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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

CASE STUDY OF DISTANCE LEARNING AT
UNIVERSITY OF NAJLAN

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Educational Technology

August 2017

This Dissertation by: Mahdi Mohammed Saleh Alqotami Alzamanan
Entitled: *Case Study of Distance Learning at University of Najran*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in Department of Educational Technology

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ABSTRACT

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In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the need for distance-learning programs in the universities has been gaining importance. Najran, the area in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which this study addressed, has been the target of serious attacks against both the government and the civilian population in a recent conflict with Yemen. Because all areas of Najran have been targeted, including educational institutions, the ability for students to attend the university in recent years has been severely curtailed. While conflict prompted the study, there were, and are, other reasons for promoting distance learning in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The evidence gathered in this study exhibited the value of distance learning overall. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia could benefit greatly from distance learning programs in Najran and elsewhere due to limited space for classes, the need to shift away from the dependence on an oil economy, and the need to address both cultural and geographical factors such as providing an education to students in more rural locations, female students, and students unable to attend traditional classes due to the rapid growth of the student population. The research questions asked in the study addressed reshaping education in the war-stricken area of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia-Yemen border areas; the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry of the affordances and constraints of distance learning; and the

perception of the value of distance learning. A qualitative case-study methodology framed by the epistemology of constructivism was used. The study was carried out by conducting focus group interviews with teachers and students as well as with hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry. Three different data collection tools were used (focus group interviews, a research journal, and the gathering of artifacts). All three provided information regarding distance learning at the University of Najran and in the hiring of distance learning graduates in the City of Najran. The findings revealed the need for access, basic infrastructure, and interest in distance learning. To allow for the continued enhancement of technology, shifts in perception and greater collaboration to promote online education and employment of distance learning graduates in Najran, changes must take place.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the need for distance learning (DL) programs in the universities has been gaining importance (Aljabre, 2012). Some of the factors related to this phenomenon have been the need for more educational availability due to limited space for college-goers, the need to shift away from the dependence on an oil economy given the unemployment rate, and the need to address both cultural and geographical factors that have become more apparent in the KSA (Altowjry, 2005; United Nations, 2016). While these factors were sufficient to warrant a study on distance learning in the KSA, there was a more pressing concern which could serve to act as a catalyst for shifting the educational landscape in the KSA.

On the border of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Yemen, a war has been taking place. In 2011, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh was ousted in Yemen (Stenslie, 2013). Following this event, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi came to power in 2012 in an unopposed Yemeni election (Obaid, 2014). Yet, Hadi's presidency was not long lasting as the Houthis, a militant group believed to be supported by Iran, seized control of the Yemen government (Stenslie, 2013). This took place in 2014 and 2015 and was considered a coup by many countries, including Saudi Arabia, although Hadi did resign under duress (Obaid, 2014). Eventually, Hadi fled to Aden, a city in southern Yemen, and it was here that he withdrew his resignation (Obaid, 2014). Hadi asserted that the

Houthis, supported by sections of the Yemeni military (loyal to previous president Ali Abdullah Saleh), had set up the coup against him (al Shihabi, 2015).

The role that the KSA has played in the Yemeni conflict was in response to a call for intervention by Hadi (Obaid, 2014). When Hadi fled to Aden, Houthi forces led an offensive against the City of Aden (Stenslie, 2013). Ultimately, Hadi retreated to the KSA. Today, the KSA and other allies have been launching airstrikes into Yemen, against the Houthis and the Houthis have been attacking the KSA along the border areas (al Shihabi, 2015). Najran, the area in the KSA which this study addressed, is right on the border of KSA and Yemen (al Shihabi, 2015).

Najran has been the target of serious attacks against both the government and the civilian population and have been one of the cities in the KSA most negatively affected by the recent conflict (al Shihabi, 2015). Because all areas of Najran have been targeted, including educational institutions, the ability for students to attend the university in recent years has been severely curtailed (Alturki, 2014). The images in the following figures describe what has been happening in the City of Najran, demonstrating the difficulty for students, and all the people of Najran, to proceed with life in a customary way (Figures 1-4; al Shihabi, 2015).



Figure 1. Photo of the Central Market in Najran after a bombing.



Figure 2. Photo of a health center in Najran after a bombing.



Figure 3. Photo of an auto salvage and workshop area after a bombing.



Figure 4. Photo of an elementary school after a bombing.

The destruction to various public spaces and buildings are apparent from these illustrations. Figure 4 is that of a K-12 school in Najran. The conflict taking place in this border area between the KSA and Yemen has been causing serious difficulties for educating both children and adults (al Shihabi, 2015). Thousands of students in Najran have been excluded from education in this crisis which has been damaging to individuals and the country as a whole.

As a potential solution, and the focus of this study, distance learning may be one of the few ways in which citizens could achieve a higher education in Najran, given the current conflict and physical destruction. In particular, the University of Najran now offers online classes and still attempts to include the occasional face-to-face class when safe locations can be found ((al Shihabi, 2015). While the university's online classes have offered students a possible solution to the current instability in Najran and provided a way for students to continue with academic study, the infrastructure has been lacking to launch into a complete online educational system at the university (Al-Asmari & Rabb Khan, 2014). Given the current and sudden shift in Najran, the use of technology must be supported and infrastructures enhanced to make way for a new system of education in the KSA (Altowjry, 2005).

In the wake of the current situation, and given the available resources, the KSA does have the capacity to scale up online programs (Al-Asmari & Rabb Khan, 2014). As such, this study was aimed at exploring the present educational situation in the KSA, particularly by using the University of Najran as the central focus of this study. Given the direct conflict along the KSA-Yemen border area, what takes place now within the

educational system in Najran (to assure that students continue to have access to educational resources) could serve as a template for the rest of the KSA.

Some of the key words used in this study were that of distance learning; the KSA-Yemen Border Area; the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authority; the Civil Service Ministry; the development of information and communication technology (ICT); and the perception of value surrounding distance learning. These components, among others, were addressed in this study through an exploration of the research questions. A qualitative research methodology was used. A case study was carried out by conducting focus group interviews with teachers and students on the perception of using distance learning at the University of Najran and in KSA as well as with hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry. A thorough literature review and the use of document analysis also contributed to this study.

Statement of the Problem

Distance learning in the KSA has been limited. There have been a number of reasons for this phenomenon. Some of these have been the need for more educational availability due to limited space for college goers, the need to shift away from the dependence on an oil economy given the current unemployment rate, and the need to address both cultural and geographical factors that have limited the ability to receive a college education (Altowjry, 2005; United Nations, 2016). While these factors alone have been sufficient to warrant a study on distance learning in the KSA, there was a more pressing concern which could serve to act as a catalyst for shifting the educational landscape in the KSA. On the border of the Kingdom of Saudi KSA and Yemen, a major conflict has ensued, making this area idea for promoting a much-needed shift toward

distance learning in the KSA. This study was vitally important to ensure that all students in Najran, and in the greater KSA, have the opportunity to attend college. The primary problem has been the lack of any substantial policy initiatives that focus on use of KSA's ICT infrastructure for distance learning. This may entail an expansion of the infrastructure and the willingness of teachers, students, and authorities at the Civil Service Ministry to empower a shift toward distance learning. This study afforded a unique approach to enabling the use of distance learning in a part of the world that has not yet embraced this possibility to its fullest. Additionally, using Najran as a case study was both exceptional and much-needed, especially given the conflict taking place along the KSA-Yemen border.

Description of This Study

As noted, the KSA could benefit greatly from distance-learning programs in its universities. Limited space for classes, the need to shift away from the dependence on an oil economy, and the need to address both cultural and geographical factors have become more apparent in the KSA (Altowjry, 2005). In line with Aljabre (2012), a growing number of both female and male students have been denied admission to universities due to overcrowding. Yet, some of this could be alleviated through the use of technology. As noted by the Communications and Information Technology Commission (2016), the mobile broadband subscription reached 106.0% and, in the overall population, 21.6 million were internet users on high speed fiber optics networks (FTTs) in the KSA. Clearly, the majority of the KSA has met the ICT pre-conditions required for distance learning (Alturki, 2014). The 2008 national plan to adopt information technology at the

national level opened up the building and use of technology in KSA. Now, there is an opportunity to focus on providing distance learning (Alenezi, 2012).

Given that the KSA has some ICT infrastructure in place and could make use of it for many reasons, this study addressed using distance learning in all of the KSA. More specifically, using distance learning in Najran has become important given the effects that the border conflict has been having on students' ability to attend classes on campus. At this time, the University of Najran offered distance learning in a few different areas, and students were enrolling (Alturki, 2014). Yet, many more students could be enrolling than actually were. The evidence suggested that there was a need to further explore distance learning in relationship to expanding ICT platforms and to investigate why teachers and students may be reluctant to embrace distance learning. This study was instrumental in encouraging the University of Najran to create expanded distance-learning programs critical for the evolution of distance learning at University of Najran. There was clearly a need in both this area and in the KSA to ensure that the university culture could effectively provide a continuing and equality-based education to students.

Significance

Distance learning in the KSA has been one of the most progressive educational policies in the region and the KSA has already established some infrastructure for distance learning (Aljabre, 2012). However, the effectiveness of distance learning in this region has not been studied as of now. Additionally, the perception of value of online education versus traditional delivery models has been unknown beyond talk in commonplace. Given that the Ministry of education in the KSA has been the main organization responsible for the implementation of educational policy, they would be

responsible for ensuring that higher education was available for all segments of the population. Online educational solutions have been a viable option and even more essential in the conflict areas between the KSA and Yemen, namely Najran, given the severely limited access to on-campus classes because of the destruction to physical spaces in this area. As such, the promotion of distance learning would allow the ministry to provide students in the KSA greater access to education. The significance of this research was highly linked with promoting the ICT system to provide for distance learning system in Najran. Given that I am from Najran, this research was of personal interest to me and I believe that education should be available to all students in the KSA. This belief was connected to the value of education that was mainstreamed in Saudi culture. Distance learning has appeared to be an effective option to meet the needs of students in the Najrani area of conflict, address KSA's issue of not enough physical room for students, and grant access to all students, whether male or female, rural or urban. But, little research has existed about online education in KSA and, in particular, the area of the Najran-Yemen border. This research has the capacity to generate an in-depth understanding which could provide an avenue for policy makers to create comprehensive policy toward advancing distance learning in KSA.

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore distance learning in the KSA and even more specifically in Najran since the influence of war in this boarder area. Effectively documenting the successes and challenges faced by distance learning, stakeholders could provide an avenue for broadening online education for all students in the KSA. This study sought to help understand the perceptions of teachers and students

related to distance learning as a means to access education, which may be a viable option to provide higher education to all people who have been unable to attend universities in the border area for the myriad of reasons discussed. Unless studies and extensive research are conducted to address the challenges, issues, perspectives, and prospects surrounding education and the quality level of the current distance learning being provided at University of Najran, impact on policy has been limited. Using Najran as the case study for this work not only shed a light on how the Saudi educational administration could provide students in KSA-Yemen border area, a much-needed access to education--now limited by conflict--but also creates a platform for distance learning to be implemented all across the KSA.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study was:

Q1 What role does distance learning serve in reshaping education in the war-stricken Kingdom of Saudi Arabia-Yemen border areas?

This question related to the conflict taking place on the KSA-Yemen border.

Given the difficulty with attending classes due to unsafe conditions, distance learning would be a good solution for students in the area who could no longer attend physical classes.

There were two sub-questions relating to this question:

Q1a What are the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry of the affordances and constraints of distance learning?

Given that ICT infrastructure is still in the process of expanding, distance learning has not yet been fully embraced by policy makers, teachers, and students. This study

sought to explore the constraints to promoting distance learning in the KSA--particularly in Najran--and what tools could be used to encourage greater online educational programs.

Q1b What is the perception of value of the distance learning experience?

Because distance learning is new, many cultures are still in the process of accepting its use. Furthermore, it does introduce greater opportunities to all students, and this could sometimes be met with resistance in areas where some portions of the population have greater opportunities to receive a college education.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the important aspects of this study, including the research questions that were answered using a qualitative case-study approach. The need for more educational availability due to limited space for college-goers, the need to shift away from the dependence on an oil economy given the unemployment rate, and the need to address both cultural and geographical factors in the KSA have been addressed in this chapter (Altojry, 2005; United Nations, 2016). The conflict taking place of the KSA-Yemen border has been addressed. Without question, students in Najran have been limited in their ability to take classes. Yet, the potential solution of distance learning has not yet been embraced. The results of this study highlighted the current status and future extension of distance learning in the KSA by using the University of Najran as the case explored in this study. Findings from this region could then be used to inform all portions of the KSA population on the potential for education for all students, regardless of conflict, lack of physical space for students, geography, and whether they were male or female.

In Chapter II, aspects of distance learning in the KSA including the environment, development of distance learning, implementations of distance learning, and how development in ICT infrastructure in Najran and the KSA can be improved are discussed. In Chapter III, the proposed methodology in terms of participants, types of methods utilized, research procedures, and plan of analysis are described.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The following literature review served to establish that there was a need to ascertain the readiness of educational institutes, faculty, and students to promote student learning through distance learning. Distance learning with qualified and equivalent degree accreditation has been more important for countries like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) because cultural and social tenants are very much different from those in the west (Al-Asmari & Rabb Khan, 2014). In the recent past, the Yemen border areas of KSA have been at unrest due to fighting (al Shihabi, 2015). The students in this area, and especially those at the University of Najran, the institution used in this study, may not be in a good position to attend the university as full-time students on campus. In this situation, this study was used to find answers on the appropriateness of distance learning in both Najran and KSA. The first research question (What role does distance learning serve in reshaping education in the war-stricken KSA-Yemen border areas?) was the primary research question used in this study. This, among others, has been the key research question that was explored in this review. To promote the idea that students could obtain a high-quality education in KSA through distance learning, the literature review first addressed education in a global context, the validity of distance learning, the role of technology, student-teacher collaboration, higher education in the KSA, education

in Najran on the KSA-Yemen border, technology at the University of Najran, and the value of education and online delivery in KSA (Aljabre, 2012).

Education in a Global Context

The existence of a globalized world today has changed the face of education and the economy on all levels. The need for educational systems to produce 21st century graduates is of vital importance. The needs of a competitive global marketplace require students who have been actively engaged in their education to achieve academic success (Casimiro, 2015). The new global economy functions most effectively by graduating students who could think critically and creatively, solve problems, reason effectively, communicate clearly, and collaborate with others (Casimiro, 2015). Yet, there has been a disparity between the desire of students to attend college in all parts of the world and those that have been able to access higher education. Education was traditionally based on the basic knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic during the agricultural age. However, the foundation of education has shifted with advancements in technology. There has been an evolution in the educational industry from lecture teaching to student-centered learning, from basic knowledge to critical thinking (Gibb, Haskins, & Robertson, 2014). The dynamically changing global environment has demanded creativity, analytical thinking, and strong problem-solving skills. Yet, this would not take place without equal access to higher education for students everywhere.

One of the primary drivers for distance learning has been the underperformance of students in the United States (Sims, 2013). Standardized assessments have become the tool for measuring student achievement and school accountability (Sims, 2013). One commonly encountered test in the U.S. has been the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). The

purpose of the SAT has been to assess high school students to determine how prepared students were for college. If a student was able to score 1550 or higher in reading, writing, and math, they would likely earn B grades during their freshman year in high school, indicating college readiness. These students were most likely to finish college with a degree. Unfortunately, 43.0% of test takers scoring well did not indicate success in college, if a student elected to continue his or her education post-high school. The writing portion has typically been the most challenging; only 45.0% of students passed this session in a study conducted in 2012 (Maruyama, 2012). Another statistic illuminated that less than 60.0% of college students in the United States earned a degree within 6 years (Sims, 2013).

On the international level, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a unique test administered on a triennial basis (Sims, 2013). The PISA was implemented in 2000 by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). One factor that has made the PISA different from other assessments was that it measured skill level, requiring students to apply their knowledge in math, science, and reading through examination, interpretation, and problem solving. Assessment and the Global Workforce Scholars support that there was a positive relationship between education and labor productivity, and a chief factor in this equation was that of human capital. Countries with higher productivity levels usually have the highest achievement scores on the PISA and have greater human capital. Higher productivity has been positively associated with education, trade, and economic freedom (Sims, 2013).

The PISA has been unique because it was designed to measure how much a student had learned which could predict how prepared students were to enter the global

labor market and the global economy as a whole. The PISA assessment has been consistently administered in more than 65 countries. A study by Sims (2013) has analyzed the results of the PISA in the years 2000, 2003, 2006, and 2009 to determine if there was a positive correlation between labor productivity (human capital) and the economies of the 65 nations included in the study. The overall results revealed a positive relationship between average PISA scores and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), per person employed (Sims, 2013). In this manner, the PISA could be used to identify the condition of a country's educational system (Sims, 2013). As the world marketplace continues to advance technologically and fiscally, increasing the demand for highly skilled individuals, there could be a critical need to align the educational system in new and meaningful ways, namely through distance learning.

The PISA also revealed that students in the U.S. performed below average in mathematics and science, and slightly above average in reading (Sims, 2013). The study showed that 29 other countries ranked higher than the United States on the PISA in 2012 (Bourgeois, 2013). The United States ranked number 36 overall of the 65 participating countries (Sims, 2013). The question being asked was: Why is one of the most powerful countries in the world producing poorly educated students? Much of this has had to do with several factors, other than standardized schooling issues, that have been changed in the landscape of education in the U.S. and in other western countries. The results of the PISA were informative in identifying a problem that has led to the need, efficacy, and value of online distance learning, not just in the U.S. but worldwide.

These findings have led to what factors make student learning successful in a college setting. Pascarella et al. (2014) identified the need to consider demographic

factors in traditional college student success in the U.S. Some factors included whether students were full- or part-time as well as whether students worked or not, and what family responsibilities they may have (Jorissen, 2012). Demographics and other characteristics of adult learners could influence the way that online students perceive their educational experience and could influence academic outcomes (Jorissen, 2012). Varying factors influence the way that students have perceived their educational experiences as well as the value that they have put on both educational and external stressors (Hachey, Wladis, & Conway, 2012; Jorissen, 2012). There has been a relationship to college achievement based on gender, age, grade point average, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Pascarella et al. 2014).

Hachey et al. (2012) stressed that the level of attendance and online access were important predictors of performance and achievement as well. Hachey et al. (2012) examined the overall relationship among online learning and performance and concluded that they were significantly related. Researchers identified several issues, such as lack of financial support (thus, forcing students to work while attending school), lack of parental education, and lack of appropriate course work in high school as being related to problems with attendance in traditional on-campus settings. In a study comparing differing factors, it was found that delaying enrollment in college for more than 1 year after high school graduation and working more hours per week while attending school were associated with a reduced likelihood of persisting in college after the freshman year (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2015). Crisp et al. (2015) also revealed that environmental and demographic factors were important to keeping students in school; these predictors included having parents with more education, providing strong financial support that

negated the need for the student to work while attending school, and having a strong high school background. Crisp et al.'s findings also indicated that working had a negative impact on the likelihood of attaining a degree while working. For these reasons, traditional higher education has become less viable for those in the U.S. and in other western cultures. As a result, there has been a significant shift towards distance learning. Worldwide, this shift has been extremely useful as many students who wish to pursue college may not be able to because of limited access to resources.

The Validity of Distance Learning

Distance learning has continued to gain momentum for at least the last two decades worldwide (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Since 2012, participation in online courses has grown to almost 6.7 million enrollments, which would be the equivalent of about 32.0% of all enrolled college students in the United States taking a minimum of one distance course (Allen & Seaman, 2014). The yearly percentage of undergraduate students enrolled in at least one distance class expanded from 8.0% to 20.0% between 2000-2008 and growth has continued at a steady pace (Ho et al., 2015). Over 69.0% of leaders in higher education also asserted that distance learning was a crucial part of their long-term educational strategies (He, Xu, & Kruck, 2014).

While distance learning has not been a new or insignificant practice, research into the efficacy of distance learning is still an emerging field. Nevertheless, in examining best practices for designing distance courses, recommending student engagement strategies, and optimal methods for instructor presence and facilitation worldwide, distance learning has continued to be promising (Dixson, 2015). While still young, distance learning has helped to solve some of the more pressing issues facing higher

education related to access to education, affordability, degree completion, and efficiencies for building personalized and adaptive learning platforms (He et al., 2014). Given the importance placed on distance learning by higher education leaders and others, it was imperative that the research community practice diligence in its study and promotion of distance learning. For many years, academics and policymakers have been discussing the need for a change in the western higher education system (Selingo, 2013). Increasingly, earning a degree has become less available to many, less affordable, and potentially less applicable (Selingo, 2013).

As an antidote for meeting the needs of college students worldwide, the landscape for distance learning has been rapidly expanding. In 2012, there were no more than a dozen articles published examining the efficacy of online learning as a global educational tool, yet between 2013-2015 there were close to 600 articles and scholarly works focused on distance learning (Sun, 2017). Exploring the impact of distance learning through published data and findings has served to inform leaders and practitioners in higher education that distance learning was a viable practice (Breslow et al., 2013; Reich, 2015).

The Role of Technology

With the development of global technology and internet use, education has evolved in comparison to more conventional means of education (Dixson, 2012). Most students in western culture have been exposed to the internet and other technologies on a daily basis. This has contributed to the need to engage students through technology (Silseth, 2012). Characteristically, technology has created students who are more independent learners (Kukulaska-Hulme, 2012). For students at the collegiate level, it has been common for them to explore what they were being taught in class to come to their

own conclusions (Bal, Grewal, Mills, & Ottley, 2015). Many college students' preferences for the technological know-how to participate globally has highlighted the need to encourage the use of technology (Dekhane, Xu, & Tsoi, 2013; Silseth, 2012).

Today, higher education typically has made use of technology, whether in traditional classes or in distance learning. Several studies have been conducted, which has pointed to technology as playing an important role in engaging students academically (Poppelman, Lobene, & Blacksmith, 2015). Learning should be adaptive and students need to have the opportunity to use certain technologies (Poppelman et al., 2015). Classroom practices by teachers that have included and promoted the use of technology have been found to bolster student achievement (Dixson, 2012). Without question, enhancing students' academic achievement, with the use of technology, has been positively associated with their academic success (Dixson, 2012).

Student-Teacher Collaboration

Innovative, research based, and effective student engagement is crucial to producing students that could perform competitively on global standards, be prepared for higher education, and could compete in the workforce (Marcketti & Karpova, 2014). Consequently, one of the best ways to create academic success has been to ensure that students are engaged in the classroom as collaborators (Høigaard, Kovač, Øverby, & Haugen, 2015). According to a study of Norwegian school students, academic self-efficacy was investigated to see if both the effects of proximal and distal qualities made a difference in student achievement (Høigaard et al., 2015). When the students believed they could be collaborative partners with their teachers, their academic achievement

increased. In this manner, the value of deep learning has been promoted (Daniels, Edwards, Engeström, Gallagher, & Ludvigsen, 2013).

