration to fees. Despite this, EE has become a vital revenue stream for universities and other training providers. Therefore, it is essential to explore the reasons behind the enrolment of different categories of applicants who pursue and earn EE certificates after completing these short courses. Additionally, it is important to investigate why employers choose to sponsor their managerial staff to take time off work to acquire specialised skills from EE providers.

Based on the personal statements of applicants, it is clear that individuals pursuing an EE course at LAMF have different motivations compared to regular students who come to the UK on a student visa. This contrasts with Jenna and Reilly's (2013) claim that students from developing countries and emerging economies often use the student visa system as a means to immigrate. Jenna and Reilly (2013) further cite data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), indicating that student visas are the second most common method of migrant inflow to the UK. Since 2009, student visas have attracted more individuals than work-related visas. It is worthwhile noting that overseas EE delegates visit the UK using a short term visitor visa. Hence, they are not included within the ONS's student statistics.

The thematic analysis indicates that overseas applicants for the EE course at LAMF do not express an interest in migrating to or remaining in the UK long-term. Even those who referenced the experience of engaging with a different culture or obtaining a UK-based education seem to prefer returning to their home countries to apply the knowledge gained from the EE course, whether at their current jobs or in new roles. This observation appears to contradict statements made by interview respondents and publicly available data regarding the characteristics of students who come to the UK on a student visa.

For instance, the personal statement of a public sector manager from Nigeria revealed a desire to pursue a specialised EE course before securing a promotion, aiming to gain a competitive advantage. This aligns with the arguments presented by King and Sondhi (2017). The applicant also identified specific areas for skill enhancement and expressed a wish to upskill prior to accepting a promotion within their home country. Additionally, this applicant appeared to seek to refresh their existing knowledge, which aligns with the claims of Ausubel and Robinson (1970) regarding the role of prior knowledge as a foundation for new learning. The applicant claimed that :

“*I am currently a Deputy Director, Procurement with the Federal Government of Nigeria. I intend to be a specialist after service in Procurement Audit. I have not been a good financial accounting manager. I hope that the course will give me a short way to understand financial management*”.

Similarly, an overseas project manager from Saudi Arabia, who applied to study an executive course in contract law stated “*As a Project Manager, this course will help me to articulate my thoughts, use proper language, understand the terminology of the contract and minimise number of disputes due to lack of clarity*”. The delegate appear to be expecting to improve the quality of their existing job as a result of studying an EE course. The applicant’s expectations appear to be aligned with the claims made by Jacobson *et al.*(2017:43) who define EE as “*the process used to develop, expand, or improve capabilities of current senior leaders or to position individuals for future senior leadership roles within an organisation*”.

4.3.2 Evaluation of Personal Statements (Statement of Intent)

Figure 4.2: 2019 word cloud of personal statement analysis with a minimum word length of 3, 200 most used words including synonyms.

By looking at Figure 4.2, which was based on the sample of personal statements from 2019, it is evident, that the most commonly used term was *management.* This had a total mention of 457 followed closely by *work,* with 391 mentions. This, coupled with the findings from the interviews support the argument that most of the applicants are interested in learning about management, the course relates to their work. It may also mean, they have jobs within management or looking for work elsewhere. This is in line with the findings of Amdam (2016) who traced the history of EE to short courses that are mainly based on management, aimed at those who were already in managerial roles in the USA.

Development was mentioned 320 times by those who applied in 2019. This may suggest that most applicants want to develop themselves or their functional unit within an organisation. The word *business* had 298 mentions while *course* was mentioned 281 times. It is worthwhile noting at this point that all of the above applications were for campus-based executive education courses. The same criteria were used for all applications received in the year 2020, which includes applications for courses that ran in 2020 and 2021 as online-live courses.

Figure 4.3: 2020 personal statement analysis with a minimum word length of 3, 200 most used words including synonyms.

Although these applications were submitted during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the most frequently used terms in personal statements have remained consistent since 2019. As shown in the word cloud (Figure 4.3), the leading keywords include "*management*" (181 mentions) and "*work*" (163 mentions), reflecting the same trends observed in 2019. However, there was a notable shift in the third position, where "*development*" appeared 146 times in 2020. This indicates that many applicants sought to enhance their skills to remain competitive in the global business market, particularly against the backdrop of job losses, furloughs, and redundancies, as highlighted by Francis-Devine *et al.* (2021) in their report on the "*Impact of Coronavirus on the Labour Market*", presented to the UK House of Commons. In contrast to "*management*", which was mentioned 181 times, "*leadership*" was referenced only 64 times in this sample. This disparity suggests a greater interest in acquiring specialised skills rather than solely focusing on organisational leadership among those applying for executive courses.

Figure 4.4: 2021 personal statement analysis with a minimum word length of 3, 200 most used words including synonyms.

In contrast to both the 2019 and 2020 application forms, the most commonly used word in 2021 was "*work"* with 285 mentions. "*Management"* was mentioned 244 times while "*development"* was mentioned 217 times, as illustrated in Figure 4.4. This demonstrates that after the peak of the pandemic, applicants' interests were shifted from business and management which previously had a higher level of mentions to a set of different keywords. People were more focussed on work (either finding or improving). The word "*business*" was mentioned 180 times. This may suggest that applicants wanted to *learn how to* carry out either functional, technical or strategic tasks and relate the course to their business /company in some way.

Figure 4.5: Overall 2019 - 2021 personal statement analysis with a minimum word length of 3, 200 most used words including synonyms.

When all of the personal statements from 2019-2021 were analysed using a word cloud (Figure 4.5), the word "*management"* had 882 mentions. It was apparent that during the three years, those who enrolled on any course were mostly interested in studying various aspects of management. It also demonstrates that it was highly likely for the applicants to have held management positions within their organisation as reported by Thompson (2018b). LAMF applicants' main objective of joining a course with the school has remained the same, regardless of the global pandemic, mode of study or changes in workplace circumstances.

Looking further, other prominent keywords that appeared across all three years were *marketing, project, leadership, team, knowledge, current, skills, responsibility, experience, brand, position* and *organisation.* Examples of such sentences include "*studied business administration with a master's degree in marketing in Chile*", "*I believe that project management is a continuous learning process of life that requires constant study*" and "*its quite crucial to have proper knowledge of creating brands and how to manage them*". As the number of occurrences does not reflect a specific pattern, it may not be possible to draw interpretations or conclusions about these recurring words.

4.3.3 Application of Theory into Practice

When reviewing existing literature, it became clear that individuals pursue EE courses to learn how to apply theoretical knowledge to their current organisational settings. Samples from the personal statements demonstrated why applicants have wanted to study an EE course to accomplish this need.

An economics graduate who wanted to study for a postgraduate certificate in finance also appeared to have a clear goal as to why the applicant should study his/her chosen course, the statement:

> "*I graduated with a BA (Hons) in Economics but I want to enrich my knowledge with a solid background in Finance so that's why I thought about pursuing this Postgraduate certificate*"

The above statement illustrates how applicants leverage executive education courses to broaden their knowledge across various subjects, aiming to enhance their career prospects. Additionally, it reinforces the views of Conger and Xin (2000) regarding the subjects that prospective applicants find particularly desirable. From another perspective, the statement suggests that the applicant is attempting to fulfil an intrinsic motivator, as outlined in Herzberg's (2010) two-factor theory.

> *"Exposure to a completely different environment will make me stronger mentally. I hope starting my career here will empower me to deal with the situations in the hardest of times".*

The applicant appears to have identified the distinction between a theory-heavy degree course and what can be expected from an EE provider. The applicant also appears to be aware of his/her weaknesses and gaps in knowledge. This demonstrates that such applicants may be well aware of their career aspirations and skills. The personal statement also reiterates the arguments made by Varner *et al.* (2013) in terms of undertaking EE courses to fill skill gaps, with a focus on what is required by organisations as opposed to what is being taught on a regular degree programme.

Another international applicant, currently unemployed, articulated their aspirations to pursue an executive education course at LAMF. This applicant believes that possessing only a degree or a master's qualification will not provide a competitive advantage in securing a desirable job. This viewpoint aligns with the arguments of Choi and Hannafin (1995), who suggest that the two factors essential for fulfilling social learning are context and community. The applicant further emphasised the expectation of acquiring contemporary tools relevant to their chosen field, which may equip them with the latest knowledge and skills within their area of specialisation. The personal statement demonstrate this aspiration by stating that:

> "*I've studied business administration with a master's degree in marketing in Chile. I am currently out of work. Both to start and to be employed I need more tools. The*

course that interests me most is digital marketing since it covers everything necessary today".

However, an applicant who self-identifies as an entrepreneur who comes from a family-owned business explained the motivations behind studying a specialised EE course at LAMF, where he emphasised the balance of theory and practice offered in an EE course. This is also in line with the claims made by Ryan (2013) about putting theory into practice. The applicant stated:

> "*Belonging to a business family, I hope to apply my skills to the world of business. To increase such skills, I not only need theoretical knowledge but practical experience as well. Business school can provide me with the skills I need to analyse and track what areas a corporation could improve in".*

The statement also appears to suggest that the applicant wants the EE course to help him identify areas the family business can improve. This is in line with the views of Jensen *et al.*(2003) who differentiate the learning journey of an EE delegate from others who engage in non-EE educational programmes. Jensen *et al.* (2003) suggest that an EE delegate's ownership of their learning process starts before they attend the course. This process begins when delegates discuss and justify their reasons and strategies for enrolling in an EE programme.

Reviewing the delegate satisfaction surveys from my professional practice at LAMF highlighted that the widely recognised benefit of acquiring specialised skills continues to resonate with LAMF's global applicants. Most delegates attend LAMF's short courses specifically to gain specialised functional or strategic skills. This generalisation aligns with the intrinsic factors outlined in Herzberg's (2010) two-factor theory of motivation. As LAMF positions its courses as industry-focused and solution-oriented, delegates are notably interested in addressing their current organisational challenges. Some delegates enrol in short courses at LAMF with the goal of acquiring new skills to support applications for promotions or higher-responsibility roles. Consequently, it can be inferred that the reasons for attending courses identified by Farris *et al.* (2003) remain relevant at LAMF. Farris *et al.* (2003) observe that most applicants enrol in executive education courses to further their functional specialisation, enhance their understanding of their company's strategic challenges, and prepare for new positions or assignments.

4.3.4 Want to Study Because of the Course Contents

As discussed in the literature review, participants or their sponsors pay a high course fee to study an EE course. EE courses cater to those who want to gain industry-focused, specialist knowledge of a niche area of study. Hence, the actual course contents may have been an important reason in terms of selecting an EE course of study. Personal statements from some of the applicants (2019-2021) emphasised the course contents when they wanted to study at LAMF. The thematic diagram based on "because of the course contents" is available in Appendix 11.

> *"My key interests lie in learning creative strategies and effective business techniques needed to stay competitive in the market".*

An applicant from Nigeria, employed at a law firm specialising in government contracts, articulated a clear vision for studying an executive education course at LAMF that focuses on intellectual property law. The applicant aims to acquire skills that are anticipated to become increasingly desirable in the future within their field. This intention aligns with Jacobson *et al.* (2017), who argue that an EE course equips learners with the skills necessary for higher-level roles. Furthermore, it resonates with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation, wherein Herzberg (1968) identifies the nature of the job itself as an intrinsic motivator for individuals. The applicant pointed out that :

> "*As the only non-legal member of the team, I am tasked with providing business research assistance to the team, I have decided to take this short course to enable me to serve an emerging client niche. This is because several of Nigeria's start-ups are keen on commercialising their IP in the marketplace. I am confident that this short course will provide the springboard I need to become knowledgeable in this identified and emerging niche".*

In a personal statement, one applicant highlighted that participating in an executive education programme would enhance his existing skills. This aligns with Ausubel and Robinson's (1970) perspectives on new learning practices building upon pre-existing knowledge structures. Another applicant, aiming to study financial modelling, suggested that the course would provide advanced modelling skills, ultimately enabling him to enhance his business and drive growth. This statement aligns with Hura's (2003) assertion that EE teaching is delivered by staff who are experts in their functional areas, grounded in a contemporary curriculum. Conversely, another applicant with decades of experience in the same company indicated a need for specialised skills to address "*any problem that is thrown my way*" implying that the course would equip him with subject-specific problem-solving abilities. This aligns with Jacobson *et al.* (2017), who identify EE as a means of acquiring active and applied learning in problem-solving within a work context. It also supports the view that EE serves as an intrinsic motivator for employees, as classified by Herzberg (2010).

An HR manager who expressed interest in studying at LAMF noted in their personal statement that the course would provide an overarching understanding of leadership behaviour, organisational behaviour, and development. The applicant aims to manage organisational change effectively. The areas identified by the applicant align with Thompson's (2018a) assertion that the main subject disciplines typically taught within EE courses focus on facilitating organisational change. This implies that the course will offer the chance to acquire advanced knowledge that one might expect an HR manager to already possess. However, it is important to highlight that the applicant has successfully pinpointed specific subject areas in which they require enhanced knowledge to manage organisational change within the workplace. This statement supports Conger and Xin's (2000) argument that a primary objective of an EE course is to equip managers with the skills necessary to drive organisational changes and implement new strategic directions.

> *"I feel that I would benefit from a better understanding of emerging technologies and their impact on business. I do not need deep technical skills, but I do need a solid foundation".*

The above statement was extracted from a personal statement written by an applicant seeking to study a short course in Emerging Technologies. The applicant demonstrates a clear understanding of the necessity for creating awareness of new technological advances within the industry. He explicitly states that he does not require a deeper understanding of these technologies, suggesting that he has a solid grasp of the level of depth and subject coverage offered by a four-day short course. By doing so, the learner is positioned to achieve meaningful learning, as highlighted by Novak and Gowin (1984), who relate this concept to Ausubel's assimilation theory (cited in Novak, 2002). Novak and Gowin (1984) argue that meaningful learning occurs when a learner integrates new information into an existing knowledge domain within their broader cognitive structure.

> *"I hope the course brings insight into the workings of Project Funding from its foundations to advance modelling and practical use in practice".*

The above statement was extracted from a personal statement written by an applicant who applied for a postgraduate certificate. The applicant demonstrates a clear understanding of what can be expected from each of the modules he has selected to study during the semester. This highlights how the acquired knowledge will be applied in seeking project funding. Additionally, this statement reflects Mento and Jones's (2002) argument regarding EE participants engaging in meaningful learning that is connected to an organisational context.

An applicant for the miniMBA expressed that, while he aspires to pursue a full MBA in the future, his current expectation is to gain a foundational understanding of the subjects typically covered in a traditional MBA. Another applicant also indicated that he initially applied based on a friend's recommendation but was pleased with the quality of the lesson resources. He reiterated that the level of coverage for each subject is sufficient for his current professional needs, providing a valuable "*starting point*" for all areas of business. This aligns with Tichy's (1989) perspective on undertaking such a course as a foundation before progressing to further studies.

Based on the above claims, it is evident that applicants choose EE courses primarily due to the specific course contents. They seem to have a clear understanding of the skills they aim to acquire upon completion. These findings align with the claims discussed in the literature review. While some applicants were motivated by the course content itself, others were drawn to the school. Mostly, it is evident that EE acts as an intrinsic motivator for the applicants. These aspects are explored in the following section.

4.3.5 Want to Study Because of the School (LAMF Brand)

As a London-based business school, LAMF has established itself as a reputed private education provider in the UK. As its name is associated with London, there appears to be an added appetite from overseas applicants. This section looks at what both staff and prospective delegates stated in terms of the school, its name, reputation, faculty, location and resources and how it influences a prospective delegate's decision to apply for an EE course at LAMF.

Selvam presented an argument about overseas applicants who wish to improve their CV and job prospects by gaining a well-recognised qualification, focussing on a school's geographic location and association with a well-known city for education. Selvam pointed out that associating with a well-known university or a school is important as it gives confidence to the learner in addition to equipping the learner with knowledge, values and skills. This statement is aligned with Keller and Kotler (2022) claim that individuals will consider brand association to add value. Further, prospective employers will view such individuals as those who are up to date and can add value to their organisations. Selvam also claimed that taking up a course at a prestigious organisation will help the learner in an interview scenario. Selvam stated that :

> "*Someone who might not be familiar with an elite university, next in line there are the likes of The London School of Law or marketing or business, this creates some sort of cultural identity to a localised environment in the whole world. If they were to, for example, apply for a job in America, I didn't know Pakistan or Nigeria, but so you studied at the London School of yeah, then the interviewer will think, okay, so he is familiar with the London way of business, and this will improve their prospects*".

Vera appears to have related to this view by claiming that:

"*Education is to give you confidence, to give you knowledge to give you values, to give you skills, but more importantly, to help you in an interview scenario. Having an elite sounding name like London School of Business or Marketing would create an affiliation to a cultural identity to a localised environment*".

An applicant seeking to enrol in a specialised short course at LAMF acknowledged both the challenges and benefits associated with EE, emphasising the importance of studying at a reputable institution. The applicant expects the course to introduce new advantages within their current work environment. They recognised that the business world is continually evolving and stressed the necessity of staying updated to maintain a competitive edge. This reflects a desire to acquire knowledge and learn how to apply it in practical situations. The applicant's perspective aligns with Amdam's (2016) assertion that executive education is essential for corporate executives to enter and remain competitive in the global marketplace. The personal statement stated:

"*I believe professionalism with ease would be the trend coming in our lives but there is no success without hardship and this is why I want to be a part of this wonderful institute and course"*.

Manuela emphasised the fact that students who come from either the African continent or Eastern Europe see the brand association alone as a differentiating factor between them and the competition. They would associate themselves with a London-based business school. This claim appears to be in line with the views of Lomer (2018) who claim that UK education is viewed as superior and desirable by many countries including former British colonies.

In Manuela's opinion, only 10% join the course to gain specialist skills. Manuela stated that :

"*the odd few I'd say maybe one in 10 joined because they wanted to develop their skills in that area".*

However, the results from the thematic analysis of personal statements appear to contradict Manuela's assertion that only 10% of applicants enrolled to gain new skills. In fact, the desire to acquire new skills and enhance existing ones emerged as the two most prominent themes within the applicants' personal statements. This aligns closely with the claims made by Jacobson *et al.* (2017), who note that one of the primary outcomes expected from executive education is the improvement of existing skills. Hence, it may be necessary to re-evaluate Manuela's perception that merely one in ten applicants joined a course to develop their skills. This assessment is essential to ensure that applicants are not creating statements solely to secure a place in a particular course. However, given the nature of the data collected, I cannot definitively ascertain the true intentions of individual learners.

Selvam argues that aligning with the school's brand can enhance delegates' attractiveness when applying for overseas employment. This affiliation creates the impression that they are familiar with the "*London way of doing business*". Selvam's views are consistent with the claims made by King and Sondhi (2017), who noted that international students often perceive Western education as the standard for theory and knowledge. They further elaborate that such education is regarded as a career-enhancing investment, serving as a stepping stone to gain a competitive advantage when returning home to enter the domestic labour market.

Regarding the transition to online-live classes, Selvam noted that the pandemic accelerated a transformation that would typically take two decades into just one year. Individuals moved away from their traditional workspaces and city-based jobs, adapting to a new online approach. He raises concerns about whether a school can achieve the same educational outcomes in a virtual setting as it would in a physical classroom. Selvam's arguments align with Vicerey's (2001) assertion that online e-learning may not be as favoured among many EE delegates, as most executives view EE as a high-touch (physical contact) and low-tech (minimal technological involvement) delivery process. Nevertheless, existing literature suggests that delegates pursue EE primarily to acquire new skills or refresh their current knowledge. This aspect will be further examined in the following section.

4.3.6 Want to Study to Learn a New Set of Skills, Knowledge and Competencies

In a rapidly evolving world where knowledge can quickly become obsolete, professionals must acquire new skills and competencies to remain competitive within their fields. Some delegates pursue EE to gain these essential skills and knowledge (Kotter, 1996). This section explores the claims made by a sample of these applicants, along with insights from both academic and non-academic staff at LAMF. Furthermore, it evaluates the motivations behind applicants' decisions to invest their time and resources in developing these skills and competencies (refer to the thematic diagram in Appendix 13).

One applicant who was applying to study for a postgraduate certificate in marketing at LAMF stated:

> "*My expected takeaway from this course would be the ability to build stronger brand checks and measures, make my communication and scope more agile so that scaling and adaptation become easier and more cost-effective*".

A self-funded applicant aiming to study Mergers and Acquisitions expressed their expectations for the course, expressing a desire to enhance their current role by gaining the ability to assess opportunities from not only a commercial and financial perspective but also a strategic one. Luxmi highlighted that enrolling in an EE short course is an effective way to acquire specialist skills and stay updated on the latest trends across various industries. This aligns with the findings of Conger and Xin (2000), who note that contemporary EE courses are increasingly innovative, learner-centred, and serve as a means for managers to refresh their subject knowledge.

Luxmi stated:

> “*With the changing times lot of things have changed so it's a better way I believe it's the best way of improving your knowledge and updating it according to the current trends*.”

Luxmi also expressed her opinion on the current state of the global employment market by stating that with a volatile job market, many applicants are attempting to gain extra skills to be seen as appealing compared to the competition as suggested by Billing *et al.* (2021). Luxmi is also of the opinion that the short courses offer a convenient way for employers that sponsor staff by stating that :

> *“It's easy for corporates send staff to go for CPD courses that last around four days, which adds value*”.

Vera observed that while many participants in short courses seek to acquire specialised skills or stay updated on the latest trends, some individuals may also use the opportunity to take a break from work and enjoy shopping in London. Luxmi noted that the four-day short course format is particularly popular among corporations, as it allows employees to be away from work for only a week rather than a longer duration. Although this could be seen as counterproductive in terms of staff absenteeism, Lippert (2001) argues that engaging in an EE course incurs a significant opportunity cost due to the time spent away from work. Therefore, it seems that sponsoring organisations carefully consider this opportunity cost before sending employees on EE training courses.

Discussing along these lines, Luxmi stated:

> “*It's an executive short course, so the duration is so short like four days, so for working people it's easy for corporates to send staff to go for CPD courses for four days so it adds value*”.

Based on the preceding discussions, it is clear that some applicants pursue executive education courses to acquire specific skills or competencies. It is essential to differentiate these individuals from those who apply based on the course content. The latter group is primarily driven by the overall learning outcomes and indicative course material, rather than the acquisition of specific skills or the enhancement of existing ones. Overseas applicants frequently seek UK qualifications to strengthen their credentials (King and Sondhi, 2018). This subject will be explored further in the following section.

4.3.7 Want to Study in the UK or Gain Overseas Study Experience

British education is regarded as high-quality, desirable, and well-respected worldwide, as noted by King and Sondhi (2017). This reputation extends to all types of qualifications, including degrees and short-term training such as executive education. LAMF, as a private business school based in London, benefits from this association with the UK and its capital. Previous researchers, including Spivak (2009), has highlighted the advantages of UK education in relation to job prospects and enhancing CVs. However, some applicants choose to study abroad to experience different cultures, as stated by McCall and Hollenbeck (2002). While this may have been true for those applying in 2019, when LAMF operated solely as a campus-based provider, delegates during the 2020-2021 academic year studied online regardless of their physical location. The illustration in Appendix 12 will explore a sample of applicants who sought to study at LAMF for the benefits of British education or to gain international exposure.

There are occasions where a student would either have started their own business or received a promotion and wanted to learn how to do the new role in a better way. However, those who enrol in a postgraduate certificate or diploma courses have more long-term academic goals than those who attend a course at a university. This is in line with the findings of Owusu-Kwarteng (2021:2407-8) who states that "*They benefited from their experiences in UK universities. These included a multitude of transferable skills which could be used to enhance their employability in the UK, or if they returned home. Several reported that they were able to boost their social and cultural capital. Others indicated that they felt a real sense of achievement because they successfully navigated an education system and culture which was very different to their own*".

An applicant who worked within academic administration role overseas appears to have a different set of aspirations in joining an EE course. They suggested that having associated with London-based education may enable them to gain an advantage in securing an internship in London. This applicant's view is closely aligned with Selvam's claims that having UK-based education on a CV may lead to the person being perceived as more desirable at a job interview. The personal statement stated that:

> "*I can be more benefited from the internship opportunities that will help me gain international experience and can give me a huge boost in my career portfolio. I am excited to study in one of the world's global cities, London*".

A similar idea was echoed by a Moroccan applicant who emphasised the importance of gaining a British education and the importance of gaining specialised skills. The statement claimed that:

> "*Having completed a French baccalaureate in management studies in the city of Casablanca; Morocco, I have decided to pursue a career in Business management in England as per its reputation for High Education quality*".

This statement supports the claims made by Lomer (2018), who highlights that one of the primary attractions for global education customers, including those from India, is the colonial ties and the perception of UK education as superior. It aligns with Waters' (2006) assertion that students from elite or upper-middle-class backgrounds often enrol in prestigious Western universities to distinguish themselves from the growing number of middle-class students seeking higher education abroad. Throughout this research project, I observed that most applicants for EE courses, irrespective of their physical location, applied with a clear academic and professional purpose. Many explicitly stated their intentions for after completing the EE course for which they had applied.

An overseas applicant from Brazil, studying project management at LAMF appeared to have a range of different expectations from the course and the school. She is a legal professional with an inspiration for inclusivity and championing equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The personal statement stated that:

> "*Inspired by my sister, who has Down syndrome, and her struggle to be included in a society unprepared to accept her, I realized my purpose was to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in Brazil. With this course, I hope to have the skills to efficiently implement projects in companies and public agencies and enhance the position of disabled people in society*".

This statement highlights the diverse expectations of EE participants, illustrating how the skills acquired through an EE course can be applied across various fields and contexts. This includes individuals aiming to promote disability positivity in their workplaces. Further, the aspirations of this applicant align with the perspectives shared by Beech (2018), who suggests that studying abroad becomes an advantage when a graduate integrate into society, with overseas qualifications often seen as a prerequisite for entering specific sectors of the job market.

However, there was no noticeable change in participants' attitudes when the teaching format was amended to weekly evenings in 2020. None of the academics who responded to the interviews mentioned any participant's lack of interaction. Therefore, it can be concluded that advancements in interactivity within collaborative platforms may have allowed participants to engage with each other and build long-lasting relationships. This may be similar to what is experienced in face-to-face environments. Moreover, the observation of similar levels of delegate motivation and engagement in the virtual learning environment compared to a physical classroom may cast doubt on the staff's pre-conceived belief that delegates are primarily interested in sightseeing and visiting the city of London rather than focusing on their studies. However, as Porter (1985) suggests, companies often sponsor their employees to attend EE courses to enhance work practices and gain a competitive advantage. This topic is discussed in the following section.

4.3.8 Improve Current Work Practices of the Delegate's Team/Department / Workgroup

The role of Executive Education (EE) in enhancing work practices within participants' current organisations has been highlighted by Amdam (2016). Employers, according to this view, are inclined to invest in both current and potential managers, offering time off and financial support to help them acquire updated skills. Such investments enable participants to refine existing practices and contribute to organisational change. As Thompson (2018b) argues, this support is often motivated by the employer's desire to remain competitive, relying on a skilled management team to drive organisational success. However, as shown in Appendix 14, some sponsored participants enrolled in LAMF held expectations that diverged from this typical employer-driven objective, indicating a range of motivations beyond simply advancing their employer's competitive position:

> *"Currently my company is expanding and venturing into new markets. This course would help me know how to architecturally create brands correctly, plan for their growth and assess the process*".

This statement appears to suggest that the course selected will enable the applicant to enable the applicant's company to expand its presence into new territories. Such an expectation aligns with Gallagher and Schuler's (2013) assertion that EE can foster a global mindset among participants. One overseas applicant, an event planner, emphasised the school's reputation and the anticipated quality of EE offered. This view aligns with Margulies and Gregg's (2013) recommendation that an EE provider's success is often tied to institutional reputation and the perceived value of its programme offerings.

The applicant stated that:

> *"I am an event planner and manager. Why I want to study is to make my company stand out in the event market as there are many competitors in the market. I know that after acquiring knowledge from LAMF, I will be able to offer a unique product in the industry in my home country*".

An entrepreneur involved in exporting trout eggs to international markets expressed his motivation to enrol in an EE course at LAMF, citing a desire for structured, in-depth knowledge of international business practices and financial expertise. This aligns closely with Varner *et al.*'s (2013) recommendations that EE providers tailor their programme syllabuses to meet the specific needs of prospective applicants. In this instance, the applicant stated that:

> *"Part of my portfolio includes expanding business relations locally and internationally while being an ambassador for the company. It is a role that requires in-depth knowledge of international business practices and acute financial acumen*".

In terms of senior managers having demand for non-postgraduate executive courses. This is in line with the arguments of McNay (2013) who points out that what was earlier referred to as manager education where the primary assumption was to train managers The managers could improve worker productivity by efficient and effective utilisation of the workers who reported to them. This in turn resulted in the organisation making higher profits. While companies focus on improving work practices, some applicants may aim to enhance specific areas of their subject knowledge. This aspect is discussed in the following section.

4.3.9 Improve Existing Knowledge of a Specialised Area

Personal statements revealed that some applicants were already well-established within their fields of expertise. They expressed a strong desire to update their specialised knowledge with newer strategies, systems, and approaches. This interest in investing in an EE course to advance their expertise was highlighted in both personal statements and staff interviews, highlighting the importance of staying current within one's profession.

Discussing this viewpoint, Michael suggested :

> "A *marketing consultant may know what they're weak on, particularly digital marketing, they need to tick that box so they're less interested in boasting about a qualification, learning things which they can put into their day-to-day consultancy work, a lot of our delegates want to go back to work and apply their learnings straight away on Monday morning*".

When the question regarding the reasons for individuals to take up EE courses was asked, Vera's opinion was that the level of motivation differs based on their nationality. Vera explained that overseas students who have industry experience would undertake a course in London to gain a good level of international exposure. Others take this as an opportunity to venture into other career paths or become specialists in their respective fields. Quoting an example, Vera stated that somebody with a master's degree in finance might want to acquire specialised skills in a particular area within finance by undertaking an executive education qualification. Vera stated:

> "*I've come across students, that they have a bachelor's degree in finance or even a master's, but there was a specific area that wasn't covered in their masters and they wanted to get some more knowledge into that*".

The above view appears to be similar to Conger and Xin's (2000) findings in terms of the expectations of working professionals and the reasons behind them wanting to enrol on an EE course. It is worthwhile bearing in mind that Conger and Xin's (2000) data was predominantly based on US organisations while my research is based on a UK-based private education provider.

An applicant who applied to study a postgraduate certificate in marketing course stated:

> "*The course is very interesting to me as it tackles the exact duties I fulfil in my role and it is quite crucial to have proper knowledge of creating brands and how to manage them".*

This statement suggests that the selected course will enable the applicant to enhance their existing knowledge of branding. This perspective aligns with Novak and Gowin's (1984) assertion that meaningful learning involves applying prior knowledge to new scenarios, effectively integrating new information with pre-existing intellectual constructs. While some applicants seek EE to deepen their knowledge, others appear to pursue these courses to improve their job prospects. This aspect will be explored further in the following section.

4.3.10 Improve Job Prospects (change of jobs/ preparing for a new job)

Some applicants who applied for an EE course at LAMF believed that completing a specialised programme would enhance their employability. Unemployed individuals or those seeking to change jobs viewed these courses as a valuable addition to their credentials, providing a competitive edge in their job search or during transitions to new employers. This perspective aligns with Ryan's (2013) recommendations regarding the value of acquiring EE before applying for higher-level positions. Both applicant personal statements and staff interviews revealed a range of motivations and justifications for investing in an EE course to improve job prospects. The corresponding thematic diagram can be found in Appendix 15.

During the interview, Luxmi discussed how people in society tend to compare themselves with others and compare their CVs or professional profiles with those with similar profiles online. Luxmi stated that:

> "*People are constantly looking at other people's profiles what they got and they want to stay ahead of the peer group".*

Speaking along the same lines, one overseas applicant who applied to study for a postgraduate certificate expressed his/her desire to study at LAMF by claiming that :

> "*I am very eager to build a career in Finance and I believe with LAMF, I will be positioned ahead of the pack in the business world*".

The previous statement aligns with Waters's (2006) perspective on international student mobility. While Waters's (2006) argument focuses on general trends in student movement for higher education, it highlights that international students from upper-class backgrounds often seek qualifications from institutions they perceive as offering high-quality education. This pursuit allows them to differentiate themselves from peers with similar academic backgrounds.

Selvam also expressed his views about studying for a postgraduate qualification by suggesting that:

> "*Doing postgraduate education, rather than just a degree is going a next step further, it's about showing or helping them get a foot into the door of a career in an interview scenario mainly, so when people do postgraduate education*".

However, Selvam also compared the general profile of those who enrol on postgraduate courses with those who do either a miniMBA or a specialist short course by explaining that:

> "*The postgraduate courses, again it's maybe people have a bit more time on their hands and they're looking to do something to put on their CV to take the next step to say they've done a postgraduate, so I think this is the ideal motivation*".

The previous excerpt aligns with Ryan's (2013) suggestion that EE participants often seek greater meaning in their work. In addition to developing their skills and knowledge, these participants aim to enhance their future employability, particularly in the context of declining job security and the need to embrace innovation. Similarly, Selvam's statement reflects Lomer's (2018) claims regarding students from India and China, emphasising that as a country, society, or community develops, competitiveness increases. Individuals must elevate their performance to differentiate themselves in a competitive market. Selvam stated that:

> "*Everything is becoming more competitive, I think this is normally as a country or a society or Community develops. There's a lot of information so as this is widely available people realise they need to up their game yeah or set themselves apart in a crowd*".

This is also in line with the views of King and Sondhi (2017) who claims that students from India and China tend to obtain international credentials to obtain a competitive advantage after returning home.

An applicant who applied for a postgraduate certificate course also emphasised the importance of studying specialised areas within finance and how this can help develop a lucrative career. The applicant stated that:

> "*The course outline offers a diverse range of topics including financial modelling and financial risk management which I believe will provide me with a thorough understanding of financial principles that I can leverage to advance my career*".

Statements similar to the above are aligned with Beech's (2014) views that prospective learners view UK-based education as being of high quality, based on the reputation of some of the elite universities that are based in the UK.

Focusing specifically on postgraduate qualifications, Selvam suggested that individuals holding such qualifications are more competitive in interview situations compared to those with only undergraduate qualifications. These advanced qualifications can help candidates navigate interview challenges more effectively. However, Selvam noted that some delegates may prioritise obtaining a certificate over genuinely upgrading their knowledge. This perspective aligns closely with Jakovljevic *et al.*'s (2008) argument that, in certain instances, learners become mere purchasers of qualifications.

This was also suggested by Michael who stated:

> "*I've done this short course look I've been to the LAMF here is some evidence to show that I know, this content, this subject matter and that could be helpful when applying for a job or looking for a promotion*".

