A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: THE EXPERIENCES OF HOMESCHOOL

STUDENTS WHO PERSISTED IN COLLEGE AT A FAITH-BASED INSTITUTION

by

Venda Kaye Johnson

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college at a faith-based institution in the Southeastern United States. The theory guiding this study was Tinto's student integration model as it focused on students' integration into campus life to increase persistence in college. The central question for this study was the following: What are the experiences of homeschool students who persist in college? The participants in this study were recent students who have graduated college within the last five years and had self-reported as a homeschool student upon admission. There was a sample size of 10-12 students. Data was collected using interviews, participant letters, and focus groups and was analyzed using Moustakas' method of data analysis that is aligned with phenomenological research. This study described the essence of the lived experiences of these homeschool students who had persisted in college and gave voice to their experiences.

Keywords: college, persistence, homeschool, academic integration, social integration

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Lord. I have felt your presence as I worked and made this dream a reality. You gave me strength and placed people in my path at just the right times to offer help and encouragement as it was needed.

My husband, Eric, has been the greatest supporter and encourager ever. Your patience and love have carried me through times when I wanted to quit. You have taken on so many extra responsibilities; I could not have done this without you. I will always love you.

My children, Christy and Ty, also deserve my gratitude. They along with their spouses, Todd and Molly, and the boys, Pierce and Baker, are wonderful blessings. You all have offered great joy when I needed it the most. I love you!

Abbie Jo and Johnny, you have also offered great encouragement and love throughout this undertaking. I love you both. Elton, I love and miss you; you were also an encourager and offered laughter at just the right times. Finally, this is dedicated to my parents. You have been gone for many years but you laid the foundation for this years ago. You encouraged me and taught me to work hard and do my best. Daddy, your phrase, "Just back your ears and dig in" is posted on my desk as a reminder that when things get hard it is time to push forward and keep working. Your unconditional love and belief in me helped me complete this dream. I love you.

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List of Abbreviations

American College Testing (ACT)

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

Coalition for Responsible Home Education (CRHE)

General Equivalency Diploma (GED)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Parents' National Educational Union (PNEU)

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

College students come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are from public schools, some from private schools, some from virtual schools, and some homeschooled. Gann and Carpenter (2018) defined homeschooling as "the education of school-aged children under general parental monitoring, replacing full time attendance at a traditional campus" (p. 464). For the purpose of this study, homeschool students are those who are not enrolled in a traditional public or private school and whose parents are the primary providers of their education. Research indicates students from homeschool backgrounds have a higher college completion rate than students from public school backgrounds (Cogan, 2010; Davis, 2011; Shields, 2015; Snyder, 2013). As colleges and universities strive to increase retention rates, it becomes necessary to consider why homeschool students achieve a higher completion rate than their public-school counterparts.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college at a faith-based institution in the Southeastern United States. The problem this study sought to solve was the gap in the literature on factors contributing to homeschool students' persistence in college (Coalition for Responsible Home Education, 2017; Ray, 2017; Snyder, 2013). This chapter provides the historical, social, and theoretical contexts for the research problem along with the researcher's motivation to conduct the study. To begin, the problem and purpose statements are introduced and the study's practical significance will be described.

Background

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), the number of

homeschool students increased from 850,000 in 1999 to 1,690,000 in 2016. This represents an

increase from 1.7% to 3.3% of students ages 5 through 17 with a grade equivalent of

kindergarten through 12th grade. With increased numbers of homeschool students come

increased numbers of college students from homeschool backgrounds (Sorey & Duggan, 2008).

This makes it vital for institutions of higher education to understand the needs of these students

(Shields, 2015). Research indicates a higher college graduation rate for homeschool students

compared to students from public school backgrounds (Cogan, 2010). Limited research on

homeschool students' persistence in college leads to the need for investigation of the experiences

of this college student subgroup (Cogan, 2010; Ray, 2017; Snyder, 2013).

This research will be of particular interest to colleges as they seek to improve retention

and graduation rates for students. Until recently, there has been no large, national database which

retains information regarding homeschool students (Ray, 2017). Ray (2017) reported that the last

decade has led to more research on these students. Thomson and Jang (2016), Guterman and

Neuman (2017), and Vaughn et al. (2015) have done research on the behaviors of homeschool

students compared to students who attend school. They found that homeschool students are less

prone to underage drinking, depression, or drug and alcohol abuse. Although these studies did

not indicate a correlation between deviant behavior and academic performance, research did

indicate a relationship between increased deviant behavior and decreased academic performance

(Busching & Krahe, 2018). With few studies on the topic of homeschool college students'

experiences, there is not enough information about this population of students (Kranzow, 2013).

This study can add to the information base and help college administrators understand what this

group of students experience on the college campus and be better prepared to meet their needs (Shields, 2015).

Historical

Parents in the United States have been homeschooling their children since colonial times (Parkay, 2013). Bunday (2013) reported that before 1985, there might have been fewer than 100,000 homeschool students in the United States. While Bunday stated it would have been difficult to determine an accurate number, his reports estimated that there were between 200,000 and 300,000 homeschool students in 1988. The homeschool movement began to grow rapidly, and by 1999, there were an estimated 850,000 homeschool students in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). The Coalition for Responsible Home Education (CRHE) (2017) reported the numbers grew greatly at the turn of the 21st century. Between 1999 and 2003, the numbers of homeschoolers in the nation increased almost 38%, and they grew another 17% by 2007. CRHE (2017) reported almost 1.7 million students were being homeschooled during the 2015-16 school year.

With the number of homeschool students growing, more of these students seek to attend colleges and universities. Historically, it has been challenging for these students to admit to institutions of higher education (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). These challenges were due to lack of high school diplomas and transcripts from accredited high schools. Several methods of reviewing homeschoolers' preparation for college have been used during the past, including scores from the General Equivalency Diploma (GED), Scholastic Aptitude Test II (SAT), or other standardized scores. Sorey and Duggan (2008) studied the college admission requirements for homeschool students and found that colleges vary in the admission requirements for these students. The authors suggested that formal guidelines for admission of homeschool students be

publicized through college websites, catalogs, and brochures. A second suggestion was to extend recruitment to include homeschool students (Sorey & Duggan, 2008).

Admission to higher education for homeschoolers has been difficult, and they often have had to use nontraditional means to gain acceptance into college (Farenga, 1989). These means include initial enrollment in correspondence courses because transcripts were not required for admission. They also may have enrolled in a community college with an open enrollment policy and then transferred to the school of their choice (Farenga, 1989; Sorey & Duggan, 2008).

From as early as the 1980s until the present, homeschool students have performed well at the college level (Cogan, 2010; Farenga, 1989; Ray, 2013; Rudner, 1999). There is a need for further research in the college experiences of these students (CRHE, 2017). The increased number of students being homeschooled and then entering college warrants the need to investigate their experiences.

Social

For many years, homeschool students have contributed to society in numerous ways. From famous athletes, government officials, military leaders, and people from all walks of life, homeschool students have grown into productive citizens. Examples of students who were homeschooled for at least a portion of their elementary and/or high school years include Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Dobson, 2000), Andrew Carnegie (Dobson, 2000), Condoleeza Rice (Rice, 2011), and Tim Tebow (Tebow & Whitaker, 2011). Not every homeschool student will seek higher education, nor will they all become famous or contribute to society in significant ways, but these and others like them are examples of what homeschool students can become.

Dobson (2000) indicated homeschool students became successful in all walks of life. Dobson went on to say the homeschool experience created stronger family bonds that led to solid

families and ultimately a healthier society. Ray's (2015) research indicated that homeschooled students became good citizens as indicated by more frequent participation in community service than traditionally educated students. They also voted and attended public meetings more frequently. Homeschool students also internalized and maintained the values of their parents at a high rate (Ray, 2015).

Many homeschool students become ordinary citizens who graduate high school and college, get a job, and raise families. They become good parents, church members, employees, and community members (Ray, 2004). Their impact on society will seem small to many, but they will be completing ordinary tasks that could have a great influence. In Dobson's (2000) interpretation, homeschooling history has demonstrated that homeschooling has served society well. Because of the influence homeschool students have, it is important that their college experience be studied in order to promote their potential.

Theoretical

The theory guiding this study was Tinto's student integration model as it focuses on students' social integration into campus life to increase their commitment to school (Yomtov, Plunkett, Efrat, & Marin, 2017). This theory extends to becoming academically engaged and integrated into academic life to increase the likelihood of remaining in school. At the root of Tinto's theory is the belief that if students integrate into the campus community, their commitment to the institution will increase along with the likelihood of graduation (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Tinto's theory includes a combination of intellectual (academic) and social (personal) integration that impacts a student's decision to either remain in college or leave (Tinto, 1993). Academic involvement should be primarily classroom involvement and student-faculty contact (Tinto, 2012). According to Tinto (2012), engagement in classroom

activities increases student success and academic performance. Social involvement is closely related to student retention in college. Students who live in residence halls or dormitories on campus have higher retention rates than those who live off campus because of increased social interaction with fellow students (Tinto, 2012).

Positive experiences reinforce the student's persistence towards college completion while negative experiences increase the likelihood the student will leave college (Tinto, 1993). Aligned with Tinto's theory is the concept that students should have personal academic intentions and a commitment to their institution in a social sense (Tucker, 1999). Tinto's theory aligns with homeschool student persistence in college because it supports both the academic and social aspects that are important to help students remain in college until their degree is complete. Developing a better understanding of the experience of homeschool students' academic and social integration will expand Tinto's theory to a subgroup that has had limited study (Ray, 2015).

Situation to Self

I first became interested in homeschool education when a friend asked me to serve as a professional monitor for her child's homeschool experience. As a classroom teacher and administrator, I have observed students leave public school to enter homeschool and leave homeschool to enter public school. As a college professor at a small, religious institution, many of my students come from a homeschool background. I have observed them in this setting and have seen that most of them excel both academically and socially. Because of these experiences, I have become interested in their persistence to excel and complete their degrees. My motivation for this study was to give voice to these homeschool students' experiences as they persisted in

college. The knowledge gained can also be applied to help traditionally educated students be successful in their college experiences.

The philosophical belief I brought to this study includes constructivism. Constructivism is based on the ways in which ever-changing mental schemes affect cognitive growth. This process allows individuals to develop ideas based on their current or past knowledge (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). The constructivists hold that both social interaction and the learning environment contribute to learning (Lui & Matthews, 2005). Pardjono (2002) said constructivism is also based on active learning with the learner being engaged in the learning process. A constructivist seeks understanding of their world by using experiences to develop subjective meanings. The constructivist believes a person's environment helps shape both their physical and social reality (Creswell, 2018). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) described a constructivist, as one who believes that individuals build their own understanding through experience and maturation. Because of this, I believe that, the homeschool student's college experiences will be significantly influenced by their homeschool education. A constructivist believes that a person's background helps shape meaning and interpretation of the world (Miller, 2011). Brooks and Brooks (1999) stated that a person brings their previous experiences with them to each learning situation and activity. As this study was conducted, the constructivist belief was used to frame the findings as homeschool students describe their lived experiences as they persisted through a college career.

The ontological assumption brought to this study aligns with the constructivist belief that a person's interpretation of their experiences affects their actions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The epistemological assumption was also grounded in the constructivist belief that individuals learn from their experiences and the homeschool students' educational perspective is based on their past educational experiences (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). The axiological assumption brought to

this study was a nonjudgmental approach. I shared my past experiences with homeschoolers so each participant knew my position (Creswell, 2018). Each participant was treated fairly and with dignity. Their stories were told accurately, and each participant had the opportunity to review the findings before the research was completed.

Problem Statement

In the United States, the number of homeschool students is rising. From 1999 to 2016, reports estimate the percentage of homeschool students, ages 5-17 years old, has risen from 1.7% to 3.4% of school age children (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). These numbers rose from approximately 850,000 in 1999 to approximately 1.8 million students in 2012 (Office of Non-Public Education, 2016). As more of these students enter college, it is important for those working in higher education to learn about their needs (Shields, 2015). Ray (2015) found the college success rate of homeschool students exceeded that of public-school students. Developing an understanding of the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college can help colleges and universities know more about the factors and characteristics that cause them to persist. There is a gap in the lack of research on factors contributing to homeschool students' persistence in college (Firmin et al., 2019; Riley, 2015; Wilkins et al., 2015). Riley (2015) studied satisfaction rates of young adult homeschoolers and their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness compared to those who were not homeschooled. The researcher found a higher level of autonomy satisfaction and competence satisfaction in homeschoolers compared to those from a traditional school background. The research showed no difference in relation to basic needs. Riley (2015) noted a scarcity of literature on young adult homeschoolers and their life outcomes. Firmin et al. (2019) discussed the self-reporting experiences of homeschool parents. It was noted that most homeschool research relates to reasons for homeschooling,

comparisons of homeschool students to non-homeschoolers, and legal connotations of

homeschooling. Firmin et al. (2019) noted the importance of further research to include a larger

demographic. They also noted the importance of larger research to extend generalizability. A

third study recorded the lack of databases of homeschool students, defining homeschool, and

political influence as challenges in homeschool research (Wilkins, Wade, Sonnert, and Sadler,

2015). Wilkins et al. (2015) stated that because of these challenges there is a "dire need to

augment and improve the knowledge base" (p. 33). Filling this gap in the literature can help

augment the knowledge base and apply the factors that increase the persistence of homeschool

college students to traditionally educated students so they can increase the likelihood of

completing college. The problem was that there was not a clear understanding of the experiences

of homeschool college students who persisted in college (CRHE, 2017; Ray, 2017; Snyder,

2013).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the

experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college at a faith-based institution in the

Southeastern United States. At this stage in the research, persistence is "the rate at which

students who begin higher education at a given point in time continue in higher education and

eventually complete their degree, regardless of where they do so" (Tinto, 2012, p. 127). The

theory guiding this study was Tinto's student integration model as it focused on students' social

integration into campus life to increase their commitment to school (Yomtov, et al., 2017). This

theory extended to becoming academically engaged and integrated into academic life to increase

the likelihood of remaining in school.

Significance of Study

The results of this study will have empirical, practical, and theoretical implications. Currently, there is little research focused on homeschool students' persistence in college and it is recommended that further research be conducted (CRHE, 2017; Ray, 2017; Snyder, 2013). Riley (2015) noted a scarcity of literature on young adult homeschoolers and their life outcomes. Firmin et al. (2019) discussed the self-reporting experiences of homeschool parents. This self-reporting policy makes it difficult to have representative groups of participants. It was recommended that research consist of a larger demographic to include other areas of the country. Wilkins et al. (2015) recorded that there is a lack of databases of homeschool students due to the self-reporting policy in place. Until recently, there have been few databases for information about homeschoolers (Ray, 2017). This current study focused on homeschool students at a small college in northwest Florida who have self-reported as a homeschool student upon admission. This study also expanded the demographic area for study. Snyder (2013) researched the academic success of homeschool students at a Catholic university and reported that research on homeschool students in college was largely focused on those attending public or private institutions with little study on those attending Catholic or religious institutions. The current study will focus on homeschool students who attended a religious institution. CRHE (2017) reported many studies of homeschool students are limited because of methodological problems. These problems include sampling issues that have used only small sample sizes and volunteer populations who may not be representative of the population (CRHE, 2017). This current study only focused on ten participants but will strive to include students from each division of the institution and include as much diversity as possible.

The practical implication of this study was that it would help researchers understand the experiences that contribute to the success of homeschool students' persistence in college. Colleges are facing a decline in the retention of students (Bers & Schuetz, 2014; Wilson, 2016). Community colleges report increased enrollment, but 50% of students either drop out or stop taking classes during the first year (Collett, 2013). Community colleges are not alone in this exodus of students; four-year colleges also report 28% of first-year students not returning for a second year (Wilson, 2016). The study site could benefit from this particular study as efforts are made to increase retention rates and lower the number of students not completing degree programs. With these high percentages of students leaving colleges, it becomes important to examine not only why students are leaving, but why students are staying in school. Cogan's (2010) report of higher graduation rates for homeschool students compared to public school students leads to the need to investigate what makes a difference for these students. Their persistence to complete their degree programs could offer insight into steps to increase graduation rates for other students. This could be beneficial for colleges of all sizes but particularly for small colleges who feel the impact of lowered student retention to a higher degree than larger institutions, especially at the site for this study.