Students have appeared to learn better when they could be creative, solve problems, make connections to real world events and situations, and make decisions as co-teachers in the learning process. Both students and teachers have the potential to benefit from more innovative, relevant, and effective learning processes that reach beyond the walls of a single classroom, which has been critically important for distance learning to be successful (Marcketti & Karpova, 2014). Students who have been challenged to higher cognitive thinking could later transfer this to their work or other environments. Teachers could have the opportunity to be stretched beyond the commonplace lectures they so often relied on for on-campus teaching year after year. Nationally, and internationally, there has been an increased focus on the teaching of 21st century skills in higher education, and how what takes place in the online classroom could directly affect how students could achieve success on the global stage (Gibb et al., 2014). Marcketti and Karpova (2014) has corroborated this idea that their concept of learning in the classroom has become limited in reference to who we are globally and that what happens in the virtual classroom needs to become a much greater part of curriculum in higher education today.

The teacher's role. The goal of the teacher should be to challenge students to higher levels of academic self-efficacy. One way of boosting the success of this type of learning could be to include a collaborative teaching method for addressing the needs of all students who could benefit from greater teacher attention and a focus on real world, technologically-based innovations (Sabzian, Gilakjani, & Sodouri, 2013). Collaborative

teaching methods could involve educators in a number of ways in which they could have the flexibility needed to respond specifically to students' needs (Burroughs, 2014).

Another way in which to foster student-teacher collaboration could be that teachers could enhance their role and level of commitment by studying journals; viewing instructive videos; seeking information; engaging in discussions on education centered websites; and by possibly attending classes, presentations, and conferences (Hadar & Brody, 2012).

Furthermore, the potential of engaging the student by including them in some of these activities aimed at knowledge acquisition could be beneficial. Without question, a difference in improvement regarding the mastery of academic skills has existed between students who have been instructed with collaborative teaching methods, as opposed to those students who were not instructed with collaborative teaching methods (Burroughs, 2014).

The shared role. The large number of undergraduate students who have enrolled in courses globally and failed to complete these courses has granted researchers the opportunity to examine successful components of effective instruction as well as students' perceptions of how they learn best. Grubb and Gabriner (2013) suggested that the most effective form of instruction derives from a triangle of instruction that includes the teacher, the student, and the curriculum, placing the emphasis on the teacher's responses to the other two aspects of the triangle. Drawing upon Grubb and Gabriner's (2013) triangle, and modifying it in the context of this study, Figure 5 reveals the relationship between students and teachers and places equal emphasis on the responsibilities of both the instructor and the student, positing that each of these must interact with the other two aspects of the triangle of instruction.

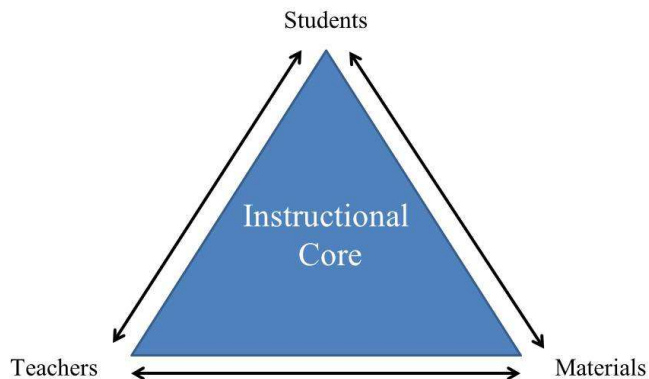


Figure 5. Triangle of instruction.

Use of this model explains the valuable interplay of attitudes and responses of both students and instructors necessary for the promotion of student engagement in the online classroom. In another similar study, it was also discovered by Könings, Seidel, Brand-Gruwel, and van Merriënboer (2014) that, when students and teachers interact and collaborate within the scope of an ideal alignment of participation, perception, and expectation, it allows for the most effective form of collaboration to take place. Collaboration has also allowed teachers and students to talk about what students need to learn and serves as a teaching guide on how to map curriculum, design lessons, and construct assessments that measure whether students were achieving goals (Chenoweth, 2014). Previous, traditional educational programs, which were well intentioned in adapting innovations, have often had little long-term effect on teaching and student achievement unless both the student and teacher were actively engaged in the educational process (Austin & Garber, 2013). In this context, a collaborative approach sees both the

teachers and the students as the decision makers in the distance learning environment (Daniels et al., 2013).

Another way that has been used to frame collaboration between students and teachers, and to promote academic engagement, has been through Healey, Flint, and Harrington's 2014 study on partnership in the classroom. These researchers posited that there were four different manners in which students could experience academic engagement. These consisted of: (a) consultation, (b) involvement, (c) participation, and (d) partnership (Healey et al., 2014). While these authors have identified the four differing forms, their study focused on partnership, the last type noted on the list. Although the researchers' view partnership as the most important means for facilitating student engagement, they still found the other three equally complementary to the process of engaging students (Healey et al., 2014).

In this study, the authors (Healey et al., 2014) also posited that student-teacher partnership was important for examining what educational tools chosen for distance learning could influence student and teacher relationships. With greater awareness comes greater choice in what was being created in the academic environment. These authors advocated for viewing teaching and learning as a partnership between students and teachers because it allowed for more authentic engagement in which reciprocal learning and teaching, choice in learning tools, and joint policy creation could occur (Healey et al., 2014). As has been addressed in earlier portions of this work, the global environment has established a framework for working with a more complex set of circumstances than in the past. Higher education must step up to the plate, and this has largely exposed the need for the type of partnership acknowledged in this study by Healey et al. (2014). The notion

of partnership has been diverse and multilayered and has encompassed a range of academic and professional cultures and practices. In an attempt to share this concept on a visual level, these researchers have constructed a simple model of the student as a partner to teachers in online higher education (Healey et al., 2014). The two areas represented in the model below (Figure 6) allow for a distinction between students as partners in regards to student engagement, teaching, and research in the online environment (Healey et al., 2014). Although there is overlap between the variables, these two spheres represent distinct areas. Both have their own deliberate implications and intellectual foundation and, therefore, create a differing impact on the student learning experience (Healey et al., 2014). Each area also has a relative number of individual actors, practitioners, and researchers that serve to contributed their own unique perspectives in higher education today.

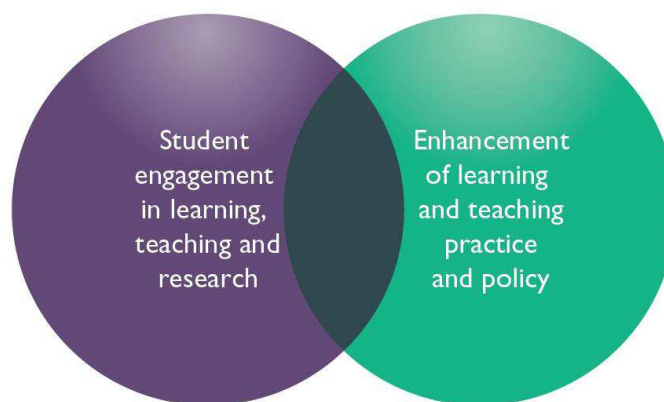


Figure 6. Students and teachers as partners online.

In light of the fact that the two areas of partnership are not at opposite ends of the spectrum, they interact and serve to modify one another. Therefore, they are shown as two overlapping circles (Healey et al., 2014). Both student engagement and student

teacher partnership are complex and not always easy to separate. In this manner, they are mutually reinforcing and co-creators in the process of developing and facilitating education in the 21st century (Healey et al., 2014). For example, and as can be understood by examining the left-hand side of the model, an online, student assisted learning program could engage students actively with their own learning, while at the same time contribute to the development and implementation of the program or project, by influencing the teaching method, as seen in the right-hand circle of Figure 6 (Healey et al., 2014). Positing such a unique theory has placed this study at the forefront of what it means for students to be co-creators in the classroom. While it may not be unusual for students in higher education to be involved in learning and research, it has been unusual to have students actively engaged as allies in the process of creating and enhancing practice and policy, outside of responding to typical class evaluations (Healey et al., 2014). The most notable aspect of this study was that it assumed that students and teachers were equal partners in the creation and facilitation process. This allowed for increased academic self-efficacy and greater student engagement in the educational process.

As addressed in this review so far, there has been an increased focus on the teaching of 21st century skills in distance learning, and how what takes place in the virtual classroom directly affects how students could achieve academic success (Gibb et al., 2014). Marcketti and Karpova (2014) has corroborated this idea that our concept of learning in the traditional campus-based classroom has become limited, in reference to global realities, and that what happens in the online classroom needs to become a much greater part of curriculum in higher education today.

Higher Education and Employment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The overall population of the KSA has been increasing as has been the case of most countries in the Middle East and Asia. As noted by the United Nations (2016), the population of KSA will be more than 40.5 million in 2025 and further increasing to 59.7 million in 2050. The increase in population has required countries to prepare and extend basic public services like health and education. The KSA labor force participation rate was low in 2010, at 20.5%, and remarkably low for women at 1.2% against 36.8% for men (United Nations, 2016). Given that the KSA has an oil-based economy, earning potential trended to be linked with this industry. As put out by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA Factbook, 2014), in previous years, 90.0% of the KSA's export earning depended on oil. Nevertheless, these numbers have been falling as the oil economy has become less lucrative due to reduced oil prices (CIA Factbook, 2014). In response to this situation, Saudi officials have been trying to promote the employment of youth who have been well-versed in education and technical skills (CIA Factbook, 2014). These findings have been supported by the work conducted by Dirani, Hamie, and Tlaiss (2017). These researchers asserted that, not only has the oil industry shifted based on reduced oil prices, but, "Its aged leadership is ceding power to a new generation, and its society, which is dominated by young people, is restive" (Dirani et al., p. 246).

The employment of women in the KSA has also been an important area to explore. Women in the Arab Gulf states have been becoming more educated and have been joining the workforce in greater numbers. The data collected by Kemp, Madsen, and Davis (2015) revealed that the KSA and Qatar have the lowest percentage of women working throughout the gulf states, and that only 5.2% of women are in leadership

positions in the workforce (Kemp et al., 2015). The primary assumption for these numbers has been tied to the cultural and economic restrictions posed on women in the more traditional environments of the KSA and Qatar. Furthermore, gas and oil companies, in general, have employed fewer numbers of females. There have also been constraints in these countries when it came to men and women working together directly (Kemp et al., 2015). While some changes have been taking place in the KSA's economic sector in relation to women working, serious cultural limitations have still existed.

Nonetheless, in response to a changing economy and the cultural shifts brought about by globalization, the growing labor force of the future has required more diversity. The revitalization of the economic sector in the KSA must expand to provide jobs in the future. As such, newer education policies are needed to focus on providing a useful education to the younger generations, including women. Furthermore, in taking culture into account, the society of the KSA has been divided among Bedouin and nomads, and putting them into an education system that has not been designed to meet their diverse cultural values and life styles could create a situation in which these groups were at risk of remaining outside of decision making--in terms of national education policy of KSA. In moving to more online platforms in the KSA, these cultural groups may have more of a voice. A final consideration for a shift in higher education in the KSA has been in addressing the educational needs of the young generation of the Saudis, many of which live in rural area and may not be able to get to universities easily. All of these factors have played an important role in making a clear case for online programs so that all students in the KSA would have access to education and employment. As often happens,

need seems to inspire innovation and online learning in the KSA has slowly been growing and gaining recognition (Altameem, 2013).

Distance Learning in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Distance learning in the KSA has been one of the most progressive education policies in the region. Unlike in Bahrain where distance learning has not been recognized, the KSA has already established a very strong legacy on distance learning (Aljabre, 2012). The Ministry of education of the KSA has been the main organization responsible for the implementation of the education policy and has been responsible for ensuring that higher education was available for all segments of the population. The vision for 2030 relates to the importance of education, and the provision of distance learning is one of the pillars of higher education policy. Since the KSA has this aggressive educational policy, it has made the policy distinguished in the region (Altowjry, 2005).

The gap between applicants and total enrollees needs to be reduced at educational institutions and distance learning could be seen in the number of students who wish to achieve a college education in the KSA. The gross enrollment ratios at the time of the study for primary, secondary, and tertiary levels were 108.716, 108.28, and 61.112, respectively (World Bank, 2016; see Figure 7). Here, distance learning would be specifically beneficial for students who were studying at secondary and tertiary levels. The secondary enrollment ratio has been encouraging, but it has been quite low at the tertiary level (Aljabre, 2012). There has been a greater need to see if students were intentionally not enrolling at the tertiary level or if there was a lack of room and seating at educational institutes, colleges, or universities to accommodate all applicants. If latter was the case, then it showed that universities were failing to take advantage of offering

courses through distance learning. It has been perhaps some of both because, at the time of this study, only 27.0% of students preferred to study through distance learning. This meant that there still was a lack of culture for distance learning in KSA. These numbers could change through proper strategic interventions in the educational sector (Aljabre, 2012).

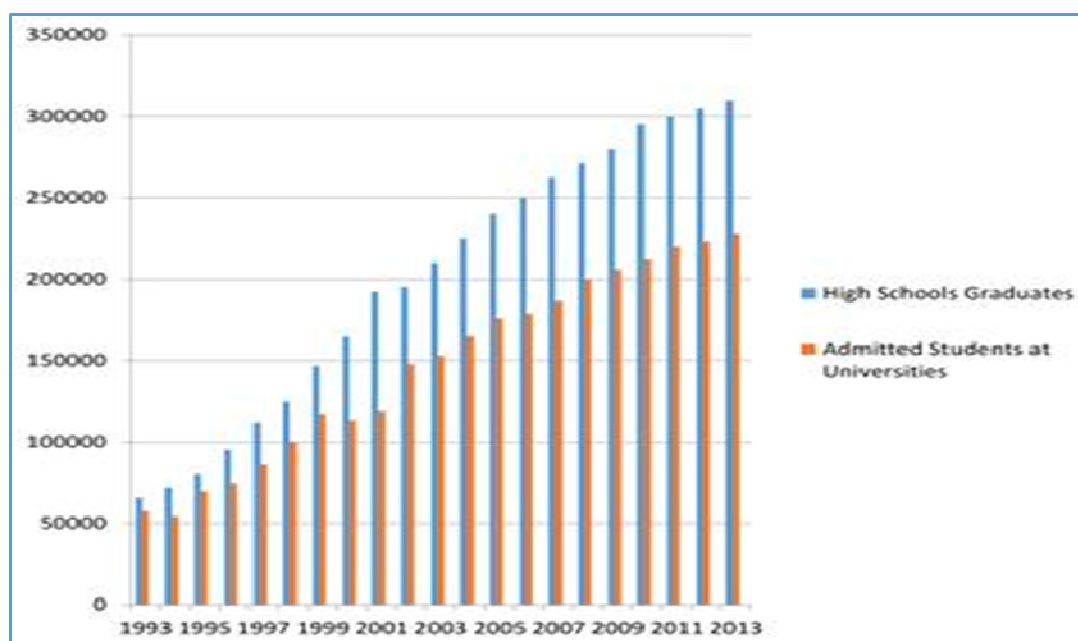


Figure 7. The gap between graduates and admissions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Aljabre (2012) has studied the current practices and prospects of distance learning in KSA universities. He identified that void still existed for development of distance learning in KSA, even after universities in the KSA have recognized the fact that distance learning was an integral part of the comprehensive education strategy. These findings were especially true in the evidence that educational institutes across the world were successfully adapting to distance learning. In line with the discussion above, Aljabre

(2012) further identified that the growing number of both female and male students and their denial of admission due to overcrowding, was another key reason that distance learning should be given priority in the KSA.

Technology in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

As noted by the Communications and Information Technology Commission (2016), the mobile broadband subscription reached 106.0% and, in the overall population, 21.6 million were internet users on high speed fiber optics networks (FTTs) in the KSA. These were the preconditions required as basic logistics for distance learning. These findings related to the 2008 national plan to adopt information technology at national level. It focused on recommendations of implementation of e-learning and distance-learning (Alenezi, 2012).

According to the available information relating to distance learning prospects in KSA, it was quite evident that society had already become ready with all up-to-date ICT indicators. In exploring the history of education of distance learning in the KSA, the following has been found:

- 1954, Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University started a distance-learning program in the Faculty of Religious Science, and then in 1965 in the Faculty of Arabic Language.
- 1978, King Saud University started a distance-learning program in the Faculty of Art and Faculty of Business.
- 1972, King Abdulaziz University started correspondence studies in some departments.
- 1976, King Saud University canceled correspondence studies.
- 1980, King Abdulaziz University established an independent unit for correspondence studies.
- 1987, Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University canceled correspondence studies.
- 1989, Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University resumed correspondence studies for female students.

- 2002, King Abdulaziz University began applying distance-learning programs and set up a separate department for distance-learning programs.
- 2007, Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University began applying distance-learning programs.
- 2008, the National Center for e-learning and distance learning was established.
- 2010, the Ministry of Higher Education issued regulations and laws governing distance-learning programs in Saudi Arabia.
- 2011, the rules governing the issuance of licenses for distance-learning programs in higher education institutions were established.
- 2011, Saudi Electronic University was established. (Alturki, 2014, pp. 7-8)

Universities, as per the education policy, have been equipped with computer labs.

However, if this was taking place in distance learning environments in the KSA, there was no information on how exactly this affected distance learning. Nevertheless, the number of students who were seeking an education in the KSA was a good indicator. Clearly, the KSA had an e-learning system already in place. But, there was a substantial need to explore it, how it worked, and whether students and teachers were on the same page in their perspectives using the newer technology. Altowjry (2005) has expressed the point that KSA should be using its ICT infrastructure to better reform its higher education. The point was highly relevant in terms of feasibility for the up scaling of distance learning as much of it was dependent on the ICT indicators. Given that the KSA had some ICT infrastructure in place and could make use of it for many reasons, this study addressed using distance learning in all of the KSA. More specifically, using distance learning in Najran was important given the effects that the border conflict was having on students' ability to attend classes on campus. At the time of this study, the University of Najran offered distance learning in a few different areas and students were enrolling (Alturki, 2014). Yet, many more students could be enrolling than actually were. The evidence suggested that there was a need to further explore distance learning in

relationship to expanding ICT platforms and to investigate why teachers and students may be reluctant to embrace distance as distance learning was one of the most beneficial methods for extending higher education to all parts of a country uniformly.

The prospects for distance learning have been higher in KSA as ICT indicators were at their highest in the Middle East and because the KSA had one of the highest literacy rates in the region, standing at more than 90.0% (Alturki, 2014). Information and communication technology (ICT) and investment in ICT has been an important debate in the KSA. The recent trends have shown that mobile penetration was more than 167.5% and internet use had increased from 5.0% in 2001 to 70.4% in 2016 (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, 2016).

Student-Teacher Collaboration in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Distance learning is contemporarily an essential component facet of education, but needs vary by country. The main reasons for the urgency of distance learning efficacy in the KSA have been based on two important factors: the rapid growth of the student population and a lack of teachers, both in quantity and quality (Al-Asmari & Khan, 2014). In line with a UN report, the population of the KSA was almost twofold in 2005, hence, putting pressure on current infrastructure. This situation needs to be addressed, particularly, if KSA wants to be included in provisioning education to both rural and urban areas. The proportion of foreign teachers in KSA has been high, but the exact statistics in the number of foreign teachers was not currently available. Consequently, the teachers who were already a part of the educational system in the KSA need a thorough understanding of the distance learning possibilities in terms of capacity. It was also important to note if teachers were ready to teach their students through distance learning.

Any unwillingness on the part of teachers would not encourage students to enroll into distance-learning programs. The perceptions and myths about distance learning would matter when it was considered a separate teaching method.

Education in Najran on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia-Yemen Border

University of Najran has currently been offering distance learning in three areas: Islamic education, Arabic language, and Public administration (Alturki, 2014). Many students have currently enrolled in these programs, yet there was a gap between total applications and total enrollees. In line with Alturki (2014), only 75.7% of all high-school students were able to get admission while the rest, 24.3%, were those who could benefit from enrollment in programs offered through distance learning. Distance learning would be beneficial in two ways: by providing admission to students whom universities were unable to accommodate on campus and to provide an alternative for all those students who were unable to reach universities, which were in urban areas, as was the case in the KSA.

University of Najran administrators have asserted that online classes, or virtual classrooms, could be used to ensure that a student's education would continue, despite the lack of classroom buildings in which students could attend classes (al Shihabi, 2015). In the wake of the current situation, and given the available resources, the KSA did have the capacity to scale up online programs (Al-Asmari & Rabb Khan, 2014). As such, this study aimed at exploring the present educational situation in the KSA, particularly in the border City of Najran as a central case study. Given the direct conflict along the KSA-Yemen border area, what takes place now within the educational system in Najran (to

assure that students continue to have access to educational resources) could serve as a template for the rest of the KSA.

Technology at the University of Najran

As noted, the University of Najran should have an e-learning system already in place. Nevertheless, there was a substantial need to explore how it worked, and if both students and teachers were willing to use the technology. Assessments of the educational technologies both for traditional and modern system were done by Omer (2015) in the University of Najran. The findings were that there was a moderate use of educational technologies by teachers and students at University of Najran. However, there was a significant difference between use of educational technology between modern methods and traditional methods of education. It was quite evident that, since modern methods were based on the technology intensive tools, the use of it would definitely be higher. Discussing the particular challenges the university would be facing and what policy options were available for University of Najran, it was critical to allow for the evolution of distance learning at University of Najran (Omer & Alqwieder, 2015). There was clearly a need to ensure that the university culture could effectively provide a continuing and equality-based education to students that were affected by unrest in the border areas.

Value of Education and Online Delivery in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Education has been a value that has become stronger for many in the KSA (Altameem, 2013). The value of education in the KSA has been vital in a time where the KSA must become more dependent of the knowledge economy rather than the oil economy (Altowjry, 2005). Therefore, the value of education has increasingly shifted

(Dixson, 2012). Given changes in the economy and changes in cultural, social, and political arenas, the KSA could benefit greatly from an enhanced higher educational system (Altameem, 2013). Many of these shifts that have occurred in the KSA have been directly related to globalization and changes in technology (Dixson, 2012). Whatever the reason (i.e., political conflict, changes in the economy, the access needed for all students --regardless of gender or area in which they live), online education has been changing the way students were educated in the KSA (Alamoudi & Sulaymani, 2014). The move to more distance learning has been paramount in the KSA given this era of globalization.

