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Academic Achievement of ESL Learners at a Teaching Hospital Training Programs

Abdul Fattah Rachdan
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2015

Abstract

Academic Achievement for ESL Learners in a Teaching Hospital's Training Program

by

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MPH, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1992

BS, De Paul University, 1982

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

October 2015

Abstract

Many students in an allied health program at a Middle Eastern Arab university were experiencing difficulties with courses taught in English, resulting in poor academic achievement, low grade point averages, a high failure rate amongst its first year students, and an adverse impact upon a future skilled and educated work force for the region. Tinto's theory of institutional action for students' success served as the conceptual framework for the inquiry that used a qualitative explanatory case study method to examine the experiences of those students who were facing difficulties with their studies. To address questions about why students were failing and leaving the school and how the institution might remedy this educational problem, the study employed initial and follow-up interviews and reviews of academic records and portfolios of 6 currently enrolled or recently graduated students over age 21, who volunteered to participate. Content and thematic analysis of the collected qualitative data produced findings indicative of lack of college readiness among students and gaps in institutional practices such as remedial methods for the unprepared students. Based on the study findings, a policy recommendation for improving the educational practices was introduced to support building a better educational environment at the school. The positive social change implications of this study are not only limited to establishing programs to support the students' success and improve retention rates at the institution but also may include the establishment of more effective approaches to the reform measures of the educational system in the country.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wife, Fattema, and my children, Susan, Samer, Dena, and Sara, for all of their love, caring, encouragement, and most of all their patience since the time of my early thoughts to end my professional career by obtaining a doctorate degree. However, this was especially true when I thought about aborting my Ed. D journey during my catastrophic health problem that I encountered during the 7th semester of my study. Their support, gave me the strength and hope to go on.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

In a rapid move to remedy the inadequate reform measures of the educational system that has thus far failed to fulfill social needs, recent years have seen the emergence of a trend of higher educational institutions in many Arab countries concluding contracts with Western universities from the USA, Canada, or Western Europe to teach programs locally. However, some schools imported readymade programs to be taught locally as well. Courses in these teaching programs were taught in English. Many students in these universities faced great challenges in studying their subjects, and poor academic achievement was prevalent, as evidenced by the low grade point average and failure among first-year students (Al-Issa, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to understand the causes of the poor academic achievement of many students in the allied health training programs at a Middle Eastern university teaching hospital in Saudi Arabia and to explore possible solutions to this problem. The need to study this problem was raised by its negative effect on the retention rate of students and the adverse effect of it on the future skilled and educated workforce.

In this study, I used the qualitative case study research method to collect primary data by conducting personal interviews and supported the research by a review of related documents for collecting secondary data. In this section, I describe the problem at this educational institution, the rationale for choosing this problem, and the evidence of this problem in the local and international professional literature. This is followed by a thorough literature review describing the framework of the study, which was based on

Tinto's theory (2006) for institutional practice to ensure students' success. There is a discussion of the guiding questions of why students fail and leave school, and what the institution could do to remedy this educational problem. In addition, the status of ESL learning and teaching in Saudi Arabia is reviewed.

Definition of the Problem

Students' failing during the first year of college due to poor academic achievement, and leaving school is a phenomenon that has severe negative impacts. These impacts are not limited to the retention rate and economic consequences for the college only but also on the failing students, their families, the educational program, and society at large.

Many scholars have discussed the negative effects of poor academic achievement and have described the adverse effect on the future skilled and educated work force by defeating the real purpose of education. According to Adenike (2013), Asikhia (2010), Crosling, Heagney and Thomas (2009), Mlambo (2011), and Olani (2009), students with poor academic records could end up struggling in a competitive society. These researchers suggested that poor achievers end up finding themselves not well prepared and/or underdeveloped mentally and cognitively and not able to deliver the demands of the future employment requirements.

The causes and effects of poor academic achievement have been the focus of the discussion by many researchers. There was a consensus among many of these researchers that there was a relationship between poor academic performance and a group of factors causing this problem. Many studies (Adenike, 2013; Ali, Haider, Munir, Khan, &

Ahmed, 2013; Asikhia, 2010; Feldman & Zimbler, 2012; Mlambo, 2011; Njagi & Amukowa, 2013) suggested that poor academic achievement of new college students during their initial experience with college life was due to primary and secondary factors that contribute to being unprepared for college-level work. These factors included being ill-prepared for college experience, lack of academic skills for college-level work, and lack of practical skills required to survive in the new college environment, where most of these students are new to independent living, self-organization, time management, and budgeting.

The problem of poor academic achievement during the first year of college is not unique to the educational programs at this university's teaching hospital in Saudi Arabia that serves as the site for this study. The problem was a common issue that concerned the entire higher education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its neighboring Arabian Gulf countries (Karl, 2007; Omar & Alrubayea, 2012). This problem has been addressed in the local academic literature. Some researchers have attributed the problem to poor language proficiency and the difficulties of studying in a foreign language (Akasha, 2013; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Giridharan, 2013; Hodara, 2012). While others have pointed to the failure of the institutions to better prepare their students for the new learning environment (Al-Amri, Al-Madi, Sadig, Ahmedani, & Salameh, 2012; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Omar & Alrubayea, 2012).

The teaching hospital where I conducted my study was a governmental tertiary care healthcare institution that according to its stated mission was to "provide the highest level of specialized healthcare in an integrated educational and research setting" (King

Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center, n.d.). In its efforts to help solve the local unemployment problem among the young Saudi high school and college graduates, the hospital initiated several educational programs to provide young adult Saudi nationals with the needed high qualifications and special skills for positions in the allied health professions at the hospital. The institution has taken this initiative because the regular Saudi educational system has failed to provide a graduate outcome that could meet the demands of such qualifications (Nolan, 2012).

This teaching hospital has adopted the same policy that has been becoming a trend in this country and the region to contract with Western universities from the USA, Canada, or Western Europe to teach their allied health training programs locally. Some schools imported readymade programs to be taught locally as well, in an effort to remedy the inadequate reform measures of their educational systems (Abouammoh, 2009; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Jamjoom, 2012; Nolan, 2012). However, this rapid effort at transformation has not met expectations (Nolan, 2011) and was considered problematic due to the conservative and authoritarian settings of the country (Romani, 2009) where conservative elements in the society see reform as an agent for corruption and deviation from the established religious values (Meijer, 2010).

The educational programs at this teaching hospital were postsecondary school training programs that grant associate and/or bachelor degrees through an agreement with an external Western university based in the USA, Canada, or Western Europe. Expatriate Western staff teaches the programs in English to students who are young adult English as Second Language (ESL) learners. Students usually enroll in the programs after

graduating from high school, in which they were taught in the traditional teaching methods of rote memorization and teacher-centered classrooms and where the teaching medium was Arabic (Aljuaid, 2010; Allamnakhrah, 2013; Elyas & Al-Sadi, 2013; Hamdan, 2014; Tamer, 2013).

Admission to the training programs at this teaching hospital required a modest criterion of proficiency in English. The minimum required score for proficiency was equivalent to a score of 5.0 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test or its equivalent local assessment test. This was a modest score, according to experts in the field of teaching ESL, which only prepared students to be proficient in their basic interpersonal conversational skills, social language. These students with only social language skills may still struggle to achieve in academic subjects due to the lack of cognitive academic language proficiency as has been discussed by many ESL experts. According to many researchers in the field of second language acquisition (Cummins, 1999-2003; Gantefort, 2012; Kong, Powers, Starr, & Williams, 2012; Krashen & Brown, 2007; Williams, 2009), learners of a second language have two levels of proficiency. One is the basic interpersonal communicative skill (BICS) in which learners use for the daily social communication, the second is the language skill in which they will use an academic setting, which they called cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Saudi learners usually come to college poorly prepared with second language skills. They often do not have a strong grasp on the first type (BICS), after spending an average of at least three to four hours per week during the last six years of their precollege education

studying English (Liton, 2012, 2013; Mahib ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013; Shah, Hussain, & Nasseef, 2013).

According to A. Rahman (personal communication, February 14, 2013), a career and training programs counselor at the teaching hospital, awareness has recently been raised of some educational practice gaps at this institution that were leading students to struggle with their courses that are taught in English. He also discussed how low GPA evidenced poor academic achievement during the first year of college. According to A. Rahman, there were two different perceptions among educators at this school of the cause of this problem (A. Rahman, personal communication, February 14, 2013).

Differing opinions for the cause of the problem are available, but many educators have considered the lack of cognitive academic language proficiency in English to be a major contributor to the problem (Rahman, 2013). They believe that unpreparedness of the students for college-level studies in English during their high school years is causing the problem (Rahman, 2013). Others believe that a gap in the educational practice of the institution is another considerable contributor to the problem (Rahman, 2013). They perceived that the institution has failed to provide the needed socioacademic integration in the new learning environment for its new unprepared students during their initial college life, that is, providing student services such as study skills and academic writing courses and student mentoring (Rahman, 2013). These researchers believed that these were needed institutional actions, which according to the American Federation of Teachers (2011), Deil-Amen (2011), Lake Research Partners (2011) and Whitt (2005), pave the way for students' success in the new learning environment.

Locally, the problem of poor academic achievement at this institution was evidenced by a variety of characteristics. These included poor grades, lack of basic knowledge, poor study habits, poor classroom participation, lack of motivation, low overall satisfaction with programs, and increased number of at-risk students among its first-year students. Students who were put on the “at-risk list” due to low grades were placed on an academic probation, went through counseling, were provided with needed support, and entered into a learning contract for the duration of the following college term to be able to continue in the program. This problem was leading to failure and a high attrition rate of the foundation year students and threatening the progress of the allied health training programs at this institution. This, therefore, highlighted the need for a study to investigate this issue.

This conducted study was built upon the contributions of previous research concerning the academic resilience of ESL learners. A number of research studies have examined the experience of ESL students in learning English (Akasha, 2013; Batt, 2008; Mahib ur Rahman, & Alhaisoni, 2013; Tracy, 2009). However, these researchers have failed to identify the ways in which the ESL learners from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds have been able to achieve academic success. The focus of this study was to address the challenges faced by ESL students at this institution. In this study, I wanted to give voice to the students of this institution, document their perspectives, and hope to create a project that would be helpful to the institution in developing more students that are successful.

Al-Shumaimeri (2006) discussed the effects of content familiarity and learning ability in a second language. In addition, Alsamadani (2010) found a correlation between the ESL learners' competency in the second language (English) and their first language (Arabic), students' self-regulating abilities, and their level of academic achievement during the first year of college. Javid, Al-Asmari, and Farooq (2012) addressed the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations for learning in a foreign language for Saudi students, such as getting a job that requires English skills, getting a promotion, or simply a personal interest in learning in a second language. Al-Murabit (2012) attributed the problem to the poor design of the English language curricula, goals, and objectives of the academic and training programs at the community colleges in Saudi Arabia, such as preparing graduates for entry-level jobs in the healthcare industry that require special skills, which include proficiency in English.

Almoallim, Aldahlawi, Algahtani, Alquraishi, and Munshi (2010) found other factors in addition to English language proficiency that were contributing to the problem of poor academic achievement, such as peer competition, poor study skills and lack of effective studying habits, and teacher-centered classrooms. Moreover, Ibrahim, Rwegasira, and Taher (2008) discussed the students' attribution of the problem to the poor quality of instructors and the lack of support for students. Furthermore, Al-Dabal, Koura, Rasheed, Al-Sowielem, and Makki (2010) related the issue to stress from unsuitable teaching methods and an unsatisfactory learning environment as well as anxiety about examinations. Elzubeir, Elzubeir, and Magzoub (2010) stated that coping with the innovation of teaching and learning methods such as the move from the

traditional rote memorization methods of learning to the newer Western style of problem-based curricula, a student-centered environment, and the concomitant increased personal responsibility for learning was viewed as another stressor affecting academic performance and attrition. Omar and Alrubayea (2012) identified other external problems facing ESL students such as living far away from the college, lack of transportation services, unavailability of suitable student housing, and difficult family circumstances. In summary, local researchers found that the gaps in practice identified in the local setting were due to the lack of socioacademic integration that supports the new students and failure to prepare students to study in English as well as the inadequate preparation for college-level work and life as discussed by Deil-Amen (2011).

The recent awareness of this educational gap has resulted in a growing interest by the allied health programs administration to learn more about this problem by conducting a study investigating this phenomenon. The purpose of this investigation was to find out the causes of the problem and may be provide some recommendations for filling this gap in practice. However, I was looking for answers concerning the issue based on the students' perspectives of the factors associated with their poor academic achievement in the training programs. As stated in Merriam (2009), I tried to find a solution to the problem of poor academic achievement and the poor retention rate associated with it; however, this was done by discovering what the real problem was as seen by the learners themselves.

Rationale

The rationale for choosing this problem was that local efforts to prepare students for postsecondary instruction using the English language had not improved the low first-year low retention rates that are due to the low average GPA and failure. The administration of this program tried to remedy this problem locally by providing additional classes in English and offered individual tutoring for struggling students. Table 1 presents a comparison of two consecutive cohorts in one of the allied health programs at this teaching hospital, showing the numbers of English classes in the regular curriculum and the average GPA and retention rate for each cohort.

Table 1
Comparison Between Two Consecutive Cohorts in One of the Allied Health Training Programs With and Without Additional English Classes

Academic year	No. of English classes/week	No. of students admitted in the class	No. of students promoted to 1 st year	Average GPA	Retention rate
Foundation year 2009-10 first cohort	6	15	11	2.69	73.3%
First year in the program 2010-11 first cohort	0	11	8	2.77	72.7%
Foundation year 2010-11 second cohort	6	15	12	2.8	80%
First year in the program 2011-12 second cohort	4	12	9	2.8	75%

Note. Data retrieved from the school academic records for the two Consecutive Cohorts in one of the allied health training programs for the years 2009-10 and 2010-11.

For both cohorts compared in the above table, students who had more English classes per week had higher GPAs and retention rates, but their results remained unsatisfactory

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The observed educational gaps at this institution and the resultant problem of poor academic achievement have been the subject of discussion in many studies conducted by educational researchers in the local literature of the Arab Middle East. Language proficiency was identified as the major contributor to the problem since the majority of the higher education institutions in the Gulf Arab countries have chosen to use the English language as the teaching medium of their studies. This issue of language proficiency has been the focus of researchers, who have attributed problems in higher education to ESL learners' deficiencies in not being well prepared to study in English (Al-Nafisah & Al-Shorman, 2011; Alsamadani, 2009; Al-Shumaimeri, 2006; Hamouda, 2013). Alsamadani (2010) and Khan (2011a) discussed the effects of content familiarity and learning ability in a second language and found a correlation between the ESL learners' competency in the second language (English) and their first language (Arabic), students' self-regulating abilities, and their level of academic achievement during the first year of college.

Other researchers have attributed the problem to a variety of other factors. Al-Khairi (2013), Javid, Al-Asmari, and Farooq (2012) and Khan (2011a) addressed the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations for learning in a foreign language for Saudi students, such as getting a job that requires English skills, getting a promotion, or

having a personal interest in learning in a second language. While Almoallim et al. (2010) and Al-Murabit (2012) attributed the problem to the poor design of the English language curricula, goals, and objectives of the academic and training programs at the community colleges in Saudi Arabia, such as preparing graduates for entry level jobs in the healthcare industry that require special skills, which include proficiency in English. Al-Amri et al. (2012) and Almoallim et al. (2010) found peer competition, poor study skills and lack of effective studying habits, and teacher-centered classrooms to be likely contributors to poor student performance. In addition, Al-Amri et al. (2012), Hamad (2013), Ibrahim, Rwegasira, and Taher (2008), and Khan discussed the students' attribution of the problem to the poor quality of instructors and the lack of support for students. However, Al-Dabal et al. (2010), Al-Sowygh (2013), and Hamad related the issue to stress from unsuitable teaching methods and unsatisfactory learning environments as well as anxiety about examinations. Furthermore, Al Asmari (2014), Alresheed (2012), Al-Saleh et al. (2010), Elzubeir et al. (2010), and Eswi, Radi, and Youssri (2013) attributed students' difficulties to not coping with the innovations of teaching and learning methods such as the move from the traditional rote memorization methods of learning to the newer Western style of problem-based curricula. However, the introduction of the student-centered environment with its associated increased personal responsibility for learning and was viewed as other stressors affecting academic performance and attrition. Suliman (2010) discussed how social motivation negatively affects performance. Additionally, Omar and Alrubayea (2012) and Salem et al. (2013) identified other external problems for ESL students, such as living far away from the

college, lack of transportation services, unavailability of suitable student housing, and bad family circumstances.

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

Poor academic achievements during the first year of college, its causes, and the negative effects of it have also been discussed in the international professional literature as a common problem in any educational setting. For example, Crosling et al. (2009), Haynes Stewart et al. (2011), Mlambo (2011), and Schuetz (2005) discussed how failure affects not only students and their emotional wellbeing but also society by adversely affecting its future pool of skilled workforce and educated citizens who would participate in bringing about the needed social change. Although researchers have agreed on the adverse effects of poor academic performance, they have expressed various opinions regarding its causes. Some researchers shared a concern for language proficiency and academic achievement when dealing with ESL learners (Fry, 2008; Garnett & Cheryl, 2011; Gary-Cook, Boals, & Lundberg, 2011; Hodara, 2012; Liton, 2012) while others believed that other factors were contributing to the problem. For example, Batt (2008), DelliCarpini (2009), Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008), Samson and Collins (2012) stressed the importance of having well prepared teachers to meet the special demands of ESL learners. Bentley (2008), DeBerard, Spielmans, and Julka (2012), and Deil-Amen (2011) pointed out that a lack of socioacademic integration and support can lead to poor academic achievement. Bluestone (2013) stressed that this integration and support is of more importance when dealing with ESL learners. Christe (2013) and Hileman (2013) asserted the importance of good student-faculty relationship

to promote success. Faafetai et al. (2013) and Price, Tschannen, and Caylor (2013) attributed poor performance to the lack of proper early preparation for college life and learning goal development.

Definitions

A variety of terms were used in this doctoral study and were often used interchangeably. The following provides definitions for these key terms:

Academic achievement: The level of a student's performance in school where he/she is able to successfully complete course work and get promoted to the next level (Spruill, 2011).

At-risk students: According to Gavigan & Kurtts (2010), this is defined as the students whom are potentially dropouts from the school for a variety of reasons and who usually have low academic achievement evident by their low GPA.

Attrition rate of college students: According to Hagedorn (n.d.), this is defined as the proportion of the students who drop out of college or stop taking classes and never graduate to the number of admitted students who stay in and graduate.

Cognitive academic language proficiency: According to Bylund (2011), this is defined as the ability to generally use the academic vocabulary and sentence structures in a dialogue within an educational environment or sitting.

College foundation year: This is a period of 1 year at the start of college study during which enrolled students will develop skills to be successful in the new educational environment. This is done by integrating academic help through basic college course

work and student support services to effectively address the student's needs to be successful (Dugan, n.d.).

Educational gap: An incomplete or deficient area in an educational practice compared to what is considered best practice (Davidson, 2011).

ESL learner: According to Ortmeier-Hooper (2008), an ESL student is the one who is learning in the English language, which is not this individual's native language.

Significance

The problem of poor academic achievement was significant for reasons such as future employers' dissatisfaction with poorly prepared graduates and the high turnover rate of the locally produced work force (Al-Homayan, Shamsudin, Subramaniam, & Islam, 2013; Khawaja, Rasheed, & Rasheed, 2013). Although this investigation was focused on the local problem at this teaching hospital's training programs, the problem was a common issue in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its neighboring Arab countries in the Gulf region (Karl, 2007; Nolan, 2012). Poor academic achievement in these countries was leading to poor graduate outcomes that do not meet the demands of the job market (Issa & Siddiek, 2012; Murshid, 2013; Omar & Alrubayea, 2012). Issa and Siddiek (2012) stressed the failure of these academic institutions to meet that demand: "There is a poor level of harmony between the institutions of higher education and development needs and the labor market ... the poor level of knowledge, skills and work values and behaviors of most graduates" (p. 147).

Al-Issa (2011) stated that the failure rate among college students in most of the higher education institutions in these countries is more than 70% in the foundation year

of college studies, especially in the science programs, where many students do not pass the exit test in English. The associations of failure rate and the lack of proficiency in English, as stated in Al-Issa, are consistent with the findings of Condrey and Derico (2012) that the major contributor to poor academic achievement and failure among ESL learners was the lack of English proficiency of the learners as they faced challenges in listening, reading, writing, and speaking. This poor academic achievement has supported the calls for the urgent need to reform of the education system (Abouammoh, 2009). Therefore, the investigation's findings may have helped in providing recommendations for a different approach to the needed reforms and development in schools and universities as well as discussed by Abouammoh (2009) and Nolan (2012).

Guiding/Research Question

The educational problem of university students' failure and attrition has been addressed in the local and international literature. However, past research mainly considered the causes of failure and attrition from the perspective of attributing the problem to individual students. Past research blamed the students' lack of certain qualities that are predictive of academic success such as self-efficacy for self-regulated learning, motivation, self-initiative, and study habits. In contrast, in this study, I investigated why the ESL students' academic performance is poor during the first year of college at this teaching hospital. This qualitative study was designed to collect information from students to gain a full understanding about the challenges to academic achievement that may be causing them to have a low average GPA and to start thinking about leaving school. By using this explanatory case study approach, I was able to answer

research guiding questions of “how,” “what,” and “why,” as discussed by Creswell (2009), Crowe et al. (2011), Glesne (2012), and Merriam (2009).

The study was guided by questions derived from applying Tinto’s theory “building a model of institutional action for students’ success” (Tinto, 2006, p.1). The guiding questions were the following:

RQ1: What are learners’ perceptions of why they are not performing at academic level?

RQ2: What do learners perceive to be potential solutions to improving their academic performance?

RQ3: How do learners perceive their academic skill levels and preparation?

RQ4: To what other factors do students attribute their being at-risk, and how important do they believe these factors to be?

RQ5: How do students assess the institution’s efforts to remedy their poor performance?

RQ6: What do the learners themselves perceive to be the solution to the problem?

Review of the Literature

This section will include a thorough review of the literature, beginning with the conceptual framework of the study, an explanation of Tinto’s theory, and support for the use of Tinto’s theory in academic literature. The section also includes a review of local and international academic literature related to the educational problem of poor academic achievement among ESL students. In addition, I will review literature discussing the conceptualizations of ESL teaching and learning and the academic achievement of ESL

learners, the status of ESL in Saudi Arabia, and finally explain how saturation of literature review was reached.

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Conceptual Framework

In this section, I present the conceptual framework of the study, in which I proposed to construct a conceptualized sense of progress for learning in another language and the challenges of learning in a new educational environment. The conceptual framework of this research study was based on Tinto's theory (2006) in which Tinto proposed a model for schools' actions to follow and apply where schools would be able to provide a learning environment that could ensure students' success.

According to Jabareen (2009), a conceptual framework is defined as "a network, or a plane, of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon" (p.51). Many researchers have described conceptual framework analysis as an iterative process aiming to help the researcher understand the studied phenomenon and develop concepts rather than to predict them (Evans, 2011; Jabareen,

2009;; Troselius & Sundqvist, 2011). In his article about building a conceptual framework, Jabareen listed eight steps for this conceptual framework analysis (pp. 53-55):

1. Mapping the selected data sources.
2. Extensive reading and categorizing of the selected data.
3. Identifying and naming concepts.
4. Deconstructing and categorizing the concepts.
5. Integrating concepts.
6. Synthesis, resynthesis, and making it all make sense.
7. Validating the conceptual framework.
8. Rethinking the conceptual framework.

Using this eight-step process will help me in refining the research questions and the design of instruments and will provide guidance on how to collect, sort, and analyze data and write-up the study.

Tinto's theory. According to Tinto (2006), much research has been done over the last 4 decades on the subject of college students' retention or attrition as well as the development of a considerable amount of theoretical work and debate concerning the character of student retention or attrition. Tinto (2005) highlighted the change from the classical perspective of the causes of retention--such as the individual attributes, skills,

and motivation of the students who leave college or stay enrolled—to the contemporary focus on social and institutional involvement in the academic and personal progress of college students. According to Tinto, this theory puts more emphasis on the gap in the institutional practices that may negatively affect retention.

Tinto (2006) emphasized the need for building a new model of instructional practice where engagement of the institution takes place by reshaping the classroom practice during first year of college or the transition to college not only for the unprepared students but even for the motivated ones. According to Tinto, that first year is critical: “It matters the most during the first year... the classroom may be the only place students meet each other and the faculty...students commute to college” (p. 8). Tinto stressed that this new practice will lead to students’ success and persistence. Tinto’s institutional model is based on the students’ need to be integrated into the formal academic performance and informal faculty academic system. According to this model, the most effective educational programs usually integrate people into the mainstream of the intellectual life of institutions. Through the analytical lens of the conceptual framework of Tinto’s theory, an understanding of the institutional practice gap will be developed. This will be done by exploring the reasons for both the poor academic performance experienced by the ESL learners at this institution and students’ descriptions of their decisions to stay and succeed in college.

Using Tinto’s framework allowed me to explore individual and institutional attributes that include the following:

- Students’ preparedness for college and their transition from high school,

- Preparedness of students in English as a second language,
- Students' socioacademic engagement in the new educational setting,
- Students' awareness and use of available supportive services in the new learning environment,
- Satisfaction with college life,
- Commitment to achieving set goals, and
- The institutional commitment to meet student needs and support of the students' commitment to achieve their goals, and other related issues.

The conceptual framework is an advantageous process (Jabareen, 2009), and it is characterized by being flexible, has capacity for modification, and offers an understanding of phenomena rather than attempting to predict them. However, Jabareen advised caution when using a conceptual framework due to the possibility of different researchers forming different conceptions of the same phenomenon. Being objective in transcribing the interviews of the participants as stated by the participants themselves and allowing them the freedom to explain their own experiences can reduce the possibility of forming different concepts of the investigated phenomenon (Krishna, Maithreyi, & Surapaneni, 2010; Mantzoukas, 2005; Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010)

Support for the use of Tinto's theory in academic literature. The current reviewed literature supported the use of Tinto's theory where many researchers (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Hossler, Ziskin, Moore, & Wakhungu, 2008;

Karp, 2011; Kuh et al., 2006; Olani, 2008) emphasized the importance of this actions proposed in Tinto's theory for the success of students.

Researchers have described how institutions could develop this new practice in the current literature. Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2008) suggested establishing ways to develop faculty-student interactions through a more strategic and systematic approach to ensure students' success and persistence. Crosling et al. (2009) discussed the effects of these ways and professed that an active relationship between the students and their learning environment would be very helpful for the quality of their learning.

Purdie II (2007) advocated a specially designed course to help students transition into college at the beginning of the critical first year of college to ensure success and persistence. Mbuva (2011) suggested a partnership between high school and college that serves as a bridge into the new challenging academic learning environment that leads to a variety of benefits that include success, retention, and higher graduation rates. Friedman and Mandel (2009) also discussed the effectiveness of students' engagement with the institution through special programs designed to improve students' success and retention, such as the first-year programs of learning communities. Deil-Amen (2011) addressed the benefits of the institutional practice of socioacademically integrating first-time students, as this gives them the feeling of belonging and competence, helps them fulfill commitments, stay in school, and succeed. Hossler, Ziskin, Moore, and Wakhungu (2008), found the institution's ability to build a model for students' persistence and success to be within its context, where policies and programs could be developed to enhance and support student's success.

Hossler et al. (2008) suggested the use of several institutional practices, which they called “policy levers” to build this model. According to Hossler et al. (2008) these suggestions included:

- (a) Using recruitment practices that support the fulfillment of students’ academic and social expectations of college.
- (b) Implementing structures and practices shown to alleviate students’ experience of racial discrimination and prejudice on campus.
- (c) Applying fair administrative and academic regulations.
- (d) Directing students through academic advising toward satisfactory course experiences.
- (e) Supporting and developing active learning strategies in the classroom.
- (f) Providing workshop training in stress management and career planning.
- (g) Supporting frequent and significant interactions between students and peers in orientation and residential life practices, and
- (h) providing need-based financial aid. (p.1-2)

Some researchers (Bentley, 2008; Burdette, 2009; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Espinoza, 2013) have focused on the vital role of the institution in providing social support services to new students during orientation time. These services enable students to meet and integrate in the new environment and share common goals for persistence and success as well as introduce students to institutional support services that emphasize the presence of a supportive environment to students. Karp (2011) also addressed the importance of nonacademic supports to improve student outcomes by

creating opportunities for social relationships, helping identify goals, enhancing commitment, providing college expertise, and making transition to college life easier.

Review of Local Literature Related to the Problem

The problem of poor academic achievement of ESL learners during the first year of college is not unique to the educational programs at this teaching hospital in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This problem is common and it concerns the entire higher education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its neighboring Arabian Gulf countries (Karl, 2007; Nolan, 2012; Omar & Alrubayea, 2012). Its significance was huge as the failure rate was more than 70% for the exit exams that were taken in English by the foundation year students in these countries (Al-Issa, 2010). Saudi and/or Arab Gulf researchers have identified a variety of factors contributing to the issue.

With English being the medium of instruction in most postsecondary institutions, including this teaching hospital, it was anticipated that lack of English language proficiency would be a cause of failure; therefore, the government of Saudi Arabia invested heavily in English language teaching (Al-Issa, 2011; Khan, 2011). It was regarded as a challenging task for the student's ability to acquire the English language while meeting the demands of the classroom (Aljumah, 2011; Khan, 2011). A number of students at this institution abandoned their schooling due to difficulties in studying in English as a second language, instead of making use of the help provided by the teachers in the form of extra tutoring.

