DESCRIBING THE EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION COURSES CROSS-CULTURALLY USING E-LEARNING METHODS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study will be to describe how selected Western theological educators have experienced the process of teaching theological education courses cross-culturally using e-learning methods. The essential phenomenon will be explored through the central research question: How do Western ministry educators experience cross-cultural theological education using e-learning formats? The theoretical framework guiding this study will be Knowles’ Adult Learning Theory, with Hofstede’s Dimensions of Culture informing the cross-cultural elements. Participants will be selected from a population of educators within Nicene Christianity with theological bachelor’s degrees and above from accredited Western educational institutions. The methods of data collection will include open-ended, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and visual representations of the essential experience. Data transcripts will be coded using the constant-comparative method and verified for accuracy.

Keywords: cross-cultural education, online education, theological e-learning, theological education, e-learning, m-learning, Christian higher education
Dedication

I lovingly dedicate this research to my wife, Melinda, who encouraged, supported, and suffered long in this endeavor. I further dedicate this work to my parents, Quentin and Norma Bogart, who made a substantial investment into this phase of my education, and who also provided valued counsel and advice. In this dedication, I cannot forget the devotion of those who have worked to provide quality theological education and ministry training across daunting cultural barriers, especially where Christian leaders are in short supply.
Acknowledgments

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Bible Education by Extension (BEE)
Institutional review board (IRB)
Learning management system (LMS)
Mobile cloud computing (MCC)
Personal digital assistant (PDA)
Research question (RQ)
Theological Education by Extension (TEE)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this study is to describe the essential experience of teaching theological education courses cross-culturally using various forms of e-learning technology. At the turn of the 21st century, Guthrie (2000) warned of a continuing leadership crisis for Christianity in the developing world. He attributed this leadership shortage to decades-long missions efforts that were narrowly focused on evangelism rather than on the larger mission of planting ongoing church organizations, as well as to the slowness of theological institutions and mission organizations in establishing training opportunities in these regions. While there are significant ongoing efforts by Christian institutions from Europe, North America, and other developed world regions to provide theological education in developing world regions, the need for basic ministry training continues to lag behind the spread of Christianity in many places (Beaty, 2014; Esterline, Werner, Johnson, & Crossing, 2013). Because of this gap in available theological training, the Christian Church faces the significant challenge of adequately resourcing the new churches and believers in world regions where the gospel is spreading rapidly. Cross-cultural theological education via e-learning formats is one option in providing additional educational training and resources. A better understanding of this phenomenon will fill the gap in the research and may provide insights as to how to improve and expand this method of training.

According to Beaty (2014), the relative scarcity of trained Christian leaders may be due to a lack of options for theological education, or because the options that are available are difficult to access due to location, cost, and other factors. Additionally, the rapid growth of Christianity at the turn of the 21st century has sometimes contributed to the widening gap between the formation of new churches and the availability of theological education in these
regions (Maddix, Estep & Lowe, 2012; Mandryk, 2010).

An important component in meeting this need will be training that can span cultural differences between theological educators from developed world regions and students from less-developed regions. Corrie (2015), Das (2016), Fluegge (2010), Naidoo (2016) and others have made the case that effective theological education must be delivered in ways that make sense in the culture of the learners, rather than requiring students to assume the cultural perspectives of the teacher. Because of this dynamic, meeting the need for increased theological and ministry training where the Christian Church is expanding will require a design that accurately transmits biblical teaching and ministry skills across cultural perspectives.

Another component in meeting the need to train leaders for those segments of the developing world where the Christian Church is growing is to increase the availability and accessibility of training through e-learning approaches. For those engaged in cross-cultural theological education via e-learning methods, an essential understanding of the phenomenon is vital. Therefore, the basic aim of this study is to attain a clear understanding of the experience of teaching theological education courses cross-culturally via e-learning methods (Moustakas, 1994). Along with achieving an essential understanding of the phenomenon, the analysis of the experiences of the participants may lead to a clearer working knowledge of how cross-cultural theological education courses can be delivered more effectively via e-learning methodologies. This chapter will follow the guidelines provided in Creswell (2013) by introducing the study, providing some preliminary background for the topic, defining the specific problem to be studied, and giving the central purpose and significance of the research. Along with these goals, I will situate myself in relation to the research, list the research questions, and provide definitions for some key terms.
Background

The Growth of E-learning

As Christianity has continued to spread rapidly in various developing world regions at the turn of the 21st century, there has been an accompanying revolution in educational technology. Allen and Seaman (2014) reported that the number of higher education students in the U.S. who took at least one online course increased from 1.6 million in the fall of 2002 to 7.1 million in the fall of 2012, for an annual compound growth rate of 16.1%. By way of comparison, the growth rate of higher education students in the U.S. overall only increased at a rate of 2.5% during the same period.

Figure 1. Growth of Online Education Students in the U.S. (2002-2012)
Along with the growth of e-learning in Western nations, the use of the Internet grew in developing world regions (Poushter, 2015). Saudi Arabia is a prime example of this trend. Due to the initial reluctance of the government to allow the Internet’s global culture to influence the Saudi population, Saudi Arabia was a latecomer to widespread Internet access. When the Saudi government permitted public access in 1999, only about 100,000 people (.003% of the population) were regular Internet users. By 2013, there were 16.5 million (55%) regular Internet users in the country (Alshahrani, 2016). The People’s Republic of China provides another example of rapid growth of Internet access. When the Chinese government opened access to the Internet in 1997, the number of users in that nation grew from 2% of the population in that year to 45.8% by 2013 (World Bank, 2014). Also according to World Bank, a number of other countries and regions also experienced rapid Internet expansion by 2013, such as Albania (56%), the Philippines (37%), Turkey (46%), Vietnam (44%), with Latin America and the Caribbean at around 46% overall, and Sub-Saharan Africa approaching 17% of the population as regular Internet users.
Social Background

The rapid growth of Christianity in various world regions during the late 20th and early 21st centuries has contributed to an acute need for theological and ministry training in various regions of the developing world (Beaty, 2014; Cartwright, 2014; Curtis, 2012; Esterline, et al., 2013; Kim, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2015). The essence of the problem is that while Christianity is currently experiencing dramatic growth in the developing regions of the world, basic theological education options to equip Christian leaders in these regions are not keeping pace with the growth. More specifically, the expansion of Christianity in some regions has resulted in new churches being formed without leadership that is grounded in the Bible or fully competent in ministry skills (Curtis, 2012; Maddix, et al., 2012). In their foundational work on the topic, Maddix et al. (2012) underscored the urgency of the situation facing Christian institutions of higher education to provide theological education for leaders in developing regions. Esterline et al. (2013) agreed, describing theological education as of the highest importance for the advancement of Christianity on a global scale. In their study, *Global Survey on Theological Education, 2011-2013: Summary of Main Findings*, Esterline, et al., reported that while Roman Catholic and Mainline Protestant enrollments remained relatively static, theological education among Evangelical and Pentecostal/Charismatic groups is currently on the rise, with female students experiencing the fastest enrollment increases.

In view of the significant growth of Christianity in various developing world regions, it is imperative that increased opportunities for theological education be provided in order to consolidate gains and maintain growth. While most e-learning formats have distinct limitations in terms of class sizes that are compatible with in-depth Christian leadership training (Illinois Online Network, 2015), e-learning can nevertheless add options in terms of increasing the
number of potential instructors and adding access options for students. While online education in any form is often less accessible than traditional forms of education in developing world regions (Beaty, 2014; Sergeeva, 2016), e-learning does have the potential to meet the educational demand in these regions due to the increasing availability of computer technology and growing access to the Internet via smartphones (Gronlund & Islam, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2015; Poushter, 2015; Smith, 2013; Yousuf, 2007).

At this point, it is important to clarify some basic terms. E-learning is used to describe planned instructional activity that makes use of electronic technology to deliver at least some elements of educational content (Hewagamage, Wickramasinghe, & Jayatilaka, 2012; Online Learning Consortium, 2015). Allen and Seaman (2013) defined online learning as an educational program in which students complete more than 75% of their coursework via the Internet. M-learning is used to denote an extension of e-learning that makes possible learning by employing handheld computing devices, such as tablets and smartphones (Haag, 2011; Kosturko, Sabourin, McQuiggan, & McQuiggan, 2015; Lewin, 2016). For the purposes of this study, we can envision the three terms as three concentric circles. E-learning is the largest circle in that it encompasses the widest range of learning possibilities, including Internet-based learning as well classroom-based learning that makes use of electronic devices, tools, and media. Online learning occupies a smaller circle inside e-learning, since its focus is on learning via the Internet, primarily through the use of computers. M-learning is the smallest of the three circles because it focuses on learning via mobile devices.
This growing availability of online access and mobile devices in the developing world presents possibilities for providing theological training through an expansion of online courses in e-learning formats and mobile learning approaches (Delamarter, Gravett, Ulrich, Nysse, & Polaski, 2011; Kim, 2015; Oliver, 2014). According to Beaty (2014), the lack of available theological education should prompt Christian leaders in North America, Europe, and other developed regions of the world to set a high priority on providing more accessible education programs to increase the effectiveness of the Church where Christianity is expanding.

**Theoretical Background**

In the past, some theological educators have expressed the point of view that the very nature of distance forms of education excludes them as viable options for training the kind of leaders needed to stabilize new communities of believers and maintain numerical growth (Esterline, et al., 2013; House, 2010; Kelsey, 2002; Le Cornu, 2001). For example, Delamarter (2005) found that many theological educators in the first decade of the 21st century expressed reluctance to employ online educational approaches for several reasons. First, according to
Delamarter, some theological educators had personal and practical obstacles to teaching online due to lack of personal training in the use of this medium or because of poor institutional infrastructure to support online education. He pointed to other educators who doubted the overall integrity of online course design and whether students could resist the temptation to misuse the online format. Delamarter went on to discuss further objections related to a perceived fundamental incompatibility of online education with certain basic aims of theological education such as spiritual formation and participation in community.

These criticisms by some theological educators can be seen as a part of the larger discussion about whether the quality of online course formats in general can compare with traditional educational formats. Since the advent of significant online educational programs in the 1990s, educational practitioners have debated whether e-learning course formats offer equivalent outcomes to traditional, face-to-face courses. Allen and Seaman (2014) found that until relatively recently, there had been a widespread perception on the part of chief academic officers within higher education that online courses tended to be inferior to face-to-face courses. The report showed that in 2003, nearly 43% of the chief academic officers surveyed believed online courses to be generally inferior to face-to-face courses, with that perception holding relatively steady through 2011. Simonson, Schlosser and Orellana (2011) reported that educators who questioned the feasibility of e-learning did so for a variety of reasons, including the scarcity of resources, lack of clear institutional vision for e-learning programs, faculty and staff inexperience with technology in general, and the potential for competition between e-learning formats and existing, face-to-face courses.

However, by 2012, the percentage of chief academic officers who believed online courses to be inferior dropped dramatically from 43% to 23%. Put another way, the report by Allen and
Seaman demonstrated that by the second decade of the 21st century, nearly 80% of the chief academic officers in U.S. higher education surveyed believed that online courses had achieved parity with or even superiority to traditional face-to-face courses. Naidoo (2012) reported similar perception changes among theological educators during the same period and argued that online and mobile-learning formats can be designed to adequately convey biblical content and promote the spiritual transformation and community aspects deemed essential to theological education.

Given the current need for theological education in developing world regions and the potential for e-learning to meet a portion of that need, it is important to examine the dynamics of teaching theological education courses cross-culturally in ways that make use of a variety of e-learning technologies (Kim, 2015; Mandryk, 2010). Several elements should be included in such a study. The first of these elements should examine how various forms of e-learning technology are being used effectively, especially in developing world regions (Blair & Stafford, 2016; Smith, 2013). A second element should include current research into best practices of theological education. For instance, determining the essential components and best practices of theological education and how they can be effectively integrated into course design should be identified for this discipline (Cartwright, 2014; Maddix, et al., 2012; Raybon, 2012). A third element should be a clear understanding of the dynamics of teaching across cultures. For example, research has shown that teaching across cultures not only requires specialized approaches and techniques, but that this form of teaching actually constitutes a different experience than does teaching within one’s own culture (Hofstede, 1986; Ikpeze, 2015).
Situation to Self

Since 2003, I have been involved in providing theological education to Christian leaders as a team member on more than 30 short-term mission projects to developing world regions such as Haiti, Mexico, South Africa, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In these ventures, I have gained a wealth of cross-cultural teaching experience in traditional classroom settings. During this same period, I was (and continue to be) an online teacher and subject matter expert at the higher education level within the U.S. My first-hand experience of the difficulties related to traveling in developing countries and teaching cross-culturally, combined with an understanding of the potential of e-learning technologies to expand training options, have instilled in me a deep interest in this topic and its potential for reducing the theological education gap in developing world regions (Baran, 2014).

Because of this background, the philosophical assumption leading me to pursue this topic is primarily methodological. After more than a decade of traveling regularly to various parts of the developing world, my perception is that even though there are many qualified educators training leaders in these regions, there are still not enough training options that are accessible and culturally relevant to meet the demand for well-prepared Christian leaders. I am approaching this study from an Evangelical Christian perspective, grounded in a biblical worldview. As with some other Christian leaders who, like me, received a secular undergraduate education, my perspective also includes a smattering of post-positivism (Hacking, 1983; Kuhn, 2012). In addition, my years of teaching philosophy, world religion, ethics, and Western civilization in secular institutions have given me an understanding and appreciation of some concepts of postmodern thinking. For instance, I have come to believe that some of what Jesus taught is not far from the postmodern contention that individuals perceive and interpret reality differently.
This similarity is borne out in Jesus’ admonition: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8; etc.). Such philosophical perspectives seem to fit well within a transcendental phenomenological approach.

Because the aim of this study is to describe the essential experience of teaching theological education courses to Christian leaders cross-culturally utilizing e-learning methods, I have chosen a qualitative approach to conducting research (Creswell, 2013). According to Moustakas (1994), describing the essence of an experience requires first describing the personal experiences of participants from their own perspectives, while bracketing the researcher’s own biases and preconceived notions. Therefore, to accomplish a qualitative study that has integrity, I attempted to bracket my own experiences and employ a social constructivist interpretive framework that aims to faithfully represent the views and experience of participants as much as possible (Moustakas).

**Problem Statement**

The research problem is rooted in the fact that Christianity is currently experiencing dramatic growth in various developing regions of the world, while simultaneously, basic theological education options to equip Christian leaders in these regions are not keeping pace with the growth (Cartwright, 2014; Kim, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2015). Although research exists into various aspects of cross-cultural theological education, few studies attempt to understand the experiences of teachers who are involved in providing theological education to Christian leaders cross-culturally using e-learning formats (Beaty, 2014; Delamarter, Gravett, Ulrich, Nysse, & Polaski, 2011; Wiseman, 2015). In addition to describing the experiences of teachers who are involved in providing theological education to Christian leaders cross-culturally using e-learning formats, it was important to consider the dynamics of theological distance.
education in general, as well as the particular concerns of cross-cultural communication and research-based andragogy (Maddix et al., 2012).

For example, general educational studies that focus on the challenges of teaching cross-culturally inform elements of the topic at hand (Serradell-Lopez, Lara-Navarra, & Casado-Lumbreras, 2012; Trullen, Bonache, & Sanchez, 2012). Other studies on the effectiveness and best practices of online education have provided important information in understanding this phenomenon (Al-Adwan, Al-Adwan, & Smedley, 2013; Park, Nam, & Cha, 2012; Tagoe & Abakah, 2014). Similarly, research into the best practices of theological education, usually based within a Western cultural context, also proved helpful in understanding the experiences of teachers who are involved in teaching theological education courses across cultures (Cartwright, 2014; Maddix, et al., 2012; Raybon, 2012). However, in spite of the insights provided by these types of studies, little research exists that gives voice to the teachers who are specifically engaged in training Christian leaders cross-culturally using e-learning formats (Beaty, 2014).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore how selected Western theological educators describe the experience of teaching theological education courses cross-culturally using e-learning formats. The term e-learning describes instructional activity that makes use of technology to deliver at least some elements of educational content (Hewagamage, Wickramasinghe, & Jayatilaka, 2012; Online Learning Consortium, 2015). Online learning focuses on learning via the Internet, primarily through the use of computers (Allen and Seaman, 2013). M-learning is an extension of e-learning that makes possible learning via handheld computing devices (Haag, 2011; Kosturko, Sabourin, McQuiggan, & McQuiggan, 2015; Lewin, 2016).
For the purposes of this study, the experience of cross-cultural theological e-learning was limited to teachers who are part of the Nicene Christian tradition and who held accredited master’s degrees and higher from Western educational institutions. The study was further limited to teachers who completed a minimum of two terms teaching basic doctrinal and/or practical ministry content to students from another culture via e-learning formats. The term Western is used in the study to denote those areas of the world such as North America, Europe, and other developed regions that share a direct link to Western European Civilization (Cole & Symes, 2014; Spielvogel, 2012).

Within the broad description of Christian leadership given in Blackaby and Blackaby (2011), I used the term Christian leader to describe men and women who either hold or aspire to the position of pastor, teacher, evangelist, or some other recognized position of church leadership, or who hold or aspire to leadership within some other type of official Christian entity. I defined e-learning as the delivery of distance learning content via various forms of information and communications technology and accessed on computers, tablets, smart phones, Skype™, or through a blended classroom approach (Joint Information Systems Committee, 2015). Since theological e-learning aimed at training adult Christian leaders is the focus of the study, I employed Adult Learning Theory as the theoretical guide for the research (Knowles, 2005).

**Significance of the Study**

This study endeavored to fill a portion of the research gap that lies at the intersection of theological education, e-learning, and cross-cultural education. Along with achieving an essential understanding of the phenomenon, the analysis of the participants’ experiences led to a better working knowledge of how cross-cultural theological education courses can be more effectively delivered via e-learning methodologies. While neither theological education nor
cross-cultural education are new concepts—and much practical work has been done to enhance their effectiveness—the addition of e-learning formats to these disciplines is relatively new, having arisen only within the final decade of the 20th century (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Haag, 2011; Patterson, 1996). Also, while research into the best practices of online education in general and of online theological education exist (Cartwright, 2014; Levene & Seabury, 2015; Maddix, et al., 2012; Mashaw, 2012; Raybon, 2012), little has been studied concerning the experiences of those who teach theological and ministry-training courses cross-culturally through e-learning formats (Beaty, 2014; Delamarter, Gravett, Ulrich, Nysse, & Polaski, 2011; Tran, 2011). Besides bringing these diverse elements together to fill a gap in the research, the study serves as a focused review and analysis of the literature to date on this specialized facet of education.

The practical significance of this study was aimed at achieving three objectives. As indicated in the central research question, the first objective was to describe the essential experience of educators who have taught theological and ministry training courses through e-learning formats to students from cultures other than their own. Understanding the essential experience can provide a focused understanding of the dynamics involved in this form of education. A second objective was to gain key insights from those experiences that may help others who are engaged in similar forms of education or who are interested in doing so. My desire is that this research can be adapted into a form that can provide both a motivation for potential ministry educators and a practical guide for how to accomplish the task effectively. Through research and analysis of the essential experience of the teachers involved in this type of theological education, I was able to isolate core issues that determine the effectiveness of this cross-cultural theological education via e-learning methodologies and identify possible solutions.
to common problems. A third objective for the study is to serve as a springboard for future research into other facets of this topic, such as the experiences of students, course designers, or administrators. My hope is that cross-cultural theological education via e-learning formats will greatly expand, and that future studies will examine other aspects of the experience.

**Research Questions**

According to Moustakas (1994), research questions serve as guides for the interview process. Using the adult learning principles of Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) and the overall purpose for formulating experiential research questions given by Moustakas, a central research question and three sub-questions guided this study. The central research question is: How do Western theological educators experience teaching cross-cultural theological education using e-learning methods? This question forms the essence of the study. As recommended by Moustakas (1994), it is the shared experience of those who teach theological education courses cross-culturally through various forms of e-learning that provided the basis for data collection, data analysis, and any conclusions that were forthcoming. From this central research question, three sub-questions emerged:

1. How did the Western theological educators design curricula and e-learning media in order to meet the needs of their students? This question attempts to determine whether the needs of adult learners, such as personal motivation for learning and the desire for learning autonomy, were incorporated into the design of the curricula used (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

2. What aspects of cross-cultural theological e-learning did the Western theological educators believe actually met the adult learning needs of their students? This question aims at assessing whether the desire of adult learners for perceived utility of learning...
content and the value of the content as a preparation for success in life were effectively addressed within the courses taught (Henschke, 2016; Knowles, 1975).

3. What did the Western theological educators change in course design and teaching approach based on their perception of students’ learning patterns? This question addresses the concepts that adult learners employ a variety of learning styles and use life experiences to drive learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). The aim of this question is to understand the difficulties the educators encountered in the process and any strategies that were employed to overcome the difficulties. Though not framed into the question, data revealed problem areas the participants were not initially aware of, and possible approaches for addressing those problems.

![Figure 4. Research Questions](image)

**Definitions**

The following definitions explain various terms and abbreviations used in the study:

1. **Andragogy** – Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998) described andragogy, also known as Adult Learning Theory, as a study of how adults use particular methods, motives and experiences to acquire new knowledge and skills. In contrast to pedagogy, which examines the learning patterns of children, andragogy can be understood as the more
specialized theory and approach to learning that takes into account the learning goals and styles of adults.

2. *Cross-cultural education* – Also described as teaching across cultures, cross-cultural education involves understanding how culture shapes both the content of learning and the learning process itself. The field of cross-cultural education is relatively new, having arisen mainly from the need of teachers to learn how to communicate effectively in K-12 classrooms that have become increasingly diverse in Europe and North America. Because of the newness of the field, the term cross-cultural education, which is often interchangeable with intercultural education, is not well defined (Jo, 2006). In the bulk of the literature, it describes education in which students within a single classroom or school come from a multiplicity of cultural backgrounds. However, in accord with the purposes of this study, I used the terms cross-cultural education and teaching cross-culturally to signify a situation in which the students are from a different culture than the teacher. In addition, cross-cultural teaching is the actual activity of instructing students who are not a part of the teacher’s own culture using content that was not originally developed in the students’ culture (Ikpeze, 2015).

3. *Developed world regions* – Developed world regions include many countries classified as Western, but may also include countries from other cultural traditions, such as Japan and South Korea, that have highly developed industrial infrastructure and educational institutions (United Nations, 2013).

4. *Developing world regions* – Developing world regions have less refined industrial infrastructure and educational institutions compared to the countries of Western Europe, North America, and other developed regions (United Nations, 2013).
5. *E-learning* – E-learning signifies planned instructional activity, usually in the form of a defined course of study that makes use of technology to deliver at least some elements of educational content (Hewagamage, Wickramasinghe, & Jayatilaka, 2012; Online Learning Consortium, 2015).

6. *Learning management system* – A learning management system (LMS), also referred to as a course management system, is a platform for building and delivering online courses. An LMS provides digital learning materials and interactive learning activities, as well as a system for managing and storing course data and for facilitating communication between students and instructors. (Meishar-Tal, Kurtz, & Pieterse, 2012).

7. *M-learning* – M-learning is a sub-set of e-learning that makes possible learning at any time, in any place by employing handheld computing devices, such as tablets and smartphones to gain access to learning content. M-learning is often described as being more highly personalized than other forms of e-learning (Haag, 2011; Kosturko, Sabourin, McQuiggan, & McQuiggan, 2015; Lewin, 2016).

8. *Nicene Christianity* – Nicene Christianity includes Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and organized church bodies from within Protestantism that adhere to basic doctrinal formulations compatible with the Nicene Creed (Bainton, 1964; Gonzalez, 2010; Labuschagne, 2015; Latourette, 1965; Noll, 1997).

9. *Online Learning* – Allen and Seaman (2013) define online learning as an educational program in which students complete more than 75% of their coursework via the Internet.

10. *Theological education* – According to Gonzalez (2015), theological education can be understood as the structured and disciplined study of the Bible and its central doctrines,
engaged in by a focused learning community and practically applied to the life, witness, and ministry of the Church both locally and in the wider context of Christianity.

11. *Western Civilization* – Western civilization denotes those regions of the world that have a direct link to the institutions and traditions of Western Europe (United Nations, 2013).

**Summary**

The Christian Church faces a major challenge with regard to adequately resourcing the new churches and believers in world regions where the gospel is spreading rapidly. Cross-cultural theological education via e-learning formats is one possible way of providing needed educational training and resources. Little research has been conducted into the experience of theological educators who are teaching students from a culture other than their own via e-learning formats. A better understanding of this phenomenon will fill the gap in the research and may provide insights as to how to improve and expand this method of training.

A qualitative approach is the best choice for this study because the study describes the experience of educators who are involved with cross-cultural theological education via e-learning formats. A transcendental phenomenological design approach was selected for this study because the experience of teaching theological courses cross-culturally via e-learning methods is the focus, and the participants selected shared similar essential experiences. Two learning theories guided the research: Adult Learning Theory and The Dimensions of Culture. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore how selected Western theological educators describe the experience of teaching theological education courses cross-culturally using e-learning formats. The significance of the study is in addressing the research gap that lies at the intersection of theological education, online education, and cross-cultural...
education. Chapter Two will review the literature related to these topics as they affect the experience of teaching theological education courses cross-culturally using e-learning methods.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The dramatic growth of Christianity in the developing world during the late 20th and early 21st centuries has sometimes resulted in an acute shortage of trained Christian leaders (Cartwright, 2014; Curtis, 2012; Kim, 2013; Mandryk, 2010). Because of this problem, Christian theological institutions of higher education face the challenge of training many new leaders to meet the needs of the expanding Christian Church (Curtis, 2012; Maddix et al., 2012). Esterline, et al., (2013) showed that theological education enrollments for some segments of the Christian Church in developing countries is outstripping available options, while Maddix, et al., (2012) described the challenge facing Christian institutions to train leaders in developing regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America as nothing less than urgent. Because of this urgency, a top-line priority for the Western Christian Church should be to provide more accessible education programs to increase the effectiveness of the Church where Christianity is expanding (Beaty, 2014; Curtis, 2012).

In view of the need for Christian leadership training, it is important to understand the essential experience of teaching theological education courses cross-culturally using e-learning methods. After a survey of the most recent literature was conducted and synthesized as the basis for understanding this phenomenon, the focus of this study was formulated into the following central research question: How do Western theological educators experience cross-cultural theological education using e-learning methods? When considering technology-based education programs as a means of training Christian leaders across cultures, several categories emerged from my research. These categories are briefly discussed following the grounding of the study in my chosen theoretical frameworks.
Theoretical Framework

According to Moustakas (1994), the function of a theoretical framework is to provide the ideological structure within which research can be conducted. Edmund Husserl (2012), the founder of phenomenology, advocated the practice of *epoché*, in which observers suspend personal judgments about a particular phenomenon in order to understand the essence. Moustakas expanded this concept in his use of the term *bracketing*. In the process of bracketing, the researcher sets aside his or her preconceptions about the subject in question in order to freshly, and even naïvely, encounter an experience. These theorists also advocated the construction of clear research questions to guide the research process. Of necessity, the conceptualization of essential questions to guide research requires some sort of theoretical grid from which to frame the questions. In other words, the researcher must have a basis for knowing what types of questions are likely to produce data that will result in a useful expansion of knowledge. Two theories served as guides for this study, including one of learning and one of cultural dynamics.

Adult Learning Theory

The primary theory guiding this study will be Knowles’ Adult Learning Theory. Adult Learning Theory, also known as andragogy, was pioneered in the 19th century by European social scientist Eugen Rosenstock and was expanded by Malcolm Knowles in the mid-20th century for an American readership (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Knowles, et al., described adult learning as, “…any deliberate and professionally informed activity designed to facilitate learning in adults.” (p. 60). In contrast to pedagogy, which examines the learning patterns of children, andragogy can be understood as the more specialized theory of learning that takes into account the learning styles and needs of adults (Knowles, et al.). More specifically,
Adult Learning Theory argues that adults learn best when a specific cluster of factors are present (Henschke, 2016; Knowles, et al.). These factors are discussed below.

**Learning autonomy.** Adults tend to be self-motivated learners. Adults learn best when they have an inner desire to acquire a particular body of knowledge. They also frequently desire a certain amount of freedom to direct the basic course of their learning and to adapt learning to their preferred learning styles and approaches.

**Learning value.** Adults are highly motivated to learn when they believe that a particular body of knowledge or a particular skill set is personally relevant in some way. They often become ready to learn only when they sense that a need for proficiency in a certain area is matched with a viable opportunity to obtain that proficiency. In other words, adult learners must be convinced of their own need to learn a particular body of knowledge or set of skills.

**Learning practicality.** Adult learners desire that learning be related to helping them accomplish life goals and achieve personal success. They frequently enroll in a course of study in order to gain needed professional skills, certification for career advancement, or to achieve some type of personal goal.

**Learning through experience.** Adult learners may exhibit a greater capacity and motivation for learning relative to younger people because of their greater accumulation of background knowledge and life experience. For instance, they often have an enhanced ability to relate to a subject or process because they have already had some acquaintance with it. In addition, adults may also provide a rich resource for others within a learning environment because of their background experience and problem-solving abilities.