As noted previously, the ICT infrastructure in the KSA was already in place to a certain degree, and a great deal of technological use took place in the KSA schools (Alamoudi & Sulaymani, 2014). However, much of the technology operated at the individual classroom level and a fully integrated online system was not yet in evidence (Alamoudi & Sulaymani, 2014). Other technological issues included the need for further updates to ICT, considering issues of security, and ensuring that information technology (IT) support was available (Altameem, 2013).

Culturally, a change was also occurring in the KSA regarding education, and even more so distance learning (Dixson, 2012). Traditionally, students have preferred that learning take place in a face-to-face context (Alshathri & Male, 2015). However, given the nature of globalization and shifting values, this has been changing. Many students in the KSA now have an opportunity to become educated, when in the past their options were limited (Lightfoot, 2014). With changes in student needs and ability to attend universities, there was a need to improve educational delivery and option to make education available to the increasing number of students who wish to receive a college

education (Lightfoot, 2014). In one study, the authors even found that the use of online educational systems has had a positive impact on student learning in the KSA (Alkhalaf Drew, & Alhussain, 2012). To truly create and sustain distance learning in the KSA, and particularly in Najran, online platforms must be supported to help create changes in educational policy and ICT infrastructure to promote more distance learning in the KSA (Altameem, 2013). To encourage changes in policy, a rebalancing of social and political norms must take place to shape online educational reform in the KSA (Lightfoot, 2014).

Summary

The literature review for this study served to establish that there was a need to ascertain the readiness of educational institutes, faculty, and students to promote student learning through distance learning. As discussed, the Yemen border areas of KSA have been at unrest due to fighting. The students in this area, and especially those at the University of Najran, the case used in this study, may not be in a good position to attend the university as full-time students on campus. To promote the idea that students could obtain a high-quality education in KSA through distance learning, the literature review addressed education in a global context, the validity of distance learning, the role of technology, student-teacher collaboration, higher education in the KSA, education in Najran on the KSA-Yemen border, technology at the University of Najran, and the value of education and online delivery in KSA. The overall effect of this review was instrumental in setting the context in which the University of Najran could create expanded distance-learning programs critical for the evolution of distance learning at University of Najran. There was clearly a need in both this area and in the KSA to ensure that the university culture could effectively provide a continuing and equality-based

education to students. In the following chapter of this study, Chapter III, strategies to improve distance learning in Najran and in the KSA were explored based on the use of a qualitative case-study model. Original data was gathered to examine the perspectives of teachers and students at the University of Najran as well as hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry in the City of Najran.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore distance learning in the KSA, and especially distance learning in the University of Najran in KSA. In addressing this topic, a qualitative research methodology was used. A qualitative study was appropriate for use here as the research questions required detailed and in-depth data gathering and analysis techniques that the qualitative methodology could provide (Creswell, 2013). In the following sections, I detail the study, epistemology, my stance as a researcher, trustworthiness and ethical considerations, the methodological framework (method and design), and finally, the analysis and coding of the data.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study was:

Q1 What role does distance learning serve in reshaping education in the war-stricken Kingdom of Saudi Arabia-Yemen border areas?

This question related to the conflict taking place on the KSA-Yemen border.

Given the difficulty with attending classes due to unsafe conditions, distance learning would be a good solution for students in the area who could no longer attend physical classes.

There were two sub-questions relating to this question:

Q1a What are the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry of the affordances and constraints of distance learning?

Given that ICT infrastructure is still in the process of expanding, distance learning has not yet been fully embraced by policy makers, teachers, and students. This study sought to explore the constraints to promoting distance learning in the KSA--particularly in Najran--and what tools could be used to encourage greater online educational programs.

Q1b What is the perception of value of the distance learning experience?

Because distance learning is new, many cultures are still in the process of accepting its use. Furthermore, it does introduce greater opportunities to all students, and this could sometimes be met with resistance in areas where some portions of the population have greater opportunities to receive a college education.

Epistemology

According to different epistemological case-study approaches, the choice in this study was that of constructivism. Customarily, constructivism has been used to understand a phenomenon in relationship to an individual's or group's perceptions (i.e., the manner in which they construct knowledge and transfer knowledge; Yazan, 2015). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), epistemology is the study, model, and rationalization for how we make or construct knowledge. Constructivism describes ontological beliefs as the nature of reality in "the multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others" (Creswell, 2013, p. 32). Constructivism is used to interpret epistemological beliefs in a manner that suggests that

“reality is co constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 32). In this manner, an epistemological constructivism infers that all knowledge is constructed on shared conventions, perceptions, and social experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). It is the relativistic construction of knowledge through the social meaning given to experiences (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). More specifically, the relative construction of knowledge has been used by researchers to assert that the potential for multiple constructed realities exist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Using constructivism as an epistemological tool grants a subjective interpretation of what is being shared and experienced and could be easily understood in reference to Figure 8 below (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

In this figure, the different layers signify the relationships between the various components of the topic. From the theoretical setting, that defines the overall dimensions of the study to education, the heart of this issue, all dimensions of the study are represented using a constructivist framework (Harrison-Walker, 2014).

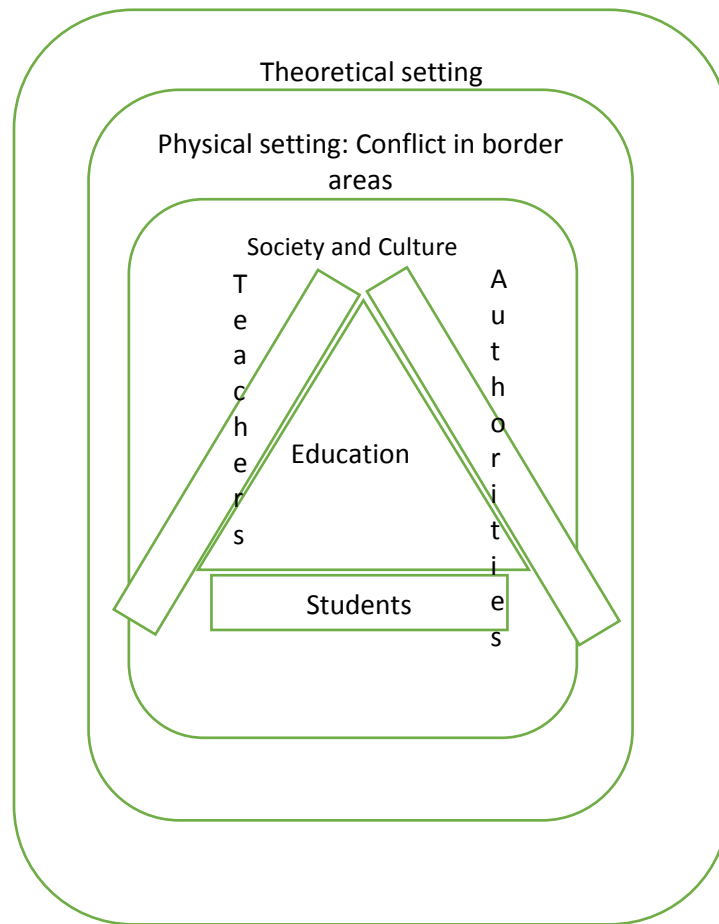


Figure 8. Conceptual framework

Theoretical Perspective: Constructivism and Distance Learning

Traditional education systems have slowly become obsolete and that has meant a shift must occur in the way in which we construct ideas about learning and teaching (Harrison-Walker, 2014). Those who design online classes for distance learners could use constructivist philosophies to aid instructors in creating student-center, collaborative approaches that support new and dynamic processes used for adult education (Kahu, 2013). Online discussion groups, that which makes up a good deal of distance learning

classes, have often been regarded as authentic, discussion-oriented, inquiry-focuses, collaborative, and project-based; all qualities fundamental to the way we construct meaning (Kahu, 2013). As such, constructivism was the most appropriate tool for understanding distance learning in the KSA as the need to redefine our concept of education has been escalating. Given the nature of the research questions, this study pertained to understanding the perceptions of students and teachers at the University of Najran as well as hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry, in relationship to distance learning.

Researcher Stance

Education has not been about only blackboards, textbooks, and curricula. Schools around the world need to ensure the safety of students, and instill confidence in parents and communities who seek education for their members. Sadly, world politics, conflicts, and sometimes war, hinders progress in education on both national and individual levels. Education has been a critical element to building a society, yet, in areas of conflict, education has often been neglected as attention and economic support were used in political arenas. The City of Najran, the focus of this study and my hometown, is located in southern Saudi Arabia. As a member of the community, a teacher, and as a high school principal there, I deeply value education for what it could bring to my community.

Education has been valued in Saudi Arabian culture, and I have been a part of the successful education of many students. Nevertheless, certain cultural constraints (i.e., a lack of opportunities for female Saudi students and those living in rural areas) and political conflicts have interfered with educating our students. As I believe that all students have the right to an education and to develop into important contributors to

society, I am very interested in ensuring education for students in the Najran education system. Given the more recent war-torn conditions in my community, many students either could not get to school safely, did not have a school left to go to, or were in danger while in class. Yet, education is critical and I would like to engage in processes that would promote educational opportunities for all students in my city as well as in other parts of the KSA. This research was a beginning to that process.

I am an educator and now a Ph.D. student in the United States. In having received a Master's degree in the U.S. and in having broad experience in the field of education in my hometown of Najran, it was clear that something must be done to ensure a solid education for others in Najran. I am passionate about education in my city and in the KSA as a whole, and I want to ensure that any individual looking for a college education would be able to pursue that dream. Despite the conflict in Najran, or perhaps in reaction to it, there was a great need for students to be able to contribute to making the KSA a greater part of the global community. Lastly, as a researcher, I am aware of my strong beliefs and desires. Yet, I want to pursue an objective analysis of the data. Therefore, I did all that I could to follow the protocols that prohibit my biases and desires from interfering with the data analysis.

Methodological Framework

There are many different ways in which to do research (Yin, 2014). Depending on the type of study being conducted and the type of questions being asked, different research methods could be chosen. For this study, the qualitative research method was used. The qualitative methodology in this study sought to explore how people, both individually and in groups, interpreted their experiences and the meaning they

constructed from their experiences with one another and the world as a whole (Yin, 2014). In this manner, individuals and groups would have the opportunity to understand the actions of others, as well as their own actions, in understanding how to frame the world. Essentially, qualitative methods make use of stories to understand “how individuals or groups make sense of events and actions in their lives” (Mitchell & Egudo, 2003, p. 1). Qualitative methodologies frequently make use of thick and rich descriptions (Yin, 2014), which was instrumental in this study.

Quantitative or mixed-method approaches were not appropriate for this study as quantitative researchers test hypotheses and qualitative researchers explore rich textural data for themes (Stake, 2013). The objective of a quantitative approach is to examine the relationship between dependent and independent variables to test a hypothesis with statistical assumptions (Creswell, 2013). Further posited by Creswell, a mixed-method approach combines qualitative and quantitative techniques in a single study. However, a more data rich method provided more in-depth responses to address the research problem. As such, neither quantitative nor mixed-method approaches were appropriate for this study.

Research Design

Case Study

Case-study approaches focus on using a technique that is both process and method oriented, allowing for flexibility (Stake, 2013). Questions like *how* and *why* have often been used in case-study designs to best understand and interpret the thoughts and experiences of those who participate in the study (Yin, 2014). As was apparent from my research stance, this study was of specific interest to me, which led me to the use of the

intrinsic approach to better understand the case. As I have a genuine interest in this case, the intention here was not to understand broad theoretical constructs and how they relate to a larger phenomenon, or to explore abstract topics, but rather to provide direct interpretation of a phenomenon that was not only affecting education in Najran but in the KSA in general. In this manner, the case-study approach was appropriate for use within this study because it allowed for the in-depth, intrinsic exploration of a phenomenon within a “real life” setting or context (Yin, 2014).

While the case of distance learning has not been a new phenomenon, in the context of instituting distance learning in an area of great conflict and within a country not yet using this platform to its fullest potential, the case-study approach was appropriate. This particular “case” was bounded by students seeking higher education within a single institution, and at a specific time. Because my research questions were used to consider how students were educated in Najran, the case-study design allowed for the consideration of individual experiences and perceptions through focus group interviews (Yin, 2014).

The Context

The context of this contemporary political setting for this study was in Najran, a city in the southern portion of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (see Figure 9). Given the conflict between the KSA and the Yemeni Houthis, as well as the cultural and geographically limitations of attending the university, distance learning here was a viable option.



Figure 9: Map showing location of the study: The Najran city of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

As it is clear from the map above, the City of Najran is directly influenced by the consistent warfare between the Yemeni Houthis and the armed forces of the KSA (al Shihabi, 2015). Daily life in this area has not been conducive to students attending the University of Najran as they were often told to stay home due to possibility of attack (al Shihabi, 2015). In the context of this conflict between the KSA and the Yemeni Houthis, it seemed that future complete stabilization might not come to fruition, nor ever meet the needs of a changing society. Distance learning then was the only viable solution for students living in Yemen border areas and an excellent option to meet the KSA's changing needs.

Data Collection Methods

Using case-study designs place an emphasis on using multiple sources as a data collection method (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Granting the availability of multiple data sources, three different data collection tools were used. These consisted of focus group

interviews, a research journal, and related artifacts from research participants. For the sake of consistency, the research journal was used throughout the entire research process. These data collection methods were in line with the underlying theoretical framework of constructivism. The data collection for this work was done, in part, at the University of Najran in the KSA through express permission of the University (see Appendix A). Primarily, there were semi-structured interview questions answered by teachers and students at the University of Najran. Hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry in Najran were also interviewed at convenient locations for the participants.

Focus Group Interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore the experiences and perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authority at the Civil Service Ministry in a flexible manner. Focus group interviews have been a verifiable tool for allowing participants to share their thoughts and opinions related to the research topic (Yin, 2014). The semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview protocol that made room for semi-structured questions (see Appendix B). Semi-structured interviewing of this type allowed for greater participant and researcher dialogue surrounding the experiences of teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry in Najran.

To adequately interpret the lived experiences of the participants, Rubin and Rubin's (2011) approach to the interview protocol was used in this study (see Appendix B). Using their semi-structured interview protocol allowed the researcher to ask "further questions about what he or she hears from the interviewees rather than relying on predetermined questions" (Rubin, & Rubin, 2011, p. vii). The flexibility of Rubin and Rubin's (2011) semi-structured interview protocol facilitated posing specific questions

about the realities of distance learning in Najran and the greater KSA. As previously noted, the focus group semi-structured interviews took place in a mutually agreed location. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and participants had the opportunity to have a second follow-up interview or email exchange if they wished to or to clarify what they shared. The interviews were initially conducted in Arabic and transcriptions in both Arabic and English were available. With permission of the participants through a signed consent form (see Appendix C), the interviews were recorded for ease in later transcription.

Research Journal

Qualitative studies are iterative in nature and are made up of an ongoing process that is often reflected in other areas of the research as well (Creswell, 2013). To accurately reflect upon, and convey the findings, in this process, I used a research journal to record the time, place, setting, and date of all interviews. I also used the journal to jot down a description of the participant--in tone, behavior, and method of expression to enable a correct assessment of what was conveyed once the interview was complete. The research journal granted me the ability to honestly reflect on what I was learning throughout the study. Using a journal in this manner helped guard the integrity of the findings, given that the researcher was also an instrument for data analysis and, therefore, aimed to remain objective to limit bias.

Artifacts

Artifacts could consist of any type of document used by an organization (Stake, 2013). In this case, cultural documents, published documents from the university, and other resources were collected and analyzed to deepen the understanding of the

participants' experiences. Analysis processes were the same as interview transcripts following an open and axial coding process. The codes were collapsed into themes with the interview data. Additionally, when other resources were discovered throughout the duration of this study, such as culturally relevant documentation and related research, these artifacts also added to understanding the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry related to distance learning.

Reflections of these findings were documented in the research journal and cultural artifacts by Obaid (2014) and al Shihabi (2015) which demonstrated the impact of the current war-torn conditions in Najran. Obaid's (2014) work in the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs Journal explored the impact of violence in the area and al Shihabi's (2015) contribution set the stage for the limited access to education in Najran. Photographs depicting the violence in the City of Najran contributed to the findings of the study. Descriptions of Distance Learning (DL) and online initiatives at the University of Najran were obtained from published documents and website text and images published by the university (Omer, 2015; Omer & Alqwieder, 2015). Artifact documentation supplied by the Communications and Information Technology Commission (2016) showing the availability of technological infrastructure that could be used for DL were used. Information on the technological and economic readiness of the KSA to engage in DL was supplied by the CIA Factbook (2014). The United Nations (2016) also supported the need for access to education in the KSA. As noted in the interviews, the literature, and in the artifact data of the photographs, the ability for students to attend the University of Najran in recent years has been severely curtailed

(Alturki, 2014). As a potential solution, and the focus of this study, DL was believed to be one of the few ways in which citizens could achieve a higher education in Najran.

Method

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit the 12 participants for this study (Merriam, 2009). Collecting data was done through the snowball method at the University of Najran, where I used personal connection with administration to acquire a recommendation of one teacher who, in turn, recommended another and they, in turn, recommended another, and so forth (Merriam, 2009). Teacher recommendations were also used to access students who fit the desired criteria. The purposeful sampling method was based on the following inclusion criteria at the time of the study: The teachers would have been (a) teaching at the college level for at least two years, (b) an instructor at the University of Najran, and (c) had experience with distance learning. The selection criteria for students was that they would (a) have been a student at the University of Najran for at least one year and (b) had taken at least one distance learning course. The selection criterion for hiring authorities was that they had worked as a hiring authority at the Civil Service Ministry of Najran for at least one year. Email correspondence was used to recruit and recommend teacher participants.

The recruitment of students was conducted by asking the participating teachers to reach out to students in their classes, both online and physical, and informed them of the study. If students were interested in participating and met the criteria, the teachers gave the researcher the student's contact information, with the student's permission. At that point, the researcher contacted students by email to organize face-to-face focus groups.

The recruitment of hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry was conducted by formally contacting the Ministry and asking for contact information for those who may have wanted to participate in the study and who met the criteria. Permission to contact and work with hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry was ensured through a signed Civil Service Ministry Agreement Letter (see Appendix D).

To achieve the best results, qualitative research have often suggested a minimum of 6-10 group participants to collect enough data of the lived experiences of participants, however, as few as 4 group participants have proven to give a sufficient amount of data as well (Creswell, 2013; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Omston, 2013). In this study, the goal to interview a minimum of four teachers, four students, and four officials at the hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry to ensure validity, and the appropriate level of data saturation was achieved by interviewing a total of 12 participants in 3 groups of 4. An interview protocol was used to guide the interviews (see Appendix B).

Before participation in the study, participants were asked to complete a consent form (see Appendix C), which had a description of the research, outlined their participation, stated the risks and benefits of participation, and provided a list of rights for participation--such as the ability to withdraw at any time for any reason. The chosen participants needed to reply to the email with a signed informed consent, initially sent to them with the invitation email (see Appendix E). Teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry who agreed to participate in the study were then invited to take part in a group interview, or focus group, with the researcher and the other participants. The data from all 12 individuals were gathered through 3 groups of 4, using semi-structured interviews. Qualitative analysts have suggested that individual

interviews, as well as a thorough engagement with the literature, were effective methods when conducting research (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Potential Benefits to the Participants

The results of this study were to provide information to educational administrators who may be in a position to influence the Higher Education Commission of the KSA. In this manner, the KSA, and particularly Najran, could use the information taken from this study to create policy options that included a distance learning platform for the higher education opportunities for all groups of people within the country. Although there was no direct compensation for taking part in the study, anyone who participated may facilitate future opportunities to enhance knowledge and skills based on the results of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection for this work was done, in part, at the University of Najran in the KSA through express permission of the University (see Appendix A). Teachers and students were interviewed at the University in a quiet place of their choosing for their convenience. The interviews of the hiring authorities were conducted at the Civil Service Ministry, once again at a quiet location of their choosing. The primary data collection process included semi-structured interviews with teachers (see Appendix F) and students (see Appendix G) at the university. Hiring authorities, who met at the Civil Service Ministry, were also interviewed (see Appendix H). To support understanding of the interviews, the researcher utilized a journal to collect reflective notes after each interview. Additionally, the researcher asked each participant for any artifacts that would support each participant's perspectives.

Data Analysis Procedure

Qualitative analysis of data requires a commitment to an ongoing process that is both thoughtful and consistent (Creswell, 2013). As a means to accurately begin data analysis, I intended to transcribe the interview data myself and, more specifically, to begin typing up the interview notes within 24-48 hours of conducting interviews, which was accomplished. Once the interviewing portion of this study was complete, I went over the transcripts a minimum of three times to assess the data. I used the review process of the data to establish any obvious patterns, while concurrently looked for relationships between cases--all with an expectation of conducting a cross-case analysis of the materials (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). The post-interview reflections in the research journal were analyzed in the same manner as the interview transcripts. Any related information was marked and coded to clarify or deepen understanding of the interview transcript text. Lastly, artifacts were coded. Most of the content of the artifacts was text, thus, they were coded in the same manner of marking phrases and looking for patterns. The codes from the interview transcripts, the research journal, and artifacts were compared and collapsed to establish themes.

Each “case” used in this study was reviewed independently in an attempt to reveal noticeable patterns, including the ultimate review and exploration of the documents and the observations associated with each case (Stake, 2013). Table 1 was used to order the data collected and for review. Patterns found within the individual focus group cases were then aggregated and compared to all other cases in this study to allow for common themes to emerge (Yin, 2014). The found themes were used to understand the unique experiences of individuals in Najran.

Table 1

Data Alignment Between the Research Questions, Interview Questions, and Data Sources/Artifacts

Research Question	Interview Question	Data Sources/Artifacts
PRQ: What role does distance learning serve in reshaping education in the war-stricken Kingdom of Saudi Arabia -Yemen border areas?	Teachers' Questions 6, 7, and 9	• focus group interviews
	Students' Questions 4, 7, and 9	• research journal
	Hiring Authorities' Questions 1 and 7	• cultural documents • photographs
SRQ: What are the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry of the affordances and constraints of distance learning?	Teachers' Questions 1, 3, 5, and 9	• focus group interviews • research journal
	Students' Questions 1, 3, 5, and 9	• Communications and Information Technology Commission
	Hiring Authorities' Questions 2 and 6	• University of Najran
SRQ: What is the perception of value of the distance learning experience?	Teachers' Questions 2, 4, 8, and 9	• focus group interviews • research journal
	Students' Questions 2, 6, 8, and 9	• The CIA • The United Nations
	Hiring Authorities' Questions 3, 4, and 5	

Given the emergent, dynamic nature of qualitative studies, data analysis was an ongoing process. Creswell (2013) explained that ongoing coding was key to identifying emerging trends in the data. Open coding was the first coding step in analyzing the data. Open coding consists of the researcher reviewing the transcribed interviews and memos and identifying categories of information shared by the participants (Creswell, 2013). Thematic analysis was also used to code and interpret the data, along with the aid of NVivo software. The thematic analysis took place using Brinkmann's (2016) seven stages of interviewing. These stages consisted of: (a) thematizing (the why and what of the inquiry); (b) designing, or planning the study; (c) interviewing the participants with

the aid of the interview questions; (d) transcribing the interviews, with or without outside aid; (e) analyzing the data, (f) verifying the data by confirming reliability; and finally, (g) reporting on the findings of the study in a clear and concise manner (Brinkmann, 2016). All hand-written notes and recordings were also utilized to develop transcripts and those transcripts were then inductively coded. A matrix of responses was developed and the response from the three sets of participants was integrated to interpret the findings.