ESL learners' development of the English language proficiency has been shown to be crucial for their academic success, and it is a process that takes time as discussed in

Gary, Cook, Boals, and Lundberg (2011). Furthermore, Al-Khairy (2013) asserted that lack of this proficiency hinders the learning ability of the ESL learners and their ability for academic progress. For ESL learners, precollege schools in Saudi Arabia provide unequal opportunities to learn the English language in preparation for the English learning environment in college by having either native or nonnative English teachers (Alkhatnai, 2011; Hamad, 2013; Liton, 2012). Therefore, Saudi universities instituted what was called the Intensive Preparatory English Language Module to overcome this issue (Alseweed & Daif-Allah, 2012). Nevertheless, the ESL learners in this institution, as well as most Arabic speaking students, still face challenges in order to expand their ability to adapt to the Western pedagogical styles due to cultural and linguistic differences (Akasha, 2013) as well as having to face the frustration of slowly learning a new language (Tseng, Dornyei, & Schmitt 2006).

Al-Shumaimeri (2006) addressed the effects of content familiarity and learning ability in a second language. Alsamadani (2010) found a correlation between ESL learner competency in the second language (English) and his/her first language (Arabic), students' self-regulating abilities, and their level of academic achievement during the first year of college. Javid et al. (2012) addressed the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations for learning in a foreign language for Saudi students, such as getting a job that requires English skills, getting a promotion, or simply the personal interest in learning in a second language. Al-Murabit (2012) attributed the problem to the poor design of the English language curricula, goals, and objectives of the academic and training programs at the community colleges in Saudi Arabia such as preparing graduates

for entry-level jobs in the healthcare industry that require special skills, which include proficiency in English.

Although most of the reviewed academic literature, local as well as international, has attributed the problem of poor academic achievement to the lack of cognitive English proficiency, some have found the problem to be associated with cultural, economic, social, and psychological factors and lack of student-faculty interactions. Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, and Wilcox (2013) addressed the psychological factors as predictive of college students' life satisfaction leading to success during the first year of college. The researchers listed several characteristics they considered important for predicting success; these were self-efficacy, organization, and attention to study, in addition to other factors they considered as psychological variables that included "stress and time management, involvement with college activity, and emotional satisfaction with academics" (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013, p. 2).

In addition to the lack of cognitive English proficiency, other researchers (Alderman, 2008; Cole, 2010; Dika, 2013; Hileman, 2013) asserted that the quality of student-faculty interactions can be a positive predictor of new student success and are as important as a high GPA from high school. Espinoza (2013) and Bentley (2008) focused on the role of the institutional practices in providing support for the new students to adjust in the new environment as a predictor of success as well. Almoallim et al. (2010) regarded other factors such as peer competition, poor study skills and lack of effective studying habits, and teacher-centered classrooms to be viable contributors to the problem.

Furthermore, Ibrahim et al., (2008) related students' attribution of the problem to the poor quality of instructors and the lack of student support. Al-Dabal et al. (2010) related the issue to stress from unsuitable teaching methods and an unsatisfactory learning environment as well as anxiety about examinations. Elzubeir et al., (2010) stated that coping with the innovation of teaching and learning methods such as the move from the traditional rote memorization methods of learning to the newer Western style of problem-based curricula, student-centered environment and its increased personal responsibility for learning was viewed as another stressor affecting academic performance and attrition. Omar and Alrubayea (2012) identified other external causes of the problem, such as living far away from the college, lack of transportation services, unavailability of suitable student housing, and difficult family circumstances.

Review of International Literature Related to the Problem

The issue of academic achievement of ESL learners has been widely addressed in the international literature as well, where the problem of poor academic performance has been attributed to language proficiency in addition to cultural, economic, social, and institutional practice factors. English proficiency as a predictor of academic success has been addressed extensively in higher education settings where English was the teaching medium and poor language proficiency noted as a major cause of poor academic achievement of ESL learners. Some researchers (Condrey & Derico, 2012) stated that the major contributor to poor academic achievement and failure among ESL learners was the lack of English proficiency as they face challenges in listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Other researchers (Al-Homoud & Schmitt 2009; Cook, Boils, & Lundgerg,

2012; Kong, Powers, Starr, & Williams, 2012) added that ESL learners are more capable of engaging in the utilization of academic language once they have achieved proficiency in the English language.

Academic institutions usually use placement tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), or similar tests, as predictors of the academic success of students whose native language is not English. Bayliss (2006) indicated that a specific score in IELTS (such as 6.5) was the minimum requirement for the ability to manage in academic subjects at a university level; however, the study asserted that a higher score might be needed where the study is more linguistically demanding. Fakeye (2009) concurred that a better performance on the English proficiency placement test did correlate with better academic achievement during the first semester of university studies. Woodrow (2006), who has investigated the predictive validity of the IELTS subtest scores (bands) and the academic achievement of ESL learners by monitoring their GPA during the first semester, found some correlation between the IELTS bands and academic success. However, the study (Woodrow, 2006) also found strong correlations between the writing, speaking and listening subtests and GPA. In addition, there was strong correlation with other variables such as students' previous professional experience and their previous English language learning experience as well as the academic staff views on English proficiency (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Center for Public Education, 2007; Karim & Shaikh, 2012; Wait & Gressel, 2009). According to (Crandall & Kaufman, 2002, as quoted in Karim & Shaikh, 2012) this previous experience promotes an active engagement of learners and “provides

scaffolding to promote understudying of complex concepts” (p. 114). They further explained “its possession simplify texts and explicitly teaching the language to promote both linguistic and conceptual learning, and encouraging cooperative and other interactive approaches that enable the students to participate in constructing their own understanding of the contents” (p.114).

In addition to language proficiency, (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012 ; Kong, Powers, Starr & Williams, 2012) addressed other covariates with academic success such as previous experience with English language and proficiency in the native language. Yuksel and Mercanoglu (2010) studied the correlation between English proficiency and academic success and found a stronger correlation for the knowledge of technical vocabulary when studying technical subjects. Visone (2009) pointed out the correlation between proficiency in reading English and academic success in science subjects; however, he put more emphasis on knowledge of subject content in English. Suarez-Oronzco, Pimentel and Martin (2009) and Garnett and Cheryl (2011) also found correlations between English proficiency and academic success; however, they stressed a stronger influence by other variables such as the ESL learners’ demographics and socio-economic status. Similar findings were reported by Telfarlioglu and Cinkara (2009) and Carhill, Suarez-Orozoo, and Paez (2008) who added the social contextual factors. Hellekjaer (2009) stated that the problem could mainly be attributed to unfamiliar vocabulary and slow reading associated with the failure of upper-secondary schools in preparing students to study in English. Hellekjaer (2009) reiterated Fry’s (2008) conclusion that poor performance of ESL learners was due to their previous preparation in public schools that

had poor standardized test performance. Igoudin (2008) discussed the motivation of ESL learners as an important factor in their academic achievement because students viewed their new language education as a vehicle to a new desired identity.

Another dimension of the learner's language proficiency also discussed by researchers was the contribution of ESL teachers to the success of the students if they were in specialized English for ESL learners teaching. This claim was made by Mosqueda and Téllez (2008), Samson and Collins (2012), Spitzer (2009), and Tracy (2009) who stated that the quality of ESL teachers can make a significant difference for the achievement of ESL learners.

The Conceptualization of ESL Teaching and Learning

Several researchers (Abdel, 2009; Eisenclas, 2009; and Williams, Abraham & Negueruela-Azarola, 2013) have examined the various aspects of learning in English as a Second Language, and based on their analysis have identified the concepts that are critical in the delineation of the construct of language learning. Their findings can be summarized in the following points:

- Learning English as a second language must be viewed as meta-cognitive knowledge;
- It is crucial to motivate ESL learners for second language learning;
- Analysis is enhanced by examining the perceptions of individuals about the success and failure of second language learning;

- The degree of learning in this context is determined by attributions that individuals make for their perceived successes and failures in second language learning;
- ESL learners have to design their own goals for English learning.

Other researchers have focused on the role that the ESL teachers can play to ensure the success of language learning programs. DelliCarpini (2009), Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008), and Samson and Collins (2012) stressed the importance of being prepared to teach students in a second language, not only by having properly trained ESL teachers, but also by establishing collaboration between the ESL teachers and the content teachers to develop a curriculum that supports the needs of the ESL classroom.

From the perspective of the sense of language learning, a number of studies have been conducted in the field of cognitive dimensions of second language learning motivation. Beglar, Hunt, and Kite (2012) stated that motivating learners towards having a positive attitude and promoting the sense of internal locus of control and attribution theory could successfully be employed in investigations for improved understanding of individuals. According to Ariyanto (2009), it would be effective if the attribution theory research were carried out in the field of language learning because it gives a more coherent account of individual differences in language learning for ESL learners. Moreover, Aleksandrowicz (2009) highlighted the crucial relationship between motivation for goal setting and satisfaction with performance for learners as well as the requirement for research in this area. Similarly, Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009) stressed

the importance of motivating research participants to offer their personal judgments regarding definitions of learning success and failure.

The Conceptualization of Academic Achievement

The following section presents the theoretical discussions of ESL learners' academic achievements.

Sense of Progress as Meta-Cognitive Knowledge

The cognitive abilities that language learners bring to the acquisition of another language have received special attention in the field of applied linguistics. Since 1970, these abilities have been related to the learner's understanding of personal learning development. Beglar, Hunt, and Kite (2012) stated that two dimensions of the meta-cognitive learning process are generally recognized in the literature on ESL learners' cognitive development. The very first dimension of knowledge concerns cognition, and consists of relatively stable information that human thinkers have about their own cognitive processes and those of others. The second dimension is related to the regulation of cognition; it involves the processes that are used to control and administer the learning process such as planning, monitoring and checking learning outcomes.

Oz (2005) saw a close relation between learning languages and the ability of the learner to utilize meta-cognition, because they see it involving the learner's evaluation of his/her learning outcomes. This "regulatory dimension of meta-cognition was an important aspect of the human experience that plays a central role in successful learning" (Oz, 2005. p.151). Oz (2005) explained the importance of this ability to utilize meta-cognition for its role in "guiding the individual in the learning process and shaping the

person's beliefs and attitude toward learning" (p. 151). According to (Oz, 2005, p.151) the learner may like or dislike what he/she was learning based on their cognition of the learning topic, which in turn affects his or her outcomes.

Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009) pointed out that a meta-cognitive perspective was discrete from cognition, which consisted of two categories of behavior: self-assessment and self-management. According to (Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009, p. 398), "...assessment refers to one's ability to evaluate...while self-management is the individual's ability to manage..." Thus, it can be said that self-assessment requires more crucial skills than self-management for two reasons: first, students with superior self-assessment abilities usually perform better in self-regulated language learning; second, self-assessment is a behavior that emerges prior to self-management (p. 294). As far as the second aspect of the meta-cognitive dimension is concerned, self-assessment can be identified as a crucial factor in promoting a sense of progress in the second language. Once ESL learners have acquired effective self-evaluation skills, they might become capable of assessing their own language learning progress more accurately and realistically and get inspired to initiate and complete tasks.

Motivation and Sense of Progress

According to Al Kaboody (2013), Bahous, Bacha, and Nabhani (2011), and Criss (2011), motivation in education means inspiring learners to initiate, to continue, and/or complete tasks. Where language-learning motivation was concerned, Saudi Arabia was no different. The motivation and sense of progress concept is applicable to Saudi ELLs (English language learners) as well, where research into learning motivation in EFL has

proliferated (Khan, 2011a; Liton, 2012; Mahadi & Jafar, 2012). According to Javid, Al-Asmari, and Farooq (2012), Saudi students are motivated, where learning second language was concerned, by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. According to Javid, Al-Asmari, and Farooq (2012), these intrinsic and extrinsic factors, such as being students in programs, which were taught in English, have important motivational effects on their attitude for learning (p. 292). Therefore, as Javid et al. (2012, p.292) further explained, the main objective of EFL learners was a practical one, so they aimed to succeed in their studies, for achieving better job opportunities after finishing their university degrees. The concept of second language learning motivation has become an essential element of a number of theories related to second language acquisition. According to Tseng, Dornyei, and Schmitt (2006), motivation was considered by a number of determining factors for success in acquiring English as a second language. Because of this, the extent of active and personal involvement in second language learning was determined. As stated by Chaaban (2010) the definition and study of second language learning motivation have significant effects on the ESL learners learning process. It was difficult to, theoretically, constitute an issue when attempting to speculate about the relationship between motivation and sense of progress.

Having a sense of academic achievement was characteristics of individual learners who develop unique perceptions about the progress of their learning. It might had an impact on the level of motivation of ESL learners to learn the language. Moreover, as stated by Abdel (2009), the cognitive perspective of motivational studies had revolved around the decision making process of individuals and their own actions.

Thus, from this point of view it could be said that individuals were not at the mercy of outside forces over which they have no power. The aspect of this standpoint cognition was the choice of fundamental importance as it was presupposed that people had choice over the way they behave and, therefore, had control over their actions.

Motivation may be related to the reasons why people choose to operate in certain ways and the key elements behind their choices of decision. On the other hand, Beglar, Hunt, and Kite (2012) stated that constraints to motivation arise from the exclusive adoption of the cognitive approach of learning a second language: people who have difficulties in reading tend to lose interest in reading and are less likely to develop the needed skills for more cognitively intensive academic reading. This claim is not effective as it includes the affective factors or social and contextual influences. This is the reason these authors consider it necessary to broaden this perspective by means of the adoption of a social constructivist view of motivation, which focuses on the premise that each ESL learner has their own sense of surrounding, which allows them to learn quickly.

Sense of Progress and Individuals' Definitions of Success and Failure

The academic achievement of ESL learners is determined by individuals' definitions of successes and failures in second language learning. This definition varies from person to person, as what constitutes success for a particular learner in a given learning task may represent failure for another. The difference of concept among individuals related to their academic achievements in learning a language will certainly produce a multiplicity of perceptions about their second language learning progress. According to Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009), success and failure were not tangible

experiences; they were regarded as psychological conditions that are the outcomes of perception of achieving or not achieving goals. Second language learners' senses of achievement are individually defined and influenced by societal norms and comparison with relevant others.

According to Tseng et al. (2006), achievement is individually defined and influenced by societal norms and comparison with relevant others. Furthermore, success has been defined in the previous literature as doing well at a challenging or effort-requiring task, exceeding one's expectations and defeating rivals, and doing well in specific situations. Tseng et al. highlighted five different indicators that may display the individuals' constructions of success and failure. These indicators were, "commitment control, metacognitive control, satiation control, emotion control, and environment control" (Tseng et al., 2006, p. 94). These indicators may vary because of subject area or may differ from one individual to another. From the perspective of school students it may be influenced by the expectations and demands of the curriculum. Finally, it may also be shaped by the interactions with other individuals.

Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009) stated that all these contexts of vocabulary learning need to be analyzed when examining the individual's conceptions of success and failure. Al-Homoud and Schmitt also identified different standards for establishing the definition of success individuals may employ task standards, personal standards and social standards. The task standards related to aspects such as types of tasks, involvement of tasks and intrinsic qualities of the task. The personal standards consist of individuals' comparison of achievement goals based on their internal standards with objective levels

of performance. The social standards relate to factors such as the learners' current performance and past achievement, social comparison, and praise received by teachers and others.

Attribution Theory and Sense of Progress/Achievement

The theory of attribution is an important component in the theoretical and empirical considerations of the ways learners perceive their progress, as this perception may be determined by learners' attributions of their learning outcomes. Another important aspect of attribution theory related to language learning is the importance of the causal factors to which success is attributed (Bluestone, 2013; and Tseng et al., 2006). According to their study, Tseng, et al. (2006), the ability of ESL learners is regarded as consisting of the stable factors of intelligence and language aptitude and ESL learner would be motivated if he or she perceived the importance of their task, and that they were making a difference in the learning progress.

Tseng et al. (2006) stated that attribution about the role of past successes and failures in second language were important motivations for learning. Moreover, it is argued that these attributions are particularly important in foreign language learning contexts where second language learning failure is a very frequent occurrence. Dornyei (2001) developed and tested motivational strategies for second language learning based upon attribution theory. Building upon the work of previous researchers who used a constructive framework for the investigation of attributions, he assumed that different people define language achievement in different ways, and that the success of a learning enterprise is not an absolute but it is conceptualized in different ways by different

cultures, groups and individuals. The ways ESL learners define success and perceive their learning progress can shape their attitude toward new learning tasks and new information. From this constructive perspective, Aleksandrowicz (2009) conducted a small-scale research study by investigating young learners' attributions for success and failure in learning French at a school in the southwest of England. The focus of this study was to investigate the ways in which learners conceptualized the notion of "doing well" as well as their perceived reasons for their successes and failures. The research outcomes highlighted that the majority of the survey participants conceptualized their achievement in terms of external factors such as teacher approval and grades. Moreover, the research findings highlighted that the range of these conceptualizations increased with age. Thus, it can be said that the attributions are also subordinate to the context in which they are made.

Another finding of the research study conducted by Tseng et al. (2006) was that the range of attributional categories developed by ESL learners, concerning their academic attainment, includes self-regulation in addition to motivation and social engagement. Self-regulation as discussed in Ahmad (2012); Howell and Buro (2011); Radovan(2011); and Zumbrunn, Tadlock, and Roberts (2011) is important for learners' success in school by being able to set goals, as well as selecting strategies to attain those goals, evaluating self-progress and restructuring those strategies if the goals are not met.

Learners' Goals and Sense of Progress/Achievement

The establishment of learning goals is a critical aspect of promoting the sense of achievement among ESL learners, as without these goals learners are not likely to have a

clear assessment of their learning progress. Previous researchers (Phan, 2011; Price, Tschannen & Caylor, 2013; Sultan & Hussain, 2012) highlighted that learners are successful in establishing and reaching learning goals, and they are likely to achieve satisfaction with their learning progress and become further committed to these goals.

Beglar, Hunt and Kite (2012) asserted that ESL learners should be helped to set their own goals and assess their own outcomes under conditions of minimal anxiety that promote realistic self-confidence. On the other hand, Chaaban (2010) stated that the goal for any specific performance is based on ability estimates, assessment of the difficulty of the task, expectations based on experiences and the relationship of the present performance to longer-range goals. Furthermore, this sense also draws attention to the importance of the effect of goals on assessments of performance by arguing that the discrepancy between desired and obtained performance is critical for subjective assessment of success.

In addition, Beglar et al., (2012) argue that proximal goals were not merely minor passages to cherished greater goals. According to these authors, sub-goals convey personal value to activities and aid in establishing the means for achievements. The fulfillment obtained from completing smaller goals functions as its own reward all through the pursuit of higher goals. In sum, it seems evident that learning goals represent a crucial aspect in second language learners' sense of progress for several reasons. First, they constitute personal benchmarks that aid learners in the assessment of their own learning outcomes. Second, it seems clear that the diversity of personal goals that learners establish for themselves will lead to personal differentiations of progress perceptions

across learners. Third, learners should be successful in establishing and reaching learning goals in order to experience a sense of personal efficacy and proficiency, rather than a sense of success or failure that stems from mere evaluations about performance accomplishment.

Institutional Attributions of Academic Achievement

In addition to the above student-related factors that underlined the poor performance of ESL learners, the literature review identified other attributions that were connected to the socio-academic settings of the students and the institutions. These factors were discussed in the related literature. Bailey et al. (2005); Deil-Amen (2011); Hossler, Ziskin, Moore, and Wakhungu (2008); and Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) provided support for Tinto's theory when they attributed poor performance of students to a gap in the institution's practice. They stressed the importance of the institution's actions to integrate the students' socio-academic life in the new environment to enhance their initial involvement behaviors and perceptions and to improve their hopes to succeed and remain enrolled.

This also was supported by French (2012), Haynes Stewart et al. (2011), and Van Der Merwe (2011), who also recommended institutional attribution retraining programs to restructure students' causal explanations of poor performance to everyday behaviors and events that affect efforts and strategies to study and succeed rather than only looking to immutable causes such as academic ability and intelligence. These causal attributions were also described in the local literature, as discussed in Al-Amri, Al-Madi, Sadig, Shoaib, Ahmedani, and Salameh (2012), Elzubeir, Elzubeir and Magzoub (2010), Ghabra

(2010) and Omar (2012), where the problem of low academic achievement among Arab students was also attributed to gaps in the institutional practice. These gaps included the teaching styles, traditional and customary in most Arab teaching institutions, of rote memorization and a teacher-centered classroom, the lack of an introduction to the new learning environment, poor student support services, and the lack of socio-academic relations between faculty and students – all of which were viewed as stressors affecting the students' academic performance.

Deil-Amen (2011) discussed other contributing factors that are institutionally related. These factors include:

Teachers'/Health trainers' know-how in the second language. As the global economy is booming, Saudi government officials have placed more emphasis on international relations and on the balance between import and export; businessmen are required to travel abroad to extend their businesses, and educators are expected to possess more specialized knowledge to meet learners' diverse needs. These situations have led to tremendous increase in the demand for professional classes or refresher courses focused on second language learning, technology knowledge, and vocational skills for healthcare specialists (Khan, 2011b).

Saudi students study English language, as a second language, for 7 years before graduating from high school, from grades 6 to 12. During this time, they attend at least two classes a week (Alresheed, 2012). Saudis can also attend private schools where English learning takes place earlier or the classes are provided more often. Some of the government schools have taken an initiative to start ESL instruction in grade four. For the

most part, the English classes in Saudi schools involve a non-native English speaking teacher, usually a Saudi national. The majority of the allied health professionals are not skilled in English communication skills. The Saudi examinations emphasize memorization to a great extent in all the subjects at all levels. It is obvious that this results in a number of weaknesses in the acquisition of ESL among the allied health professionals whose English skills are characterized by poor pronunciation, no fluency, heavy reliance on the first language to understand the concept of English grammar, and fossilization of language errors.

Teaching style and curriculum issues. Poor teaching because of the poor knowledge of the domain or poor andragogy, which includes a lack of creativity and interaction in the classroom, is one of the common factors of poor teaching style (Ghabra, 2010; Mosqueda & Téllez, 2008). There is also an unevenness of the outdated curriculum and teaching styles (Elzubeir et al., (2010). Due to this teaching style, students may not get adequate exposure to real world situations in which they may practice their knowledge. Besides the above, there is inadequate discussion of counseling, performance and mentoring. The integration of all of these aspects results in the educational wastage. Therefore, as it is common in the institutions in Saudi Arabia, there is a need to address both students' personal and intuitional issues that cause the ESL students to perform poorly.

The structure and content of adult ESL classes. According to Huang, Tindall, and Nisbet (2011) the motivation of ESL learners towards learning in a second language is closely related to the structure and content of their ESL classes. Huang et al. (2011)

found that if the structure and content of adult ESL classes were aligned to the needs and goals of the learners, the motivation would flow easily and that could promote their participation. According to Huang et al. (2011), an adult learner needs several opportunities while they were involved in a learning activity. They suggested that they be given the opportunity to set their own goal of that learning activity for a successful participation in a classroom experience (Huang, et al., 2011). The gap experienced in the current curriculum gave the students a sense of not being involved in authentic activity that was aligned to their set needs and goals and made them struggle to voice their needs, and not to have a sense of belonging in their classrooms. The fact that the programs being taught at the study institution are brought from Western universities and being taught by expatriate teachers makes the experience of its ELS learners similar in its nature to those immigrant students' in Western countries. Those students feel lost in the new environment and usually will not be able to voice or express their feelings and in turn become hopeless. According Maslow (1943) as quoted in Littrell (2012), a learner who was experiencing that kind of feeling would be stuck on the lowest rung of Maslow's hierarchy of needs steps (p. 4-5). Maslow (1943) as quoted in Littrell (2012) claimed that a person who experiences this feeling would only be concerned with physiological and safety needs and will not have the ability or the concern to get involved higher order of being. While people who possess the higher status in Maslow's steps of needs would think about issues such as "...Cognitive ...love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization..." (p. 5). In order to help ESL students to be productive in their new education environment, the building of the curriculum must be innovative in a way to

address their needs to be adaptive to this new cultural environment and not only provide the basic language skills to understand their subjects in the second language.

Lack of appointment of active student mentors, proctors or advisors. The institution usually fails to appoint an advisor faculty member for new students during the initial phase of their studies. According to Christe (2013), Laugerman (2012), and Woods et al. (2010), this faculty advisor/mentor role is important to ensure successful transition of new students into the next step in their journey. Dellinger (2009) stressed the importance of the role of the faculty advisor or mentor's ability to provide the needed scaffolding in ESL programs. The role of the faculty advisor or mentor is to develop a close relationship with each student and orient him or her to learning and development practice, follow their progress regularly and guide them throughout the courses. The literature on successful learning, retention and integration reinforces the assertions that this success relies on all the areas of an institution that work together (Friedman & Mandel, 2009; Littrell, 2012; Purdie II, 2007).

Saturation of Literature Review

For review of literature related to this research study, the Walden University library website was the main source of information. I utilized the following databases: ERIC, Education Research Complete, ProQuest Central, and Academic Search Complete. In addition to the above electronic resources a variety of textbooks dealing with the topic were utilized.

Articles that were peer reviewed and mainly published within the last five years were selected for the literature review. More than 450 articles and/or studies dealing with

the project topic were identified, retrieved, and saved for later use in special folders on my computer. Each folder contained articles pertinent to specific areas of interest such as English proficiency, characteristics of poor college performance, institutional best practices to control attrition rate, educational reform. The indexing of the articles in each folder contained information such as a brief summary of the article, author information, date of publication, peer reviewed journal information, and finally the retrieval information. Although the reviewed articles covered many issues related to this proposed study, many of them had redundant information and newer ones reiterated the ideas of the old ones by direct citation or summarization of the older work of previous researchers, indicating that the literature review had reached saturation.

My search for articles started at the commencement of my doctoral journey where I was interested in studying the development of higher education in the Middle East and Northern African Arab countries. However, this was later changed to focusing more on the issue of higher education in English in the Arab Gulf countries and specifically in Saudi Arabia because of my personal experience as an educator in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. During the last two semesters of my study and the start of the doctoral project my focus was directed more toward the specific issue of challenges to academic performance of the first year students at this teaching hospital in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The study was also concerned with the related adverse effects of poor academic achievement on the retention rate at this institution and the society.

In search for supporting materials for this doctoral study, I was looking for articles or previous studies that described the issues related to topics of education in this

country. These topics included English teaching in Saudi secondary education, and the admission policies to colleges and universities in Saudi Arabia, characteristics of the Saudi secondary and postsecondary students, such as academic and/or English proficiencies, educational institutions' practice gap leading to the problem of poor academic performance and increased attrition rate, and challenges and opportunities for the education reform efforts that are taking place in the country.

The search included peer reviewed articles or previous studies that were published mainly during the past 5 years, and dealing with the following issues:

- History and development of Saudi Arabia (social, cultural, and economical context);
- The education status in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (K-12): its development, progress, and reform;
- Postsecondary education in Saudi Arabia;
- Pre-college English teaching in Saudi Arabia;
- ESL (English as a Second language) in higher education of the Arab Gulf countries: Challenges and opportunities;
- Vocational training and community colleges in Saudi Arabia;
- Causes of college attrition and methods of control;
- Western higher education in Saudi Arabia: Its benefits and drawbacks;
- Academic performance challenges for unprepared college students;
- Theories and best practices to improve performance and reduce student's attrition

Use of Public Data

A variety of Saudi governmental and/or international organizations' databases dealing with the education issue in Saudi Arabia were also explored to find relevant supporting materials, such as students' enrollment statistics, number of schools and colleges, budgeting, reform efforts, future educational projects, etc. The following resources (some in Arabic) were utilized:

1. *The Saudi Central Department of Statistics*: This governmental entity is established by and subordinated to the Ministry of Economy and Planning. It is considered the sole official statistical reference in the Kingdom for implementing and providing governmental agencies, public and private organizations and individuals with official statistical information and data.
2. *UNESCO Worldwide – Saudi Arabia*: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is an international organization that uses education to achieve its mission of promoting peace, alleviating poverty, and establishing sustainable development and intercultural dialogue throughout its member states. It has a variety of websites that provide information about Saudi Arabia and its educational system.
3. *Saudi Ministry of Higher Education*: The ministry has a website that provides information about higher education in Saudi Arabia. This information includes items such as data and forecasting the future of all higher education variables, admission to colleges and universities and its types, majors of study and their dependencies, educational process evaluation, enrolled students' trends and

their related phenomena of failure, dropouts and graduate volume, and faculty specializations and professional development.

4. *World Education Services (WES)*: This non-profit organization provides research about international education and trends. Its website WEP is specialized in issues related to education in Saudi Arabia
5. *Saudi Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC)*: This is a Saudi government establishment dealing with issues related to secondary and postsecondary technical and vocational education to prepare the badly needed national manpower in the country. Their website provides information about the (TVTC) colleges and institutes, such as admission requirements, number of enrolled students, graduation rate, achievements reports, and plans.

Implications

Although the focus of the study was on a local problem at this teaching hospital in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and dealt with a specific educational gap, its findings may be useful to the entire education system, secondary and postsecondary sectors. The study findings may guide the reform-oriented officials in the education system to areas that have been overlooked or never touched before, to bring on the real needed reform.

Possible project directions could include:

- Establishing a new English teaching curriculum during high school period that caters to the needs of college bound students to study in English.

- Establishing an out-reach program to provide more awareness about college academic work and life for high school students to make an informed decision about their next academic journey.
- Establishing special courses that prepare students for college academic experience and life during high school or foundation year in college.
- Redesigning the courses offered in the foundation year to reflect more emphasis on strengthening the basic academic knowledge needed for future college work.
- Establishing teaching effectiveness seminars for the teaching staff with special focus on the learner-centered classroom.
- Establishing extracurricular activities to promote socio-academic integration for new college students.
- Establishing student services with an emphasis on student's mentoring.

Summary

The previously discussed issue in this proposed study was a depiction of an educational problem experienced by ESL learners of an allied health training program. The discussion explained how the academic achievement of those ESL learners was affected by a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. These factors included the lack of English proficiency, poor preparations for college academic work and life, lack of institutional support, as well as other social and cultural factors that may have a negative impact. Although the discussed issue was an illustration of the setting at a particular teaching hospital in Saudi Arabia, it is not a problem unique to the local setting according to the reviewed local and/or international academic literature.

