THE LIVED EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN JUVENILE FACILITIES: PERSPECTIVES

OF FORMER JUVENILE OFFENDERS

by

Deneil D. Christian

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of earning a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT) and self-efficacy theory provided the theoretical framework for the study. The two research questions were: 1) How do former youth offenders describe their lived experiences of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania? 2) How do former youth offenders describe their self-efficacy in completing their high school diploma or equivalent while they were in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania? This qualitative study employed a hermeneutic phenomenology research design. Purposeful criterion and snowball sampling was used to recruit ten former juvenile offenders in Pennsylvania for this study. Data were collected through a survey, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, and reflexive memos. The data analysis process involved coding using NVivo 12 Plus and thematic development. Five main themes emerged from the data: 1) Academic Support, 2) Curriculum and Instruction, 3) Student Motivation, 4) Community Reintegration, and 5) Capability. The findings revealed that having access to academic support was crucial to the participants' educational experiences. The results also indicated that self-efficacy beliefs and motivation were present among all participants. Implications of the study's findings, limitations, and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: juvenile offenders, juvenile correctional education, academic achievement, social cognitive theory, self-efficacy theory

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to:

Two of the most influential people in my life, my parents –

Mr. D. E. Christian and Mrs. H. M. Campbell–Christian, and

To every youth in the United States –

Those currently involved with the juvenile justice system,

Those previously involved with the juvenile justice system,

And those who have avoided the juvenile justice system.

Big up unu self…

Acknowledgments

Completing this doctoral degree has been one of the most challenging yet rewarding endeavors I have undertaken. I want to express my gratitude to those who contributed to my success on this academic journey. I would first like to acknowledge God for giving me the ambition, courage, and strength to complete this degree. I want to thank my committee chair, Dr. Joshua L. Adams. Thank you for challenging me and constantly reminding me to keep the end goal in mind. Even throughout your deployment overseas, you remained committed to my success. Your sense of humor and continued motivation helped me through the "dark days." I could not have asked for a better dissertation chair. I also want to thank my other committee member, Dr. Carl M. Miedich. I knew I wanted you to be a part of my committee from the moment I took *Advanced Juvenile Justice Policy*. Thank you for accepting my request to have you serve on my committee. I appreciate your random phone calls, prayers, feedback, encouragement, and expertise on the APA Style.

Special thank you to the young men and the young lady who took the time to describe the education they experienced when they were in a juvenile correctional facility. This study would not have been possible without your input. Thanks to all my family, friends, and colleagues who offered encouragement at various phases of my doctoral journey. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my parents, Mr. D. E. Christian and Mrs. H. M. Campbell–Christian. I am always encouraged to reach my full potential because I know you both expect nothing less from me. You have always communicated the importance of hard work and discipline. You have always been and will continue to be one of my biggest inspirations. I promise to keep making you proud!

"If yuh waan good yuh nose haffi run."
~ Jamaican Proverb

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List of Abbreviations

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)

Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma (CSSD)

Department of Education (DOE)

General Educational Development (GED)

High School Equivalency Test (HiSET)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Intermediate Units (IU)

Juvenile Court Judges' Commission (JCJC)

Motivation for Educational Attainment (MEA)

National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN)

Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center (PJJSC)

Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS)

Self-Efficacy Theory (SET)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Social Learning Theory (SLT)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

On any given day in the United States, approximately 48,000 youth are confined in juvenile and adult correctional facilities (Sawyer, 2019). Like other adolescents, youth in the justice system have a right to high-quality education (Development Services Group, 2019; Steele et al., 2016). Though educational achievement has been discussed as a factor in crime prevention (Abeling-Judge, 2019), there is a higher academic failure rate among justice-involved youth than other children (Johnson, 2018; Kremer & Vaughn, 2019). Only a few states provide comparable educational and vocational programs to incarcerated and non-incarcerated youth (Tannis, 2017). Such shortcomings might help to explain the low level of academic achievement among this student demographic. This chapter provides a background of the issue that will be explored in this study. It includes the situation to self, the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the significance of the study. Additionally, this chapter introduces the research questions and provides definitions of key terms.

Background

Youth in the juvenile justice system have a statutory right to education comparable in quality to public school settings (Development Services Group, 2019; Leone & Wruble, 2015). The importance of providing juvenile offenders with a regular education was established more than a century ago. In the fall of 1917, the Norris Farm and Camp School in Waukesha County, Wisconsin, was established to provide a standard school environment for delinquent boys whose needs could not be met in the city (Drewry, 1920). Over the decades, many challenges emerged related to providing education for juvenile offenders. These issues include providing education for youth with special education needs, meeting federal standards with limited funding, and

addressing the mental health, substance abuse, and trauma issues among this student demographic (Toldson, 2010). Special education is an area of juvenile correctional education that has historically received significant attention from scholars (Brooks, 2008; Forbes, 1991; Leone et al., 2002; Prout; 1981). Today, special education remains a pressing concern for youth in the juvenile justice system (Burke & Dalmage, 2016; Ho & Rocheleau, 2020; Miller, 2019).

Social Context

Adolescents incarcerated in juvenile justice facilities have perhaps the most critical need for education (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015). However, these youth are an educationally underserved population with a high academic failure rate (Johnson, 2018). Despite having a statutory right to an education that is comparable to those found in public school settings, the existing literature indicates that the education provided to justice-involved youth in most states does not meet federal and state guidelines (Development Services Group, 2019; Korman et al., 2019; Leone & Wruble, 2015; National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016; The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015). Although the current academic achievement of justice-involved youth is unknown at the national level, regional studies have indicated that it is significantly low (Development Services Group, 2019). The academic achievement of youth in juvenile correctional education programs rarely exceeds the elementary school level (National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016; Steele et al., 2016). Consequently, these adolescents are at a high risk of not completing their high school education. Fernández-Suárez et al. (2016) posited that youth who drop out of school are at a higher risk of engaging in criminality and are more likely to recidivate. Furthermore, high school students who have been incarcerated are less likely to return to school. They are also at the highest risk of being

unemployed and receiving low incomes, resulting in welfare dependency (Osborn & Belle, 2019).

Theoretical Context

This study explored the lived educational experiences of former juvenile offenders who completed their high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile facility. Of great interest to this study was understanding former juvenile offenders' perceived self-efficacy while pursuing their education. Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT) and self-efficacy theory established the foundation for this study. The SCT explains learning as occurring by observing others, developing competencies, setting goals, and responding to feedback (Bandura, 1986). Although juvenile correctional facilities can expose youth to negative behaviors, these facilities' educational opportunities can serve as a protective factor (Development Services Group, 2019). Moreover, adolescents in a school environment might be more likely to model the behaviors they observe to have positive outcomes (Bandura, 1989a). Self-efficacy theory is a central component of the broader SCT framework. Bandura explains self-efficacy as one's belief in their abilities to develop and utilize specific measures to handle arising situations (Bandura, 1995). The academic self-efficacy of justice-involved youth involves their perceived ability to achieve self-valued goals in a school setting (Michael, 2019). Greene (2017) emphasized that self-efficacy is a crucial component of understanding and supporting learning motivation in a classroom setting.

<div align="center">

Situation to Self

</div>

I currently serve as a Business and Criminal Justice Teacher at a Catholic college-preparatory high school. Before my current position, I worked as a direct care staff member in a state-operated non-secure juvenile residential placement facility. This facility operates a public, alternative, all-boys school that serves students in grades 7 through 12. Students are provided

with the opportunity to earn their high school diploma, General Educational Development (GED), and Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma (CSSD) and receive vocational training. I spent a considerable amount of time working at the school during my day shifts. I have witnessed many of these students' struggles, setbacks, persistence, and successes as they endeavored to achieve their high school diploma or GED. I observed several students who took multiple attempts on one or more GED sections or earned credits towards their diploma at a slower than average pace. Some of these individuals completed their program's treatment aspect without earning their diploma or GED before their release from this facility. I mentioned struggles and setbacks instead of failures because some of these youth achieved their diploma or GED post-release.

Several factors piqued my interest and motivation to pursue this study. First, I am aware of students' low academic achievement in juvenile correctional programs and the high rate of special education needs among these students (Development Services Group, 2019). Second, the quality of education in these programs often does not meet state standards. Only eight states provide equal educational and vocational programs to incarcerated and non-incarcerated adolescents (National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016; Tannis, 2017). Therefore, I was interested in understanding how my study participants achieved their educational goals despite the shortcomings of juvenile correctional education. Third, youth offenders are rarely afforded the opportunity to share their educational experiences (Donges, 2015; Martin, 2017). Their lack of voice could suggest that school administrators make decisions regarding the design and evaluation of these programs (Martin, 2017). Through my study, I intended to give a voice to this student demographic with the hope that their voice will improve the educational experiences for future students in these juvenile correctional education programs.

The three philosophical assumptions I brought to this study were ontological, epistemological, and axiological. My ontological assumption is characterized by the notion that a phenomenon has multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I may have a different view of realities, and so do the participants and readers of this study. This phenomenological study aimed to report how study participants describe their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Epistemologically, I attempted to get as close as possible to the research participants to understand better their subjective experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hence, I used my past professional experience in a juvenile correctional facility to lessen the distance between myself and the participants. The axiological assumption I brought to this study was my positionality regarding the research context and setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although my personal experience with juvenile correctional education is not from a student's perspective, I recognize that researchers should be aware that "research is value-laden and that biases are present in relation to their role in the study context" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20).

Social constructivism is the worldview I used to guide this study. In this worldview, individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The constructivism paradigm is also referred to as interpretivism. Its central research purpose is to *understand* and is associated with methodologies such as phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory (Glesne, 2016). In my phenomenological study, the constructivist worldview allowed individuals to describe their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), individuals develop varied and multiple subjective meanings of their experiences directed toward particular objects or things. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were helpful since the research goal was to focus on the participants' views of the phenomenon as much as possible (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Problem Statement

The high school education completion rate in juvenile residential facilities is significantly low (Development Services Group, 2019). Educational achievement has been discussed theoretically and empirically in the peer-reviewed literature as a factor in crime prevention (Abeling-Judge, 2019; Ciorbaru, 2018; Machin et al., 2011). Current research emphasizes the benefits of completing formal education (Taheri & Welch, 2016) since high school completion has been shown to significantly reduce crime among male adolescents (Lochner, 1999). Researchers have also articulated the association between youth academic underachievement and delinquent behavior (Azad & Ginner Hau, 2020; Fernández-Suárez et al., 2016). According to a 2015 study by The Council of State Government Justice Center, only eight states provide incarcerated youth with access to educational and vocational programs comparable to their non-incarcerated peers (Tannis, 2017). The quality of instruction in these correctional education programs tends to be less than traditional high school programs, and these substandard curricula do not align with state standards (Morris, 2014; National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016).

A few relatively recent studies have explored adult educational experiences (Cage, 2019) and juvenile offenders (Donges, 2015; Martin, 2017; Morris, 2014). The findings of Cage's study provided insights into the motivation of incarcerated adult students for enrolling in a correctional education program, such as HiSET (high school equivalency test), basic adult education, and vocational courses. Peer-reviewed literature in this area is scant, and little research has explored the self-efficacy or motivation of youth offenders in completing their high school diploma or equivalent while in a juvenile correctional facility. The problem this qualitative study explored was the experience of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania from the perspectives of former juvenile

offenders. This study sought to fill a gap in the literature related to describing the educational experiences and identifying the self-efficacy and motivational sources that influenced former youth offenders to complete their high school diploma or equivalent while they were in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how former youth offenders describe their shared experiences of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. The objectives of the research were twofold. Firstly, this study explored and interpreted the lived educational experiences of these former juvenile offenders. Secondly, this study explored and interpreted the self-efficacy and motivation of former juvenile offenders in completing their high school diploma or equivalent while they were in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. For this study, self-efficacy in obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent is generally defined as one's perceived ability to achieve the standards necessary to complete a high school diploma or equivalent (Michael, 2019). The theories that guided this research were Bandura's SCT and self-efficacy theory. According to the SCT, learning occurs through observing others' behaviors, developing competencies, establishing goals, and responding to feedback (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1995) defined self-efficacy as the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). SCT helps to explain the influence of social factors on youth academic achievement. The self-efficacy theory establishes the relationship between one's beliefs in their capability and motivation to complete a high school diploma or equivalent.

Significance of the Study

This study sought to contribute to the empirical literature on the educational experiences of justice-involved youth. Specifically, this study aimed to provide insights into the self-efficacy and motivation of former juvenile offenders who completed their high school diploma or equivalent while in a juvenile facility in Pennsylvania. A few relatively recent studies explored juvenile correctional education from students' perspectives (Donges, 2015; Martin, 2017; Morris, 2014). However, these studies did not specifically focus on students who had already completed their education in a juvenile facility. For instance, Martin's (2017) study and Morris' (2014) study were conducted with youth offenders actively enrolled in a juvenile facility school. In addition, although Donges' study involved former youth offenders who obtained a high school diploma or a GED, there is no evidence to indicate whether the participants earned their high school qualifications while in a juvenile correctional facility. Moreover, the current study aimed to give voice to former juvenile offenders concerning their perceived self-efficacy and motivation while pursuing their respective educational goals through an in-depth inquiry of the participants' experiences.

This study was theoretically significant because it aimed to extend Bandura's SCT and self-efficacy theory in an educational context. According to Bandura's (1986) SCT, learning occurs through observing others while developing competencies, creating goals, and responding to feedback. Adolescents in juvenile correctional education programs interact with their peers, teachers, and other juvenile justice staff. The current literature indicates that positive school experiences, such as relationships with school staff, can lead to positive educational outcomes (Blomberg et al., 2011; Johnson, 2018). Hence, this study aimed to provide additional support to

Bandura's SCT by exploring how social interactions within a juvenile facility academic setting influence learning. Bandura (1995) defined self-efficacy as one's belief concerning their capabilities to perform the necessary actions required to meet the demands of arising situations. In an academic context, students exhibiting high self-efficacy are able to persist in achieving their goals despite encountering any difficulties (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). This study sought to understand whether self-efficacy played a role in the academic achievement of former juvenile offenders who earned their high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile facility. This study aimed to provide additional support for the theoretical relevance of self-efficacy on academic achievement.

This study's practical significance involves the positive impact created for juvenile justice professionals, juvenile offenders, and the broader society. It provides an increased understanding of the educational experiences of juvenile offenders. Educational administrators in juvenile justice facility schools will have additional insights regarding juvenile correctional programs. This information may assist with designing, implementing, and evaluating educational services provided in juvenile justice schools (Martin, 2017). In addition, juvenile justice professionals will gain an increased understanding of whether social interactions and self-efficacy inform academic achievement for youth in an institutional setting. Since there are numerous benefits associated with graduating from high school (Rossi & Bower, 2018), this study reinforces the importance of high school completion, particularly among justice-involved youth. Moreover, the economic benefits of completing high school for both adolescents and society have been well-established (Joo & Kim, 2016; Rossi & Bower, 2018). Hence, this study emphasizes the reduction of high school dropouts among justice-involved youth.

Research Questions

Justice-involved youth have perhaps the most critical need for education (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015). However, incarcerated youth have less access to quality education than their non-incarcerated peers (Tannis, 2017; The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015). The educational services provided to these youth often do not meet state and federal standards (Development Services Group, 2019; Korman et al., 2019; Leone & Wruble, 2015; National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016; The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015). Two research questions guided this study to understand how former juvenile offenders were able to navigate the numerous challenges of a juvenile correctional education program in Pennsylvania.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do former youth offenders describe their lived experiences of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania?

The literature indicates that research exploring juvenile offenders' lived educational experiences is scant (Donges, 2015; Martin, 2017). Hence, the first research question was relevant in conducting further research into former juvenile offenders' educational experiences, particularly those who earned their high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile facility. Furthermore, Martin (2017) suggests that juvenile offenders' narrated school experiences can assist with designing and evaluating juvenile correctional education programs.

RQ2: How do former youth offenders describe their self-efficacy in completing their high school diploma or equivalent while they were in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania?

The second research question described former juvenile offenders' self-efficacy beliefs who completed their high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile facility. Cage (2019) posited that self-efficacy might positively affect academic success in a school setting. Conversely, Donges (2015) reported that juveniles with low self-efficacy described their school experiences negatively. This research question sought to understand better how self-efficacy perceptions inform the completion of a high school diploma or equivalent among former juvenile offenders.

Definitions

1. *Academic Achievement* – "The level of actual accomplishment or proficiency one has achieved in an academic area, as opposed to one's potential" (Ferguson, 2013, p. 19).

2. *Correctional Education* – A type of educational program or vocational training offered in a correctional institution (Bennett, 2015).

3. *Incarceration* – The most restrictive option used by courts to confine juveniles. It includes public or private secure facilities, post adjudicatory institutions, and residential facilities (Miner-Romanoff, 2010).

4. *Juvenile Correctional Facility* – For this study, it includes both a pre-adjudication *juvenile detention center* and a post-adjudication *juvenile residential placement*, either locally run, state-run, or privately operated.

5. *Juvenile Delinquent* – "A person who has attained ten years of age and is not yet twenty-one years of age who is alleged to have, upon or after the juvenile's 10th birthday, committed a delinquent act before reaching eighteen years of age or who is alleged to have violated the terms of juvenile probation prior to termination of juvenile court supervision" (Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, 2018, Glossary-6).

6. *Juvenile Detention Center* – A secure facility licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services that holds juveniles temporarily (Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, 2018).

7. *Juvenile Recidivism* – The adjudication of delinquency in a juvenile court or conviction in a criminal court for a misdemeanor or felony within two years of a previous case closure (Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, 2018).

8. *Juvenile Residential Placement* – This facility serves as the last resort under the Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Act. Placement facilities include "an institution, youth development center, camp, or other facility for delinquent children which is operated under the direction or supervision of the court or other public authority and approved by the Department of Human Services" (Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, 2018, p. 9.31).

9. *Motivation* – "The psychological construct 'invented' to describe the mechanism by which individuals and groups choose particular behaviour and persist with it" (McInerney, 2019, p. 427).

10. *Self-Efficacy* – An individual's belief concerning their capabilities to perform the necessary actions required to meet the demands of potential situations (Bandura, 1995).

Summary

This study explored how former juvenile offenders described their experiences of earning a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile facility in Pennsylvania. It sought to understand what role, if any, do social interactions and self-efficacy beliefs play in obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in an institutional setting. It was essential to understand the dynamics of justice-involved adolescents' lived educational experiences as these insights may assist educational administrators in designing, implementing, and evaluating these programs. In

addition to presenting the problem and purpose statements, this chapter highlighted this study's empirical, theoretical, and practical significance. The following chapter will discuss the theoretical framework that guided this study and review the related literature on juvenile justice and education.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The literature evaluating youth offenders' educational needs in juvenile correctional facilities in the United States has been documented over the past century (Toldson et al., 2010). Drewry (1920) recommended a regular school environment for delinquent juveniles whose needs could not be met in the city. This chapter begins with a description of the theoretical framework guiding this study. Bandura's social cognitive theory and self-efficacy theory will be used to establish the foundation on which the study will be framed. The review of related literature focuses on the existing research on an array of topics related to the education of youth involved with juvenile justice systems worldwide. This chapter provides a constructive perspective of high school academic achievement in the United States among the general population of adolescents and youth offenders. The existing research documents the relationship between academic underachievement and recidivism and education as a protective factor against delinquency. The current review of the literature synthesizes the juvenile correctional education experience. It also provides evidence of an obvious gap in the literature related to former youth offenders' self-efficacy in completing their high school diploma or equivalent.

An exhaustive literature search was conducted primarily through two online library databases: Liberty University's Jerry Falwell Library and Lamar University's Mary and John Gray Library. The keywords used to perform this search included *juvenile justice system; high school achievement; high school and GED success; high school graduation rate; high school completion; juvenile correctional education; juvenile offenders educational experiences; special education; self-efficacy theory; social cognitive theory; education and delinquency; education and recidivism;* and *educational experiences of female juvenile offenders.* These searches led to

peer-reviewed articles in databases such as EBSCO, JSTOR, Elsevier, ProQuest, Wiley, Springer, HeinOnline, and SAGE Journals. In addition, searches using similar keywords were conducted through Google Scholar to locate government and corporate studies, reports, and other publications.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lenses that were used to frame this study were Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT) and self-efficacy theory. The theoretical framework establishes the foundation on which the study is built and supported. It provides a structure to define philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically how the researcher will approach the study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). SCT and self-efficacy were chosen as the theoretical lenses because this study aimed to explore former youth offenders' perceived motivation for completing a high school diploma based on their correctional education experiences. Researchers have discussed Bandura's SCT and self-efficacy theory when explaining learning in social and academic settings and understanding human motivation (Greene, 2017; Michael, 2019; Walters, 2019). Studies exploring juvenile offenders' lived educational experiences in an institutional setting within the last five years are limited (Martin, 2017). Consequently, there are no known application of Bandura's SCT and self-efficacy theory in studies of juvenile offenders' educational experience within the last five years. Nonetheless, two recent studies have applied these theories to correctional education among adult offenders (Cage, 2019; Roth et al., 2017). Cage studied the perceptions of correctional education among incarcerated adult students through the theoretical lens of Bandura's social learning theory (SLT), which evolved into the SCT. Additionally, Roth and colleagues utilized the self-efficacy theory to study Norwegian adult inmates to predict their prison education participation.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

The SCT suggests that learning occurs by observing others' behaviors, developing competencies, establishing goals, and responding to feedback. Although the SCT was officially introduced in 1986, it traces its roots to the 1960s when Albert Bandura began writing on the social learning theory. Bandura and Robert Sears are among the social learning theory two primary theorists (Grusec, 1992). However, both theorists offered different viewpoints of the social learning theory. Grusec reasoned that much of Sears' theory focused on understanding how children came to internalize and adopt values, attitudes, and behaviors of the culture in which they were raised. Bandura (1977) argued that the traditional theorists viewed behavior as a product of directly experienced response consequences. Contrary to these theorists, Bandura postulated that the best way to understand psychological functioning is through a continuous reciprocal interaction between behavior and its controlling conditions. To reflect more accurately what he was advocating since the late 1960s, Bandura relabeled his approach, *social cognitive theory,* in 1986 (Grusec, 1992).