Given the fact that theological education of Christian leaders normally involves adult learners (Cartwright, 2014), using the key concepts of andragogy should play a foundational role
in designing and teaching effective curricula cross-culturally. A further reason for choosing Adult Learning Theory as the basis of my theoretical framework is that my research was intended to focus on the experiences of the adult teachers who instruct theology and ministry courses. Because the theological educators I interviewed had to learn how to teach theological courses cross-culturally using various forms of technology, Adult Learning Theory was an invaluable help in analyzing their experiences.

Table 1

Components of Adult Learning Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reflects adults’ need for…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Autonomy</td>
<td>Self-motivated and self-directed learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Value</td>
<td>Relevance of content to personal life-goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Practicality</td>
<td>Utility of content for vocational/personal expertise and advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Through Experience</td>
<td>Use of scaffolding to progress in knowledge and skill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dimensions of Culture

A key supplemental theory guiding the cross-cultural aspects of the research was Hofstede’s Dimensions of Culture (2003). Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede initially developed the Dimensions of Culture model in the 1960s and 1970s. Together with his son, Gert Jan Hofstede, and scholars Michael Bond and Michael Minkov, Hofstede subsequently expanded the model into an internationally recognized standard for assessing differences between cultural groups (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Among the categories of culture identified by this theory are:

Power/Distance. This cultural category assesses the degree to which people in a society accept inequalities of power, authority, and hierarchy. Higher power/distance scores reflect the
general acceptance of power inequalities and the belief that people should assume their assigned places in society and function within accepted boundaries. Lower numerical scores reflect cultural attitudes that promote the sharing of power, personal equality, and a minimizing of authority structures.

**Individualism/Collectivism.** This indicator measures the strength of community ties within a society. Higher scores indicate greater value placed on individual rights and expression, along with weaker interpersonal connections and loyalties. Lower numerical scores reflect collectivist societies in which group loyalty and belonging are prized, and individual self-determination is reduced in value.

**Masculinity/Femininity.** This indicator assesses the relationships and roles of men and women in a society. Masculine-oriented societies tend to draw sharp distinctions between the roles of men and women and place value on traditional male characteristics such as decisive action and competition. Feminine-oriented societies tend to favor a blurring of gender roles and to promote cooperative relationships.

**Uncertainty Avoidance.** This cultural dimension attempts to analyze the means with which people manage anxiety about future outcomes. Societies that receive higher scores tend to build social structures that attempt to build a high degree of predictability and control over life outcomes. Lower scoring societies tend to take a more relaxed, less controlling approach to the uncertainties of the future. Although both types of societies may choose to engage in endeavors that involve risk, they do so from entirely different motivations. High scoring societies tend to take risks only when risk seems to be the best option to produce maximum future security, while lower scoring societies tend to see risks as simply part of the natural hazards of human experience.
**Pragmatic/Normative.** This cultural indicator is largely focused on the spiritual conception of time and whether available resources may be used to cause change. Higher scores in this category reflect a long-term orientation, as well as a pragmatic and utilitarian approach to daily life, with a high regard for frugality and personal modesty. Lower scores indicate loyalty to tradition and to standardized moral, political and religious values, with an emphasis on societal values such as personal life-enhancement and short-term success.

**Indulgence/Restraint.** This measurement looks at the issues of personal gratification, with high scores reflecting a regard for the quick satisfaction of individual desires and a high value on recreational activities. Lower scores show an emphasis on personal self-denial and the regulation of individual behavior by society.

Table 2

*The Dimensions of Culture*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Measures…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power/Distance</td>
<td>Acceptance of power inequalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism/Collectivism</td>
<td>Strength and authority of community ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity/Femininity</td>
<td>Clarity and specialization of gender roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>Acceptance of risk and reasons for risk-taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic/Normative</td>
<td>Willingness to innovate and change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indulgence/Restraint</td>
<td>Importance of instant personal gratification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Dimensions of Culture model provided useful reference points in the analysis of the cultural aspects of the data gathered in the interview process. Hofstede’s theory was especially useful in conjunction with the overall Adult Learning Theory framework because elements in the learning process, such as how individuals frame problems, process information, and devise
solutions have been linked to cultural influences (Knowles, 2005). Further, since both teachers and students are necessarily influenced by their cultures of origin, effective intercultural communication within a course of study must take into consideration factors such as traditions, customs, social mores, thought patterns, and language (Hofstede, 1986; Moran, Abramson, & Moran, 2014). Because of these dynamics, cultural factors play a critical role in cross-cultural e-learning. An important outcome of this study was the discovery that the experience of teaching theological education cross-culturally via e-learning methods, on the whole, tended to corroborate these cultural dimensions.

**Related Literature**

As has been discussed, the rapid expansion of Christianity in several world regions has resulted in a need for theologically trained leaders in these regions. One component in solving this gap in Christian leadership training could be an expansion of distance education options through online courses, mobile learning options, and other e-learning methodologies. For example, educators involved in cross-cultural theological education have called for more online education programs, as well as for an enhanced quality of existing online programs to meet the need for Christian leadership training in the developing world (Beaty, 2014; Curtis, 2012). Other scholars have argued that a strategic opportunity exists for Christian organizations to form partnerships with one another and with church groups based in developing world regions to provide culturally-relevant, biblically sound, and technologically accessible online theological courses for students in developing regions (Cartwright, 2014; Kim, 2015).

Several categories emerged in the process of assessing the relevant literature in light of the central research question. As might seem obvious, the first category was the issue of what constitutes effective e-learning in general. This category of literature revealed several important
issues: the developing understanding of best practices of e-learning methodology, factors related to students’ acceptance of e-learning options, problems with student persistence, and questions related to the emerging field of m-learning. A second category of literature examined the feasibility of sustainable and effective online theological education, including specialized best practices of online theological education, the important issues of spiritual formation, and the need to prepare students to address social and community issues. A third category was that of the dynamics of cross-cultural education, including the subcategories of cultural concepts of authority, language considerations, and cultural learning styles. These categories are discussed in detail in the remainder of the chapter.

**E-learning**

Although there is a clear need for expanded and innovative cross-cultural theological education, what constitutes an effective and sustainable means for delivering theological courses via e-learning technologies is less certain (Mashaw, 2012). E-learning is a relatively recent educational term denoting planned instructional activity that makes use of technology to deliver at least some elements of educational content (Hewagamage, Wickramasinghe, & Jayatilaka, 2012; Online Learning Consortium, 2015). In referring to the beginnings and early development of the Internet, Simon (2016) referred to its emphasis on being an informational environment that fostered decentralization of control over data and a portal for open access on a global level. Consequently, as an educational format that is tailor-made for dissemination via the Internet, e-learning has, from the beginning, been constructivist in its general approach to learning. Simon went on to assert that, while traditional forms of education focused on the instructor as the source and distributor of information, most e-learning designs tend to conceive of instructors as instructional guides, with the students themselves as the focal points of the educational endeavor.
Therefore, under the e-learning paradigm, students tend to be more involved in and more directly responsible for the learning process, rather than acting simply as recipients of the instructors’ expertise.

While much of the current e-learning research is focused on online courses and LMSes (Keramidas, 2012; Schorr & McGriff, 2012), an increasing volume of research is also looking into more recent issues related to m-learning formats, which typically deliver educational courses and resources utilizing smartphones and tablets (Coursaris & Kim, 2011; Iqbal & Qureshi, 2012; Keengwe, Schnellert & Jonas, 2014; Levene & Seabury, 2015; Mtega, Bernard, Msungu, & Sanare, 2012). In the e-learning component of this study, several themes emerged, including readiness to use e-learning options, best practices of e-learning, student persistence, and the growing use of m-learning technology for education.

**Readiness to use e-learning.** Perhaps the first question educators should ask concerning e-learning is whether students will actually use this option if the option is offered. According to Al-Adwan, Al-Adwan, and Smedley (2013), even when online curricula are well designed and readily available, if students are not willing to use e-learning or m-learning delivery systems, learning will not be effective. Research focusing on e-learning acceptance has shown that students’ overall attitude toward technology is a primary factor in the degree to which they are ready to engage in e-learning options (Park, Nam, & Cha, 2012). Students’ reluctance to choose e-learning options can be ameliorated, however, if educational institutions provide consistent infrastructure, including reliable access to the Internet, a robust and intuitively designed LMS, and a high level of ongoing technical support (Park, et al.).

Other issues in students’ willingness to engage in e-learning revolve around the adult learning attributes of self-efficacy and independent learning. According to Tagoe and Arbakah
(2014), the flexibility of e-learning courses is appealing to students in developing world regions, but at the same time, students who have limited access to the Internet, or who lack confidence in using computers or mobile devices, are much less likely to select e-learning options. These findings indicate that e-learning program designers should provide opportunities for students to increase their sense of self-efficacy as a preparation for academic success in an e-learning environment. In addition, careful attention should be given to providing reliable Internet access and to selecting user-friendly learning management systems and e-learning course designs in order to promote favorable outcomes for students.

Given that consistent Internet availability is often a problem in developing world regions, one possible solution is a course design that makes use of a flipped classroom approach (Warugaba, Naughton, Gauthier, Muhirwa, & Amoroso, 2016). Bishop and Verleger (2013) defined a flipped classroom as a learning approach that consists of online or other distance-based instruction, followed by interactive group learning activities in a face-to-face classroom environment. In this type of e-learning design, individual students can do much of their initial study online and save their assignments on electronic storage devices in order to upload them to the Internet during times of access. Individual study can be supplemented by face-to-face meetings at designated times to discuss topics, address problems, and share experiences.
Table 3

*Traditional vs. Flipped Classrooms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Classroom</th>
<th>Flipped Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic concepts are learned in class.</td>
<td>Basic concepts are learned outside of class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic concepts are taught by teacher as the expert and reinforced through class exercises.</td>
<td>Basic concepts are acquired by learners through readings, videos, and electronic presentations and reinforced through discussion assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More advanced concepts are acquired through homework and group assignments outside class.</td>
<td>More advanced concepts are acquired inside class through discussion and group exercises.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While many students and faculty in developing world regions show a reluctance to engage in e-learning opportunities due to inexperience with technical devices and Internet unreliability (Delamarter, 2005; Aldafeeri, 2016), it is clear that e-learning can, nevertheless, be a realistic option when certain basic problems are addressed. However, according to the literature reviewed, if e-learning is to be an effective means of delivering effective training, including theological training, educational programs must be carefully designed. Best practices in designing e-learning programs address local Internet availability, employ a user-friendly LMS, and provide some means of readily available technical support.

**E-learning best practices.** Another important factor in e-learning is the growing awareness that online education requires a unique set of best practices (Schell & Janicki, 2012). A number of recent studies examined e-learning best practices, including Maddix, Estep, and Lowe (2012); Raybon (2012); and Cartwright (2014). Based on these studies, I have synthesized several large categories of e-learning best practices from a student perspective, each of which contains several related best practices. These larger categories of e-learning best practice include adequate support, appropriate cognitive load, consistency of content, ease of use, flexibility in
design, management and feedback features, and range of learning activities. Because the majority of students enrolled in online learning courses are adults (Maddix, Estep, & Lowe), these categories will be discussed in light of Adult Learning Theory.

**Adequate support.** Although adult learners desire some measure of learning autonomy, they also require a basic level of support in the learning process (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Cartwright, 2014). Technical support for course connectivity to the Internet or phone system should be available, as well as assistance in navigating the LMS or the course structure, provided either by the instructor, fellow students, local mentors, or other specialists.

**Appropriate cognitive load.** Cognitive load is a measurement of the total mental effort used by the working memory to solve a problem (Sweller, 1988). In his research, Sweller differentiated between extraneous load (which is made up of the unnecessary stress elements within the learning process); intrinsic load (the stress that is inherent in learning the specific content, given the learner’s level of expertise); and germane load (the stress resulting from the concentration needed to integrate content into long-term memory). Sweller believed that learning should be designed so as to reduce the cognitive load to the learning essentials. Applying Sweller’s findings to an e-learning environment, appropriate cognitive load can work together with adult learners’ need for self-determination to facilitate learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). According to de Araujo Guerra Grangeia, de Jorge, Franci, Martins Santos, Vellutini Setubal, and Schweller (2016), appropriate cognitive load may be achieved in course design by striking a balance between appropriate cognitive load and learner self-determination. De Araujo Guerra Grangeia, et al., recommended that this balance be attained through reducing extraneous load, managing intrinsic load, and optimizing germane load.
**Consistency of content.** Course content should have a consistent focus throughout all learning units and assignments (Cartwright, 2014). Following from the desire of adult learners to be convinced of their need to learn a certain body of knowledge (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005), the course must adhere to a clear and consistent set of learning expectations and outcomes (Cartwright; Raybon, 2012). Along with clarity of outcomes, a motivational element should be made part of the course design in order to set high standards for achievement, while also assuring students that diligence and full engagement will likely result in success.

**Ease of use.** Once students have made the decision to enroll in an e-learning course, their first impression upon entering the course should be a pleasing, engaging look and feel to the course homepage. According to Cartwright (2014), the course should have a clean, efficient, easy-to-understand organization. Colors and graphics should be appropriate to the course material, and font style and sizes should facilitate comprehension of the text. The layout and navigational elements should be intuitively discernable or explained in the course introduction, which should be written in such a way as to clearly outline the course of study and build a sense of positive anticipation (Cartwright; Raybon, 2012). Furthermore, the LMS platform must provide for all of the features needed within the course (Cavanagh, 2014). As self-motivated learners, adults must be assured from the beginning of the course that they can succeed and even enjoy the learning process (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

**Flexibility in design.** E-learning best practices should also be considered from the perspective of instructors and course designers. While it is important to design courses in light of standardized best practices, instructors and course designers must also consider the specific needs and circumstances of their student populations in the design process. Given the diversity among population groups in the developing world, the mix of institutional educational
objectives, and the growing range of technologies available for educational use, a willingness to consider a variety of academically rigorous e-learning options seems called for. Indeed, several studies have demonstrated the need for flexibility, both in course design and in teaching approach in order to accommodate a variety of institutional and learner objectives (Arinto, 2016; Davidson, 2011).

**Management and feedback features.** Given adult learners’ desire for a degree of self-determination, providing elements within a course that allow students to adjust the schedule and pace of learning, as well as to monitor their progress in fulfilling course goals, is essential (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Maddix, Estep, & Lowe, 2012; Raybon, 2012). Allowing students some role in managing their learning and providing ways of discerning whether that management is working are also significant factors in e-learning success for adults (Cartwright, 2014). Both Raybon and Cartwright recommended that along with this self-regulation, there must be prompt, specific, and constructive feedback from instructors given through multiple means such as embedded rubrics, instructor comments, and email communications.

**Range of learning activities.** Given that there is a range of effective learning styles and that adult learners tend to be diverse in their approaches to learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Raybon, 2012), courses must be designed in ways that allow for a wide spectrum. A well-rounded course may include a variety of modes for accessing and processing course content. Visual, auditory, and interactive delivery of content may be designed into the course, as well as constructive learning and relational components, such as discussion boards and group projects (Cartwright, 2014; Maddix, Estep, & Lowe, 2012; Raybon). The depth of experience that adult learners bring to discussions and collaborative learning opportunities
should cause course designers to enhance the accessibility of assignments to accommodate a range of learning styles, thereby adding a richness to the entire experience.

Table 4

*E-learning Best Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ease of Use</td>
<td>The look, feel, and efficient layout of the LMS structure and course design make navigation virtually intuitive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent Content</td>
<td>Units and assignments have a consistent focus. Learning outcomes are clear and applied throughout the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of Activity and Style</td>
<td>Course design allows for diverse learning styles and uses a range of learning activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Management/Prompt Feedback</td>
<td>Course design allows learners reasonable self-regulation. Instructors provide timely and constructive feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate Support</td>
<td>Students have consistent access to technical assistance for connectivity, LMS navigation, and problem solving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate Cognitive Load</td>
<td>The difficulty of learning is appropriate for learning level. Extraneous obstacles to learning are reduced as much as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility of Design</td>
<td>Standard course templates can be adjusted to meet the specific needs of a given student population.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student persistence.** Student persistence in online courses is an ongoing concern within the field of e-learning. The rates at which students drop out of online courses vary from program to program, but in some cases can reach levels of over 50% (Croxton, 2014). Although some of the factors in student attrition are due to external pressures such as lack of finances, time
constraints, family influences, or lack of employer support, internal factors also contribute to student dropout rates. According to Croxton, internal student attrition factors may include: lack of student self-determination, self-efficacy, and self-regulation. While some external and internal factors in student attrition may be beyond the control of course designers, other factors can be addressed within the design process. For example, the relevance of a particular course to students’ interests and life-situations has been shown as a major factor in successful course completion (Hone & El Said, 2015; Peltier, Schibrowsky & Drago, 2007). Technical difficulties, poor course design, and instructional factors such as lack of social interactivity and teacher presence also contribute to dropout rates, and should be addressed in the process of curriculum design (Adamanopoulos, 2013; Croxton).

**M-learning educational models.** M-learning is a recent phenomenon that has arisen through the proliferation of mobile devices as a means of widening access to information on the Internet (Haag, 2011; Kosturko, Sabourin, McQuiggan, & McQuiggan, 2015; Simon, 2016). Additionally, Alghabban, Salama, and Altalhi (2016) described m-learning as a linkage between mobile devices, such as smartphones, PDAs, and tablets, with the computing capacities of the Internet. Alghabban, et al., used the term *mobile cloud computing* (MCC) to characterize an infrastructure where data processing and storage occur externally to the mobile device. Essentially, m-learning utilizes mobile devices to access the Internet in order to take advantage of the massive computing resources of the Internet cloud, such as storage, computation, and data processing. In this way, students can make use of devices that they may already posses to gain access to learning platforms and information sources without overtaxing the relatively limited storage, memory, processing, and battery life of these types of devices. For example, using MCC, relatively low-capacity mobile devices like cell phones may be used to share videos and
other large file types in a learning environment. In other words, m-learning shifts the operation of e-learning applications to the cloud servers and away from the mobile devices themselves.

Figure 5. The M-Learning Environment

The use of mobile devices as an intentional means of providing educational enhancements has been pioneered mainly in developing countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, Jordan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and other nations where computers are less prevalent (Acosta 2016; Alghabban, Salama, & Altalhi, 2016; Alzu’ Bi & Hassan, 2016; Yousuf, 2007). Because of this pioneering application, m-learning has become an increasingly popular option among students in developing world regions. Research into this trend attributes the popularity of m-learning to cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, learner autonomy, platform familiarity, instantaneous fact acquisition, global access, diversification of information sources, opportunities for cooperative learning, and social connectivity (Parmigliani & Giusto, 2016; Serrab, Shibli, & Badursha, 2016; Wong, 2016).

Research by Parmigliani and Giusto (2016) found that m-learning formats tend to provide learning opportunities that focus on practical skills and knowledge sets that are contextual. That is, m-learning has an enhanced capacity to emphasize design elements that enable students to
focus their learning in specific vocational contexts and participate in relevant communities of practice. The researchers confirmed that m-learning excelled in the areas of flexibility, personalization, and learner collaboration. An example of the rapidly developing applications of m-learning can be seen in the adaptation of cell phone texting platforms to facilitate collaborative learning, discussions between instructors and students, or interaction between groups of students (Dissanayeke, Hewagamage, Ramberg, & Wikramanayake, 2015). Another example is in the use of podcasting as a cost-effective way of providing enhanced learning tools for existing online courses (Synytsya & Voychenko, 2015).

Initial research may indicate that m-learning is developing into more than just another educational option. Blair and Stafford (2016) argued that the adaptation of smart phones for educational use, while making information instantaneously available to those with mobile devices, is also forcing a change in learning paradigms. They asserted that the ubiquitous availability of information provided on the Internet through smart phones and tablets is altering the way people access educational information and requires a substantially different design. A study by Shonola, Joy, Oyelere, and Suhonen (2016) added that students in developing countries like Nigeria typically enhance existing course materials and assignments by accessing information via smartphones, PDAs, and tablets. Dron and Anderson (2016) went further to assert that m-learning trends may point to a future de-emphasis on structured courses and degree programs in favor of a crowd-driven, individualized, and emergent educational paradigm. However, given the developing and incomplete nature of m-learning theory, caution must be observed in drawing final conclusions based on these initial studies (Al Zahrani & Laxman, 2015).

Other scholars have noted that by their very nature, e-learning and m-learning approaches
both tend to be individualistic activities (Lewin, 2016; Simonson, Smaldinao, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012). In both e-learning and m-learning formats, the traditional community experience offered in a classroom is replaced with activities that are typically self-directed, including accessing social media, streaming videos, and podcasts (Synytsya & Voychenko, 2015). While admitting that the accessibility of m-learning options is convenient and sometimes even liberating for the learner, Lewin argued that these media promote a diffused and individualistic approach to education, which may be disconnected from recognized programs or degrees.

In employing the term pharmakon in his article (The Pharmakon of Educational Technology), Lewin was referring to the term’s use by the postmodern philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1981), to signify something that has both healing and destructive properties within itself. The contention was: as with all technologies, m-learning has both positive and negative effects on users. Al Zahrani and Laxman (2015) also warned against an uncritical acceptance of m-learning by pointing out that even though initial studies show that m-learning provides attractive educational options, the delivery of learning content utilizing this technology does not guarantee that effective learning is taking place. At the very least, the ongoing dialog about the double-edged nature of m-learning should draw attention to the wider discussion about the potentialities, dangers, and overall ramifications of m-learning technology in the future.

**Online Theological Education**

Traditionally, Western theological education has focused on a residential, teacher-as-expert, lecture-driven approach to learning (Delamarter, Gravett, Ulrich, Nysse, & Polaski, 2011; Mainwaring, 2015). Conversely, Simonson, Smaldinao, Albright, and Zvacek (2012) pointed out that some aspects of distance education are by their very nature, student-centered, self-directed, and constructivist in approach. Therefore, a change in approach from traditional
theological education to an e-learning format involves a fundamental rethinking of course design. More specifically, this difference between traditional educational approaches and e-learning formats demonstrates that implementing an e-learning approach to theological education cannot be simply an electronic version of a face-to-face course design.

Since the 1990s, theological e-learning has been conceived of in a number of ways. Delamarter (2011) classified online theological programs into several types, with varying degrees of overall learning effectiveness. According to Delamarter’s classifications, some of the earliest types of online theological courses were simply electronic versions of established theological correspondence courses, with emails and assignment uploads replacing the exchange of documents through conventional mail delivery. Another early attempt at providing online theological education was a type of course that mimicked an existing, face-to-face course, with the delivery method altered to reach students at a distance. A more recent trend advocates designing student-centered, constructivist learning courses to teach a wide range of theological and practical ministry courses (Oliver, 2014). This third type has proved to be the most effective at producing doctrinally trained and capable Christian leaders, especially when combined with personal, face-to-face mentoring in a hybrid course design (Delamarter; Simonson et al., 2012).

**Best practices of theological education.** Theological educators seem to be of two minds regarding online programs. On the one hand, some institutions may simply have initiated theological e-learning programs in the rush to join the popular online education trend or as a way of increasing enrollment (Cartwright, 2014). On the other hand, some theological educators have expressed grave doubts as to whether online theological programs can serve as viable alternatives to traditional theological training at all (Esterline, et al., 2013). For example, House (2010) contended that theological education offered via an online format tends to isolate students
from one another and to minimize opportunities for deep mentoring by professors. In an evaluation of theological distance learning in general, Le Cornu (2001) warned against the kind of e-learning that is too tightly controlled by the course designer and that does not promote interaction of the learner with a range of perspectives on course content. Delamarter’s (2005) interviews of faculty and administrators from a spectrum of theological institutions provided testimonial evidence that many theological educators had deep concerns about online ministry courses during the first decade of the 21st century. While some of these concerns may have been dispelled in more recent years, lingering doubts remain despite a greater acceptance of online education and more effective curriculum design (Naidoo, 2012).

Recent studies have endeavored to address educators’ concerns by defining accepted standards for online theological education (Baltrip, 2015; Cartwright, 2014; Raybon, 2012). In some ways, the research into standards for online theological education parallels the wider research into best practices for e-learning in general. As discussed earlier, these best practices include adequate support, appropriate cognitive load, consistency of content, ease of use, flexibility of design, management and feedback features, and range of learning activities. However, several studies have added issues that are specific to theological education, such as the need to establish supportive faith communities (Porterfield & Isaac-Savage, 2013), the necessity of fostering students’ personal and spiritual maturity (Maddix, Estep, & Lowe, 2012; Naidoo, 2012), and the importance of providing training in the cultural and social issues that Christian leaders are expected to address (Cartwright; Maddix, Estep, & Lowe; Masenya & Booyse, 2016).

**Sense of community.** Theological education has traditionally placed a high emphasis on students’ physical presence within a campus community under the mentoring of senior scholars and veteran pastors (House, 2010; Naidoo, 2012). Since the physical presence of teacher and
students is not possible in solely online courses, some theological curriculum theorists have voiced doubts about the feasibility of fostering a sense of community online (Tran, 2011). Hybrid courses, which combine face-to-face and e-learning elements, offer one type of solution to this dilemma. For example, Porterfield and Isaac-Savage (2013) demonstrated that effective preaching could be learned in a hybrid format despite the limited physical presence of class members. Findings from similar studies in solely online theological courses showed that physical presence is not an absolute requirement for students to experience a sense of community (Cornelius, Gordon & Ackland, 2011; Deulen, 2013).

One way of making sense of the controversy over the issue of online community may be to understand that the traditional concept of community may have been defined too narrowly. Recent studies suggest that when students participate together in a specific set of focused activities, a community exists regardless of whether the participants are physically present or are interacting via technology (Naidoo, 2012; Porterfield & Isaac-Savage, 2013). Naidoo and others further recommended that learning communities be designed as a central feature of theological e-learning curricula. Additionally, research into the dynamics of e-learning corroborates Naidoo’s assertion that failure to purposefully include online communities as a basic design feature of e-learning tends to result in a loss of motivation and focus (Croxton, 2014; Warugaba, Naughton, Gauthier, Muhirwa & Amoroso, 2016).

**Personal and spiritual formation.** Another significant objection to online theological education is that online theological education does not automatically provide adequate means for fostering personal maturity and spiritual formation in students (Cartwright, 2014; Kelsey, 2002; Nichols, 2014; Patterson, 1996; Reissner, 1999). Lindemann’s (2016) research into the process of worldview formation in college students in Christian institutions of higher education showed
that the factors in such a process are complex. According to Lindemann, these complex factors include students’ basic personality orientations, the perspectives of their upbringing, their network of relationships, and prior educational experience. Another cluster of factors revolve around the clarity with which theological institutions purposefully define their own worldviews, the deliberation and skill with which this perspective is embedded into course design, and the consistent reflection of the perspective in the life of the institution. A third important factor is whether students perceive that the desired worldview satisfactorily explains reality and successfully interacts with the larger culture.

Though online communities and hybrid courses may offer a partial solution to the problem of spiritual formation by creating opportunities for encouragement and mentoring, purposefully designing a transformative element into a fully online theological program presents a number of challenges. For example, can online theological programs certify the degree to which graduates have been transformed in character and are ready to face the challenges of church leadership and public ministry (Naidoo, 2012)? To address this issue, some innovative curriculum designers have moved toward an online theological education model that specifically fosters spiritual growth (Tran, 2011). These models integrate two necessary transformational conditions into course content: student involvement in active ministry while engaged in coursework, and an interactive course design that prompts dialog and the sharing of personal experiences by class members. Such concepts in course design offer possibilities for fostering personal maturity and spiritual transformation at a distance via online theological programs, especially when students have opportunities to be mentored in local ministry settings (Fluegge, 2010).
White (2006) offered some perspective on the issue of spiritual formation in distance education by observing that the letters contained in the New Testament can be seen as an early form of distance education, with a strongly transformational element. Forrest and Lamport (2013) provided a biblical template for spiritual transformation at a distance through the use of Paul’s letter to the Romans. They argued that Paul’s obvious intent was clear doctrinal instruction leading to the spiritual transformation of the recipients and pointed to the fact that while the Apostle Paul had never visited Rome nor met most of the people before writing the letter (Romans 1:10-13; 15:22), the letter nonetheless strongly conveys both a sense of community and the urgency of personal transformation. While not ideal for every training situation, the potential for fostering personal growth and spiritual transformation at a distance via theological e-learning programs seems to be a realistic option both theologically and practically (Nichols, 2014).

**Preparation for social and cultural engagement.** Some Western theological educators have urged that effective ministerial training include a component that addresses competency in social issues relevant to the cultures and communities in which students will serve (Mainwaring, 2015). Theologians from developing countries have also argued that traditional ministerial training is inadequate if the course content focuses on theological courses at the expense of training in biblical models for addressing key community problems (Masenya & Booyse, 2016). Recent studies have explored ways of reconfiguring theological courses from being orientated toward meeting the needs of established Christians in a church context, to a focus on redemptive mission within the wider society (Oliver, 2013). Adding the element of social engagement into online theological education will require a reconceptualization of curriculum design and course outcomes. Hand-in-hand with social and cultural engagement, Esterline et al. (2013) found that
the most desired components in theological education in developing world regions were practical skills such as training in cross-cultural communication and an emphasis on experiential learning.

While theological e-learning is still developing, my review of recent literature on the topic demonstrates that as e-learning has developed, initial doubts have been significantly dispelled as to e-learning’s applicability for effective theological education and its potential for producing biblically informed, socially equipped, and personally transformed Christian leaders. Yet an important issue remains: Is theological e-learning a viable option in a cross-cultural context? This question is addressed in the remainder of the chapter.