The theoretical significance of this study was grounded on Tinto's student integration model. Tinto (2012) asserted that students who were academically and socially engaged to a higher degree were more likely to complete their college degrees. Tinto's theory is based on students entering college with many different characteristics, including family backgrounds, community backgrounds, educational experiences, skills, and values (Mannan, 2007). Each of these characteristics contributes to a student's decision to persist or leave college. Tinto (1982) stated that research should expand to include the study of specific groups; therefore, examination

of homeschool students expands Tinto's student integration model, offering application specifically to the subgroup of homeschool students who are persisting in college.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were based on Tinto's student integration model and sought to examine the college experiences of homeschool students. The social integration model has a two-fold focus on social and academic integration and how these two areas impact a student's decision to remain in college or leave (Tinto, 2012). These questions were designed to be open-ended and sought to create a clear picture of the experiences that led to students persisting in college. The following questions guided this study:

Central Research Question: What are the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college? With homeschool students completing college at a higher rate than traditionally schooled students (Cogan, 2010) I wanted to examine the experiences that led the students to persist in college. The characteristics a student brings with them to college contribute to their persistence (Mannan, 2007). A close inspection of the experiences of the homeschool students can offer insight into the effects of student characteristics and behaviors that promote their success.

Sub-Research Question 1: How are college expectations shaped for homeschool students? Tinto (2012) posited that a number of factors influence a student's expectations for college including the institution, family, peers, and society. He stated that clarity of the expectations directly influenced student retention. According to Tinto (2012), the degree of the expectation (too high or too low) impacted student performance and retention. Smith (2015) went on to say that students come to college with "characteristics, intentions, and commitments"

(p. 895). Based on Tinto's model, these expectations and intentions greatly impact college retention.

  Sub-Research Question 2: What experiences contributed to the social integration of homeschool college students? The social integration model recognizes the importance of social integration in college persistence and success (Tinto, 2012). Burch (2018) noted that the student's perception of social integration is crucial to decisions about retention. By learning about specific experiences that contributed to the students' social integration, a better understanding can be gained about how this contributed to completion of college.

  Sub-Research Question 3: What experiences contributed to the academic integration of homeschool college students? Tinto (2012) posited that academic integration was as important as social integration in determining retention of college students. In an assessment of Tinto's model, Stein (2017) said that "academic systems consisting of grade performance and intellectual development and social systems consisting of peer group interactions and faculty interactions" (p. 22) as one of the events that lead to a student remaining in college. An exploration of the kind of engagement experienced by homeschool students can offer insight into their level of academic integration.

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Definitions

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  The phenomenon of interest in this study was the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college. This required an understanding of several terms.

1. *Persistence* - "the rate at which students who begin higher education at a given point in time continue in higher education and eventually complete their degree, regardless of where they do so" (Tinto, 2012, p. 127).

2. *Homeschool student* – homeschool students are those who are not enrolled in a traditional public or private school and their parents are the primary providers of their education (Gann & Carpenter, 2018).

3. *Academic integration* – a combination of the intellectual, psychological, and physical energy a student dedicates to integrating into the learning environment, including academic interaction with peers, faculty, and staff outside the classroom (Astin, 1993).

4. *Social integration* – the incorporation of one's social behaviors and background with that of peers, faculty, and staff in the learning environment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Summary

With the increasing number of homeschool students attending college and persisting to complete degrees, it becomes important for college administrators, registrars, and faculty to understand these students. The problem was that there was not a clear understanding of the experiences of homeschool college students who persisted in college (CRHE, 2017; Ray, 2017; Snyder, 2013). There has been little research into the persistence of these homeschool students (Riley, 2015; Firmin et al., 2019; Wilkins et al., 2015). To learn more about these homeschool students this study sought to learn about their experiences on the college campus, the experiences that contributed to their social and academic integration, and how their college experience expectations were shaped. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college at a faith-based institution in the Southeastern United States. The findings of this study can inform college faculty and staff about how to best serve these students.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college at a faith-based institution in the Southeastern United States. Tinto's (1993) student integration model was examined as the theoretical framework for this study. Current literature was reviewed to help develop an understanding of the homeschooling movement. Tinto postulated that past events lead to development of a person academically and socially (Demetrioiu & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Aligning with Tinto's theory, the social and academic integration for homeschool students will be reviewed in this chapter. The literature review will also include the history of homeschooling, a review of homeschool delivery methods and homeschool curriculum, demographics of homeschool families, and reasons parents choose to homeschool their children. This chapter will also discuss the academic success of college students who are homeschool graduates. A variety of homeschool delivery methods and curricula along with the benefits of homeschooling will be introduced. Finally, problems with homeschool research will be addressed to create an awareness of the need for future research.

Theoretical Framework

The theory guiding this study was Tinto's (1993) student integration model as it focused on students becoming socially and academically integrated into campus life to increase their commitment to school. Tinto first published his model in 1975, causing practitioners to look at undergraduate retention and graduation differently (Demetrioiu & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). This model postulated that a series of events influence student retention in college (Stein, 2017). Stein went on to say that Tinto included in these events pre-college experiences and academic

and social integration. Because of his extensive work in student retention, Tinto's theory has been the basis for much of the work done in college and university's retention plans and efforts (Demetrioiu & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011).

Retention is influenced by social and academic involvement in many ways. Classroom engagement and student-faculty contact are the primary means of academic involvement (Tinto, 2012). Tinto explained that classroom engagement in meaningful learning activities causes the student to increase performance leading to increased retention. He went on to say that students who are engaged with faculty, both inside and outside the classroom, demonstrate increased academic performance. Arnekrans (2014) further stressed the importance of faculty engagement and reported that faculty connections and favorable assessments of academic curricula accounted for almost 9% of student retention rates.

Social involvement also has a great influence on student retention and persistence (Tinto, 2012). Tinto wrote that those students who engage socially benefit, but that those who are not engaged socially might suffer from isolation, loneliness, and withdrawal. Burch (2018) stated that social integration might take the form of peer groups, extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and staff. According to Tinto, those students who live in residence halls on campus are more likely to be engaged and have higher retention rates.

Burch (2018) went on to address the problem of students becoming too social upon entering college and emphasized the importance of social integration focused on academics. Academic and social integration overlap in some areas (Tinto, 2012). These include academic cooperative groups that benefit students academically but also provide opportunities for social engagement and the formation of relationships. Arnekrans (2014) emphasized the importance of classroom interactions and effective instructional practices to improve student retention. Another

example is the involvement of students in academic organizations that also promote social engagement (Tinto, 2012).

Tinto's (1993) student integration model stressed the importance of both social and academic integration for students. Tinto (2012) emphasized that students who are both socially and academically engaged are more likely to persist in their academic endeavors. Burch (2018) maintained that students who integrated in only one area were at a higher risk of leaving college. Those students who integrate both socially and academically are more likely to remain in college (Burch, 2018). Tinto's (1993) student integration model can offer support and insight as the stories of these homeschool students are examined.

Related Literature

The number of homeschool students enrolled in colleges and universities is increasing (Sorey & Duggan, 2008) along with the number of homeschool students in elementary and secondary school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) reported approximately 767,000 kindergarten through fifth grade students, 398,000 students in grades 6 through 8, and 525,000 in grades 9 through 12 were homeschooled in 2016. Murphy (2014) called homeschooling the "most robust form of educational reform in the United States" (p. 245). He went on to cite the lack of research on the outcomes of homeschooling (Murphy, 2014).

Tinto's (2012) student integration model is based on social and academic integration of the student to achieve increased persistence and retention in college. An examination of social and academic integration serves as a basis for understanding the homeschoolers' experiences as college students thus supporting research on the outcomes of homeschool. Related literature emphasizes the importance of examining this group of students to understand their unique

experiences as they persist in their college career. This chapter includes a brief review of the history of homeschooling in the United States and moves on to review homeschool delivery methods and curriculum. The demographics of homeschool families and reasons that parents choose to homeschool their children give further insight into the homeschool movement. The success of homeschoolers is included to demonstrate the credibility of the homeschool movement. Finally, the benefits of homeschooling and an analysis of research on homeschool students offers awareness of the need for more research.

History of Homeschooling in the United States

Homeschooling in the United States is not a new concept. Many early colonial parents taught their children at home, and as pioneers began to move westward, this practice continued due to the sparsity of schools on the prairie (Parkay, 2013). In the country's early years, the curriculum focused on reading, writing, and math with lessons centered on religion or practical life skills (Parkay, 2013). The Massachusetts Act of 1647, known as the Old Deluder Satan Act, was the first law in the United States to mandate the establishment and support of schools (Lagemann, Geiger, & Woloch, 2014). In states where there were no laws for required schools, schools were usually provided by churches who ran private schools (Parkay, 2013). Many families did not have the money to pay for private schools, so students were either excluded from educational institutions or were taught at home. By 1930, all 50 states had compulsory education laws (Parkay, 2013). In many cases, these laws were enacted to combat child labor in factories (Gaither, 2008). With pressure from large manufacturers, some states temporarily repealed their laws and later re-enacted them.

The early 19th century saw the beginnings of law suits filed to protect the rights of parents to teach their children at home. One of the first was *State v. Peterman*, 1904, when the

court ruled that a school at home was considered a private school (Homeschool: A History, 2015). A 1950 court ruling in *People v. Levisen* stated that a family's homeschool through correspondence qualified as private schooling (*People v. Levisen*, 1950).

In 1964 John Caldwell Holt wrote *How Children Fail,* and critics began to question the educational institution and the quality of public education. Caldwell's book further advanced the concept of homeschool education (Davis, 2011). Holt (1995), a fifth-grade teacher, described traditional school as disturbing the process of learning for children. Holt went on to gain attention through the media for the advancement of homeschooling. At about the same time, Paul Goodman (1964) wrote *Compulsory Mis-education* suggesting compulsory education was not the most effective means of obtaining an education.

With the homeschool movement advancing, more court cases went to trial. New Jersey's 1967 case, *State v. Massa*, ruled that a child could be taught at home and that the homeschool teacher did not have to be a certified teacher (*State v. Massa*, 1967). Many court cases have supported the right of parents to educate their children at home including *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972) which ruled that Amish parents could teach their children at home based on religious exemptions. Repeatedly parents have won in court cases regarding the right to homeschool. Although homeschool has gained legal ground, there are still challenges that arise as the battle continues for parental rights to homeschool (Gaither, 2008).

As the homeschool movement continues to grow (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), a new avenue for delivery of the homeschool education is also growing. Technology has made meeting homeschool goals less challenging. Coleman (2014) reported wide use of some kind of distance learning by homeschool students. Nearly 19% of homeschool

students had taken online courses or used the Internet to receive part of their education (Coleman, 2014).

Presently, homeschooling is legal in all 50 states with regulations and requirements varying from state to state (Homeschooling in the United States: 2012). Davis (2011) reported that some of the state requirements include attendance records, use of approved curriculum, specific teacher qualifications, visits by the state Department of Education and or social workers, standardized testing, professional evaluations, and minimum required work hours per week. State regulations vary from no regulations to strict regulations as to the requirements for homeschooling (Davis 2011). Each state has its own requirements with these ranging from the state requiring no notice of homeschooling to high regulation (Homeschool Legal Defense Association, 2018).

Florida (the state where the study site was located) has a robust homeschool group with about 3% of Florida's students being homeschooled. In 2000, it was reported that there were almost 40,000 homeschool students in Florida. By 2015, these numbers had doubled with 80,000 homeschool students in Florida (Watson, 2018). Florida is considered to have moderate homeschool regulations. These regulations include written notice of intent to the district superintendent, a portfolio or educational records, and annual educational evaluation (Florida Department of Education, 2018). With each state having varying laws regulating homeschooling, parents must be knowledgeable of the laws of their individual state.

Homeschool Delivery Methods

There are many methods of delivery used by homeschool parents. These include, but are not limited to, the Charlotte Mason method, classical education, unschooling, cooperatives, and the eclectic method of delivery. Homeschool parents play a dual role in their children's

educational experience; they assume the roles of both parent and teacher (Carpenter & Gann, 2016). Because of being in the teacher role, the decision about a specific homeschool method lies with the parent and can be based on the needs of the children, parental goals, and available resources.

Charlotte Mason. Charlotte Mason was an advocate for homeschool education in the late 1800s and early 1900s and founded the Parents' National Educational Union (PNEU) (de Bellaigue, 2015). The three areas focused on in Mason's educational philosophy were atmosphere, living ideas, and cultivation of habit. By atmosphere, she believed children should be exposed to a wide array of influences. Living ideas included the concept that children should be exposed to a curriculum that included great literature and thought. The cultivation of habit focused on discipline due to her belief that children's brain development was dependent upon the habits they formed (de Bellaigue, 2015). Mason focused on teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic with an emphasis on real-life experiences, self-expression, and ethics (Alamry & Karaali, 2016). Mason's approach to education centered on the use of real books instead of textbooks, connections between topics, including fine arts into the curriculum, and development of good habits and a love for learning (Duffy, 2012).

Parents who base their homeschool education on the Charlotte Mason Method may schedule their day to complete academic subjects in the morning and use the afternoon for field trips, crafts, and play activities, and their curriculum would be guided by Christian principles (Thomas, 2016). Lessons would be short and varied with emphasis on excellence and real-life experiences. These parents would be more interested in their children's ability to demonstrate knowledge using performance-based assessments rather than paper and pencil assessments (Alamry & Karaali, 2016).

Classical education. The classical educational approach to homeschooling is also called

the Socratic Method. This method of homeschool delivery is centered on students learning

through written and spoken communication and is concentrated on language rather than images

(Alamry & Karaali, 2016). Based on the trivium, instruction is determined by a child's cognitive

developmental stage (Bauer & Wise, 2016). Bauer and Wise (2016) described these as the

grammar stage, logic stage, and rhetoric stage. These stages coincide with foundational

knowledge, critical thinking, and communication skills (Hays, 2015). The grammar stage is

generally students who range from grades 1 through 4 and the foundations for education are laid

during this time. These students learn facts with little focus on self-expression or discovery. The

second stage, logic, allows the student to concentrate on relationships, cause and effect, and how

facts go together. Bauer and Wise (2016) described the final stage, rhetoric, as a time when a

student "applies the rules of logic learned in middle school to the foundational information

learned in the early grades and expresses her conclusions in clear, forceful, elegant language" (p.

14). Parents using the classical or Socratic method might incorporate the Socratic dialogue into

their instruction strategies. Socratic dialogue is planned, guided questioning and narration that is

used to help students clarify understanding and demonstrate learning. This tactic guides students

to break concepts and ideas into various components, organize thoughts, and then communicate

relationships and conclusions (Lockman, 2013). There would also be a strong focus on reading

and discussion following the Socratic dialogue method. The focus would be to encourage

students to think about what they have read, consider important questions, and move to higher

levels of thinking (Duffy, 2012).

Unschooling. Petrovic and Rolstad (2017) defined unschooling as "a method of

homeschooling that puts the desire, drive, motive and responsibility for life – this thing we call

learning, or education – in the hands of the learner" (p. 820). This method is based on John

Holt's deschooling ideas (Morrison, 2016; Petrovic & Rolstad, 2017; Vasconcelos, 2017;

Watson, 2018). Parents who follow the unschooling method of homeschooling favor an

unstructured learning environment that focuses on the interests of the children (Neuman &

Guterman, 2017). Through the use of this method, parents can guide and suggest an area of

study, but if the child shows no interest, they are not required to study the topic (Morrison,

2016). In its purest form, parents allow their children the freedom to choose areas of interest to

study. There are no specific curricula, no particular assignments, or no tests for measuring

progress. Instead, there is free play and exploration time for children to find their own areas of

interest along with cooperation and partnerships in the learning process. Most parents following

the unschooling method do not go to this extreme but do have great consideration for the

student's interest. Children are encouraged to share opinions and ideas about resources and

learning methods (Duffy, 2012). Children are encouraged to be free thinkers who develop into

lifelong learners (Morrison, 2016). The unschooling method is based on a process of natural

learning through real-life experiences (Alamry & Karaali, 2016).

   Homeschool cooperatives. Pride (2004) defined a homeschool cooperative (co-op) as "a

group of families who have come together to provide their children with educational experiences

that they would not ordinarily have the opportunity to participate in as individual families" (p.

465). Gann and Carpenter (2018) defined co-ops as "a group of parents who gather regularly to

collectively teach courses" (p. 464). These groups offer opportunities for parental support,

sources for instruction and curriculum, and extracurricular activities. These co-ops may meet

once each week or multiple times during the week for students to be in a classroom environment.

The remainder of the week would be spent completing assignments or research that was covered

in the co-op group (Thomas, 2016). These groups can make up a significant amount of the student's instructional time. Another co-op system may involve rotating children among families (Dobson, 2002). This method of homeschool delivery is often extended into high school years to allow students to learn from parents who are more knowledgeable of specific subject areas (Carpenter & Gann, 2015).

Eclectic. The eclectic model of homeschool incorporates several different approaches including online courses, individual or group tutoring, homeschool cooperatives, self-taught courses, and parental instruction (Carpenter & Gann, 2015). Eclectic homeschooling allows for the combination of many different ideas and methods (Duffy, 2012). This method gives opportunity for students to learn in group settings and may be used for topics that families are less secure in teaching themselves (Ripperger-Suhler, 2016). Students may receive instruction using many different methods during a given week. This method lends itself to some flexibility in scheduling. Group learning times must be scheduled, but other times of the day or week may be used for family activities like book readings or extra-curricular activities like sports (Carpenter & Gann, 2015).

