

# A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Factors That Contribute to Persistence in Online Doctoral Programs for Students With Learning Disabilities or ADHD

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## Abstract

The primary purpose of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences, challenges, and strategies of individuals with learning disabilities and ADHD in online doctoral programs. By exploring their unique perspectives, I aimed to identify the factors that contribute to their persistence and success in these programs. The insights gained from this study will help inform online educators, administrators, and policymakers in creating supportive and inclusive environments for students with learning disabilities and ADHD.

The study included seven participants with LD or ADHD who were in the dissertation phase of their programs, alongside four recent graduates from online doctoral programs. Purposeful sampling was utilized. The study gathered insights from these students through online discussion board prompts, online individual interviews, and online focus groups to explore their lived experiences.


The study used Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology approach and was guided by Tinto's (1975) theory of student persistence. There were six key themes: Overcoming Challenges and Barriers, Adaptation and Coping Strategies, Motivation, Self-Efficacy, Support Systems, and Personal Determination and Perseverance. Analysis revealed practical, empirical, and theoretical implications, offering recommendations for future research in this field.

## Purpose

 Purpose: Explore factors that contribute to persistence in online doctoral programs for students with learning disabilities or ADHD

 Participants: Online doctoral students and recent graduates

 Institution: Large private universities in the southeastern U.S.

 Goal: Show how universities can best support students with LD and ADHD and help future students with LD and ADHD persist in their online doctoral programs.

## Research Questions

### Central Research Question

What are the factors that contribute to academic persistence in online doctoral programs for students with LD and ADHD?

### Sub-Question One

How do online doctoral students with LD and ADHD describe the influence of their learning disabilities on their academic persistence?

### Sub-Question Two

What strategies and accommodations are effective in supporting academic persistence for online doctoral students with LD and ADHD?

### Sub-Question Three

What role do individual factors, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and self-regulation skills play in the academic persistence of online doctoral students with LD and ADHD?

## Methods, Design, & Data Collection

Qualitative Research Methodology

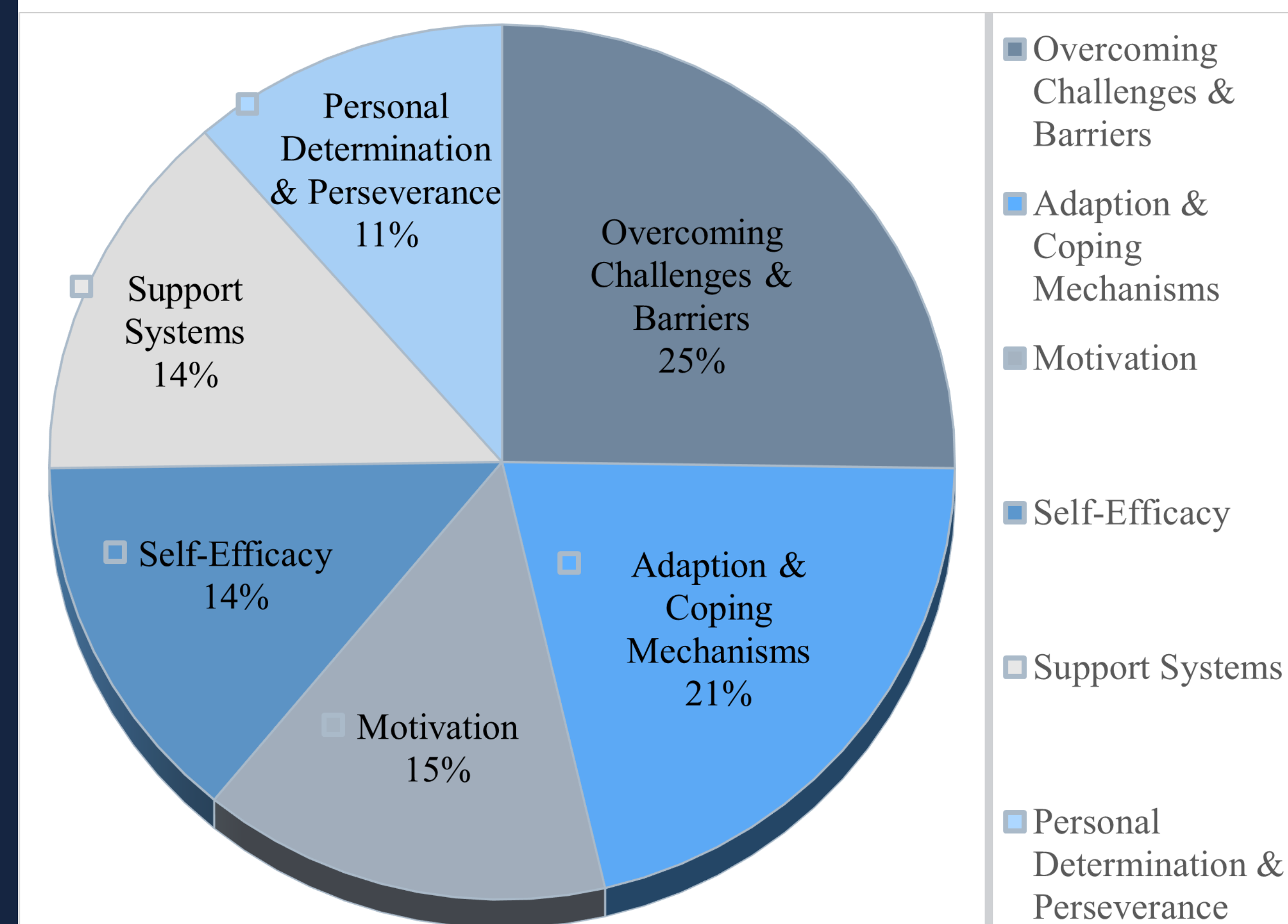
Transcendental Phenomenological Approach