The following is a description of the remaining sections of this project study.

Section 2 will discuss the methodology used in this study, such as the study design, the conceptual or theoretical framework, sample selection, data collection and analysis methods. Section 3 will describe the project, its goals, rationale, implementation, potential resources and existing supports, potential barriers, the timetable for implementation, the roles and responsibilities of student and others. This section will also discuss the project evaluation and the implications for social change. Finally, section 4 will provide reflections and conclusions about this study, which include its strength, recommendations for remediation of limitations, and an analysis of me as scholar and practitioner. This section will also discuss the project's potential impact on social change, its applications, and directions for future research.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

In this section, a description of the selected research methodology is provided. First, I describe the research design, research philosophy, and research approach related to this research study. Secondly, I discuss the data collection method, research instrument, and data analysis techniques that were used in this study. Finally, I address the credibility and trustworthiness, the qualitative terms compared to the reliability and validity in the quantitative studies as discussed by Bapir (2012), and ethical considerations of this research study.

Research Design

In this qualitative study, I used the explanatory case study approach. According to Creswell (2009), Crowe et al. (2011), and Merriam (2009), the aim of a qualitative study is to provide an in-depth description and analysis based on the interpretations of experiences and perceived meanings that were elicited from the study participants. This particular approach of qualitative case study was used for the investigation and analysis of a single or collective case.

Doing the research in this methodology enabled me to capture the complexity of the studied case. According to Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift (2014), when a researcher uses qualitative case study methodology, he or she is able to gain rich in-depth information as well as many variables that can be used to identify the circumstances of the studied case. Thus, the researcher is enabled to generate particular indicators for the cause of the problem of the studied case (Hyett et al., 2014). This method helped me in

making sense of behaviors based on the narratives of the participants, as was described in Glesne (2012). Further support of the use of this methodology came from the description of how qualitative case study could go beyond the local limitations of the investigated case by Vissak (2010).

Justification for the Use of the Explanatory Case Study

The reviewed literature concerning difficulties faced by ESL learners studying allied health professions has not addressed students' sense of academic achievement. This downfall presented me with a considerable challenge to secure the relevant information of the concerned issue as well as choosing the appropriate research methodology for investigation of the current research question. My choice then was to address the concept of academic achievement within the well-established literature of the ESL learners' academic achievement. With this choice, I was able to examine the individual differences in learning a language of the ESL earners as well as what factors affected their learning as was described in Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009).

Previous researchers in this area suggested a variety of methodologies for analyzing the individual learning experiences of ESL learners. Some researchers have employed quantitative positivist research methodology, which normally involves a large group of participants who respond to a survey (Hanson, 2008; Taylor & Medina, 2013; Tuli, 2010). Other researchers have studied the individual differences in learning in another language and have employed experimental or quasiexperimental research designs in an attempt to sort out whether people with one or another collection of personal characteristics learn more or less effectively (Tseng et al., 2006).

Antipositivism interpretive qualitative researchers (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Hammersley, 2012; Tekin & Kotaman, 2013) have criticized such quantitative studies. These antipositivism interpretive qualitative researchers have claimed that quantitative studies look at the general case and move toward the specific objective using a deductive approach to consider a potential cause of something and hope to verify its effect. The researchers listed above have criticized the quantitative researchers for using rigid statistics and numbers to explain the studied phenomenon while the world we live in has varying perspectives and interpretations of events involved in the studied phenomenon, and social reality is different to natural reality (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Hammersley, 2012; Tekin & Kotaman, 2013). I also believe explaining the studied phenomenon could not be achieved by the rigid statistics and numbers to capture the real meanings revealed by participants about their own real lived experiences; therefore, I used the qualitative approach in my study to provide the in-depth descriptions of those lived experiences.

According to Abdel (2009), a recent trend in social and educational research has emerged to view individual differences in a given scenario using the interpretive research paradigm. The new interpretive research approach takes a more holistic view of the individual learner as the researcher looks after meaning and consequently views of knowledge as subjective and associated with the knower (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Hammersley, 2012; Tekin & Kotaman, 2013). By using the interpretive research paradigm, large-scale correlation or experimental studies have been replaced by small-scale personally oriented studies of qualitative approaches.

According to Hancock and Algozzine (2011), the use of qualitative case study gives the opportunity to intensively analyze and describe a specific case within its own environment and setting. Hancock and Algozzine also asserted that this approach gives the researcher an in-depth explanation of a situation and meaning for those involved and helps in identifying the factors contributing to the investigated problem. Another purpose of case studies is to determine how events occur and which ones may influence particular outcomes (Algozzine, 2010). However, according to Baxter and Jack (2008), case studies, when correctly applied, can lead to developing theory, evaluating programs, and developing interventions. The use of qualitative case study methods in investigating the issue at hand may have been criticized for its lack of statistical strength and its inability to draw conclusions; however, I preferred its use for two reasons. First, case studies are capable of providing me with a better understanding of the problem and helping me determine why and how it occurred. The second reason is its flexibility for obtaining the secondary data from a variety of sources such as published literature and data, institution's records and archives, and reports that can substantiate its findings.

Finally, this qualitative study was designed to collect information from students to gain a full understanding about the challenges to academic achievement that may be causing them to have a low average GPA and to start thinking about leaving school. By using this explanatory case study approach, I was able to answer the research guiding questions of "how," "what," and "why" as discussed by Creswell (2009), Crowe et al. (2011), Glessne (2012), and Merriam (2009).

Participants

The institution's allied health professions coordinator identified possible participants in the study. Forty-three possible candidates were contacted by email to solicit their participation. Most of the identified candidates were working at the institution where this study was conducted; however, some of them have left that city and returned home after graduating or dropping out of school. A letter of introduction to the study was included in the email (see Appendix B) as well as a small questionnaire, which contained four questions to establish eligibility for inclusion in the study (see Appendix B). The emails also included the consent forms, which the participants had to sign before being considered for final selection (see Appendix C in English and Appendix D in Arabic). Seventeen positive replies were returned by email. After receiving the positive replies, a follow up thank you letter was emailed to those who agreed to participate in the study.

Only 11 possible participants were found eligible for inclusion in the study based on the completed questionnaire; these were five males and six females. The inclusion criteria for this study required the participants meeting certain characteristics. These were having a grade of 2.5 or lower during the first year of school, having been placed on at-risk student list (or on probation), having considered dropping out of school during the first year of college, and/or having graduated from school but having difficulties and ending up with a low GPA. Per the requirement of the research ethics, none of the participants was one of my current students or a former student to whom I related in an official capacity at the school. A purposeful sample of three males and three females

were selected to be interviewed for data collection from the remaining pool of participants to ensure nonoverlapping groups; however, the selected candidates were selected in a random fashion. In addition, two males and two females were selected as possible backup participants, and this proved to be useful when one of the scheduled male participants changed his mind about participation because of the tape recording of the interviews.

According to the findings of a study that examined a large number of qualitative studies in a leading information system journal, it was found that there was little rigor in justifying sample size for qualitative case studies (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Nevertheless, the use of a small-randomized sample has been criticized for its likelihood of being homogeneous by some researchers (Dattalo, 2009). However, its use, according to Anderson (2010), Plinks et al. (2013), and Suri (2011) was considered the most useful technique in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases.

Establishing Researcher/Participant Working Relationship and Ethical Considerations

The following list of ethical considerations was adhered to throughout the study as suggested by many researchers (Allmark et al., 2009; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011; Glesne, 2011; Kaiser, 2009; Schneider, 2012; Unluer, 2012):

1. **Privacy:** The data set that was collected by using the interview questionnaire was only used for the purpose of the research study. To protect their identity, participants were assigned pseudonyms that would be known only by me, and

I did not connect statements from specific participants to results of the study.

Electronic and paper data were disposed of after the research study was completed.

2. Confidentiality: The data collected were kept safe by maintaining strict privacy checks on confidentiality. I ensured the confidentiality of the data at every stage of the research and employed an open/overt approach whereby my identity, the purpose of the study, and its methodology were known to all the people concerned.
3. Do no harm: Participants or organizations involved in the study were not judged by the people in the research project and nothing was done that may hurt them in any way.
4. Voluntary participation and withdrawal: Participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants were able to refuse to answer any question and/or leave the study at any time.
5. Informed consent: The participants acknowledged full understanding that their privacy and confidentiality would be maintained, that they understood the purpose and the nature of the study, that at no time they would have been harmed in any way, that they were voluntarily participating, and that they could refuse to answer any question and/or leave the study at any time.
6. Reflexivity: In this research, I was an insider researcher (instructor/researcher) with a background of an ESL learner; therefore, I had to overcome my bias as an insider to limit or eliminate the dual role and overinvolvement.

Data Collection

The data collection for this research study entailed using primary and secondary sources of data. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008), Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge (2009), and Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2010), qualitative researchers use a variety of methods for collecting data, such as individual interviews, focus groups, observations, collection of documented material such as letters, diaries, photographs, open-ended questions in questionnaires, and action research. This strategy of using multiple sources of data strategy enhanced data rigor and credibility (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to collect as much information as possible about the research problem or phenomena under study. This was done by answering questions such as “why,” “what,” and “how;” therefore, qualitative data were collected by interviewing the participants in this case study, as suggested by Yin (2003). This method was chosen for several reasons based on its recommendation by Creswell (2009), Merriam (2009), and Turner (2010). First, it provided a direct interaction with individual participants. Second, the information obtained in this way was richer and provided a deeper insight into the phenomenon under study. Third, the interviewees were encouraged to reveal personal opinions and explanations for their behaviors.

The triangulation method of collecting data was used; primary and secondary data were collected from the case study personal interviews the case study interview notes, review of participants’ academic records, and the review of the participants’ educational portfolios. Many qualitative researchers consider this triangulation method as a procedure

for research validity (Devetak, Glažar, & Vogrinc, 2011; Hussein, 2009; Jonsen & Jehn, 2009; Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2012; Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). According to these researchers, triangulation increases the validity of research when a researcher combines several sources to collect data looking for information from which themes can emerge and help the researcher in building the finding of his or her study. Other researchers (Bauwens, 2010; Klein & Olbrecht, 2011) gave additional value for triangulation in qualitative research. This was especially true when conducting interviews for the collection of data; hence, it does not only duplicate the data collected from other methods, it also gives a better understanding and may reveal additional insight to the told experiences that were not disclosed in an interview.

Pilot Study

According to Chenail (2009) and Leon, Davis, and Kraemer (2011), pilot studies help to see whether the planned procedures perform as envisioned. The pilot study was conducted with two interviewees as a test run for the study. Participants for the pilot study were different ones from the actual study participants. This pilot testing helped me assess my interview's design and process to identify flaws, limitations, or other weaknesses and allowed me to make the necessary changes to refine the interview questions as discussed by Leon et al. (2011) and Turner (2010). Some of the questions were modified after the pilot study to make them better understood.

Data Collection Instruments and Sources

Primary data for this study were collected from the face-to-face interviews that were conducted with the participants in the privacy of my office. According to Turner

(2010), interviews when coupled with other forms of data (secondary data) collection such as the review of records, documents, meeting notes, diaries, and participants portfolios provide the researcher with a well-rounded collection of information for analysis. In reviewing the institutions' admission and graduation records, I could determine the attrition rate. By examining the participating students' academic records, I found areas of studies where students were performing poorly. Looking at students' demographics helped to discover patterns or trends related to the students' socioeconomic background. Finally, looking at samples of the participating students' portfolios gave me an extensive body of evidence with regard to academic performance based on the learner's self-regulation (Kitsantas, Winsler, & Huie, 2008).

Data Collection Strategy

The interviews were conducted using a self-made instrument, which included a list of semi-structured open-ended questions (see appendix D) which was used as a guideline for interviews. The same guidelines were used for each of the participants in both iterative interviews. The interview questions were purposely made open-ended to be used as basis for the conversations with the interviewees but not limiting as discussed in (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008).

All interviews were recorded using a high quality small digital recorder. During the interviews, I was highly alert to what was being said to follow up on interesting points that were made by the interviewees. I used prompting and probing follow up questions where necessary such as "why did you think so, or what do you mean with that", as well as drawing the interviewees' attention to any inconsistencies in their

answers. In addition to the tape recording, I was also taking notes to record the facial expressions, body language, and changes of tone of voice as the participants were answering the questions and or further elaborating on their answers.

Most interviews lasted for about 45-55 minutes during the first round, and about 25-35 minutes during the second round, which was used to reiterate and confirm what was said in the first round. The interviews were conducted in the privacy of my office at the institution where this study was conducted. My office was a spacious large room (3.5x5m) with a window overlooking a large park. The room contained several comfortable chairs, a desk with office equipment, and several green plants. The setting was very comfortable and conducive for conducting these personal interviews which according to Anderson (2010); and King and Horrocks (2010) has a strong influence on how the interview would proceed.

Once an interviewee was in my office he or she was welcomed and thanked for his or her participation and the procedure of the interview was explained again in person reiterating was stated in the consent form. Once the participant was comfortable, we proceeded with the interviews.

All interviews were conducted in English; however, some of the interviewees asked if a question could have been asked in Arabic or if they could answer it in Arabic. The level of their conversational skills in English was acceptable, but they spoke with a heavy local accent. According to Creswell (2009) when reporting my findings that were built from the data collected during the interviews with the participants, I should not only summarize the narratives, but to add comments about those narratives. Most of the

interviewees seemed very enthusiastic in their participation and showed a real interest in helping to make the study a successful one. I felt as if they were very happy that their voice was going to be heard. All of the participants were at ease most of the time and this was evident by their facial expressions and their use of body language. Only one male participant was still hesitant because of the tape-recording of the interview; however, he indicated that he was comforted with the thorough explanation about the extra effort to ensure his privacy and confidentiality.

According to Southerland (2013a), data collected were aligned with the research questions. The table on the following pages (Table 2 based on Southerland, 2013a) explains the data collection technique that was followed in this study and its alignment to the study questions:

Table 2

Data Collection Technique

Research question	Type(s) of data	Data collection method	Data source	Collection process
RQ1: What are learners' perceptions of why they were not performing at academic level?	Data on perception of the students	In-depth interviews	Participating former students	Face to face interview
RQ2: What do learners perceive are potential solutions to improving their academic performance?	Data on perception of the students	In-depth interviews	Participating former students	Face to face interview
RQ3: How do learners perceive their academic skill levels and preparation?	Interview, documentary archival (i.e., test scores), students' portfolios	In-depth interviews, gather planning documents, collect school test score data	Participating former students. Institution's administration	Face to face interview, Obtain permission administrator to institution's records

Table 2 continues

Research question	Type(s) of data	Data collection method	Data source	Collection process
RQ4: To what other factors do students attribute their being at-risk, and how important do they believe these factors to be?	Interview documentary, archival related to the students' socio-economic background	Conduct in- depth interviews, review students' admission records	Participants Institution's administration	Face interview, obtain permission from administrator to review institution's records
RQ5: How do students assess the institution's efforts to remedy their poor performance?	Interview, documentary archival (i.e., minutes of meetings)	Conduct in- depth interviews, review institution's records of meetings related to the issue	Participants Institution's administration	Face interview, obtain permission from administrator to review institution's records
RQ6: What do the learners themselves perceive to be the solution to the problem? What types of academic support do students believe would be beneficial in achieving academic success?	Interview Documentary archival (i.e., minutes of meetings)	Conduct in- depth interviews, review institution's records of meetings related to the issue	Participants, institution's administration	Face interview, obtain permission from administrator to review institution's records

Note. Explanation of the data collection techniques based on the research questions.

The Researcher's Role/Biases

It was crucial for the credibility of my study to clarify my role in it (Lodico, Spaulding, and Vegetal, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Unluer, 2012). The collected data in this

study was subjective in nature to provide full and rich in-depth description of the lived experiences of the participants. Therefore, I had to be as objective as possible and set aside any biases I might've based on my background as an ESL learner, and being an insider researcher as well (Lodico, Spaulding, & Vegetal, 2010; Merriam, 2009). In this qualitative case study, I was the sole instrument for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the collected data. Therefore, it was important that I clearly stated my own biases that may have affected any of the stages of the study (Hancock & Algorzzine, 2011; Lodico, Spaulding, & Vegetal, 2010; Merriam, 2009).

First, I was an ESL learner who grew up in a similar culture to the studied one, and I have been studying in English as a second language for more than 30 years. I first became involved with teaching ESL students in several countries of the Arab Middle East more than 15 years ago. This background has influenced my teaching styles and methods where I believe that ESL learners are at disadvantage when compared to native English learners. Therefore, special measures were taken to remedy that disadvantage. Second, I believed that the experience of ESL learners was different if the learner was studying at home in comparison to studying in an English speaking country. Third, I was a firm believer that institutional support is a major factor for students' success. Fourth, I was an insider (faculty/researcher), which had both advantages and disadvantages (Unluer, 2012). On one hand it is advantageous because as an insider researcher I had a greater understanding of the culture being studied, I generally knew the politics of the institution, and could easily establish trust with the participants and other stakeholders. On the other hand it was disadvantageous in that I may lose objectivity for being too familiar, and

would be making the wrong assumptions or biased ones based on my past experience and knowledge of the process. Finally, I might struggle with duality in balancing my role as an ESL teacher and a researcher (Allmark et al., 2009; Corbin-Dwye & Buckle, 2009; Unluer, 2012; Watts, 2010).

Data Analysis Results

Data analysis in qualitative studies is an inductive process by which a researcher builds a general description and generates meaning units from significant statements and a conclusion from the numerous small pieces of the collected data (Creswell, 2009; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; Merriam, 2009). I used the approach described by Merriam (2009) to make sense of the collected data “by data consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said, and what the researcher has seen and read” (p.175-176).

A variety of methods have been described in the literature for the analysis and reporting of findings of a qualitative studies such as typology, constant comparison, analytic induction, content analysis, thematic analysis, narrative analysis, etc.; however, it is important to choose a method that is appropriate for what is being studied (Anderson, 2010). Content analysis is the most common amongst qualitative researchers; where researchers deconstruct, interpret, and reconstruct interview text (Sargeant, 2012). Thematic analysis is another common analysis technique use by qualitative researcher; however according to Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas (2013) it is very similar to content analysis and it is difficult to draw a line to separate the two techniques. According to Saldaña (2013); and Silverman and Marvasti (2008), researchers have used

both techniques for coding purposes by examining large volumes of collected and transcribed data to interpret meanings from the content of text data, and then, in a systematic fashion, compress text into fewer content categories in order to develop codes that are used to build up the emergent themes. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2011) these varieties of methods “have in common a basic process that includes: reparative, ongoing review of accumulated information in order to identify recurrent, themes, or categories” (p.67). Once a choice of analysis method is chosen for a particular qualitative case study, it is of most concern for the researcher to “develop descriptions and themes, and to present these themes and descriptions that convey multiple perspectives from participants and detailed description of the settings or individuals” (Creswell, 2009, p.193).

For the analysis of this study, I used the recommendations for the novice researcher by Hancock and Algozzine (2011) to use the thematic analysis, in which I would examine “every new piece of information in light of a particular research question to construct a tentative answer to the question” (p.67). The analysis process for this study was conducted simultaneously with the transcription of the interviews as recommended by many scholars such as Creswell (2009), Merriam (2009), and Hancock and Algozzine (2011), Srivastava, and Hopwood, (2009). During the transcription of the interviews, I started the analysis of my collected data by coding, organizing, and categorizing them. In the analysis of the study, I used the following techniques: read-and-reread, code and memo, categorize, and organize as discussed by researchers such as (Elo, et al, 2014; Per Runeson, R. & Höst, M, 2009; Worley, Dunlap & Ledford, 2011).

Table 3, adopted from Southerland (2013b) provides a summary of the analysis process:

Table 3

Summary of Data Analysis Methods and Their Support in the Literature

Types of data collected and analyzed	Data analysis strategies	Methods literature sources	Memoing notes to self
1: Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcription • Classification • Coding • Consolidating • Reducing • Interpreting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacob and Furgerson (2012) • Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) • Turner (2010) • Creswell (2009) • DPhil and DPhil (2009) • Merriam (2009) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact expert at local research center for ideas
2. Review of documents (e.g., students' academic records, students' test scores, students' portfolios, planning documents, budget documents, meeting minutes, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcription • Classification • Coding • Consolidating • Reducing • Interpreting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kitsantas, Winsler, and Huie (2008), 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact expert at local research center for ideas

Note. Explanation of how the analysis was conducted based on the reviewed literature.

Transcription of the Interviews

Transcribed written document are usually used to present data collected from personal interviews in qualitative studies. Although transcribing may seem to be a straightforward technical task; however, according to Bailey (2008) it is more

complicated than just that, in fact it involves judgments about what level of detail to choose in the reporting. Bailey (2008) pointed out several issues that need to be handled when reporting audible and visual data by transcription such as the verbal and non-verbal communication for a more accurate capturing of how things were said. Bailey (2008) and Skukauskaite (2014) considered this transcription as an interpretive process that must include reporting the non-verbal dimensions of interaction, and the careful representation of representing the verbalization.

Once an interview was conducted, I immediately transcribed the recorded interview into a word document and started simultaneous analysis as I was transcribing the proceedings of that interview. In the transcripts, I have written all what was said during the interview as well as adding my comments to describe how things were said in reference to the tone of voice, the facial expressions, and or the use of body language.

The summarization of the interviews' narratives is presented in (appendix E). In this summary, I presented snap shots of some of the real lived stories that were revealed in these interviews. At times, I was using verbatim quotations to strengthen the effects of some of the salient data that were revealed in the interviews. I used bold font to high light those salient data so they can be easily identified during the analysis phase. I included one full verbatim transcripts of one of the interviews as a sample of the interviews proceedings (appendix F) as well. I have chosen this particular interview because this interviewee was very talkative and volunteered a wealth of helpful information in answering many of the study questions. The summary of the narratives was presented in the same chronological order in which they occurred.

To ensure their confidentiality in the transcripts, as per their agreement in the informed consent, none of the participants was clearly identified. The participants were referred to as male participant 1, 2, and 3, or female participant 1, 2, and 3 as well. The summary of each interview was presented to that particular participant for member checking.

Read and reread the transcripts. I started with quickly reading my transcripts as a whole and made notes of my first impression, and then I was reading the transcripts one by one and carefully line by line looking for relevant pieces of information.

Coding and memoing. During reading and re-reading the transcription I was underlining and coloring some of the information that seemed to be relevant in a different font colors; such words, phrases, sentences, or sections. I used different font color for different issues revealed by the participants; such as red for personal related issues, green for institutional issues, etc. (this is in relationship to the educational gaps, which I am looking for in my study based on Tinto's theory). I highlighted my memos that were recorded in my notes during the interviews as well. The following is an example from one of the transcripts:

“ She stated that had **problems in all three programs** with the **method of teaching**. Again she leaned back as she continued talking and said:”
however, at the IPA (Institute for Public Administration) the method is better than here at KFSH (**she meant this teaching hospital where the study is conducted**) because they have the **foundation year in English** for all the subjects and especially had **specialized English** for each

subject, and here at KFSH students come from a **different educational backgrounds** (she means some come from science background while others come from literature background) and **teaching them as a whole is a problem**” (Excerpt from Interview conducted with female participant #1 on 05 Jan, 2015).

Categorizing. For categorizing the codes, I did read the transcripts again and was looking for the information that seemed to be more important or was repeated many times and by more than one person, I combined some of the codes that looked similar into one category, as well as dropping the ones that did not look important or relevant enough. Once this was done, I labeled the categories based on the interview questions such as: language skills, previous educational experience, teaching methods, learning habits, etc.

Organizing. In the organization of the emergent information that was coded, I classified them based on some of the preconceived theories and concepts from which the interview questions were built, and their conceptualization of underlying patterns such as: personal issues, or institutional issues that were reviled during the stories telling throughout the interviews.

Tables 4 and 5 present the way in which the themes were organized. They list the themes that have emerged, and who told them. Each emergent them were listed in a separate column, and the next column indicated whether this theme was salient in that particular participant’s story. In addition I used a special column for “Memoing” that may be helpful during the interpretation of the data.

Table 4

Personal Related Emergent Themes

Emergent theme	Female Participant 1	Female Participant 2	Female Participant 3	Male Participant 1	Male Participant 2	Male Participant 3	Memoing
Lack of English proficiency	NO	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Being unprepared for college level work	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Being unprepared for college experience	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Lack of academic skills for college level work (poor study habits)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Lack of skills required to survive in the new college environment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Lack of self-confidence and sense of achievement	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Lack of motivation	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	
Negative peer pressure	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	

Note. Table shows the personal related themes that emerged from the face-to-face interviews.

Table 5

Institutional Related Emergent Themes

Emergent theme	Female Participant 1	Female Participant 2	Female Participant 3	Male Participant 1	Male Participant 2	Male Participant 3	Memoing
Lack of high school to prepare students for college	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Poor preparation in foundation year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Outdated teaching methods	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Ineffective teaching methods	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Lack of student centered environment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Lack of contextual based learning for teaching English	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Poor facilities such as student lounges, student parking, etc.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Lack of students' services such as mentoring and or counseling	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Lack of or poor faculty-student socio-academic relations	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	

Note. This table lists the salient themes that are institutional related and have emerged from the stories told by the interviewed participants.

Data Interpretation

A closer look at the above tables shows consensus on a variety of issues in the told stories throughout the interviews. The following is a list of the emergent themes from the collected data. The themes are categorized based on their relevant research question:

Question # 1

Tell me about your past academic experience?

Emergent Theme. Negative experience in high school.

Interpretation. All the participants had a negative past educational education and especially in high school. Their high school experience was characterized with poor educational system that relied on rote memorization and a teacher centered classroom. Their learning style was done by repetition of what the teacher present in the class without giving the learner the opportunity to think. This was depicted in the following quotation of one of the interviewees “...I hated high school, I hated the system...it is very eliminating...very rigid... we were still spoon fed with information...the materials was so funny like we had fifteen grammars and we used to repeat them over and over from grade to another...” (Excerpts from female participant #1 interview).

However the experience in college the participants had varying stories; some had negative experience while others enjoyed being in college. Some of the negative experiences that made some of the participants struggle in their academic work were related to the new teaching style of student-centered classroom. Student-centered classroom was a new teaching and learning method brought by the new

western education style in the country. The high demand of independent work of this new method made the students struggle as was stated by one of the participants. She said, "...well...the foreign instructors usually give us hints and give us reading materials and many hand outs and later ask us about it, but most of the students do not response because they did not do what they are supposed to do on their own, they are used to be spoon feed..." (Female participant #1 interview). On the other hand some participants, even though they had some difficulties in the transition to college, they enjoyed being in college and to learn in the new teaching style as depicted in the following quotation: "...they were asking me to think for myself and come up with ideas, to search and learn...I loved it..." (Female participant #1 interview).

Question # 2

How do you describe poor academic achievement?

Emergent Theme. Not doing well in school.

Interpretation. The majority of participants described poor academic achievement as not doing well in school; however, they had differing opinions for the causes; most of them accused the teaching institutions in their previous schooling, and some admitted that the problem was related to their own effort as well.

Question # 3

How do you describe being at risk student?

Emergent Theme. Doing bellow expectation in school.

Interpretation. All the participants were able to describe what being at risk student is. It was described as doing schoolwork at a level below the standards that were set by the school. Some also added having grades below a specific GPA. Again as stated earlier some of the participants accused the school system, while others admitted that being at risk was related to their own efforts.

Question # 4

Do you think you were not doing well in your past academic experience, and why?

Emergent Theme. Not doing well in specific subjects

Interpretation. The majority of the participants thought they were doing acceptable level of academic performance; however, some of them stated that they were not doing well in certain areas of their studies. The majority of the responses attribute that to poor previous English skills (4 out of six participants), outdated teaching methods and specifically for the lack of contextual based learning for teaching English, teaching methods (all 6 participants), inexperience of student centered classroom, as well as having poor preparation for college work and life.

Question # 5

Tell me about your transition from high school to college?

Emergent Theme. Negative experience for the transition from high school to college

Interpretation. The majority of participants had negative academic experience for the transition from high school to college. All of them attributed that to not being

prepared for the transition by their previous high schools. However when they were asked if they like being in the new college environment; some of them stated that they were very happy for the change, but they were unable to handle the new demands of the new learning environment which caused this experience to be negative

Question # 6

What did you know about studying in a college level?

Emergent Theme. No knowledge of studying at the college level.

Interpretation. There was a consensus that the participants had no previous knowledge in studying at a college level. student centered class room and its requirement of some independent work by the learner was totally new since they were all used to rote memorization in the teacher centered class room in their previous schooling.

Question # 7

How do you evaluate your preparation for studying in a college level?

Emergent Theme. Poorly prepared for college level

Interpretation. All participants stated they were not prepared for the new college environment in both the academic and the social aspects. They were challenged by the new student centered classroom and its requirement from the learner; they were not taught how to get the information outside the classroom. In addition, the majority stated that they were not used to living independent while attending college; this was specially accentuated by female participants.

Question # 8

Tell me how did your English skills affect your academic performance?

Emergent Theme. Poor English skills

Interpretation. Some of the participants thought they had good English skills; however when it academic English (Reading and writing) was concerned, the majority of the participants stated they were having issues with the subjects taught in English since their language skills were not parallel with the required level of reading and writing in the second language. The majority of the participants attributed this lack of academic English skills to the method of teaching English as a second language in high school or the method of teaching the college subject in English at the college level.

Question # 9

If you think you were not doing academically well, to what factors do you attribute your poor academic achievement?

Emergent Theme. Two themes emerged from this question for not doing well academically: (a) the institutional factors, and (b) the personal factors.

Interpretation. The majority of the participants stressed the negative effects on their academic performance by the poor school policies or services to support the poorly achieving students, i.e. not having proper mentoring and or counseling for those students and the failing ones as well, poor facilities such as student lounges, and student parking.

On the personal factors, the majority of participants considered poor study habits for a major contributor for poor academic achievement during their college experience;

however, motivation, being serious, lack of self-confidence and sense of achievement, and the negative peer pressure were accounted by some of the participants.