**Cross-Cultural Education**

De Beuckelaer, Lievens, and Bucker (2012) described cross-cultural competence as the process of developing interpersonal skills and cultural perspectives that are necessary for effective interaction with people from other cultures. Working from Hofstede’s Dimensions of Culture (2003), it is evident that differences in perspectives, values, and patterns of interaction in a class consisting of instructor and students from different cultures can potentially lead to miscommunication of course content and inaccurate social interpretations. Conversely, instructors who are competent across cultures tend to overcome differences in cultural perspectives, educational expectations, and social conflicts with greater ease than those without cross-cultural expertise (Hofstede, 1986).

Early studies in cross-cultural curricula in the 21st century tended to highlight the need for developing strong cross-cultural education models in a variety of content areas. For example, a study by Betancourt (2003) focused on incorporating cross-cultural training into medical education in order to better serve the needs of a diverse population. More recent studies in cross-cultural education have also tended to focus on fields other than theological education like
intercultural music education (Yang & Chung, 2015), cross-cultural management styles (Trullen, Bonache, & Sanchez, 2012), and educational leadership across cultures (Nelson, 2016). Such studies have highlighted the importance of three quality clusters necessary for cross-cultural educational success.

The first cluster focuses on cultural intelligence. Effective cross-cultural education requires an awareness of the range of possible reactions to the basic issues and experiences of human life as categorized by Hofstede (2003). This knowledge base for how cultures tend to operate is a pre-requisite for the type of sensitivity that can correctly interpret cultural interaction in a particular educational endeavor (Nelson, 2016). Underlying cultural intelligence must be a second quality that involves personal humility, which necessarily involves an admission that one’s own cultural understandings and loyalties are not automatically the standard that others must adhere to (Nelson, 2016). Similarly, Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) identified four personality traits relevant to successful cross-cultural interaction: openness, social initiative, emotional stability, and flexibility. Working from this study, De Beuckelaer, et al., (2012) grouped these traits into two basic qualities that they believed are essential for effective cross-cultural teaching: cultural empathy and open-mindedness.

The third quality cluster necessary for educational success in a cross-cultural context has to do with institutional and course design perspectives. Yang and Chung (2015) stressed fundamental organizational commitment to meaningful cross-cultural education. They argued that without such a commitment on an organizational level, success is likely to be severely limited. Organizational commitment to cross-cultural effectiveness must be accompanied by a collaborative effort on the part of course designers, teachers, and staff throughout the entire scope of the program (Trullen, Bonache, & Sanchez, 2012). Finally, Nelson advocated that clear
and non-judgmental methods of communication should be established as the norm within a program.

Table 5

Qualities Essential to Successful Cross-Cultural Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Intelligence</th>
<th>The acquired skill set that is aware of a range of possible reactions to and solutions for basic human needs and situations.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Humility</td>
<td>The mindset that accepts the view that there may be legitimate ways of addressing issues other than one’s own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Commitment</td>
<td>The readiness of educational institutions to commit substantial resources to implement sustainable cross-cultural education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While studies like these are focused on training programs and other educational contexts that are not directly related to theological education, the basic findings are applicable to effective cross-cultural theological education as well. Research specifically related to cross-cultural theological education has shown that when non-Western students receive theological training in Western contexts, the coursework may focus on issues that people in the students’ home cultures aren’t facing (Beaty, 2014; Fluegge, 2010). Because of this problem, non-Western leaders trained in Western contexts may return to their communities ill-equipped to address the problems the local people struggle with on a regular basis.

To address this problem, a growing number of missiologists have suggested that a fundamental goal in teaching theological education cross-culturally should be to restructure theology and ministry courses to fit the cultural worldviews and concerns of non-Western students (Corrie, 2015; Das, 2016; Fluegge, 2010). In her own South African context, Naidoo (2016) urged the replacement of the current Western educational paradigm with an Africanized theological education in which the entire approach to theological education would be re-
conceptualized from the standpoint of indigenous South African questions and issues. Similarly, Hwang (2011) urged theologians in developing world regions to design authentic indigenous theologies that reflect both biblical accuracy and cultural relevance. In the same vein, Kim (2015) suggested that Western institutions that offer theological education programs cross-culturally should consider implementing a team teaching approach to include instructors from the global south in order to gain their perspectives on the application of doctrine to cultural issues.

For example, Davidson’s (2011) adaptation of concepts from adult education theory to the context of rural China may provide a template for how a re-conceptualized theological education might work. In his training program, groups of indigenous Chinese leaders were taught initial courses in the fundamentals of Christian faith. The students then progressed to learning principles of biblical interpretation, with a special emphasis on applying biblical truth within their own culture. Rather than imposing Western solutions to problems arising in ministry, students were consistently encouraged to work out the applications of scripture for living and representing Christ in a Chinese context. The growing ministry competence of the initial groups and their impact within their respective communities sparked an influx of new believers from the surrounding areas, which in turn required the formation of three more leadership groups who received the same training.

These studies indicate that teaching theological education courses across cultures requires a continual awareness that the norms of the students’ cultures may often be different from those of the course designers and teachers. Therefore, the teaching methodology and learning styles should be adjusted to fit the educational context, learning goals, and cultural sensibilities of the students. Even more specifically, students should be trained to be creative in developing practical solutions for addressing the problems presented by particular cultural situations. More
importantly, theological educators must be willing to allow the students themselves to guide much of the decision-making process as to how scripture and Christian doctrine may be applied in a manner that is culturally appropriate.

**Concepts of authority.** How teachers and students understand power and authority within a class environment is a basic element in designing cross-cultural curricula. For example, whether teachers are seen as unchallenged experts or as facilitators of learning varies widely among cultures. According to Hofstede’s Power Distance Index (Hofstede, 2009), many countries in the developing world have power-distance perceptions ratings in the 70 to 80 range. This power-distance score normally indicates a more passive approach to learning in which students tend to uncritically accept content from the instructor. On the other hand, many Westernized countries, such as the U.S., Great Britain, Canada, and South Africa, have a mid-range power-distance rating of 40 to 50, which normally indicates a learning approach that permits a certain freedom on the part of students to question and even challenge teachers (Cronje, 2011).

In situations where Western teachers instruct students from developing countries, these differences in power-distance perceptions can result in significant confusion concerning acceptable class learning behavior. Not only might cultural confusion result from misunderstandings concerning passive or active learning, but misunderstandings might arise on a variety of other issues as well; i.e., how constructive feedback is to be received on graded assignments. For example, Western teachers may routinely provide to-the-point critiques of students’ work, designed to offer scaffolding for further learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Such critiques may be misunderstood by students from higher power-distance cultures as judgments about their intelligence and academic competence (Tian & Lowe, 2013). In other words, cross-
cultural education requires that both students and teachers learn to adapt their power-distance expectations and behavior to achieve effective learning.

**Language.** Hofstede (1986) suggested that cross-cultural teaching is most effective when teachers are able to use the native language of the students, as opposed to having the students learn the language of instruction. He contended that since the teacher has significant power over the learning content and environment, the language used by the teacher to convey concepts is critical. Hofstede went on to explain that language has a categorizing function through word choice that is constantly interpreting reality in light of the corresponding culture. To clarify, language is more than a mere collection of words: the very words in a language are shaped by a cultural worldview. This means that what constitutes a meaning in one language does not necessarily translate into precisely the same meaning in another language. My own experiences of learning to teach through interpreters in Hispanic and Francophone countries has personally confirmed these contentions about language and meaning. In urging that teachers learn the students’ language, Hofstede argued that teachers gain a deeper sensitivity for the students’ culture in the process. While the practicality of learning the students’ language is doubtful in many cases, it may be advisable in some instances to gain at least some basic facility with that language.

Other studies focusing on situations in which courses are offered in a language comfortable for the instructors have stressed the need for students to attain a basic level of proficiency in the language of instruction prior to enrolling (Magnier-Watanabe, Benton, Herrig, & Aba, 2011). This type of scenario seems to be a better fit for most situations in which Western theological educators teach students from developing world regions. For example, this model may fit English-speaking North Americans who teach in African or Caribbean countries where
English is the language of education, but the mother tongue of the students may be a tribal language or an English patois. However, it must be kept in mind that learning a language is more than mastering the mechanics of grammar and syntax. Nuances in word choice, facial expression, inflection, and body language are part of the communication process as well (Tian & Lowe, 2013). These factors indicate that even when students have a basic level of proficiency in the language of instruction, clear communication cannot be overstressed, especially when students and teacher are from different cultural backgrounds.

**Learning styles.** Studies about whether culture plays a significant role in learning approach have arrived at mixed conclusions. For example, Yang and Kinshuk (2014) examined whether culture affects the way Chinese and American students learn in collaborative groups and found that culture was a significant factor in learning methodologies used by the two groups. On the other hand, Marambe, Vermunt, and Boshuizen, (2012) compared the learning styles of Indonesian, Sri Lankan, and Dutch students and found that despite some relatively minor cultural differences, the three groups showed a tendency to learn in similar ways. Though results from these studies proved to be inconclusive, they demonstrated that when designing effective courses in theological education for use across cultures, designers should have some level of personal experience with student learning patterns in the target culture.

A final issue that is specific to cross-cultural theological education is that studying the biblical text is in itself a cross-cultural experience (Bartholomew, 2015; Ramm, 1999). In addition to adapting for cultural differences between teacher and students in cross-cultural theological education, both sides of the cultural divide must also learn to encounter the diverse cultures of the Bible. For example, the cultures of ancient Israel, Egypt, Babylon, and Persia in the Old Testament, First Century Judaism in the Gospels, and Greco-Roman culture in the New
Testament letters, must be understood when studying the Bible in order to appropriately apply their lessons to contemporary life and ministry (Eichrodt, 1976; Hauer, & Young, 2005; Tenney, 1985). It is therefore essential that curriculum design provide for ways of experiencing meaningful contact with the biblical cultures that can be clearly understood and applied by students in their own cultural situations. Additional research should continue to explore ways of doing this effectively.

**Summary**

The rapid growth of Christianity in developing world regions in the early 21st century calls for innovative ways of training Christian leaders. A significant component in meeting this need could be an expansion of distance education curricula options through e-learning methods. In order to effectively design cross-cultural theological e-learning curricula, it is important to understand the essential experience of this type of teaching. As a prelude to gathering data from those who have the experience of teaching theological education courses cross-culturally using e-learning methods, a literature review was conducted of the most recent research related to the subject.

The literature review synthesized several key categories related to the primary research question, including the need for cross-cultural theological e-learning options in developing world regions, effective e-learning methodology, the developing characteristics of m-learning, and best practices of theological education and theological e-learning. Several issues vital to understanding effective cross-cultural education emerged from the research as well, including the necessity of clear communication, sensitivity to the learners’ cultural concerns, maintaining appropriate levels of power distance, the shaping role of language, flexibility to accommodate
learning styles, and the awareness that any study of the Bible is in itself a cross-cultural experience.

After surveying and synthesizing the most recent literature related to theological, online, and cross-cultural education, a gap emerged as to the essential experience of teaching theological education courses across cultures using e-learning methodology. As the framework for the research, I have chosen Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005), since the overwhelming majority of students enrolled in theological programs are adults. I have also chosen to use Hofstede’s Dimensions of Culture (2003) as a theory from which to examine the cross-cultural aspects of the study. Chapter Three will provide a structured plan for carrying out research into how Western theological educators experience teaching cross-cultural theological education using e-learning formats.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The expansion of Christianity in the developing world during the late 20th and early 21st centuries has resulted in a shortage of trained Christian leaders in world regions where significant growth has occurred (Cartwright, 2014; Curtis, 2012; Esterline, et al., 2013; Kim, 2013). In the second decade of the 21st century, theological institutions and ministry training organizations face the challenge of training many new leaders to meet the needs of the Church where Christianity is expanding (Curtis, 2012; Maddix, et al., 2012). This shortage of Christian leaders calls for Western Christian educators to provide more accessible theological education programs, including e-learning options, to increase the effectiveness of the expanding Christian Church (Beaty, 2014; Cartwright, 2014; Wiseman, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to explore how selected Western theological educators describe the experience of instructing Christian leaders cross-culturally using e-learning methods. Since little research exists into this specific topic, the essential experience should be studied (Beaty, 2014; Cartwright, 2014). Following the procedures discussed in Moustakas (1994), my research involved obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals, identifying qualified participants, selecting an appropriate sample, conducting interviews, making observations, hosting focus group discussions, and using other data gathering procedures through audio recordings and other means. A paid transcriber then transcribed the data. From the transcripts, I analyzed the data using Moustakas’ suggested modification of the method of transcendental phenomenological analysis developed and refined successively by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975).

This method calls for an initial description of the phenomenon from the researcher’s own
experience, following the steps bulleted below. The researcher’s personal description is used as a backdrop for analyzing the subsequent data from the transcripts as follows:

- A complete list of all relevant statements will be compiled from the transcribed data.
- The individual statements will be condensed into a shorter list of non-overlapping statements, which will constitute the invariant horizons of the experience.
- The invariant horizons will be organized into themes.
- The themes are then synthesized into a textural description of the experience with examples.
- The researcher reflects upon the textural description in order to construct an imaginative structure of the experience.
- The textural and structural aspects of the experience are synthesized into the overall meaning and essences of the experience.

Chapter Three will describe the research methods to be utilized in gathering data for analysis in order to accurately describe the essential experience. The chapter is organized around the categories of the design approach, restatement of the research questions, the research setting, participants, procedures, role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Design

The origins and acceptance of qualitative research can be traced to a mid-20th century reaction to what many theorists perceived as a wooden and less than comprehensive understanding of reality on the part of scientism and of positivism in general (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). While acknowledging that quantitative research has a valuable sphere of usefulness, social scientists of the era that held to a post-positivist perspective began to critique the notion
that only quantitative research could yield truth about reality. Their critique was based upon the assertion that quantitative research was severely limited due to its neglect of the personal experiences and perspectives of people living life. With this perspective on reality, qualitative research aims at an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, experience, or situation by investigating the totality of the experience (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Because data is to be collected from the experiences of human participants who have been engaged in cross-cultural theological education via e-learning methods, a qualitative approach to research was the appropriate choice for this study (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological design was chosen because the aim of the study is to describe the lived experience of theological educators who train Christian leaders cross-culturally via e-learning methods (Creswell; Lichtman, 2013). According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenological research focuses on understanding both the essence and wholeness of the experience of a phenomenon through gathering and analyzing data in something like pure form. Therefore, a further aim of this research was to capture the essence of the experience, excluding personal bias as much as possible, for which a transcendental type of phenomenology is the proper choice (Moustakas).

![Figure 6. Research Design Flow Chart](chart.png)

Using Moustakas’ (1994) data analysis steps, I described my own experience of the phenomenon in order to clarify and bracket my perception of the phenomenon. In explaining the
concept of bracketing, Husserl (2012) used the Greek term *epoche* to signify the withholding of judgments and preconceived notions concerning an object or phenomenon in order to allow a fresh and unbiased view of the phenomenon to emerge naturally. Moustakas (1994) used the term *bracketing* to describe a similar process. Bracketing attempts to ensure that any biases or pre-conceived notions about an experience are identified and acknowledged in order to set them aside in the data collection and analysis portions of a study. I made every effort to bracket myself as the researcher by recognizing the possible pre-conceived biases of my own background and experiences of teaching theological courses cross-culturally in order to examine the interview data through the experiences of the theological educators themselves.

From this starting point, I identified 12 to 15 theological educators who gave assent to the broad Nicene understanding of the Christian faith. The rationale behind using this number of participants is to ensure that the research will provide thick, rich data (Moustakas, 1994) leading to data saturation, and to meet academic standards for trustworthiness and rigor. These educators held a minimum of a master’s degree from accredited Western institutions, and had experienced the phenomenon of teaching theology and ministry courses cross-culturally via e-learning methods. Attempts to contact potential participants were made via letter or email, with a follow-up telephone call. Letters describing the goals, procedures, requirements, timeline, and possible uses of the study were sent to each potential participant asking for his or her involvement.

Snowball sampling was successfully utilized to widen the pool of potential participants (Creswell, 2013). A purposeful convenience sample was then selected from those willing to participate. The privacy of participants was protected by assigning pseudonyms, keeping written material in a secured storage area, and storing electronic participant information on a password-protected computer or storage device. Interviews utilized open-ended, semi-structured interview
questions aimed at obtaining rich, thick, deep data about the essential experience. In order for the interviews to be effective, I attempted to create a relaxed and trusting environment with each participant through initial conversation. Focus group discussions were based on a series of questions modified from the initial interviews. Interviews and focus group data were recorded via audio recorder and backed up on a secure hard drive.

This study was grounded in two theoretical frameworks: Knowles’ Adult Learning Theory (2005) and Hofstede’s Dimensions of Culture (2003). Adult Learning Theory informed my understanding of the theological educators, both in terms of their personal experience with the teaching process and in terms of how they processed their students’ learning experience. The Dimensions of Culture informed that portion of the participants’ experience that involves teaching students from a culture different from their own. Research Question 1 is the fundamental question of the study. Research Questions 2 through 4 explore the basic components of the study. Adult Learning Theory and the Dimensions of Culture will provide the background framework for all four of the research questions.

Adult Learning Theory also guided the description of data needs by asking how teachers used adult learning principles as given by Knowles, et al., (2005) to design or modify the theological education courses they taught. The Dimensions of Culture (Hofstede, 2003) informed data needs by addressing the experience of teaching across cultures and specifically how participants solved culture and language barriers in their teaching experience. Both frameworks provided structure in designing the interview questions related to participant background and preparation to teach, as well as the data about how changes in teaching were experienced. These frameworks also directed the choice of data sources by clarifying the characteristics and experience of potential participants. Likewise, both theoretical frameworks
gave shape to the methods of data collection (interviews, focus groups, and archival material) by providing insight into key elements of the participants’ specialized teaching experience and how best to collect this type of information. Data analysis relied heavily on the knowledge base and perspectives of both theoretical frameworks for insight into interpretation.

Table 6

*How Research Data is Founded in the Theoretical Frameworks*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adult Learning Theory</th>
<th>Dimensions of Culture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>Informs all RQs.</td>
<td>Informs all RQs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Needs</td>
<td>Informs how participants used adult learning concepts.</td>
<td>Informs how participants solved language and culture barriers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Sources</td>
<td>Informs participants’ understanding of adult learning needs.</td>
<td>Informs participants’ understanding of cultural differences and potential learning problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td>Informs the focus of questions 6 through 11.</td>
<td>Informs the focus of questions 12 through 14.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Provides background for data collection.</td>
<td>Provides background for data collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>Provides knowledge base and perspectives on the experience of teaching adults.</td>
<td>Provides knowledge base and perspectives on the experience of teaching across cultures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After securing the participation of the participants and completing the interview process, I identified key statements from the interview data, known as codes. Following this step, I organized the key statements into themes. The themes were then arranged into thematic categories. From the emerging themes, textural and structural descriptions of the participants’ experiences were constructed into a composite description of the essence of the experience.
Research Questions

Moustakas (1994) stated that the purpose of research questions is to serve as a guide for the data gathering process. The central research question guiding this study was as follows: How do Western theological educators experience teaching cross-cultural theological education using e-learning methods? From this central research question, three sub-questions aimed at uncovering major aspects of the phenomenon. Sub-Question 1: How did the Western theological educators design curricula and e-learning media in order to meet the adult learning needs of culturally-different students? Sub-Question 2: What aspects of cross-cultural theological e-learning did the Western theological educators believe actually met the adult learning needs of their students? Sub-Question 3: What did the Western theological educators change in course design and teaching approach based on their perception of students’ learning patterns?

Setting

As previously stated, I contacted a spectrum of theological institutions, missions agencies, and individuals that had experience offering theological and ministry courses across cultures via e-learning formats. Since the objective was to obtain a “big picture” sense of the experience, the selection of these entities was aimed at including a purposeful sampling across a spectrum of Christian groups that hold to a broad Nicene theological perspective. Ideally, I wanted to select participants from Evangelical, Mainline Protestant, Pentecostal/Charismatic, Roman Catholic, and other groups. While this goal was a worthy ideal, a narrower sample eventually emerged from my inquiries that reflected a high percentage of Evangelical males from North America.

Moustakas (1994) recommended researcher presence in the interview process in order to arrive at, “careful, comprehensive descriptions, and vivid and accurate renderings of the
experience” (p. 105). Only one of the 13 interviews was conducted in person. The other 12 interviews were conducted by phone or Skype™, as discussed by Krueger and Casey (2009); and Stewart and Williams (2005). This procedure was followed because the participants were scattered across the U.S., and even included one participant from Europe.

Participants

According to Moustakas (1994), there are no hard and fast rules for selecting research participants other than that candidates must have experienced the phenomenon, are able to provide a full description of their lived experience, are willing to share their experience, and agree to provide written consent to participate in the interview and publication process. He stipulated that 10 to 15 participants are an adequate number for phenomenological research. Since participants must necessarily have experienced teaching theological courses cross-culturally via e-learning methods, the preferred means of selecting the best participants from a spectrum of Christian groups was purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013).

I determined suitability for participation in the study by limiting candidates to those who met the qualifications given above. My aim was to recruit educators from a diverse spectrum of perspectives including gender, age, ministry focus, and theological perspective. The final purposeful sample of 13 participants included 12 males and one female. One participant was non-evangelical. The other 12 represented some type of evangelical perspective. One came from a background outside North America, while the rest originated on the North American continent.

Procedures

I received IRB approval from Liberty University on March 9, 2017, which allowed me to begin conducting formal research. According to Moustakas (1994) the main source of data in
phenomenological research is gathered through interviews. In order to describe the essential experience of training Christian leaders cross-culturally using e-learning technologies, a sample of 12 to 15 qualified participants was needed to provide thick, rich data and to meet academic standards for trustworthiness and rigor (Moustakas, 1994).

I began recruitment of participants by contacting evangelical Christian organizations with which I had past personal association. My inquiries then broadened to institutions that I believed might have some cross-cultural theological e-learning programs. As recommended by Moustakas (1994), I employed snowball sampling to obtain further institutional and personal contacts. The initial contacts were made via telephone or email to determine whether there was an interest in organizational participation. Those who expressed interest were sent a formal letter and an institutional permission form (Appendix B). Once formal consent had been obtained from the institutions, I made contact with potential participants as recommended by the institutions. These contacts were made via emails and telephone calls.

Interested individuals were then sent a formal letter describing the goals, procedures, requirements, timeline, and possible uses of the study, along with a consent form (Appendix B). Snowball sampling from these contacts led to further inquiries, until the 13 final participants were obtained. Permission letters were eventually received from nine institutions of higher education and mission organizations, eight of which eventually yielded participants. Consent forms, both printed and electronic, from all 13 participants were obtained and kept in a secure location.

Demographic data was gathered from the participants selected for the study, including age, ethnicity, gender, educational background, experience, affiliation, etc. Pseudonyms were assigned to the individual participants to protect their anonymity, and their institutional
affiliations, locations, and backgrounds were described non-specifically. Only one of the interviews could be arranged in a face-to-face venue. The other interviews were conducted via teleconferencing methods. All of the interviews were recorded using digital audio recordings, memoing, and a research journal. Seven of the participants participated in three focus group sessions via audio-recorded teleconferences. I also examined the public websites of several of the participants to locate archival materials. The websites yielded insight into the objectives of their programs, various course design features, methods of course communication, and other aspects of the e-learning settings.

The data from the interviews and focus groups was transcribed by a paid transcriber. I analyzed it using Moustakas’ suggested adaptation of the method proposed by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975) for transcendental phenomenological data analysis. From the verbatim transcriptions of interviews and focus groups, I assigned codes to the participants’ responses using the constant-comparative method (Moustakas, 1994). I decided to use the comment tool in Microsoft Word™ to assign codes and make coding notes. The transcripts of the interviews and focus group discussions were reviewed thoroughly, both individually and laterally by interview question to the point of data saturation. The coding process involved initial codes, numbering in excess of 60 individual ones, which were eventually merged into 49. These 49 codes were organized into 10 themes that were further organized into five thematic categories to describe the essential experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The Researcher's Role

According to Moustakas (1994), the researcher is the primary data analysis tool in qualitative research. Because I have been involved in both online education within the U.S., and in training ministry leaders cross-culturally, I entered the research with certain pre-conceived
notions. Having been a team member on more than 30 missions trips involving theological education in developing countries, I have personally seen an intense desire for training among Christian groups in these regions, and can affirm that existing training opportunities in many of these regions are not adequate to meet demand. Because of this background, I was strongly motivated to explore e-learning as a possible means of expanding theological training options for Christian leaders across cultures. I have also personally experienced many of the typical sorts of problems associated with theological education that attempt to impose Western paradigms on students in very different cultural situations. As a consequence, I had to revise some of my own Western assumptions about how the Bible and Christian doctrine may apply to life in various cultures. These experiences and biases were addressed through the bracketing process.

Bracketing was also necessary in my role as researcher in relation to my perceptions of potential participants and their organizations. Although I am an evangelical Christian with a master’s degree from an accredited evangelical seminary, a combination of life experiences has prompted me to widen my perspectives. Though I continue to be firmly committed to a generally conservative perspective of the Bible, I have come to appreciate perspectives from other sources within the wider Christian body, and I looked forward to the possibility of learning from the experiences of those outside my immediate circle. I did not personally know 11 of the participants before the interviews. However, toward the two with whom I was previously acquainted, I took particular care in bracketing myself in order to allow the data emerging from their experiences to speak without interference. I will also identified and bracketed any relationships I had with the participating educational institutions or mission organizations (Moustakas, 1994).
The first step in the bracketing process was to describe my own experiences and notions concerning the phenomena of teaching Christian leaders cross-culturally using e-learning methodologies. Once this description of my perspectives was complete, I became more aware of certain pre-conceptions and was better able to prevent them from distorting the meanings as they emerged from the interviews. Besides determining an honest description of my own experiences before the data analysis, another method of identifying any possible biases was through maintaining a journal during the interview process (Creswell, 2013), which I did. In this journaling process, I was able to monitor my impressions, thoughts, feelings, observations, and reactions in an ongoing manner in order to maintain an awareness of how my perspectives could be influencing the data.

Data Collection

According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenological research attempts to uncover an essential human experience. To do this, information pertaining to the phenomenon must be obtained from participants who have had the experience. Most often, the process of understanding the experience takes the form of participant responses to open-ended questions designed to uncover the essence. Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) explained that a naturalistic approach to data gathering necessitates that the researcher understand and bracket his or her biases in order to obtain the data in a natural state. Using this approach, I collected data through interviews, archival information, follow up interviews, focus groups, and a word cloud.
Table 7

*Data Collection Types with Rationales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal interviews</td>
<td>Human experience</td>
<td>Interviews provided the primary data related to the personal experiences of the participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival data</td>
<td>Documents, learning platforms, and electronic files</td>
<td>The archival data provided clarification of the other data sources and served as a backdrop for understanding the overall experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up interviews</td>
<td>Human experience</td>
<td>Follow up interviews allowed for clarification of interview data and archival material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Human experience</td>
<td>Focus groups allowed for clarification of interview data and archival material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word cloud</td>
<td>Composite of the experience</td>
<td>A word cloud provided a visual weighting of the overall experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the participants were chosen, I compiled basic demographic information including age, gender, ethnicity, educational background, denominational affiliation, and employment status (Pew Research Center, 2015). In addition, I determined participants’ relation to the central research question (Moustakas, 1994) by obtaining more specific information, such as: teaching institution or venue, years of teaching experience, region or country of cross-cultural experience, type of e-learning technology used, etc. In keeping with the delimitation of teaching within the spectrum of Nicene Christianity, participants were selected from entities compatible with a broad Nicene understanding of Christian doctrine (Appendix A).
Interviews

Moustakas (1994) described phenomenological interviews as lengthy discussions on a topic that take the form of open-ended questions and responses that are informal in nature. Although Moustakas recommended that questions be carefully designed, questions may be modified or omitted in interviews, depending on the circumstances, to allow the participants to describe the experience in their own words. The aim of this study was to use open-ended, semi-structured interviews aimed at obtaining detailed (rich, thick, deep) data about the essential experience from each participant. Interviews were recorded via an audio recorder and backed up on a secure hard drive. Additionally, for the interviews to be effective, it was important to create a relaxed and trusting environment with each participant. After a brief initial conversation to set the tone, interview questions included the following:

Preparation to teach cross-cultural theological e-learning courses:

1. How did you become involved in cross-cultural theological training via e-learning technology?
2. What was your expectation of cross-cultural theological e-learning before you began teaching these kinds of courses?
3. What training did you receive to prepare you to teach theological courses?
4. What training did you receive to prepare you to teach cross-culturally?
5. What training did you receive to prepare you to teach via e-learning technology?

The influence of Adult Learning Theory in teaching cross-cultural theological e-learning courses:

6. What were the stated learning objectives of the courses you taught?
7. What is your impression of your students’ professional and personal goals in taking the courses you taught?

8. In what ways were students able to manage their own learning in the courses you taught?

9. How did you modify the course content while teaching in response to feedback you received from students in order to more fully meet their learning goals and needs?

10. How did the students’ own personal and ministry experiences impact their learning?

The influence of culture and technology in teaching cross-cultural theological e-learning courses:

11. How did you modify your teaching approach and/or style while teaching in response to feedback you received from students in order to be more culturally understandable?