Homeschool Curriculum

Homeschool curriculum and delivery methods go hand in hand. The decisions of which curriculum and method to use are made by the homeschool parents. In a recent study, Pannone (2014) found that parents make curricular decisions based on recommendations from other parents, religious and moral motives, and topics that are interesting to the student. Pannone also learned that parents chose materials and curriculum based on their child's specific needs. Specific teaching methods and styles were also influenced by a desire to maintain and increase good relationships with their children. Parents felt it was also important to be flexible and change

curriculum as needed to meet the children's needs. Based on these findings, it is evident that more often parents are being very selective and specific in choosing materials and curriculum for their homeschool students (Hanna, 2012). Hanna noted parents are varying the curricular materials and activities they are using with their homeschool students.

Determining the curriculum and method to use for homeschooling can be a daunting task for any parent. It is quite possible for a student to work on two different grade levels. For example, a student may be a second-grade reader but a fourth-grade math student. For this reason, it is suggested that parents focus on how students learn, their specific interests and abilities, and their temperaments (Duffy, 2012) as they make decisions about homeschool materials. Homeschool should be flexible enough to explore students' interests and meet their educational needs. Duffy suggested that as parents choose curriculum, they consider their educational goals for their child and the child's learning styles. Duffy proposed that decisions about specific curricula could be made once these have been determined.

In one longitudinal study, Hanna (2012) interviewed homeschool parents to gather information about homeschool instruction and then re-interviewed the same parents 10 years later. Over the span of the study, she found an increased use of prepared curricula, increased use of textbooks obtained from local school districts, increased use of community facilities such as the public library, increased use of technology, greater consultation with educators, and more networking. Gann and Carpenter (2018) indicated parents often choose materials and curriculum that are based on individualized instruction. These materials can then be modified to meet the specific individual needs of their students. This selection of materials leads to one-on-one teaching and/or tutoring along with mastery learning techniques. Parents also incorporated

collaboration between students and peers and between students and parents (Gann & Carpenter, 2018).

Demographics of Homeschoolers

Homeschool students come from a wide range of backgrounds. The U. S. Department of Education (2017) reported that 79% of homeschool students came from nonpoor families, based on households with incomes above the poverty threshold. Ray (2004) reported that 18% of homeschool households had an income of under $25,000; 44% had incomes that ranged from $25,000 to $49,000; 25% ranged from $50,000 to $74,000 and 13% had incomes over $75,000. The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) reported that in the 2011-12 school year, 83% of homeschool students were White, 7% were Hispanic, 5% were Black, and 2% were Asian or Pacific Islander. The educational level of homeschool parents ranged from 15% who had less than a high school diploma, 15% who had attended graduate school, 16% with a high school diploma, 25% had attended a vocational or technical or had some college and 30% had a bachelor's degree (U. S. Department of Education, 2017). Watson (2018) reported that between 89% and 97.9% of homeschool families were married and had an average of 3.5 children. It was also reported that less than 20% of homeschool mothers worked for pay and almost 85% of those worked part time. Homeschool students also lived in a variety of settings from city (29%), suburban (39%), town (10%), and rural (22%). Homeschooling is not representative of any one group of people. The growing incidence of homeschooling is drawing students from all walks of life and backgrounds.

Reasons for Homeschooling

Parents offered many reasons for choosing to homeschool their children. A study by Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) indicated that parents chose to homeschool their children

because they wanted to play an active role in educating their children. NCES (2008) reported

91% of parents reported concern about the environment of their schools as an influence in the

homeschool decision. Increased bullying, school violence, drugs, and negative peer pressure

contributed to dissatisfaction with school climate and have helped raise the number of

homeschool students in the United States (Homeschool Increases, 2016). Seventy-seven percent

of homeschool parents reported a desire to provide moral instruction as a reason to homeschool

(Office of Non-Public Education, 2016). The Office of Non-Public Education (2016) reported

other significant reasons parents chose to homeschool as dissatisfaction with academic

instruction, a desire for religious instruction, and a desire for a nontraditional approach to

education. Less than 20% of parents who chose homeschool education did so because of their

child's physical or mental health problems or other special needs (Office of Non-Public

Education, 2016). These reasons have remained stable from 2003 to 2007 as parents consistently

reported these as determinants for deciding to homeschool (Coalition for Homeschool Children,

2017; NCES, 2008). These issues have also been the primary reasons for homeschooling in a

recent report by the U. S. Department of Education (2017). Of all the reasons given for

homeschooling, concern for school environment was the primary reason for making the

homeschool decision (U. S. Department of Education, 2017).

Success of Homeschool Students

Through the years, homeschool students have proven their ability to perform

successfully. They have shown a high degree of success both academically and professionally.

Academically, they have matched or exceeded their peers on the SAT and ACT along with

higher college graduation rates than traditionally educated students (Cogan, 2010; Jones &

Gloeckner, 2004; Snyder, 2013). Their success has not ended with high school or college

graduation, but they have also been successful in their chosen professions. The list of successful homeschoolers includes United States Presidents (Lomazow, 2017), entrepreneurs (Dobson, 2000), and a Supreme Court Justice (O'Connor & Day, 2002). They have also gone on to become attorneys, artists, professional athletes, navy airmen, contractors, and first responders (Dobson, 2000).

Academic success. Traditionally research has shown homeschool students academically outperforming students from public or private schools. Early research from Rudner (1999) reported the successful achievement of homeschool students. His research showed 25% of homeschool students were enrolled in grade levels above their peers in private or public schools and scored higher on achievement tests. Rudner further reported homeschool students' average ACT composite scores were above the national average. Soon after, Snyder (2000) reached the conclusion that homeschool students were being prepared as well academically as traditionally schooled students for college entrance. Ray's (2004) work compared homeschool, private, and public-school students' aptitude for college achievement and indicated similar preparedness for college between the groups of students. He later reported homeschooled students were prepared for college as well as public- or private-schooled students but showed higher critical thinking skills (Ray, 2004).

In a later study, Davis (2011) reported homeschool students scoring 30 to 37% higher on all subject areas compared to their peers in public schools. Davis also reported students who had been homeschooled for two or more years scored higher than those who had been homeschooled for only one year, and those who had been homeschooled throughout their elementary and secondary years had the highest achievement. This study indicated that longevity in homeschooling increases student performance. These findings supported a later study that

indicated homeschooled students on average had higher ACT composite scores, earned more college credits during the freshman year, had higher first year cumulative GPAs, higher four-year cumulative GPAs, and higher four-year graduation rates (Snyder, 2013).

In a more recent study, Wilkins, Wade, Sonnert, and Sadler (2015) reported a 2005 study that showed homeschool students performing better than expected on the verbal section of the SAT but lower than expected on the math section of the same test. A second study conducted in 2007 also reported homeschool students scoring lower on the math section of the ACT. Wilkins et al. (2015) conducted a study to determine how homeschooled students differed from traditionally schooled students in a college calculus class. Their findings indicated the two groups had similar SAT math scores, but the homeschooled students earned higher calculus grades. The study by Wilkins and her co-researchers seemed to indicate that homeschool students perform as well as or better than their traditionally schooled peers in college calculus classes. In another recent study, Bennett, Edwards, and Ngai (2018) compared the academic performance of homeschooled students to traditionally schooled students attending a private Christian college. The site of this study was a selective college with a large population of homeschool students. Results indicated there was no difference in GPAs of the two groups. The authors suggested these results indicate the preparedness of the two groups of students and the successful performance of both groups.

Research over the past two decades indicates that homeschool students are achieving as well as or better than their traditionally educated peers are. Not only are these students performing better on the SAT and ACT, they have a higher graduation rate than traditionally educated students (Cogan, 2010; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004; Snyder, 2013).

Professional success. Homeschool students are not only successful in the classroom, but they also achieve professional success. Homeschool students have proven to be successful in many fields including law, athletics, computer software development, military service, culinary careers, musicians, contractors, and first responders (Dobson, 2000). Although these individuals are not famous, they used their homeschool education to establish and advance their careers.

Homeschool has also led to the success of many famous individuals. Seven United States presidents are on the list including Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Dobson, 2000). Because of health problems, Roosevelt was homeschooled until the age of fourteen (Lomazow, 2017). Other famous homeschoolers include businessmen and entrepreneurs like Amadeo Giannini, founder of Bank of America, and Andrew Carnegie, steel manufacturer (Dobson, 2000). Homeschooling also produced Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor (O'Connor & Day, 2002). Another famous homeschooler was Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (Rice, 2011). A famous homeschooler is Tim Tebow, 2007 Heisman Trophy winner who became a professional football and baseball player, sports broadcaster, and movie producer (Tebow & Whitaker, 2011).

These individuals have done well with the education they received and have excelled in their chosen careers. Not all homeschool students will become famous, but they have the potential to obtain good jobs and move forward in their careers.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Homeschooling

Homeschool students have demonstrated exemplary academic achievement. These students have been among the winners in the National Geographic Bee, Scripps National Spelling Bee, Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, Game Show Network's (GSN) National Vocabulary Championship, National Mock Trial Championship, and National Merit Scholarship awards (Wayne, 2019). Parents and students both give accounts of the success that

was achieved through the homeschooling process. Larabell (2015) tells of one parent whose two children were homeschooled from kindergarten through high school. Both girls graduated from college with honors; one graduated magna cum laude, the other summa cum laude. Hamilton (2018) described her homeschool success that began at age 6 and continued through completion of high school at age 16 when she decided to attend college. Since that time, she has completed two bachelor's degrees and is pursuing a master's degree. Although these cases are isolated, they are evidence of the accomplishments of successful homeschool students.

Students identified several common traits that were gained from the homeschooling experience that they believe led to their success. One common theme was self-motivation (Hamilton, 2018; Larabell, 2015; Noble, 2014). Self-motivation led to a love of learning that fed a desire to learn as much as possible (Hamilton, 2018). Green et al. (2012) found that motivation and self-concept predicted a student's attitude toward education leading to class participation and completion of school work and being a predicter of test performance. Development of good time management skills was also identified as a beneficial trait (Hamilton, 2018; Larabell, 2015). One author reported that good time management skills put her ahead of her college peers as they were just learning to develop time management skills (Hamilton, 2018). It has been reported that time management skills were related to conscientiousness (MacCann, Fogarty, & Roberts, 2012) and conscientiousness (time management) is a predictor of academic outcomes. A third trait that was identified was effective study habits (Hamilton, 2018; Larabell, 2015). Effective study habits contributed to the success of these students as they had already become proficient in understanding a variety of texts and reading for understanding. Lack of study time and cramming were reported as being associated with poor academic performance (Beattie, Laliberte, Michaud-Leclerc, & Oreopoulos, 2019). Self-motivation, good time management, and effective study

habits are all important in academic development and achievement. Homeschool students felt they had an advantage over their peers in each of these areas.

Another theme that was reported by homeschool students that led to their success was the ability to communicate well with people from all walks of life and of any age (Hamilton, 2018; Larabell, 2015). Clear communication skills include both written and spoken communication. Homeschool students felt they had an advantage due to the opportunity they had to be exposed to a wide variety of individuals through the homeschool experience.

Another commonality among former homeschool students was the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Hamilton, 2018; Larabell, 2015; Noble, 2014). Because students did not rely primarily on lecture as a means of learning, they developed the ability to understand ideas, concepts, and data on their own with little reliance on a teacher (Larabell, 2015). It has been said that students need to be taught how to think rather than what to think (Tsui, 2002). Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are valuable for a student's future both academically and professionally. Tsui felt that mastery of these skills allows individuals to become independent lifelong learners. The development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills led these students to become independent thinkers who were not only prepared for college but also for careers (Larabell, 2015; Noble, 2014).

Two final benefits of homeschool education were noted as the parents' ability to meet the individual child's needs and strengthened family ties (Firmin et al., 2019). With each child having individual needs, Firmin et al. (2019) noted that homeschool parents felt they were able to tailor instruction to the specific needs of each of their children. This could have been through instructional materials, methods, or pacing of activities. Public education refers to this concept as differentiated instruction. This is a process of recognizing and implementing strategies to meet

the individual needs of each student (Tompkins, 2017). The research by Firmin et al. found that homeschool parents were able to meet their child's needs by focusing attention on each child. Firmin et al. (2019) also stated the strengthening of family ties as an important aspect of homeschool education. The amount of time parents got to spend with their children led to a closeness between parent and child. This added time spent during instruction allowed parents to see their children succeed and overcome challenging tasks. Parents reported they learned to appreciate their children through these efforts. Homeschool parents are interested in their child's education but also in their overall development. It has been said that the teacher is the most important factor in the development of a child's worldview (Schultz, 2002). Through homeschooling, parents play dual roles as both parent and teacher allowing them to be the strong influence in the development of their child's worldview.

While many report the benefits of homeschooling, some report that homeschool students do not do as well as students from traditional schools. Murphy (2014) reported that homeschool students were not as successful as traditional schooled students in military service. It was noted that homeschool students had a higher attrition rate; were not as likely to admit at higher pay grades; were admitted more on waiver; left the military for negative reasons more often; and were viewed as lower quality upon leaving the military compared to students from traditional schools (Murphy, 2014). In another study, Yu, Sackett, and Kuncel (2016) reported that homeschool students appeared to perform at higher levels in college than traditionally educated students. Upon further investigation, when Yu, Sackett, and Kuncel matched homeschool and traditionally educated students by gender, race, academic preparedness, and socioeconomic status they found that the differences in performance between the two groups diminished. They concluded that homeschool students may be as successful as traditionally educated students, but

the success was not attributed solely to being homeschooled (Yu, Sackett, & Kuncel, 2016). Murphy (2014) reported in a study of homeschool students' academic growth from year to year, the students performed well but did not always demonstrate 12 months' growth. In a study of almost 600 college freshmen, Saunders (2010) found that homeschooling or traditional schooling had no effect of social integration or student persistence.

With research to support the benefits of homeschooling, there is also research to support that homeschooling alone is not a factor in a person's success, academically, socially, or professionally. When studying social integration, Saunders (2010) found that homeschooling had little or no influence on social integration but did not negatively affect the student. There is also evidence to suggest that homeschool students' academic performance was equal to that of traditional students (Murphy, 2014; Yu, Sackett, & Kuncel, 2016). Murphy (2014) went on to state that there is a lack of evidence to indicate the impact of homeschooling on society. With mixed reports of homeschool students' performance and success, it is imperative that research into homeschool student's performance continue.

Homeschool Research

Homeschool research has been conducted for many years, but further study is called for (CRHE, 2017). Wilkins et al. (2015) stated, "there appears to be a dire need to augment and improve the knowledge base" (p. 33) concerning homeschool education. CRHE (2017) found that homeschool research had significant problems including confusion of correlation with causation, lack of external validity, no correlation for background factors, and lack of random sampling. These problems, along with others, help support the need for further research. Other research problems noted by Larabell (2015) included random sampling problems. Larabell stated that much of the homeschool research might have been biased and based on results that are

"cherry-picked" with only the "cream of the crop" of homeschool students being used in research. Other sampling problems were due to small samples from small schools (Yu, Sackett, & Kuncel, 2016). Wilkins et al. (2015) and Watson (2018) also noted the problem of having representative databases and small sample sizes being used for homeschool research. It was noted that students and their parents are involved in the homeschool process by self-selection for many different reasons. Watson went on to say that these reasons alone might cause homeschool students to be different from their traditionally schooled peers.

Carpenter and Gann (2016) described three problems faced by homeschool researchers. First, homeschool students and their parents do not report to a national database or data gathering center. Because states require various means of reporting, there is no consistent record of students who are homeschooled. Secondly, there is no uniform curriculum for homeschoolers. In contrast, public school students are exposed to a state-wide standard curriculum that is designed to be consistent within that particular state. Homeschool parents choose their preferred curriculum and delivery method, and it may vary greatly from one family to another. Finally, Carpenter and Gann identified the various activities that can be considered homeschooling. This is closely related to the various delivery methods that are used. Not all homeschool is conducted at home; some students are educated at home, some attend public school for part of the day, or some are involved in distance learning programs. The variety of homeschool methods caused research participants to not have consistent backgrounds (Yu, Sackett, & Kuncel, 2016).

Other obstacles for homeschool researchers were noted by Cardinale (2013). The author acknowledged the difficulty gaining access to homeschool students because of parental hesitation and proximity challenges. Many homeschool parents may be reluctant to share information due to a desire to protect their children and families. Proximity may be an issue

because of the relatively small number of children educated in a specific home. It would be difficult and impractical to visit each home. Another challenge noted by Cardinale is the inconsistency between homeschoolers regarding standardized testing. With only a limited number of homeschool students opting to take standardized tests, the sample may not be representative of all homeschoolers.