Michael compared the motivations of sponsored applicants to those of self-funded applicants, noting that a sponsored applicant's motivation for undertaking a course differs from that of someone who uses their life savings to pursue education instead of going on holiday or buying a dress. He claims that the latter group tends to be the most demanding subset of learners, as they are eager to ensure they receive value for their investment. Their primary intention often revolves around enhancing their personal brand to become more employable, desirable, and valuable to organisations. Michael added that another motivation could be to secure a better job, perform better in their current role, or, for self-employed individuals, to improve their business operations. This perspective aligns with Ryan's (2013) claim that EE participants expect to enhance their future employability, both internally and externally. Michael believes that executive education providers typically offer courses that equip participants with the skills and knowledge needed to be more effective in their careers. However, Burke and Burke (1989), suggests that individuals also pursue executive education to engage with external experts and peers from similar professional backgrounds to discuss work-related challenges. This aspect will be explored further in the following section.

4.3.11 Networking with Like-minded Individuals and Discussing Work Problems with Industry Experts

The literature review chapter highlighted a key distinction between academic courses and EE courses: the latter facilitates networking opportunities among like-minded professionals from various fields (Jones and Pfeffer, 2003). One significant advantage of executive education is that, in addition to discussing problems, scenarios, and case studies with the course facilitator, participants can engage with peers who bring a wealth of experience from their own industries. King (1990) notes that individuals working in small groups utilise guided reciprocal questioning, which encourages higher levels of critical thinking, resulting in answers that demonstrate greater achievement. Furthermore, the classroom setting enables establishing of industry connections and fosters friendships. This was reiterated by Bolt (1993), who identifies team building and networking as central components of executive education. The corresponding thematic diagram can be found in Appendix 16.

In support of the arguments above, Luxmi suggested that:

> "*People love to communicate with each other, which makes sense as professionally, understanding people coming from different profiles and different domains so it's all about executive education so it's about sharing your experiences it's all about the interaction and sharing and getting more knowledge from others or learning from other people's experiences*".

Berry *et al.* (2018) quoting Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954), observe that such courses will also act as a platform to discuss a highly specialised case study or problem simulation with a group that is interested in a small subject area. Thus, Luxmi's statement (above) appears to be aligned with Barry *et al.'s* (2018) claim.

An industrial Engineer who wanted to study a specialised short course at LAMF pointed out that :

> *"Understanding people from diversified cultures will increase my network, which in turn would guide me to lead people well, thus hope to nurture my hidden talents here".*

These comments appear to be aligned with the arguments of Berry *et al.* (2018) quoting Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954), in discussing homophily as the tendency for like-minded persons (in terms of some personal characteristics) to form friendships, leading to influence a person's decision-making. Two underlying factors for such connections were identified by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) as similarities in status and value. Similarly, Waters (2006) argues that socio-economic status shapes mobility choices, while McPherson *et al.* (2001) highlight the importance of homophily in social networks, emphasising that individuals are more likely to connect with those who share similar characteristics. Additionally, Findlay *et al.* (2017) emphasise that spatial considerations play a crucial role in decision-making, further highlighting the need for executive education providers to understand the complex relationship of these factors.

Selvam claimed that, unlike in a class-based environment, participating in online classes limits delegates' opportunities to interact and build networks with other participants. He emphasised that, for senior-level positions, establishing such connections is as important as the quality of education received. Selvam asserted that "*your network is your net worth*." Selvam's statement aligns with the views of McPherson *et al.* (2001), who suggest that similarity fosters relationships, leading to networks that become homogeneous. This is in line with the views of Taylor and Hossam (2013) who suggest such learners will have their preferences, past industry experiences and individual circumstances. The lecturer / facilitator's job would be to provide a conducive environment that will enable such adult learners to capitalise and draw on their past experiences to achieve success. Selvam also noted that participating in the miniMBA programme provides an overarching understanding of six strategic-level subjects typically covered in a traditional MBA. Additionally, it serves as a refresher course for those who already possess higher-level academic qualifications.

In terms of enrolments in the leadership development course, there were 15 male participants compared to 7 female participants. UK-based statistics indicate that females enrol in a higher number of academic and higher education courses (as per HEPI report, 2020/Figure 4.8). However, when it comes to executive education courses that facilitate networking with senior professionals and develop essential strategic thinking skills, males appear to have nearly twice the opportunities as females. This disparity may enhance their success rates in both managing companies and networking with like-minded individuals at the same professional level. Additionally, it can be argued that males have more opportunities to satisfy intrinsic motivators by engaging in challenging work-related scenarios (Herzberg, 2010) especially from a historic perspective where males may have had more access to challenging roles or growth opportunities, depending on organisational culture and individual career paths. Nevertheless, given the small sample size, it is challenging to draw definitive conclusions regarding the relationship between gender and participation levels in higher-level management skills development courses. In this context, Selvam suggested that:

> "*Especially when you get higher up, it's about your contacts. Your network is your net worth*".

Selvam further elaborated on this by stating:

> "*If you're in an environment where other people are from good circles, the people are from good realities of life they have good connections, this is a big thing and doing this face to face you're in that environment, you can talk, you can make friends, the lifelong value you create by the connections, and if you're on a campus face to face some people find that easier, It just depends on the students*".

Based on the interview responses and personal statements, it is evident that delegates view networking and idea-sharing as crucial components of EE. Despite the shift from face-to-face to online course delivery, delegates have demonstrated consistent motivation and engagement. This raises the question of whether modern EE programmes truly need to be conducted exclusively in a face-to-face format. Additionally, while some individuals pursue executive education primarily to network and collaborate, others enrol in these courses to prepare for career transitions or to embark on entrepreneurial ventures. This aspect will be explored further in the following section.

4.3.12 Prepare for a New Career in Future or Become an Entrepreneur

Different applicants seem to have varying motivations for applying to an EE course at LAMF. Some individuals seek to change careers, transitioning to a different industry, while others aim to embark on entrepreneurial ventures. An analysis of the personal statements revealed that several applicants aspire to start their own businesses following their studies in EE. An applicant who applied to study a specialised short course on campus claimed:

“We need to get out of our comfort zone to outgrow ourselves. I am starting my own business in the corporate world with a clean slate in my hand hoping to draw the first line with your teachings”.

This claim appears to have been reiterated on another personal statement written by an applicant who applied to study for a postgraduate certificate in management. The applicant stated that:

“*I would like this course to help me further my business by giving me more opportunities in Business Management, either in my current industry or something new*”.

An overseas, self-funded applicant who is both an entrepreneur and a manager in the aquaculture industry highlighted the specific skills they hope to gain by studying an EE course at LAMF. This applicant demonstrated a clear understanding of the benefits associated with the chosen programme. Their statement aligns with the views of Conger and Xin (2000), who emphasise the importance of acquiring specialised skills through executive education. The personal statement stated that:

“*I am an entrepreneur who believes that acquiring relevant, accurate and updated information allows one to make important and highly strategic decisions that not only impact my business, or my employees and my personal life but also enables me to be a `hands-on’ leader*”.

However, Selvam believes that business owners may enrol themselves on a short course because of knowledge gaps. This statement appears to be aligned with the argument made by Varner *et al.*(2013) about business owners using EE as a means of bridging the gap between their academic knowledge and corporate needs. Selvam stated that:

“*It's more for business owners so maybe they need help with branding maybe they need help with marketing maybe they need help in creating a right team That instils their values their determination, and their passion for their business*”.

In another instance, a doctoral student pursuing a doctorate in engineering at the University of London expressed a desire to learn about entrepreneurship through an EE programme. Their goal was to apply the insights gained from the programme to their doctoral research. This statement aligns with Lippert's (2001) recommendations, which suggest that EE courses focus on developing specific skills and providing "*insight skills*" to professionals who already have clear objectives and know how to apply the knowledge they acquire (Lippert, 2001:4). The applicant stated that:

"*Currently I am an EngD (Engineering Doctorate) student of chemistry at UCL. I would like to learn about entrepreneurship and how to use my ideas or results of my research towards industry implementation and starting my businesses*".

This perspective suggests that even individuals pursuing high-level academic qualifications may find EE short courses appealing for acquiring skills that were not fully addressed throughout their academic careers. It is worth noting that existing literature on EE does not typically consider the viewpoints of those already engaged in specialised or research-based higher education. These individuals often turn to EE to gain additional specialised skills that were not included in their primary qualifications.

Another applicant expressed his/her expectations on their personal statement by stating that :

"*I am convinced that this course will give me a new mindset to analyse cases and give me the skills to deal with the difficulties of entrepreneurship*".

This statement appears to demonstrate the mindset which was discussed by McCall and Hollenbeck (2002) about developing a global leader. McCall and Hollenbeck (2002) point out that executives become highly successful in an international context if they possess a global mindset.

Although most of the EE applicants appear to represent the corporate sector, one overseas public sector worker who applied for a postgraduate course had a somewhat different viewpoint. The applicant stated that:

"*As the vice Chief of Cabinet of the Municipality of <removed>, I would like to develop my financial market tools as I want to grow in this aspect of my job and to start working on the financial market as well because I am deciding if it will be my new road*".

The applicant's statement reveals two aspirations for studying an EE course: (1) to enhance performance in their current role by developing and executing projects of national importance, and (2) to explore the possibility of acquiring a new skill set that would facilitate a career change. Selvam asserts that the miniMBA equips participants with the confidence to adapt to different environments and tackle challenges. This viewpoint aligns with Todeva and Knoke's (2005) claim that building participants' confidence is a non-quantifiable indicator of success. However, it is also evident that some executive education participants are not seeking to change careers; rather, they aim to be better prepared for promotions or new roles within their current organisations, as suggested by Lippert (2001). This aspect will be explored in the following section.

4.3.13 Prepare for a Promotion / New Job Role at the Existing Company

Some applicants enrol in specialised EE courses with the anticipation of receiving a promotion at work or believing that the course will give them a competitive edge when it comes to advancement. This expectation was evident among applicants from various industries and job levels and aligns with the arguments made by Farris *et al.* (2003) regarding promotions in the workplace. Consequently, it can be perceived that gaining a promotion is a key expectation for delegates upon completing an executive education course.

An applicant who is an experienced engineer expressed his/her motivations behind enrolling on an EE course at LAMF by stating:

> "*As an experienced engineer, I have to get involved with the management side of the company. These courses will help me to understand in general how to manage a business from the beginning. LAMF's postgraduate certificate in management will be very helpful for my future objectives*".

This applicant appears to want to study an EE course to improve his/her prospects of obtaining a higher-level position and seems to have a perception that an EE course will improve this possibility.

However, an applicant who was an industrial engineer by profession chose to apply for a combined postgraduate certificate in management and finance at LAMF and pointed out that the course would give the applicant more confidence in handling difficult situations. The applicant claimed that:

> "*The course is perfectly aligned with my personal and professional interests because it will allow me to gain confidence and security, empowering me to acquire more responsibilities in every future position as an integral professional*".

This statement illustrates that applicants seek higher-level qualifications to empower themselves and gain the confidence and security needed to take on broader responsibilities in their current workplaces. This aligns with Ryan's (2013) assertion that EE courses enhance participants' confidence in assuming greater responsibilities within their organisations.

This also appear to be in line with the views expressed by one of the applicants who applied for a postgraduate certificate who stated:

> "*The most interesting course outline is related to entrepreneurship and business strategy management both are directly related to my current project and also can give me a complete toolbox to be prepared for future challenges at my workplace*".

This highlights the applicant's intention to become a desirable professional equipped with future-ready skills. This statement supports Bolt's (1993) claim that the goal of EE is to equip participants with the necessary skills to achieve organisational objectives, some of which are critical for an organisation's future. Michael emphasised the importance of being familiar with the latest buzzwords and updating his knowledge to conduct successful consultations. This perspective is also reflected in several personal statements. The final aspect of updating existing subject knowledge is discussed in the section below

4.3.14 Update Existing Knowledge of a Specialised Subject Area

Most delegates who apply for EE courses are highly qualified and experienced in their respective fields. However, knowledge, procedures, and methods continually evolve, necessitating that even subject experts update their skills to remain competitive or sustain their consultancy and professional practices, as noted by Bolt (1993) and supported by Ryan (2013). During the interviews, both academic and non-academic staff at LAMF discussed this aspect in detail, and similar sentiments were echoed in the applicants' personal statements. Luxmi pointed out that there may be delegates like herself who have not engaged with education for a while and are undertaking an EE course to familiarise themselves with the latest theories and trends in the industry. This aligns with the findings of Conger and Xin (2000), who indicate that participants use EE to stay current with developments in their area of specialisation.

Luxmi stated that:

> "*Within a week you learn quite a lot, and it's people, we've already been in the professional field for a long time, so it makes more sense to just add more value to their knowledge and learn more of those current trends in the market*".

This perspective aligns with the views of Jahera (2013), who states that for an EE provider to achieve sustained success, it is essential to offer high-quality programmes, maintain a strong institutional reputation, and provide flexibility in delivery to accommodate the needs of working professionals. Luxmi is confident that pursuing an executive education course is the optimal way for working professionals to stay updated with the latest trends in their field of specialisation.

Agreeing with the viewpoints expressed by Luxmi, Manuela recommends that senior managers who have done their degrees decades ago must undertake such specialist short courses to keep themselves up to date. Speaking about her own course in management consultancy, she stated that:

> "*The course itself is sort of new, it's not just stuff that's been told 20 years ago so it's got current best practices, so the whole thing around the course is the currency around the best practices with case studies*".

Sharing a similar view to both Luxmi and Manuela and emphasising the subject of marketing, Michael suggested that:

> "*a lot of people who studied marketing at university, some time ago would not have studied much digital so they would want to add on digital as an extra layer of knowledge, Snapchat or Ted talk or clubhouse, which are all specialist channels and I know that will be useful knowledge in five years*".

This line of discussion appears to be in line with Dyer and Hurd's (2016) recommendations. Dyer and Hurd (2016) claim that it is vital for the teaching faculty to maintain their professional development and update themselves within their area of teaching that may have an impact on their teaching practice.

At this moment, I have come to the realisation that behind each statement is a professional practitioner who has a family, who has a responsible job, who has clear aspirations for his/her future, somebody who wants to gain a new set of skills to switch careers or do a better job and become competitive to be ahead of others. Analysing their statements for the current research project added a "*human dimension*" to these personal statements, which otherwise would have been just a few paragraphs used to match an application with an EE course. Therefore, it is valuable to examine how EE delegates can be characterised, with various attributes and classifications explored in the following section.

4.4 Research Question 3
How Can EE Delegates Be Characterised/ Constructed?

4.4.1 Introduction to Research Question Three

Participants in executive education courses typically either self-fund their studies or receive sponsorship, which includes time off work to engage in the programme. Furthermore, EE participants actively engage in the classroom, interacting with both the tutor and fellow participants on an equal footing, contributing to discussions centred around real industry problems and developments (Garvin, 2007). EE providers aim to attract suitable delegates for their specialised courses by targeting both corporate clients and individual executives through various promotional strategies and marketing campaigns. Participants and alumni often recommend EE courses and providers through word of mouth within their professional networks (Kotler, 2019). In this context, this research question explores whether EE delegates should be characterised as students, customers, consumers, or classified under another category.

4.4.2 Executive Delegate Characteristics

Academic courses typically award credits and involve formal assessments, whereas executive education (EE) courses often provide Continuous Professional Development (CPD) hours and may or may not include a formal assessment upon completion. Regarding the distinction between academic and executive courses, Mills noted that executive courses primarily attract candidates who typically hold an MBA. The exception to this trend is the postgraduate certificate courses, which draw delegates seeking to obtain an academic qualification. During the interview, Mills suggested that some participants would only look at the course titles and say "*I get a lot of people like looking at the titles and go I fancy that one that one that one that one*". However, Mills also compared such individuals to others who would seriously consider course contents before deciding on a course:

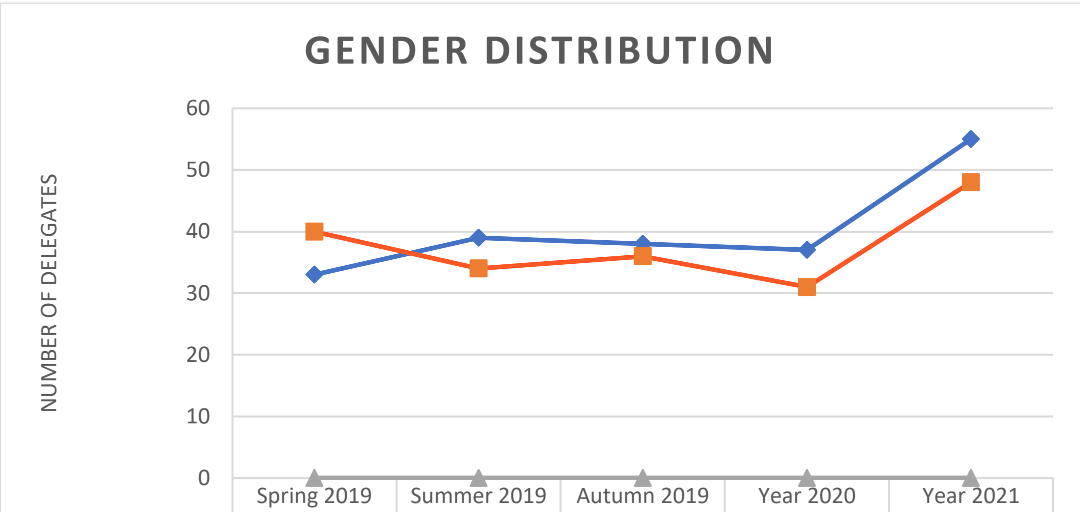
> "*the content of what they're getting has to be very relevant and applicable, relevant content and whether it matches their own motivational needs*".

Manuela stated that while those who enrol on short courses have specific aspirations such as being between jobs or wanting to apply for a better job after getting the qualification, they are doing it for CV building. The geo-demographic characteristics of EE applicants were analysed using a sample of 391 applications received between 2019 and 2021, with the first section focusing on gender.

4.4.3 Gender-based

Data from applications received by LAMF between 2019 and 2021 was evaluated to identify differences in the reasons professionals undertake EE courses. This evaluation was also compared against published data regarding the relationship between participation in higher education and gender. A female applicant from Saudi Arabia stated why she wanted to study an EE course and how she wished to expand her career scope after studying an EE course. The statement claimed that:

> *"Increasing my knowledge of key motivations for stakeholders in a project is necessary since back in my home country (Saudi Arabia) there are a lot of new projects daily. The course will be useful because it will enhance my ability to be something big and hold huge projects as a Saudi Female which will build my professional reputation as a female".*



	Spring 2019	Summer 2019	Autumn 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
Male	33	39	38	37	55
Female	40	34	36	31	48
undisclosed	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4.2: Applicants based on gender – LAMF (2019-2021)

Based on the above table 4.2, 100% of the applicants identified themselves as either male or female, although the application form itself allows for them to either not disclose or identify themselves differently.

Most global research reports, including the study conducted by Mott (2022) on behalf of the British Council, identify higher education institutions as incubators for future thought leaders and social leaders. However, there is a notable disadvantage for female learners within higher education. As indicated in Table 4.2, there was almost an equal gender split among applicants at LAMF during the 2019-2021 period. Nevertheless, during 2020, when the school transitioned from on-campus to online-live classes, there was a slight decline in demand from female applicants for EE courses, coinciding with travel restrictions, lockdowns, and job losses (as evidenced by the Office for National Statistics, 2021, shown in Figure 4.6). This trend reversed in 2021, suggesting that the drop in demand from female applicants may have been temporary, potentially linked to the global pandemic.

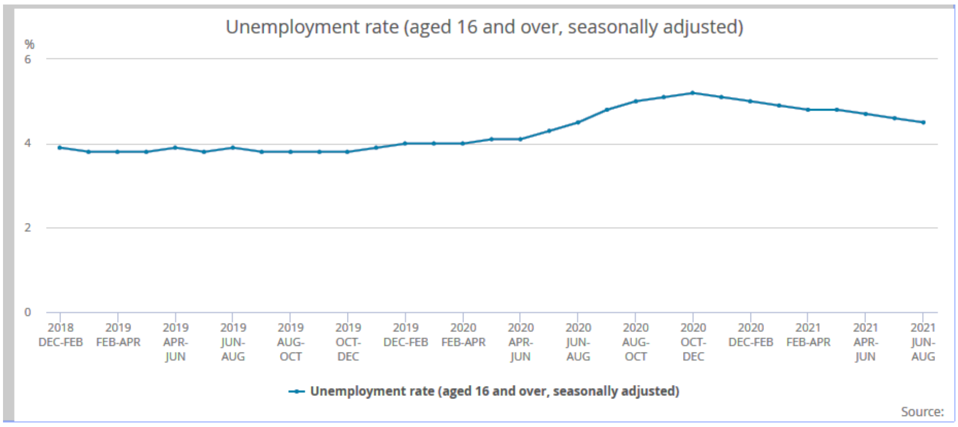


Figure 4.6: UK's unemployment rate (source: ONS, 2021)

According to the HEPI (Higher Education Policy Institute, UK) report, 2020, which looked at the UK's national attainment in higher education, those who identified themselves as females accounted for over 56% of higher education places in the UK as shown in figure 4.7.

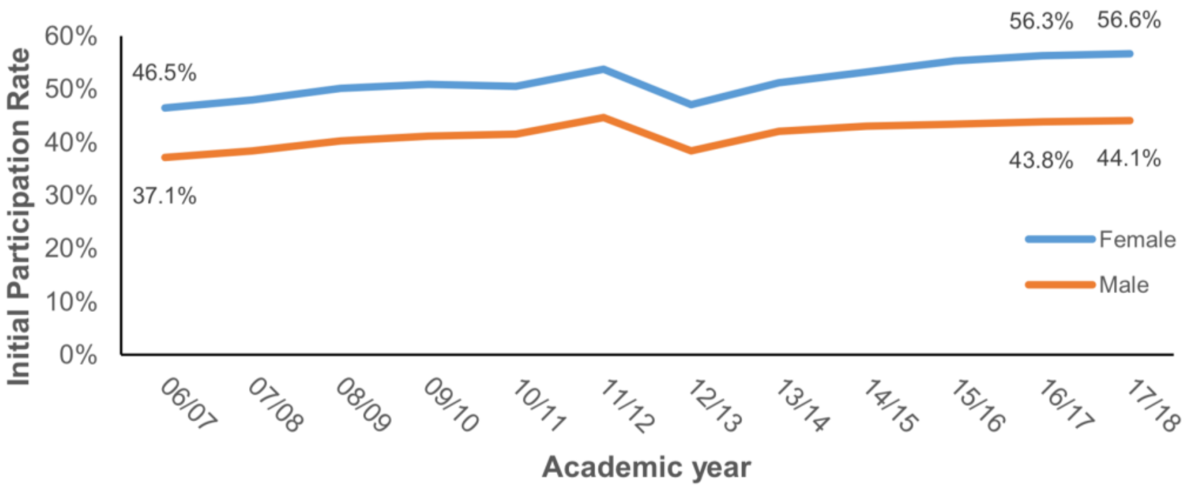
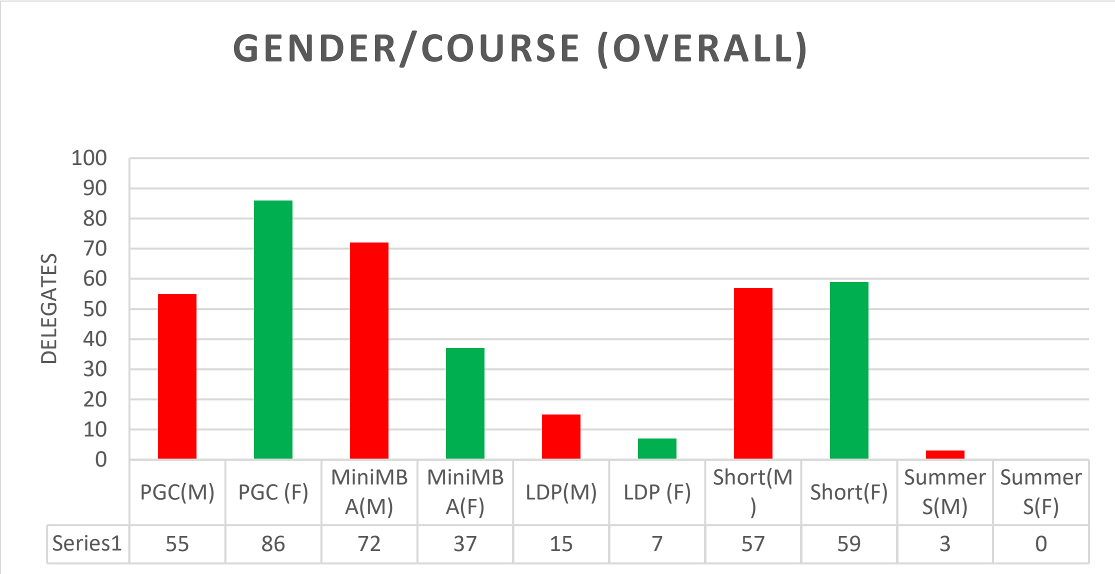


Figure 4.7: Higher education participation rate. Source: HEPI report (2020)

This trend is reflected in the overall enrolments for all three Postgraduate Certificate programmes, where female enrolments from 2019 to 2021 totalled 86, compared to 55 for males. Enrolments in specialist short courses have been nearly equal. This contrasts with the findings of Rosa and Clavero (2021), which suggest that the Covid pandemic adversely affected females in higher education, more than males. Their research highlights issues such as a decline in the number of academic publications and the challenges of balancing work and domestic responsibilities, exacerbated by changes in work and teaching schedules resulting from the pandemic.



	PGC(M)	PGC (F)	MiniMBA(M)	MiniMBA(F)	LDP(M)	LDP (F)	Short(M)	Short(F)	SummerS(M)	SummerS(F)
Series1	55	86	72	37	15	7	57	59	3	0

Table 4.3: Overall enrolments by gender (2019-2021)

Table 4.3 illustrates the total enrolments across various course categories. The Executive miniMBA, designed for senior executives at the strategic or board level of an organisation, showed a significantly higher number of male participants (72) compared to female participants (37). Kelan and Jones (2010) suggest that a postfeminist social atmosphere prevails within management courses, where gender is perceived as less relevant; however, gender continues to influence the culture of business education in notable ways. Kelan and Jones (2010) argue that the existing gender culture within business schools can only be transformed by adopting more subtle strategies to challenge the prevailing masculine norms. Despite this, there is overarching evidence of gender's disappearance from higher education. The miniMBA participant data reflect the ongoing issue of reduced opportunities for females in attaining higher-level employment, a concern that is being addressed globally. This aligns with findings from the McKenzie Report (2021) on Women in the Workplace, which includes an analysis presented in Figure 4.8 below.

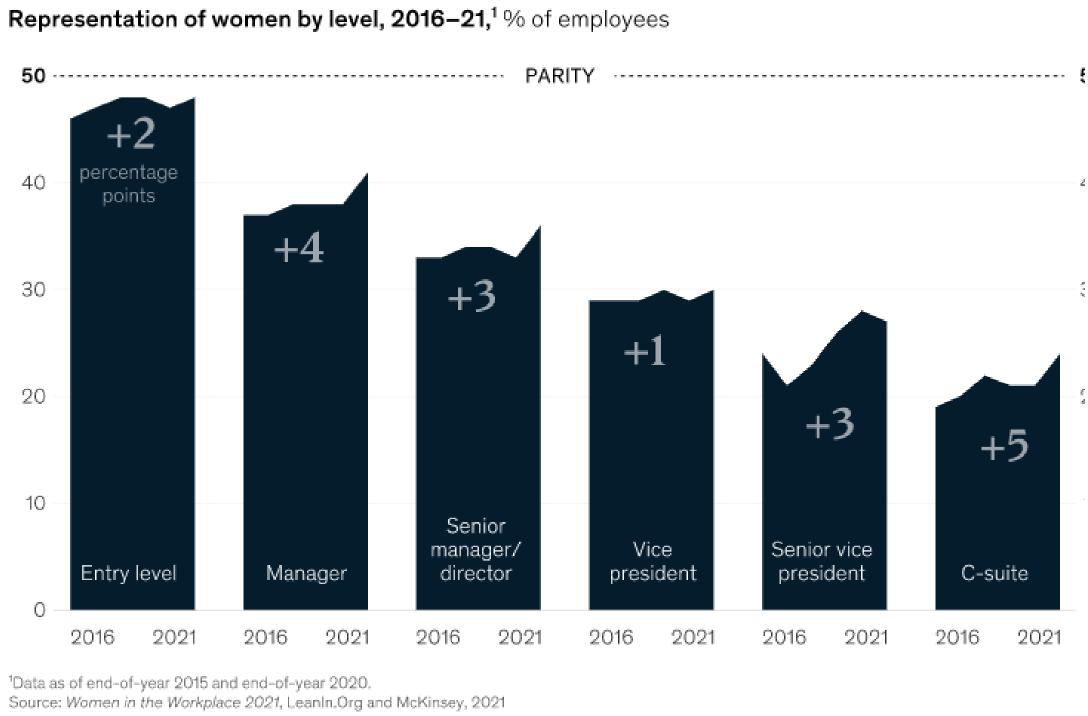
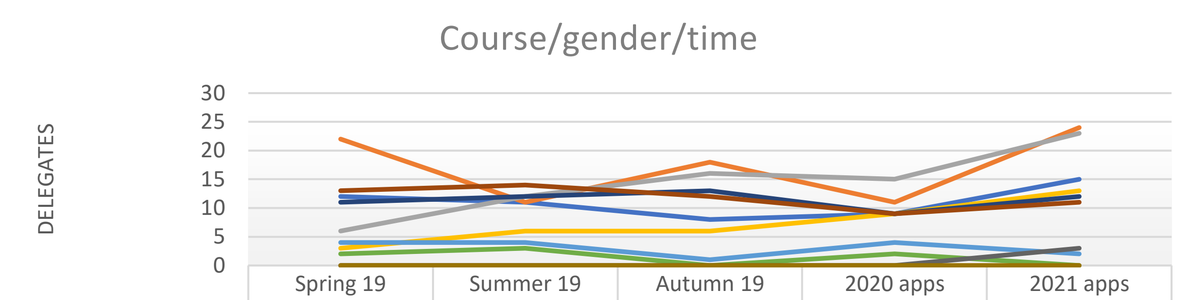


Figure 4.8: Women in global leadership (source: McKenzie report, 2021)

Although the sample size is small, particularly for the Leadership Development Programme, it consisted of 15 male participants and seven female participants. The HEPI report indicates that more females engage in mainstream higher education compared to males. This sample suggests that there may be greater opportunities for males in participating in management and leadership development courses, which provide participants with essential tools for managing organisations or business units. These courses also offer networking opportunities with professionals from their fields or areas of interest worldwide, as highlighted by Margulies and Gregg (2013). Such interactions enable participants to understand current best practices while building a network of executives with similar professional profiles who aspire to higher positions within their companies. A larger sample may be needed to determine if gender correlates with access to higher-level EE courses. Gender analysis of enrolments shows that, although female participation in the Executive miniMBA remains lower, it grew from three in Spring 2019 to 13 by 2021. In contrast, low enrolment in the Leadership Development Programme prevents any definitive conclusions.

In terms of specialist short courses, there is a minor dip in female enrolments when 2021 enrolments are compared with that of 2019. This trend is also evident in Table 4.4 below.

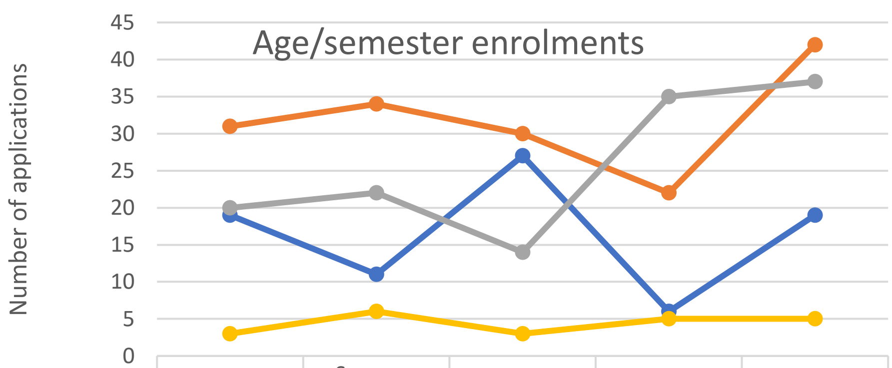


	Spring 19	Summer 19	Autumn 19	2020 apps	2021 apps
PGC(M)	12	11	8	9	15
PGC (F)	22	11	18	11	24
MiniMBA(M)	6	12	16	15	23
MiniMBA(F)	3	6	6	9	13
LDP(M)	4	4	1	4	2
LDP (F)	2	3	0	2	0
Short(M)	11	12	13	9	12
Short(F)	13	14	12	9	11
Summer S(M)	0	0	0	0	3
Summer S(F)	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4.4: Longitudinal analysis of gender vs course enrolments (2019-2021)

4.4.4 Age-related Characteristics

Most EE courses are subscribed to by individuals with experience, although some recent graduates also enrol, particularly in LAMF's postgraduate certificate and diploma programmes, which offer a general overview of the subject rather than a short, focused EE course. An analysis of application data from 2019 to 2021, including those for online study during the COVID-19 pandemic, was conducted to determine whether there has been a shift in age groups among those undertaking EE studies and to assess whether EE courses are more popular among certain age groups (see Table 4.5).



	Spring 2019	Summer 2019	Autumn 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
<30	19	11	27	6	19
30-39	31	34	30	22	42
40-54	20	22	14	35	37
55+	3	6	3	5	5

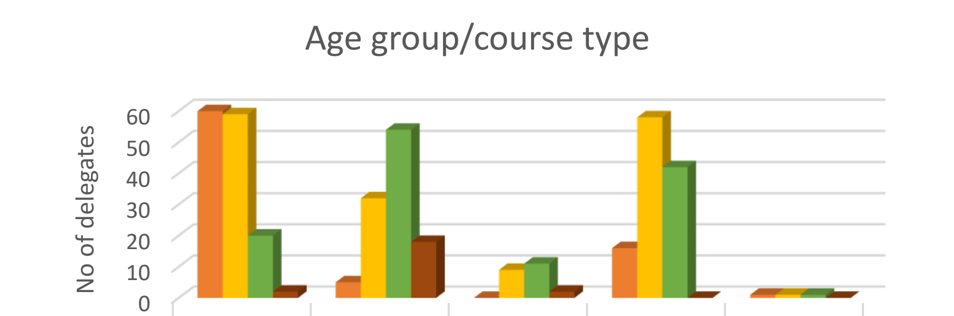
Table 4.5: Applicant age analysis (semester-wise)

To analyse applicant age variation, data were divided into four groups: under 30, 30–39, 40–54, and over 55. Carver (1994) argues that age has little impact on course success. On the other hand, McClure, Wells, and Bowerman (1986:183) found that part-time learners balancing work and study face different priorities than full-time students, with job duties often outweighing academic ones. Therefore, full-time employees in management development programmes tend to encounter unique success factors compared to recent graduates with limited work experience. Most applicants pursuing EE courses at LAMF immediately after university are likely under 30 (UCAS, 2024).