Bandura's (1989a) social cognitive perspective believes that social factors play an influential role in cognitive development, and there are many motivators of the pursuit of competence. According to Bandura, scholars often explain behavior in terms of one-sided determinism. In contrast, Bandura offered a model of causation that involves *triadic reciprocity*. This reciprocal causation model includes the bidirectional influence of operating interacting determinants, such as behavior, cognition, other personal factors, and environmental influences. Nonetheless, Bandura cautioned that it should not be implied that different sources of influence are of equal strength, nor do they all occur simultaneously. Since people are both products and

producers of their environment, the directionality of effect occurs between behavior and environmental circumstances (Bandura, 1986a).

Modeling and cognitive self-regulation are two significant aspects of Bandura's SCT (Locke, 1987). Four subfunctions help determine the effectiveness of modeling or observational learning: attentional processes, retention processes, production processes, and motivational processes (Bandura, 1989a). The first sub-function, the attentional process, involves people's observation in an abundance of modeling influences and the information they extract from their observation. The second sub-function is the retention process since observed events cannot influence people if they cannot remember them. The third subfunction, the production process, involves a concept-matching process that translates symbolic conceptions into appropriate courses of action. The fourth subfunction in modeling is the motivational processes in which people determine which observed behavior they should perform since not all observed behaviors are modeled. Bandura opined that three primary types of incentive motivators influence the performance of behaviors that have been learned through observation: direct, vicarious, and self-produced. He further noted that behaviors observed to have a positive outcome for others are more likely to be modeled. In contrast, people are unlikely to model behaviors if they have unrewarding or punishing effects.

Self-regulation of motivation results from people's influence on their motivation and behavior, based on the positive and negative outcomes they produce for themselves (Bandura, 1989a). According to Bandura, motivational effects originate from multiple self-reactive influences, such as the effective self-evaluation of one's attainments, perceived self-efficacy to fulfill one's standards, and adjustment of personal stands to keep them within attainable bounds. The system of self-regulation of motivation and action through internal standards and self-

reactive influences includes three subfunctions: self-observation, judgment process, and self-reaction (Bandura, 1991). Self-observation provides the needed information for setting and evaluating one's progress towards achieving realistic goals. The judgmental process plays a significant role in self-directness through a personal standard of judging and guiding one's actions. Based on performance judgment, self-reactions provide the mechanism by which standards regulate courses of action. Hence, Bandura believes that people pursue courses of action based on whether they produce positive self-reactions or self-censure. Hardin (2010) observed that Bandura and his students did much of the studies examining SCT, focusing primarily on *triadic reciprocity*. However, the SCT was applied in a recent study examining teenage students' information literacy (Zhu et al., 2019) and incarcerated students' perceptions of correctional education through the SLT (Cage, 2019).

Zhu et al. (2019) noted that only a few studies had investigated information literacy through the SCT perspective. Consequently, they sought to advance the literature in this area by examining the personal, behavioral, and environmental factors that predict students' information literacy. One of the most critical findings supporting the SCT perspective relates to research question three. The results demonstrated that students' information literacy was positively influenced by parents' frequent information and communication technology (ICT) usage and positive ICT attitudes. Similarly, teachers with higher ICT self-efficacy or regular collaborative ICT usage were more likely to influence students' information literacy positively.

Cage (2019) conducted qualitative research to share the marginalized voices of incarcerated adult students in Louisiana. This study aimed to understand why people enrolled in prison courses and the perceived benefits of taking classes while incarcerated. Bandura's SLT was one of the theoretical lenses through which the researcher sought to understand students'

perceptions of correctional education. This study emphasized that prisoners tend to have lower academic achievement levels because they are exposed to individuals with low levels of academic achievement. Conversely, Cage asserted that the SLT suggests increased exposure to educational settings means prisoners are more likely to behave like educated people. The SLT indicates that environmental factors can positively or negatively influence an individual's behavior (Bandura, 1995). One of Cage's study participants stated that he had several opportunities to become involved in negative activities within the prison. However, he chose to take part in positive activities such as correctional education.

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy is a social cognitive variable and the central construct of the SCT (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2002; Walters, 2019). It is grounded in the broader theoretical framework of SCT (Schunk & Pajeres, 2002). Bandura (1995) defined self-efficacy as the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). Therefore, self-efficacy provides a valuable theoretical foundation when seeking to understand one's motivation for academic achievement. Grusec (1992) argued that explaining how control over behavior shifts from external sources to the individual is a significant challenge for any socialization theory. Much like the social learning theory, Bandura and Sears differed in their views on self-efficacy. Grusec noted that Sears' mechanism for socialization was found in identification, while Bandura found it in self-regulation. According to Bandura (1989b), self-efficacy beliefs affect one's thought patterns, which may be self-aiding or self-hindering. Self-efficacy beliefs in children provide a unique contribution to variance in developmental outcomes within the interplay of socioeconomic, familial, educational, and peer influences (Bandura et al., 2003).

Individuals' self-efficacy beliefs are developed from four primary influences: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological and emotional states (Bandura, 1995). Biglan (1987) claimed that numerous studies had questioned the high ratings, consistency, and relationship of self-efficacy on behavior (Baer et al., 1986; Kirsch, 1980; Kirsch & Wickless, 1983; Lane & Borkovec, 1984). Hawkins' (1995) article provided additional criticisms of self-efficacy. He conceded that self-efficacy was a predictor of behavior but disagreed that it was a cause of behaviors. However, he posited that his intentions were not to disregard Bandura's theory but to identify issues that would lead to the theory's modification. In fact, Hawkins argued that his criticism did not mean he believed human thought did not affect human motivation nor that self-efficacy had no effect on learning. Despite these criticisms, self-efficacy has been tested and has received support in different academic disciplines such as mathematics, literacy, and writing (Pajares & Graham, 1999; Pajares & Johnson, 1996; Pajares & Miller, 1994; Roth et al., 2017). In addition to being the focus of studies on phobias (Bandura, 1983), depression (Davis & Yates, 1982), social skills (Moe & Zeiss, 1982), smoking behavior (Garcia et al., 1990), pain control (Manning & Wright, 1983), health (O'Leary, 1985), and athletic performance (Barling & Abel, 1983; Lee, 1982), self-efficacy has received increased attention in academic motivation (Pajares, 1996; Pintrich & Schunk, 1995; Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

Schunk (1989) contended that self-efficacy is not an essential influence on all behaviors. Instead, he supported Bandura's (1982) assertion that certain well-established skills or behaviors typically do not require efficacy appraisal. For instance, while students might assess self-efficacy for learning new material or skills, they are less likely to do so to accomplish review exercises (Schunk, 1989). Greene (2017) advanced the argument of self-efficacy on learning by asserting

that self-efficacy is crucial to understanding and supporting learning motivation, especially in classroom settings. This concept, known as academic self-efficacy, refers to an individual's belief concerning their ability to attain the standards necessary to achieve their goals in an educational setting (Michael, 2019). In contrast to students who doubt their learning ability, students exhibiting self-efficacy for learning participate more readily, work harder, persist longer despite difficulties, and achieve higher (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Based on self-efficacy arguments, youth offenders need to control their antisocial behavior and focus on setting prosocial future goals.

Walters (2019) suggests that self-efficacy has only received intermittent attention from criminology and criminal justice researchers. Nonetheless, self-efficacy was used in a recent prison education study (Roth et al., 2017). However, these scholars noted that studies incorporating self-efficacy in prison education are scant. They included academic self-efficacy as a critical component of understanding adult inmates' participation in prison educational programming. This study's findings indicated that prisoners' scores on literacy, mathematics and self-regulated learning self-efficacy predicted participation in education while incarcerated but did not for information and computer technology (Roth et al., 2017). Cage (2019) highlighted self-efficacy in the SLT framework of her study on adult incarcerated students' perception of correctional education. She noted that while there may be lower levels of self-efficacy among prisons due to the prison environment and their individual educational experiences, self-efficacy can positively influence academic success in an educational context.

Theoretical Gap

Badura's SCT and self-efficacy theory are essential theories for understanding learning in a social context and motivation for academic success (Cage, 2019; Greene, 2017). However,

self-efficacy has only received limited attention in the current criminal justice literature (Roth et al., 2017; Walters, 2019). Michael (2019) asserted that most research has focused on general self-efficacy while neglecting its application in academic settings. The use of self-efficacy to inform studies in correctional education among adult inmates is also limited (Roth et al., 2017). Neither SCT nor self-efficacy theory exists among studies that explored justice-involved youth's educational experiences within the last five years. Like their adult counterparts, juveniles in the justice system are marginalized and whose voices are often unheard (Cage, 2019; Martin, 2017). Martin conducted the most recent study exploring adolescents' educational experiences in a juvenile justice school. His research focused on Black male juveniles and was studied through a conceptual framework comprising four concepts: alternative school design, disproportionate minority contact, Black male experience in high school, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Although Cage's (2019) study provided support and established the relevance of SCT and self-efficacy to understand education motivation in a correctional setting, it is unknown how these theories inform studies on juvenile offenders in correctional education programs. Based on this gap in the literature, the purpose of this study was to understand the lived educational experiences of former offenders who earned their high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility. Roth et al. (2017) provided insights on the relevance of self-efficacy to understand adult inmates' motives for pursuing an education while incarcerated. Despite its contribution to correctional education, it still unknown how self-efficacy applies to juvenile offenders in correctional education programs. Furthermore, the conducted study was quantitative in nature. This study employed a qualitative approach to describe juvenile correctional facilities' educational experiences from former youth offenders' perspectives. Qualitative research was

needed to obtain thick descriptions and depth of the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Related Literature

Adolescents in the juvenile justice system have a right to an education that is comparable to those offered in public school settings (Development Services Group, 2019; Steele et al., 2016). The existing literature demonstrates, however, that students in juvenile justice education programs are not well served. Only eight states provide youth in juvenile justice facilities with the same access to educational and vocational programs available in the community (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015). Research is abundant on the relationship between education and juvenile delinquency (Azad & Ginner Hau, 2018; 2020; Fernández-Suárez et al., 2016; Hoffman, 2018; Makarios et al., 2017; Kim, 2020; Robison et al., 2017). Lower educational attainment is one of the most widely studied negative consequences of delinquent behavior (Kim, 2020). Delinquency among adolescents often results in lower academic achievement, school dropout, and recidivism (Azad & Ginner Hau, 2020; Development Services Group, 2019; Fernández-Suárez et al., 2016).

On the contrary, the literature indicates that educational achievement is a protective factor against delinquency with long-term positive effects on employment and desistance from crime (Development Services Group, 2019). However, meeting the educational needs of adolescents in the juvenile justice system is challenging. The literature synthesis on juvenile correctional education demonstrates that these programs are often subpar and do not meet federal and state standards (Development Services Group, 2019; Korman et al., 2019; National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016; The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015). Some of the key contributors to juvenile justice education include Thomas G. Blomberg, David E. Houchins,

Peter E. Leone, and Jade Wexler. Much of these scholars' work was published more than five years ago, which exceeds the requirement to be included in this literature review. Nonetheless, their contributions to the field remain relevant and are frequently cited in the current literature (Development Services Group, 2019; Grigorenko et al., 2019; Jäggi et al., 2020; McCray et al., 2018; Miller, 2019; Sinclair et al., 2019; Steele et al., 2016).

      The bulk of research related to education and justice-involved youth has focused on the adverse outcomes of educational underachievement and the benefits of completing formal education (Amin et al., 2016; Hoffman, 2018; Fernández-Suárez et al., 2016, Kim, 2020; Taheri & Welsh, 2016; Widdowson et al., 2016). However, in the current literature, it is still unknown how juvenile offenders describe the adverse outcomes of not completing a formal education or its benefits. Conducting a qualitative study with these individuals is essential to explain prior quantitative findings more in-depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, studies giving a voice to juvenile offenders are almost non-existent in the current literature. Though Martin (2017) provided some recent insights into juvenile offenders' school experiences, this study was limited to Black offenders, all of whom were males. The current study sought to gain a broader understanding of juvenile offenders' educational experiences by recruiting a participant pool that is racially diverse and includes all genders. Furthermore, the little existing research exploring education completion, the protective factor of education, and the lived experiences of juvenile offenders has been concentrated in the United States' southern region (Development Services Group, 2019; Martin, 2017). There was a need for research in the Northeastern region. Hence, this study in Pennsylvania was critical in addressing this deficiency in the literature.

Juvenile Justice in the United States

The juvenile justice system in the United States traces its roots to 1899 when Cook County, Illinois, established the first juvenile court (Bowman, 2018). The newly created court mandated specific provisions when dealing with troubled children. These provisions included: 1) the state could act as *paren patriae* or guardian of the child, 2) a tribunal would hear cases of children under sixteen years old, 3) the court would use informal and noncriminal procedures to facilitate remedial, preventative, and nonpunitive justice, and 4) judges would provide *parent-like* care and discipline to children (Pierce, 2017). According to Bowman (2018), the establishment of the first juvenile court in Cook County, Illinois, paved the way for other agencies across the country to establish the American juvenile justice system. Pierce described the new juvenile court as well-received. Almost every state had created similar juvenile court systems within twenty-five years following the first such court in Cook County, Illinois.

Creating a separate court system for adolescents was based on the idea that children experienced unique issues and had individual needs (Bowman, 2018). For instance, Migden (2017) articulated that scientists now believe that the brain is not fully developed until the early to mid-twenties. Furthermore, the brain's frontal lobes, which facilitate high-level reasoning and decision making, do not develop fully until the mid-twenties. Hence, Migden argued that young adults, age 18 to 24, are more like juveniles than adults. Based on adolescents' uniqueness, the law should protect and treat children differently from adults (Pierce, 2017). Researchers have agreed that the fundamental theory behind separating juvenile offenders from adults was to provide a nonpunitive approach to delinquency that emphasized care and direction (Bowman, 2018; Howell et al., 2017; Pierce, 2017). The juvenile justice system recognized that since children were different from adults, they were less blameworthy and more likely to change

(Migden, 2017). Hence, rehabilitation was a key focus when developing the juvenile justice system.

The unique, youth-centered approach to the juvenile justice system established specific rules: cases were to be held in an exclusive, separate courtroom with a less formal summary proceeding; children and adults were not to be confined in the same institutions; children under 12 were not to be committed to a jail or police station; and probation officers – not paid or affiliated with the state – would investigate juvenile cases (Bowman, 2018). Bowman observed that judges had significant discretion to determine the best way to rehabilitate these adolescents. However, having a juvenile justice system for juveniles also meant that these young offenders were not afforded the same due process rights as adult offenders. Bowman argued that since the juvenile justice system emphasized an informal process, youth offenders were not entitled to due process rights. It was not until 1967, when the Supreme Court heard *In re Gault's* case, that this informal and unregulated approach ended (Pierce, 2017). Bowman asserted that before the court's judgment of *In re Gault,* juvenile courts were producing informal and inconsistent outcomes, a trend that has been criticized.

Roper v. Simmons (2005) and *Graham v. Florida* (2010) are two precedent cases that increased the formality of the juvenile court, which began to mirror the formality of the adult criminal court (Bowman, 2018). Serious and violent offending by adolescents increased significantly by the late 1980s (Blackburn, 2019). The *get-tough* era of the 1980s and the 1990s saw an increase in the severity of punishment for first-time and repeat criminal offenders (Schaefer & Uggen, 2016). Juvenile offenders were no exception to increased punitive measures during this era. During this period, researchers outside of the field of juvenile justice began labeling juveniles as *super-predators* (Howell et al., 2017). According to Blackburn (2019),

most states responded by curtailing the juvenile court's jurisdiction over serious crimes and transferring youth offenders into adult courts and adult prisons.

In Los Angeles, California, conservatives received support from liberals to demand a more punitive system for juvenile offenders during the 1970s (Felker-Kantor, 2018). The city began shifting to a more punitive approach while still maintaining the juvenile justice system's rehabilitative side. In the 1990s, young offenders were being tried as adults and subjected to mandatory minimum sentences (Bowman, 2018). More punitive policies started to form a part of the juvenile justice system despite its initial emphasis on decision-making in children's best interest (Schaefer & Uggen, 2016). Felker-Kantor contended that these punitive measures resulted in youth offenders experiencing higher incarceration and more extended time than ever before. Although most states were enacting harsh measures against juvenile crime, Pennsylvania took a different approach by incorporating the *Balanced and Restorative Justice* approach (Blackburn, 2019). According to Blackburn, Pennsylvania continues to model these principles through its mission of *community protection* (right of all Pennsylvanians to be safe from crime); *victim restoration* (repairing the harm done to victims of crime), and *youth redemption* (the belief that Pennsylvanian juvenile offenders are capable of change and can become responsible members of their communities).

High School Education Attainment

Completing high school is an essential aspect of upward mobility, as there are numerous benefits associated with graduating from high school (Rossi & Bower, 2018). High school completion has been established as a predictor of long-term morbidity and mortality (Hahn et al., 2015). On-time high school graduation ranks among the 26 leading health indicators for *Healthy People 2020* (Qu et al., 2016). Completing a high school diploma or equivalent is typically a

requirement for admissions into postsecondary and degree-seeking programs (Jepsen et al.,

2017). Moreover, many higher education institutions base their admissions decisions on high

school performance and test scores (Cerdeira et al., 2018). According to the National Center for

Education Statistics (2019), the national adjusted cohort graduation rate for public high school

students was 85 percent in the 2016-17 school year, the highest since the first measurement of

graduation rates in 2010-11. Specifically, in Pennsylvania, the graduation rate during the 2016-

17 school year was 87%.

Despite a steady rise in graduation rates over the last five decades, more than 500,000

students still drop out of high school (McFarland et al., 2016; Rosen et al., 2019). Each day,

approximately 7,000 students drop out of high school, and the dropout rate is especially notable

amongst students of racial and ethnic minorities (Rossi & Bower, 2018). Like racial and ethnic

minorities, students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds are also at a higher risk of dropping

out of high school (Joo & Kim, 2016). Youth in juvenile correctional education programs are

also at an increased risk of not completing their high school education. According to the

Development Services Group (2019), the high school education completion rate in juvenile

residential facilities is significantly low. The literacy and overall academic achievement of

juvenile offenders rarely exceed the elementary school level (National Juvenile Justice Network,

2016; Steele et al., 2016). Additional issues further complicate the educational achievement of

youth offenders. Steele noted that juvenile offenders are more likely than their nonoffender

counterparts to experience emotional problems, substance abuse issues, and special education

needs. Since juvenile offenders tend to face these issues while achieving lower educational

outcomes, this study sought to understand the lived educational experiences of those who

performed at a higher level to meet the standards required to earn a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Numerous studies have investigated high school graduation and general educational development (GED) completion rates (Joo & Kim, 2016; Rosen et al., 2019; Rossi & Bower, 2018; West et al., 2019). However, Joo and Kim argued that the graduation rates based on official statistics differ from independent researchers. Consequently, these scholars examined the rate and trends of high school graduation to help policymakers and program designers better monitor and assess human capital development among young adult populations. Using cohort data from the *Survey of Income and Program Participation,* a longitudinal survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, the researchers divided the data cases into eight cohorts to estimate the percentage of individuals who obtained their high school diploma or equivalent by age. This study indicated that the graduation rate by age 18 declined while the rate by age 24 remained consistent. These authors further suggested that there are significant economic benefits associated with cutting high school dropout rates. Hence, they recommended that increasing the high school graduation rate, especially among minorities, be an urgent national agenda. This recommendation also highlighted the significance of researching juvenile offenders' educational experiences since the high school graduation rate is lower among this demographic.

Rosen et al. (2019) examined on-time high school completion through the educational resilience framework. According to these scholars, the educational resilience framework suggests that some students overcome these adversities to achieve successful outcomes despite adverse experiences. This theory shares similar claims as academic self-efficacy, which holds that those who have high self-efficacy for learning persist longer despite any encountered difficulties (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). This study's data was based on a nationally representative sample of

approximately 2,300 ninth graders from 944 public and private high schools. Results indicated that many factors typically associated with educational resilience did not uniquely predict re-engagement behavior for students who drop out or take extended school absences. A higher level of self-efficacy also did not increase the chances of returning to complete a high school diploma or an alternative credential after a previous dropout (Rosen et al., 2019).

