

**EXPLORING TRAINERS' EXPERIENCES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AT THE
SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY ACADEMY**

by

HENDRIK JACOBUS JOOSTE

Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Education

In the Faculty of Education

at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Supervisor: Dr. Martin Combrinck

Co-supervisor: Dr. Moses Moyo

Mowbray

April 2025

CPUT copy information

The dissertation may not be published either in part (in scholarly, scientific or technical journals), or as a whole (as a monograph), unless permission has been obtained from the University

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to whom I owe all glory and honor. His guidance through the Holy Spirit has been my strength and light throughout this journey.

To my beloved wife, **Sally Jooste**, whose unwavering support, love, and encouragement have been my foundation. Your belief in me, especially during the most challenging times, has been a constant source of strength.

To my late parents, **Hendrik Lottering** and **Sarah Lottering**, whose wisdom and guidance continue to inspire me, and whose memory remains a driving force behind my success.

To my friends and colleagues, whose encouragement and motivation helped me stay focused and inspired during the difficult moments.

And to my two mentors, **Dr. Martin Combrinck** and **Dr. Moses Moyo**, whose belief in me and constant guidance have been instrumental in making this journey a success.

This work is a testament to their wisdom and faith in my abilities.

Acknowledgements

Growing up in a small Karoo town, where Afrikaans was the primary language spoken, the transition to academic English was a challenge. With the guidance of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, I overcame this hurdle and improved my academic expression.

I am deeply grateful to **Chaplain Smuts** at the **DOD School of Logistics Training** for your constant support and critical feedback. Your dedication and assistance were invaluable.

Thank you to **MajorsThireshan Chetty** and **Cobus Saunders** for always being available to review my work and provide constructive criticism. Your help was greatly appreciated.

I also wish to acknowledge **Mr. (Retired) Captain Hendricks**, now at Stellenbosch University, for your guidance and support during this journey.

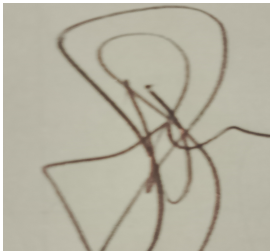
I am extremely grateful to my mentors, **Dr. Martin Combrinck** and **Dr. Moses Moyo**, for their expertise and constant support. **Dr. Moyo**, I especially thank you for your tireless dedication, guidance, and availability throughout this process. Your support was truly a blessing.

Thanks to the lecturers from **SAMA** for their time and support during my study, and to **Dr. Mhaka Khoza**, Section Head of the Distance Education Department at SAMA, for your assistance during the interviews.

Finally, I thank my family and friends for their unwavering support, prayers, and encouragement. May God bless you all.

DECLARATION

I declare that the contents of this research proposal represent my unaided work and that the research proposal has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. I also confirm that the Turnitin report, including all sources, shows a similarity index of below 7%. Furthermore, this reflects my personal views and does not necessarily represent the official stance of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.



Signed

April 2025

Date

ABSTRACT

Like some government departments, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) continuously seeks to improve the quality of service through various initiatives presented in the White Paper on Defence. The SANDF continuously seeks to restore legitimacy in South Africa through professional military education and training. Continuous professional development is one of the crucial processes used to improve the quality of services by making the personnel aware of development trends and the use of new technologies. The South African Military Academy (SAMA) a training unit in the SANDF provides a qualification-based course in distance education mode in partnership with Stellenbosch University to young officers to imbue them with a knowledge framework and to equip them for career opportunities. The evolution of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and online educational platforms are gradually being embraced as means for providing distance education, thereby bringing new experiences and challenges to the SAMA that educators had to deal with. Military educators may have difficulties coping with these changes and challenges. Their experiences with these changes and challenges are essential in sustaining the provision of distance education through both paper and electronic forms. This study aimed to explore the experiences of these military educators in distance education at the SAMA in the Western Cape to gain a deeper understanding of how their experiences affect distance education. The study was conducted at the SAMA. The purpose of this proposal is to provide a narrative justifying the need to conduct a study to explore the experiences of educators in the defence force concerning distance education and training environments in the face of the influence of information and communication technologies. The study population consisted of 66 military educators of which purposive sampling was used to choose the sample of individuals to interview. The research employed a case study at the SAMA through a qualitative approach in which data was collected using interviews. Data was interpreted qualitatively, and the findings were organised into key themes. The findings and recommendations ensuing from the study contribute towards the quality and effectiveness of distance education.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Demographic Information of Participants	41
Table 4.2: Themes and Subthemes	42

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Community of Practice framework	20
Figure 3.1: Research onion model	26
Figure 3.2: Research methodology chain.....	27
Figure 3.3: Data Analysis in Qualitative Research	34

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACRONYMS	MEANING
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CoP	Community of Practise
ETD	Education Training and Development
FMS	Faculty of Military Science
ICT	Information Communication Technology
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
ODETP	Occupationally Directed Education and Training Practitioners
PME	Professional Military Education
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
RMC	Research Methodology Chain
ROM	Research Onion Model
RQ	Research Question
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SAMA	South African Military Academy
SANDEF	South African National Defence Force
SU	Stellenbosch University
UK	United Kingdom
UNISA	University of South Africa
USA	United States of America

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
DECLARATION.....	iv
ABSTRACT	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
LIST OF ACRONYMS.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ix
CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.2 Problem statement.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.3 Rationale of the study	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.4 Purpose of the study	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.5 Research objectives.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.5.1 Main objective.....	3
1.5.2 Sub-objectives	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.6 Research Questions	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.6.1 Main research question	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.6.2 Sub question/s.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.7 Motivation for the Study	4
1.8 Definition of key concepts	5
1.9 Benefits of the study	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.10 Structure of the dissertation	6
1.11 Summary.....	7
CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Distance Education	8
2.3 Online Learning.....	10
2.4 Distance Education Before COVID-19 and Thereafter.....	11

2.5 South African Open and Distance Learning	12
2.6 Distance Education in the Military	13
2.7 Military Educators Experiences of Distance Education at SAMA	15
2.7.1 Definition of 'Experience'	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.7.2 Experiences of Military Educators.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.8 Attitudes of Educators	17
2.9 Challenges Faced by Military Educators	18
2.10 Impact of Challenges on Military Educators about Distance Education at SAMA	18
2.11 Theoretical Framework	19
2.12 Summary.....	22
CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	25
3.1 Introduction	25
3.2 Research Design and Methodology	25
3.2.1 Methodology	25
3.2.2 A Research Onion Model of Research (ROM).....	26
3.2.3 Research Methodology Chain (RMC)	27
3.3 Research Philosophy	28
3.4 Research Approach	28
3.5 Research Design	29
3.6 Strategy.....	30
3.7 Population and Sampling Procedures.....	30
3.7.1 Population.....	30
3.7.2 Sample size and sample procedures.....	31
3.7.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria	31
3.7.4 Site selection	31
3.8 Data collection, instruments design and pilot studying.....	32
3.8.1 Data collection instrument.....	32
3.8.1.1 Advantages	32
3.8.1.2 Disadvantages.....	32
3.8.2 Instrument design	32

3.8.3 Procedures for data collection	33
3.8.3.1 Advantages	33
3.8.3.2 Disadvantages.....	33
3.8.4 Data generation methods	33
3.9 Time Horizon.....	33
3.10. Data Analysis	33
3.11 Trustworthiness.....	35
3.11.1 Credibility	35
3.11.2 Dependability and confirmability	36
3.11.3 Transferability	36
3.12 The Researcher's Position	36
3.13 Ethical Considerations	37
3.14 Summary.....	37
CHAPTER FOUR – ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION.....	39
4.1 Introduction	39
4.2 Analysis, presentation of findings and interpretation.....	39
4.2.1 Demographic overview of participants	39
4.2.2 Findings: Themes and subthemes.....	41
4.2.2.1 Theme 1: Navigating the distance education learning environment	43
4.2.2.2 Theme 2: Ensuring effective distance learning practices.....	48
4.2.2.3 Theme 3: Managing learning issues and student diversity	53
4.2.2.4 Theme 4: Leveraging support systems and managing family dynamics..	59
4.2.2.5 Theme 5: Student engagement and achievement.....	64
4.2.2.6 Theme 6: Optimising efficiency and support	70
4.3 Conclusion	74
CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS	76
5.1 Introduction	76
5.2 Discussions.....	76
5.2.1 Participants demographics.....	76
5.2.2 Engaging with the distance learning space	77
5.2.2.1 Student engagement barriers at SAMA	77

5.2.2.2 Irregular attendance in virtual classes	78
5.2.2.3 Limited engagement with course content	78
5.2.2.4 Challenges with technology and internet access	79
5.2.2.5 Effects of load shedding	79
5.2.3 Maintaining quality in distance education	79
5.2.3.1 Lecturer support	79
5.2.3.2 Comprehensive student support.....	80
5.2.3.3 Learning environment and student support	80
5.2.3.4 Faculty support.....	81
5.2.3.5 Ongoing professional development	81
5.2.4 Overcoming learning barriers and managing diversity.....	81
5.2.4.1 Student diversity	82
5.2.4.2 Limited lecturer interaction	82
5.2.4.3 Student isolation and withdrawal	82
5.2.4.4 Language barriers and reading online	83
5.2.4.5 Adapting to meet students needs	83
5.2.5. Support networks and family responsibilities	83
5.2.5.1 Fragmented support systems	84
5.2.5.2 Family responsibilities	84
5.2.5.3 Employment pressures	84
5.2.5.4 Effects of military deployment.....	84
5.2.5.5 Mental health and emotional well-being	85
5.2.6 Enhancing student engagement and achievement	85
5.2.6.1 Student commitment.....	85
5.2.6.2 Motivation of students.....	86
5.2.6.3 Academic performance.....	86
5.2.6.4 Completion of studies	87
5.2.6.5 Feedback mechanisms.....	87
5.2.7 Enhancing effectiveness and support.....	87
5.2.7.1 Unequal workload distribution	88
5.2.7.2 Managing additional duties	88

5.2.7.3 Support from institutions	88
5.2.7.4 Time for professional development.....	89
5.2.7.5 Limited access to teaching methods.....	89
5.3 Summary.....	90
CHAPTER SIX – SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	91
6.1 Introduction	91
6.2 Overview of the Study	91
6.3 Synthesis of Findings and Conclusions	93
6.3.1 Key Experiences that strengthen Distance Learning (RQ1)	93
6.3.2 Conclusions	94
6.4 Obstacles faced in distance learning at SAMA (RQ2).....	94
6.4.1 Summary of the main difficulties	94
6.4.2 Conclusion: understanding the nature and impact of these problems	95
6.5 The Effects of These Challenges (RQ3).....	96
6.5.1 The reflection from lecturers	96
6.5.2 The effect on the learning environment	97
6.6 Limitations of the Study.....	97
6.7 Implications of the Study.....	97
6.7.1 Implications for Military Educators	98
6.7.2 Implications for SAMA and SANDF	98
6.7.3 Implications for wider Military education sector	99
6.8 Recommendations	99
6.8.1 Practise-orientated recommendations	99
6.8.2 Policy-level recommendations	99
6.8.3 Areas for further research	99
REFERENCES.....	101
APPENDICES	121
Appendix A: University ethical clearance letter	121
Appendix B: SAMA ethical clearance letter.....	122
Appendix C: Turnitin Report	109

Appendix D: Interview Guide	111
Appendix E: SAMA – Application letter for permission to conduct interviews	112
Appendix F: SANDF ethical clearance letter	113
Appendix G: Interview transcript samples	111
Appendix H: Editing certificate	139

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The concept of distance learning is not a new phenomenon as it dates back to the 18th century where the very first instance of distance education was delivered by way of correspondence; a case where it was mailed together with the postal service in Boston, USA (Sewart & Keegan, 2020). Distance Education at Illinois Wesleyan University Illinois Wesleyan University was one of the earliest institutions to provide distance education for graduate and undergraduate students in the United States, beginning in 1874 (Hansen, 2017). At the beginning of the 20th century, technology-mediated distance education also began to emerge (Bozkurt, 2019). Distance learning improved with the advance of technology and became ubiquitous around the world. It was in England that modern distance education originated, with Isaac Pitman teaching shorthand by mail in 1840 (Worsley & Archibald, 2019). The term of distance education is firstly introduced by Isaac Pitman (Worsley & Archibald, 2019).

Normal classroom-bound learning was gradually substituted by distant learning methods in the late 1800s. Based on this enrichment the non-synchronous CBI advanced over this interval (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2013). Thousands of software programs have also been developed across countries to aid in distance learning. Video conferencing, television and fax are used to connect students in remote areas and to provide instruction. These tools are educating better than previously (Pregowska et al., 2021). The resources behind distance learning today are vast. We have learning materials through email, audio-visual materials, internet, web chats and streaming videos (Pregowska et al., 2021).

Online courses are the latest trend in this line (Dhawan, 2020). Internet courses fall into two basic types: synchronous in that students and teachers communicate in real-time and asynchronous in which students have access to the course-related materials anytime (Lin & Gao, 2020). The advent of

the internet has created a variety of novel teaching options including virtual classrooms, multimedia, and webcasts. These support real-time teaching with a/v and peer review (Simonson et al., 2019). It is also within the military that online open education is growing the most around the world (Pregowska et al., 2021; Bozkurt, 2019). This enlargement has changed the work and how it practices the education, training, and development (ETD) conducted in military schools, into other words, the education of Army. As a result, teachers in the military need to be able to develop and deliver online course (Simonson et al., 2019). They must also stay current with new technologies and pedagogical techniques. Military trainers should possess the capability to manage digitally education and create digital training content through on-line (Bozkurt, 2019). To have these efforts succeed, teachers need to be trained to teach well online (Simonson et al., 2019). What teachers know about teaching and fear have mostly been sidelined (Joy, 2004). Thus, it is essential to examine military educators' attitudes and perceptions in order to compare their attitudes across decades of war.

1.2 Problem Statement

The fast pace at which technology is changing and the advent of the internet, presents the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) with both opportunities and threats. This state of affairs has a bearing, firstly, on leaders and educators, notably the shortage of academic staff, at the South African Military Academy (SAMA)'s Faculty of Military Science (FMS). The new realities have rippled throughout the entire system. Educators have had to deal with trying to keep some form of continuing competency and making learners satisfied with the present implementation. Sure, rapid technological advances have made it all the more challenging for military educators to keep up with the times. The COVID-19 pandemic further frustrated the sometimes less-than-desirable process of military education (Kirchner & Yelich-Biniecki, 2022). SAMA struggled to assure the quality of their educational offerings when collaborating with first (university) in South Africa (Fokkens, 2011). Their experiences have been rarely reported or applied for quality in education even if the urgency of developing quality strategies in distance courses remains (Simonson et al., 2019). This gap is

being addressed by the current study which investigates the lives of military educators studying off-campus, and that applies their experiences in the education and training of future recruits (Esterhuyse & Mokoena, 2018).

1.3 Rationale of the Study

With the quick progress of technology, distance learning was a major mode of learning in the world. SAMA is one of the leading academies that trains officers of the army across the country. As the SANDF emerges towards modern educational methodologies, distance education has become a necessity in the need to respond to soldiers' unique learning needs, in particular under military circumstances. Unfortunately, although the importance of this learning mode is growing there is little information researched to date on the opinions held by SAMA military educators on the provision of distance education in such a demanding environment. The aim of this article is, therefore, to investigate these experiences, detailing the way military teachers who are designed to conduct distance learning at SAMA conceive things (perceptions), what they do not understand (problems) and what they consider important to work on (focus). The objective is to gain an understanding of the ways in which this mode of delivery affects the SANDF education and training continuum.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

This research attempts to explore the lives of military lecturers in the SAMA distance learning. The goal is to standardize training and conditions of service in all faculties of the SANDF.

1.5 Research Objectives

1.5.1 Main Objective

The general objective of the study was to examine SAMA military teachers' experiences toward distance education and the impact of experience on quality of education and training.

1.5.2 Sub-Objectives

The sub-objectives of this:

- To critically analyse the experiences of educators of the distance education at SAMA.
- To identify the challenges that educators face for distance education at the SAMA.
- To evaluate the impact of the challenges on educators who facilitate distance education at SAMA.

1.6 Research Questions

1.6.1 Main Research Question

The main research question is as follows: What were the experiences of educators in the military in the use of distance education at SAMA that impacted on the provision of quality education?"

1.6.2. Sub-Questions

Minor questions emerging from the main question:

- What factors just named did military trainers encounter as important for the DE and the educational context
- What was challenging for the military tutors with regard to the delivery of distance education in SAMA?
- How did the military instructors view the challenges of distance education at SAMA?

1.7 Motivation for the Study

While the world is in question, the literature suggests that an insufficient body of information from the literature of distance education has informed the quality of the educational and training environments for military educators (Simonson et al., 2019). Many disruptions have occurred in military education as technology changed the education and training landscape. The problems were also compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic, which further gummed up a creaky military education system. A cultural analysis on the military educators' experience might provide some practical lessons learnt in terms of their perception of DE, reflections on performance, enablers or barriers in DL. This is the significance of the

study. It is evident from this study that distance learning has spread to be practised in a wide variety of training institutions worldwide and has assumed a wide variety of forms and achieved acceptance predominantly in developed countries. Through taking them into account - distance education in a military context becomes more understandable for us, and the study contributes to the development of military teaching and learning. It addresses a gap in the related literature by understanding: (a) the experience of military educators with distance education and (b) the use of this experience with the intention of providing better education and development services to military personnel and trainees.

1.8 Definitions of Key Concepts

Military: Coats and Pelligrini (in Siebold, 2001:144) describe military as "a directed system looking to an end for control. When the military is a bastion for the defense and promotion of democracy, the potential for an advanced democratic culture is enhanced (Burke 2002:23). Burke also added that the term 'military', includes the military personnel.

Distance Education/Learning: "... a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are at a distance, it occurs when students and instructor are separated by distance and sometimes by time" (Gunawardena, & McIsaac 2013). Distance education has been traditionally mediated by print, radio, and television, thus enabling education for potential learners who would otherwise not have received any formal education (Sewart & Keegan, 2020).

Training and Development: Training enriches the understanding, skill, and perspective of the employee to perform to the desired level at individual, team and organizational level. Shenge (2014) adds that Organizations need reliable funding to deliver effective training if it is to achieve its goals and have a chance of doing well. Trainings that work must be planned, managed and evaluated in terms of their contribution to the growth and development of establishments (Shenge, 2014:50).

Trainers: Al-Mohammed, Riaz and Aldoob (2023) stress that teacher/trainers play important role in training. They control the learning

environment and they provide feedback to learners to enable them to achieve their goals and improve their performance.

1.9 Benefits of the Study

There is limited information available at SAMA in the area of research in the field of distance education as a component of professional military education which is a relatively new area of focus within the ETD department of the CPUT. Researching DE in this era will build up a research culture of it as well. Key findings and recommendations from this study can contribute to PME and the ETD culture. This research has the potential to increase the effectiveness of military educators and have an important impact on military education and training. In providing a more nuanced view of distance-education practice, such findings can help inform and train in military environments to foster more effective and flexible practice in the training, education and development of soldiers.

1.10 Structure of the Dissertation

The organization of the chapters of the thesis is classified under sub-heads which discussed the key points as shown below:

Chapter One: Introduction - The introduction is to describe why the study is being conducted and introduce the topic.

Chapter Two: Literature Review - The Literature Review provides a review of the research and the work that has been done.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology- This chapter describes how the data was collected and analyzed. It allows readers to assess the trustworthiness and validity of the study.

Chapter Four: Analysis, Presentation, and Interpretation - Puts evidence into the context of past events and experiential analysis, not theory.

Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations – Summary of the findings – Conclusion and recommendation is the basis of this chapter.

Chapter Six: Conclusion: Implications and Recommendations - The chapter presents the summary of the purpose, research questions and findings. Below is an explanation of what these findings mean.

1.11 Summary

Chapter one provided the groundwork for the investigation of perceptions of military educators teaching DE with SAMA. It offered a skimpy summary of distance education's past, including early correspondence work and the advent of technology-based learning. The chapter highlighted the impact of technological advance on world education and military education. It also highlighted some untenable and unrealistic prescripts for military educators in the SANDF, particularly in an age of rapid technological advancements and the Covid-19 pandemic in the delivery of military education. The purpose of the study was to bridge the gap, investigate how military teaching staff at SAMA perceived distance education, and how it influenced quality of education and training. The research objective was also presented in the end of the chapter. These aims centred around exploring teachers' experience, understanding challenges and the impact that these challenges had on attainment. Chapter Two will discuss the literature review on distance education with an emphasis on military applications. It will elucidate some of the most important issues, challenges, and gaps in the literature, particularly in respect of military academics at institutions such as SAMA.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of military educators participating in distance education at the SAMA in the Western Cape. Although Chapter One includes an introduction to the research, its background, a report of the research problem, a rationale for the research, the purpose of the research, research questions, key terms, a definition of some terms based on the context of the study, the theoretical framework, and the research design and its significance, Chapter Two comprises an in-depth literature review. The chapter then places the research problem into the context of existing literature, identifies missing links in the literature, and underscores the contribution of this study.

2.2 Distance Education

The distance learning has been influenced strongly by the globalisation, the demographic changes and the developments of the information and the communication technology (ICT) (Özgür & Koncak, quoted in Kotze, 2020). Such research is usually carried out in developed, industrialised countries (Kotze, 2020). Because of variety in its shape and practice, distance education has been defined in diverse ways. Of interest are the definitions proposed by Buselic (2012) and Anderson and Rivera-Vargas (2020). Distance learning is, formal learning when the student and instructor are not in the same place at the same time, Anderson and Rivera-Vargas (2020:212) explain. Likewise, Buselic (2012:15) sees it as a field that teaches methods and technologies used to deliver the teachings to learners who are not in a physical classroom. What's more, distance education frequently includes asynchronous communication, or distributed teaching, eliminating the need for presence in space and time (Anderson and Rivera-Vargas 2020:209).

Distance learning is used to describe the phenomenon known as distance education differ, but the most common is that it is a formal, organized and educationally sound learning experience in which the majority of learning activities take place apart from the traditional place of instruction, the most common of which is the home or the office for part or all of the learning

(Gunawardena & Mclsaac, 2004:17; Simonson et al., 2019). In the case of military environments, specialists should be capable of designing and deploying distance education programs which can be adapted to learners' expectations. Internationally, 'distance education' is called by different names (Kotze, 2020). Distance education has embraced technological advancements and the new modalities allow increased student/teacher interaction which has brought educators and learners closer together. Learning technologies continue to reshape how we learn, both within traditional educational contexts and in online formats (Veletsianos, 2010).

Distance education has evolved in response to social and technological transformations is argued by Anderson and Rivera-Vargas (2020:210) since the late 19th century. Kurzman (2013) concurs, reporting that the advent of MOOCs has facilitated education on a large scale over the last 30 years. The quick advances in technology have led to major fundamental shifts in higher education globally (Veletsianos, 2010). The idea of distance education can be traced to the 18th century postal correspondence study in Boston (Pregowska et al., 2021:2), which emerged because of a need for alternative methods of education (Holmberg, 2005:43). Formerly largely dependent on physical resources, DE currently occurs predominantly online on the global scale (Qayyum & Sawicki -Richter, 2019). Various countries have 'localised' distance education to meet the demands of their particular circumstances and technology (Hebecki et al., 2020; Pregowska et al., 2021:3).

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, students connected through computers, smart phones and other devices. From the mid-1800s, the use of the international postal system allowed students who lived too far to travel to attend a campus to receive an education, with correspondence courses offered across the USA and in Canada (Anderson & Elloumi, 2021). Similar movements spanned Eastern and Western Europe and influenced countries such as Poland, Russia, Romania, Belarus, and Kazakhstan as well, where correspondence learning is practiced (Pregowska et al., 2021:3; Tanas, 2015). Some countries such as the UK and Germany set up large distance education universities in the early 20th century one in the case of many others like France

introduced public distance education (Keegan, 2013: 228; Pregowska et al., 2021:3). The use of postal resources by Australia was indispensable factor for an education system for the distant area (Kim, 2020). In Africa, universities implemented distance education courses to rural communities at the outset of the twentieth century (Pregowska et al., 2021:4; Chatanika et al., 2012; Offerman, 2009). UNISA became the first public distance teaching institution on the African continent in 1946 and it is the largest provider on the continent (Keegan & Rumble, 2018; Manson, 2016; Pregowska et al., 2021:4). China initiated postal correspondence education during the early 1900s, to promote education access across the country (Keegan, 2013). In the 20th century chat, radio, TV, videotapes were utilized for facilitating distance education across the globe (Jena, 2020; Johnson 2020).