The analysis of this data set, as shown in Table 4.5, reveals that the majority of applicants were aged 30 to 39 years. Even during the pandemic and with the transition to online teaching, the demand only slightly decreased from 30 to 22 applications. In contrast, the number of applicants below 30 fluctuated throughout 2019, ultimately decreasing to just six applications in 2020. However, there was a steady growth in applications from this age group in 2021. The dip in applications in 2020 can be attributed to the cancellation of the school's Summer and Winter business schools, which typically target recent graduates and university attendees. Additionally, the entry-level job losses worldwide during the pandemic, as highlighted by Powell and Francis-Devine (2022), may have made these courses unaffordable for younger applicants. This aligns with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) report titled "*An Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 on Job and Skills Demand Using Online Job Vacancy Data*" published in 2021.

While 55+ has a steady but small number of applications consistently across the years, the 40-54 age band behaved opposite to the <30 band where an increase in demand (up to 50% from 2019) can be noticed in the years 2020 and 2021. As the school's portfolio of courses did not change during the period of data collection, the change in demand may be attributed to changes in the environment. This included people wanting to gain new skills and improve or update their existing skills to remain competitive during and after the pandemic. One plausible explanation might be that those above 40 years of age have a higher level of disposable income and have more stable jobs when compared to those below 30 years of age.

Table 4.5 further demonstrated that between January 2019 and mid-2021, the total number of delegates who were less than 30 years old was 82 while those between 30 – 39 recorded the highest being 159. 40-54 year olds amounted to 127 while the total number of candidates above 55 years has been only 22.



	Postgraduate certificate	miniMBA	Leadership development Prg	Short courses	Summer school
<30	60	5	0	16	1
30-39	59	32	9	58	1
40-54	20	54	11	42	1
55+	2	18	2	0	0

Table 4.6: Age groups under each course category

Each age group was further analysed concerning the types of courses the delegates applied for. As illustrated in Table 4.6, both the under 30 and 30 to 39 age groups, typically comprising junior or mid-level managers, demonstrated a preference for either the four-module Postgraduate Certificate course or the six-module Postgraduate Diploma qualification, which includes a major project. In contrast, the 40 to 55 age group exhibited around one-third of the demand for these programmes compared to the younger groups. This may be attributed to their positions as senior managers who do not necessarily find it beneficial to acquire a formal Postgraduate qualification at this stage in their careers (Maslow and Lewis, 1987). Notably, only two applicants aged 55 and older applied for a Postgraduate programme during the entire period under review.

When considering the applicant age for the Executive miniMBA, only five applicants under the age of 30 applied for the course. The Executive miniMBA has distinct entry criteria compared to other programmes; each applicant must possess at least five years of management experience for admission. This approach supports King's (1990) claim that individuals working in small groups engage in guided reciprocal questioning, where peers ask higher-level critical thinking questions, resulting in answers that demonstrate a higher level of achievement. King (1990) describes this as a guided reciprocal peer-questioning method that fosters greater interaction and collaboration during study sessions. Notably, the Executive miniMBA attracted 32 applicants from the 30 to 39 age group, while the majority of applicants (54) came from the 40 to 54 age group, with 18 applications from individuals aged 55 and older.

Surprisingly, no applicants below the age of 30 applied for the Leadership Development Programme (LDP), which also attracted minimal interest from the 55+ group. The course was most popular among those aged 40-55, receiving 11 applications, followed by 30-39-year-olds with 9 applications. The LDP focuses on contemporary leadership topics, including coaching, mentoring, women in leadership, and communication strategies. Unlike the miniMBA, this course appeals to individuals managing small teams or those aspiring to be team leaders or managers. The personal statements indicated that younger applicants preferred more formal qualifications, such as the Postgraduate Certificate courses. Older applicants also showed limited interest, potentially because the course addresses themes like women in leadership and equality, which may not resonate with their experiences. Lyness and Grotto (2018) recommend focusing on female leadership empowerment and identifying systemic organisational barriers. Notably, none of the interview participants specifically mentioned the LDP or its relevance for today's aspiring leaders.

Specialist short courses primarily attracted applicants aged 30-39, who are often well-established in their careers and hold postgraduate qualifications. Lippert (2001) notes that these professionals participate in such courses to acquire specific technical, conceptual, or strategic skills, enabling them to make better decisions in their current roles or to enhance their qualifications for prospective employers. While there was some interest in specialist short courses from applicants under 30, the 55+ age group showed no interest during the 2019-2021 period. This lack of engagement is notable, especially given the potential benefits of upskilling during the COVID-19 pandemic for securing or finding jobs requiring specialised skills.

The summer school, targeting current students and recent graduates, received just one application each from the under-30, 30–39, and 40–55 age groups. This minimal number does not allow for conclusions about applicants' motivations. Normally, this three-week residential workshop appeals to overseas university students interested in cultural exchange at an international business school. However, since early 2020, LAMF's summer school has been indefinitely cancelled due to the pandemic, leaving these limited applications inconclusive.

4.4.5 Existing Qualifications (at point of admission)

Among the delegate applications from the 2019-2021 sample, those who did not apply through the mature route chose the degree route. Applicants opting for this route must demonstrate their suitability for postgraduate study by providing evidence of an undergraduate degree or a higher qualification in any discipline. To qualify, they must submit a copy of their degree certificate or transcript. The data was grouped based on the level of degree attained, regardless of the country of origin or language of instruction.

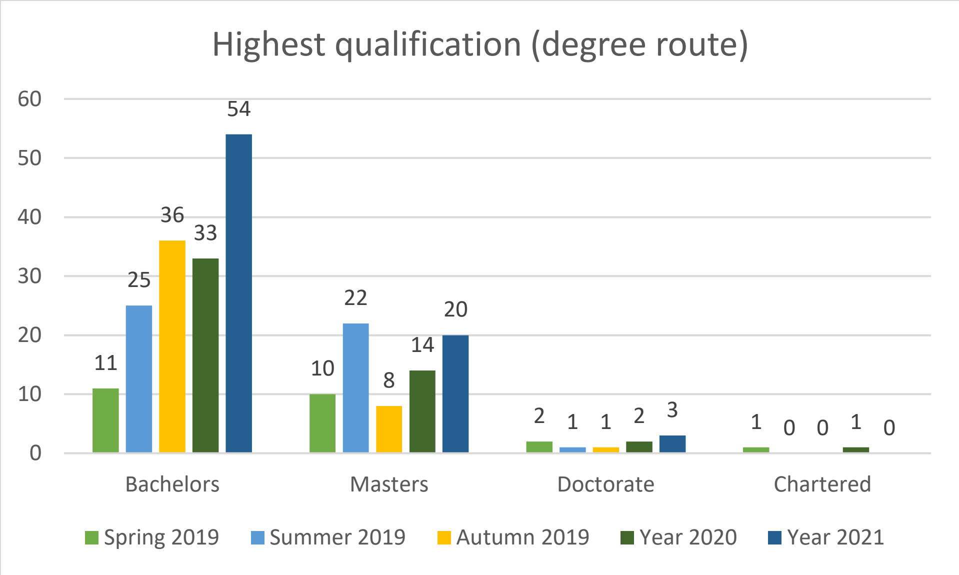


Figure 4.9: Highest existing qualifications for degree route applicants (2019-21)

Figure 4.9 shows that most applicants (159) already held an undergraduate degree (UK Level 6 qualification or equivalent). Applications from these candidates increased post-pandemic. In 2020/21, classes were offered online, attracting applicants, including those overseas, who wanted specialist qualifications while balancing work across time zones. This trend suggests that individuals aimed to enhance their competitive edge (Porter, 1985) and that online study eased barriers like high travel costs and work absences. Online formats let participants fit classes around their schedules, a shift echoed by Manzoni (2022), who noted that 5G and global internet growth have expanded access to online and hybrid formats, helping participants optimise time around class schedules. In contrast to the standard delivery of undergraduate or postgraduate academic courses, traditional classroom-based Executive Education (EE) is conducted as short-term, high-intensity classes (Jones and Pfeffer, 2003). The hybrid or live-online formats may not provide an optimal study experience when using the same structure. Manzoni (2022) suggests further investigation into various class durations and formats, such as eight sessions of three hours each or fifteen sessions of ninety minutes each. Supporting this viewpoint, Chakravarthy (2022:223) notes that due to the pandemic, EE providers should re-evaluate their approach to EE, particularly in "*strengthening its functional, general management, and custom programmes*".

When comparing entry criteria, the total number of applicants with a master's degree was lower than those with an undergraduate degree, with 74 applications received. This figure represents 46% of the applicants who also held an undergraduate qualification. This ratio aligns with the Eurostat (2021) report, which indicated that out of 17.5 million students who undertook a degree in 2018, 60% were pursuing undergraduate studies. For LAMF's applications from individuals with a master's degree, no clear pattern emerged. There was a decline in numbers around Autumn 2019, followed by steady growth in 2020/21. This trend may reflect a desire among individuals with advanced qualifications to protect their jobs by obtaining specialist qualifications.

In contrast to the previous figures, only nine applicants with doctorates submitted applications during the analysed period. While doctorates represent a higher level of academic achievement, individuals holding this qualification typically work within academia (as suggested by Welter and Urbano, 2020) or in roles that involve a research component, as noted by The Economist (2016). The publication also claims that a doctorate does not provide financial advantages over a master's degree. All delegates at LAMF come from the industry and occupy positions of responsibility. Their motivations for higher salaries and improved job positions may account for the relatively low number of applicants with a doctoral degree compared to those with a master's degree.

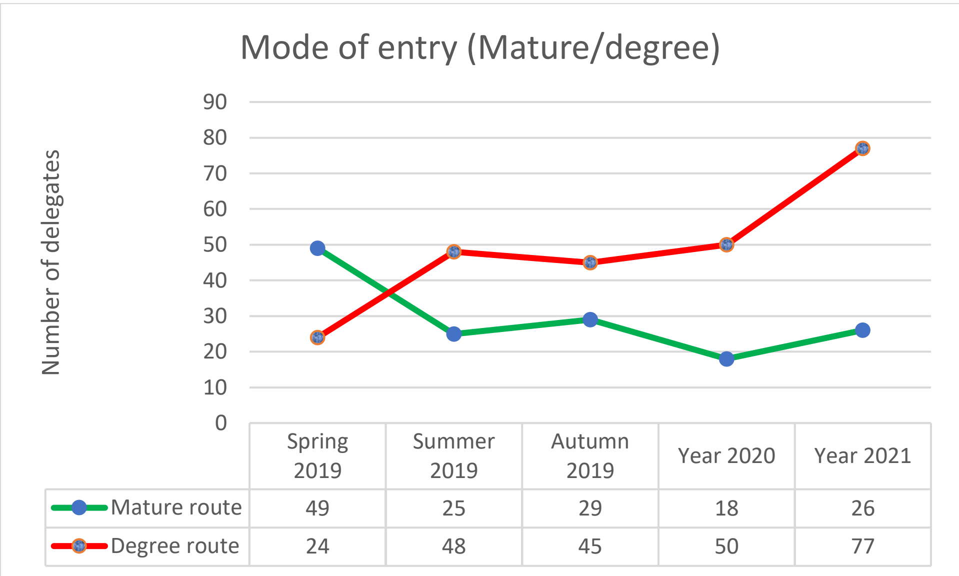
A professional with "*Chartered*" status indicates full qualification to practise in their field, such as a Chartered Engineer or Chartered Accountant. According to the data presented in figure 4.9, only two applicants with chartered status applied to study at LAMF between 2019 and 2021. This finding presents an interesting correlation with the research conducted by Connelly and McMahon (2007), which examines the implications of holding chartered status. Their findings suggest that, in the context of teachers, those with chartered status perceived it as beneficial in a professional setting; however, the study did not identify any advantages of this status for the employers of those individuals.

In contrast, thematic analysis of the data revealed that one of the most prevalent reasons for enrolling in an executive education course was to enhance the current work practices of their employer. This suggests that chartered qualifications may primarily benefit the individual title holder, whereas executive education courses are designed to benefit both the delegate and their organisation. This aligns with the recommendations of Thompson (2018a), who discussed the advantages of executive education for both individuals and employers.

Several factors may explain the low number of participants with "*chartered*" status. One possibility is that the application form inquires about the type of "*degree*" held, which applicants may misunderstand. As a result, they might state a different degree or a lower-level qualification they possess alongside their charter. To address this issue, it would be advisable to ask for the level of the applicant's highest qualification, providing both professional and academic options on the application form. Another potential scenario is that individuals with chartered status may be well-established in their careers and feel confident that they do not need to pursue niche qualifications to remain competitive, as noted by Margulies and Gregg (2013). Additionally, given that LAMF is a medium-sized private business school, it is possible that those with chartered qualifications may opt to apply to more prestigious institutions to enhance the recognition of their qualifications as recommended by Connelly and Mcmahon (2007). Consequently, it may not be appropriate to generalise the relationship between chartered status holders and applicants seeking to study an executive education course at LAMF.

4.4.6 Mature Route Applications

It is crucial for managers to stay informed and up-to-date in their field. This requires ongoing professional development, enhancing leadership potential, and sharpening strategic thinking. According to Margulies and Gregg (2013), EE courses can help management staff develop these skills. However, evidence supporting a correlation between obtaining a degree-level qualification and participating in EE courses appears limited, as suggested by Bjørnåvold (2000) . LAMF's basic entry requirements include a degree in any discipline or five years of work experience for applicants enrolling under a mature route. While this mature route was not the most popular entry pathway at LAMF, some applicants demonstrated industry experience instead of a degree at admission as recommended by Cameron and Miller (2004a). An analysis of the characteristics of mature route applicants between 2019 and 2021 was conducted, focusing on any changes in admission patterns before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.



	Spring 2019	Summer 2019	Autumn 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
Mature route	49	25	29	18	26
Degree route	24	48	45	50	77

Table 4.7: Applicant mode of entry (mature / degree route – 2019-2021)

Table 4.7 illustrates the number of applications made via the mature route and degree route from Spring 2019 to 2021. The first row indicates that applicants who applied through the mature route, possessing over five years of relevant work experience but no degree, declined from 49 in Spring to 25 in Summer 2019, followed by a slight increase to 26 in 2021 from 18 throughout 2020. Notably, the number of applications did not drop due to the pandemic in 2020. For applicants with degrees, the number remained consistent from Summer 2019 (48 applications) to the end of 2020 (50 applications) and rose to 77 in 2021. This increase may be linked to all courses being offered online since 2020. More graduates applying in 2021 could also reflect a desire to gain higher-level qualifications to become more competitive in the job market. Williamson *et al.* (2020) noted that private training providers capitalised on the challenges faced by learners and profited from the uncertainties in the job market during the pandemic.

At LAMF, as Luxmi noted, the spring intake typically attracts more applicants than the summer (the lowest) and autumn intakes. The high number of mature route applications (49) in Spring 2019 likely reflects this overall trend rather than an increase in mature route applicants specifically. Overall, there was a dip in mature applications in 2020, but the numbers appeared to gain traction by 2021. While this may be linked to the pandemic, identifying any other patterns from the data is unrealistic.

4.4.7 English Language and Applicants from Non-English Speaking Countries

As a UK-based EE provider, LAMF conducts all instruction in English. For both campus-based and online courses, each candidate's English language proficiency is assessed to ensure they can effectively communicate in English. The reasons are two-fold, where they (participants) are expected to proactively contribute to classroom discussions and they are expected to answer their assessment questions at the correct level (postgraduate/level 7) at the end of their course of study.

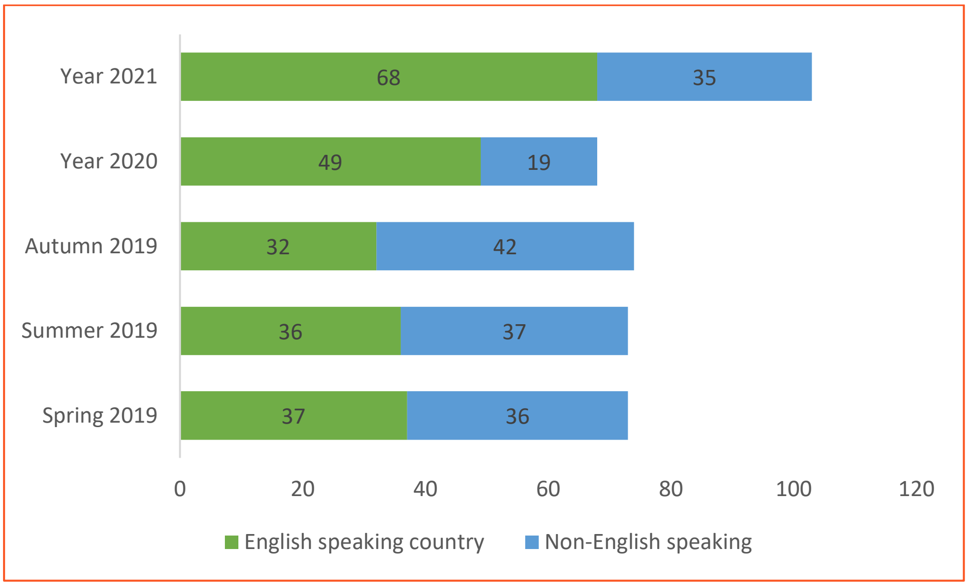
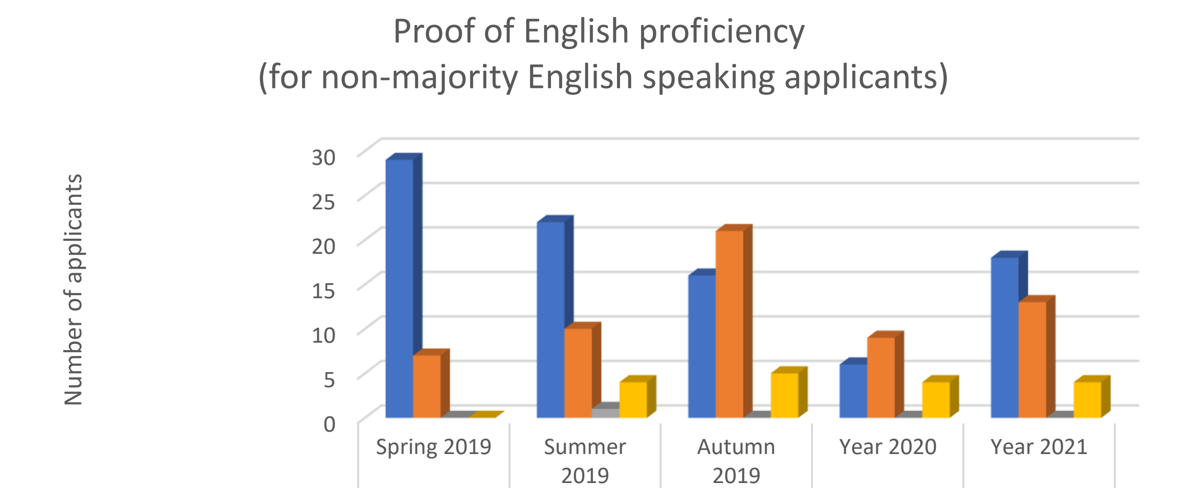


Figure 4.10: English-speaking countries / English considered a foreign language

Figure 4.10 illustrates the origins of the applications. The school categorises countries into majority English-speaking countries and non-English-speaking countries. Applicants from English-speaking countries do not need to demonstrate their English proficiency. The school adheres to the UK Visa and Immigration's list of majority English-speaking countries, as outlined on their website. In 2019, there were more delegates from non-English-speaking countries when all courses were offered on-campus. However, following COVID-19, which impacted travel and necessitated a shift to online courses, the trend reversed. By 2021, the number of delegates from English-speaking countries was twice that of those from other countries (68 compared to 35) as illustrated in table 4.8.



	Spring 2019	Summer 2019	Autumn 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
English test (IELTS/TOEFL)	29	22	16	6	18
Degree studied in English	7	10	21	9	13
Employer letter	0	1	0	0	0
Interview	0	4	5	4	4

Table 4.8: Proof of English Proficiency (Test/Degree/Emp Letter/Interview)

The school implements an English language policy that aligns with the UK government's approach to admitting international students (GOV.UK, 2024). According to Vera and Selvam, who are the initial contacts for applicants, the application of this national policy at LAMF often results in challenging discussions with potential students. While English serves as the official language of work and communication in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Singapore, and most parts of Canada, applicants from these regions are still required to provide proof of their language proficiency as defined by the UK government website dedicated to knowledge of English. This requirement can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction, as many applicants struggle to understand why they must demonstrate proficiency in a language they have used throughout their lives. Vera stated that when a request for proof of English is made from such applicants, they reply by saying:

> *"English is the only language we know and use, and we speak in English in all of our offices. I have been corresponding with you in English, so why do you want me to prove that I can understand* it [English]".

Accepted methods of evidencing proof of English language proficiency for non-majority English-speaking nationalities are a language test (IELTS, WAEC, TOEFL), a degree studied in English, a letter from an employer or an interview with a senior member of LAMF staff.

With the exception of Autumn 2019 and the year 2020, all other groups indicated that the most popular method for demonstrating English language proficiency was through a dedicated language test, followed by a degree studied in English. Although most delegates were employed, the data suggests that an employer's letter was the least popular option. This may be because, as middle to senior management staff, it could be seen as embarrassing for them to request a letter from colleagues to certify their reading and writing skills in English.

Interestingly, when comparing the totals for each data set against those who did not identify as originating from majority English-speaking countries (Table 4.8), the two totals did not align. Several reasons could explain this discrepancy. On the application form, applicants can tick "*Yes*" to the question "*Is English your first language*" which may result in insufficient checks for an English language test. The admissions department seems to adopt a relaxed approach towards such applications, particularly from developed countries like Canada. Although Canada is not officially classified as a majority English-speaking country due to some regions considering French as their primary language, this leniency may still apply.

Another factor could be that sales advisors, who work on commission, might encourage applicants to indicate that English is their first language if they lack formal documentation to prove it. Applicants may genuinely believe their first language is English, even if their country is not on the school's list of accepted nations. For example, applicants from Ghana often assert that all official work in their country is conducted in English, leading them to identify as English-speaking individuals, as noted by Vera and Selvam during the interviews.

The policy adopted by the school appears to discriminate against some under-developed countries that are either former British colonies or have adopted English as their official language, as suggested by Sunder (2021). Selvam and Vera support this claim by noting that no applicants from countries like Ghana, Nigeria, or Kenya have ever been rejected at the application stage for a lack of English proficiency. Furthermore, these applicants have not encountered difficulties in engaging in meaningful conversations with classmates or tutors as noted by Mills and Tom. Therefore, it is essential to investigate this issue more broadly to alleviate the burden on applicants who are already proficient in English. In addition to demonstrating their language proficiency, some international applicants must also navigate a visa process to participate in the campus-based EE programme at LAMF. The next section will explore this requirement

4.4.8 Country of Origin and its Impact on UK based Executive Education

Although LAMF is a UK-based education provider, it can sponsor participants for a short-term study visa to attend Executive Education courses in London if required. This characteristic is aligned with the claims made by Jena and Reilly (2013). However, since March 2020, the entire course portfolio has been offered online. This change means anyone with internet access and the ability to pay can enrol in LAMF's EE courses from anywhere in the world. This shift has created problems for participants in distant time zones. For example, someone joining from South Korea or Japan would need to attend class at 2 a.m. This can be quite difficult for many. Additionally, the cost of EE courses is significant. As noted by Dahlquist and Hasseltoft (2020), the strength of the UK currency compared to weaker currencies can make these courses unaffordable for many potential applicants.

Regarding the country of origin for applications (Appendix 17), it is important to note that all applicants in 2019 applied for campus-based study, which involves travel and visa requirements. In contrast, the applicants in 2020 and 2021 applied for online-live delivery courses. Therefore, it is evident that new applications from countries that have never applied to study a course with LAMF in the past, signing up for online courses. This trend may be seen as a positive trend in terms of individuals who live in countries that are under sanctions, embargos or any other restriction due to no fault of such individuals.

Using the applicant data by country, a continent-based total was created, combining all three years to assess demand across continents. For this analysis, the UK (the home country) was excluded from Europe to provide a clearer perspective. The data was then compared to the IMF's (International Monetary Fund) continent-based income distribution data.

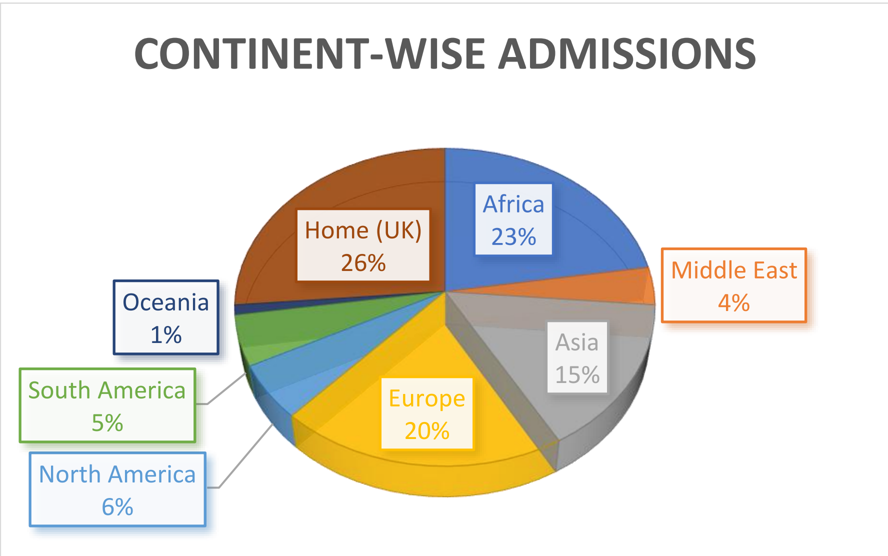


Figure 4.11: Continent-wise admissions in LAMF (UK is shown separately)

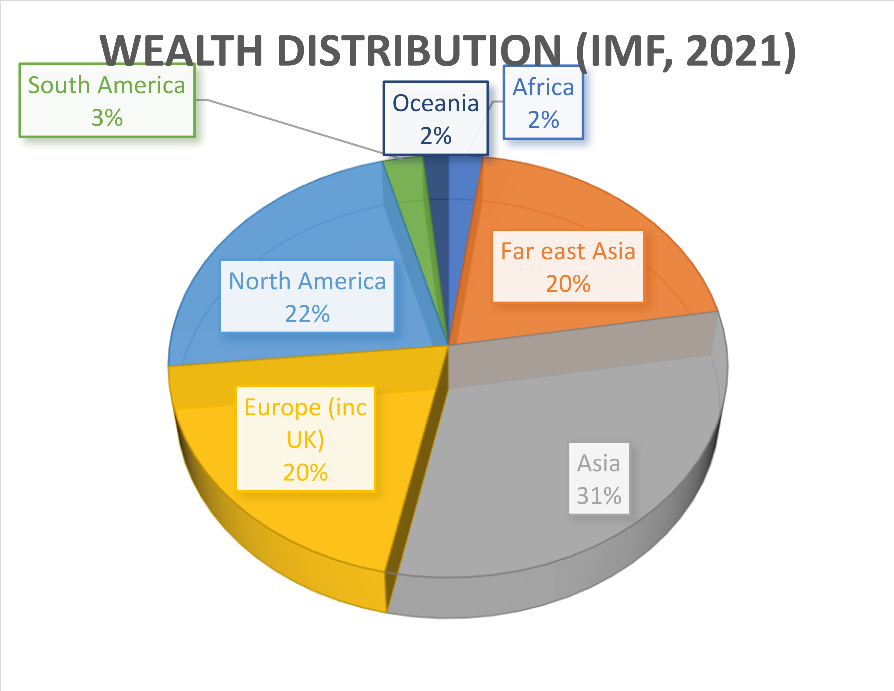


Figure 4.12: Global wealth distribution (source: IMF, 2021)

When looking at the two pie charts (figure 4.11 and 4.12), it is evident that most of the applicants came from the UK and the rest of Europe which has a high level of wealth. Although North America has a high level of wealth, the applications represented only 6% of the total number of applications as demonstrated in Figure 4.11. This may be due to North Americans having access to reputable educational institutions in their own region, as well as the significant travel time required to reach the UK.

The most noticeable change is the number of applications from UK-based (home) applicants. Before 2020, this number remained relatively low. However, after the shift to online-live delivery, home applications increased compared to pre-pandemic levels. This rise may be linked to the high level of internet penetration in the UK. Geraci *et al.* (2018) noted that internet access is crucial for online course participation. Many people were on furlough or made redundant during the pandemic. Additionally, applicants may have sought to upskill during self-isolation to better prepare for the changing job market. As Lydon and McIndoe-Calder (2021) suggest, individuals may have had more disposable income since they were not spending on entertainment or travel, making these courses more affordable. It can be assumed that UK-based mature delegates prefer studying at home for convenience rather than travelling to London. Michael also claimed that post-pandemic, there will be a strong appetite for learning as people seek to enhance their skills and knowledge for future careers.

The second largest market was Nigeria. Although there was a slight dip in demand in 2020, it remains relatively stable.

This may indicate that applicants intended to study a programme rather than use the course as a pathway into the UK. The small drop in demand when the courses transitioned to online-live can be attributed to this interpretation. This evidence may challenge Beech's (2018) views on the relationship between international student mobility and long-term immigration aspirations, especially regarding EE applicants as students. Although Selvam who had a strong opinion about this particular issue suggested that:

> *"Because we are targeting right now African markets, an unfortunate by-product is we're dealing with people who are in those areas that want to come to the UK".*

Elaborating further on this viewpoint, in his own words, Selvam stated that :

> *"Advisors should not sell the country dream but advise potential delegates about the educational experience instead".*

Selvam criticised some delegates from African countries and India, claiming they used short courses as a means to enter the UK. Selvam highlighted that this has become an issue across the UK education sector. However, Marginson (2014) notes a decline in students coming from countries like India to the UK since 2010. HESA (2022) data suggest a decline in students arriving from China. Marginson (2014) further argues that recruiters bear the responsibility to attract the right candidates for the right courses, focusing on quality over quantity. From 2020 onwards, demand has noticeably increased from applicants residing in Australia, Canada, Germany, and Ghana. A possible reason for applicants in Australia and Canada is that they could avoid the expense and effort of a long flight, while still gaining a UK-based qualification (Vicerey, 2001). With online classes available, new applicants have emerged from countries that had not previously participated, including Syria, Iran, and Ukraine. Moren (2015) suggests that for Syria and Iran, a primary reason could be avoiding restrictive travel measures, which stem from international sanctions imposed since 2012.

On the other hand, the school has lost some of its established overseas markets since it moved to online delivery. These include China, Brazil, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. This could have been due to a cultural issue where most delegates tend to associate travel and shopping with participation in campus-based short courses. This was elaborated on by Michael who stated:

> "*London is an experience and for executive short courses, three to four days face to face as part of a week in London, particularly in the summer might be quite attractive if you live in Dubai or Beijing or Berlin*".

Selvam also suggested that the school attracts individuals who combine a few days of study with shopping and city sightseeing. Selvam claimed, "*Speaking roughly, some of my* *colleagues act as travel agents*". Although this viewpoint differs, it aligns with observations made by Beech (2018). Beech (2018) focuses on India and China, describing them as agent-led countries where many students submit applications through agents. This raises the possibility that some of LAMF's delegate advisors may adopt a similar approach to engage prospective applicants from these regions.

However, Vera's viewpoint was rather different as he looked at such students from a different perspective by stating that "*for the international students as you know, international students, they want to upscale themselves, but they also want to have the experience*". This is in line with the recommendations of Gallagher and Schuler (2013) who discuss immersion experience concerning EE. Gallagher and Schuler (2013:5) argue that international exposure in a "*major economic and financially growing city*" or a "*cultural or historic city*" is important. They emphasise the value of learning in a multicultural group, supported by a cross-functional, interdisciplinary academic team. Gallagher and Schuler (2013) suggest that this will enable them to overcome preconceived notions and stereotypes about working internationally and across cultures.

In South America and Oceania, both wealth distribution and application numbers remain low. Although wealth distribution in Africa is also low, applications from African countries remain high for LAMF. This suggests that, despite the high course fees, individuals from low-income countries still seek to obtain a globally recognised qualification. As Manuela suggested:

> "I*t's a kind of an affordable way of doing a course, it is expensive, but it's affordable compared to really huge amounts of time you have to spend on the alternative [a long-term qualification] but also the other thing is, that these executive courses are bit lighter, doesn't have the gravity of the brand*".

Manuela's views appear to be loosely aligned with McCall and Hollenbeck (2002) who claim that most global executives identify engaging in short-term educational experiences as an important aspect of their professional development. Notably, there has been no visible drop in applications from Asian and African countries due to the pandemic. This outcome has led me to reconsider the pre-conceived views held by LAMF staff, including myself, about most EE course participants applying to study at LAMF.

Although Asia, including the Middle East, shows relatively high wealth distribution based on IMF data (2022), application numbers remain low. British education is valued in this region, as noted by Holloway *et al.* (2012), but the focus tends to be on credit-bearing degree qualifications. King and Sondhi (2018) observe that middle-class parents in these areas often seek the same qualifications from the UK that helped them secure lucrative careers in the past. From a different perspective, the next section explores a distinction between sponsored and self-funded delegates.

4.4.9 Sponsored Delegates and Self-funded Delegates

The literature review, including findings by Thompson (2018b) and Saari *et al.* (1988), suggests that employers often sponsor EE delegates. This sponsorship is motivated by several factors, such as offering training as a job perk, utilising a training budget, boosting organisational performance, or improving team effectiveness within a business unit. In contrast, self-funded applicants join EE courses for various personal reasons. According to Jacobson *et al.* (2017), these include enhancing their CV, preparing for a new role or starting a business, networking with field professionals, and experiencing new cultures. At LAMF, it appears that most participants were self-funded.