In a related study, West et al. (2019) investigated the motivation for educational attainment among ninth-graders to predict high school completion. The motivation for educational attainment (MEA) questionnaire, which included 32 items assessing several later educational attainment facets, was utilized in this study. The researchers hypothesized that student scores on the MEA general factors would predict high school graduation versus dropout 5-6 years later. However, the findings of this multinomial logistic regression analysis indicated that neither the general factor nor any of the three specific factors (teacher expectations, peer aspirations, and the value of education) were predictors of high school graduation versus GED completion. West et al. noted that while ethnicity moderated the associations between scores on the general factor and high school graduation versus dropout, gender did not. One of the implications of this study is that grade nine is a critical point for identifying students at high risk of failing since many students who drop out do so after their first year in high school. Rosen et al. (2019) shared a similar implication. These authors articulated that academic success in the ninth grade increases the probability that students will return to finish their education on time, which means it is essential for all ninth graders to achieve success. Based on these assertions, it was helpful to understand whether the former juvenile offenders in this study describe the ninth grade as a phase in their educational experience where they attained success.

Joo and Kim (2016) highlighted the benefits of high school graduation on the economy. Similarly, Rossi and Bower (2018) acknowledged the economic benefits of high school completion while observing the effect of high school dropouts on the broader economy. These researchers explored why approximately two-thirds of GED test-takers reported taking the test to pursue additional studies, but few eventually enrolled in college. Using the human capital theory to frame this study, the researchers used logistic regression to predict which students attended colleges based on several demographic variables (race, socioeconomic status, family status) and proximity to a community college. Interestingly, these tests revealed that none of the variables were practically significant predictors of college attendance, unlike prior research. Based on this finding, Rossi and Bower recommend that future research explore the factors that drive this behavior.

Much of the research on high school graduation and GED completion rates have utilized a longitudinal dataset (Joo & Kim, 2016; Rosen et al., 2019; Rossi & Bower, 2018; West et al., 2019). Similarly, logistic regression and multinomial regression were the typical analyses employed in these studies (Rosen et al., 2019; Rossi & Bower, 2018; West et al., 2019). According to McFarland et al. (2016), the high school dropout rate among the institutionalized population, including individuals living in correctional facilities for youth and adults, nursing homes, and other health-related facilities, is disproportionately higher. Educational attainment among youth in the juvenile justice system is unknown at the national level (Development Services Group, 2019). However, the Development Services Group noted that two studies in Florida provided insight into this area. These studies showed that only 7 to 9 percent of youth returning to their community after commitment to a residential facility in Florida earned their high school diploma or GED. The limited regional data provided by the Development Services

Group focused on Florida. Hence, it would be valuable to conduct future research that offers insights into the high school completion rates in other regions across the country or even at the national level since this is unknown.

Education Underachievement and Delinquency

There has been substantial interest in the influence of education on juvenile delinquent behaviors (Hoffman, 2018). Accordingly, there is no shortage of studies examining the relationship between education and juvenile delinquency (Azad & Ginner Hau, 2018; 2020; Fernández-Suárez et al., 2016; Hoffman, 2018; Kim, 2020; Makarios et al., 2017; Robison et al., 2017). Kim (2020) posited that one of the most widely studied negative consequences of delinquent behavior has been lower educational attainment. However, Hirschfield (2017) claimed that few criminologists had established the impact of school factors on delinquency because most studies, especially those that use cross-sectional analyses, fail to address selection bias satisfactorily. Since most previous work has been unable to address this, further research is needed to improve our empirical understanding of school factors' impact on juvenile delinquency.

Despite the alarming dropout rate among juvenile offenders versus the general youth population, few studies have analyzed school dropout among juvenile offenders (Fernández-Suárez et al., 2016). Consequently, these researchers examined the risk factors for dropout using the judicial files of 264 juvenile offenders (218 males and 46 females). In addition to school factors, this study considered individual and family factors. The results of this study suggested that school dropouts had a higher level of irresponsibility than non-dropouts, which supports the idea that disruptive behavior hampers educational attainment. Consistent with Patrick et al.'s (2016) research, this study reinforces that alcohol and drug use predict higher school dropout

rates. Fernández-Suárez et al. demonstrated the need to implement school and family policies that emphasize the role of parental monitoring to prevent alcohol and substance use. To increase the knowledge of the role of school factors and individual and family characteristics on school dropout, qualitative research can understand how these relate to adolescents in a correctional education environment.

Like other scholars, Tan et al. (2018) asserted that crime among youth is strongly associated with school-related stressors, such as poor school experience and academic difficulties. School-related variables have been frequently used to understand the cause of juvenile delinquency since adolescents spend a considerable amount of time in school settings (Hirschfield, 2017). Truant behavior may also disrupt the educational programming of adolescents. Mallet (2016) defined truancy as the constant, unexcused absence from school that exceeds the number of absences allowed by state law. This type of behavior is more than just skipping school. Mallet indicated that truant adolescents are likely to be caught within the prison-to-school pipeline – a concept of severe and strict discipline. Although truancy may start as an infrequent behavior, it can quickly escalate into a regular occurrence that could eventually lead to school dropout (Keppens & Spruyt, 2019). These scholars examined the relationship between an authoritative school climate and class skipping to advance the literature in this area. They found that class skipping occurs less frequently in authoritative schools. A limitation of their study is that some of the measures employed in their secondary data analysis were utilized in a manner for which they were not intended. Still, this limitation highlights a starting point for future research to use appropriate methodological measures in this area.

Female delinquents, without the risk of persistent delinquency, are an underresearched group (Azad & Ginner Hau, 2018). Azad and Ginner Hau (2020) observed that while the

connections between various school problems and delinquency have been well-established, most studies tend to use male juvenile offenders with extensive or persistent delinquency or both. In their study of 138 females sentenced to youth service in Stockholm, Sweden, Azad and Ginner Hau (2018) found that although these young females reported limited delinquency, they needed support and education assistance. In a follow-up to their earlier study, Azad and Ginner Hau (2020) examined educational attainment and recidivism among female juvenile offenders with limited delinquency. These researchers observed that female offenders exhibiting limited delinquency did not re-offend within two years after being sentenced to youth service. Still, they had lower levels of academic achievement than adolescent females in the general population.

High school students who have been incarcerated are less likely to return to school (Osborn & Belle, 2019). Beyond the apparent patterns of delinquent behavior, several other negative consequences are associated with low academic achievement among juvenile offenders. For instance, Osborn and Belle posited that incarcerated youth are at the highest risk of unemployment and low incomes, resulting in welfare dependency. One study found that juvenile delinquents are significantly more likely than their non-delinquent counterparts to be unemployed, even after controlling for temporally prior traits, human capital, and criminal justice contact (Carter, 2019). Even in a best-case scenario where juvenile offenders persist in completing their high school education, an arrest may inhibit their advancement to college since transcripts may show poor academic performance, disciplinary infractions, and low curricular involvement (Widdowson et al., 2016). These are some of the factors considered by many higher education institutions when making admissions decisions.

College attendance is an aspiration for most high school seniors. However, only 60 percent of high school graduates enroll in college the semester immediately following high

school graduation, and only 70 percent enroll within two years (Widdowson et al., 2016). To understand the impact of arrests on college enrollment, these researchers conducted a study consisting of 17 years of data from the *National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997*. Results indicated that arrests reduced the likelihood of attending a 4-year college directly after high school. However, arrest generally did not affect 2-year college prospects. Kremer and Vaughn (2019) hypothesized that maternal education would increase the likelihood of having college aspirations, while family neglect decreases such ambitions. This quantitative study's findings indicated that juveniles with a mother who had some college or higher had 3.37 times greater college aspiration odds than those with a mother who had a high school diploma or less. Although Widdowson and colleagues and Kremer and Vaughn's studies increase our understanding of college aspiration among justice-involved youth, their quantitative methods do not provide a detailed description. Qualitative research can serve as a follow-up to explain those quantitative findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Peer delinquency is another factor that can impact educational achievement. The typical American student spends approximately fifteen thousand hours in school, with additional time spent in after-school work and school-based extracurricular activities (Hirschfield, 2017). Hence, the association among delinquent peers may negatively impact non-delinquent students, consequently affecting their academic achievement. This idea is consistent with Bandura's social cognitive perspective, which views people's behavior as learned through observing and imitating others (Bandura, 1977). Furthermore, a lower level of school experience is associated with low academic achievement and having antisocial peers (Tan et al., 2018). A study of the relationship between peer delinquency and student achievement in middle schools in North Carolina found that the average number of offenses committed by peers was negatively associated with math

achievement but not reading (Ahn & Trogdon, 2017). Research exploring the influence of peer delinquency on educational performance through an SCT lens is necessary. This study filled a gap in the literature by exploring how social interactions with peers in a juvenile correctional education environment influenced students' academic outcomes.

The literature has indicated that delinquent behavior affects educational attainment, and that poor school performance is a risk factor for engaging in delinquent behavior. Similarly, the relationship between correctional education/vocational training programs and recidivism rates has been extensively studied (Duke, 2018). While recidivism rates vary based on states and studies, Hay et al. (2018) suggested that the general recidivism pattern is a relapse into criminal behavior within two years. Duke posited that despite numerous successful reintegration of inmates into society, roughly 76% re-offend and are re-incarcerated. Similar rates of recidivism exist among juvenile offenders. Approximately 70% of released youth are re-arrested for a new offense, 50% receive an adjudication, and 20% return to a correctional institution (Hay et al., 2018).

Educational risk factors such as low academic achievement, academic failure, negative attitudes towards school, low bonding to school, frequent school transitions, truancy and absenteeism, low academic aspirations, and school dropout have been associated with recidivism (Development Services Group, 2019). The Development Services Group reported on a study in a Nebraska facility that investigated academic measures as predictors of recidivism among boys 12 to 18 years old. Interestingly, the results showed that boys in a remedial education group were twice more likely to recidivate or violate parole than boys who were not a part of a remedial group. This study demonstrated that even though juvenile offenders typically have lower educational attainment, some of these individuals still perform worse than others and are at a

higher risk of reoffending. The Development Services Group (2019) observed an increased risk of recidivism among youth offenders who achieve lower standardized achievement scores, lower full-scale I.Q scores, and lower verbal I.Q scores. Although contact with the juvenile justice system may produce adverse educational outcomes, this is not always the case. For instance, the Development Services Group claimed a higher level of academic achievements, such as an increase in the number of earned credits during confinement, is associated with an increased likelihood of returning to school and earning a diploma upon release. Qualitative research is needed to understand how juvenile offenders returning from confinement to the community perceive the possible negative consequences of not completing their high school diploma or equivalent.

Education as a Protective Factor

Education and regular school attendance are not only critical protective factors against delinquency and juvenile justice system involvement, but they also can have long-term positive effects on employment and desistance from crime (Development Services Group, 2019). However, providing education for adolescents in the juvenile justice system is challenging. Juveniles in the justice system have a higher academic failure rate than other children (Johnson, 2018; Kremer & Vaughn, 2019). Many of these adolescents also have a history of trauma, mental health issues, and special academic needs (Development Services Group, 2019; Johnson, 2018). Amin et al. (2016) suggested that proposing educational policies as a crime-reducing device should be supported by evidence on the causal effect of education on crime for it to be a convincing case. Although education does not universally prevent all crime, there is considerable evidence supporting the preventative effect of educational attainment on crime in adulthood (Abeling-Judge, 2019).

Despite extensive research on education as a source of crime prevention and control, Abeling-Judge (2019) identified a deficiency in the literature about the relevance of re-enrolling in school to complete educational degrees after dropping out. In his study, Abeling-Judge found that returning to school was associated with reducing different types of crime for those who returned to school compared to those who did not. For instance, those who earned a GED committed less property crime, but not violent crimes. Similarly, while those who returned to earn a high school diploma were significantly less likely to commit property crimes, obtaining the diploma did not alter their commission of violent crimes. Based on these findings, education should be reconsideration as both a source of prevention and desistance. Since change is associated with both internal and external factors (Bersani & Doherty, 2018), there is a need for qualitative educational research that involves narrative interviews with stopped-out offenders who returned to school (Abeling-Judge, 2019). Former juvenile offenders who completed their high school diploma or equivalent are an ideal population for whom such a qualitative study should be conducted. Though these individuals achieved their educational goals, it would not be surprising to learn that they had previously stopped school before finally completing their education in a juvenile justice facility. Therefore, this study filled a gap in the literature by employing an in-depth inquiry to understand and deconstruct former juvenile offenders' educational experiences in a Pennsylvania juvenile correctional facility (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Development Services Group (2019) asserts that youth in the juvenile justice system are less likely to benefit from education-related protective factors. However, a youth's school experience can help determine the likelihood of education serving as a positive outcome. Despite the deficiencies and poor history of academic achievement, positive school experiences, such as relationships with school staff and positive academic expectations, can be protective factors

against delinquency (Johnson, 2018). Jäggi et al. (2020) investigated whether a better subjective school experience and better grades were connected to more positive outcomes for male and female juvenile offenders and emerging adults returning to their communities. The data from the longitudinal study revealed several insightful findings. Firstly, facility school attachment was associated with decreased delinquency 12 months after release among males and females in younger and older age groups. Secondly, grades in the facility, however, were unrelated to all outcomes. Thirdly, facility school attachment was a predictor of school engagement for returning minors. These scholars also noted that it is unknown how subjective differences in juveniles' incarceration experiences impact their re-entry into their communities.

Although educational attainment has been articulated as a critical variable in successfully reintegrating into the community, various protective and rehabilitative services often do not specifically emphasize the importance of educational achievement (Grigorenko et al., 2019). Nonetheless, education as a protective factor against crime and delinquency is promising. Quantitative research in Florida has shown that education in confinement had positive outcomes for juvenile offenders returning to the community (Development Services Group, 2019). By researching the educational experiences of former juvenile offenders in Pennsylvania who already completed their high school goals, we can better understand whether these individuals, in fact, describe education as a protective factor against delinquency and criminality into adulthood. Ellison et al. (2017) conducted a rapid evidence assessment to review the link between prison education and post-release outcomes, such as recidivism and employment. Their meta-analysis of 18 studies on re-offending found that prison education had a positive impact on recidivism. This study also indicated that inmates receiving prison education were 24 percent more likely to find employment than those who did not.

Bozick et al. (2018) provided support to Ellison and colleagues' findings related to education. These authors found that inmates participating in a correctional education program were 28% less likely to recidivate than those who did not participate in these programs. However, their findings did not coincide with the results related to employment. Instead, Bozick et al. reported no difference in the likelihood to obtain post-release employment among those who participated in correctional education and those who did not. Though both studies involved meta-analyses, the date range and prison location of the eligible studies in their analyses differed somewhat. Ellison et al.'s (2017) research consisted of studies published between 1994 and 2015, primarily in North America. On the other hand, Bozick and colleagues' study involved publications exclusively in the United States from 1980 to 2017.

Grigorenko et al. (2019) posited that academic resiliency and continued desire for further education have been demonstrated among juveniles in the justice system. However, incarceration can have a long-term impact on a juvenile's future. Hence, policymakers should develop and promote policies that emphasize educational achievement and academic success as alternatives to delinquency (Amin et al., 2016). In a study analyzing the causal effect of earning a high school diploma, GED, or vocational degree on arrest, Amin and colleagues examined a representative sample of 7,953 eligible youth applicants to Job Corp between 1994-1996 within the contiguous United States. This study showed that a high school diploma might have had the highest arrest reducing effect, followed by vocational degrees and GED. Based on the short-term nature of test preparation programs such as the GED, it is not surprising that it was found to have the least arrest-reducing effect. These programs do not provide a full range of cognitive and psychological skills developed in a regular high school environment (Shubert et al., 2018).

Schubert et al. (2018) highlighted the need for education beyond a GED. The authors examined the employment and educational outcomes for justice-involved youth with or without mental health disorders. This longitudinal study suggested that adolescents with one of the assessed mental health disorders were less likely to obtain education beyond a GED than youth without one of the assessed disorders. Furthermore, these researchers suggested that the GED does little, if anything, to improve employment and earning prospects. This study emphasizes the need to promote education and training beyond a GED to prepare juveniles for positive re-entry into society. The pursuit of a college education may be an appropriate avenue for justice-involved minors. Kremer and Vaughn (2019) found that 87% of youth incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities in Western Pennsylvania aspired to attend college, which is higher than the 63% of ninth-graders in the general population that reported that they expected to attend college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Despite the high expectations among these incarcerated youth, Kremer and Vaughn noted that research documenting lower educational attainment levels among juvenile offenders suggests that these youth may have unrealistically high hopes for the future.

Ohara et al. (2020) reviewed the youth record, juvenile diary (staff report), and school performance ratings of 283 boys in Japan to explore correctional education's effects on juvenile delinquents in a children's self-reliance support facility. This quantitative study's findings suggest that multi-dimensional and intensive correctional education significantly improved children's resilience and academic performance. These findings point to the need for juvenile correctional education to involve several enriching educational aspects rather than the current bare minimum or sub-par education offered to juvenile offenders (Development Services Group, 2019; National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016; Sharlein, 2018; Tannis, 2017). Most recent

studies on education as a positive outcome for juveniles have utilized quantitative approaches

(Abeling-Judge, 2019; Amin et al., 2016; Jäggi et al., 2020; Ohara et al., 2020; Schubert et al.,

2018). Abeling-Judge proposed that further research should utilize qualitative approaches, such

as narrative interviews, especially with offenders who previously dropped out of school and

decided to return. Overall, more qualitative research is needed to understand how youth

offenders perceive the positive outcomes of earning an education at or above the high school

level.

Juvenile Correctional Education

Research suggests that juvenile correctional education programs can enhance youths'

social, cognitive, and life skills after their release from a juvenile correctional facility (Ho &

Rocheleau, 2020). The Council of State Governments Justice Center (2015) provides one of the

most recent, comprehensive, and frequently cited publications related to education among

justice-involved youth (Carter, 2018; Development Services Group, 2019; Miller, 2019; Tannis,

2017; Weaver, 2017). Therefore, it would be negligent not to cite this publication when

discussing correctional education in the juvenile justice system. According to The Council of

State Governments Justice Center, the most critical need for education exists maybe among

incarcerated youth. However, their situation makes them especially challenging to serve.

Adolescents in the juvenile justice system have a statutory right to a publicly funded education

that is comparable to their counterparts in traditional public schools (Development Services

Group, 2019; Steele et al., 2016). Educational services in juvenile residential facilities are subject

to federal civil rights laws such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

(Development Services Group, 2019). Juveniles placed in detention centers and residential

placement facilities cannot attend schools within their communities. Therefore, juvenile

correctional facilities are obligated to provide educational services for these youth (Steele et al., 2016). The existing literature provides insights into students' characteristics in juvenile correctional education programs, the quality and standards of these programs, the availability of academic support, and students' experiences (Development Services Group, 2019).

The administration and delivery of education vary by state and facility type. In some jurisdictions, the juvenile justice system handles this responsibility, while in others, the department of education assumes this function (Development Services Group, 2019). The Council of State Governments Justice Center (2015) provided a breakdown of the entity responsible for delivering education in state-run, locally run, and privately operated juvenile facilities in all 50 states. The juvenile justice system oversees education in six states, while the state or local education agency oversees education in three states. In 41 states, the juvenile justice system, department of education, and private providers administer education. Juvenile facility types in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania include state-run, locally run, and private-operated facilities. Regardless of their control type, all juvenile facilities must be licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, 2018). The administration of education for incarcerated juvenile offenders in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania occurs through the Pennsylvania Department of Education (DOE) and the local intermediate units (Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, n.d.).

Adolescents entering the juvenile justice system have a lower academic achievement level than children in the general population (Development Services Group, 2019; National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016; Steele et al., 2016). Many adjudicated youth's educational levels rarely exceed the elementary level (National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016; Steele et al., 2016). Although grade repetition rates vary from study to study, the Development Services Group

(2019) contends that grade repetition is a common issue among justice-involved youth. The

juvenile justice system is drastically overrepresented by youth with special education-related

disabilities (Miller, 2019). According to the National Juvenile Justice Network (2016), an

estimated 70% of juvenile offenders have learning disabilities. This claim has been corroborated

by Miller, who reported that between 30-70% of students in the juvenile justice system have a

learning disability. The juvenile correctional education student demographic is also more likely

to have emotional and substance abuse issues than youth in the general population (Steele et al.,

2016).

     Boys comprised approximately 86% of youth held in juvenile correctional facilities in

2011, and children of racial and ethnic minorities were strikingly overrepresented (Steele et al.,

2016). Data on student experience and access to rigorous courses in juvenile correctional

educational programs are often incomplete or inaccurate (Korman et al., 2019). However, the

National Juvenile Justice Network (2016) argued that incarcerated youth are provided with

substandard education that usually does not align with state curricula, creating credit

transferability issues for students going back to their home school districts. However, the

Philadelphia Department of Human Services (n.d.) asserts that all credits earned in the

Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center are transferrable to the youth's home school.

Although federal regulations stipulate a high-quality educational program for justice-involved

youth, only eight states provide incarcerated youth with access to educational and vocational

programs similar to those available to their non-incarcerated peers (Tannis, 2017; The Council of

State Governments Justice Center, 2015). Evidence suggests that educational outcomes among

juveniles in correctional programs vary by the facility's operational control. For instance, the

Development Services Group (2019) posits that youth in state-run facilities have higher high

school graduation rates and GED completion than youth in locally run facilities.