The arrival of the internet has further transformed the methods of dissemination (Simonson et al., 2019). Studies on online education cover main themes including: teaching effectiveness, quality indicators, student success (Farooq et al., 2020; Frazer et al., 2017), transitioning faculty, teaching strategies; workload; and, professional development (De Grange & Walters, 2009; Al-Bales et al., 2020). Challenges include faculty support, emotional support, time management, and course delivery discrepancies. The faculty experiences in the distance education are mixed (Mansbach & Auston, 2018). In the 21st century, terms such as e-learning and m-learning refer to some parts of distance education (Holmberg, 2005:43). While distance education is changing, it is shaping policy and practice, drawing a need to understand the contextualisation of it (Kidd & Murray, 2020; Bailey & Lee, 2020).

Keegan's (2013) work remains a leading contribution as it established the theoretical boundaries of distance education, distinguishing it from other forms of learning. In the context of this study, this distinction is critical for understanding how military educators at SAMA navigate their dual roles in professional training and higher education.

2.3 Online Learning

Online learning has emerged as an important alternative in higher education, especially for adult learners such as those at SAMA (Lockee, 2021). According to Faisal and Kisman (2020), internet applications are the services that permit the interactions between students and instructors using distance education management system. Though ICT opens up educational access, the low-income countries face challenges such as high expenses and lack of infrastructure (Faisal & Kisman, 2020). In addition, ICT provides a platform for managing information effectively and efficiently (Kabir & Kadage, 2017), a necessity for distance education. However, most students struggle with ICT access which tends to hinder technology integration in higher education (Lembani et al., 2020). African agency work emphasise increasing education need and ICT infrastructure constraints (Harsasi & Satawijaya, 2018; Kabir & Kadage, 2017). Online learning (one of the main modalities of distance education) may be hundred percent online or have blended components with face-to-face learning (Gunawardena & Mclsaac, 2013). Blended learning consists of exchanges through bulletin boards, email, chat rooms, Teams, Skype, Zoom. Related but distinct, online learning is predominantly reliant on internet-based content delivery devoid of face-to-face interaction, whereas distance education includes the use of online and non-online resources. (Baker & Unni, 2018). E-learning has been received with enthusiasm across generations and is frequently integrated with face-to-face education to increase attention and understanding (Serrano et al., 2019).

Holmberg's (2005) emphasis on guided didactic conversation is another leading perspective that shaped early distance education models. When applied to SAMA, this framework helps explain how military educators' experiences of dialogue and interaction are transformed in online environments where personal contact is limited.

2.4 Distance Education before COVID-19 and thereafter

Prior to the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, DE was frequently perceived as a poor substitute for 'traditional' face-to-face teaching (Wieland & Kollias, 2022:85), mainly because technology was believed to have dominated the content delivery and many educators lacked the skills or the confidence to

teach online efficiently. According to Gunawardena and Mclsaac (2013), instructors are not being prepared for the growing need for quality in online education. Even before Covid-19 there were crises in the education sector (World Economic Forum, 2022; Khan, 2022). Lockee (2021) details how the pandemic caused a sudden, global move to online learning, which exacerbated previous learning inequities and questioned the success of distance education (World Economic Forum, 2022). Yet, the crisis has sped up the innovation of learning in the military, forcing more units to work on the quality of their distance learning (Khan, 2022; Wozniak, 2021). Ionascu (2022:176) foresees sustainability of the development of the military education system through the integration of digital tools and redefining the notion of distance education following (Wieland, & Kollias (2022:90). More affluent countries should likewise increase the infrastructure for online teaching (Ionascu, 2022:176). All institutions have to change with changing delivery models for education (Singh & Mathees, 2021; Kalloo et al., 2020). Daniel (2020) calls on traditional educators to make the shift to asynchronous learning, offering that it is “an existential survival” adaptation. In order to be of any use in education, educators should be open to the new methods and strategies corresponding to digital technologies (Ionascu, 2022:176). Although technological shifts have introduced many benefits and difficulties, continued innovation has the potential to reduce the divide among students and can allow for better and more meaningful interactions to occur.

Gunawardena and Mclsaac’s (2004) study is a leading international work on online collaborative learning. Reconceptualised within this study, it highlights how military educators at SAMA face similar challenges of maintaining community and engagement, despite operating within a unique military context.

2.5 South African Open and Distance Learning

The South African government has embraced open and distance learning since the country’s transition to democracy in 1994 (Hess, 2017). The surging demand has led to widespread expansion of distance education all over the country. Research has demonstrated that distance education has the potential to offer thousands of South African learners’ access to opportunities (Qayyum &

Sawicki-Richter, 2019; Keegan, 2013) and has a positive effect on the quality and progression of education (Glennie, 2007:101). It is still a cornerstone of higher education provision in South Africa with the purpose of academic functioning to grow (Department of Higher Education, 2014). The significance of DE in the South African context is, in particular, reflected when considering the higher education sector as this opens up access to a wide heterogeneity of student profile that does not have access to higher education (Glennie, 2007:101). UNISA is the largest comprehensive, distance education institution in the world. But this phenomenon of expansion has in turn exposed certain limitations in responding to different training requirements. The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) have been involved in formulating policy aimed at dealing with these challenges, and calling for better support and more resources for teaching materials (Glennie, 2007). Recent research by Cloete, Mouton, and Sheppard (2016) and Brown, Hughes, Keppel, and Hard (2015) report growing interest in this area. Conversely, the dearth of research with a focus on the experiences of the educators in the context of distance education is noted by Du Preez and Le Grange (2020). South African research focuses, for the most part, on distance learning in general, with limited in-depth attention to the views of educators, especially in the training and development context.

Esterhuyse's (2006; 2007; 2013) studies are leading in the South African military education context. They provide foundational insights into the complexity of professional military education (PME) and SAMA's institutional arrangements. However, these works focus more on structures and policies, rather than the lived experiences of educators, a gap this study addresses.

2.6 Distance Education in the Military

The use of distance education has increased significantly in military environments worldwide, including the USA, over the past decade (Bacolod & Chaudhary, 2018). Star-Glass (2011) reports an escalation in military distance learning efforts due to technological and fiscal challenges leading to increased dependence on distance education (Judy, 2016). The 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act was also influential with respect to promoting intellectual convergence and

the growth of distance education in the US military (Johnson-Freese, 2012:135). According to Judy (2016), the investment in human capital has ensured the establishment of distance learning as the bedrock of military education that caters to the educational needs of a varied student demographic. According to Wozniak (2021:610), military training proved that they can integrate distance education effectively. Gunawardena and McIsaac (2013) who also discovered that faculty who transition to new online approaches can prosper in a changing higher education landscape, reflecting more general easing of understanding of distance learning, even with all the associated hurdles.

As we develop new technology, teachers need to participate in that conversation to remain relevant. They play a key role in the formation of learning (Costley & Lange, 2016:169; Wieland & Kollias 2022:90). Wieland and Kollias (2022:90) also remind us that educators are ill-equipped for distance teaching. But then, technology advances in the last ten years allowed distant education performance that are equivalent to the traditional ones, also at SAMA. The Covid-19 pandemic required military education to suddenly move online, revealing deficiencies in virtual resources and infrastructure (Ali, 2020; Bowen, 2020; Crawford et al., 2020). Officers of the world went through similar challenges (Sheringham, 2022; Atkinson, 2014). But online education has its benefits, including cost savings and flexibility. Judy (2016) describes how online students are frequently superior to face-to-face students. Based on Starr-Glass's (2011) study, troops found ICT-based learning at a distance just as effective as, or better than, traditional classroom instruction. Military institutions now are providing both distance and residential programmes, sometimes in conjunction with private providers, as they seek to diversify their offerings (Judy, 2016; Johnson-Freese, 2012; Van der Waag-Cowling & Milto, 2013). Despite its advantages, it's also characterized with some limitations such as lack of face-to-face interaction between military students and professors and among military students themselves, lack of group dynamics (Judy, 2016). With these, still a worthwhile, versatile education option (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2013).

But literature sources reveal that nothing has even touched on the experiences of military educators. The value of our discussion how would educators respond at present and in future is essential for them to pass knowledge learning process. Learners can listen and learn from their thought process, which will vary among all of you. Exploring how military educators consider the issue can contribute to improving practices in distance education as well as support for them as educators (Kidd & Murray, 2020; Bailey & Lee, 2020).

Supporting studies such as Kabir and Kadage (2017) show how technological access and equity affect distance education in developing contexts. At SAMA, these findings are reconceptualised to highlight how educators' experiences are shaped not only by pedagogy but also by infrastructural constraints like load-shedding and connectivity challenges.

2.7 Military Educators' Experiences of Distance Education at SAMA

Some factors which influence the experiences of military teachers in distance education at the SAMA, military educators find their experience levels differing. They have different roles and responsibilities and teach different programmes. The diversity of students means that individual circumstances are important too. Despite this diversity, there is a common thread running through them.

2.7.1 Definition of "Experience"

Scholars generally regard experience as knowledge learned through actual participation and interaction with the environment (Dreher et al., 2009). It is an evolving process, shaped by engagement and reflection on changing circumstances. Recognising experience as a complex and constructed shared reality means that one can promote better educational paradigms and practices that take account of this.

2.7.2 Experiences of Military Educators

SAMA is affiliated with Stellenbosch University's Faculty of Military Science (FMS). As part of the SANDF, it provides distance education for military professionals (Fokkens, 2011). The Department of Military Professional Development supports education, with FMS providing quality assurance

mechanisms in collaboration with the SANDF. This is backed by human and financial resources (Esterhuyse, 2007; Khoza & Van Zyl, 2015). The academy's distance education courses are based on qualifications and are flexible, designed to cater for the career progression of junior officers. However, with the advent of information and communications technology (ICT), new challenges are emerging in our existing online delivery system. This will require integrating more quality assurance measures to support educators as a whole (Fokkens, 2011).

With a multifaceted array of experiences in the military, educators bring these into their teaching practices and results (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). After spending time in different education systems, most teachers will have an idea of what is wrong with the other one. Some, however, due to ignorance and null experience, do not even know that they should have low (Cornell-d'Echert, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic now also has pushed these issues to even greater force. It is necessary for educators to familiarize themselves with new technology and the current trends of teaching online. The research effort towards distance education at SAMA causes educational quality a lot complicated, which is such an understandings of military educators' real feelings of weariness (Esterhuyse, 2006; Fokkens, 2011). When careful planning is done to adjust teaching more suitable for vulnerable, distant students he can turn it into both opportunities and challenges. (Veletsianos & Houlden, 2019; Mormina & Pinder, 2018). Filling this research gap would then enable military distance education to take a big step forward.

Military educators' experiences should not only be described as events or tasks, but theorised as a lived phenomenon that shapes and is shaped by professional identity, institutional culture, and pedagogical practices. As Dreher et al. (2009) note, experience is gained through daily practice, but within the SAMA context this practice is deeply embedded in the dual demands of military structure and academic delivery. Bergh (2023) highlights how these experiences can either enhance or constrain professional growth, while

DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) illustrate how educators' experiences in military settings are characterised by adaptation, negotiation, and identity development. Seen through this lens, the "experience" of military educators becomes a process of meaning-making in which they continuously balance personal, professional, and institutional expectations. This theorisation positions military educators' experiences as the central phenomenon of this study, providing a conceptual anchor that links challenges, attitudes, and the role of Communities of Practice to the broader realities of distance education at SAMA.

Bergh's (2023) recognition of the importance of educator experiences is a supporting perspective, while DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) provide a leading contribution by framing military educators' experiences as multidimensional. In this study, these dimensions are reconceptualised to explore how SAMA educators' experiences influence not just teaching practices, but also their sense of belonging within a Community of Practice.

2.8 Attitude of Educators

The outcome of military distance education depends on the attitude of military educators. Attitude refers to feelings or reactions towards tasks and interactions. When we refer to attitude, it can be positive or negative toward school or in the negative direction. The military teacher's attitude can affect student participation and teaching quality. (Altimann, 2008). If attitudes are positive one can grapple with difficulties, still maintain teaching quality, be in harmonious contact with students; while if they become negative, on the other hand, this will mean diminishing effectiveness and being marginalized. (de la Rama et al., 2020). The military educators' disengagement and unenthusiastic attitude that often occurs in distance teaching can aggravate students' growth. As a result. (Sahu, 2020) Military educators with negative attitudes might bring very serious consequences. That would be less support for the students; it could lead to communication problems and finally undermine SANDF education goals (Kauffman, 2015). If we want to motivate and effectively influence educators to do something, and take responsibility for their failure to adjust attitudes.

Altimann's (2008) study provides a leading perspective on how attitudes affect teaching effectiveness. Reconceptualised in this study, attitudes are not viewed only as individual traits but also as outcomes shaped by institutional pressures, workload, and student engagement in SAMA's distance education system.

2.9 Challenges Faced by Military Educators

As they attempt to deliver efficient distance education, the lecturers in the South African Military Academy experience a lot of difficulties. Focusing attention on Student participation online, in particular, is disenchanted by frequent national power cuts. Further, this inconsistency also hinders the overall learning experience by students. Further Challenges in student engagement are various: uneven attendance to online sessions, poor discipline and late or missing homework. A student who goes out on deployment and can't get access to resources does not feel backed up at all. Students' ability to solve problems which is further hindered by technological limits as well as not having academic or a student who does not respond also slows down the forward movement for timely feedback and interaction. While military educators have to manage full-time residential teaching duties, they also experience all of these problems, and more. On the whole, both work overload due to these challenges and their time spent in dealing with the problems negatively impact the quality of military educational provision.

Supporting studies such as Sahu (2020) and Chowdhury et al. (2022) show how online learning presents challenges of motivation, disengagement, and workload. In this study, these insights are reconceptualised within the SAMA context, where unique challenges such as deployment schedules, power outages, and limited support systems intensify the burden on military educators.

2.10 Impact of Challenges on Military Educators about Distance Education at SAMA

Those military educators who face difficulties in distance education will be confronted with considerable stress, disengagement, and despair. There are very few prospects for further development. Heavy workloads lead to low motivation and poor qualifications (Altimann, 2008; Sahu, 2020). Feeling that

one is valued in a job and satisfaction with it drops off. This change is crystallised through elitism which expresses the intellectual interests of a few of the leading old authors, for instance Russians or Germans rather than Americans (Kauffman, 2015; de la Rama et al., 2020). Educators' efficacy and their zeal for teaching are reduced by students who have become disoriented. A sudden upsurge in e-learning has meant that load-shedding and other issues complicate the Teaching as well as communication. Then Morale among teachers is low, and stress. (Sahu, 2020) If these issues are not addressed at SAMA the foundation of education may be threatened; its mission to produce capable people worthy of leadership in Chinese society will also be weakened if this happens. In addition, it could lead to burnout and high staff turnover (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Kauffman, 2015).

Altimann's (2008) and Kauffman's (2015) works are leading contributions in linking educator workload and support to professional wellbeing. Applied to SAMA, these findings underscore how institutional neglect of educator experiences risks burnout, turnover, and the destabilisation of professional military education.

2.11 Theoretical Framework

Working together in the common ground of the learning environment with an intimate group that shares its views on challenges and teaching practices of distance education. In such manner, this group becomes known as a Community of Practice (CoP). CoP research the process, as exemplified in this book about the process of the community of practice, is sometimes called 'co-operative education'. It is that phase in a man's life when he seeks to bridge the gap between his present circumstances, which may bring him discredit (such as being preoccupied with mobile phones), and a new situation that holds future relevance. In addition to assimilating this new environment, we must also preserve elements of the old one. The CoP theory, which was proposed by Lave and Wenger in 1991, helps to explain how expertise and professional self-understanding develop through collective activity. This theory provides the foundation for our study.

Their work conceptualises learning as a form of social participation, where individuals gain knowledge and develop professional identities through engagement in shared practices within a community. Central to their theory is the concept of *legitimate peripheral participation*, which describes how newcomers become part of a community by initially participating in low-risk tasks and gradually moving toward full participation as they gain competence. In the context of this study, military trainers at the South African Military Academy can be seen as members of a professional community of practice, where knowledge-sharing, mentoring, and informal collaboration are critical for effective teaching and learning. The shift to distance education may have disrupted these social and participatory structures, potentially affecting how trainers engage with one another and with their learners. Lave and Wenger's framework is therefore appropriate for understanding how the transition to an online learning environment impacted the trainers' sense of belonging, role development, and professional learning.



Figure 2.1: Community of Practice framework
Community of Practice Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991)

The CoP concept has been cited in this study in order to reveal how educators in the SAMA army learn from their own manifest experiences. furthermore, it examines how their participation in a distance education community shapes identity, attitudes, and also methods of instruction Of course their motivation to

succeed in this community has been handicapped by such challenges as heavy workloads and institutional support for the few, and raising student engagement in their ranks. These elements are the main topic of the problems and plans raised by this study, which will develop further how experiences modify their delivery.

The CoP model is a way to leverage collectively the expertise and abilities of the group for performance improvement. Community building and voluntary participation and evaluation of value (Anderson 2008) are two of the studies that are related to it. This study finds an agreement between the arguments from Cheng et al. (2017) and Saba (2016) that distance education should be grounded in strong theoretical and philosophical principles. In addition, CoPs can exist in both the real and digital worlds, so that teachers may talk to one another and pupils involved in distance education can learn together. Best practice and knowledge creation are needs which must be satisfied in any professional setting. In military distance education, CoPs help to make teachers and students a community. They are of much help to these groups in providing a space for critical self-reflection and enquiry, and thus producing a unified identity. Furthermore, SAMA's CoPs have been instrumental in helping military educators adapt to new technologies and changing learner requirements. Military educators have an important role to play in shaping the learning environment and the commitment level. Together, they have shared responsibilities and challenges. The participation of military educators in a CoP supports a sustainable development and sharing of exemplary educational methods. This is in line with the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between SAMA and Stellenbosch University.

The process of quality assurance includes evaluating educators' performance as well as distance education effectiveness (Suleiman, 2023). This study stressed the extreme necessity of maintaining high quality standards for online programs (Jung, 2020). Applying quality assurance frameworks in the field of educational studies for specific teaching situations is becoming more common in various training institutions, although online learning has only been practised in a very few cases (O'Keefe et al., 2020). Through the CoP framework we

came to understand the experiences of SAMA's educators and how these impacted distance education. Self-assessment is now a key element in determining the quality of performance improvement. Morale and the standard of instruction will both suffer if the problems faced by educators are not solved.

It is because of the CoP model that recognizing and supporting military educators as valuable contributors will promote individual and institutional growth (Kumet et al., 2014:79). The training institution must give educators a platform to share their experiences so that negativity can be purged from their lives and performance on the job increased. Therefore the CoP model is being used in SAMA's study to understand the experiences of military educators involved with distance education.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice theory is a leading framework that explains how professional learning occurs through shared practice. This study reconceptualises CoP within the SAMA context, where distance education has disrupted traditional forms of collegial interaction, making the lived experiences of educators central to sustaining professional identity and effective teaching.

2.12 Summary

The literature review on military educators and distance education identified several critical areas, including the theoretical foundations of distance education, the challenges these educators face, and the impact of these challenges on the educational environment. Foundational works such as Keegan (2013), Holmberg (2005), and Gunawardena & Mclsaac (2004) provided the leading theoretical perspectives that continue to shape contemporary understandings of distance education. These studies are seminal because they established the defining characteristics of distance education and its pedagogical implications. More recent supporting studies, such as Qayyum & Zawacki-Richter (2019), Kabir & Kadage (2017), and Chowdhury et al. (2022), have built upon these foundations by demonstrating how distance education practices evolve across global, regional, and military contexts.

Within the South African setting, Esterhuyse (2006, 2007, 2013) and Fokkens (2011) produced leading local research on professional military education (PME) and the South African Military Academy (SAMA). Their contributions provide a foundational understanding of PME's structural and institutional challenges. Supporting perspectives, such as Khoza and van Zyl (2022), expand this work by highlighting the broader experiences of South African educators in higher education and distance learning. Together, these studies establish a strong base, but they do not adequately address the lived experiences of military educators themselves.

Reconceptualised within the frames of this study, the leading international and local works illuminate how military educators' roles, identities, and professional practices are disrupted and reshaped by distance education. For example, Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice (CoP) theory explains how collaboration and identity formation occur in teaching communities; when applied to SAMA, it highlights how the shift to online delivery has disrupted traditional mentoring and collegial structures, thereby influencing educators' experiences. Similarly, Esterhuyse's work on PME complexity underscores why exploring educators' perspectives is essential to understanding not only training delivery but also institutional sustainability at SAMA.

Despite the existence of both leading and supporting studies, an important gap remains. Much of the existing research relies on surveys or broad institutional analyses, which provide limited insights into the complexities of military educators' lived experiences. No study has yet explored in depth how military educators at the SAMA experience distance education, how their professional identities are reshaped, and how their participation in communities of practice influences teaching and learning outcomes.

This study therefore seeks to address this gap by offering a detailed qualitative exploration of military educators' experiences in distance education at the SAMA. By grounding the research in both foundational theory and contemporary scholarship, the study contributes to advancing understanding of

distance education in military contexts while ensuring that the voices of educators remain central to the analysis.

CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Related literature in military educators and distance education has been reviewed in Chapter Two. It addressed a notable void in the knowledge about military educators' experiences, pertinent theories and major concerns. For this reason, in-depth qualitative inquiry into these experiences is warranted. This chapter examines some of the difficulties facing military lecturers at the South African Military Academy (SAMA) in providing distant education through certain models presented.

3.2 Research Design and Methodology

3.2.1 Methodology

Qualitative methodology was used in this study to explore military instructors' experiences and challenges of distance education at SAMA. Semi-structured interviews constituted the primary means employed to collect data. The use of this approach allowed the researcher freedom, it offered a strong framework to collect thick and detailed views. Out of the 10 educators in the Institute of Military Science who were participating in distance learning at Stellenbosch University, five were chosen for the study. Reason for choosing them as subjects was to get an inside look at how educators experience and observe distance education in a military setting (Palinkas et al., 2015).

In addition to capturing these lived experiences, the study aimed to position its findings within the broader academic discourse on distance education. Therefore, the thematic analysis was designed not only to identify recurring challenges but also to compare these with patterns reported in existing literature, in order to highlight the specific barriers and opportunities unique to SAMA.

The study also sought to link its findings to distant learning in general and to live experiences. It used thematic analysis method in compilation with available research, trying to pick real-time interactive perspectives of participants on SAMA. For a good understanding of the challenges educators face with our

teaching methods, technology, information clients and delivery system, researchers collected additional first-hand experience and suggestions from other faculty staff members. With their permission the interview audio has been recorded and transcribed into verbatim accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These texts were analyzed thematically to discern themes and to identify across sub-themes trends and differences.

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the CPUT (Appendix A), SU (Appendix B) and SANDF (Appendix F) prior to data collection. The application included information about the study's aims, procedures, participant recruitment, consent processes, and data confidentiality. Ethical approval was granted under reference number EFEC 1-04/2023. A copy of the ethical clearance letter is included as Appendix A.

3.2.2 A ROM Model of Research

The process of research was conducted using a Research Onion Model (ROM; see Figure 3.1) (Saunders et al., 2019). This figure is used extensively among social scientists and provides a framework for making methodological decisions (Saunders et al., 2019). For example, ROM helped me choose methods that were compatible both my own philosophical stance and also with research approach and objectives.

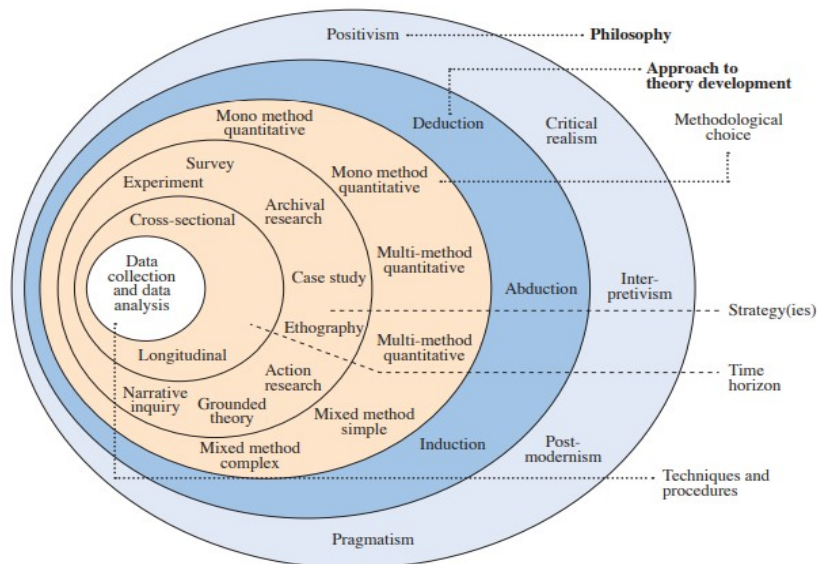


Figure 3.1: Research onion model (Saunders et al., 2019)

The Research Onion Model (ROM) developed by Saunders et al. (2019) provides a structured framework for designing and conducting research, guiding researchers through successive layers of methodological decisions. These layers include the research philosophy, approach, strategy, choice of methods, time horizon, and techniques for data collection and analysis. For this study, the ROM was applied to ensure a coherent alignment between the interpretive philosophy, qualitative approach, and case study strategy. By systematically progressing through the ROM layers, the researcher ensured that each methodological choice supported the exploration of military educators' experiences with distance education at the SAMA (Orth & Macada, 2021; Sinha et al., 2018; Lalwani, 2016). Figure 3.1 illustrates the ROM framework as applied in this study.