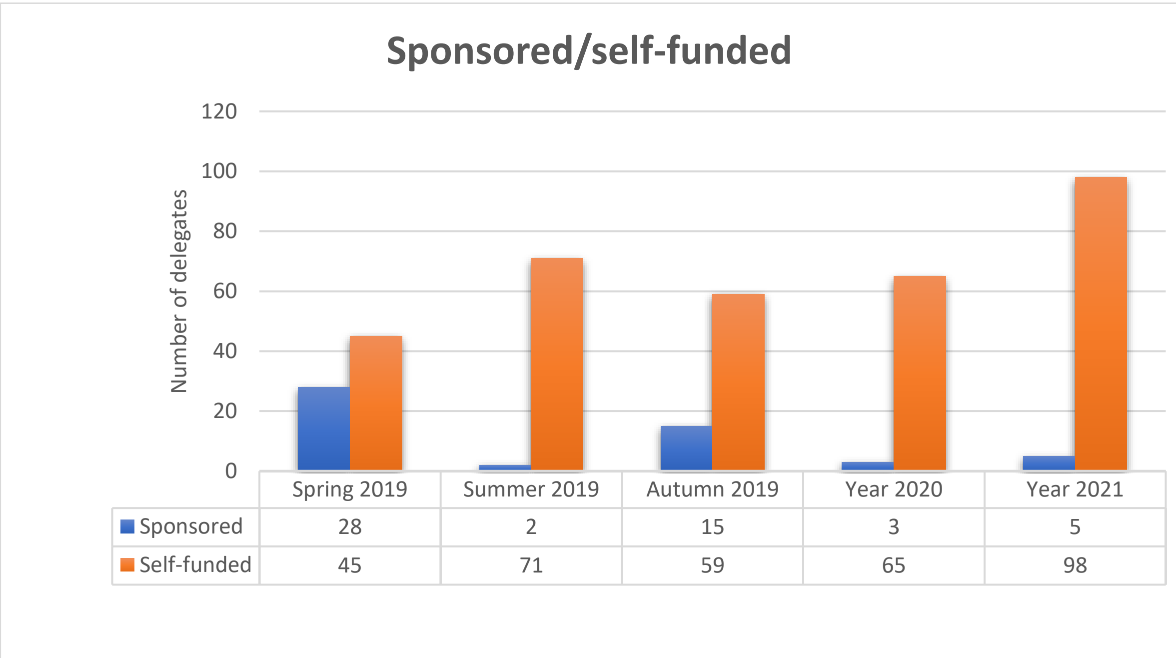


Table 4.9: Source of funding for Executive Education applicants at LAMF

The school has only two funding sources for applicants: self-funded or employer-sponsored. It does not award scholarships, nor do the courses qualify for UK government funding options, such as Student Finance England (SFE). Reviewing the data in Table 4.9, it is clear that from 2019 to 2021, most applicants were self-funded, totalling 338 compared to only 53 sponsored applicants. This trend suggests that delegates are primarily focused on upgrading their skills, rather than learning skills specifically needed for their current jobs.

This observation aligns with Jacobson *et al.* (2017) who describe self-funded EE participants as motivated by personal growth and supported by Edmondson (2018) on enabling psychological safety. Michael highlighted this need for skill upgrades, noting that a marketing graduate from ten years ago might not have acquired digital marketing skills. With emerging platforms like Snapchat and TikTok, these professionals may now need specialised knowledge to stay competitive. As a result, such delegates may choose EE courses in digital marketing to enhance their expertise.

For sponsored applicants, the application process allows a company to act as the applicant's sponsor. Typically, this sponsor is the applicant's employer, although occasionally, it may be a government or scholarship organisation. In 2019, before the pandemic, the Spring intake saw more sponsored applications than the other two semesters. This trend is common since Spring falls at the end of the financial year, when many organisations allocate remaining training funds. This supports findings by Winsor *et al.* (2013), who observe similar patterns in a study of 240 US companies. Since COVID-19 began, the number of sponsored applications dropped significantly, from 45 in 2019 to just three in 2020 and five in 2021. This decline likely reflects the spending freezes or cuts many organisations applied to non-essential expenses. These findings align with Ellingrud *et al.* (2020), who suggest that while companies may reduce such activities, their investments in areas like warehouse process improvements and artificial intelligence could create new types of jobs in the post-COVID era.

Another aspect is the availability of a training budget. Michael suggests that when a corporation has an unspent training budget, they may approach their employees and suggest:

> "*This budget is available, you can have this training, do you want it, take it or leave it*".

Vera noted that the financial year for most companies ends on 5 April, and companies often spend any remaining training budget towards the end of this period. This behaviour aligns with findings from Winsor *et al.* (2013). Comparing sponsored delegates to self-funded delegates, sponsored individuals may face more pressure to achieve specific outcomes during the course, Vera stated that :

> "*they're not let's say under pressure and too much concerned about the quality of the course perhaps Doing these because it was suggested by the employer, especially towards the end of the financial year, February, March, when they have unused training budget*".

Applicants under sponsorship are usually team leaders or managers. They often have long employment records with the same company. This aligns with Mills' claims and McNay's (2013) arguments about the profile of sponsored EE participants. Elaborating on this point, Mills stated that :

> *"Staff team leaders, probably that sort of level who has been with the company for a long time, they've been sent there by their bosses, or they want to come on it to learn how to develop more business I think it's attractive to the business and that's why we get sponsored, mature students".*

Mills claimed that securing sponsorship is more likely for a loyal employee than for a recent graduate who has not worked with the same employer for long. However, during the pandemic, nearly every sector has faced challenges. Training budgets are often among the first to be cut, as many organisations view them as non-essential expenses, as suggested by Armstrong (2020) and Cameron (2001). This is reflected in the comparatively low number of employer sponsorships in 2020 and 2021 compared to 2019, as shown in Table 4.9

It is noteworthy to consider Michael's views concerning employer-sponsored applicants, referring to such applicants, he stated that:

> *"I've been happy in my job and ambitious to stay with the company and I've been offered some training, I always said, thank you very much, I will make time for these training courses*".

Comparing sponsored training courses to other company perks, Michael remarked, "*If someone offered me a company car, I would say, can I have the best company car available*?" This statement, supported by Amabile (1993), suggests that sponsored applicants often seek the most appealing professional development opportunities provided by their employers. Training offers may be viewed as perks within their overall rewards package. Michael further pointed out that:

> "*A lot of people picking out what they want from their development, not prepared to wait for the organisation to do it, It is that It could open more doors for them now. They're not just thinking in all honesty about the organisation that they are currently with*".

One sponsored applicant, a marketing manager at a medium-sized company, applied to study brand management. This applicant clearly expressed a desire to pursue an EE course at LAMF, highlighting how completing the course would benefit both the company and their professional career. This aligns with McNay's (2013) assertion that the main goal of management training is to enhance managers' ability to increase worker productivity.

Additionally, Saari *et al.* (1998) support this by stating that effective management contributes to higher profits for organisations. The applicant further stated that:

> *"I would consider being on the top of communication and marketing initiatives to deliver success in the market and be able to make proper managerial decisions in building a strong brand*."

This statement aligns with key themes from the thematic analysis, where the most frequently mentioned topics were the acquisition of new skills and the improvement of current work practices. As observed by Woods *et al.* (2007), while Mills argues that some sponsored applicants lack the motivation of self-funded applicants, this perspective resonates with the views of Farris *et al.* (2003) regarding different motivational factors. Notably, EE can be viewed as an intrinsic factor according to Herzberg's (2010) two-factor theory. Mills suggested that a sponsored employee may adopt a more relaxed attitude towards EE:

> "*When the business has paid for my course, as long as I turn up in a course, as long as I passed this I'm not bothered*."

Tom suggests that:

> "*you do get people who have been funded by their organisations, there's always people who have been put on to the course by an organisation and funded because they demand it. Their motivation is probably not as great as the other two [self-funded and those who requested for training]*".

Vera also shared a similar viewpoint by comparing self-funded applicants to sponsored applications by stating that :

> "*they're not let's say under pressure and too much concerned about the quality of the course perhaps doing these courses as they were suggested by the employer*".

This is consistent with Petit's (2013) claims. Petit (2013) states that prospective applicants are willing to pay a premium for an EE course. This willingness is based on the provider's brand value and the programme format, regardless of corporate sponsorship levels.

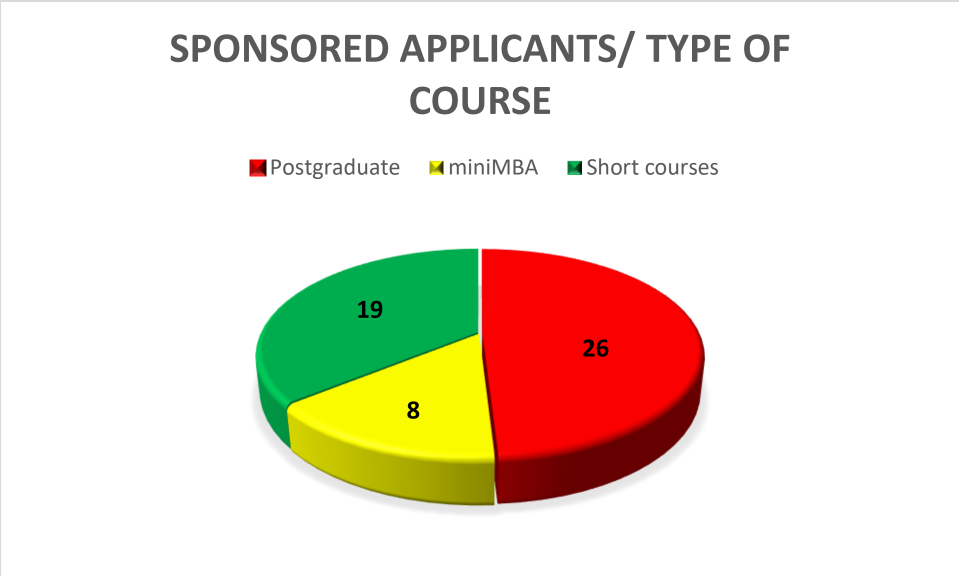


Figure 4.13: Sponsored applicants based on course category

As shown in Figure 4.13, while the Executive miniMBA typically attracts many delegates, most sponsorships (26) were for the three-month postgraduate certificate courses, while specialised short courses received 19 sponsorships. Notably, the Executive miniMBA attracted only 8 delegates over three years, representing 15% of the total number of sponsored delegates. This aligns with Thompson's (2018b) claim that a core reason for EE is to equip participating executives and their sponsoring companies to enhance competitiveness in local, regional, and global markets, a view supported by Garvin (2007).

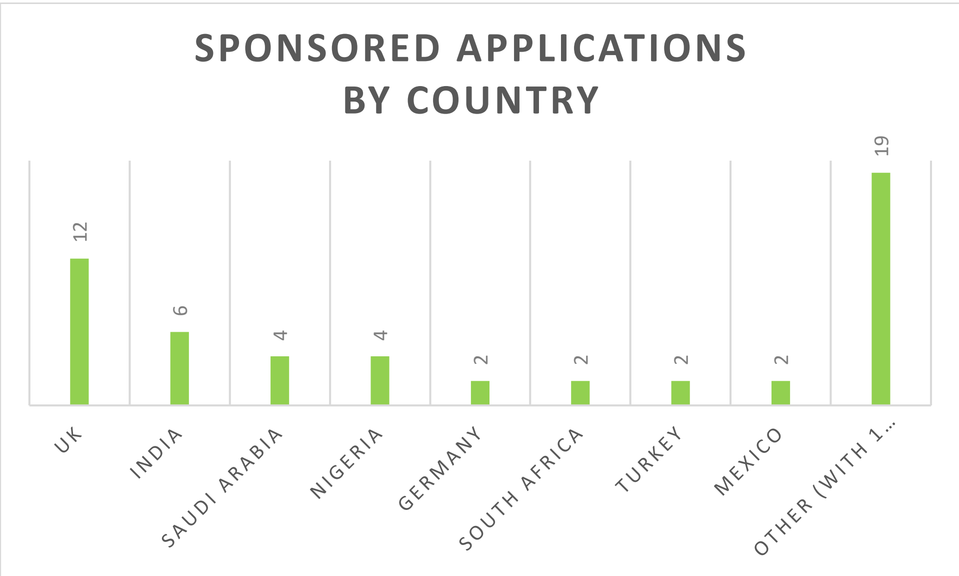


Figure 4.14: Sponsored course applications based on country of origin

From the bar graph in Figure 4.14, it is clear that most (12) sponsored participants were from the UK, where companies typically maintain generous training budgets, as noted by the UK DfE survey (2020). The survey indicated that UK employers trained at least 66% of their workforce in 2017 and 61% in 2019, with total spending reaching £42 billion in 2019.This aligns with the claims made by Winsor *et al.* (2013), who based their arguments on data from 240 US companies. Winsor *et al.* (2013) suggest that high-performing organisations allocate a substantial segment of their budgets to training leaders. This includes developing management skills, using external career coaches, and conducting training programmes. Winsor *et al.* (2013) also state that the annual average cost of training a high-level employee in a large organisation in the USA is approximately US$8,000, primarily focused on leadership development and management training. Thus, Winsor *et al.* (2013) argue that the funds allocated for EE within the corporate sector are substantial.

Looking at the non-UK-based sponsorship data, India had the second highest number of sponsored delegates, with 6. Notably, India's GDP is much lower than that of the UK. According to Anand (2021), 90% of corporate training in India is conducted online. Both Nigeria and Saudi Arabia sponsored four delegates each, while Germany, South Africa, Turkey, and Mexico-based companies sponsored two delegates each. These numbers suggest that sponsorship decisions may not depend solely on GDP or the distance a delegate must travel to participate in a course, as suggested by Woods *et al.* (2007). Companies from nineteen other countries sponsored one delegate each. However, the sample does not provide enough information to draw a definitive conclusion.

Michael noted that some employers offer overseas training as part of their remuneration package for sponsored delegates. Instead of providing cash or adding the course fee to employees' salaries, they offer valuable training courses. This claim agrees with the arguments made by Amabile (1993). Michael clarified this point by stating that:

> "*An employer might ask one of their staff, saying that they have some money remaining in their annual training budget and whether they want to spend it in taking up an executive training course*".

Agreeing with this point, Luxmi pointed out that corporates are reluctant to enrol their staff on expensive degree programmes because of both time and budget. She claimed:

> *"Course prices of executive education courses hit the sweet spot in striking the right balance between time commitments and training budgets".*

This statement appears to be in line with the claims made by Lippert (2001) who claims that employers tend to prefer sponsoring an EE course. EE courses are both concept and content-heavy, while focussing on relevant theories, relying on contextualisation to practical application.

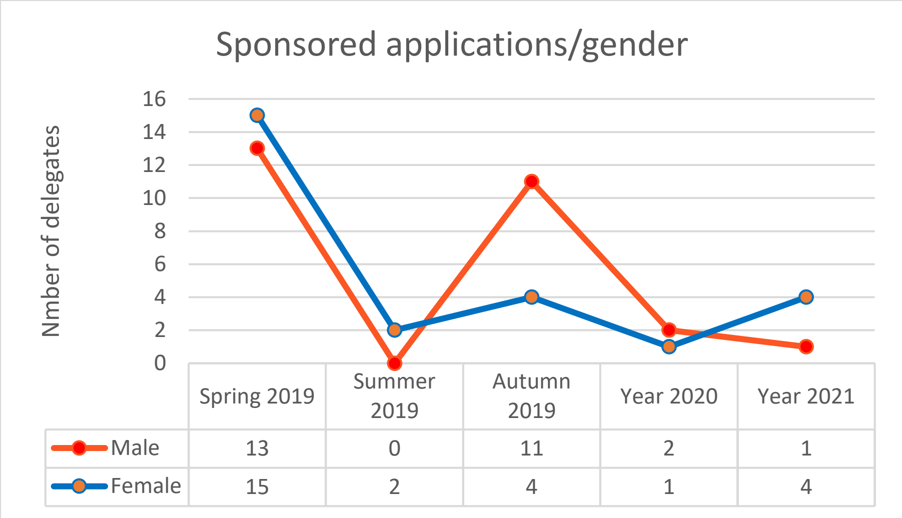


Table 4.10: Sponsored delegates (2019-2021) based on gender – LAMF

Table 4.10 shows the total number of sponsored delegates and their gender to explore any relationship between gender and corporate sponsorships. Overall, Spring 2019, covering the end of the 2018 financial year, had the highest number of sponsored delegates (13 male and 15 female). In contrast, Summer 2019 had only two female delegates and no male delegates. Autumn 2019 saw an increase in sponsored male delegates, with 11 males and four females. However, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the school had only three sponsored delegates in 2020 and five until June 2021. This limited data does not allow for any conclusions regarding gender bias. Even in Spring 2019, the numbers show an almost equal representation of both genders among the delegates.

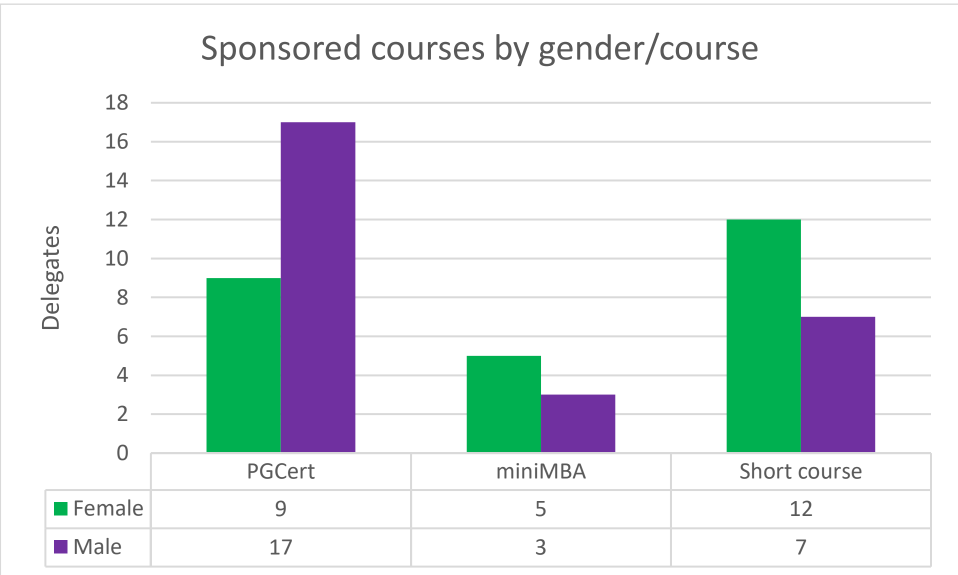


Figure 4.15: Sponsored delegates (2019-2021) based on gender – LAMF

Figure 4.15 presents data on sponsored delegates based on course category, regardless of gender. This data was further analysed in Table 4.11, which examines the total number of sponsored delegates across all three years, broken down by gender and course type. Seventeen male candidates were sponsored for postgraduate certificates, compared to nine females. More females were sponsored for miniMBAs and short courses than males. Since the grand totals are similar across both genders (27 males and 26 females), I cannot draw general conclusions about gender bias in course sponsorships. Sponsoring organisations seem comfortable with postgraduate certificate applicants being away from work for three months. These courses are typically full-time and include around four 3,000-word assignments, along with scheduled classes requiring at least 12 hours of study per week.

However, the opposite was true for specialised short courses, which usually last four consecutive days or eight weekly evenings. Twelve females were sponsored, compared to only seven males. For the miniMBA, there were five female sponsors and three males, which is too small a sample to draw accurate conclusions. No applicants were sponsored by either UK-based or overseas sponsors for the leadership development course. Ryan (2013) notes that the value of EE training varies depending on the corporate sponsor. Different corporations assess the value of EE training for their staff in various ways. Generally, this assessment aligns with the corporate objectives and strategic requirements of each company. Holton (1996) points out that other factors also influence a company's evaluation of an EE programme or provider. These factors include the company's level of commitment to EE, the provider's resource allocation, and the course's learning outcomes.

Phillips and Phillips (2016) state that competency assessments of delegates against programme objectives can be a way to assess the value of EE training to a company. Although sponsoring employees for degree programmes can be part of a company's long-term staff retention strategy (UCAS, 2024), many employers choose to fund short-term EE courses instead. This preference stems from the quicker return on investment (ROI) these courses provide, their focus on equipping staff with new skills, and their role in recognising and rewarding employees (Farris *et al.*, 2003). Other non-quantifiable indicators include improvements in staff morale, teamwork, confidence levels, and cross-departmental cooperation. According to Herzberg (2017), such sponsorships may act as intrinsic factors in Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation.

4.4.10 Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic and Post-pandemic Executive Education

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted organisations and educational institutions globally. Before the pandemic, EE was primarily delivered face-to-face. It consisted of discussion-based sessions where the tutor facilitated and acted as the subject matter expert, as noted by Stopper (1998). Due to travel restrictions, most EE courses, including those offered by LAMF, transitioned online. They utilised communication tools like Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Cisco Webex. Pratama *et al.* (2020) observe that technology companies continuously updated their collaboration software to meet the needs of various user groups.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed both applicant behaviour and the traditional methods of teaching EE courses. Before the pandemic, LAMF operated entirely as a campus-based course provider, delivering all short courses as four consecutive-day offerings. Since 2020, most courses have been offered as weekly evening sessions using online collaborative platforms. Carlsson-Wall and Richtnér (2021) note that in 2019, global revenue for executive education approached US$2 billion, with about 60% coming from in-class delivery to groups of around 20 participants. However, the pandemic led to a revenue drop of 25%. LAMF faced a notable revenue loss due to changes in the geo-demographic characteristics of its EE applicants.

Before 2020, delegate satisfaction surveys were handed out physically during the last 30 minutes of class, leading to a higher response rate due to peer pressure and time allocation. However, since 2020, participation in these surveys has decreased, with some groups providing no feedback. This decline may stem from delegates viewing the surveys as unimportant, dissatisfaction with the tutor, or a neutral level of satisfaction. Despite tutors being subject matter experts, some struggle with the new collaborative learning system. Additionally, the only remaining delegate support officer may not have sent survey invites, as analysing and presenting feedback at meetings adds to her workload.

Tom’s response to the question on the impact of COVID-19 and post-covid executive education tends to suggest the same interpretations where he suggests:

> *“ We've got people who have discovered that they can go and do this thing on their own, and they might even want to fund it themselves, and so we have to now prepare for that. We've seen a lot of this after the pandemic. “*

Furthermore, Michael’s response to the question that was based on the impact of the pandemic included:

> “*An unemployed person dipping into their savings and saying Okay, instead of going on vacation or buying a new dress or coat, I'll spend this money on my education, and this will make themselves more employable*”.

This response may suggest that gaining important technical and conceptual skills will enable such participants to stand above the rest in a competitive marketplace. Lippert (2001:4) also supports this, stating that EE courses offer targeted developmental skills and "*insight skills*" to participants. These participants are already savvy (aware of their goals), smart (possessing and applying knowledge), and insightful (learning and growing from experiences). In agreement, and discussing the post-pandemic executive education in general, Michael suggested that "*education is going to have to be flexible and agile*". Michael suggested that "*post-pandemic, there will be a hunger and thirst for learning and knowledge*".

Mills confirmed that the school promptly transitioned to online teaching in response to the pandemic. He believes the future of learning will combine classroom and online methods which is in-line with the observations made by Chakravarthy (2022). While the school adapts to market demands and enters new markets, Mills feels it has not fully considered the implications of its new projects. Michael noted that established brands with credibility are well-positioned. He expressed confidence in LAMF, highlighting its rapid transformation from a campus-based to an online course provider. This included adopting the latest collaborative technology and adapting academic content for online delivery within weeks of the lockdown, which is in-line with the arguments presented by Manzoni (2022). Selvam agreed, stating that the education sector experienced two decades of transformation in just a few months, with all interactions becoming remote. He emphasised that the challenges and impact of this shift are still to be fully understood. This claim agrees with the arguments presented by Billing, De Smet, and Reich (2021).

Michael noted that at the pandemic's onset, training organisations were uncertain about their next steps and the duration of the situation. There was no clear direction regarding technology investments or strategies for business sustainability, aligning with Taylor *et al.* (2021). Taylor *et al.*'s (2021) findings reflect that LAMF's shift to online teaching via Microsoft Teams and Zoom was ultimately the right choice, despite a cautious start. Manuela echoed this sentiment, stating that the prevailing belief was that face-to-face training was superior. However, the pandemic necessitated a shift to virtual teaching methods, a view supported by Pratama *et al.* (2020).

Manuela acknowledged that both teachers and delegates initially struggled with virtual learning. However, over time, they adapted and recognised its effectiveness. She suggested that even after the pandemic, EE will need to include hybrid or online teaching, which aligns with Stanton *et al.* (2017), who support incorporating asynchronous learning with classroom instruction. Mills agreed, emphasising that post-pandemic class schedules should reflect delegates' preferences for a blend of in-person and virtual learning. Manuela observed that:

> "*The pandemic has created some forced innovation within educational delivery, executive education needs to even once we go back to campus, continue to offer a hybrid of in-person training and online live-streaming*".

The technical ability of participants in online live courses at LAMF seems to have improved by the end of 2020 and into 2021 compared to the start of the pandemic in Spring 2020. This conclusion is drawn from the reduced number of technical support emails and calls received by LAMF's administration team during this later period. This was reiterated by Luxmi who claimed that:

> "*Initially, when the pandemic started, we've had many support calls, but then, the platforms such as Skype for business and Zoom started adding new features, became more stable and the number of support calls went down, I believe those who signed up in later stages were more aware of this software"*.

Michael is confident that because LAMF is a well-known brand, it can overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic. Luxmi tends to agree, stating that the school has a notable number of repeat delegates who return to study other courses. She suggests that the reason is the high-quality education the school provides. Tom also agrees, noting that the school's main success factor at this time is its prompt adaptation to the new way of doing things due to the pandemic's effects, which aligns with the claims made by Manzoni (2022). Selvam agreed by stating that:

> "*Updating software to better forms of training platforms from what we originally started when the pandemic started so that's definitely in their favour*".

Another factor identified by Tom was migrating to a modern virtual learning environment. Michael tends to agree with this statement as he stated "*I do think that there is a role for virtual in the future of training,".*

Tom believes that post-pandemic, there will be two types of individuals seeking executive courses at LAMF: those who prefer classroom-based learning to engage face-to-face with tutors and peers, and those who prefer to study in their own environment through live virtual training. Tom recommends that the school adopt different marketing and promotional strategies for these groups, which aligns with the recommendations made by Keller and Kotler (2022). Luxmi adds that in light of the pandemic and its impact on the school, it is essential to diversify course offerings. She emphasises that launching a digital academy is a wise decision, as future demand will likely focus on subjects related to data science, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality.

The interview responses show that the school has adapted well to the changes brought by the pandemic. While delegate satisfaction has declined due to various factors, overall enrolment numbers are recovering after the drop in 2020. The next section presents conclusions based on the three research questions.

4.5 Conclusion

Analysis of the collected data reveals a divergence in perceptions of EE and LAMF between staff and applicants. Among the teaching staff, opinions varied regarding course content, participant demographics, opportunities for further study, and their commitment to the school. Some staff strongly believed that participants apply for EE courses primarily to gain entry to the UK. However, this perspective does not hold for applicants from 2020 to 2021, as all courses from March 2020 were delivered online. The personal statements of overseas applicants did not suggest aspirations to remain in the UK after completing their courses. Instead, most well-crafted statements indicated that applicants had a clear understanding of the course's expectations and how it could enhance their professional practice.

To answer the first three research questions, data from 391 applications were analysed, along with transcripts from seven interviews conducted with LAMF staff. A discussion based on each research question was compared to existing theories that were discussed in the literature review. Although most of the findings were closely aligned with existing theories, there were instances where some of the responses and findings were different to established theories and processes. Areas such as equal opportunities, sponsorships, and responses to changes in EE may require further research. The following chapter will reflect on these findings draw conclusions and recommendations and identify contributions to new knowledge, based on these findings.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the main conclusions from the findings and lines of arguments derived in response to the research questions. The findings of this study are related to the key drivers that Influence the provision and sustainability of Executive Education (EE), focussing on the main characteristics of EE students who study at London Academy of Management and Finance (LAMF).

5.1.1 Research Questions:

1. What are the characteristics of LAMF as an executive education provider?
2. What motivates delegates to study an EE course?
3. How can EE delegates be characterised?
4. What recommendations for sustainability and growth can be made to LAMF?

Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for business schools, government agencies, and individuals interested in EE, whether online or on campus in London. It offers recommendations for employers on the value of EE. This includes its role in organisational growth, maintaining a competitive edge, applying the latest industry systems and techniques, and as a tool for motivating or rewarding high-performing staff. Finally, the chapter draws on the study's significance, contribution to new knowledge, limitations and areas that warrant future research.

5.2 Research Question 1:
Identify the Characteristics of LAMF as an EE Provider.

5.2.1 Application process and applicant choice

The thematic analysis of application forms reveals that most applicants enrolled in EE programmes to improve their skills. The second most common reason was to enhance existing workplace practices, while the third was to expand their knowledge. Only a few (12%) applicants applied specifically because of the school's name or brand recognition. This suggests that, unlike students in undergraduate or postgraduate programmes, EE applicants prioritise course content and its impact on their professional practice over institutional reputation. This supports Thompson's (2018b) claim that employed individuals join EE courses primarily at their sponsoring companies' request to enhance competitiveness in local, regional, and global markets. This conclusion is consistent with Lippert's (2001) claims that EE courses are conceptually and content-heavy, focusing on relevant theories while contextualising them for practical application. It also supports Amdam's (2016) view that, unlike degree programmes constructed around academic knowledge, the logic behind executive education is built on industry experience.

Moreover, it is evident that each EE applicant fills out an application that spans at least eight pages, suggesting an exhaustive process. The school collects data that appears neither relevant nor necessary for academic admission decisions, such as criminal convictions, country of birth, second nationality, and multiple phone numbers. This seemingly excessive collection of information contradicts the UK Information Commissioner’s Office guidance (UK GDPR guidance and resources, 2021), failing to meet standards for lawfulness, fairness, transparency, purpose limitation, and data minimisation in processing personal data.

5.2.2 Course Portfolio and Performance

Based on interview findings and personal statements from 391 application forms, there is evidence that the school takes a dynamic and proactive approach. The academic programmes are current and fulfil their promises, equipping participants with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to improve their professional practice. This aligns with Vygotsky’s (1997) argument that learning constructs new knowledge based on what a learner already knows. Hence, the findings suggest that the school has adequately met the primary expectations of its individual EE course participants. Hura (2003) and Jacobson *et al.* (2017) claim that EE courses are built on three pillars: a flexible and modern curriculum, teaching staff with functional expertise, and school-industry partnerships that shorten the programme's developmental learning curve. However, the interviews reveal that while the school allows tutors to propose new courses, LAMF currently lacks a robust and systematic approach to connect with the industry and identify its needs. The school currently has a significant weakness, as noted by Thomas *et al.* (2013), who argue that EE courses should be designed with corporate customers in mind rather than adopting a "*design it and they will buy it*" approach. This raises concerns about resource wastage on new courses without due diligence, as evidenced by the school having over 40 courses in its portfolio, with only a few generating sufficient revenue. Mills pointed out that the school adopts an unstructured, scattergun approach to course introduction, lacking market research or formal mechanisms to capture industry input and identify in-demand courses.

Staff interviewed felt the Executive miniMBA name was "*very creative*" and the school’s marketing efforts were positioned to attract those interested in MBA-related topics. However, analysis of 391 personal statements indicated that the name itself was rarely a deciding factor for enrolment. Participants primarily chose the miniMBA for two reasons: some lacked the time for a full MBA, while others, as Selvam noted, valued the opportunity to strengthen their weakest skills. Covering six core management subjects, the miniMBA serves as both a refresher and a targeted skill enhancement, suggesting that participants enrol to address specific skill gaps rather than for the appeal of the course name. Despite interview participants labelling the Executive miniMBA as LAMF's flagship course, evidence indicates that applicants prefer the longer-term postgraduate qualification for its in-depth knowledge. Furthermore, the school does not appear to attract current university students for summer business programmes, suggesting that its marketing approach for working professionals fails to appeal to young undergraduates seeking summer study opportunities abroad or at different institutions.

As Keller and Kotler (2022) suggest, LAMF could adopt a technology-based, personalised marketing strategy to penetrate identified market segments and attract diverse geo-demographic groups. However, it is essential to consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted travel during most of this study, potentially influencing these findings. Mills's statement, "*We have this, is this what you are looking for?*" aligns with Margulies and Gregg's (2013) claim that the curricula offered by EE providers depend on the perceived strengths and interests of providers and the specific areas demonstrated by faculty.

5.2.3 Tutor Engagement and Motivation

The academic team's involvement in course development varied considerably, as all teaching staff are part-time external consultants, which meant their engagement depended on individual attitudes toward the school. Thematic coding of the interviews was conducted (see Appendix 18 for an example). This supports Ryan's (2013) caution about flexibility in EE programmes, which should be limited to a set number of parameters to avoid complications and a loss of focus. Business tutor Mills viewed himself as a valued member of the LAMF team, appreciating the school's forward-thinking approach and openness to tutor ideas. In contrast, Manuela, who teaches project management, and Tom, who teaches miniMBA, expressed a more detached perspective, stating they deliver content assigned to them without influencing recruitment or introducing new courses. Manuela likened the school to a training company focused on short courses, highlighting a divide in perceptions among tutors regarding their roles and the school's approach.

The findings suggest that although all tutors have similar contracts, their motivations differ based on their engagement with the school. Taylor and Hamdy (2013) note that low expectations lead to low motivation, and this study indicates that some tutors, like Manuela, perceive the school primarily as addressing extrinsic factors such as pay, aligning with Herzberg's two-factor theory. However, Mills finds motivation through intrinsic factors like responsibility and engagement, as evidenced by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Most faculty, except Mills, appear to lack passion for the school, which is crucial for sustained engagement and job satisfaction, as noted by Ryan and Deci (2000). This aligns with Bartholomew *et al.* (2011), who suggest individuals thrive when their social environment supports their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Jacobson *et al.* (2017) argue that a modern business school must go beyond knowledge sharing to make a real impact on students.

5.2.4 Campus Location as a Pull Factor

LAMF's prime location in Holborn, Central London, is noteworthy, as Petit (2013) identified location as the third most important factor, after course and brand, in selecting an executive education course. However, my analysis of 391 applications from 2019 to 2021 revealed that only three applicants cited location as a factor in their enrolment decision. Despite all applications in 2020-2021 being for online study due to the pandemic, the data indicates that most applicants did not view the course location as an important factor, even prior to the shift to online teaching in 2020. This finding contradicts some staff beliefs regarding the importance of campus location for choosing LAMF for EE, particularly as all interviews were conducted in 2021 when courses were being offered online.

This discrepancy contrasts with Farris *et al.* (2003), who found that reputation was the key factor in selecting an EE course based on a sample of 80 respondents from various US industries. The difference may stem from changes in priorities between 2003 and 2021, or the geographical and time-related context of the samples. The findings suggest that most LAMF applicants do not regard location as an important factor when selecting courses. This aligns with Margulies and Gregg's (2013) argument that applicants choose EE providers based on perceived institutional strengths and faculty expertise. This discrepancy highlights a difference between staff and applicant perspectives regarding the importance of study location. Petit's (2013:5) research identifies programme format, brand value, and location as key areas of preference among a sample of 50 applicants. Given the small number of respondents citing location in my dataset of 361, it appears that reasons for applying to LAMF differ from Petit's (2013) findings. However, it is important to note that my sample focused on a single school, and 171 of the 391 applicants pursued their courses online due to pandemic-related travel restrictions.