Summary

As seen throughout this chapter, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore distance learning in the KSA, and especially distance learning at the University of Najran. In addressing this topic, a qualitative research methodology was discussed as appropriate for this study as the research questions required detailed and in-depth data gathering and analysis techniques that this approach could provide (Creswell, 2013). In this study, I used a case-study approach based on constructivism, as noted above. In the ensuing sections of this chapter, I discussed the study's epistemology, my researcher stance, ethical considerations, the methodological framework (method and design), and finally, the analysis and coding of the data. The following Chapter IV describes the findings and analysis. Finally, Chapter V presents discussion of the dissertation.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore distance learning in the KSA, and even more specifically in Najran, since the influence of war in this border area. Effectively documenting the successes and challenges faced by distance learning, stakeholders could provide an avenue for broadening online education for all students in the KSA. This study sought to understand the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry Civil related to distance learning as a means to access education. The study was conducted using a constructivist framework (Harrison-Walker, 2014) and, through extensive research and interviewing, addressed the challenges, issues, perspectives, and prospects surrounding distance learning being provided at University of Najran. Using Najran as the case study for this work shed light on how the Saudi educational administration provided students in KSA-Yemen border area access to education--now limited by conflict--and also was used to create a platform for distance learning implementation all across the KSA.

The following chapter presents the data gathered from the three groups of participants. The participants provided data from their experiences in distance learning (DL) and hiring in order to explore the research questions for this study. Pseudonyms were used and all the participants agreed to be recorded for the purposes of this study. The chapter presents the findings that emerged from data collected and through the use of

a research journal, which I utilized to assess what was conveyed once the interview was complete. The research journal gave me the ability to honestly reflect on what I learned throughout the study. The interview data on teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry are presented below, arranged based on the interview question asked and a comparison of the data for each set of groups interviewed is presented.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study was: What role does distance learning serve in reshaping education in the war-stricken KSA-Yemen border areas? This question related to the conflict taking place on the KSA-Yemen border. Given the difficulty with attending classes due to unsafe conditions, distance learning was a good solution for students in the area who could no longer attend physical classes.

There were two sub-questions related to this question:

Q1a What are the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry of the affordances and constraints of distance learning?

Given that ICT infrastructure is still in the process of expanding, distance learning has not yet been fully embraced by policy makers, teachers, and students. This study sought to explore the constraints to promoting distance learning in the KSA--particularly in Najran--and what tools could be used to encourage greater online educational programs.

Q1b What is the perception of value of the distance learning experience?

Because distance learning is new, many cultures are still in the process of accepting its use. Furthermore, it does introduce greater opportunities to all students, and

this could sometimes be met with resistance in areas where some portions of the population have greater opportunities to receive a college education.

Group Interview with Teachers

This section of Chapter IV provided information on the group of four teachers interviewed for the study. The participants were Dr. Mohamed, Dr. Abdul-Salam, Dr. Saeed, and Dr. Hassan. The selection criteria for all four teachers were that they had been teaching at the college level for at least two years, were an instructor at the University of Najran at the time of the study, and had experience with distance learning. Their responses about DL were based on the interview questions asked.

Interview Question 1

In response to the first interview question (Please describe your current job description in terms of your responsibilities as a teacher in distance learning?), three of the four teachers explained that one of the main components of their work was to, “design the course content, and prepare the activities and assignments.” Dr. Mohamed added that his duties also included managing the, “process of testing students electronically,” and Dr. Abdul also expanded on the subject of evaluation with the following statement:

Our responsibilities [also] include: determining the assignments and assessments, demonstrating how [students’] points were calculated, reviewing reports submitted through Black Board concerning the progress of the students, following-up and evaluating students based on the number of hours they spend [online], and notifying students through messages [which are sent] using the system of improvement.

Dr. Hassan shared that his main responsibilities involved, “planning, implementation, and using the calendar.” The teacher further explained how the planning phase also involved “loading [courses] into the Black Board.” Lastly, Dr. Saeed addressed in what ways

recent heightened tensions in the region had affected teacher responsibilities. In his own words, he stated the following:

With the [current] conditions [in the region where the] University of Najran is, and in the absence of the services which are normally available to teachers, we have to do everything from educational design, to course development, and from course implementation, to evaluation of course impacts on students. In other words, teachers participate in almost all e-learning processes.

Interview Question 2

In exploring the four teachers' answers to the second interview question (How, if at all, are the distance learning courses that you teach different from traditional courses?), two of the four interviewees responded by explaining how, "Chapters in the traditional education and distance learning are different in many ways." The same two teachers added that, "The design of the course differs as well as the various ways in which communication takes place [i.e., media, WhatsApp, email, and media methods used in the delivery of traditional education]."

Interview Question 3

In reflecting on question number three (What kind of support, do you receive from other university departments and administrators to effectively deliver distance learning?), Dr. Abdel Salam and Dr. Saeed shared that support from the Dean of E-Learning was a fundamental part of the assistance they received. Both teachers explained that support also came in the form of "a network of technologies, which play a role in the repair of devices," and through "management of networks or information technologies, which include reform and maintenance." Furthermore, Dr. Abdel Salam stated that he received "support from faculty members in other departments," and also benefitted from "training courses available on Black Board and E-learning websites." Lastly, Dr. Saeed

contributed to the conversation by sharing how a part of his support network came in the form of the “provision of courses (which are) prepared in advance.”

In terms of support garnered from other universities, Dr. Saeed highlighted that, at times, other colleges “perform course evaluations for us” and “inform us as to whether or not they have accepted or rejected” our curriculums. Additionally, Dr. Hassan shared the following:

We have benefited from some universities whose course descriptions are the same as ours. For example, King Khalid University, and King Saud University have similar courses which were uploaded with the same description, following some modifications.

Interview Question 4

In responding to question number four (What technologies do you use to effectively deliver distance courses?), three of the four teachers illustrated that Black Board was an essential part of effective instructional delivery. Dr. Saeed expanded on how Black Board was used to teach:

If we want to talk about a comprehensive system, it would be Black Board, because it includes all capabilities such communicating with male and female students. The system also allows me to input any content I want in many formats, shapes, and multimedia. Dealing with the system is easy, and each student is provided with their own personal account. I also like Black Board because I can create exams with many different formats and lastly, I use the system for assignments, duties, forums, and discussions.

The majority of the interviewees also explained that emails were frequently used to communicate with students and provided a backup system during periods in which the Black Board system was off-line. Finally, Dr. Mohamed, Dr. Abdul Salam, and Dr. Hassan shared that technologies such as Microsoft Power Point, WhatsApp, SMS, social media, and telephone calls were used to manage the distance learning (DL) programs.

Interview Question 5

In response to the fifth interview question (Do you think that traditional classroom students and distance learning students are different from each other? Why do you think so?), the four teachers' comments were varied. Dr. Mohamed began by sharing the following:

In terms of tendencies and interests, and through my observation of traditional education students, I have found that there is no [longer] any interest in the lectures. [On the contrary], I find that DL students regularly interact with one another, and promptly comply with their assignments.

Dr. Abdul Salam and Dr. Saeed added to the subject by sharing their mutual agreement as to how DL students “will develop other skills in obtaining information” and “will be able to handle future [life] learning skills better than students who receive their education in a traditional setting.” Furthermore, and regarding social differences between the two types of students, Dr. Hassan and Dr. Saeed underlined how DL students tended to possess a lower level of social skill. Dr. Hassan’s precise words on the subject were as follows:

There is no doubt that there is a difference between traditional students and e-learning students concerning social skills. In traditional learning, [students develop] social skills through dialogues, and through the use of face-to-face discussions. Both of these forums create a learning advantage that DL students cannot capitalize on.

Dr. Abdul Salam also expounded on the topic by stating that, “When we talk about students who receive the whole of their education through DL, we find that they exhibit differences in interests and are less social.” Dr. Saeed concluded by saying, “As professors, we find variations in students’ tendencies, interests, motivation and learning [styles], regardless of the format of education received.”

Interview Question 6

In exploring the teachers' answers to the sixth interview question (What are the greatest challenges of distance learning in the University of Najran, KSA?), three of the four participants shared that, "For both teachers and students, learning to deal with the internet and various media formats required" posed a significant challenge. The majority of the teachers also highlighted that, "technical difficulties," which included a "lack of periodic maintenance and maintenance on existing equipment" as well as "outages endured by students in remote areas," all posed barriers to the effective delivery of DL. Per Dr. Mohamed, Dr. Abdel Salam, and Dr. Saeed, other challenges included, "parents not wanting to deal with technology, DL students not being serious about follow-up, and course syllabuses not meeting international standards for use in DL programs." Lastly, and per Dr. Hassan, a momentous obstacle to effectively delivering DL concerned attitudes about e-learning. In his own words, the teacher shared the following:

The biggest challenge facing e-learning at the University of Najran is the negative attitudes towards distance learning [held by both] students and faculty. Both have a great amount of reluctance in using this type of education. Such reluctance [and negative attitudes] stem from a lack of the required skills for e-learning programs. [Consequently], we must spread the culture of DL, and we have to develop [accentuate] the benefits of using technology to teach and learn.

Interview Question 7

In reflecting on question number seven (In what way have the current conditions in Najran affected your teaching?), Dr. Saeed explained that the impetus for becoming a DL teacher was the "war we got started in" and also spoke of the comfort he found in "knowing that students [can carry out their school work] in safe conditions." Furthermore, Dr. Saeed concluded by touching on the current risks involved with the predictability of traditional students whereabouts; in other words, knowing that they were

going to be “at a specific lecture, at a particular time.” Dr. Hassan and Dr. Mohamed concurred with Dr. Saeed and explained how decisions to implement DL were due, in part, to increasingly heightened tensions in the region. Finally, Dr. Hassan went into more detail about how current conditions had influenced the way education is being provided:

In the case of emergency situations, the best decision is to resort to utilization of the Black Board system. The system allows for secret user names and passwords for both the university and student, and therefore is the best way for me to teach [and complete] courses. This is especially important with the current security conditions which have forced students to stay in their homes.

Interview Question 8

In responding to question number eight (Based on your experience, how can distance learning can be improved at the University of Najran?), all four teachers reiterated that technical difficulties connected with the implementation and use of DL programs have continued to exist. From internet outages to old equipment, and from audio problems [i.e., teachers and students not being able to hear one another in their “virtual classrooms”] to infrastructure issues, a significant investment in the technical side of DL could notably improve conditions. Additionally, Dr. Abel Salam proposed that motivating “each teacher to upload his lecture into the system” could be one step towards making the University’s DL program “real.”

Interview Question 9

In response to the final interview question (Is there anything else that you would like to mention?), each of the four teachers had relevant data to add. Regarding technology, Dr. Mohamed addressed the need to have “a technical staff” which “especially focuses on the electronic web” like “other colleges must have”. Concerning

ways to develop DL so that it possessed the same level of quality which traditional education held, Dr. Saeed shared the following:

[Quality] depends on a number of factors. Available techniques, the quality of the design of educational content, the methods of diversification and provision of available feedback, the extent of interaction, and the richness of both the content and multimedia are all important. By focusing and developing these factors, one can effectively manage both course content and the students' [varying] characteristics. Additionally, managing these elements allows one to superintend the dynamics of communication that exist between students and the rest of the elements of the educational process.

Dr. Hassan contributed to the topic by dispensing with additional factors that enhanced the quality of DL. His precise words on the subject were as follows:

I can add [to Dr. Saeed's comments] about factors which help the quality of DL to better reflect that of traditional education tracks. Elements such as ensuring that [typical] students are able to manage the academic load [displayed on the DL calendar], the continuous publication of student information, periodic updates to course content, and the provision of student feedback, are all critical in closing the quality gap between distance and traditional educational programs.

On another subject, and as an extension of information provided in question number two, Dr. Mohamed and Dr. Hassan spoke to some of the particular skills which lent themselves to effective DL program management. In his own words, Dr. Mohamed began by sharing the following:

Of course, the skills required for distance learning are different from the skills needed for traditional education. For example, and with DL, computer processing or designing courses so that they are suitable for distance learning [i.e., using PowerPoint] are very important skills. Also, it is imperative to be proficient with the use of technology [as a whole], and with any array of media-based communication programs such as WhatsApp and Black Board. All such skills are not necessary [or not nearly as important] for students who are gaining their education through traditional means.

Dr. Hassan followed Dr. Mohamed by stating that, "The most important skills required for faculty teaching members are those of management and use of e-learning systems.

These skills include downloading courses, preparation of electronic tests, correction of

tests, and interaction with students.” Second to last, and in response to “How did distance learning affect the teaching profession?,” Dr. Mohamed reasoned in this way:

Distance education has had a great impact on the teaching process to include a positive effect on the level of education output. DL solved the problem of non-attendance, or the inability to attend, and has provided a great opportunity for the faculty teaching board to develop courses on a continuous basis.

In conclusion, and regarding both students and faculty members’ overall response to the implementation of DL at the University of Najran, Dr. Abdel Salam shared that, “Everyone loves to try it and we are [all] learning about the great advantages of e-learning.”

Group Interview with Students

This section of Chapter IV provides information on the group of four students interviewed for the study. The participants were Mohamed, Rashed, Naji, and Hadi. The selection criterion for all four students was that they had been a student at the University of Najran for at least one year and had taken at least one distance learning course. Their responses about DL were based on the interview questions asked.

Interview Question 1

In response to the first interview question (What is your own experience with distance learning?), the four students’ responses were diverse. Mohamed explained that his exposure to distance learning (DL) began during his Master’s degree program, when the University of Najran “launched the distance learning [curriculum] through Black Board and Model Programs.” Mohamed further explained that, in starting to take some DL classes, the majority of his course load was received through traditional means. Additionally, and at some point in his program, Mohamed considered switching entirely to the DL program, but subsequently decided to continue the method he had previously

chosen. Taking DL courses at the University of Najran was also a first-time experience for Rashed, Hadi, and Naji. Hadi added that, “There is no doubt that the DL program was added to Najran University’s curriculum due to the current conditions in Najran, and the war of Yemen.” The subject of DL coming to the university was covered in detail in question number seven.

Interview Question 2

In exploring the four students’ answers to the second interview question (If you were previously studying through traditional setting, why did you start studying through distance learning?), all responded unanimously by sharing how the current conditions in the region had led to their decision to start taking DL classes. Naji added that an additional impetus for his decision to start with DL courses was that they “saved time and effort.”

Interview Question 3

In reflecting on question number three (How, if it all, are the distance learning courses that you take differ than the traditional courses?), the four participants agreed that flexibility was an inherent part [and benefit] of DL courses. Being able to “attend” lectures from any location and at any time provided the great advantage of convenience. This being the case, both Mohamed and Hadi shared how technical problems often rendered DL as problematic during the initial stages of its implementation. Finally, and in favor of traditional educational delivery methods, Mohamed shared the following:

Traditional education uses face-to-face methods to increase the interaction among teachers and students. [Teachers] use questioning and direct discussion to [facilitate] the creation of cooperative groups [and to] create a [healthy] competitive environment. I prefer face-to-face traditional education over distance learning as I can better absorb [the material] the teacher wants me to learn.

Interview Question 4

In reflecting on question number four (If you were given the chance to choose between traditional schooling or distance learning, which would you like better, and why?), the four interviewee's responses mirrored feedback provided in question number three. Based on DL's flexibility, Rashed, Naji, and Hadi were in favor of e-learning. On the contrary, Mohamed was partial to traditional curriculums, which featured direct interaction between teachers and students. Mohamed also reiterated that his current opinion was based, in part, on continued technical problems which "plague" DL users. Lastly, Hadi expressed an interest in "merging the two educational tracks" in a way which could potentially maximize on the benefits of the two, differing types of programs.

Interview Question 5

In response to the fifth interview question (What kind of support, do you receive from the university departments and teachers to do well in distance learning?), Mohamed, Rashed, Naji, and Hadi explained that training courses [lessons], videos, and information were provided using the University's Black Board. In his own words, Hadi shared the following:

A lot of effort was made to provide students with all available technologies, and to give us adequate time to learn the system. We were also given the chance to participate in DL lessons which helped us understand how to complete assignments. Lastly, students were given the opportunity to communicate with their teachers in order to better understand how to work with DL.

Interview Question 6

In response to the sixth interview question (Do you think distance learning is beneficial to you in gaining knowledge, accreditation, and in being accepted for employment? Why or why not?), the interviewees clearly highlighted the value of DL

from a knowledge standpoint. Additionally, and on the contrary, the students shared that in regards to accreditation and employment, “the traditional education certificates are more accredited than the distance learning certificates.” Additionally, Rashed went as far as to say that, “If you want to find work in an educational field, or any field for that matter, DL is useless because diplomas are required.” Lastly, Hadi provided a possible explanation for why DL and traditional education were not valued equally:

We could attribute this to some kind of lack, or we could say [that this problem] exists because the systems we have are very old. The [technology] should be developed [updated] to create some kind of equality between distance learning [and traditional education]. The need for this change is obvious because DL is a new means to learn.

Interview Question 7

In exploring the students’ answers to the seventh interview question (In what way have the current conditions in Najran affected your education?), Rashed, Naji, and Hadi shared that current conditions had affected the educational process. Rashed clarified by pointing out that there was an increase of “student absences in the schools,” and that “attendance was very weak.” Hadi further illustrated the effects through the following statement:

[Current conditions] have prevented us from having direct communication with teachers in the university. They have also interfered with the utilization of services such as access to the university library, and being able to converse with other students to get [important] class knowledge and information.

This being the case, Hadi also presented a DL program benefit that was likely caused by the heightened tensions in the region. He explained this notion by stating how, “There is a positive effect (with the current situation) regarding using DL, in that we can continue to move forward with our education despite increasingly unsafe conditions.” Finally,

Mohamed spoke of the correlation between war-like conditions and the implementation of the University's DL program:

Regarding the current conditions in Najran region, the board of Najran University insisted on providing an alternative to traditional education. [The plan was to provide such an alternative] through the use of multimedia education, which would allow for the provision of distance learning for University students. This alternative was extremely appropriate [and necessary], as it could ensure the safety of the students.

Interview Question 8

In responding to question number eight (Based on your own experience, how can distance learning be improved at the university of Najran?), all four interviewees universally agreed on the need for improvement. Mohamed's precise words on the subject were as follows:

We can improve and develop through effective lesson planning and through gaining an accurate understanding of the students' requirements. By choosing appropriate presentation, communication, interaction, and participation methods and through an increase of training on how to use DL educational technologies, conditions could be greatly improved.

In closing, Rashed shared how "developing DL via electronic platforms such as Ein Channel [where students can take different exams], would be very helpful," and Naji and Hadi spoke of the "many disadvantages, such as [labored] communication and the quality of the devices used," which rendered DL tracks as more laborious. The two students concluded by sharing about the "importance of infrastructure," the "need for fiber optics," and the University's responsibility to "update electronic programs."

Interview Question 9

In exploring the four students' answers to the ninth and final study question (Is there anything else that you would like to mention?), two of the four participant's addressed some of the more cumbersome challenges faced as a DL student. Rashed

initiated the conversation by expressing how, “in the beginning, it [problems] was due to internet and device unavailability, but once these problems were worked out, the process became very easy.” Naji concurred by sharing, “Undoubtedly, we faced some challenges such as device and network issues as well as problems with internet connection speeds, but we faced and overcame these problems over time.” On the contrary, Mohamed’s eventual shift from traditional to DL was relatively trouble free. In his own words, the student stated that, “Everything was very easy and simple, and we didn’t face any troubles or problems regarding the transition process from traditional education into distance learning.”

On other fronts, and as a final response to question nine, Rashed, Naji, and Hadi expressed the need to further develop DL in KSA. Rashed shared that, “I hope that DL programs become available at all educational levels, and that DL becomes an alternative possibility, not only for regions which are facing difficult conditions, but in all areas of the KSA.” In conclusion, Naji’s precise words on the subject were as follows:

Distance education is considered as a strategic option, so we hope to [further] develop this possibility with help from directors and researchers such you [Dr. Mahdi]. We need to put our country in the ranks of the developed nations regarding distance learning. For this reason, we hope DL programs will begin to be recognized in the same way that traditional education is currently valued. This “valuing” should extend to all educational programs, [to include those which are offered in the field of science], and should also be recognized in the job nomination process. Students who use DL are able to develop their knowledge and skills, and they have the great benefit of retaining [and refreshing] them. This is often not the case for traditional students.

Group Interview with Hiring Authorities at the Civil Service Ministry

This section of Chapter IV provides information on the group of four hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry interviewed for the study. The participants were

Ibrahim, Jaber, Ali, and Mohamed. The selection criteria for all four hiring authorities was that they had worked as a hiring authority at the Civil Service Ministry of Najran for at least one year. Their responses about DL were based on the interview questions asked.

Interview Question 1

In response to the first question (What is your experience with graduates from the University of Najran finding employment?), Ibrahim began by explaining that the majority of their dealings with Najran graduates surrounded questions “about the mechanism of employment” and how such mechanisms pertained to the individual’s specialty. Ibrahim added that students made inquiries regarding how to register, using the “Jadara System.” and “the right to enter into trade-offs and dates.” Jaber continued the conversation by sharing that the preponderance of students he worked with had questions concerning the application process. Lastly, Mohamed explained that recent graduates typically “lack training” or “aren’t clear on the correct way [in which] training works.”

Interview Question 2

In exploring the four Civil Service Ministry participant’s answers to the second interview question (How, if at all, are employment opportunities different for distance educated graduates than from traditional graduates?), responses varied. Ibrahim and Ali rated distance learning students’ opportunities for employment as higher than those of traditional graduates. In their own words, Ibrahim stated that distance learning (DL) students “deal with the computer perfectly, and have a great ability to write and edit,” and Ali remarked how DL students were “better researchers” and had “wider horizons” than traditional students. In opposition to Ibrahim and Ali, Mohamed stated that, “Full time [traditional] students have more opportunities” because they “receive practical training”

which was not provided to DL students. Finally, and from his point of view, Jaber highlighted that employment opportunities for both categories of students were the same.