Question # 10

How do you describe the support you received from your family when you started college?

Emergent Theme. Participants were not well supported by their families

Interpretation. All participants stated that they were supported by their families; however, some family issues had some negative impact on their achievement such as a sudden change in family status i.e. the death of a parent was detrimental for one of the male participants. One of the female participants stated that the social activities of the family were causing her to lose a lot of study time.

Question # 11

Describe your new learning environment, and was it supportive enough?

Emergent Theme. New learning environment had some negative and positive effect on academic achievement

Interpretation. All participants stated that the new learning environment was a major factor on their academic achievement; however, they had differing views, some stated this was negatively affecting them, while others considered it a positive factor, never the less the negatively viewed ones were dominant. Some of the negatively affecting factors were studying subjects in a second language, having mixed gender classrooms, newly imported student-centered classroom teaching methodology and its

need to work more independently in comparison to what they were used to as was stated by one of the female participants. She said, “in high school I mean... we were memorizing everything and that was easy...”). One of the positively affecting factors was having foreign instructors (Westerners); this was stressed more by most of the female participants, because they felt they were able to speak more freely and was given the opportunity to think out of the box as stated in one of the females’ interviews.

Question # 12

How do you describe your learning habits before and after joining the college?

Emergent Theme. Poor learning before joining college were not effective in the new college environment.

Interpretation. All the participants stated that they did not have good studying habits before joining college due to the old teaching and learning methods that they were used to in high school or in a previous college before being exposed to the new methods applied at this institution.

Question # 13

Describe your relationships with your past teachers? And how do you describe the socio-academic relations with them?

Emergent Theme. Socio-academic relationships with instructors were new in this learning environment.

Interpretation. All participants stated that socio-academic relationships with instructor were something unheard of in their previous schooling. The majority of the participants considered it as a very positive factor in their learning and relationship was

considered as friendship, sisterly, or brotherly ship. Having this kind of relations was put into good use as stated by most of the female participants as well as most of the male ones; what was stated in by one of the females participants was an example of the good use of these relationships: “the relation becomes more than friend... it’s like a mentor”.

Question #14

In your opinion, what can the institution do to ensure academically poor achieving students?

Emergent Theme. Institution must provide more students’ service to ensure success of poor students.

Interpretation. There was consensus amongst all participants that institutional services were not supportive enough for ensuring the success of students in general and poor achievers in particular. Some of these services which were included: mentoring and or counseling to motivate poor achievers, poor facilities such as student lounges, student parking, etc., lack of social activities to enhance the socio-academic relationships with faculty.

Question # 15

In general, how do you think poor academic performance can be solved at this institution?

Emergent Theme. Filling the learning gaps at this institution is firstly the college responsibility and secondly the learners’

Interpretation. The majority of the participants agreed that the institution had a great role improving the situation. They listed some recommendations that included the

need for better coordination of the programs, having special programs to remedy academic deficiencies, and having specialized teachers who could teach subjects in a second language.

Table 6 shows a listing of themes that were inducted from the analysis of the responses of the participants to each of the interview questions. The table shows the source of the responses such as males' or females'; which was important information for understanding some rival explanations in the responses of participants, and was used in the comparative analysis of the emergent themes as well.

Table 6
List of Emergent Themes From the Analysis and Interpretation of Interviewee Responses

	Emergent Theme	Male Participants	Rate of Occurrence Amongst Males	Female Participants	Rate of Occurrence Amongst Females	Rate of Occurrences (total study)
1	Negative experience in high school	3	100%	3	100%	100%
2	Not doing well in school	3	100%	2	67%	84%
3	Being at risk for bellow expectation in school	3	100%	3	100%	100%
4	Not doing well in specific subjects	3	100%	3	100%	100%
5	Negative experience for the transition from high school to college	3	100%	1	33%	67%
6	No knowledge of studying at the college level	3	100%	3	100%	100%
7	Poorly prepared for social and academic college level	3	100%	1	34%	67%
8	Poor English skills	3	100%	1	34%	67%
9	Factors causing poor academic performance					
	a. Institutional factors.	3	100%	3	100%	100%
	b. Personal factors					
10	Not well supported by their families	2	67%	3	100%	84%
11	New learning environment had some negative and positive effect on academic achievement	3	100%	3	100%	100%
12	Poor learning habits before joining college were not effective in the new college environment.	3	100%	3	100%	100%
13	Socio-academic relationships with instructors were new in this learning environment	3	100%	3	100%	100%
14	Lack of students' services to support poor academic achievers	3	100%	3	100%	100%
15	Filling the learning gaps at this institution is firstly the college responsibility and secondly the learners'	3	100%	3	100%	100%

Note. This table shows the themes that were emerging from the participants' responses to each of the interview's

questions. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

This study was conducted to find the reasons for the problem with academic achievement of the ESL learners at this institution, and suggestions for developing possible solutions based on the lived experiences of those struggling students. By using

the qualitative content and or thematic analysis for building up of the themes, the study revealed some serious findings that were aligned to the conceptual framework of Tinto's theory.

The following lists of the educational gaps were found at this institution. These gaps were classified based on their attribution either to the learners themselves or to the institution:

A. Personal Gaps:

1. Lack of English proficiency,
2. Being unprepared for college level work,
3. being ill-prepared for college experience,
4. Lack of academic skills for college level work,
5. Lack of the practical skills required to survive in the new college environment; where most of these students are new to independent living, self-organization, time management, budgeting, etc.,
6. Lack of self-confidence and sense of achievement.

B. Institutional Gaps:

1. Lack of students' services,
2. Lack of or poor faculty-student socio-academic relations,
3. Teachers' know-how in the second language,
4. Teaching style and curriculum issues,
5. The structure and content of adult ESL classes,
6. Lack of appointment of active student mentors, proctors or advisors.

Although the number of items on the lists is equal; the analysis and interpretations of participants' responses indicated they felt that the majority of factors for not doing well were institution related. Figure 1 shows the attributing factors (institutional vs. personal) as were perceived by the participants:

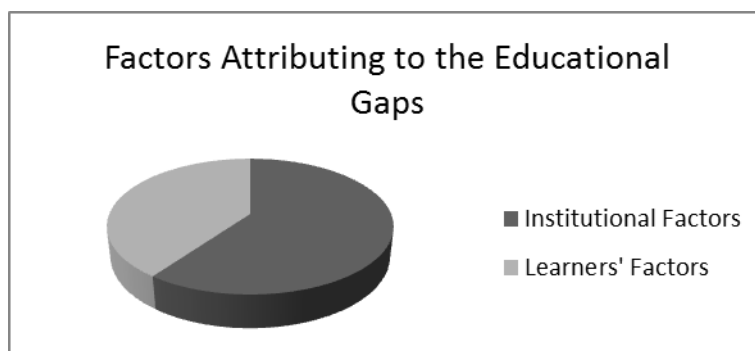


Figure 1. The ratio of institutional and learners' attributed factors to the studied educational gap as perceived by the learners.

The chart above represents the attributing factors to the educational gaps that were perceived by the participants. In answering the 15 interview questions, there were nine responses attributing the gaps to the institution, and six responses that attributed the gap to the learners themselves.

Discussion

The findings of this study evolved from the analysis of the transcripts of the conducted interviews, the review of official school documents, and from the students' portfolios. With the exception of the reviewed documents, such as students' academic records and school records, which contained factual and objective information, the information that were gathered from the told stories and the portfolios were subjective in

nature. However, this should not make their value any lesser because that was precisely the intent of the study to give voice for the learners at this institution in the form of opinions.

The subjective nature of the participants' responses, to some interview questions, caused rival explanations for how certain participants perceived their lived experience. To understand some of these rival explanations better, it must be stated that participants in this study, although they were all Saudi Nationals, came from different ethnic, social, economic, and educational backgrounds. Some of the participants were different ethnically such as black vs. white, had different social life such as being raised by one parent due to the death of the father, and or coming from a different educational background such as coming from literature or science based high school studies.

The major differences that may have caused the most rival explanation was male vs. females. A closer look at table 6 shows that males were the most affected by the negative impact of the contributing factors to the studied educational gaps such as in the transition from high school to college life and for having to undergo a more independent life with more responsibilities when they left home for school. For example, when these males were living at home with their parents, they would not be involved in any house chores such as cleaning, washing clothes, or cooking, which was customarily females' jobs in this Middle Eastern Arab society, but now with living alone and away from home they had to care for themselves. On the other hand, some of the female participants, although they had difficulties with their transition from high school to college life as well, explicitly stated they were very happy they were going to attend college. The reason for

this happiness, as was stated in their stories, was getting out from the oppressive and authoritarian life style in high school. This was specifically true for being able to think more freely as was stated by one of the female participants about her new educational experience in college “they were asking me to think for myself and come up with ideas, to search and learn...I loved it” (Transcription of Interview with Female Participant #1, Appendix F).

One of the expected findings of the study, as perceived by many educators at this institution, was the lack of cognitive academic English skills. This was discussed in the previously reviewed literature (Alresheed, 2012; Elzubeir, et al 2010; Ghabra, 2010; Mosqueda & Téllez, 2008) where these researchers found similar causes for similar problems in their studies such as curriculum issues, teaching style, ESL teacher’s preparation, etc. However, this was not a major finding; the real serious findings of the study appeared to be in alignment with the perspectives of Tinto’s theory where the institution demonstrated a potential low level of institutional commitment towards issues related to the institution’s actions to improve the outdated assessments for admission, the ineffective remedial classes, and the lack of students’ services. In this regards, the findings of this study were not unique to this institution and in fact, they were in alignment with findings of previous studies covered in my literature review discussing the problem. The local and international academic literature that was reviewed presented similar findings for the causes of the problem as was suggested in Tinto’s theory. Many of these researchers who supported Tinto’s theory presented similar findings in relation to the lack of institutional actions that were supportive of students’ success and retention

(Al-Amri, et al , 2012; Deil-Amen, 2011; Elzubeir, et al, 2010; Ghabra, 2010; and Omar, 2012).

Finally, most of the studies in the reviewed literature were aiming at finding the causes and the rate of occurrences of the problem using rigid numbers of cold statistics. This study in contrast used the qualitative case study to gain better understanding of the problem from the explanations of the told stories of the real lived experiences of its participants, and it gave them the opportunity to have a voice and to express their opinions about the problem and its solutions.

Evidence of Quality

According to many researchers (Ali, 2011; Anderson, 2010; Creswell, 2009; and Merriam, 2009) the qualitative researcher is able to achieve similar reliability and validity as in the qualitative research to assess consistency and usefulness of his research. The validity of the research study is concerned with two main concepts. One concern is whether the research instrument is actually measuring what is required or the acquired measurements give a true representation of the phenomena they are intended to represent (Creswell, 2009; and Merriam, 2009). The second concern is whether the findings and interpretations are accurate (Ali, 2011; and Creswell, 2012).

To ensure the best possible accuracy and credibility of the findings of my study I took several steps to enhance the evidence of credibility and trustworthiness. These steps include triangulation, checking for negative cases, discrepant data or disconfirming evidence, member checking, collaborative process, and feedback or peer debriefing.

Triangulation. According to Anderson (2010), Guion, Diehl and McDonald (2011), Hussein (2009) and Lewis (2009), triangulation refers to the reproducibility of themes or categories when using various methods to study the same phenomenon. These various methods include data collection from the interviews, students' academic records, institutions' archives, government and other organizations reports that are related to the studied issue, and any supporting evidence in results of similar previous studies. In analyzing the collected data in this study I prepared and organized, reviewed and explored, coded into categories, and looked for emergent themes from these collected data to build explanations as suggested by Creswell (2012) and Lodico, Spaulding, and Vegetal (2010). Once explanations were formulated, I used the triangulation technique to re-examine these explanations for both confirming and disconfirming evidence.

Discrepant data. Finding discrepant data or disconfirming evidence is a difficult task because qualitative researchers have the tendency to find confirming rather than disconfirming evidence (Creswell & Miller, 2000). However, the data was rigorously examined to determine if any discrepancies or disconformities did not support the emergent themes or categories for possible modification (Lewis, 2009, p.11).

After using triangulation to confirm themes and categories that were emerging from the data analysis, I looked for data that might have been discrepant and thus might have contradicted any of the established themes or did not fit into any of the recognized categories. If any discrepancy or disconfirmation was found, I re-examined my analysis and/or recoding of collected data for possible errors, and then modified themes and categories established earlier as suggested by Nolen and Talbert (2011).

Member checking. According to Harper and Cole (2012), Koelsch (2013), Lewis (2009) and Reilly (2013), member checking is an important quality control process in qualitative research. Member checking is utilized to ensure the credibility of interpretations or understanding of narratives or events relevant to an investigation by the researcher. The researcher submits his interpretations or understanding for checking and validating and/or correcting any errors by the participants who were the source of those interpretations or understanding.

In this study, I used the following three steps of member checking: The first step was during data collection, where I restated and summarized the information revealed during the interview, and then asked the participant to determine accuracy. The second step was during the data analysis phase where I shared my understanding and interpretations with the participants to ensure accuracy. The final step was after the write-up of results where I shared all of the findings with the participants involved and allowed them to analyze the findings and comment on them critically.

Through these three steps, the participants affirmed either that the summaries reflect their accounts of their experiences, or that they did not reflect these experiences. With the participants' affirmation of the accuracy and completeness of my interpretations, the credibility of my study was achieved.

Collaborative process. This refers to the collaboration between researcher and the participants. Lewis (2009) recommended having this relationship with the participants to help in building a better view into the study. Because of its importance, a collaboration process was introduced as a key feature of a qualitative research project about social

change (Ospina, Dodge, Foldy & Hofmann – Pinilla, 2008). However, Lewis (2009) cautioned that novice researchers should be careful not to allow participants' bias into their interpretations.

Feedback or peer debriefing. According to Lietz and Zayas (2010), “peer debriefing is a valuable tool utilized by researchers to strengthen their research by generating new ideas and identifying potential pitfalls related to the methodology” (p. 196). It is done by discussing methods of data collection and analysis, themes and categories structuring, and perceptions with an impartial peer in order to see a situation more clearly. I used a team of expert colleagues who were involved in a similar educational setting to review the collected data and to conduct an analysis in a similar qualitative method. The colleagues' evaluation and analysis findings were compared with my findings and similar conclusions were arrived at, which gave confidence in my findings as was discussed in (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2011).

Summary and Conclusion

The previous section of this proposed study was a description of the research methodology and design that was followed while conducting the study. It also included a discussion of the justification of why qualitative case study as a method and design was chosen. In the section the research questions were listed, the participant selection was described and a listing of the criteria for selecting those participants was provided. A thorough discussion was provided for the ethical consideration concerning data collection from the selected participants, and I discussed my role as researcher and biases. Finally, the primary and secondary data collection and analysis methods were described.

Moreover, the findings of the study were listed with a discussion that was related to their subjective nature. This was followed by a discussion of the reliability and validity, and the study limitations.

The findings of this study illustrated educational practice gaps at this institution. Through the interviews of my study, the participants identified a number of factors, which from their perspectives contributed to their poor academic performance and led them to have low average GPAs and think about leaving school. Although some of the participants' attributions for poor performance were learner-related, the majority of the students attributed their poor performance mainly to some ineffective or missing institutional practices over which they had no control such as helping them transition to the new expected student-centered process. As it was implied from their answers, these practice gaps included poor preparation for college level work by their previous high schools, poor assessment methods for proper placement after college admission, and ineffective remediation methods for the deficiencies in their preparation for college work at this institution.

The study findings suggested the conclusion that the institution was in need of a comprehensive training and development program for its staff, faculty, and administration for building a better school environment to ensure students success. However, the problem was not related only to this particular institutional action, it was related to the admitted students' preparations for college in their previous schooling as well. I concluded that the solution to the problem should be a more extensive one, which can reach out to and work collaboratively with the high schools in the community to

build a bridge between the two levels of education for better institutional actions that ensure future students' success. Based on the circumstances of the presented problem I developed a policy recommendation which when adopted can provide solutions for the problem. My project described in the following section will present these recommendations, and how they can be applied.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

In this section, I describe a policy recommendation to remedy the identified educational gaps at this school that included gaps related to the learners themselves such as the lack of English proficiency to study in college subjects in English and/or being prepared for college work and the environment. Some of the gaps were institution-related as well, such as outdated admission assessments, ineffective remedial actions, and lack of student's services. In this section, I will present the proposed policy recommendation project, its description and goals, the rationale for choosing this genre, review of the related literature concerning the genre and the content areas of the project, the project evaluation plan, and finally its implications.

Project Goals and Description

In addition to recommending an outreach program to help high schools in better preparing future students for college work, the goal of this policy recommendation is to provide the framework for developing and using future policies for admitting, assessing, and teaching methods of students who may not be ready for college work. These policies, when applied, may pave the way for new and improved institutional practices to help in remedying the identified practice gaps in Section 2 of this study and ensuring students' success.

Scholarly Rationale for Choosing Policy Recommendation

The problem of admitting unprepared or underprepared students is not unique to this institution since it has been discussed in the current academic literature worldwide.

According to many studies, the rate of unprepared students entering college has been very high during the recent years (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Burdman, 2011, 2012; FSG Social Impact Advisors, 2010; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Sepanik, 2012; Tepe, 2014). These researchers not only discussed the students' unpreparedness and its associated effects on students' retention and or graduate outcomes, they also provided recommendations for remedial solutions that were based on building better connections between high schools and higher education institutions.

As stated earlier, the findings of this study illustrated some educational practice gaps, which, if continued, would hamper efforts to produce a national workforce by this institution's allied health programs. The stakeholders at this institution, including administrators, admission staff, career counselors, and faculty, may not be aware of these practice gaps and/or may not have the knowledge or the expertise to remedy these gaps. There is need to address these practice gaps; however, this will require a drastic modification in the usual way of conducting business.

Large direct steps for change may not be easily accomplished in this part of the world due to the attitude of not accepting change easily, as was discussed by Al Alhareth, Al Dighrir, and Al Alhareth (2015), Idris (2007), and Riedy (2013). Bowers, Nolet, Roberts, and Esmond (2007) defined policy recommendation as an act or means of communicating findings of a study to concerned stakeholders in an organization as well as providing the recommendations for possible solutions. Therefore, choosing a policy recommendation may be a gentler approach for the attainment of the thought change by not only informing stakeholders of these gaps but also making suggestions for solutions.

However, according to Bowers et al. (2007), for a change to be more effective, lasting, and more likely understood, it must be supported across the organization.

I chose policy recommendation as a genre for my project because it is considered an effective method of communication and is a knowledge transfer strategy with the objective of informing decision makers about key findings of a research project.

However, according to Castiglione and Ritchie (2012), when providing recommendations to make a change, it was a crucial requirement they be evidence-based and fit the local setting to improve the chances for success.

I developed this particular policy recommendation based on the findings of my study, which suggested that some methods of admitting students who were not college ready into the allied health programs at this institution might not have been effective in providing an environment that could assure students success. The institution's administration might not have been aware of this flaw in their admission practice when they assessed these students for placement in specific courses. Based on the students' answers in the interviews, it seemed that the institution had failed to provide the proper remedies of some required prerequisites such as academic English skills, critical reading and cognitive thinking, self-regulation, independent living and self-organizing.

During interviews, the participants stated that they thought both the administration's policies and teaching practices were not effective in producing an environment conducive for their success. Students mentioned practices that included ineffective policies of the administration such as recruiting and admitting students who were likely to fail during their first year of college, and teaching methods such as

assessing, placing, and remedying prerequisites deficiencies that were ineffective. A number of the study participants specifically addressed this issue by stating an example of how the institution was admitting students of different educational backgrounds into the same program, such as having students with a science background who were strong in science subjects in the same class with students who had a literature background who were strong in language skills. This variation in the educational background caused the science background students to have difficulties with language related issues since their previous studies did not concentrate on the language skills and the literature background students to have issues with the science subjects due to the nature of their previous studies that were mainly concerned with humanities subjects.

Although the institution has set specific criteria for admission, it seemed that exceptions were made for many applicants who did not meet the set criteria with the premise that remediation would be provided upon admission. The set criteria included a score of five on the ILETS exam for English proficiency and the score of 70 on locally general aptitude tests known as Qudrat and Tahsily, which higher education institutions used for assessing science and general education subjects' proficiency. The admission of unprepared students was contrary to the recommendations of many researchers (Conley, 2008; Cromwell, Larsen McClarty, & Larson, 2013; Donham, 2014; FSG Social Impact Advisors, 2010; Walsh-Portillo, 2011; Wang, Chen, & Welch, 2012; Willett & Karandjeff, 2014) who emphasized the importance of students' readiness for college. These researchers not only discussed academic readiness, they recommended other

criteria that included other dimensions such as curiosity, open-mindedness, self-reliance and self-regulation, and perseverance to ensure students success in college.

The study provided evidence that the participants were struggling during their first year to keep up with the new learning environment due to deficiencies in their previous schooling preparations. However, it seemed the institution failed to properly remedy and/or recognize these deficiencies because it only addressed the deficiency in English skills and did not address other issues that were also important. For example, a number of the study participants stated that they were new to a student-centered classroom, for example, and were not able to keep up with the demands of independent work required in such a classroom. Other participants stated they did not know how to change their previous studying habits or how to manage their time, and without the institution's help, they were struggling. Many participants believed their own English skills were adequate to study subjects in English; however, their comments indicated that their adequacy was only for social everyday English skills such as watching western movies. When they were admitted into one of the programs, they were assessed for placement in specific courses and determined deficient in many areas such as English skills, math, and basic science. However, the institution only addressed the English skills deficiency where they placed deficient students in a remedial English class. These students were taught in the same ineffective manner of regular ESL courses that were provided in their previous schooling for everyday social language usage and not for academic work. Instead, they needed language skills that they could use to effectively read and comprehend complex texts, think critically, communicate effectively what they

comprehended, and apply what they learned in their new work environment after graduation. The study findings illustrated that there was a consensus amongst the participants that the institution did not act to remedy this gap by not having specialized teachers who could teach subjects in a second language.

Rationale: How I Will Address the Problem

This policy recommendation has three components, which, when applied, would improve administrative and teaching actions and may pave the way for an environment that is more conducive for learning and is more effective in ensuring students' success. In this policy recommendation, I will propose the following:

1. An outreach program needs to be established to bridge the gap between high school and college actions to better prepare future high school students' transition to college.
2. The use of alternative methods for assessment and placement of admitted students.
3. The use of alternative methods of remediation of deficiencies in college prerequisite work, that is, the use of contextual based learning for remedying deficiencies in academic English skills.

Review of Literature

In this section, I will present the literature review that I conducted to learn about the experiences of other scholars who addressed similar situations and to support my recommendations. The literature review was conducted by using the Walden University library and other sources in search for current studies that were dealing with topics

discussed in this study such as academic language, contextualized teaching and learning, educational gaps, the bridge between high schools and higher education, college readiness, and assessment and admitting unprepared students. This literature review provided me with more knowledge about the importance of building a bridge between high schools and colleges to better prepare their students for the college learning environment. It also provided me with the insight for better assessment and placement methods of new but unprepared college students that may ensure their future success and completion of study and graduation from college. Finally, this literature review informed the value of contextual based learning in an ESL environment for better building of academic language skills.

Although I have reviewed more than 150 articles, studies, and related reports of previous work conducted by scholars of educational policy reforms in the recent 5 to 10 years, I found that they mainly shared the same ideas and made similar policy recommendations, therefore indicating that my literature review reached saturation.

The Bridge to College

According to the Information Office of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, DC, the Saudi educational system has seen a massive increase in the number of schools and universities over the past 50 years, and the number of enrolled students has increased at least tenfold (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2015) . This drastic increase in the number of educational institutions from kindergarten through college and enrollment of students was accompanied by a continuous effort to reform the educational system (Drzeniek, Dusek, & Dusek, 2013; Saudi Ministry of Higher Education, 2004).

Throughout the past 5 decades, since the rapid expansion of the public sector in the 1970s and 80s, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has placed great emphasis on education because of its role in preparing future generations who are the nation's true fortune and has supported some reform efforts (Alnahdi, 2014). However, Alnahdi (2014) described these efforts as lacking consistency or cohesion since they were individualized efforts by some educators and/or isolated independent work of some schools, thus leading to a huge variation in the quality of the provided education. Although the reform efforts included some innovative curricular changes such as adopting the English language as a medium for teaching, reducing the combined Arabic and Islamic courses requirement, acquiring international accreditation and international hiring of teaching staff, especially by the private institutions, the educational content remains unchanged (Nolan, 2012).

Furthermore, according to Hamdan (2015), the Saudi K through 12 level educational system has failed to prepare students for critical thinking, inquiry-based learning, and problem solving, students characteristics that are needed for college readiness. The comparatively low academic performance by Saudi students, due to lack of college readiness, was the concern of educational policymakers during recent years and was seen as a cause of jeopardy to the pace of national workforce development (Wiseman, Sadaawi, & Alromi, 2008). As a result, according to Al Othma and Shuqair (2013), Arab universities in this region used placement tests to assess newcomers as preparatory tests to orient the students to the university education environment. However, they found that “most students failed in these tests and the universities came up with a strategic idea of placing the students in remedial courses” (p. 137). There was a debate

about the effectiveness of these remedial courses, according to Al Othman and Shuqair; their study did not show any significant improvement in the students' test performance after remediation. Some of the reasoning for this sentiment was the negative attitude towards these remedial courses by the students themselves, who resented the remedial courses because they felt as if they were a form of punishment. Others students believed that the teaching approach was to blame for the lack of efficiency in remedial courses (pp.133-35).

This knowledge of students not being ready for college and the need for remediation efforts were not new to academia, especially in the western world, where these efforts have been in the discussion for more than 70 years (Koch & Gardner, 2014). However, according to Koch and Gardner (2014), these efforts were failed ones because the attrition rate was still too high, and many colleges were not satisfied with the performance of these first year student. Koch and Gardner further asserted, with this very negative experience, "students either abandoned school, or if advanced to second year, they would definitely be directed to the inevitable drop in performance during the second year of study known as the sophomore slump" (p. 34).

The current academic researchers have addressed the problem of not being ready for college and its effects on retention and successful completion until graduation. According to the American College Testing brief (ACT, 2013), ACT has four benchmarks by which they determine a student's readiness for credit-bearing college work. These benchmarks include English to assess writing skills, mathematics for assessment of basic Algebraic reasoning knowledge, social sciences for assessment of

reading comprehension ability, and biology for assessment of science comprehension. ACT asserts that the use of these benchmarks, allows colleges (especially 2-year institutions) to assess the admitted students for a proper course assignment for remediation work and to attain high probability of success. According to Cromwell et al. (2013), a recent report by the ACT stated that it was very common that most students entering college were not ready for college work when they were assessed for meeting four benchmarks of college readiness. The report found only 25% of students was ready for college, 28% met none of the four benchmarks, and the rest needed some remediation before they were accepted as regular credit-earning students.

In addition to these very important benchmarks, college readiness education researchers shed light on other important aspects of readiness for college work that a student needs to possess in order to improve the likelihood of completion and success of the college journey. However, Cromwell et al. (2013) added the following indicators of college readiness: “attendance, academic motivation, academic discipline, school conduct, and contextual knowledge” (p. 3). Conley (2008) stressed the importance of the possession of cognitive and metacognitive capabilities as well and the demonstration of academic self-management skills such as “time management, strategic study skills, awareness of one’s true performance, persistence, and the ability to use study groups by the incoming students” (p. 4). In addition to the above listed academic self-management skills, successful college work “required students to demonstrate high degrees of self-awareness, self-control, and intentionality” (Conely, 2008, p. 4).

Donham (2014) concurred with the previous researchers; however, she added another dimension for college readiness: she suggested that incoming students needed to know how to learn since college work require the ability for independent learning in a student centered classroom. She explained how incoming students could know how to learn by enabling them to understand how to:

differentiate between scholarly and popular information sources; develop precision search skills that help students filter to the most relevant information for their information needs; use various citation styles, based on disciplinary preferences; know which types of sources to use for what purposes. Students need to learn about overview sources for background building and exploration as compared to focused, in-depth sources. (Donham, 2014, p.16)

Wang, Chen, and Welch (2012) addressed other problems in getting students ready for college, especially when English Language Learners (ELL) were concerned. The study found an achievement gap that affected student performance, which the authors attributed to linguistic abilities. The study suggested that ELL students needed special interventions to help them grow at a faster rate so that they could be as ready as their peers could for future education and careers (p.17).

Globally, as well as in Saudi Arabia, both high schools and colleges made relentless efforts to remedy this educational gap of not being ready for college. However, the results were not as envisioned, where the scholarly work of the new incoming college students did not meet the expectation of the new college requirements despite being fully eligible to attend college (Cromwell, Larsen McClarty, & Larson, 2013; Donham, 2014;

National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2010; Tepe, 2014). Tepe (2014) postulated that this lack of college readiness may be the result of high schools and colleges not working in concert; and surmised that there was a missing connection between them, a bridge of preparation, by which graduating high school student could cross to and succeed in college. Many developing countries, including Saudi Arabia, tried to implement educational reform efforts based on best practices reported by the more advanced countries. According to The Middle East Institute (2010), Saudi Arabia has been emulating American education in its higher education sector and or importing readymade American educational programs, therefore, the long and extensive American experience with educational reform may have some applicability to Saudi Arabian schools.

According to National Center for Public Policy (2010), high schools and colleges had always worked on preparing student in the best possible way; however, high schools, under the No Child Left Behind Policy pressure, focused their efforts on preparing students to complete and graduate from high school and getting eligible to enroll in college. The National Center for Public Policy (2010) emphasized that there was a difference between enrolling in college and being ready for college and claimed that “nearly 60 percent of first-year college students discover that, despite being fully eligible to attend college, they are not academically ready for postsecondary studies” (p.1). Many other researchers, who agreed that there was a missing connection between the two levels of the education system, supported this notion and explained what college readiness is, and suggested possible solutions. However, there was a debate on how to

remedy this gap, it included views advocating remediation during the first year of college, and others, which denied their effectiveness and instead emphasized the importance of being ready before joining college.