Special Education Needs

Students with learning and developmental disabilities are overrepresented in the juvenile

justice system (Miller, 2019; Wiggins, 2016). Wiggins contended that Black youth are not only

overrepresented in the juvenile justice system, but they also account for a disproportionate

percentage of students placed in special education programs. The Development Services Group

(2017) furthered this argument by asserting that in addition to Black youth, Native Americans,

Latinos, males, and youth of lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are more likely to be diagnosed

with a disability. Youth in juvenile correctional facilities are seven times more likely than

students in public school to require special education services (Burke & Dalmage, 2016). Despite

this documented prevalence of disabilities and the need for special education among justice-

involved adolescents, Miller observed that the educational services needed to support juveniles

with special needs are often inadequate in detention and correctional facilities. Federal policies

such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) establish guidelines on treating

youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the juvenile justice system

(Development Services Group, 2017).

There have been numerous litigations alleging that juvenile correctional programs are not

meeting state and federal mandates. For instance, Miller (2019) noted that as of 2013, almost 60

lawsuits were filed about the non-compliance of juvenile facilities regarding the provisions of the

IDEA, including child find, individualized education plans (IEPs), and least restrictive

environments and transitional services. However, research examining strategies to increase

compliance with student needs and education programs in the juvenile justice system is limited.

Burke and Dalmage (2016) sought to advance the literature in this area by exploring advocacy

strategies used by probation officers and the barriers they face when trying to ensure that court-

involved youth receive appropriate educational support. Their study found that documentation,

collaboration with stakeholders, assertive communication, and creative advocacy were some of

the advocacy strategies used. Conversely, the study found some barriers included poor working

relationships with schools, the older age of youth, and obstacles to parent involvement.

Miller (2019) conducted a similar study with staff in a juvenile detention facility to

understand how the team addressed the barriers to providing sufficient special education

programming. Consistent with the existing literature, this research indicated that the studied

juvenile facility experienced some common issues associated with adherence to special

education in juvenile detention and correctional facilities. According to Miller, staff developed

relationships with internal and external stakeholders and utilized creative problem-solving tactics

to overcome barriers that would otherwise limit youth's access to special education. Improving

the delivery of special education services in juvenile facilities is critical since the literature

established that youth with disabilities are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice

system. Students with disabilities may struggle more to achieve academic success while involved

in the juvenile justice system (Development Services Group, 2019). Ho and Rocheleau (2020)

found that adjudicated juveniles with special education reported slightly higher recidivism rates.

However, unlike the general population of juvenile offenders, their study found that education

failed to predict recidivism among the sampled youth in special education programs.

Quality and Standards

The literature on effective instructional approaches in secure juvenile confinement is

limited (Development Services Group, 2019). However, existing research indicates several

shortcomings. Several studies report that education in juvenile facilities may not meet the same standards as those in public school settings (Development Services Group, 2019; Korman et al., 2019; National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016; The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015). According to the National Juvenile Justice Network (2016), incarcerated youth are subjected to substandard education that often does not align with state curricula. In addition, the staff working in these facilities usually do not receive sufficient training on addressing the development need of this population and how to ensure continuity of education (Development Services Group, 2019). Since the administration of education in juvenile justice facilities varies by state (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015), no generalized qualification standards are required to teach in these facilities. Similarly, the requirements to be a direct care staff or juvenile detention officer will vary by facility type, i.e., detention center or residential placement, and operation control, i.e., state or local government, or private for-profit entity. For example, youth care staff employed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are trained to handle emotionally improper and suicidal youth and use appropriate physical restraint techniques to control adolescents' aggressive behaviors (Commonwealth of PA, 2018).

Educational services in state-operated facilities are provided in Pennsylvania through agreements between the Pennsylvania DOE and the local intermediate units (IUs) (Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, n.d.). The 29 regional IUs provide cost-effective and management-efficient educational services and liaison between public school districts and the Pennsylvania DOE (Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units, n.d.). The typical requirement to teach in a public school is a certification in the teaching specialty's content area. Currently, prospective educators must complete an approved standard certification program or an approved alternative certification program or internship (Pennsylvania Department of Education,

n.d.). Teachers in state-operated juvenile facilities would follow the standard of their respective IUs. The School District of Philadelphia (IU-26) provides educational services within the Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center (PJJSC). To be employed as a teacher in the School District of Philadelphia, an individual must obtain certification through the Pennsylvania DOE or apply for an emergency permit through the Pennsylvania DOE (The School District of Philadelphia, 2020).

Korman et al. (2019) studied the patterns and trends of educational services for youth in juvenile justice schools using two years of data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). This study revealed several deficiencies across states that provided adequate data to the CRDC. These deficiencies indicated that: 1) students in juvenile justice schools received far lower access to advanced math and science classes, 2) students in juvenile justice schools do not pass Algebra 1 at a consistently high rate like their peers in traditional schools, and 3) students in juvenile justice schools have less access to credit recovery than their peers, despite having a higher need in this area. The Council of State Governments Justice Center (2015) provides one of the most recent and comprehensive publications on educational programming quality in juvenile correctional facilities. This report indicated that only eight states (16 percent) provide incarcerated youth with comparable educational and vocational services available to youth in the community. Additionally, only 13 states (26 percent) provide incarcerated youth with equal access to educational services available to youth in the community, including credit recovery programs, GED preparation, and post-secondary courses.

Students in juvenile correctional programs are often taught by uncertified or unqualified teachers (Korman et al., 2019). According to these authors, many juvenile facilities fail to provide adequate instructional hours to students. They posited that students in juvenile justice

schools lose a day of instruction each week since they spend an average of 24 hours per week in educational programming instead of 30 hours. Furthermore, many states do not hold juvenile facility schools and educators accountable for ensuring that youth services meet state curricula standards (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015). Nonetheless, The School District of Philadelphia (n.d.) maintains that the teachers at the PJJSC creatively incorporate the Common Core Curriculum and provides personalized learning for students to meet the requirements for a Pennsylvania high school diploma or GED.

In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice partnered to recommend five guiding principles for providing high-quality education in juvenile justice secure care settings. According to the Development Services Group (2019), these principles are as follows:

1. Provide a facility climate that prioritizes safety and education in conditions conducive to learning and addressing all youth's needs through social support services.

2. Ensure sufficient funds allocation to facilities so that the educational opportunities for justice-involved youth meet the standards of those available to youth in the general population.

3. Recruit and retain highly qualified teachers whose skills are relevant for working with justice-involved youth and who can positively impact youth by providing effective teaching and learning environments.

4. Utilize rigorous and relevant curricula aligned with state academic or career and technical education standards through instructional methods and materials that prepare students for college and the workforce.

5. Utilize formal processes and procedures to ensure successful navigation of the system and effortless transitions back into communities.

To ensure that youth in juvenile correctional education programs receive high-quality education, state and local government should: 1) require juvenile facility schools to provide the same educational and vocational services that are available in the community; 2) hold these facilities accountable for providing educational and vocational services that align with state standards; and 3) require all facilities to obtain nationally recognized accreditation for their educational and vocational programs (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015).

Academic Support

Teaching in a juvenile correctional program involves unique challenges. In addition to lower academic achievements among students in juvenile justice schools, teachers are confronted with emotional and safety issues (Development Services Group, 2019; Steele et al., 2016). Still, providing youth in the juvenile justice system with quality teachers is vital in the educational process (Houchins et al., 2017). Unfortunately, research examining the academic support available to youth in juvenile facilities is scant. Much of the limited research providing insights in this area was conducted more than five years ago. This deficiency in the literature points to the insufficiency of research that explores the educational experiences of justice-involved juveniles (Martin, 2017). Adolescents who have experienced a juvenile correctional educational program are perhaps in the best position to provide insights on the academic support available in these programs. Martin provided insights from students in his study of Black males in a juvenile justice school in the United States' Mid-Atlantic region. The findings related to academic support from teachers were overall positive. Some participants shared that teachers made the

work easier to understand, listened to their academic concerns, and built relationships and bonds with them (Martin, 2017).

      The National Juvenile Justice Network (2016) posited that youth in short-term facilities receive less instructional time than adolescents in public schools. Korman et al. (2019) claimed that youth in juvenile facility schools typically receive 24 hours of instruction each week instead of 30 hours, which is standard for justice-involved youth in even a country like England (Shafi, 2019). The literature has indicated that many children in the juvenile justice system require special education services. However, many juvenile facilities fail to meet students' needs, which has resulted in numerous lawsuits (Miller, 2019). Completing math and science courses is a typical requirement for college admissions, yet access to these courses is limited in juvenile justice schools (Korman et al., 2019). According to Korman and colleagues, lab equipment use is prohibited in facilities that prioritize safety and security. Hence, students in some states do not have access to resources that facilitate labs in science classes. Fauth et al. (2019) found that teacher self-efficacy was positively related to student achievement. Therefore, teacher efficacy might influence the level of academic support provided to students in juvenile justice schools. Since teachers with high self-efficacy are likely to use class time more effectively (Weaver, 2017), it means students are more likely to receive the support they need from these teachers. Teacher and student self-efficacy can affect the same motivational outcomes, and research has shown a positive relationship between teacher and student outcomes (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) asserted that further research is needed to understand how teachers and students influence each other over time and how teachers develop and maintain both their self-efficacy and that of their students.

Experiences of Juvenile Offenders

The lived educational experiences of juvenile offenders are yet another area of the juvenile justice literature that is under-researched. Martin (2017) argued that juvenile justice schools' design and evaluation fail to include the students' voices. He explored the narrated educational experiences of Black males in a juvenile justice school. This study's conceptual framework comprised four concepts: alternative school design, disproportionate minority contact, black male experience in high school, and culturally responsive pedagogy. This phenomenological study looked at how Black male high school students narrated their experiences of attending a juvenile justice school and their perceptions of the academic and social support provided during placement. The researcher identified five major themes: academic success, student support team access, intelligence level, teacher academic support, and assistance from teachers. The findings of this study provide insights from students that can be used to assist with the design of future disciplinary-based alternative programs. In addition to conducting future research with this population to gain additional insights, Martin (2017) recommended a future study that involves students in the Office of Refugee Resettlement Program within the same juvenile justice school.

Summary

This study sought to fill a gap in the literature related to former juvenile offenders' educational experiences and self-efficacy who completed their high school diploma or equivalent while in a juvenile correctional facility. This chapter introduced Bandura's social cognitive theory and self-efficacy (SCT) theory as the theoretical lenses framing this study. Bandura's social cognitive theory suggests that learning occurs through observing others' behaviors, developing competencies, establishing goals, and responding to feedback (Bandura, 1986). From

an SCT perspective, learning in a school setting might be influenced by others' observed behaviors. Self-efficacy is the central construct of the broader SCT framework. According to Bandura (1995), people's self-efficacy comes from believing in their abilities to organize and execute the courses of action necessary to handle potential situations. Students who exhibit self-efficacy for learning participate more readily, work harder, persist longer despite any difficulties, and achieve higher (Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

The literature review included a synthesis of education and delinquency, education as a protective factor against delinquency, and juvenile correctional education. Much of the research has focused on the relationship between education and delinquency rather than students' experiences. Several researchers have concentrated on delinquency's effects on educational achievement (Kim, 2020; Tan et al., 2018). Others have focused on education as a protective factor against delinquency and subsequent recidivism (Abeling-Judge, 2019; Development Services Group, 2019; Johnson, 2018). The educational needs of juvenile offenders have been documented in the literature for over a century. However, much of the recent research indicates that the educational services provided to this subpopulation of adolescents are grossly deficient (Development Services Group, 2019; Korman et al., 2019; Miller, 2019; National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016; The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015). There is limited research that provides justice-involved youth with the opportunity to describe their educational experiences. It is also unknown how these experiences are understood through the theoretical lenses of Bandura's SCT and self-efficacy theory since no recent studies in the last five years have applied either approach in this context. The existing literature highlights the need for additional research that explores the lived educational experiences of juvenile offenders. However, it is essential to understand these educational experiences through a social cognitive

lens to deconstruct how social interactions with teachers, staff, and students promote or diminish learning in a juvenile justice facility. This study also sought to fill a gap in the literature related to juvenile offenders' self-efficacy and motivation in completing their high school diploma while in a juvenile correctional facility.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived educational experiences of former juvenile offenders who obtained their high school diploma or equivalent in a Pennsylvania juvenile facility, despite the many challenges associated with these programs. A hermeneutic phenomenological research design was appropriate for this study because it aimed to describe former juvenile offenders' lived experiences of a shared phenomenon. This chapter provides a detailed description of the research design that will be used in this study and the sampling strategy to be employed. The data collection methods, data analysis strategy, and the researcher's role are also addressed in this chapter. In addition, a description of the trustworthiness of the study and the ethical considerations are provided.

Design

This qualitative study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to understanding the lived educational experiences of former juvenile offenders who earned their high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile facility in Pennsylvania. Tewksbury (2009) asserted that most of the research in criminology and criminal justice utilizes quantitative methods. However, a quantitative approach was not appropriate for this study, as a quantitative research design is concerned with investigating the causes and effects of an outcome (Creswell, 2013). Quantitative inquiries translate knowledge into numeric value using data collection methods that limit the possible results to those identified by the researcher (Tewksbury, 2009). Therefore, quantitative research does not provide an opportunity for the participant to provide a detailed explanation of the topic of inquiry. Instead, qualitative research was needed to obtain thick descriptions and depth of the participant's experiences of the shared phenomenon (Creswell

& Poth, 2018). Therefore, the knowledge obtained from qualitative inquiries tends to be more informative, richer and offers enhanced understanding when compared to quantitative research data (Tewksbury, 2009).

According to Bhattacharya (2017), qualitative research focuses on human experiences and how the researcher creates meaning out of those experiences. Hence, the research questions guiding this study could not be answered with a "yes" or "no" response. Instead, the researcher sought to understand the lived experiences of the participants regarding the shared phenomenon. Unlike quantitative methods that seek generalization, qualitative research emphasizes the meaning within distinct human experiences, even if they cannot be generalized (Bhattacharya, 2017; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). According to Morgan (2014), a qualitative researcher favors context over generality. Qualitative inquiries allow for open and emergent exploration using small, purposefully selected samples (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Since qualitative research involves real-world situations, Bloomberg and Volpe emphasized that the study takes place in a natural context where the research design framework allows flexibility and creativity.

Phenomenology is one of several qualitative research approaches (Creswell &Poth, 2018). According to van Manen (2014), "phenomenology is originally and essentially a philosophical discipline" (p. 22). However, as a qualitative research approach, Creswell and Poth (2018) posited that phenomenological research involves studying the lived experience of a concept or phenomenon. According to Creswell and Poth, a *phenomenon* is defined as the researcher's central idea. Edward Husserl is often regarded as the father of phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kaufer & Chemero, 2015; Laverty, 2003). Husserl's primary aim was to study phenomena as they appeared through consciousness (Laverty, 2003). Other influential proponents later expanded his views, such as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice

Merleau-Ponty, and Emmanuel Levinas (Zahavi, 2018). A key concept that differentiates

Husserlian phenomenology is the idea of bracketing. In this type of phenomenological study, the

researcher *brackets* his or her lived experiences to understand the participants' experiences

(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; van Manen, 1990; 2014).

The two most common approaches to conducting phenomenological research are

hermeneutic and transcendental (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990).

Though both methods have similar roots, they differ in that transcendental phenomenology takes

a descriptive approach, while hermeneutic phenomenology takes an interpretive approach

(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Transcendental focuses on examining the phenomenon from a fresh

perspective as if it were the first time it is being perceived (Moustakas, 1994). However,

Moustakas acknowledged that this is rarely achieved and perfected. He also asserted that the

observed phenomenon itself is not real, but the experience's subjective perceptions are real.

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that phenomenology involves more than just description, as it

also requires the researcher to interpret the meaning of the lived experiences. Hence, a

hermeneutic phenomenological approach was appropriate to describe and interpret the lived

educational experiences of former juvenile offenders in Pennsylvania.

Hermeneutic phenomenology involves research oriented toward lived experiences and

the interpretation of the *text* of life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Laverty (2003),

hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with human experiences as it is lived. Heidegger, a

former student of Husserl, shifted the focus of phenomenology from a descriptive to an

interpretive undertaking (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). This hermeneutic perspective focuses on

searching for themes and engaging with the data interpretively to understand the meaning of the

experiences (Sloan & Bower, 2014). Furthermore, Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) believe that

human existence is inherently rooted within a realm of meanings. According to Sloan and Bower (2014), hermeneutic phenomenology allows the researcher to interpret the meanings of a phenomenon. Hence, the researcher can analyze text to find meaning and provide interpretation. Bhattacharya (2017) furthered this assertion by articulating other hermeneutic phenomenology tenets, including dialog, preunderstanding, and traditions. In terms of data analysis, the hermeneutic perspective prefers the phenomenon to dictate how the data will be analyzed instead of having a predetermined analytical method (Sloan & Bower, 2014).

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this hermeneutic phenomenological study:

RQ1: How do former youth offenders describe their lived experiences of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania?

RQ2: How do former youth offenders describe their self-efficacy in completing their high school diploma or equivalent while they were in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania?

Setting

The setting for this study was the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. I chose this location because of its geographical convenience and familiarity with the state's juvenile justice system. As mentioned in Chapter One, I previously worked in a juvenile justice correctional facility that operates a public, alternative, all-boys school. Throughout this time, I observed several juvenile offenders obtain their high school diploma or equivalent. Hence, Pennsylvania was a suitable location to explore the educational experiences of former juvenile offenders who earned their high school qualifications in a juvenile facility in the state. Pennsylvania is a state located in the

Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions of the United States. It comprises 67 counties, distributed

across six regions: Northwest, Southwest, Northcentral, Southcentral, Northeast, and Southeast

(Pennsylvania Governor, 2020). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Pennsylvania had an

estimated population of 12.8 million in July 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Pennsylvania's

demographic makeup was 81.6% White, 12% Black or African American, 3.8% Asian, while the

remaining 2.6% consisted of other racial groups. Regardless of race, Hispanics and Latinos

accounted for 7.8% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). An estimated 90.5% of the

population age 25 and older earned a high school diploma or equivalent, while 31.4% achieved a

bachelor's degree or higher. In 2019, Pennsylvania's median household income was

approximately $62,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

Participants

The study participants include former juvenile offenders who completed their high school

diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. Purposeful criterion

sampling and snowball sampling were used to select participants for this study (Creswell & Poth,

2018). Purposeful sampling is an appropriate technique for qualitative research to identify and

choose information-rich cases (Palinkas et al., 2015). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that

the three considerations that go into the purposeful sampling approach are: 1) a decision about

whom to select as participants or sites, 2) the specific type of sampling strategy, and 3) the size

of the sample. Creswell and Poth contend that phenomenological studies should use a narrow

range of sampling strategies when selecting participants. The criterion sampling strategy is

appropriate for identifying and choosing cases that meet some predetermined criterion of

importance (Palinkas et al., 2015). Moreover, Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized that

criterion sampling is helpful for quality assurance.

Criterion sampling was appropriate for this study because the participants were required to meet specific eligibility criteria. Each participant had to be at least 18 years old and completed a high school diploma or equivalent while in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. The potential participants also had to be no longer involved with the juvenile justice system, including not being on probation or parole, nor incarcerated, to avoid the issues of studying a protected population. Snowball sampling was also appropriate because this study aimed to recruit a racially and gender diverse participant pool of former juvenile offenders who had all experienced the same phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Snowball sampling is based on a referral technique in which cases of interest are identified through people who know others who generally know of information-rich cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2015). Thus, by employing a snowball sampling strategy, one participant may know of other former juvenile offenders who may be eligible for this study. Demographic data on each participant was collected and documented, though there were no restrictions on race or gender. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that the sample size in a phenomenological study range from one (Padilla, 2003) up to 325 (Polkinghorne, 1989). This study's sample size was 10 participants, which met the sample size recommendation for a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Procedures

An application was submitted to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and approval was obtained before any data was collected (see Appendix A). Once IRB approval was obtained, I began recruiting participants using a recruitment flyer (see Appendix B). The flyer was uploaded to my social media accounts (Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn). I also shared the flyers with two of my acquaintances, who were asked to share the flyer. The first acquaintance is a former juvenile offender, who helped me recruit other former juvenile

offenders who might have been eligible for my study. The second acquaintance is a Philadelphia-based blogger with a significant portion of his followers based in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Instead of a screening survey, I utilized a verbal or written confirmation script to determine each participant's eligibility for the study (see Appendix C). For this study, I employed a survey, interviews, and reflexive memos as the primary data collection methods (Bhattacharya, 2017; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2016).

Once eligibility was established, a consent form containing additional information about my study was sent to the participants, who were asked to sign the form electronically through Google Forms (see Appendix D). After the participants signed the consent form, I forwarded a link to the online survey on Google Forms (see Appendix E). The first eight questions on the survey were related to demographic information, while the remaining three questions solicited information that was used in the data analysis portion of the study. After the participants completed the survey, I contacted each participant to schedule a mutually convenient time for an interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide, which I refined with my dissertation chair's assistance and a juvenile justice subject matter expert (see Appendix F). Although all interviews utilized the same questions, I had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions based on the participants' responses. All interviews were audio-recorded for transcription and data analysis purposes, using a Sony ICD-BX140 digital voice recorder. After the interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai, a speech-to-text software, I sent a copy of the transcript to each participant to ensure accuracy, make corrections, or add information (Patton, 2015). I conducted memoing after each interview. Once all data was collected, I began the process of data analysis. Data from the interviews and the open-ended responses on the survey were analyzed manually and with NVivo 12 Plus, a qualitative data analysis software (QDAS).