5.2.5 Course Price

Price, including both direct and indirect costs, did not play a major role in applicants' decisions to enrol in executive education programmes. Although Kotler (2019) recommends that organisations tailor products to individual needs and monitor market offers, including exclusive pricing, this research suggests that LAMF's EE participants are largely uninfluenced by price or discounts. Petit (2013) similarly notes that course price ranks below brand value and course content in importance. Findings reveal that LAMF's executive courses are competitively priced within industry norms, and any decrease in enrolment cannot be attributed to price, whether for online-live or campus-based formats. Interview feedback and personal statement analysis indicate that current LAMF course prices do not deter either self-funded or corporate-sponsored applicants. In line with Kotler (2019) and Twenge (2014), LAMF could benefit from considering how millennials, who bring new attitudes and values to the consumption process, approach purchasing services.

5.3 Research Question 2:
What Motivates Delegates to Study an EE Course?

5.3.1 Employer to Gain a Competitive Advantage

The information gathered demonstrates that applicants primarily enrol in EE courses to gain skills and knowledge aimed at enhancing their employer's practices and competitiveness. This aligns with McNay's (2013) statement regarding managers in EE and supports Jacobson *et al.*'s (2017:43) description of EE as "*the process used to develop, expand, or improve capabilities of current senior leaders or to position individuals for future senior leadership roles within an organisation*". Thompson (2018) similarly argues that, despite the varied purposes of EE courses, they are fundamentally designed to strengthen the sponsor company's competitive advantage and boost productivity. Consequently, my findings align with existing research linking EE to productivity improvements for employers.

5.3.2 Skills

Applicant data indicates that most participants joined an EE course at LAMF primarily to gain skills (210 mentions) aimed at improving work practices at their current employer (206 mentions). This supports Ryan's (2013) argument that EE participants often seek meaningful work experiences and skill development. Some applicants enrolled in EE courses to enhance job prospects, start a business, or secure promotions, which is consistent with theories on executive education's role in career advancement. This supports Farris *et al.*'s (2003) findings that primary personal drivers for EE study include functional specialisation, understanding strategic challenges, and preparing for new roles. Garvin (2007) further argues that EE's foundation promotes strong delegate engagement, particularly through action learning activities. Similarly, my findings reflect Phillips and Phillips's (2016) view that motives for engagement range from personal growth to developing organisational strategy. This expectation aligns with Ryan's (2013) suggestion that EE programmes should limit flexibility to avoid distractions, a sentiment confirmed by Selvam in his interview, who emphasised the desire to study what was "*said on the tin*".

5.3.3 Student Mobility

Sales and academic staff at LAMF generally believe that applicants from countries like Nigeria, India, Brazil, and some parts of Eastern Europe use EE admissions as a convenient route to travel to the UK, with one staff member even comparing colleagues to "*travel agents*" facilitating this purpose. While such motivations may apply to student visa holders planning migration (King and Sondhi, 2018), this does not reflect the intentions of most EE applicants. As Gallagher and Schuler (2013) suggest, while some are interested in cultural exploration, the majority, including applicants from these regions, have well-defined objectives for their studies and clear plans for applying their knowledge upon returning home.

Given the high number of EE applicants from India, whether campus-based or online, I conclude that these applicants do not appear to use the course for long-term immigration goals, which contrasts with claims about mainstream student applications from India by Lomer (2018) and Beech (2018). The personal statements of Indian applicants for campus-based study in 2019 show no notable differences from those written for online courses in 2020-2021. A similar trend is observed for applicants from Nigeria, as Beech (2018) notes that Nigeria is not an agent-led market for student mobility, unlike India. This indicates that EE applicants genuinely express their intentions in their personal statements, regardless of whether they pursued an online or campus-based course. Unlike international degree applicants, as noted by McNay (2013), LAMF’s EE applicants have clear objectives for their studies and specific plans for applying their skills after completing their courses, aiming to enhance their contributions in their home countries (Pfeffer, 2007). This stands in contrast to degree applicants, who may not always have defined career paths following their studies, highlighting the focused aspirations of EE participants.

There was no indication that any of the school’s delegates overstayed their visas or failed to attend the course after applying for a visa to come to the UK. A similar level of demand was evident from delegates in non-low-risk countries like Nigeria and India for online EE courses in 2020, which were delivered online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, I conclude that LAMF’s EE delegates apply with a clear sense of their goals. Furthermore, they aim to fulfil intrinsic factors by participating in such courses, as suggested by Herzberg (2017), and strive for higher levels within Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). Additionally, during the application process and while studying in London, some delegates may encounter disadvantages if staff treat them differently based on their country of origin. Such negative presumptions may have led to a more exhaustive application process, requiring extra references, documentation, and questions compared to those from low-risk countries. This situation suggests a need for further research to determine whether all course applicants in the UK are offered equal opportunities and fair processing.

5.3.4 COVID-19 Pandemic and the use of collaborative platforms

LAMF's EE was offered entirely on campus until March 2020, aligning with Vicerey's (2001) claims. However, global lockdowns and travel restrictions prompted a shift to online education using collaborative tools. From March 2020 onwards, LAMF transitioned to online live classes. Analysis of personal statements reveals that the most recurring keywords in both 2019 and 2020 were "*management*" and "*development*". This suggests that primary motivations for studying remained largely unchanged during this period, despite the pandemic and the shift in delivery mode. This conclusion challenges Vicerey's (2001) argument that online education may be less popular than campus-based EE courses, as participants often perceive EE as a high-touch, low-tech experience. However, it is essential to consider that advances in internet speed, live-streaming quality, and the increasing acceptance of hybrid work and study between 2001 and 2020 may have influenced this perspective. In 2021, as illustrated in figure 4.3, the keyword "*work*" emerged as a prominent focus, indicating that applicants sought to upskill or acquire new skills in response to global job losses. Other consistent keywords included marketing, project, leadership, team, knowledge, skills, responsibility, experience, brand, position, and organisation. This suggests that the primary motivation for EE delegates at LAMF remained unchanged despite COVID-19 and the shift in delivery methods.

5.3.5 English Language Proficiency

In terms of providing English language proficiency, LAMF adopts the same system as the UK government for recognising majority English-speaking countries. However, applicant feedback indicates that this practice may be perceived as discriminatory by individuals from countries like Ghana and Nigeria, where English is the primary language. This raises concerns about forcing applicants from these nations to undertake costly and time-consuming language exams to demonstrate their proficiency. Prior to the pandemic, the number of UK-based applications remained low; however, this increased with the shift to online teaching. My demographic data reveals that UK-based working professionals, prefer short training courses that fit their schedules. This aligns with the findings of Taylor *et al.* (2021), which suggest that mature delegates in the UK favour studying at home rather than travelling to London. Additionally, the increase in internet access over the last four to five years, coupled with COVID-19-related travel restrictions, may have encouraged more individuals to allocate savings towards developmental activities, including executive education. Hence, further research is necessary to more accurately assess these factors and their implications for policy.

Overall, I can conclude that executive education (EE) delegates appear motivated to fulfil the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Evidence suggests they are not focused on physiological or safety needs but instead aim to meet belongingness, esteem, and self-actualisation needs. Furthermore, from the perspective of Herzberg's two-factor theory, EE can be regarded as an intrinsic factor. Since EE programmes primarily target mid- to senior-level employees, they concentrate on intrinsic motivators such as work-related challenges, managing complex tasks, personal growth, a sense of achievement, and leadership development.

5.4 Research Question 3
How Can EE Delegates Be Characterised/ Constructed?

5.4.1 Gender and Age

Overall, the number of females enrolling in the postgraduate certificate programmes consistently surpassed that of males throughout the three years of data collection. In contrast, the enrolment numbers for both genders in specialist short courses were relatively equal during the 2019-2021 period. This raises the question of whether participants from both genders regard EE as a vital component of their career progression and the development of specialised skills. The trend of higher female participation in postgraduate courses aligns with the HEPI (2020) report, which highlighted a similar pattern among all UK-based participants in higher education.

By looking at the enrolment data for the miniMBA designed mainly for senior managers, contrary to the views of Kelan and Jones (2010) who suggest a postfeminist environment where gender is no longer seen as important, there were 72 applications from male participants while there were only 37 applications from female participants. This presents an opportunity for further research, as the total number of female participants in higher education, both at LAMF and nationally, is higher than their male counterparts. As Jacobson *et al.* (2017) points out, miniMBAs are primarily subscribed to by current or potential business leaders, so it may be worthwhile to review the selection criteria within corporates to see whether male employees are earmarked as future leaders compared to their female peers.

In terms of age, applicants aged 40-54 displayed increased interest in the 2020-2021 period compared to 2019, while the number of 55+ applicants remained consistent across all three years. Notably, demand for EE among younger applicants has significantly declined. These trends indicate that the pandemic prompted middle-aged, mid-career executives to seek new skills or enhance their existing ones through EE courses more than any other age group.

Given that this demographic often faces financial commitments such as mortgages and childcare costs, they may have prioritised employability and job security over other concerns. This shift challenges Thompson's (2018a) description of a typical EE delegate, who was usually male, aged 35 to 50, and in a well-paid position. Data from LAMF suggests a broader age range (40-54) and minimal gender disparity among participants. Furthermore, the significant reduction in demand from younger applicants could be attributed to job losses during the pandemic, which made training less of a priority compared to essential needs.

5.4.2 Credits, CPD, Recognition of Prior-Learning (RPL) and Certificate of completion

Typically, students seek credit-bearing degree qualifications when choosing a long-term course, as suggested by Holloway *et al.* (2012). However, none of the interview participants viewed the lack of credit-bearing options as a drawback for the value proposition of LAMF's EE courses. The school did not anticipate a decline in demand, despite its entire EE portfolio being non-credit-bearing. This is supported by the fact that none of the 391 applicants between 2019 and 2021 mentioned needing academic credit for any EE courses. The course pages on the school's website explicitly state that the courses carry CPD hours rather than academic credit. Findings indicate that none of the participants enrolled in EE courses to gain academic credit, nor did any request exemptions for units based on recognition of prior learning. All applicants who enrolled in an EE course at LAMF between 2019 and 2021 completed the entire course and assessments, suggesting they aimed to acquire new skills, refresh existing expertise, or fulfil CPD requirements set by employers for promotion or job retention. Thus, participants view the non-credit-bearing postgraduate certificate and diploma courses at LAMF as higher education options rather than traditional EE programmes. It is important to note that these conclusions are based on existing data, and there is no evidence to support or refute the idea that those seeking academic credit may have looked elsewhere instead of inquiring about qualifications offering academic credit.

LAMF provides every participant with an e-certificate showing their accreditations and CPD hours. However, based on interview responses and course applications, none of the applicants placed much importance on the certificate of completion. Unlike a degree or diploma, the certificate itself was not a priority. This suggests that participants were more focused on the course content than the final certificate, likely due to their existing qualifications. This aligns with Amdam's (2016) claims, who distinguished between university and EE students. Amdam (2016) argues that EE participants are often higher up in an organisation. As a result, they may place less emphasis on the type of certificate they receive at the end of an EE course. Findings also suggest that LAMF is not perceived as a diploma mill, as cautioned by Jahera (2013). Overall, this discussion highlights the perception of LAMF's EE courses as valuable learning experiences focused on skill development and professional advancement rather than traditional academic credentials.

5.4.3 Sponsorships and assessing post-course performance

In terms of corporate-sponsored applications, both male and female applicants demonstrated a similar trend across all three years. This finding contradicts Thompson's (2018a) characterisation of a typical EE delegate as a male aged between mid-thirties and fifty, occupying a well-paid job. Evidence from this study strongly suggests a lack of gender bias in selecting staff for sponsorships. This trend is evident not only in the UK but also in other nations that sponsored delegates studying at LAMF between 2019 and 2021. The top three sponsoring countries (India, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria) are all characterised by male-dominated societies, as noted by Fitzgerald (2022). Contrary to the common perception that employers are hesitant to allow employees extended time away from work, the highest number of sponsorships were actually for postgraduate certificate courses, which require at least ten weeks of study. This supports Ryan's (2013) argument that the evaluation of the value of executive education training depends on the corporate sponsor, as different corporations assess the value proposition of the education received by their staff differently.

As pointed out by Ryan (2013), only a minimal number of corporate sponsors assess the outcomes of executive education programmes and their impact on employee performance. Among the 53 sponsored delegates, only three stated that their employers specifically asked them to join a particular EE course. This aligns with Michael's observation that most corporates claim to have a training budget, allowing employees to select courses that interest them. This tendency suggests that employers may not be deeply concerned about the specific skills employees gain from EE or how these courses impact performance. Consequently, this lack of assessment limits the potential benefits of training for overall organisational productivity. However, personal statements from applicants indicate intentions to share acquired knowledge with co-workers or implement improvements at their workplaces. As Thomas *et al.* (2013) suggest, LAMF does not appear to engage effectively with corporate sponsors, lacking a systematic approach to designing customised EE courses that meet corporate needs and provide a good return on investment, as noted by Shepherd and Huhmann (2003).

Additionally, my research lacks data on whether employers conduct post-course evaluations to assess skill improvements in their staff, as recommended by Phillips and Phillips (2016). This aspect would have strengthened the conclusions regarding employer perceptions and the impact of EE on organisational performance. Future research is warranted on post-course evaluations and their outcomes in collaboration with employers, as indicated by Saari *et al.* (1988) and Gee (2017).

5.4.4 Existing Qualifications

Amdam (2016) argues that modern executive education (EE) challenges the belief that a university degree is necessary for advancement to top management positions. The findings indicate that LAMF received 147 applications from mature students who might lack degree-level qualifications, compared to 244 applications from individuals who already held a degree or higher qualification. This suggests that, while a degree may not be essential for climbing the corporate ladder, most individuals who reach top positions likely possess a degree, whether obtained immediately after school or later in their careers. This aligns with Lippert's (2001) observation that most EE delegates are already highly educated or experienced, equipped with both broad conceptual and industry-specific technical skills. Amdam (2016) also notes that degree course admissions rely on grades or assessments, whereas EE participants are admitted based on their hierarchical status within a corporation. Although Welch (2005) states that EE courses are typically aimed at mid to senior-level managers, LAMF admits individuals with a degree or at least five years of work experience, irrespective of their position. In summary, both graduates and non-graduates engage in EE, with the higher number of graduates likely reflecting their ability to secure more advanced roles in the corporate world. However, the data collected does not allow me to definitively determine the correlation between having a degree and pursuing EE.

5.4.5 Applicants with a Disability or an unspent criminal conviction

Andrews (2015) claims that two-thirds of people with disabilities avoid disclosing their condition in job interviews due to fear of discrimination, but this may not apply to applicants for EE courses at LAMF. Data shows that none of the 391 applicants from 2019 to 2021 declared a disability, even though the school explicitly requests this information to assess disability needs and make reasonable adjustments. This suggests that individuals who may have disabilities might prefer not to disclose them, fearing unfavourable treatment during the application process, studies, or assessments. Another conclusion is that while disability itself may not hinder progression, social stigma and workplace discrimination (as noted by Andrews, 2015) could prevent individuals from attaining high-level positions suitable for EE. Further research could investigate how disabled employees progress in various sectors, such as construction, information technology, and retail, compared to their non-disabled counterparts. This would involve evaluating the progression criteria used by different organisations. Additionally, underlying issues, such as negative biases and unconscious bias from peers and superiors, may also affect their advancement. These findings present an opportunity for further research.

Among the 391 applications reviewed in this research, none of the applicants declared any criminal convictions, either spent or unspent. While it is impossible to draw definitive conclusions about this absence, it is noteworthy that UCAS (2022) indicates that disclosing a criminal conviction is only necessary for courses in fields such as teaching, social care, or medicine, which involve work with children or vulnerable adults. Therefore, LAMF might consider removing this question from the application form, as its course portfolio does not include such programmes. Similar to applicants with disabilities, those with convictions may choose not to disclose their status due to fear of prejudice. Another possibility is that individuals with convictions may not have attained the organisational positions necessary for EE. Consequently, it may be beneficial to evaluate existing support structures for reintegrating individuals into society after serving their sentences. This could facilitate their integration into meaningful employment and help ensure that a spent conviction does not impede their career progression. Given the lack of credible literature on convictions and EE, further research and publications in this area are warranted.

5.5 Research Question 4
What Recommendations for Sustainability and Growth Can Be Made to LAMF?

Based on this research study, I recommend that LAMF conduct formal market research before investing in new course development, in line with Farris *et al.* (2003), who argue that EE courses must be designed with corporate customers in mind. This was supported by Mills and Manuela during the interviews. Additionally, the school could benefit from Varner *et al.*'s (2013) recommendation to adopt a modular, customisable curriculum. Implementing a systematic approach, such as the Competing Values Framework (CVF) by Cameron and Quinn (2011), can aid in designing bespoke EE courses tailored to specific corporate needs once LAMF establishes sufficient partnerships. The market research should target existing geo-demographic segments, particularly prospective delegates from Nigeria and Middle Eastern countries, as well as new segments, including the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and the UK as suggested by both Selvam and Vera during their interviews. This will enable LAMF to launch new course offerings based on its existing strengths and concentrate marketing efforts on the identified target market segments.

As highlighted by both Mills and Michael during their interviews, in order to create awareness and develop promotional campaigns, I recommend that the school explore various marketing channels to identify the combination most frequented by professionals considering EE. Additionally, the marketing message should be clear and concise as identified by Manuela during the interview. Interview feedback provided by Michael indicated that, in some cultures, receiving a discount is an essential part of the purchasing experience; therefore, it may be necessary to offer a discount on course fees to a select group of customers. However, consistently providing discounts could devalue the brand, leading customers to perceive the discounted price as the product's actual value. This was emphasised by Tom as part of his interview response. Based on interview insights provided by Manuela and Tom, I also suggest that the school reassess its policy of sending multiple unsolicited marketing emails to the same addresses. As noted by a sales respondent including Selvam, this practice could cause the school to be seen as a spammer, resulting in its emails being flagged by recipients and automatically routed to spam folders.

Given that the school is not currently engaged in corporate business development, I recommend that LAMF initiate these efforts in the UK and Europe, as advised by Winsor *et al.* (2013). Without prior experience in this sector, the school may encounter resistance and cultural barriers when attempting to penetrate Asian markets, potentially leading to disappointing responses from corporations in that region as highlighted by Tom. Instead, market penetration in Asia should follow the acquisition of experience from the European and UK markets. Additionally, LAMF could benefit from evaluating competing providers when considering new client segments or course portfolios, as suggested by Freeman and Cavinato (1992).

I recommend that the school review its delegate application process, as much of the information collected appears unnecessary and may violate UK data protection laws. Additionally, it is evident that delegate application forms are retained longer than necessary, as defined by the ICO under Principle (e): Storage limitation (2021). A potential solution is to implement an online shopping cart system, allowing applicants to review course content, declare their English language proficiency, and meet academic admissions criteria before paying for the course. This recommendation stems from the observation that no applications were rejected for not meeting the school's entry criteria between 2019 and 2021 and based on the comments made by Selvam and Vera during their interviews. Furthermore, none of the participants encountered issues with their ability to converse in English during their time at LAMF.

There may be an opportunity to examine the response rate regarding where applicants declare a disability within the lengthy application form as highlighted by Luxmi. For instance, would there be more declarations if the question appeared at the beginning rather than at the end? Applicants might experience screen fatigue or exhaustion by the conclusion of the application, leading them to prefer a quicker completion.

Regarding the application question about convictions, it should be clarified to state, "*Do you have any unspent criminal convictions*?" Additionally, a process may need to be established if an applicant declares an unspent conviction. Since LAMF and its campus do not host minors or vulnerable individuals, there may be no valid reason to ask about criminal convictions. Thus, this question could be removed from the application form entirely.

Although Petit (2013) suggests that EE applicants do not view career services as crucial when selecting a course, interview responses including comments made by Luxmi indicated that the current career services team fails to effectively engage with delegates, particularly those enrolled in postgraduate certificate programmes lasting 3-6 months. The applicant data shows that, unlike participants in specialised short courses or the Executive miniMBA, delegates in postgraduate certificate programmes are primarily recent graduates or individuals seeking new job opportunities. Therefore, the school should implement a more consistent and higher level of engagement focused on individual career development in a meaningful way.

It is strongly recommended that the school engage its external consultants in meaningful ways, such as through staff seminars, development days, participation in academic conferences, and collaboration with management and sales teams, this is evident by the comments made by Manuela and Mills. This engagement can foster a sense of belonging, leading to higher commitment and involvement within the school community. Given that some teaching staff including Manuela and Tom appear disengaged, implementing a strategy to enhance staff motivation and satisfaction at LAMF is essential. Increased staff motivation may contribute to greater delegate satisfaction and encourage more out-of-hours engagement; for example, motivated tutors might respond to participants' emails even after classes have concluded. Additionally, providing academic staff with school email addresses can promote brand affiliation, facilitating professional communication with delegates and alumni.

Based on the interview responses provided by Luxmi and Vera, the school's alumni network currently consists only of a LinkedIn page where an administrator posts occasional news items and discount codes. However, this network could be leveraged more effectively by introducing alumni events in London. Such events would enhance networking opportunities and generate positive word-of-mouth publicity for the school and its courses. Additionally, these forums could serve as a platform to introduce new products (courses) to the market and gather feedback from a group of industry professionals.

The admissions data indicates that LAMF's summer business school under EE has not generated significant interest, even prior to the pandemic. Existing theories defining EE highlight that these courses are primarily designed for working individuals with industry experience. Consequently, a summer programme aimed at current university students may not appeal to potential applicants seeking EE. Therefore, I recommend relocating the summer business school programme from EE to LAMF's professional school.

Margulies and Gregg (2013) suggest that EE providers typically employ a mixed-method approach for recruiting delegates to their programmes. Given LAMF's limited recruitment channels and Winsor *et al.*'s (2013) finding that training a high-level employee in a large organisation costs approximately US$8,000 annually, LAMF could benefit from establishing a corporate recruitment team alongside a well-connected B2B business development team. As highlighted by Mills and Michael, this approach would allow team members to focus on corporations with training budgets, addressing their training needs with tailored EE solutions. Recruitment efforts could be concentrated on high-value corporate executives, resulting in a greater number of successful enrolments.

Applicants from countries such as Ghana and Nigeria face a distinct disadvantage in demonstrating their language ability compared to those from recognised majority English-speaking countries as pointed out by Selvam and Vera. Despite conducting their schooling, university education, and workplace communications in English, the UK government and higher education institutions do not classify these countries as majority English-speaking. Hence, applicants from these nations are required to prove their English proficiency. However, there is no evidence of applicants from these countries failing to provide adequate proof of language ability. The additional step in the application process results from their countries not being listed as English-speaking nations in the national database. Therefore, I strongly recommend that LAMF review its list of officially recognised majority English-speaking countries or create its own list based on prior experience. This will help ensure that applicants from certain African countries are not unjustly excluded without proper justification..

5.6 Contribution to New Knowledge

Gallagher and Schuler (2013:5) argue for the *immersion experience* when studying an EE course, where they state that getting international exposure in a “major economic and financially growing city” and/or a “cultural or historic city” is a pivotal part of executive education, which was also part of the criteria identified within my theoretical framework under delegate motivation. London meets these criteria, as many international students pursue undergraduate and postgraduate degrees there, contributing to the country’s economy and the financial stability of its universities. Furthermore, Farris *et al.*’s (2003) research, which was based on 80 corporate executives concluded that for EE, participants highlighted the physical location as one of the two important factors (the other being “*taught by an outsider*”) in terms of desired venue. Based on the applicant data from my research, it is evident that the same conclusion cannot be drawn for EE delegates who applied to study at LAMF, as they have not given much prominence to studying in London or the UK as one of their top reasons for undertaking an EE course, as identified within my theoretical framework under “learner motivating factors”. Therefore, existing theories about participant priorities for EE may no longer apply to the post-COVID EE training market, which now has access to advanced online training platforms.

Existing marketing theories, which were also identified within my theoretical framework under "Marketing strategies and sales of EE courses" suggest that to gain a competitive advantage when applying for a job, brand association by attending a good business school or a university will play a prominent role. This is discussed by Collins (2002:1) who points out that "*Job seekers' intentions were directly affected by two dimensions of employment brand equity: brand associations (measured as attraction and perceived job attributes) and perceived quality*", which was also identified within my theoretical framework under "Learner expectations". However, my data based on personal statements revealed that there is minimal evidence to suggest that applicants joined an EE course to associate themselves with LAMF, with an expectation of gaining an advantage over other candidates. Although some participants applied to study a course before a promotion at work, they did so to upskill themselves and become more competent in their respective fields. Therefore, based on my data, it is evident that the majority of EE participants did not apply to study at LAMF because of brand association, contrary to the LAMF staff's perception that participants apply for its name. Therefore, contrary to existing theories, it could be argued that brand association may only be significant for prestigious universities and training providers. This factor likely plays a lesser role in selecting an EE course from non-premium providers.

Existing theories on undertaking EE courses which were based on pre-pandemic (pre-2020) EE participant characteristics, which were also discussed within my theoretical framework under "Teaching and learning strategies adopted by EE providers", including the claims made by Carlsson-Wall and Richtnér (2021) suggest that EE courses are small groups of learners that use a high-quality, physical learning space to engage in proactive discussions with trainers and other learners. However, interview responses from academic staff indicated that some EE courses, including the miniMBA and postgraduate certificate programmes, could achieve similar effectiveness and study experiences using online collaborative tools. While not all EE courses may be equally successful online compared to campus-based formats, business schools can select a subset of their portfolio to offer as online courses. This approach can help maintain effectiveness and ensure programme quality. This will eliminate both the time and costs that are associated with campus-based study while minimising the course's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.

Jahera (2013) claims that academic staff within a business school have a negative view of EE as they perceive the expansion of an EE portfolio as an increased workload, which was also identified within my theoretical framework under "academic staff motivating factors". However, based on my data, where the academic staff of the school are paid hourly as consultants, I can challenge this claim in the context of LAMF where all of the academic staff who were interviewed provided a positive approach to introducing new EE courses within the portfolio. This claim is based on the assumption that pre-development market research is conducted effectively and that the school introduces EE courses in subjects where they excel.

Varner *et al.* (2013) differentiate between EE and continuing education, which was also linked to my theoretical framework's "History of EE Characteristics of EE" section. They argue that the difference is in the target audience where EE equips middle to senior corporate managers while continuing education provides skills such as human resources, problem-solving and computer skills to a wider audience. Based on my data, Varner's approach in generalising the target audience into the above-mentioned sub-sections may not be accurate in terms of including problem-solving skills as being a part of continuing education (only). This is because most of the EE applicants identified problem-solving at work as one of their primary reasons for applying to study an EE course.

My theoretical framework identifies 'Classifying the EE learner,' and Bolt (1993) suggests that EE's intended audience comprises the top 5% of an organisation's management. My data evidenced that for LAMF's EE courses, the global audience varied from C-Suite executives to would-be entrepreneurs to departmental supervisors. Thus, Bolt's (1993) claims may not necessarily reflect or be indicative of EE's target audience in 2024.

Todeva and Knoke (2005) note that companies seeking partnerships with EE providers are primarily motivated by intangible benefits, which were also identified on my theoretical framework under "Corporate partnerships with EE providers". These include prestige, reputation, status, and the recognition of the EE provider's brand, rather than costs, profits, or other tangible benefits. However, based on the interview responses and the personal statements, it is clear, when considering LAMF, that although there is an element of prestige, brand recognition and reputation, there was no mention of corporate clients who have a long-term relationship with the school as an EE provider. Therefore, Todeva and Knoke's recommendations may not be entirely valid for all EE providers, as there may be some EE providers that only focus on individual clients instead of corporate clients. On the other hand, LAMF may want to explore the reasons why corporate clients have not found the school attractive as an EE provider.

My theoretical framework links to "Impact of globalisation on student mobility", King and Sondhi (2017) highlight the negative perception by the UK's lawmakers and the general public about international students from India. The concern was about Indian students using ISM as a means of migrating to the UK. However, personal statements from applicants from India for EE courses reveal that these applicants differ significantly from those applying for long-term qualifications, such as degrees, in the UK. My research data demonstrates that EE applicants from India have the same types of aspirations as any other EE applicant and this is not related to any long-term immigration motives or taking up employment while they are in the UK. Therefore, theories on international student mobility and migration may not fully apply to EE participants. There are notable differences in characteristics and behaviour between EE delegates and international students, even though overseas EE delegates are considered international students by the host organisation.

In conclusion, EE delegates do not seem to share the same characteristics or long-term immigration plans as other students in higher education courses. They do not appear to be concerned about collecting academic credits or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Instead, EE delegates primarily pursue EE to update their knowledge and address skill gaps, with a clear understanding of how they will apply this knowledge. However, EE providers often treat EE delegates the same way as they do other students. Participation and sponsorship in EE programmes do not seem to be influenced by gender. Contrary to existing generalisations, post-COVID EE delegates may not prioritise location or brand association (except for prestigious universities) when selecting an EE course. Thanks to technological advancements, EE delegates seem to have a similar level of interaction with each other as they would in a physical classroom. Some EE providers do not appear to tap into corporate training budgets by working with companies to offer bespoke EE courses tailored to their skill gaps. Additionally, corporate sponsors do not seem to have a clear method for evaluating post-course skill improvements in their employees who participate in EE. Finally, academic staff motivation and engagement depend on each individual's worldview and attitude toward the provider.

The absence of systematic funding for EE courses, similar to the Student Finance England (SFE) system, creates a vicious cycle that hampers access for women from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those who may have taken career breaks, as well as marginalised groups. Without sufficient financial support, many individuals from lower-income backgrounds are unable to afford EE, which is increasingly recognised as a crucial factor for career advancement and promotions within organisations. This disparity reinforces existing inequalities, as those unable to invest in their professional development are less likely to achieve leadership roles. Jena and Reilly (2013) highlight how economic conditions can limit access to educational opportunities, while Sunder (2021) highlights the systemic barriers faced by underrepresented populations. Moreover, the financialisation of education, as discussed by King and Sondhi (2017), further commodifies higher education, making it even less accessible. To break this cycle and ensure social justice, it is essential that funding mechanisms be established to support EE, enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to acquire the vital skills needed for success and upward mobility in their careers.

5.7 Limitations of the Study

The study was based on LAMF, a private EE provider based in London, where both interviewees and applicant data come from LAMF. Hence, the results and conclusions are mostly organisation-specific as opposed to industry-specific. This may limit the transferability of conclusions to other business schools and non-UK-based business schools, yet findings could relate to those EE providers with similar characteristics.

This single-researcher-led study, conducted by the researcher in their role as academic director for the school, has taken every possible step to mitigate bias and prejudice. Following Patton's (1999) guidelines, the research employs triangulation of theories, data sources, and methods to enhance objectivity. Efforts also include an awareness of acquiescence bias, or friendliness bias, as outlined by Sarniak (2015). Additionally, social desirability bias, emphasised by Larson (2019), is considered particularly relevant when respondents discuss sensitive topics, as self-presentation concerns may lead them to underreport controversial views and overreport socially acceptable ones, as noted by Krumpal (2013). Finally, potential unconscious researcher bias and limitations in interpreting results are acknowledged as factors that may influence the study's outcomes.

Interviews took place during the global pandemic, a period when staff redundancies were common, which limited the number of available respondents to seven. Given that the researcher has either direct or indirect authority over the participants, there was a risk of respondents adopting a "*tell him what he wants to hear*" stance. To address this potential bias, both written and verbal pre-interview discussions were held to clarify that the researcher was acting solely as an academic and that interview responses would not affect professional relationships. Additionally, participants were informed that only summaries or excerpts might appear in the doctoral thesis, with assurances of anonymity and the re-assurance that raw data would remain confidential. This approach aimed to mitigate social desirability bias, as noted by Larson (2019).

Originally a campus-based institution, the school transitioned to an online business school in response to COVID-19. This shift brought extensive changes not only in operations but also in collaboration and communication platforms, affecting "*the way we do things around the school*". The rapid adjustments in teaching methods and collaborative tools, coupled with the pandemic's social and personal impact on staff, may have adversely affected both staff wellbeing and the overall study experience for participants. Additionally, travel restrictions likely limited the classroom-based experience and reduced networking opportunities within LAMF's EE from 2020 onward. Hence, this study's findings capture a unique period of change, offering insights into how these transformations have shaped both the school's operational dynamics and the educational experiences of its participants.

All LAMF academic staff members are external consultants, differing from the typical structure in higher education, where faculty are predominantly internal. This strategy enables the school to reduce payroll costs by paying industry experts based only on the hours spent teaching. However, it also contributes to low levels of commitment, motivation, and organisational dedication. Interview findings revealed varied levels of motivation and belongingness among respondents, suggesting that engagement in introducing new courses may not be as robust as in institutions with internal faculty. Therefore, insights related to staff motivation and involvement may not directly apply to other business schools.

Although a random sample of applications was selected, incomplete applications were excluded from data analysis due to missing essential details needed to match applicants to specific courses. There is no record of whether these applicants were accepted, despite the incomplete information. Due to the low volume of applications in 2020 and 2021, all intakes for those years were combined, whereas 2019 applications were categorised by Spring, Summer, and Autumn intakes. This reduction in applications stemmed from the pandemic and the transition from campus-based to online delivery. The limited sample size for 2020-2021 did not allow for identifying patterns related to equal opportunities across gender, disability, nationality, or the impact of the shift to online study. The data was also insufficient to determine any correlations between course type and applicant characteristics such as gender, age, or educational background, reflecting a period of unique circumstances that may not represent typical trends.

5.8 Application to Wider EE Sector

The findings reveal that applicants for the EE courses showed no interest in earning academic credits, nor did they request to be taught at postgraduate level. This is clearly the case as none of the 391 applicants mentioned acquisition of academic credit. Personal statements indicated that applicants had a clear understanding of the course content in advance. In a broader context, EE could be positioned as a non-credit-bearing, specialised short course, independent of a specific level on the FHEQ framework for higher education (QAA, 2021). This approach aligns with the observed preferences of applicants, who appear more focused on acquiring targeted expertise than on fulfilling formal academic standards. Further, none of the applicants or interview respondents made specific references to FHEQ level of a course.

A broader insight for the EE sector, as stated by Winsor *et al.* (2013) and reiterated by interviewees Michael and Mills, is that many corporations maintain substantial training budgets allocated for annual use. The percentage of sponsored delegates, both domestically and internationally, suggests that EE currently takes only a modest share of these budgets.