Researchers (Klein, 2013; McClenney, 2012; Sepanik, 2012) claimed that remediation during the first school term could make a difference in the progress of the admitted unprepared students if these remediation included courses that provide for a better first year experience in college. These courses must include an orientation and college success course, which would be required from all first year students. According to these researchers (Klein, 2013; McClenney, 2012; Sepanik, 2012), this introductory orientation course teaches the incoming students how to learn in college by providing them the required skills they need to succeed in the new learning environment such as developing new study skills and setting goals. McLennan (2012) and Sepanik (2012) also recommended providing more students' services such as academic planning, help with registration, and orientation to the new learning environment. On the other side of the debate, there were researchers (Chan & Srey, 2010; Taylor Smith, Miller & Bermeo, 2009) who did not believe in the effectiveness of these remedial programs, and that unprepared students placed into remedial programs were less likely to graduate. They explained their stance, although it has drawn a big debate, by stating that studies about the experiences of many states found unprepared students who were placed in developmental courses never advanced, and that many of them, would drop out and not return after a few semesters.

Although the debate had its two sides, one advocating remediation during the first year of college, and the other believing that the problem of unprepared students should have been solved in high school, there existed one more view. This other view believed that both efforts could be effective in filling this educational gap; however, high schools and colleges should work in concert. A cooperative effort by which high school students get prepared for college work while they were still in high school or during the transition period before starting college. This cooperative effort starts with an outreach program to build a bridge between high school and college, which will improve college access for unprepared students (Schultz & Mueller, 2006) by providing academically, socially, and psychologically needed help. According to Barnett & Hughes (n.d.), an outreach program will strengthen the odds that students enrolled in college will persist and graduate, where colleges and high schools can work together to increase the number of students who were college-ready upon entry.

Researchers (Barnett, et al., 2012; Giuliano & Sullivan, 2007) spoke of summer bridge programs that were designed to assist individuals entering college. During these programs, high school students spend four weeks in some colleges and stay in their dormitories for an immersion experience that was carefully designed for students' self-empowerment and to pave the way for success. According to Giuliano and Sullivan (2007) this immersion experience provides students with concrete ways to approach learning successfully and transform them into more confident individuals with a new sense of who they were by receiving "supportive English and math classes, computer and

time-management workshops, tutoring and study skills sessions, all of which were wrapped within a rigorous daily schedule” (p.8).

Although many researchers supported the idea of building a bridge between high schools and colleges, in its report to 33 state governors in the United States, the Complete College America Report (2013) stressed the importance that this bridge should not be broken and leading to nowhere. In their study of remediation programs throughout many states, the report found traditional remediation a broken system, and recommended a better way of bridging the gap by starting many more students in college courses where, how, and when they needed the support most. The Complete College America (2013) reported that the system was broken because of the negative attitude of the students who believed that with the remedial class they were still in high school and did not feel the college experience. Therefore, The Complete College America (2013), recommended building an effective bridge rather than a broken one that was leading incoming unprepared students to nowhere. This bridge could provide them with remedial courses that were aligned with their high school studies and were seen as co-requisites supporting their new learning to complete college rather than boring pre-requisites which they perceived as not necessary.

The recommendations of the Complete College America were based on their findings that current traditional college placement assessments were not predictive of future students’ performance. Recommendations included the following: First, traditional college assessment should be supplemented with a new assessment after students have received a testing guide and practice test and time to brush up on their skills before

testing. Second, the replacement of traditional remediation by the use of co-requisite models instead. However, there was a distinction in designing the programs to meet the needs of the differences in the assessed students appropriately as portrayed in the following scheme, “place students with few academic deficiencies into redesigned first-year, full credit courses with co-requisite built-in support, just-in-time tutoring, self-paced computer labs with required attendance, and the like” (Complete College America Report, 2013, p.9). They also recommended that the length of these courses, for these students, “should be equivalent to the ordinary courses so students stay on track for on-time graduation” (p.9). However with students who needed more academic help, they recommended that the time would be lengthened, but with a “built-in co-requisite support where the students get the courses over time period extended to two semesters instead of one by which students get the same content but more time on task” (Complete College America Report, 2013, p.9). Finally, they recommended that students severely suffering from academic deficiencies should be directed to some alternative high quality certificate programs where the remediation and adult basic skills development could be embedded into their instruction (Complete College America Report, 2013).

Although this literature review provided a variety of perspectives on how college unpreparedness could be remedied, and presented how researchers had opposing stances concerning the best approaches, it also showed that there was consensus that remediation was the responsibility of both high schools and colleges. It has been suggested by many reports and policy recommendations (Glancy, et al, 2014; Kirst & Venezia, n.d.; Knowledge Works, 2015; Newton & Vogt, 2008; Sepanik, 2012; The Blackboard

Institute, 2010) that both levels of education should be working in concert to achieve the desired results of not only having students eligible for college enrollment but ready for college work as well.

Assessment and Placement of New College Students

Historically, the admission into Saudi higher education was solely based on the percentage score of the students' final year in high school. This practice was changed in 2001 when the ministry of higher education added two nationwide exams to ensure more reliable criteria for admission, the "Aptitude Test" and the "Achievement Test" (Albishri, Aly, & Alnemaary, 2012; Murshid, 2013). These two tests are widely used nowadays in Saudi Arabia and they are mostly referred to by the educational institutions with their Arabic names; the aptitude test is called *Qudrat* (*abilities* in Arabic), while the achievement test is called *Tahsili* (*achievements* in Arabic). The tests are available in both Arabic and English languages; most institutions accept the Arabic version, while few require the English one. However, most institutions that teach in English or teach western programs may also require their counterpart exams from the west, such as SAT I and II (Scholastic Assessment Test). This in addition to TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or IELTS (International English Language Testing Service) which are standardized tests measuring students' ability to speak and understand English at a college level.

The two tests, *Qudrat* and *Tahsili*, are administrated under the supervision of the National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education. According to the National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education, referred to as *Qiyas*, meaning measurement, in

Saudi Arabia, the aptitude test (Qudrat) comprised of multiple-choice questions to assess the learners “ability in reading comprehension, logical relations, problem-solving behavior, inferential abilities, and induction abilities” (The National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education, 2011, p. 1). The achievements test, (Tahsili) assesses the accumulated scientific knowledge of the student during the three years of high school in chemistry, biology, physics and mathematics, as well as English. According to the National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education (2011), the goals of these assessments were to determine to what extent a student possesses certain skills, whether the student’s ability qualifies him/her for admission to a particular study program, and finally, to which program a student should be admitted.

According to Atkinson and Geiser (2009), American institutions have utilized aptitude and achievement tests, such as ACT and SAT), for college admission for more than 100 years, and millions of students take these tests every year. According to Espenshade & Chung (2010), there existed some differences in the purpose of the two tests: the primary purpose of the SAT was to measure the student’s potential for academic success in college; and while ACT had a similar purpose, it was “more consistent with an achievement test and tied to mastery of knowledge learned in high school” (p. 3). However, nowadays SAT Subject Tests (formerly known as SAT II) rather than SAT I, the general aptitude test, are being more widely used. According to Roderick, Nagaoka and Coca, (2009), colleges wanted to predict students’ overall readiness and not only academically, therefore they were concerned with assessing the four identified essential sets of skills of content knowledge and basic skills. These were, “core academic skills,

non-cognitive, or behavioral, skills, and college knowledge, which is the ability to effectively search for and apply to college” (Roderick, Nagaoka & Coca, 2009, p. 185).

Although standardized aptitude tests are widely used today all over the globe, scholars have debated their predictive validity (Espenshade & Chung, 2010; Zwick, 2007). A longstanding debate existed between scholars who believed that college admission tests should be based on classroom learning, the achievement test, and those who argued that the tests should be less dependent on learned material and should instead be assessing the ability of students to persist and succeed in college by using the aptitude test (Zwick, 2007). The National Association for College Admission Counseling (2008), although emphasized the importance of these tests in predicating college’s first year grades, it criticized their “one-size-fits-all” approach and suggested that “they should not be considered as sole predictors of true college success insufficient predictors of a student’s likelihood of overall success” (p. 11). In its criticism, the Association for College Admission Counseling (2008) insisted that college success was not only defined by grades, it emphasized that success included “degree attainment, a wide range of GPAs, and the acquisition of experiences and skills that will propel a student into the workforce, graduate education or responsible citizenship”. Therefore, these tests were not sufficient to predict success in its wider definition (College Admission Counseling, p. 43). An in-between stance was taken by Scott-Clayton (2012) to support and criticize the use of aptitude tests as placement tools; she claimed that “placement tests were more predictive of success in math than in English, and more predictive of who was likely to do well in college-level coursework than of who was likely to fail” (p.37).

According to Hamdan Alghamdi and Al-Hattami (2014), aptitude tests were becoming more popular in Saudi Arabia and the issue was debated amongst scholars there as well. Alnahdi (2015) and Murshid (2013) supported the use of Qudrat and Tahsili tests because they believed in their value in measuring the potential abilities of the tested student for admission, which high schools did not usually measure. On the other side, Siddiek (2015), who believed in the value of Qudarat and Tahsili tests to predict readiness for college as their counterparts (SAT I and II or ACT) were applied in the western countries, stated that they were not ready for use during the Saudi educational system reform. Siddiek (2015) emphasized that the Saudi educational system was still in the process of reform, learning objectives were still not clear, and the revisions of the syllabi to meet objectives still were not achieved, therefore, these standardized tests' validity could not be established in such an environment.

Hamdan Alghamdi, and Al-Hattami (2014) had a differing stance on the use of Qudrat and Tahsili, although they supported their use by admission personnel in Saudi colleges for their predictive ability of students' academic achievements, they also made recommendations that they should not be applied to all disciplines in higher education. In their study (Hamdan Alghamdi & Al-Hattami, 2014), which was investigating the predictive validity of these admission tests in some Saudi universities, claimed that there was a significant indicator the tests were valid predictors of college success in the applied medical sciences college, but not in the humanities college due to the variance in the criterion variable.

As the debate continues, some higher education institutions added other methods of assessing students' readiness for college. Willett and Karandjeff (2014), for example, recommended the use of high school transcripts data to improve student placement. They suggested that institutions could derive meaningful information that can facilitate more accurate placement of specific population, such as the un-or-underprepared students, and predict their likelihood for success in college courses. They claimed that by doing this, the institutions can understand the relationship between students' high school English and science performance measures, the level of their first college courses attempted at the institution and their success in these courses.

Although the above reviewed literature illustrated some debate over how aptitude and achievements tests should be used, both supporters and critics confessed believe in their value for predicating future performance of admitted students. However, based on (Hamdan Alghamdi & Al-Hattami, 2014) I would recommend that these tests be used for specific groups of applicants who apply to the medical sciences based programs, but not to the humanities based ones due to the variation in the prerequisite requirements of each program.

The use of alternative assessment methods. According to Fulton (2012), many unprepared students end up in remedial useless class if they placed in them only based on based on the results of aptitude tests. The ACT Report (2007); Chan, and Srey (2010); Cromwell, Larsen McClarty, and Larson (2013); and Hughes and Scott-Clayton (2011) suggested the use of alternative assessment methods, in addition to the traditional aptitude tests, to prevent misclassification of students, or incorrect placement, and help

colleges achieve better results by assessing their applicants' non-cognitive characteristics as well. Hughes and Scott-Clayton (2011) suggested a new assessment, which included, "English and math tests with other domains per test, and scores given by test and domain, under subheadings of 'needs improvement,' 'limited proficiency', and 'proficient'" (p. 22). Hughes and Scott-Clayton (2011) included the following characteristics in their suggested alternative assessment, "inquisitiveness, analytic skills, and problem-solving abilities; key content knowledge; academic behaviors, such as self-awareness, self-control, study skills, and communications skills; and contextual skills and awareness, including an understanding of the norms and conventions of the postsecondary system, critical thinking, and reasoning skills" (p. 23). The data collected from the interviewed participants illustrated that miss-placement in the remedial classes was done by placing all admitted students into the same remedial English class even though the admitted students had variations in their deficiencies or educational backgrounds. Based on the above reviewed literature, it is highly recommended that the institution use different placement tests for different programs to assess the applicants' readiness in the specific areas of their programs as was suggested by Hughes, Scott-Clayton (2011).

Personal interviews. In recent years, many higher education admission staff and schools' officials believed that numerical scores and or standardized testing could not provide them with needed personal information about their applicants. Therefore, they added the process of personal interviewing, as an alternative assessment method, to determine some of the non-cognitive skills, attitudes, and personal attributes of an applicant such as the level of academic perseverance and resilience, which were not

covered by other criteria or tests like GPAs and or aptitude test results. In addition to the usual requirements by the Saudi higher education for college admission such as the high school final year's GPA (or the scores on high school exit exam), and the recently used aptitude and achievement tests, this institution utilized the process of personal interviewing of all the applicants into any of its allied health programs.

Local and international literature has discussed the use and benefits of the personal interviews during the admission process in providing non-academic information about their candidates for admission. Many scholars found correlation between possessing some specific non-cognitive or non-academic skills, attitudes, and personal attributes of the applicants and their ability to succeed and complete college. Locally, this issue was increasingly becoming very popular during the recent years amongst scholars concerned with college students selection, admission, and successfully completing school. Scholars (Alnasir & Jaradat, 2011; Al-Rukban, Munshi, Abdulghani, & Al-Hogail, 2011; and Jdaitawi, 2009) supported the use of admission interviews to obtain non-academic information for their value in predication future success in college.

Criticism of the value of personal interviews in the admission process. Jdaitawi (2009) found significant positive relations between social connectedness, self-efficacy and self-control, in predicting self-regulation, an important non-cognitive trait that every student must possess to succeed and complete college. He explained that self-regulation was important when a student was involved in a problem-solving task, especially when faced with an academic challenge; self-efficacy would play an important role to persist. Alnasir, and Jaradat (2011) also found stronger correlation between the non-cognitive

personal qualities, that were assessed through the admission interview, and success in the first year of college than high school GPA or the written test on science, and a test of students' English language skills that were administered prior to college admission. They claimed that the study they conducted to test the effectiveness of a newly developed assessment method called AGU-MCAT (Arabian Gulf University Medical College Assessment Test) which included a personal interview in addition to the traditional students' science knowledge and the English exam to assesses students' English reading and listening skills; found it very effective. However, they further explained that for their study sample (138 male and female Saudi Arabian students, including one group who underwent the interview process and one who did not), the selected and admitted students from the interviewed group showed a better performance in term of academic achievement and resilience. Al-Rukban, et al. (2011) conducted a similar study on another group of Saudi student applicants to a medical science college in Saudi Arabia. Their findings only reported a correlation between cognitive skills and later achievement in college; however, these authors also stressed the importance of the personal interviews during the admission process to gather non-academic information pertinent to the candidate that would have been difficult if not impossible with the traditional assessments.

Although this alternative method, the interviewing process to help in assessing and factoring in the non-cognitive skills, abilities and traits of the applicants into the admission decision, was utilized by the admission staff; it is highly recommended that

this alternative method of assessment be aligned to the specific needs of the learning objectives of the future study.

Assessment of noncognitive skills. In the international literature, several scholars (Kyllonen, 2013; Koeniget al., 2013; Lievens, 2013) noted the importance of inclusion of non-academic or non-cognitive skills in the criteria for admission into college, for their predictive validity of future success. Kyllonen (2013) claimed that conscientiousness in college, which indicates that a student would work hard, persists, and be organized; had a strong correlation to good grades and that this correlation was equal to the correlation of the academic abilities. According to Koenig et al. (2013), stakeholders viewed other personal competencies as important when admitting students in medical professions (p.606). These core personal competencies included, “ethical responsibility to self and others, reliability and dependability, service orientation, social skills, capacity for improvement, resilience and adaptability, cultural competence, oral communication, and teamwork” (Koenig et al., 2013, p. 606). Soutter, and Seider (2013), discussed the importance of having some of these non-academic or non-cognitive skills by the admitted students to facilitate their ability to thrive at the postsecondary level such as determination and perseverance, which play an important role in the success of college students. They also called on the concerned stakeholders from K-12 education, university settings, and all others who were concerned with college access and completion to work together in building these important skills for better chances of succeeding and completing college. Lievens (2013) added another interesting dimension to the discussion where it gave interpersonal skills a significant added value over

cognitive skills, especially for medical sciences students, for predicting of future performance.

Although the reviewed literature showed some variations in the scholars' opinions on the issue of assessment for college admission, there was a consensus on the value of assessing both cognitive (academic) and the non-cognitive (non-academic) skills in predicating future success of their admitted students. Yet, there was a clear call for concerned stakeholders not to use a one-size-fit all method of assessment. Rather they were recommended to use the tests that were proven effective in predicting the success and the persistence of the admitted students to complete their studies such as the modified SAT Subject Test in combination with some of the alternative testing methods such as the personal interviews.

In conclusion, as illustrated by the reviewed literature, the use of assessment tests played a noticeable role in the college admission and placement process; however when assessing unprepared students, careful consideration must be taken where basic standardized tests should not be the only method of assessment. Since the purpose of these assessments was to determine the admitted student's specific abilities, strengths, and challenges, I recommended that the institute use a combination of assessment methods. According to the reviewed literature (Alnahdi, 2015; Murshid, 2013; Hamdan Alghamdi & Al-Hattami, 2014; The National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2008; Willett & Karandjeff, 2014; Zwick, 2007) this combination testing included high school transcripts, the subjects' aptitude test, achievement tests, and personal interviews.

Contextual Based Learning

Learning academic subjects in an ESL classroom can be daunting, not only because students need to understand the new subject matter content; they have to struggle to understand the academic language of the instruction. Many participants in my study may have believed that they had good English skills by stating that they were able to carry on conversations with the western staff in the hospital, or watching western movies. However, the language of the academic subjects is different from the daily language they use in their social interactions; it requires the ability for reading comprehension, as well as the ability to express this comprehension in writing. Many researchers (Cummins, 2007, Cummins, et al, nd; Krashen & Brown, 2007), specified that there was a difference between our social conversational language, that we use in everyday activities and our academic language. They specified that the difference be due the inclusion of academic language of specific complexity of sentence structure, and a complex dialogue style that were not used in the daily social language. Coleman and Goldenberg (2010) further defined academic language as “the vocabulary, syntax, and other language form necessary to participate in classroom lessons and various other types of academic interactions” (p. 15). The Alliance for Excellent Education, (2012) also emphasized that academic language skills were required to express understanding of subject content in academic settings where math standards, for example, require students to construct viable arguments and analyze the reasoning of others.

Due to the importance of acquisition and use of academic language; academicians in areas of cognitive academic language usage such as (Fang, Schleppegrell, & Cox,

2003; Garrett-Rucks, Howles, & Lake, 2015; Haynes, 2007; Larson, Dixon, & Townsend, 2013; National Council of Teachers of English, 2006; Perin, 2011; Spivey, 2015) recommended the use of different methods to improve language skills needed for college work. This method was different from the methods used for the social English. They recommended contextual based learning for the ESL learners, whereby they can use every day learning experience in the clinical areas of the allied health programs to build their academic language skills rather than the use of every day's social language. Perin (2011) also suggested contextualized learning for unprepared college students; furthermore, she asserted that contextualization deepens domain knowledge of topics, which students study in regular classroom where in an English class they can read and write about issues encounter in the clinical area of their allied health programs for example.

According to DeLott Baker, Hope & Karandjeff (2009), "contextualized teaching and learning actively engages students and promotes improved learning and skills development" (p. 6), and thus helps teachers in explaining to the learners how the content of the subject matter learned in the class room was related for application in a real situation encountered at the future work place.. This is so important for ESL learners in the academic world since fluency in social communicative skills is not an indicator of academic competence (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Marcelletti, 2013). According to these researchers, it is imperative for ESL learners, where teaching and learning is in English, to be sufficient in their academic language for native-like proficiency for mastering genuine interactive situations in academia.

Ambrose, Davis, and Ziegler (2013) explained contextualized learning and teaching in the terms of constructivism theory and claimed that through contextualization, learners would understand the meanings of what they were learning instead of being spoon fed with the information by their teachers and merely memorizing the knowledge. Ambrose, Davis, and Ziegler (2013) described learners in such a situation as “being empty vessel waiting to be filled by the instructor who is pouring abstract knowledge into them” (p. 48). Macaulay, Van Damme, and Walker (2009), supported this claim by giving an example of how contextualization greatly benefits students for the learning of what many perceive as difficult academic subjects, such as biochemistry, by placing their learning in relevant real life situations, the way in which learning is best supported.

According to Johnson (2008), contextualization helps in scaffolding the understanding of the second language interactions, such as in the case of ESL learners, by build an improved capacity for vocabulary, concepts, word structure, and syntax. Based on this, contextualization is especially helpful in the case of Arab students, who usually face many problems in their studies as ESL learners which may be related to “vocabulary register, organization of ideas, grammar, spelling, and referencing” (Al-Khasawneh, 2010, p. 1). According to Ali, Mukundan, Ayub, and Baki (2011), vocabulary is the central component for acquisition of second language regardless of the students’ academic levels; this notion was supported by the literature review conducted by Archibald et al. (2008) of the characteristics of learning language by ESL students. Archibald et al. (2008) found the active engagement of ESL students to be the best method of acquiring the language. For students learning the content of the studied subject

in the second language; these researchers found vocabulary development to be essential for building the knowledge in the second language (Archibald et al., 2008, p. 1).

A study by Yang and Dai (2011) found contextualization to be more effective when compared to the rote memorization in building vocabulary, which was a common complaint by the participants of my study. Many studies in the recent academic literature (Ali, Mukundan, Ayub & Baki, 2011; Amirian & Momeni, 2012; Archibald et al., 2008; Babae, 2011; DeLott Baker, Hope & Karandjeff, 2009; Rodríguez, 2013; Stewart, 2010; and Visoi, 2011) discussed how contextualization in teaching and learning could be attained by a variety of teaching methods and evaluation strategies. These researchers suggested methods, which included promoting active learning by guided interviews and debates, oral presentations, role-playing and improvisation activities that are characteristics of a student centered classroom. They also claimed that learning new words, phrases, and concepts could be more beneficial if were attained within the context of the discipline in which the students were involved in, i.e. a clinical practice area. In addition, they suggested the application of the motivational theory of learning during the use of contextual based teaching and learning approach by acknowledging the students' role in managing the process of their learning, and therefore catering for their preferred learning style and personality differences.

Although this literature review has provided the definition of the contextualized teaching and learning, explained its application, and informed its benefits; contextualized teaching and learning cannot be achieved without the firm belief of the concerned

institute's staff such as administrators and faculty, which with their dedication and passion, can bring about the desired change.

Project Description

Like many other higher education around the world, this institution is facing the problem of having admitted unprepared students for college work into its allied health programs. The admitted students at the school had one or more deficiencies in their previous schooling before joining college. Some of these deficiencies were academic in nature, some non-academic, and some were related to their English language skills. Despite numerous efforts to remedy these deficiencies by the administration, the problem still existed and was evident by the low average GPA of its first year students and the alarming attrition rate. I conducted a qualitative case study to investigate this issue. I utilized the process of personal interviews and the review of academic records of some former students from the allied health programs who were challenged with their studies and dropped out of their programs, and the ones who continued and graduated had to struggle throughout their studies.

Based on the findings of my study and review of the current literature on the themes identified, the resulting project is a policy recommendation to change some of the practices that may have led to the increased effects and continuation of the problem despite of the administration's efforts for remediation. This policy recommendation includes three substantive changes, as follows:

1. An outreach program to be established to bridge the gap between high school and college to better prepare future high school students in transitioning to college.

2. The use of a more effective method of assessment and placement of admitted students i.e. the use of the newer aptitude tests in addition to personal interviews that focus more on the non-academic skills of the applicants for admission.
3. The use of alternative methods of remediation of deficiencies in college prerequisite work, i.e. the use of student centered classroom teaching methods and the incorporation of contextual based learning for remedying deficiencies in academic English skills

In addition to the recommendations, this project will contain mini seminars and workshops to prepare the team members for the proposed changes by this project, and for applying theory into practice. I will be conducting these seminars and workshops as the primary researcher. I will also use the help from a team of available experts in the field from the institution's quality management department and research center.

The Needed Resources

With the anticipated administration interest in this proposed project, I recommend that the administration make all resources available for the project to ensure its success. The recommendation includes facilitating the meeting with the concerned stakeholders by the administrator, arranging appointments, meeting rooms with the stakeholders, and making copies of the recommendation and dissemination to the stakeholders by the department secretaries. I recommend the assignment of a classroom to conduct the seminars and workshops, a meeting room for the involved team for periodic meetings to discuss the progress of the project as well. One recommendation that is more important is

making time available for the team members to be spent in the activities of the project, and providing secretarial help and the cost of office supplies by the administrator.

Potential Barriers

Although I am expecting full support of the institution's administration, there are some anticipated barriers for the progress of the proposed project and especially during the initial period. Education reform researchers such as (Kirkland & Sutch, 2009) attributed these barriers to external and internal factors that might be imposed by the perceptions and attitudes of the people involved. The external factors included challenges to adoption of innovation in practices and the change to the environment that came about by its introduction, such as "a lack of access to resources, a lack of time, a lack of effective training; or technical problems of the institution staff" (Kirkland & Sutch, 2009, p. 13). Internal factors on the other hand, included resistances borne from "a lack of confidence, negative attitudes to the change, and the lack of perceived benefits of the innovation by the institution staff as well" (Kirkland & Sutch, 2009, p. 13). However, Kirkland and Sutch (2009) stressed that the perceptions and attitudes of the people involved imposed these factors.

Other researchers (Knight, 2009; Lane, 2007; Maughan, Teeman & Wilson, 2012; Zimmerman, 2006) further emphasized that internal factors were more important for why some people involved in educational setting resist a proposed change. Yilmaz and Gökhan (2009), for example, attributed those internal factors to a variety of reasons such as the failure of the staff or faculty to recognize the need for change. Due to experience of some faculty and staff, their fear of the unknown may cause them to feel unsafe in this

new environment and will likely not embrace the change and become defensive and resort to old habits. Some faculty and staff may perceive change as a threat to their proven abilities. Finally, the fear of loss of some benefit enjoyed by some faculty and staff within the current distribution and control of resources and status, which changes in the school, will bring.

Potential solutions to barriers. The first expected challenges for my proposed project would be the recruitment of partners whom are willing to get actively involved and to devote their extracurricular time in the process; for the solution of this obstacle, I recommend that the director of the institution utilizes his authority to facilitate this recruitment. To set a more collaborative spirit amongst the institution's staff and as suggested by (Ahmedi, Beck, Murina, & newton, 2004; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008; Cuff & Vanselow, 2004; Hussein, Khudair, & Barakat, 2013; Kirkland & Sutch, 2009; Lunenburg, 2010) I recommend that the new policy be presented to the concerned stakeholders. This will prepare the environment for the proposed change, and help make sure the stakeholders understand the vision and accept the rationale for the proposed change. Therefore, I will recommend to the administration that I will utilize some of the weekly department meetings to explain the recommendation to the staff and solicit their support. The final challenge is the time required to undergo this change project may not be available, as well as its priority may not be viewed as needed as other ongoing or future projects, therefore I would recommend an early start with implementation may avert its postponement to a later time.

Project Implementation

Once the university doctoral study chair and committee members approve this proposed project, I will submit it to the director of the training and development department, who oversees the educational activities at this institution. With the anticipated acceptance of this policy recommendation by the institution, I recommend the recruiting team members for the project implementation from the existing faculty and staff of the training and development department. In addition, I recommend recruiting some experts from the departments of quality improvement and the research center of the institution to provide their expertise in the evaluation of the project implementation and its outcomes. If all goes well and the needed resource were made available, I will start conducting the proposed mini seminars and workshops for preparing the faculty and the concerned staff for the new institutional practices, and then the project will be ready for implementation at the start of the next school term students' admission.

Implementation Timetable

To give ample time for applying the needed changes at the start of the next school, the implementation project will require a minimum of three months. The implementation steps include developing and conducting a needs assessment, explaining the new recommended change to the people whom likely to be affected by it, and assessing their motivation and capacity for change. Once this was accomplished, plans will be developed and a final draft drawn which include a timetable to ensure cost effective implementation of the change. Table (7) as seen in appendix J depicts the steps in which this policy recommendation will be implemented. Once these essential steps are

taken, I recommend that the director of the training and development department assign the roles and responsibilities to each of the team members. I recommend that this will be followed by conducting the mini seminars and workshops for training and development of faculty, admission staff, career counselors, and other administrative staff. Appendix I depicts suggested training and development seminars and workshops to be conducted during the 2nd stage of the implementation plan.

Roles and Responsibilities

As stated earlier, the goal of this policy recommendation is to make possible changes to improve some of the usual practices at this institution. To ensure the success of this project implementation, a senior institution's administrator must assign the roles and responsibilities of the project implementation participants. As with all projects, this project needs project administrator, a project manager, an advisory committee, and team members. Appendix A has a detailed list of roles and responsibilities for the implementation of this project.

Project Evaluation Plan

The main goal of this policy recommendation was to create an effective educational environment that ensures students' successful completion of their studies. As it is customary with all projects, when implemented, this proposed project must undergo an evaluation process to establish whether the desired outcomes were reached, as well as knowing what was and was not working in the project. According to Day-Miller and Easton (2009), "project evaluation is a systematic collection of information about activities, characteristics, and outcomes of projects to make judgments about the project,

improve effectiveness, and and/or inform decisions about future programming” (p. 43). Barba, et al. (n.d.) suggested three types of evaluations, diagnostic, formative, and summative for decision-making concerning educational projects. Since this educational project is an attempt to change the usual practices at this institution and it is expected to be implemented over an extended period, the evaluation should be conducted in a fashion where the participants can, at any time, make revisions or continue with the planned activities. Therefore, both formative and summative assessment methods of the educational environment at this institution should be applied. The application of these assessments should be done before, during, and after the implementation of the recommendation. Before the recommendation is implemented will serve as a baseline, during the implementation to make sure the process is carried out correctly by utilizing the Plan-Do-Check-Act method as described in (Taylor, McNicholas, Darzi, Bell, & Reed, 2013), and after the completion of the project to assess outcomes and goals reaching. A detailed evaluation plan is presented in appendix A.