Wilkins et al. (2015) also noted that there had been a trend toward homeschool research being politicized with large amounts of research being conducted by advocacy organizations. Because of the controversy that has traditionally surrounded homeschooling, it has a combative political history (Watson, 2018). This fact is also a contributing factor in gathering accurate data concerning homeschool students. These problems limit the ability to generalize research findings.

Firmin et al. (2019) noted most homeschooling research has been focused on the areas of parental reasons for homeschooling, academic comparisons of homeschooled and traditional schooled students, and legal implications of homeschooling. According to Riley (2015), there has been little research on young adults from homeschool backgrounds. Riley noted that there had been few academic articles on adults from the homeschool background.

These issues with homeschool research present problems and possibly inconsistencies with previous findings. There is a need for further research in homeschool student achievement and the college experiences of these students (CRHE, 2017; Firmin et al, 2016; Riley, 2015; Wilkins et al., 2015). The increased number of students being homeschooled and then entering college warrants the need to investigate the impact of the homeschool experiences on the students' education and future.

Social and Academic Integration in College

"Learning is a social action" (Smith, 2015, p. 893). Learning takes place in the formal classroom setting and outside the classroom. Smith wrote that Tinto initially separated social and academic integration but later presented them as being closely related and overlapping. As a result, it is important to recognize both the social and academic integration that college students experience. Tinto's (1993) social integration model is the basis for this study. Tinto's theory posited that if students become socially and academically integrated into campus life, their commitment to school would increase (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's theory was based on a belief that if students had a sense of belonging, they would develop social and academic congruence (Deil-Amen, 2011). A foundation of this theory was that a sense of belonging and membership was vital to student persistence and success. Student persistence was linked to a fit between the student and the values, social rules, and academic quality of the college community. Researchers have found that both forms of integration are important but have not identified one as being more important than the other (Deil-Amen, 2011). Some researchers have stated that one form of integration increases the other (Jean-Francois, 2019). It appeared that when academic integration increased, social integration also increased (Deil-Amen, 2011; Jean-Francois, 2019). Based on Tinto's theory, an examination of the social and academic integration of students can offer insight into how these areas impact a homeschool student's persistence in college.

Social integration in college. One of the most common misconceptions about homeschool students is that they are socially delayed (Davis, 2011, Romanowski, 2006). Romanowski (2006) wrote that some homeschool students were social misfits; he went on to say there are also students from traditional school settings who were social misfits. He posited that lack of socialization is not limited to homeschool students alone but that a lack of socialization

can be a characteristic of a student in any educational setting. Socialization is defined as, "The

process whereby people acquire the rules of behavior and the systems of beliefs and attitudes

that equip a person to function effectively as a member of a particular society" (Durkin, 1995, p.

614). Socialization is a process that begins at a young age as a child begins to interact with

others and participate in daily activities (Romanowski, 2006).

Many have the notion that homeschool students spend their days alone with their parents

doing nothing but schoolwork and have little interaction with outsiders (Romanowski, 2006).

According to researchers, homeschool students have a wide variety of opportunities to

participate in outside activities (Davis, 2011; Ray, 2015; Romanowski, 2006). Homeschool

students are not limited to being in the same classroom day after day with the same children.

Instead, they are exposed to many different learning situations. Romanowski said homeschool

students regularly interact with their peers, children of different ages, and adults.

Shields (2015) indicated that homeschool students are above average in the areas of

interaction, leadership, community service, and self-esteem. The study went on to say there was

no evidence to suggest homeschooling was the cause of them being above average. These

students were involved in a wide variety of activities including sports, clubs, politics, community

service, and volunteer work (Romanowski, 2006; Shields, 2015). Davis (2011) wrote that

homeschool students connected with others through homeschool communities or cooperative

groups and distance education that allowed them to work with other students virtually through

the Internet. This variety of activities and interactions allowed the homeschool student to be

exposed to a wide range of people putting to rest the argument that homeschool students lack

socialization skills.

Kranzow (2013) further supported Davis (2011) and Romanowski's (2006) work. In a study of homeschool graduates who had entered college, Kranzow found that none of the interviewed students felt socially isolated from their peers. The students reported participating in on and off campus activities with their peers. Most of the activities were informal and students were connecting with others of their own age and making friends. Kranzow found that homeschooled students were involved watching movies, shopping, and spending time with friends. None of the students interviewed reported feeling socially isolated according to Kranzow.

The social adjustment of homeschool students has been an area of research. Saunders (2010) noted that homeschool students and traditionally schooled students showed no difference in the level of social integration upon entering college. CRHE (2017) reported homeschool students could be well socialized and involved in outside activities, but it required parental time, attention, and planning. The coalition also recognized that not all homeschooled students fit this description; some were awkward and socialized only with homogenous groups. Kranzow (2013) reported homeschool students were likely to have the social skills to transition easily into college life and persistence for higher education and academics. Dobson (2002) reported homeschool students shared, networked, and collaborated effectively. Dobson also noted homeschool students' ability to easily carry on conversations with individuals of all ages, including adults. Research has indicated the social skills of homeschool students to be equal to or better than those of traditionally educated students at the college level (Ray, 2013).

Saunders (2010) asserted that homeschool students were avoiding the negative aspects of educational socialization. Other studies have found homeschool students score better on behavioral scales than students from traditional schools. Vaughn et al. (2015) found homeschool

students were less likely to report the use of tobacco, alcohol, or drugs. They were also more

likely to disapprove of their peers drinking alcohol. Homeschool students also demonstrated a

lower level of depression compared to traditionally educated students (Guterman & Neuman,

2017). Traditionally schooled students had higher problem behavior scores than homeschooled

students (Shyers, 1992). These findings are aligned with Medlin's (2013) writings. He wrote that

homeschool students' moral reasoning was as well developed as their peers; they demonstrated

less emotional conflict than their peers and had a strong sense of social responsibility. Medlin

also stated that homeschool students were less likely to demonstrate problem behaviors. Based

on these findings, it appeared that homeschool students and their parents have been successful in

avoiding the negative influences of educational socialization (Saunders, 2010).

     Academic integration in college. Tinto (2012) described student persistence and

retention as closely related terms. He used the terms to express the rate at which students who

began in higher education completed their degrees. Tinto's model focuses on both academic and

social integration as major factors in student persistence and retention. Academic integration

may be attained in a variety of ways. Many colleges implement learning communities to help

achieve integration. (Smith, 2019). These communities bring students together to help develop

relationships. According to Hamond and Shoemaker (2014), academic integration can also be in

the form of student relationships with advisors, committees, classmates, or peers. Classroom

engagement and student-faculty contact are the primary means of academic involvement,

according to Tinto. One study indicated academic advising as the most influential strategy for

increasing student retention for beginning freshmen (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Byl et al. (2016)

identified the importance of face-to-face and online peer counseling for first year college

students along with peer education and peer modeling as a means to improve academic

integration. Tinto explained that classroom engagement in learning activities that are meaningful caused the student to increase performance leading to increased retention. Clark, Middleton, Nguyen, and Zwick (2014) noted that college faculty help promote academic integration by incorporating engaging activities and environments that encourage discussion and participation. Tinto went on to say that students who are engaged with faculty, both inside and outside the classroom, demonstrate increased academic performance.

Tinto's (1975) work described academic integration as having two dimensions. First was the structural integration which included meeting institutional standards. Next was the normative integration which described the individual student's identification within the institution. Schaeper (2019) posited that there should be two additional dimensions. These additional dimensions would include social academic integration, the intra-curricular connections with faculty, and motivational academic integration, the academic commitment to a chosen major and the required academic work.

For homeschool students, academic integration is generally part of their academic routine. Davis (2011) described homeschool tactics that utilize auditory, visual and kinesthetic methods as creating learning opportunities that are engaging and interesting for students. Shields (2015) depicted homeschool formats that include the use of co-ops with shared resources, instructors, and activities. Homeschool co-ops are communities of parents and multiple generational family members who share educational responsibilities, enabling them to draw on the strengths of many individuals (Shields, 2015). This educational format lays the groundwork for students to become accustomed to interaction with instructors during the elementary and secondary years as they prepare to move into higher education. Thomas (2018) found that

homeschooled college students demonstrated self-reliance and self-growth in their academic performance.

As colleges accept more and more homeschool students, it is imperative that there is an understanding of the impact the homeschool experience has not only on the students' academic skills, but also on their social skills. Wilson (2016) listed lack of community belonging, social support, and social and cultural capital as some of the factors that lead students to leave college. Colleges should seek ways to meet these needs for all students. In a study by Jean-Francois (2019), a link between student academic and social integration to student-faculty interactions was emphasized. This study of a group of international students listed strategies they used to become more socially integrated in their colleges. Among these strategies were developing friends on campus, becoming involved in student organizations, participation in campus events, seeking employment, and participating in volunteer work. Through the implementation of these strategies, international students reported increased academic integration and greater participation in college activities. This led to more classroom engagement, development of friendships, and more involvement in both on and off campus activities. These strategies could be helpful for all students. Addressing the social needs of college students could lead to improved retention and graduation rates.

Tinto's (2012) research indicated the importance of academic integration in a student's persistence in college. Colleges and universities should become more knowledgeable regarding homeschool students' needs and limitations as this population of students grows (Cogan, 2010; Shields, 2015). This increased knowledge of homeschool students' needs would help higher education improve campus services for the group of students. Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2012) stressed the importance of academic support services that were closely aligned with

everyday classroom learning. According to the authors, when these services are effectively in place the likelihood of persistence in college increases (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2012).

Summary

Tinto's (1993) student integration model guided this study to examine the social and academic integration of homeschool students into college life. Tinto (2012) asserted that students who were more academically and socially engaged were more likely to complete their college degrees. Tinto's theory is based on students entering college with many different characteristics including family backgrounds, community backgrounds, educational experiences, skills, and values (Mannan, 2007). Smith (2015) wrote "Tinto posits that individual students enter college with a variety of characteristics, intentions, and commitments" (p. 895). Each of these characteristics contribute to a student's decision to persist or leave college. Tinto (1982) stated that research should expand to include the study of specific groups, therefore examination of homeschool students expands Tinto's (1993) student integration model offering application to this specific subgroup of students.

Homeschooling in the United States goes back as far as colonial times. Presently, homeschooling is a growing movement with increasing numbers of families choosing it as an educational path for their children. In Florida, the location of this study, the number of homeschool students increased by 12,763 students or 16% of the state student population during a period from the 2013-14 school year to the 2017-18 school year (Florida Department of Education, 2018). Recently, there has been an increased number of military families choosing the homeschool option due to their frequent moves (Kolenc, 2016). Homeschool growth is not isolated to only the United States, but studies show international growth. Petrovic and Rolstad (2017) noted that homeschooling numbers increased 8% in Australia and 65% in the United

Kingdom over the past 6 years. It is reported that concern for the school environment is the primary reason for choosing the homeschool path (U. S. Department of Education, 2017). Homeschooling is not isolated to only wealthy, well-educated parents; homeschoolers come from every walk of life, socioeconomic group, religion, and educational background.

Homeschool delivery methods and curriculum vary widely, and the specific method of delivery is chosen by the parent based on the specific needs of the student. Often the chosen delivery method will help determine the curriculum. With the many options available, research indicated many parents chose a combination of several different methods that may vary from year to year, student to student, or subject area to subject area (Carpenter & Gann, 2015; Duffy, 2012; Hannah, 2012). It is important to consider that homeschooling offers the ability for flexibility in both delivery method and curriculum.

Academic and social integration are important for student persistence and retention in college (Tinto, 2012). Research indicates homeschool students are academically well prepared for college (Bennett, Edwards, & Ngai, 2018; Snyder, 2013; Wilkins et al., 2015). Studies report homeschool students also perform well academically, scoring as well as or better than their traditionally educated peers (Bennett, Edwards, & Ngai, 2018; Cogan, 2010; Davis, 2011; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004; Ray, 2004; Rudner, 1999; Snyder, 2013; Wilkins et al., 2015). Not only are homeschool students academically well prepared for college, they are also socially prepared (Davis, 2011, Romanowski, 2006). The success of homeschool students has not ended in the homeschool classroom but has extended into adulthood with successful careers. Homeschool students and their parents report many benefits of homeschooling. These include development of self-motivation, love of learning, good time management skills, study habits, and well-developed communication skills (Hamilton, 2018; Larabell, 2015).

With little research on the persistence of homeschool students to complete college (CRHE, 2017; Ray, 2017; Snyder, 2013) and questionable results from many studies of homeschool education (Coalition for Responsible Home Education, 2017; Wilkins et al., 2015) there is a need to further examine the college experiences of these homeschooled students. Watson (2018) stated that it is rare to find hard data concerning homeschool students, and further study into the homeschool movement is important. As colleges face increasing numbers of students who leave before completing their degrees, much could be learned from the homeschool subgroup of students that could lead to increasing numbers of traditionally educated students. The problem of retention of students should cause colleges and universities to consider various ways to retain all students. This transcendental phenomenological study would offer additional information to the body of study to help colleges better understand these particular students. As the number of homeschool students in college rises, it becomes even more important to examine how they relate and function, both academically and socially, in college life.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college at a faith-based institution in the Southeastern United States. The research questions for this study sought to describe the experiences of these participants to understand their persistence in college. The appropriate method for answering the research questions was a qualitative study with a phenomenological design. Individual interviews, document analysis of participant letters, and focus groups were used to gather data. Analysis of data was based on Moustakas' (1994) design, which aligned with qualitative phenomenological research. A description of the setting, participants, and procedures is included in this chapter. Next, the researcher's role, data collection methods, and data analysis are described. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations are discussed.

Design

This qualitative study used a transcendental phenomenological design to describe the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college. Creswell and Poth (2018) described qualitative research as an inquiry process based on a methodological approach that investigates a social or human problem. They went on to say, "The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture; analyzes words; reports detailed views of participants; and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 326). Gall et al. (2007) supported this definition by saying, "The dominant methodology is to discover these meanings and interpretations by studying cases intensively in natural settings and by subjecting the resulting data to analytic induction" (p. 650). The emphasis on collecting data in the natural setting gave support to the use

of a qualitative study for this research. The researcher also interviewed participants to describe a lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenology is one approach to qualitative research (Gall et al., 2007). Phenomenological research focuses on the common lived experiences of a group of individuals. The researcher's focus was on describing the common experiences from the participants' perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2007). The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to tell the participants' stories (Creswell, 2018). Moustakas (1994) described the lived experience as the starting and ending points of phenomenological research. The phenomenological approach was appropriate because this study focused on the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The transcendental approach is used for studies that focus on setting aside judgments and preconceived ideas regarding the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) said that transcendental research allows the researcher to use intuition to obtain a picture of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon. By contrast, hermeneutical phenomenology seeks to interpret the experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of this study was not be to interpret the experiences of the participants but to describe the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college at a faith-based institution in the Southeastern United States. For this reason, the transcendental approach was most appropriate for this study.

Research Questions

Central Research Question: What are the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college?

Sub-Research Question 1: How are college expectations shaped for homeschool students?

Sub-Research Question 2: What experiences contributed to the social integration of homeschool college students?

Sub-Research Question 3: What experiences contributed to the academic integration of homeschool college students?

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Setting

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The setting for this study was a small, private, faith-based college in a rural setting in northwest Florida. The college is organized around five divisions and offers 23-degree programs with a majority of students majoring in a ministry related degree. This site was chosen because I am employed at the college so it was a convenient site to gather data. Based on information from the registrar, there was a sufficient number of formerly homeschooled students to generate data. For the purpose of this study, a pseudonym was used for the site, and it was called Florida Christian College. Florida Christian College operates under the authority of an appointed Board of Trustees. The Trustees appoint a President to oversee the operation of the institution and serve as the academic leader for the institution.

According to the most recent demographic information, Florida Christian College's student population is made up of 66% full-time students and 34% part-time. Thirty-three percent of the students are online only. Fifty-eight percent are male and 42% are female. The racial distribution is 8% Black, 4% Hispanic, 7% Bi-racial, and 75% White. The remainder of the students identify as belonging to a racial group that contains less than 1% of the population. The students are mostly 24 years of age or younger (61%) and only 39% of the students are 25 years old or greater (Florida Christian College, 2018). The Registrar reported almost half the student

population came from small faith-based private high schools or homeschools with a large

percentage of the students coming from homeschool backgrounds.

Participants

Participants were selected by purposeful sampling. This sampling method was used to

allow an intentional sample group whose members had experienced the research phenomenon

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of purposeful sampling is to choose participants who are

"information-rich" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 178) concerning the topic of study. Each of the

participants must have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

They each must have self-identified as being homeschooled on their college application and

persisted and graduated from college. Maximum variation is including variations of individuals

who meet specific characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Maximum variation of participants

including race, gender, age, and homeschool format was attempted to strengthen the

generalizability of results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A sample size of 10-12 students was sought

to participate in the study (Polkinghorne, 1989).