11. What problems (if any) did you or your students experience with the language of instruction?

12. What technical challenges did you experience in the process of teaching?

Doctrinal and formational issues in teaching cross-cultural theological e-learning courses:

13. What evidence of spiritual transformation did you perceive in your students during the classes you taught?

14. What types of learning communities were formed in the classes you taught?

Evaluation of the experience of teaching cross-cultural theological e-learning courses:

15. How has teaching cross-culturally affected your understanding of effective theological education?

16. How has teaching cross-culturally affected your outlook on the Christian faith?

17. What changes do you plan to make in any future cross-cultural theological e-learning that you are involved with?
18. Describe your overall experience of cross-cultural theological training via e-learning technology.

19. Choose three vividly descriptive words to describe the essential experience of cross-cultural theological training via e-learning technology.

Table 8

*Interview Questions and Theoretical Frameworks*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Category</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation to teach cross-cultural e-learning courses</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The influence of Adult Learning Theory in teaching cross-cultural e-learning courses</td>
<td>6-11</td>
<td>Adult Learning Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The influence of culture and technology in teaching cross-cultural e-learning courses</td>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>Dimensions of Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctrinal and formational issues in teaching cross-cultural e-learning courses</td>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>Adult Learning Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of the experience of teaching cross-cultural e-learning courses</td>
<td>17-21</td>
<td>Adult Learning Theory/Dimensions of Culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rationale behind the questions pertaining to participants’ preparation for teaching cross-cultural theological e-learning courses (questions 1 through 5) was to discover the motivations for engaging in cross-cultural theological e-learning and the specific ways in which the teachers received training or acquired the experience necessary to teach these types of courses. In other words, what were their advance perceptions of and preparation for the experience? Specifically, questions 1 and 2 were intended to ascertain the reasons why participants became involved in this type of teaching. As adults who have had to learn how to master the skills of cross-cultural theological education, it was important to ascertain whether the
teachers were motivated by the same sort of drives experienced by other adult learners (Knowles, et al., 2005). Questions 3 through 5 focused on any formal and informal theological, cultural, and technical training they received that enabled them to engage in the task. For instance, how did they acquire the cultural sensitivity to be successful in this form of teaching (Nelson, 2016)?

Questions pertaining to the influence of Adult Learning Theory in teaching cross-cultural theological e-learning courses (questions 6 through 11), aimed at discovering how teachers consciously or subconsciously used adult learning principles to design or modify in advance the theological education courses to be taught to a culturally different student population. Specifically, question 6 focused on how course learning objectives aligned with Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, et al., 2005). Questions 7 through 11 looked at how teachers modified course content and teaching approaches during the process of teaching in response to such adult learning principles as achieving personal learning goals, learning autonomy, and learning via experience (Knowles, et al.; Henschke, 2016).

Questions about how the influence of culture and technology affected the teaching experience (12 through 14) attempted to discover the experience of teaching across cultures and how technology influenced that process (Hofstede, 1986; Ikpeze, 2015; Oliver, 2014). Questions 12 and 13 aimed specifically at culture and language barriers the teachers faced in their teaching experience and how those barriers were addressed. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, teaching across cultures requires specialized understandings of how the Bible, Christian doctrine, and ministry skills can be applied in different cultural settings (Davidson, 2011; Hwang, 2011; Naidoo, 2016). Question 14 examined the technical medium of learning as an issue faced by both students and teacher (Cartwright, 2014; Maddix, et al., 2012; Raybon, 2012).
The questions that pertained to doctrinal and formational issues in the teaching experience (15 and 16) were concerned with whether the teachers believed that the students in their courses were adequately prepared for ministry as a result of the courses they taught. Specifically, the questions attempted to determine whether the teachers sensed that students achieved an adequate level of doctrinal training, whether any learning communities were formed (Croxton, 2014; Porterfield & Isaac-Savage, 2013), and whether students were spiritually and personally transformed through the course content (Forrest & Lamport, 2013; Massenya & Booyse, 2016; Naidoo, 2012; Oliver, 2013; Tran, 2014).

Questions pertaining to the evaluation of the experience (17 and 21) invited participants to reflect on teaching cross-cultural, theological, e-learning courses and any changes in curriculum, philosophy, or personal outlook that resulted from the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

An interview protocol was followed that included coded identities of the participants, date and time of the observation, and an introductory script designed to set the participants at ease (Moustakas, 1994). I invited an independent observer from within the field of education to review my interview questions before conducting pilot testing. No questions needed to be revised.

Word clouds will be used to highlight important meanings emerging from the data. Word clouds are organized graphic representations of word frequency related to a topic or phenomenon (Tratter, Lin, Parra, Yue, & Brusilovsky, 2012; Viegas, Wattenber, & Feinberg, 2009). In a word cloud, a set of words or phrases are assigned textual attributes that represent frequency of occurrence, with the most frequent terms being given greater weight as represented by color, size, or boldness of text. The weighted text is then arranged in an appealing visual
representation, from which the major themes can easily be observed. By examining the weight of terms in a word cloud, researchers can examine specific patterns in textual data (DePaolo & Wilkinson 2014). The final two interview questions, which served as prompts for constructing the word clouds, were: Describe your overall experience of cross-cultural, theological training via e-learning technology; and, Choose three vividly descriptive words to describe the essential experience of cross-cultural theological training via e-learning technology. The utilization of a word cloud representation of the frequency of term use to form a graphic representation assisted in synthesizing the stated descriptions of the participants to the overall essence of the experience.

![Sample Word Cloud](image.png)

**Figure 7. Sample Word Cloud**

**Follow-Up Interview**

Following the determination of the invariant horizons of the experience for each interview during the initial phase of data analysis, several quick, follow-up interviews were conducted to check for accuracy and gather any possible additional data (Moustakas, 1994). This process helped ensure that I arrived at an accurate understanding of the experience as stated.

**Archival Data**

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), it is important to gain some background understanding of the setting in which a phenomenon is experienced in order to provide a context
for evaluating data. To obtain such an understanding, they recommended gathering and examining documentary evidence from the research setting itself. Rather than a single physical setting from which archival material could be obtained, in this study there were 13 different settings. Although some of the archival data such as course syllabi, textbooks, etc., was sent to me, some of the data was electronic in form. Electronic data was obtained from the participants in files, and I obtained other information by examining the public websites of various organizations involved in the study. These websites yielded program structure, courses offered, learning objectives, and other aspects of the e-learning environments. Data was stored in a password-protected device, and will be destroyed three years after completion of the study.

Given that much of the data accessed was online, I paid particular attention to Creswell’s (2013) discussion of the advantages and cautions related to online data gathering. He pointed out such positive features of online research as: reduced travel-related costs, more efficient use of time, more time for participants to reflect and carefully frame responses, ease of entry and re-entry into settings, the ability to examine data in non-threatening ways, and the option for including groups of participants that might normally be excluded from research. Along with these advantages, Creswell listed several cautions related to online research, including the need to plan steps for protecting the privacy of participants and settings, additional dynamics related to the abuse of power on the part of the researcher, ethical issues related to the ownership of materials and documents, and problems involving the verification of data.

**Focus Groups**

Focus groups are a desirable form of data gathering when interaction among group members is likely to produce the richest body of information related to the research questions (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas, focus groups can greatly enhance the data gathered
in interviews when participants have similar experiences to share, are motivated to cooperate in exploring the topic, and can draw out information missed or absent from the interviews.

The focus group sessions were intended to allow a group consensus to form on various themes within the topic. This consensus approach is similar to the concept behind the Delphi Method (Lindstone & Turoff, 1975), in which data is gathered from a series of interviews with a panel of experts in a particular field of expertise, and then synthesized into a number of basic principles, insights, or procedures. In this study, focus groups were designed to bring to light aspects of the experience that participants had not considered in their individual interviews. The procedure was to repeat the final 16 interview questions verbatim and use a condensed first section as follows:

Preparation to teach cross-cultural theological e-learning courses:

1. How did you become involved in cross-cultural, theological training via e-learning technology?
2. What was your expectation of cross-cultural, theological e-learning before you began teaching these kinds of courses?
3. What training did you receive to prepare you to teach cross-cultural, theological courses via e-learning methods?

The influence of Adult Learning Theory in teaching cross-cultural theological e-learning courses:

4. What were the stated learning objectives of the courses you taught?
5. What is your impression of your students’ professional and personal goals in taking the courses you taught?
6. In what ways were students able to manage their own learning in the courses you taught?
7. How did you modify the course content while teaching in response to feedback you received from students in order to more fully meet their learning goals and needs?

8. How did the students’ own personal and ministry experiences impact their learning?

The influence of culture and technology in teaching cross-cultural theological e-learning courses:

9. How did you modify your teaching approach and/or style while teaching in response to feedback you received from students in order to be more culturally understandable?

10. What problems (if any) did you or your students experience with the language of instruction?

11. What technical challenges did you experience in the process of teaching?

Doctrinal and formational issues in teaching cross-cultural theological e-learning courses:

12. What evidence of spiritual transformation did you perceive in your students during the classes you taught?

13. What types of learning communities were formed in the classes you taught?

Evaluation of the experience of teaching cross-cultural theological e-learning courses:

14. How has teaching cross-culturally affected your understanding of effective theological education?

15. How has teaching cross-culturally affected your outlook on the Christian faith?

16. What changes do you plan to make in any future cross-cultural, theological e-learning that you are involved with?

17. Describe your overall experience of cross-cultural, theological training via e-learning technology.
18. Choose three vividly descriptive words to describe the essential experience of cross-cultural, theological training via e-learning technology.

The rationale behind repetition in the interview questions was to achieve a deepened understanding of the experience through group interaction with these questions. Interview questions 3 through 5 were condensed into a single question in order to streamline the discussion of personal training in preparation for the experience. The intent of each question was similar to the rationale behind the use of the questions in the individual interviews to obtain data related to the central research question and three sub-questions. The goal was to use group interaction to provoke an enhanced understanding of the experience of teaching theological education courses cross-culturally via e-learning methods. More specifically, an enhanced understanding was sought with regard to: the motivations and prior training of the teachers (Nelson, 2016); the utilization of Adult Learning Theory in the curricula (Knowles, et al., 2005); the influence of culture and technical medium of delivery on teaching and perceived student learning (Maddix, et al., 2012); and the degree to which teachers and students may have been personally, doctrinally, and spiritually transformed through the experience (Naidoo, 2012; Oliver, 2012; Porterfield & Isaac-Savage, 2013). I was able to organize three focus groups: one composed of three members, and two composed of two members each. These were conducted via teleconferencing methods, as described by Creswell (2013), and audio recorded for future transcription.

**Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, data analysis entails organizing the gathered data, categorizing the data into categories of meaning through a coding process, combining and condensing codes, and then describing the essence of the experience in narrative form (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas recommended a systematic approach to phenomenological data analysis, beginning with a
description of the researcher’s own experience of the phenomenon for bracketing purposes. This personal experience should be composed into a detailed, verbatim transcript and analyzed through the same coding steps that will be applied to the interview transcripts of each of the participants.

According to Moustakas (1994), once the bracketing process has been accomplished, the first step in data analysis is to examine the verbatim transcripts of each of the participants’ interviews in order to determine their significance relevant to the research questions. The transcripts should be carefully examined to isolate a non-repetitive list of experiential statements. The completed list will constitute the invariant horizons of the experience. Significant statements should then be grouped into meaning units using constant-comparative coding, which can be developed into a textural description of the experience with verbatim examples.

Data gathered from the archival materials provided by the participants was transcribed verbatim onto observation protocol forms. The transcripts were then examined in order to isolate a non-repetitive list of experiential statements, which served as the invariant horizons of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). I elected to use the comment tool in Microsoft Word™ as an aid in organizing and comparing codes. Once I reviewed the transcripts to the point of data saturation, a number of codes that were very similar were merged. The finalized codes were organized into 10 overall themes, and then structured under five thematic categories to describe the essential experience (Moustakas, 1994). I also composed a structural description of the setting in which the data was gathered. This was combined with the textural description into a composite narrative of the essential experience with verbatim examples (Moustakas, 1994). Focus group transcripts were analyzed using a similar methodology. The word cloud
representation that used the responses of participants to the final two interview questions enabled a visual evaluation of the overall experience themes.

Triangulation makes use of several forms of data in order to confirm patterns of evidence (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas recommended at least three forms of data gathering in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the experience. In line with this recommendation, I employed interviews, follow-up interviews, focus groups, archival data, and word clouds as means of providing not only a rich, deep and thick body of data, but also as a means of cross-checking the accuracy of the data analysis. For example, I found that data from the focus groups both confirmed and enhanced data gathered from the interviews. Data from the archival materials clarified information discussed in the interviews and focus groups. As recommended by Moustakas (1994), I used a memoing technique to explain my data analysis procedures and keep an ongoing, personal, research journal to bracket my own biases and experiences.
In order to validate a study, it is important to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the research (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) described bracketing as an essential procedure in transcendental phenomenology that allows the researcher to suspend judgment about phenomenon before and during data analysis. I therefore attempted to bracket my own opinions and experiences while examining the data as a way of identifying preconceived notions and understanding the data in something like pure form. Creswell used the term validation for the same process, describing it as an effort to ensure the accuracy of the findings, as determined by
the researcher and the participants, always keeping in mind that the final report is a reflection of the researcher’s understanding. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the trustworthiness of research is validated through the following criteria: credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability.

**Credibility**

Credibility denotes the degree of confidence that can be placed on the truth of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I attempted to establish credibility in this study through the triangulation of data sources. As discussed above, triangulation of data gathered from interviews, word clouds, focus groups, and archival information enabled cross checking of the accuracy of the data analysis (Creswell, 2013).

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability refers to ways of demonstrating that the findings of a study are consistent rather than anomalous, and repeatable under similar conditions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba, an external audit is the primary means of achieving dependability. An external audit involves having a researcher who is not involved in the study examine both the process and product of the research to evaluate the accuracy and provide an independent opinion about whether the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data. In order to ensure dependability, a colleague who is certified under CITI conducted an audit of the process and findings of this study.

Confirmability is the degree to which the results of a study are shaped by the evidence itself rather than by the agenda of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba recommended an audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity as means of achieving confirmability. They described an audit trail as a documented record of the steps taken during data analysis to
arrive at conclusions. In this study, I used an audit trail to provide an honest and open description of the steps taken in this study and their rationale from beginning to end. Likewise, triangulation of data sources will allow those who read or reference the study to determine whether researcher bias played a significant role in the research. Additionally, I practiced continual reflexivity during the study to reflect on any biases or preconceptions that could influence my analysis. My research journal and memoing during the coding and analysis phases served to ensure reflexivity.

**Transferability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability demonstrates the applicability of research results to similar contexts. Transferability is ensured through a deep, thick, and rich description of the setting, participants, and data gathered (Lincoln & Guba). My rich description throughout the data gathering and analysis phases of the research will allow other researchers to adapt the procedures and findings of the study to future studies.

Table 9

*Methods for Ensuring Trustworthiness of Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>To establish the truthfulness or veracity of data</td>
<td>Triangulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>To ensure the consistency of data</td>
<td>External audit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>To ensure that data is based on evidence rather than assumption</td>
<td>Audit trail, triangulation, reflexivity through research journal, and memoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>To ensure that findings are transferrable to similar contexts</td>
<td>Rich description</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethical Considerations

The ethical treatment of participants and data is of paramount importance in qualitative research (Belmont Report, 1979; Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Creswell outlined ethical issues in qualitative research as including honesty in reporting data, fairness in representing the data, respecting persons, doing no harm, observing all legal and institutional policy guidelines, and delivering a validated product.

In line with these ethical considerations, all participants in the study were legal adults and signed consent forms agreeing to their participation. The individuals were fully informed in writing of the purpose of the study, the expected duration, the procedures to be followed, and the study’s intended uses. The participants were also informed in writing of any risks that participation in the study could expose them to and were assured that best practices in data security and personal confidentiality would be observed. Signed consent forms from the participants agreeing to the requirements and parameters of the study were kept in a locked storage location, and will be destroyed three years after completion of the study. Data was backed up to secure devices and kept in a computer storage device that is password protected. Assigning pseudonyms to participating educators and institutions assured the protection of the identities of all parties cooperating with the study. The IRB requirements of Liberty University were fully complied with, as were the specific stipulations given by the cooperating institutions.

Summary

Due to the acute shortage of trained Christian leaders in several world regions where Christianity has experienced dramatic growth in recent decades (Beaty, 2014; Cartwright, 2014; Curtis, 2012; Kim, 2013), Christian theological institutions of higher education face the challenge of training many new leaders (Maddix et al., 2012). Beaty (2014) and Cartwright
called for the Western Church to provide more accessible education programs as a top-line priority. One possible solution to meeting this need could be an expansion of e-learning options (Delamarter, Gravett, Ulrich, Nysse, & Polaski, 2011). The purpose of this study was to explore how selected Western theological educators describe the experience of instructing Christian leaders cross-culturally using e-learning methods. Since research into the specific topic of the experience of instructing Christian leaders cross-culturally using e-learning methods does not exist, this chapter outlined a plan to conduct this research. The research plan began with a statement of the problem and the purpose of the research in Chapter One, and continued with a thorough literature review demonstrating a gap in the literature related to this topic in Chapter Two. From this foundation, Chapter Three outlined procedures used in identifying appropriate participants, selecting a convenience sample, conducting interviews and focus group discussions, and constructing a graphic representation of the experience, through audio recordings, and other means. The data was transcribed and analyzed using transcendental phenomenological methodology.

Specifically, the methodology for this qualitative study followed the procedures for Transcendental Phenomenology. I gathered data from open-ended, semi-structured interviews, observations, focus groups, and a word cloud. The data was audio-recorded and backed up, and will be kept for three years after completion of the study. Data was transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the constant-comparative coding method to identify codes and patterns. These patterns were merged into several overall themes describing the essential experience. Journaling and memoing provided a means of ensuring purity of data collection and explanation of procedures. The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through bracketing, triangulation, participant review, and peer review. Ethical considerations were addressed by following IRB
approval stipulations, informing participants of the purpose and goals of the study, assigning pseudonyms, and protecting the stored data with secure passwords. Chapter Four will present and discuss the findings of the proposed research.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This study examined the essential experience of Christian educators who were involved in teaching and/or designing cross-cultural, theological, e-learning courses. My exploration of the current literature on the topic showed that while research exists into the separate topics of theological education, cross-cultural education, and e-learning, there is a relative lack of research into how these three factors combine in the experience of Christian educators involved in cross-cultural, theological, e-learning.

An expanding need for Christian leadership training in developing world regions, and my own experiences related to teaching Christian leaders cross-culturally, were the factors that spurred my investigation of this experience. I have chosen a qualitative, transcendental, phenomenological approach for this study since its focus is on the essential experience of the Christian educators engaged in this endeavor. I have employed commonly accepted, phenomenological research methods in data collection and analysis to arrive at an understanding of the experience (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). The results revealed the insights and lived experiences of the Christian educators interviewed. To guide my study of how the participants experienced teaching and designing cross-cultural, theological, e-learning courses, I organized my research around a central research question and three sub-questions.

The central research question was: How do Western theological educators experience teaching cross-cultural, theological education using e-learning methods? Results showed that the participants experienced the phenomenon in both positive and negative ways. They described their experiences as “rewarding, challenging, and transforming,” felt that their efforts played a role in spreading Christ’s kingdom on Earth, and received enjoyment and fulfillment from participating in
the global Church. Participants also found satisfaction from overcoming educational, cultural and technical challenges. Along with positive experiences, there were frustrations having to do with solving technical problems, navigating complex language and cultural issues, and striving to provide practical, timely, and compelling theological education.

From this central research question, three sub-questions emerged. The first was: How did the Western theological educators design curricula and e-learning media in order to meet the needs of their students? This question aimed at the dynamics of the design process. I found that most of the participants had an adequate working knowledge of Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005) and of the concepts behind the Dimensions of Culture (Hofstede, 2009). On one level or another, they used both of these frameworks to design and teach their courses. They also made use of clear teaching objectives to design their programs and to meet student needs. Participants assessed available technical options for content delivery and selected what they considered to be appropriate e-learning methods in course design.

A second sub-question was: What aspects of cross-cultural, theological e-learning did the Western theological educators believe actually met the adult learning needs of their students? The purpose of this question was to determine the effectiveness of participants’ initial designs. Participants expressed the perception that their students effectively learned content and that they experienced personal transformation and a sense of community in the process of learning. The final sub-question asked was: What did the Western theological educators change in course design and teaching approach based on their perception of students’ learning patterns? Results indicated that participants made necessary changes in basic course design to meet student needs and achieve program objectives.

Chapter Four will present and discuss data collected from a purposeful sample of 13
Christian educators. Participants who met the qualifications specified in Chapter Three were selected from institutions of higher education, mission agencies, and church organizations involved in the phenomenon. Interview and focus group questions were aimed at obtaining rich descriptions of the participants’ essential experience. I will explain the process of theme development and correlations of the data to my research questions in later sections of the chapter. In order to fully understand the results of my research, it is important to introduce the participants in this study.

**Participants**

The participants all held a minimum of an earned master’s degree from accredited Western institutions. Six of the participants held earned doctorates. All participants had experienced the phenomenon of teaching or designing theology and ministry courses cross-culturally via e-learning methods. Some of the potential participants were identified by contacting various institutions of higher education and mission agencies to obtain contact information for their personnel who could qualify for participation. Other potential participants were referred to me in the course of my inquiries and were subsequently contacted concerning participation. Inquiries were made via emails and telephone calls. In order to explain the study and request cooperation, letters describing the goals, procedures, requirements, timeline, and intended uses of the study were sent to each institution and each potential participant. Permission letters were received from nine institutions of higher education and mission organizations, eight of which eventually yielded participants. Completed consent forms were received from each of the 13 participants.

From the beginning of the research, my aim was to obtain an overall understanding of the phenomenon of teaching theology and ministry courses cross-culturally via e-learning methods. To accomplish this goal, I attempted to select participants from a spectrum of entities engaged in this endeavor. This approach yielded participants from a variety of organizational types to provide a
cross-sectional view of the phenomenon (Table 10). Upon completion of data collection, I classified the participating entities into six distinct organizational types: theological seminary, Christian-based higher education, training organization with a mission focus; church organization training department, mission organization with a training program, mission organization with an affiliated ministry training institute, and independent instructor/consultant.

Table 10

*Participant Organizational Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Type</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theological seminary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian-based higher education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training organization with mission focus</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church organization training department</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission organization with a training program</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission organization with an affiliated ministry training institute</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent instructor/consultant</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the inquiry process I found it interesting that of the five institutions of higher education that I initially contacted (three theological seminaries and two university schools of divinity), only three were engaged in cross-cultural, theological e-learning in some form. One of these programs simply delivered course content to students in Asia via videos of instructors’ lectures with translated subtitles. Two other institutions were in the initial stages of designing cross-cultural, theological programs, but were currently offering regular online seminary courses in English for the existing student populations in North American.
The participant sample consisted of 12 males and one female. Participants varied in age from early 30s to mid-70s (Table 11). Not surprisingly, younger participants tended to show strong technological and Internet skills, while lacking extensive experience in theological education and cross-cultural background. Participants in the 60 to 69 and 70 to 79 age groups (Table 11) were strong in theological education and cross-cultural experience, but possessed a wide variation in e-learning skills. While some demonstrated considerable technological savvy, others admitted to lacking adequate technical expertise. The participants in the 40 to 49 and 50 to 69 age ranges showed a balance of strengths in theological education, cross-cultural understanding and technical skills.

Table 11

**Participant Ages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The identities of participating entities and individuals were protected by assigning pseudonyms to individuals and describing their organizations and areas of ministry in non-specific terms. Written material was kept in a secured storage area, and electronic participant information was kept on password-protected computer and storage devices. Interviews utilized the interview and focus group questions described in Chapter Three, but also included follow-up questions.
prompted by participant responses. The resulting data provided rich, thick, deep insight about the essential experience.

The educational programs used by the participants were not uniform in their fulfillment of the three aspects of the research: theological education or ministry training, cross-cultural education, and the use of some form e-learning. I rated the fulfillment of participants’ programs in each of the three aspects as high, medium, or low (Table 12). A high fulfillment indicated that the program was fully engaged in the aspect under study; a medium fulfillment indicated that there was substantial engagement, but that some elements of the aspect were incomplete; a low fulfillment indicated that, while some engagement was present, the aspect was minimally featured. For instance, a program could be rated as high in its engagement with theological education due to a main focus on training leaders for Christian ministry. Its cross-cultural engagement could be rated as medium because its instructor or course designer was from a North American Caucasian cultural background, while the student body was composed partly of North American Caucasians, and partly of other ethnic/linguistic groups living in North America. The same program could be rated low in e-learning engagement because it used a video-based lecture or online discussion forum within a traditional, face-to-face classroom approach.
Table 12

*Cross-cultural, Theological E-learning Elements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Theological Education</th>
<th>Cross-cultural Learning</th>
<th>E-Learning Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bart</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camilla</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As demonstrated in Table 12, participants had a range of experience with the phenomenon. Since cross-cultural theological e-learning programs vary in emphasis and methodology, it was important to include participants who represented that diversity. This range of experience allowed me to gather a rich body of data pertinent to the aims of the study, and will provide applicability for a wider group of institutions and individuals who may wish to learn from its findings.
Aaron currently serves as president of an innovative institution of higher education that specializes in serving underprivileged communities in major metropolitan areas of the U.S. Aaron also leads an organization that supports Christian entities through the use of technology to transform the lives of people from disadvantaged income and ethnic groups. His educational background includes bachelor’s and master’s degrees in computer technology and a doctorate in transformational leadership. Before taking his present position, Aaron’s professional background involved making cutting-edge contributions in the early development of Internet technology. Even though Aaron was successful in the field of developing technology, he nevertheless sensed a calling to urban ministry. Aaron described his change in career focus thusly:

I realized that my heart was more for the city, so I started up a community technology center in an inner city, Black church. And then that grew and became a tech-oriented mission organization. Along the way, we acquired [an urban-focused college]. So from the beginning, we’ve been at the center of integrating Jesus, justice, and technology with online education. So cross-cultural online theological education makes a lot of sense. (Personal interview, April 20, 2017)

The educational institution that Aaron now directs is rooted in a Christian worldview and offers affordable associate’s, bachelor’s and master’s degree programs, catering to low-income students from multiple ethnicities as well as students from a number of nations living and working in urban areas of the U.S.

Bart

Bart is a regional director of a ministry organization that focuses on establishing and strengthening urban churches and ministries, especially among disadvantaged minority groups. He
holds bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees from highly-respected Christian institutions of higher learning. Bart’s previous ministry experience includes planting cross-cultural urban churches and serving as an administrator of an urban training center for Christian leaders. The urban training organization that Bart currently serves specializes in equipping leadership for urban ministries. Bart’s students come from a variety of cultural groups residing within the urban area where he serves, including African Americans, Hispanics and Asians, as well as students from some 15 Central American, South American, and African countries. Bart’s program employs a format in which students meet in a traditional classroom setting and engage in discussion in prompted by a DVD-based lecture. Explaining that he came to transcultural e-learning with some reservations, Bart offered:

I was definitely a skeptic. I’m in my 40s, so I’m not that old, but I am pretty old-school. So taking the first step to embrace theological education by extension—and now working [to adapt our program to be taught in an accredited university]—has brought me to the point where I think that as long as my students continue to receive an excellent education, I’m willing to try anything ethical to make training available for the two billion people who otherwise will not have access to quality theological education. (Personal interview, April 10, 2017)

Camilla

Camilla holds a graduate degree from a prestigious school of education within a high-profile secular university in the U.S. She currently serves as the online learning director for a large church organization in a major metropolitan area of the U.S. The program that she oversees serves a culturally diverse learning community and includes both religious and secular training programs. Her duties include designing and overseeing course development for the organization.
Camilla became involved in cross-cultural, theological e-learning when she was hired for her current position. “Because the [church organization] is such a diverse community, from the moment I started contemplating what we could do with e-learning, I was addressing the cross-cultural component.” (Personal interview, April 13, 2017). One of the e-learning courses that Camilla designed that has both cross-cultural and theological components is an introductory course explaining the religious beliefs and practices of the sponsoring church organization. The purpose of the course is to introduce students from outside the U.S. to the religious beliefs and practices of her church group. The students enrolled in this course are typically Asian high school students. Other courses that she oversees are designed to train ethnic leaders affiliated with her church group for more effective ministries of various types within local congregations and associated ministries.

**Don**

Don is a mission leader and trainer who is currently based in a European country. His educational background includes a bachelor’s degree from a Bible college in North America, and a master’s degree from a mission-focused Christian university. Don and his wife have been involved in church-planting projects for more than 40 years in South America, the Caribbean, and Europe. He received cross-cultural training in his undergraduate and graduate background, as well as through his years of experience living in several different countries. After serving with his organization for nearly 20 years, Don was asked to join a team of mission leaders to develop a training curriculum for missionaries that focused on such core church-planting skills as evangelism, discipleship, and community formation. Although the training program was deliberately designed for a cross-cultural student body, it currently serves missionaries from North American backgrounds with a small number of students from other cultures.
In the beginning of the program, the team had minimal experience in teaching or designing e-learning courses. Don described their approach to program design as pragmatic and experimental saying,

First, we delineated the basic training we wanted to do. When we determined that, the problem was to decide how we were going to communicate it. Since our missionaries were so scattered, the easiest method was to design it in online modules. Since then, it has become a learning process in how to work with the online system. (Personal interview, April 19, 2017)

In the future, Don looks forward to developing a more robust, cross-cultural emphasis to the program as increasing numbers of non-North Americans associated with the mission become involved in the training.