The Researcher's Role

The researcher serves as the primary instrument of measurement in a qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, I was the human instrument in collecting data, observing, taking notes, asking interview questions, and interpreting responses (Patton, 2015). Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on understanding meanings through a hermeneutic circle (van Manen, 2014). This circle involves a movement of comprehension, which goes back and forth across the text until it is understood (Gellweiler et al., 2018). The hermeneutic circle challenges the researcher's expectations, anticipations, or prejudices, which allows for understanding the text and the world outside of oneself (Zhang, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) claimed that research is value-laden, and researchers should be aware of the biases concerning their role in the study. Hence, I had a duty as the researcher to report potential sources of bias and error (Patton, 2015).

I worked with juvenile offenders in a state-operated, non-secure juvenile facility for approximately 15 months. My position allowed me to develop a professional relationship with youth from various counties across the state of Pennsylvania. Therefore, it was a possibility that potential participants could include former juvenile delinquents I interacted with in a juvenile placement facility. I also recognized that I had assumptions and biases related to juvenile correctional education. I spent a considerable amount of time working at the alternative school located at the juvenile correctional facility where I was previously employed. Therefore, it may have been challenging to bracket out all personal experiences since data interpretation requires the researcher to incorporate their assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 2014). However, Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized that researchers "must bracket out, as much as possible, their own experiences" (p. 79). In my phenomenological study, the constructivist worldview allowed individuals to describe their lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). As a

constructivist, I utilized the social constructivism worldview to guide this study. Through this worldview, individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

Qualitative research frequently utilizes multiple data-gathering methods in a deliberate attempt to obtain a more sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). This strategy, known as triangulation, involves using multiple data collection methods, different sources, various investigators, and several theoretical perspectives to corroborate evidence for validating the study's accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2016). This study employed a survey containing open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews, and reflexive memos to achieve triangulation.

Survey

Survey research involves collecting data from study participants through their responses to questions (Ponto, 2015). Though surveys are typically a quantitative data collection method, they can be used in combination with qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and document reviews (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2018). Ponto (2015) posited that when surveys are used for qualitative research, they utilize open-ended questions. According to Maxfield and Babbie (2018), open-ended questions allow the survey respondents to provide their own answers, while close-ended questions offer a list of options from which the participant selects his or her answers. The survey used in this study took approximately 20 minutes to be completed and consisted of seven close-ended and four open-ended questions. However, all close-ended questions and one open-ended question solicited information solely related to the participants' background and demographics. NVivo 12 Plus case classification feature was used

to create participant attributes from the background and demographics data. The remaining three open-ended questions focused on obtaining data from the participants to answer the researcher's questions. NVivo 12 Plus was used to create codes from the data obtained through the open-ended questions. An advantage of using surveys is that they are typically unobtrusive and relatively easy to administer (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2018). However, Bloomberg and Volpe noted that, when used alone, surveys are of little value in exploring complex social relationships or patterns of interactions. For this reason, the survey was supplemented by semi-structured interviews and reflexive memos.

Interviews

Interviews are the primary method used to collect qualitative data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative interviews are verbal conversations between an interviewer and the interviewee or participant, which follow a general inquiry plan (Bhattacharya, 2017; Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). The use of interviews was vital to obtain a thick and rich description of the participants' lived educational experiences while they were in a juvenile justice facility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). Bhattacharya (2017) asserted that researchers might employ various types of interviews, including formal semi-structured interviews, in-depth, open-ended interviews, informal open-ended interviews, and natural conversations. This study utilized semi-structured, open-ended interviews to understand the participants' lived educational experiences. The interviews lasted about 45-60 minutes. Hence, approximately 150 pages of raw data pages were organized and analyzed.

Semi-structured interviews involve using an interview guide to facilitate a more focused exploration of a specific topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Maxfield and Babbie (2018) reasoned that semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to explore themes that emerge in

the interview. Although researchers employing semi-structured interviews usually follow the

prepared protocol (see Table 1), they also permit unexpected directions in the interview once

they are relevant to the research topic (Bhattacharya, 2017; Maxfield & Babbie, 2018).

Researchers have an ethical responsibility to safeguard their participants' confidentiality

(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Therefore, participants in this study were assigned pseudonyms or

fake names to protect their identities (Allen & Wiles, 2016). Pseudonyms were chosen and

refined in collaboration with the participants. Allen and Wiles noted that researchers should

consider the participants' thoughts and care regarding gender, culture, and location when

choosing pseudonyms.

Table 1. Interview Questions

Interview Questions	Research Question
1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.	
2. Please describe your educational experience while you were in a juvenile correctional facility.	RQ1
3. Please tell me about the academic support you received from teachers or other staff (e.g., teacher's aide, social worker, psychologist, counselor, etc.) while you were in a juvenile correctional facility.	RQ1
4. If special education services were needed, such as an individualized education program (IEP), please tell me about your experiences with the special education services you received in a juvenile correctional facility.	RQ1
5. In what way(s), if any, did teachers, staff and peers influence your educational achievement when you were in a juvenile correctional facility?	RQ1
6. Who or what motivated you to complete your education while you were in a juvenile correctional facility?	RQ1
7. Please describe any issues you faced with the educational services provided to you in a juvenile correctional facility.	RQ1
8. How did you work around these issues to achieve your high school diploma or equivalent?	RQ2
9. How would you describe the way you felt about your ability to complete your education when you were in a juvenile correctional facility?	RQ2
10. What were some of the things you did to ensure that you completed your educational goals when you were in a juvenile correctional facility?	RQ2
11. What additional information would you like to share with me about your educational experience in a juvenile correctional facility that we have not discussed today?	
12. Do you have any questions for me?	

The interviews were conducted using a self-authored interview guide, refined with my

dissertation chair's assistance and a juvenile justice subject matter expert. An interview guide is

essential because it allows the researcher to carefully think about everything the interview should cover and how the collected data will help answer the research questions (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Question one was an opening question that sought to gather background information about the participant. It also aimed to build rapport between the researcher and the participant (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Questions two through four were related to the participant's educational experiences of earning a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility. The existing literature indicates limited research that gives a voice to juvenile offenders concerning their educational experiences (Donges, 2015; Martin, 2017). Hence, these questions aimed to obtain a deeper understanding of former juvenile offenders' shared educational experiences. Questions five through ten were designed to elicit information on the influence of social interactions and self-beliefs on completing a high school qualification in a juvenile justice facility. These questions were explicitly grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1995). Motivation and self-efficacy for learning share a close relationship because self-efficacy is essential to understanding learning motivation in a classroom setting (Greene, 2017). Questions 11 through 12 were closing questions. These questions sought to allow the participant to reflect on what was covered and provide additional insights (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

Reflexive Memos

Memos play a role in developing the theory as the researcher jots down ideas during data collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Birks et al. (2008) contended that qualitative research, by its very nature, necessitates the researcher to assume a reflexive stance. Reflexive memos involve "reflecting upon and asking questions of research interactions all along the way, from embarking on an inquiry project to sharing the findings" (Glesne, 2016, p. 145). According

to Glesne, this requires the researcher to ask themselves questions and record them in a field log. Using these journal-style entries or logs, the researcher can document information about the participants, phenomenon, or investigation process by thinking and writing about them (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher can also ask questions of others and record their feedback in the memo log, which could change the course of the inquiry (Glesne, 2016). Through reflexive memos, I had the opportunity to have conversations with myself about the data I obtained regarding former juvenile offenders' lived educational experiences while earning a high school diploma or equivalent in a Pennsylvania juvenile facility (Saldaña, 2016). Though reflexive memos are sometimes referred to as analytical memos, they are not limited to the research's analytical phase (Birks et al., 2008). Instead, they can help formulate ideas about the research topic, assumptions, and subjective perspectives and develop the research design. Birks and colleagues emphasized the importance of prioritizing memo writing in retaining information that may otherwise be lost. Hence, memoing was done after every interview using the memos feature in NVivo 12 Plus. Memoing was also done before the first interview to record my emotional state, such as nervousness and anxiety, and my overall perception about conducting the first interview for this study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary review of the database, coding and identifying themes, representing the data, and interpreting them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although qualitative researchers tend to use a general process (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the specific type of analysis will depend on the methodology, research goals, and data collection method (Glesne, 2016). While most of the data analysis began when all data collection was completed, Stake (1995) suggested that there is no specific point when data

analysis begins. Hence, I employed memoing to continuously analyze the data from the initial

data collection point throughout the data analysis process. Organizing the data into a file naming

system is essential to effortlessly retrieve the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consequently, the

survey data was labeled and stored in an electronic folder, and the interview data were labeled

and stored in another electronic folder. Both folders are securely located on a password-protected

computer. The reflexive notes were recorded using memos in NVivo 12 Plus. This software was

used on a password-protected computer.

Transcription

Patton (2015) asserted that completing all or some of one's transcriptions allows for

insight and clarity through immersion in the data. Therefore, I transcribed the data from the

interviews with the assistance of Otter.ai. This speech-to-text service provides voice recording

and transcription through a mobile application or web browser (Otter.ai, 2020). Since Otter.ai

captured the audio and text, my role as the researcher was to listen to the recordings, ensure that

the transcripts were captured accurately, and make corrections as needed. Otter.ai allows

transcripts to be downloaded in various file formats such as TXT, DOC, and PDF. Recordings

and transcripts were securely stored on Otter.ai cloud storage. The participants' confidentiality

was not an issue of concern when using Otter.ai since they were only addressed by their

pseudonyms during the interviews. Furthermore, Otter.ai leverages specific physical, managerial,

and technical safeguards to protect collected data and personal information from loss, misuse,

unauthorized access, disclosure, alteration, and destruction (Otter.ai, 2020). Otter.ai is utilized by

prestigious higher education institutions such as Columbia University, the University of

California, Los Angeles, and Tulane University (Otter.ai., 2020). Recently, Otter.ai has received

increased attention from doctoral students and significant praise from qualitative researchers

(Otter.ai, 2019; Serdencuk, 2019).

Naïve Reading

After the data was transcribed, the transcripts were read using a line-by-line approach

(van Manen, 1990). Reading the transcript multiple times allows the researcher to gain an

understanding of the initial meaning of the data (Pratt-Erikson et al., 2014). This step is a

necessary component of the hermeneutic circle because it allows the researcher to go back and

forth across the text until fully understood (Gellweiler et al., 2018). During naïve reading, the

researcher analyzes the text until the meaning units are identified (Pratt-Eriksson et al., 2014).

The condensed themes, which became the essential meaning of each unit, were expressed

concisely to reflect everyday language (Pratt-Eriksson et al., 2014; Ricoeur, 1976).

Memoing

As previously mentioned, data analysis occurred throughout the data collection process

using memoing. However, following the member-checked data transcription and the completion

of naïve reading, I used NVivo 12 Plus to perform additional memoing by taking notes, engaging

in reflexive thinking, and summarizing field notes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This data analysis

strategy allowed me to develop new thoughts and perspectives (Glesne, 2016). Memoing also

creates an opportunity for the researcher to identify initial codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Moreover, the use of reflexive memos is one way the researcher can engage the hermeneutic

circle by moving back and forth through the entire text (Laverty, 2003).

First Cycle Coding

During the first cycle coding, I used *in vivo* coding approach to acclimatize myself with

the participants' words used to describe their lives, perspectives, and worldviews (Glesne, 2016;

Saldaña, 2016). The use of *in vivo* coding increases the likelihood that the researcher will capture

the participants' experiences (Stringer, 2014). First cycle coding is usually straightforward as this

cycle involves initial code, which aims to refamiliarize the researcher with the data (Glesne,

2016; Saldaña, 2016).

Second Cycle Coding

Saldaña (2016) reasoned that the researcher can reorganize and reanalyze the data from

their chosen first cycle method during second cycle coding. I employed pattern coding during

this cycle of coding. Pattern coding creates *meta-code*, which identifies similar coded data within

a category label (Saldaña, 2016). Elliot (2018) suggested that pattern coding is valuable when the

researcher wants to combine material into a smaller number of more meaningful units. Through

pattern coding, I was able to pool together more descriptive codes that were less abstract (Punch,

2014).

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is the process of searching for themes and patterns (Glesne, 2016).

According to Glesne, thematic analysis involves separating data into categories by *codes.*

Saldaña (2016) defines a *code* as a word or a short phrase the researcher uses to assign language-

based or visual data elements. The coding stage is the heart of qualitative data analysis (Creswell

& Poth, 2018). I employed a qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) – NVivo 12 Plus – to

assist with the thematic analysis process. Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) posited that QDAS has

become more prevalent in recent years. Qualitative researchers have discussed the purpose, rigor,

and transparency of NVivo (Bonello & Meehan, 2019; Maher et al., 2018; Richards, 1999;

Woods et al., 2016). Bazeley and Jackson (2014) provide helpful information on using NVivo

for data analysis. NVivo software allows the researcher to import, organize, explore, and connect

qualitative data (QSR International, 2020). NVivo 12 Plus was used to organize the data and

identify additional preliminary codes from the interviews and the open-ended responses from the

surveys. Saldaña (2016) cautioned that QDAS does not code the data for the researcher. Hence, I

located frequently used words and phrases to identify codes and themes in the data (Moustakas,

1994). Initially, I conducted a word frequency query in NVivo 12 Plus to create a word cloud

from the survey and interview files. Since the word frequency included the wording of the

research questions and the researcher's spoken words, it was essential to carefully review the

transcript to ensure that the codes and themes came from the participants' descriptions. One of

the coding challenges for beginning researchers, such as myself, is the possibility of developing

an elaborate list of codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, it was essential to eliminate

repetitive and irrelevant data to avoid this pitfall (Patton, 2015).

Synthesis

Patton (2015) asserted that "whether you do or do not use software, the real analytical

work takes place in your head" (p. 531). As the human instrument in this hermeneutic

phenomenological study, I was responsible for interpreting the meaning of former juvenile

offenders' lived educational experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sloan & Bower, 2014). The

data synthesis involves combining the analyzed data and providing meanings and essences of the

experience (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, I employed a survey, interviews, and reflexive

memos to achieve triangulation. Together, analyzed findings from the multiple data sources were

synthesized to interpret the participant's experiences of the phenomenon. Furthermore, this

synthesis allowed me to represent and visualize the findings. According to Creswell and Poth

(2018), representing and visualizing the data involves developing a textual description of what

happened, developing a structural description of how the phenomenon was experienced, and developing the essence using a combined description.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research allows researchers to be confident in their findings and interpretation (Patton, 2015). In addition, it provides evidence that the researcher's descriptions and analysis accurately reflect the reality of the phenomenon and participants studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Establishing trustworthiness involves meeting four criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Glesne, 2016). I employed several methods that include, but were not limited to, purposeful sampling, journaling/reflexivity, triangulation, thick description, detailed information, and member checks to achieve trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility refers to whether the research has accurately represented the participants' perceptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). I ensured credibility in this study by journaling, triangulating the data, conducting member checks, and obtaining thick descriptions. Since I recognized that I brought biases to this study, I utilized NVivo 12 Plus memos to record my subjective perspectives and biases through reflexive notes. By triangulating the data, I used multiple methods to corroborate evidence obtained through different means. Through member checks, I ensured that my findings accurately portrayed the participants and were not influenced by my biases. I also presented thick descriptions for my readers by obtaining detailed information from the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability involves ensuring that the process of inquiry is documented, logical, and traceable (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Patton, 2015). Confirmability requires the researcher to demonstrate how the conclusions were drawn to show that the findings and interpretations originated from the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Through triangulation, I increased this study's dependability by articulating how each data collection method was relevant for the research design and research questions. Bloomberg and Volpe stressed that a goal of confirmability is to acknowledge how our biases and prejudices impact our interpretation of the data and how we use reflexivity and reflexive discourse to address those concerns. Hence, I continuously used reflexive notes to ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

Transferability

Qualitative research is not concerned with producing truths that can be generalized to other people and settings (Bhattacharya, 2017; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Morgan, 2014). Instead, qualitative research emphasizes the meaning within distinct human experiences, which might apply to broader contexts while maintaining content-specific richness (Bhattacharya, 2017; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Bloomberg and Volpe reasoned that transferability is concerned with "how well the study has made it possible for readers to decide whether similar processes will work in their own setting and communities" (p 205). The use of purposeful sampling and providing detailed information contributed to the transferability of this study. I defined the purposeful sampling strategy to increase the transferability and replicability of this study. Considering Bloomberg and Volpe's recommendations, I also provided detailed information to increase the transferability of this study to similar settings.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers are confronted with many ethical issues throughout the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2016). However, they have a moral responsibility to minimize any potential harm involved in the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was critical to ensure that the participants were protected. I obtained informed consent from the participants, which outlined the study's voluntary nature, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and detail about how I would protect their privacy and confidentiality. Once data collection began, the participants were only referred to by their pseudonyms. The specifics of what I heard and observed were not discussed with anyone to ensure privacy and confidentiality (Glesne, 2016). It was equally essential to protect the obtained data from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss, or theft (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Therefore, I kept the pseudonyms codebook on a separate computer from the data to prevent anyone from determining the participants' identities. Furthermore, I will keep all research information on password-protected personal computers at my home for three years.

Compensation

Each participant received a $15 VISA e-gift card after participating in this study. The participant had to complete all the research's procedural steps to be eligible for compensation, as outlined in the consent form. Researchers may offer low-cost cash prize incentives to increase responsiveness when recruiting study participants (Pedersen, & Nielsen, 2016). Since I valued the time each participant devoted to my study, the e-gift cards were meant to express appreciation to the participants (Pandya & Desai, 2013).

Summary

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the lived educational experiences of former juvenile offenders who obtained their high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile facility in Pennsylvania. This chapter discussed the research design and a rationale for choosing a phenomenological approach, specifically hermeneutic. Details regarding the settings and participants were also discussed. The various methods to be used in the data collection process, including surveys, interviews, and reflexive memos, were discussed in this chapter. The data analysis procedures, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations for the study were also discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the lived educational experiences of former juvenile offenders who obtained their high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. The focus of this chapter is to present the research findings. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do former youth offenders describe their lived experiences of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania?

RQ2: How do former youth offenders describe their self-efficacy in completing their high school diploma or equivalent while they were in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania?

This chapter begins with descriptions of each study participants' demographics. Next, study results are presented in the form of themes that were developed after a thorough transcript analysis and textual and structural descriptions of how research participants experienced the phenomenon. Finally, the synthesized findings that answered each research question are also discussed in this chapter.

Participants

Table 2. *Participant Demographics*

Participant	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	High School Qualification	Year Earned	Facility Type
Carter	28	M	Native-American/ African American	Diploma	2012	Private
Hakim	23	M	African American	Diploma	2015	State
Daniel	23	M	Multi-racial	GED	2017	Private
Shane	26	M	African American	Diploma	2013	State
Valentino	30	M	White	Diploma	2009	Private
Rasheed	24	M	African American	GED	2016	Private
James	28	M	White	Diploma	2013	Private
Pedro	22	M	Latino	GED	2016	State
Raquel	25	F	African American	Diploma	2015	Private
Quan	27	M	African American	Diploma	2012	State

Carter

Carter was a 28-year-old Native-American/African American male who had three children. He was sent to two private placements throughout his teenage years due to delinquency issues. Although he was doing well academically in his traditional high school, he felt he had behavioral problems, which resulted in his prior juvenile placements. Despite having a less than favorable educational experience with his first placement, he had a positive educational experience with his second placement and eventually earned his high school diploma. Carter

later went to college and earned an associate degree in computer science. He is an avid writer who previously worked in the demolition field before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hakim

Hakim was a 23-year-old, unemployed African American male who is the father of two children (a son and a daughter). He had his first delinquent case at age 11 and kept going in and out of juvenile placements until age 19. He earned his high school diploma at the early age of 16 while in a state juvenile placement facility. However, after he transitioned to the community, Hakim was re-arrested and was sent to a private placement facility. While there, he took college courses with a community college in Pennsylvania but did not receive a degree. Although he engaged in positive activities when he left his last placement at 19, he was subsequently arrested on adult criminal charges.

Daniel

Daniel was a 23-year-old multi-racial father of two children. He has had multiple experiences in juvenile placement facilities in Pennsylvania. Daniel earned his GED at the age of 19 in a private juvenile placement facility. He believed that earning his GED opened the door to more job opportunities. Since his release from his last juvenile placement, Daniel has worked in construction but is currently unemployed. He was arrested on adult charges and was released from adult probation in 2020. He now lives with his girlfriend at his mother's house.

Shane

Shane was a 26-year-old African American male who earned his high school diploma in a state-operated juvenile facility. He never attended a traditional high school due to his constant commitments to juvenile placement facilities throughout his teenage years. Although Shane earned his high school diploma at the age of 18, he was required to "age-out" in the juvenile

facility, *i.e.*, remain under juvenile justice jurisdiction until age 21. However, he was able to earn some college credits online while he remained in a juvenile placement facility. Today, Shane is unemployed and is expecting a baby soon.