A list of graduates and their contact information was obtained from the site's registrar.

These graduates would have self-reported as a homeschool student upon admission. The

participants in this study would be recent students who had graduated college within the last five

years and had self-reported as a homeschool student upon admission. Recent graduates were

chosen because they had persisted in college and had experiences to relay and share. It was

projected that there would be approximately 50 recent homeschool graduates on this list, and all

would be invited to participate in the study.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Subgroup	Number of Participants
Gender	
Male	4
Female	6
Race	
Black	2
White	8
Academic Division	
Business Leadership	2
Music	2
Psychology	2
Teacher Education	1
Theology	3

Procedures

After obtaining approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I sought permission to conduct this study from the president of the site where the research would take place. Once these initial permissions were obtained, I identified potential participants by working with the site's registrar to attain a list of homeschool students who were recent graduates from the site (graduates from the last three to five years). Potential participants were

contacted by email and with a personal invitation to participate in the study. Students who choose to participate were required to return a signed consent form before the study began.

Data was collected by using a personal interview, documents, and focus groups. The interview questions were designed to move from building rapport with the participants to sharing their lived experiences of being a homeschool student. Interviews and focus groups were audio recorded for future transcription in order to help obtain as much information as possible from the interview process. Participants were also asked to write a letter to younger versions of themselves describing their experiences as a homeschool student who had persisted in college.

After the interviews were concluded, an initial hearing was completed with note taking. A second hearing was conducted to assure accuracy of the notes with additional notes taken as needed. A transcriptionist was used to complete the transcription process. Participants had the opportunity to review the transcriptions and offer suggestions and corrections as needed.

The focus groups were conducted to validate what had already been said. These group sessions were also recorded and transcribed. A first hearing was done, and notes were taken with a second hearing also taking place to validate the notes and make corrections as needed. Again, the participants were invited to review the transcriptions and offer suggestions and corrections as needed. The letters were reviewed to identify common expressions, statements and themes that can be labeled and used to help with triangulation. Data analysis was conducted after all data was collected.

The Researcher's Role

I am a full-time faculty member at a small religious college in the southeastern United States. This institution was the site for the study. Fall of 2019 began my seventh year as a professor at the site, and I am presently the division chair for teacher education. I hold a

bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in educational supervision and a specialist's degree in educational leadership. I am currently working on a doctorate in educational leadership. I hold certifications in elementary education K-6 and educational leadership K-12. I have taught first, second, third, and fifth grades and spent eight years in an administrative position.

As a public-school educator, I have always been a proponent for public education. However, these views have changed, and presently I hold a much more positive view of homeschool education. I first became interested in homeschool when a friend asked me to be the professional reviewer for her child's homeschool education. Prior to this time, I had observed students who left public school for homeschool because parents became angry with administrators or teachers. Many of these students returned to public school with no evidence of academic growth during the homeschool time. As I began to watch the impact of increased standardized testing and the school's focus on testing, I also began to see improved homeschool experiences in my area. More homeschool parents began incorporating homeschool cooperative programs into their curriculum. I also saw parents becoming better prepared to teach their children at home, using more structured curriculum, and setting high expectations for their children. My opinion of homeschool education began to improve, and I began to see greater numbers of successful students emerging from local homeschool experiences.

My goal was to remain impartial during this study so a clear description of the participants' experiences could be portrayed. It is possible that I would personally know some of the participants and that some of them may have been my students. Since I no longer have influence on their grades there should be no feeling of being coerced to participate. In this case, I strived to be cautious and separate myself from my personal knowledge of the participant. As the

human instrument in this study, I was responsible for data collection. It was necessary to bracket

myself from the study to avoid bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) described

bracketing, or Epoche, as putting aside our own preconceived ideas in order to have a clear

perspective toward a phenomenon. While bracketing was necessary, reflexivity was equally

important. Reflexivity requires the researcher to disclose personal biases about the research topic

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reflexivity recognizes that although the researcher will suspend

judgement, biases and preconceptions remain. I disclosed my opinions about homeschool

education to the reader to allow the audience to understand my position as the researcher in the

study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After completion of the data analysis, participants were asked to

review the generated descriptions and provide feedback to ensure accuracy of the descriptions.

Data Collection

Triangulation is using multiple data sources to corroborate evidence for validation of

qualitative research findings (Gall et al., 2007). For the purpose of triangulation, data was

collected through the use of individual interviews, document analysis of participant letters, and

focus groups. Moustakas (1994) describes interviews as a fundamental aspect of

phenomenological research. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest the use of documents as a

supplement to the interview process. For the purpose of this study, I used personal documents in

the form of letters written by the participants. The final data was collected from focus groups.

These groups are beneficial when participants are similar (Creswell & Poth, 2018), such as

homeschool students who have persisted in college.

Interviews

Interviews are a fundamental part of phenomenological research. The interview can be

used to gather information and data about the lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell and

Poth (2018) described the interview as a way to understand the world from the participants' point of view. Interviews were held virtually from my office and were recorded after the participant had signed a preapproved consent form (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Semi-Structured Semi-Standardized Interview Questions:

1. How were your college expectations shaped?

2. Before you began college, what were your expectations about college life?

3. What did you hope to get out of college?

4. How did your actual college experience measure against your college expectations?

5. Describe what it was like to leave your home and family and go off to college.

6. How did you learn about the "unwritten rules" of college social life?

7. Describe the extracurricular activities you were involved in.

8. Describe your dormitory life.

9. In what ways did homeschooling help prepare you socially for college?

10. In what ways did homeschooling help not prepare you socially for college?

11. Describe your first week in classes your freshman year.

12. What were some things or behaviors you had to learn to complete the first semester of academic work?

13. Describe the greatest academic difference between homeschool and college.

14. In what ways did homeschooling help prepare you academically for college?

15. In what ways did homeschooling not help prepare you academically for college?

Behavior is influenced by past history along with present circumstances (Miller, 2011). Based on this concept, the participant's previous experiences had contributed to their present

level of maturity. Questions one, two, three, and four demonstrated how the participant's past history had helped shape their expectations for college life, both socially and academically.

Questions five and eleven allowed the participant to reflect on the new experiences of attending college and the initial classes. A person's past has an influence on their present and the way they manage new experiences based on their level of maturity (Miller, 2011). Based on this concept, these questions gave the participant the opportunity to describe any feelings they may have had about beginning the college experience.

Tinto's model focuses on academic and social integration as vital factors in student persistence (Tinto 2012). Romanowski (2006) wrote that students from both homeschool and traditional school settings could be social misfits. Based on this premise, homeschool students may have social skills that need to be learned upon entering college. Question six addressed how students learned these social skills. Hamond and Shoemaker (2014) stated that academic integration could be in the form of student relationships with advisors, committees, classmates, or peers. Based on this, question 12 addressed the academic skills that participants needed to learn as they began their first semester of college.

A student's engagement with their peers causes them to be more likely to remain in school (Tinto, 2012). Time outside the classroom, extracurricular activities, and dormitory life give students opportunities to be engaged with peers and develop relationships. Questions seven and eight gave the participant an opportunity to share how these areas impacted their relationships and engagement with other students.

Kranzow (2013) felt homeschool students were equipped with the cultural capital to be successful in the transition to college and then persist throughout college. Questions nine, 10, 13, 14, and 15 gave the participant an opportunity to reflect on ways that homeschooling prepared

them and did not prepare them to transition and be successful in college. These questions

allowed the participant to reflect on the academic and social aspects of their experiences.

Document Analysis of Participant Letters

Participants were asked to write letters to a high school aged homeschool student who is

planning to attend college. The letter should include: (1) a description of the participants' own

college experience as a homeschooler who has persisted in college, (2) a description of their own

transition to college life, and (3) advice about the social and academic transition from

homeschool to college life. Tinto (2012) stressed the importance of the social and academic

integration of students in college to help retain the students and have them complete their

education. These letters offered an additional data source to support triangulation for verification

purposes.

Focus Groups

The final data collection tool was a focus group. Focus groups are designed to be relaxed

and comfortable to allow participants to share ideas and comments in a discussion format (Gall

et al., 2007). Five participants were randomly selected to participate in the focus group and asked

to promote open discussion between participants (Gall et al., 2007). The small group promoted

interaction between participants and encouraged the sharing of ideas that may not have emerged

during the individual interview process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2007). The focus

group met after individual interviews were completed. Focus groups were held virtually from my

office. The design of focus group questions was to be open-ended and the questions were open to

adjustments as needed through the session.

Open-Ended Focus Group Questions:

1. What challenges did you have as you transitioned from the homeschool setting to the college setting?

2. Discuss your greatest fears or weaknesses as you transitioned from homeschool to college.

3. Discuss your greatest strength as you transitioned from homeschool to college.

4. Describe the traits you learned or obtained through homeschooling that helped you persist in college.

5. What advice would you give an incoming freshman with a homeschool background?

Miller (2011) described the importance a person's past has on their present circumstances. Based on these findings, past experiences shape an individual's current attitudes and experiences. This leads to the premise that college expectations are also shaped by past experience. Question one allowed the participants to discuss how realistic their college expectations were.

Questions two and three address the social integration of the college student. By discussing the participants' fears, weaknesses, and strengths, knowledge was gained about the students' integration into college life. Awareness of the students' perception of their own social integration offered insight into how college's may help other students integrate more effectively into college life.

Kranzow (2013) suggested that homeschool students were equipped to be successful college students. Bennett, Edwards, and Ngai (2018) suggested that homeschool students were as prepared as traditionally educated students to be successful in college. Questions four and five offered insight regarding the perception of homeschool students concerning their own college academic integration.

Data Analysis

After the collection of data in phenomenological research, the data goes through the

horizonalization process (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) describes this as an initial

listening and grouping process that includes listening to all recordings and reviewing all

transcripts to identify and list every relevant expression. Reduction and elimination are the next

steps in data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). During this process, each relevant expression is tested

for two conditions. First, to determine if the expression contains information necessary for

understanding the phenomenon. Second, to determine if the expression can be labeled.

Expressions that do not meet these requirements are eliminated. Vague and repetitive

expressions are eliminated if they cannot be presented more specifically. All remaining

expressions are called horizons and become known as the unchanging components or invariant

constituents of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents is the next step in the

horizonalization process (Moustakas, 1994). During this process, the invariant constituents are

grouped into themes that can be labeled; they will then become the core themes of the

phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Validation of the invariant constituents and themes is the next

step (Moustakas, 1994). During this step, the invariant constituents and themes are compared to

each participant's recordings. The researcher will determine if they are expressed explicitly in

the transcription. If they are not expressed explicitly, the researcher will determine if they are

compatible. If they are not explicitly expressed or compatible they will be deleted (Moustakas,

1994).

After relevance and validity of the invariant constituents are determined, an Individual

Textural Description will be completed (Moustakas, 1994). Direct quotes from the transcribed

interview will be included in this step. An Individual Structural Description for each participant will be developed next offering meaning to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The Textural-Structural Description for each participant will be developed to describe the essence of the phenomenon and incorporate the invariant constituents and themes (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the Composite Description will be developed to describe the essence of the experiences that are representative of the entire group (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Connelly (2016) defines trustworthiness as "the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study" (p. 435). Amankwaa (2016) stated the criteria for establishing trustworthiness are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Williams and Morrow (2009) said these criteria separate qualitative research from anecdotes or journalism and gives validity to this form of research. Amankwaa (2016) posited that trustworthiness should be planned and follow specific steps. This process should include dates and times that the trustworthiness actions take place and this information should be included in the audit trail. These suggested steps were followed in this study to insure trustworthiness and rigor for this study.

Credibility

Credibility is how accurately the findings are reported (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation was used to validate the identified themes within the data. Triangulation requires the use of multiple data sources to verify and support the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, triangulation was accomplished by the use of individual interviews, focus group interviews, and participant letters. Significant statements and themes should be present in data from individual interviews, focus groups, and participant letters.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability can be described as the stability in the study (Gall et al., 2007). Dependability ensures that the findings are consistent and could be replicated (Amankwaa, 2016). An audit trail was used to establish documentation of the research process (Gall et al., 2007). Confirmability is the researcher's ability to show the data represents the participants' responses and not the researcher's beliefs or ideas (Cope, 2014). I removed my biases from this study to help ensure confirmability. Moustakas (1994) refers to this as Epoche. This process involved me removing my preconceptions and ideas that could possibly influence the findings of the study. To achieve this, I was open and honest about my prior experiences with homeschool students so the audience would understand my position as the researcher. Confirmability was also accomplished through triangulation of data allowing participants' ideas to be represented in multiple ways (Amankwaa, 2016). Another step to obtain dependability and confirmability was to conduct member checks for accuracy of reporting the participants' experiences.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the findings from one study being applied to other settings or contexts. Transferability was addressed by the use of "rich, thick descriptions" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 252) of the study. Thick descriptions include detailed information that allows the reader to determine how information may be applied to other situations (Amankwaa, 2016). These descriptions should give details about the context, location, participants present, participants' attitudes, and observed reactions (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016). Thick descriptions give vivid pictures of the research events and allow the reader to determine if results are applicable to other situations (Amankwaa, 2016; Krefting, (1991); Connelly, 2016). These thick descriptions will help ensure the transferability of this study.

Ethical Considerations

Several measures were taken to ensure this study was done ethically. First, IRB permission was obtained before the study began. I also obtained written permission from the president of the site along with written permission from each participant. Participants gave informed consent and were told that participation was voluntary with no consequences for not participating, and that they could drop out of the study at any time. Pseudonyms for participants and the site was used to ensure confidentiality. Participant feedback was sought to ensure my biases did not influence the results. Data was stored in a locked storage cabinet, and digital data will be password protected after the completion of the study. Data will be retained for a three-year period and then deleted from the computer, and the computer's trash will be emptied to leave no trace of the data.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college at a faith-based institution in the Southeastern United States. This qualitative study used a transcendental phenomenological design to describe the experiences of these students and was designed to answer research questions based on Tinto's student integration model. The study was conducted at a small private, faith-based college in a rural setting in northwest Florida with 10 participants. Participants were recent graduates from the college who had self-reported as a homeschool students upon admission.

After obtaining IRB approval and approval from the local college, data was gathered using personal interviews, focus groups, and participant letters. Data was analyzed using Moustakas' design. This design includes the horizontal process of initial listening and grouping;

reduction and elimination; clustering and thematizing; validation of invariant constituents and themes; and determination of relevance and validity of invariant constituents. Next, an Individual Textural Description, Individual Structural Description, and Textural Structural Description was completed. Finally, the Composite Description was done to describe the essence of the experiences that were representative of the group of participants (Moustakas, 1994).

 This study was conducted in a trustworthy and ethical manner. To ensure credibility, several steps were taken including triangulation of data with three sources of data being used. An audit trail was conducted along with member checks to establish dependability and confirmability. Transferability was ensured by using "rich, thick descriptions" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 252). This study sought to describe the lived experiences of these students as they had persisted throughout their college career.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college at a faith-based institution in the Southeastern United States. The problem was that there was not a clear understanding of the experiences of homeschool college students who persisted in college (CRHE, 2017; Ray, 2017; Snyder, 2013). This chapter presents the results of the data analysis. Data was gathered by individual interviews, analysis of participant letters, and focus group discussion. There was a total of 10 participants with five of those being included in the focus group. The chapter begins with a profile of each participant followed by the themes that emerged through data analysis. Themes were used to develop a textural description, structural description, and synthesis of the phenomenon. The research questions were answered and a final summary of the chapter was also included.

Participants

The recruitment method for this study was purposeful with maximum variation used to identify 10 participants. Each participant had graduated from Florida Christian College within the last five years and had self-reported as being homeschooled on their college application. Eight of the participants identified as White and two identified as Black. There were six female participants and four male participants. Florida Christian College has five academic divisions and each division was represented in this study. The demographics for this study are presented in the Table 1 below.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Subgroup	Number of Participants
Gender	
Male	4
Female	6
Race	
Black	2
White	8
Academic Division	
Business Leadership	2
Music	2
Psychology	2
Teacher Education	1
Theology	3

Each participant voluntarily chose to be a part of this study and participated in the individual interviews, completed the written letter, and five of them were randomly chosen to participate in the focus group. Because of the varied locations of the participants, individual interviews and the focus group discussion were done through ZOOM. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants.

Ann

Ann is a 26-year-old white female. She was homeschooled for eight years and attended

public school the remainder of her elementary and high school education. When Ann discussed her academic experience, she said, "As a homeschooler, I pushed myself. There was no other push or shove to improve. I was just improving my own marks on my own." She described her homeschool experience as making her focused on learning. She graduated in 2018 from Florida Christian College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Christian Education and Leadership with a concentration in Youth Ministry. Ann currently does volunteer ministry in her local church and is self-employed.