Interview Question 3

In reflecting on question number three (Regarding your experience with graduates, can you explain what particular differences, in terms of skills and knowledge, willingness to work, and other attributes are different for those who studied through distance learning?), Ibrahim and Ali both agreed that the traditional student possessed higher levels of both knowledge and willingness than DL students. Ibrahim added that, although traditional students rated higher in these two areas, they fell short in terms of actual (practical) skills. In his own words, the Civil Service employee stated that “distance education students have more skills than traditional students.”

Interview Question 4

In responding to question number four relating to what particular skills were either present or lacking in distance learning students, the interviewees had differing experiences to share. Ibrahim explained that, while skill levels seemed to differ very little, traditional students appeared to have more practical experience. Ibrahim confirmed this notion and stated that this reality was expected, given DL students “start their practical training experience in the fields of businesses *after* graduation.” Jaber and Ali’s responses were unified, but dissimilar to those of Ibrahim. The two Civil Service employees agreed that graduate attributes in all areas appeared to be at the same level (as traditional students), regardless of the format in which the degree was obtained.

Interview Question 5

In exploring the four Civil Service interviewee's answers to the fifth interview question (Based on your experience, what factors (or attributes) are employers looking for in hiring graduates from the University of Najran?), Ibrahim began the discourse explaining that employers were looking for "serious learners [graduates]" and that knowledge was paramount in getting hired. Jaber's response paralleled that of Ibrahim and the interviewee augmented that employers were consistently searching for candidates with high skill levels. In referring to other important employee characteristics, Ali and Mohamed touched on employers' interest in graduates who were "internationally wise" and "up to date with current technologies."

Interview Question 6

In reflecting on the question number six (To what extent do you think that distance learning is a viable method to obtain a degree and find employment?), all four interviewees' responses were harmonious; all agreed that DL was an effective and viable educational method for students. Ibrahim added that, while he believed DL was an effective educational delivery method, he was concerned about the gradual disappearance of traditional students and expressed a desire to understand the dynamics, which were contributing to this reality. Furthermore, Ibrahim named both Malaysia and Japan as nations, which had made significant investments into DL technology, and shared his belief that this type of development was required in the KSA. Jaber and Ali, both in agreement on the need for DL, also spoke about how the method provided a great deal of flexibility "for those who are engaged in work which prevents them from getting a

traditional education.” Finally, Ali and Mohamed spoke of the development of unsafe conditions which had further justified the need for DL.

Interview Question 7

In responding to the final question (Is there anything else that you would like to mention?), Ibrahim shared information the current conditions in Najran. He stated that, “The current conditions should not push us to become too dependent on DL. Rather, development of traditional education methods needs to be made.”

Comparative Data for Each Set of Group Interviews

Teachers

In responding to the differences between traditional and DL courses, two of the four participants reported that differences existed with the following three elements: course chapters, course design, and communication methods. The other two participants either did not respond or were not clear in their answers. Relating to support received from other university departments (and other universities), two of the four participants reported the following primary supports: Dean of E-Learning, technological assistance (i.e., repair of devices, management of networks or information technologies, to include reform and maintenance), and training courses available on Black Board and E-learning websites. One participant reported receiving support from other universities and the fourth participant either did not respond or did not give a clear answer.

Concerning what technologies were used with DL, three of four participants reported using the following: Black Board, emails, Microsoft Power Point, WhatsApp, SMS, social media, and telephone calls. Regarding the difference between DL and traditional students, one participant reported that traditional students showed no interest

in lectures and that DL students regularly interacted with one another and promptly complied with their assignments. Two of the four participants reported that DL students developed enhanced skills in obtaining information and were better able to apply learning skills in life. Three of four participants reported that DL students possessed less social skills.

For the question regarding what were the greatest DL challenges, three of four participants reported the following DL challenges: (a) working with the internet and various media formats required, technical difficulties such as a lack of periodic equipment maintenance, and outages in remote areas; (b) parents not wanting to deal with technology; (c) students not being serious about follow-up; and (d) course syllabuses not meeting international standards. The fourth participant found negative attitudes towards distance learning (held by both) students and faculty to be the greatest challenge. When the teachers were asked how current conditions in Najran affected their teaching, all four participants reported relying more heavily on DL due to the conditions. Finally, when asked how DL could be improved, again all four teacher participants reported the need for improvements with the technology. Table 2 is provided to more clearly understand the results based on teachers' perceptions.

Table 2

Comparative Data Finds for Teachers

Question #	Teachers				Notes
	Dr. Mohamed	Dr. Abdul-Salam	Dr. Saeed	Dr. Hassan	
1. Current distance learning responsibilities?	1. Design the course content and prepare activities and assignments 2. Electronic student testing	1. Design the course content and prepare activities and assignments 2. Determining the assignment and assessments and how points (for students) were calculated 3. Reviewing reports submitted through Black Board 4. Following-up and evaluating students based on the number of hours they spend (online) 5. And notifying students through messages (which are sent) using the system of improvement	We have to do everything 1. Design the course content and prepare activities and assignments 2. Course development 3. Course implementation 4. Course evaluation (given current conditions in region)	1. Planning (loading courses into the Black Board) 2. Course Implementation 3. Using the calendar	

Table 2 (continued)

Question #	Teachers				Notes
	Dr. Mohamed	Dr. Abdul-Salam	Dr. Saeed	Dr. Hassan	
2. How are distance learning courses different from traditional courses?	<p>1. Chapters between the 2 programs are different</p> <p>2. Course design is different</p> <p>3. Communication methods are different</p>	<p>1. Chapters between the 2 programs are different</p> <p>2. Course design is different</p> <p>3. Communication methods are different</p>			
3. Support received from other university departments (and other universities)?		<p>1. Dean of E-Learning</p> <p>2. From network of technologies (i.e., repair of devices, management of networks or information technologies, to include reform and maintenance)</p> <p>3. From training courses available on Black Board and E-learning websites</p>	<p>1. Dean of E-Learning</p> <p>2. From network of technologies (i.e., repair of devices, management of networks or information technologies, to include reform and maintenance)</p> <p>Note: teacher also reported that they receive support from other universities</p>	<p>Note: teacher also reported that they receive support from other universities</p>	

Table 2 (continued)

Question #	Teachers				Notes
	Dr. Mohamed	Dr. Abdul-Salam	Dr. Saeed	Dr. Hassan	
4. What technologies do you use with distance learning?	Black Board, emails, Microsoft Power Point, WhatsApp, SMS, social media, and telephone calls	Black Board, emails, Microsoft Power Point, WhatsApp, SMS, social media, and telephone calls	Black Board, emails, Microsoft Power Point, WhatsApp, SMS, social media, and telephone calls		
5. How are distance learning and traditional students different?	Traditional students show no interest in lectures and DL students regularly interact with one another and promptly comply with their assignments.	1. DL students develop enhanced skills in obtaining information 2. DL students are better able to apply learning skills in life 3. DL students possess less social skills	1. DL students develop enhanced skills in obtaining information 2. DL students are better able to apply learning skills in life 3. DL students possess less social skills	DL students possess less social skills	

Table 2 (continued)

Question #	Teachers				Notes
	Dr. Mohamed	Dr. Abdul-Salam	Dr. Saeed	Dr. Hassan	
6. What are greatest distance learning challenges?	1. Working with the internet and various media formats required	1. Working with the internet and various media formats required	1. Working with the internet and various media formats required	Negative attitudes towards distance learning (held by both) students and faculty	
	2. Technical difficulties such as a lack of periodic equipment maintenance, and outages in remote areas	2. Technical difficulties such as a lack of periodic equipment maintenance, and outages in remote areas	2. Technical difficulties such as a lack of periodic equipment maintenance, and outages in remote areas		
	3. Parents not wanting to deal with technology	3. Parents not wanting to deal with technology	3. Parents not wanting to deal with technology		
	4. Students not being serious about follow-up	4. Students not being serious about follow-up	4. Students not being serious about follow-up		
	5. Course syllabuses not meeting international standards	5. Course syllabuses not meeting international standards	5. Course syllabuses not meeting international standards		
7. How have current conditions affected your teaching?	Relied more heavily on DL	Relied more heavily on DL	Relied more heavily on DL	Relied more heavily on DL	
8. How can distance learning be improved?	Improvements with the technology	Improvements with the technology	Improvements with the technology	Improvements with the technology	

Table 2 (continued)

Question #	Teachers				Notes
	Dr. Mohamed	Dr. Abdul-Salam	Dr. Saeed	Dr. Hassan	
9. Is there anything else that you would like to mention?	Please see actual interview				

Note. DL means distance learning; KSA means Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Students

For the students' overall experience with DL, one participant reported having taken DL classes prior to Najran's program coming online and the other three participants first started "attending" DL with Najran. In explaining why they switched to DL, three participants reported starting DL courses as a result of the war conditions in the region. One of the four participants added that their decision was also based on DL's ability to save time and effort. In respect to how DL courses were different, all four of the participants reported that DL provided a great deal of convenience and flexibility. One student reported that, despite the convenience and flexibility of DL, he preferred traditional educational methods.

In relation to which format (traditional or DL) were preferred by students, three of the four participants choose DL, one of whom would also have liked to see some of the benefits of traditional education (further) incorporated into e-learning. The fourth participant preferred traditional education. Concerning the type of support available for DL learning and classes, all four participants reported receiving training courses (lessons), videos, and information through the University's Black Board.

When answering questions related to DL providing knowledge and accreditation, and allowing the students to be hired, all four participants reported that DL provided superior knowledge but did not provide necessary accreditation for employment. Lastly, in response to what ways the current conditions in Najran may have affected the students' education, all four participants stated that conditions in the region had directly contributed to the implementation of DL. Table 3 allows for a visual representation of the findings based on the interview questions asked of students.

Table 3

Comparative Data Findings for Students

Question #	Students				Notes
	Mohamed	Rashed	Naji	Hadi	
1. Experience with distance learning?	Started during Master's program	First time was with Najran	First time was with Najran	First time was with Najran	
2. Why did you switch to distance learning?	Due to war conditions in region	Due to war conditions in region	Due to war conditions in region <i>and it saves time and effort</i>	Due to war conditions in region	
3. How are distance learning courses different?	Provide a great deal of convenience and flexibility <i>however, I prefer traditional education</i>	Provide a great deal of convenience and flexibility	Provide a great deal of convenience and flexibility	Provide a great deal of convenience and flexibility	
4. Which format of education do you choose (traditional or distance learning)?	Traditional	DL	DL	DL <i>but it would be beneficial to incorporate the positive components of traditional education into DL</i>	
5. What kind of support do you receive for distance learning?	Training courses (lessons), videos, and information are provided through University's Black Board.	Training courses (lessons), videos, and information are provided through University's Black Board.	Training courses (lessons), videos, and information are provided through University's Black Board.	Training courses (lessons), videos, and information are provided through University's Black Board.	

Table 3 (continued)

Question #	Students				Notes
	Mohamed	Rashed	Naji	Hadi	
6. Does distance learning provide knowledge and accreditation, and does it allow you to get hired?	Reported that DL provides superior knowledge but does not provide necessary accreditation for employment.	Reported that DL provides superior knowledge but does not provide necessary accreditation for employment.	Reported that DL provides superior knowledge but does not provide necessary accreditation for employment.	Reported that DL provides superior knowledge but does not provide necessary accreditation for employment.	
7. In what way have the current conditions in Najran affected your education?	They have directly contributed to the implementation of DL	They have directly contributed to the implementation of DL	They have directly contributed to the implementation of DE	They have directly contributed to the implementation of DL	
8. How can distance learning be improved?	<p>1. Effective lesson planning</p> <p>2. More accurate understanding of the students' requirements.</p> <p>3. Using (more) appropriate presentation, communication, interaction, and participation methods</p> <p>4. Increased technological training</p>	Start using "Ein Channel" as a DL electronic platform	<p>1. Improve quality of communication and devices</p> <p>2. Improvements with infrastructure</p> <p>3. Upgrade to fiber optics</p> <p>4. Update electronic programs</p>	<p>1. Improve quality of communication and devices</p> <p>2. Improvements with infrastructure</p> <p>3. Upgrade to fiber optics</p> <p>4. Update electronic programs</p>	

Table 3 (continued)

Question #	Students				Notes
	Mohamed	Rashed	Naji	Hadi	
9. Is there anything else that you would like to mention?		1. Want to see DL developed in all of KSA 2. Technological difficulties were initially the biggest hurdle to overcome but things eventually improved	1. Want to see DL developed in all of KSA 2. Technological difficulties were initially the biggest hurdle to overcome but things eventually improved 3. DL needs to be recognized at the same level as traditional education	Want to see DL developed in all of KSA	

Note. DL means distance learning; KSA means Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Hiring Authorities at the Civil Service Ministry

When asked what the hiring authorities' experience with DL graduates finding employment was, three participants reported different experiences and the fourth did not respond with enough clear information. In reviewing the noted differences between DL and traditional students in regards to finding employment, two participants reported that DL students had a better chance of finding employment; one stated that traditional students had a better chance; and one participant reported no difference. When asked if DL students possessed different skills and knowledge, levels of willingness to work, and other (important) attributes above that of traditional students, two participants reported traditional students as having higher levels of knowledge and willingness (the second of these two added that traditional students also possessed higher levels of practical skills). The other two participants did not respond to this question but did respond to the next, very similar question.

Concerning what particular skills hiring authorities noted as being present or lacking with DL students, two participants reported traditional students as possessing greater practical experience and two reported no difference. When questioned further about what factors employers were looking for in graduates of the University of Najran, two participants reported high levels of knowledge as highly desirable to employers. One of these two participants also added the importance of skill. The remaining two participants reported "being internationally wise" and "up to date with technologies" as being most important.

In relation to DL being a viable method to obtain a degree and find employment, all four participants reported that DL was a viable method to obtain a degree and find employment. Yet, data from other interviews revealed DL was not valued the same as traditional education and, consequently, DL students had more difficulty finding employment. Table 4 shows how the answers to the interview questions relate to the interview questions for the hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry and Table 5 provides an overall comparison of the interview questions and the three sets of participants.

Generally, it was apparent through the data distributed in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 that the interview responses aligned with the research questions. Data collection and analysis were sufficient to develop responses to these questions.

Table 4

Comparative Data Findings for Hiring Authorities at the Civil Service Ministry

Question #	Civil Service Employees				Notes
	Ibrahim	Jaber	Ali	Mohamed	
1. Experience with distance learning graduates finding employment?	Deal mostly with the "mechanism of employment" and how such mechanisms pertained to the individual's specialty.	Deal mostly with using the "Jadara System "to register, application questions, and questions regarding "the right to enter into trade-offs and dates."		Find that students "lack training" or "aren't clear on the correct way (in which) training works."	
2. Differences between distance learning and traditional students finding employment?	DL students have a better chance	Chances are the same	DL students have a better chance	Traditional students have a better chance	
3. Do distance learning students possess different skills and knowledge, levels of willingness to work, and other (important) attributes (than traditional students)?	Traditional student possesses higher levels of both knowledge and willingness than DL students		Traditional student possesses higher levels of knowledge, willingness, <i>and practical skill</i> than DL students		Note: In question 2, Ibrahim says there are more employment opportunities for DL students but here, he says that traditional students are more knowledgeable.

Table 4 (continued)

Question #	Civil Service Employees				Notes
	Ibrahim	Jaber	Ali	Mohamed	
4. What particular skills are present or lacking with distance learning students?	traditional students appear to have more practical experience (didn't mention this in question 2)	graduate attributes in all areas appear to be at the same level (as traditional students),	traditional students appear to have more practical experience (same response as question 2)	graduate attributes in all areas appear to be at the same level (as traditional students),	
5. What factors are employers looking for in University of Najran grads?	Serious learners with a high level of knowledge	Serious learners with a high level of knowledge, <i>and skill</i>	“Internationally wise” and “up to date with current technologies.”	“Internationally wise” and “up to date with current technologies.”	
6. Is distance learning a viable method to obtain a degree and find employment?	Yes (but see note!)	Yes (but see note!)	Yes (but see note!)	Yes (but see note!)	Note: Data from other interviews shows that DL was not valued the same as traditional education and consequently, DL students have more difficulty finding employment)

Table 4 (continued)

Civil Service Employees					
Question #	Ibrahim	Jaber	Ali	Mohamed	Notes
7. Is there anything else that you would like to mention	The current conditions should not push us to become too dependent on DL. Rather, development of traditional education methods needs to be made.”				

Note. DL means distance learning; KSA means Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Table 5

Comparative Data Findings for Teachers, Students, and Civil Service Employees

Question Type by Similarity	Teachers	Students	Civil Service Employees
What are some distance learning challenges? What improvements are needed?	<p>Working with the internet and various media formats required</p> <p>Technical difficulties such as a lack of periodic equipment maintenance, and outages in remote areas</p> <p>Parents not wanting to deal with technology</p> <p>Students not being serious about follow-up</p> <p>Course syllabuses not meeting international standards</p> <p>Negative attitudes towards distance learning (held by both) students and faculty</p>	<p>Effective lesson planning</p> <p>More accurate understanding of the students' requirements.</p> <p>Using (more) appropriate presentation, communication, interaction, and participation methods</p> <p>Increased technological training</p> <p>Start using "Ein Channel" as a DL electronic platform</p> <p>Improve quality of communication and devices</p> <p>Improvements with infrastructure</p> <p>Upgrade to fiber optics</p> <p>Update electronic programs</p>	

Table 5 (continued)

Question Type by Similarity	Teachers	Students	Civil Service Employees
What are the effects of the current conditions in Najran and how does this relate to distance learning?	Relied more heavily on DL	<p>Wanting to see DL developed in all of KSA</p> <p>DL needs to be recognized at the same level as traditional education</p>	<p>“The current conditions should not push us to become too dependent on DL. Rather, development of traditional education methods needs to be made.”</p>
What are the differences between distance learning and Traditional Learning? How are distance learning and traditional students different? How are distance learning courses different?	<p>Traditional students show no interest in lectures and DL students regularly interact with one another and promptly comply with their assignments.</p> <p>DL students develop enhanced skills in obtaining information</p> <p>DL students are better able to apply learning skills in life</p> <p>DL students possess less social skills</p>	<p>Provide a great deal of convenience and flexibility.</p> <p>Provide a great deal of convenience and flexibility <i>however, I prefer traditional education</i></p>	<p>Traditional student possesses higher levels of knowledge, willingness, and practical skill than DL students</p> <p>Note: In question 2, Ibrahim says there are more employment opportunities for DL students but here, he says that traditional students are more knowledgeable.</p>

Table 5 (continued)

Question Type by Similarity	Teachers	Students	Civil Service Employees
<p>Do distance learning students possess different skills and knowledge, levels of willingness to work, and other (important) attributes (than traditional students)? Does distance learning provide knowledge and accreditation, and does it allow you to get hired? How, if at all, are employment opportunities different for distance educated graduates than from traditional graduates?</p>		<p>Reported that DL provides superior knowledge but does not provide necessary accreditation for employment</p>	<p>DL students have a better chance</p> <p>Chances are the same</p> <p>Traditional students have a better chance</p> <p>Traditional student possesses higher levels of both knowledge and willingness than DL students viability for obtaining a degree and finding employment</p>

Note. DL means distance learning; KSA means Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Emergent Themes

Main Theme 1: Varied Perceptions of Teachers, Students, and Hiring Authorities on Distance Learning

Sub-theme 1.1: Conflict conditions. When the teachers were asked how current conditions in Najran affected their teaching, all four participants reported relying more heavily on DL due to the conditions. In particular, Dr. Hassan noted that Black Board was dramatically relied on “due to the security conditions in Najran.” Dr. Mohamed also shared that the “distance education system is applied in Najran, regarding the current conditions of war in Najran via lessons and channels, and it has achieved a full success.” Dr. Hassan and Dr. Mohamed concurred with Dr. Saeed and explained how decisions to implement DL were due, in part, to increasingly heightened tensions in the region. Dr. Hassan concluded, “I think that technological developments have led to the transition to e-learning to keep pace with our times, in addition to the current conditions at the University of Najran and in the city.”

One teacher, Dr. Salam, said that hybrid courses were used on the basis of their being calm in the city so that students could attend a lecture. Dr. Abdul Salam went into more detail about how current conditions had influenced the way education was being provided when he shared that current conditions “have also interfered with the utilization of services such as access to the university library, and being able to converse with other students to get [important] class knowledge and information.”

For the students’ response, one student reported having taken DL classes prior to Najran’s program coming online and the other three participants first started “attending” DL with Najran. Naji, the student whom had used DL before the conflict, stated, “The

idea existed already, but the activation process didn't get completed because of the current conditions in the region. It was a Quantum leap, and necessary choice that the technology should be merged with education.”

In explaining why they primarily switched to DL, three participants reported starting DL courses as a result of the war conditions in the region. Lastly, in response to what ways the current conditions in Najran may have affected the students' education, all student participants stated that conditions in the region had directly contributed to the implementation of DL.

Hadi also shared that DL “was a fantastic idea and program under these conditions where this program could serve the students who's living in far places and keep them safe in their homes or wherever they are.” Hadi continued by saying, “It helped them to get the necessary knowledge and information in a safe place.”

Taking DL courses at the University of Najran was a first-time experience for Rashed, Hadi, and Naji, and Hadi added that, “There is no doubt that the DL program was added to Najran University's curriculum due to the current conditions in Najran, and the war of Yemen.”

This being the case, Hadi also presented a DL program benefit that was likely caused by the heightened tensions in the region. He explained this notion by stating how, “There is a positive effect [with the current situation] regarding using DL, in that we can continue to move forward with our education despite increasingly unsafe conditions.” Finally, Mohamed spoke of the correlation between war-like conditions and the implementation of the University's DL program:

Regarding the current conditions in Najran region, the board of Najran University insisted on providing an alternative to traditional education. [The plan was to provide such an alternative] through the use of multimedia education, which would allow for the provision of distance learning for University students. This alternative was extremely appropriate [and necessary], as it could ensure the safety of the students.

Rashed shared that, “I hope that DL programs become available at all educational levels, and that DL becomes an alternative possibility, not only for regions which are facing difficult conditions, but in all areas of the KSA.” Without question, DL was increasingly more important given the conflict conditions in the City of Najran.