Valentino

Valentino was a 30-year-old White male who earned his high school diploma in a private juvenile placement facility. He described his experience as mostly good but found the curriculum to be very easy. Since leaving his last placement, Valentino has managed to live a responsible life without being re-arrested. He has worked in multiple retail positions and currently works as a department manager for a major retailer. He credits much of his accomplishments to earning his high school diploma and completing trade school training in retail, customer service, and supervisory management.

Rasheed

Rasheed was a 24-year-old African American male who is currently employed part-time. He is a father of two children who described himself as a lover of art. Rasheed earned his GED in a private juvenile placement facility almost five years ago. He stated that he has always been a good student who earned primarily As and Bs while in high school. Based on his narrated educational experience in a juvenile facility, he had a mostly positive experience. Since leaving placement, Rasheed has remained arrest-free. He is currently applying to colleges for the Fall 2021 semester to study art education and graphic design.

James

James was a 28-year-old White male who is currently unemployed. He earned his high school diploma in a private juvenile placement facility, which he felt was mainly a negative experience. Although he was able to get a few jobs after he earned his high school diploma, he

did not believe that having the diploma helped prevent re-offending. Nonetheless, James went on to earn an associate degree in business administration. Due to being arrested a few times while pursuing his associate degree, he shared that it took him four years to earn his degree. His college degree accomplishment is a testament to his self-efficacy, as he was able to persist in achieving his educational goals despite encountering obstacles.

Pedro

Pedro was a 22-year-old Latino male who earned his GED in a state-operated juvenile placement facility. He currently works full-time for a shipping company and attends college part-time. Pedro stated that he was more than halfway through his associate degree program at a local community college where he is studying digital forensics. His goal is to eventually transition to a job that is related to his degree. Pedro's educational experience of earning his GED in a juvenile placement facility was a mix of positive and negative experiences. Overall, he was confident that his education had given him the tools needed to succeed in the community as he has not been re-arrested since leaving placement.

Raquel

Raquel was a 25-year-old African American female who earned her GED in a private juvenile placement facility. She had an overall positive experience earning her GED and has offered praises to one of her teachers, whom she believes went above and beyond motivating her. Raquel described herself as an adventurous individual who has a passion for working with people, especially vulnerable populations. She currently works as a truancy caseworker, dealing with children who may have had similar experiences to those she had as a child. Raquel credited her career achievement to her decision to attend college. Raquel completed her bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in criminal justice in December 2020 – an accomplishment she

credits to the same teacher who had been one of her biggest motivators while she was in placement.

Quan

Quan was a 27-year-old African American male who earned his high school diploma in a state-operated juvenile placement facility. He is the father of one child, lives with his girlfriend, and is currently unemployed. Quan believed that his educational experience in placement was primarily positive, although he thought the curriculum was not challenging. Since his release from placement, Quan has been re-arrested several times, which he stated had resulted in his inability to maintain consistent employment. However, he said that he does not plan on being arrested again as he wants to be a good role model for his one-year-old son. Quan shared that he was actively looking for work because he wanted an honest way of providing for his family.

<div align="center">

Results

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Data for this hermeneutic phenomenological study were obtained through survey responses, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, and reflexive memos. The following primary themes were identified and are discussed: 1) academic support, 2) curriculum and instruction, 3) student motivation, 4) community reintegration, and 5) capability. The information obtained from the aforementioned primary themes was used to answer the following research questions: How do former youth offenders describe their lived experiences of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania? How do former youth offenders describe their self-efficacy in completing their high school diploma or equivalent while they were in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania?

Theme Development

This study utilized three key sources of data collection: 1) a survey, 2) interviews, and 3) reflexive memos. Interviews were utilized as the primary data collection method and a survey as the secondary data collection method. In addition, reflexive memoing was done throughout the data collection and analysis phases. Otter.ai application was used to record and transcribe the data from the interviews. The transcripts were carefully read to ensure the accuracy of the participants' responses. The participants were also allowed to check the transcript for accuracy. Finally, the data from the survey and the interviews were coded and used in thematic development.

Naïve Reading

The transcripts were read using a line-by-line approach (van Manen, 1990). The researcher listened to each audio recording immediately after each interview while carefully reading the transcripts for accuracy. Once corrections were made, the transcripts were read two more times to gain an understanding of the initial meaning of the data (Pratt-Erikson et al., 2014). This was an essential step in the hermeneutic circle because it allowed the researcher to examine the text repeatedly until it was fully understood (Gellweiler et al., 2018).

First Cycle Coding

First cycle coding was conducted after the transcripts were initially read and checked for accuracy. During the first-cycle coding, I used *in vivo* coding to familiarize myself with the words each participant used to describe their lived experiences and perspectives (Glesne, 2016). This direct and straightforward coding approach allowed the researcher to identify initial codes while becoming refamiliarized with the data (Glesne, 2016; Saldaña, 2016).

Second Cycle Coding

Second cycle coding occurred after each transcript was read twice. Saldaña (2016)

reasoned that during second cycle coding, the researcher is able to reorganize and reanalyze the

data from their chosen first cycle method. The researcher created descriptive codes from several

less abstract codes (Punch, 2014). This pattern coding approach allowed the codes to be

combined into smaller meaningful units (Elliot, 2018).

Survey

Participants were asked to complete a survey prior to scheduling a one-on-one interview.

They were asked to respond to eight closed-ended and open-ended demographic questions and

three open-ended questions to answer the research questions. Eight participants described

themselves as either *average, good*, or *great* students while they were in a juvenile correctional

facility. The remaining two participants did not directly describe the type of student they were in

a juvenile correctional facility. Instead, they portrayed the curriculum and coursework as *easy*.

All 10 participants indicated that they felt they had the ability to complete their high school

education when they were in a juvenile correctional facility. Three participants reported asking

for help from teachers or peers when faced with obstacles in their educational pursuits while in a

juvenile correctional facility. Another three participants stated that they remained focused and

figured stuff out on their own when faced with an issue. Three participants indicated that they

did not encounter any problems, while one participant did not state how he overcame the

obstacles he described.

Interviews

One-on-one interviews were the primary source of data collection. Through interviews,

the participants provided thick, rich descriptions of their lived educational experiences in a

juvenile correctional facility. The interviews were conducted virtually for convenience and to ensure health and safety due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Some participants chose to do video-recorded interviews utilizing Zoom, while others opted for audio-recorded phone interviews. The interviews lasted between 25 and 45 minutes. All recordings were stored on a password-protected computer to maintain the privacy of the participants.

Reflexive memos

Throughout the data collection process and data analysis, NVivo 12 Plus was used to record the researcher's ideas. Memos were written after each interview to gain insights into the data being obtained from the participants. These memos were helpful as the researcher tried to understand the information generated from the survey responses and the one-on-one interviews. The researcher's subjective perspectives and ideas about initial codes were recorded through these reflexive memos. In addition, they were used to record concepts that the researcher would refer to in the data analysis phase of the current study.

Themes

Table 3. *Themes and Related Codes*

Themes	Related Codes
Academic Support	Access to Extra Help
	Lack of Teacher Concern
	Access to Special Education
Curriculum and Instruction	Coursework Quality
	Instructional Methods
	Learning Activities
Student Motivation	Internal Influence
	External Influence
Community Reintegration	Recidivism
	Job Opportunities
	Further Education
Capability	Ability to Complete Education
	Seeking Help from Others
	Overcoming Obstacles

Academic support

Academic support emerged as the first primary theme during the analysis of the data. This theme was present in several of the participants' interview responses. The academic support theme addressed various types of assistance that were or were not available to the participants during their educational pursuits. Although teachers were generally viewed as the primary sources of academic support, the participants were asked to consider academic support provided by a teacher's aide, social worker, psychologist, counselor, and other staff. Academic support was coded into three sub-themes: *access to extra help*, *lack of teacher concern*, and *access to special education*.

Access to extra help. The ability to access extra help is sometimes necessary for students in a learning environment. Eight of the participants (Carter, Daniel, Hakim, Pedro, Raquel, Shane, Quan, and Rasheed) in this study reported having access to extra help when they needed it. However, excerpts from five participants will be presented. Daniel stated:

> For every placement, there's always like your teacher or an aide in the class, so if you need help, there's always somebody there that can help you. For like my GED, whenever I was getting my GED tests, that was hands-on. That was one-on-one, like they helped me get it all the way through there. Like worked with me one-on-one every day for almost a month. And then I passed.

Cater shared a similar experience with a second placement, where he eventually earned his high school diploma. He stated:

> Oh, see Miss [Clarke], make sure she was on top of me. She was there, right up there with me… She said if I needed any help with anything, just let her know. Listen, I needed help, and Miss [Clarke] waited until after class was finished, and she gave me a study guide. This is how nice she is. She said, take this study guide, and once you study the study guide, you pass the test, you'll be passing my class. I took the study guide. I went to the library I took that study guide to the library… I passed the test. I was so excited.

Raquel shared that she had access to both individualized extra support and general class support. She stated:

> I got support from my teachers when I needed it. I remember this particular time when my science teacher stayed back with me after, right after school, and explained the work to me some more. Most of them also will explain things, like go over things again in class if you don't understand.

Shane also shared his experience with the academic support he received with his high school education and the college courses he took while in juvenile placement. He stated, "They helped me. They helped me learn; some of them helped me learn things that I didn't learn. I had took some college classes, some of them helped me learn with that, they helped me." Although Hakim acknowledged that he had access to extra support, he shared that this could be disrupted at a moment's notice. For instance, he stated:

> Yeah, sometimes but due to, due to you being a placement, one person can always ruin that for you. So, for example, say if I had tutor right now or whatever the case is 10:30/10:45, right now in the morning or whatever. And I'm on campus, and I got tutoring class right now. As soon as a fight breakout or something like that. Yeah, that tutoring class, that [expletive] over with, you feel what I'm saying. I don't got that tutor class no more.

> **Lack of teacher concern.** Teachers' lack of concern and interest towards students was evident in three participants (Valentino, James, and Pedro) shared experiences. Valentino stated:

> Well, my education there was kinda trash for real, because lot of them teachers ain't really care about if you learn or not. They basically let me figure out stuff on my own using a tablet, and the education was a cakewalk. I mean, they let everyone pass for real, for real.

James shared his less than favorable experience regarding the lack of concern shown by his teachers. He stated:

> There was no, almost no support except from your counselor or the social worker but this wasn't with no book stuff. They basically was helping me with anger management and substance abuse stuff, you know, the treatment stuff. We had different teachers for each

subject, but they don't pay you much attention. Even for someone like me, I had an IEP [individualized education program] plan in there.

Although Pedro admitted that he had access to extra academic support when needed, he also held a negative view of teachers' concern for their students. He stated, "They don't really teach you. Let me say they don't teach you that much. Those staff just be there to get paid. It's just the money for them. They don't care for the kids."

Access to special education. Only four (James, Daniel, Pedro, and Rasheed) of the 10 participants indicated that they needed or were provided with special education services. The remaining six participants stated that these services were not required. James' experience supports the existing literature, which indicates that some juvenile facilities fail to provide students with the special education services mandated by law (Miller, 2019). James stated, "Bro like I was telling you, I got no special treatment even though I had an IEP plan. They never enforced it, and I just had to seek out people who could help me." Conversely, Pedro felt like he did not need special education services despite having an IEP. He stated, "I got an IEP, but I don't feel like I needed that [expletive]. So, I never been, like I wasn't one to ask them for no special help kind of thing."

Rasheed had a positive experience with the special education services he was provided. He stated:

I had an IEP, in, you know, that, the teacher they made sure that they were following the IEP. They, you know, gave me extra time to complete my work. I still gotta get my work done, but they gave me extra time. And they would let the [teacher's] aide work with me one-on-one. So it was kinda, you know, I didn't, I never had a problem, you know. They did the best they could to make sure that I didn't get left behind.

Daniel shared a similar positive experience with his IEP while he was in a juvenile placement facility. He stated:

> They helped me. They gave me like, I wasn't, I didn't have to complete the work as fast as other students. But like I still had to get it completed, and if I needed help, I got help and then like they would make me do like an extra class in the dorm, or help me with my work, you know. They will be there to help me. It wasn't it, I mean they helped me with the IEP stuff.

Curriculum and instruction

Curriculum and instruction emerged as the second theme in this study. The participants were asked to describe their educational experiences while they were in a juvenile correctional facility. The participants' narrated responses addressed various aspects of their education, though some were discussed more than others. Hence, the curriculum and instruction theme was coded into three sub-themes: *coursework quality*, *instructional methods*, and *learning activities*.

Coursework quality. The existing literature indicates that the quality of the curriculum in juvenile correctional facilities tends to be subpar compared to traditional high schools (Korman et al., 2019; Leone & Wruble, 2015; National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016). Though none of the survey or interview questions specifically asked the participants about the coursework quality they experienced, Hakim and James shared their perceptions regarding the coursework quality in their survey responses. Hakim wrote, "The Work Was Way To Easy . . I Feel Like They Was Just Preparing Me For Jails And Not Schooling." James wrote, "The curriculum was cake and it freed up time for me to learn about [expletive] I was interested in." Four participants (Hakim, James, Valentino, and Quan) shared their perceptions of the coursework quality in their one-on-one interviews. Hakim stated:

The only issue for me. It might sound like a little confusing. As the work, the work not being as complicated, it wasn't that difficult. Yeah, it was just easy. Oh no, maybe I'm too smart but I think it was too easy… I mean, I used to ask for harder work. But I see we're about 10 other kids that's the same age as you, you're not going to just be like, out loud willingly, "yo, can I get some harder work?"

James shared his disapproval of the coursework quality. He stated:

The education was no good because I didn't really learn nothing in placement. They give us this watered-down version of a high school education… They didn't give us up to date textbooks to learn from. Bro, like I was up there in 2013, and we were learning from a science book from like 2005. I kid you not, yo that's crazy as [expletive].

Valentino echoed a similar concern regarding the academic quality by stating, "Well, my education there was kinda trash for real… I mean, they um, they let everyone pass for real, for real." Also, Quan stated, "It [coursework] was dumb down, it was, it was like a water challenge. It wasn't like something that would take you farther and farther."

Instructional methods. Some participants shared their experiences with the various instruction methods utilized in the educational journey in a juvenile correctional facility. Carter, Valentino, and Quan described their experiences of using computers as the primary instruction method, which they saw as an independent learning model instead of being instructor-led. Carter shared that he had a horrible experience with online-based learning at a juvenile placement he was at before eventually earning his high school diploma at a different placement facility. He stated:

Certainly, it wasn't, it wasn't that great, because let me tell you the reason why is, like, the system we use on the computer, I didn't like it, like you really don't learn much on

the computer just sitting there like that. And then when you ask the staff for help. Most

likely they don't help you… So, it was pretty much it's a self-learning, teaching yourself.

He shared that the teachers at this particular placement facility did not utilize a whiteboard to aid

in the instructional delivery. He stated:

You know how in the regular high school teachers help you out. They write stuff on the

board. If you don't get it, raise your hand… When I got there I thought the classroom was

gonna be like teachers writing on the whiteboard, right, because they had whiteboards

there too. You know how they got the whiteboard and marker, and the teacher gonna

write on the board. That's how it's gonna work. So, I pull out my computer, and I'm like

what is this. I got a username and password to log into the system. With the computer

system, they don't, they don't help you at all. They talk about figure it out or do it on

your own.

Valentino stated, "They basically let me figure out stuff on my own using a tablet, and the

education was a joke." Quan highlighted how the reliance on learning from a tablet diminished

the learning he received from his teachers. He stated, "Most of what we learn was from a tablet.

The teachers didn't really teach you anything. They uh, they just sat around in the classroom."

Learning activities. This sub-theme emerged from the variety of learning activities the

participants experienced during their educational pursuit in a juvenile correctional placement

facility. Three participants (Daniel, Carter, and Valentino) described that their learning activities

primarily involved multiple-choice quizzes. Daniel stated:

It was mostly completing these multiple-choice tests on the computer. There was, was

workbooks too to prepare you to pass the GED. I had to do a bunch of these tests in the

book where you choose the right answer. I kinda, I like it because sometimes you can guess, but they also teach me how to do essays.

He further shared how he utilized different learning activities while earning his GED in a juvenile correctional facility. He stated:

I did hands-on stuff in the workshops and stuff like that. Anything that would make me feel like I'd be able to get my education better in life, like have a better education, like not just to get a GED but to have security. I would ask like certain workshop teachers to give me different types of like measurement draw outs, better my measurements, and stuff like that. Math, I really didn't do nothing on. I always watch science videos to learn more science stuff.

Valentino expressed his desire for something more stimulating than repetitive quizzes. He stated:

It was all these quizzes on the computer. Man, I ain't gonna lie, that stuff got boring, just there, uh, clicking through these ton of questions. I mean, they could have added some other learning stuff to make it more interesting, you know.

Carter described how multiple-choice quizzes did not provide real learning as he was forced to guess his way through the learning materials at times. He stated:

So I'm just guessing what's, what's the answer because they know they give you multiple choice answers to the multiple-choice answer, so I'm just like, you're not helping us out, so I'm just going to guess, so I was guessing my whole time there.

Hakim, Quan, and Shane briefly mentioned that they were required to complete senior projects as part of the requirements to earn their diplomas. However, Daniel and James expressed the need for more projects, which tend to be customary in traditional high schools. Daniel stated, "I feel like they should have better education and more. And if you go to high school, you do

science projects and stuff like that." James added, "Like, we didn't have a lot of the projects and labs that you usually find in a regular high school."

Student motivation

Pursuing any form of goal, including a high school qualification, requires some level of motivation. All participants in this study shared their motivation sources while pursuing their high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility. Student motivation was coded as *internal influence* and *external influence*. Four participants (Daniel, Raquel, Hakim, and Pedro) shared that they were both internally and externally motivated. Four participants (Rasheed, Valentino, Carter, and Shane) shared that they were externally motivated. Only two participants (Quan and James) reported being internally motivated. Daniel expressed how his self-motivation was influenced by his desire to create history in his family. He also was an example for his older sister to emulate. He stated:

> The whole idea of wanting to change. Just wanting to be the first one in my family to get
> a high school diploma or a GED. That was so that minute, that was when my sister went
> back and got hers [GED].

Raquel shared how a combination of internal and external motivation played a role in her academic achievement. She stated, "My one teacher, Mrs. [Scott], my mom, and myself, of course. I really believed in myself and pushed myself." Hakim highlighted the importance of self and family as his sources of motivation. He stated, "I say family, family, family and myself." Pedro found his motivation came from his desire to show the people around him that he could achieve something good. He stated:

> I mostly motivated myself because, um, just the fact that I, you know, I can show my
> folks that I can do something good, and, um, also the young bulls (males) around me,

cause, for real, they be the one looking on, looking at what you doing, you feel me. They

look up to you.

Rasheed's parents were his primary source of motivation while he persisted in earning his GED.

He stated:

I would have to say my folks, you know, back home, mom. My mom and dad. You know

they were always there and just encouraging me, let me know I could do it, you know, I

would, I would have my weekly phone calls too, so you know they show that interest in

my education.

Valentino also described parental motivation as being critical while pursuing his education in a

juvenile correctional facility. He stated:

My pops motivated me because he had gone to college, and he really wants me to at least

get my diploma. Like, I am from a good home and stuff, but I just got caught up with the

bad crowd. So, I felt like I had to let my dad feel proud, and I wanted to change my life

situation, so I had to just get my diploma so I can get jobs and stuff.

Family members served as Carter's external motivation. He stated:

My motivation was my dad. My dad, like came up, my dad and my aunt, were both my

motivator. My aunt took care of me since I was a kid, you know. My mom was there, but

she was doing her own thing. We're not gonna get into that, but my aunt and my dad

motivated me. They came up to visit me three times when I was up there [juvenile

placement]. The third time to come and visit me because I don't want to feel some type of

way, me feeling heartbroken that I can't be with them.

Shane perceived that his circumstances (being required to "age-out" in a juvenile facility) left

him with no option other than to be externally motivated. He stated:

I had no choice because I was going to be there for so long. I got sent there when I was

17, and I was going to be there until I was 21, so I had no choice but to get it [high school

diploma].

James emphasized that he was self-motivated to earn his high school diploma when he was in a

juvenile correctional facility. He stated:

I motivated myself. Yea, it was all me because I wanted to do better for myself when I

got out. I figure I was up in there with nothing but time, time, and so it made sense to get

my diploma. When I was home, I wasn't going to school, so I just looked at it as I better

just do while I was there.

Like James, who was self-motivated and capitalized on the time he had in the juvenile placement

facility, Quan also used the time to fuel his internal motivation. He stated, "I motivated myself

because I had to be there for a long time."

Community reintegration

The literature indicates numerous benefits associated with completing a high school level

education, such as economic, post-secondary school admissions, and desistance from crime

(Abeling-Judge, 2019; Jepsen et al., 2017; Rossi & Bower, 2018). Participants were asked to

share how their educational achievement (high school diploma or equivalent) assisted in their

transition back to the community, if at all. The participants' varied responses coded community

reintegration into three sub-themes: *recidivism, job opportunities*, and *further education*.

Recidivism. Six participants (Raquel, Pedro, Rasheed, Valentino, Shane, and Carter)

were not re-arrested after earning their high school qualification and leaving a juvenile

placement facility. However, four participants (Hakim, Daniel, James, and Quan) re-offended, in

some cases, multiple times. Quan described that he had re-offended since leaving placement and

was trying to stay out of trouble. However, excerpts from Daniel, Hakim, and James will be presented. Daniel shared his multiple experiences with juvenile and adult correctional facilities after earning his GED in a juvenile correctional facility. He stated:

> I was in and out of other placements and jails when I got my GED. I was, I was sentenced to a year in the county [jail]. I came home, and I got booked again. I was on probation until last December. That's when, when I got off.