James

James holds earned degrees from a military academy, a secular state university, a theological seminary, and a doctorate in education from a private university specializing in cutting-edge research. James’ professional experience includes teaching courses in leadership development, with a focus on adult education techniques and the use of information technologies. He has written several articles related to distance theological education and instructional design.

James currently oversees a master’s-level degree program in world leadership as a division of a U.S.-based seminary where he also teaches some of the courses. Although the bulk of the coursework in the program is offered online, students enroll in the program as part of a cohort. The cohort typically meets together for an initial intensive course, as well as for a reflection time at the conclusion of the program. While the curriculum is designed to be cross-cultural, approximately 85 to 90% of the current students are from North American backgrounds, with only 10 to 15% being
from other backgrounds. James attributes the low percentage of non-North American students to the high tuition rates of the institution and the demanding academic entrance requirements to meet accreditation standards.

James explained that he became interested in theological education by extension while he was working on his master’s degree and preparing to go the mission field, saying:

I just thought that the philosophy of theological education by extension was a better way to develop leaders—the idea of bringing seminaries to people who were already leading, as opposed to bringing young people to a campus, training them and then putting them in leadership positions. (Personal interview, April 12, 2017)

Because of his own experience in seminary, James’ expectation in designing the current program was that distance learning would be more or less equivalent to traditional, face-to-face education in terms of academic performance. “I knew from my personal experience that I could get as much out of studying cassettes and notebooks as I could by being in the classroom.” (Personal interview, April 12, 2017)

**John**

John served for more than a decade in a developing world region, where he worked with churches, training leaders within the minority Christian movement there. Though his undergraduate and graduate degrees were in science and technology, John took Bible and ministry courses from several Bible colleges and certificated programs in order to prepare for his mission service. He is fluent in several of the languages used by the people groups of the region where he served. Due to his diagnosis with a serious, ongoing illness, John and his family had to return to the U.S. some years ago. During his treatment and recovery, John felt compelled to continue training indigenous Christian leaders working in this region. His urgency to continue their training arose from several
factors: his deep relationships with many of the leaders in the Christian movement; the acute scarcity of training options for these leaders; and his familiarity with the languages and culture of the region. Building on his technical background, John has experimented with several types of e-learning technology over the years in order to deliver basic Bible teaching and personal mentoring to his students in the regional language. Describing the impact of his continuing leadership training as vital to the ongoing ministry in the region, especially in inaccessible areas, John said:

I was talking to [a leader] I am working with, who is now in a village in [an adjacent country]. He’s the only Christian leader in that village—he and his wife and children. The remote training was like a lifeline to them. I mean, not just academically and intellectually, but also for emotional support. They felt very supported by having this connection.

(Personal interview, March 21, 2017)

Kevin

Kevin holds a master’s degree in Biblical Studies with a minor in Christian Education from a seminary in the U.S. Southwest. After graduation, he worked in various aspects of urban ministry. Since 2009, Kevin has served with an urban mission in the Midwestern region of the U.S. The students that Kevin teaches come from a variety of ethnicities: African American, Caucasian, Latino, as well as a handful of students from several African countries. The training program that Kevin uses consists of four course categories: biblical studies, theology, the church and practical ministries, with several courses in each category. The format has students meeting in a classroom on a weekly basis to discuss and interact with a DVD-based lecture.

During Kevin’s early ministry among the urban poor, he gradually felt the need to focus on leadership training. Kevin expressed this calling as a growing realization of the need for trained leaders as the key to healthy inner-city churches. Kevin made the transition to his current position
as a way of fulfilling this calling. He wondered what it would look like to train urban leaders who were already serving in the urban church, saying:

I came from an academic environment where theological education was primarily an intellectual exercise. The people teaching you were not your pastors and mentors—they were your professors. You had this whole other church life, this whole other spiritual life that was something else entirely from what was going on in seminary. What I’ve learned is that e-learning in the context of urban ministry really does reintegrate learning [with spiritual growth and ministry]. (Personal interview, March 27, 2017)

Matt

Matt has an earned degree in a technical field from a state university and a master’s degree from an evangelical theological seminary, both located in the Western U.S. Matt’s seminary experience provided not only theological education, but also a heavy emphasis on intercultural studies. His seminary training had the added feature of offering some courses in a distance-education format, which in the pre-1990s era, consisted of lectures on audiotape and videotape combined with workbooks and other assignments to be completed at a distance. Subsequent to the completion of his degrees, Matt and his family served with a mission organization in an Eastern European region. Matt’s involvement in Christian leadership training grew out of his experiences teaching and working with pastors and other leaders in Eastern Europe. His mission organization recognized his aptitude for leadership development and invited Matt to join a team that was in the process of developing an online training program for missionaries serving on the field. During this time, Matt focused on experimenting with ways of delivering ministry training cross-culturally via e-learning.
The organization that Matt currently oversees specializes in networking with mission and church organizations to assist them in their training programs. The organization offers pre-designed theological and ministry training packages, as well as consulting and assistance in customized program design for Christian organizations, as well as a network of training resources. When asked about any significant preparation he received for e-learning, Matt responded:

The [small-group] training I received was a very strong asset to me as I became an online teacher. I went into online teaching with a mindset of a facilitative kind of relationship with my learners, which is the attitude of a small group leader. So I imagined a small group spread out all over the world, but interacting with each other through technology. (Personal interview, March 31, 2017)

This response reflects Matt’s conviction that course design and instruction should facilitate student learning, rather than simply offer content.

Noel

Noel was born and raised in a Central African country. His upbringing in a tribal region of that country featured deep family associations with some of the early evangelical Christian missionaries to that region. As a young man, Noel was one of a group of promising students who were sent to study abroad. He received a master’s degree from an evangelical seminary in France and later, a doctorate in missiology from a U.S. seminary. Noel is a gifted linguist, speaking several Central African languages, as well as French and English, and has an expertise in biblical languages as well. Currently, Noel is the founding president of a training organization located on the West Coast of the U.S. that focuses on evangelism and Christian mission. He oversees the curriculum of the school and teaches a variety of courses to an ethnically diverse student body.
While Noel’s cross-cultural teaching experience is extensive, his experience using e-learning is limited to two courses. In response to the interview question about his technical expertise, Noel responded,

I did not have much training in electronic teaching. But seeing the needs, we had to figure out how to make the information available. We have all these contacts around the world, and we don’t have qualified people to help. (Personal interview, April 7, 2017).

Richard

Richard is affiliated with an urban mission that equips Christian leaders who are serving, or who desire to serve, in urban churches and ministries. His background includes a master’s degree in biblical studies and a doctorate in practical theology, both from East Coast seminaries. Until 2010, Richard held the position of tenured professor at a small, Midwestern Christian university, at which point he resigned to focus his teaching and training skills on the needs of inner-city churches and Christian leaders. When asked about this career move, Richard shared that he did so for very specific reasons:

I wanted a change of pace from a very homogenous classroom [of young, middle-class college students]. I was looking forward to having older and more experienced people in my classroom. I wanted an opportunity to rethink what I knew: the practicality and veracity of it. The move definitely met, exceeded, and even stretched those expectations. (Personal interview, March 27, 2017)

Richard’s training in cross-cultural education included a modest amount of personal experience, including participation in cross-cultural teaching activities in the Caribbean region and a limited amount of course work in his doctoral training related to cultural issues. The students that Richard currently teaches are largely from ethnic minority and economically disadvantaged
backgrounds. The 16-course curriculum that he uses emphasizes practical theological issues, including Bible interpretation, church planting, and theology. The format typically has students gathering in a classroom to engage with a DVD-based lecture and instructor-facilitated discussion. Some of the class discussion may continue outside of class via email.

Stan

Stan serves as an educational consultant to theological institutions and mission organizations. He holds a doctorate in missiology from a respected, Midwestern Christian university. His professional experience is impressive, including teaching posts at seminaries both stateside and abroad; a career as an international educational consultant; experience as an education extension project designer; author of an educational textbook; missionary with service in several countries; theological education coordinator for a mission organization with multi-national influence; and lecturer in more than 30 venues in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Stan’s initial experience with cross-cultural e-learning was prompted by an invitation to develop an e-learning pastoral training program for the leaders of approximately 200 new churches that had recently been established in a Portuguese-influenced region of Africa. Stan explained,

I simply didn't think it could be done. I told [the sponsoring organization] that pastoral training using e-learning was ineffective. Finally, out of great frustration, they insisted that I write a pilot project to establish once and for all that it couldn’t be done. So I did. And much to my surprise (and probably theirs), it worked. I thought you needed face-to-face interaction, learning groups, accountability— things that I could not imagine happening in electronic ways. I was wrong. (Personal interview, March 27, 2017)
Timothy

After receiving his Master’s of Divinity from a denominational seminary in the U.S., Timothy served as senior pastor of a large church in the western part of the country. During his ministry there, he began travelling to developing world regions, teaching pastors’ seminars, and leading teams of people from his church to engage in humanitarian ministries. In the process, he observed an acute lack of training among Christian leaders. In his words,

What I found was that in many cases, the only thing these [leaders] knew was what they had learned from their own pastors. They had a Bible. They had no concordance, no Bible dictionaries, no cassette tapes, and really nothing except what they had learned about the gospel. (Personal interview, March 15, 2017)

Timothy’s realization of the need for leadership training led him to focus his travelling ministry on teaching and mentoring Christian leaders several times per year, eventually ministering in 15 different countries. As such, Timothy was never formally affiliated with any mission organization or theological institution. Timothy’s training ministry continued when he transitioned to leadership in another church and has been ongoing since his retirement from the pastorate several years ago. Timothy specializes in offering practical ministry courses and leadership mentoring to groups of students in several countries in Africa, as well as countries in Latin America and South Asia. His students have included pastors, elders, worship leaders, and church functionaries from a variety of church groups.

William

William currently oversees and designs training programs for cross-cultural missionaries and field leaders for an East Coast mission organization. He holds a Master’s of Divinity from an evangelical seminary in the Midwest. For more than 10 years, William served as a missionary for
an organization in Eastern Europe before returning to the U.S. in 2005. After his return, he taught courses in cultural adjustment to North American missionaries who were preparing for placement on their assigned fields. While most of William’s students have been North Americans, approximately 15 to 20% were non-North Americans, mostly from a handful of European countries. The courses were offered mainly in an online format and covered practical subjects such as evangelism, discipleship, spiritual formation, successful life-habits, and cultural adjustment.

Early on in his teaching experience, William came to realize that online ministry training must have immediate application to students’ lives and ministries. He is a strong advocate for educational content that can be immediately perceived by students as being both relevant and useful. In his words, “People don’t process raw information effectively when it’s on a screen. They have got to have a ‘here and now’ reason for taking in new information. It’s got to have relevancy and immediacy.” (Personal interview, March 18, 2017)

Results

A phenomenological study aims at uncovering the basic nature, or essence, of a defined experience (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Van Manen, 1990). The results section of a study serves to present and explain the essential experience under examination as revealed in the findings of the research. In this study, I will present and explain the findings of my research into the experience of teaching theological education courses cross-culturally using e-learning methods. Findings will be discussed under the five thematic categories of participant preparation, ministry training design, cross-cultural factors, e-learning implementation, and participant experience and then correlated to the respective research questions.
Theme Development

In my data analysis, I used Patton’s (2002) approach because it allows flexibility to the researcher, while at the same time providing structure for the process. Patton (2002) described the verbatim interview transcripts, along with researcher notes as, “the undigested complexity of reality,” which the researcher must organize in order to distill the essence (p. 463). The 13 recorded interviews and three focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Using Patton’s (2002) guidelines for the analysis of data, I began with a preliminary reading of the 16 transcripts to establish a basic classification system, making notes of possible codes. A second reading allowed me to make a closer examination of the transcripts with an eye toward assigning provisional codes to relevant meaning units. Codes were assigned by distilling the data into basic meaning units under a descriptive word or phrase (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Table 13 shows the final codes and their sources. Codes were noted in the margins of the transcripts using the Microsoft Word™ comment feature.

For example, Camilla shared, “Lately I’ve been using a backward design, which moves from objectives and into design.” (Personal Interview, April 13, 2017). Camilla’s statement was assigned the code: co (course objectives). Noel stated, “Not everyone has access to Wi-Fi. Some are paying a high cost to be connected.” (Personal Interview, April 7, 2017). Noel’s comment was assigned the code: lime-l (limitations of e-learning). In discussing how students interact with one another to stimulate learning from one another, William remarked:

If you get the right number of people in a forum where it’s easy for them to interact and give just a few principles on how a concept applies in your region, a lot can happen from the students themselves. It’s a very simple formula, really, but content is not the driver here. It’s the interaction, the practicality, and I would say the respect that creates a learning
community—and the fact that you're treating learners like adults. (Personal Interview, March 18, 2017)

This comment was classified under the code: lrncom (learning in community).

A running list of codes was maintained, and when all transcripts had been read for the second time, the codes were compared in a process that Patton (2002) described as convergence and divergence. Convergence examined the codes, either to merge similar codes into more concise units, or to propose preliminary themes into which codes could be grouped. For instance, Camilla and Matt both stated in their personal interviews that they used Moodle™ as the preferred learning platform for course design. Richard mentioned that he had used the e-College™ platform in the past. Bart, Kevin, and Richard were using a platform designed by their mission agency. Since there was a variety in the e-learning platforms among the participants, I merged the data from their remarks concerning the particular platforms that they used into a single new code: lms (learning management system).

Divergence looked at the boundaries of meaning units with the purpose of splitting off new codes from original codes that were too broad or imprecise. For example, in one of the focus groups, the participants were discussing the types of students they teach. I initially assigned remarks about students to the code: stutyp (student types). However a second reading of a comment made by Timothy in that focus group session prompted me to realize that some of what he said about his African students that I had originally classified under stutyp actually merited a new code. He said,

I try to bring [the course content] down to a level where everyone can grasp it. In the case of the students I teach in Africa where English is one of the official languages, the students were wanting to come to the class, but their English was really poor. (Focus
Group Session, March 17, 2017)
Timothy’s comments within the context of talking about the types of students he taught revealed a new code, which I called: inslev (instructional level). This process of convergence and divergence led to a refining of codes into the final 49.

The codes were then grouped into 10 themes, which developed as logical groupings of similar codes. For example, in his interview, Stan stated in relation to the code: lanprob (language problems),

For most African students, unless they've been raised in the city, the language of education is not the language they've grown up with. So they're studying in a second, third, or fourth language, and I think that's really hard when it come to theology. (Personal Interview, March 27, 2017)

During my interview with Bart, he made a comment that was coded: lanins (language of instruction),

The curriculum we are using is fully available in English and Spanish, and then it’s being translated in, like some 20 other languages. So, obviously, the issue of language is a basic, you know, if they don’t speak English, then they need to be instructed in a different language. (Personal Interview, April 10, 2017)

Since both Stan and Bart’s data were coded as pertaining to the issue of language, both codes were classified under the theme: Language Factors. The 10 themes were: Participant Background, Program Focus, Adult Learning Design, E-learning Factors, Instructional Design and Modification, Cultural Factors, Language Factors, Technical Problems, Resource Information, and Overall Reflections. These themes roughly corresponded to the aims of the interview and focus group questions. I then constructed 10 theme documents by cutting and pasting relevant sections from
each of the transcripts into separate theme documents, which I read yet again to discover any codes that had been missed in the initial readings.

The value of these theme documents can be shown from my Content and Instruction theme document comprised of all the comments related to this theme pasted together and organized by participant. In this “horizontal reading” of the data, a comment by Richard stood out that I had missed in my earlier readings:

I learned to show up early because the students have lots of questions. And so, when I first started teaching classes in 2011, I discovered that particularly eager students would show up an hour before class, and I would just plan to be there and sit with them and listen to their questions. So, I modified my teaching as I tried to make myself available. (Personal Interview, March 27, 2017)

Richard’s comment resulted in the code: temod (teaching modification). I considered the coding process complete when all meaning units had been identified, all data had been analyzed to the point at which additional analysis became redundant, and when further analysis began to go beyond the delimitations of the study (Guba, 1978).

Ultimately, the 10 themes were organized into five broader, thematic categories to describe the essential experience. The thematic categories included: Participant Preparation, Ministry Training Design, Cross-cultural Factors, E-learning Implementation, and Participant Experience. The creation of thematic categories allowed me to gather the 10 themes into even broader groupings as a means of seeing a larger picture of the essential experience.
Table 13

**Codes and Code Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Source</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>alpu, ae-l, ccc, cofi, capp, cd, cofc, ce, c-ced, c&amp;sn, efcur, e-lrs, e-lt, esex, esthed, expt, inso, instlev, kw, lanins, lanprob, lrncom, lime-l, obstsuc, pertran, partrain, progmod, progout, progtyp, solvlang, solnse-l, solvtech, stgoal, stlncon, stutyp, subj, tfrust, teloc, techles, techprob, temod, techu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>ae-l, ccc, capp, cd, cofc, ce, c-ced, c&amp;sn, efcur, e-lrs, e-lt, esex, inorg, esthed, inso, lanins, lanprob, lrncom, lime-l, minqual, obstsuc, ongtr, pertran, partrain, progmod, progout, resind, solnse-l, solvlang, solvtech, stgoal, stlncon, stutyp, tfrust, techles, techprob, techu, tmst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Material</td>
<td>alpu, cd, ce, c-ced, efcur, e-lt, lanins, lrncom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Code meanings are provided in Appendix F.

**Correlation to Research Questions**

From the beginning of this study, four questions have guided my research. My central research question aimed at capturing the essential experience: How do Western theological educators experience teaching cross-cultural theological education using e-learning methods?

Three sub-questions naturally flowed from the central question. The first looked at design: How did the Western theological educators design curricula and e-learning media in order to meet the needs of their students? The second sub-question examined efficacy: What aspects of cross-cultural, theological, e-learning did the Western theological educators believe actually met the adult learning needs of their students? The third sub-question asked about design and teaching modifications: What did the Western theological educators change in course design and teaching approach based on their perception of students’ learning patterns? The remainder of this chapter will show how the data collected answered these four essential questions. From the way that I designed the interview
and focus group questions, the data naturally provided answers to the sub-questions first, with the final group of data answering the central research question. To prevent the distinct possibility of drowning in a sea of information, I have organized the data under my 10 themes.

**Sub-question 1: Design.** How did the Western theological educators design curricula and e-learning media in order to meet the needs of their students? This question was answered by the data in the themes: Participant Background, Ministry Training Design, and Adult Learning.

**Participant background.** Much of the participant background theme was discussed in a previous section in which the participants were introduced. Also under this theme were the codes: participant training, expectations, and minimum qualifications. Minimum qualifications formed a separate theme with the codes of cultural qualifications and technical qualifications. With regard to participant training, as previously mentioned, all 13 participants held at least a master’s degree; three of those degrees were in non-theological disciplines and were earned at secular educational institutions. Six participants held earned doctorates, all from theological or ministry oriented institutions. The cross-cultural training received by participants tended to come from several types of sources. The number of participants who received some formal classroom training or attended seminars in cross-cultural communication was 10, and those who had significant personal experience living or working cross-culturally numbered 12. All of the participants learned some aspects of cross-cultural education from on-the-job training. With the exception of Camilla, who received formal coursework in e-learning theory and technique, the participants had all gleaned their e-learning skills from seminars, personal experimentation, and on-the-job experience.

Participants had varied expectations of the phenomenon, as well as various assessments of whether their expectations were fulfilled (Table 14). Expectations ranged from confidence of
success to surprise and almost disbelief that cross-cultural, theological, e-learning could be effective. For example, Camilla’s expectations closely matched her subsequent experience because of her formal training and her initial understanding of the cultural diversity of the church group that hired her. On the other hand, Richard was pleasantly surprised by the experience, stating:

There’s an aspect of [the e-learning curriculum] that is easier than I anticipated. I assumed it would only cross a cultural boundary with great revisions—lots of rewriting and re-conceptualizing—but I’ve discovered that it has crossed boundaries more easily than I imagined it would. (Personal interview, March 27, 2017)

Matt reflected the experience of the bulk of the participants when he shared, “My biggest expectation was that there would be a lot of value in making learning more accessible.” (Personal interview, March 27, 2017)

Table 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Expectations Concerning the Phenomenon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Preconceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don, John, Noel,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy, William</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The minimum qualifications for participation in the phenomenon formed a separate theme encompassing the codes of cultural qualifications and technical qualifications. When asked about their perceptions of the minimum qualifications for teaching and designing cross-cultural theological and ministry courses, participants offered several insights as to the cultural qualifications necessary. These included knowing how to listen and the ability to discern between primary Christian truths and secondary doctrinal issues, on which Christians may hold differing
views. They suggested a basic ability to relate to people cross-culturally gained from significant
time spent outside one’s own culture. They also felt that an understanding of the cultural
differences in power/distance dynamics would be important; a recognition that worldview and
education cause people to interact in differing ways; a familiarity that educational and learning
styles may differ with culture and social class; and some understanding of the specific culture of
their students.

While training in online education and the use of technical platforms was thought to be
desirable, the minimum competency suggested in terms of e-learning was the ability to send and
receive emails and experience in using e-commerce and online banking platforms. Matt
underscored this qualification by suggesting that this minimum competency would enable teachers
and designers to function at a basic technical level and provide the basis for gaining further skills.

*Ministry Training Design.* Significant codes that fell under the overall thematic category
of ministry training design included teaching location, student type, program type, term of study,
program outcomes, and ongoing training. Regarding teaching locations, the students taught by
the participants in this study were literally scattered around the globe, from urban centers within
the U.S. to remote locations in developing world regions. Some of the programs in which they
were enrolled gathered students into a central location where teaching took place either via e-
learning or with e-learning enhancements, while other venues featured students studying alone in
exclusively e-learning environments.

Types of students taught by the participants fell into four categories: urban Christians and
Christian leaders within the U.S.; missionaries and cross-cultural ministers (both North
American and non-North American); non-North American indigenous Christian leaders; and a
miscellaneous category that included Camilla’s course design (in process) for non-North
American youth preparing for U.S. study and Matt’s diverse training platform (Table 15).

Students also represented a spectrum of Christian denominations from various Protestant groups to Roman Catholicism. The missionaries and cross-cultural Christian workers tended to be mono-vocational and were mainly funded from North America, while the U.S. urban Christian leaders and the indigenous Christian leaders outside North America tended overwhelmingly to be bi-vocational.

Table 15

*Student Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Types</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Urban Christians and Christian Leaders</td>
<td>Aaron, Bart, Kevin, Richard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missionaries and Cross-cultural Leaders</td>
<td>Don, James, William</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-North American Indigenous Leaders</td>
<td>John, Noel, Stan, Timothy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Camilla, Matt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While nearly all of the programs emphasized training within the context of ongoing ministry, program types were quite varied. They focused on comprehensive ministry training; Bible knowledge; doctrinal/theological education; selected ministry and Christian life topics; aspects of missions training such as cross-cultural adaptation; personal coaching/mentoring; and question/answer formats. Instructional levels ranged from secondary school (Camilla) to graduate and post-graduate studies (James, Stan). Programs were mainly designed to be teacher-facilitated, although Camilla’s program design (which aimed at preparing Asian secondary students for entry into U.S. parochial schools) had independent study features. Among the teacher-facilitated designs, several participants (John, Stan, and Timothy) indicated using...
teacher-to-individual student approaches that included personal mentoring or question-answer formats. The program overseen by James was designed for students to participate in via an 18-month learning cohort. Both Matt and Noel taught seminar-length courses. The rest of the participants featured conventional classes of varying sizes studying together for a single term.

The length and configuration of study terms took several forms, the most common being a standard semester or quarter term. Aaron, Bart, Camilla, James, Kevin, and Richard all taught using this format. Except for James, whose students enroll in a structured cohort for the entire program, all of the other programs allowed students to choose whether to enroll or opt out of a term. Don also employed this more standard format, with the final course designed as an intensive, weeklong session, during which students spend one hour per day in brief reading assignments and extensive discussion board activities. According to archival information gleaned from his website, Matt’s platform featured two main formats: four-week mini-courses with a total time commitment of approximately 16 hours, and one-session webinar courses that have pre-reading and post-session assignments with a time commitment of four hours, plus reading and assignment time. John, Timothy, William, Noel, and Stan taught in formats that were variable in terms of length and format.

Just as the program types varied, program outcomes were diverse. Stated outcomes included Bible competency as the foundation for effective ministry, preparation for discipleship ministries, development of specific ministry skills, leadership and character development, deepened cross-cultural awareness, and the construction of learning communities. Several participants, including Stan and Timothy, stressed the fundamental underlying goal that students should “learn how to learn” in ministry. William emphasized the importance of building programs around what he termed “just–in-time training,” in which relevant and timely content is
offered to meet immediate ministry issues. He contrasted just-in-time training with the “just-in-case” approach that he believed to be characteristic of some forms of traditional education, in which a pre-set curriculum is offered regardless of its immediate usefulness. Stan agreed that practical and useful outcomes were highly desired by students in his programs. He observed that especially in the case of bi-vocational Christian leaders in developing regions,

These people are already doers and are fairly desperate for some foundational skills and background. They’ve taught everything they know, and they want more Bible knowledge so they can actually keep on preaching. So you’re dealing with adults who have a lot of experience, but with relatively little content knowledge to work with. (Personal interview, March 27, 2017)

While not featured in the interview or focus group questions, an issue that emerged from the interviews had to do with the ongoing training of teachers and program designers. For instance, as members of a common organization, Bart, Kevin, and Richard regularly participate in an institutional training and course evaluation program for faculty. The program includes an extensive training manual, post-term evaluations, and teacher resources. Although other participants did not mention any formal, ongoing, teacher training, several indicated that they continually make use of books, articles, videos, online helps, and other resources to improve their teaching, course design, cross-cultural understanding, and technical abilities.

**Adult Learning.** The adult learning design theme looked at student goals, student learning constraints, and adult learning principle used.

**Student goals.** The interview question concerning why students enroll in training was chosen to determine whether students’ goals had significant correlation with the program outcomes.
Student goals, as understood by the participants, were distilled into nine basic objectives, which I further organized under the categories of professional goals and personal goals (Table 16).

The most straightforward of the professional goals was simply to fulfill a mandate from a superior, or to accomplish a requirement necessary to move forward toward another goal. Similarly, some students were motivated by the desire to receive some form of certification, whether in a specific ministry skill or in demonstrating completion of more general studies. Related to this goal was the desire on the part of some students for the social status that might be granted in certain cultural settings to someone with a ministry education. Other students became involved as a way of re-entering structured studies, including as preparation for enrollment in formal, accredited educational programs. Professional advancement was another stated reason why students enrolled in courses, either as a means of gaining better employment opportunities, or to advance in their ministry organization. Many others took courses for the expressed purpose of gaining enhanced professional competency. According to Stan, “It’s not all about salary or looking good. I mean, for some it might be, but for many of them it’s giving them the qualifications to do what they have a deep longing from the Lord to do.” (Focus group interview, April 17, 2017).

Personal goals included a desire for deeper knowledge of the Bible and Christian doctrine. James stated that many of his students had a yearning to be part of a supportive learning community. Still others saw structured study as a means to promote personal and spiritual growth. Richard articulated the desire for personal growth in many students with the following vignettes:

A woman who is an immigrant from Taiwan heads up a ministry on skid row. She's an effective leader of that group, but her goals are very modest. If you ask her to articulate her goals, she’ll say: “I do not want to be in error theologically and practically.” [Also] tonight in my class there are three chaplains from the county jail. They would say that
they've been doing ministry and teaching after a certain fashion for years, but they had no
idea how to really articulate the gospel, apologetics, or theology. So a core objective is to
really identify with this newly discovered depth of Christianity and to explore it.

(Personal interview, March 27, 2017)

The correlation of student goals with program outcomes was not an exact match.
Admittedly, some of the stated reasons for why students became involved in cross-cultural
cultural theological e-learning programs had less to do with internal motivations, and more to do with
external factors, such as fulfilling requirements and mandates. However, setting external
motivations aside, several correlations did appear from the results. The student goals of
professional competency correlated with the program outcomes of the development of ministry
skills and Bible competency. Students’ desire for deeper knowledge matched the program outcome
of Bible competency. Students’ goal for personal growth showed a correlation with the program
outcomes of leadership and character development.
Table 16

*Student Goals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Goals</th>
<th>Professional Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deeper knowledge of Bible and doctrine</td>
<td>Fulfill mandate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in learning community</td>
<td>Receive certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal/spiritual growth</td>
<td>Professional/social status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparation for advanced studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achieving competency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Student learning constraints.* Several constraints on student learning emerged during the study. Most of the participants mentioned the time limitations that their students struggled with as a factor affecting learning outcomes. Students in cross-cultural, theological, e-learning programs tend to be busy. In relation to this issue, Matt emphasized that programs and curricula must be relevant, have immediate application, and demonstrate real value. Another factor concerned the prohibitive costs of traditional theological education for lower-income students in North America and developing world regions. As a consequence, many of the programs in the study were either free or low cost to students. Likewise, the academic requirements for entrance into traditional forms of ministry training were a factor in restricting access to many people outside the North American middle and upper classes. The reason that many of the programs in the study were established was to provide access to those in ministry who did not have the academic background to enroll in other programs.
Adult learning principles used. As discussed in Chapter One, Adult Learning Theory is built around several components. I summarized the main components of the theory as learning autonomy, learning value, learning practicality, and learning via experience (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Several of my interview and focus group questions were aimed at discovering whether courses were intentionally designed using adult learning principles. I found that nearly all of the participants had at least a basic knowledge of Adult Learning Theory, and that several demonstrated extensive knowledge of the theory. Their discussion of program and course design, as well as of their teaching methods also showed deliberate implementation of the theory.