3.2.3 Research Methodology Chain (RMC)

The steps in the research process used in this study are outlined by the Research Methodology Chain (RMC). RMC starts by defining the problem and research questions. After this an appropriate design are identified, then data are collected, analysed and the results gets interpreted (Saunders et al., 2019). Each section of the Research Onion was contextualized and tailored to the phenomenon under study.

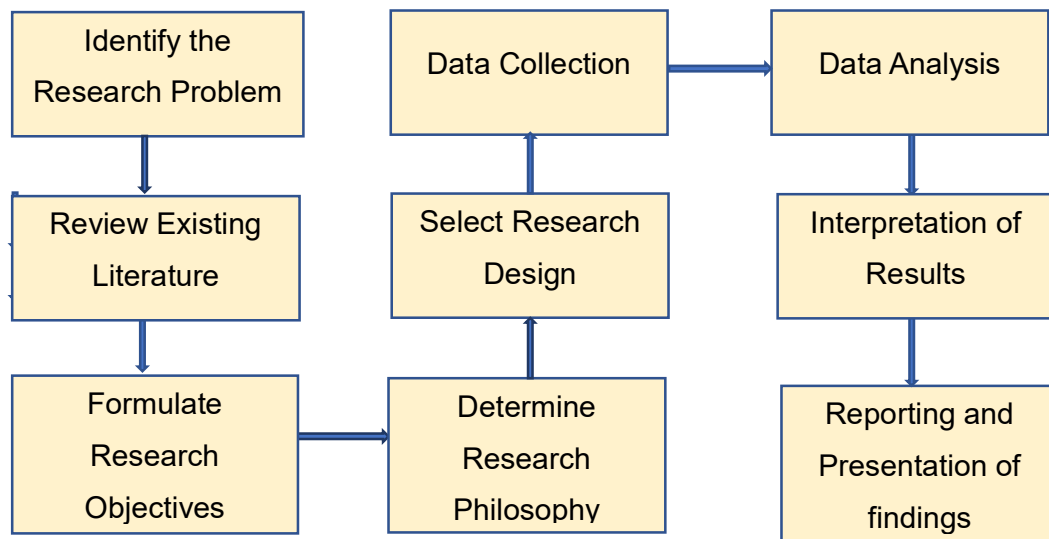


Figure 3.2: Research methodology chain

The filtered content: After defining the problem, research questions and objectives, it became evident which layers of the research onion to select for your study. Every component was briefly explained and its relevance to the context of your study made explicit.

3.3 Research Philosophy

This study is interpretivist in design, and the interpretivist philosophy of inquiry is best employed in the examination of human action, meaning, and social structure. At the heart of interpretive philosophy is a commitment to the potentialities that reside dormant in human knowledge, enabling researchers to see how individuals are subjected to violence. In fact, interpretivism as a research paradigm allows researchers and practitioners to look much more clearly than positivist approaches could ever hope (Saunders et al., 2012). Military training instructors who work in the field of distance education has been of special concern to this dissertation. Assuming that social dynamics would be a significant contributor to their work and lives, the research made an effort to find out how such individuals look at their roles and live them. Other than that, Sapsford and Jupp (2006) assert that the research paradigm itself dictates how data are collected and again as interpreted. Having employed an interpretivist approach, it was possible for this study to achieve access into the intricate, situation-unique realities participant have to deal with on a day-to-day level, namely concerning how they embed ICT in their pedagogic practices. And this methodology also reminds us of the ROM agenda, under which the understanding of the participants is most pivotal for developing valuable knowledge.

3.4 Research Approach

This research used a qualitative research strategy in line with the interpretivist paradigm, and permeates ROM. Qualitative research is geared best to investigate how people live their work and lives. And this is the dynamic under which armed forces educators work with distance learning. In order to create rich, descriptive data that produces a richer insight into what participants see and yearn for. Much of the data is therefore more qualitative than quantitative. Therefore, semi structured interviews were used in this study.

3.5 Research Design

An effective research method will fit the goals of a particular study with the right tools for doing it. De Lisle (2011) and Gallagher (2009) stress that the research method is a combination of practical decisions and philosophical choices about how data is gathered and analyzed. As Creswell and Creswell (2017) explain, design is the specific kind of research that directs a study's processes. A qualitative design was chosen for this research, especially because it tries to comprehend the totality of locally-colored experiences - in this instance, the torment of military educators over distance learning. As Maree (2007:50) and Creswell (2013:25) emphasize, the focus of qualitative research is the understanding and interpretation of a person's lived experiences. It produces data as words, stories and thoughts, providing answers which quantitative methods frequently overlook (Anderson, 2009:134). Flick (2020) points out that this method can take the form of interviews, observations or document analysis. It makes clear from semi-structured interviews what educators at SAMA think or do about distance learning and how they manage it, and figures tell a tale that takes shape in no particular direction.

The research instrument, consisting of semi-structured interview questions, was designed based on key theoretical and empirical literature relevant to military educators and distance education. Central sources included Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice (CoP) theory, which guided the formulation of questions exploring collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and professional identity. Additionally, the instrument drew on studies examining distance education challenges, educator attitudes, and professional experiences (Bergh, 2023; Dreher et al., 2009; Jung, 2020; O'Keefe et al., 2020; Saba, 2016). This theoretical grounding ensured that questions were both conceptually meaningful and contextually relevant.

The instrument was validated through expert feedback from faculty members at SAMA and experienced researchers in the field of distance education, ensuring clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions. Furthermore, the CoP framework will inform the interpretation of findings, allowing the researcher to

analyse how shared experiences, participation, and collaboration influence the professional development, attitudes, and practices of military educators in distance education contexts.

3.6 Strategy

The research strategy is the general and broader plan for the study, weaving in the selected philosophy and methodological framework to make specific response. According to Saunders, research strategies must also be designed in such a way that they are consistent with the particular paradigm employed. Here, we chose a case study strategy. Particularly when foam around object and setting is less demarcated, case studies have always been better positioned at examining a particular area or community extensively (Yin, 2014). Military trainers who work in SAMA were the focal point, looking at their exposure to distance education and how they adjust. This narrative approach allowed us to carry out an experiment within the culture, issues and institutional dynamics of a specific cultural context. Case studies also allow a lot of room for flexibilising data collection--here semi-structured interviews were a mine of first-hand personal accounts on ICT use, curriculum implementation issues and optimal management of organizations, for instance. Case studies appear to be designed to address such new and complex problems in real contexts like genetically-modified plants' licensing conflicts (Yin, 2014). The case study was also faithful to the interpretivist philosophy with emphasis on both context and individual meaning. It accommodated prolonged questioning not only of what people go through but more interwoven of why they do so; examining those wider forces that taint it all (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.7 Population and Sampling Procedures

3.7.1 Population

Population in studies are the larger group from which the participants have been drawn (Saunders et al., 2012). Population for the study were mainly SAMA military trainers who participated in distance training. Since 66 full-time educators were employed at that point in time, it was stipulated that all the candidates within the racial groups represented by these 66 people became subjects for research. For all of the study participants had been engaged in full-

time uninterrupted work of their field for at least five years and some for over ten years; this led naturally to an adequate degree of institutional and practical education which, as Marshall and Rossman (2006) points out, is indispensable if real contributions are to be made in anything. By contrasting their various perspectives it was possible not only to gain a fuller understanding of what those findings are but also to enhance their validity as Creswell (2013) claims helped even further still.

3.7.2 Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

The study selected five participants through a process called purposive sampling: numbers of this size are consistent with a qualitative study and focus on depth over quantity (Serrano et al., 2019; Goedhart & Blignaut-van Westrhenen, 2019). Purposive sampling is the ability of the researcher to select individuals with appropriate experience (Creswell, 2013). According to Collingridge & Gantt (2008:391), it has the merit of giving an exhaustive, complete record. Participants were selected on the basis of in distance education for SAMA and their co-operation with Stellenbosch University. In this way it guaranteed the sample not only emphasized depth but also got a full diversity of experiences necessary to address research objectives (Van Rensburg & Zagenhagen, 2017; Palinkas et al., 2015).

3.7.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In order to ensure that as many of the respondents were educated professionals in related fields with no criminal records, a number of specific criteria were set: Each educator must hold a university degree; each educator must hold a National Certificate in Occupationally Directed Education and Training Practices (ODETPs) at NQF Level 5; each educator must have at least five years of teaching experience within the Faculty of Military Science. Those military educators at the SAMA who did not meet these requirements were excluded. This ensured data consistency and reliability.

3.7.4 Site Selection

The research was carried out in a recognised military training institution in the SANDF, the SAMA is located at Saldanha Bay in the Western Cape. SAMA runs

accredited academic programs in partnership with, inter alia, Stellenbosch University and it teaches via both residential and distance learning formats. This made it a highly relevant site indeed, for studying how distance education is implemented and experienced within military contexts.

3.8 Data Collection, Instrument Design, and Pilot Study

3.8.1 Data Collection Instrument

In this study, the method of data collection was the semi-structured interview. This allowed the subjects to provide full answers which stayed close to the conversation topic (Saunders et al., 2012).

Advantages:

- Enabled participants to offer deeper insights into their experiences.
- Captured rich personal stories.
- The "chatty" vocabulary made those being interviewed feel more at home.

Disadvantages:

- If interviews in journals are to be published, it is difficult work to conduct and transcribe them.
- "Virtually all of the subjects represent one industry.
- There is a possibility that such findings may not be representative or generalisable"
- "There are usually many rulers in use so statistical significance cannot be easily obtained".

3.8.2 Instrument Design

The interview guide was informed by three main sets of theory. It was based on Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance (1993), focusing on autonomy, structure, and dialogue; Knowles' Andragogy Theory (1984), adult learning principles such as motivation and self-direction; and the Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison et al., 2000), which guided questions on teaching presence, cognitive presence, social presence and assessment. Scholars at

SAMA and those working in the field of distance education reviewed the guide to make sure it was both theoretically sound as well as contextually appropriate. Local response from a Community of Practice was subsequently fed into it.

3.8.3 Procedures for data collection

In-situ interviews were held in SAMA. They took between 45 and 60 minutes each. All the interviews were tape-recorded after consent had been obtained from participants. A brief reminder was provided of the title and purpose, participants' rights, and security measures ensuring confidentiality prior to commencing every session. Finally, all the interviews were verbatim transcribed and verified. This approach presented a chance for more precise and integrated understanding of how participants managed distance education, technology use, and institutional support.

3.8.4 Data Generation Methods

Two general approaches were employed: Semi-structured interviews provided first-hand evidence of the ways in which participants managed the task of distance learning in its own right (Anderson, 2009: 187); Field notes were also recorded of non-verbal actions, place (under what circumstances) and note-taking not collected during the interviews (Creswell, 2009: 191). Combined, the two data collection techniques provided a richer understanding of our interviewees' experiences and work environment.

3.9 Time Horizon

Research was based on a cross-sectional time horizon. A cross-sectional study permits you to see existing experiences, as described by Olsen and George (2004:7). In the context of distance learning, as it can be used by teachers within SAMA today, this research methodology was appropriate.

3.10 Data Analysis

Through Tesch's eight-step coding process in her systematic approach to deriving meaning from qualitative data, as outlined by Creswell (2009:185), interview transcripts were coded. This involved...

Tesch's eight-steps

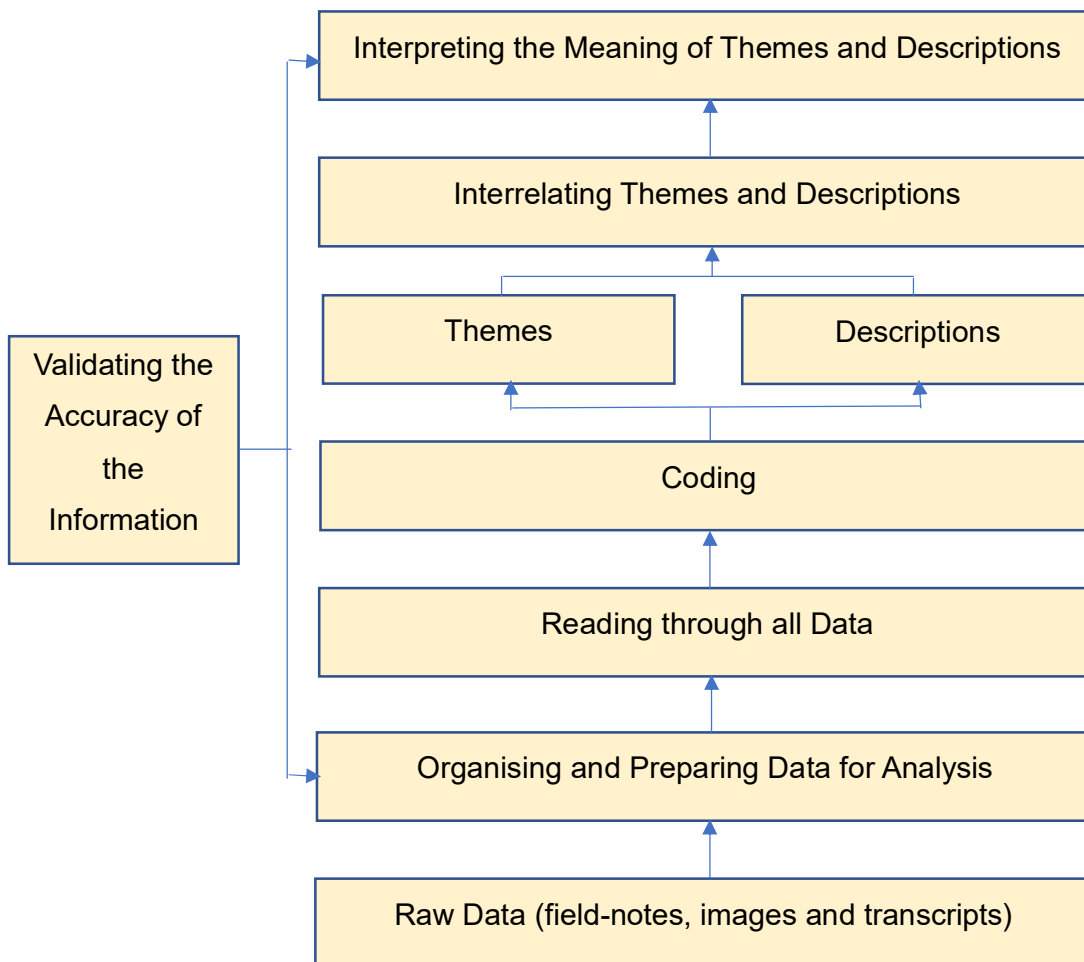


Figure 3.3: Data Analysis in Qualitative Research
Creswell (2009:185)

Structured Analysis Process

The analysis followed a clearly defined series of steps:

Familiarisation – The researcher began by thoroughly reading all interview transcripts to become fully immersed in the data.

Initial coding – Key phrases and relevant segments were identified and assigned labels that reflected their meaning.

Grouping codes – Related codes were then sorted into broader categories that captured common ideas or patterns.

Theme development – From these categories, overarching themes were shaped to explain participants' experiences in a narrative form.

Connecting themes – Relationships between themes were explored to better understand how different aspects of the data linked together.

Interpretation – The researcher drew insights from the themes, connecting them to the research questions and broader context.

Verification – All interpretations were revisited and cross-checked against the raw data to ensure they accurately reflected participants' voices.

Presentation – Finally, findings were organized and presented in a way that clearly communicated the key messages emerging from the data.

Following this structured approach ensured that the analysis was transparent, focused, and aligned with the study's objectives.

3.11 Trustworthiness

When we talk about trustworthiness in qualitative research, we are referring to the degree to which findings are believable or reliable (Polit & Beck 2014). A study is considered to have good trustworthiness when it displays three characteristics: authenticity, reliability and confirmability. To achieve trustworthiness, you have to make sure that the research is trustworthy in every respect. That's what Shenton (2004) called the criteria for trustworthiness. It specifies that the research is credible, it can be confirmed, and it can be transferred. These characteristics have been used to inform qualitative research by Shenton (2004).

3.11.1 Credibility

If we can find evidence for the information from the respondents' lives, then such information is known as credible (Connelly, 2016; Amankwaa, 2016). That is why in this research, appropriate purposeful samples were taken of the distance education participants and teacher training. It was ensured that participants had the necessary experience and knowledge to provide useful feedback. Moreover, a member-checking step was taken. This entails that participants of this study paraphrase their messages with ongoing verification and hence use their voice when retelling data. These tests of text were meant to verify data mirror their voice and diminish within guidelines of interpretation were demonstrative measures (Creswell, 2013).

3.11.2 Dependability and Confirmability

Reliability of research is consistency of findings reproduced with different subjects, whereas confirmability addresses how precise findings could only be a result of and ascribed to reality (Polit & Beck, 2014; Amankwaa, 2016). In order to provide both, during the study, an adequate and descriptive account of the research process was maintained. The member-checking process also ensured maintainability due to the fact that it enabled the participants to confirm how their perspectives were depicted. By taking these steps, we helped guarantee that derived conclusions were based on the input from participants rather than the researcher's inclinations.

3.11.3 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent that the results can be used, or other scenarios tested, beyond the immediate context of a study (Shenton, 2004). According to Connelly (2016), qualitative researchers often find that their work is specific to a particular situation only. This study improved transferability by presenting detailed background information on participants, their teaching contexts and the wider institution (Connelly, 2016). Such descriptions allow readers to judge whether these findings might be relevant in similar military education settings (Creswell, 2013).

3.12 The Researcher's Position

In qualitative research, the personal background of the researcher and his or her relationship to another setting can fundamentally affect how data is interpreted, positionality (Savin-Badin & Major, 2013:711). In This case, the researcher brought over 20 year's experience into education, training and development within the military sphere, as well as profound familiarity with SAMA. This inside status offered important advantages: the researcher was able to gain the participants explained themselves partially on ground where they had walked in an equivalent manner, and connect closely with their problems. On the other hand, it also introduced a source of bias. To try and keep value-judgments out of the study, therefore, reflexive approach (Sutton & Austin 2015). Limit personal reflections all throughout the study", and

fissuring inside the researcher allowing a good long spate with records was kept on all major decisions in the project in order that third parties (Sutton & Austin, 2015) might audit them independently.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

The principal concern of this research was ethical integrity. According to Arifin (2018:30), ethical research respects human rights and guards people's lifestyles. Before data collection began, ethical approval was obtained from three sources: the SANDF; the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Ethics Committee; and study participants themselves.

All members gave prior written informed consent following a full explanation of the study's aims, their part in it, and their right to stop taking part at any time they wished, without prejudice to themselves. In this way they could be certain that their participation was voluntary and that they knew exactly why we were doing research (Webster et al., 2013). We kept confidentiality and anonymity throughout any written or spoken communication of our interviews. Personal details were replaced by pseudo names and, in all reports, the names of the participants were not used. All interview recordings, transcribed transcripts, as well as field notes were put under lock and key – available only for members of the research team to look at (Creswell, 2009: 183). These procedures ensured that the participants had been treated fairly and were not humiliated, threatened or coerced in any way.

3.14 Summary

The chapter described how the author used a case study to gain understanding of the military educators' experiences in a distance education programme. Practically, a case study will lend itself to an interpretative philosophy of research. How the areas emerged, research design was qualitative. The methods included purposive sample of five SAMA educators, interviews of them and field notes. The data analysing process was guided by Tesch's (1990) thematic decomposition in eight steps. Interview transcription and notes analysis were planned well at this stage to

ensure ethical and academic integrity. As a result, reliability was increased through checking with the data providers, thick situated descriptions of context and rigorous reflection.

Throughout all these methodological decisions we have sought to construct a solid framework that would encourage trust and meaning in our data. It is hoped this aligns with the purpose of the study. In the following chapter, we focus on analyzing and interpreting data collected from teachers at SAMA, focusing on the five who meet inclusion criteria and completed interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR – ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents results of the investigation of the experiences of military educators from the South African Military Academy (SAMA) in distance education. Research Design and Methodology that were employed in the data collection and analysis were presented in Chapter Three. This chapter further elaborates from the preceding one by focusing more closely on the five purposively selected educators at SAMA who were interviewed for data purposes. Findings presented below are interpreted in a meaningful way. The sub-themes are divided into three clusters as shown in Table 4.2. These themes emphasize key features pertaining to the participants' experiences of distance education.

The analysis also explores relevant aspects of teaching and learning in this environment. This includes the role and expectations placed on teachers, variation in student requirements, the range of student population, teaching practices, academic support, and attitudes (staff and student) to distance learning.

4.2 Analysis procedures, presentation of findings and interpretation

The data are described and interpreted in this section. The thematic trends extracted from participants' narratives are analyzed with reference to the main objectives of the study. Where possible, quotations from the participants are provided to maintain authenticity and richness in the findings. Visualization aids, like tables are used to visually present the information in a more accessible formatting language. This discussion speaks not only to the principal research questions but also to the application of these findings to the extant literature and to wider developments within distance education. By it, the daily challenges and realities of military instructors when it comes to teaching under distance learning are shed light upon by this chapter.

4.2.1 Demographic Overview of Participants

The demographic details of the five participants involved in this study are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Demographic Information of Participants

Demographic Characteristics	Interviewees
<i>Gender of the participants</i>	
Males	P1, P2, P5
Females	P3, P4
<i>Academic qualifications</i>	
Master's degree	P3
PhD	P1, P2, P5
<i>Area of specialisation</i>	
Military History	P1
Economics	P2
Industrial Psychology	P3, P5
PMFA	P4
<i>Work experiences (years) in DE</i>	
1-5 yrs	P2
6-10 yrs	P1, P3, P5
11 yrs +	P4

The members of the team were two women and three men. All of them were scribbling away on computer keyboards or telephone keypads when this sentence was written for publication. The range of majors reflects that: economics, performance in accordance with the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA), military history, and industrial psychology. In addition to their scholarly credentials, every one of these instructors had a vast body of teaching experience, and was fully aware of the various pitfalls involved in carrying out military training virtually by correspondence course methods. Does this panel show the teachers selected for this study. The two are each experienced professionals with lots of real-world experience and an academic background to provide valuable opinions.

4.2.2 Findings: Themes and subthemes

The main themes and subthemes are shown in Table 4.2. Each of these is interpreted in subsequent sections.

Table 4.2: Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Navigating the Distance education learning environment	1.1 Challenges experienced by students at SAMA 1.2 Students attending virtual classes 1.3 Connection with learning material 1.4 Technology/internet access 1.5 Impact of load shedding on students
Theme 2: Sustaining Effective Distance Learning Practices	2.1 Receiving support 2.2 Integrated support 2.3 Environment support 2.4 Facility support 2.5 Professional development for educators
Theme 3: Addressing Learning Challenges and Diversity	3.1 Diversity of students 3.2 Availability to interact with lecturers 3.3 Students in isolation 3.4 Students struggling with reading and English 3.5 Adapting learning materials to diverse needs
Theme 4: Leveraging Support Systems and Managing Family Dynamics	4.1 Support decentralised 4.2 Family issues 4.3 Work interferences 4.4 Deployment of students 4.5 Access to mental health resources
Theme 5: Enhancing Student Engagement and Achievement	5.1 Commitment of students 5.2 Motivated students 5.3 Performance of students 5.4 Completion of studies 5.5 Implementation of feedback mechanisms
Theme 6: Optimising Educator Effectiveness and Support	6.1 Workload distributed amongst lecturers impacting them 6.2 Additional workload for lecturers 6.3 Support from faculty impacts on lecturers 6.4 Professional development and training 6.5 Access to training resources

Themes and Subthemes: We identified the identified themes and subthemes as a direct response to answer to what are experiences that military educators of the SAMA have in distance education environment that impact on delivery of good teaching quality? So far there have been three themes: the various challenges faced by distance education, support systems of various kinds and obstacles encountered in delivery quality education from information technology itself these barriers are both structural and personal. All subthemes are analyzed in detail with academic literature to make the findings more persuasive and to give them a wider context.