Given the interviews with teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry, the findings related to the conflict conditions in Najran clearly affected education in the region. Notes compiled in the research journal and artifacts via cultural documents by Obaid (2014) and al Shihabi (2015), in particular, illustrated the impact of the current conditions in Najran. The photographs depicting the violence in the City of Najran added to the findings in the study that education was at risk in Najran. As noted in the interviews, the literature, and in the artifact data of the photographs, the ability for students to attend the University of Najran in recent years had been severely curtailed (Alturki, 2014). As a potential solution, and as the focus of this study, DL was believed to be one of the few ways in which citizens could achieve a higher education in Najran.

Sub-theme 1.2: Distance learning as potentially engaging. The perception of DL being engaging was mixed, even when participants engaged in the same course with the same instructor. For example, the differences between DL and traditional students was discussed by Dr. Mohamed when he shared, “I have found that there is no [longer] any interest in the lectures.” Yet DL students regularly interacted with one another and promptly complied with their assignments as also noted by Dr. Mohamed, “I find that DL

students regularly interact with one another, and promptly comply with their assignments.” Along these same lines, two of the four teacher participants reported that DL students developed enhanced skills in obtaining information and were better able to apply learning skills in life. Yet, three of four teacher participants reported that DL students possessed less social skills. This was evidenced by Dr. Hassan when he said, “In traditional learning, [students develop] social skills through dialogues,” implying that students did not develop social skills as well when engaging in DL. While students did not directly address this topic, one of the hiring authorities noted that traditional students had higher levels of knowledge and willingness, and the second of these two added that traditional students also possessed higher levels of practical skills. These mixed perspectives regarding engagement and the impact it may have had was specific to the stakeholder group, yet blurred ideas about development of skill and skill types were present.

Along with the findings from the interviews, the use of the research journal to keep track of notes taken throughout the process had contributed to the findings. As I interviewed each group, I carefully observed the participants and wrote about how the participants responded to each question through body language and facial expressions. At times it looked as if the participants felt more strongly about the violence in Najran than what they were stating, and almost all appeared to feel the need for DL. It was apparent that the participants all agreed that economic and cultural changes were taking in the KSA and that the need for new ways to educate students was in order. On certain occasions, I asked for further clarification based on what I noted and experienced, both spoken and unspoken, and used my observations to contribute to the results.

Artifact evidence consisted of studies conducted and information obtained through the University of Najran, via published documents from the University describing DL and online initiatives within the University and website text and images published by the University of Najran illustrating the current online initiatives taking place within the University (Omer, 2015; Omer & Alqwieder, 2015). The cultural documents by Obaid (2014) and al Shihabi (2015) were used to demonstrate the effects of war conditions in Najran. Obaid's (2014) work through the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs Journal explored the impact of violence in the area and al Shihabi's (2015) contribution helped set the stage for the limited access to education in Najran.

Artifact documentation supplied by the Communications and Information Technology Commission (2016) presented the availability of technological infrastructure that could be used for DL, and the information on the technological and economic readiness of the KSA, to engage in DL, was provided by the CIA (2014). Artifact data from the United Nations (2016) supported the need for access to education in the KSA. As evidenced in the interviews, the literature, and in the artifact data, the ability for students to attend the University of Najran in recent years has been severely limited. The findings made it clear that while DL could be used to engage students in the educational process, not all findings in the study supported student engagement as the primary solution to education in the KSA.

Sub-theme 1.3: The need for technology. Concerning the efficiency of technology in the DL contexts and specifically in relation to the research question regarding the greatest DL challenges, three of the four teacher participants reported the following DL challenges: (a) working with the internet and various media formats

required, technical difficulties such as a lack of periodic equipment maintenance, and outages in remote areas; (b) parents not wanting to deal with technology; (c) students not being serious about follow-up; and (d) course syllabuses not meeting international standards. The one teacher participant, Dr. Hassan, found negative attitudes towards distance learning students and faculty to be the greatest challenge to implementing DL. Dr. Hassan shared that, “Some of students were weak at the computer skills, and sometimes the internet is very weak and downloading is very slow.” Finally, four teacher participants reported the need for improvements with the technology. One student in particular, Naji, gave his opinion of DL as having been more challenging in the beginning when he said, “Undoubtedly, we faced some challenges such as device and network issues as well as problems with internet connection speeds, but we faced and overcame these problems over time.” Lastly, Hadi provided a possible explanation for why DL and traditional education were not valued equally:

We could attribute this to some kind of lack, or we could say [that this problem] exists because the systems we have are very old. The [technology] should be developed [updated] to create some kind of equality between distance learning [and traditional education]. The need for this change is obvious because DL is a new means to learn.

It appeared there was a difference of opinion in the efficiency of technology in the KSA; nevertheless, it was clear that there was enough access, need, and interest in the technology to allow DL to continue.

Through the interviewing of the participants, the aid of the research journal, the artifact documentation supplied by the Communications and Information Technology Commission (2016), the University of Najran, the CIA Factbook (2014), and the United Nations (2016), DL has been shown to be a needed and viable approach to education in

Najran. The information obtained through the University of Najran, such as published documents relating to DL as well as online initiatives within the University, illustrated the current online initiatives taking place within the University (Omer, 2015; Omer & Alqwieder, 2015). Artifact data through the Communications and Information Technology Commission (2016) demonstrated the current technological infrastructure was ready to be used for DL. Information on the technological and economic readiness of the KSA to engage in DL from the CIA Factbook (2014) was revealing. Further data from the United Nations (2016) reinforced the need for access to education in the KSA.

Nevertheless, issues regarding infrastructure and access must be addressed to make DL in the KSA more tenable. The CIA Factbook (2014) noted that the KSA had considerable technology and has continued to advance in this regard. The Communications and Information Technology Commission (2016) has also noted that mobile broadband subscriptions recently reached 106.0% in the overall population, and, as put forth previously, 21.6 million were internet users on high speed fiber optics networks (FTTs) in the KSA. The advancement of this type of communication system would be essential for the operation of DL in the KSA. Furthermore, the available artifact information provided by Alturki (2014), and relating to DL prospects in the KSA, indicated that the country was fully geared for the technological age given its up-to-date ICT indicators (Alturki, 2014). However, the participants in the study had varying perceptions of the efficiency of technology in Najran suggesting the need for further investigation into the use and efficacy of technology.

Main Theme 2: The Mixed Value of Online Teaching and Learning

Sub-theme 2.1: The need for equal access. Access for all students was an important idea when discussing the value of online teaching and learning because not all students in the KSA have the opportunity to go to college. There were different reasons for this, but the most common were those that pertained to being in more rural locations and in being female. According to Dr. Saeed, “E-learning could overcome the problem of place because some of the students were living in far places, preventing them from attending the default classrooms.” Dr. Hassan also concluded that, “In terms of e-learning, we could overcome some of the main problems in the traditional learning such the availability of courses and the problem of attendance.” Finally, the teacher participants were very open about the opportunities that females had in attending college in the KSA with the implementation of DL. Dr. Hassan shared that DL “is also very proper for the girls in Saudi Arabia where there is no any kind of direct contact with them because of the conservative nature of Saudi Society.” Furthermore, Dr. Mohamed explained that, “Girl students, who haven’t had the chance to enroll into traditional education, due to the traditions of the society, think that college is now very open for them.” On a slightly different note, but still relating to access, Dr. Mohamed said that, “The capacity of the classrooms is a problem as there is no chance for me to accept more than 30 students in the lecture.” Clearly, DL made room for more students, who would not normally have had the opportunity to go to college, to attend school.

Whether the artifacts, via information gleaned from the study referred to classroom capacity, the dwindling role of an oil-based economy, the role of female student, or the position of rural students, the interviews and the notes taken in the

research journal helped illuminate these issues in the KSA. Artifacts in the form of documentation through the University, as well as from the CIA Factbook (2014) and through the work of Altowjry (2005), and the economy-related documentation from the United Nations (2016) supported the findings in this study that there was a need for access to education in the KSA. The notes taken via the use of the research journal outlined the participants' opinions and feelings regarding the need for equal access were clear, and along with the other types of documentation outlining the limited access to education, the artifact data surrounding the declining KSA labor force was suggestive.

Through information supplied by the United Nations (2016), the population of KSA could be more than 40.5 million in 2025 and could increase to 59.7 million in 2050. The KSA's increasing population would require the countries to expand basic public services like health and education. Additionally, the KSA labor force participation rate was low in 2010, at 20.5%, and very low for women at 1.2%, in comparison to 36.8% for men (United Nations, 2016). Given the KSA has an oil-based economy, earning potential has been linked with this industry. According to the CIA Factbook (2014), in previous years, 90.0% of the KSA's export earning depended on oil. Nevertheless, these numbers have been falling as the oil economy has become less lucrative due to reduced oil prices (CIA Factbook, 2014).

The data illustrated that access to education was low for both men and women given the unemployment rate (United Nations, 2016). In response to this situation, the economy and employment rate have now been linked to those who were well-versed in education and technical skills (CIA Factbook, 2014) and Saudi officials have been trying to promote the employment of youth who have greater education and technical skills

(CIA, 2016). In this manner, lack of access to education, and the need for increased access, has been documented through varying data.

Sub-theme 2.2: Mixed teaching efficiency. For the students' overall experience with DL, this too was mixed. All four participants reported receiving training courses (lessons), videos, and information through the University's Black Board. One of the four participants shared that their decision to use DL courses was based on DL's ability to save time and effort. Naji shared that an additional impetus for his decision to start with DL courses was that they "saved time and effort." All four of the student participants reported that DL provided a great deal of convenience and flexibility. However, one student reported that, despite the convenience and flexibility of DL, he preferred traditional educational methods. Despite this opinion, most of the teachers also agreed that DL was useful. Dr. Saeed expanded on how Black Board was used to teach by saying,

If we want to talk about a comprehensive system, it would be Black Board. The system also allows me to input any content I want in many formats, shapes, and multimedia. Dealing with the system is easy, and each student is provided with their own personal account. I also like Black Board because I can create exams with many different formats and lastly, I use the system for assignments, duties, forums, and discussions.

Dr. Abdul Salam also noted that DL was easier to implement because "for students, traditional education [means they] must be more ready because classes are at a specific time and students have questions." He continued to share that, "[Students] have issues, thus, lecturer should be ready, while in distance learning, the lecturer can go to the references and go to different sources and find the specific answers. There is some kind of satisfaction with e-courses." Lastly, Dr. Hassan had this to say, "From my point of view, I think that technological developments have led to the transition to e-learning to

keep pace with our times, in addition to the current conditions at the University of Najran, and to overcome the difficulties of traditional learning.”

Distance learning (DL) was clearly preferred as being easier and more efficient for most of the students. One student in particular would also like to have seen some of the benefits of traditional education [further] incorporated into e-learning. For teachers, they seemed to feel overall that DL was a valid and worthwhile format for learning. Given the interviews with teachers and students at the University of Najran and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry, the findings related to the teaching efficiency of DL were revealing. Artifacts in the form of documentation through the University of Najran as well as from Burroughs (2014) and other portions of the literature supported the findings in this study that there was a need for greater teaching efficiency in Najran. Healey et al. (2014) posited that student teacher partnership was important for examining the needed educational tools for distance learning. Viewing teaching and learning as a partnership between students and teachers would allow for more authentic engagement (Healey et al., 2014). The literature recounting Burroughs' (2014) work also reinforced the notion of collaboration as a way to maintain student engagement. Burroughs noted there was a difference in improvement in the mastery of academic skills between students who were instructed with collaborative teaching methods as opposed to those students who were not instructed with collaborative teaching methods.

Students would benefit from greater teacher attention, and a focus on real world, technologically-based innovations and collaborative teaching methods have proven to influence positive student achievement (Sabzian et al., 2013). Given that traditional

educational programs have been used in the University of Najran (Omer, 2015), it seemed plausible that there had been a lack of teaching efficacy at the University.

These findings have been voiced by the participants in the study in various ways. The most support for DL and the need for greater teaching efficacy at the University have been noted by the students in the study. However, the promotion of greater student engagement and teacher efficiency through DL could benefit from further examination. While students believed that DL was a viable platform to create teaching efficacy, some of the teachers appeared to feel as though traditional teaching methods were more valid, more so than what was offered through DL. The findings regarding teaching efficacy were clearly reinforced through the mixed responses and suggested that both DL, and the way in which it was perceived and embraced by teachers, must be further examined. Without full support of a system of education, the success of the method would be at risk.

Sub-theme 2.3: Potential employment aid. This theme was mostly found in the perspectives of the hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry, although students too shared their opinion on this topic. When asked about their experience with DL graduates finding employment, there was a mix of responses. Two hiring authority participants reported traditional students possessed greater practical experience and that also high levels of knowledge were highly desirable to employers. This theme tied into both Mr. Ali and Mr. Mohamed reporting “being internationally wise” and “up to date with technologies” as being very important. When asked if DL students possessed different skills and knowledge, levels of willingness to work, and other (important) attributes above that of traditional students, two hiring authorities reported traditional students as having had higher levels of knowledge and willingness (the second of these two added

that traditional students also possessed higher levels of practical skills) and the other two answered similarly to another question. Mr. Ali, in particular, was helpful in asserting that, “Employee knowledge increasing adds to [the need not to] transfer [from a different place] and that the flexibility of the time was useful.”

In relation to DL being a viable method to obtain a degree and find employment, all four hiring authority participants reported that DL was a viable method to obtain a degree and find employment. In their own words, Ibrahim stated that distance learning students “deal with the computer perfectly, and have a great ability to write and edit,” and Ali remarked how DL students were “better researchers” and had “wider horizons” than traditional students. Yet, data from other interviews revealed DL were not valued the same as traditional education and, consequently, DL students had more difficulty finding employment. In particular, two hiring authority participants reported that DL students had a better chance of finding employment; one stated that traditional students had a better chance; and one participant reported no difference. Mr. Mohamed in particular stated that, “Full time [traditional] students have more opportunities” because they “receive practical training” which was not provided to DL students.

Finally, when students answered questions related to DL providing knowledge and accreditation, and allowing the students to be hired, all four participants reported that DL provided superior knowledge but did not provide necessary accreditation for employment. For example, Rashed shared that, in regards to accreditation and employment, “the traditional education certificates are more accredited than the distance learning certificates.” Additionally, Rashed went as far as to say that, “If you want to find

work in an educational field, or any field for that matter, DL is useless because diplomas are required.”

The interviews with all three groups, use of the research journal, and the artifacts gathered in the form of information used in the study all supported the findings related to DL and employment. Although not all of the participants in the study shared that DL was the best option for post-university employment, officials have been trying to promote the employment of youth who were well-versed in education and technical skills (CIA Factbook, 2014). These findings were reinforced by the work conducted by Dirani et al. (2017) and, without question, shifts would be warranted to create greater employment opportunities for DL students in Najran. Overall, the findings from the interviews, artifacts, and through use of the research journal indicated that themes related to DL were mixed as can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6

Data Alignment Between the Research Questions, Theme, Participants' Responses, and Data Sources/Artifacts

Research Question	Theme	General Participant Response	Data Source/ Artifacts
Main Theme 1: Varied Perceptions of Teachers, Students, and Hiring Authorities on Distance Learning			
PRQ: What role does distance learning serve in reshaping education in the war-stricken Kingdom of Saudi Arabia-Yemen border areas?	ST1.1: Conflict Conditions	Conflict influences the region and educational opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus group interviews • research journal • cultural documents • photographs
SRQ: What are the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry of the affordances and constraints of distance learning?	ST1.2: Distance Learning as Potentially Engaging	DL is viewed as mixed for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus group interviews • research journal • University of Najran
	ST1.3: The Need for Technology	Technology is needed for DL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus group interviews • research journal • Communications and Information Technology Commission • The CIA

Table 6 (continued)

Research Question	Theme	General Participant Response	Data Source/ Artifacts
Main Theme 2: The Mixed Value of Distance Education			
SRQ: What is the perception of value of the distance learning experience?	ST2.1: The Need for Equal Access	Equal access is needed and can be supported through DL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus group interviews • research journal
	ST2.2: Mixed Teaching Efficiency	DL is mixed in its efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus group interviews • research journal
	ST2.3: Potential Employment Aid	DL is mixed for gaining skills and employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus group interviews • research journal

Note. DL means distance learning; KSA means Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; CIA means Central Intelligence Agency.

Summary

In summary, Chapter IV presented the data gathered from the three groups of participants. The participants provided data from their experiences in distance learning (DL) and hiring in order to explore the research questions for this study. The findings for the teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry were presented and arranged based on the interview question asked. The use of a research journal, information gathered from the Communications and Information Technology Commission, the University of Najran, the CIA, the United Nations, and the photographs taken of the conditions in the City of Najran were all used to support the findings of the study. A comparison of the data for each set of groups interviewed was presented, followed by a chart for further clarification. In the following Chapter V, the concluding chapter, a discussion on the findings and recommendations is presented.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As discussed throughout this study, distance learning in the KSA has been limited. There are a number of social, practical, cultural, and economic reasons for this phenomenon (Altowjry, 2005; United Nations, 2016). The most pressing concern that fueled the need for a dissertation in the KSA about distance learning was the existence of serious conflict on the border of the KSA and Yemen and its impact on the education opportunities in that area. The war occurring in the region prompted exploring the need for distance learning (DL) in the KSA, especially along the Yemeni border. While this conflict was what prompted the study, there were, and are, other reasons for promoting DL in the KSA. The study sought to help understand the perceptions of teachers and students related to DL as a means to access education, which may be a viable option to provide higher education to all people who are unable to attend universities in the border area and elsewhere. This study was vitally important to explore perceptions about DL and understand the system so that all students in Najran, and in the greater KSA, have the opportunity to attend college. Using Najran as a case for this work was useful to shed light on how the Saudi educational administration could provide students in KSA-Yemen border area a much-needed access to education.

In relation to different epistemological case-study approaches, the choice in this study was that of constructivism given that an epistemological constructivism inferred that all knowledge was constructed on shared conventions, perceptions, and social

experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Using constructivism as an epistemological instrument granted a subjective interpretation of what was being shared and experienced by the participants allowed the findings to be easily understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The constructivist approach also linked to the use of Grubb and Gabriner's (2013) triangle of instruction to understand the collaborative relationship between teachers and students. The study pertained to understanding the perceptions of students and teachers at the University of Najran, as well as hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry, in relationship to distance learning.

Methods were carefully undertaken to validate and support the accuracy of the data presented. In completing the interview transcribing and thematic interpretation of the study, with the aid of NVivo software, I remained objective throughout both the data collection and analyses phases of the study. To support the integrity of the findings in this study, I used a number of components to ensure trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness

To minimize threats to validity, the approach in this study was based on the constructivist framework of the study. Methods were careful undertaken to validate and support the accurateness of the data presented. In approaching the interview transcribing and thematic interpretation of the study, I remained objective throughout both the data collection and analyses phases of the study. To support the integrity of the findings in this study, I used credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability to ensure trustworthiness.

Credibility

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, multiple methods of data collection and sources were used to validate the work. The use of artifacts through pictures, documents, and through information gathered by Omer (2015) and Omer and Alqwieder (2015) from the University of Najran, the CIA Factbook (2014), and from the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (2016) all enhanced triangulation. Furthermore, the group interviews were audio recorded using a recording device, and authorization for permissions to record the sessions were granted by each participant through informed consent. I audio recorded the interviews, interpreted, and transcribed each individual interview. The transcripts were member checked to ensure the credibility of the answers as well (Yin, 2014). To assist with member checking, I provided the participants with a copy of the interview transcript and the initial analysis of the data. The purpose of this was to give the participants the opportunity to identify potential discrepancies within the written transcript and to point out potential corrections that needed to be made to ensure accuracy of intent.

Dependability

For dependability, an audit trail, created via my researcher journal, increased the dependability of the findings. Utilizing an audit trail also allowed for data collection and decision making to be tracked throughout the research process. Thematic analysis was also used to code and interpret the data, along with the aid of NVivo software. The first stage of analysis consisted of gathering the interview data based on the research questions. The material gathered from the interviews aimed to answer the interview questions developed for the study (see Appendices F, G, and H). The gathered data were

then aligned with the research questions and with any other information gathered during the research.

Transferability

For transferability, thick descriptions of each case were used to allow for the transferability of the findings to other areas and circumstances. Although only a minimum of 12 participants were included in the study, the needed level of saturation was reached. The participants used in this study were from the City of Najran. While the unique circumstances in Najran may not have been robust enough to make inferences about all other geographic locations in the KSA, the changes in economy, the need for access to education, and the condition of the technological infrastructure in the KSA allowed for generalizability.

Conformability

Regarding conformability, I gained IRB approval before any data was collected. Informed consent was acquired from all 12 participants and every effort was made to avoid unethical activities such as the violation of non-disclosure agreements and betraying confidentialities. Furthermore, no personal identifiers associated with the participants were attached to the final research and I remained aware of any potential ethical dilemmas. Although unnecessary, I was willing to modify the research design, protocols, and procedures had it been necessary. Pre-defined roles in the proposed study also set boundaries for appropriate and ethical behaviors, and roles were clarified using an informed consent tool (see Appendix C) and through the use of the interview protocol (see Appendix B). The informed consent form provided a description of the study, risks, and benefits to the participants, their roles, and rights, as well as researcher

documentation of honesty. All of the above information was clearly presented to support the participants in making an informed decision regarding their participation in the study. Finally, all signed consent form information was retained by the research advisor on the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) campus. Three years after the completion of the project the signed forms will be deleted.

Discussion

Relating to perceptions, several themes were apparent in the findings as presented in Chapter IV. While teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry agreed that DL had many positive aspects, there were some conflicts and differences in opinion. In relation to the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authorities on DL, themes such as DL as potentially engaging, having mixed efficiency, the need for equal access for all students, the value of teaching with DL, and potential employment opportunities are all present below framed by each of the research questions asked in the study.

Research Question 1

Regarding Research Question 1 (What role does distance learning serve in reshaping education in the war-stricken Kingdom of Saudi Arabia-Yemen border areas?), the conflict taking place on the KSA-Yemen border must be addressed. As noted throughout the study, Najran has been the target of serious attacks against both the government and the civilian population for some time (al Shihabi, 2015). All areas of Najran have been targeted, including educational institutions, and the ability for students to attend the university in recent years has been severely curtailed (Alturki, 2014). The conflict in the KSA-Yemeni border area has caused disruptions in the ducation of both

adults and children. Therefore, the focus of this study was using DL as a means to gain an education in Najran without students being in danger when attending school.

The findings of this study, in response to the interview questions asked, showed that teachers, students, and hiring authorities all felt that using DL was an appropriate solution to the conflict circumstances. When the teachers were questioned regarding how the current conditions in Najran affected their teaching, all four participants reported relying more on DL. One teacher, Dr. Hassan, shared that Black Board was intensely relied on “due to the security conditions in Najran.” Another participant teacher in the study, Dr. Mohamed, also shared positively that the “distance education system is applied in Najran, regarding the current conditions of war in Najran via lessons and channels, and it has achieved a full success.” One teacher, Dr. Abdu Salam, also noted that hybrid courses were used on the basis of their being calm in the city so that students could attend a lecture, another indication of serious unrest and limited access to education in the region.