Although I found this result personally gratifying, Stan made the important observation that some elements of Adult Learning Theory reflect larger aspects of Western culture. He questioned whether Adult Learning Theory as a whole could be a consistent tool for understanding learning dynamics in many non-Western venues. For example, the power-distance dimension of Hofstede’s Dimensions of Culture (2009) varies considerably from group to group and has a direct impact on the way that students interact with their teachers, how they engage in class discussions, and significantly, whether they feel entitled to engage in certain types of self-directed learning. In reference to learning autonomy, several participants indicated that in some cultures, it would be unthinkable for students to openly question their teachers’ conclusions or to devise a personalized learning plan. Stan suggested that while Adult Learning Theory could be helpful in course design and teaching across cultures, it should be used with caution and applied in ways that are consistent with specific cultural learning traditions, patterns, and styles.

With that said, I found a number of adult learning principles in use among the participants. Student-managed learning emerged as an important element in instructional design. Students could direct the course of their learning by choosing among options for assignments, scheduling their
regular study time, choosing the level to which they would fulfill the suggested reading, and determining how learning would be contextualized and applied to ministry. Students could also make use of flexible due dates and options for re-submitting assignments for higher grade. Additionally, they could choose from several ways of fulfilling assignments, such as written work, video presentations, oral exams, and group projects. Don explained that his program attempts to mix the kinds of materials used, such as videos, use of key study guides, along with giving students a choice of assigned readings.

Some of the participants indicated that their students had the option of giving input in determining the content of study. Timothy and John both made a regular practice of asking what students felt was most important for them to learn in order to be successful in ministry, and then tailored their teaching to meet those needs. As a final project, James explained that he’d directed his students to design a signature assignment applying what was learned during the program to their actual ministry contexts, saying, “As I’ve trained our faculty in Adult Learning Theory, I’ve encouraged them to measure our learning outcomes with a signature assignment at the end. We try to make that signature assignment very practical in its implementation.” (Personal interview, April 12, 2017)

A set of concise, clearly communicated, learning objectives was stated as being vital to student success. Matt indicated that a major factor in student disappointment was having unfulfilled expectations. Some participants mentioned students’ appreciation of the teacher as a learning facilitator, rather than as an infallible expert. Scaffolding, which uses previous experiences as a frame of reference for further learning, was featured in many of the programs (Vygotsky, 1978). Discussions and assignments were designed to take experiences that students were familiar
with to teach new or expanded concepts and skills. Most of the participants stressed the fundamental importance of practical and relevant learning content.

**Sub-question 2: Efficacy.** What aspects of cross-cultural, theological, e-learning did the Western theological educators believe actually met the adult learning needs of their students? This question was answered by much of the data in the themes: Content and Instruction, Language Factors, Cultural Factors, and E-Learning Applications.

**Content and instruction.** The content and instruction theme was quite extensive and included the codes, subjects taught, course elements, content delivery, obstacles to student success, content application, learning in community, personal transformation, program modifications, and teacher frustrations. The purpose of the theme was to examine what participants taught, the effectiveness of the training, and how it was modified over time.

**Subjects taught.** From the interviews and examination of archival material, I found that a variety of subjects were offered, including standard Bible survey and doctrinal courses. Various types of applied theology courses, as well as specialized courses, such as youth ministry and chaplaincy training were also offered. Other offerings were Christian life courses; evangelism, missions, and intercultural studies; as well as niche seminar courses on a host of topics.

**Course elements.** As with so many other elements that emerged from the research, the participants in the study discussed a wide variety of curricula and course content. Notes were often provided as a part of content delivery, usually in the form of detailed outlines, which students could use either to prepare for class sessions, or to review afterward. Timothy made a habit of suggesting that his students keep these notes in notebook form as archival information that could be used in current and future ministry.
Other common course content elements were DVD lectures, either followed by discussion or with several periods of discussion interspersed during the DVD showing, reading assignments, case studies either in written form or posed during a lecture, and student-posed questions with teacher responses. Kevin shared a peer-to-peer mentoring content element that he found to be of significant value, saying:

In the class I just finished, I had a guy who’s been clean off addiction for two years, in discipleship for one year, and is just really dipping his toe into leadership. And I had a guy with a PhD who is the missions pastor at a large church in the same class. But the guy who’s been clean for two years is running a former addicts’ house, and he has things to say and a perspective on what we’re learning that nobody else has. (Personal interview, March 27, 2017)

The program used by Bart, Kevin, and Richard employed a consistent content structure for each class session that includes a brief devotional, a clear statement of learning objectives, a case study that introduces the topic for the session, the DVD lecture with periods of discussion interspersed, and a practical application assignment. The platform hosted by Matt’s organization suggested a 3:1 rule of thumb for content/application ratio. Matt shared that he designs courses with the assumption that out of a total of four hours in a week spent in a course, one hour is devoted to content exposure. The other three hours are to be spent in reflection, application, and interacting with others.

Assignments also showed significant variation, from written research papers and essays, to ministry projects and exegetical studies. Aaron cautioned that assignments designed for courses in which urban students and students from developing countries make up the enrollment must take into account the much-greater range of academic backgrounds among these students.
than would be expected in traditional, more mono-cultural higher education settings. Little data emerged concerning assessments. Some archival material indicated that the use of objective tests and quizzes, as well as written essays and projects, were used to determine student learning.

Several of the participants indicated that they supplied key learning resources for students as part of the course design. Timothy discovered that the study sites in Africa lacked basic Bible study resources. His solution was to donate Bible study software to those sites. In his words, “The students don't even have concordances, and how do you function without a concordance? So I sent [the site coordinator] some [Bible study] software and asked her to put it on the main computer that they were using.” (Personal interview, March 15, 2017). Similarly, Stan built an entire ministry training program around a core library of 10 essential books that he believed students would need in ministry. Along the way, he taught them how to maximize the utility of those individual resource books.

Obstacles to student success. A long list of obstacles to student success emerged from the interview and focus group questions. I organized these obstacles into several types: external obstacles, financial obstacles, student obstacles, and program obstacles (Table 17). External obstacles had to do with things beyond the control of course designers, teachers, or students. The most frequently mentioned obstacle to student success was the heavy time commitments students had with secular jobs, family, and ministry responsibilities. Another obstacle outside the control of anyone in the educational process was the vast difference in time zones between teacher and students, with a difference of 12 or more hours being highly problematic for students and teachers to communicate in real time. Other problems included the inconsistency of infrastructure, such as electricity and Internet connectivity, and government observation of the Internet, resulting in periodic religious persecution. John shared,
My students have been called in by the [government security agency]. They have been interrogated and physically beaten. Some were enrolled in university and were told by the administration that if they didn't stop believing in Jesus, they would be expelled. They didn’t, and they were expelled from the university. (Focus group discussion, April 19, 2017)

As with external obstacles, financial obstacles hindered student learning and offered no solution within the grasp of either students or course designers. These problems often involved the costs of study (including fees and tuition), obtaining study materials, various other expenses such as paying for Internet connection, and in the case of students who lived at some distance from study centers, travel expenses.

Student obstacles that could possibly be corrected over time were low technical competency, insufficient proficiency in the language of instruction, a background in rote learning styles, and a lack of critical-thinking skills. Program obstacles, while posing significant problems, offered the possibility of correction by program designers and teachers. Significant learning level differences among students could be addressed in the course-design process, as suggested earlier by Aaron. Insufficient personal contact between students and the teacher, or with other students, could be addressed in course design and via teacher training. Students were hindered in their learning due to the use of unnecessary or unexplained theological or academic jargon.
### Table 17

**Obstacles to Student Success**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle Category</th>
<th>Obstacle Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **External**      | • Time constraints  
                   |       • Time zone differences  
                   |       • Inconsistent infrastructure, Internet  
                   |       • Government opposition |
| **Financial**     | • Tuition  
                   |       • Material expenses  
                   |       • Travel costs |
| **Student**       | • Low tech competency  
                   |       • Low language proficiency  
                   |       • Rote learning styles |
| **Program**       | • Learning level ranges  
                   |       • Insufficient student/teacher contact  
                   |       • Unexplained jargon  
                   |       • Low training in e-learning techniques  
                   |       • Teacher cross-cultural incompetency |

Participants stressed using generic language as much as possible in course design and teaching, and that key terms should be thoroughly explained. Richard went so far as to make a running list of words and terms that students struggled with in order to familiarize them with key vocabulary. Noel brought up the problem of using video-conferencing methods to teach students in distant time zones. He shared, “I need to remember that there is a time gap. When I speak, someone across the divide doesn’t get my words right away. So I must let them hear me before continuing and I must slow down my pace.” (Personal interview, April 7, 2017). Unfulfilled student expectations due to poor communication of course content and objectives was another obstacle that could be corrected within programs. Finally, cultural incompetency on the part of the teacher was listed as a correctable problem. Stan related the following:
There is a huge problem with people who take off from the U.S. and go to China or Africa to bless them with their knowledge. They’re actually clueless about the reality of the questions that students bring to the classroom. Students may sit there and smile, but you're totally wasting their time. You cannot teach effectively without that fundamental knowledge of the world of your students. (Personal interview, March 15, 2017)

Content application. Several participants stated applying content to ministry as being a problem. Stan argued for providing only as much content in a course as could be applied effectively within the time frame of the term. Don spoke about his growth in understanding that there may be a variety of ways that content can be applied, “When you get into other cultures, you realize how many presuppositions, how many blinders we have about our thinking and our understanding of theology. That’s forced me to think from a different perspective.” (Personal interview, April 19, 2017)

Learning in community. Establishing a sense of community has been seen as vital in effective theological education (Naidoo, 2012; Tran, 2011). The participants in this study universally agreed that community is important in cross-cultural, theological e-learning, with several expressing the opinion that hybrid courses (in which there is a blend of face-to-face and e-learning features) are the ideal. For example, Richard taught in a hybrid situation. He shared that he makes himself available to students before and after class sessions and has observed a sense of community grow from that gesture. However, participants several stressed that genuine community can be created even in purely e-learning formats, but that course designers and teachers must be intentional in doing so. The participants also suggested that photos or brief videos introducing students and teacher could be used to set the environment for class community. Similarly, Facebook™ groups established for the duration of the class can foster
development of learning communities.

The study participants cited various types of community groups as forming in their classes, including care groups, after-class study groups, project groups, and community groups of existing ministry associations. They also observed that groups formed within a particular class tend to disband after course completion unless there is an existing relationship among members, or some event occurs to establish ongoing relationships. Matt shared that learning communities sometimes form via assignments that can have multiple outcomes, or that raise conflict issues, but which must be resolved biblically. Matt went on to suggest that wiki assignments, in which students can interact with and add to others’ work, or student-facilitated discussions, may sometimes trigger these types of conflict situations. However, he warned that poorly designed wiki assignments and student-led discussions may actually work against the formation of biblical community. James spoke of his institution’s intentional design to create community saying, “One of the things we have cohorts spend time doing in the first course is telling their stories. What really develops the trust level in the cohort is when they hear that other people have problems too.” (Personal interview, April 12, 2017).

Cohort systems such as James’, and the one used by Bart, Kevin and Richard, as well as the intentional creation of smaller class sizes, tend to facilitate community by allowing students to hear from others how God is at work in very different places and situations. During his participation in a focus group with Kevin and James, John shared that the element of community is a missing component in his teaching. He went on to discuss possible ways of introducing this element, despite the scattered locations of his students. Timothy shared that although he does not know many of his students, he does have ongoing relationships with the site coordinators and sometimes engages in videoconferencing with classes with the help of the coordinators in order
to create community.

**Personal transformation.** Theological educators have stressed the vital importance of personal transformation as a component of effective theological education (Delamarter, 2005). Some educators have been critical of theological distance learning and e-learning because they believed that these forms of training are not capable of effecting the kinds of transformation necessary in the formation of Christian leaders (House, 2010; Kelsey, 2002). While agreeing with the premise that personal transformation is essential to effective theological education, the participants in this study strongly asserted that such transformation was possible via cross-cultural e-learning. They specified both personal growth and transformation in terms of ministry competence (Table 18). Participants measured personal growth in their students through deepened faith. Noel saw increased faith in his students’ willingness to cross cultural barriers with the gospel. Bart detected increased faith in an excitement for scripture memorization. Don saw a renewed commitment to prayer that God would open up outreach opportunities. Aaron mentioned deep mental and emotional healing as students confessed sins and recognized their callings.

Several participants listed enhanced living as seen in improved marriages and the breaking of old habits as being indicative of spiritual change. Kevin regarded consistency and self-discipline as marks of personal transformation: “There’s something about the faithfulness and diligence to do the class work that bleeds over into the rest of their spiritual life and ministry. There seems to be this direct correlation.” (Personal interview, March 27, 2017). Matt saw openness and increased personal encouragement as signs of transformation:

The biggest evidence [of transformation] is people taking the risk to be open in a discussion about their own spiritual walk. If they’re willing to open up, you see an
interchange that happens that can go back and forth two or three times. To me, that’s a sign of spiritual change. (Personal interview, March 31, 2017)

Camilla agreed that personal transformation was essential, but as the program designer rather than a teacher, she did not have direct observations about results. Camilla stated that her teachers regularly monitored evidence of spiritual transformation in discussion boards and chat venues.

Deepened ministry commitment was a second element in personal transformation. Kevin pointed to the establishment of trans-denominational ministry partnerships among his students as evidence of growth in ministry commitment and perspective. Aaron cited commitment to serve and increased ministry competence in his students,

I interviewed three recent graduates of our program. All three had previously been drug addicts—two of them had been hard-core drug addicts. They’d been in prison. Two of them are now counseling other addicts in a Christian context. The third one is actually leading a bunch of ministries at a rescue mission. (Personal interview, March 27, 2017)

When asked about personal transformation, Stan indicated that with many students, transformation is a function of an ongoing relationship built with the teacher during class and measured by watching their development over time. Timothy suggested that a site mentor or coordinator could also be a key figure in fostering and measuring personal transformation.
Table 18

*Measurements of Personal Transformation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformation Type</th>
<th>Personal Transformation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deepened Faith</td>
<td>Cross-cultural evangelism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased scripture memorization</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased prayer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional/spiritual healing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhanced living</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry Commitment</td>
<td>Ministry partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased service/ministry competence</td>
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</table>

**Language factors.** This theme looked at language as a basic component of culture and how it affected course design and delivery. The language of instruction in most of the programs was English. Exceptions were John, Noel, Stan, and Timothy who have done all or part of their teaching in other languages. Some of the programs that participants were involved in also had versions of the courses in other languages, such as Matt’s program and the program of Bart, Kevin, and Richard, which is currently available in 10 languages. Participants agreed that the ideal is instruction in the heart language of the students. When this is not possible, designing courses in the educational language of a multilingual nation, such as English, French, or Portuguese, is acceptable with the understanding that less educated students will struggle in their understanding and participation.

**Cultural factors.** Several codes made up the theme designated as cultural factors. Codes included culture and social norms, contextualization of content, and cross-cultural education design.

**Culture and social norms.** One of the main elements in this research was cross-cultural education. The participants provided a wealth of information on the subject of how culture
affects the way that people learn and how it impacts theological education. One of the observations made was that language itself is a cultural experience, and learning at least something about the language of students can provide deep insights into how they learn and perceive the world. Another observation had to do with marriage, male/female relations, and the concept of family as highly cultural constructs. Noel shared this personal insight:

I come from an extended family mindset. So a brother or sister is not necessarily someone who comes from the same parents. If I am talking with someone who has an atomic view of family, then a brother or sister is from the same father and mother. They have other terms for other relationships, like half-brother, half-sister. So I need to become aware of cultural differences and convey the message of the Bible appropriately.

(Personal interview, April 7, 2017)

Matt agreed, observing, “If you watch the way people raise their children: how they teach what’s right and wrong, and how to act in society, that will give you some hints about the deep heart ways that people actually learn things.” (Personal interview, March 31, 2017)

Stan and Timothy both spoke about how culture affects the way discussions occur and who participates. They offered examples from some African and Asian countries, where younger people are discouraged from freely speaking in the presence of older people and are taught to value the opinions of elders, even if they privately question those opinions. This high power/distance dimension carries over into the relationship between teacher and students, where the teacher is regarded as an expert. Stan related an incident from his own experience in this regard,

There was a missionary in our early days in [an African country]. He had grown up in the educational world of valuing the experience of your students. None of his African
students had ever studied the Bible. They would ask questions, and this young missionary would say to them, “That’s a wonderful question. What do you all think about that?” At the end of the term, the students went to the head of the school and said, “We don’t want this man as a teacher ever again. He doesn't know anything.” (Focus group discussion, March 17, 2017)

Aaron pointed out that urban culture within the U.S., as well as some cultures in developing countries, have a very different sense of time and time use, which can impact study and class time. He also discussed differences in the concepts of possession and property rights between those cultures and mainstream Westerners, along with the ramifications for plagiarism in academic work. Both Aaron and Timothy provided insights on how economic status affects culture. Timothy shared his experience of reading a book about poverty and culture and realizing that culture is a factor of economic level saying, “All over the world, those that are at the lowest economic level have certain common cultural tendencies that change [as economic status increases].” (Personal interview, March 15, 2017)

_Contextualization of content._ How the Christian Faith may be taught and applied differently in different cultures also emerged from the research. Noel stressed that the New Testament provides the criteria for critiquing culture. “We are one tribe of Jesus Christ. The scripture is the basis for our unity. We don’t deny our culture, but we must use the Bible to sort out what is biblical in our culture and what must be denounced.” (Personal interview, April 7, 2017)

Noel listed six barriers to cross-cultural ministry that must be crossed in order to be effective: spiritual (unbelief), linguistic (lack of common language), cultural (dissimilar ways of life), social (economic and social status), ethnic (different people groups), and geographic
These barriers have an obvious impact on theological education and ministry training as well. William provided the insight that while the teacher might be the content expert, the students themselves are often the experts in how Christian content is applied authentically in their own culture. Matt shared the story of an older Western missionary whose approach to teaching Christian doctrine in India was to make use of the Indian reverence for the wisdom of elders. His method was to adopt a role similar to that of a Hindu guru and to interact with students on a question/answer basis in order to make disciples and teach Christian truth.

Kevin shared his own journey of initial skepticism toward the urban ministry curriculum used by his organization. While parts of it did not resonate with his own experience, he found himself marveling at its impact on his urban students. He has since learned to trust that an urban-culture course designer typically understands better than he does what connects with urban students and how they learn. Richard, who uses the same curriculum, also expressed amazement that a material designed for use in the urban U.S. has been effective in such widely scattered places as urban centers in India and South America. Richard also observed that North American academics tend to value brevity and succinctness in lecture and class discussions. However, his own experience in teaching urban students is that urban culture tends to value repetition and expansion. Therefore it was necessary for him to allow his students to talk through concepts more thoroughly than he would have previously expected. Bart offered the thought that teaching cross-culturally exposes the cultural blind spots of the teacher through interaction with student cultures, and that it can be a highly sobering experience unless the teacher is prepared for this possibility.

Cross-cultural education design. In relation to curriculum design, several insights were given. In response to the comment that cross-cultural theological education may prove too
daunting for some teachers, Richard reflected that it is possible to teach in an unfamiliar culture if the teacher knows some basic cross-cultural principles. However, without a familiarity with the student culture, teachers must have the humility to understand that they may not be communicating as effectively or causing change as deeply as they might think. For example, subjects like counseling, conflict resolution and church dynamics, as well as family issues, are highly tied to culture and may differ in the outworking of biblical teaching in various cultural contexts. In John’s experience, some relationship with students and their culture goes a long way toward effective, cross-cultural design and delivery. Don suggested that admitting that the teacher may not understand some aspects of student culture can foster productive, cross-cultural discussion and learning.

In the event that non-Western students need to be acclimatized to study effectively in a Western perspective, James and Camilla both provided mechanisms within the introductory units of their programs to acquaint students with basic concepts and procedures. James made provisions to intentionally work with students from high power/distance cultures to encourage them to participate freely in discussion assignments. Camilla included brief videos that illustrate aspects of Western thinking and culture for students who may otherwise experience bewilderment with things Westerners take for granted.

Aaron offered insight into learning platforms as they relate to culture. He suggested that urban cultures within North America tend to be very savvy with consumption-focused platforms characteristic of m-learning, such as smartphones and tablets. These devices can be used educationally, but have the drawback that they are weak in production elements like keyboard features. However, they may prove helpful with students who are adept at navigating these platforms.
**E-learning applications.** The code *e-learning types* fell under the e-learning applications theme. Several types of e-learning were used by study participants (Table 19). Types included purely online courses and seminars, online courses with face-to-face elements, videoconferencing style courses, m-learning style courses, intentionally hybrid courses, and face-to-face courses with e-learning elements. Several of the participants used more than one type. Aaron, Camilla, Don, Matt, Stan, and William all made some use of purely online formats to deliver content and interact with students. The program overseen by James featured mainly online courses with significant face-to-face elements at the beginning and end. John, Noel, and Timothy made extensive use of videoconferencing in order to lecture and interact with students. Both Stan and Timothy made use of m-learning approaches, especially texting platforms. Camilla’s theologically oriented courses were of the intentionally hybrid type, with face-to-face time balanced by online discussions and exercises. Bart, Kevin and Richard worked with a face-to-face urban ministry training program that included e-learning elements, such as DVD lectures and some online exercises.
Table 19

E-learning Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E-learning Type</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purely online</td>
<td>Aaron, Camilla, Don, Matt, Stan, William</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online with face-to-face elements</td>
<td>James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videoconferencing</td>
<td>John, Noel, Timothy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-learning</td>
<td>Stan, Timothy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>Camilla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face with e-learning elements</td>
<td>Bart, Kevin, Richard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

E-learning resources. Learning management systems, texting platforms, Apps, and other e-learning tools employed by participants were varied. Moodle™ was the most common LMS, and was used by Camilla, Don, Matt, and William, with eCollege™ and Canvas™ being used in the past by James and Richard, respectively. The program used by Bart, Kevin, and Richard loaded videos, handouts, study guides, and tutoring resources onto its website to help students adjust to the learning process and complete assignments. Noel and Timothy made extensive use of Skype™ to deliver content and utilized the screen-share feature to demonstrate concepts graphically. They also used Apple’s Facetime™ and the iMessage™ texting platform to interact with students individually. John shared his experience with WhatsApp™ to make audio and video phone calls, send text messages, images, documents, and videos.

Advantages of e-learning. Participants shared that theological e-learning can be highly relational and interactive. William shared his surprise at this phenomenon:
I didn’t expect that when you have a guy in one country and a guy in another country who are in very different contexts but are trying to accomplish a similar task—that they can actually teach each other. I could never send them an article or video that would be as powerful as those two talking about how you plant a church [in different contexts].

(Personal interview, March 18, 2017)

Stan volunteered that although e-learning may be second best compared with teaching in person, it is better than nothing and may be the only option available in some cases. He went on to add that e-learning can also be very cost effective for teachers when travel costs, living expenses, and potential health costs are factored in. Stan and Matt agreed that e-learning formats can overcome the extrovert-friendly environment of face-to-face learning venues in which verbal students can dominate the discussion. E-learning discussion assignments can be designed in such a way that all students must participate. In this way, shy students can express themselves, and verbal students must carefully consider their words before committing them to writing. E-learning discussions also can be re-read numerous times until they are fully digested.

Matt went on to posit that some LMS platforms offer detailed feedback on student participation and performance. He emphasized that e-learning has the potential for immediate application of content into ministry. Whereas students who learn in venues divorced from their ministries, such as at conferences, seminars, or during lengthy terms of study at Bible school or seminary, e-learning content can often be applied the same day. He added that e-learning niche courses can provide just-in-time learning that addresses situations that Christian leaders are facing at the very moment they need the information. In e-learning courses, students can interact with other students potentially from around the world on issues that they commonly face in relation to the course content. John offered the important reminder that some students
experience pressure from their governments, or from societies that are not friendly to Christianity. E-learning can offer ways for them to receive the training and encouragement they need without the potential dangers that go with studying in a physical location.

Aaron had several insights from his own experience on the value of e-learning. He shared that personal mentoring often involves breaking down character flaws in Christian leaders, which can be difficult in an e-learning setting. While e-learning formats may continue to lag behind traditional, theological education formats in some ways, he contended that e-learning has gained parity with face-to-face learning over the past decade in terms of student assimilation of content. On the other hand, he also shared that e-learning is showing potential superiority over traditional education in terms of hands-on training because students are able to learn in the midst of ministry and with immediate application. In partnership with mentoring from churches and existing associations, Aron believed that deficiencies in character development and spiritual formation can be overcome in e-learning approaches.

**Sub-question 3: Modification.** What did the Western theological educators change in course design and teaching approach based on their perception of students’ learning patterns? This question was answered by the balance of the data in the themes: Content and Instruction, Language Factors, Cultural Factors, E-Learning, and Tech Issues.

**Program modifications.** The interview and focus group questions concerning program modifications were divided into the categories of past modifications, planned future modifications, and wish-list items. Participants made an array of modifications in the past to their teaching programs. Recognizing the lack of student study experience and research skills, the program used by Bart, Kevin, and Richard developed guides and resources accessible on their course site for use by students in fulfilling assignments. For ongoing modifications, their platform has a program-
wide evaluation and suggestion form. Richard also mentioned correcting and clarifying confusing assignment instructions.

Timothy changed his approach from set subjects chosen by him to student-determined, issues-driven teaching. Given students’ time commitments, Matt revised his program to reduce the amount of work per course. He also required that teachers be recruited from among those who have actually practiced the content. Don’s first course was beta-tested by a panel from the organization, and subsequent revisions have come from student feedback. Camilla designed her program with courses formatted as templates that could be modified by individual teachers to suit specific student needs. Stan has moved toward a learner-centered approach that delivers basic content, assigns a discussion forum initiated by the teacher, and then allows students to work the problem for themselves. Stan now also requires students to complete basic advance work before each session as preparation for this type of learning.

As to planned future modifications, Richard shared that his organization plans to enhance cultural contextualization of courses for the expanding number of groups that use the curriculum. Personally, he wants to become more familiar with the churches and cultures of the students that he serves. Stan said that he hopes to keep up with current e-learning literature. Noel’s desire for future changes was simple: more e-learning courses to serve geographically distant groups. Kevin wanted more student-led discussions and more relevant, student-feedback mechanisms. John plans to explore the use of PowerPoint™ and other presentation software for clearer content delivery. Given the inconsistency of the Internet for some students, Don plans more extensive use of e-books that students can download at the beginning of a course and read at their leisure, reducing the need to use the Internet. His organization also plans Spanish translations for its main courses. Camilla’s future plans include keeping current with developing tech options and establishing a review process.
for church entities that use the courses. James is moving toward requiring all students to become conversant with the Dimensions of Culture (Hofstede, 2009) as a basis for course discussions. Matt is working on options other than written forms, such as video, for submitting assignments.

Wish-list items emerging from the questions demonstrated forward thinking on the part of the participants. Kevin would like to provide each of his students with an electronic tablet or other portable device that could have notes, reading assignments, and video lectures pre-loaded for students to use and review outside of class time. James would reduce the cost of tuition to admit more cross-cultural students and would provide advanced credit to qualifying students from non-accredited programs should they wish to proceed to formal seminary training. John would like to find a way to harness the language and ministry expertise of returned Western missionaries and connect them back via cutting-edge technologies into the cultural groups they served. He suggested that this would greatly enhance the spread of the gospel and the strength of the global Church. Aaron simply made the projection that a universal, transcultural, multilingual, and contextualized theological education platform (similar in concept to the Bible App™) will be forthcoming.

**Teacher frustrations.** Apart from the challenges already mentioned in the preceding sections, participants mentioned several specific frustrations. John struggled with health issues since his return to the U.S., but continued to teach during his bouts with illness. His weakened condition and lack of finances has made it difficult to make the kinds of improvements he would like to see in his ongoing teaching. He mentioned that he has sometimes felt alone in his teaching project in terms of emotional and prayer support. Aaron’s faculty has an uneven range of technical ability or even interest, which has caused him to spend hours helping them become proficient with online platforms and teaching methods. James spoke of his continual efforts to
balance the flexibility of his program in order to meet student goals and maintain accreditation standards. Stan shared that he constantly tries to evaluate what students actually need to know:

“You don't want to give them an easy degree, but if they're going to spend time studying, are they studying the right things?” (Focus group discussion, April 17, 2017).

**Language problems.** A number of problems concerning language arose from the research. The use of unnecessary or unexplained academic jargon was cited as a frequent problem. Along with this problem, English competency was an issue, either due to English being a second language for students, or simply because some students who are fluent speakers of English had low reading and writing abilities. Some cultural issues were linked to language as well. It was pointed out that in developing countries, the higher economic classes usually had far fewer problems with the language of instruction than did their lower economic counterparts. In some cultures, there was pressure to teach and minister in “status languages,” such as French in Haiti or Portuguese in Mozambique, rather than in the ethnic languages spoken by most students. Stan made the observation that this situation was somewhat analogous to the use of Latin in medieval universities because it was thought that God deserved to be discussed in Latin rather than in the vulgar tongues of the common people. Yet, he pointed out that use of status languages tends to create unnecessary distance between course content and the everyday lives of students. Other language problems concerned teachers maintaining currency in the language of instruction and choosing the best dialect of a language for translation.