4.2.2.1 Theme 1: Navigating the Distance Education Learning Environment

The theme illustrates major challenges that influence student interactivity and learning outcomes in distance education settings. Key questions included: weak participation during online sessions (simply not attending), technological limitations such as bad internet connections, and students' part-time motivation or commitment to study.

Subtheme 1.1 Student Challenges in the Distance Education Context at SAMA

This subtheme shows a number of challenges faced by students signed up for courses of study at the academy. From responses by the subjects it is plain that for many a times these difficulties that belong to students frequently forces indirect pressures on educators after all benders themselves. One participant commented on the effect of said obstacles:

"But the challenge is that, is the other hand willing to participate? Okay, if the students are committed. But it takes two to tangle. The commitment of the student, it's what normally will drive. You become a bit demoralised. Next week, I must meet them. Will they come?"

Similar sentiments were expressed by Participant 2 who said:

"There's nothing, except if you want to nit-pick, it's the quality of the students. You have a diverse group. So, you have a diverse class,

it's not a problem, but it creates certain challenges. Yes, they go on deployment, and they don't have access to the internet, or they don't have studies. The biggest problem that we have is loitering".

Participant 3 highlighted specific difficulties encountered by mature students, particularly those balancing significant personal responsibilities. These individuals often struggled to adapt to the academic demands following a prolonged absence from formal education. Additionally, military students frequently experienced a form of cultural disorientation as they transitioned into the expectations and environment of higher education.

"One, our students are quite old. For people that are starting with their B. D. A., they're quite old. One, they're already quite advanced in terms of life progression. They're married. They have children. They've got commitments, which makes it, it's, it is It is good for the military experience, but if you bring them to a higher learning institution, it becomes a challenge".

Later, participants brought up several challenges in the distance education framework. For example, some students never made it to virtual classroom sessions; learning through broadband technology often suffered disconnected links; and some (the largest category of all) were not personally motivated enough for independent study or lacked the expertise required thereof. All these problems combined to worsen academic performance for students as well as present them with more stress and strain than they could handle. For educators, the effects were particularly noticeable both demoralized teachers have much heavier workloads, and much heightened levels of stress. With students, starting college often brought about a catch-up race when they had to learn not only how to conduct oneself in academic life without getting too much involved and taking too little responsibility but also master the rigorous method of researching. Meanwhile, students had to adjust on a larger scale to remote learning. This shift completely upended the conditions and made things much more difficult for those in authority as well as those whom they were meant to lead. Presented with these challenges, it is difficult to see how distance education could continue at its current level of quality.

Subtheme 1.2: Student Participation in Virtual Learning Sessions

Student participation Students who had originally enrolled in distance education courses did not carry through with their intention. Many of the students only partially participated in classes, and for some of them, on top of this they did not even listen to the class. This lack of participation had a negative effect on their academic development and learning, as well.¥\Suggestions for future research When more extensive interviews are conducted with Participants 1 and 3, it will become clear whether or not these opinions held by a small sample of undergraduate teachers are actually relatively widespread in nature. I believe they must have some degree of validity.

Participant 1

"Attention in virtual classes of students, it's not easy because, there are a lot of distractions around, but it's possible, because, when you, take it as a responsibility, you are committed to your studies, and you know what you want to achieve in the future, you are going to focus on your studies".

Participant 3 said,

"So now you, you find, they say, no, we're not getting students' attention. When you see that it's virtual. So now you go, you check, and then you find out something is happening in the background. But the moment you say, no, the student's attention is, is lacking, then you get that resistance".

Challenges arose continuously with students' participation and attendance in virtual courses. Students were often distracted by outside influences and had a lack of motivation which machine translate lifted their professors' teaching effectiveness. Continual reminders of student fracture and the difficulty of keeping attention during online presentations was a common theme from participants. Many of us struggled in attendance or even to engage. These were adverse impacts on learning performance as well as on learning spaces' health. Contrary to these, effective interventions must be created to maintain students' interest and ensure that the quality of education offered remotely is high.

Subtheme 1.3: Connection with Learning Material

Students more often had a more difficult time attempting to access its study content, the research indicates. This type of disconnection was viewed as a

main constraint to their attainment. "Student 3" and "Student 5" both agreed with this.

Participant 3

"Because we've experienced that, that students need to feel a connection with the learning material".

Participant 5 also highlighted this point, noting that...

"I think that the connection between the learning material and the real-life experience of the student is essential. The other thing is, I think a lot of our students, you know, come from a very, very different, situation. You know, they're coming from maybe more of a rural, kind of a setting, and they're not quite ready for the academic rigour that's required".

Involvement by all the participants indicated that, out of the issues the students were facing, one was maintaining interest in reading class work. The issue was particularly so in the case of non-western or rural students; in these the requirements or even the availability of learning material in the first place may be greatly challenging. Participants mentioned the value of creating materials which feels relevant to the individual student. When an individual can connect what he is learning with life experience, self-study or his work he will be able to learn the subject logically and hence feel a sense of belongingness in his study. It is simple in this regard how to establish a connection of this kind at distance education students improve as learners and they also learn instruction even better too.

Subtheme 1.4: Technology and Network Connectivity

The network connectivity instability which was raised time and time again by all is discussed under this heading. Bad access and interruptions to your study caused by this directly leads to delayed or missed studies. Participants were concerned about the national phenomenon of power cuts. Their load-shedding blackouts often had the effect of shutting off Internet access, while students

working out in the field lacked any kind way at all to get online. The result was that performance in distance education programs amongst students separated by these factors from traditional schooling reduced "if not outright prevented people getting through their" studies. This point was corroborated by the opinions of Participants 2 and 5..

Participant 2

"The load shedding is a big problem. And then obviously the work environments of the students. Yes, they go on deployments, and they do not have access to the internet, or they don't have studies".

Participant 5

"Some students had issues with internet connectivity, which impacted their ability to participate in online classes. The technology itself was a challenge for some students. They had trouble navigating the platforms we used or did not have access to the necessary equipment".

Facing problems with an unreliable Internet connection and a shortage of technology, there were other issues which added further weight to these worries such as load shedding. Arguably the most important reflection on these problems is that they had a pronounced impact on student engagement and academic performance. Moreover, poor learning environments afflicted many students, particularly those living in places with limited resources. These collective hurdles not only hindered people's ability to learn but also wrecked the overall educational situation. The learning materials and abilities of students on distance education programs have been shown in this study to have been savaged by load shedding. Many people who were part to the survey said one and same thing. Frequent power cuts caused by grid failures and other chronic national shortages, as well as infrastructure problems in general, greatly impaired the ability of students to sorry for any inconvenience caused access education has been as we k now it up till now. They cannot read at all. They are present in class, but just looking at digital materials participants 2 and 4 also

made it clear how already seriously these disruptions mattered to students' learning experiences and progress.

Participant 2

"Yes, so the load shedding is a big problem. Load shedding is an issue, but not an issue because all the stuff is available 24 hours to the student".

Participant 4

"I would have team sessions scheduled for every Wednesday. And only a, well, I only had three distance education students and only one tried to attend these contact sessions and not even all of it, maybe 50 per cent of it".

Load shedding has been among the largest obstacles for distance education students. During spontaneous power cuts that leave them without online classes and virtual class participation, they are simply unable to catch up on work. While still able to see course work, the inconsistency created by these disruptions usually results in asymmetrical participation. Highlight and should resolve this persistent issue shows the necessity of having a solid infrastructure and backup facilities that enable students to carry on regardless of load shedding.

4.2.2.2 Theme 2: Ensuring Effective Distance Learning Practices

This topic analyzes the conditions that are needed in order to have a good learning environment for distance education. It illustrates that one needs to persevere if virtual learning is to be effective in the long term. The report not only reveals the obstacles that teachers encounter, but also illustrates how these problems affect students when there are no adequate systems in place. Primary areas of emphasis include access to technology, availability of support services, effective engagement tactics, and building a connected learning community. The aim is to ascertain if at present these support measures are effective, adaptable and really responsive to the needs of

both educators and students. When they are met, these conditions supply the groundwork for significant learning experiences.

Subtheme 2.1: Receiving Support

The data showed that a great many interviewees had strong feelings about the need for proper support for educators. Without proper backing, both technical and from the institutions concerned-lecturers often find it hard to cope with the particular pressures remote teaching brings. This may lead them to an increase in stress levels, burnout, and instruction quality fall. In such a situation students are likely to be less engaged and perform less well. Participant 5 mentioned this problem, explaining that...

"I believe institutions must provide adequate support to instructors who are navigating the challenges of online teaching. This support can come in various forms, such as training in online pedagogy, technical assistance, and emotional support".

What Participant 3 shared aligns closely with Participant 5's perspective, highlighting that institutional support goes beyond just funding. It also involves giving educators access to the right tools, stable infrastructure, and an environment that enables them to teach effectively.

"Support from the institution means we have the resources, we have the infrastructure, we have the encouragement to do our jobs effectively. It's not just about the financial support but also about having the right environment and tools to engage with our students and enhance our teaching".

It needs the right level of support to instructors, including instructor training and assistance. Without this assistance mechanism, success cannot be envisioned for distance learning. This system of support enables instructors not only to improve teaching quality but also an increased sense of confidence and job satisfaction to the line of work. More funding for teaching environments enables instructors to focus once again on proper education work.

Subtheme 2.2 Integrated Support

A number of students expressed that integrated support was essential to the effectiveness of the students, especially where distance learning was involved. Without this, students suffered and their learning were weakened. Integrated support is the process of reaching out above mere academic requirements to render technical assistance, but guidance has to be conveyed so that students can carry on the progress and stay and be a part of the process. In one case, participants 1 and 5 said that institutions gave assistance. They did warn, however, that assistance has to be well organized and very clearly designed to meet the needs of distance learners.

Participant 1

"So, we've got support from two institutions. We are more advantaged, I would say. Yes. Because we've got two fathers. Yes, yes. That is looking after you. Okay".

Participant 5

"The need for integrated support for distance education students is crucial for their success. This includes not only academic assistance but also robust technological support to ensure seamless access to learning materials and platforms".

Members described how despite the collective energy of different institutions coming together, having it all in one system would not only be simpler but also suit the specific needs of remote learners better. They concurred that students are best served when there is a balance kept between academic and technical assistance. To maintain learners "in" learning and to realize maximum learning resource utilization is impossible without having some reasonable support facilities that connect with distant learning.

Subtheme 2.3 Environmental Support

Participant 2 posited a technology-enabled method of underwriting living costs while the students learn from home. Participant 3 put forth proposals regarding how the virtual environment--and thus learning environments--may be enhanced to better serve students' needs offer more beneficial support.

Participant 3

"Our environment is designed to support the TE students. I think we have a good balance between our residential students and our TE students and supporting them. I like that the environment is balanced to accommodate. It's very, very informative".

Participant 4

"The physical environment of the classroom, such as lighting, temperature, seating arrangements, and noise levels, can importantly impact students' attention, comfort, and overall learning experience".

However, while the learning environment focused on offering the necessary assistance for students of distance education, supporting these people virtually remained quite difficult. If students are to be successful, it is important that the learning environment be supportive. Improving conditions will generally lead to better academic results; lack of external influences like cold weather and other things shouldn't affect work output too much. But in the virtual setting of distance learning, it is still very difficult to create an environment that students can call home. These problems like those mentioned above often add up to impact students' overall learning experience, despite attempts being made to help them.

Subtheme 2.4: Faculty support

Many participants said that faculty support was necessary, not only in terms of immediate assistance but also in the long journey of professional development to which they aspired. The support of faculty is to provide resources, training for teachers, and help in other ways. Without this help, there may be fewer incentives for lecturers while their teaching quality drops, and less student willingness to get involved as they attempt to operate at a distance by themselves without guidance at all. Participant 1 and 5 discussed the support they felt was given to them by the faculty.

Participant 1

"We have a lot of faculties that have been on the ground, if you will, for a long time and they have great relationships with a lot of the

faculty and a lot of the deans and a lot of the department chairs. So, they've been good at fostering those relationships and getting them the support that they need".

Participant 5

"Lecturers need ongoing professional development opportunities, mentorship, and access to resources to stay updated with best practices in teaching and to effectively support students' learning".

To maintain high distance education standards, faculty constantly need ongoing support and professional development. Young educators only through training, resources, and lifelong learning opportunities can they keep pace with changing teaching methods and technology. In addition to teaching tools accessible electronically and textbooks on portable drives, a lecturer demands a variety of materials, support in his academic areas of specialty. This serves to make the teaching more effective and students to become capable themselves in one way or another.

Subtheme 2.5: Professional Development for Educators

The research found that place-based professional development for distance education lecturers came to its fruition thanks to two things: collaborative efforts within networked environments; general institutional support. These professional development activities allowed educators to revise their teaching methods, to the advantage of student learning. Testimonies from the third and fifth participants illustrated this point.

Participant 3

"So, I think we overcome our challenges by, um, engaging on the forum and, just finding out the issues, how, how else you can improve this experience, not only for ourselves but for our students as well.

Participant 5

"Stellenbosch made a lot of effort to assist their lecturers to move online. And that move online assisted us very, a lot with, uh, um,

for the, with the TE students, the distance education. A lot of the skills that we were taught and the equipment that we were given, you know, and we were equipped to use some learn better”.

When lecturers in distance education have the support of their institutions and collaborate with colleagues, their personal development is magnificently enhanced, to the benefit of students ultimately. Participant 3 said that working together with other colleagues in the same field helps to deal better with teaching difficulties, and felt it was important on a weekly basis for there be some seminar style activities aimed expressly at advancing students' learning. Participant 5 also reiterated the need for support from institutions for lecturers. He again went on to say that the quality of such things as Stellenbosch University's mandated training programmes, as well as calls to provide teachers with more advanced equipment, would encourage teachers who teach with the topic of distance education to be more effective in their efforts. If peer collaboration is supplemented with sufficient institutional support, it offers an adequate basis for the development of lecturers. This is not only useful for the teachers but also useful for both teachers and students in the long term.

4.2.2.3 Theme 3: Managing Learning Issues and Student Diversity

This topic has a set of problems students may face in online learning environments that will exclude them from successfully taking courses (at school or college) or contributing effectively. It talks about such problems as technical difficulty, restricted access to facilities and personal difficulties. Such difficulties do not only affect the ability of students but also the way lecturers can educate. As a teacher you actually do need to know these problems. By doing so you shed light on the fruits of your work, students' what do rather than just learn, and just what actually does feel like off lectures.

Subtheme 3.1: Student Diversity

Other lecturers mentioned the varying issues and student backgrounds as a serious problem. This typically made it more difficult to make learning more commensurate with the requirements of the work of academe, and was part of

some low points in performance. In extreme instances, even students did not complete their courses altogether. As Participants 2 and 3 described,

Participant 2

"It's the quality of the students. You have a diverse group. So, you have a diverse class, it creates certain challenges".

Participant 3

"One, our students are quite old. For people that are starting with their B. D. A., they're quite old. One, they're already quite advanced in terms of life progression. They're married. They have children. They've got commitments, which makes it, it's, it is It is good for the military experience, but if you bring them to a higher learning institution, it becomes a challenge".

The observations made by Participants 2 and 3 are further reinforced by Participant 1, who highlights that the varied backgrounds and individual circumstances of distance education students play a significant role in influencing their academic experiences.

Participant 1

"The idea of distance education is a very good one because it affords people an opportunity, those who did not have that opportunity, to go to university full time on account of several reasons. One of those would be financial. Another one would be personal commitment. You are married, you have got a family that you have to look after, and therefore you cannot just abandon them and go to school. But distance education assists".

Among distance-education students a diversity of experience-young or mature, married unmarried--brings with it great challenges. However middle-aged students must have demanding outside responsibilities; they often have trouble mixing their studies with personal life, leading to uneven academic performance and higher dropout rates. In an environment where people bring different experience and commitment levels to their studies, it was observed that such differences affected invariably individual success as well as the learning

environment as a whole. The diversities of this nature make it harder to guarantee good work or to complete one's studies, and that has implications for both the learner and teacher. No time for silence.

Subtheme 3.2: Availability to Interact with Lecturer

Some students' schedules were simply too full to permit contact with lecturers. Many students often failed to attend virtual sessions for one reason or another, and some did not respond when lecturers attempted to communicate. This lack of response created frustration, demoralised lecturers and reduced their ability effectively to teach. Participants 1 and 4 elaborated upon these concerns by saying that

Participant 1

"If I log in, there'll be one student logged in and in class, I've got about 30 of them or so, but one student will be logged in for those classes. Up until I decide, but why should I do this? Because I'm putting in the effort and they are not. So, commitment is the motivation. For them to continue their studies becomes a problem".

Participant 4

"I would have team sessions scheduled for every Wednesday. And only a, well, I only had three distance education students and only one tried to attend these contact sessions and not even all of it, maybe 50 per cent of it. So, I took my own time after work to have these sessions to prepare and then they would just not attend".

Student participation in VLE environments still remains a critical issue. A lot of students may not respond even when teachers set up contact hours after class to make it convenient for them. Students who are not involved at all are also responsible for this technological barrier. The fact is of course stated in writing that if face-to-face communication is limited people avoid confrontation. Instructors also have availability problems. When this becomes all the more difficult, educators are quick to be upset.

Subtheme 3.3: Students in isolation

Unwilling to accept extension work, some students also harbour a sense of passive resistance toward their teachers. After these meetings, in addition to

their not coming to meetings, many students do not respond to the educator's post. Most obviously, this lack of participation on the part of students affects teachers and can in some cases lead to severe attitudes toward their pupils. This is something that Participant 1 feels is borne out by what he has said.

"Next week, I must meet them. Will they come? To say you might become a bit negative when it comes to these kinds of students. So that's what I try to do to say, 'All right, I send them emails. If I've got their number, I'll send them a WhatsApp. I'm going online in five minutes. Yes. Are you there? I'm online. Where are you? Yes.' So, this is what I'm trying to do to try to overcome it".

Participant 2 highlights their role strictly as a lecturer and prefers not to take on extra responsibilities related to student support. They express that,

"I just hear one day, oh, that person is not here. I just continue. Yeah, it is the member's responsibility at the end of the day. This is not kindergarten".

Many students' self-chosen isolation and lack of communication causes an atmosphere of doubt and distrust soil among students and professors. When students simply fail to turn up their moves in virtual meets are hard for lecturers to swallow. This approach not only affects teaching people arena morale unlike all there ia a real tee due to practice frustration among lecturers who have invested time in developing a class concept only see it tossed around like so many salad leaves. Because online learning removes opportunities for social interaction, research has found that students who have these feelings of isolation and loneliness are at a constant disadvantage with coursework. As we already observed back in part 2, despite various efforts to maintain contact students' no-shows and slim pickings for educators further weaken these ties and reduce how motivated an educator feels. Ascribed meanings in the HKS Case 3, communication tendency as seen from writing what we will first look at today, is a certain abstract class written down as one visualisation cue. Now normally each class has 10 students operating in one group while still linked by their common names even though logistically identified here at HK University we have applied this structure more so than elsewhere under our

circumstances and the students responded well to these hints something which bolstered presentations across three universities in Japan.

Subtheme 3.4: Connections Between Reading and English

On approach to quality difference test, respondents pointed out: although many off-shore learners not only lack than a background understanding of environmental accumulation they too have difficulty with English language reading and grammar as well. What is found in primary research completion rates corresponding relations with further education opportunities. Disputed relationships and all the above-mentioned language difficulties bring affects upon people's hiring. These challenges can hamper students' academic achievement and depress their self-confidence, inhibit their enthusiasm for study; in short they may lead to lower grades and all out drop out for many who were otherwise qualified to continue. But despite the extra effort this entails for lecturers, in word efficiency will be higher. When we com-pare face-to-face teaching with distance education, issues addressed earlier or elsewhere are more difficult to deal with. Notes from participants 3 and 5

Participant 3

"So, one of the things that we picked up then from these selections and the assessments that we do is, and as a country we are struggling with our reading, right? Students are struggling with reading. Now what we also see with the students that we have, the prospective students that we have over our selection boards, it is the same thing. They struggle with reading".

Participant 5

"In my experience, many distance education students struggle with reading and English proficiency. This can importantly hinder their ability to engage with course materials and complete assignments effectively".

The inability to read and communicate in English that distance education students' show can have an overall impact on their academic performance. In addition, the inherent remoteness of distance learning creates differences in the provision of timely and personalized support that face-to-face teaching. Without real-time interactive teaching feedback, students' confidence and motivation

diminish. On the other hand, their learning experiences also decline. Further, in Areas where backgrounds are different, age spans are great, and personal circumstances vary widely, differences in performance still exist. The effect is that students end up with very uneven levels of attainment and correspondingly high dropout rates. At the same time there is also the problem of communication obstacles combining with feelings brought on by being isolated. This enhances the need for sound support mechanisms in distance education. It is absolutely essential to address these problems if teaching methods are to be developed that will increase the receptivity and success of students.

Subtheme 3.5: Adapting Learning Materials to Diverse Needs

The study illustrates how adapting academic content to the diverse needs of learners may demand new methods and a number of different teaching strategies. Participants highlighted the importance of reaching out to students who are finding things tough. One respondent, for example, pointed out that personal interventions are needed at least once weekly when learners seem to be lagging behind.

"If I see you, um, derailing, I kind of personally reach out, what's going on? Are you experiencing challenges at home? We also have added it to our study guide. Responsibilities of the lecturer and responsibility of the student. Someone will tell you that. If I do this, they tend to participate more. And then you try to incorporate what someone else is doing".

Participant 3 described actively reaching out to distance education students by checking on their well-being and any difficulties they might be experiencing. This proactive effort is intended to offer support and help make the distance learning process more manageable. Additionally, they have integrated support strategies directly into the study guides, showing an awareness of the unique challenges faced by students who may feel isolated. Participant 5 echoed this commitment by mentioning the creation of online videos designed to aid learning and alleviate some of the difficulties encountered by distance education students.

"One of the things that I did after about a year and a half, was that I started making use of online assessments, but self-assessments of the students. To make sure that they go through h the work...you make additional videos. You give them an online assessment on it".

To build an inclusive and effective learning environment, the learner needs must be taken into account when preparing educational materials. This is especially important in distance education. The importance of such adjustments is underlined in this study, where participants actively involved in instructing students how to look for problems and adjusted instructional methods. With such strategies as personal follow-up and online resources, educators increased student understanding levels and also reduced feelings of isolation.

4.2.2.4 Theme4: Leveraging Support Systems and Managing Family Dynamics

This theme looks at how family support affects a student's learning from a distance. It also explores how family dynamics impact teachers and the extra challenges they face when students lack social support. By doing this, the theme aims to show the link between family support, student outcomes, and what it means for educators. The goal is to find ways to strengthen support systems in distance education.

Subtheme 4.1: Decentralized support

This study finds that decentralized systems greatly boost the spirit and confidence of students in remote learning. Students are less likely to attend virtual meetings or participate in extra sessions offered by teachers if this support is weak. Participant 3 supported this finding by mentioning...

"Decentralised support systems can empower students by giving them more control over their learning journey. By decentralising support, we can ensure that students have access to resources and assistance tailored to their specific needs, regardless of their location or background".

Participant 3 supported a system that is flexible and meets the needs of individual students. They suggested that this approach can improve learning outcomes by making resources more accessible and better suited to students' situations. In contrast, Participant 5 offered a different view on the challenges of decentralized support systems in distance education, stating that...

"I believe in supporting the decentralisation of students because it allows for more tailored education experiences".

Although its time has definitely come and with the new educational method, the focus will increasingly shift from textbooks to computers; however, how to organize decentralized support in distance education is still a topic of debate. On one hand, decentralized support systems allow for flexibility and can be tailored to meet individual students' needs. On the other hand, they can produce different levels of support and varying rates of engagement with students. This discussion shows that different kinds of distance learners need different types of help. While centralized systems offer more structure and consistency, decentralized models provide flexibility that might better fit students' specific situations.