Dr. Abdul Salam explained further that the current conditions “have also interfered with the utilization of services such as access to the university library, and being able to converse with other students to get (important) class knowledge and information.” As evidenced by these quotes, professors felt strongly about the adverse conditions of warfare in Najran and had opinions about how DL could provide educational opportunities despite the context. Professors wanted their students to be able to receive all the benefits that education had to offer and they were concerned. Continued educational opportunities for citizens in Najran were important because education was a main societal structure. The future of the city in terms of social and professional growth

could be impacted if its population was to decrease in educational capacity. Professors believed that DL was a viable option in these troubled times for students who could not come to campus given the difficult issues surrounding safety. Therefore, it was reasonable to conclude that they would support the expansion of DL in the school system and continue to teach despite the war-torn context because they were able to continually support students and meet their educational needs.

Students also felt the conflict in Najran contributed to the need for DL. Naji, a student whom had used DL in the past, prior to any conflict shared, “the idea existed already, but the activation process didn’t get completed because of the current conditions in the region. It was a Quantum leap, and necessary choice that the technology should be merged with education.” In further explaining why the student participants moved to DL, three participants reported starting DL courses as a result of the war conditions in the region. Hadi alleged DL “was a fantastic idea and program under these conditions where this program could serve the students who’s living in far places and keep them safe in their homes or wherever they are.” Hadi continued by sharing, “it helped them to get the necessary knowledge and information in a safe place” and that “there is no doubt that the DL program was added to Najran University’s curriculum due to the current conditions in Najran, and the war of Yemen.” Hadi finished by sharing, “We can continue to move forward with our education despite increasingly unsafe conditions.”

Finally, Rashed mentioned, “I hope that DL programs become available at all educational levels, and that DL becomes an alternative possibility, not only for regions which are facing difficult conditions, but in all areas of the KSA.” Clearly, DL was increasingly reshaping education in the war-stricken KSA-Yemen border areas in Najran

and has also become a catalyst for greater change and for meeting the needs of all students in the KSA. For many in Najran, DL was one of the only ways in which to receive a safe education. This was vitally important because all people should have the opportunity to obtain an education without being afraid for their safety. Students should not have to sacrifice their dreams, goals, and futures because the governments of two countries decide to engage in armed conflict. I strongly believe that education is something that should be available to all people in a safe environment. Therefore, DL was the viable response to address what was happening in Najran today.

Through the use of interviews, artifacts such as cultural documents provided by Obaid (2014) and al Shihabi (2015), the literature, researcher's photographs to illustrate context, and the use of the research journal link the utility of DL in the conflict area of Najran. In particular, the interviews and the artifact analysis were the sources of empirical data for this study. The ability for students to attend the University of Najran has been severely reduced (Alturki, 2014) and DL was one of the few ways in which students could achieve a higher education in Najran.

Sub-research Question 1

In relation to Sub-research Question 1 (What are the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry of the affordances and constraints of distance learning?), there was a mix of perceptions regarding DL as engaging for the student and as an efficient way to educate. Despite any thoughts to the contrary, the perception of DL as engaging has been validated in the research and in the findings. For example, it has been found in the literature that student engagement was critical to producing students that could perform competitively within the KSA and

internationally and who could compete in the workforce (Marcketti & Karpova, 2014). According to Høigaard et al. (2015), students and teachers have the potential to benefit from more innovative, relevant, and effective learning processes that reach beyond the walls of a single classroom and into the realm of DL.

This was supported in the findings by Dr. Mohamed who noted, “I find that DL students regularly interact with one another, and promptly comply with their assignments.” Along these same lines, two of the four teacher participants reported that DL students developed enhanced skills in obtaining information and were better able to apply learning skills in life. This finding was supported by Healey et al. (2014) who noted that what took place in the online classroom directly affects how students could achieve success on the global stage. Another way that has been used to frame collaboration between students and teachers, and to promote academic engagement, was through Healey et al.’s 2014 study on partnership in the classroom. These researchers posited that there were four different manners in which students could experience academic engagement. These consisted of: (a) consultation, (b) involvement, (c) participation, and (d) partnership (Healey et al., 2014). While these authors have identified the four differing forms, their study focused on the success of partnership. The literature describing Burroughs’ (2014) work also supported collaboration as a way to keep students engaged, when he noted there was a difference in improvement in the mastery of academic skills between students who were instructed with collaborative teaching methods, as opposed to those students who were not instructed with collaborative teaching methods.

Nevertheless, and although collaboration and DL seem to promote academic proficiency, three of the four teacher participants reported that DL students possessed less social skills. This was evidenced by Dr. Hassan when he said, “In traditional learning, (students develop) social skills through dialogues,” implying that students did not develop social skills as well when engaging in DL. Given these findings, a dialogue seemed to imply face-to-face interaction as opposed to an electronic dialogue. The perception of DL being engaging was mixed, was also brought up by one of the hiring authorities who noted that traditional students seemed to have higher levels of knowledge and willingness. This implied that DL was not yet where it needed to be to give students the same type of education that traditional students receive nor was it completely beneficial in terms of socialization. For DL to be an approach to education that effectively met the needs of all students, these issues must be addressed.

In relationship to DL as efficient, three of four teacher participants reported the following DL challenges: working with the internet and various media formats required, technical difficulties such as a lack of periodic equipment maintenance, outages in remote areas, parents not wanting to deal with technology, students not being serious about follow-up, and course syllabuses not meeting international standards. Teacher Dr. Hassan supported this by explaining that, “some of students were weak at the computer skills, and sometimes the internet is very weak and downloading is very slow.” Nevertheless, and as noted by the Communications and Information Technology Commission (2016), mobile broadband subscriptions recently reached 106.0% and, in the overall population, 21.6 million were internet users on high speed fiber optics networks (FTTs) in the KSA. According to the available information relating to DL prospects in KSA, it appeared the

KSA was already geared for the technological age given its up-to-date ICT indicators, the fact that the KSA ICT indicators were the highest in the Middle East (Alturki, 2014).

However, the participants in the study have varying perceptions of the efficiency of technology in Najran. Many believed the KSA had an e-learning system already in place. But, there was a substantial need to explore it, how it works, and whether students and teachers were on the same page in their perspectives using the newer technology. As an example, one teacher participant, Dr. Hassan, found negative attitudes towards distance learning students and faculty to be the greatest challenge to implementing DL.

Yet, to complicate matters further, some of the students appeared to feel that DL was efficient and the technology needed was in place and fully operational and others did not feel this way. In support of the efficiency of technology in Najran, one student in particular, Naji, gave his opinion about the technological advances of DL as having been more challenging in the beginning. He noted, “Undoubtedly, we faced some challenges such as device and network issues as well as problems with internet connection speeds, but we faced and overcame these problems over time.” On the other hand, Hadi provided a possible explanation for why DL and traditional education were not equally efficient when he shared, “[the problem] exists because the systems we have are very old. The [technology] should be developed [updated] to create some kind of equality between distance learning [and traditional education].” It appeared there was a difference of opinion in the efficiency of technology in the KSA, nevertheless, it was clear that there was enough access, need, and interest in the technology to allow DL to continue. Overall, what has been found in the literature was there was a moderate use of educational technologies by teachers and students at University of Najran (Omer, 2015).

Both the interview data gathered from participants and the use of the research journal to keep track of notes and researcher's reflection taken throughout the study have clarified the potential of DL as engaging. Although not all findings in the study supported student engagement as the primary solution to education in the KSA, DL could be enhanced in Najran to engage more students in education. Additionally, interviewing the participants, using the research journal, and exploring the artifact documentation supplied by the Communications and Information Technology Commission (2016), the University of Najran, and the CIA Factbook (2014) have been important to understanding the role of technology. Although DL was viewed as an educational platform in the KSA, infrastructure and access issues must be addressed to make DL applicable

Sub-research Question 2

Research Sub-research Question 2 (What is the perception of value of the distance learning experience?) revealed that, overall, the perception of DL was that it held significant value. The literature corroborated these findings as well. According to Altameem (2013), education is a value that is becoming stronger for many in the KSA. Alkhalaf et al. (2012) and Altowjry (2005) asserted that education as a whole has been holding more value as the KSA has become more dependent on the knowledge economy rather than the oil economy. Culturally, a change is taking place in the KSA regarding education and even more so regarding distance learning (Dixson, 2012). Traditionally, students have preferred that learning take place in a face-to-face context (Alshathri & Male, 2015). However, given the nature of globalization and shifting values, this has been changing. Many students in the KSA now have an opportunity to become educated, when in the past their options were limited (Lightfoot, 2014). Therefore, access to

education for all students, the value of teaching with DL, and greater employment opportunities have been all highly valued in the KSA.

Access for all students has been an important idea when discussing the value of online teaching and learning because not all students in the KSA have the opportunity to go to college. There were different reasons for this, but the most common were those that pertained to being in more rural locations, being female, and the rapid growth of the student population (Al-Asmari & Khan, 2014). In line with a United Nations report, the population of the KSA could be almost twofold in 2050, hence, putting pressure on current traditional infrastructure. For students who have been squeezed out due to space limitation, or restricted in their access due to living in rural areas, being female, or in high conflict areas lacking safety, DL provided an important alternative. The findings in the study supported this, as noted by Dr. Saeed, “E-learning could overcome the problem of place because some of the students were living in far places, preventing them from attending the default classrooms.” Dr. Hassan also concluded that, “in terms of e-Learning we could overcome some of the main problems in the traditional learning such the availability of courses and the problem of attendance.” Along similar lines, Dr. Mohamed shared, “the capacity of the classrooms is a problem as there is no chance for me to accept more than 30 students in the lecture.” The teacher participants also supported the opportunities that females have in attending college in the KSA with the implementation of DL. Dr. Hassan shared that DL “is also very proper for the girls in Saudi Arabia where there is no any kind of direct contact with them because of the conservative nature of Saudi Society.” Dr. Mohamed furthered the idea of access for female students when he explained that, “girl students, who haven’t had the chance to

enroll into traditional education, due to the traditions of the society, think that college is now very open for them.”

Related to the value of teaching with DL, most of the teachers agreed that DL was useful for teaching. Dr. Saeed expanded on how Black Board was used to teach by saying, “the system also allows me to input any content I want in many formats, shapes, and multimedia. I can create exams with many different formats and lastly, I use the system for assignments, duties, forums, and discussions.” Dr. Saeed continued by sharing, “Dealing with the system is easy.” Dr. Abdul Salam also noted that DL held value because, “for students, traditional education [means they] must be more ready because classes are at a specific time and students have questions” He continued to share that, “[Students] have issues, thus, lecturer should be ready, while in distance learning, the lecturer can go to the references and go to different sources and find the specific answers. There is some kind of satisfaction with e-courses.” Lastly, Dr. Hassan shared, “From my point of view, I think that technological developments have led to the transition to e-learning to keep pace with our times, in addition to the current conditions at the University of Najran, and to overcome the difficulties of traditional learning.”

Nevertheless, the students’ overall experience with DL as a valuable tool for teaching and learning was mixed. All four participants reported receiving training courses (lessons), videos, and information through the University of Najran’s Black Board system. Three of the four participants shared that their decision to use DL courses was based on DL’s ability to save time and effort. Ultimately, while all four of the student participants reported that DL provided a great deal of convenience and flexibility, one student conveyed that, despite the convenience and flexibility of DL, he preferred

traditional educational methods. Generally, for teachers and students, DL was valued as being easier, more efficient for most of the students, and a valid and worthwhile format for learning. Data from a review of the literature corroborated these findings that overall teaching with the use of DL was a viable practice (Breslow et al., 2013; Reich, 2015).

The use of DL for employment opportunities also held value in the KSA given current employment rates. The KSA labor force participation rate was low in 2010, at 20.5%, and very low for women at 1.2%, versus 36.8% for men (United Nations, 2016). Given the KSA has an oil-based economy, earning potentials tended to be linked with this industry. Nevertheless, the KSA's export earning dependency on oil has been falling as the oil economy has become less lucrative due to reduced oil prices (CIA Factbook, 2014). In response to this situation, officials have been trying to promote the employment of youth who were well-versed in education and technical skills (CIA Factbook, 2014). These findings have been supported by the work conducted by Dirani et al. (2017) who have asserted that a move towards education, and particularly DL, was expanding in the KSA.

Along with what has been found in the literature, the perspectives of the hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry supported the value of DL for employment. Nevertheless, when asked about their experience with DL graduates finding employment, there was a mix of responses. Two hiring authority participants reported traditional students possessed greater practical experience. Nevertheless, in their support of DL in finding employment, both Mr. Ali and Mr. Mohamed reported "being internationally wise" and "up to date with technologies" as being very important. In their own words, Ibrahim stated that distance learning (DL) students "deal with the computer perfectly, and

have a great ability to write and edit,” and Ali remarked how DL students are “better researchers” and have “wider horizons” than traditional students. Yet again, when asked if DL students possessed different skills and knowledge, levels of willingness to work, and other (important) attributes above that of traditional students, two of the hiring authority participants reported traditional students as having higher levels of knowledge and willingness. Data from other interviews revealed DL were not valued the same as traditional education and consequently, DL students had more difficulty finding employment. In particular, two hiring authority participants reported that DL students had a better chance of finding employment; one stated that traditional students had a better chance; and one participant reported no difference at all. Mr. Mohamed, in particular, stated that, “full time [traditional] students have more opportunities” because they “receive practical training” which is not provided to DL students.

Finally, when students answered questions related to DL providing knowledge, accreditation, and a valid means for being hired, all four student participants reported that DL provided superior knowledge but did not provide necessary accreditation for employment. For example, Rashed shared that, in regards to accreditation and employment, “the traditional education certificates are more accredited than the distance learning certificates.” Additionally, Rashed went as far as to say that, “if you want to find work in an educational field, or any field for that matter, DL is useless because diplomas are required.” Clearly, the findings were mixed and changes are warranted.

These findings suggested that, while teachers and students both value DL, the greater society did not feel the same way as a whole, despite the war conditions in Najran. The reason for this may be that the culture has not yet become accustomed to the

idea of moving more fully into the age of technology. Traditional teaching and learning have been a part of most cultures for many, many years and human beings have been resistant to change. Additionally, the KSA has not yet fully engaged with all of the appropriate ICT infrastructure and, given this, many may feel that DL could not give the same stable and trusted benefits that traditional education has for so long. For DL to be more widely accepted as a viable means to receive an education and find employment, and for individuals to be accepted as having learned all that needs to be learned to do well in a certain profession, cultural, social, and infrastructure changes must take place in the KSA.

The main themes discussed access to education for all students through the support of artifacts in the form of documentation published through the University of Najran (Omer, 2015), the CIA Factbook (2014), and through the work of Altowjry (2005). Artifact data from the United Nations (2016) also supported the need for access to education in the KSA. The findings related to the teaching efficiency of DL were revealing, given the interviews with teachers and students at the University of Najran as well as with hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry. Results of the interview findings and the availability of artifacts from the University of Najran (Omer, 2015), Altowjry (2005), and from other areas of the literature, contributed to the findings in this study that a need exists for greater teaching efficiency in Najran.

Finally, the themes revealed in this study regarding DL, and the viability of employment in Najran, were all noteworthy. Through use of the interviews, the research journal, the artifacts, and the literature reviewed in this study, DL was viewed as a mixed opportunity for post-university employment. Overall, if changes in education and the use

of DL were to take place in the KSA, the educational landscape must be adjusted to make the hiring of DL students more viable.

Summary

Regarding DL, the findings for the teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry, as well as what was learned through a thorough review of the literature, form this discussion. The findings for Research Question 1 (What role does distance learning serve in reshaping education in the war-stricken Kingdom of Saudi Arabia-Yemen border areas?) showed that DL was increasingly reshaping education in the war-stricken KSA-Yemen border areas in Najran. Furthermore, DL has also become a catalyst for greater change and for meeting the needs of all students in the KSA. In relation to Sub-research Question 1 (What are the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry of the affordances and constraints of distance learning?), there was clearly a mix of perceptions regarding DL as engaging for the student and as an efficient way to educate. Generally, DL was regarded as engaging. Although not completely efficient yet, online platforms have been upgraded and used more often. Yet, it has appeared there was a difference of opinion in the efficiency of technology in the KSA, which may not be unusual given the current state of transition in moving to more fully functional DL. Nonetheless, the findings suggested there was enough access, need, and interest in the technology to allow DL to continue.

For research Sub-research Question 2 (What is the perception of value of the distance learning experience?), the evidence pointed to DL holding value overall. The most value appeared to be in providing an education to students in more rural locations, female students, and students unable to attend traditional classes due to the rapid growth

of the student population (Al-Asmari & Khan, 2014). Generally, DL was valued as being more convenient, more efficient, and a valid and worthwhile format for learning for most of the students who participated in the study. The literature also corroborated these findings (Breslow et al., 2013; Reich, 2015). Regarding employment, all four student participants reported that DL provided superior knowledge but did not provide necessary accreditation for employment. The majority of the hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry also shared that while DL could be useful in finding employment, traditional schooling may provide a greater opportunity for finding employment. Clearly, the findings were mixed and changes would be warranted.

Limitations

Limitations were potential weaknesses related to decisions the researcher made in conducting a study that was difficult to control (Yin, 2014). There were some possible limitations in the design of this study and in the methodology used. The first potential limitation was that the study was conducted by a single researcher. In some manner, this indicated that there was only one perspective in which the data was interpreted. Second and related, the same researcher who collected the data, including conducting the interviews, was the single analyzer and interpreter of the collected data. Conducting research in this manner would be a possible point of entry for researcher bias. Preferably, researcher tasks should be separated, which would create less chance for introducing bias. Another limitation was the participants' ability to understand the purpose of the study and to identify with the interview questions. Nevertheless, the participants had the appropriate level of knowledge and their ability to articulate that knowledge was sufficient. Finally, case studies could be difficult to generalize to other geographic areas and populations

(Yin, 2014). As not all individuals or groups function in the same manner, to ensure the findings in this study were accurate, further research may be needed.

Recommendations for Practical Application

The findings from the study supported a number of recommendations for practical application on varying levels. Discussing the particular challenges the university was facing and what policy options were available for University of Najran, it was critical to allow for the evolution of distance learning at University of Najran (Omer & Alqwieder, 2015). There was clearly a need to ensure that the university culture could effectively provide a continuing and equality-based education to students that were affected by unrest in the border areas. To truly create and sustain distance learning in the KSA, and particularly in Najran, online platforms must be supported to help create changes in educational policy and ICT infrastructure to promote more distance learning in the KSA (Altameem, 2013). To encourage changes in policy, a rebalancing of social and political norms must take place to shape online educational reform in the KSA (Lightfoot, 2014). In particular, the University of Najran has offered online classes and has provided a way for students to continue with academic study. However, the infrastructure has been lacking to launch into a complete online educational system at the university (Al-Asmari & Khan, 2014). Given the current and sudden shift in Najran, the use of technology must be supported and infrastructures enhanced to make way for a new system of education in the KSA (Altowjry, 2005). The primary problem has been the lack of any substantial policy initiatives that focus on use of KSA's ICT infrastructure for distance learning. This may entail an expansion of the infrastructure and the willingness of teachers, students, and authorities at the Civil Service Ministry to empower a shift toward distance learning.

Regarding recommendations for collaboration, this could be quite broad, and policymakers and practitioners would have a choice about what to incorporate into their teaching approaches. Willingness has been key in successful collaboration and that would mean a shift must occur in the way in which ideas were constructed in reference to learning and teaching (Harrison-Walker, 2014). The global environment has established a framework for working with a more complex set of circumstances than in the past and, for those areas still in the process of becoming fully technological, collaboration would be essential. Those who design online classes for distance learners could use constructivist philosophies to aid instructors in creating student-center, collaborative approaches that support new and dynamic processes used for adult education (Kahu, 2013).

For teachers, the goal should be to challenge students to higher levels of academic self-efficacy. One way of boosting the success of this type of learning could be to include a collaborative teaching method for addressing the needs of all students who could benefit from greater teacher attention and a focus on real world, technologically-based innovations (Sabzian et al., 2013). In essence, a dynamic approach to online education facilitated through DL, collaborative teaching methods could involve educators in a number of ways in which they could have the flexibility needed to respond specifically to students' needs (Burroughs, 2014). Without question, this should include teacher and hiring authority collaboration to ensure that students would be gaining the tools they need to be successful in the job procurement after graduation. Another way in which to foster student-teacher collaboration would be through the professional development of teachers and collaboration between teachers and students as found in the triangle of instruction

(Grubb & Gabriner, 2013). Teachers could enhance their role and level of commitment by studying journals, viewing instructive videos, seeking information, engaging in discussions on education centered websites, by attending presentations, classes, and conferences (Hadar & Brody, 2012). As teachers enhance their skills, the view about the education and degree quality that DL students obtain would be similar to that some of the participants believe traditional students receive. Furthermore, teachers could incorporate methods of teaching that target the socialization of students and engage in paradigm shifts away from traditional pedagogical practices.

Briefly touched on above, another recommendation would be based on the need to revitalize the economic sector in the KSA through the expansion of education and allow all individual access to new income earning opportunities. Newer educational policies would need to focus on providing a useful education to all students. The use of DL to educate those restricted from receiving a complete education due to space limitation, lack of access due to living in rural areas, cultural divisions (Bedouins and nomads frequently do not get along), being female, or by living in high conflict areas was critical. The final consideration for a shift in higher education in the KSA would be in addressing what the students and some of the hiring authorities in this study have pointed out as the ineffectiveness of DL to procure viable employment after graduation. As one student, Rashed explained, "If you want to find work in an educational field, or any field for that matter, DL is useless because diplomas are required." If DL is to be fully integrated into the KSA, it would need to be valued more highly by prospective employers. While this surely would entail a shift in perspective, this could also be achieved through upgraded

infrastructure, collaboration on all fronts, teacher professional development, and a willingness to provide access to education for all people.

Recommendations for Future Research

Three recommendations for future research emerged from this study. The order of this list is random and does not indicate a greater level of importance for any topic. All recommendations for further study are valid, meaningful, and would contribute to the use of DL in all parts of the KSA.

1. Consider a mixed-methods and/or quantitative approach. As noted, this study employed a qualitative case-study methodology, which facilitated the capturing of rich detail pertaining to what was obtained in the interviews with teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry. Nevertheless, the sample used in this study was not large. Given this element, the generalizability may have been limited. In such a situation, using a quantitative methodology could provide a broader and more inclusive data set, allowing for additional discovery about the use of DL in the KSA.