For EE providers, assessing and strengthening corporate partnerships can help secure a more substantial presence within these training allocations. Using established frameworks like the Competing Values Framework (CVF) to identify skill gaps within partner organisations would enable EE providers to offer customised training solutions. Additionally, forming curriculum development or steering committees that involve key employers could help EE providers create a portfolio of specialised courses aligned with corporate needs. This aligns with the comments made by Tom and Mills during the interviews. This would ensure that corporate clients receive tailored training that equips employees with essential technical, conceptual, and strategic skills, fostering a sustainable competitive edge for their businesses.

EE providers could further enhance their value to corporate clients by establishing collaborative mechanisms with employers to assess post-training effectiveness and the practical application of skills within the workplace. While existing literature acknowledges the importance of this aspect, there is little evidence that it is broadly practised across the corporate sector. Despite the significant investment corporates make in training, efforts to measure the practical impact of acquired skills and enforce post-training accountability seem limited in comparison to the focus on assessing training needs. Developing robust post-training evaluations would allow EE providers to offer insights into the tangible benefits of their programmes, helping corporates justify their training expenditures and refine future training investments. This aligns with Mills's and Manuela's recommendations about conducting post-course evaluations for sponsored delegates in order to ascertain achievement of corporate goals by the participants undertaking EE courses of study.

The data on campus-based EE courses indicates a mixed demographic, including both international applicants who require a visa and those who do not. For EE providers that are integrated with a visa sponsor institution, such as a university, or those approved to issue short-term study visas, this represents a competitive edge over specialist training providers without such authorisation, as pointed out by Selvam during the interview. It may be advantageous for these unauthorised providers to consider registration under a recognised accreditation framework, such as that of the British Accreditation Council (BAC UK), which provides robust quality assurance for educational programmes. By obtaining accreditation, these providers can demonstrate course quality and procedural integrity, potentially enabling them to issue sponsorship letters for short-term visitor visas. This approach could broaden their appeal to international applicants and enhance the perceived credibility of their offerings.

Farris *et al.* (2003) identifies travel distance and the location of training organisations as important factors influencing learners' choices of EE providers. However, personal statements evaluated during my study reveals a notable shift during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as both learners and EE providers adapted to new norms. The transition to virtual learning environments enabled collaboration and knowledge transfer, enabling providers to go beyond geographic boundaries and offer synchronous teaching without requiring physical proximity between learners and facilitators.

The pandemic prompted considerable advancements in collaborative tools, introducing a range of options for online engagement, including chat rooms, discussion forums, quizzes, screen sharing, voting, and collaborative whiteboards. While course facilitators possess expertise in their subject areas, they may lack proficiency in technology, resulting in underutilisation of these innovations in EE training sessions. This was highlighted by Mills during his interview. To address this issue, it is advisable for EE training organisations to offer ongoing professional development for academic staff focused on the operational functionality of collaborative platforms. This initiative would enable lecturers to maximise the use of available tools, eventually enhancing the quality of the learning experience for EE learners.

For EE providers, the data presented in Figure 4.9 indicates that a notable majority of EE applicants hold an undergraduate degree, with only a small fraction holding a doctoral degree or a chartered qualification at the time of application. Table 4.7 reveals that most applicants pursued admission through the degree route rather than the mature entry route, further supporting the dominance of degree-level qualifications among applicants. In terms of gender representation, there is no notable disparity in the number of applicants across different categories; however, it is important to note the absence of applications from non-binary individuals. This information could be crucial for EE providers as they consider strategies for developing targeted marketing campaigns. By utilising these insights, particularly in creating marketing and promotional content for social media platforms, providers can more effectively allocate their marketing budget and engage with their desired audience.

As Lippert (2001) suggests, EE is evolving from traditional university based frameworks to industry-focused specialised programmes, delivered by industry experts who are knowledgeable about the latest trends and developments in their respective fields. EE providers should engage external lecturers in a sustained, meaningful, and adequately compensated manner. The variation in terms of level of motivation was evident in terms of the comments made by Mills and Manuela, who held contrasting views in terms of their position within the school. This engagement should incorporate involvement in curriculum development, promotional initiatives, and comprehensive evaluation systems. Furthermore, it is essential to establish a feedback and feed-forward mechanism, where constructive feedback from lecturers is actively considered, and timely actions are taken in response. Additionally, providers should ensure that lecturers receive updates regarding the actions taken based on their feedback, fostering a collaborative environment that enhances the overall quality of the EE experience.

5.9 Recommendations for Further Research

The findings indicate that during the data collection period (2019-2021), no applicants with disabilities applied for EE courses at LAMF. However, it is unclear whether this absence reflects a lack of disabled applicants or if those with disabilities chose not to disclose their status due to factors not captured in the data collection strategy. This raises questions about the potential reluctance to disclose disabilities in an academic context. The primary aim of gathering such information is to facilitate reasonable adjustments for individuals. Future research could explore barriers to disclosure and identify strategies to create a more inclusive environment. This would encourage individuals with disabilities to apply and share their needs without fear of stigma or negative repercussions.

Further research could explore whether employers who sponsor their staff tend to overlook individuals with criminal convictions, denying them the same opportunities afforded to those without. Additionally, examining the reintegration of individuals with spent convictions into society could provide insights into their access to job opportunities and advancement to managerial levels that would benefit from EE. According to the charity Unlock (2022), there are 11 million citizens in the UK with a criminal record, and one-third of those are on jobseeker's allowance. This statistic may shed light on the findings of the 2010 report "*Prejudged: Tagged for Life*" published by the UK charity Working Links, which indicated that over 75% of employers discriminate against individuals with a criminal record based on a sample of 300 employers. These issues highlight the need for further investigation into the barriers faced by this demographic in the workplace.

My research findings align with the claims made by Unlock (2022), as my dataset of 391 applications revealed no declarations of convictions. This suggests either that individuals who disclosed a conviction to their employer did not advance to a level qualifying for executive education, or that none of the applicants felt confident enough to disclose such a conviction. In addition to recommending further research in this area, it is essential to promote legislative changes and awareness programmes for recruitment managers and HR professionals regarding applicants with criminal records. Notably, the UK's Rehabilitation of Offenders Act stipulates that employers have a duty of care towards their employees. Further investigation could determine whether this duty of care extends equally to individuals with a criminal record. On the other hand, future research could explore whether self-funded applicants with criminal convictions can achieve financial stability and prosperity comparable to others. This would assess whether the affordability of EE poses a barrier to their career progression and financial independence.

Interviews for the current study revealed varying levels of motivation and commitment among academic staff. While some tutors felt integrated into the school's management, others viewed themselves as hourly paid external contractors. Given that all academic staff receive identical teaching contracts and workloads, it is crucial to explore the reasons behind these differences in commitment and loyalty. This exploration could extend existing theories on motivation, particularly Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory. Future research could examine how different subject experts perceive their engagement with the host organisation and how this affects course success. This area is important, as many business schools depend on external subject experts for specialised, industry-oriented courses, as highlighted by Amdam (2016).

It appears that delegates from certain countries requiring a visa to enter the UK have a clear plan for using the knowledge gained from their studies to advance their careers upon returning home. However, sales staff expressed concerns that some applicants may exploit the school's admissions system as a means to travel to the UK, particularly noting suspicions around applications from Nigeria, Ghana, and India.

Despite these concerns, the personal statements from these applicants did not significantly differ from those of other candidates. Therefore, further research is necessary to determine whether delegates return to their home countries and apply the knowledge acquired from their executive education courses in the UK. Additionally, further research can be undertaken to assess the genuineness of such personal statements as a separate study. Such efforts could help address the stigma associated with applications from these countries, thereby reducing the negative bias and scrutiny that these applicants may face due to staff perceptions.

Existing theories indicate that individuals engage in EE not only to learn from lecturers but also to forge important networks with industry practitioners. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most EE courses were conducted on campus; however, the shift to online and blended learning has changed this format. Post-pandemic, many individuals appear hesitant to commute for work or study, having recognised the advantages of modern collaborative tools. This shift introduces a new dimension to networking in education, suggesting that the traditional emphasis on in-person interactions may need to be re-evaluated. The role of face-to-face networking in EE might not hold the same significance in the post-COVID blended study experience, prompting a critical re-examination of existing theories surrounding EE. Further research could explore how virtual networking influences learning outcomes and professional connections, reshaping our understanding of the value of EE in a changing educational environment.

Existing research indicates that most EE programmes worldwide are designed as non-credit-bearing professional development initiatives. It is worth exploring whether assigning academic credit under a national framework for higher or professional education could enhance the value of these programmes. Such an approach may enable participants without formal qualifications to accumulate academic credits, ultimately allowing them to progress towards a formal higher-level qualification. Additionally, there is potential for individuals to earn CPD hours through short courses, with the possibility of converting these hours into academic credit. This could facilitate the transition to credit-bearing qualifications based on the total CPD hours accumulated. However, it is crucial to recognise that not all CPD courses are linked to a qualification level within national qualifications frameworks, which may hinder the recognition and perceived value of the awards these courses confer upon completion.

Winsor *et al.* (2013), referencing research from the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), found that in the USA, a key benchmark for training is the expenditure per employee, while in Europe, it is measured as a percentage of overall payroll. Asian organisations lag behind on both metrics. However, based on interview responses and personal statements, there was no clear indication of the effectiveness of corporate training budgets. A systematic approach to budget allocation or a formal method for evaluating the impact of training on employees, such as changes in behaviour, productivity, or teamwork, was notably absent. Given that Winsor *et al.*'s (2013) research is over a decade old, further investigation is warranted into how UK-based organisations set training budgets and assess the effectiveness of the training provided.

All applicants identified themselves as either male or female. This raises questions for further research into whether individuals from other gender identities feel reluctant to disclose their gender on academic applications. Additionally, there is an opportunity to explore whether individuals from non-binary or other gender groups face discrimination in terms of promotions, sponsorships, or equal opportunities at work. Finally, it may be worthwhile to investigate the possibility of eliminating gender-related questions from applications, particularly if such inquiries have no relevance to the selection process or participation in specific courses of study.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Mature route Admissions assessment form

<anonymised> Executive Education
Criteria for Matriculation under Experience

Applicants Details

Applicants Name:	**Course Applied for:** PGC MKT

Evidence provided in support of application

	Yes	No	Comments
Company letter/Letter of reference	☒	☐	
Job description	☒	☐	______ CV
Curriculum vitae	☒	☐	______
Application form incl. Personal statement	☒	☐	______
All qualification certificates	☐	☒	
Passport copy, driving license, etc.	☒	☐	
Proof of English language	☒	☐	Emp letter

Details of any additional evidence (e.g. a job portfolio):

1. ______
2. ______
3. ______

The applicant has provided complete, correct and authentic evidence in support of this application:

YES ☒ **NO** ☐

Minimum Criteria

Minimum Criteria ***Please tick the appropriate box and give additional comments where appropriate***				
	Yes	**No**	**Any additional comments**	**Evidenced in**
The applicant is 23 years of age or older.	☒	☐		PP
Applicant meets the English Language requirement.	☒	☐		Emp letter
PGC Mkt The applicant has five (5) years of work experience in a professional capacity	☒	☐		CV
[Name of Course/Programme] The applicant has five (5) years of work experience in a professional capacity	☐	☐		
[Name of Course/Programme] The applicant has five (5) years of work experience in a professional capacity	☐	☐		
The applicant meets the minimum criteria: **YES** ☒ **NO** ☐				
Additional comments if any: POE, Passport to be submitted, in order to meet minimum criteria				

Course Relevance				
What course they applying for	**Yes**	**No**	**Any additional comments**	**Evidenced in**
Applicant has career achievements in the relevant field of the course applied for.	☒	☐		Personal Statement
Applicant has provided a complete account of his/her work experience and it directly relates to the course applied for.	☒	☐		CV
The applicant is prepared appropriately compared to a candidate matriculating based on existing academic qualifications	☒	☐		CV
Future Aspiration				
	Yes	**No**	**Any additional comments**	**Evidenced in**
The applicant's career goals and **future aspirations match clearly with the course applied for.**	☒	☐		PS
The course **will help** the **applicant** to meet his/her long-term career aspiration	☒	☐		PS
The applicant has met all the requirements of General Criteria:			**YES** ☒ **NO** ☐	
Additional comments if any: ______				
Admissions department endorses the application for matriculation				
Application Accepted	**Yes** ☒		**No** ☐	
If No, please provide details: ***(e.g.** the applicant failed to meet the minimum criteria)* ______				

General Criteria

Management Criteria (for miniMBA applicants ONLY)				
Is the applicant managing people or processes	**Yes**	**No**	**Any additional comments**	**Evidenced in**
Applicant's **position** in the Company is clearly defined and demonstrates that he has management-level responsibilities.	☐	☐		
Applicant has **line manager responsibilities** for more than two people	☐	☐		
Applicant's **roles and responsibilities** clearly identify that the applicant is responsible for working in a managerial role.	☐	☐		

Name:	Signature:	Date:06/04/2020
Supervisor Name: _____	**Signature:** _____	**Date:**
Comments (if applicable): _____		

Guidance Notes:

Applicants Details and Evidence

- Applicant's details must be completed.
- The list of evidence must be complete in order to proceed with the application. If the applicant fails to provide any of the evidence listed above, his/her application will be automatically rejected.
- Each criterion will be matched with the evidence provided by the applicant. The relevant evidence must be included in **Evidenced in** section.
- Copies of evidence will be kept with this form for audit purposes.
- Ensure that the evidence provided is correct and authentic.

Minimum Criteria

- In each case ensure that the minimum criteria have to be met before proceeding to General Criteria. If the applicant fails to meet minimum criteria his/her application will be rejected.
- In order to meet minimum criteria, the applicant **must** be 23 years of age or older, meets English Language requirement and have five (5) years of work experience in a professional capacity

General Criteria

- When scrutinising applicant's previous experience you should consider the following:
  a) whether the applicant has accumulated sufficient experience to prepare himself/herself for the course of study;
  b) whether the applicant's experience is of relevance to the course;
  c) whether the applicant is prepared appropriately compared to a candidate matriculating on the basis of existing academic qualifications;
  d) whether the candidate has adequate English (or other) language ability.
- Ensure that all General criteria requirements have been met either by ticking **YES** box

Additional Comments.

- If applicant fails to meet all the requirements under General Criteria, his/her application will be rejected.

Appendix 2 – English language proficiency interview record

English Language Proficiency Questionnaire

Applicant Name

Applicant ID Number (if applicable)

Programme Name

Start date

Rating Scale

1 –Poor	2 – Unsatisfactory	3 - Acceptable	4 – Good	5 - Excellent

Written questions on the application	**Applicants answer rating**
1. What are the primary duties/responsibilities associated with your current role?	3
2. What element(s) of the course outline are of most interest to you?	3
3. How do they relate to your objectives?	3
4. How would you like this course to influence your current role or future aspirations?	3

Phone Interview date	**Phone Interview notes**	**Phone Interview Rating**
02/07/2021		3

Interviewers Name:	
Interviewer Signature:	
Date:	

'Under Patronage of

HRH Prince <anonymised>

Executive Education Programmes

Application Form 2018

I am applying for the following programme:

Postgraduate Certificate	☐
Short Courses	☐
Management Development Programme	☐
Leadership Development Programme	☐
Professional Development Programme	☐
Summer Business School	☐
Winter Business School	☐
Corporate Training	☐
Internship	☐

Application Deadlines

Due to a high demand for our Executive Education Programmes, places are limited. We therefore advise that you apply as early as possible. For any general enquiries and to send complete application forms please contact us at: executiveadmissions@<anonymised>.uk

+44 (0) 20 <anonymised>.

Programme Information

For course start dates and timetable information, contact our Programme Advisors or executiveadmissions@**<anonymised>.**.uk or +44 (0) 20 <anonymised>..

Please Note: Information is accurate as of date of publication and may be subject to change or review.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Delegate ID:

Before completing this form, please ensure that you have read the full <ANONYMISED>. General Terms and Conditions found on the <anonymised>. *website: http://www.<anonymised>..org.uk/terms-and-conditions.html, and the Terms and Conditions found on the back of this form.*

1. PERSONAL DETAILS

Title (Dr, Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms):		Date of Birth (DD/MM/YYYY):	
Surname/Family Name:		Country of Birth:	
First/Given Name:		Country of Residence:	
Preferred Name :		Principal Nationality:	
Gender:		Secondary Nationality:	

If you hold a UK Visa please state the type of UK Visa you hold: ____________

2. CONTACT DETAILS

Term-time Address (UK address details)

Address Line 1		Primary E-mail	
Address Line 2		Other E-mail	
City/Town		Home Phone	
Postcode		Business Phone	
Country		Mobile Phone	

Permanent Address (if different from the above. International students please also provide an overseas address)

Address Line 1 ______________________ Postcode ______________________

Address Line 2 ______________________ Country ______________________

City/Town ______________________

3. ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

(A) Is English your first Language?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

(B) Have you taken any English language examinations or standardised tests (e.g. TOEFL, IELTS, Cambridge First Certificate)?

☐ **No** Please go to **(C)**

☐ **Yes** Please give details and enclose a copy of your certificate (if you were given one):

Name of Test Taken: Result Score:

(C) How would you describe your level of English?

☐ **Fluent**

☐ **Advanced**

☐ **Intermediate**

☐ **Elementary/Beginner**

4. WORK EXPERIENCE & EDUCATION HISTORY

Please provide a CV (maximum 2 sides of A4) detailing all your work experience and educational history.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Please write a personal statement, taking into account the questions below (no more than 200 words):

What are the primary duties/responsibilities associated with your current role?

What element(s) of the course outline are of most interest to you – how do they relate to your objectives?

How would you like this course to influence your current role or future aspirations?

You may continue on a separate sheet if required

5. PLEASE CHOOSE FROM THE AVAILABLE COURSES AND STUDY OPTIONS

Guide: For a Post Graduate Certificate, please choose a minimum of 4 courses. They can be from the same area of study or from a combination of two areas.

***Please Note** – Pay only **£5,100** for Post Graduate Certificates with five courses.

COURSE	DURATION	HOURS	INTAKE			PRICE
Postgraduate Certificate in Management			SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	£4500
The full Programme select 4 courses			FEB	MAY	SEP	
Business Development Techniques	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Entrepreneurship	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150

COURSE	DURATION	HOURS	INTAKE			PRICE
HR Development and Talent Management	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
International Business	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Management and Leadership	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Project Management	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Strategic Business Management	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150

Postgraduate Certificate in Finance			SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	£4500
The full Programme select 4 courses			FEB	MAY	SEP	
Accounting for Performance and Control	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Corporate Finance	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Financial Markets: Trading and Analysis	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Financial Modelling	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Financial Risk Management	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Mergers and Acquisitions	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Project Finance	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Understanding Financial Statements	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150

Postgraduate Certificate in Marketing			SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	£4500
The full Programme select 4 courses			FEB	MAY	SEP	
Brand Management	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Consumer Behaviour Analysis	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Content Marketing and SEO	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Data Analytics in Marketing	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150

COURSE	DURATION	HOURS	INTAKE			PRICE
Digital Marketing	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150
Marketing Strategy	12 weeks	30	☐	☐	☐	£1150

COURSE	DURATION	HOURS	INTAKE			PRICE
Short Courses			SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	
Digital Marketing and Social Media	4 days	28	☐	☐	☐	£1595
Finance for Non-Finance Managers	4 days	28	☐	☐	☐	£1595
Financial Planning and Analysis	4 days	28	☐	☐	☐	£1595
Management Consulting and Project Management	4 days	28	☐	☐	☐	£1595
Strategic Brand Management	4 days	28	☐	☐	☐	£1595
Strategic Business Planning	4 days	28	☐	☐	☐	£1595
Strategic Leadership and Change	4 days	28	☐	☐	☐	£1595
MiniMBA	4 days	28	☐	☐	☐	£2200
Business Innovation	4 Days	28	☐	☐	☐	£1595

Management Development Programme			SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	**£2800**
The full programme select all 4 courses						
Business Strategy	3 days	21	☐	☐	☐	£850
Effective Management Techniques	2 days	14	☐	☐	☐	£650
Managerial Finance	3 days	21	☐	☐	☐	£850
Marketing Planning and Strategy	2 days	14	☐	☐	☐	£650

Professional Development Programme			SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	**£1995**
Professional Development Programme	5 days	35	☐	☐	☐	£1995

Leadership Development Programme			SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	**£1995**
Leadership Development Programme	5 days	35	☐	☐	☐	£1995

Summer Business School				SUMMER		
Full programme select all 3 courses						**£1950**
Corporate Finance in Practice	4 ½ days	25		☐		£850
Global Marketing Practices	4 ½ days	25		☐		£850
Strategic Management & Leadership	4 ½ days	25		☐		£850

Winter Business School			WINTER			
Full programme select all 3 courses						**£1950**
Corporate Finance in Practice	4 ½ days	25	☐			£850
Global Marketing Practices	4 ½ days	25	☐			£850
Strategic Management & Leadership	4 ½ days	25	☐			£850

Internship			SPRING	SUMMER	WINTER	**£600**
Internship			☐	☐	☐	£600

<ANONYMISED>.(<ANONYMISED>.) EXECUTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES TERMS & CONDITIONS

These Terms and Conditions together with the <ANONYMISED>. General Terms and Conditions set out the basis on which We shall provide the Programme. Nothing in this Contract relates to any accommodation, travel or any social activities which You might arrange with Us concerning the Programme; any such accommodation, travel or social activities will be subject to separate terms and conditions.

Meanings

In these Terms and Conditions:

"Business Day" means a day on which banks are open for general business in London (other than a Saturday or Sunday).

"Commencement Date" date You sign the declaration in these Terms and Conditions.

"Contract" means the contract (of which these terms and conditions form part) made between Us and You in relation to Your place on the Programme.

"Deferral" means postponing Programme Start Date.

"Intake" means any one of three terms of entry being either spring, summer or autumn.

"You, Your, Yourself" means the individual who has applied to participate in the Programme and We have agreed to admit to the Programme.

“the Programme” means the Programme at <ANONYMISED>. which the You are to attend.

“Programme Start Date” means the date Programme course commences.

“We, Us, Our” means **<anonymised>.(UK) LIMITED incorporated and registered in England and Wales with Company Number** <ANONYMISED>**)** whose main office and address for service of legal documents is UK <ANONYMISED>.

“Transfer” means changing Programme.

1. Course Fees

1.1 You will be required to pay Us a fee in order to take up the place on the Programme (Programme Fee). You must pay the Programme Fee within fourteen (14) days of the date of the letter We send to You confirming an offer of a place on the Programme (Confirmed Offer Letter).

1.2 You may be required to pay a non-refundable deposit in order to reserve a place on the Programme. Deposits will only be returned in certain cases where the visa has been refused (see Refunds section of <ANONYMISED>. General Terms and Conditions).

1.3 You may agree in accordance with the Flexible Payment Plan Terms and Conditions (see <ANONYMISED>. Terms and conditions webpage) http://www.<anonymised>..org.uk/terms-and-conditions.html to pay the Programme Fee in instalments. There is an administration fee payable of £50 per instalment.

1.4 We may suspend and/or dismiss You at any time if You fail to pay any sum owing to Us under these Terms and Conditions or in connection with the Programme by the due date for payment.

1.5 We will send You an Invoice for the Programme Fee. Details of how and when to pay the Programme Fee will be provided in the Invoice.

1.6 Late payments are subject to interest charges at 4% per annum above the base rate for the time being of <ANONYMISED>Plc on the amount from time to time outstanding from the due date up to the date of actual payment (Default Rate). Interest shall be compounded quarterly. Any interest payable by You shall be payable within five (5) Business Days after Our written demand.

1.7 We reserve the right to change the Programme Fee at any time. The Programme Fee is published on Our website. The date on which the revised Programme Fee applies is the date of publication. If You have paid the Programme Fee before the date of publication of the revised Programme Fee You will not be liable for any shortfall.

2. Attendance and Registration

2.1 You are expected to attend 100% of Your classes provided on the Programme and must provide documentary evidence to excuse any absences due to ill health or personal circumstances.

2.2 If Your attendance is less than 80% of Your classes You may fail the course and/or be expelled from the Programme.

2.3 All Programmes must be completed within a year of the Programme Start Date.

2.4 You will not be entitled to any refund if You do not adhere to the attendance requirements.

2.5 Registration on the Programme constitutes registration as a student with the <ANONYMISED>. You agree to be bound by <ANONYMISED>.'s Delegate Code of Conduct and Terms and Conditions (as set out on the <ANONYMISED>. website).

3. Transfers and Deferrals

3.1 You may transfer Your place on a Programme or transfer onto another Executive Education course (Transfer), subject to submitting an application form in writing to Us (including if required, an Extenuating Circumstances Form), and subject to Our prior approval for the request to Transfer.

3.2 You may apply to Defer Your place on a Programme under the terms set out in the <ANONYMISED>. General Terms and Conditions.

3.3 You will be required to pay an administration fee to Transfer or Defer.

3.4 You may only apply to Transfer for entry into the immediately following Intake provided that the request is for an Intake within the same calendar year i.e. it is not permitted to Transfer from Autumn intake to Spring.

3.5 You must make an application for Deferrals or Transfer in writing no later than two (2) weeks after the start date of the Programme.

3.6 Late applications for Deferral or Transfer will be considered where special circumstances apply. You must submit the Extenuating Circumstances Form together with supporting evidence which can be requested by Our Executive Education Administration.

3.7 Determining whether or not Your circumstances are extenuating and or exceptional is at Our sole discretion.

3.8 All Transfer and Defferal decisions are at Our sole and absolute discretion.

4. Cancellation

4.1 You may cancel the Contract in accordance with <ANONYMISED>. General Terms and Conditions as published on Our website.

4.2 There will be no refund of the Programme Fee if You withdraw from the Progamme at any stage after the Programme Start Date. If You withdraw from the Programme either without Our prior consent or after the Programme Start Date, We reserve the right to pursue You for any outstanding fees in relation to the Programme Fee.

4.3 We may cancel the Contract at any time if:

a. You fail to pay any sum owing to Us under these Terms and Conditions;
b. You do not adhere to these Terms and Conditions;
c. You supply Us with incorrect, fraudulent or misleading information;
d. You behave in a manner that in Our opinion is prejudicial to Our interests or reputation; or
e. the Programme is cancelled.

4.4 We may cancel the Contract at our discretion for any reason by giving You notice in writing 30 days prior to the Programme Start Date.

4.5 We accept no liability for any costs or losses incurred by You through cancellation of the Contract.

4.6 If either You or We cancel the Contract We shall require You to stop studying on the Programme, leave the premises immediately and return any property including Security Passes that belong to Us.

5. Amendments to the Programme

5.1 We will make all reasonable efforts to deliver the Programme as described in the brochure and on Our website. We must manage Our resources efficiently and shall be entitled to alter published programmes, course dates, location, timetables, number of classes tutors, course specifications, the content of lectures and/or study materials and method of delivery of the Programme.

5.2 We may make reasonable variations to the content and syllabus of the Programme. The availability of Programmes is subject to student demand.

5.3 We will make available to You such learning support, IT and other facilities We consider appropriate but do not guarantee availability of the resources and other added-value services due to reasons beyond Our control, including technical faults and limitations.

6. Visas

6.1 You should only apply for a “Short Study Visa”. All queries relating to the application should be directed to the local British embassy.

6.2 You shall comply with all United Kingdom entry and visa requirements.

6.3 You shall adhere and abide by any stipulated attendance and/or immigration regulations.

6.4 You must familiarise Yourself with UK Visas and Immigration regulations and at all times abide by the conditions of Your visa.

6.5 You must inform Us immediately of any change to Your immigration status.

6.6 We reserve the right to disclose Your details, including academic progress and attendance rates to the Home Office.

6.7 We provide educational services and are NOT immigration advisers. We are not regulated to offer any immigration advice. If you require immigration advice, you should seek independent legal advice as We cannot and do not offer any immigration advice.

6.8 You are solely and entirely responsible for the validity and accuracy of Your visa application including ensuring that You meet the relevant Immigration Authority requirements.

6.9 We have no responsibility for any visa refusal including but not limited to the You failing to provide the necessary documents, failing to demonstrate adequate financial support, submitting an incomplete application, false representations being made, or forgery of documents.

7. Refund Policy (Visa Refusal Cases Only)

7.1 If Your Visa application is late or refused and Your enrolment has already been processed, You shall not be entitled to a refund.

7.2 You agree that You have read and further agree to be bound by Our General Refund Policy (the terms of which may be found on the website: http://www.<anonymised>..org.uk/terms-and-conditions). Note that Our General Refund Policy provides that You will not be entitled to a refund unless You submit Your application for a refund at least 15 days prior to the Commencement Date.

7.3 If Your visa application has been refused and You are eligible for a refund in accordance with Our General Refund Policy then the fees paid will be refunded less the administration charge of £150 (plus any courier and transfer charges) on production of the following documents:

a. copy of the Visa Refusal Letter;

b. copy of the Your passport showing both a photograph and signature; and

c. where the payee was someone other than You, an original authority letter from You authorising the repayment to the original payee.

7.4 If You do not comply with the refund procedure, You will NOT be eligible for a refund save in exceptional circumstances which shall be at Our sole discretion.

8. Your Responsibilities

8.1 You shall conduct Yourself, at all times, in accordance with Delegate Code of Conduct (details of which are available on Our website) and in particular behave with honesty and integrity and show courtesy, consideration and respect for others.

8.2 You shall ensure all documents and information You provide to Us are true, authentic and correct.

8.3 You shall attend all classes, lectures, tutorials, examinations and other activities which form part of the Programme (subject to absence for medical or other prior agreed reasons).

8.4 You shall contact Our staff as soon as possible if You are unable to attend the Programme classes.

8.5 You shall abide by Our terms and conditions or rules and regulations relating to the Programme as notified to You in any of our policies and procedures or otherwise and as amended from time to time.

8.6 You shall comply with any UK Visa requirements including ensuring sufficient time for visa applications to avoid being subject to Transfer, Defferal and/or Us having to cancel the contract with You.

8.7 You shall fully acknowledge the use of material referred to or copied from other sources.

8.8 You shall not make any un-authorised visual and/or audio recordings of lecture and other learning and teaching activities. We may destroy any such recordings.

8.9 You shall have a satisfactory level of written and spoken English language as required in Our entry requirements. If Your level is later found not to be at the required level, We may require You to complete a written and oral assessment.

9. Legal

9.1 To the extent permitted by law, We do not accept any responsibility and expressly exclude liability for any loss or damage to You or Your property that occurs while You are on the Programme.

9.2 The Contract (including non-contractual disputes or claims) is governed by English law and the parties submit to the exclusive jurisdiction of the English Courts.

9.3 This Contract together with <anonymised>. General Terms and Conditions, [Flexible Payment Plan Terms and Conditions, Delegate Code of Conduct] constitute the entire agreement between the parties and supersedes and extinguishes all previous agreements, promises, assurances, warranties, representations and understandings between them, whether written or oral, relating to its subject matter.

9.4 The Contract (Rights of Third Parties) Act 1999 shall not apply to the Contract.

9.5 If any provision of this Contract is or becomes invalid, illegal or unenforceable, it shall be deemed modified to the minimum extent necessary to make it valid, legal and enforceable.

9.6 You acknowledge that We are registered as a data controller under the Data Protection Act 1998 and agree that personal data about You ("Personal Data") may be processed by Us.

9.7 <ANONYMISED>. Terms and Conditions are subject to change. We communicate changes through updates to our websites. It is advisable to regularly check for updates.

DELEGATES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The information you provide, will be held in confidence, and will not be seen by, nor made known to any sector. It will be used only to monitor the operation of our Equal Opportunity Policy, and for normal academic and administrative purposes in accordance with the principles set out in the 1998 Data Protection Act.

a. <ANONYMISED>. is committed to ensuring that every student is as comfortable as possible during his or her time with us. Do you have any medical conditions (including pregnancy) that may require special examination arrangements or may affect your attendance on the course and/or the taking of examinations?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If "Yes", please describe your condition(s):

b. Taking into account the condition(s) that you described in (a.) above, do you have any special requirements with regard to the materials that we will be providing in support of your studies (for example, large print or Braille transcripts)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If "Yes", please describe your condition(s):

6. DECLARATION OF CRIMINAL RECORD

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act

You are required to state whether you have any criminal convictions (as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974), by ticking the appropriate box on the application form.

Have you ever had a criminal conviction? ☐ Yes

☐ No

7. DECLARATION

I have read the above and I certify that the information provided and the statements made by myself are, to the best of my knowledge, true and accurate.

On registering for an <ANONYMISED>. Executive Education Programme I acknowledge that I have read, understood and agree to these terms and conditions and the <ANONYMISED>. General Terms and Conditions.

Your Information – Our Fair Processing Notice to You

All information received from you in connection with your application will be processed in accordance with the documented purposes as defined below.

<anonymised>.(UK) Limited ("we" or "us") is a part of the <ANONYMISED> group of companies (the Group). The information you provide on this application form will be processed in accordance with <ANONYMISED> Group's **Privacy Notice** which can be found on our website. A copy can be requested from our Admissions team.

Data Controller

For the purposes of your application, we are the data controller. We are a limited company registered in England and Wales with company number <ANONYMISED>. You can contact us at info@<anonymised>..org.uk or on +44 (0) 20 <ANONYMISED>. Our data protection officer can be contacted at legal@<ANONYMISED> or by writing to the Legal Department, <ANONYMISED>.

Purpose of the Processing

(i) **Processing your application**:

We will use the details provided by you in this application to consider and process your application. We share your application and the personal data supplied in it with <ANONYMISED>which carries out part of the application process for us. We enter into a contract with them which prohibits them from using your data for any purpose other than to perform the contract with us.

The above processing of your personal data is justified under article 6 (1) (b) - necessary for the performance of a contract or in order to take steps at your request prior to entering into a contract.

(ii) **Keeping you informed of other relevant courses and programmes that you might be eligible for:**

In addition, if you wish, you can tick the boxes below to opt in to receive, from time to time, other materials relating to exciting offers, newsletters, events, scholarships and bursaries which we believe might be of interest to you (including from the wide range of universities in the <ANONYMISED> group).

The above processing of your personal data is justified under article 6 (1) (a) – consent. (Your consent options are detailed at the end of this form).

Categories of Personal Data

(i) **Processing your application**:

We do not need to tell you the categories of personal data we process for the purposes of processing your application because you have personally provided all the data yourself and so you are aware of this.

(i) **Keeping you informed of other relevant courses and programmes that you might be eligible for:**

For the purposes of future marketing information that you may opt into at the end of this form, we will only hold your name, email address and phone number. At any time you can tell us to stop holding this information. You can do this by emailing us info@<anonymised>..org.uk.

If you choose not to receive this information from us, you will not find out about other relevant courses or programmes for which you might be eligible. However, your decision to object to marketing materials does not affect your application in any way.

Recipients of your Data

In the case of some applications, we may need to share your application with the regulator of that particular industry (eg for law applications, the Solicitors Regulatory Authority). For more detailed information please read the <ANONYMISED> **Privacy Notice** on our website. The full list of our group companies can be found at this address: https://www. <ANONYMISED>/our-institutions.