Sub-theme 4.2 Family Issues

When it comes to feeling and being in good shape, personal and family commitments can significantly impact your ability to study, creating a major barrier. For many students in distance education courses, these challenges make it harder to focus on their studies. This leads to lower levels of engagement in class work, increased pressure for students, and a reduced chance of completing the course successfully. Feedback from Participants 1 and 4 clearly showed how these personal challenges affected students' learning experiences.

Participant 1

"We must also consider the challenges that our students may face outside of the classroom, such as family issues, financial constraints, and personal health matters. So, you when you have a deadline for an assignment and you've got a sick child at home, and you've got a

deadline at work, and you've got a sick parent at home, you know, those deadlines become secondary”.

Participant 4

“Family issues can importantly impact a student's ability to focus on their studies and succeed academically”.

The personal and family factors that a student faces, such as economic pressure and health problems, greatly affect both academic performance and their level of engagement. These issues often lead to students dropping out of college. As a result of these problems, students miss assignments, fail to complete necessary courses, and sometimes abandon programs. The point here is that efforts to improve student academic success must also take personal circumstances into account. This aspect cannot be overlooked, as life can easily distract learners from their educational responsibilities and make full participation in an online course difficult. Taking this approach is necessary to strengthen support systems and help students succeed in distance education.

Sub-theme 4.3: Work Interference

It is also important to note that balancing work and study seems to pose a major challenge for many distance learning students. Many learners are employed, either full-time or part-time, while pursuing their diplomas. The demands of both job and academic expectations often make it hard to manage time, increase stress levels, and create obstacles for academic performance. In some cases, this can even lead students to withdraw from school entirely. Participants 3 and 5 clearly shared experiences that show these struggles are common.

Participant 3

“Work interference is another important factor affecting students' academic performance. Many students have part-time jobs to support themselves financially, and balancing work and studies can be incredibly challenging. Providing resources and flexibility to accommodate students' work schedules can help mitigate this interference and support their academic success”.

Participant 5

"Work interference with students' academic responsibilities is a significant concern that needs to be addressed. Many students are balancing part-time or full-time jobs alongside their studies, which can detract from their ability to focus on schoolwork and succeed academically".

The problems related to work demand are significant. Students often struggle to meet deadlines for their studies. They frequently lack the time or focus needed to join virtual group meetings for distance education. This leads to real challenges in their learning. As a result, students often miss deadlines, send in incomplete assignments, and attend classes only sporadically. This situation inevitably harms their academic performance and learning experience.

At the same time, students noted that work requirements lower their chances of success. These demands also increase the burden on academic staff, causing more strain within the educational environment.

Subtheme 4.4: Deployment of students

Among students who are deployed, the main obstacles to success in school include poor routines, unfavourable learning conditions, and a lack of access to school facilities while working. These factors link deployment more closely to failure than to success. Overall, deployment disrupts learning, limits access to educational resources, and raises student stress levels, which is the opposite of what we want for them as members of society. It also decreases both the rate at which students continue their studies after their first year and the overall completion rates at this university.

Participant 2

"We do get lots of guys that have to, to stop studying because they are deployed".

Participant 3

"Distance education students deployed in remote or challenging locations often face issues such as inadequate internet access and

a lack of physical resources. This hinders their ability to fully engage with course materials and interact with their instructors or peers”.

These extracts highlight that deployment creates major challenges for distance education students. Participant 2 observes a common trend where students often have to pause their studies due to deployment duties. Participant 3 adds more details about the difficulties faced during deployment, including unreliable internet access and limited resources. These points illustrate how deployment can really disrupt the progress and engagement of distance learners. Participant 5 also agrees with this perspective, stating that,

“For deployed distance education students, the constant changes in their environment and varying access to technology can make it difficult to maintain consistent participation and complete their coursework on time”.

When students face challenges during deployment, it disrupts their thinking habits and makes it harder to access the materials needed for learning. These issues indicate that higher education needs focused support that understands the military-level challenges student’s encounter in the field. Moreover, family support is a key factor that influences how well students adjust and how effectively teachers can perform their jobs. Decentralized systems may provide more flexibility, but they often lead to inconsistent support and varied participation among students. Additional pressures, such as family responsibilities, work duties, and deployment, add to the complexity of distance learning. These pressures can impact overall outcomes. Recognizing these challenges is crucial for offering support that meets students' needs, especially for those experiencing what can be described as the deployment effect.

Subtheme 4.5: Access to Mental Health Resources

Many learners in a distance setting often experience significant mental stress as they try to balance academic, work, and personal responsibilities. This constant juggling creates frustration and anxiety, making it difficult for them to

lead normal lives. Successful students may think, "I've studied hard for three hours or five hours; now I deserve a break."Participant 2

"The biggest problem that we have is loitering. That's your, wow. That's a national crisis. Yeah, because a lot of our students don't have, um, you know, um, fancy converters and things like that at their houses. Yes. So, the load shedding is a big problem. Um, and then obviously the work environments of the students. Yes. Um, they go on deployments and then they don't have access to the internet, or they don't have studies".

Participant 4

"I think the key challenge is, um, time commitment by students. You know, distance education is, is very, um, challenging in the sense that you're working full time, and you must make time for your studies also. So, I think that is the first main challenge. It could be due to work commitments. It could be due to family commitments. It could just be due to commitments to, to the studies".

Both participants shared reflections from the perspective of how tough it is for students of distance learning to hold up under these conditions or even why should only one side be paid attention? The second person pointed out those things like continual blackouts, which represent far deeper infrastructural problems that obstruct students' learning activities can be allowed to develop. These disturbances are usually taken as a sign of future academic disappointment. Students of the internet, an electromagnetic spectrum that is far wider than human sight, daunted by such conditions feel they cannot absorb anything and multiply their suffering with each attempt at learning. When consistent access to the internet or clean, working equipment that is actually their own is missing, simply doing well becomes a struggle. It often means both dropping out of school and falling into emotional stress.

4.2.2.5 Theme 5: Improving Student Engagement and Achievement

This theme is titled "Student Performance, Commitment, and Motivation." It closely examines what underlies students' dedication. It also looks at the factors that contribute to success or failure in online, asynchronous, or distance learning. Motivation is linked to students' participation rates and academic results. This is reflected as well by the way these affect teachers, hence their

sense of worth and joy in work. Here the aim is to find means of providing more support to students and making the teachers' efforts a more interactive and happier kind of learning experience altogether.

Subtheme 5.1: Student Commitment

A major concern commonly voiced by the respondents is students' lack of dedication in distance education. Looking from various angles, this became evident in many areas-specifically things like missing completion dates; work not finished; a drop off in excitement about study generally at the end or during time frame (I don't know which is correct); When it came to these acts, teachers were angry as they caused a certain amount of difficulty in promoting academic advance. The group exchanged their views on this issue; the next two papers record their responses.

Participant 1

"If the students are committed. But it takes two to tangle. The commitment of the student, it's what normally drives, the lecture to be of assistance because normally when you are far away you miss out what is being taught in class then you must be, someone who's committed who's working very hard who has contact with those that are full time".

Participant 2

"There's an issue of commitment from the students' side as well. I mean, because it's online, they can, they can log in whenever they want to. They can, they can engage whenever they want to. But they, they are, they are, they must be committed, right? So, we also experience a lot of challenges with regards to that".

Findings reported in the literature show that it is widely recognized among scholars of education distance learning that student persistence is an undertaking. Future studies might consider the possible effects of self-regulation and motivation, as well as how students are able to obtain support systems to sustain their involvement in online learning. In interviews, some students said that it is easier to act on the very flexibility and isolation commonly credited with improving distant education. Conversely, this can also

make learning more abstract, difficult to position oneself for from home where one usually takes classes or privileges one's own interests, isolate one's thoughts into sub consciousness and so forth.

Subtheme 5.2: Motivation Among Students

They were missing the motivation to study. Result: their participation in courses dropped off and at all levels so did performance. Without the necessary guidance on how to balance work-loads or meet deadlines, students might quit halfway through a semester or longer if things continue in this vein. It is this which prevents state-of-the-art hardware from becoming widespread on today's campuses everywhere: a lack of support slows down technological change. The significance of this development is that it eroded the quality of student-instructor interactions and greatly increased isolation and loneliness for students in their studies. For many students, the result was failure. Both Participants 1 and 5 commented...

Participant 1

"Students, when they are far away, they have that level of motivation to want to study".

Participant 5

"It's been kind of mixed. I think, you know, at the beginning of the semester, there was a lot of motivation, you know, students were excited to be back, and, you know, they were eager to learn. But as the semester has gone on, I think, you know, motivation has started to wane a bit, you know, especially with everything going on in the world right now. It's been hard for a lot of students to stay focused and motivated, you know, with everything else that's happening".

A lack of student motivation can greatly impact how lecturers feel and teach. When students often miss deadlines or don't engage, teachers may become tired of their work and care less about each student's success. This may lead instructors to focus on improving the course while hoping students will become interested. Participant 4 explained in an interview:

"After all, you work really hard but then students will not hand in anything."

In online learning, students' motivation is still a persistent problem. Ignoring the particular factors of limited face-to-face interaction and postponed feedback, an overall decline often occurs. Students get disconnected from their studies and slack off, academic achievement decreases over time. Following this line of logic, the data from the participants themselves is typical. Many students start with a sprint but soon find they are hobbling along.

Subtheme 5.3: Student Performance

Among the findings of the survey was the fact that some respondents experienced major doubts in student performance at distance education settings. Lack of academic success means students often fall short of achieving the required learning objectives. This was the perspective offered by Participants 1 and 3 who had been-they said...

Participant 1

"It's like if the students are not performing well, it can also affect the lecturers' performance".

Participant 3

"They don't come to the party, you go the extra mile, you, you know, you try to help, and you try to assist, and you reach out and everything is available. It's just for them to say, grab your hand and, you know, come on board and get on the bus or stay on the bus or, yeah".

When the course format and instructional methods are suitable, it helps determine the success of distance learning students; under such circumstances average academic achievements will be far better than those obtained by campus-based learners. These teachers we received feedback from suggest that there is an inverse relationship between a student's achievement and how hard teachers must work. When students do poorly it punishes lecturers more

because they have to spend time explaining lectures over again, resulting in lowered morale, satisfaction with their jobs. With regard to the non-completion of studies, the study pointed out that in distance education courses a number of students eligible for degrees will not receive them. This tendency leads to higher dropout rates and undermines overall results and prestige of such programmes; however it also presents continuing difficulties at both teacher-level or institution-wide for maintaining academic quality and strengthening student satisfaction. "Moreover," Participant 3 was quoted as saying, "they don't complete, which means that few people are obtaining real degrees despite the fact they have been in higher education for years."

"We had 30 registering for ITE, but out of the 30, only 5 would qualify to sit for the final examination because they are the only ones that would have submitted and completed all the tasks".

Participant 3 highlighted a major concern about student commitment and their ability to finish assigned tasks in the program. This observation shows a common issue where many enrolled students either drop out or do not complete their studies. In response, Participant 5 suggested creating a feedback or survey system. This system would focus on identifying student needs and challenges early. This method could help institutions support learners better and possibly boost retention and completion rates.

"Finally, regarding the completion of studies, I propose we implement a comprehensive survey system to gather feedback from students about their overall experience and any challenges they faced during their studies. This feedback will be invaluable for improving our programmes and ensuring that future students have a more enriching educational journey".

Low completion rates in distance education concern many people. A lack of connection between teachers and students, insufficient support services, and challenges faced by individual students all contribute to this issue. Participants noted that many students struggle to finish their studies, which undermines the credibility and success of distance education programs.

Subtheme 5.5: Implementation of Feedback Mechanisms

Several participants indicated that introducing feedback mechanisms is a problem at each institution. The absence of timely feedback was a significant barrier in many areas. Participant 4 mentioned that during any given term, many students do not maintain regular communication. This decreases their engagement, which in turn affects their academic performance. Participant 4 emphasized this point by saying:

"Students do not tend to communicate with you during the term".

Participant 4 further elaborated on the efforts made to enhance engagement by stating,

"We had to start using, you know, online learning, learning material, online platforms".

Participant 5 emphasised the commitment to maintaining student contact, saying,

"We tried to, you know, have as much contact as possible with students".

These observations support the earlier findings about the limitations of feedback methods in distance education. While some measures were implemented to improve communication between students and lecturers, a consistent lack of student engagement continued to pose a challenge. This suggests that existing strategies were not fully effective in promoting regular interaction or supporting students adequately. Participant 3 echoed these concerns, noting that although students were provided with the necessary resources to initiate contact and give feedback, significant challenges in the distance learning environment still persisted.

"They suffer away as the semester comes. They just register and say, oh, I am registered, but when it comes to our records, they're not performing. We have a lot of resources available. We have contact time. You've got your resource material... we upload our resources. We are predominantly working on our SUNLEARN platform."

Problems in feedback mechanisms highlight more general communication snags, which may cause a severe drop in student performance. Feedback, reflective and interacting, is essential to promoting engagement and academic achievement. For it provides learners with necessary directions forward. It was mentioned by group number 4 that even with operational online platforms and frequently checking up on each other, the lack of student activity is still a big obstacle to successful learning.

4.2.2.6 Theme 6: Optimising Educator Efficiency and Support

The "Lecturer Performance/Attitude" theme investigates how various influences such as the lecturer's own performance, demand for teaching resources and support systems affect both how effective teaching is or student results in distance learning. This theme details how an educator's attitude towards students and his institutional back-up affect his ability to make contact with learners at a ratio of one person per one class, and also resoundingly good quality teaching. The aim of this theme is to unearth these dynamics as they bear on successful distance education in both teachers' and students' perceptions.

Subtheme 6.1: Workload Distribution and How it Affects Lecturers

The study found that uneven distribution of lecturing workloads seriously influences educators' morale, job satisfaction and overall teaching performance. As workloads become unbalanced, faculty may feel as if they are becoming heavier than needed, especially in managing responsibility for distance education, with repercussions in terms of stress and potentially neglecting students' demands. Such conclusions confirm earlier findings on the weaknesses of feedback mechanisms for distance education.

Participant 1

"It affects morale because one may say 'Why is it that I'm always the one marking the assignments?'"

Participant 5

"I think workload distribution has been a big issue this semester, you know, um, with everything being online, you know, it's been a lot harder to manage, you know, especially for lecturers. You know, a lot of lecturers have been feeling overwhelmed with the amount of work they have to do, you know, recording lectures, grading assignments, um, you know, answering student emails, you know, it's just been a lot. And I think that's impacted morale, you know, among the lecturers".

A tutor's workload is distributed among the entire faculty and is very much affected by this. This is particularly true in distance education. When workload pressure mounts and stress builds, job satisfaction naturally declines into a state characterized by exhaustion-something that can mean less work done or no output at all for extended periods. Far from being uncommon these days, even for those who do not experience it personally, this situation negatively impacts both students' learning abilities and instructor morale. The experiences of Participants 1 and 5 reveal a significant issue with uneven task distribution. This imbalance can undermine morale and lower the overall quality of teaching. To address this, we need institutions that balance workloads and provide support for health, helping teachers maintain good standards.

Sub-theme 6.2: Additional Workload for Lecturers

Some participants expressed feeling overwhelmed by the extra responsibilities of teaching remotely. This added burden worsened their working conditions and increased stress levels, raising the risk of mental collapse. For those managing both traditional, in-person courses and students from far away who have been left to navigate challenges on their own, a troubling connection arises. Participants 1 and 5 shared their feelings about this pressure of responsibility.

Participant 1

"Sometimes there's so much work that it overburdens the lecturer".

Participant 5

"Yeah, I mean, lecturers are feeling the strain. You know, they're having to juggle so many different things right now, you know, with teaching online, trying to provide support to students, you know, dealing with their challenges, you know, it's a lot".

Distance education teachers took on extra duties such as system operation, managing the education system, and assisting students. These added responsibilities increased their work pressure significantly. Participants 1 and 5 noted that the added tasks make it harder for teachers. They described the situation with one word tension.

Subtheme 6.3: Support from Faculty Affects Lecturers

Some lecturers mentioned that the support they received from their teaching faculty did not meet their needs. This lack of support, whether in efficiency or staffing, lowered their morale and teaching quality. It also led to greater dissatisfaction among staff. When lecturers do not get proper support, their interaction with students suffers, which decreases the overall standard of education. No strong institutional support leads to fewer opportunities for promotion, heavier workloads and hermit-like existence Participant 4 expressed these feelings in this way:...

"I also think there is an expectation that we as lecturers need to put in more effort to regularly meet with our ITE students".

Participant 5 echoes this sentiment by emphasising the importance of faculty support,

"Support to lecturers is crucial for ensuring that they can effectively perform their roles and provide the best possible education to students".

Support from faculty greatly affects how well lecturers perform and how satisfied they feel in their jobs. A lack of help or care from the school often leads to lower job satisfaction and poorer teaching quality. Participant 4 and

Participant 5's experiences illustrate this issue, showing how insufficient support can undermine your work and your chances for advancement. These points emphasize the need for strong, dependable support systems to help teachers succeed and maintain their motivation.

Subtheme 6.4: Professional Development and Training

Some teachers felt exhausted. They shared how challenging it can be to balance their existing responsibilities with their own wishes for personal and professional growth. After facing these challenges, they found it harder to improve their teaching and even felt a sense of despair. This mindset affected all areas of their lives, and it worsened the quality of education they provided. Under such pressure, there was little time or energy left for their own professional development. As a result, this pressure had a significant impact on their work.

Participant 2

"The workload is overwhelming, and there's little time left for my development".

Participant 4

"The demands are high, and I often feel stretched too thin, which hinders my professional growth".

Participant 5 echoed this sentiment by stating that,

"I find it challenging to balance my teaching responsibilities with my learning and development".

Lectures come with a heavy workload, leading to many tasks and less time for further education. This situation leaves lecturers with little opportunity to learn more. When they have limited time for personal growth, it not only hinders their professional development but also affects the quality of their teaching.

Subtheme 6.5: Access to Training Resources

Many lecturers struggle to access the latest teaching materials. This difficulty arises whether they are non-permanent staff in large cities or part-time teachers in rural areas. Participants noted that the lack of up-to-date or suitable materials hampers their ability to create meaningful and engaging learning experiences for students. This issue was discussed by Participants 2 and 4, who pointed out that...

Participant 2

"We often struggle with the availability of up-to-date resources for our courses, which can limit our effectiveness as educators."

Participant 4

"The teaching materials we have are often outdated, and while we try to make the best of what we have, it affects how we deliver our content."

The learning materials are outdated. Even though participants try to use them effectively, this limitation harms the delivery of the course content. Participant 5 shared this concern, saying that,

"Access to modern resources is essential, but we frequently find ourselves relying on older materials that don't engage the students as effectively as they should."

In these projects, I found it important to create a group for both research and construction. The quality of educational materials at all levels directly affects students' interest in learning and their success. When teachers rely only on outdated resources, their effectiveness drops and never rises above zero. This causes students to lose enthusiasm for learning, which lowers their motivation and academic performance. This situation shows the need to provide educators with effective modern tools to create new learning environments.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter focused on five teachers from SAMA schools and offered a detailed report on their experiences and attitudes. It also outlined the lessons from our study. From these findings, we identified key themes: teaching today is complex and should be especially emphasized during moments of weakness; the strengths and challenges encountered are situated within this subject's context.

Chapter Five - The research will expand on these findings. It will address their implications for both broader educational frameworks and policy in general. By linking these points up with pertinent literature, chapter 5 seeks to throw some light on ways that educators and decision-makers could take forward. Such research will form a valid contribution to the ongoing discussion about effective teaching and support for institutions.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 I shared what five educators at the South African Military Academy (SAMA) told me. In this chapter I'll build on those insights. My aim here is to dig into the themes that came up and ask: what do they mean for how distance education happens, and could happen better?"

5.2 Discussion of Key Findings

The discussion begins by revisiting the major themes from the previous chapter, with a focus on participants' viewpoints. I compare what the educators said with what the research says, and I show what that means in real teaching settings. The chapter also addresses the structural challenges of distance education and concludes with reflections on the study's limitations and opportunities for further research.

5.2.1 Participant Demographics

To make sense of the qualitative findings, it was important to understand who the participants were. Their backgrounds gave critical context to their perspectives. The study included a balanced group of educators across gender and disciplinary backgrounds, with many having between six and ten years of experience in distance education. This experience brought a well-informed perspective to the challenges and opportunities identified. Yin (2014) and Connelly (2016) observe, having educators with real-world experience adds depth and credibility to the study. The academic diversity of the group also provided valuable nuance to the findings, highlighting how disciplinary differences shape experiences within the distance learning environment at SAMA.

5.2.2 Experiences with the Distance Learning Environment

5.2.2.1 Student Engagement Challenges at SAMA

A recurring concern among participants was the lack of student engagement. Educators often described feeling demoralised when students failed to participate or meet academic responsibilities. One participant expressed

frustration: "It takes two to tango. The lack of commitment from students really wears us down." These experiences align with Moore's (1993) view that external pressures on students, particularly in military settings, can reduce their academic focus. As Baczolad & Chaudhury (2018) and Suleiman (2023) suggest, educators are often forced to go beyond their traditional roles, addressing challenges that fall outside academic instruction. One educator put it plainly: when students keep tuning out, it wears us down. Without support from above, it just keeps happening.

5.2.2.2 Inconsistent Attendance in Online Sessions

Educators also reported that many students failed to attend online classes regularly. Participant 1 noted that even when students did join, their level of engagement was minimal due to competing responsibilities or environmental distractions. This observation echoes Anderson's (2009) assertion that online learning lacks the immediacy required to sustain focus. When the class isn't organised and students aren't self-motivated, it quickly becomes hard for educators to keep learners engaged. Mansbach and Auston (2018) further emphasise the importance of purposeful interaction in online classrooms, something that was notably lacking in many SAMA sessions.

5.2.2.3 Difficulty Engaging with Course Content

Participants noted that many students came from rural backgrounds and lacked academic preparedness for the rigour of distance education. One remarked, "They're not quite ready for the academic rigor that's required." This reflects De Grange and Walters (2009), who argue that misalignment between student readiness and curriculum expectations is a common barrier in distance learning. Compounded by poor internet access (Sahu, 2020), students struggled to engage with material, especially when they saw little relevance to their own lives. Bozkurt (2019) makes an important point: students are more likely to stay engaged when the material actually connects to their everyday experiences.

5.2.2.4 Technical Barriers and Internet Access

Technological difficulties, including limited access to devices and unreliable internet, were major obstacles. Participants highlighted how frequent power outages further disrupted learning. As Kotzé (2020) explains, students who lack access to digital tools or the skills to use them are unlikely to succeed in online education. These constraints significantly hampered academic performance.

5.2.2.5 Impact of Load Shedding

Load shedding was one of the most disruptive external factors affecting distance education students. frequent power cuts meant students often couldn't join sessions or even access materials, and when you add job and home duties, it became a major barrier. As noted by Crawford et al. (2020) and Sahu (2020), such disruptions increase the likelihood of student dropout and hinder academic progress.

5.2.3 Maintaining Educational Quality in Distance Learning

5.2.3.1 Lecturer Support

Many participants stressed the need for sustained support systems for educators. Access to professional development and technical resources was seen as essential for teaching effectiveness in a remote setting. Manson (2016) and Bell & Walters (2015) both argue that a supportive environment improves not only teaching quality but also educator wellbeing.

5.2.3.2 Comprehensive Student Support Systems

While some participants appreciated the support offered by partner institutions, they expressed a need for more integrated, centralised support for students. According to Lin & Gao (2020), support systems must bring together technical tools, academic guidance, and emotional assistance to ensure student success in online environments.

5.2.3.3 Learning Environment and Student Performance

It became clear that the success of distance education heavily depends on how inviting and user-friendly online classroom is. Participants acknowledged the difficulty of replicating a supportive, face-to-face learning atmosphere

online. This supports the views of Amankwaa (2016), who emphasised that learner-friendly environments correlate strongly with academic achievement.

5.2.3.4 Faculty Support and Professional Wellbeing

Participants highlighted a clear link between institutional support and educator performance. Without adequate resources and consistent communication, teaching quality suffered. Kaufmann (2015) and Farooq et al. (2020) similarly identify lack of support as a cause of educator burnout and student disengagement.

5.2.3.5 Professional Development Opportunities

Opportunities for peer collaboration and structured training were considered valuable by participants. Weekly planning sessions and informal exchanges improved teaching effectiveness. This is consistent with the findings of Star-Glass (2011) and Aldimann et al. (2020), who argue that professional learning communities enhance adaptability in distance education contexts.

5.2.4 Navigating Diversity and Learning Obstacles

5.2.4.1 Impact of Student Diversity

Students' diverse backgrounds created different levels of engagement and academic performance. Older students balancing work and family often struggled to meet deadlines. As Bailey and Lee (2020) explain, diverse learner profiles require adaptive teaching strategies to prevent dropout and ensure inclusivity.