2. Repeat the study. While this study was conducted in a full and comprehensive manner, it would be interesting to see if replicating the same study in different areas would provide the same findings and results. For example, in an area with different socioeconomic conditions, different cultural values, more or less access to education, and more or less conflict taking place would the results be synonymous with the study conducted here? Furthermore, would replicating the study with different countries in the Middle East garner different findings? These are valid and appropriate questions, and warrant replicating this study under different conditions.

3. Create a longitudinal study that explores the long-term outcomes of students using DL to graduate from universities in the KSA, especially in Najran. It would be instructive to discover what students do professionally post-graduation, either by choice or circumstance. Exploring the differences among those students who have primarily taken DL courses, versus those who have taken traditional courses, or a mixture of both could be very revealing in ascertaining the level of effectiveness and efficiency of DL in the KSA.

Conclusions

As has been ascertained through the literature and findings in the study, DL in the KSA has been somewhat limited and, until now, little research existed about online education in KSA and, in particular, the area of the Najran-Yemen border. There were a number of social, practical, cultural, and economic reasons for this phenomenon (Altowjry, 2005; United Nations, 2016). Yet, the most pressing concern fueling the need for such topics to be explored in the KSA was the existence of serious conflict on the border of the KSA and Yemen. While conflict prompted the study, there were, and are, other reasons for promoting DL in the KSA. The evidence gathered in this study exhibited the value of DL overall. The KSA could benefit greatly from DL programs in Najran and elsewhere due to limited space for classes, the need to shift away from the dependence on an oil economy, and the need to address both cultural and geographical factors. The most value appeared to be in providing an education to students in more rural locations, female students, and students unable to attend traditional classes due to the rapid growth of the student population (Al-Asmari & Khan, 2014). Distance learning was valued as being more convenient, more efficient, and a valid and worthwhile format for

learning for most of the students who participated in the study as well as from what was found in the literature (Breslow et al., 2013; Reich, 2015). Nevertheless, the findings revealed that, although DL could be useful in finding employment, traditional schooling may provide a greater opportunity for finding employment. These findings indicated the need for shifts on numerous levels for promoting the use of DL in the KSA.

Nevertheless, the findings clarified that DL was regarded as engaging by the teachers and students who participated in this research. Although there was a difference of opinion in the efficiency of technology in the KSA, the findings suggested there were enough need, access, infrastructure, and interest in DL to allow for the continued enhancement of technology, shifts in perception, and greater collaboration to promote online education. The study conducted here could generate an in-depth understanding of the implications DL has on the culture and economy of the KSA, especially in the war-stricken KSA-Yemen border areas in Najran.

Clearly, the promotion of distance learning would allow students in the KSA greater access to education. The significance of this research was related to promoting an enhanced ICT system and overall access to education, which was a viable option to provide higher education to all people who were unable to attend universities in the border area and elsewhere. This study was vitally important to ensure that all students in Najran, and in the greater KSA, had the opportunity to attend college. Using Najran as the case study for this work clarified the need for the Saudi educational administration to provide students in KSA-Yemen border area a much-needed access to education. Given the direct conflict taking place, what occurs now within the educational system in Najran (to assure that students continue to have elevated access to educational resources) could

serve as a template for the rest of the KSA. The study undertaken here afforded a unique insight to enabling the use of DL in a part of the world that has not yet embraced this possibility to its fullest for a variety of reasons.

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APPENDIX A

**UNIVERSITY ORGANIZATION AGREEMENT LETTER
ENGLISH AND ARABIC VERSIONS**



UNIVERSITY ORGANIZATION AGREEMENT LETTER

I, Dr: Ragea Alqahtani, Dean of the College of Education at the University of Najran, hereby authorize Mahdi Alzamanan to conduct research with teachers and students from the University of Najran.

I authorize this research to be done primarily for the following purpose:

Completion of a research dissertation at the University of Northern Colorado.

I authorize the use of the information gathered for re-disclosure in a report for others and for potential publication.

Name of Dean of the College of Education at the University of Najran: Dr: Ragea Alqahtani

Hereby, permission is granted to conduct interviews with teachers and students about their perceptions of distance learning in Najran University and in the KSA.

Name of authorizing Officer: Dr: Ragea Alqahtani



UNIVERSITY ORGANIZATION AGREEMENT LETTER IN ARABIC

الملحق (ج) اتفاقية رسالة بجامعة نجران

انا, محمد الحسن مدير جامعة نجران, نأذن لمهدي ال زمانان لاجراء البحث مع اعضاء هيئة التدريس والطلاب من جامعة نجران.

افوض هذا البحث الذي ينبغي القيام به في المقام الاول للغرض التالي:

الانتهاء من اطروحة بحثية في جامعة شمال كلورادو.

افوض استخدام المعلومات التي تم جمعها لاعادة الكشف في تقارير الجامعة لاجراء البحوث الاخرى والتي يمكن نشرها.

اسم مدير جامعة نجران: محمد الحسن

بموجب هذه الوثيقة تم منح الاذن لاجراء مقابلات مع اعضاء هيئة التدريس والطلاب من جامعة نجران عن تصوراتهم للتعليم عن بعد في جامعة نجران وفي المملكة العربية السعودية.

اسم الموظف المصرح:

عميد كلية التربية بجامعة نجران.

الدكتور: راقع القحطاني

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO



INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

STEP 1: Welcome and Overview of Purpose of Interview and Protocol (2-3 minutes)

“Hi. First of all, thank you for being here to participate in this group interview.

“My name is Mahdi Alzamanan, and I am a student of Doctor of Philosophy in Education Technology at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC). My project is a research study aimed at understanding the future prospects, challenges and current situation of distance learning at the University of Najran, KSA. Since you play an important role in answering understanding this issue, I would like ask you some semi-structured questions about distance in Najran.”

“The interview today should take between 60-90 minutes. I am going to facilitate the interview and would anyone mind if I taped the interview? It will help me stay focused on our conversation and it will ensure I have an accurate record of what we discuss. After the transcripts are created from the recording, two additional steps will take place.”

“First, I will invite those who participated to submit additional information that can help provide additional insight into the questions posed. The individual, group, or I may want to schedule a follow-up conversation over the phone or via email to clarify or elaborate on any of the responses shared at the interview. This can also take place in a second, follow-up meeting”

“Second, I will erase the audio recording. The typed transcripts was kept on a computer in a password-protected file for three years. Anyone can decide at any time to discontinue their participation. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have. Shall we get started?”

STEP 2: Introduction (2-3 minutes)

“Please tell me about your background and experience as a _____ (professor, student, hiring authority at the Civil Service Ministry) here in Najran.”

STEP 3: Questions were posed to interviewees (4-5 minutes per question)

STEP 4: Closing Question (3-5 minutes)

“Is there anything you would like share about distance learning here in Najran or in the KSA that I did not ask?”

STEP 5: Thank participants, recap next steps, and member check (2-3minutes)

- After the group interview, the audio recording was transcribed.
- If needed, member checking, or ensuring that participants shared exactly what they intended to share, will take place via email or phone to elaborate or clarify.
- Member checking may also take place during a second, follow-up interview if needed.

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT--ENGLISH AND
ARABIC VERSIONS



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Case Study of Distance Learning at the University of Najran
Lead Investigator: Mahdi Alzamanan, Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx
Email: Alza8999@bears.unco.edu
Researcher Advisor: Dr. Mia Williams
Email: mia.williams@unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to explore distance learning in the KSA, and even more specifically in Najran since the influence of war in this boarder area. Effectively documenting the successes and challenges faced by distance learning stakeholders can provide an avenue for broadening online education for all students in the KSA. This study seeks to understand the perceptions of teachers, students, and hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry in relationship to distance learning as a means to access education, which may be a viable option for providing higher education to all people who are unable to attend universities in the area. Unless studies and extensive research are conducted to address the challenges, issues, perspectives, and prospects surrounding distance learning provided at University of Najran, impact on policy is limited. Using Najran as the case study for this work will not only shed a light on how the Saudi educational administration can provide students in KSA-Yemen border area much-needed access to education--now limited by conflict--but could also inform a platform for distance learning to be implemented all across the KSA.

This project is being conducted by Mahdi Alzamanan, a Doctoral Student at the University of Northern Colorado, to form the basis of his degree for the Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of Educational Technology, and under the supervision Dr. Williams. Although I am from the geographic area of the study, I will make every effort to treat the study, and any information learned, objectively.

I will remain objective and neutral when interviewing the participants and analyzing the data. I will also record and analyze the data accurately and without bias. During the study, you were asked to participate in an interview, which was audio recorded using a digital recorder. Each participant was required to partake in an interview that will last for approximately 60-90 minutes. During the interview, you were asked to express your opinion on a number of semi-structured questions.

The information was reported in the form of a dissertation, and potentially published in a scientific journal. A results summary was shared with community partner(s) and the participants, and all information was kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Information obtained during the course of the study (both identifiable and non-identifiable) was stored in locked cabinets and in a password-protected computer for 3 years. Access to this information will only be given to researchers involved in this project. After three years, the information was deleted from the computer/external USB Drive and paper copies shredded. In the event that this study is published, all information provided about individuals was confidential and unidentifiable.

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this project. For any relational or professional risks, those minimal risks that may exist, the researcher will never reveal other research participants' beliefs and perspectives as this study is for informational gathering purposes only. The only other associated cost is that of lost time, which you will spend in making yourself available for an interview, and potentially a follow up email, phone, or in-person meeting. Please note that although I will treat emails with all due care and confidentiality, the security of information exchanged via email cannot be guaranteed. Should you find any risks unacceptable, please do not hesitate to contact either the project supervisor or the student researcher. Although there is no direct compensation for taking part in the study, your participation may facilitate future opportunities to enhance your knowledge and skills using distance learning based on the results of the study. Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision was respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form was given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO, 80639; 970-351-1910.

You may also contact the researcher to ask any questions about the project.

I can be reached by email or by phone with the following contact information:

Alza8999@bears.unco.edu

909-538-9599

If you are willing to participate, please contact the student researcher by responding to the email address provided in the invitation for research participation. You was asked to provide your consent by signing the consent form at the start of the interview. You will receive a copy of the informed consent.

Subject's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO



الملحق (A-b) نموذج موافقة للمشاركة البشرية في مجال البحث جامعة شمال كولورادو
عنوان المشروع: دراسة حالة التعليم عن بعد في جامعة نجران
الباحث: مهدي ال زمانان، رقم الهاتف: xxx-xxxx (xxx)
البريد الإلكتروني: Alza8999@bears.unco.edu
مشرف الباحث: دكتور: مايا ويليم
البريد الإلكتروني: mia.william@unco.edu

الغرض والوصف: الغرض الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو استكشاف التعليم عن بعد في المملكة العربية السعودية، وتحديدًا في نجران منذ تأثير الحرب في هذا المجال الحدود. توثيق فعال للنجاحات والتحديات التي تواجه أصحاب القرار في التعلم عن بعد حتى يمكن أن توفر وسيلة لتوسيع التعليم عبر الإنترنت لجميع الطلاب في المملكة العربية السعودية. وتسمى هذه الدراسة إلى فهم تصورات المعلمين، والطلاب، وموظفي التوظيف في وزارة الخدمة المدنية في العلاقة مع التعليم عن بعد كوسيلة للوصول إلى التعليم، والتي قد تكون خيارًا قابلاً للتطبيق لتوفير التعليم العالي لجميع الناس الذين لا يستطيعون حضور الجامعات في المنطقة. ما لم يتم إجراء دراسات وبحوث واسعة النطاق للتصدي للتحديات والمشاكل ووجهات النظر، والآفاق المحيطة بالتعليم عن بعد المقدمة في جامعة نجران، والتأثير على النظام محدود. باستخدام نجران كدراسة حالة لهذا العمل لا تسلط فقط الضوء على كيفية الإدارة التربوية السعودية يمكن أن توفر للطلاب في منطقة الحدود السعودية اليمنية التي تشتد الحاجة إليها في الحصول على التعليم الآن محدودة بسبب الصراع لكن يمكن أيضا اخبار منصات التعليم التي سيتم تنفيذها في جميع أنحاء المملكة العربية السعودية.

يجري هذا المشروع من قبل مهدي ال زمانان وهو طالب دكتوراه في جامعة شمال كولورادو، لإحراز شهادته للدكتوراه في الفلسفة، في قسم تكنولوجيا التعليم، وتحت إشراف الدكتور وليامز. على الرغم من أنني من المنطقة الجغرافية للدراسة، وسوف ابذل كل جهد لعلاج هذه الدراسة، وأية معلومات تعلمتها، من الناحية الموضوعية. سأظل موضوعي ومحيد عند إجراء مقابلات مع المشاركين وتحليل البيانات. وأنا أيضا أسجل واحلل البيانات بدقة ودون تحيز. خلال الدراسة، سوف يطلب منك أن تشارك في مقابلة، والتي سوف يكون الصوت المسجل باستخدام جهاز تسجيل رقمي. سوف يطلب من كل مشارك للمشاركة في مقابلة ان تستمر لحوالي 60-90 دقيقة. وخلال المقابلة، سوف يطلب منك للتعبير عن رأيك على عدد من الأسئلة شبه منظمة.

سيتم إبلاغ المعلومات في شكل أطروحة، ويحتمل أن تنشر في مجلة علمية. وسيتم اشراك ملخص النتائج مع الشريك المجتمع والمشاركين، وستبقى جميع المعلومات سرية من خلال استخدام أسماء مستعارة. وسيتم تخزين المعلومات التي تم الحصول عليها أثناء الدراسة (على حد سواء يمكن معرفه وغير معرفه) في خزائن مغلقة وجهاز كمبيوتر محمي بكلمة مرور لمدة 3 سنوات. سيتم منح الوصول إلى هذه المعلومات فقط للباحثين المشاركين في هذا المشروع. بعد ثلاث سنوات، سوف يتم حذف المعلومات من الكمبيوتر / محرك USB الخارجي وتمزيق النسخ الورقية. في حال تم نشر هذه الدراسة، فإن جميع المعلومات المقدمة حول الأفراد سرية.

هناك الحد الأدنى من المخاطر التي تنطوي عليها المشاركة في هذا المشروع. لأية مخاطر ذات علاقة أو مهنية، تلك المخاطر الدنيا التي قد تكون موجودة، الباحث لن يكشف عن

التوقيع بالأحرف الأولى

معتقدات المشاركين البحوث "والمنظورات هذه الدراسة هي لأغراض جمع إعلامية فقط. التكلفة الوحيدة الأخرى المرتبطة هي الوقت الضائع، والتي سوف تجعل نفسك متاح للمقابلة، ويحتمل أن تكون متابعة البريد الإلكتروني، والهاتف، أو اجتماع شخصيا. يرجى ملاحظة أنه على الرغم من أنني سوف اتعامل مع الرسائل مع كل العناية والسرية، تبادل أمن المعلومات عبر البريد الإلكتروني لا يمكن أن تكون مضمونة. يجب أن تجد أي مخاطر غير مقبولة، لا تترددوا في الاتصال إما المشرف على المشروع أو الطالب الباحث. رغم عدم وجود التعويض المباشر لمشاركتهم في الدراسة، مشاركتكم قد تسهل الفرص المستقبلية لتعزيز المعرفة والمهارات استخدام التعلم عن بعد على نتائج الدراسة.

المشاركة طوعية. قد تقرر عدم المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، وإذا بدأت المشاركة قد لا تزال تقرر وقف والسحب في أي وقت. سيتم احترام قرارك ولن يؤدي إلى فقدان المزايا التي يحق لك الحصول على خلاف ذلك. بعد قراءة ما سبق، وبعد أن كان فرصة لطرح أي أسئلة، الرجاء تسجيل الدخول أدناه إذا كنت ترغب في المشاركة في هذا البحث. ويعطى نسخة من هذا النموذج لك الاحتفاظ للرجوع إليها في المستقبل. إذا كان لديك أية مخاوف حول اختيارك أو العلاج كمشارك في البحث، يرجى الاتصال بمكتب البحوث، قاعة Kepner، جامعة شمال كولورادو غريلي، CO، 80639. 970-351-1910 يمكنك الاتصال الباحث أن يسأل أي سؤال حول المشروع. يمكن لي الوصول إليها عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني

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إذا كنت على استعداد للمشاركة، يرجى الاتصال الباحث الطالب من خلال الاستجابة لعنوان البريد الإلكتروني الذي قدم في الدعوة ل مشاركة الأبحاث. سوف يطلب منك تقديم موافقتك من خلال التوقيع على استمارة الموافقة في بداية المقابلة. سوف تتلقى نسخة من الموافقة المسبقة.

التاريخ

توقيع المشارك

التاريخ

توقيع الباحث

التوقيع بالأحرف الأولى

APPENDIX D

**CIVIL SERVICE MINISTRY AGREEMENT
ENGLISH AND ARABIC VERSIONS**



CIVIL SERVICE MINISTRY IN NAJRAN AGREEMENT LETTER

I, Ali Alqahtani, a manager at the Civil Service Ministry in Najran, hereby authorize Mahdi Alzamanan to conduct research with hiring authorities from the Civil Service Ministry of Najran.

I authorize this research to be done primarily for the following purpose:

Completion of a research dissertation at the University of Northern Colorado.

I authorize the use of the information gathered for re-disclosure in a report for others conducting research and for potential publication.

Name of Civil Service Ministry in Najran Manger: Ali Alqahtani

Hereby, permission is granted to conduct interviews with hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry about their perceptions of distance learning in Najran and in the KSA.

Name of authorizing Officer: Ali Alqahtani



CIVIL SERVICE MINISTRY IN NAJRAN AGREEMENT LETTER IN ARABIC

الملحق (هـ) اتفاق رسالة بوزارة الخدمة المدنية بنجران

انا, علي القحطاني, مدير وزارة الخدمة المدنية بنجران , نأذن لمهدي ال زمانان لاجراء البحث مع ممثلي التوظيف من وزارة الخدمة المدنية في نجران.

افوض هذا البحث الذي ينبغي القيام به في المقاوم الاول للغرض التالي:

الانتهاء من اطروحة بحثية في جامعة شمال كلورادو.

افوض استخدام المعلومات التي تم جمعها لاعادة الكشف في تقارير الوزارة لاجراء البحوث الاخرى والتي يمكن نشرها.

اسم مدير وزارة الخدمة المدنية بنجران: علي القحطاني.

بموجب هذه الوثيقة تم منح الاذن لاجراء مقابلات مع ممثلي التوظيف في وزارة الخدمة المدنية بنجران عن تصوراتهم للتعليم

عن بعد في نجران وفي المملكة العربية السعودية.

اسم الموظف المصرح: علي القحطاني

APPENDIX E
EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO



EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Invitation to Participate In the Research Project Titled:
“Case Study of Distance Learning at the University of Najran”

Student Researcher: Mahdi Alzamanan
Project Supervisor: Dr. Williams, Mia
Student’s Prospective Degree: Doctor Of Philosophy

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Mahdi Alzamanan, a doctoral student at the University of Northern Colorado. I am conducting group interviews as part of a research study to determine the usefulness of distance learning at the University of Najran, and in the KSA as a whole. The selection criteria I am using for teachers is that you will have been a) teaching at the college level for at least two years and b) an instructor at the University of Najran. The selection criteria I am using for students is that you will have been a student at the University of Najran for at least one year, and the selection criteria I am using for hiring authorities at the Civil Service Ministry is that you have been c) a hiring authority at the Civil Service Ministry for at least one year. As either a professor, student, or hiring authority, and in meeting the criteria, your expertise and participation would enable me to collect the necessary data for establishing the potential status and usefulness of distance learning in Najran and in the KSA as a whole. In this way, educational policy makers can use this study to improve distance learning services in the KSA.

If you agree to be interviewed, the interviews will take roughly 60-90 minutes. For the interviews, the group can choose to meet at the university or any other location where everyone feels comfortable. If needed, member checking, or ensuring that you have shared exactly what you intended to share, can take place via email or phone to elaborate or clarify. Member checking may also take place during a second, follow-up interview if needed. In either case, member checking could take anywhere from a few minutes to an additional hour depending on what needs further clarification. However, I will certainly attempt to minimize the time you spend on this process.

I am ultimately trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives as either a professor, student, or hiring authority at the Civil Service Ministry who could be effected by an increase in distance learning in Najran. Your responses to the questions was kept confidential. Each group interview was assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of the findings. There is no compensation for participating in this study, and you can withdraw from participation at any time. However, your participation was a valuable addition to this research, and the findings could lead to greater understanding of how to most effectively meet the needs of students in the Najran and in the KSA. If you are willing to participate, please let me know and I can tell you more about the interviewing process. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Mahdi Alzamanan

APPENDIX F
GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO



GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. Please describe your current job description in terms of your responsibilities as a professor in distance learning?
2. How, if at all, are the distance learning courses that you teach different from traditional courses?
3. What kind of support, do you receive from other university departments and administrators to effectively deliver distance learning?
4. What technologies do you use to effectively deliver distance courses?
5. How you think students in traditional courses and students in distance learning are different from each other?
6. What are the greatest challenges of distance learning in the University of Najran, KSA?
7. In what way have the current conditions in Najran affected your teaching?
8. Based on your experience, how distance learning can be improved at the University of Najran?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to mention?

APPENDIX G
GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS



GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. What is your experience with distance learning?
2. If you were previously studying through traditional setting, why did you start studying through distance learning?
3. How, if at all, are the distance learning courses that you take different from traditional courses?
4. If you were given a chance to choose between traditional schooling or distance learning, which would you like better, and why?
5. What kind of support, do you receive from the university departments and teachers to do well in distance learning?
6. Do you think distance learning is beneficial to you in gaining knowledge, accreditation, and in being accepted for employment? Why or why not?
7. In what way have the current conditions in Najran affected your education?
8. Based on your experience, how can distance learning be improved at the University of Najran?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to mention?

APPENDIX H
GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HIRING
AUTHORITIES AT THE CIVIL SERVICE
MINISTRY

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO



GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HIRING AUTHORITIES
AT THE CIVIL SERVICE MINISTRY

1. What is your experience with graduates from the University of Najran finding employment?
2. How, if at all, are employment opportunities different for distance educated graduates than from traditional graduates?
3. Regarding your experience with graduates, can you explain what particular differences, in terms of skills and knowledge, willingness to work, and other attributes are different for those who studied through distance learning?
4. In your opinion, what particular skills are either present or lacking for potential employees that come from a distance learning background?
5. Based on your experience, what factors are employers looking for in hiring graduates from the University of Najran?
6. To what extent do you think that distance learning is a viable method to obtain a degree and find employment?
7. Is there anything else that you would like to mention?