**Solving language problems.** Clarity of communication was stressed by several of the participants. Don and Richard recommended avoiding idiomatic expressions and simplifying or clearly explaining academic jargon and theological terms. Timothy encouraged providing written notes to accompany lecture content, which students could use to clarify understanding. Stan urged
that course designers keep in mind the fluency level of the students at all times. Suggestions concerning translation were also offered. Matt insisted that translators be fully fluent in both languages, and that they be given adequate resources to deliver a quality product. Don suggested finding the most widely understood and accepted dialect of a language as the language of instruction. Camilla designed key vocabulary features into her design for Asian students, along with graphics to provide visual context for the terms and concepts. Both Camilla and James require students to pass an English proficiency test before enrollment in their programs. John shared that he regularly listens to television programs in the language of his students in order to maintain fluency.

*Limitations of e-learning.* William observed that many students do not absorb information as well from a screen as they do from written material or verbal discussions. Similarly, some students do not express themselves as well in writing and may find themselves handicapped in a purely online environment. Timothy admitted that his preference would be to teach in person because of the face-to-face contact with students, but the difficulties and expense of travel make e-learning an attractive option. Noel agreed that facial expression and body language can not be gauged as effectively in e-learning formats. Don, John, Stan, and Timothy pointed to large time-zone differences as making e-learning a challenge for both students and teachers. Aaron suggested that differences in computer and online competency among students also present a challenge for designers of cross-cultural, theological e-learning.

*Solutions to e-learning limitations.* Several of the participants expressed the view that when feasible, hybrid courses are ideal since they combine the best of face-to-face interaction with the advantages of e-learning. William stated that obstacles to a sense of community in e-learning formats can be rendered irrelevant if relationships exist outside the e-learning environment. For
example relationships with existing ministry teams or among groups of students engaged in e-learning in a central location can make up for lack of community online. Timothy found that lack of physical teacher presence can be effectively overcome by using a site coordinator to manage and/or mentor groups of students in remote locations. In relation to the possibility of government censorship and monitoring of Internet-based courses, John found that phone-based videoconferencing platforms may provide a more secure alternative.

**Tech issues.** The tech issues theme organized two codes: technical problems experienced and solutions to technical problems. Although none of the participants expressed a negative view toward using technical means to provide cross-cultural theological education, Stan posed an important consideration,

> [In some countries,] for the cost of buying a decent computer, you could afford two teachers for a couple of years. So whether you want to invest in a computer lab with three or four computers or provide employment to [indigenous] pastors who could teach, mentor, pray etc., is a fundamental question. (Personal interview, March 27, 2017)

Similarly, Mark cautioned against implementing technical programs simply because they are perceived as “cutting-edge” when the students may not be ready for those programs. With these cautions in mind, I will discuss the technical problems that emerged, along with some solutions offered.

**Technical problems experienced.** Infrastructure and equipment failure were consistent issues that surfaced in the research. Inconsistent electrical power due to poor power grids or bad weather were stated as common challenges with regard to e-learning. Internet connectivity, slow Internet speeds, and spotty cell phone coverage were also seen as common concerns. Several of the participants agreed that these issues were improving in developing world regions, but that
there continues to be a significant lag behind developed nations. Other participants spoke of government censorship of the Internet as causing difficulties with e-learning delivery.

Although equipment failure can pose a problem in the most sophisticated online learning programs, some of the participants indicated equipment failure as a major frustration. Outdated computers, servers and wiring were mentioned, along with lack of provision for regular, on-site maintenance. Bart, Kevin, and Richard mentioned that when courses are taught in a prison setting, equipment sometimes is not available due to miscommunication with the authorities. Matt spoke of problems caused by student confusion over the differences in software designed for use in P.C. environment vs. software designed for Apple™ products. Further, the lack of page numbers on e-book versions of reading materials also was cited as a frustration in the e-learning process. Additionally, student incompetence with basic e-learning skills was another technological problem. Skills that students lacked included low ability to send and receive emails, difficulty in navigating elements of course learning management systems, and general lack of computer competence.

Solutions to technical problems. Some of the solutions offered to these technological problems were obvious, such as replacing outdated and broken equipment and providing training for low-competence students. Stan urged that attempts at synchronous learning exercises should be avoided in situations where the infrastructure and Internet are unreliable. Instead, he suggested that discussion be designed as asynchronous and that videos could be provided for students to download and view when time and bandwidth permit. Matt and Camilla stressed the importance of timely and accurate helpdesk features as part of the learning platform.
Central Research Question: The Essential Experience. How do Western theological educators experience teaching cross-cultural, theological education using e-learning methods? This question was answered by the data in the themes: Resource Information and Personal Reflections.

Resource information. The resource information theme ordered several codes, including innovative organizations, resource individuals, effective curricula and e-learning tools, and insightful sources.

Innovative organizations. A partial list of organizations engaged either in innovative online theological education or cross-cultural theological education was gleaned from participant interviews and observation of archival materials posted on organizational websites. Aaron recommended Third Millennium as an innovative organization providing free biblical information worldwide. Bart suggested City Vision University as a pioneer in Christian online education. James referenced some of the training programs of the Summer Institute of Linguistics as providing helpful models. Kevin suggested examining the website: Biblicaltraining.org as well as the materials of the Missionary Training School of Global Frontier Missions. Matt recommended Crosswired as an online learning community connecting people and equipping them for work in missions. He also suggested looking at programs offered by World Team, Send International, and Youth With A Mission (Y.W.A.M.). Richard mentioned that Indiana Wesleyan University is engaged in significant online education.

Stan indicated several institutions as worth investigating including: SIM International, which offers theological education and technical services for accomplishing their mission; Asbury Theological Seminary, which offers five fully online master’s degrees; Houghton College, which has a program of online, cross-cultural education on a global level; and Greater European Mission, which is in the process of developing a European-based e-delivery system for
theological education. He also shared that Africa International University offers online programs that include some cross-cultural elements, and that South African Theological Seminary has a history of effective distance education. William recommended Grow2Serve, which offers its own seminars and mini-courses in a variety of context-specific ministries, as well as a platform with helpdesk services for like-minded organizations to host courses.

Resource individuals. Bart and Richard both recommended Sherwood Lingenfelter as an author of several important books on cross-cultural issues related to teaching. Bart also recommended Andrew Sears of City Vision University as a forward-thinker in online education for the economically disadvantaged. James pointed to Ralph Winter as a pioneering name in Theological Education by Extension (TEE). Stan thought that it would be worth looking at the work of John Boekhout, who was a developer of Bible Education by Extension (BEE) curricula. William suggested reading the works of Ken Ward and Lois McFinney, both of whom are known for pioneering various forms of innovative theological education. He also recommended reading Jane Vella of Global Learning Partners, as a prime thinker in applying Adult Learning Theory in Christian contexts across cultures, and contacting Mark Morgenstern of Grow2Serve for ideas about innovation in online course design.

Effective curricula and e-learning tools. Aaron recommended looking into the video resources of RightNow Media as tools for e-learning. Bart endorsed the Capstone Curriculum of The Urban Ministry Institute, which has been translated into 10 languages, with 10 more in process. James felt that a study of the classic TEE materials would be a good preparation for engaging in the phenomenon. John recommended taking advantage of training provided by the Perspectives on the World Christian Movement as essential for cross-cultural ministry. Stan suggested that the cross-cultural, educational materials developed by the Christian and
Missionary Alliance organization, and the BEE materials would be relevant to engaging in cross-cultural theological e-learning.

*Insightful sources.* Bart highlighted Sherwood Lingenfelter’s *Leading Cross-culturally* (2008) as important reading. Richard recommended *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* (2012) by Richards and O’Brien as essential for cross-cultural teachers. Stan felt that the *Booknotes for Africa* series could offer some cutting edge information on the phenomenon as it is occurring in Africa.

*Personal reflections.* I have incorporated insight into the essence of theological education, changed concept of Christianity, the essential experience, and key words under the theme of personal reflections. This theme aimed at identifying and illustrating the experience in its most essential form.

*Insight into the essence of theological education.* When asked the question concerning whether the experience of teaching and designing cross-cultural, theological, education courses had resulted in insights about the essence of theological education, participants came to several basic conclusions. First, participants saw effective theological education as a symbiotic relationship between teacher and students. Stan and William agreed that when properly taught, students can often determine the best ways to apply theological content to their own cultures. Camilla offered the observation that effective learning is always an interactive exercise between teacher and students, rather than a mere absorption of content. She further observed that whether face-to-face or via e-learning, good instruction is always the key element.

Theological education should also be transformational. Matt offered the observaton that effective theological education and ministry training is, essentially, a form of discipleship. In his words, “It’s very fulfilling when you have this tangible moment when somebody has an ‘ah-ha
experience,’ and you feel like, ‘Wow! I got to be a part of that.’” (Personal interview, March 31, 2017). Aaron and James both emphasized that transformation of men and women into Christian leaders requires personal development and spiritual growth, which must occur in some sort of community setting. In a focus group discussion with James and Kevin concerning the importance of community, John recognized the need to add a community element to his own training program, which had been mostly a one-to-one experience until then.

The countercultural nature of theological education was highlighted by Noel and Timothy, who stressed that biblical Christianity transcends culture, and that it both connects and corrects cultures. Bart added that each cultural group brings its unique virtues and vices to the universal Church, whose job it is to integrate the virtues of each cultural group while correcting their vices. Don, Kevin, James, and Richard pointed out that much theological education has been designed from a Western, adult-learning, cultural perspective. He suggested that this perspective is not necessarily representative of the universal Christian Church, either globally or chronologically. As a result, effective theological education requires a cross-cultural element to recover its balance and power.

Finally, the participants stressed that theological education should be practical. Timothy stated this concept clearly when he said that students are most interested in information and skills that can be used in their immediate ministry contexts. At the same time, he urged that course objectives, content, and delivery be kept to their most essential elements. As an official of a theological institution, James observed that theological seminaries are often not on the cutting edge of delivering practical theological education, and suggested that innovative ways of getting education to students—especially across cultures—have been left to mission agencies, parachurch organizations, and freelancers. Kevin agreed and stated that in his experience,
theological institutions are often unwilling or unable to effectively connect ministry training with practical, real-world ministry.

Stan believed that developing technology presents an opportunity for theological educators to completely re-think what effective theological education could be. He pointed to YouTube™ and other video sites that offer access to learning from the best preachers, worship leaders, and Bible teachers across the globe. He went on to suggest that technology exists to develop mentoring and student feedback platforms as well. His view was that technology is allowing a fresh conceptualization not only of what is, but also of what possibilities may be available in the near future.

*Changed concept of Christianity.* All of the participants felt that the experience had altered their concept of the Christian Faith either by strengthening it, broadening it, or giving it perspective. Through the process of teaching cross-cultural, theological, e-learning courses, several of them came to a more clear realization that Western Christianity represents but a single perspective among a variety of biblically valid cultural perspectives. Others reached a deeper appreciation of the cultural richness of authentic Christianity. Kevin, Matt, and Stan pointed out that the Bible can be seen through a number of cultural lenses and can be authentically applied in numerous ways, especially on secondary doctrinal issues. John reflected that cross-cultural students have a way of critiquing their teacher’s culture and may have cultural insights into the world of the Bible that Westerners have largely lost. William spoke of challenged Western assumptions, and Timothy described his perception of a gulf between North American Christianity and Christianity as experienced in other regions. Matt learned that biblical teaching on authority structures within the Church tend to be downplayed and even rejected by Western Christians who operate from egalitarian assumptions. He added that he had realized that Christianity is more relational than
propositional. Noel recalled that God is in the process of redeeming the entire human race and forming them into a new humanity. In his words: “To live is to belong to God. First I belong. Then, I am.” He went on to marvel at God’s grace in using him. Aaron and Kevin were both reinforced in their realization that God is deeply concerned for the poor and disadvantaged. John offered the perspective that, “Remote education is allowing the fulfillment of the prophecy that all the nations of the world will have access to the gospel that otherwise would have been closed to them.” (Personal interview, March 21, 2017).

The essential experience. As with many other elements of this study, participants experienced the phenomenon in a variety of experience types (Table 20). Aaron found the experience of cross-cultural, theological, e-learning to be personally frustrating. His frustration was not with the experience itself, but with how he believed the Church to be missing opportunities to greatly expand its educational and discipleship reach. Conversely, Bart described himself as being enriched by participating in the universal Church. Camilla found the phenomenon to be engaging and gratifyingly versatile, with limitless possibilities. Don found it challenging and rewarding. James was personally transformed through seeing God at work around the world. Kevin described the experience as a privilege. He went on to say that e-learning is not the last word in cross-cultural, theological education, but that it has a real place among the educational options. Kevin reasoned that it makes training available that might not otherwise be available, and that it brings people together transculturally.

Speaking of course design, Matt observed that although it requires a lot of up-front work, courses can be used repeatedly thereafter. Noel found the experience to be technologically challenging. Richard said that the phenomenon is life giving and that it keeps him sharp. Stan remarked at how fulfilling it can be to mentor significant global leaders. Although he did not
believe e-learning to be as rich of an experience as face-to-face teaching, Timothy found the experience to be fulfilling, rewarding, frustrating, as well as a great privilege. He added that he believed e-learning to be part of the changing face of missions. William shared that he did not find the phenomenon to be difficult, and that in no way should it be thought of as second-rate.

Table 20

*Participant Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience type</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fulfilled by the accomplishments</td>
<td>Camilla, Matt, Richard, Stan, Timothy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged by the task</td>
<td>Aaron, Don</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformed by the experience</td>
<td>James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmed in the process</td>
<td>Noel, William</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edified through participation in the Global Church</td>
<td>Kevin, Stan, Timothy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied through overcoming challenges</td>
<td>Bart, Kevin, Richard, William</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated by technical problems</td>
<td>John, Matt, Noel, Timothy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcame language and culture issues</td>
<td>Bart, Camilla, Don, John, Kevin, Matt, Noel,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richard, Stan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggled to provide quality theological education</td>
<td>James, Stan, Timothy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Key words.* In addition to these descriptions, I asked each participant to select three words to capture the essence of their experience to be used in constructing the following word cloud:
The findings of this research provide important answers to my research questions and correlate with my chosen theoretical frameworks. Results showed that the participants experienced the phenomenon of teaching cross-cultural, theological education using e-learning methods from a mostly positive perspective. They found it to be a fulfilling, challenging, and even transforming experience. Participants derived deep affirmation from the belief that their efforts were playing a role in fulfilling the spread of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth. They received enjoyment and edification from having participated in the Church on a global level, and they found satisfaction from the process of overcoming educational, cultural, and technical challenges. There were also frustrations in the experience having to do with technical problems, navigating the sometimes complex
language and cultural issues, and striving to provide practical, timely, and compelling Bible and ministry education.

The specifics of design, efficacy, and modification, as related in three sub-questions, were also addressed in the results. As to the design process, I found that most of the participants had a good working knowledge of Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005) and of the concepts behind the Dimensions of Culture (Hofstede, 2009), which they used in designing and teaching their courses. They considered beforehand potential language and culture issues that they would have to address in course design and teaching. They had clear ideas of the overall teaching objectives, either from a program perspective or from perceived student needs, and assessed available technical options for content delivery, selecting what they considered to be appropriate e-learning methods in course design.

The second sub-question looked at whether participants’ initial designs were effective. Besides the range of learning success that might be considered typical in any sort of teaching experience, participants expressed the perception that much of the time, their students learned content effectively. Their assessment was that students underwent personal transformation in the process of learning, and that in many cases, students experienced a sense of community as well.

The final sub-question had to do with design and teaching modifications. Results showed that changes were made in basic course design, such as shifting from designer-focused objectives to student-based objectives; adjustment to be more culturally and linguistically accommodating; and experimentation with technical and e-learning options to provide more effective content delivery.

Chapter Five will discuss and interpret the results of the research in reference to existing relevant literature. Implications of the results will be explored with regard to how they may be applied for effective, cross-cultural, theological e-learning.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This chapter will discuss the findings in Chapter Four concerning the experience of teaching and designing cross-cultural, theological education courses using e-learning methods. The chapter will consist of an overview, a summary of the findings, a discussion of the results as related to relevant literature and theoretical frameworks, implications of the findings for practice, a brief explanation of the limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

The lived experiences of 13 participants were captured through recorded individual interviews and three focus group discussions. The data was then analyzed into 49 emergent codes, which were organized under 10 themes and then further distilled into five thematic categories. As stated more fully at the conclusion of Chapter Four, the findings of the study showed correlation with the research questions and with my chosen theoretical frameworks.

My central research question asked: How do Western theological educators experience teaching cross-cultural, theological education using e-learning methods? Results emerging from the research indicated that overall, the participants experienced the phenomenon of teaching cross-cultural, theological education using e-learning methods in positive ways. They found the experience to be fulfilling, challenging, and transforming, and they took deep satisfaction from what they had learned in the process. The frustrations experienced had to do with various technical problems, the struggle to overcome language and cultural issues, and mistakes made in the attempt to design and deliver practical and accessible theological education.

The first sub-question focused on design: How did the Western theological educators design curricula and e-learning media in order to meet the needs of their students? Findings
related to this question showed that participants have a working knowledge both of the Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005) and Dimensions of Culture (Hofstede, 2009) theoretical frameworks. They typically understood and used at least some basic adult learning principles and cross-cultural concepts in the design and teaching of their courses. Some participants were already competent in e-learning theory and design. Others used a trial and error approach in designing courses and over time, achieved a satisfactory result.

The second sub-question looked at efficacy: What aspects of cross-cultural, theological e-learning did the Western educators believe actually met the adult learning needs of their students? Concerning aspects of their designs that actually met the needs of their students, the results showed that their initial designs were at least partly effective. In the initial phases of most of the courses, students learned content satisfactorily and experienced some level of personal transformation and sense of community.

The final sub-question asked: What did the Western theological educators change in course design and teaching approach based on their perception of students’ learning patterns? Findings demonstrated that various changes were made to increase effectiveness in course design and teaching, such as moving to student-based learning objectives, making adjustments in the culture and language aspects of the courses, and experimenting with more suitable e-learning options.

**Discussion**

The phenomenon under study involved the intersection of three elements: best practices of theological education, cross-cultural education, and e-learning methodology. In my review of the literature, a gap emerged in the knowledge base demonstrating that little research had been conducted into the phenomenon before this study was initiated. The growing use of e-learning methods to provide cross-cultural, theological education, combined with the scarcity of research
into this particular intersection of elements, underscore the value of this study. The use of Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005) and The Dimensions of Culture (Hofstede, 2009) as frameworks for evaluating the data add to the study’s originality and value.

In Chapter Two, I presented foundational literature related to the elements of the phenomenon. I identified and briefly discussed my two theoretical frameworks, as well as some of the existing literature concerning e-learning, online theological education, and cross-cultural education. This literature provided a lens for discussing and developing meaning from my findings. Meanings from the findings will be discussed under the five thematic categories: participant preparation, ministry training design, cross-cultural factors, e-learning implementation, and participant experience.

**Adult Learning Theory**

Adult Learning Theory, as explained and popularized by Malcolm Knowles, served as one of the theoretical grids used in this study (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Adult Learning Theory can be understood as the study of the learning styles, needs, and goals of adults (Knowles, et al, 2005). The theory argues that adults learn best when a specific cluster of factors are present (Henschke, 2016; Knowles, et al, 2005). I summarized these factors as: learning autonomy, learning value, learning practicality, and learning via experience (Knowles, et al, 2005). In Chapter Four, I discussed at some length how adult learning principles were used in the various program designs. For instance, the participants used such adult learning principles as student-managed learning in the form of choosing among assignment options, the ability to adjust study times, and deciding how to apply learning to ministry. They also employed clear learning objectives that focused on practical learning content, scaffolding exercises that made
use of student experiences for further learning, and an approach that cast the teacher as a learning facilitator, rather than simply as a content expert.

As mentioned above, all of the participants had some knowledge of adult learning principles. While none of them explicitly recommended that educators who wish to be involved in cross-cultural, theological e-learning must have a background in adult learning, their input as to the minimum training needed assumed some basic familiarity with these principles. Stan, a participant in this study with many years of cross-cultural teaching experience, did not disagree with the consensus that those who wish to engage in the phenomenon be conversant with adult learning principles. However, he did offer an important caution, saying that since Adult Learning Theory was conceived of by Westerners in a Western cultural context, the theory as a whole may not always be uniformly applicable in non-Western educational venues. In particular, the factors of learning autonomy and learning via experience may manifest themselves differently in high power/distance cultures. These factors may be affected by other cultural dimensions as well.

The Dimensions of Culture

The Dimensions of Culture (Hofstede, 2009) was the other theoretical framework used in this study. Geert Hofstede and his son, Gert Jan Hofstede, in cooperation with Michael Bond and Michael Minkov, developed this cultural assessment model in order to provide a standard for understanding differences between cultural groups (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Among the categories of culture identified by this theory are Power/Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Pragmatic/Normative, and Indulgence/Restraint. My findings as to what cultural dynamics the
participants experienced largely corroborated the Power/Distance, Individualism/Collectivism,
and Pragmatic/Normative dimensions of the theory.

Power/Distance and Individualism/Collectivism both emerged from the data as major
factors in designing and teaching cross-culturally. Several of the participants pointed out the
importance of being aware of the power/distance constraints in cross-cultural teaching. For
instance, they pointed out that in certain cultures, it would be culturally inappropriate for
students to openly question or disagree with their teachers, who tend to be seen as respected
experts. They also considered it important to be aware that Western-style class discussions,
which tend to feature student knowledge and experience, may not be a good fit in cultures where
students are often seen as novices in a particular field and may have little of value to offer.

The Individualism/Collectivism dimension looks at the degree to which people think and
act as individuals, as opposed to seeing themselves primarily as members of a group. I found it
interesting that Bart, Kevin, and Richard, who teach in U.S. urban contexts, were the ones who
spoke of having to adjust to this cultural dimension. Richard specifically shared his experience
of becoming aware of the need to allow for class discussion among his urban students. This
allowed them to arrive at an agreed consensus of opinion before moving on to the next topic.

The Pragmatic/Normative cultural dimension attempts to measure the extent to which
decisions are made in response to opportunities and developing situations rather than in
conformity to expected traditions and community norms. Participants who taught in U.S. urban
contexts, including Aaron, Bart, Kevin, and Richard, likewise indicated working with this
dynamic. For instance, Aaron expressed with some astonishment and frustration that he had to
work against the notion, sometimes reinforced by African American community leaders, that
minorities cannot succeed in e-learning formats.
John, Noel, Stan, and Timothy also discussed this factor. Noel spoke passionately about the need to help students understand the gospel’s role in causing people to examine, critique, and transcend community norms when they are in conflict with scriptural teaching. Participants’ responses did not address the Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, or Indulgence/Restraint cultural dimensions. Perhaps if I had structured questions specifically for each of these cultural dimensions, more information would have been forthcoming.

The cross-cultural education portion of my literature review included recommendations that cross-cultural educators have a minimum level of cultural sensitivity. For instance, Nelson (2016) emphasized that educators should acquire a basic cultural intelligence, built on personal humility. De Beuckelaer, et al., (2012) argued for cultural empathy and open-mindedness as necessary qualities for effective, cross-cultural teaching. Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) expanded on these recommendations by identifying the personality traits of openness, social initiative, emotional stability, and flexibility as being essential to cross-cultural interaction.

The participants in this study did not disagree that these traits formed essential background for the experience. What they added to these ideas were recommendations for how these qualities could be acquired. They strongly advocated that potential, cross-cultural, theological educators have some experience living in a culture other than their own. They further suggested that some skill in meaningful interaction with people of substantially different cultural backgrounds would prove to be extremely helpful. Noel and John accentuated the importance of students’ willingness to do the work necessary to cross cultural boundaries for the sake of the gospel. Timothy made the important point that language learning is, in itself, an important cross-cultural experience, and he suggested that some second language experience would provide significant background for teaching cross-culturally.
Best Practices of Online Theological Education

A second grouping of literature looked into the factors comprising effective online theological education. Several studies, including Maddix, Estep, and Lowe (2012), Raybon (2012), and Cartwright (2014), examined e-learning best practices. From these studies, I synthesized several specific categories, including: appropriate cognitive load, consistency of content, flexibility in design, management and feedback features, and range of learning activities. According to Sweller (1988), cognitive load is a measurement of the total mental effort used by the working memory to solve a problem. The participants in this study addressed the cognitive load category of best practice by stressing ease of use in learning platforms so that students could focus on learning content, rather than waste time learning to navigate a confusing platform design. They also pointed to course designs that account for a wide range of educational backgrounds in order to allow each student to function at their optimum levels of learning.

Cartwright (2014) wrote that course content should be consistent in terms of focus throughout all learning units. Raybon (2012) added that courses must adhere to clear and consistent learning outcomes. Matt, Stan, Timothy, and William underscored these recommendations, with the added emphasis that learning objectives within courses should align closely with students’ personal educational goals. Given the intense student desire for training that is both practical and timely, they stressed that course designers must structure content and design learning outcomes to meet student needs for usable knowledge and skills.

Along with consistency of content, programs should have some built-in flexibility in design to accommodate a variety of institutional and learner objectives (Arinto, 2016; Davidson, 2011). Timothy demonstrated this kind of flexibility when he shared his realization of the need to shift his teaching toward subjects and topics generated by his students. Stan also realized at
some point that it would be better to teach basic content, and then allow students to work out culturally appropriate applications for themselves. Matt intentionally changed his approach away from courses of a conventional length, moving instead to seminar style “niche” courses, (lasting from one to four weeks) in order to meet the just-in-time needs of students.

Self-determination in managing the learning process was stated as being an important goal in the literature (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Maddix, Estep, & Lowe, 2012; Raybon, 2012). However, the participants did not stress this point. Rather, they pointed to the heavy time pressures on their students, many of whom had to balance studies with active ministry, secular jobs, and extended family responsibilities. Participants shared that instead of being driven by some inner desire to be in control of learning as stated in the literature, simple time management was the motivator for student self-management in their e-learning programs. The ability to do readings and submit assignments within a flexible time frame was seen as essential, given the demands on students’ time. The emphasis of Raybon (2012) and Cartwright (2014) that instructors provide prompt, specific, and constructive feedback was echoed by the participants in the recurring theme of consistent instructor presence and responsiveness to student questions and problems.

Several participants expressed the wish that their courses could include a range of visual, auditory, and interactive learning activities as advocated by Raybon (2012). However, they lamented the acute limitations of technology, which prevented the implementation of this desire. Inconsistent infrastructure, slow Internet speeds, outdated equipment, and other factors, were all cited as hindrances to a greater variety of content and accessibility options in their courses.

**Personal transformation.** Cartwright (2014), Kelsey (2002), Nichols (2014), Patterson (1996), and Reissner (1999) pointed out that some theological educators have expressed the
opinion that online, theological education does not adequately foster personal transformation. In order to address this issue, Fluegge (2010) and Tran (2011) suggested theological e-learning models that integrate two necessary transformational conditions: student involvement in active ministry, and a course design that encourages the sharing of personal experiences by class members. James’ cross-cultural degree program intentionally built its content around these very conditions. He shared that he considers the deep, personal sharing of students within the context of their ongoing ministries to be vital to their personal and spiritual transformation.

Another option for solving the problem of personal transformation is to offer hybrid courses. Camilla and Timothy both used the technique of adding e-learning course elements into a traditional face-to-face courses with good effects. In Timothy’s case, he made use of a site coordinator and local pastors to provide mentoring and oversight for the spiritual and professional progress of his students in an African venue. The program used by Bart, Kevin, and Richard likewise made use of both face-to-face elements and e-learning features to foster student growth.

**Sense of community.** Likewise, theological education has traditionally placed a high value on students’ physical presence within a campus community (House, 2010; Naidoo, 2012). Because teacher and students are not physically present with one another in fully online courses, some theological educators have been skeptical about authentic, online, learning communities (Tran, 2011). Although some studies have recommended that learning communities be designed as a central feature of theological e-learning curricula (Cornelius, Gordon & Ackland, 2011; Deulen, 2013), other research into this aspect of fully online theological courses indicates that physical presence is not absolutely necessary for the experience of authentic community
(Naidoo, 2012; Porterfield & Isaac-Savage, 2013). As an example of successful online community, Don shared his mission’s success:

In the feedback we got, one of the items that came across as very positive was the fact that students felt connected to students in other parts of the world and other ministries, and realized that they’re not alone. And sometimes as a result, I believe that dialogue has continued between them. It has helped unite the mission in some ways. Not that we’re divided, but people feel more connected with people in other parts of the world. So, the community aspect has been definitely there. In fact, that's been one of the strong points.