5.2.4.2 Reduced Interaction Between Students and Lecturers

Despite efforts to extend availability, educators reported minimal student participation in consultations or additional sessions. Kim (2013) highlights how online learning limits spontaneous interaction, which is vital for building effective student-instructor relationships.

5.2.4.3 Isolation and Disengagement

Feelings of isolation were common among both students and lecturers. Participant 4 described silent online sessions as demoralising. Simonson et al.

(2019) link student isolation to lower satisfaction and higher attrition, reinforcing the importance of peer interaction in virtual learning.

5.2.4.4 Language and Literacy Challenges

Participants noted that some students struggled with academic English, affecting their comprehension and writing. Limited access to language support compounded this issue, as also highlighted by Brown and Park (2016) and Pregowska et al. (2021), who link language barriers to reduced academic success.

5.2.4.5 Adapting Materials for Diverse Learners

One lecturer said: 'We began using charts, videos and real-life case-studies so the students could actually see the ideas working'. This aligns with Keegan and Rumble (2018), who advocate for diverse instructional formats in distance learning. Siebold (2001) also notes that content must be both accessible and relevant for optimal student outcomes.

5.2.5 Support Networks and Personal Responsibilities

5.2.5.1 Fragmented Support Systems

Although decentralised support structures can offer flexibility, participants expressed concern about their inconsistent application and lack of accountability. Some students struggled to access or effectively utilise these systems, missing appointments or falling behind. Keegan (2013) notes that while decentralised support may offer personalised assistance, inconsistent implementation often reduces its effectiveness. Anderson and Rivera Vargas (2020) stress the importance of striking a balance between adaptability and consistency to ensure equitable student outcomes.

5.2.5.2 Family Responsibilities

Family commitments were identified as a significant barrier to participation. Between family duties and money pressures, many students just couldn't keep up, missed deadlines and absences were common. Van Rensburg and Zagerhagen (2017) argue that domestic challenges frequently take precedence over academic goals for distance learners. As De Lisle (2011) suggests,

acknowledging and planning for these realities is crucial for designing supportive and inclusive educational systems.

5.2.5.3 Employment Pressures

Most distance learners were employed full-time, making it difficult for them to balance job expectations with academic obligations. Participant 5 mentioned that students were often overwhelmed by work demands, causing them to fall behind academically. These findings support the work of Tanas (2015) and Lebani et al. (2020), who identify work-study imbalance as a key challenge to academic success. Without flexible policies or targeted support, these students remain at risk of attrition.

5.2.5.4 Military Deployment

Being deployed threw yet another challenge into the mix for the military students. Participants noted that learners on assignment often lacked access to internet or course materials. Lecturers had to adjust expectations and teaching plans accordingly. Romliszowski and Mason (2013) recommend personalised learning pathways and self-paced resources to accommodate students in unpredictable and remote environments.

5.2.5.5 Mental Health and Emotional Well-being

Mental health emerged as a growing concern. Participant 4 observed that students under continuous pressure often became disengaged and demotivated. Stress, isolation, and burnout were commonly reported, with many students lacking access to emotional or psychological support. Creswell (2013) and Palinkas et al. (2015) emphasise the importance of institutional mental health services in promoting well-being and academic success. Without these supports, both learner performance and morale suffer.

5.2.6 Improving Student Engagement and Academic Outcomes

5.2.6.1 Student Commitment

Participants noted that student commitment levels were generally low, despite efforts to increase engagement. Bailey and Lee (2020) found that sustained motivation in online learning relies on structured support and regular feedback.

Suggested interventions included personalised communication, clearer course expectations, and active monitoring of student progress.

5.2.6.2 Motivation Levels

Student motivation often diminished over time, with initial enthusiasm waning mid-course. Gunawardena and McIsaac (2013) argue that the lack of real-time interaction in online environments reduces engagement. Participants suggested that goal-setting, real-life relevance, and prompt feedback are necessary to maintain student interest (Kaufmann, 2015; Shenge, 2014).

5.2.6.3 Academic Performance

Low academic performance among students was a source of concern for educators. As Participant 2 mentioned, repeated underperformance led to frustration and reduced morale. Webster et al. (2013) advocate for timely feedback and adaptive instructional planning to improve academic outcomes. Personalized approaches and learning aids can also be effective, as suggested by Mansbach & Auston (2018).

5.2.6.4 Programme Completion

High dropout rates were consistently reported. Participant 3 reflected on the emotional toll of supporting students who eventually disengaged. These findings align with Bailey and Lee (2020) and De Grange and Walters (2009), who attribute attrition to poor support, personal challenges, and weak engagement. Proposed solutions include proactive academic advising, regular progress tracking, and community-building initiatives (Baker & Unni, 2018; Anderson & Elloumi, 2021).

5.2.6.5 Feedback Effectiveness

Educators raised concerns about students not engaging with feedback. Despite efforts to provide constructive responses, many students ignored the input. Participant 4 highlighted that digital feedback often lacked impact due to passive learner attitudes. Siebold (2001), Creswell (2013), and Farooq et al. (2020) all stress the importance of creating interactive, student-led feedback systems to promote active learning.

5.2.7 Enhancing Educator Support and Effectiveness

5.2.7.1 Unequal Workload Distribution

Participants expressed frustration over imbalanced workload distribution, which negatively impacted morale. Some staff members bore more responsibility than others, contributing to fatigue and burnout. Worsley and Archibold (2019) and Star-Glass (2011) found that unfair task allocation undermines staff satisfaction and team cohesion. Promoting equity in task assignment is essential for maintaining a motivated and effective workforce.

5.2.7.2 Additional Responsibilities

In addition to teaching, educators were expected to manage online platforms, provide out-of-hours support, and adapt material for blended delivery. These demands strained personal well-being and teaching quality. Mason (2016), Bozkurt (2019), and Lockee (2021) all identify the need for clearer role definitions, workload management strategies, and stronger institutional support to reduce staff overload.

5.2.7.3 Institutional Support Deficits

Several participants felt unsupported in dealing with teaching challenges, especially those related to student participation and technology. Effective distance education depends on institutional backing, including access to resources and emotional support (Brown & Park, 2016; Fokkens, 2011; Atkinson, 2014). Strengthening these systems will enhance educator performance and resilience.

5.2.7.4 Time Constraints for Professional Development

Heavy teaching loads often left little time for research or professional learning. Kidd and Murray (2020) emphasise that without continuous development, educators may become stagnant and less effective. Institutions should consider providing dedicated time for upskilling to ensure ongoing teaching innovation and effectiveness.

5.2.7.5 Limited Access to Updated Materials

A lack of updated teaching resources was another concern. Outdated materials made it difficult to deliver relevant and engaging content. Participant 5 observed that this disconnect reduced student engagement. Anderson and Elloumi (2021) and Kotzé (2020) argue for stronger investment in current digital tools and resource libraries to support teaching excellence.

5.3 Summary

This chapter has presented a detailed discussion of findings from interviews conducted with educators at SAMA. It highlighted how various factors, ranging from student motivation and diversity to institutional support and workload management, impact the quality and outcomes of distance education. Challenges such as poor engagement, low academic performance, and high dropout rates were closely linked to limitations in both student support and staff wellbeing. In short: institutions must stay flexible, teaching practices need to keep evolving, and both staff and students must have reliable support systems. The final chapter will summarise the key conclusions of the study and present targeted recommendations to enhance distance learning in similar military education settings.

CHAPTER SIX – SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter brings together the key findings of the research and discusses their broader implications. Practical recommendations are offered with the aim of enhancing distance education, particularly within military environments. These suggestions focus on increasing student engagement through effective feedback, providing targeted support to educators, and implementing strategies to reduce learner dropout rates. The chapter also identifies potential areas for future research, especially regarding innovative approaches that could improve teaching and learning in military institutions. The overall goal is to contribute towards the development of more adaptive and effective distance education systems.

6.2 Overview of the Study

The study began in Chapter One by defining its focus: exploring the experiences of military educators at the South African Military Academy (SAMA) engaged in distance education. It provided background on how distance education has evolved, including the impact of recent technological advances, the COVID-19 pandemic, and pressures faced by educators. The core problem addressed was balancing the maintenance of educational quality with rapidly changing technologies, under the frameworks of SAMA and Stellenbosch University (SU). This chapter also outlined the study's purpose, objectives, research questions, and clarified key terms like "military education" and "training and development." The significance and structure of the research were also discussed.

Chapter Two explored the firsthand experiences of military educators adapting to changing teaching methods while managing academic demands within the military context. A key finding was that many educators were unaware of how their attitudes and perceptions influenced student learning. The Community of Practice (CoP) theory provided a useful lens to understand these experiences,

particularly peer collaboration and shared learning. Gaps in existing literature were highlighted, emphasizing the need for more qualitative research on educators' experiences in military distance education.

Chapter Three outlined the research design and methodology. A phenomenological approach was chosen to deeply understand the lived experiences of SAMA educators. The interpretive paradigm was explained, along with participant selection procedures. Of 66 educators, five were purposively chosen for their relevant insights. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, analyzed using Tesch's qualitative framework. Ethical considerations were detailed, and the researcher's military education background was acknowledged as part of the interpretive process.

Chapter Four presented the collected data and summarized emerging themes such as educators' roles, student demands, support structures, and practical distance education challenges. Issues like inconsistent internet access, limited student engagement, and educator fatigue were noted.

Chapter Five discussed these findings within the context of existing literature. It highlighted systemic issues such as unfair workload distribution, weak learner-educator engagement, and limited resource access affecting both educators and students. The need for enhanced institutional support and policy improvements was emphasized.

This final chapter summarizes the overall findings, provides recommendations for improving military distance education at institutions like SAMA, and suggests priority areas for further research. The study was guided by the central question: What are the experiences of military educators in providing quality distance education at SAMA? It aimed to explore these experiences, identify challenges, and assess their impact on teaching effectiveness.

6.3 Synthesis of Findings and Conclusions

This section integrates the main findings to clarify factors that either support or impede effective distance education at SAMA. While distance education offers

flexibility and opportunities, it also brings distinct challenges for students and educators alike. These include technological limitations, lack of direct learner-educator interaction, and variable student availability and motivation. The findings underscore that distance learning is most successful when paired with ongoing training, robust feedback systems, and responsive institutional support.

6.3.1 Key Experiences That Strengthen Distance Learning (RQ1)

Participants identified several factors critical to sustaining effective distance education:

Institutional Support: Many educators emphasized the importance of training, professional development, and emotional support. Feeling supported enhanced their confidence and ability to connect with students.

Student Support: For military students balancing academic and service commitments, coordinated academic and technical assistance was crucial in helping them manage their workload.

Learning Environment: Although virtual platforms provided flexibility, educators noted these lacked the structured interaction of in-person classes. Making online learning more interactive remains a key challenge.

Educator Development: Opportunities for continuous professional growth and peer engagement were valued. Sharing knowledge and strategies helped educators feel better prepared for the demands of distance teaching.

Peer Collaboration: Informal exchanges among colleagues helped improve teaching practices. Educators found collaborative and practical development efforts most beneficial.

6.3.2 Conclusion

The findings highlight the necessity of integrated support systems combining staff backing, infrastructure, and technology to foster purposeful engagement for both educators and students. Strengthening communities within the learning environment can lead to improved outcomes for all involved.

6.4 Obstacles Faced in Distance Learning at SAMA (RQ2)

6.4.1 Summary of Main Challenges

Six key difficulties were consistently raised:

Technology Access: Students frequently struggled with unreliable internet and power outages. Despite having devices, many were unfamiliar with digital platforms required for coursework.

Lack of In-Person Contact: Educators found it hard to sustain student interest and gauge comprehension without physical presence. The absence of classroom structure made learners vulnerable to distractions.

Low Participation: Military demands and home distractions often caused students to miss classes or disengage.

Personal Responsibilities: Older students or those returning from breaks struggled to balance family, work, and studies, leading to missed deadlines and frustration for educators.

Time Management: Many students had difficulty managing their workload, which hindered teaching progress and re-engagement.

Limited Student Availability: Military duties and deployments disrupted regular attendance and assignment completion, adding pressure to both educators and learners.

6.4.2 Conclusion: Understanding These Challenges

These obstacles highlight the complex nature of delivering effective distance education. Technological and infrastructure issues, combined with the lack of face-to-face interaction, affected both learning and teaching support. Students balancing multiple commitments and unpredictable military duties faced significant difficulties, which increased stress on all parties. Without adequate responses, these challenges will continue to undermine distance education at SAMA.

6.5 The Effects of These Challenges (RQ3)

Educators described how these challenges influenced their teaching and the broader learning environment. Persistent connectivity issues and equipment shortages led to poor student attendance and outcomes. Educators often felt unsupported and frustrated by the lack of personal connection with students, unsure if lessons were understood.

Emotionally, this took a toll. Watching students struggle with motivation or fall behind caused some educators to become discouraged, sometimes reducing

their teaching effort. This weakened student-teacher relationships, resulting in decreased motivation on both sides.

6.5.1 Educators' Reflections

Teachers expressed deep concern about poor internet access, absenteeism, lack of devices, and missing face-to-face contact. However, the emotional burden of these problems was particularly impactful. Many felt powerless when students struggled due to external pressures rather than lack of effort. These feelings shaped their teaching approaches and underscored the importance of institutional support for both students and educators.

6.5.2 Impact on the Learning Environment

The challenges directly affected teaching delivery. When educators perceived low student engagement, they often adjusted their teaching style, sometimes reducing effort, which perpetuated disengagement. Educators withdrew, students sensed this, and the overall learning environment suffered—marked by limited interaction, weak feedback, and low enthusiasm. To break this cycle, institutions must provide resources and support to help rebuild strong educator-student connections.

6.6 Limitations of the Study

This research has several limitations. It focused solely on the South African Military Academy within the SANDF, so findings may not be generalizable to other institutions or non-military settings. The small purposive sample of five participants, though insightful, may not represent all military educators' experiences. The study relied on self-reported interview data, risking recall bias. Furthermore, only educators' perspectives were examined; including student views could have provided a more comprehensive understanding. Lastly, technological challenges are influenced by South Africa's specific infrastructure context, which might differ in other countries.

6.7 Implications of the Study

The findings carry implications on three levels: individual military educators, institutional leadership at SAMA and SANDF, and the broader military higher education sector.

6.7.1 Implications for Military Educators

Military educators need to adapt their teaching methods to better engage students online. Using interactive resources and providing consistent, meaningful feedback can address low participation. Establishing peer support or virtual communities may enhance student engagement and belonging. The study links educator stress to student performance; equipping educators with appropriate tools, emotional support, training, and technology access can improve their teaching confidence and resilience.

6.7.2 Implications for SAMA and the SANDF

Institutionally, improvements are required in internet reliability, digital platforms, and student support programs. Introducing formal mentorship schemes similar to those in professional settings could strengthen student support. Policies must reflect the unpredictable demands of military service by allowing flexible scheduling, equitable workload distribution, and ongoing educator training—essential for sustainable distance education.

6.7.3 Implications for the Wider Military Education Sector

In the broader military education context, there is growing evidence that self-paced and blended learning models are effective, especially for students balancing military commitments. Flexible learning pathways increase student satisfaction and completion rates. Training educators in the use of digital communication and feedback tools is vital, particularly where in-person teaching is limited or impossible.

6.8 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations aim to enhance teaching practice, inform institutional policy, and guide future research.

6.8.1 Practice-Oriented Recommendations

Develop tailored training programs to help military educators improve digital teaching skills and foster student engagement. Establish structured peer-support or mentorship networks to reduce student isolation. Encourage the use of interactive online teaching tools to boost student participation.

6.8.2 Policy-Level Recommendations

Review and adjust staff workload distribution to ensure fairness and prevent burnout. Modify course schedules to accommodate military service demands. Require regular professional development focused on digital teaching methods for all military educators.

6.8.3 Areas for Future Research

Conduct longitudinal studies exploring the long-term impact of distance education on student retention. Include student perspectives to capture a fuller picture of the distance learning experience. Compare findings across different military units and geographic regions to assess wider applicability.

REFERENCES

Al-Bales, A., El Sayed, T. and Dineen, T., 2020. Addressing the evolving role of faculty in distance education. *Journal of Distance Education*, 35(2), pp. 112-130.

Al Mahameed, M., Riaz, U. and Aldoob, M.S., 2023. The implementation of sustainability practices in Arab higher education institutions. *Journal of Financial Management of Property and Construction*, 28(3), pp. 246-263. Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley.

Ali, W., 2020. Online and remote learning in higher education institutes: A necessity in light of COVID-19 pandemic. *Higher Education Studies*, 10(3), pp. 16-25. ERIC.

Altimann, A., 2008. The role of attitude in effective online teaching. *Journal of Distance Education*, 22(1), pp. 145-160.

Amankwaa, L., 2016. Creating trustworthiness in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 15(1), pp. 1-12.

Anderson, G., 2009. Qualitative research methods in education. *Educational Research Journal*, 18(2), pp. 123-145.

Anderson, K., 2008. Enhancing the experiences of educators through Communities of Practice. *Journal of Educational Development*, 14(2), pp. 78-89.

Anderson, T. and Rivera-Vargas, P., 2020. Distance Education: A Systems View. *Routledge*, pp. 209-212.

Anderson, T. & Elloumi, F., 2021. Theory and Practice of Online Learning. *Athabasca University Press*.

Archibald, D. and Worsley, S., 2019. The Father of Distance Learning. *TechTrends*, 63, pp. 100–101. Springer, United States. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-019-00373-7> [Accessed 15 February 2025].

Arifin, S.R.M., 2018. Ethical considerations in qualitative study. *International Journal of Care Scholars*, 1(2).

Atkinson, C., 2014. *Military soft power: Public diplomacy through military educational exchanges*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Bacolod, M. and Chaudhary, L., 2018. Distance to promotion: Evidence from military graduate education. *Contemporary Economic Policy*, 36(3), pp. 380-397. Wiley Online Library.

Bailey, M. and Lee, H., 2020. The need for research on the experiences of distance education trainers. *Education Research Review*, 25(1), pp. 33-46.

Bailey, M. and Lee, J., 2020. The impact of distance education on educational outcomes: A global perspective. *Education and Technology Research Journal*, 18(4), pp. 56-68.

Baker, J.D. and Unni, R., 2018. Online Learning and Distance Education: Definitions and Distinctions. *Educational Technology Review*, 45(3), pp. 30-45.

Bell, J. and Waters, S. 2018 *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers*. 7th ed. London: Open University Press.

Bennacer, S., 2022. Self-assessment in improving performance in distance education. *Quality Assurance Journal*, 21(4), pp. 123-136.

Bergh, J., 2023. *The role of role models in military leaders' practice and education*. *Reflective Practice Research in Higher Education*. Available at: <https://metadata.lit-verlag.de> [Accessed 4 March 2025].

Bowen, J., 2020. The impact of COVID-19 on educational institutions: Challenges and responses. *Journal of Educational Management*, 14(1), pp. 50-62.

Bozkurt, A., 2019. From Distance Education to Open and Distance Learning: A Holistic Evaluation of History, Definitions, and Theories. In: *Handbook of Research on Learning in the Age of Transhumanism*, IGI Global, Hershey, PA, United States, pp. 22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-8431-5.ch016> [Accessed 15 February 2025].

Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77-101. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa> [Accessed 15 February 2025].

Brown, M., Hughes, H., Keppel, G. and Hard, N., 2015. Growth in distance education: An overview. *Distance Education Journal*, 29(1), pp. 22-38.

Burke, T., 2002. The role of the military in democratic societies. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 1(1), pp. 23-39.

Buselic, S., 2012. Distance Education: Models and Methodologies. *Springer*, Berlin, Germany, p. 15.

Chatanika, P., Namusisi, D. and Ndawula, M., 2012. The impact of distance education on rural development in Africa. *Journal of African Education Studies*, 11(2), pp. 49-63.

Cheng, Y., Lin, M., Hwang, G. and Chen, T., 2017. Theoretical foundations of distance education: A comprehensive review. *Educational Research Review*, 12(2), pp. 155-170.

Chowhury, M., Saha, R., Rahman, S. and Siddique, M., 2022. The challenges of online education in military settings. *Journal of Military Education*, 21(4), pp. 93-105.

Cloete, N., Mouton, J. and Sheppard, C., 2016. *Doctoral education in South Africa*. Oapen Library, Cape Town.

Collingridge, D.S. and Gantt, E.E., 2008. The quality of qualitative research. *American Journal of Medical Quality*, [online] Available at: <https://journals.lww.com> [Accessed 7 March 2025].

Connelly, L.M., 2016. Trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 25(5-6), pp. 719-726.

Cornell-d'Echert Jr, B., 2020. The Influence of Professional Development as Perceived by In-Service Military Instructors. *Search.proquest.com*.

Costley, C. and Lange, E., 2016. Trainers' role in distance education: Influence on learning environments. *Journal of Distance Education*, 31(3), pp. 167-180.

Creswell, J.W., 2009. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 3rd ed. Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W., 2013. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 3rd ed. Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W. & Creswell, J.D., 2017. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 5th ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications. Available at: books.google.com.

Daniel, J., 2020. The future of online learning in higher education. *International Journal of Online Learning*, 27(6), pp. 37-44.

De Grange, L.A. and Walters, D., 2009. Evaluating online teaching effectiveness: A comprehensive review. *Journal of Educational Research*, 102(3), pp. 167-178.

de la Rama, A., Fadul, D. and Bello, M., 2020. Global perspectives on distance education: Impacts and innovations. *International Journal of Distance Education*, 15(1), pp. 127-138.

de Lisle, J., 2011. Research design and its impact on research outcomes. *Journal of Research Practice*, 7(1), pp. 45-58.

Department of Higher Education, 2014. Distance Education Policy Framework. Pretoria: Department of Higher Education.

Dhawan, S., 2020. Online education: A review of the latest advancements. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 23(1), pp. 1-14.

DiRamio, D. & Jarvis, K., 2011. *Veterans in higher education: When Johnny and Jane come marching to campus: ASHE Higher Education Report, Volume 37, Number 3*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dreher, C., Reiners, T. & Dreher, N., 2009. Virtual worlds as a context suited for information systems education: Discussion of pedagogical experience and curriculum design with reference to Second Life. *Journal of Information....* Available at: aisel.aisnet.org.

Du Preez, P. & Le Grange, L., 2020. *The COVID-19 pandemic, online teaching/learning, the digital divide and epistemological access*. Unpublished paper. Available at: <https://researchgate.net> [Accessed 8 March 2025].

Els, R.C. and Meyer, H.W., 2024. The influence of leaders' attitudes and commitment to quality management of training on organisational excellence: A mixed-methods study. *Human Resource Development International*. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com> [Accessed 15 February 2025].

Esterhuyse, W., 2006. Distance education in the South African National Defence Force: A review. *Military Education Journal*, 22(4), pp. 56-71.

Esterhuyse, W., 2007. Challenges and developments in military education. *South African Journal of Military Studies*, 30(2), pp. 45-60.

Esterhuyse, W., 2013. Addressing challenges in distance education within the SANDF. *Educational Review*, 28(1), pp. 32-45.

Esterhuyse, W. and Mokoena, M., 2018. Exploring the impact of distance education on military training environments. *Military Education Review*, 12(2), pp. 98-115.

Faisal, M. and Kisman, S., 2020. Development of online learning applications in distance education. *Journal of Distance Education Technology*, 15(1), pp. 52-60.

Farooq, M., Bashir, M. and Kausar, A., 2020. Key themes in online education research: A literature review. *Educational Research Review*, 35(4), pp. 85-102.

Flick, U., 2020. *An introduction to qualitative research*. 6th ed. Sage Publications.

Fokkens, M., 2011. External changes and their impact on military education at the South African Military Academy. *Journal of Military Training*, 19(3), pp. 115-130.

Frazer, A., Holden, P. and McCarthy, T., 2017. Understanding student success in online learning environments. *Journal of Online Education*, 16(2), pp. 101-115.

Gallagher, J., 2009. *Designing effective research methods*. London: Routledge.

Glennie, J., 2007. The impact of distance education on South Africa's higher education system. *Journal of Distance Education*, 25(1), pp. 100-110. Distance Education Press.

Goedhart, N.S., Blignaut-van Westrhenen, N. et al., 2019. The flipped classroom: supporting a diverse group of students in their learning. *Learning Environments Research*. Cham: Springer.

Gunawardena, C.N. and Mclsaac, M.S., 2004. *Distance Education: New Directions*. New York: Routledge.