Justification for Using This Type of Evaluation

According to researchers (Kovach, Cudney & Elrod, 2011; Taylor, et al, 2013), the Plan-Do-Check-Act method as a continuous quality improvement tool, also known as Plan-Do-Study-Act, has been proven effective over the recent years in a variety of fields such as health care, industry, and education; and has been advocated by scholars for a variety of reasons. Taylor, et al., (2013) advocated the use of the PDCA cycle when testing changes in complex systems because it provided the means for iterative testing, and they claimed that if this method was used it would allow for hypothesizing,

experimenting, and evaluating a process in a “pragmatic” and “scientific” fashion (p.2). Moran, Epstein, and Beitsch (2013) emphasized that the use of PDCA will ensure that strategic and operational goals and objectives are aligned and reinforce one another.

Projects Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes Measures

As stated earlier, the main goal of this project was to create an effective educational environment that ensures students’ successful completion of their studies. The proposed project will provide the framework for developing and utilizing future policies for admitting, assessing, and teaching methods of students in fulfillment of the stated goal. These policies, when applied, may pave the way for new and improved institutional practices to help in remedying the identified practice gaps in section 2 of this study and ensuring students’ success. However, when we talk about project’s goal(s), it must be understood that this is a much broader concept that can be measurable for determining its success and effectiveness; therefore, I will use the more specific term objectives, which can be measured by assessing their outcomes. First, since objective is defined as “a performance measure that would lead to achieving the goal” (Project SITE, 2012, p. 1), then it should be as specified by (Project SITE, 2012) “specific, concrete, measureable, and time framed” (p. 1) . Second, since a goal may have few or several objectives, I will keep in mind to ask few questions of why, how, who, what and when in the process of developing objectives. For example, I will ask why we are doing this project, what are the real issues at the core of the project and what deliverables do management or stakeholders expect from this project, and who have a stake in the outcome, and finally how they differ in seeing success or failure in achieving the stated

goals. Some of these measurable outcomes are long –term such as the overall performance of first year students, and short –term ones such as modifications of the attitude of some stakeholders towards change.

Overall Evaluation Goals

The overall goals of this evaluation are to assess whether I was able to provide the recommendation and get stakeholders’ reactions to it, and then assess if the implementation of this project was successful in establishing the framework needed for building a better school environment that can ensure students readiness and be conducive to their successful completion of college.

This overall goal cannot be achieved without concerted and collaborative effort of the concerned stakeholders of this issue. The stakeholders list starts at the higher level of the intuition’s management represented by the director of the training and development department. It will also include the teaching faculty of the allied health programs subjects and the English as a second language, the administrative staff including the admission staff, the students’ services staff, the students’ counseling staff, and last but not the least the researcher.

In conclusion, as customarily with all educational projects, the evaluation of this proposed project will establish whether the desired outcomes were reached. The evaluation will also provide knowledge of what was and was not working in the project during the process of its implementation and give tips for improved implementation process of future projects.

Possible Social Change Implications of the Project

Local Community

Although the intention for conducting this study and its associated proposed project was limited to the specific goals of improving the admission process and assessment of admitted students and providing the proper remedial courses, the application of this study project's recommendation may also be helpful in different ways. For example, implementing the policy would provide some performance improvements for the involved team members at this local site with the mini training and development courses of the faculty and staff. Practice improvements through acquisition of new learning from the mini professional development seminars and workshops for the staff, teaching and administrative, may be one of the early benefits gained. The appropriate application of student-centered classrooms and the innovations in teaching methods such as the application of contextual based learning, which been proven helpful for teaching allied health subjects to learners with limited English language skills, may be of great value in updating the teaching skills of faculty. These updated teaching skills would be far more beneficial to the learners when compared to what they have been accustomed to of the outdated method of teacher-centered or textbook-centered classroom, and or rote memorization. The seminars and workshops will update the admission staff with the current methods of assessments for college readiness, and educate them on how to place unprepared student in the correct remedial courses properly and ensure that these students do not "stagnate" in remedial placements. These seminars would introduce the admission

staff and faculty to develop remedial classes that were designed for the special needs of the admitted unprepared students, where no student would be bored and frustrated from a course work that does not fit their needs. Another important benefit is the opportunity for making attitude modification towards change, and making some of the staff who showed resistance to change feel empowered by these new improvements in teaching and administrating skills rather than being threatened by them. Finally and most importantly, the benefits may extend into the students' community in the school who may feel that their voices were heard finally, which many of them will consider a booster of motivation and a promoter for the sense of belonging. This may be achieved when the students feel the positive change in their new learning environment; thus leading to persistence and successfully completing college.

Far-Reaching

The reviewed literature presented evidence that the findings of this study were not unique to this institution, the combined academic and non-academic challenges were negatively affecting students' performance; therefore, the successful implementation and its benefits may be far-reaching. This study project has four components in its policy recommendations that call for (a) establishing an outreach program to bridge the gap between high school and college, (b) adopting more effective assessment strategies, (c) applying student-centered classroom and contextual-based learning. When these policy recommendations are applied, a team of experts from both levels of education should be formulated to work together for building the new desired educational environment. Educators from both levels will help each other in preparing the students for college

studies where high school teachers and administrators learn what is expected in college, and college teachers and administrators know what to expect from the high school graduates and be ready for accommodating their new educational needs. Other possible far-reaching benefit will be the emulation of this program by other reform-oriented educators in the country.

Conclusion

The findings of this study illustrated how the combined effects of some academic and non-academic factors have negatively affected the performance of some students at this institution. From the interviews of the case study that were conducted with some of the former students whose performance was poor during the first year of college, it was implied that their challenge was due to educational practice gaps at this institution and in their previous high schools. Based on an extensive literature review, the policy recommendation of this study project was developed containing components that called for building a bridge between high school and college, adopting more effective assessment strategies by the college at admission time, and the application of some innovative methods of administrating and teaching that can ensure students success. The literature review presented evidence that this problem was not unique to this institution, and that other institutions in the community and from both levels of education, high schools and college, had similar problems, therefore, a collaborative effort by all stakeholders is needed to bring about the needed change.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

This section will bring my project study to conclusion. I will reflect on the study findings and their implication for the educational practices at this institution. I will evaluate the study project for its strengths and limitations in addressing the problem. In addition, I will assess how the study affected me as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. I will reflect on the importance of the work and what was learned. Finally, I will discuss the implications of the study and associated project for the social change, applications, and directions for future research.

Project Strengths

With the acceptance and successful implementation of the proposed project, its sustainable tangible benefits can be characterized as project strengths. The strengths of this project are not limited to its ability in achieving the current stated goals of its implementation; it has a series of strengths, which will bring about far more benefits. However, according to Asher Blair (2000), gaining such benefits would require a strong leadership that creates the environment to accept such projects. With the positive involvement of the institution's faculty and staff, the project will bring about an increased awareness amongst them for the continuous need to evaluate and improve their practices as described by Edgecombe, Scott Cormier, Bickerstaff, and Barragan (2013). This positive involvement will help in building a new trusting relationship amongst the staff, faculty, and administration in this school that will pave the way to future improvement projects as described in Asher Blair (2000) and Brewster and Railsback (2003). With

their participation, faculty and staff will gain the opportunity for learning the process of developing a policy recommendation that can be used in future improvement projects. The successful implementation of the proposed miniseminars and workshops will pave the path for the establishment of a continuous training and development program at the institution and promote sustainability of the improved practices. However, the most important strength of this project is its ability to build the human capacity of the school's faculty and staff by motivating them for developing creative, innovative methods of practice, a risk-taking attitude towards positive change, and share the responsibility in facing the complexity of sustainable development. Faculty and staff who are recruited to work in the project as volunteers during their extracurricular time will become integral to organizational processes rather than as a consulted or a subsidiary group and can thus strengthen the working community of the institution by contributing their giftedness and talent (Creyton, n.d.).

Project Limitations

Besides its strengths, the project bears some limitations that are related to its change-making nature. Even if the project implementation is successful, it has no clear vision of sustainability. The possible policy change may bring developments that meet the needs for correcting the current situation; however, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating educational processes such as educational practice reform may require a long time, which may impose a serious limitation on this project. This is especially true in systems that are used to bureaucratic management decision-making (Varghese & Martin, 2014), as it is the normal practice in the region where the study was conducted. However,

it is customary that this institution employs expatriate faculty and staff on short- to medium- duration contracts, which means that some important players may not be available throughout the implementation due to completion of their contracts. The frequent administration and/or leadership change, which is also customary at this institution, may pose a more serious limitation on this project. With the possible change of administration or leadership, the priority of this project may be downgraded or it might be cancelled all together due to change in the philosophy of the new administration or leadership. Another major limitation of the study is based in its nature: Qualitative case studies are not known for their ability to generalize their findings because they may have been institution-specific. Although lack of generalizability is a major weakness or limitation of this project, other institutions that are facing similar issues and that may develop similar findings and/or new ones can emulate the project. When their findings are combined with this study's results, the resulting policy changes can strengthen the efforts for a far-reaching educational reform. One more issue with project limitation is concerned with motivation. Even though the project may be a motivator for some, it may also be demotivating for others. Some faculty or staff who generally work well on their own or who cannot function well in teams may become demotivated to complete the project correctly. According to Clark (2003), demotivated people may "avoid starting something new, resist doing something familiar, stop doing something important and switch their attention to a less valued task" (p. 2).

Beside the nature of a qualitative study as a limiting factor, some of the above listed limitations were predicted. This is especially true for the major limiting factors in

this study such as the resistance to change, the slow process of the bureaucratic system, and the fast turnover of staff due to the short to medium stay nature of the expatriate employment contracts; however, with careful planning, their effects can be decreased.

Recommendations for Alternative Approach

Although the conducted study may look as if it was flawless, after a closer look, one may see areas of improvement by lessening the effects of some weaknesses and limitations. This can be accomplished by the recommendation for an alternative approach to the study methodology. This alternative approach has two tracks; one pertains to the study's data collection specifically, and the other calls for an entire new study with a different methodology.

In the data collection specifics, the study had several issues of concern. One is the sample size; it should have had more participants to be more representative. By having a larger sample, conclusions drawn from the investigation would not be as narrow. Although the participants in this study did meet the inclusion criteria and the study included participants who represented the large picture by including males and females, as suggested by Merriam (2009), a small number of participants may cause possible biases and subjectivity. Furthermore, having a bigger sample size allows for having more backup individuals to guard against the sample collapse as well, as suggested by Oppong (2013).

Another concern with the data collection rises from the fact that the data were collected by one person and from one person at a time, and then analysis and evaluated by one person, me as the sole researcher, which may have increased the already existing

bias or subjectivity of the collected data. This method of data collection and analysis may have caused a lack of rigor and served as a major source of bias due to the subjective nature of this method. Merriam (2009) stressed the importance of adhering to the ethical guidelines of conducting a study and suggested the Epoche technique for resolving this issue. In this technique, the researcher removes and sets aside or at least is aware of prejudices, viewpoints, or assumption during the process of collecting data. Jack (2008) suggested the use of peer reviewers for the methods of collection and analysis for removing the effects of subjectivity. Data were collected only from the students, and although the study was intended to give voice to the students who were affected by the institution's practices, it should have taken into account the perspectives of other important stakeholders. The inclusion of a focus group made of faculty, administrative staff, and even successful students may have given a broader insight and understanding of the problem and may have suggested more options in finding solutions.

The other track for alternative approach recommendations lies in the study methodology. Although I have chosen the qualitative case study to get more rich explanation and better understanding of the problem as the participants themselves experienced it, a mixed research method may have given the study additional strengths and have lessened some of its weaknesses. Using the quantitative wing of a mixed method and its scientific rigor would have given me certain knowledge and concepts such as reliability, validity, and statistical significance, which can be used to describe some parts of reality with certainty, in turn giving a greater justification of the results (Barba et al. n.d.; Baškarada, 2014; Creswell & Garrett, 2008). A good example of this, as

discussed by Barba et al. (n.d.) and Day-Miller and Easton (2009), would be if the entire pool of possible participants had participated in answering a survey questionnaire where their answers could have been use as a method of triangulation for the data collected through the interviews of the smaller sample. Further, with the quantitative wing of the mixed study, I could have quantitatively studied the extent of the problem, based on quantifying the research questions answers.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

When I started my doctoral study, I did not know what I know today. Before embarking on this journey, I thought a doctoral study was continuation of my more than 16 years of previous schooling. I discovered that this time was different. I learned that the educational journey for a scholar does not stop at a specific level; it is a life-long learning process. In this section, I will describe what I have learned about scholarship and project development. I will also describe how I see myself as a scholar and project developer. Finally, I will describe how developing a project was a complex endeavor as well as elaborate on leadership and its role in bring change.

Scholarship

“You are a scholar.” The many times I heard this expression, I wondered what it meant. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014), the definitions of scholar, and its derivative scholarship is “a person who has studied a subject for a long time and knows a lot about it, and respectively scholarship is a serious “formal study or research of a subject,”. Therefore, I believe a doctoral student and a doctoral study fit the definitions of scholar and scholarship respectively. A doctoral study is a serious formal study or

piece of research that is carried out by a life-long learner for an extended time beyond the time required for the basic kindergarten through college knowledge acquired for getting a professional career. According to Maranville (2014), the scholarship road is a very long inconsistent road ridden by people who possess the “adaptability that comes from continuous learning--acquisition of emerging knowledge and skill sets--as well as from greater awareness of one’s self” (p. 2). According to Pyhalto, Toom, Stubb, and Lonka (2012), this road is not for everyone; “the attrition rates among doctoral candidates have been reported to range from 30% to 50%” (p.1), because of the distress experienced by the doctoral students during their doctoral journey. Pyhalto et al. (2012) explored the problems and challenges as perceived by the doctoral students themselves in relationship to their well-being and study engagement. The study included possible stressors such as the lack of scholarly community and supervision practices that provided a learning environment that included various elements such as “supportive supervision, tacit knowledge, facilitative learning, and proper assessment practices” (p. 2).

Analysis of self as scholar. After spending all this time and effort in this study, I think Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014) definitions do not carry the real meanings for scholar and scholarship. What I have learned from being a doctoral student at Walden is that being a scholar means having a lot of knowledge that is gained through the process of scholarship. I learned that in searching for knowledge about a topic or a subject, I had to find what was written on a topic. Not only did I have to report the variety of expert opinions I found, I had to comment on these opinions by using my learned skills as a good consumer of published literature and state whether I agreed or disagreed with them

and why, and finally, I needed to incorporate this knowledge in the body of my work. I learned that searching for what was written about a topic was an endless task; the more you search, the more information you will find until you reach what is called literature review saturation. I learned many things that strengthened my perspectives on being a scholar. I learned to be a weekend warrior who had to allocate time properly between the doctoral study and other life's demands such as family and work. I learned how to be tolerant with the heavy workload, competitive classroom atmosphere, and sometimes-harsh evaluation. Finally, as an ESL learner, I learned how to write adequate academic writing.

In addition to acquiring the academic skills of scholarship, I also learned about the many factors that made my doctoral journey a successful one. According to Bain, Fedynich, and Knight (2010), a variety of factors exists that helps in the success of a graduate student. These factors include having a valued reason for getting a higher graduate degree, having a supportive learning environment, having interest rather than feeling burdened by the course material as well as feeling rewarded by it, having professors who care, understand, and are involved in their students' journey, and coach, mentor, advise, and encourage them.

My valued reason for being in this doctoral journey was my family; they influenced my decision to go back to school. Although obtaining the doctoral degree may not be very beneficial for my career since I am near retirement age, it has great value for my wife and children who always looked up to their "super dad." Being in this graduate journey along with a few colleagues through many courses, usually the same ones every

semester, created a feeling of comradery that was supportive and motivating and became a driving force to endure the sometimes difficult moments. I valued having the supportive learning environment of my doctoral study provided by the majority of my professors. This was especially true during my doctoral study intensive courses; my committee members and the university research reviewer were so involved that I felt their caring, understanding, and encouragement; with their constructive comments and suggestions, the heavy workload of my courses never felt as a burden. Finally, I learned the value of resilience in my doctoral journey. According to Seibert (2005), events in people's lives, such as a health problem, may trigger a special emergency response to have resilience and express what they feel upset about, as a step towards regaining the needed positive frame of mind for bouncing back (p. 39). Resiliency, as described by Seibert (2005), is the ability to adapt to life's changes and crises and to carry on with a productive life. Without resilience, I almost became part of the 30 to 50% of doctoral students who abandoned their studies, as described in Pyhalto, et al. (2012) when I developed a catastrophic medical condition and became dependent on a hemodialysis machine due to my end stage renal disease (kidney failure). Besides resiliency, Seibert emphasized the need for support and suggested asking family for emotional help, support, and encouragement. My family stood by me and gave me all what I needed to carry on. Other suggestions by Seibert (2005) were having a friend who listens, sympathizes, and not tell you not to feel what you were feeling (p. 45). I found this friend in one of my professors who was my study committee chair as well; she helped me stay focused and encouraged me to overcome my difficulties.

Project Development

A report issued by the Ohio State University (2009) defined project development as “a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service or outcome that has a beginning, requires substantial coordination and effort to accomplish, and has an end” (p. 7). Day-Miller and Easton (2009); Modesto, and Tichapondwa (2009); and the Ohio State University report (2009) explained how project development was a process initiated in response to an identified need based on discovered gaps in institutional practices. According to the Rotary International (2009), project development, with goals in mind, covers a variety of activities extending from creating a work plan that includes the specific tasks and responsibilities of individuals and groups, the needed resources, clear budgeting, project timing and deadlines, and the anticipated task outcomes. It also emphasized the need for this plan to be simple, easy-to-understand, has a schedule that documents each task involved in reaching the project’s objectives (p. 8).

Analysis of self as project developer. As a researcher student who got involved in developing a project that addressed the identified problems in his research study, I learned some valuable lessons. I learned that implementing any project not only demands drive and determination, but also it demands the acquisition of project management skills to facilitate planning, scheduling, and controlling of all activities that must be done for attainment of the desired goals. I learned that the successful project development and implementation is the product of teamwork that cannot be accomplished without proper communication, understanding, and cooperation (Brahm, Davis, Peirce, & Lamb, 2011) which entails every team member to play his/her role as planned. Finally as a project

developer, I learned that I must play the role of the project manager as well, not in the usual sense of management, but as an enabler or leader. In this role, I learned how to plan with the team members, help the team members stay motivated and get the work completed, manage to get the needed resources, buffer members from implementation's barriers, facilitate good flow of communication to ensure information reaches stakeholders, and provide leadership.

Leadership and Change

Often, institutional time of change is characterized as “chaotic innovation that is full of anxiety, uncertainty, and wondering of the affected people by this change, of what and why change was happening” (Marasse & Maselli, 2010, p. 36). According to Duren (2012), people will be preoccupied by the change and how it will affect them personally, distracted and confused during the period of change; from the time of its announcement to its actual application. Good leadership skills pave the way for a much gentler transition to the desired change. However, leadership skills needed at time of change should not be confused with change management skills (Lunenburg, 2011). While change managers need the skills to navigate through the turbulent waves of change and keep things under control; leaders are the ones to challenge the status quo, blow the winds in its sails, and give it the initial driving force by inspiring and persuading the institution's members (Lunenburg, 2011). Change is a complex and difficult challenge in which visionary leaders must envision its process and outcomes to fuel the change move. Leading through change, according to Marasse, and Maselli (2010), requires leaders to have “the compassion to notice where you are, the empathy to appreciate where others are, and the

resilience to honor the past, stand in the future and be responsible for what is happening in the present” (p. 36).

Analysis of self as a leader. Although I will not be playing the role of leadership in this proposed project, this study taught me how to be an effective project leader. From the review of the current academic literature about leadership and change (Dinwoodie, Pasmore, Quinn, & Rabin, 2015; Duren, 2012; Gitsham, Wackrill, Baxter & Pegg, 2012; Kotter, 2007; Marasse & Maselli, 2010), I learned the many skills needed to facilitate a successful implementation of a project. First and most important, I learned that the collaborative effort involving the people most affected by change is the most important factor for its success and that knowing is the key element for acceptance to collaborate. To gain their support and cooperation, I should be able to communicate with, explain, and convince the people most affected, of why and how this change is going to be good for them. I learned that once I convinced them to accept that there was a need for change, I had to spark the initial motivation to get things moving, by creating a sense of urgency around the need for change. I learned that I had to create and communicate a vision to help the involved stakeholders understand why I was asking them to do something differently. I learned that I had to be tactful in getting the needed resources and removing the barriers. I learned that by creating short-term targets, quick wins might be considered as a motivator. I learned that I had to continually evaluate each step of successful change, even small, and build on what went right and identify what you can improve. Finally, I learned that the achieved change must be sustainable by making it part of the core of your institution’s philosophy.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

The overall importance of this study lies in its main goal of improving the academic performance of the ESL learners at this institution to increase the average GPA and retention rate; in addition, it gave struggling students a voice to express their perspectives. Improved practices and relationships amongst faculty, staff, and students will lead to improved academic performance, students' empowerment, college completion, and preparation for entry into the job market with the required knowledge and skill. However, its implications not only affect the students, it will also be beneficial to other stakeholders in the local setting at the institution and far reaching to the community at large for a possible positive social change. The study provided the opportunity for making better relationships between the various groups in the community at large by bringing the two levels of education concerned with the students' preparation of for college and the job market. Bridging the gap between the institution and the high schools will provide high schools graduates that are ready for college work. With college ready students, the institution can produce the needed graduate's outcomes of highly skilled work force to meet the urgent demands of the community. Highly skilled and employed graduates can be an asset to the community at large. Successful graduates enter the job market with pride, practice their learned skills with confidence, and display a professional attitude. Employed and successful, the graduates can serve as a role model for the young people in their families and the community, thus contributing positively in the sought social change.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The implications of this study and the application of its project are multiple. The study illustrated that there was a need for improving the educational practices at the institution and provided the framework for moving from theory to action in building a better school environment that supports students' success as prescribed in Tinto's theory, (2006). The proposed project explains how to build the model of institutional action for student success as discussed by Tinto & Pusser (2006). The study's project offers the stakeholders in the local setting such as faculty, administrators, and administrative staff the opportunity to come together and collaboratively work to improve the educational practices at the institution. The seminars and workshops incited by this study offer continuing education and professional development for the entire staff of the institution. The bridging between the institution and high schools provides a mean of communication for building better course objectives, syllabi, and learning objectives and outcomes that meet the demands for college work and the job market.

This study utilized the qualitative case study approach and was successful in getting a rich description of the problem as perceived by its participants. This approach was appropriate for better understanding the problem, therefore; the study and its project were intended for application at this local site. However, the reviewed local academic literature illustrated that the problem experienced at this local site is a common issue with the higher education system in the country. Hence, it is recommended that a future study be conducted to include several institutions in the community with a sample size much larger than the one used in this study. In addition, it is recommended that the study will

be a mixed study: qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative part still can get the deep richness of the description of the problem as perceived by the participants who would tell their lived experience, but the quantitative part, with its structured methods of collecting data, will generate numerical that can be used as statistics to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviors, and other defined variables. This quantification can give an insight for the extent of the problem and allows for generalizing its results across the entire higher education system in the country.

Conclusion

In this qualitative case study, I interviewed six former ESL students who were experiencing academic challenges in their schooling; as a result, they either dropped out of school or graduated with low GPA. Investigating the problem with a small size sample provided a rich description of the problem as perceived by those participants. It also offered an in-depth examination of causes and contributing factors of the academic challenges in their performance during the first year of college. As the study revealed, these contributing factors were shared between the students' and the institution's attributions. A policy recommendation was proposed to remedy the situation at this educational site by adopting Tinto's theory for building a model of institutional action for student success.

As preload for this qualitative case study, a through literature review was conducted in section one to know what has been written about the topic under investigation in both local academic and international arena. Based on the main questions of this study of why students were struggling and what could the institution do about it, I

proposed this method of qualitative case study to investigate the problem in section two of this study. In section three, I proposed a policy recommendation, which was intended for educating the institution's stakeholders, especially faculty, staff, and administrators. My goal was to increase the awareness about the causes of the difficulties faced by the ESL learners at this institution and to encourage the stakeholders for adopting educational practices that ensure students success. In addition, the policy recommended reaching out and building a bridge connecting high schools in the community with colleges to have better prepared students for college work. Finally, in Section 4, I have reflected on this study and outlined its possible limitations. In addition, recommendations for further research are suggested to expand the study and collect data from several institutions in the community, as well as collect data from a larger sample size that not only include struggling students, but take into account the opinions of other possible stakeholders such as faculty and staff. Finally, a mixed-methods research approach was recommended if further studies were to be conducted, mixed method not only provide the deep and rich understanding of the problem as in qualitative alone, it can also give statistical quantification to better appreciate the extent of the problem and make the study's results generalizable.

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Appendix A

The Project

Policy Recommendation with Detail

A Call for Improved Educational Practices by a Collaborative Action at the Teaching Hospital's Allied Health Training Programs to Ensure the Academic Success of its ESL Learners

Abdul Fattah Rachdan

Walden University

October 2015

Executive Summary

With the successive efforts of our institution to remedy the unpreparedness for college work of the admitted students into our allied health programs, students are still exhibiting poor academic performance. The negative effects of this poor performance are manifested in the low average GPA and high attrition rate amongst the first year students.

Although the institution staffs have introduced a variety of remedial methods to improve the performance, but because they have only been partial in their aim, such as trying to deliver improvement through improving English skills, or basic general education classes, and have judged success through narrow measurements, they have only achieved a limited success.

The goals of this policy recommendation are to:

- Provide an overview of the poor academic performance problem of the first year students at this institution,
- Educate the concerned stakeholders (administration, faculty, and staff) of the results of a recent qualitative case study investigating the causes of the poor academic performance at this institution, as perceived by students,
- Convince the concerned stakeholders to explore new or improved practices, which collaboratively, will build a model of institutional action for students' success based on the framework of Tinto's theory.

In this policy recommendation, I will provide the background for the specific recommendations, the project study that was used to develop findings and conclusions about students' performance, and a series of specific actions that are recommended in order to improve students' overall retention and performance at the school based on Tinto's Theory for building a better school environment

Introduction

As a partial fulfilment of my capstone doctoral study at Walden University and based on the findings of my study, I am presenting this policy recommendation with detail to the administration of this institution.

The research standard practice at Walden required me to identify a local problem at a specific research site, for which I have chosen your teaching hospital allied health programs to investigate the causes of some educational gaps that were leading to poor academic performance of your students. Once a local problem was identified, as standard research practice, I had to provide its evidence, its significance, and base my study on a specific theoretical framework. I conducted my research study project in light of the current academic literature, local and international, that has discussed similar issues. My research study was based on the theoretical framework of Tinto's Theory for building a better school environment (Tinto & Pusser, 2006), which helped me to formulate my research guiding questions. Prior to conducting my research study project, the research standards called for obtaining the Walden University's IRB approval. As a local requirement, I also had to obtain the approval of the Office of Research Affairs (ORA) at this institution to conduct my study.

The findings of my study illustrated educational practice gaps at this institution that were identified by the study participants and based on their perspectives of the

factors leading to poor academic performance, low GPA, and high attrition rate amongst the first year students at this institution this problem.

The Problem

The rapid development in the social needs of the upcoming Saudi society during the past few decades mandated a massive reform of the higher education system in the country, which was expected to produce a highly skilled and educated national workforce; however, its graduate outcomes failed to fulfill the increasing social needs. As a result, many higher education institutions in the country, like this institution, developed contracts with Western universities from the USA, Canada, or Western Europe to teach their programs locally. At this institution, courses for the allied health programs were taught in English. Many students faced great challenges in studying their subjects, and poor academic achievement was prevalent, as evidenced by the low GPA and failure among first-year students. Although the main perception of the cause of the problem was linked to lack of English language proficiency, other factors might have been as important.

Study Overview

The purpose of the capstone study that led to this policy recommendation was to understand the causes of the poor academic achievement of many students in the allied health training programs at this institution and to explore possible solutions to this problem. The need to study this problem was raised by its negative effect on the average GPA, the retention rate of students during the first year of their studies, and the adverse

effect of it on the future skilled and educated workforce. The study illustrated that the problem of poor academic achievement at this institution was evidenced by a variety of characteristics. These include poor grades, lack of basic knowledge, poor study habits, poor classroom participation, lack of motivation, low overall satisfaction with programs, and increased number of at-risk students among its first-year students.

Research Questions:

The study was guided by questions that were derived from applying Tinto's theory (Tinto & Pusser, 2006) for building a model of institutional action for students' success. The main guiding questions were why students were not performing well academically, and what could the institution do to improve the situation.

Methodology:

In the study, I used the qualitative case study research method to collect primary data from personal interviews, which I supported by a reviewing the related documents for collecting secondary data such as school academic records of some former students. For this study, 43 former students were identified as possible pool of participants. They were contacted by email to solicit their participation and were asked to answer a short questionnaire to determine their qualification for inclusion in the study. The criteria for inclusion were:

1. Having a GPA average of 2.4 or lower during the first year of school.
2. Being placed on the at-risk student list (or on probation).

3. Considered dropping out of school during the first year of school.
4. Have graduate from school but were having difficulties and ended up with low GPA.

Seventeen positive replies were returned by email and only 11 were determined as eligible for inclusion. A purposeful sample of three males and three females was selected for interviewing for data collection from the remaining pool of participants to ensure non-overlapping groups; however, the selected candidates were selected in a random fashion. In addition, two males and two females were selected as possible backup participants.

Data Analysis:

For the analysis of this study, I used the thematic analysis method in which I examined every new piece of information in light of a particular research question to construct a tentative answer to the question. Some of the revealed themes by the interviewed students identified the factors that were leading to their poor academic performances. What was interesting from the revealed themes, the students did not only attribute the causes of the problem to them, but also attributed them to some institutional practices they had no control over.