Susan

Susan is a 25-year-old black female. She was homeschooled twelve years and attended both public and private schools during her pre-school years. Susan said she wanted to gain independence as she entered college. She described her college expectations by saying, "My expectations about college life were that it would be an opportunity to grow. It would be an opportunity to make new friends. Really be a chance to just like be my own person finally." According to Susan, her college experience exceeded her expectations. She is a 2018 graduate of Florida Christian College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. At the time of the interview, Susan was teaching in a local public high school.

Milly

Milly is a 28-year-old white female who attended both homeschool and private school. She is a 2015 graduate of Florida Christian College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Leadership. Milly has completed a Masters degree in Business Leadership and currently teaches as an adjunct professor and works with a local business. Milly said she wanted to get the most from her college experience and did not want it to be cliquish. To help avoid this she said, "I would sit with different groups at lunch…but I would sit with people, just random groups. I

think that helped me a lot… In my mind everybody was friends, and everybody liked me."

Chris

Chris is a 24-year-old white male. He was homeschooled for 10 years and attended public school for third and fourth grades. Chris offered this advice to incoming freshman who had been homeschoolers,

My advice to you as you're looking to head off to college is to relax and not put so much pressure on yourself… Go to the cheesy events that the school puts on and try to say hi to the person sitting next to you in class. It can go a long way to making new friends.

He graduated from Florida Christian College in 2017 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Leadership. Chris works with a corporation in the western part of the United States.

John

John is a 27-year-old white male. He attended both public and private schools and then was homeschooled for the final seven years of his education. John said this about his college expectations,

I really wanted to just grow as a person and develop independently away from family… When I went to college, I wanted to almost start over in a sense. I have my life back home and everyone knows me but when I go to college, no one knows who I am. It kind of gives me an opportunity to kind of reinvent myself in some ways, kind of shed some things I don't want to have part of me personally anymore.

John described his college experience as being much better than his expectations. He graduated from Florida Christian College in 2015 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music. John is currently enrolled in a Masters program for psychology.

Bill

Bill is a 24-year-old black male. He was home schooled throughout his elementary and high school years with one year in public pre-school. Bill felt his college professors contributed to his experience in a positive way. He described it this way, "The professors, you knew they had your back. If you were studious and were about wanting to get your work done, they were like super helpful." He is a 2019 graduate of Florida Christian College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music. Bill is a musician at his church and works as a counselor.

Mark

Mark is a 23-year-old white male. He attended public and private schools until he reached high school and began homeschool, he continued in homeschool throughout his high school years. He is a 2019 graduate of Florida Christian College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Ministry with a concentration in Pastoral Ministry. Mark described leaving home and going to college as, "A little bit of joy and a lot of fear of the unknown." Although he wanted to live on his own, he was concerned about it. He felt he had more social challenges than academic challenges but learned many social lessons through the trial and error method and was successful in his endeavors. Mark is currently enrolled in a Masters level program and serves as Associate Pastor at his church.

Jane

Jane is a 28-year-old white female. She was homeschooled throughout elementary and high school with no experience in public or private school. When asked how homeschooling did not prepare her for college social life, she said "I felt naïve in some ways." Jane described having little knowledge about drugs and other "sinful things" that adolescents did. She did not feel sheltered as a young homeschooler but Jane did feel that she was not exposed to these kinds of

things. As a college student, she was sometimes embarrassed about her lack of knowledge but as an adult she feels the lack of knowledge did not matter. She is a 2015 graduate of Florida Christian College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education. Jane is a homeschool mother to her two children.

Mary

Mary is a 23-year-old white female. She was homeschooled throughout elementary and high school and never attended a public or private school. Mary offered this advice to homeschoolers who were beginning college,

> …your first friends won't always be your forever friends, don't try too hard socially, read the syllabus, and create good relationships with your professors. Utilize the library, find out if you study better in groups or alone, always take notes on everything, and involve yourself in campus life.

Mary found it difficult to make friends in the beginning but found it easier to make friends in large groups instead of making individual friends. Eventually, she learned to enjoy college life and had many friends. Mary is a 2020 graduate of Florida Christian College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. Currently, Mary is working part-time with plans to move to another state in the near future.

Julie

Julie is a 26-year-old white female. She was homeschooled from kindergarten through twelfth grade and attended a Presbyterian preschool before her parents made the decision to homeschool her. Julie hoped to get a useful degree in college. She said, "I want to homeschool any kids I have, so a degree that I would be able to use to help shape their Christian worldview and give them a better foundation." Julie felt her degree would prepare her to offer her children

biblical knowledge and ways to help others. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Christian

Education in 2019. Julie currently works in a local business and serves in a volunteer ministry

role in her church.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

The results of this study were obtained after data was carefully reviewed following the

description in Chapter 3. The study's data included individual interviews, analysis of participant

letters, and focus group discussion. Data from the interviews and focus group discussions were

transcribed and printed allowing me to effectively read and review it. During this time, I used

journaling to identify any personal biases that might exist.

Recordings were listened to and transcripts and letters were read and reviewed carefully

to begin identifying key words and phrases, that were evident. These codes were organized into

six categories. The following key phrases were derived from each data source:

Table 2

Key Phrases Interview

Key Phrases Interview

- Influence
    - Mother came away so confident
    - Shaped by mother and friends
    - Older brother
    - Family
    - Parents
    - My parents and other siblings
    - My brother and sister
    - My parents

- Expectations
    - Make new friends
    - Many dates
    - Bonding experience
    - Camaraderie

- o Making friends
- o Giant summer camp
- o Friend groups
- o Deep friendships
- o Best friends

- Expectation
    - o Be my own person
    - o Be an adult
    - o Grow independently from family
    - o Opportunity to reinvent myself
    - o Personal development
    - o Be on my own
    - o Not an extension of my parents
    - o Grow me as an adult
    - o Did not hide behind my parents
    - o Life became my own
    - o Branch out
    - o Felt like a big kid
    - o Independence
    - o Do what I wanted to do

- Social Development
    - o Trial and error
    - o Growing pains
    - o Watching people
    - o Roommate
    - o Ability to talk to all ages

- Self-motivation
    - o Self-motivated
    - o Responsible
    - o Drive to learn
    - o Drive to do well
    - o Determined
    - o Focused
    - o Independent learner

- Academic Development
    - o Formal writing
    - o Listening to lectures
    - o Taking notes
    - o Test taking skills

- Academic language
- Teaching styles

Table 3

Key Phrases Letters

Key Phrases Letters

- Expectation
  - Independence
  - Living on my own

- Strengths
  - Flexibility
  - Independent study

- Weaknesses

- Self-discipline
  - Scheduling
  - Lectures

- Note taking

Table 4

Key Phrases Focus Group

Key Phrases Focus Group

- Social Concerns
  - Lacked multi-cultural understanding
  - Inability to balance academic and social
  - Establish identity

- Social Strengths
  - o Discipline
  - o Flexibility
  - o Patience
  - o Getting along with many age groups

- Academic challenges
  - o Lecture
  - o Research papers
  - o Note taking
  - o Distractions

- Academic strengths
  - o Well read
  - o Self-taught
  - o Focus on grammar and language
  - o Self-motivated
  - o Love of learning

These key phrases from each of the data sources were reviewed and combined into one list to develop a list of codes. Codes from the three data sources were combined and organized into six categories.

Table 5

Codes

Interview, Letter, and Focus Group Coding

Themes and Codes

- Theme: Influence of Family
  - o Mother came away so confident
  - o Shaped by mother and friends
  - o Older brother
  - o Family
  - o Parents
  - o My parents and other siblings
  - o My brother and sister

- o My parents

- Theme: Friendship
    - o Make new friends
    - o Many dates
    - o Bonding experience
    - o Camaraderie
    - o Making friends
    - o Giant summer camp
    - o Friend groups
    - o Deep friendships
    - o Best friends

- Theme: Independence
    - o Be my own person
    - o Be an adult
    - o Grow independently from family
    - o Opportunity to reinvent myself
    - o Personal development
    - o Be on my own
    - o Not an extension of my parents
    - o Grow me as an adult
    - o Did not hide behind my parents
    - o Life became my own
    - o Branch out
    - o Felt like a big kid
    - o Independence
    - o Do what I wanted to do

- Theme: Social Development
    - o Trial and error
    - o Growing pains
    - o Watching people
    - o Roommate
    - o Ability to talk to all ages

- Theme: Self-motivation
    - o Self-motivated
    - o Responsible
    - o Drive to learn
    - o Drive to do well

- o Determined
- o Focused
- o Independent learner

- • Theme: Academic Development
  - o Formal writing
  - o Listening to lectures
  - o Taking notes
  - o Test taking skills
  - o Academic language
  - o Teaching styles

Theme Development

There were six main themes that emerged during data analysis. Each theme was expressed by most or all of the participants throughout the study and was evident in individual interviews, the letters, and the focus group. The participants spoke of the influence of family, friendship, independence, social development, self-motivation, and academic development. Themes were ordered as they corresponded to the research questions.

Influence of family. In the individual interview the participants were asked, "How were your college expectations shaped?" Eight of the participants responded that family influenced their expectations about college. Three participants indicated that parents "helped shape" their college expectations. Two indicated their mother "was the influencing factor" with one of them stating that her mother had attended college and "came away so confident" that she wanted to be like her. Siblings also influenced the expectations of three participants. One participant stated that college was "something that they wanted me to achieve" in reference to her parents.

Throughout the interviews, it was evident that family was important to the participants. This was evidenced by Bill's reference to his parents: "My mom gave me some positive feedback when it came to college." He went on to say, "My mom and my sister, they really

encouraged me because they helped me to understand that getting a college education will just help open different doors for job opportunities." In reference to his parents, John said that "They were very open about what I was good at even though I may not have felt that I was. In doing that, it helped kind of shape, kind of direct where and what I might want to do." In the focus group, Mary stated, "I'm the baby in my family so I had the preparations of what my older siblings knew college to be as I went into college."

The families of these participants had a great impact on shaping their college expectations. The influence was not limited to only parents but siblings also were an influencing force. Being able to watch older siblings as they went through the college experience caused ideas and opinions to be shaped for these participants.

Friendship. Data sources indicated that friendship was a common theme in the college experiences of the homeschool participants as the concept of making new friends was prevalent throughout the data gathering process. This was evidenced in the individual interviews as participants used phrases such as bonding, comradery, making friends, and referring to new friends as they discussed friendship relationships. Members of the focus group referred to making friends and friend groups. It was through the letters, that the value of friendship was expressed most distinctly as every participant made a reference to friendship. Participants wrote about making new friends and finding a good set of friends with Mary referring to growing deep friendships. Julie described balancing study time with making new friends. In her letter, Milly described making her "first best friend" while in college. Jane wrote about friends as a "huge blessing." In his letter Chris wrote, "I met a lot of good people, a few bad people, and a few amazing people that I still talk to today. Those friendships and experiences are one of the things

that made college so valuable to me." It is clear that developing friendships was an important part of the college experience for the participants.

Independence. The third theme to emerge in the college experiences of the homeschool participants was independence. Seven of the ten participants made at least one reference to independence throughout the study. When asked, "Before you began college, what were your expectations about college life?" Mary stated that she could "be an adult" while Susan said she could "be my own person, finally." The theme of independence continued as participants were asked, "What did you hope to get out of college?" Their replies included statements about independence and being on their own. John stated that he hoped to "grow independently from family" and he hoped college would be an "opportunity to reinvent myself." Mark stated that he wanted to be on his own and went on to say that he hoped to not "be an extension of my parents." The letters gave further evidence of the concept of independence. Ann described college as a time to "grow and branch out from your parents." During the focus group, Mary described college as a time to "establish an identity." Jane wrote that, "Mom and Dad will no longer have their eyes watching you and checking over your work, so your success will be measured by your ability to motivate yourself." For the seven participants who discussed independence, they expressed the expectation and process of growing as an individual and developing their own identity.

Social development. Data gathered concerning the college experiences of the homeschool participants indicated three participants did not feel homeschooling prepared them socially for college. Chris, Mark, and Mary stated they felt socially unprepared for college life. Mark said, "once I got out of my bubble then I lost all sense of responsibility." He went on to say that he had to learn to balance social life and his academic responsibilities. These three

participants seemed to have different opinions about social development of homeschool individuals than the other participants.

Other participants felt they were socially prepared for college. There seemed to be a consensus that this preparation was largely due to learning to be able to talk to and get along with people from all age groups. Julie said this helped her "feel comfortable in her own skin." Mary said she felt more flexibility because of the ability to talk with all age groups. She felt she had an advantage of being able to "talk with people who are in different areas of life than you, who are on different thinking levels, different cognitive levels than you." This was also indicated with the general feeling of being able to approach and talk with professors. Participants expressed the ability to approach professors without fear or intimidation. Another advantage that was attributed to being able to talk with all age groups was the ability to feel empathy for others. This empathy applied to those who were on a higher level of thinking or those who may have been on a lower level, even those with mental disabilities. Milly stated that their ability caused them to "love them just the same" no matter what their level was.

While most participants felt they were socially prepared for college, they still expressed some areas that they felt uncomfortable or unprepared. These areas included feeling naïve and not being prepared for pettiness or conflict between individuals. Multiple participants felt they were unprepared for understanding people from other cultures. This first surfaced when Milly was asked, "In what ways did homeschooling help not prepare you socially for college?" She responded, "A lot of things I didn't know culturally." Milly went on to explain that she was culturally behind and did not know a lot of terms, she felt that she was different from everybody else. During the focus group discussion, John identified his greatest social fear or weakness as "multi-cultural understanding." Mark expanded on this when he explained that upon entering

college he might have felt that his opinion was the only one. He explained that he had to adjust and learn from others. Mark said, "I learned that instead of arguments for arguments sake, it was more beneficial for me to learn things." Julie learned that, "our opinion, while it may be very well and good for us, may not be the end all be all." It appeared these former homeschool students learned the importance of opening up to learn from other's ideas and opinions as a means to broaden their horizons.

Self-motivation. Self-motivation surfaced as another theme in the college experiences of the homeschool participants. Through the individual interviews and focus group this theme became evident by the participant's statements. Ann and Chris referred to being self-motivated while Jane referred to her "drive to do well." Julie described herself as determined while Mary said she had developed a "love of learning for learning sake." When Mary referred to "being able to teach yourself" John added that homeschooling allowed him to be able to "connect the dots between vague topics or subjects." In reference to expectations, Julie stated that as a homeschooler you had to be "motivated to meet those goals." As the participants discussed their homeschool backgrounds and how they had been prepared to attend college, the concept of self-motivation became more evident as discussions moved toward the ideas of being responsible for academic work, determination, and growing as an independent learner.

Academic development. The theme of academic development was apparent throughout the study of the college experiences of the homeschool participants but it was more evident through the individual interviews and focus group than through the letters. Academic development included areas like learning academic language, adjusting to teaching styles (self-taught compared to lecture), and learning to take notes. Another area that emerged was scheduling. Participants said they were not used to having a set a schedule for the academic day.

They conveyed that while being homeschooled, they usually finished their work on their own schedule with little or no time restraints and then could do something other than school. It seemed that adjusting to a set schedule for classes and having time restraints and due dates was a challenge for them. Formal writing and research papers were also a challenge for participants. Only one participant, Mark, felt writing research papers was a task he felt comfortable and confident in doing. Julie described "paper writing" as her greatest academic difference between homeschool and college. She said she could write but she had never learned formatting and citations. Ann expressed the same sentiment and said she wished she had taken a formal writing class to be more prepared for college.

Another area that was discussed was the distractions that were present in the classroom. As participants described the difficulties of shifting from homeschool to an actual classroom setting, they described other students as being a distraction. John said, "People asking dumb questions." Milly said, "It's really the peers that are the annoying part." Julie described the shift saying in homeschool you have your siblings that might distract you but you could go somewhere else to do your work. Participants described going other places (outside, the bedroom, etc.) to do schoolwork, but in the classroom you could not escape the other students. It appeared they were challenged to focus their attention on the professor rather than other students in the classroom. This was quite different for them because they could not escape from the distraction to finish the lesson as they could in homeschool.

Research Question Responses

This study on homeschool students who have persisted in college and graduated was designed to answer one central research question and three sub-questions. The central research sought to more clearly understand the unique experiences of homeschool students who have

persisted and graduated from college. The themes previously described were the primary sources utilized to answer each of the questions.