When asked about his transition to the community, Hakim shared that he had a combination of positive and negative experiences. He stated:

> I had like a positive and a negative. The only reason I said negative is because I graduated early. So once I came home, it was like, easy for me to fall back fall back into negative stuff because I had nothing else to do. You feel what I'm saying. But in a positive aspect, if I would have looked at it and like, yeah, I graduated at 16, I could have went straight to college or went to Job Corps to something like that. I'm saying, but I wasn't really thinking like that. I was thinking about having fun.

He further shared an experience about becoming a fugitive after leaving his last placement and getting into trouble. He stated:

> I got, I got out of placement, my last placement, was when I was 19, or whatever. I don't know if you familiar with Judge [Brown] but Judge [Brown] had discharged my case from, because I took, I took them on a run, or whatever the case may be, when I was 19 when I came home from [juvenile placement name], I took them on a run. And I'm pretty much from there she had just dismissed my case because I was too old and watch from there, I just started, I started working I started doing like a lot of positive stuff. At the same time, I started catching more cases.

James found that despite his high school diploma serving as a means to employment, it did not prevent him from re-offending. He stated:

> I think it [high school diploma] helped me a bit. Okay, look at this, when I got my diploma, I got a job, but I still got booked again. That's why I said it helped me a little bit cause, because, I got a job but just having a diploma did not stop me from going back to some of my old ways, you know.

Job Opportunities. Most participants narrated the importance of having a high school diploma or equivalent to secure job opportunities. However, six participants (Carter, Daniel, Hakim, James, Quan, and Shane) reported, in their survey responses, that they were unemployed. Regardless of their employment status, most participants recognized that job opportunities are available to those who have at least a high school diploma or equivalent. Examples from Daniel, Valentino, Rasheed, and Pedro will be presented. Daniel stated:

> Well, whenever I got my GED, it helped me. I didn't have it from the place I was working at before, and they fired me because I didn't have my GED. So when I got out [of placement], I was able to get other jobs. People are more accepting of you working for them if you got a high school diploma or GED, even with a criminal background.

Valentino added that he was able to maintain a job because he had his high school diploma. He stated, "It help me a little bit because I haven't gone back to placement since, and I been able to hold a job and here [at my job] you gotta have your diploma or GED." Rasheed shared his proud feeling of having his GED and being able to apply for jobs that required it. He stated:

> You know, I was able to apply for jobs that require a high school diploma or GED. I mean, if I didn't get it, you know like I could never apply to those jobs. So just, you

know, having the ability to apply for the job because I have my diploma was, you mean,

was good, it was a good feeling.

Pedro's response regarding the role of his GED in his transition to the community addressed all

three sub-themes under community reintegration. He stated:

It definitely helped because I got a job working full-time, and I am in my second year of

college. I got nearly 40 credits at community [college] right now. I haven't been booked

again, and, uh, I ain't getting into no trouble, for real.

Further Education. Half of the participants (Cater, Hakim, Pedro, Raquel, and Shane)

indicated, in their survey responses, that their highest level of education was either some college,

an associate degree, or a bachelor's degree. Pedro shared in his interview introduction that he

was pursuing an associate degree in digital forensics at a local community college. He was more

than halfway through his program. Carter narrated that he was proud to have achieved his

associate degree despite taking him longer than expected. He stated:

When I ended up back in the community, I was a whole different person. I was like, I

had, I was already a nerd, but wasn't that much of a nerd, but I had became a nerd nerd, I

had stayed in my life, focused on my education when I came home. When I graduated

with my high school diploma, I was focused on furthering my education. So, know what I

did? I went to college. I'm glad I got the education I got today even though I graduated

late, but I still got my college degree. I graduated, I had took time off because I had kids,

and well, I took time off because I had kids, three kids, lots of time. You know, I

graduated last year. I did what I did.

Hakim and Shane's pursuit of higher education occurred within their respective juvenile

placement facilities. However, this only happened after they earned their respective high school

qualification. Furthermore, they were able to transition back into the community with more than a high school qualification*, i.e.*, some college credits. Hakim stated, "Yeah, and while I was at the, uh, while I was at [Placement Name] I started, I started doing college, and all that, I went to [Oxford] County Community College, I started there." Shane stated that while in placement, he took some college courses online. He said, "I had took some college classes… Yep, no after I got my diploma… Yep, it was online." Raquel possessed the highest level of education among the participants. She shared how she went to college after earning her GED despite college not being an initial goal. She stated:

> It really did because I went to college like a year after [leaving placement], and I just completed my degree in December, so I am happy I got my GED when I was in placement. You know, um, it's funny, I did not plan to go to college, it was Mrs. [Scott] who encouraged me to do it because I told her I wanted to work with kids, troubled kids like me. So, I took psychology with a minor in criminal justice. Even before I was finished my degree, I got a job working as a truancy caseworker, so it paid off, really paid off for me.

Capability

Capability is concerned with an individual's internal beliefs about their ability to execute the necessary actions to achieve a particular goal. Students exhibiting self-efficacy for learning participate more readily, work harder, persist longer despite any difficulties, and perform at a higher level (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). In this study, self-efficacy focused on how the participants described their ability to complete their education while they were in a juvenile correctional facility. The participants were also asked to describe any issues they faced related to their educational pursuits and their actions to work around those issues to complete their high

school diploma or equivalent. Capability was coded as the ability to complete education, seeking help from others, and overcoming obstacles.

The participants were asked to respond to a survey question that required them to describe whether they believe they had the ability to earn their high school diploma or GED. All 10 participants wrote that they had the ability to complete their respective high school level qualifications. Carter wrote: "Yes I study harder everyday I was trying to focus on graduating staying out of getting in trouble I was passing my classes with B's and A's." Hakeem added, "I Always Been Smart So Yeah . . I Would Asj [*sic*] For Harder Work And They'll Give It To Me When Asked Other Than That No." Daniel responded, "Yes I had what it took to earn my GED. It was not easy to accomplish it took weeks of studying and learning things I Dident [*sic*] from my past schools but I beleaved [*sic*] in myself and I did it." For Rasheed, being sent to placement influenced him to demonstrate self-efficacy. He wrote, "I knew I had it in me to earn my GED but I never really used to take my work seriously until I ended up in placement."

During semi-structured interviews, participants provided more in-depth descriptions of how they felt about their ability to complete their education while in a juvenile correctional facility. For example, Hakim shared that he always thought he could complete his education, even before going to placement. He stated:

> I felt like I had the ability, even before going to school in placement, I always like, even though I used to go to school for a certain reason [girls], I always was engaged in the school. I always would engage no matter what. No matter what it is, it could be anything right. I know the answer. I try to find the answer, get the answer right. I never give up.

Raquel shared that her self-efficacy only became apparent when she went to placement. She stated:

I felt as though I had the ability when I got to placement, but this was not the case in my

old school. Up there [placement], they, they really try to help you, so you have no reason

to feel you can't do it.

James found that one of his peers played a role in increasing his self-efficacy. He stated:

I felt like I had the ability, but I felt like, you know, the teachers made me not really have

an interest. But once my homeboy started to show me certain things, the stuff I wasn't

understanding, that's when my ability boost, and I started to put in the work so I could

finish and dip out of there.

Few participants also shared that they asked for help from either a teacher or peer when

faced with an academic issue while pursuing their education in a juvenile correctional facility.

Carter shared that he did not receive any help from his teachers when he asked for it. He stated:

Again, when I asked the teacher for help, they didn't help me. They was like, they just

brushed me off, told me to do it on my own. They said, "it's your education. You know

how to do. This [online learning system] is nothing but easy work."

Carter shared that he had peers who helped him when he could not get help from teachers. He

stated:

But I met some cool people that are from where I'm from in [City Name]. They told me

that I could do it like I had people that helped me. I had a lot of people who help me, I

ain't gonna lie, besides the staff, the teachers they didn't help me, but my peers were

trying to do the best they can, but we can't really talk to each other [in class].

Hakim shared that he sought help from his counselor while he was pursuing his education. He

stated:

Yeah, when you're in placement, you got to go to a counselor that they give you phone

calls and basically do your treatment plans and stuff like that. And he was, he helped me

and stuff like that. He basically, basically installed it in my head like you don't want to

go home unless you got a high school diploma.

The participants were asked to share how they navigated any obstacles they faced in

trying to achieve their high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility.

Raquel shared that her biggest issue had to do with her academic transcript from her previous

school. She stated:

The biggest issue, wow, this was a mess. I don't even think it was [placement name]

fault. So, my whole transcript got messed up, and I was basically going to have to repeat

the 11th grade up there. It, um, my old school messed up my credits, and it was just so

aggravating. That's how I ended up going for my GED, so, because, like I wasn't going

to go back and earn those credits.

Raquel shared how she was able to work around this issue to achieve her GED. She stated:

I just switched. I told them to move me to the GED program. But I was still mad because

I wanted to earn my diploma, but it was kinda less work, in terms of not having to do all

those classes. I was just, just using the time to study for the GED, bunch of, um, a lot of

practice tests and so on.

James shared that he had to work around the issue of not getting help with his IEP. He stated:

I was studying outside of class with this one bull (male) I told you about that be helping

me, and you know, helping me out, figure stuff out, and I try to do all my work in class

and not really waste time. But I have ADHD, so sometimes I wasn't really focused on

class, but I, I did what I had to do at the end of the day, you know, to, um, get my

diploma.

The participants were also asked to share some of the things they did to ensure that they

completed their education while they were in a juvenile correctional facility. This question

focused more on the persistence of the participants rather than their ability to navigate obstacles.

Hakim stated, "I did my work. I got involved in all the activities they had there." Shane shared,

"I just stayed in my classes, did what I was supposed to, followed stuff and paid attention, and

did my senior project. That's about it." Valentino highlighted the importance of staying out of

trouble to ensure he completed his education. He stated:

> I just sat in class and did my work and tried to stay out of trouble cause if you get into
>
> trouble, they pull you out of school to address those issues, and that basically hold you
>
> back in your schoolwork. So, for me, it was just stay out of trouble and doing what I had
>
> to do on the tablet.

Rasheed did several things, from paying attention to studying to asking for help. He stated:

> You know, I paid attention and asked for help from my, my, other residents in there. I
>
> would ask them, you know, when I'm in the, in the large dorm room. And like this one
>
> bull (male), he used to help me with my math, you know, because I wasn't good at math.
>
> So he used to help me. I pay attention in school, and if and when I'm in school I asked for
>
> help, I just study and practice, you know, just did my best.

Despite failing a portion of his GED, Pedro demonstrated persistence in accomplishing his

educational goal. He stated, "I study, work on my assignments, and pass all my stuff on the

GED. I had retook one of the sections, though, the math section." Like Pedro, Raquel took

similar courses of action. She stated, "I used the practice books and test, and review, practice, and ask for help."

Research Question Responses

Research Question One

How do former youth offenders describe their lived experiences of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania? Four themes were identified during data analysis to address this research question: 1) Academic Support, 2) Curriculum and Instruction, 3) Student Motivation, and 4) Community Reintegration. Three sub-themes were identified within the academic support theme based on the participants' lived experiences and perceptions: *access to extra help*, *lack of teacher concern*, and *access to special education*. After carefully reviewing the data related to the curriculum and instruction theme, the researcher identified three sub-themes: *coursework quality*, *instructional methods*, and *learning activities*. The participants' lived educational experiences involved a great degree of motivation. Both internal and external factors served as sources of motivation for the participants. Community reintegration was another theme the researcher identified by analyzing the participants' educational experiences in a juvenile correctional facility. Finally, the participant's shared lived experiences and perceptions indicated three sub-themes: *recidivism*, *job opportunities*, and *further education*.

Research Question Two

How do former youth offenders describe their self-efficacy in completing their high school diploma or equivalent while they were in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania? This research question was solely focused on the participants' perceptions of their self-efficacy beliefs. Hence, *capability* was identified as the sole theme addressing this research question.

Through this theme, participants demonstrated their *ability to complete education*, *seek help from others*, and *overcome obstacles*. Carter's experience was an example of someone who persisted in achieving his high school diploma and a college degree. His initial experience with his first placement was negative. However, when Carter went to another placement, where he ultimately earned his diploma, he believed in his ability to complete his high school diploma, sought help from his teacher, and overcame obstacles so that he could enroll in college. Carter stated:

> I just went back to school and study hard. Like, I study. I think especially study, like I studied with my friend that's about it like my friend, like me and him went to the same school, we help each other study. We went to the library, we were studying hard when I was studying, I was studying, I graduated. In the 11th grade, but I wound up passing the 10th grade, I passed the 10th grade by the skin of my teeth, I had okay grades. When I went to 11th grade, I started passing my classes with As and Bs. That's it. No, no, you'll see I'm not a B. When I went to 12th grade, my grades were all A's. When I graduated, all A's. I passed my high school. When I went to 12th grade, I had all As, no Bs, no nothing. I was studying. I was in there. I was in school every day on time. I would study. I'm like, you know what, I'm going to pass because I want to graduate high school so I could start going to college.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings of the data analysis. An overview of the study, a brief description of the study participants, and a detailed description of the research findings were presented. The results of this study were reported through theme development and discussion of each theme and sub-theme. Four themes were identified that addressed research question one: academic support, curriculum and instruction, student

motivation, and community reintegration. Capability emerged through careful data analysis as the sole theme addressing research question two. Participants described their academic capability beliefs regarding their ability to complete education, seek help from others, and overcome obstacles. A summary of the research findings and implications of the results are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the experience of earning a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. This qualitative study addressed the experience of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania from the perspectives of former juvenile offenders. This chapter begins with a summary of the findings, followed by a discussion of these findings concerning the existing theoretical and empirical literature. Theoretical, empirical, and practical implications, delimitations, and limitations of the study are also presented. This chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

To explore and understand how former juvenile offenders described their experiences of earning a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania, two research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do former youth offenders describe their lived experiences of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania?

RQ2: How do former youth offenders describe their self-efficacy in completing their high school diploma or equivalent while they were in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania?

Hermeneutic phenomenological requires the researcher to search for themes and engage with the data interpretively to understand the meaning of the participants' lived experiences (Sloan & Bower, 2014). Theme and sub-theme development were utilized to address the research questions. Both research questions were addressed through textual descriptions of the

participants' lived educational experiences and structural descriptions of how the phenomenon was experienced. The following five themes emerged from data analysis: *academic support*, *curriculum and instruction*, *student motivation*, *community reintegration*, and *capability*. Themes one through four were used to answer research question one, while theme five was used to answer research question two.

Research Question 1

How do former youth offenders describe their lived experiences of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania? The data analysis revealed four main themes that addressed this question: 1) Academic Support, 2) Curriculum and Instruction, 3) Student Motivation, and 4) Community Reintegration. Three sub-themes were identified by the researcher as participants described the first theme, *academic support: access to extra help, lack of teacher concern, and access to special education.* Similarly, a careful review of the data revealed three sub-themes within the *curriculum and instruction* theme: *coursework quality*, *instructional methods*, and *learning activities*. *Student motivation*, the third theme, was coded as *internal influence* and *external influence*. Three sub-themes were identified that supported and were in keeping with the theme of *community reintegratio*n: *recidivism*, *job opportunities*, and *further education*.

Research Question 2

How do former youth offenders describe their self-efficacy in completing their high school diploma or equivalent while they were in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania? This research question was solely concerned with the participants' perceptions of their self-efficacy while pursuing their respective high school-level qualifications. In addition, this research question was concerned with understanding the participants' beliefs regarding their

ability to attain the standards necessary to achieve their educational goals. The fifth theme

identified from data analysis, *capability*, addressed this research question. This theme was coded

as the ability to complete education, seek help from others, and overcome obstacles.

Discussion

The purpose of the hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the lived

educational experience of earning a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional

facility in Pennsylvania. The theoretical framework guiding this study was Bandura's social

cognitive theory (SCT) and Bandura's self-efficacy theory. This study utilized hermeneutic

phenomenology as the research design. Purposeful criterion and snowball sampling were used to

recruit ten (10) participants for this study. Three data collection methods were used in this study:

1) survey, 2) interviews, and 3) reflexive memos. This section discusses the study's findings

concerning the theoretical and empirical literature covered in chapter two. Some of the current

results support previous research, while other findings contradict previous research.

Theoretical Literature

Bandura's SCT and self-efficacy theory served as the theoretical framework for this

study. The SCT holds that learning occurs through observing others, developing competencies,

creating goals, and responding to feedback (Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura (1995),

environmental factors can positively or negatively influence an individual's behavior. This study

extended the application of Bandura's SCT to learning in a juvenile correctional facility. The

participants demonstrated how environmental factors within a juvenile correctional facility

positively and negatively influenced their learning. The theme, *academic support*, provided

evidence of both positive and negative influences on learning. Eight participants reported having

access to extra educational support from their teachers or teacher's aide. This form of academic

support allowed the participants to develop competencies crucial to their success as they earned credit towards their diploma or passed each GED section. This finding corroborates previous research indicating that students in a juvenile justice school felt the academic support they received from teachers made their coursework easier to understand (Martin, 2017).

The academic achievement of participants such as James, Rasheed, and Carter, was also influenced by peers. Each participant shared that their peers either helped them understand certain aspects of their coursework or served as a study partner. James recounted that he sought other individuals to help him when he did not receive adequate special education services. These peer interactions provide insights into the positive influence peers can have on one's academic achievement. The existing literature indicates that having antisocial peers is associated with low academic achievement (Tan et al., 2018). Few participants believed there was a lack of concern from teachers towards students and that the special education services were insufficient. Though these experiences may have negatively influenced these participants, it is evident that completing their high school-level qualification was a goal, which may have been motivated by other factors independent of the juvenile correctional facility environment. The participants' experiences support the argument that increased exposure to educational activities means people are more likely to behave and achieve like educated people (Cage, 2019).

Self-efficacy is defined as one's beliefs in organizing and executing the courses of action needed to navigate prospective situations (Bandura, 1995). The current study extended Bandura's self-efficacy theory to learning in a juvenile correctional facility setting. Through the theme, capability, this study aided in obtaining an increased understanding of the significance of self-efficacy beliefs on academic achievement. All participants described the presence of self-efficacy beliefs while they were pursuing their high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile

correctional facility in Pennsylvania. Academic self-efficacy relates to individuals' views of their ability to attain the standards needed to complete their education goals (Michael, 2019).

Schunk and Pajares (2002) observed that students exhibiting self-efficacy for learning participate more readily, work harder, persist longer despite challenges, and achieve higher. Collectively, the participants shared that they had the ability to complete their education, seek help from others, and overcome obstacles. Hakim stated that he always believed he had the ability to complete his education even before going to placement. However, for James, he found that one of his peers in a juvenile correctional facility played a role in boosting his self-efficacy beliefs. Carter shared that the lack of help from teachers in his first juvenile placement resulted in him seeking help from his peers. Conversely, Hakim sought help from his counselor, who reinforced the importance of completing his high school diploma. Some participants shared examples of challenges they encountered and the steps they took to overcome those obstacles. Other participants shared some of the specific things they did to ensure they earned their high school diploma or GED while in a juvenile correctional facility.

The presence of internal and external motivational influences was a critical component of the participants' academic achievement. The participants shared how people and situations served as motivation sources as they persisted in completing their educational goals. While motivation and self-efficacy are sometimes used interchangeably, they are not synonymous. Self-efficacy is concerned with one's belief in their capacity to achieve, while motivation focuses on one's desire to achieve. Hence, a participant could have believed they possess the ability to earn their high school diploma or GED but lacked the motivation or desire to achieve it. However, people with high self-efficacy usually have high motivation and vice versa (Ackerman, 2020). Furthermore, Greene (2017) posited that self-efficacy is crucial to understanding and supporting

learning motivation, especially in classroom settings. The current study's findings revealed that the participants had the necessary self-efficacy beliefs and motivation to achieve their educational goals. There was an obvious gap related to juvenile offenders' academic self-efficacy and motivation in the limited literature exploring their lived educational experience. Hence, the current findings related to self-efficacy and motivation provided new insights in this area.

Empirical Literature

Participants described how earning their high school diploma or equivalent assisted with their transition to the community. Six participants shared that they were not re-arrested after completing their high school education and returning to their respective communities. This finding supports previous research indicating that completing formal education significantly reduces crime among adolescent males (Taheri & Welch, 2016; Lochner, 1999). Abeling-Judge (2019) found that individuals who earned a GED or high school diploma committed less property crime, though this did not alter the commission of violent crimes. Based on the current study's findings related to the *community reintegration* theme, three of the six participants that did not recidivate earned a GED. In contrast, three earned a high school diploma. Hence, this finding supports Abeling-Judge's result that the likelihood of committing or not committing a crime is the same among GED and diploma holders.