We do not share your personal data with any third party outside of the <ANONYMISED> group of companies for marketing purposes.

Transfers to Countries outside EEA

We are a global business and it is likely that certain applications, or the data contained in them, may be shared with other <ANONYMISED>. group companies which are not located in the EEA. However this transfer would only take place if you consented to receive marketing emails from the <ANONYMISED> group of companies about their courses that you might be eligible for or if your application is for a course offered by that overseas entity.

We ensure that none of the <ANONYMISED> group of companies will use your personal data or the data on your application form for any purpose other than as set out in this note or in our **Privacy Notice**. We tell them not to share that data with any third party and we also seek to ensure that all <ANONYMISED> group companies meet standards of security and organisational and technical measures which satisfy European standards of data protection.

By signing this form, you give your consent to the sharing of your application information in this way. You have the right to withdraw your consent for this processing at any time. However you should know that this would mean the processing by the overseas entity would stop and you would no longer receive relevant materials about courses and programmes for which you may be eligible.

Retention of your Application

If you are successful, your data will be saved and stored in our database for successful candidates. Our **Privacy Notice** will then apply to how we use your data in that case and for how long.

If you are unsuccessful, we will retain your application for 6 months and after that it will be destroyed.

Your Rights

Under certain circumstances, by law you have the right to:

- Request access to your data.
- Request correction of the data that we hold about you.
- Request erasure of your data. You also have the right to ask us to delete or remove your data where you have exercised your right to object to processing (see below).
- Object to our processing of your data. This is an absolute right if we are using your data for direct marketing.
- Request the restriction (or suspension) of processing of your data.
- Request the transfer of your data to another party.

To exercise any of these rights, please contact <ANONYMISED>in writing. No fee is usually required unless your request for access is unfounded or excessive.

Your Opt In Consents

If you don't check the relevant box below, we won't send you marketing information about courses or programmes for which you may be eligible. We will not share your details outside of the <ANONYMISED> group of companies for marketing purposes.

If you change your mind at any time and no longer want to receive our marketing information you can withdraw your consent given here by calling us on +44 (0) 20 <ANONYMISED>or by using the Unsubscribe link on future emails.

Please now check below as applicable:

[ ] I am happy to receive information from <ANONYMISED>. Executive Education and other <ANONYMISED> **group institutions**

[ ] I do not want to receive information from <ANONYMISED>. Executive Education and other <ANONYMISED> **group institutions**

Submitting your Application

In order to proceed, please now ensure you understand and accept all applicable terms and then check the boxes below:

[ ] I declare that the information given in the application is true, complete and accurate and no data requested has been omitted.

[ ] I accept the Terms and Conditions as set out in this application.

[ ] I accept the terms of this Fair Processing Notice and the **Privacy Notice** which supplements it.

PRINT NAME

DATE

SIGNATURE

NOTE: By signing this form, you are confirming that you are authorized to do so. Please note that this form will not be processed without your signature. It is a criminal offence to sign this form if you are not the signatory to this application and / or have provided false or misleading information.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Send a completed copy of your application form to your Programme Advisor via email only. You are required to attach copies of the relevant documents listed in the application check-list below.

We will evaluate your application. You will receive your an Confirmed Offer Letter from Us no later than a week after it has been received by the Programme Manager. Once you have received Our Confirmed Offer Letter, your Programme Advisor will be in touch with you.

Before you submit your application form, please make sure you have enclosed all the necessary information. Applications cannot be processed without the specified documents.

APPLICATION CHECK-LIST

Have you included the following?

☐ A completed application form

☐An English language copy of your CV/résumé (no more than 2 sides of A4 to include previous work experience and educational history).

☐ Proof of English language proficiency

☐ A copy of your degree certificate and a translated copy of your courses transcripts

☐ A copy of your passport and all previous UK visas (where applicable)

☐ A recent passport size colour photograph of yourself

☐ A valid email address

PAYMENT OPTIONS

Option A. Bank Transfer

Please quote your full name and your student ID number as your reference when making a payment via bank transfer. Typically student ID has a following format A1234567. If you do not have a student number, please contact your consultant who will be able to provide you with it.

☐ I confirm that a transfer of £ has been made to <ANONYMISED>. Accounts as stated below

Bank Name: <ANONYMISED>

Bank Address: <ANONYMISED>

Account Name: <ANONYMISED>

Account number: <ANONYMISED>

Sort Code: <ANONYMISED>

Swift BIC: <ANONYMISED>

International Bank Account Number: <ANONYMISED>

Option B. Card Payment

☐ I authorise you to charge £_ _ to my credit/debit card.

Card type (please tick as appropriate)

☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard ☐ American Express ☐ Other

Name as it appears on the card:

Credit/Debit Card Number: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Issue Number: (where applicable) _|

Valid From (where applicable): ___/___ Valid Until: ___/_ __

CVV Number (last 3 digits of security code reverse of the card): |_ _|_ _|_ _|

Address the card is registered to:

Address Line 1 ______________________

Address Line 2 ______________________

City/Town ______________________

Postcode ______________________

Country ______________________

EMPLOYER'S AUTHORISATION FOR SPONSORED STUDENTS

We authorise **<anonymised>.**to invoice us for the fees due in respect of the courses applied for by the student named above. We accept responsibility for the fees due in all circumstances including termination of employment and enrolment cancellation.

SPONSORED EMPLOYEE'S DETAILS

Title (Dr, Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms) ______________________

Surname/Family Name ______________________

First/Given Name ______________________

Company/Organisation ______________________

Job Title ______________________

SPONSORING OFFICIAL'S DETAILS

Title (Dr, Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms) ______________________

Surname/Family Name ______________________

First/Given Name ______________________

Company/Organisation	
Job Title	
Address Line 1	
Address Line 2	
City/Town	
Postcode	
Country	
E-mail	
Other E-mail	
Business Phone	
Mobile Phone	

Sponsoring Statement

I confirm that I have received, read and accepted these Terms and Conditions together with <ANONYMISED>'s General Terms & Conditions.

I also confirm that I am authorised by my organisation to form a contractual relationship with <anonymised>.in connection with this booking.

Sponsor's Signature: ____________________
Date: _____/_____/_____

Appendix 4 – Delegate Satisfaction Survey Summary

Column1	Course	Intake (Click here to get to worksheet)		a-Enrolment	urseStructure	tor Rating	urse Materials	ministration Team	mpus	erall Experience	Yes Recommend	o wouldn't recommend	eft Recommendation blank	urse Average
PGC Management	Entrepreneurship	Spring	D	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.75	4.75	3.75	4.13	50%	0%	0%	**4.63**
PGC Management	International Business	Spring	C	4.78	4.42	4.50	4.50	5.00	4.50	4.25	20%	0%	0%	**4.56**
PGC Management	Management and Leadership	Spring	D	4.33	4.25	4.60	4.60	4.93	4.23	4.50	50%	0%	0%	**4.49**
PGC Management	Project Management	Spring	J	4.40	4.40	4.40	4.27	4.60	4.40	4.40	57%	0%	0%	**4.41**
PGC Management	Strategic Business Management	Spring	D	5.00	4.96	5.00	5.00	4.94	4.83	4.92	86%	0%	0%	**4.95**
PGC Management	Business Development Techniques	Spring	L	4.33	4.34	4.50	4.00	4.75	4.19	4.42	78%	0%	0%	**4.36**
PGC Management	HR Development and Talent Management	Spring	Cancelled											
PGC Marketing	Brand Management	Spring	A	4.05	4.75	4.95	4.71	3.43	2.57	3.29	57%	29%	0%	**3.96**
PGC Marketing	Content Marketing and SEO	Spring	B	4.00	4.00	4.50	4.22	3.89	3.83	3.83	67%	0%	0%	**4.04**
PGC Marketing	Data Analytics in Marketing	Spring	B	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.22	3.67	4.17	25%	0%	0%	**4.58**
PGC Marketing	Consumer Behaviour Analysis	Spring	Cancelled											
PGC Marketing	Digital Marketing	Spring	B	3.81	3.75	4.14	3.57	3.57	2.79	3.00	57%	0%	0%	**3.52**
PGC Marketing	Marketing Strategy	Spring	B	2.53	2.63	2.75	2.17	2.42	2.25	2.00	25%	25%	0%	**2.39**
PGC Finance	Accounting for Performance and Control	Spring	M	3.33	4.33	4.67	4.00	4.33	3.50	4.00	100%	0%	0%	**4.02**
PGC Finance	Corporate Finance	Spring	T	4.22	4.67	4.78	4.39	4.33	3.67	4.33	100%	0%	0%	**4.34**
PGC Finance	Financial Modelling	Spring	S	3.91	4.14	4.40	4.10	4.33	3.71	4.07	56%	0%	0%	**4.10**
PGC Finance	Financial Markets: Trading and Analysis	Spring	T	3.67	4.35	4.33	3.93	4.33	3.60	4.20	100%	0%	0%	**4.06**
PGC Finance	Financial Risk Management	Spring	Cancelled											
PGC Finance	Mergers and Acquisitions	Spring	N	4.33	4.33	4.22	4.22	4.44	3.00	4.33	100%	0%	0%	**4.13**
PGC Finance	Project Finance	Spring	T	4.00	4.10	4.13	4.07	4.27	3.30	4.10	50%	0%	0%	**4.00**
PGC Finance	Understanding Financial Statements	Spring	M	4.00	4.88	4.83	5.00	5.00	4.75	5.00	100%	0%	0%	**4.78**
MDP	Business Strategy	Spring	J	4.40	4.70	4.87	4.45	3.93	3.60	4.20	80%	0%	20%	**4.31**
MDP	Effective Management Techniques	Spring	L	4.27	4.50	4.53	4.33	4.13	3.90	4.10	60%	0%	40%	**4.25**
MDP	Marketing Planning and Strategy	Spring	J	4.00	3.94	4.25	4.33	4.00	3.25	4.25	50%	0%	0%	**4.00**
MDP	Managerial Finance	Spring	M	4.19	4.06	4.58	4.00	4.08	3.63	3.75	60%	0%	0%	**4.04**
LDP	Leadership Development Programme	Spring	L	3.90	4.17	4.44	3.51	3.92	2.85	3.84	73%	7%	7%	**3.81**
LDP	Leadership Development Programme	Spring	Phil Renshaw			4.87					0%	0%	0%	**4.87**
PDP	Professional Development Programme	Spring	Cancelled											
Short Courses	Digital Marketing and Social Media	Spring	M	4.04	3.83	4.81	4.81	4.11	4.08	4.08	78%	0%	0%	**4.28**
Short Courses	Digital Marketing and Social Media	Spring	Mike Berry			4.44								**4.44**
Short Courses	Finance for Non-Finance Managers	Spring	M	3.85	3.94	4.14	3.38	3.90	3.43	3.79	63%	25%	13%	**3.78**
Short Courses	Digital Transformation & Leadership	Spring	D	4.28	4.25	4.61	3.89	4.39	3.83	4.02	83%	0%	17%	**4.18**
Short Courses	Financial Planning and Analysis	Spring	S	3.68	3.56	3.41	3.46	4.04	3.50	3.54	78%	11%	0%	**3.60**
Short Courses	Management Consulting and Project Management	Spring	E	4.25	4.86	5.00	4.95	5.00	3.86	4.64	86%	0%	0%	**4.65**
Short Courses	MiniMBA	Spring	T	3.67	3.69	4.50	3.89	4.11	3.17	3.17	25%	25%	50%	**3.74**
Short Courses	MiniMBA 2	Spring	`	4.04	4.29	4.43	4.04	4.26	3.46	4.00	76%	0%	18%	**4.08**
Short Courses	Strategic Brand Management	Spring	M	4.00	4.57	4.90	4.28	4.71	3.93	4.29	71%	0%	0%	**4.38**
Short Courses	Strategic Leadership and Change	Spring	E	4.72	5.00	5.00	4.53	4.47	3.90	4.80	100%	0%	0%	**4.63**
Short Courses	Strategic Business Planning	Spring	J	4.07	4.53	4.63	4.33	4.33	3.81	4.39	78%	0%	22%	**4.30**
Spring Intake Category Totals				**4.12**	**4.31**	**4.52**	**4.20**	**4.27**	**3.66**	**4.05**	**66%**	**4%**	**5%**	**4.19**
PGC Management	Entrepreneurship	Summer	D	4.17	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.67	2.75	4.50	100%	0%	0%	**4.440**
PGC Management	International Business	Summer	C	3.94	4.63	4.83	4.44	4.39	3.00	3.83	67%	0%	17%	**4.152**
PGC Management	Management and Leadership	Summer	C	4.17	5.00	5.00	4.75	4.58	2.63	4.13	75%	0%	25%	**4.321**
PGC Management	Project Management	Summer	G	4.47	4.80	4.67	4.93	4.53	3.70	4.00	80%	0%	20%	**4.442**
PGC Management	Strategic Business Management	Summer	D	4.38	4.44	4.54	4.46	4.67	3.56	4.38	88%	0%	13%	**4.345**
PGC Management	Business Development	Summer	L	5.00	5.00	4.89	4.67	4.67	3.33	4.50	50%	0%	25%	**4.207**
PGC Management	HR Development and Talent Management	Summer	A Cancelled											
PGC Marketing	Brand Management	Summer	A	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.75	4.75	50%	0%	50%	**4.928**
PGC Marketing	Content Marketing and SEO	Summer	B	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	3.00	4.00	0%	0%	100%	**4.428**
PGC Marketing	Data Analytics in Marketing	Summer	B	4.67	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.17	4.67	33%	0%	67%	**4.785**
PGC Marketing	Consumer Behaviour Analysis	Summer	A Cancelled											
PGC Marketing	Digital Marketing	Summer	B	4.40	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.78	17%	0%	67%	**4.739**
PGC Marketing	Marketing Strategy	Summer	P	4.67	3.75	3.87	4.00	4.73	4.30	4.30	40%	0%	60%	**4.23**
PGC Finance	Accounting for Performance and Control	Summer	M	4.22	4.50	4.89	4.33	4.33	3.33	4.00	100%	0%	0%	**4.230**
PGC Finance	Corporate Finance	Summer	T	4.33	4.75	4.67	4.50	4.17	3.25	4.50	67%	0%	0%	**4.309**
PGC Finance	Financial Modelling	Summer	S	4.53	4.65	4.60	4.67	4.20	3.70	4.30	100%	0%	0%	**4.378**
PGC Finance	Financial Markets: Trading and Analysis	Summer	T	4.67	4.75	4.83	4.33	4.33	3.50	4.50	100%	0%	0%	**4.416**
PGC Finance	Financial Risk Management	Summer	V	3.89	4.25	4.78	3.89	4.11	3.00	3.67	67%	0%	33%	**3.940**
PGC Finance	Mergers and Acquisitions	Summer	N	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	3.33	4.00	4.00	50%	0%	0%	**4.476**
PGC Finance	Project Finance	Summer	T	4.25	4.60	4.67	4.44	4.17	3.63	4.38	100%	0%	0%	**4.304**
PGC Finance	Understanding Financial Statements	Summer	M	3.75	3.88	4.00	3.83	3.83	2.88	3.75	75%	25%	0%	**3.702**
MDP	Business Strategy	Summer	J	4.83	4.63	4.58	4.58	4.75	3.88	4.63	100%	0%	0%	**4.553**
MDP	Effective Management Techniques	Summer	L	4.42	4.54	4.67	4.24	4.48	3.50	4.57	75%	0%	13%	**4.344**
MDP	Marketing Planning and Strategy	Summer	J	4.56	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.89	3.50	4.50	100%	0%	0%	**4.634**
MDP	Managerial Finance	Summer	M	4.67	4.67	4.44	4.11	4.67	3.67	4.50	100%	0%	0%	**4.388**
LDP	Leadership Development Programme	Summer	L	3.92	3.94	4.31	3.83	4.44	3.71	3.96	83%	8%	8%	**4.014**
LDP	Leadership Development Programme 2	Summer	Phil Renshaw			4.39								
PDP	Professional Development Programme	Summer	Cancelled											
Short Courses	Digital Marketing and Social Media	Summer	M	4.62	4.80	5.00	4.80	4.10	3.80	3.80	0%	40%	0%	**4.588**
Short Courses	Digital Marketing and Social Media	Summer	Mike Berry			5.00								
Short Courses	Finance for Non-Finance Managers	Summer	N	3.93	4.60	4.73	4.07	4.33	4.00	4.00	100%	0%	0%	**4.238**
Short Courses	Financial Planning and Analysis	Summer	S	3.81	3.56	3.92	3.42	4.38	3.63	3.44	38%	38%	25%	**3.734**
Short Courses	Management Consulting and Project Management	Summer	E	4.26	4.83	5.00	4.72	4.78	3.50	4.58	100%	0%	0%	**4.524**
Short Courses	MiniMBA 1	Summer	T	4.78	4.75	4.78	4.89	4.78	4.33	4.67	100%	0%	0%	**4.710**
Short Courses	MiniMBA 2	Summer	T	3.98	4.38	4.38	4.36	4.05	3.36	3.89	86%	0%	14%	**4.05**
Short Courses	Strategic Brand Management	Summer	J	4.33	4.40	5.00	4.20	4.93	3.65	4.10	100%	0%	0%	**4.373**
Short Courses	Strategic Leadership and Change	Summer	E	3.97	4.51	4.93	4.50	4.47	3.75	4.15	90%	0%	10%	**4.323**
Short Courses	Digital Transformation & Leadership	Summer	D	3.78	3.92	4.22	3.89	3.94	3.92	3.75	83%	0%	17%	**3.916**
Short Courses	Design Thinking & Innovation	Summer	Cancelled											
Short Courses	Design Thinking & Innovation	Summer	Cancelled											
Short Courses	Strategic Business Planning	Summer	J	4.17	4.58	4.42	4.22	4.28	3.42	4.21	83%	0%	17%	**4.186**
Short Courses	Enterprise Operations Management	Summer	J	4.29	4.57	4.67	4.62	4.62	3.79	4.21	100%	0%	0%	**4.394**
SBS	Strategic Management & Leadership	Summer	C	4.47	4.62	4.82	4.41	4.61	4.26	4.21	74%	0%	26%	**4.487**
SBS	Strategic Management & Leadership 2	Summer												
SBS	Global Marketing Practices	Summer	J	4.19	4.18	4.42	4.32	4.23	4.11	4.11	65%	5%	25%	**4.222**
SBS	Global Marketing Practices 2	Summer												
SBS	Corporate Finance in Practice 2	Summer												
SBS	Corporate Finance in Practice	Summer	M	4.44	4.47	4.65	4.15	4.56	4.25	4.47	60%	0%	20%	**4.425**
Summer Intake Category Totals				**4.34**	**4.58**	**4.69**	**4.46**	**4.47**	**3.64**	**4.23**				**4.336**
PGC Management	Entrepreneurship	Autumn	D	4.27	4.53	4.63	4.50	4.25	4.13	4.31	75%	0%	25%	**4.373**
PGC Management	International Business	Autumn	D	4.29	4.64	4.71	4.14	4.48	4.14	4.00	78%	0%	0%	**4.343**
PGC Management	Management and Leadership	Autumn	D	4.00	4.50	4.74	3.93	4.48	4.06	4.00	82%	0%	0%	**4.243**
PGC Management	Project Management	Autumn	G	4.04	4.13	4.42	3.92	4.08	3.94	3.94	100%	0%	0%	**4.065**
PGC Management	Strategic Business Management	Autumn	D	4.30	4.81	4.78	4.48	4.22	3.78	4.00	80%	0%	10%	**4.337**
PGC Management	Business Development Techniques	Autumn	G	4.20	4.20	4.47	3.73	4.33	4.10	3.68	100%	0%	0%	**4.325**
PGC Management	HR Development and Talent Management	Autumn	A	4.17	4.88	4.67	4.50	4.25	3.88	4.13	80%	0%	0%	**4.330**
PGC Marketing	Brand Management	Autumn	A	4.39	5.00	5.00	4.78	4.39	4.00	4.08	83%	0%	17%	**4.519**
PGC Marketing	Content Marketing and SEO	Autumn	B	4.33	4.83	4.67	4.83	4.44	4.17	4.80	57%	0%	29%	**4.582**
PGC Marketing	Data Analytics in Marketing	Autumn	B	4.56	4.58	4.00	4.11	4.67	4.33	4.33	67%	0%	33%	**4.36**
PGC Marketing	Consumer Behaviour Analysis	Autumn	C Cancelled											
PGC Marketing	Digital Marketing	Autumn	B	4.14	4.61	4.43	4.71	4.14	4.14	4.43	88%	0%	0%	**4.372**
PGC Marketing	Marketing Strategy	Autumn	P	5.00	4.92	4.89	4.67	4.89	4.67	4.67	100%	0%	0%	**4.813**
PGC Finance	Accounting for Performance and Control	Autumn	C Cancelled											
PGC Finance	Corporate Finance	Autumn	T	3.78	4.58	4.67	4.33	4.44	3.00	3.83	50%	0%	25%	**4.091**
PGC Finance	Financial Modelling	Autumn	S	3.79	3.91	4.46	3.83	4.04	3.13	3.56	50%	0%	17%	**3.81**
PGC Finance	Financial Markets: Trading and Analysis	Autumn	T	3.75	3.88	4.08	3.83	4.08	3.38	4.00	100%	0%	0%	**3.857**
PGC Finance	Financial Risk Management	Autumn	P	4.11	4.17	4.33	4.00	4.22	4.00	4.00	20%	0%	40%	**4.11**
PGC Finance	Mergers and Acquisitions	Autumn	N	4.33	4.13	4.50	3.83	4.50	2.75	4.25	14%	0%	14%	**4.041**
PGC Finance	Project Finance	Autumn	P	3.67	4.75	4.67	4.67	4.33	4.50	5.00	33%	0%	0%	**4.511**
PGC Finance	Understanding Financial Statements	Autumn	M	3.83	4.63	4.42	4.58	4.33	2.88	4.38	57%	0%	0%	**4.148**
MDP	Business Strategy	Autumn	J	4.43	4.78	4.59	4.66	4.52	3.72	4.67	78%	11%	11%	**4.480**
MDP	Effective Management Techniques	Autumn	L	4.25	4.52	4.65	4.29	4.42	3.69	4.28	75%	0%	25%	**4.**
MDP	Marketing Planning and Strategy	Autumn	J	4.00	4.05	3.78	3.73	3.80	2.30	3.40	60%	20%	20%	**3.58**
MDP	Managerial Finance	Autumn	M	3.89	4.05	4.58	4.32	4.06	3.17	4.02	50%	0%	50%	**4.011**
LDP	Leadership Development Programme	Autumn	L	3.67	4.17	4.36	3.93	4.11	2.97	3.72	94%	0%	6%	**3.846**
LDP	Leadership Development Programme	Autumn	Phil Renshaw			4.53								
LDP 2	Leadership Development Programme 2	Autumn	Cancelled											
LDP 2	Leadership Development Programme 2	Autumn	Cancelled											
PDP	Professional Development Programme	Autumn	Cancelled											
Short Courses	Digital Marketing and Social Media	Autumn	Cancelled											
Short Courses	Digital Marketing and Social Media	Autumn	Cancelled											
Short Courses	Finance for Non-Finance Managers	Autumn	N	3.53	3.75	3.83	3.17	3.39	3.75	3.50	86%	0%	0%	**3.560**
Short Courses	Financial Planning and Analysis	Autumn	S	3.79	3.43	3.33	3.30	4.00	3.68	3.14	82%	18%	0%	**3.524**
Short Courses	Management Consulting and Project Management	Autumn	E	4.17	4.79	4.83	4.44	4.50	3.50	4.33	100%	0%	0%	**4.367**
Short Courses	MiniMBA	Autumn	T	3.92	4.32	4.54	4.02	4.20	3.61	4.03	74%	5%	0%	**4.091**
Short Courses	MiniMBA 2	Autumn	T	4.06	4.69	4.83	4.42	4.29	2.97	4.29	83%	0%	11%	**4.221**
Short Courses	Digital Transformation & Leadership	Autumn	D	4.00	3.94	4.42	4.08	4.50	4.00	3.63	75%	0%	25%	**4.080**
Short Courses	Data Science for Executives	Autumn	M	3.83	4.43	4.87	4.60	4.47	4.00	4.20	60%	20%	20%	**4.341**
Short Courses	Enterprise Operations Management	Autumn	J	4.00	3.88	3.83	3.83	3.83	3.00	3.50	100%	0%	0%	**3.696**
Short Courses	Strategic Brand Management	Autumn	J	4.14	4.50	4.52	4.43	4.52	3.36	4.07	86%	0%	14%	**4.221**
Short Courses	Contract Law for Business Executives	Autumn	D	3.50	3.75	4.33	3.50	3.67	3.50	3.50	50%	0%	50%	**3.678**
Short Courses	Strategic Leadership and Change	Autumn	E	4.03	4.50	4.93	4.63	4.78	3.67	4.42	63%	0%	38%	**4.422**
Short Courses	Strategic Business Planning	Autumn	J	4.60	4.60	4.80	4.78	4.80	4.07	4.40	93%	0%	7%	**4.578**
Autumn Intake Category Totals				**4.07672**	**4.383**	**4.489**	**4.209**	**4.29**	**3.664**	**4.068**				**4.168**

Appendix 5 – Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Study title: Key Drivers That Influence the Provision and Sustainability of Executive Education

Dear participant, My name is Shanake De Fonseka and I am a Doctoral researcher at Brunel University, London. You are being invited to take part in an academic research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

The primary aim of this research project is to evaluate the main characteristics of executive education students who study at LAMF.

Objectives of the research project:

1. What motivates individuals to study an EE course (prestige, networking, brand association, thirst for specialist knowledge, because their employer sends them)

2. Should EE delegates be considered as students

3. Should EE courses be considered as Postgraduate qualifications

4. How does andragogy and experiential learning underpin pedagogical approaches to EE

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to take part in this academic research as you play a pivotal role within the marketing/sales/admissions/compliance process when admitting applicants to short courses and postgraduate certificate courses for Executive Education department.

The following members of staff are being invited to take part: compliance manager, admissions officer, recruitment team leader, recruitment consultant(s), marketing manager, marketing executives, managing director.

Do I have to take part?

As participation is entirely voluntary, it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from participating in this research will not in any way have an impact on your day-to-day work at the school.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The research interview is not part of a series of interviews. I will interview you online using Microsoft Teams and the research interview will last for approximately 30 minutes. I may have to contact you for a few follow-up questions, should a need arise. During the interview, I will be asking you around 10 questions and we will be discussing each question for a few minutes. The entire interview will be anonymous, and there is no need to specify any student or staff names during the process. If we do discuss identifiable names, I will remove such mentions from the interview transcript in order to maintain anonymity.

During the interview, I would kindly request you provide me with truthful and honest answers. Feel free to ask for clarifications at any time. Don't feel pressured to provide me with "what you think I expect to hear" during the interview. There are no right or wrong answers. As the interview might last for around 30 minutes, I will have to record our conversation. I will only retain this recording until I transcribe the interview, and will not be sharing the recording with any third party.

Are there any lifestyle restrictions?

Due to the nature of this study, there are no restrictions and the research project is classified as a low-risk study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

We will only be discussing an actual process that takes place within the school and will not include any "business critical" or disclosure of sensitive data. The interview contents and transcripts will be destroyed after December 2022. Only small statements or quotes may be included within my final EdD thesis. There are no known risks or disadvantages identified at this stage.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no specific benefits of taking part in this research. The research is done only as an academic research project as part of my doctoral degree.

What if something goes wrong?

While I am confident that nothing will go wrong during the interview, should you wish to make a complaint, you may do so with the Chair, College of Business, Arts, Social Sciences Research Ethics committee at cbass-ethics@brunel.ac.uk .

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you which leaves Global University Systems premises will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be identified from it. All of the information will be kept in Brunel University's secure server (encrypted) and will be erased once the research project is concluded. It will not be kept for longer than December 2022.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recording be used?

Yes, the interview will be recorded for transcribing. The recording will be permanently erased once the transcribing is completed.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this research project will become part of my main research study for my Doctor of Education degree. Should you wish to receive a copy of the results, please let me know, and I can make this available to you. Please bear in mind, that no identifiable data is included within the report at this stage.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is self-funded and is done in partial fulfilment of my Doctoral degree programme in education at Brunel University, London.

What are the indemnity arrangements?

Brunel University provides appropriate insurance coverage for research which has received ethical approval

Who has reviewed the study?

The research and its associated documents have been reviewed and approved by the Brunel Research Ethics Committee.

Research Integrity

Brunel University London is committed to compliance with the Universities UK Research Integrity Concordat. You are entitled to expect the highest level of integrity from the researchers during this research

Contact for further information and complaints

Mr Shanake De Fonseka (myself) – shanedefonseka@gmail.com or 1729507@brunel.ac.uk

Dr Paula Zwozdiak-Myers –
Senior Lecturer, D.O.E., Brunel University - Paula.Zwozdiak-Myers@brunel.ac.uk

Professor David Gallear – cbass.ethics@brunel.ac.uk
Chair of CBASS research ethics committee – Brunel University -

Appendix 6– Consent form

CONSENT FORM

A study to evaluate the key drivers that influence the provision and sustainability of executive education at LAMF

Shanake De Fonseka

APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED FOR THIS STUDY TO BE CARRIED OUT BETWEEN 01/11/2020 AND 30/11/2021

The participant (or their legal representative) should complete the whole of this sheet.		
	YES	NO
Have you read the Participant Information Sheet?	☐	☐
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	☐	☐
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?	☐	☐
Who have you spoken to about the study?		
Do you understand that you will not be referred to by name in any report concerning this study?	☐	☐
Do you understand that:		
• You are free to withdraw from this study at any time	☐	☐
• You don't have to give any reason for withdrawing	☐	☐
• Choosing not to participate or withdrawing will not affect your rights?	☐	☐
• You can withdraw your data any time up to 30/11/2021	☐	☐
I agree to my interview being audio recorded	☐	☐
I agree to the use of non-attributable quotes when the study is written up or published	☐	☐

The procedures regarding confidentiality have been explained to me	☐	☐
I agree that my anonymised data can be stored and shared with other researchers for use in future projects.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in this study.	☐	☐

Signature of research participant:	
Print name:	Date:

Appendix 7 – Critical friend confirmation letter

Priyarajha Goonewardene
No 59 Voltaire Road,
Clapham Common,
London SW4 6DD
TELEPHONE 0207 498 7577

22/08/2023

<u>To whom it may concern:</u>
<u>Confirmation of research integrity for Mr Shanake De Fonseka's thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education at Brunel University, London</u>

I am pleased to confirm that the abovenamed has consulted me between January 2020 and August 2023 on a regular basis and have regularly discussed his research project, receiving feedback and constructive criticism on an ongoing basis.

In terms of the evidence provided in this paper, it is my professional judgement that the data analysis, findings and conclusions are based firmly on the data collected and the enquiry has been conducted according to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA).

I can further confirm that the Mr De Fonseka has modified his paper in the light of my critique and his subsequent meetings with his supervisors at Brunel University, the conclusions are now firmly based on the data collected using semi-structured interviews, applicant data of the anonymised school in question.

Priyarajha Goonewardene MBA, FHEA
Senior Lecturer – Bucks New University (LSST programmes)

Appendix 8 - BREO approval (Ethics committee approval)

College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Brunel University London
Kingston Lane
Uxbridge
UB8 3PH
United Kingdom

www.brunel.ac.uk

8 October 2020

CONDITIONAL LETTER OF APPROVAL

NB you do not need to re-submit your application

APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED FOR THIS STUDY TO BE CARRIED OUT BETWEEN 08/10/2020 AND 31/12/2021

Applicant (s): Mr Shanake De Fonseka

Project Title: Key Drivers That Influence the Provision and sustainability of Executive Education

Reference: 25346-LR-Oct/2020- 28093-2

Dear Mr Shanake De Fonseka

The Research Ethics Committee has considered the above application recently submitted by you.

The Chair, acting under delegated authority has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. Approval is given on the understanding that the conditions of approval set out below are followed:

- Participant Information Sheet:
- Do I have to take part: You put the date by which the participant can withdraw their data.
- Who has reviewed the study? You give the name of your Supervisor and the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.
- **Approval is given for remote (online/telephone) research activity only. Face-to-face activity and/or travel will require approval by way of an amendment.**
- **The agreed protocol must be followed. Any changes to the protocol will require prior approval from the Committee by way of an application for an amendment.**
- In addition to the above, please ensure that you monitor and adhere to all up-to-date Government health advice for the duration of your project.

Please note that:

- Research Participant Information Sheets and (where relevant) flyers, posters, and consent forms should include a clear statement that research ethics approval has been obtained from the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- The Research Participant Information Sheets should include a clear statement that queries should be directed, in the first instance, to the Supervisor (where relevant), or the researcher. Complaints, on the other hand, should be directed, in the first instance, to the Chair of the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- Approval to proceed with the study is granted subject to receipt by the Committee of satisfactory responses to any conditions that may appear above, in addition to any subsequent changes to the protocol.
- The Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to sample and review documentation, including raw data, relevant to the study.
- You may not undertake any research activity if you are not a registered student of Brunel University or if you cease to become registered, including abeyance or temporary withdrawal. As a deregistered student you would not be insured to undertake research activity. Research activity includes the recruitment of participants, undertaking consent procedures and collection of data. Breach of this requirement constitutes research misconduct and is a disciplinary offence.

Professor David Gallear

Chair of the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 9 - Encrypted network drive access confirmation

Information Services

IT Service Desk

Ticket CC-I-0000603566
Network drive

This ticket has been set to a status of **Resolved.**

Dear Shanake,
Its the Brunel Network Account H drive thtat you have.
Please log on Log on to Brunel connect Portal (connect.brunel.ac.uk).Download AnyConnect VPN on your computer and then install it.
Then go to and click on 'My Apps' > choose the appropriate AnyConnect VPN for your computer from the left side listing.

Once AnyConnect VPN is installed, you need to connect by click to the 'Connect' button by providing your network account details and network account password.

Once connected, from the Brunel Connect Portal, click on the 'Help' from the top menu and then 'Knowledge Base' from the left listing.

Now from the Knowledge Base search box type H drive.