Central question: What are the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college? The participants in this study described their experiences as homeschool students who persisted in college. The first theme that emerged was the influence of family. The dominant influences in the participants' college decisions were family members. The theme of independence emerged concerning college expectations and was extensive, occurring throughout the individual interviews and focal group discussion. Participants expressed their desire to be their own person, do what they wanted to do, be own their own, have an opportunity to reinvent myself, and grow independently from their family. Themes that centered on social development included friendship and social development. Participants expressed their desire to make new friends with deep friendships, camaraderie, and bonding experiences. Although most participants felt socially prepared to attend college, they expressed fear and some anxiety about the new experience. They stated they learned social skills through trial and error, watching their peers, and learning from their mistakes. The final group of themes centered around academics. Participants expressed they felt self-motivated with a desire to learn and do well. As homeschool students, they felt they had become academically responsible, determined and focused. They expressed they had definite challenges as they moved from homeschooling to the classroom. These challenges included a weakness in the area of formal writing, inability to take notes, lack of knowledge of academic language and various teaching styles.

Textural description. Moustakas (1994) described the textural description as, "An integration, descriptively, of the invariant textural constituents and themes of each research participant" (p. 180). He goes on to describe the composite textural description as, "An

integration of all of the individual textural descriptions into a group or universal textural description" (p. 180). Based on this, the themes were used to create a composite textural description of the lived experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college. The composite textural description is the participants in this study were socially prepared for college because they had developed the ability to talk to people of all ages and were academically prepared because of being self-motivated. They were also greatly influenced by their families as they were homeschooled. Their families had created environments and opportunities for them to be exposed to many individuals including various age groups, people with different cognitive abilities, and people with varied interests. Much of their education had been designed around a curriculum that encouraged or depended upon self-paced activities that helped develop motivation to do well.

Structural description. The textural description and the themes were used to develop a composite structural description. Moustakas (1994) wrote, "The individual structural description provides a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience, the themes, and qualities that account for 'how' feelings and thoughts connected" (p. 135). These structures led to the composite structural description. The structural description here is based on the participants' love of family and of learning. The participants' love of these two things appeared to be the basis of their ability to persist in college.

Synthesis of the textural and structural. Moustakas (1994) described the synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions as a process to, "Intuitively-reflectively integrate the composite textural and composite structural descriptions to develop a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience" (p. 181). To answer the central question, "What are the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college?" the following conclusion

was drawn. These homeschool participants were able to persist in college because of the love of their families and their love of learning. These participants were all graduates from a faith-based college and expressed their goal and desire to follow God's will for their lives. With this as one of their goals, they also had the desire to honor their families by doing well in their education. Their love of learning led to their desire to grow socially, academically, and spiritually as an individual. This love of learning helped them to be determined and focused learners, even though they admitted to times when they had to refocus their attention back to the goal of completing their degree. Moving from homeschooling to the classroom was both exciting and frightening for the participants but they transitioned and learned new skills and strategies to help become better students. The heart of the experience of these homeschool students who persisted in college was their love of their families and their love of learning.

Sub-Question 1: How are college expectations shaped for homeschool students? The participants in this study of homeschool student who persisted in college described the influence for their college expectations as coming from their families and emerged in the first theme, influence of family. The responses included parents and siblings as being the primary influencers in shaping their expectations. Eight participants expressed the influence of one or more family members who were strong influences in their expectations about college life. In the second theme, friendship, they also expressed the expectation of having new friends and developing deep relationships and friendships as they began their college experience and was described in the third theme of independence. Another concept that was prevalent as participants discussed their expectations was independence. Ann said she could "do what I wanted for the rest of my life." Susan wanted to develop independence and Mary wanted to "be an adult." These phrases, along with those previously discussed, demonstrated a prevalent desire to develop as an

individual who can be on their own. When asked how their college expectation measured against their college experience, the feeling was that the experience exceeded the expectation.

The expectations these participants had upon entering college were focused on developing friendships and independence. With the expectations largely being influenced by family, primarily parents and siblings, the data indicates the actual experience met or exceeded the expectation.

Sub-Question 2: What experiences contributed to the social integration of homeschool college students? In this study of homeschool students who persisted in college, most of the participants felt they were socially well prepared for college life while three of them did not feel well prepared. Those who felt prepared reported the ability to "talk to people of all ages" as a great benefit as they adjusted to college life. Others stated their parents had immersed them in various social activities with many opportunities for social interaction as they were in their elementary and high school years. The three participants who did not feel socially prepared reported various descriptions of isolation as they attended elementary and high school. Chris stated that in his home "socializing is downsized in homeschooling" and that he did not talk to a lot of people. Mary said, "we moved and there were no other homeschool families in our community and our school board wouldn't allow us to participate in sports or theater or anything. I wasn't around a lot of people until I came to college." Mark expressed his lack of social preparedness this way:

I'm not 100% sure that homeschooling did prepare me for social life in college. When you're homeschooling, it is normally you and your mom, or you and a video, or you and your other sibling. That was really the only regularly scheduled relationships that I had, and I didn't mind having that. I was an introverted person and I think a lot of the reason I

stayed introverted until being 18 years old was that I was homeschooled at home, and

that's all I really wanted to do.

While most of the participants felt they were socially prepared for college, all of them felt they

still had to learn more about the social side of college life. The theme of social development

identified this concept. Each one stated they were involved in some kind of extracurricular

activity while in college and these activities were helpful. Yet, participants talked about having

to learn the "unwritten rules" of social life by the processes of "trial and error" or "observe and

report." They talked about watching upper classmen and observing what other students did in

various situations. The mistakes they made helped them learn and grow into more socially

confident individuals.

Sub-Question 3: What experiences contributed to the academic integration of

homeschool college students? When discussing academics, the theme of self-motivation

emerged. The homeschool students in this study referred to themselves as determined, focused,

and self-motivated with a love for learning. The final theme, academic development, emerged as

participants discussed the challenges they faced when entering college. Although they felt well

prepared academically for college, they admitted to having to learn to function in the classroom

setting. Some skills they admitted to having to learn were organization, study skills, time

management, and self-discipline. They described having to learn the academic language of the

classroom, note taking skills, and adjusting to learning from lectures. Nine of the participants felt

they lacked the skills to do research and write academic papers. Another area that was

challenging for the participants was adjusting to being in class with others. They felt their peers

were definite distractions in the classroom. While they did have to adjust and learn to

accommodate for these weaknesses, they felt their homeschool background prepared them well

because of the one-on-one hands on learning experiences they had. They stated the strong language arts curriculum had helped them develop critical thinking skills and that they had strong basic skills with a good foundation in the content areas.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the analysis of this study. Data was gathered from individual interviews, analysis of participant letters, and focus group discussion. There was a total of 10 participants with five focus group members. After data was gathered, Moustakas' (1994) design was used for analysis of results. Themes were identified and descriptions were included for each theme. The themes included: influence of family, friendship, independence, social development, self-motivation, and academic development. In order to answer the research questions, a composite textural description, composite structural description, and textural and composite synthesis was developed leading to the focus of the phenomenon being the homeschool students' love of their families and their love of learning.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college at a faith-based institution in the Southeastern United States. It is noted that there is little research focused on homeschool students' persistence in college (CRHE, 2017; Ray, 2017; Snyder, 2013) and a lack of research on young adult homeschoolers (Riley, 2015). This study will help fill the gap in literature for this group of students. This chapter presents the researcher's findings and interpretations of the phenomenon. Information is presented in six parts, beginning with this overview, followed by a summary of the findings. Following this will be a discussion of the findings in relation to current literature and theory. The fourth section will present the implications of the study, including the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. The delimitations and limitations will be discussed next, followed by the recommendations for future research. The chapter will end with a summary of the findings.

Summary of Findings

Using Moustakas' (1994) design for analysis of transcendental phenomenological research, six main themes emerged. These themes were influence of family, friendship, independence, social development, self-motivation, and academic development. These themes were used to answer each of the study's research questions, which will be discussed here.

Central Question

What are the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college? In order to answer this question, the themes were reviewed and textural and structural descriptions were developed. These were used to create the synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions.

This synthesis is the essence of the study. The essence of the lived experience of homeschool students who persisted in college was focused on their love of their families and their love of learning.

Sub-Question 1

How are college expectations shaped for homeschool students? The participants in this study described family as an influencing factor in shaping their college expectations. Participants expressed that parents were the greatest influencers, but also affirmed the importance their siblings' influence. There was also an expectation of developing deep friendships, along with becoming independent. Each participant expressed that their college experience exceeded their expectations. The expectations of these participants were shaped by their families and were focused on developing friendships and independence.

Sub-Question 2

What experiences contributed to the social integration of homeschool college students? These homeschool students who persisted in college expressed mixed feelings about being socially prepared for college. Seven of the participants felt socially prepared for college stating that their parents had immersed them in many social activities and they had developed the ability to talk to people of all ages. The three who did not feel socially prepared for college felt isolated during their elementary and high school years with little interaction with students in their age groups. All the participants felt they had to learn more about the social side of college life. They reported this was done through a trial and error process. Social integration in college was accomplished by watching upper classmen and becoming involved in extracurricular activities.

Sub-Question 3

What experiences contributed to the academic integration of homeschool college students? The homeschool students in this study felt well prepared academically for college but admitted to having to function in the classroom setting. The most challenging skills they had to learn were organization, study skills, time management, and self-discipline. They also had to learn to work in the classroom with other students who could be distracting. Their comments indicated they felt well prepared because of the one-on-one hands on learning experiences they had during homeschool. The participants reported their background in a strong language arts curriculum, and critical thinking skills helped prepare them well for college.

Discussion

This study of homeschool students who persisted and graduated from college contributed to the empirical and theoretical literature. Empirically, the literature is expanded by describing the persistence and life outcomes of homeschoolers, expanding the demographics of homeschooler studies, the social and academic preparedness of homeschoolers who persisted in college and the strength of family ties for these participants. Theoretically, research examines the pre-college experiences of the homeschool students (academic and social), the importance of learning new social skills, development of friendships, and academic preparedness. The findings contribute to the literature with a focus on the essence of the lived experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college with a focus on their love for their families and their love for learning.

Empirical

Empirically, there is little literature focused on homeschool students who have persisted and graduated from college (CRHE, 2017; Ray, 2017; Snyder, 2013). There is also little

literature on young adult homeschoolers and their life outcomes (Riley, 2015). Kranzow (2013) noted the lack of studies on the topic of homeschool college students' experiences. Shields (2015) suggested this kind of information would be beneficial to college administrators and allow them to better prepare to meet the needs of this part of the college population. This study helps fill the gap in the literature by describing the lived experiences of homeschool students who persisted and graduated from college. The study describes the experiences of 10 homeschool students who persisted and graduated from college. It tells about their social and academic life on a college campus. Participants told about their good and bad experiences allowing college administrators to have a base of information to help prepare for homeschool students.

Firmin et al. (2019) recommended that research expand to include a larger demographic from various areas of the country. Firmin et al. conducted a study with only Caucasian participants and recommended expanding the participants to include individuals from other races and ethnicities. Snyder's (2013) study focused on homeschool students at a Catholic institution. He reported that research on homeschool students in college mainly focused on those from public or private institutions with his being one of the few to concentrate on those attending religious institutions. Snyder emphasized the importance of expanding research to include students from other religious institutions. This study expanded the demographics because the participants for this study were graduates from a small religious, non-Catholic college in northwest Florida who had self-reported as homeschool students. Previous studies have also cited problems with sampling issues that include the use of volunteer populations who may not be representative of the population (CRHE, 2017). This study sought to expand the research. Although the sample is small with only 10 participants, they are representative of each division

at Florida Christian College. The effort was made to expand the literature and make the results more easily transferable for future study and use.

This study helps extend the literature concerning homeschool students' social preparedness for college. Kranzow (2013) found that homeschool graduates who had entered college did not feel socially isolated from their peers. Davis (2011) went on to say homeschool students were connected to others through homeschool communities and cooperative groups that exposed them to a wide variety of people. These researchers indicated homeschool students are well prepared for the social side of college life. This current study found that not all homeschool students felt connected to others as they attended school, causing them to feel socially unprepared for college. While most of the participants felt socially well prepared for college, three of the participants felt they had limited exposure to their peers as they attended elementary and high school. These three participants expressed feeling isolated due to the lack of experiences with people their own age. This lack of communication and interaction with peers caused them to feel more withdrawn and timider as they began college. The remaining seven participants expressed that they had been immersed in activities during their elementary and high school years. This social immersion helped prepare them socially for college. They felt they were comfortable upon entering college and could manage college social life.

Self-motivation has been listed as a trait that is common among homeschool students (Hamilton, 2018; Larabell, 2015; Noble, 2014). This study supports and expands this research as the theme of self-motivation emerged. Along with self-motivation, the participants in this study also expressed being responsible, determined, and focused in their academic work. They stated that because of the homeschool format they had become independent learners. Participants also expressed a drive to do well and a love of learning because of their homeschool backgrounds.

This research indicates the homeschool student who attends college comes equipped with the strengths of being self-motivated and responsible in their academic efforts making them a stronger student who is determined to do well and complete their courses of study.

Hamilton (2018) and Larabell (2015) reported that homeschool students had good time management skills and effective study habits. The participants in this study reported they had difficulty in both of these areas. As homeschoolers, they had been allowed to work on their assignments with no time restraints or due dates. This caused them to have difficulty as they moved into the college setting where there were due dates and time limits in place. They also reported they had to develop study habits that were aligned with being in the college classroom. These habits had to align with a lecture type setting and working with other students in the classroom. By contrast, the participants felt they had developed strong critical thinking and problem-solving skills because of being independent learners during their homeschool years. This aligns with the studies of Hamilton (2018), Larabell (2015), and Noble (2014).

Another strength of homeschool students has been their ability to communicate well with others (Hamilton, 2018; Larabell, 2015). Studies indicate homeschool students communicate well with people from all walks of life and of any age group. This study supports this research as participants claimed this as one of their greatest strengths. They felt their exposure to various age groups as they were participating in homeschool allowed they to develop communication skills beyond their peers from traditional schools.

Dobson (2000) indicated homeschool students created stronger family ties that led to solid family relationships. Firmin et al. (2019) also reported the strong family ties associated with homeschool education. This study supported these findings as participants discussed their love of family and the support system they had from their families. Participants described their

families as being an important part of their lives and having a strong influence in their lives. While most participants noted the strong influence of their parents, the importance of siblings and other family members also was evident.

Theoretical

This study is grounded in Tinto's (1993) student integration model. This model focuses on students becoming socially and academically integrated into campus life as a means to increase their likelihood to remain in college and complete their degrees. Stein (2017) proposed that Tinto's model included a series of events that impact student retention in college. One of the events Stein (2017) referred to was a students' pre-college experiences. The participants in this study described both their social and academic experiences before entering college. Seven out of ten of the participants felt they were socially well prepared for college based on the experiences they had during their elementary and high school years of homeschooling. They attributed this to their parents creating situations for them to learn to talk to individuals of all ages. This ability to comfortably talk to people allowed them the flexibility to talk with all age groups, the feeling they could easily approach professors, and the ability to feel empathy for others. This aligns with the work of Hamilton (2018) and Larabell (2015) who reported that homeschool students had the ability to communicate well with people from all walks of life and of any age. These clear communication skills help lead to the success of homeschool students. The remaining three participants felt their lack of socialization prior to entering college impeded their initial integration into college social life. These three participants expressed that their parents had shielded them and separated them from other people. They felt that upon entering college they were behind in social development making the transition to college life more challenging.

Participants in this study also voiced that there were social skills they all felt uncomfortable with. These skills included feeling naïve and uncomfortable with people from other cultures. Participants reported they had to learn to be open to other people's ideas and opinions as a means to broaden their own horizons. This included learning to listen and pay attention to others rather than arguing and discounting the importance of someone else's opinion. Learning the "unwritten rules" of college life was also a challenge for the participants. These skills were learned by watching other students to see how they reacted to situations. Participants reported that along with observation, they used a system of trial and error to learn from their own mistakes. This was a way of learning social cues and habits that made the homeschoolers more comfortable with various social settings.

The value of social integration was also evident as participants discussed development of new friendships. This concept was evident in the individual interviews, focus group, and letters. participants described making friends by using phrases like bonding, comradery, and developing friend groups. They also described making "best friends" and "lasting friendships." The value of friendship was expressed as a common theme among the participants and was an important part of their college experience. The group agreed that social challenges were met through watching upper classmen and a trial and error process. They had to learn from their mistakes and grow socially.

Another aspect that Stein (2017) listed was the students' academic integration. These participants agreed that although they felt academically prepared to begin college, they had much to learn about college academic life. They were challenged with learning academic language, note taking, time management, and learning in the classroom environment. Scheduling was also a challenge for these homeschool students. While homeschooling, they could finish their work

on their own schedule with no due dates or time restraints. This was not the case in college where there were due dates and time limits in place.