Kremer and Vaughn (2019) found that 87% of youth incarcerated youth in juvenile detention facilities in Western Pennsylvania aspired to attend college, which was higher than the 63% of ninth-graders in the general population that reported that they expected to attend college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The current study's findings indicated that half of the participants were enrolled in or graduated from college, and one participant was actively applying for Fall 2021 college admissions. This finding supports the results of Kremer and

Vaughn related to college aspiration among juvenile offenders. Though the current study does not show a similar overwhelming majority, 60% compared to 87%, more than half of participants aspired to attend college, which is comparable to the 2016 statistics for the general population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Most participants shared a positive experience related to academic support, specifically the access to extra help. Furthermore, half of the participants who reported having access to special education services described a positive experience. Though research exploring juvenile offenders' lived educational experiences is scant in the existing literature, Martin (2017) provided insights in this area. Martin found that participants described the academic support from teachers as overall positive. Some participants shared that teachers made the work easier to understand, listened to their academic concerns, and built relationships and bonds with them. The current study presents similar findings as eight participants described having access to extra help from teachers. Some participants (*e.g.*, Carter, Raquel, and Daniel) also described relationships they built with their teachers.

Some of the findings of the current study diverge from previous research. West et al. (2019) found that grade nine is a critical point for identifying students at high risk of failing since many students who drop out do so after their first year in high school. Rosen et al. (2019) shared a similar argument by articulating that academic success in the ninth grade increased students' probability of returning to finish their education on time. One of the interview questions in the current study sought to understand whether the participants would describe a specific grade in their high school education where they felt they were successful, such as earning good grades. Only one participant (Carter) identified the ninth grade as that period. However, the remaining

nine participants did not believe there was a specific grade where they felt either successful or more at-risk of failing.

The current study's findings also do not support previous research that educational achievement has a long-term positive effect on employment (Development Services Group, 2019). The results showed that six participants (60%) reported being unemployed in their survey responses. Only four participants (40%) were employed, three full-time and one part-time. Hence, this study provides no significant evidence to support that earning a high school diploma or GED improves former juvenile offenders' employment prospects post-release from a juvenile correctional facility. However, this could be due to the participants' re-offending behavior rather than a lack of job opportunities available to holders of high school diplomas and GEDs. Of note, all four participants who reported re-offending after completing their high school-level qualification were among the six participants who reported being unemployed.

This study extended previous research covered in the literature review section in several ways. Firstly, it extended the literature, demonstrating that educational achievement can protect against recidivism. Though education does not universally prevent all crime (Abeling-Judge, 2019), this study indicated that having a high school diploma or a GED has some preventative re-offending effects. Secondly, this study extended previous research showing high college aspirations among juvenile offenders despite their generally lower academic performance when compared to the general youth population. Thirdly, this study advanced the previous limited qualitative research on the academic support available to youth in juvenile correctional facilities. Overall, this study made a novel contribution to the main body of knowledge of the juvenile justice discipline. There was a need for more qualitative research involving juvenile offenders, particularly those giving a voice to these individuals. The current literature indicates that few

studies incorporate the lived experiences of juvenile offenders (Donges, 2015; Martin, 2017). This study provided a channel for juvenile offenders in Pennsylvania to describe their lived educational experiences in juvenile correctional facilities.

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

This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the lived educational experiences of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. The findings of this study have produced several implications. This section addresses the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study. Recommendations for policymakers, juvenile facility school administrators, and juvenile justice staff are also discussed.

Theoretical Implications

This study described the lived educational experiences of former juvenile offenders who completed their high school education or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. Bandura's SCT and self-efficacy theory provided the theoretical lens through which this phenomenon could be understood. This study's findings indicated that environmental factors, such as interaction with teachers, staff, and peers, positively and negatively influenced the participants' behavior. The SCT holds that social factors play an influential role in cognitive development (Bandura, 1989a). Most of the participants in this study described having access to academic support while pursuing their education in a juvenile facility. Additionally, few participants shared the influence of teacher relationships on their motivation to persist and their peers' helping role. It was essential to understand how these environmental factors contributed to the participants' persistence in earning their respective high school level qualifications. The SCT provided a framework for former juveniles to share their lived educational experiences in a juvenile correctional facility. This study may guide other scholars in applying the SCT to

learning in juvenile correctional facility settings since there was a noticeable gap in the literature, as evidenced in the exhaustive literature review.

Self-efficacy theory is a valuable theoretical framework when seeking to understand goal attainment of any type. Bandura (1995) defined self-efficacy as the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). All participants in this study demonstrated the required self-efficacy and motivation to navigate their educational journey in a juvenile correctional facility. A critical component of demonstrating self-efficacy is performing at a higher level, working harder, and persisting longer when facing difficulties (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Understanding if and how participants exhibited self-efficacy was crucial to this study. The participants described that they were confident in their ability to complete their studies. Most of the participants sought help from teachers, staff, or peers, relied on both internal and external sources of influence, and overcame obstacles faced. This study's findings highlighted the importance of emphasizing self-efficacy as a relevant aspect of academic achievement, particularly among youth offenders in juvenile correctional education programs.

Empirical Implications

This study has produced significant empirical implications. The first implication is the evidence supporting prior research that completing formal education has a crime-reducing effect. The existing literature has numerous studies examining education underachievement and its effect on delinquency and crime (Azad & Ginner Hau, 2018; 2020; Development Services Group, 2019; Fernández-Suárez et al., 2016; Kim, 2020; Makarios et al., 2017). There is also no shortage of research exploring education achievement as a protective factor against delinquency and crime (Abeling-Judge, 2019; Amin et al., 2016; Development Services Group, 2019; Kremer

& Vaughn, 2019; Hoffman, 2018; Robison et al., 2017). However, the literature almost entirely consists of quantitative research on these topics. Hence, this qualitative study offered a relevant and timely contribution to the field. It provided some insights into participants' perceptions of the role their education achievement had in their reintegration into the community, including its effects on recidivism.

The second implication is that college aspiration is prevalent among justice-involved youth. Kremer and Vaughn's (2019) study had found that college aspiration was extremely high among juvenile offenders in juvenile detention facilities in Western Pennsylvania. The results of the current study provide support for the earlier findings. Based on these studies' findings, mainly since both were conducted in Pennsylvania, it is crucial to emphasize college attendance as an option for juvenile offenders while still in a juvenile correctional facility and upon returning to the community. Grigorenko et al. (2019) found that many protective and rehabilitative services do not emphasize educational achievement despite being a critical component in successfully reintegrating into the community.

The third implication is the need to provide academic support, including special education services to youth in juvenile correctional education programs. Several research participants highlighted the significance of accessing extra academic help while pursuing their high school education while they were in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. Martin's (2017) qualitative study with young offenders who were actively enrolled in a juvenile justice facility school already indicated that academic support and building teacher relationships were essential aspects of the participants' educational experiences. The current study provides insights into these areas with former juvenile offenders who completed their high school education. Unfortunately, this study does not offer much insight into the access of special

education services due, in part, to less than half of the participants reporting needing or being provided with these services. Nonetheless, half did not feel they were provided with adequate services of the four participants who shared their special education services experience. In addition, Miller (2019) found that over 60 lawsuits were filed against juvenile correctional facilities in the United States as of 2013 for noncompliance with various federal regulations related to special education services provided in these facilities. Hence, special education services should be a priority concern for juvenile correctional education administrators.

Practical Implications

This study produced several practical implications for policymakers, juvenile correctional facility school administrators, and other juvenile justice staff. First, policymakers should address concerns regarding coursework quality and access to special education services. They can achieve this by ensuring juvenile facilities are held accountable for not providing adequate educational services to justice-involved youth. The students in juvenile correctional facilities have a statutory right to education comparable to public schools (Development Services Group, 2019; Leone & Wruble, 2015). Policymakers should also ensure that high school completion is required for all youth adjudicated to a long-term juvenile placement facility. Young offenders need to return to the community with as many competencies as possible.

Second, juvenile correctional facility school administrators must ensure that educational programs are designed with input from youth offenders. Though these programs will not be created entirely on the subjective perceptions of former juvenile offenders, their experiences and perceptions should be a part of these programs' decision-making. For example, many juvenile facilities prioritize safety over providing students with access to science laboratory experiences (Korman et al., 2019). While safety should be a concern, juvenile facility school administrators

should prioritize providing students with a holistic learning experience incorporating science laboratory experiences and other hands-on projects. One of the participants in this study indicated that juvenile offenders were already at a disadvantage, so they should be provided with quality education in juvenile correctional facilities.

Third, juvenile correctional education staff should provide adequate academic support for students in these programs. They should also create an environment where students can be positively influenced, and their efforts reinforced and supported. Bandura's SCT and self-efficacy theory points to the effects of environmental factors and self-efficacy beliefs on learning and goal achievement. The staff in juvenile correctional facilities, particularly counselors, should ensure that college attendance is prioritized. Many juvenile offenders aspire to attend college, and some have gone on to earn college credits and degrees. Two of the participants in this study described their access to college courses while they were in a juvenile correctional facility. There should be a continued effort to provide and expand college course access to this student population while in these facilities, even before they have earned their high school diploma (dual enrollment). It is a common practice for students in traditional high school diploma programs to access dual-enrollment courses. Finally, counselors should assist youth in juvenile correctional education programs with college and financial aid applications. They should also provide resources on choosing a college major, applying for admissions, and financial aid so that these individuals can utilize this knowledge upon their successful return to the community.

Delimitations and Limitations

Patton (2015) defined delimitations as the researcher's intentional decisions to limit or restrict the study's boundaries. This study's delimitations were influenced by this study's purpose, which was to explore how former youth offenders describe their shared experiences of

obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. Therefore, the participants were required to meet specific criteria: 1) be 18 years of age or older, 2) have completed a high school diploma or equivalent, such as a General Educational Development (GED), a Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma (CSSD), or a High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania, and 3) no longer be involved with the juvenile justice system (*i.e*., not on probation, parole, or incarcerated).

The first criterion was essential to mitigate any negative impact reliving the experiences of a juvenile correctional education may have on a minor. Furthermore, the literature indicates that youth in juvenile correctional education programs perform at a lower level (Azad & Ginner Hau, 2020; Development Services Group, 2019; National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016; Steele et al., 2016). Hence, it was assumed that the participants were likely to be 18 years of age or older when they completed their high school education. Regarding the second criterion, there was a need for research with former juvenile offenders who had persisted in completing their formal education. Existing research, such as Martin (2017), was conducted with students actively enrolled in a juvenile justice facility school. These students may or may not have persisted in completing their education. Hence, research with participants who had already completed their education was necessary. The third criterion was also essential to avoid researching a protected population, such as those incarcerated, on probation, or parole.

The study's limitations are the factors beyond the researcher's control that restrict or constrain the study's scope (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). This study, like all others, was not without limitations. One of the limitations of this study was the demographic representativeness. Half of the participants identified as African American, while the remaining half identified as White, Native American/African American, Latino, and Multi-racial. This study did not include

any participants who identified as American Indian, Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander. Despite efforts to recruit a racially/ethnically and gender diverse participant pool, only one female participated in this study. During the recruitment of participants, three females responded and expressed an interest in the study. However, only one followed through on their interest. This study did not include any participants younger than 22 years old or older than 30 years old.

Another limitation concerns the geographic representativeness of the participants. Except for one participant from Southwestern Pennsylvania, the remaining participants of the study were from Southeastern Pennsylvania. The remaining four regions of Pennsylvania – Northwestern, Northcentral, Southcentral, and Northeastern – were not represented. Another significant limitation of this study relates to participants who had a high school diploma equivalent. The only high school diploma equivalent participants represented in the study were GED earners. There were no participants who earned another high school diploma equivalent, such as the CSSD or HiSET.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings and limitations of this study create a starting point for scholars to conduct future research. Although qualitative research is not concerned with producing results transferrable to other people and settings, using purposeful sampling and providing detailed information regarding the research design may increase this study's transferability to other similar locations (Bhattacharya, 2017; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Morgan, 2014). Hence, the first recommendation is to replicate this study with participants from underrepresented and unrepresented Pennsylvania regions and throughout the United States. The racial/ethnic demographics may likely change across regions. For instance, this study primarily represented

African Americans because the Southeast region, particularly Philadelphia County, has Pennsylvania's most prominent African American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

A second recommendation is to conduct research exploring the juvenile justice educational experiences of female juvenile offenders. This demographic is underrepresented in the literature, highlighting the need to conduct research that focuses entirely on their experiences. Seven participants in this study completed their education at a private juvenile placement facility, while three completed theirs in a state-operated facility. While the facility's operational control was not of interest to this study, this information was recorded for case classification purposes while utilizing NVivo. Therefore, the third recommendation is to research the educational experiences and outcomes of former juvenile offenders placed in private facilities versus those placed in state-operated facilities. Though this study shed light on the positive effects of completing a high school diploma or equivalent, such as reduced recidivism, job opportunities and seeking secondary education, it did not explore the adverse effects of not doing so. Hence, a final recommendation for future research is to examine juvenile offenders' perceived negative consequences of not completing formal education.

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

This study aimed to explore the experience of earning a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. A hermeneutic phenomenological research design was used to explore and interpret the lived educational experiences of the participants. In addition, Bandura's SCT and self-efficacy theory were used to explore the influence of environmental factors and self-efficacy beliefs on learning in a juvenile correctional facility. This study was guided by two research questions: 1) How do former youth offenders describe their lived experiences of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile

correctional facility in Pennsylvania? 2) How do former youth offenders describe their self-efficacy in completing their high school diploma or equivalent while they were in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania?

Five main themes emerged from the results of this study: 1) Academic Support, 2) Curriculum and Instruction, 3) Student Motivation, 4) Community Reintegration, and 5) Capability. Additional sub-themes were identified within Academic Support (*access to extra help, lack of teacher concern, and access to special education*), *Curriculum and Instruction* (coursework quality, instructional methods, and learning activities), and *Community Reintegration* (recidivism, job opportunities, and further education). Through an inquiry of the participants' experiences and perceptions, it is evident that having access to academic support was crucial to their educational experiences. The results also indicated that the participants' educational experiences in a juvenile facility involved great motivation from internal and external sources. Another significant finding of this study is that self-efficacy belief was present amongst all participants. This study made a significant contribution to the limited empirical literature that explores justice-involved youth. Policymakers, juvenile correctional education administrators, and scholars can use this study's results to inform future juvenile correctional education policies, programs, curricula, and research.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 15, 2021

Deneil Christian
Joshua Adams

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-44 The Lived Educational Experiences in Juvenile
Facilities: Perspectives of Former Juvenile Offenders

Dear Deneil Christian, Joshua Adams:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) 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 the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in
which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:
101(b):

Category 2.(iii). 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:
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).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission
Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the
consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information
electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without
alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any
modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of
continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification
submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications 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

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER

Research Participants Needed

Photo by Jessica Christian/San Francisco Examiner

The Lived Educational Experiences in Juvenile Facilities: Perspectives of Former Juvenile Offenders

To participate, you must:
- Be 18 years of age or older.
- Have completed a high school diploma or equivalent (e.g., GED, CSSD, HiSET) in a juvenile correctional facility (detention or placement) in Pennsylvania.
- No longer be involved with the juvenile justice system (cannot be on probation, parole, or incarcerated).

The purpose of this research is to understand the educational experiences of former juvenile offenders who completed their high school diploma or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania. Participants will be asked to complete an online survey through Google Forms (approximately 20 minutes), participate in a recorded phone or video interview on Zoom (approximately 45-60 minutes), and review the interview transcript (approximately 20 minutes).

Each participant will receive a $15 VISA e-gift card by email upon completing all of the procedures listed above.

Deneil Christian, a doctoral candidate in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Deneil Christian at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮@liberty.edu for more information. You can also text/call by scanning the QR Code at the top of the flyer.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

APPENDIX C: SCREENING INSTRUMENT

<u>Verbal/Written Confirmation Script</u>

To confirm your eligibility to participate in this study, please answer 'yes' or 'no' to the following questions.

1. Are you at least 18 years old?

2. Did you earn a high school diploma or equivalent, such as a General Educational Development (GED), a Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma (CSSD), or a High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania?

3. Are you currently involved with the juvenile justice system (that is, on probation, parole, or incarcerated)?

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

The Lived Educational Experiences in Juvenile Facilities: Perspectives of Former Juvenile
Offenders
Deneil Christian
Liberty University
Helms School of Government

You are invited to participate in a research study to understand the experience of completing a high school education or equivalent in a juvenile correctional facility. You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 years of age or older, have completed a high school diploma or equivalent, such as a General Educational Development (GED), a Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma (CSSD), or a High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) in a juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania, and you are no longer involved with the juvenile justice system (e.g., not on probation, parole, or incarcerated). Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Deneil Christian, a doctoral candidate in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent in a Pennsylvania juvenile correctional facility from the perspectives of former juvenile offenders.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Complete an online survey through Google Forms (approximately 20 minutes).
2. Participate in either an audio-recorded phone interview or video-recorded Zoom interview (approximately 45-60 minutes).
3. Review the interview transcript for accuracy (approximately 20 minutes). The transcript will be sent to you via email within 1 week of the interview. The review should take you approximately 20 minutes. You will be required to return the transcript to the researcher via email within 1 week of receipt.

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. However, this study may benefit society by providing a deeper understanding of the educational experiences of juvenile offenders in correctional facilities. This study may assist juvenile justice school administrators with the design, evaluation, and implementation of juvenile correctional programs for future students in these facilities.

Compensation: Each participant will be emailed a $15 VISA e-gift card within two days of participating in this study. To be eligible for compensation, the participant will have to complete all the procedural steps of the study. Failure to complete all eligible procedures will result in the loss of compensation. Email addresses will be requested from participants to arrange for compensation benefits.

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 an individual. 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.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected computer and may be used in future presentations and peer-reviewed journal articles. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer, and only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

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 not to 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 included in the next paragraph. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Deneil Christian. You may ask any questions you may have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at ███████@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Joshua Adams, at ███████@liberty.edu.

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 the IRB at irb@liberty.edu.

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.

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

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX E: SURVEY

1. How old are you?
   a. 18-21 years old
   b. 22-25 years old
   c. 26-30 years old
   d. Over 30 years old

2. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Transgender
   d. Non-binary
   e. Other (specify): _____

3. What is your racial/ethnic background? (Select all that apply)
   a. African American or Black
   b. Asian
   c. Latino/a
   d. Native American
   e. White
   f. Multi-racial
   g. Other (specify): _____

4. What is your employment status?
   a. Employed Full-Time
   b. Employed Part-Time
   c. Self-Employed
   d. Unemployed
   e. Other (specify): _____

5. What is your highest level of education?
   a. High School (diploma, GED, etc.)
   b. Some College
   c. Associate Degree
   d. Bachelor's Degree
   e. Master's Degree
   f. Terminal Degree (Ph.D., Ed.D., J.D., etc.)

6. What type of high school qualification did you earn?
   a. High School Diploma
   b. General Educational Development (GED)
   c. Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma (CSSD)
   d. High School Equivalency Test (HiSET)

7. In which juvenile correctional facility did you earn your high school qualification?
    a. Abraxas Youth Center
    b. Glen Mills School
    c. Loysville Youth Development Center
    d. Mid-Atlantic Youth Services
    e. Northcentral Secure Treatment Unit
    f. Phila Juvenile Justice Service Center (Youth Center)
    g. Saint Gabriel's Hall
    h. South Mountain Secure Treatment Unit
    i. Vision Quest
    j. Youth Forestry Camp #2
    k. Youth Forestry Camp #3
    l. Other _____

8. In what year did you earn high school qualification?
    _____

9. How would you describe yourself as a student in a juvenile correctional facility? (Please respond in 250 characters or less, including spaces)
    _____
    _____
    _____

10. Please describe whether you believed you had what it took to earn your high school qualification or not. (Please respond in 250 characters or less, including spaces)
    _____
    _____
    _____

11. If you faced any problems with your lessons, what were some of the things you did to keep working towards your educational goal? (Please respond in 250 characters or less, including spaces)
    _____
    _____
    _____

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.

2. Please describe your educational experience while you were in a juvenile correctional facility.

> *Sub-question* – Can you tell me about the year/grade in high school level education when you felt you were performing well academically (e.g., earning good grades)?

3. Please tell me about the academic support you received from teachers or other staff (e.g., teacher's aide, social worker, psychologist, counselor, etc.) while you were in a juvenile correctional facility.

4. If special education services were needed, such as an individualized education program (IEP), please tell me about your experiences with the special education services you received in a juvenile correctional facility.

5. In what way(s), if any, did teachers, staff, and peers influence your educational achievement when you were in a juvenile correctional facility?

6. Who or what motivated you to complete your education while you were in a juvenile correctional facility?

7. Please describe any issues you faced with the educational services provided to you in a juvenile correctional facility.

8. How did you work around these issues to achieve your high school diploma or equivalent?

9. How would you describe the way you felt about your ability to complete your education when you were in a juvenile correctional facility?

> *Sub-question* – If you attended a traditional high school before going to a juvenile correctional facility, please describe the way you felt about your academic abilities at that school.

10. What were some of the things you did to ensure that you completed your educational goals when you were in a juvenile correctional facility?

      Sub-question – How did your educational achievement in a juvenile correctional facility assist with your transition back into your community, if at all?

11. What additional information would you like to share with me about your educational experience in a juvenile correctional facility that we have not discussed today?

12. Do you have any questions for me?

Probing Questions

- Continuation probe – "Keep going…"

- Elaboration probe – "Tell me more about that…"

- Attention probe – "Ok, I understand."

- Clarification probe – "What did you mean when you said…"

- Steering probe – "We got off track a little. You were saying…"