Summary of Findings:

By using the qualitative content and or thematic analysis for building up of the themes, the study revealed some serious findings that were aligned to the conceptual framework of Tinto's theory.

The following lists of the educational gaps were found at this institution. These gaps were classified based on their attribution either to the learners themselves or to the institution:

A. Personal Gaps:

7. Lack of English proficiency,
8. Being unprepared for college level work,
9. being ill-prepared for college experience,
10. Lack of academic skills for college level work,
11. Lack of the practical skills required to survive in the new college environment; where most of these students are new to independent living, self-organization, time management, budgeting, etc.,
12. Lack of self-confidence and sense of achievement.

B. Institutional Gaps:

7. Lack of students' services,
8. Lack of or poor faculty-student socio-academic relations,
9. Teachers' know-how in the second language,
10. Teaching style and curriculum issues,
11. The structure and content of adult ESL classes,
12. Lack of appointment of active student mentors, proctors or advisors.

Although the number of items on the lists is equal; the analysis and interpretations of participants' responses indicated they felt that the majority of factors for not doing well

were institution related. Fig, (1) shows the attributing factors (institutional vs. personal) as were perceived by the participants:

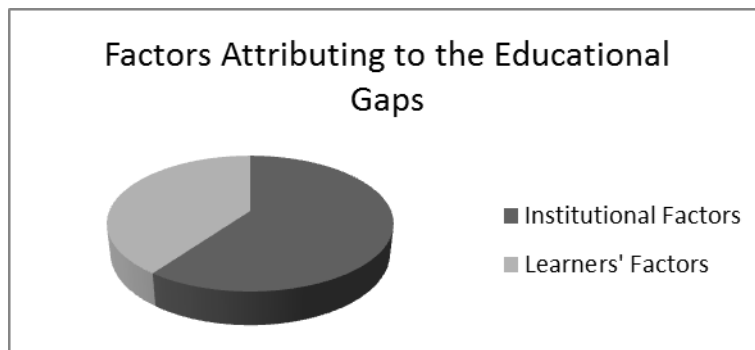


Fig. 1 represents the ratio of institutional and learners' attributed factors to the studied educational gap a perceived by the learners.

The chart above represents the attributing factors to the educational gaps that were perceived by the participants. In answering the 15 interview questions, there were nine responses attributing the gaps to the institution, and 6 responses that attributed the gap to the learners themselves.

Recommendation Action

Based on the findings of my study and review of the current literature on the themes identified this policy recommendation is designed to change some of the practices that may have led to the increased effects and continuation of the problem despite the administration's efforts for remediation. This policy recommendation includes three substantive changes, as follows:

4. **The establishment of an outreach program to bridge the gap between high school and college:** This recommendation calls for a collaborative effort by the institution administration, faculty, and admission staff to build a cooperative relation with the high schools in the community. In this effort, they will be sharing their expertise for building new school curricula that is compatible with the college work and better prepare future high school students in transitioning to college.
5. **The use of a more effective method of assessment and placement of admitted students:** This recommendation calls for the use of the newer aptitude subject tests instead of the general aptitude tests to get a better picture of where the admitted student stand and to better placement in the needed remedial. In addition, it is recommended to use the personal interviews during the admission process that focus more on the non-academic skills of the applicants for admission for a better understanding of the characters of the admitted student.
6. **The use of alternative methods of remediation of deficiencies in college prerequisite work:** This recommendation calls for the use of student centered classroom teaching methods and the incorporation of contextual based learning for remedying deficiencies in academic English skills. In addition, the remediation classes must be organized in a fashion that limits the variations in students' academic backgrounds and cognitive levels to minimum. This will prevent the loss of motivation by students who may feel that classes are boring

because they are below their level, or too challenging because they are above their abilities.

In addition to the recommendations, this project includes mini seminars and workshops to prepare the team members for the proposed changes. The application of these seminars and workshops will introduce the action plan's team to the theories of the proposed changes in the educational practices and help for applying theory into practice. As the primary researcher, I recommend that I will be conducting these seminars and workshops. I also recommend the use of help from a team of available experts in the field from the institution's quality management department and research center.

Needed Support and Available Resources

With the anticipated administration interest in this proposed project, I recommend that the administration make all resources available for the project to ensure its success. These include facilitating the meeting with the concerned stakeholder by the administrator, arranging appointments, meeting rooms with the stakeholders, and making copies of the recommendation and dissemination to the stakeholders by the department secretaries. In addition, there is a need for a meeting room to conduct the seminars and workshops, periodic meetings to discuss the progress of the project as well. One recommendation that is more important is making time available for the team members to be spent in the activities of the project, and providing secretarial help and the cost of office supplies by the administrator.

Potential Barriers

Although I am expecting full support of the institution's administration, there are some anticipated external and internal barriers for the progress of the proposed project and especially during the initial period. The external factors included challenges to adoption of innovation in practices and the change to the environment that came about by its introduction, such as a lack of access to resources, a lack of time, a lack of effective training; or technical problems of the intuition staff. Internal factors on the other hand, included resistances borne from a lack of confidence, negative attitudes to the change, and the lack of perceived benefits of the innovation by the institution staff as well.

Potential Solutions to Barriers

Barrier 1: The first expected challenges for my proposed project would be the recruitment of partners whom are willing to get actively involved and to devote their extracurricular time in the process for the solution of this obstacle.

Recommendation: The director of the institution utilizes his authority to facilitate this recruitment.

Barrier 2: The more important expected challenge may arise from the attitude of some of the recruited partners towards change, as well as their frustration from the new practice.

Recommendation: I recommend that the new policy be presented to the concerned stakeholders during the weekly department meetings to breakdown proposed training and development intended to change usual practices for practicality and ease of acceptance.

Barrier 3: The final challenge is the time required to undergo this change project may not be available, as well as its priority may not be viewed as needed as other ongoing or future projects.

Recommendation: I recommend an early start with implementation to avert its postponement to a later time.

Implementation

With the anticipated acceptance of this policy recommendation by the institution, I recommend recruiting team members for the project implementation from the existing faculty and staff of the training and development department. In addition, I recommend recruiting some experts from the departments of quality improvement and the research center of the institution to provide their expertise in the evaluation of the project implementation and its outcomes. If all goes well and the needed resource were made available, I recommend to start conducting the proposed mini seminars and workshops for preparing the faculty and the concerned staff for the new institutional practices as soon as possible, and then the changes might be ready for implementation at the start of the next school term students' admission.

Change Management Team:

To ensure the success of this project implementation, the director of the training and development department must assign the roles and responsibilities of the project implementation participants. As with all projects, this project needs the following important players:

1. **Project Sponsor:** This responsibility should be assigned to a senior institution's staff member such as the director of training and development department, He will be commissioning others to deliver the project and supports the cause throughout the project. By default, he will make decisions, approve the assignment of staff, intervene at time of crises, and most importantly assign and work closely with a project manager.
2. **A Project Manager:** As I am the sole researcher who studied the educational environment at this institution and found the described educational gaps through the conducted study, I will recommend that I should be assigned the role of the project manager. If assigned, I will be responsible for developing, in conjunction with the director of the training and development department the following essential requirements:
 - a. *Providing a definition of the project.* With this, the project manager then ensures that the project is delivered on time, to budget and to the required quality standard, and ensures the project is effectively resourced and managed.
 - b. *Supervising the implementation process.* The project manager will be responsible for recruiting and managing the work of project implementation team, as well as allocating and utilizing resources in an efficient manner and maintaining a co-operative, motivated and successful team.

3. **Advisory Committee Members:** these members will be recruited from the research center and the quality improvement department to act as consultees during the progress of the implementation and provide experts opinion. They can help in implementing the steps of change and provide functional expertise in an administrative and the evaluative process of the project, and work with participants to ensure that the project was meeting its objectives.
4. **Project Team Members:** These people will be involved in the implementation process after it has been designed, approved, and commissioned. This group will be comprised of faculty, admission staff, career counselors, and other administrative staff. They will be involved heavily in the project in activities such as:
 - a. Help in defining educational requirements of the new envisioned environment at this institution.
 - b. Provide expert opinion for how the process should be implemented.
 - c. Undergoing training and development sessions to learn about the new and improved practices in educational institutions such as: recruiting, assessing and admitting, and providing remedial for the admitted unprepared students, and the educational requirements.

Project Implementation Steps:

Once the administrator is in full support of the proposed change, other stakeholders need to be supportive as well; the faculty and staff must have an open mind for the change for it to take place. For this reason, mini seminars and workshops must

precede the implementation of the proposed project. These seminars will prepare faculty and staff for the change by explaining to them how the change will affect their practice at the initial phase of the change process and after. Finally, faculty and staff must see and accept how the change will benefit them by improving their skills with this mini seminars and workshops.

The project will implement change by using the framework of change theories. Based on Lewin theory, which was discussed by Mitchell (2015) there are three steps that will be taken during the change action. The implementation includes the unfreeze step, in which assessing status quo and planning actions will take place. Then, the next step of change will be taken, in which the change team will define the plan and develop a final draft, draw up timetable to ensure cost effective implementation of the change and assign the responsibilities to each of the team members. In addition, there will be a need for good utilization of the project leadership interpersonal skills to inspire change. The most important phase of this step will be the ongoing training to support change because it allows the change agents to embrace the change more effectively. Training at this phase will be in the form of mini seminars and workshops for a more effective recruitment, admission, assessment and placement, teaching methods, and better administrative skill that are conducive for better learning. Communication, feedback on progress, teamwork and motivation are required throughout these phases for the change process to move forward. Finally, the refreeze step will take place in which, the third and final step will be the termination of the change process and the return back to normal activity by the change agents to apply and evaluate the outcomes of their change endeavor.

Implementation Timetable

A timetable is an integral part of any educational project implementation. It is a tool used during the monitoring and evaluation phases of the project to give timely guidance of the progress process, and at the end ensure that the goal of the educational program were met and that participants return to their duties with enhanced knowledge, skills, or abilities. To give ample time term for the applying the needed changes at the start of the next school, the implementation project will require a minimum of three months.

The following tables illustrate the proposed implementation timetable of the proposed change project and the weekly schedule of the mini seminars and workshops:

Table # 7
Project Implementation Timetable

Implementation Stage	Phase	Activity Name	Person in Charge	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3
Stage I	1	Examining the status quo	Entire implementation team	x		
	2	Developing detailed plan or draft of the proposed change	Project manager	x		
	3	Soliciting acceptance by the people whom likely to be affected by the change,	Project manager	x		
	4	Assessing the motivation and capacity for change	Project manager	x		
Stage II	5	Defining the plan and developing a final draft	Project manager with the input of the project sponsor, and team members	x		
	6	Drawing up timetable to ensure cost effective implementation of the change	Project manager			
	7	Assigning the responsibilities to each of the team members	Project sponsor	x		
	8	Conducting the mini seminars and workshops for training and development of faculty, admission staff, career counselors, and other administrative staff	Project manager Recruited experts		x	
Stage III	9	The termination of the change process and the return back to normal activity	Project sponsor after consultation with the recruited experts in the field of project evaluation			x

Note. Table above illustrates the timetable for the project implementation, and roles and responsibilities of stakeholders.

Table #8
Training and Development Seminars and Workshops to be conducted during the 2nd stage of the implementation plan

Week	Activity	Educator	Audience/Participants	Activity Type	Duration
1	Review of Current Alternative Assessment Methods for Admission	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour
1	Application of Alternative Assessment Methods for Admission	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	Workshop	4 hours
2	Knowing Your learner	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour
3	Developing Syllabus Based on Course Objectives	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour
3	Developing Syllabus Based on Course Objectives	TBA	Faculty	Workshop	4 hours
4	Formative and Summative Assessments	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour
5	The Value of Contextual Based Learning	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour
5	Developing Teaching Material Using Contextual Based Learning	TBA	Faculty	Workshop	4 hours
6	Introduction to Student-Centered-Classroom	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour
7	How to Build a Bridge Between High School and College	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour

Table above illustrates the weekly scheduled training and development seminars and workshops for faculty and staff.

Project Evaluation Plan

As it is customary with all projects, when implemented, this proposed project must undergo an evaluation process to establish whether the desired outcomes were reached, as well as knowing what was and was not working in the project. Since this educational project is an attempt to change the usual practices at this institution and it is expected to be implemented over an extended period, the evaluation should be conducted in a fashion where the participants can, at any time, make revisions or continue with the planned activities. Therefore, the change team should use a formative and summative method of evaluation such as the customary Plan-Do-Check-Act. Being a formative process will provide feedback and information during the implementation process; and summative will provide information and feedback that sums up the implementation process once it has been completed.

Justification for Using this Type of Evaluation

Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) method as a continuous quality improvement tool (also known as Plan-Do-Study-Act) has been proven an effective over the recent years in a variety of fields such as health care, industry, and education (Kovach, Cudney & Elrod, 2011), and its use has been advocated by scholars for a variety of reasons. The PDCA is a method that helps in achieving a balance between the systems and behavioral aspects of management. PDCA cycle use has been advocated because it presents a pragmatic scientific method (hypothesize, experiment, evaluate) for testing changes in complex systems, as well as ensuring that strategic and operational goals and objectives are aligned and reinforce one another.

Application of the PDCA Method

Based on the above review literature, the PDCA is a formative and summative evaluation process used in a variety of quality management projects. In this project, it can be used at any step or phase of the unfreeze-change-refreeze and repeats it until achieving the desired outcomes. The change agents of this project must understand that the change process in this project will be cyclic and that the cycle can go forward in a continuous fashion when proceedings were satisfactory and it could move back in an iterative fashion when errors were found in the change process. Figure (2) is graphic representations of how changes agents can apply PDCA process at every phase of the change project within the framework of unfreeze-change-refreeze theory.

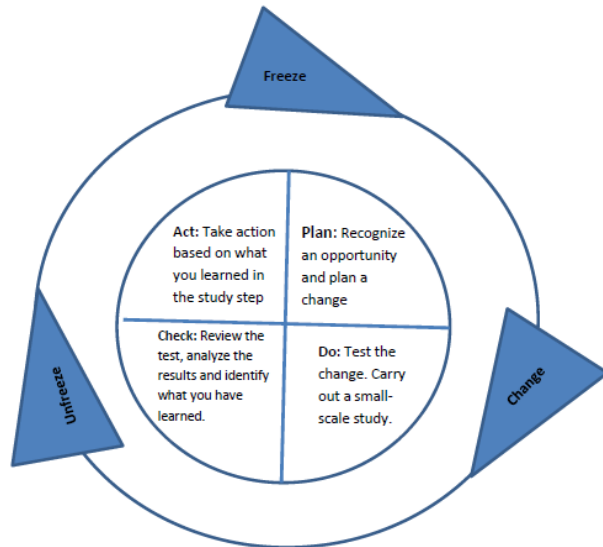


Fig. 2. Representation of how the change agents can apply continuous quality management technique of PDCA from within the freeze-change-refreeze approach.

Projects Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes Measures

As stated earlier, the main goal of this project was to provide the framework for developing and utilizing future policies for admitting, assessing, and teaching methods of students who were not ready for college work or were having poor English skills to study college subjects that were taught in English. These policies, when applied, may pave the way for new and improved institutional practices to help in remedying the identified practice gaps in section 2 of this study and ensuring students' success. However, when we talk about project's goal(s), it must be understood that this is a much broader concept that can be measurable for determining its success and effectiveness; therefore, I will use the more specific project's objectives that can be measured by assessing their outcomes. First, since objective is defined as a performance measure that would lead to achieving the goal, then it should be specific, concrete, measureable, and time framed. Second, since goal may have few or several objectives, I will keep in mind to ask few questions of why, how, who, what and when in the process of developing objectives. For example, I will ask why we are doing this project, what are the real issues at the core of the project and what deliverables do management or stakeholders expect from this project, and who have a stake in the outcome, and finally how they differ in seeing success or failure in achieving the stated goals. Some of these measurable outcomes are long –term such as the overall performance of first year students, and short –term ones such as modifications of the attitude of some stakeholders towards change.

Alignment of Projects Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes Measures to the Learning Outcomes Required for Filling the Identified Educational Gaps. The ultimate educational practice reform, the main goal of this project at this institution, may require a long period for it to be assessed for its success, or failure and this period may extend to two or three years at least because of the nature of PDCA approach. As stated earlier, PDCA approach presents a pragmatic scientific method for testing changes in complex systems by providing a structure for iterative testing of changes to improve quality of systems. Therefore, a group of newly admitted students will be considered as treatment group in a scientific experiment. This group will be monitored over a period that includes admission, assessment for readiness, and remedial, and finally its performance during the first year of college will be compared with a control group sample of previous years before the application of the new system.

Although the assessment of the above outcome will be a long-term process, summative in nature, the project has other outcomes that can be measured during its progress. Being an informative tool as well, the PDCA approach can be used to measure a variety of learning outcomes from the conducted seminars and workshops such as change in the attitude towards change and the acceptance of the proposed practice modification of some of the stakeholders. Other measurable outcomes could be the level of motivation, the level of enthusiasm and support of some of the previously considered “restraining forces” after their change to “driving forces” as was discussed in the force-field analysis of Lewin’s theory.

Overall Evaluation Goals. The overall goals of this evaluation is to see that the implementation of this project was successful in establishing the framework needed for building a better school environment that can ensure students readiness and be conducive to their successful completion of college. This overall goal cannot be achieved without concerted and collaborative effort of the concerned stakeholders of this issue. The stakeholders list starts at the higher level of the intuition's management represented by the director of the training and development department. It will also include the teaching faculty of the allied health programs subjects and the English as a second language, the administrative staff including the admission staff, the students' services staff, the students' counseling staff, and last but not the least the researcher.

In conclusion, as customarily with all educational projects, the evaluation of this proposed project will establish whether the desired outcomes were reached. The evaluation will also provide knowledge of what was and was not working in the project during the process of its implementation and give tips for improved implementation process of future projects.

Conclusion

To summarize and conclude, the primary goal of this policy recommendation is to provide the framework for developing and utilizing future policies for admitting, assessing, and teaching methods of students who were at risk of failing. In addition, the establishment of an outreach program to help high schools in better preparing future students for college work was recommended. When applied, the policies may pave the

way for new and improved institutional practices to help in remedying the identified practice gaps in the conducted study.

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Appendix B

Invitation Letter to Participate in a Research Study

Dear former students:

My name is **Abdul Fattah Rachdan** and I am a doctoral student at **Walden University**. You may have been acquainted with me during my time as one of the instructors in the training center, but this activity is not related to that role. I am conducting a research study for the purpose of continuing my education for the doctoral degree in education. The study is titled ***“Challenges to Academic Achievement for the ESL Learners in a Teaching Hospital’s Allied Health Training Programs”*** to find out why students face academic problems regarding their studies during their first year of the program (for a variety of reasons in addition to English) and become academically challenged, which leads to them having a low GPA, and might even drive them to drop out of the program.

The participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. The participation is anonymous (no names will be used), and the information you give will be kept highly confidential (only I, the researcher will have access to it). You will be asked to sign an informed consent as well. There will be no payment made for the participation in this study and you may not benefit from the study directly; however, the final goal of this study is to improve the conditions for future students and assure their academic success.

The research involves the participant answering questions in a face-to-face interview (at your convenient time) which may last up to 45 minutes. This may be repeated again in a different session at a later date.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to answer a short questionnaire to establish your meeting the criteria for participants’ selection. Please let me know by returned email if you are willing to participate at the following email for further information you may contact me by phone.

Yours sincerely,

Abdul F. Rachdan

Abdul Fattah Rachdan, MPH, ARRT(R)
Allied Health Programs Instructor

Appendix C

Questionnaire for Establishing Meeting Criteria to Participate in the Study

Dear former student:

Thank you for your positive reply to participate in this study which is titled: “Challenges to Academic Achievement for the ESL Learners in a Teaching Hospital’s Allied Health Training programs”. You are kindly requested to answer the questions in the following short questionnaire to help me establish that you meet the criteria of inclusion in the study. The questions can be answered with a simple “Yes” and “No” answers; however spaces are provided if you have additional comments. Please return this form by email. If you have any questions regarding this form please contact me by email or by phone.

Again, thank you for your positive reply.

Yours sincerely,

Abdul Fattah Rachdan

	Criterion	Yes	No	Comment
1	Did you have a GPA average of 2.4 or lower during the first year of school?			
2	Have you been placed on the at-risk student list (or on probation)?			
3	Have you considered dropping out of school during the first year of school?			
4	Did you graduate from school but were having difficulties and ended up with low GPA?			

Appendix D
Consent Form (in English)

You are invited to take part in a research study of why students have difficulties in their studies that are taught in English during their first year of college. The researcher is inviting former students who had difficulties in their studies and either finished school but with low GPA, or those ones who failed and dropped out of school to be in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named **Abdul Fattah Rachdan**, who is a doctoral student at **Walden University**. You may already know the researcher as a faculty member at the training center, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the problem of having difficulties during the first year of college and especially with courses that are taught in English. The results of this study may help in developing better training programs which ensure students success.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Be interviewed 2 times for 45-60 minutes each over 2 consecutive weeks.
- The interviews will be conducted in person face to face; however, if it is more convenient for you other methods such as email, phone, skype, etc. can be used. Interview will be tape recorded.
- You will be asked to review your statements once transcribed to ensure the accuracy of their reporting
- In a collaborative process you may be asked to make suggestion on how the interviews are conducted with you.

Here are some sample questions:

- Tell me about your past academic experience?
- Do you think you were not doing well in your past academic experience, and why?
- Tell me about your transition from high school to college?
- What did you know about studying in a college level?
- Tell me how did your English skills affect your academic performance?

- If you think you were not doing academically well, to what factors do you attribute your poor academic achievement?
- How do you describe the support you received from your family when you started college?
- In your opinion what can the institution do to ensure academically poor achieving students?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at training center will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during, or after the study. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, stress or becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing

The study may benefit the future students of the training programs at this institution by developing better designing better training programs to ensure students success.

Payment:

No payment will be made to any of the participants.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by safe keeping in my office or computer. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone and/or by email. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **12-19-14-0252817** and it expires on **December 18, 2015.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep. Please keep this consent form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix E
Consent Form in Arabic
استمارة الموافقة المستنيرة

أنت مدعو للمشاركة في دراسة بحثية عنوانها: "لماذا يواجه الطلاب صعوبات في دراساتهم التي يتم تدريسها باللغة الإنجليزية خلال السنة الأولى من الدراسة الجامعية". الباحث يدعو الطلاب السابقين الذين كانت لديهم صعوبات في دراساتهم، وأما ممن قد تخرجوا من الكلية ولكن مع معدل تراكمي منخفض ، أو أولئك الذين فشلوا في الدراسة مما تسبب في تركهم للكلية. هذا النموذج جزء من عملية تسمى "موافقة مستنيرة" للسماح لك لفهم هذه الدراسة قبل أن تقرر ما إذا كانت ستشارك. هذه الدراسة يقوم بها باحث اسمه عبدالفتاح رشدان، وهو طالب في مرحلة دكتوراه في جامعة والدن. لربما كنت تعرف الباحث مسبقاً كأحد أعضاء هيئة التدريس في مركز التدريب، ولكن هذه الدراسة منفصلة من هذا الدور.

معلومات أساسية:

والغرض من هذه الدراسة هو لمعرفة المزيد حول مشكلة وجود صعوبات خلال السنة الأولى من الكلية ولا سيما مع الدورات الدراسية التي يتم تدريسها باللغة الإنجليزية. قد تساعد نتائج هذه الدراسة في وضع أفضل البرامج التدريبية التي تكفل للطلاب النجاح.

الإجراءات:

- إذا كنت توافق على أن تكون في هذه الدراسة، سوف يطلب منك إلى:
- مقابلتين شخصية ولمدة 45 دقيقة لكل منهما خلال اسبوعين متتالين.
- وستجري المقابلات مع الشخص وجها لوجه؛ ومع ذلك، إذا كان أكثر ملاءمة بالنسبة لك فإن أساليب أخرى مثل البريد الإلكتروني، والهاتف، أو سكايب يمكن استخدامها. المقابلة سوف تكون مسجلة بواسطة جهاز تسجيل.
- سوف تتم مطالبتك بمراجعة البيانات الخاص بك بعد نسخها كتابيا لضمان دقة التقارير التي ستقدم لاحقاً.
- قد تتم مطالبتك في عملية تعاونية تقديم اقتراح بشأن الكيفية التي تجري بها في المقابلات التي أجريت معك لجعلها أفضل.

وفيما يلي بعض الأسئلة العينة:

- أخبرني عن تجربتك الأكاديمية الماضية؟
- هل تعتقد أن لم تبلي حسنا في تجربتك الأكاديمية الماضية، ولماذا؟
- أخبرني عن التجربة الخاصة بك بالنسبة للانتقال من المدرسة الثانوية إلى الكلية؟
- ماذا تعرفه عن الدراسة في مستوى كلية؟
- قل لي كيف تؤثر مهاراتك في اللغة الإنجليزية على الأداء الأكاديمي الخاص بك؟
- إذا كنت تعتقد أن كنت لم تقم بعمل أكاديمي جيدا، فما هي تلك العوامل الخاصة بك التي تسببت في ضعف تحصيلك الدراسي؟
- كيف يمكنك وصف الدعم الذي تلقيته من أسرتك عند بدء الدراسة في الكلية؟
- في رأيك ما يمكن للمؤسسة التعليمية القيام به لدعم وضمان النجاح الأكاديمي للطلبة؟

الطابع الطوعي للدراسة:

هذه الدراسة طوعية. جميع المسؤولون سوف يحترموا قرارك الشخصي ان لم تختار أن تكون في هذه الدراسة. لا أحد في مركز التدريب سوف يتعامل معك بشكل مختلف إذا قررت لا تكون في الدراسة. إذا قررت الانضمام إلى الدراسة الآن، يمكنك تغيير قرارك خلال، أو بعد الدراسة. وبإمكانك ان تتوقف في أي وقت.

المخاطر والفوائد ليجري في الدراسة:

هذا النوع من الدراسة ينطوي على بعض المخاطر من المضايقات البسيطة التي يمكن مواجهتها في الحياة اليومية، مثل التعب أو الإجهاد أو أن تصبح منزعاً. هذه الدراسة لن تشكل خطراً على السلامة الخاصة بك.

لا تشمل هذه الدراسة على فائدة مباشرة لك ولكن قد تفيد الطلبة في برامج التدريب المستقبلية في هذه المؤسسة وذلك بالتطوير والتصميم الأفضل لبرامج التدريب مما يضمن للطلبة النجاح.

الدفع:

لا يوجد اية مكافآت مادية لأي من المشاركين في الدراسة.

الخصوصية:

أي من المعلومات التي قمت بتوفيرها ستبقى سرية. الباحث لن يستخدم معلوماتك الشخصية لأي أغراض خارج هذا المشروع البحثي. أيضاً، لن يتضمن البحث اسمك أو أي شيء آخر يمكن التعرف منه عليك في تقارير الدراسة. سوف تبقى البيانات آمنة ومحفوظة بأمان من قبل الباحث. سيتم الاحتفاظ بالبيانات لمدة 5 سنوات على الأقل، كما هو مطلوب بالجامعة.

الاتصالات والأسئلة:

إذا كان لديك أية أسئلة الآن أو إذا كان لديك أسئلة في وقت لاحق، يمكنك الاتصال بالباحث عن طريق الهاتف و/أو عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني أو بواسطة الهاتف.

إذا كنت ترغب في الحديث سراً عن حقوقك كمشارك، يمكنك الاتصال:

بالدكتورة ليليان انديكوت وهي ممثلة جامعة والدين الذي يمكنها مناقشة هذا الأمر معك. رقم هاتفها 18009253368، ملحق 1210.

أو مكتب شؤون الأبحاث بمستشفى الملك فيصل التخصصي ومركز الأبحاث هاتف 442 4568

سيقوم الباحث بإعطائك نسخة من هذا النموذج للحفاظ عليه. الرجاء الحفاظ على هذا النموذج في سجلاتك الخاصة.

لقد تمت مراجعة هذا البحث والموافقة عليه من قبل لجنة أخلاقيات الأبحاث بمستشفى الملك فيصل التخصصي ومركز الأبحاث.

بيان موافقة:

لقد قرأت المعلومات الواردة أعلاه، وأشعر بأنني أفهم جيداً بما يكفي للاشتراك في هذه الدراسة لاتخاذ قرار حول مشاركتي. بالتوقيع أدناه، أنا أفهم أنني أوافق على الشروط المذكورة أعلاه.

اسم المشارك	
تاريخ الموافقة	
توقيع المشارك	
توقيع الباحث	التاريخ

Appendix F

Interview Questions for Collecting Primary Data

1. Tell me about your past academic experience?
2. How do you describe poor academic achievement?
3. How do you describe being at risk student?
4. Do you think you were not doing well in your past academic experience, and why?
5. Tell me about your transition from high school to college?
6. What did you know about studying in a college level?
7. How do you evaluate your preparation for studying in a college level?
8. Tell me how did your English skills affect your academic performance?
9. If you think you were not doing academically well, to what factors do you attribute your poor academic achievement?
10. How do you describe the support you received from your family when you started college?
11. Describe your new learning environment, and was it supportive enough?
12. How do you describe your learning habits before and after joining the college?
13. Describe your relationships with your past teachers? And how do you describe the socio-academic relations with them?
14. In your opinion what can the institution do to ensure academically poor achieving students?