Gunawardena, C. and Mclsaac, M., 2013. The evolution of distance education technologies. *Distance Education Journal*, 35(2), pp. 91-106. Taylor & Francis.

Gunawardena, C.N. and Mclsaac, M.S., 2013. Distance education and learning. *Journal of Distance Education*, 18(1), pp. 45-60. Springer.

Gunawardena, N.T. and Mclsaac, M.S., 2013. Advances in computer-based distance education. *Distance Education*, 34(2), pp. 171-183. Taylor & Francis.

Hansen, L., 2017. The early development of distance education in the USA. *Historical Studies in Education*, 29(3), pp. 215-229. History Press.

Harsasi, N. and Satawijaya, S., 2018. ICT challenges in distance education in developing countries. *Global Education Review*, 5(3), pp. 45-56. Global Education Press.

Hebecki, B., Bertus, M. and Allen, J., 2020. Adapting distance education to local contexts: A comparative study. *International Journal of Educational Technology*, 12(2), pp. 22-34. Springer.

Hess, G., 2017. South Africa's commitment to distance education. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 12(4), pp. 87-100. Policy Press.

Holmberg, B., 2005. *Theory and Practice of Distance Education*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Ionascu, S., 2022. Innovations in military distance education: A post-pandemic outlook. *Military Education Journal*, 39(2), pp. 176-188. Military Education Press.

Jena, P.K., 2020. Evolution and trends in distance education: A historical perspective. *Asian Journal of Distance Education*, 16(1), pp. 50-65. Asian Distance Education Press.

Johnson, M., 2020. The role of media in distance education development. *Journal of Media and Education*, 24(1), pp. 77-89. Media Press.

Johnson-Freese, J., 2012. Military distance education: Policy and practice. *Defense Education Review*, 14(2), pp. 130-145. Defense Education Press.

Joy, M., 2004. Instructors' experiences and needs in distance education. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 52(4), pp. 19-32. Springer.

Judy, R., 2016. The role of distance education in the U.S. military. *Journal of Military Studies*, 20(3), pp. 215-230. Military Studies Press.

Jung, I., 2020. Ensuring quality in distance education: The role of quality assurance. *International Journal of Distance Education*, 31(1), pp. 55-70. Elsevier.

Kabir, M.N. and Kadage, S., 2017. ICT and its impact on distance education in developing countries. *Educational Technology Insights*, 23(2), pp. 61-74.

Kaloo, R., Michel, A. and Kamaldee, T., 2020. Adapting educational practices to the digital age. *Education Technology Advances*, 33(5), pp. 145-158.

Kauffman, H., 2015. A review of predictive factors of student success in and satisfaction with online learning. *Research in Learning Technology*. Available at: repository.alt.ac.uk.

Keegan, D., 2013. Theoretical perspectives on distance education. *Routledge*.

Keegan, D. and Rumble, G., 2018. Distance teaching at university level. *The Distance Teaching Universities*, 19(2), pp. 103-121. Taylor & Francis.

Khan, S., 2022. Distance education and military training: A comprehensive review. *Defense Education Journal*, 19(4), pp. 132-145.

Khoza, S. and Van Zyl, S., 2015. Challenges in military distance education. *South African Journal of Military Studies*, 28(3), pp. 145-160.

Kidd, T. and Murray, S., 2020. Research on the experiences of distance education trainers. *Educational Research Journal*, 25(3), pp. 200-215.

Kidd, T.T. and Murray, J., 2020. Emerging trends in distance education: The new normal. *Educational Review Quarterly*, 17(4), pp. 95-112.

Kim, H.J., 2020. The role of postal resources in the development of distance education in Australia. *Australian Journal of Education*, 44(3), pp. 89-102.

Kim, P., 2010. Communities of Practice and educational improvement. *Educational Theory and Practice*, 32(4), pp. 125-140.

Kim, K.J., 2020. Emerging technologies in distance education. *Journal of Educational Technology*, 23(2), pp. 76-89.

Kirchner, M.J. & Yelich Biniecki, S., 2022. Learning to navigate a global pandemic from military training. *Horizons in Adult Education*. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com> [Accessed 16 February 2025].

Kotze, H., 2020. Global perspectives on distance education: Trends and challenges. *Journal of Global Education*, 31(3), pp. 210-226.

Kumet, K., Shamsuddin, S. and Lee, W., 2014. Enhancing educator performance through Communities of Practice. *Educational Improvement Quarterly*, 19(3), pp. 128-145.

Kurzman, P., 2013. The rise of MOOCs and their impact on higher education. *MOOC Review Journal*, 8(2), pp. 34-48.

Lalwani, S., 2016. Exploring the layers of the Research Onion Model: A comprehensive approach. *International Journal of Research Studies*, 9(4), pp. 76-89.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E., 1991. *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at: books.google.com.

Lembani, N., Gunther, P., Breines, L., Dalu, M. and Mwazvita, M., 2020. Addressing ICT access challenges in education. *African Journal of Technology*, 22(2), pp. 75-87.

Lin, C. and Gao, L., 2020. Synchronous and asynchronous online instruction: A review. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 16(1), pp. 1-12.

Lockee, B.B., 2021. Teaching and learning online: New perspectives. *Routledge*.

Mansbach, S. and Auston, M., 2018. Conflicting experiences in online education: An analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 45(1), pp. 30-43.

Manson, A., 2016. The University of South Africa (Unisa) 1918–1948: the first transition, from colonial to segregationist institution. *African Historical Review*, 48(1), pp. 42-62. Taylor & Francis.

Maree, K., 2007. First steps in research. *Van Schaik Publishers*, Pretoria, South Africa.

Marshall, C. and Rossman, G.B., 2006. Designing qualitative research (4th ed.). *Sage Publications*, Thousand Oaks, CA, United States.

Mormina, M. & Pinder, S., 2018. A conceptual framework for training of trainers (ToT) interventions in global health. *Globalization and Health*. Cham: Springer.

Moore, M.G. 1993. *Theory of transactional distance*. In: D. Keegan (ed.) *Theoretical principles of distance education*. London: Routledge, pp. 22–38.

O'Keefe, L., Rafferty, J., Gunder, A. & Vignare, K., 2020. Delivering High-Quality Instruction Online in Response to COVID-19: Faculty Playbook. *Online Learning Consortium*. Available at: ERIC.

Offerman, T., 2009. Distance education in Africa: Historical and contemporary perspectives. *African Distance Education Review*, 10(2), pp. 15-29.

Olsen, W. and George, L., 2004. Cross-sectional studies and their impact on research. *Journal of Social Research*, 29(1), pp. 5-17.

Orth, M. and Macada, C., 2021. The use of the Research Onion Model in research design. *Journal of Research Methodologies*, 15(3), pp. 145-160.

Palinkas, L.A., Horwitz, S.M., Green, C.A., Wisdom, J.P., Duan, N. and Hoagwood, K., 2015. Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), pp. 533-544. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>.

Panlinkas, S., Whitmore, S. and Miller, R., 2015. Qualitative research sampling techniques. *Qualitative Research Methods Journal*, 11(2), pp. 212-225. Available at: Research Methods Press.

Polit, D.F. and Beck, C.T., 2014. *Nursing research: Generating and assessing evidence for nursing practice* (9th ed.). Wolters Kluwer Health.

Pregowska, A., Masztalerz, A., Galinska, A. and Osial, A., 2021. The role of technology in modern distance education. *Educational Technology & Society*, 24(2), pp. 34-45. Available at: Educational Technology & Society Press.

Qayyum, A. and Sawicki-Richter, K., 2019. Distance education in the 20th century: A global overview. *International Review of Education*, 65(1), pp. 22-35.

Romiszowski, A. J. and Mason, R. (2004) *Computer-mediated Communication*, in Jonassen, D. H. (ed.) *Handbook of Research for Educational Communications and Technology*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 397-431. [SAGE Journals](#)

Saba, F., 2016. Theories of distance education: Why they matter. *New Directions for Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Available at: books.google.com.

Sahu, P., 2020. Closure of universities due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): impact on education and mental health of students and academic staff. *Cureus*. Available at: cureus.com.

Sapsford, R. and Jupp, V. 2006. *Data collection and analysis*. 2nd edn. London: SAGE Publications.

Savin-Baden, M. and Major, C.H. (2013) *Qualitative research: the essential guide to theory and practice*. London: Routledge.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2012. *Research methods for business students* (6th ed.). Pearson Education.

Saunders, M., 2019. *Research methods for business students* (7th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2019. *Research methods for business students* (8th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.

Serrano, J., Korpelainen, T. and Sundqvist, E., 2019. Enhancing student engagement through blended learning. *Blended Learning Journal*, 22(2), pp. 45-58.

Sewart, D. and Keegan, D., 2020. Historical roots and development of distance education. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 21(1), pp. 65-78.

Shenge, L., 2014. Training and development: An overview. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 26(1), pp. 50-63.

Shenton, A.K., 2004. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), pp. 63-75.

Sheringham, J.L., 2022. *Officer professional military educational development*. ProQuest.

Siebold, G.L., 2001. The military as a controlled system. *Military Review*, 81(4), pp. 144-154.

Simonson, M., Smaldino, S., Albright, M. and Svacek, S., 2019. *Teaching and learning at a distance: Foundations of distance education* (7th ed.). Information Age Publishing.

Simonson, M., Zvacek, S. and Smaldino, S., 2019. The impact of online instruction in distance education. *Educational Technology & Society*, 22(3), pp. 19-32.

Singh, R. and Mathees, R., 2021. Adapting to changes in educational delivery: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Educational Adaptation*, 19(4), pp. 112-126.

Sinha, S., Clarke, M. and Farguharson, D., 2018. Applying the Research Onion Model to qualitative research in business. *Business Research Review*, 12(2), pp. 98-115.

Starr-Glass, D., 2011. Military learners: Experience in the design and management of online learning environments. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*. Available at: <http://jolt.merlot.org> [Accessed 17 February 2025].

Suleiman, A., 2023. Quality assurance strategies in higher education institutions. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*. Available at: [researchgate.net](https://www.researchgate.net).

Sutton, J. and Austin, Z., 2015. Qualitative research: Data collection, analysis, and management. *Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy*, 68(3), pp. 226–231. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4212/cjhp.v68i3.1456>.

Tanas, C., 2015. Distance education: Historical perspectives and future directions. *European Journal of Distance Education*, 23(1), pp. 12-23.

Van Der Waag-Cowling, V. & Milto, N., 2013. A study of research in the Faculty of Military Science, Stellenbosch University 1990-2009. *Scholar.sun.ac.za*.

Van Rensburg, G. & Zagenhagen, K., 2017. Serving two masters: Professional role conflict in a military teaching and learning environment. *Military and Veterans Health*. Available at: search.informit.org.

Veletsianos, G., 2010. *Emerging technologies in distance education*. New York: Springer. Available at: <https://books.google.com> [Accessed 16 February 2025].

Veletsianos, G. & Houlden, S., 2019. An analysis of flexible learning and flexibility over the last 40 years of Distance Education. *Distance Education*. Available at: Taylor & Francis.

Webster, S., Lewis, J. and Brown, A. 2013 'Considerations in qualitative research', in *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. Torrossa.

Wieland, K. and Kollias, P., 2022. The impact of COVID-19 on distance education: An analysis. *Journal of Educational Crisis Management*, 29(3), pp. 80-95.

World Economic Forum, 2022. The state of education before and after COVID-19. *Global Education Report*, 35(1), pp. 56-70.

Worsley, D. and Archibald, D., 2019. The impact of correspondence courses in early distance education. *Distance Education Quarterly*, 32(3), pp. 22-35.

Wozniak, M., 2021. Military education and the adaptation to distance learning during the pandemic. *Military Training and Development*, 30(2), pp. 89-101.

Yin, R.K., 2014. *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

File: DOD SLT/R/103/10/3/2

5:16



RESTRICTED



Cape Peninsula
University of Technology

Faculty of Education
Highbury Road
Mowbray
7700
Tel: +27 21 680 1506

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

On the **26 April 2023**, the Chairperson of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology granted ethics approval (**EFEC 1-04/2023**) to H.J Jooste for a research project titled:

Title:

An exploration of trainers' experiences in distance education at the South African Military Academy

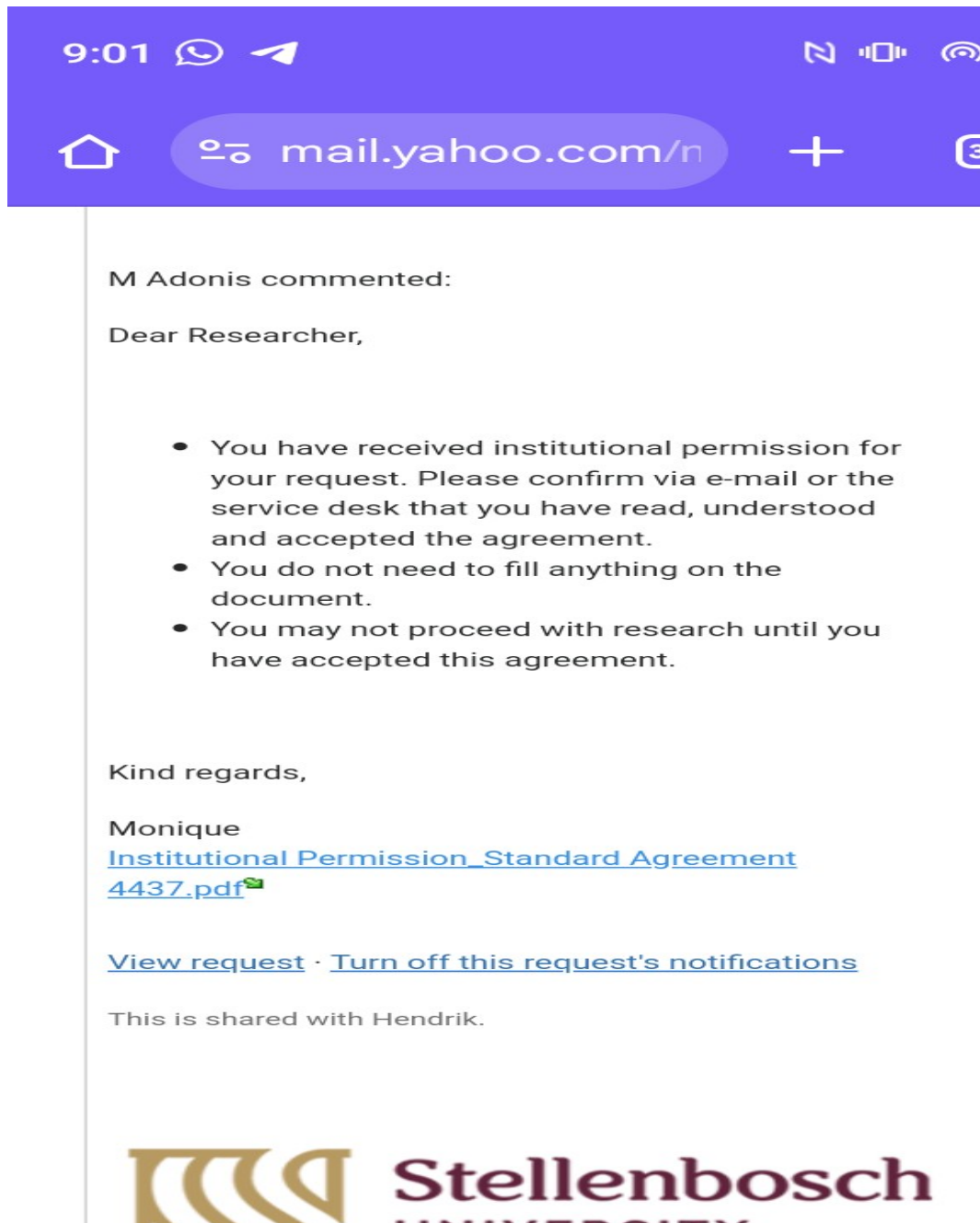
Comments:

The Faculty Research Ethics Committee unconditionally grants ethical clearance for the research project. The clearance is valid until **31st December 2026**. Permission is granted to conduct research **of Education**. Research activities are restricted to those details in the research project as described in the Ethics application. Any changes wrought to the described study must be reported to the committee immediately.

Date: 4 May 2023

Prof. Zayd Waghid
Chair of the Faculty Research Ethics committee
Faculty of Education
efec@cput.ac.za

APPENDIX B: SAMA ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



APPENDIX C: TURNITIN REPORT

Turnitin Originality Report Processed on: 25-Jan-2025 20:24 SAST ID: 2571290565 Word Count: 63067 Submitted: 1					
Jooste MED Thesis Chapters 1 - 6 Compilation - Under Construction 24 January 2025.docx By HENDRIK JACOBUS JOOSTE	<table> <tr> <th>Similarity Index</th><th>Similarity by Source</th></tr> <tr> <td>7%</td><td> Internet Sources: Publications: Student Papers: </td></tr> </table>	Similarity Index	Similarity by Source	7%	Internet Sources: Publications: Student Papers:
Similarity Index	Similarity by Source				
7%	Internet Sources: Publications: Student Papers:				
< 1% match (Internet from 05-Feb-2019) https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/41247/Haarhoff_Perceptions_2014.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 03-Nov-2022) https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/45884/Woldeyes_Access_2014.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 04-Jun-2024) https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/94448/Motsatsi_Students_2024.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 07-Feb-2019) https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/60941/DuToit_Educational_2017.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 15-Mar-2023) https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/83078/Beckmann_Transitioning_2021.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 15-Mar-2023) https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/86239/Morowane_Contextually_2022.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 16-Jan-2023) https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/71654/Tauatswala_Educator_2018.pdf?sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 07-Feb-2019) https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/57166/Booyesen_Exploring_2016.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 27-Dec-2024) https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/30572/dissertation_mkhlize_pz.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 22-Nov-2022) https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/27418/dissertation_ngulani_l_g.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 19-Oct-2022) https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/1962/06chapter5.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=14					
< 1% match (Internet from 23-Jan-2024) https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/30198/dissertation_panyapanya_m.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 24-Nov-2022) https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/808/dissertation_vandyk_ec.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 15-Jan-2023) https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/25575/dissertation_singh_f.pdf.txt?sequence=3					
< 1% match (Internet from 22-Nov-2022) https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/27270/thesis_stark_k.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 02-Dec-2022) https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10413/21159/Mhaule_Zanele_2017.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 20-Nov-2024) https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/466f8567-f549-4066-aaf1-b4f4114a99c5/download					
< 1% match (Internet from 16-Dec-2022) https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10413/17762/Magiga_Munyaradzi_2019.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (Internet from 24-Sep-2022) https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10413/20855/Mudhumo_Eustina_2021.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1					
< 1% match (publications) Padma Rani, Bhanu Bhakta Acharya, Kulveen Trehan. "Digital Inequalities in Media Education in South Asia: Consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic". Routledge, 2025					
< 1% match (student papers from 23-Nov-2023) Submitted to Cape Peninsula University of Technology on 2023-11-23					
< 1% match (student papers from 22-May-2024) Submitted to Cape Peninsula University of Technology on 2024-05-22					
< 1% match (student papers from 07-Mar-2022) Submitted to Cape Peninsula University of Technology on 2022-03-07					
< 1% match (Internet from 30-Dec-2024) https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/621476013.pdf					
< 1% match (Internet from 26-Jun-2022) https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/188772984.pdf					
< 1% match (Internet from 15-Jan-2023) https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/151666665.pdf					
< 1% match (Internet from 05-Jan-2023)					

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

8:36



12:05



Appendix 1

PROPOSED INTERVIEW GUIDE

MILITARY TRAINERS AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY ACADEMY

Thank you for showing interest in participation in the interview

The purpose of the interview is to collect in-depth information regarding my research. Your participation will assist to explain to better understand and explore the experience phenomenon. In this interview you will be asked questions about your experiences as trainers in distance education at the SAMA. These questions have no correct answer; answer them with first best impression. You can ask me to clarify the question if you do not understand it. You are free to leave the interview at any time you wish to. The data collected here will be used for the purpose of the study which include answering research questions, publication of conference and journal paper. At the end of the interview, you will be asked to confirm the originality of the data, this will also be repeated after transcription. Do you consent to be interviewed as well as allowing me to audio tape the conversation? All transactions will remain confidential to the public and your consent will be stored. Do you want researchers to use the same data for academic research. Please tick one.

Yes

No

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Sub question 1

What experiences do military trainers consider as important about distance education training environment to sustain distance education?

- 1.1 What are your experiences as a military trainer on distance education?
- 1.2 What type of environment are military trainers working in?
- 1.3 How does the environment sustain distance education?








RESTRICTED

Sub question 2

What are the challenges experienced by military trainers regarding distance education at SAMA?


- 2.1 What issues or challenges do you experienced with distance education in its current form?
- 2.2 How do the issues or challenges affect military trainers' abilities to offer distance education?

APPENDIX E: SAMA- APPLICATION LETTER FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT INTERVIEWS

7:36       

< Preview

RESTRICTED

 **logistics division**
Department:
Defence
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA


DOD SLT/R/103/10

Telephone: 021-787-1443
Facsimile: 021-787-1690
Enquiries: Lt Col H. Jooste

DOD School of Logistics Training
Private Bag X 2
Wynberg
7824
25 September 2023

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW LECTURERS IN THE FACULTY OF MILITARY SCIENCE AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY ACADEMY (SAMA)

1. Discussion with Dr Khoza and me dated 22 September 2023, has reference to the following:
2. I hereby wish to apply for permission to only interview the lecturers at the Faculty of Military Science (FMS).
3. The interview involved semi-structured interviews with the lecturers to obtain information about their experiences in distance education.
4. It is my presumption that the research findings will make a creditable contribution towards identifying different strategies, techniques, and methods of preserving the legacy of the South African Defence Force through education training and development of distant education in online mode, equipping young officers with the necessary skills and knowledge within the SANDF.
5. Your favorable consideration and approval are highly appreciated.


(H. JOOSTE)
ETD WING CMDR DOD SCHOOL OF LOGISTICS TRAINING: LT COL

RESTRICTED






RESTRICTED



DISTR
For Action
Commandant SAMA
For Info

(Attention: Dr M. Khoza)


APPENDIX F: SANDF ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

7:40





RESTRICTED



defence intelligence
Department:
Defence
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA


Telephone: 012 315 0502
Extension: 816 0502
Facsimile: 012 326 3246
Enquiries: Maj A.M. van Vuuren

DI/DDS/R/21

Department
Def Int Div
Private Bag
Pretoria
0001
// Septem

**AUTHORITY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF D
90081803PE LT COL H.J. JOOSTE**

1. Receipt of request letter DOD SLT/R/103/10 dated 08 August 2023 to within the DOD with a Research Proposal attached as per requirement is hereby
2. Security Clearance Status:
 - a. MZ Number: 000409002
 - b. Confidential Clearance Request was Captured on 20180613
3. Permission is hereby granted from a security perspective for 90081803PE LT COL H.J. Jooste to conduct research within the DOD on a topic entitled **"An Exploratory Study of the Experiences in Distance Education at the South African Military Academy of Science"** requirement for the fulfilment of the Masters of Education Degree in the Faculty of Education at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.
4. After completion of the research, the final research product must be submitted to the Defence Intelligence Division (DI), Sub-Division Counter Intelligence (SDCI) for authorization before it may be published or distributed to any entity outside the DOD.
5. Approval is granted on condition that there is strict adherence to inter alia the "Disclosure of Defence Information" and Section 104 of the Defence Act (Act 64 of 1957) pertaining to protection of DOD Classified Information and the consequent compliance.
6. For your attention.



(M.E. PHENDANI)
CHIEF DIRECTOR COUNTER INTELLIGENCE: MAJ GEN

RESTRICTED

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT SAMPLE

Participant 1

0:00:00] Right. Good afternoon Mr. M. I'm Lieutenant Colonel H.J. and the purpose of this visit today is to do an interview, uh, with you with regards to your experiences within the field of distance education at the South African Military Academy, the corporate purpose of the study is to understand the experiences.

and how it affects distance education at the end. Um, it will be good if you can just quickly also introduce yourself, sir. Thank you very much, Colonel. I am M a lecturer at, the Military Academy in the Department of Military History, [00:01:00] It is true, we do have students, first year, second year, third year that is undergraduate.

And then from there, it's uh, normal with other universities then you'll have postgraduate students, but I want to believe your focus is on the undergraduate students. Um, as I said before, um, for me, it's, it's, it's purely about the experiences from the lecturer side. So whether it is undergraduates, whether it is postgraduates, it's irrelevant.