(Personal interview, April 19, 2017)

**Cross-cultural Factors in Teaching**

Another category of literature focused on the dynamics of cross-cultural education. This grouping of literature looked at the cultural implications for course design and language considerations. There has been a certain amount of recent scholarly discussion concerning the problems related to teaching theology and ministry courses cross-culturally. Beaty (2014) and Fluegge (2010) argued that when non-Western students receive theological training from Westerners, the Western focus of the curriculum may leave them ill-equipped to address problems that their own communities face on a regular basis. Consequently, there has been a growing call by missiologists to restructure cross-cultural, theological programs to be more compatible with the cultural worldviews and concerns of non-Western students (Corrie, 2015; Das, 2016; Fluegge, 2010; Hwang, 2011; Naidoo, 2016). As an example, Davidson (2011) reported on a theological training program in rural China in which students were consistently encouraged to work out scriptural applications for a Chinese context, rather than simply being given Western solutions.
In relation to this point, Stan shared an example of the need for teachers and curricula to be culturally reconfigured:

It’s a battle I lost constantly within the mission because I would argue with them about teachers who had just finished their doctoral training and who then came out to the mission field. When they got there, I would argue, “You need a year as somebody's intern because you don’t know enough to teach.” They’d go, “But I just got my doctorate.” I’d insist, “You don’t know enough to teach.” But the school would say, “He’s got his PhD. Let him teach.” And I’d go, “But he doesn't know enough to teach [in this culture]” (Personal interview, March 27, 2017).

Don tempered the emphasis on the need for cultural familiarity with the observation that learning can be enhanced, and even enriched, in situations in which students from very different cultures study together. However, he stressed that this type of enhanced learning can only happen when there is free and sustained interaction among students about the varying cultural ramifications and applications of the topics being discussed.

Language is an important component of culture. Hofstede (1986) argued for the concept that language tends to categorize reality through word choices. This point was echoed in research by Magnier-Watanabe, Benton, Herrig, and Aba (2011). Because of this dynamic, he urged that if possible, teaching should be conducted in the heart language of students. There was no disagreement on this point from the participants. However, when teaching in the heart language of students is not possible, participants suggested the option of teaching in an accepted educational language such as French, Spanish, Portuguese, or English. While using an agreed-upon educational language may provide a satisfactory solution, students’ proficiency in the educational language becomes an issue, both in its spoken and written forms.
E-learning Implementation

Yet another category of literature examined the technical aspects of the phenomenon. The literature related to this topic looked at technical problems and the emerging phenomenon of m-learning.

Technical problems. Participants mentioned inconsistent infrastructure, slow Internet speeds, and faulty equipment as being obstacles to a successful teaching experience. They also discussed low levels of technical competence among students, and even among some teachers, as factors that they had to overcome. Although the literature mentioned these factors as well, Croxton (2014) pointed to a significant result of such technical failures: lack of student willingness to engage in e-learning. Park, Nam, and Cha (2012) demonstrated that students’ overall attitude toward technology is a primary factor in their willingness to engage in e-learning. They went on to suggest that students’ reluctance to choose e-learning options can be overcome if educators show that they can provide reliable access to the Internet, a well-designed learning platform, and satisfactory technical support.

In the interviews, Camilla and Matt both stressed the importance of these technical factors in their programs. To meet the technical needs of students with a wide variety of skill levels, they included strong helpdesk features into their programs from the very beginning. Don’s solution to the problem of inconsistent infrastructure was to pre-load study materials onto the learning platform so that students could download them at times when they could rely on decent Internet access. Noel, as well as John, Timothy, and others shared about their own struggles to learn how to use various aspects of e-learning technology. They also expressed the desire for consistent technical assistance either from a staff assistant or from someone who could step in and solve problems on a regular basis.
The emerging phenomenon of m-learning. In the early stages of my research, I came across an article by Yousuf (2007) that proved to be pivotal in motivating my interest in cross-cultural, theological, e-learning as a research topic. The article examined the experiences of Pakistani students who were engaged in m-learning, which was a term that I was unfamiliar with at the time. I had realized that e-learning through online courses and other electronic features could provide ways of training many students in developing world regions. Yet, I also understood that conventional online courses could be very difficult to deliver in many of these regions. Yousuf’s article on the successful use of m-learning in Pakistan piqued my interest in this emerging form of learning as a possible alternative to standard online courses.

M-learning, which uses mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones for delivering educational content, has become an increasingly popular option among students in developing world regions (Acosta 2016; Alghabban, Salama, & Altalhi, 2016; Alzu’ Bi & Hassan, 2016; Yousuf, 2007). Studies by Serrab, Shibli, and Badursha (2016) and Wong (2016) attributed the popularity of m-learning to a number of factors, including cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, learner autonomy, platform familiarity, instantaneous fact acquisition, global access, diversification of information sources, and social connectivity. Parmigliani and Giusto (2016) found that the strength of m-learning is in design elements that focus learning on specific bodies of knowledge, in developing specialized skill sets, and in participation in defined communities of practice (Wenger, 2000).

According to Dissanayeke, Hewagamage, Ramberg, and Wikramanayake (2015), an example of the applications of m-learning can be seen in the adaptation of cell phone texting platforms to facilitate communication. For instance, texting can be used for collaborative learning, ongoing discussions between instructors and students, and interaction between groups.
of students. In their interviews, John and Timothy indicated that their practice of using texting and messaging platforms to provide individual mentoring to students was an effective part of their teaching. They emphasized that for students in certain situations, messaging and texting methods provided the only options available for ongoing learning. Synytsya and Voychenko (2015) found that instructional podcasts were being used as a cost-effective way of providing enhanced learning tools for online courses. James and Stan commented on this type of usage when they pointed out the popularity of YouTube™ videos for step-by-step instruction on a host of practical skills, from guitar lessons to home repair, and remarked on their potential for theological training.

Aaron offered his own assessment that students who come from North American urban culture tend to be more skilled in using mobile devices than they are in using conventional computers. He acknowledged that due to screen size and awkward keyboard features, smartphones and tablets tend to be designed as consumption devices, rather than production devices. However, Aaron believed that certain kinds of learning are not only possible on mobile devices, but perhaps even preferable in some circumstances because of their mobility. John added that using m-learning devices for instruction instead of traditional online learning platforms can reduce the risk of government censorship and/or pressure on students in regions where the government is suspicious of Christian activity.

**Participant Experience**

During the past several decades, Christianity has experienced dramatic growth in the developing world. This rapid growth has resulted in a significant shortage of trained Christian leaders in some world regions (Cartwright, 2014; Curtis, 2012; Kim, 2013; Mandryk, 2010). Beaty (2014) and others have reacted to this need by calling for more accessible education
programs to train additional leaders in areas where Christianity is expanding (Curtis; Esterline, Werner, Johnson, & Crossing, 2013).

This study aimed to examine theological educators who were attempting to meet this need by using e-learning methods to train leaders Christian cross-culturally. In my research, I discovered several reasons why the participants in this study became involved and why they were motivated to continue to serve in this way (Table 21). On a basic level, all of the participants experienced a motivation to train Christian leaders. I found, however, that it was not this basic motivation that distinguished them. It was the circumstances under which they became involved in the cross-cultural teaching and e-learning aspects of the phenomenon that set these individuals apart as important for study.

On one end of the spectrum, Aaron and Camilla had significant backgrounds in e-learning and Internet technology. Aaron had a professional background in the early development of the Internet, yet he felt drawn out of this field to bring what he described as “Jesus, justice, and technology” to bear on the problem of training the urban poor (Personal interview, April 20, 2017). He began by setting up a training center in an inner-city church, and then expanded his efforts through acquisition of a college that now offers accredited degrees, including ministry degrees, at reduced rates. Camilla was hired by a church organization out of a graduate program that had an emphasis on educational technology. Her mandate in coming to the organization was to establish an innovative online component to an existing array of training programs, including several that have important cross-cultural emphases.

At the other end of the spectrum were John, Noel, and Timothy, none of whom had any particular training or previous interest in e-learning. Each of them had been heavily involved in training Christian leaders in traditional formats. Noel had simply done some experimentation
with Skype™ as a form of content delivery to two remote venues. Timothy had used Skype™ and messaging platforms in order to expand the training he had been doing in regions like Africa and South Asia. He found that e-learning could relieve the pressure to make multiple trips per year to these locations. John had been forced to leave the mission field due to severe health problems and simply could not reconcile himself to abandoning the leaders he had been training. Video-conferencing and messaging technologies seemed to be the only way of continuing the training and the relationships that he had worked so hard to establish. John described his involvement in e-learning as follows:

It was out of necessity. I was no longer able to take international flights because of my illness. I couldn’t change time zones because there was too much of a time difference, which was very difficult on my health. So, out of necessity, we turned to e-learning.

(Personal interview, March 21, 2017)

In between these extremes were Bart, Kevin, and Richard who were simply motivated to train leaders for urban churches. They each became part of a particular mission organization that had such a training program, and that included some e-learning elements. As a consequence, they learned the program and its cross-cultural and e-learning aspects. Similarly, Don, James, Matt, Stan, and William had been involved in ministry training that had cross-cultural features. In their situations, each of them had been approached by their organizations to develop programs to implement this training via e-learning. From this initial experience, they have since expanded, modified, or used their skills in other organizational contexts. According to Matt:

[Our mission] was trying to figure out how to work with missionaries that were already out on the field, and how we could do that in creative ways. So we started using online learning for missionaries so that they could continue to learn and grow in their ministry...
skills. (Personal interview, March 31, 2017)

As can be seen from this diversity of experience, the experiential range of the 13 participants made this study significant as a basis for further research into this phenomenon.

Table 21

*Circumstances of Involvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing tech/e-learning abilities harnessed for cross-cultural training</th>
<th>Aaron, Camilla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learned existing organizational, cross-cultural, e-learning program</td>
<td>Bart, Kevin, Richard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped develop organizational, cross-cultural, e-learning program</td>
<td>Don, James, Matt, Stan, William</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal drive to find e-learning methods for cross-cultural training</td>
<td>John, Noel, Timothy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Implications**

In this section, I will examine the theoretical and practical implications of my research. I will discuss specific sources of innovation related to the phenomenon and look at significant cultural factors in curriculum design. I will also point out common mistakes, stress the importance of practical outcomes, and suggest a flexible model for program design.

**Missions Organizations and Entrepreneurs Lead the Way**

Looking back, my initial expectation was that institutions of theological higher education would be substantially involved in cross-cultural, theological, e-learning. What I did not anticipate was that the bulk of my participants would instead come from mission-focused entities and individual educational entrepreneurs (Table 22). Although higher theological education entities are indeed involved in e-learning (Maddix, Estep & Lowe, 2012), they tend to lag behind in the cross-
cultural applications of theological e-learning. Participant interviews indicated that there were a number of reasons for this result. A contributing factor was the pressure for theological higher education institutions to maintain accreditation status and educational admission standards. These standards tend to work against admission of significant numbers of students from outside North America, as well as against potential students from disadvantaged ethnic groups within North America. According to James,

> Because we’re a formal school and we have to go by accreditation rules, there are a lot of barriers to entry. Everybody has to have an accredited bachelor’s degree, and even a bigger barrier to entry is the tuition that we charge. Most people that are living in economies other than in the West can’t afford it. (Personal interview, April 12, 2017)

There is also the understandable focus of these institutions to meet the rapidly changing needs and expectations of their current student populations. Often, there are few resources available to go beyond addressing immediate needs. Finally, while several of the Christian educational institutions that I initially contacted expressed a desire to engage in cross-cultural, theological, e-learning, the lack of a driving urgency to enroll students from regions where the Church is expanding resulted in sluggish vision for new programs and approaches.

On the other hand, mission-focused entities were not limited by these factors to the same extent. I found that participants from mission entities indicated relatively more motivation on the part of their organizations to rethink educational models and techniques in order to accomplish their training goals across cultures. As a result, eight of the participants in the study came from mission-oriented organizations, three acted as independent, mission-focused instructors or consultants, while only two participants were from accredited institutions of higher education. Clearly, much of the innovation and experimentation is occurring from the mission sector.
Table 22

Summary of Findings: Innovators and Prerequisites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Innovators</th>
<th>Prerequisites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission Organizations</td>
<td>Theological Education: Basic theological training and teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Entrepreneurs</td>
<td>Adult Learning Design: Basic understanding of adult learning principles, and flexibility in cultural applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cross-cultural Competence: Sensitivity developed via training and personal experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Impact of Culture on Effective E-learning

For course designers and teachers to be effective, an understanding of basic cultural dynamics is vital. Familiarity with The Dimensions of Culture (Hofstede, 2009) should, in my opinion, be required for those who design and teach cross-cultural, theological courses. Effective teaching is also dependent upon understanding some of the specific cultural values and practices of a given group of students. While the participants in my study did not think it absolutely necessary for teachers and designers to be experts in the culture of their students, they did recommend it as highly desirable.

Two key cross-cultural lessons that were learned from the research have to do with language and social class. Stan shared that one important function of human language is its ability to describe and classify data. Different languages approach these classification functions in different ways. Therefore, choosing a language of instruction that will suit the needs of both teachers and students is a fundamental task in cross-cultural, theological education.

Another language issue is the balance between simplicity and impact. Anyone who has personally studied the Bible in depth, or who has heard a carefully reasoned expository sermon,
will be familiar with the problems of obtaining a clear English sense from a difficult Greek or Hebrew passage. Because of this linguistic concept transfer problem, it would be wise in course design to avoid idiomatic constructions that unnecessarily complicate student understanding. On the other hand, the danger of opting for a generic form of the instructional language tends to drain the color and impact from content delivery. Perhaps the best solution is to err on the side of simple, clear, and non-idiomatic language, while reserving the right to use clearly explained, colorful expressions for impact.

Several of the participants pointed out that while understanding a particular student culture is important, social divisions play a significant role within cultures as well. Stan and Timothy shared their observations that in many cultures, students from the more affluent and highly educated social classes may share key elements in common with one another. This commonality of the upper social classes across cultures may be due to the influence of Western-style educational systems and greater connectivity to Western social values and norms. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that cross-cultural students from the upper classes of a given culture may have certain world-view elements in common with their teacher, which may not be shared by students of lower social and educational standing. Therefore, in designing courses in which a wider range of social classes and educational backgrounds will be served, designers and teachers must bear in mind the potential disparity in educational abilities and cultural worldviews.

**Creative E-learning Design is Key in Meeting Student Needs**

In some cases, e-learning may not prove to be the best option for effective cross-cultural theological education and ministry training. Given the objectives of the program, the needs of the students, and the technical options available, e-learning may prove impossible or highly
problematic in some situations. In other circumstances where some e-learning elements are feasible, hybrid courses may prove to be ideal. Several of the participants mentioned their belief that hybrid courses should be considered best because they provide the best of face-to-face contact and e-learning flexibility. For example, students may meet together in a physical location, either with a teacher or under the supervision of a site coordinator. In addition to conventional, face-to-face elements, some of the classwork may be completed using e-learning technologies. In other cases, fully online courses will prove to be the best choice, but may need to be modified to accommodate unreliable infrastructure, outdated equipment, or limited student technical skills.

No e-learning system, or combination of e-learning elements, will work successfully in all cross-cultural situations. The particular educational needs and goals of each group of students must be considered, along with organizational goals and resources. These factors must be evaluated, combined with realistic possibilities for using available technology and honest assessments of student comfort levels with e-learning. Once an e-learning program is established, the rapid development of e-learning technologies should prompt a regular re-evaluation of course design and teaching methods.

So, with a clear understanding of goals and options, various e-learning methodologies can be utilized to effectively train Christian leaders. Options range from simple texting of key information and personal communications, to the use of Skype™ for lecture and interaction with students. Fully online courses with streaming videos and Internet content links may prove to be possible in still other venues.

I developed the E-learning Design Process Model to provide a graphic illustration of the basic steps in considering e-learning design (Figure 10). The model begins with an assessment
of overall objectives and available resources. Since e-learning has been described as learner-centered (Simonson, Smaldinao, Albright & Zvacek, 2012), the process should begin with a clear understanding of student needs, particularly as the students themselves perceive them. These needs can then be combined with basic, theological knowledge and ministry skills to form the basis of a training program. After forming clear conclusions about how student needs, basic knowledge, and program goals fit together, designers can consider what organizational resources will be required. Such resources as teachers, curriculum specialists, cultural experts, and technical capabilities must be assembled to accomplish the program objectives. This frank evaluation may result in a decision that e-learning is not the best option, given student needs, program goals, and available resources.

If e-learning is an option, these first steps should be followed by an honest evaluation of the technical issues that e-learning will create, and the resources available to address technical issues. It is important to keep in mind that separate technical situations will likely exist on the teaching and learning sides of the system. Technical issues accompanying an e-learning program will include infrastructure factors such as reliable power grids, Internet and telecommunications availability, and other issues. The skill levels of staff and student skill with regard to the use of computers or mobile devices must be clearly evaluated, as well as assessing the ease with which learning platforms can be used. Equipment needed and the feasibility of regular updates and maintenance should also be considered. Again, these steps in the design process may demonstrate that e-learning is not a feasible option at the time.

However, if some form of e-learning is feasible, the next series of steps is to determine whether the program will use some form of pure e-learning, such as conventional online courses, or opt for a hybrid design. Once this decision has been made, the actual course design process
can begin. Decisions about the language of instruction, cultural factors that will influence
design, specific course content, and transformational elements can be made at this stage.

While the difficulties and resources to be considered in the e-learning design process may
seem daunting, it is encouraging to remember that successful e-learning is possible, and that it is
being conducted regularly. Innovations in design and improvements in both technology and
infrastructure are also taking place on a regular basis, which make the task more feasible with
each passing year.

![E-Learning Design Process Model](image)

**Figure 10. An E-Learning Design Process Model**

**Think Practicality, Relevancy, and Timeliness**

Several studies have shown that practicality of content is linked to student persistence in
e-learning programs (Croxton, 2014; Hone & El Said, 2015; Peltier, Schibrowsky, & Drago,
2007). Nearly all of the participants in this study confirmed this finding. They stressed the need
to offer courses that are relevant to students’ needs, and that provide practical content with just-
in-time applicability. Conversely, they stressed that courses not perceived by students to be of
practical use, either in students’ immediate ministry contexts or as valuable background
knowledge, are not likely to be effective learning experiences. Therefore, course designers
should carefully assess the needs of potential students in terms of theological understanding,
ministry skills and life issues, and then design course content to meet those needs. Program designers should keep in mind that the needs of students in developing countries or in North American urban centers are not necessarily similar to North American middle and upper class student populations. Table 23 summarizes some important elements in cross-cultural, theological, e-learning design.
Table 23

*Summary of Findings: E-learning Design*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Best Practices**        | • Optimum cognitive load via simplicity of focus and ease of use.  
• Consistency of content via clear objectives and alignment with student needs.  
• Flexibility in design to meet student needs, adjust to new circumstances, and face technical realities.  
• Management and feedback features provide for student time constraints, teacher presence, and feedback.  
• Range of learning activities must balance variety of elements with technical feasibility. |
| **Personal Transformation** | • Opportunities for deep sharing in online forums.  
• Consider hybrid courses  
• Provide site mentoring. |
| **Sense of Community**    | • Design ways that students can personally connect.  
• Design group assignments and collaboration. |
| **Cultural Factors**      | • Consider the cultural dimensions in design.  
• Gain basic understanding of student culture.  
• Create an environment for honest cross-cultural communication. |
| **Language Factors**      | • Select an appropriate language of instruction.  
• Factor in various levels of student language proficiency. |
| **M-learning Options**    | • Use podcasts and online videos for content delivery.  
• Use texting for assignment submission, feedback, and communication.  
• An option when Internet is not reliable or available. |
| **Technical Issues**      | • Problems to overcome: infrastructure unreliability, low Internet speed, inadequate equipment, and low learner competence.  
• Choose an appropriate learning platform; provide tech/help services; and consider pre-loading study materials. |
Common Mistakes

Many mistakes can be made in designing and teaching cross-cultural, theological, e-learning programs. For example, the attempt to use curricula that were originally designed for face-to-face courses, with little or no modification for online use, often delivers awkward and uneven outcomes. Likewise, the assumption that a curriculum that has been successful in one culture can be used with equal success in a different culture may not be accurate. Yet another faulty assumption is that consistent infrastructure and reliable equipment will be available for student use. A full assessment of these resources is a basic step in making e-learning program decisions. Finally, courses that require e-learning skills from students and teachers that are beyond their capabilities will also likely prove frustrating. In such cases, it may be wise to postpone offering e-learning options until staff and students can receive the training necessary for success.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations of this study necessarily narrowed my research focus to those who have experience teaching or designing cross-cultural, theological, e-learning courses. Further delimitations restricted my sample to teachers and program designers who are part of the Nicene Christian tradition, who hold accredited master’s and doctoral degrees from Western educational institutions, and who have completed a minimum of two terms of instruction.

As with any research sample, I acknowledge that my sample had unavoidable limitations. My goal in recruiting participants was to include a balance of males and females, and a spectrum of denominational perspectives from Roman Catholic to Pentecostal. The sample that coalesced from my inquiries to various entities ended up as predominantly male, evangelical, and North American. However, the exceptions to this rule among the participants provided important contributions to the data. In this study, I was reliant upon a relatively small pool of people who
were involved in theological and ministry training, which had significant cross-cultural aspects, and that used some form of e-learning delivery. The people who graciously consented to participate in my study did so in order for the phenomenon to be more clearly understood and the Kingdom of God potentially advanced. For this, I am deeply grateful. I was privileged to learn from them and to share their excitement in what they were accomplishing.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

With the understanding that this study provided a broad overview of cross-cultural, theological e-learning, I recommend that further research be conducted into various aspects of the phenomenon. For instance, since the focus of this study was teacher experience, important research is needed into the experience of students engaging in the phenomenon. Important data can be gathered from case studies of any of the successful organizations mentioned in the Resources section of Chapter Four. Significant insight into the phenomenon could be gained from a study that focuses on a situation in which the teacher belongs to a particular culture, and students belong to a distinctly different culture.

A study done on the effectiveness of e-learning curricula that was designed in English, but translated into a different language would also provide important insights. Yet another angle on the phenomenon could come from research on non-Western theological educators who teach cross-culturally using e-learning. I did not gather significant data on effective methods of assessing student learning and ministry competence in cross-cultural, theological, e-learning. A study on effective assessment techniques would be a valuable contribution. Finally, research specifically into the emerging phenomenon of cross-cultural theological m-learning would add cutting-edge information to the pool of knowledge.
Summary

Christianity has been spreading rapidly in some parts of the developing world during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This dramatic growth has sometimes resulted in an acute shortage of trained Christian leaders. An expanded understanding and use of e-learning could offer a means of training more leaders in these culturally diverse regions. The literature review in Chapter Two demonstrated that cross-cultural, theological, e-learning is possible, and it discussed some of the factors necessary for its success. I followed the procedures for transcendental phenomenological qualitative research in the design and data gathering phases of this study. Data gathered from the research participants confirmed much in the existing literature related to best practices of theological education, cross-cultural education, and e-learning. The interviews tended to confirm and expand the impact of culture in course design and delivery.

However, the data also provided some cautions and additional insights as to the experience, such as the warning that Adult Learning Theory may not apply in non-Western cultures in the same way that it does in Westernized societies. When the limitations and strengths of e-learning are understood and programs are designed with clear needs-based objectives, successful cross-cultural, theological, e-learning is not only possible, but may be preferable in some situations. According to the participants in this study, it can also be an extremely fulfilling experience.

Before beginning this study, I had extensive experience teaching and designing online higher education courses in the U.S., but I had never applied this expertise cross-culturally. I had, however, experienced teaching theological courses face-to-face in several developing countries, which I found both fulfilling and challenging. In my travels, I have met some truly
amazing people. I have been deeply gratified to have been of some help to them personally and of some use to Christ’s Kingdom.

Along the way, I have been privileged to see some interesting parts of the world and to experience the richness of a number of cultures. I would not have missed these experiences for anything, and I look forward to more adventures in the future. Then again, I also vividly remember being very ill on a couple of occasions, and feeling very far from home. In those moments, the first inklings began to stir in my mind of the possibilities of using e-learning as a way of meeting the tremendous needs I saw, without the expense and risk of travelling to distant and sometimes difficult places. I offer this research as a small contribution to a wider understanding of this option for training the leaders sorely needed by Christ’s Church.
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Henschke, J. A., (2016). Self-directed learning (SDL) and andragogy: My take on their contrasting and complementary relationship. IACE Hall of Fame Repository (February 2016), 1-17.


March 9, 2017

Michael Bogart
IRB Approval 2786.030917: Describing the Experience of Teaching Theological Education Courses Cross-Culturally Using E-learning Methods

Dear Michael Bogart,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971
APPENDIX B

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by Whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come again with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father (and the Son), who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the Prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.


APPENDIX C

Sample institutional recruitment letter

Date
(Sender information deleted)

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Michael Bogart, and I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Education program at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA. I am conducting research into the lived experience of theological educators and ministry trainers who teach theological and ministry courses cross-culturally using some form of e-learning. The research will be the basis for my dissertation entitled, Describing the Experience of Teaching Theological Education Courses Cross-Culturally Using E-learning Methods. The ultimate aim of the research will be to better understand the process of training Christian leaders using e-learning technologies in the developing world.

I am requesting the participation of your institution/organization in this research. There are no known risks to participants beyond those encountered in everyday life. Participants’ responses will remain confidential and anonymous, and research data will be kept in a secure location and will be reported using pseudonyms. No one other than the researcher will know individual responses to the interview and focus group questions.

If you are interested in your institution/organization participating in this pivotal research on cross-cultural, theological, e-learning, please contact me at (email deleted) or via telephone (phone deleted).

Thank you for your assistance in this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Michael Bogart
APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research entitled, *Describing the Experience of Teaching Theological Education Courses Cross-Culturally Using E-learning Methods*.

This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required, and your rights as a participating organization. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the lived experience of theological educators and ministry trainers who teach theological and ministry courses cross-culturally using some form of e-learning.

The benefits of the research will be to better understand how to teach theological and ministry courses cross-culturally using some form of e-learning in areas of the world where Christianity is expanding beyond existing educational options.

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose will include:
- Individual interviews
- Focus groups of three to five participants
- Review of archival materials

As a participating organization, you are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods I will be using. Please contact me at anytime at the e-mail address or telephone number listed above. You also have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study, all information provided by your personnel (including recordings) will be destroyed and omitted from the final research. Insights gathered from participants will form the basis for writing a doctoral dissertation, which will be read by my dissertation committee and eventually archived through Liberty University. Though direct quotes from you may be used in the research, all names, affiliations, and other identifying information will be kept anonymous.

By signing this consent form I certify that I (print full name) ______________________ as an official representative of ___________________________________(organization) agree to allow personnel form this organization participate in this study.

______________________________ (Signature) _____________ (Date)
APPENDIX E

Sample individual participant recruitment letter

Date
(Sender information deleted)
Dear Potential Participant,

I am inviting you to participate in a research study entitled, *Describing the Experience of Teaching Theological Education Courses Cross-Culturally Using E-learning Methods*. I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Education program at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, and am conducting this research in the process of writing my dissertation. The purpose of the research will be to describe the lived experience of theological educators and ministry trainers who teach theological and ministry courses cross-culturally using some form of e-learning.

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. There are no known risks to participation beyond those encountered in everyday life. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Data from this research will be kept in a secure location and will be reported under a pseudonym. No one other than the researcher will know your individual responses to the interview and focus group questions.

If you are interested in participating in this pivotal research on cross-cultural theological e-learning, please contact me at (email deleted) or via telephone (phone number deleted).

Thank you for your assistance in this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Michael Bogart
APPENDIX F

INDIVIDUAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Michael Bogart
(Sender information deleted)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research entitled, Describing the Experience of Teaching Theological Education Courses Cross-Culturally Using E-learning Methods.

This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required and your rights as a participant. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the lived experience of theological educators and ministry trainers who teach theological and ministry courses cross-culturally using some form of e-learning.

The benefits of the research will be to better understand how to teach theological and ministry courses cross-culturally using some form of e-learning in areas of the world where Christianity is expanding beyond existing educational options.

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose will include:

• Individual interviews
• Focus groups of three to five participants
• Review of archival materials

As a participant, you are also encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods that I will be using. Please contact me at anytime at the e-mail address or telephone number provided above. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In the event that you choose to withdraw from the study, all information you provide (including recordings) will be destroyed and omitted from the final research. Insights gathered by you and other participants will form the basis for writing a doctoral dissertation, which will be read by my dissertation committee and eventually archived through Liberty University. Though direct quotes from you may be used in the research, your name, affiliation, and other identifying information will be kept anonymous.

By signing this consent form I certify that I (print full name here) __________________ agree to the terms of this agreement.

_________________________________________ (Signature) _____________ (Date)
APPENDIX G

CODES

alpu: adult learning principles used
ae-l: advantages of e-learning
cccc: changed concept of Christianity
cofi: circumstances of involvement
capp: content application
cd: content delivery
cofc: contextualization of content
ce: course elements
co: course objectives
c-ced: cross-cultural education design
c&sn: culture and social norms
efcur,: effective curriculum and e-learning tools
e-lrs: e-learning resources
e-lt: e-learning type
essex: essential experience
expt: expectations
esthed: insight into the essence of theological education
inorg: innovative organizations
inso: insightful sources
inslev: instructional level
kw: key words
lanins: language of instruction
lanprob: language problems
lrc: learning in community
limit: limitations of e-learning
lms; learning management system
minqual: minimum qualifications for involvement
obstsuc: obstacles to student success
ongtr: ongoing training
pertran: personal transformation
partrain: participant training
progmod: program modifications
progout: program outcome
progtyp: program type
resind: resource individuals
solvleng: solving language problems,
solnse-l: solutions to e-learning limitations
solvtech: solving tech problems
stgoal: student goals
stlncon: student learning constraints
stutyp: student type
subj: subjects taught
tfrust: teacher frustrations
teloc: teaching location
techles: tech lessons learned
techprob: tech problems
techu: technology used
temod: teaching modification
tmst: terms of study