15. In general how do you think poor academic performance can be solved at this institution?

Appendix G

Summary of Interview Narratives

1. Male Participant 1:

This interview was conducted on January 4, 2015. It started at 10:10 am and lasted for 48 minutes. This is a 26 years old single adult learner who has returned to school to study in one of the allied health programs for improving his chances in get a job in the changing job market after attending another college for a different subject that was going nowhere in his opinion. He is now working at the hospital where the study is being conducted after graduating last year. The interview was conducted in Arabic, although he had good conversational skills in English and accepted the question to be in English, he preferred if he answers in Arabic. He started his story by pointing out to his most negative experience with his educational journey. He mostly focused on the rote memorization method of teaching that was customary in his previous schooling and how it was his weakest. He mentioned that he was doing well in the practical courses, but had very challenging time with memorizing the theoretical materials. He mentioned that his transition from high school to college was very rocky and he has failed tow times in high school due to family circumstances after the death of his father and the inability of his mother to run the family efficiently. With these family circumstances, he did not feel serious enough about studying and did not prepare for college. His first college experience was not well planned and he did not get any counseling about the future outcomes of that study as far as the job market was concerned. He used to be absent from class due to the encouragement of some of his bad friends (negative peer pressure) which eventually lead

to dropping out of school. In his new school experience (where this study is conducted) the situation has changed. He stated that he know that he had to be serious about his study so he will graduate and get a good job in the hospital, this was the biggest motivation he had in addition to wanting to help his mother who was very happy for him to be in his new program. He stated that he was very happy about being in this new program, but never the less he listed a group of factors that made it challenging such as his poor English skills and especially in spelling and memorizing terms, having group assignment with colleagues of the other gender since the classes were mixed and some of the females resisted working with males. Although this experience of mixed classes was new in his society, he did not mind it and yet thinks it could be advantageous since it could bring a new way of cooperation that was not experienced before. He stated that his socio-academic relation with past teacher was good and especially with the western faculty. These good socio-academic relations had positive effects on his achievement since the teacher did a lot of consoling in addition to teaching, he stated that he used to have been costummed to be being absent from class or coming late into class and he things that one of his western teachers affected him to change these bad habits.

In this interview the participant was eager to share his stories and expressed his happiness that his voice might be heard finally. Throughout the interview he was displaying a proactive role for his participation, he smiled a lot, although at times he looked serious or even sad when he talked about some of the negative experiences in his past educational journey, and he used a variety of skills in communicating his thoughts

and ideas that included facial expressions and body language in support of his declarations.

2. Female Participant 1:

This interview was conducted on January 5, 2015. It started at 12:50 pm and lasted for 1 hour and 7 minutes. Although it was scheduled for 45 minutes it lasted much longer because the participant was very talkative and has volunteered to provide a wealth of information that seem as an added value to help in the analysis of the majority of the other interviews. Other participants were not able to fully paint a comprehensive picture for their lived experience due to lack of communication skills not only in English but in the native Arabic language as well even though I have tried to extract more of their answers by using follow up propping questions to have them further elaborate on their statements, but found them unable or unwilling to volunteer extra information.

This participant is a 26 years old adult learner who also attended different college prior to being a student in one of the allied health programs at this institution where the study is being conducted for improving her chances of getting a better job at this institution. She got married during her first year of her new college experience. She is working in one of the allied health profession in the hospital where this study is conducted after graduating last year. As stated this participant had good communication skills and was very eager to talk about her educational experience, yet to volunteer her explanations and analysis for many of practices gaps that she observed during her journey in the local education system.

She used a lot of facial expressions and body language. She tended to use a lot of “ahh and uhm” when answering many of the questions. She also used to pause for a moment before answering to collect her thoughts and to give a well thought of answer; however, her English skills were not very helpful and she tended to say “I don know it was ...” and then she will be silent for a moment and go on to say something else when she could not further elaborate on an issue. Exhibit (D) is a full transcription of her interview. The following salient data emerged from this interview, these were concerns that she point out, which seem to be common in most of the interviews: teaching methods, foundation year in English, different educational background, no previous preparation for college, lack of Contextual Based Learning, lack of goal setting, low standers for admission, poor English skills, no financial problems, social issues, failure of high school system, lack of proper transportation for female students, family relations, program focus on real education, studying habits, socio-academic relation with the faculty, lack of application of teaching effectiveness methods, and finally lack of proper mentoring of struggling students. These salient data will be used as bases for the analysis of the findings of this study.

3. Female Participant 2:

This interview was conducted on January 16, 2015. It started at 11:00 am and lasted for 42 minutes. The interviewee is 22 years old who was single during her studies but now is married for 4 months. This participant was one of my students in one of the allied health programs. She graduated from the program 2 years ago by meeting minimal graduating but with a low GPA; however, she did not get a regular employment position in the

hospital due to her inability to pass a required registry exams that would make her eligible for regular employment.

This interview was conducted in English since she had very good skills in conversational English. When she started the interview she was slow in answering the questions as if she wanted to think for a moment to give a well thought of answer. She stated that her previous academic experience was not as she envisioned. She did not know anything about the program which she joined and spent 4 years studying and had no preparation for college life at all when she was in high school. Now after spending 4 years in the program she is not satisfied with the outcomes. When I asked her why she chose this program, she replied that it was not really a choice; it was the only opportunity available. When I reiterated the question for her to elaborate on her past academic experience, she replied that her high school studies was kind of easy because she was in her customary environment, but when she started college things were completely different with the new learning environment. When she was answering she looked up and used her hands like if she was saying no: "I never had foreign teachers before, I never studied in English before other than for the English class, and now we had to study everything in English, it was hard". Then she leaned over and said: "another thing we didn't had this new experience of this program". I asked her to explain how this was a new experience. She replied: "well...hm how do I explain this...hm... I mean it was small program with a class with 12 students and mixed boys and girls". I asked her whether this was good or bad. She replied: "it was both good and bad, it was good that we had good attention from the teachers, bad (then she paused) ... it is really not bad, but

because it was done here at the hospital we really did not experience the real university life and to meet many students to have friendships or whatever”. I asked if she meant it was a lack of social life. She shook her head in agreement and said: “yah, something like that”. I asked her to elaborate on being in a mixed gender class. She smiled and said: “well it was not easy at first then later it became ok”. I asked her why she thought it was not easy at first. She said: “well, we were not use to this before”. I asked her to explain how she was doing with the academic work. She stated that she was doing ok but not good or not very bad. She stated that she though that she could have done better. I asked her to explain why. She said: “I was taking it easy especially in the subjects that I didn’t like or not didn’t like... I was not strong in like in physics”. When she was asked about the transition from high school to college she reiterated what was said by other interviewees so far as being a big change in the environment and difficult for having no preparations for this move. She stated that she did not know anything about college life before because they did not prepare her for this new experience in high school, but she believed that in college you have to be serious because they consider you as an adult and not like if you were still in high school.

I asked her if there were other reasons she thinks were attributing to her being not doing very well academically. She opened her eyes wide and took a long sigh and paused for a moment then said: “ahh...teachers...but they were not the only factors; they are not specialized in teaching a particular subject”. I asked her to further explain or give an example. She continue saying:” for example during the first year... I mean the foundation year one teacher was teaching us more than one subjects and it was confusing... not

confusing but not interesting as it should be”. I asked her to explain how it was not interesting. She replied: “can I say it in Arabic?”, I agreed to that and she continued in Arabic what translate to “well I do not mean interesting I mean it was all mixed up and we were confused this one teacher was teaching us more than one subject and she did not give enough attention to teach subject separately and used to jump between the subjects, she talks about one thing from one subject then suddenly talk about something else from another subject which got us confused...she paused for a moment and continued in English... this lack of organization on the teacher part caused us not to do well in those classes”. She continued after a long pause to further elaborate: “ also I believe we were not used to on our own...in high school the teacher did everything for us and here we have to work on our own and being confused did not help”. I asked her if there were any other factors she could attribute to not doing well academically. She sighed and paused for a moment...then said: “ahh...may be the place itself...the learning environment was not helpful for learning because the program was new and we were the first patch and nothing was organized in the beginning when our classes were held in a villa outside the hospital. Being in a mixed gender program having the boys and girls together in the same classroom was not possible at first and we had to be shifted from one room to another constantly...we as females were not allowed in that building were the boys studied...we were put in one separate classroom all day with a very small room used as lounge... it was not very comfortable...we even had to enter the building from the back door because we were not supposed to be there... this was during our foundation year...it was very bad for us until we moved to classrooms in the hospital”. In the previous statement the

participant was referring to the issue of gender mixing in classrooms here in this country where sex segregation in classroom is the norm for the entire educational system in Saudi Arabia. This program is an imported program from the west and practices gender mixing in the classroom which proved to be workable; however a suitable environment such as the international environment at the teaching hospital where the study was conducted was needed. I asked her if she had any personal factors she could add. She replied while shaking her head: “no I didn’t had any personal factors”.

This participant acknowledged her family support and its positive effects on her studies in a western style education by helping her make the choice for this program. She also stated that she was very happy that she has chosen this program because of the international setting with teachers from all around the world. However; she stated that the new environment was difficult. When I asked her to explain she said: “we had to learn new habits for learning...we had to teach ourselves new things... before joining this program...in high school I mean... we were memorizing everything and that was easy, but now we had to teach ourselves new learning methods... we had to do things on our own...there was this research paper writing...it was something new...we did not do before in high school”. I asked her if that was good or bad. She smiled and said: “no...no it was good I learned how to organize things...I learned how to use the internet for looking up information...we learned that text books are not the only source...yes it was good but difficult because it was new”.

When asked about the socio-academic relation with the teaching staff she stated that she had good relationship with them and she was very happy for that kind of friendly

relation in compassion to what was used in high school where relations were very plain. She stated that being in a small classroom made it possible for the teachers to give more attention as well as getting to know the students more in personal level which made interactions easier between students and teachers inside and outside the classroom. I asked her how that affected her personally. She leaned back and paused for a moment and said: “for me personally...may be because I am not very open...I mean I am not very talkative...I don't know...well it was good in general and definitely better than high school where there was no relationships at all”.

I asked her about what could the institution do to ensure the success of poorly performing students. Again she paused for a moment as if she was collecting her thoughts and said: “umm...may be they should have interviews with the students every few months and asking them about the teachers... because most of the time the students have something to say but they don't find someone who can achieve this for them...I mean they should be given a voice to say what is on their mind and ask them if any changes need to be made. I asked her to give an example. She said: “rules for example they should be asked how it should be applied to be forced on them just like that without asking for their opinion just like when there is a new rule”. I asked her if she had anything on her mind or a voice that was not heard. She replied: “not for me personally but I remember one time...oh...paused...no... no, it is Ok”. I believed she had something to say but she was afraid to make it known as usual.

Finally I asked her about what could be done to solve the problem of poor academic achievement at this institution in general. She leaned forward and looked

serious when she answered: “there is a difference between the student who doesn’t care and things it will be alright not to pass or thinks things will fix themselves and the ones who are struggling because they have problems and need help”. She paused then continued saying: “the first ones they should be punished but the other ones that are interested but they cannot do it must be helped...but they cannot ask for help”. I asked her to explain why they cannot ask for help. She said: “for any reason...paused...may be they are shy or embarrassed because they think they are the only ones who is not doing well and they may look stupid”. I asked her what should be done in that case. She said: “if someone is not doing well for that reason and not because they do care the teacher should observe that and try to encourage them and to get them more motivated”. I asked her if lack of motivation was common amongst the students. She replied while shaking her head negatively: “no...no... not everyone...there were some...two or three needed help”. I asked her if she thought only the teacher had to do that motivation. She said: “definitely not the teacher alone...the administration...may be they should have a counsellor or a mentor where the students can go to when in need...this in addition to help and encouragement from the family”. I asked her if she wanted to add anything else and she replied: “no that is all”.

At the end of the interview I thanked her for her valuable time and information and affirmed her next scheduled interview for reviewing and or modifying her answers and statements, and that she will be getting a copy of the summary of the transcripts for her approval as a member checking which is a usual practice to ensure the quality in qualitative research.

4. Female Participant 3:

This interview was conducted on 18 January 2012. It started at 11:00 am and lasted for 55 minutes. This participant is a 26 years old female who was a student in two programs at this institution but never graduated from any of them because of her poor academic performance. She was last a student in the medical secretarial program in which she only studied for two terms and decided to drop out due to many challenges she was facing. She is now working as clerk in one of the hospital department but not in the medical divisions.

At the start of the interview she seemed stressed and not comfortable to disclose her past educational experience. She asked if this was going to be confidential as promised. I assured her that I would keep in line with whatever was mentioned in the consent for and that confidentiality and safety was of most concern while conducting and reporting the findings of this study. Once the interview started it proceeded without interruption.

Throughout the interview she seemed very hesitant to answer many of the questions immediately and she paused for some time to think what she wanted to say. She used a lot of “hums and ahhs” as well as a variety of body language that was suggesting her hesitation to answer such as holding her chin with her fingers and wondering with her eyes around the room. However, she seemed very honest, yet glad that someone was listening to her never heard voice before.

Her answers at the beginning were short as she tended to answer with “yes and no, or may be, I do not know, etc.”, but I kept following my original questions by “why do you

say that, or what do you mean with that” to let her talk and explain more about her lived experience.

Appendix H

Transcription of Interview with Female Participant #1

This interview was conducted on Tuesday 5 January 2015. The interview started at 12:50 pm and lasted for 1 hour and 7. The interview was conducted in the privacy of my office. The interviewee is one of my former students in one of the allied health professions classes which I taught at this institution five years ago and currently is an employee in the teaching hospital where this institution is located.

At the beginning of the interview I introduced myself as a doctoral student at Walden University and explained that the purpose of the interview was to collect data for my doctoral study and that this interview has no relation to my capacity as an instructor in the institution at the present time. I explained the informed consent form that the interviewee will sign, and explained the process of the interview in which I will first ask a question from my list of questions in English and translated into Arabic if desired by the interviewee. And finally I asked the interviewee if he had any questions for more clarification.

When the interviewee assured me that she has fully understood the process I started with my questions and answers session. At the moment the interviewee seemed to be at ease and very enthusiastic; this was evident by a smile of her face and she assured me that she understand everything in English and that she was comfortable to conduct the interview in English. She speaks with good verbal skills in English, but with the typical local accent.

Question 1: Tell me about your past academic experience?

She leaned back and started with “ahh”; as if she wanted to briefly think about her answer and asked me if I meant all of her academic experience or just in college. I told her that she was free to answer, as she will feel comfortable. She stated that since finishing high school she had 3 different experiences with being in an academic setting where she studied at a diploma level for hospital administration, office management, and finally medical secretary at this institution. She stated that had problems in all three programs with the method of teaching. Again she leaned back as she continued talking and said:” however, at the IPA (Institute for Public Administration) the method is better than here at KFSH (she meant this teaching hospital where the study is conducted) because they have the foundation year in English for all the subjects and especially had specialized English for each subject, and here at KFSH students come from a different educational backgrounds (she means some come from science background while others come from literature background) and teaching them as a whole is a problem. Some students had previous knowledge of certain subjects, but others were lost because they had no previous preparation”. She gave an example for the use of the medical terminology in the business writing for medical professions in the medical secretaries’ class and she asserted that the students with back ground in English literature, for example, had no prior knowledge in medical terms and were having difficulties in understanding; while it was easier for the ones from science background who previously studied biological courses, with anatomy and physiology, in the past since they were failure with the anatomical and biological terms. She further elaborated on the experience here at KFSH and she said:” Here there was only medical terminology course

and was very... very... poor and those who had no background absolutely had no idea, they were like...hum..., I don't know that was useless, it was not given properly". I asked her to further elaborate and explain the difference between the two institutes. She stated that during the foundation year at the IPA they had to write small paragraphs about the body systems which included medical terminology that they were introduced to previously, and thus a student would develop a better understanding of the terms. She was referring, without realizing it, to "Contextual Based Learning"

Question # 2: How do you describe poor academic achievement?

She asked if I was referring to her poor academic performance or poor academic achievement in general. I told her to answer the question as it is listed on the questions sheet, referring to poor academic achievement in general. She said: "Hum...I think poor academic achievement is when you do not reach the goals that you have set...like the criteria gets lower... in the recent years I noticed that the students that are coming from the IPA are not as good as they used to be...everyone is noticing that... the girls that come here you see them with high grades but you communicate with them you do not see that knowledge, and even the language they have very weak communication". Then she continued:" I think there is something with the teaching staff changed or something, I think the standards were lowered and the institution don't keep or maintain them, I think that is poor education, I think no one should go easy on education because when you have poor graduates you will have poor employees and I think this will cause problems".

Question # 3: How do you describe being at risk student?

She opened her eyes wide and looked at me saying:” hum, Student at risk? If you mean failing, and dropping out, and not being able to do their work; from my experience for instance, for example, I know we do not have any financial problems because it is paid already, she is refereeing that the education expenses are paid for by the government, but we are very social and this makes it very difficult for female students, some students have to drop out because they cannot put up with the load of assignments and studying, they have big families and they have to answer to a lot of social obligations, the family is usually big and expect them to help with their social activities and do not understand that they had to do their school work and have private time for studying”. She stopped for a moment and added: “this makes them drop out...hum... I think hum... other than that may be... I think if you are struggling with the material... for instance if you are constantly having low grades... may be you feel you are not getting the material and everyone is ahead of you and you may just drop”. Here I asked her about her own about experience and if she had similar problem and whether if she had thought about dropping out.

Question # 4: Do you think you were not doing well in your past academic experience, and why?

She replied “yes”. “Since I was a kid I had a problem may be psychological more than the ability with math and numbers, I had difficulties, and I hated that subject”. I asked her if this was only in her last experience of studying at this institute or was it all along her previous studies, and if so and how did it affect your study at this institution? She leaned back and said, “this was from before but also in this program... we had an

accounting course, we had math subject, we also had biomedical statistics and it all had numbers. If you see my transcripts you will see many A's and B's but you will also sixties and below, you will know it is math and numbers, (she means grades less than 60%), this was since I was a kid I hated math, I do even try to make an effort". I asked her to further elaborate and explain why. She answered: "hum... I think it is the method of teaching...hum... from the very start in elementary school... I think the way I was taught math made me hated it... it is really connected to... hum... but I had my difficulties and I really hated that subject".

Question # 5: Tell me about your transition from high school to college?

She answered with a big smile on her face, "I loved it". I asked her why you say so. She replied:" because I hated high school". I asked her to further elaborate. She continued, again with a big smile she said:" Hum...I hated high school, I hated the system...it is very eliminating...very rigid, so when I went to this new environment (she meant college) they were asking me to think for myself and come up with ideas, to search and learn...I loved it". I wanted her to confirm that she only had negative experience in high school. She replied that it was only in high school. She added that she was having problems that caused her to drop out of the last year of high school. She said: "there was nothing that would convince me to go back, but I don't know how I went back and graduated...I don't know how...I really hated the system in high school".

Question # 6: What did you know about studying in a college level?

"Absolutely no idea" (she replied with a loud tone while fanning her hands in a signal meaning no, and then continued saying with a lower tone): "to be honest the only

thing was that we are not obligated to wear uniform...that is the only thing we know, absolutely we had no idea, no preparation of any kind;

Question # 7: How do you evaluate your preparation for studying in a college level?

She answered: “well as I said we had no preparation whatsoever. When we started college at the IPA we were still spoon fed with information, but when we had foreign instructors (she meant western) they did teach us how to study differently, but they had so much problems...no one was cooperating with them”. I asked her to explain. She said: “well...the foreign instructors usually give us hints and give us reading materials and many hand outs and later ask us about it, but most of the students do not respond because they did not do what they are supposed to do on their own, they are used to be spoon fed, this forced so foreign instructors to adapt to our learning way, it was very difficult because we are not used to read, I guess in the west learning means reading and reading and reading, so here no, they only want you to give them fixed information”.

Question # 8: Tell me how did your English skills affect your academic performance?

She answered after a short pause: “hum...for me it was in most of the subjects if it was not a direct English subject it was ok because the instructors went easy and did not deduct marks from us for mistakes in grammar or spelling such as in ethics or medical terminology, so it was not a real problem, the problem was with courses like business writing where we have to speak or write in English it was common for everybody in the class. However my main problem as was described by one of my instructors that you write in English but you think in Arabic and he kept saying that, I think that was a very

common problem because we are not surrounded by the English environment so we are not used to hearing the terms used so we assume the nearest assumption to our language and we use it". Here I followed up my question with a clarifying one about her preparation in English before joining college. She smiled and replied: "preparation in high school was a disaster, if it was for high school preparation I would not be accepted in this program, but in high school I learned English from listening in the movies, I was a movie addict... hum..., I had the language, the spoken language, but I did not have any basics, the materials was so funny like we had fifteen grammars and we used to repeat them over and over from grade to another. Here at the institute I had problems because we had foreign instructors and we had to speak in English, if you do not you lose grades. In the beginning I had a lot of troubles, I did not know how to speak and I was struggling".

Question # 9: If you think you were not doing academically well, to what factors do you attribute your poor academic achievement?

She leaned back and paused for a second and started talking by saying: "aha...the first thing that comes to my mind is the method they were teaching us they were not very helpful, the information they were trying to teach us was not delivered so well.. (I asked her if there were any other factors) she continued saying: "hum... the fact that I was coming from another provenance in the country and I had to travel from and to my city was a problem especially during the exams time... hum... being a female here we cannot drive and we have to depend on other drivers for transportation and this was not only a problem to be here on time in the morning but it was a problem in the afternoon to get home on time before it is dark and you are exhausted because the drive always will be

late to pick us up at the end of the day. This takes time from my day which I can use for studying, sometimes I try to do so assignment during that time but I could not because I was already consumed. Here I asked her if being away from home was a negative factor. She smiled and said: “actually this was good as I stated before we are here a social society and being away from my family gives me time for myself so I am not obligated to be involved in and social activity not like the girls that are from here in Riyadh where they go home and have to be involved with their families; however, I know for some girls from other provenances the experience was not as pleasant as mine they did feel home sick and that affect them, but for me I am a loner and I can do well alone.

Question # 10: How do you describe the support you received from your family when you started college?

She asked if this was from the beginning of the college or all along. I told her she can answer for both. She started saying: “well... they were ok with me studying in another city at first, but later when I had to stay here during some weekends to do some assignments, my mom goes nuts and crazy mad, and she would start saying “are you forgetting your family ...you have to come home” but this was in the beginning, but now for instance (she is now an employee at this institution) when she says me starts asking me “when are you go to get a job here in our city... it is enough... your health is getting worse ... and you are getting home late and you are leaving your husband at home alone (she got married after graduation)... this would be repeated every few weeks.

Question # 11: Describe your new learning environment, and was it supportive enough?

She leant forward and squeezed her eyes (I think she was showing seriousness in her answer) and started saying: “hum...if I am to describe the program here I think it is like fast food... it is a very fast process... it is a barely an academic process... it is for professional course or a training course and you do not feel it is a learning or educational environment... it is a training environment that is how I felt. Here I asked her to explain why she thought so. She said: “why? Because I think the program is designed to benefit the hospital so they did not want to waste the time on other things they wanted you to focus on, but if you are studying in general the ideas will be wide open, but if you are here at the hospital do not think any further, just study what you need as employee in the hospital... hum... it is eliminating and I do not like the idea (here I asked her if she meant “limiting” and not “eliminating”), she nodded her head in an agreement and said: “ oh yes that is what I mean”. I asked her to further elaborate and to state how it should have been done in her opinion. She paused for a moment and gave a long sigh then started saying: “hum... there is a lot of things that needed to be changed, (she paused to think for a moment and continued), ..., for instance the level of students... in term of age, educational background, for some people it was easy for them and for others they were struggling and the program does not take consideration for that... I do not know it was based on what standards they were accepting student and from which background, there was differences, I think it was not fare at some points, also for them when we had medical related courses they were lost and it was not fare for them, we were the ones participating and getting the grades and they were not, and for example when we were taking Advanced English Writing for Business the ones who came from an English

background (she meant studying in English majors) it was very easy for them and we were the ones who were struggling, so there are some big variations within the students”.

Question # 12: How do you describe your learning habits before and after joining the college?

She answered with ease this time and said: “there is a change, ahh, before it was just the book and you have to read the book over and over and that’s it, that is what you have to do, but when I went to college, she paused...., to be honest I am a person who does not like to study (she meant from the book) so if I have a subject in a lecture I will just go open articles or open videos about it watch it and read it and have fun about it, that’s it that is the way I study, hum, like, hum, I will have more information doing that instead of just reading the book, there is a really a curve in the method of studying, I learned where to get the information or how to get the information unlike before when the only one who was giving me the extra information was the teacher”.

Question # 13: Describe your relationships with your past teachers? And how do you describe the socio-academic relations with them?

She started the answer with a question for clarifying what was meant by “past teachers” and if it was meant in high school or college, but then she continued her reply saying: “in school, I think for most students it was student-teacher relationship (she meant in high school), hum, ..., for me it’s I think for some reason I used to ask a lot of questions even beyond class hours, it sort of developed a relation, brotherly or sisterly relation with the teachers and after school it started to become more like of a friend ship, like many of my instructors are my friends now, and I am still in contact with them

through social media I think the more you get older, the relation becomes more than friend than mentor, maybe it is an age factor I don't know".

Question #14: In your opinion what can the institution do to ensure the success of poorly academic achieving students?

She paused for a moment and placed her hand under her chin and said with a low tone voice: "hum, I think maybe they can design a program, because I mean in school they are now developing a new system called learning difficulties, my sister is a teacher and she studied this major for learning difficulties and the way she explains for them is different from other students, because for some reasons, of course she will investigate first, maybe sometimes the reason is social, sometimes it is ability, sometimes I don't know but after she gets to the core she explain to them until they improve, maybe we can get a similar system". I asked her if she thought this problem was very evident here and really needs attention. She replied while nodding her head in an acknowledgment of the seriousness of the problem: "here it is a matter of...hum..., maybe seriousness on the part of the students, maybe the institute has to make better introduction for their program so the students know what they are getting into, so if you want to drop from the beginning you know, because if you are not serious as a student no matter what the instructor will do". I asked her why would she think the students will not be serious if these programs were training programs and graduates would get better jobs, wouldn't they be afraid they will be dropped out if they do not do well and lose this opportunity? She replied: "I think if the program gives useful information, I do not think anyone will not be serious and will not think about dropping out and I do not think it is lack of motivation, it is like if the

program or the teaching staff gives me the useful information I do not think anyone will think about to drop out". I asked her if she was referring to motivation and she replied saying: "it is not matter of motivation, it is about what you give me to continue, it is if you thought something is interesting you get hocked on it, you don't feel this way, you know, for example for me if you give me a subject I fell it is a waste of time and it is not useful I will not be serious and I just ignore it, why would I, because I think it is stupide and useless, (here I commented that the issue here is not about being useful or useless and it was about graduating and achieving the goal from being in a program, so what could the institution do to ensure that) she continued saying: " maybe some people think it is easy to pass (I asked her again about the institution and what it could do about this) she continued: "I told from the beginning I believe in high standards in education and I do not believe in going soft (she said this with a big laughter and a smile on her face) I think this is my idealism in education, I think in education you have to work hard you have to get the best of what you can do".

Question # 15: How do you think this institution can solve poor academic performance in general?

"You need to take each case individually; I cannot give a fixed solution because everyone has a different problem and of course needs a different solution for example for those who have a problem with the material for example in English you have to go back to the beginning, what was your standard accepting the students. I asked her a clarifying question for her answer well if we took one case at the time how can we solve it. She said:" it comes to the coordinator of the program because once you chose a qualified

coordinator for a program they have to be focused on that program, you have to know everything about the students, you have to be close with them that you will know what's happened and from that point you can work with it, you can deal with it, and then report to the instructor or the advisor or supervisor of that program, I don't know what they call that position, I think they created that position for a reason, it is part of their role to know what is happening, so the one who is hired has some educational background like educational method or something so they know how to deal with students, for example if you bring a secretary, an experienced secretary, to be an instructor in a medical secretary program she may have the experience to be a secretary but not really the methods to be instructor".

At the end of the interview, I thanked the participant and told her that she will be contacted again for a second round of interview where we can reaffirm or modify what was stated in the first interview. She was told that she would be receiving the summary of her interview transcripts after the second round of interviews (member checking) to do what is usually done in qualitative case study as an evidence of quality.

Appendix J
Project Implementation Timetable

Table # 7
Project Implementation Timetable

Implementation Stage	Phase	Activity Name	Person in Charge	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3
Stage I	1	Examining the status quo	Entire implementation team	x		
	2	Developing detailed plan or draft of the proposed change	Project manager	x		
	3	Soliciting acceptance by the people whom likely to be affected by the change,	Project manager	x		
	4	Assessing the motivation and capacity for change	Project manager	x		
Stage II	5	Defining the plan and developing a final draft	Project manager with the input of the project sponsor, and team members	x		
	6	Drawing up timetable to ensure cost effective implementation of the change	Project manager			
	7	Assigning the responsibilities to each of the team members	Project sponsor	x		
	8	Conducting the mini seminars and workshops for training and development of faculty, admission staff, career counselors, and other administrative staff	Project manager Recruited experts		x	
Stage III	9	The termination of the change process and the return back to normal activity	Project sponsor after consultation with the recruited experts in the field of project evaluation			x

Note. Table above illustrates the timetable for the project implementation, and roles and responsibilities of stakeholders.

Appendix I
Training and Development Seminars and Workshops To Be Conducted During the 2nd Stage of the
Implementation Plan

Table #8
*Training and Development Seminars and Workshops to be conducted during the 2nd stage of the
implementation plan*

Week	Activity	Educator	Audience/Participants	Activity Type	Duration
1	Review of Current Alternative Assessment Methods for Admission	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour
1	Application of Alternative Assessment Methods for Admission	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	Workshop	4 hours
2	Knowing Your learner	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour
3	Developing Syllabus Based on Course Objectives	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour
3	Developing Syllabus Based on Course Objectives	TBA	Faculty	Workshop	4 hours
4	Formative and Summative Assessments	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour
5	The Value of Contextual Based Learning	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour
5	Developing Teaching Material Using Contextual Based Learning	TBA	Faculty	Workshop	4 hours
6	Introduction to Student-Centered-Classroom	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour
7	How to Build a Bridge Between High School and College	TBA	Faculty Administrative staff	PPT Presentation	1 hour

Note. Table above illustrates the weekly scheduled training and development seminars and workshops for faculty and staff.