Online Discussion Board, Online Individual Interviews, and Online Focus Groups

## Participant Demographics

Participants	Age	Gender	Region of Institution	ABD/Graduate and Program of Study	Disability Type(s)	Age of Diagnosis
Daryl	58	M	Southeastern	ABD - Christian Worship	Dysgraphia	48
Marie	35	F	Southeastern	ABD - Curriculum & Instruction	ADHD	23
Kate	36	F	Southeastern	ABD - Curriculum & Instruction	ADHD, Dyslexia	12
James	35	M	Southeastern	Graduate Communication	ADHD	27
Minerva	40	F	Southeastern	Graduate - Curriculum & Instruction	ADHD	37
Rick	42	M	Southeastern	Graduate - Curriculum & Instruction	Dyslexia	5
Wesley	60+	M	Southeastern	Graduate - Strategic Leadership	ADHD	40s
Murph	52	F	Southeastern	ABD - Public Policy	ADHD, Dysgraphia	7
Anthony	52	M	Southeastern	ABD - Public Administration	ADHD	12
Jolene	53	F	Southeastern	ABD - Community Care & Counseling	ADHD, Dyscalculia	12
Lane	31	F	Southeastern	ABD - Curriculum & Instruction	ADHD	18

## Themes



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## Findings

These students displayed resilience, adaptability, and innovation, which were crucial for their academic success.

They effectively used intrinsic and extrinsic resources, demonstrating proactive time management and preparation skills to mitigate stress.

Students created conducive learning environments, like employing strategies to manage sensory overloads and distractions.








Despite facing numerous academic and personal challenges, these students showed remarkable resilience.

The use of assistive technologies by these students underlined their adaptability and the significant role of technology in providing equal academic opportunities.

Motivation was a key factor, driven by both internal ambitions and external support from families and peers, emphasizing that academic journeys are often supported by a community.

The study also highlighted the limited use of formal accommodations, raising questions about their accessibility and potential stigma.

## Recommendations for Future Research

-  Explore Assistive Technologies
-  Study the Psychology of Routine
-  Assess Medications and Alternative Therapies
-  Investigate Support Networks
-  Examine Time Management and Flexible Learning
-  Qualitative Studies on Faith and Resilience
-  Research Self-Efficacy and Goal Setting

## References

- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage publications.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543045001089>