So for me, it's just about the broad spectrum. How does distance education affect you as the lecturer? And how, what is the impact on distance education itself? Because [00:02:00] I, I believe there is, um, issues, challenges, things that might be out of your control. Other lectures, systems, um, the world that is, that is changing, ongoing changes on a daily basis.

So there's sometimes things that we, that we can't control. So my focus today is purely to, to get that information, um, about how do you experience it and how does it affect, obviously the, um, The relationship between you as a lecturer in distance education, what is the impact thereof? Um, so in that regard, I have compiled a few questions.

Um, if we can continue, then I will then just ask you the questions and you can then just, uh, try to answer it. Yes. So, sir, the first question that I have here. Um, or the sub question one, what experiences do military [00:03:00] trainers consider is important about distance education and the training environment to sustain the distance education?

So under that, I do have about five questions and then there's another subsection two that we will also cover and then a subsection three. Um, Subsection 1. 1. How long have you been working as a trainer in the center or elsewhere? I started in 2014.

Um, at the time I taught second year and third year. So I did not have any at third year. But we had a show at second year.[00:04:00]

But, let's start. I would say the idea of distance education. It's a very good idea. Because it affords people an opportunity, those who did not have that opportunity, to go to university full time on account of a number of reasons. One of those would be financial.

Another one would be, um, personal commitment. You are married, you have got a family [00:05:00] that you have to look after, and therefore you cannot just abandon them and go to school. But distance education assists. And, uh,

I Personally, I did not go through distance education except for my postgraduate studies. But, I have a number of people that I now hold in high regard. Remember when I was still at the university, I had a professor who told me that the last time that he was in class, He was doing from three. And then whatever he achieved thereafter from three, it was through distance education.

And that's where I, you know, [00:06:00] began to appreciate distance education. And to say if a person is really committed. There's nothing that can stop them from achieving whatever they want to achieve. So that professor was a motivation to me. And that's why when I came, um, at the military academy, where I found students doing distance education, um, I, Felt it was important to assist them so that they can pass.

Yes. But it takes two people. Hmm. Whether it's a will there's a way. Yes. If the students [00:07:00] are committed. Yes. And they contact you as the lecturer. . There are a number of students that did well, but there are also others that, you know, did not even submit the first or any of the, um, assessments, which they should, which I think, uh, some of them have reasons because when you ask them, they'll tell you that, uh, I was busy at work.

Mm-Hmm, some got deployed. And they could not, uh, uh, complete whatever they were, they were doing. So, but some, I found that they are just using excuses. Yes. Yeah. Um, so if I heard you correctly, 2014, you started, so that's roughly nine years. So during these [00:08:00] nine years, when, when did you start to, to get more involved in distance education itself, or did you, did you, did you become involved from the onset when you, when you, when, when you entered 2014, did you start at that time already with distance education or was it?

Only later on, during this working period. What happens here, the modules that we teach, you'll find residential students and, uh, distance education students. So it depends on the module if you have got students for distance education. Like I indicated when I came, the first module that I taught was third year.

So there was no distance education student third year, but second year there were students. Okay. Thank you very much, sir. Um, the next question, sir, um, [00:09:00] can you briefly describe your, your qualifications to me? I've got, uh, two master's degrees, one in historical studies and the other one is MBA. Two master's degrees.

Okay. Okay. Thank you for that, sir. Um, okay. In terms of, uh, in terms of your experiences, can you also elaborate on your experiences, um, as a, as a trainer in distance education itself? How, I know you, you mentioned some, some stuff now. Um, when you answered the first question, I know there was some stuff that came out, but can you maybe elaborate more on your experiences within the distance environment itself?

Um, as I indicated [00:10:00] That's, how you, sorry, how you experience it. Um, I think later on there will be a Yeah, there will be a question where we will deal with issues and challenges and so forth. So just in broad. Um, I indicated that the concept itself is a very good one because it affords people an opportunity that they did not have.

Um. To continue with their studies while they are working. Yes. So that's, it's my, uh, my view to say it's a very good initiative. But it takes two to tangle. Hmm. The commitment of the student, it's what normally [00:11:00] will drive. the lecture to be of assistance because normally when you are far away you miss out

what is being taught in class then you must be, uh, someone who's committed who's working very hard who has contact with those that are full time. To be able to understand. Also to go with the pace of, uh, fellow students that are doing full time. Yes. So, as a lecturer my experience is, uh, I've had students who have done well because they were committed.

But I also had [00:12:00] A big chunk, I would say particularly at first year level who register but don't complete, not even a similar assessment and therefore they don't qualify to sit for the examination.

Um,

I heard that you say that some of the students, specifically in the first year. That are not maybe doing well. Um, can you maybe just elaborate a bit more on that, what might be the reason for that? Um, some will say I was on deployment, therefore I cannot, or I'm on deployment, I cannot [00:13:00] complete my tasks.

And some would say I was busy at work.

Uh, and some would not even bother to give reasons why they could not, uh, complete. When I arrived here, I found it, uh, it was, you know, a norm. But first year students. We would have 30 registering for ITE, but out of the 30, only 5 would qualify to sit for the final examination because they are the only ones that would have submitted.

And completed all the tasks[00:14:00]

and it therefore makes it difficult for you as a lecturer

to say, but if I had 30 students, ITE students, uh, that is the language that we are using. ITE. ITE. ITE. Yeah. So, but recently, we have removed the, I, the, we are left with TE, telematics education, but it is the same, um, as a distance education. Okay. Yes. So, uh, it, it becomes a challenge when they don't complete, because

When you registered and made a submission, you said, I have 70 students. Yes. Presidential and part [00:15:00] time students. But at the end of the day, only five qualify to sit for the examination. And out of that five, maybe two, uh, pass. Yes. So, and the very same students the following year will come, the third year they will come, the fourth year they will come, um, somehow, I, I once heard that, uh, some of the students will do that because they are receiving S&T.

Yes. So they are benefiting, but, uh, they don't deliver. So if ever they are coming here. Uh, in January and in, in, in July, because we have got contact sessions twice a year. So, yeah, but, uh, I cannot confirm the correctness of, uh, such allegations. But [00:16:00] definitely the beginning of the year you'll have a big number of students that are registering.

Um, I, I can perhaps just give. An example just to show you here, like I indicated. In 2017, we had 26 ITE students for the first year. So you can see, from these 26, not even a single one of them passed. Because, they succeeded to submit this assessment. And you can see, uh, those blank spaces. They did not submit, others submitted.

But at the end of the day, they did not qualify this DNQ. Yeah. They did not qualify. Wow. So this is 2017, 26 [00:17:00] students. 2017, um, we also had 11 students. Um. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 did not qualify to sit, meaning they did not complete, uh, the tasks. As you can see, they did not submit their assignments. Yes, yes. You see. So, and, uh, we had, uh, two that qualified for the second exam, which is supplementary in another.

So for that year, we only had one student passing. It's difficult. It's not easy to deal with. It's not. It's not. In 2018, we had 35 students. And out of the 35 students, only one qualified for re-evaluation. [00:18:00] From 35. And these, um, that doesn't qualify this past couple of years. It's purely on their side. It's because of what you just showed me now.

The papers that wasn't, uh, submitted. All of these excuses and stuff. Yes. Yeah. So that's why I said Some Yeah. would say, alright, I was on deployment. Yes. not Submit, yeah. and others would say, I was busy Yes. and I forgot. But that would be a Sure. a small number that would Yeah. you know Yeah. be able to give those reasons.

Yes. The large majority would not even bother to give a reason why. They did not. And that also becomes an experience because the first year you experience this, the second year you experience this, the third year you experience that. Okay. You see. That's why I decided to [00:19:00] have this kind of information.

Okay. So that you can satisfy yourself. Wow. You see. So it gives, uh, an experience to say ITE. Yeah. First year. Every year it's a different story. It's a different story. Yes. But we don't move, uh, forward. Yeah. Because the output, it's far less. Yes. But it becomes different when you go to third year. Yes, yes, yes.

So with third year, because they can see, Um, we are at third year, they are serious, so we do have got a number of those that pass. But we also have got another group of students, who are residential here, and they don't perform well, and they are returned to the unit, so they continue as ITE. [00:20:00] So they move, they cross the floor from residential to ITE.

Yeah, so, um, the success rate,

it was better in the past, but of late, We don't understand why it's like that. But there was also a time where we had a very good student who got 92%. Third year. Wow. 92%. So you can see when you come back and the other one would say, no, this one was a captain. They say, no, it's a captain. It does not have too much work to understand.

So I'm not in the unit. I don't know what this person is doing. The responsibilities that they have. Yeah. You see, but [00:21:00] the commitment. So the experience here will be now for three years. You have seen this happening, then the conclusion becomes, um, first year there are challenges. Yes. They come here in big numbers, but only five of them are going to qualify to sit for the examination, and at the end only one is going to pass.

Yeah. Thank you very much for that sir. Yeah, it's so informative. But I can assume it's, it's, it's, it's very, it must be very frustrated for you guys. Yeah. Seeing such a big group, uh, reporting for their studies and then, uh, 90 percent of 70 percent drops out along the way. Yeah, it must, yeah, I can just imagine.

Because we invest that time. Yes, correct. Okay. Um, what, [00:22:00] what type of environment do you work as a military trainer here? What type of environment is this just to, for me to just note it down? Um, the group before COVID, it depended on, the lecturer, the environment, we have access to the internet. The group before COVID, yes, but even during COVID,

we were full-time. Those that are residential, we were teaching, but uh, we never had a break. So I would say COVID never affected us. But in a way, it prompted, [00:23:00] um, the integrated system to say we need to also incorporate the use of, uh, technology to access particularly the ITE because

After COVID, then it was decided that, um, we should have sessions with the distance education students.

So previously, it depended on the lecturer because they would only come in January for a week. Then that's when they will have contact session. So it depended on the student if they contacted you or not.

Okay, so in, [00:24:00] in, um, then, just tell me how, how does this environment sustain distance education? Like I say, um, post COVID, they are receiving support. Before COVID, they only support, that's how it was structured, that they only come here in January for contact sessions. So, in between, there will be no contact with the student.

Except if the student himself sends an email or make a call to say, can you assist me here? But after COVID. Now the situation has improved to assist the students by, uh, having sessions with them.

Okay, now thank you for that, [00:25:00] sir. Now we'll go over to subsection, sub-question two. Uh, we're going to look more into the challenges. Um. Experienced by, by, by you guys as trainers. Can you briefly describe, um, the issues or challenges you, that you experience within the, with distance education in its current form?

I know you touched here and there on already on, on issues and challenges. Maybe I can just elaborate a bit more as the, as distance education is now in its current form.

Uh, currently, as I indicated, that there is support to students through Teams, um, the beginning of the year, [00:26:00] those that are able to come, you go and meet them, uh, face to face. Those that are not able to come, you are able to contact them virtually. So that link you retain for the whole year, and that's where you are going to be meeting them.

You can disagree if you are meeting them on Wednesdays afternoon.

But the challenge, again, uh, I wouldn't mention the issue of SCOM on our site because we've got a generator. So we have got support to give support to the students. The challenge will come from the student side because they will complain that we had load shedding. That's why I was unable to be online.

So then, meaning you have to [00:27:00] reschedule.

So, um, personally, like I indicated that from the time I was at the university. I began to realise the significance of distance education. And that's why I'm willing to support it today. But the challenge is that, is the other hand really willing to participate? Okay. Um, Listening to you sir, um, Came out, um, once again that, uh, the challenge is more on the side of, of, of the learner.

Um, can we then assume that on the side of the lecture, there's no real challenges when it comes to distance education? If I can maybe just, uh, elaborate more [00:28:00] on that part. Um, looking at facilities, looking at your structures, looking at your technology, et cetera, et cetera. Um, you said there's no problem with, with, with COVID.

Do you, do you guys, do you guys work around COVID? And you're still at face to face contact with the learners? Um, yeah. So, if there's maybe anything on that side? We don't have a challenge, like I say. Um, both the investor and the DOD, they are supporting the computers are coming from Stirling Bosch. Yes.

And, uh, the generator, I think is coming from the DOD. Okay. So the internet, computers, everything is Stirling Bosch. Okay. So we've got support from two institutions. We are more advantaged, I would say. Yes. Because we've got two fathers. Yes, yes. That are looking after you. Okay. Yeah. [00:29:00] Okay. Okay. No, thank you very much, sir.

Um, those challenges that you, that you did mention, sir, um, question two, two, how, how does it affect your abilities? I know, uh, most part came from all the, the learner themselves are responsible for that. What is the impact on you as an, as a lecturer? Uh, it has a negative impact, because you prepare, yes. too say, I'm meeting my students, and, uh, this is what I think it's important for them to take home from this lesson of today.

Yes. And there is no student. Mm-Hmm. virtual. Okay. Then you wait for 30 minutes. Mm-Hmm. No one pitches up. Yes. Or only one pitches up [00:30:00] and knowing very well that you were prepared. You wanted to assist them so that they can pass the exams. Yes. And they don't pitch up only one pitches up. Yes. So, you know, this is going to be your output at the end of the day.

Yeah. Only one student is going to make it. Okay. For students that did not attend. They are likely not to make it. Yes. Because for the fact that they are not in class. Yeah. They are missing out. Yes.

Okay. So it affects you, uh, negatively. Yes. Because you have prepared. Yes. You become a bit demoralised. Hmm. Next week, I have to meet them. Will they come? Hmm. You're already negative now towards. You see. Yeah. And it builds up. Will it turn out the same here? Yes. Until the time where if they don't encourage you [00:31:00] by caring, you become negative to say but, uh, what's the use?

Yeah. Okay. Um, how long have you been experiencing this, uh, this, this challenge? Since, uh, 2014 when I arrived. Since 2014. Although at the time we did not have, uh, these virtual meetings. But for the fact that we have, uh, received confirmation that we have got 30 ITE students. You send out assignments, and only 10 complete the assignments.

You send out a test, and only 5. So you are looking forward to that in June, I'm going to be submitting 70 students [00:32:00] and it doesn't happen. Only five from ITE and the rest are coming from residential students because this is also affecting, uh, your plans for postgraduate. We are. A unique institution. We need students for honors.

If first year does not perform, you won't have second year. If second year do not perform your art, you won't have third year. If third year do not perform, you won't have honors. Hmm. So at the end of the day, one thing leads to another thing. It affects the life of this institution itself. Yes.

Um, so this, [00:33:00] okay, this negative situation concerning what you just, um, explained now to me, um, was this reported somewhere? Well, we, we reported to the ITE. We have got an I. T. office. An I. T. office? Yes. Okay. That handles, you know, the affairs of I. T. students. So they are aware of that. Because they are the ones who,

who will give us the number, the statistics to say for military history 114. That is first semester. Yes. You have got so many students. Yes. They are the ones that, uh, we submit our case and papers to. [00:34:00] So, they give us envelopes, school of law, and all the centers, learning centers. And they also know when they return to say, uh, no one pitched up to sit for, for that.

So they, they are the office that we, we report to. Um, so they, they do address these issues and come back to you guys as lecturers. Um, not as far as I know. We do report. Yes. But, uh, there are others that they try to assist. Okay. For example, they had a challenge of, uh, a sure centers. So they go out to make them because you'll find that a student travels over 100 [00:35:00] kilometers to go to the next center.

Yes. To write their exam. So they tried to negotiate and open up centers. We have got more centers than we had in 2014 now. But the issue of commitment, it's another thing. Which I don't think they, uh, they have the, the capacity or ability to do that. Because if a student says Uh, I had too much work. What can you do?

What can you do? And you cannot go to the OC and, uh, And you're not, say, what's the, what's the student himself, so. So it's the student who must make arrangements Yes. With their OC. Yes. To say, I've got online session. Two o'clock on Wednesdays. We cannot describe. Um,[00:36:00]

So, so according, yeah, with regards to this, with regards to these challenges, it's mostly caused by the learners themselves. Um, you as the lecturer, you guys, can you engage the learner in that regard and Yeah, engage the learner to, you know, to, to find out what the problem is. And, um, I know you mentioned, uh, some reasons before where they just said, for example, uh, we don't have time, we deploy.

Um, I couldn't make it, whatever the reason may, may be. You guys from, from the lecturer side, you guys do, do engage the learners and, and, and, um, Yeah, engage them and ask them concerning these challenges. [00:37:00] For example, was it September? Yeah, because we are sharing the money, I, over in September. And then it's, I had one student for 344.

Uh, I, had an arrangement with him that we are having our sessions on Wednesdays in this particular time. And he attended to the third one he did not attend, which was very much important to me because it was just a week before exam, a week before test. So, I had to I was in the office waiting for him. He did not appear on team.

So I sent him an [00:38:00] email to say, Uh, I'm leaving the office. We will now move away from team to Zoom. So I kept on sending an email to him. Until he responded. And I had to, uh, conduct the lesson from home. Yes. Because I, I'm the one who was pushing. Yes. Thank you very much. So, because I realised that, uh, he managed first 314.

Mm. He slept with 344 for him to, to graduate. Mm. So, but it's not every time where you, you'll have that kind of patience. Yes. Because I went home, I had something to do at home. Yes. That's why I had to leave. Yes. But, uh, I still managed to accommodate him. So, you can [00:39:00] just imagine if there were 20 students, would I have had an opportunity to, because I even called him at some point.

I called him, sent him a WhatsApp. You see, so if there are 20 students, how do you do that? So you basically, when the extra mile go out of your way to, to accommodate the student. Definitely. And, uh, yeah, that's the results you, you got at the end of the day. Okay. Thank you for that sir. Uh, the last, uh, sub question.

Um, how do military trainers perceive the impact of challenges regarding distance education at the summer? Number one, there is how does these challenges, okay, we actually now already covered that part. How does this challenge regarding distance education impact you as a trainer? So you already, you already explained that to me.

Thank you for that. Yeah. To say if the students are positive, yes. You become positive [00:40:00] because you prepare. Correct. You, you don't just, uh, go there because for the sake of going, you, you, you want them to benefit. Yes. Just like you, teachers, students. Yes. So if they're not reciprocating Yes. And this, it's a trend, surely it's affecting you.

Question number 32 then, how does the challenges in distance education impact on your performance as a, as a lecturer here, or a military trainer? Does it have any impact on you as a military trainer here? , uh, it, it, it gives a different perspective. Mm-Hmm. to I or to distance education. Mm-Hmm. And not to your residential students because you know you are here.

Yes. You've got residential students. Yes. But when it comes to [00:41:00] this aspect of, uh, reside rather distance education, say, oh, is that group alright? Let me go. I'll see who's online. Because I also even encourage them to say. If maybe you find it difficult to reach me, here are the residential students email addresses.

Please contact them. Check with them. What have you done this week? So that you can be on the same page as them. And this is what they should be doing themselves. But I'm trying to go that extra mile to say, if maybe you find it difficult to communicate with me, Maybe, because this one you are on the same level, you can be able to.

So it does have an impact on your performance as a trainer. Um, your trainers doesn't perform. Uh, I'm just trying to get to something. What I'm saying is How [00:42:00] does it reflect you as a trainer? Uh, what it does I am here knowing that. The first preference in terms of the arrangement is the residential students because you have to see them every day.

It changes your perception on, uh, ITE, the distance education. To say you might become a bit negative when it comes to these kind of students. And, but for these ones, because you know they are always there. You know, I'll find them in class, but this one, um, when you have to meet them to say, all right, we've got an appointment for two o'clock on Wednesday, uh, you are not so encouraged because you don't know if everybody's going to be there, you understand?

So that's how it impacts you. , you [00:43:00] see, will you see, uh, distance education? So it's more a demoralised thing. Yeah. When it comes to its performance itself, yes. Okay. Yeah. But for your residential experience, because yes. You don't have a problem with that. Something different. Okay. Thank you sir. And I, I, I, may I, if I may ask.

Yes. I also had a few students, different years who were at sas. And normally this will be those students that were full-time here. And, uh, they could not complete, then they get attached to SAS here in Delhi students. I even encourage them that when it's time for my lesson, this is the timetable. Do attend.

Yes, correct. I had one student, uh, attached to Langebaanweg.

To say it's not very far. Mm-Hmm. [00:44:00] you can come and attend my classes. They don't. Mm-Hmm.

I, I, I cannot write letters to their OCS and say, can you, I, I cannot do that. Yeah. I, I, yeah. Invited them to say, you are free. Yes. To come and attend my class. This is the challenge. Okay, thank you, sir. The last one, sir. Um, How do you overcome these challenges as a military training regarding distance education?

How do you overcome this? I can, I could hear that there's some frustrations, especially with first years and, yeah, all the commitment from the guys and so forth. So how do you overcome these challenges? Yeah, I think I also tried to say normally I would try to get their email addresses. Yes. They are San Juan and the GBA ones.

Yes. So that I [00:45:00] can contact them because at times when you contact them with the university One, they will say, no, I don't have this. I cannot access it. But with Gmail, they can access it all the time. So that's what I try to do to say, all right, I send them emails. If I've got their number, I'll send them a WhatsApp.

I'm going online in five minutes. Yes. Are you there? I'm online. Where are you? Yes. So, this is what I'm trying to do to try to overcome it, because I know, uh, for them to register, it means they want to achieve something. Like I indicated to say, my professor at the university said, the last class that he was in full time was for three.

So I know it can still make a change to these [00:46:00] students. So that's why I, I try my best, but my best can, you know, go a certain distance. Yeah, so, so that's how I'm trying to overcome it. And also to, to remain positive. To say, uh, the next group of students might not be the same as this group. Okay. And I continue to see it as my responsibility to be of assistance to them.

Yes. But I can only go to a certain distance. Thank you very much, sir. Um, I think that's, that actually concludes the whole interview. I just want to, to ask you, um, yeah, just add on. Do you have anything to say that you maybe can contribute to the study? Uh, it's only that you are only looking at [00:47:00] the,

the lecturing stuff. Yes. It would have assisted you a lot because some of those, uh, the answers to those,

you have interviewed me as to how I overcome. You know, these challenges. I would experience you. I might give you a glowing picture to say this is what I'm trying to do. Yes. But what about the students themselves? To say the very same aspect. Yes, yes, yes. How do, what kind of assistance are you receiving from your lecturers?

Yes. Understood. And definitely you'll have, you might get a different answer because they do have their own experiences as well. Why don't you complete, why don't you complete the tasks, the activities? Yeah. very [00:48:00] much. Because it's contributing to this big, huge problem that we are sitting with. Yes. I showed you the numbers.

So I've compiled, uh, uh, the, the. Performance, first year, second year and third year. Third year there are few. There was a year where we had five. Two of them passed. And also, uh, in terms of rank, you'll find that those that are lieutenant colonels and commanders, they pass.

Those of junior rank, they don't do that well, you see. I think that's where perhaps you could also interrogate. Yes. Is it because these ones are more responsible, are more matured? You understand, [00:49:00] they value their time in education. So, I think some of the, uh, the questions that you have, the students could also be of assistance. Thank you very much, sir. I really appreciate your time, your effort, your, all your valuable inputs. It's, it's, it's It's, um, how can I put it, um, it's much appreciated, sir. I could see and hear that you understand the environment. And you are here now with all your experience, you are here for a couple of years and, and how it affects you and also what you contributed and possible solutions that you came up with and how [00:50:00] you also assist the learners and so forth and so forth.

So, so thank you. Thank you very much for that sir. Um.

I think Causa, the one who, that you contracted, she's now responsible for that office. For? Distance education. Distance education. Yes, it is. She's the coordinator. We did, we did spoke to her. Yes. So when you ask a question as to the kind of support, uh, that way the, the can be of assist, she can be of assistance.

Some of those questions to say if there are challenges, how are they addressing those challenges? Yes. Yeah. Thank you very much, sir. Is this the one that I have to sign? It's that one and this one. That's, that's actually now concluding the interview then.

[00:51:00]

APPENDIX H: EDITING CERTIFICATE

	Styles	
	<p>NERESHNEE GOVENDER C</p> <p>REGISTRAR DR NERESHNEE neresh</p> <p>WRITING PRACTITIONER</p> <p>PhD-Management Sciences: Marketing (gender and media); PG Certificate in Public Relations; B-Tech Public Relations (<i>Cum laude</i>)</p>	
	<p>HENDRIK JACOBUS JOOSTE 221553886 CPUT Supervisor/s: Dr Martin Combrinck Co-supervisor: Dr Moses Moyo</p>	
	<p>RE: EDITING</p>	
	<p>FOCUS AREA: AN EXPLORATION OF THE EFFECTS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AT THE SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION</p>	
	<p>Research proposal submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a B-Tech Public Relations</p>	