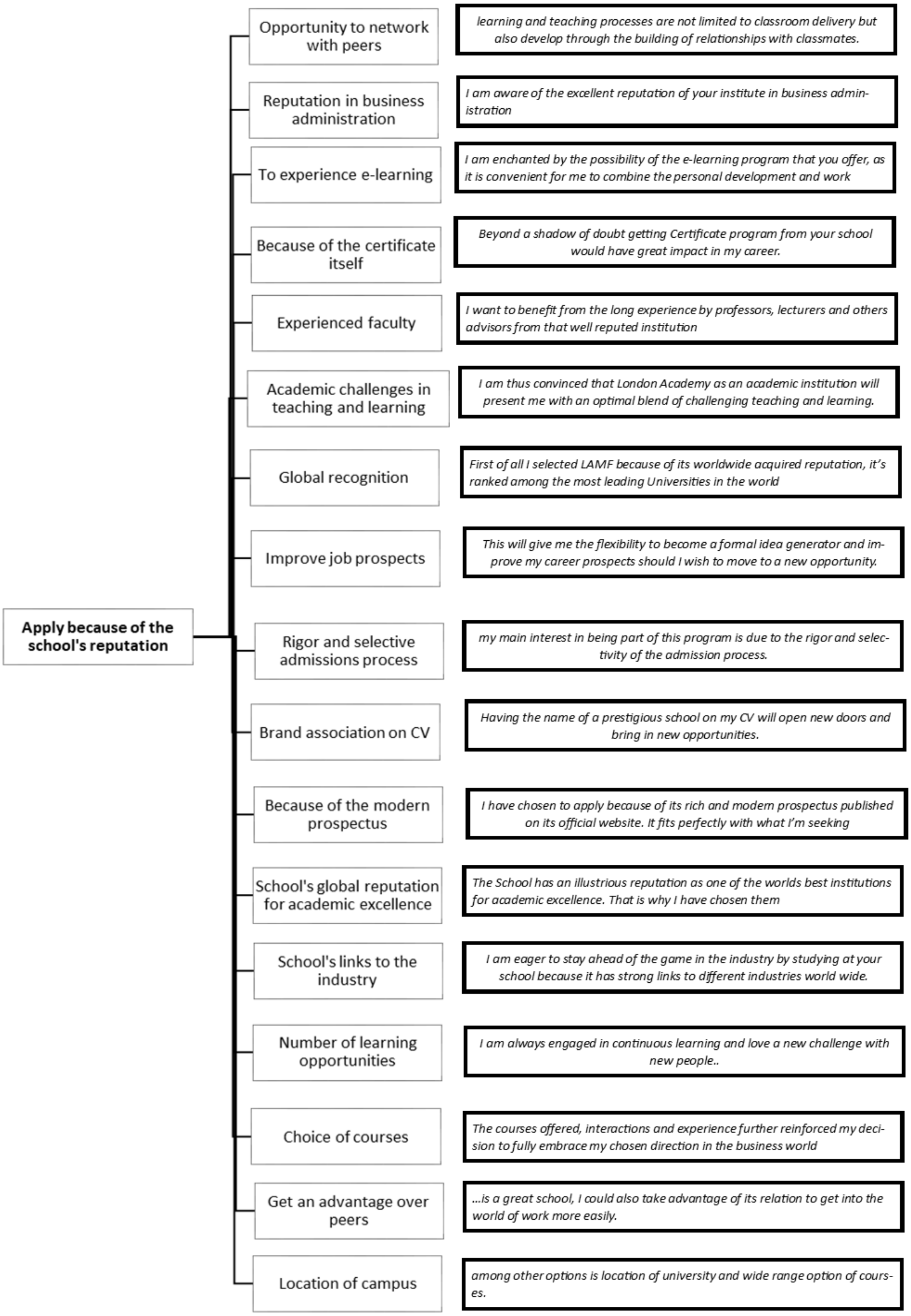
You now see search result, please select appropriate Connecting to Brunel H Drive for your operating system on your computer/laptop. Now follow the instruction from that page to map the H drive.

Alternatively, please visit the TechZone in Bannerman Centre (Library) building between 09:00 and 1900 (Monday to Friday, except on days when the university is closed), with the Brunel photo ID and the device to get this resolved.

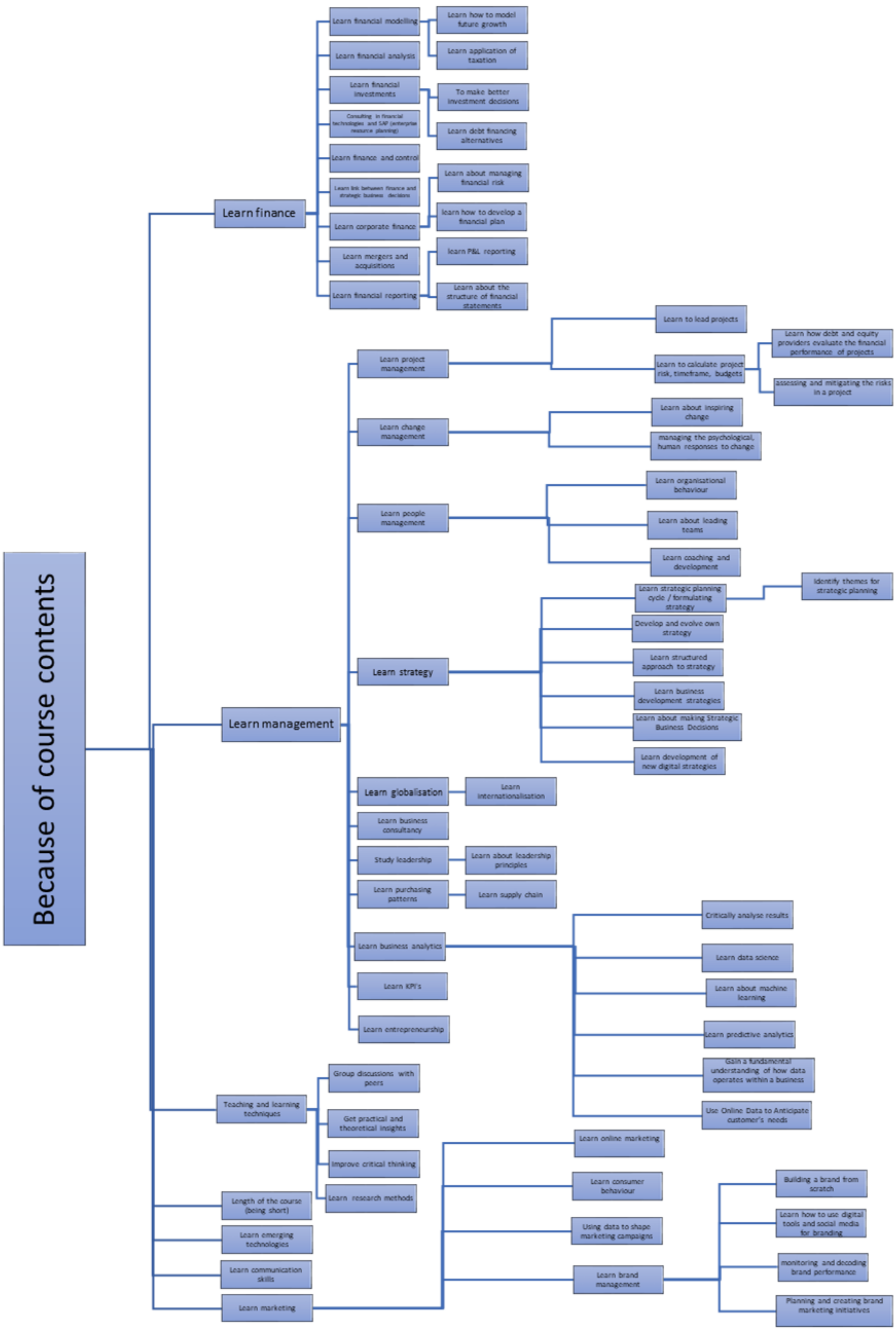
Kind regards,
Farooq.

On behalf of Computing Support
Farooq Khawaja - BSc (Physics) – MInstP - SDI: SDA qualified - ITIL: Essentials:
Brunel University
01895 265888
computing-support@brunel.ac.uk

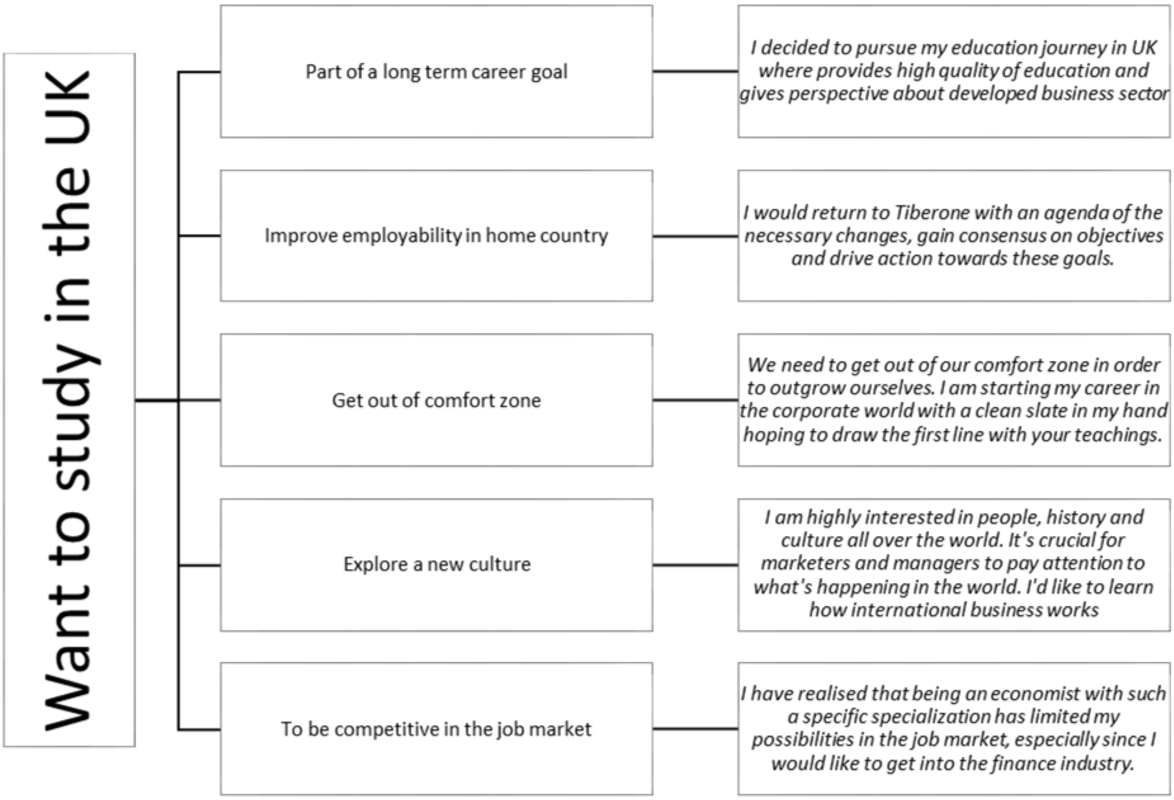
Appendix 10 – Thematic diagram – Applied because of the school's reputation



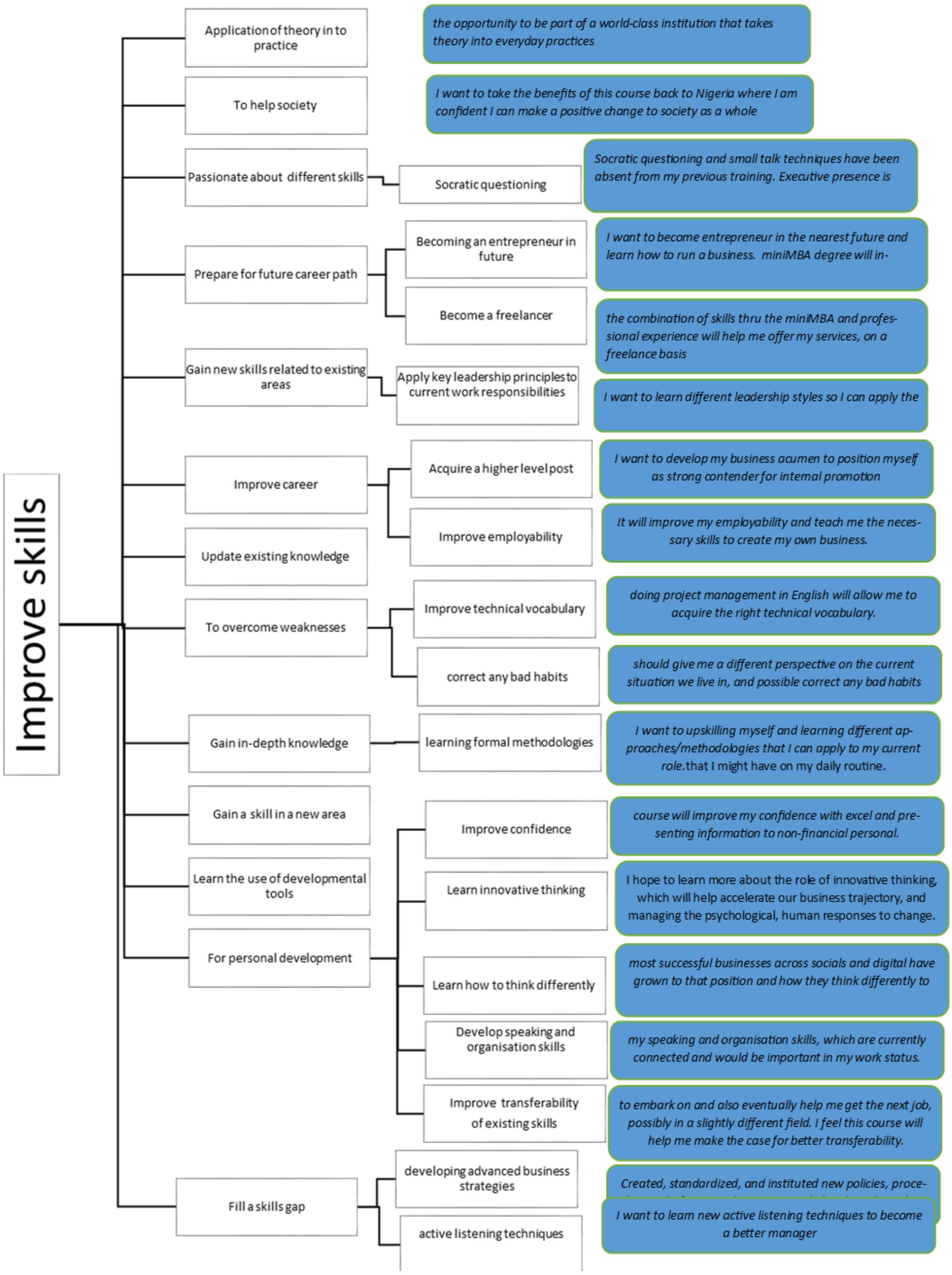
Appendix 11 – Thematic diagram - Applied because of course contents



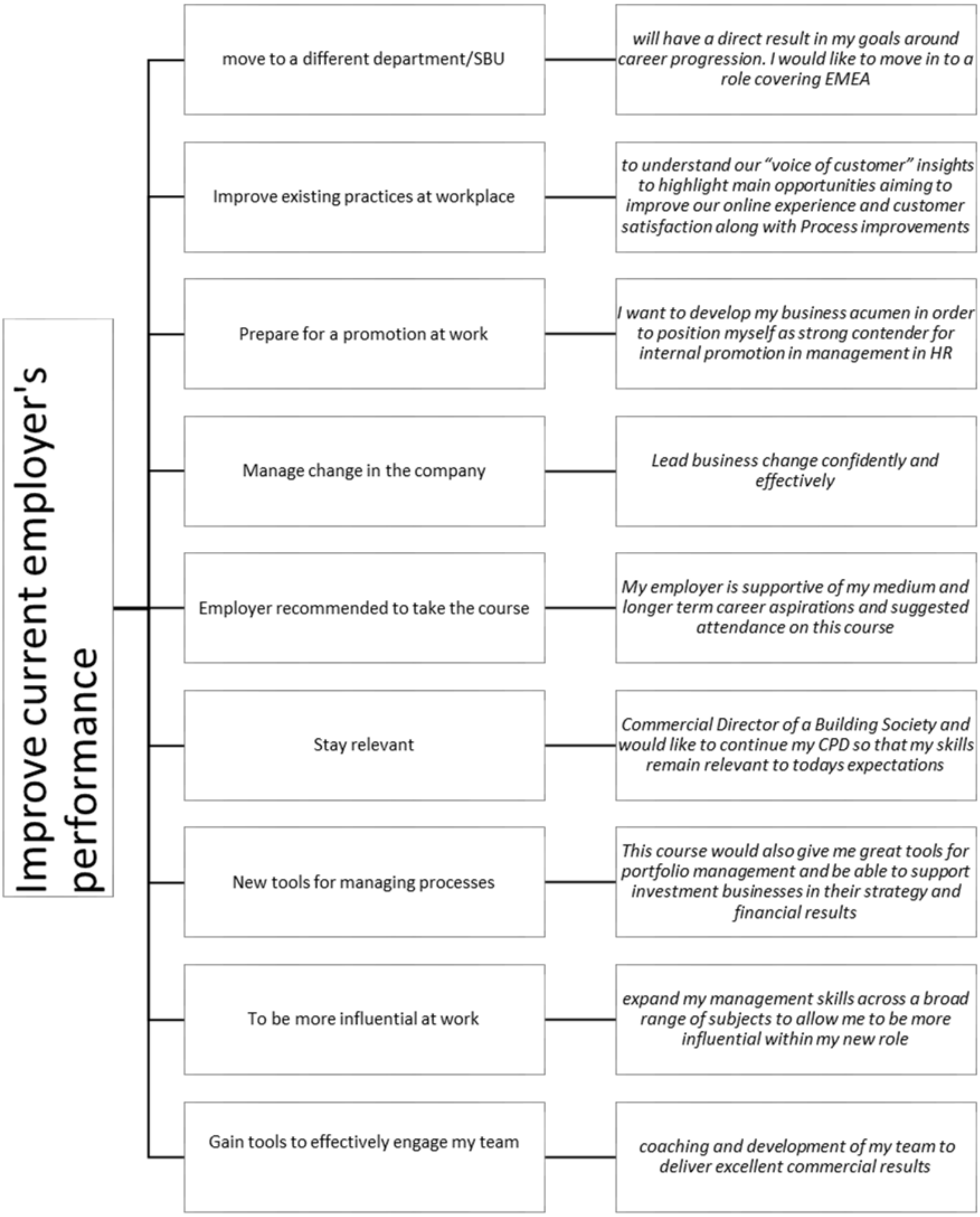
Appendix 12 – Applicant wanted to study in the UK



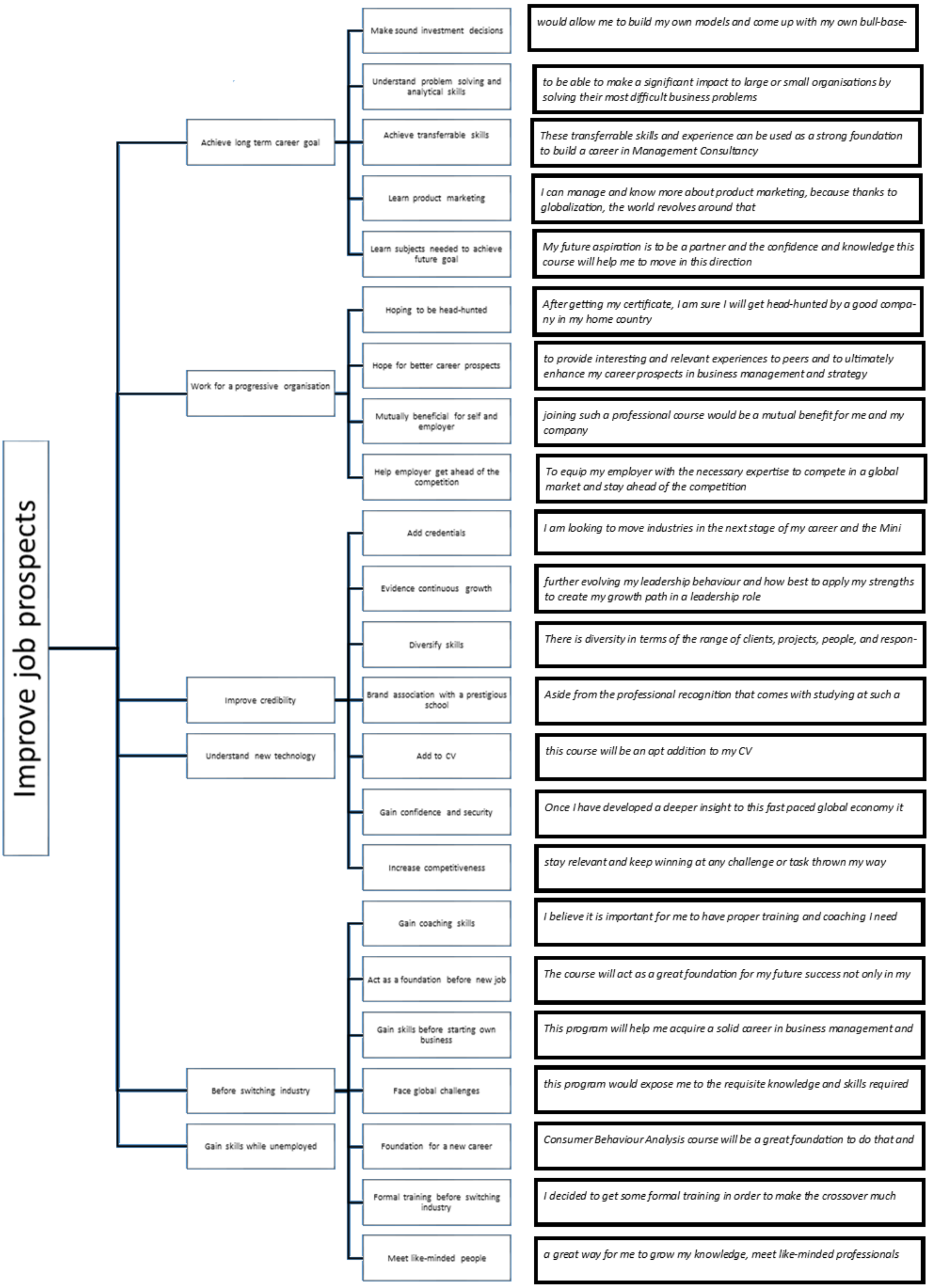
Appendix 13 - Thematic diagram – Wanted to improve skills



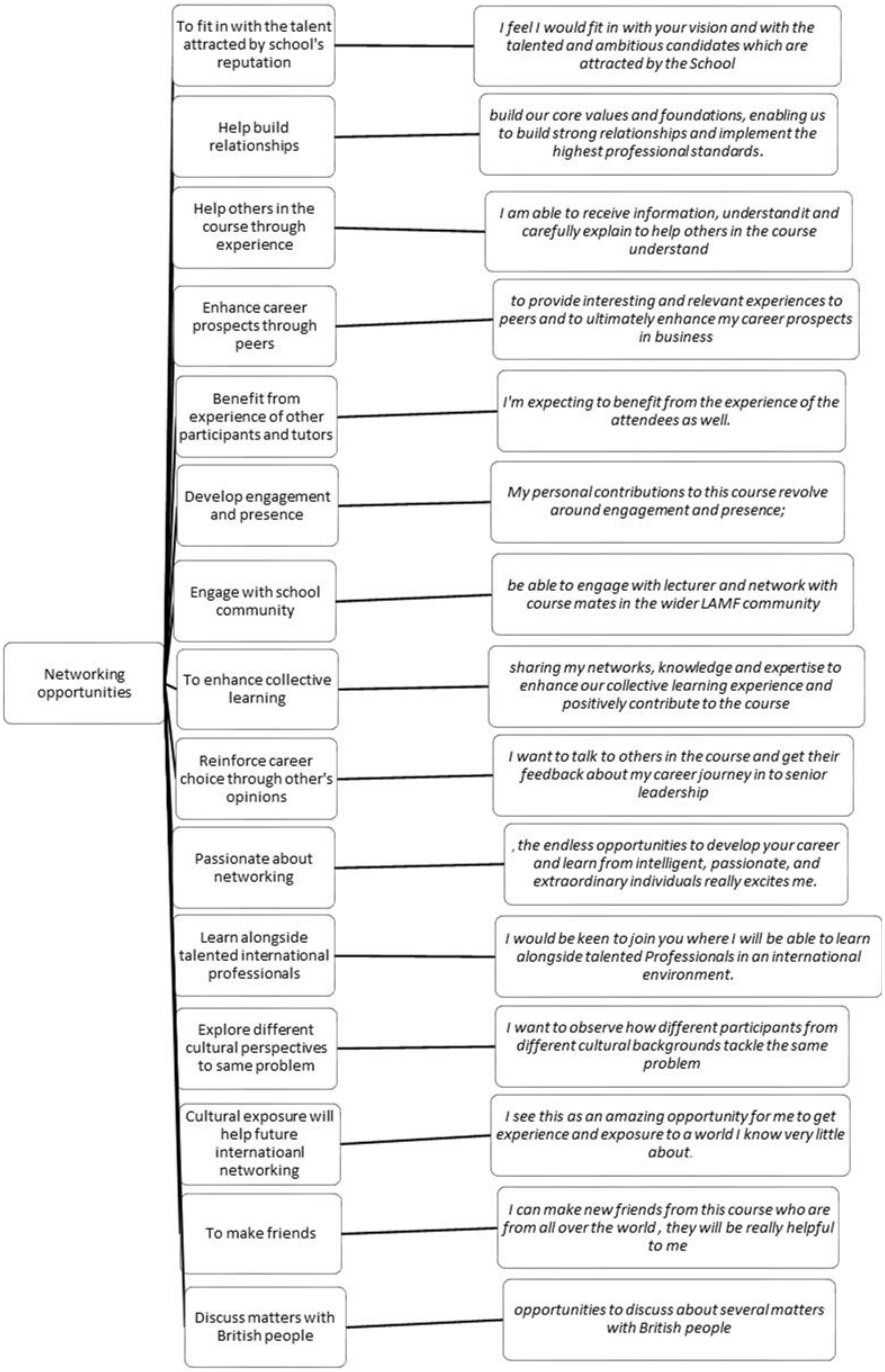
Appendix 14 – Thematic diagram – Applicant wants to improve current employer's performance



Appendix 15 - Thematic diagram – Wanted to improve job prospects



Appendix 16 - Thematic diagram - Wanted to improve networking opportunities



Appendix 17 – Country/semester-wise admissions data

Country	Spring 2019	Summer 2019	Autumn 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
Albania	0	0	0	1	0
Angola	0	0	1	0	0
Argentina	0	0	1	0	0
Australia	0	0	0	1	2
Austria	0	0	0	1	0
Belarus	0	0	1	0	0
Bahamas	1	0	0	0	0
Barbados	0	0	0	1	0
Belgium	0	1	1	0	2
Botzwana	0	0	0	2	1
Brazil	0	3	2	0	0
Bulgaria	0	1	0	0	0
Burkina Faso	0	0	1	0	0
Cameroon	0	0	0	1	0
Canada	2	0	0	0	4
Central African Republic	0	0	0	0	1
China	3	3	0	0	2
Chili	0	1	3	0	1
Columbia	0	0	3	1	0
Congo	0	0	0	0	1
Croatia	1	0	0	0	0
Cyprus	0	0	0	0	1
Denmark	1	0	0	0	0
Ecuador	1	0	0	0	0
Egypt	2	1	2	0	1
Ethiopia	0	0	1	1	0
France	0	1	0	1	1
Germany	2	1	0	0	4
Georgia	0	1	0	0	0
Ghana	1	1	2	3	4
Greece	0	0	0	0	1
Hungary	0	0	0	0	1
India	5	3	7	4	6

Iran	0	0	0	1	0
Ireland (republic of)	0	0	2	0	0
Italy	2	3	2	2	3
Jamaica	0	1	0	0	0
Japan	0	3	0	0	0
Kenya	1	0	1	3	0
Kuwait	0	1	0	0	0
Latvia	1	0	0	0	0
Lithuania	1	0	0	0	0
Lebanon	2	2	0	0	1
Libya	0	0	0	0	1
Malaysia	1	0	0	0	0
Mauritious	1	0	0	0	0
Mexico	2	0	1	0	0
Morocco	0	1	1	0	0
Namibia	0	0	0	1	0
Nepal	0	0	1	0	0
Netherlands	1	2	0	1	1
New Zealand	0	1	0	0	0
Nigeria	5	8	10	4	8
Norway	0	0	0	0	1
Oman	0	0	1	0	0
Pakistan	1	1	0	0	0
Peru	0	0	0	0	1
Philipines	1	0	0	0	1
Poland	1	1	0	0	0
Portugal	0	1	0	0	3
Romania	0	2	0	0	0
Russia	1	2	0	0	1
South Korea	1	1	2	0	1
South Africa	2	2	2	2	3
Saudi Arabia	4	1	4	0	2
Singapore	2	0	0	0	0
Slovakia	0	0	1	1	1
Slovania	0	0	1	0	0
Spain	1	0	4	0	0
Sri Lanka	0	0	0	0	1
St Lucia	0	0	0	0	1
Syria	0	0	0	0	1
Sudan	0	1	0	0	0
Switzerland	1	0	0	0	1
Taiwan	0	1	1	0	0
Thailand	0	1	0	0	0
Tunisia	0	0	0	1	0

Turkey	5	1	2	0	1
Uganda	0	3	0	0	0
UK	13	15	12	29	33
Ukraine	0	0	0	1	0
USA	3	1	0	4	3
Uzbekistan	0	0	1	0	0
Venizuela	1	0	0	0	1
Zambia	0	0	0	1	0
	73	**73**	**74**	**68**	**103**

Appendix 18 – Examples of thematic coding from participant transcripts

Research question	Theme	Code (Sub-theme)	Example Quotes	Rationale for Selection
RQ1	Workload Concerns	Increased teaching hours	"With more EE courses, and so we have to now prepare for that we've seen a lot of this" – [Manuela]	Shows a common concern among lecturers about workload.
RQ1	EE Course Expansion	Positive perception	"I just like to reiterate, on type how much I feel involved, because you allow me to be involved as much as I can ." – [Mills]	Highlights a positive view on lecturer engagement, showing a range of perspectives.
RQ1	Continuous innovation	Dynamic course structures	"A really good effort between some people within the school, there has been a commitment to improving things", – [Manuela]	Links respondent statements with existing theories on EE characterisation
RQ1	Marketisation of EE	Anticipating consumer requirements	"I get a lot of people like looking at the titles and go I fancy that one that one that one that one", – [Mills]	Highlights how repeat purchase behaviour can be encouraged
RQ1	Identifying USP of EE providers	Balancing faculty expertise with course portfolio	"Our tutors are not only academics but designers in their field of expertise so it's different from a lecturer from Queens University or London Business School", – [Tom]	Highlights the difference between university academics and EE facilitators
RQ1	Core characteristics of EE courses	Forging networks with like-minded practitioners	"They forge good partnerships during a course, I've been partly responsible, or involved in another commercial training operation and that's a good way forward as well", – [Tom]	How EE participation can encourage collective problem solving

RQ1	Linking EE staff motivation with Maslow's hierarchy	How academic staff's commitment is viewed by professional staff	"Some tutors will just arrive on time, teach and go home, while others will come into the office to have a chat and see how we are doing", – [Luxmi]	Emphasising how different academic staff may view themselves as part of the EE provider
RQ1	Impact of e-learning on EE providers	Changes to EE programme delivery due to Covid	"Executive education needs to even once we go back to campus, needs to continue to offer a hybrid of in-person training",– [Manuela]	Technological transformation on overall programme development
RQ2	Student Engagement	Online vs. in-person	"I think there is those programs seem to work very well, I can only speak for mine but the feedback is generally pretty good" – [Mike]	Illustrates a key debate on online vs. traditional teaching.
RQ2	Professional staff's perception on EE delegate motivation	CV building for overseas participants	"I didn't know Pakistan or Nigeria, but so you studied at the London School of yeah, then the interviewer will think, okay, so he is familiar with the London way of business", – [Selvam]	Staff perception on why participants from certain countries enrol on an EE course
RQ2	Professional staff's perception on gaining higher positions	Taking up EE training before applying for a new job	"Education is to give you confidence, to give you knowledge to give you values, to give you skills, but more importantly, to help you in an interview scenario", – [Vera]	Professional staff's views on participants taking up EE courses to upskill
RQ2	Academic staff's views on EE participant motivation to enrol	Extraordinary comments on underlying reasons for enrolment	"The odd few I'd say maybe one in 10 joined because they wanted to develop their skills in that area", – [Manuela]	A view that didn't align with existing theories of motivation to study

RQ2	Professional staff's view on EE applicant motivation to study	Perceptions of professional staff in terms of underlying reasons for enrolment	"With the changing times lot of things have changed so it's a better way I believe it's the best way of improving your knowledge and updating it according to the current trends", - [Luxmi]	Delegate support team's view as to why a person undertake EE training
RQ2	Academic staff's views on EE participant motivation to enrol	Updating their existing specialised skills	"A marketing consultant may know what they're weak on, particularly digital marketing, they need to tick that box so they're less interested in boasting about a qualification", – [Michael]	A specific scenario within marketing, ,which represents alignment with existing theories of undertaking EE study
RQ2	Professional staff's views on EE participant motivation to enrol	Filling important skill gaps to be more competitive	"There was a specific area that wasn't covered in their masters and they wanted to get some more knowledge into that", – [Vera]	How professional staff view applicants wanting to fill skill gaps, which is in-line with existing theories
RQ3	Characteristics of overseas learners	Proof of English proficiency for admission	"Countries like Ghana, Nigeria, or Kenya have ever been rejected at the application stage for a lack of English proficiency", – [Selvam]	Professional staff's views on overseas participant language proficiency
RQ3	Selection of EE Topics	Market-driven approach	"it's a bigger program and I want everyone to match up to the standard so that quite a bit more demanding", – [Tom]	Connects course selection to industry demands.
RQ3	Change in applicant characteristics post-covid	Academic staff's views on post-covid transition	"Post-pandemic, there will be a strong appetite for learning as people seek to enhance	Specific reasons for enrolment on an EE course after Covid

			their skills and knowledge for future careers", – [Michael]	
RQ3	Characteristics of applicants from geographic segments	Professional staff's views of applicant characteristics for African markets	"Because we are targeting right now African markets, an unfortunate by-product is we're dealing with people who are in those areas that want to come to the UK", – [Selvam]	Staff sceptecism about identified countries (non-low risk countries)
RQ3	Characterisation of EE learners under student mobility	Professional staff's differentiation of EE delegates and international students	"For the international students as you know, international students, they want to upscale themselves, but they also want to have the experience", – [Vera]	Aligning professional staff's views with existing theories of EE and ISM
RQ3	EE applicant characteristics in terms of affordability	Academic staff's views on selecting EE over long term study for practitioners	"It's a kind of an affordable way of doing a course, it is expensive, but it's affordable compared to really huge amounts of time you have to spend on the alternative", – [Manuela]	Aligning academic staff's views with existing theories of EE learner characteristics
RQ3	Characteristics of sponsored delegates	Academic staff's generalisation of sponsored delegate characteristics	"This budget is available, you can have this training, do you want it, take it or leave it",– [Michael]	Corporate budgets and non-targeted EE training as a staff perk