Classroom distractions were also difficult for the homeschoolers. In the college classroom, the main distraction was fellow students. The participants expressed that in the homeschool setting distractions could be avoided by going to another setting (outside, another room, etc.). In the college setting, they were not able to move away from the other students to refocus their attention. The participants were bothered by classmates asking "dumb questions."

The results from this study aligned with Tinto's student integration theory as participants emphasized the importance of immersing themselves academically and socially into college life. Tinto's theory combined academic and social integration as aspects that help shape a student's decision to remain in college (Tinto, 1993). The evidence from this study supported this theory as participants expressed their experiences and challenges throughout their college life.

Implications

This study focused on the lived experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college and completed their degrees. Ten participants explained their experiences by describing their college expectations along with their social and academic experiences as a gap in the previous literature was addressed. As the data was analyzed, it was discovered that the essence of the study was based on the participants' love of their families and their love of learning. The implications of this study are important theoretically, empirically, and practically.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework for this study centered around Tinto's student integration model (Tinto, 2012). This framework is based on the assertion that students who are academically and socially engaged are more likely to complete their college degrees. This

study's population was limited to homeschool students who had graduated from college within the last five years. The results of this study indicated that this theory was evidenced in the experiences of these former homeschool students who had completed college. Both the academic and social engagement were described as participants spoke of their college experiences.

Academically, this study adhered to Tinto's framework as participants described the challenges of formal writing, listening to lectures, taking notes, test taking, academic language and various teaching styles. Participants felt challenged by these skills, but through determination and being focused were able to master the necessary competencies to be successful in their academic performance. It is recommended that colleges incorporate reviews of these skills into student success courses that are required for incoming freshmen. Review of taking notes and test taking skills could be reviewed and practiced. Participants described themselves as being self-motivated with a drive to learn and do well. They also described having a love of learning that was fostered through their homeschool experience. Participants attributed their self-motivation and drive to learn as also being instilled through the homeschooling process. Tinto's theory contends that students enter college with a variety of characteristics, including family backgrounds, educational experiences, skills, and values (Mannan, 2007). With this concept in mind, the traits of self-motivation, determination, and a drive and love of learning fall into the list of characteristics they entered into college with that helped equip them to be successful. Along with fostering self-motivation and love of learning, it is recommended that homeschool parents include formal writing and research skills into their homeschool curriculum. It is also recommended they introduce their students to learning from the lecture format and also note-taking skills.

Tinto (2012) also expressed the importance of being immersed in social relationships. Each participant stated they had been involved in some kind of extracurricular activities during their college years. Along with this, they described making new friends and developing deep relationships that continued after their college graduation. While they depicted the development of good friendships, they also admitted that there was a growing and developmental time upon entering college. There were social skills that needed to be learned and mastered and these were learned by watching other people and learning from their own mistakes. Each participant expressed the importance of their social relationships as a means to help them continue through their college years. It is recommended that colleges provide a variety of activities and events to engage incoming students. These activities would be a means to encourage building relationships and developing friendships.

Empirical Implications

This study focusing on homeschool students who persisted and completed college adds to the empirical literature. Following Riley's (2015) recommendation to expand the literature on young adult homeschoolers and their life outcomes proved to give voice to the participants in this study. Each of the participants had successfully completed their college degree and moved into adulthood. They had overcome the struggles of social and academic challenges and adjusted and managed to advance through their college years. The development of previously learned and newly learned skills helped them grow and overcome the challenges they faced.

Firmin et al. (2019) noted that most homeschool research relates to reasons for homeschooling or comparisons of the academic performance of homeschool and non-homeschoolers. This current study expands the literature on homeschoolers to focus on the lived experiences of homeschool students who have attended, persisted, and graduated from college.

This research delves into the expectations of these participants along with their social and academic experiences. The descriptions of the social and academic challenges these students faced could be beneficial to colleges as they seek to support students and maintain enrollment. It is recommended that colleges review the social and academic challenges facing these students and develop ways to help students overcome the challenges and increase student retention. Strategies might include encouraging participation in intramural sports, exercise classes, drama clubs, music ensembles, or volunteer work to make new acquaintances, develop new friendships, and overcome social challenges. Classes designed for incoming freshmen might include teaching study methods and time management skills to help overcome academic challenges. Tutoring services could also promote academic success.

CRHE (2017) and Firmin et al. (2019) expressed the need to have more representative groups of homeschoolers included in future studies. This study focuses on students at a faith-based institution in northwest Florida and expands the literature to another geographical area of the country. Snyder's (2013) advice of expanding the literature to include more than homeschool students who are attending Catholic schools is also noted. These factors were considered in this study that included self-identified homeschoolers from a faith-based institution in northwest Florida. This opened the door for the study to broaden the geographical boundaries of previous studies. The study also included students from each of the college's divisions of study. It is recommended that colleges review the findings to determine if the reported academic challenges are consistent across divisions of study. This would offer insight into precise ways to help students overcome challenges.

Practical Implications

The practicality of this study may offer the greatest benefit. Colleges are facing an increase in the number of students who leave before completing their degrees (Bers & Schuetz, 2014; Wilson, 2016). Although community colleges report an increase in the number of students who enroll, they report that 50% of students either drop out or stop taking classes during the first year (Collett, 2013). Along with these numbers, four-year colleges report 28% of first-year students do not return for a second year (Wilson, 2016). The challenge for colleges and universities is to consider not only why students leave but why they stay in college. Statistics indicate that homeschool students have a higher college graduation rate than public school students so understanding why these students remain in college can be beneficial to all higher educational institutions (Cogan, 2010).

The lived experiences of these homeschool college students who have persisted in college can help colleges make decisions about steps to take to increase retention. The participants in this study described the importance of being involved in extracurricular activities, developing strong friendships, and growing in their independence as being factors that helped them develop socially. Three of the ten participants in this study felt they were not prepared socially for college life because of a lack of interaction with people and events during their homeschool years. The remaining seven participants described their homeschool years as a time of being involved in activities with their peers and people of all ages. These activities ranged from dance, sports, and other community activities. It is recommended that parents of homeschoolers consider the results of this study as they plan their homeschool children's events. It is also recommended that homeschool parents immerse their children in activities that offer the opportunity to socialize with their peers on a regular basis. It is evident that the time spent with

other people and being exposed to a variety of situations helped prepare homeschool students for their college experience.

On the academic side, participants described their lack of mastery of skills such as writing papers, academic language, note taking, time management, and organizational skills. Participants admitted they had to learn these skills and were challenged as they began their college coursework. It is recommended that homeschool parents take note of the challenges these participants faced and adjust their curriculum to prepare and support their students throughout their high school years. It is also recommended that colleges offer support resources to help students develop and improve these skills. Labs that offer tutoring sessions could benefit students and help develop skills to ensure student success.

It is possible that these findings would apply to all incoming college freshmen. In regards to these areas, there may be little or no difference between college students with homeschool and non-homeschool backgrounds. Support resources could help new college students feel more prepared and help ensure future success causing them to remain in school.

Delimitations and Limitations

This is a qualitative study using a transcendental phenomenological design so certain delimitations were necessary. The goal of collecting data in the natural setting and interviewing participants to describe a lived experience led to the qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological design was used because of the desire to present a common experience of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2007). The transcendental approach was used because the goal was to simply tell the participants' stories while setting aside judgements and preconceived ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With the focus being on the study of homeschool students who had persisted in college, participant selection was delimited to only

those who had experienced the phenomenon. Thus, the study was delimited to homeschool students who had self-identified as homeschoolers on their college application and had graduated from college within the last five years. The study was also delimited to 10 participants who had graduated from Florida Christian College. This site was chosen because I was employed at the college so it was a convenient site to gather data. The sample size of 10 participants was chosen because it was within the suggested range (Polkinghorne, 1989) and met the requirements for Liberty University.

There were three primary limitations in this study. The sample size of 10 is not big enough to be representative of homeschool students who have persisted and graduated from college. Another limitation was the lack of ethnic diversity; the participants were 80% White and 20% Black. The lack of more equitable and diverse ethnicity would offer a better perspective of the experiences of this group of students. A final limitation was my ability to effectively act as the researcher. Following Moustakas' (1994) process of epoche, I attempted to remove all preconceived notions and personal bias.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study offered valuable insight into the experiences of homeschoolers that remain in college and complete their degrees but additional research is needed. For example, future studies should include larger sample groups with more ethnic diversity. The participants in this study were made up of eight White and two Black members. These demographics are representative of the study site's enrollment according to the site's enrollment summary (Enrollment Summary, 2017). A future study that included a wider ethnic diversity could lead to more generalization of the findings. Expanding the studies to include other geographical areas would also offer a more

complete picture of the experiences of the participants. This could also lead to a better generalization of the findings.

The participants in this study indicated they felt academically prepared for college based on their homeschool background, but they still had specific academic areas that were difficult for them. These areas included writing papers, learning academic language, note taking, time management, and learning in the classroom environment. Future studies should seek to determine if these academic areas are consistently challenging or difficult for homeschool students. This could be beneficial to homeschool parents as they seek to plan effective curriculum for their students. This could also benefit colleges as they plan success strategies for incoming freshmen.

Additionally, future research is needed to replicate this study with students from public and private school backgrounds. A comparison of data between the more traditionally educated students with the homeschool students would show if these findings are unique to homeschool students or if there would be similar results.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college at a faith-based institution in the Southeastern United States. This study was needed because there is little research focused on homeschool students' persistence in college and the need to expand the literature on young adult homeschoolers and their life outcomes. One central question and three sub-questions were designed to investigate the gap in research literature. The central question was: What are the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college? The three sub-questions were: How are college expectations shaped for homeschool students? What experiences contributed to

the social integration of homeschool college students? What experiences contributed to the academic integration of homeschool college students? Triangulation of data was used to answer these questions. The data collection methods were individual interviews, participant letters, and a focus group. Data was gathered from 10 homeschool students who had persisted and graduated from a faith-based college in the southeastern United States. Six themes emerged from the data. These themes were: (a) influence of family, (b) friendship, (c) independence, (d) self-motivation, (e) social development, and (f) academic development. From these themes the essence of the phenomenon emerged and focused on their love of their families and their love of learning.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 25, 2020

Venda Kaye Johnson
IRB Exemption 4099.022520: A Phenomenological Study: The Experiences of Homeschool
Students Who Persisted in College at a Faith-Based Institution

Dear Venda Kaye Johnson,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance
with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration
(FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you
may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved
application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in
which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

> (2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude,
> achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual
> or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
>
>> (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of
>> the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects,
>> and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any
changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued
exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a
new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether
possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at
irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM
A Phenomenological Study: The Experiences of Homeschool Students Who Persisted in College
at a Faith-Based Institution
Venda Kaye Johnson
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on homeschool students who have persisted in college. You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 years of age or older, were a former homeschool student who persisted, and graduated from a faith-based college within the past five years. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Venda Kaye Johnson, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Take part in an individual interview. This interview should take approximately 45 minutes and will be audio recorded.
2. Write a letter to a high school aged homeschool student who is planning to attend college. The letter should include (1) a description of your own college experience as a homeschooler who has persisted in college, (2) a description of your own transition to college life, (3) advice about the social and academic transition from homeschool to college life. It should take approximately 45 minutes to write the letter.
3. If selected, participate in a focus group. This focus group should take approximately 45 minutes and will be audio recorded.
4. Participate in member checking for accuracy of reporting. This should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

* The researcher will randomly select 5 participants to participate in the focus group.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include gaining insight into steps that can be taken to increase graduation rates for other college students. This could be beneficial for colleges of all sizes but particularly for small colleges who feel the impact of lowered student retention to a higher degree than larger institutions.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Participants will receive a $20 Walmart gift card.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Digital data will be stored on a password-protected computer for three years after the study. Other data will be stored in a locked cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all other data will be shredded.
- Interviews and the focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher and the professional transcriptionist will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Venda Kaye Johnson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ███████████████ and/or ███████████████ You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Sarah J. Pannone, at ███████████████

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Central Research Question: What are the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college?

Sub-Research Question 1: How are college expectations shaped for homeschool students?

Sub-Research Question 2: What experiences contributed to the social integration of homeschool college students?

Sub-Research Question 3: What experiences contributed to the academic integration of homeschool college students?

Interview Questions:

1. How were your college expectations shaped?

2. Before you began college, what were your expectations about college life?

3. What did you hope to get out of college?

4. How did your actual college experience measure against your college expectations?

5. Describe what it was like to leave your home and family and go off to college.

6. How did you learn about the "unwritten rules" of college social life?

7. Describe the extracurricular activities you were involved in.

8. Describe your dormitory life.

9. In what ways did homeschooling help prepare you socially for college?

10. In what ways did homeschooling not help prepare you socially for college?

11. Describe your first week in classes your freshman year.

12. What were some things or behaviors you had to learn to complete the first semester of academic work?

13. Describe the greatest academic difference between homeschool and college.

14. In what ways did homeschooling help prepare you academically for college?

15. In what ways did homeschooling not help prepare you academically for college?

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Central Research Question: What are the experiences of homeschool students who persisted in college?

Sub-Research Question 1: How are college expectations shaped for homeschool students?

Sub-Research Question 2: What experiences contributed to the social integration of homeschool college students?

Sub-Research Question 3: What experiences contributed to the academic integration of homeschool college students?

Focus Group Questions:

1. How realistic were your college expectations?

2. Discuss your greatest social fears or weaknesses as you began college.

3. Describe the social traits you learned or obtained through homeschooling that helped you persist in college.

4. What academic challenges did you have as you went from the homeschool setting to the college setting?

5. Describe your greatest academic strength as you began college.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW, LETTER, AND FOCUS GROUP CODING

Key Phrases Interview

Key Phrases Interview

- Influence
    - Mother came away so confident
    - Shaped by mother and friends
    - Older brother
    - Family
    - Parents
    - My parents and other siblings
    - My brother and sister
    - My parents

- Expectations
    - Make new friends
    - Many dates
    - Bonding experience
    - Camaraderie
    - Making friends
    - Giant summer camp
    - Friend groups
    - Deep friendships
    - Best friends

- Expectation
    - Be my own person
    - Be an adult
    - Grow independently from family
    - Opportunity to reinvent myself
    - Personal development
    - Be on my own
    - Not an extension of my parents
    - Grow me as an adult
    - Did not hide behind my parents
    - Life became my own
    - Branch out
    - Felt like a big kid
    - Independence
    - Do what I wanted to do

- Social Development

- o Trial and error
- o Growing pains
- o Watching people
- o Roommate
- o Ability to talk to all ages

- • Self-motivation
  - o Self-motivated
  - o Responsible
  - o Drive to learn
  - o Drive to do well
  - o Determined
  - o Focused
  - o Independent learner

- • Academic Development
  - o Formal writing
  - o Listening to lectures
  - o Taking notes
  - o Test taking skills
  - o Academic language
  - o Teaching styles

Key Phrases Letters

Key Phrases Letters

- • Expectation
  - o Independence
  - o Living on my own

- • Strengths
  - o Flexibility
  - o Independent study

- • Weaknesses

- • Self-discipline
  - o Scheduling
  - o Lectures

- Note taking

Key Phrases Focus Group

Key Phrases Focus Group

- Social Concerns
    - Lacked multi-cultural understanding
    - Inability to balance academic and social
    - Establish identity

- Social Strengths
    - Discipline
    - Flexibility
    - Patience
    - Getting along with many age groups

- Academic challenges
    - Lecture
    - Research papers
    - Note taking
    - Distractions

- Academic strengths
    - Well read
    - Self-taught
    - Focus on grammar and language
    - Self-motivated
    - Love of learning

Themes and Codes

- Theme: Influence of Family
    - Mother came away so confident

- o Shaped by mother and friends
- o Older brother
- o Family
- o Parents
- o My parents and other siblings
- o My brother and sister
- o My parents

- Theme: Friendship
  - o Make new friends
  - o Many dates
  - o Bonding experience
  - o Camaraderie
  - o Making friends
  - o Giant summer camp
  - o Friend groups
  - o Deep friendships
  - o Best friends

- Theme: Independence
  - o Be my own person
  - o Be an adult
  - o Grow independently from family
  - o Opportunity to reinvent myself
  - o Personal development
  - o Be on my own
  - o Not an extension of my parents
  - o Grow me as an adult
  - o Did not hide behind my parents
  - o Life became my own
  - o Branch out
  - o Felt like a big kid
  - o Independence
  - o Do what I wanted to do

- Theme: Social Development
  - o Trial and error
  - o Growing pains
  - o Watching people
  - o Roommate
  - o Ability to talk to all ages

- Theme: Self-motivation
  - Self-motivated
  - Responsible
  - Drive to learn
  - Drive to do well
  - Determined
  - Focused
  - Independent learner

- Theme: Academic Development
  - Formal writing
  - Listening to lectures
  - Taking notes
  - Test taking skills
  - Academic language
  - Teaching styles