

REMOTELY CLOSE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF HOW ONLINE
EDUCATION MAY IMPEDE ACADEMIC PERSISTENCE AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION.

by

Daniel Ryan Day

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy: Education - Organizational Leadership

Liberty University

2024

REMOTELY CLOSE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF HOW ONLINE
EDUCATION MAY IMPEDE ACADEMIC PERSISTENCE AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION.

by

Daniel Ryan Day

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy: Education - Organizational Leadership

Liberty University

2024

APPROVED BY:

Dr. Pat Ferrin, Committee Chair

Dr. Janet Deck, Committee Member

Abstract

The aim of this transcendental phenomenological study is to define and describe the lived experiences of those who have taught and taken online classes at post-secondary Assemblies of God schools. Tinto's theory of academic persistence and social integration served as the guiding theory of the study, as it was an indispensable part of exploring how online education may impede academic persistence and social integration between students and professors. The central question of the study deals with how online educators may improve academic persistence and social integration between their students and themselves by applying Tinto's model of integration. By strategically utilizing the transcendental phenomenological method, Day gathered information regarding the lived experiences of the willing participants to discover emergent themes. A sample of 17 men and women who have received online education and taught online education at AGUSA schools have participated in this research project. To gather the needed information, Day utilized the following data collection methods: individual interviews, group discussions, and journal prompts. In light of the growing number of schools investing in online educational delivery systems, Day argues that students have a far greater experience when they are socially integrated rather than socially isolated. Furthermore, professors have felt the effects of social isolation and experience a high sense of professional satisfaction when they are adequately connected with their students. Therefore, through this study, Day desires to discover advanced methods for social integration so that the students may persist in their academic goals and professors may remain motivated with their professional career.

Keywords: Academic Engagement, Performance, Persistence, Resilience, Extracurricular Activities, Social Integration, Sense of Belonging, Social Isolation.

Copyright Page

© 2024, Daniel Day

All Rights Reserved

Dedication

Firstly, this work is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I come this far only by His grace, mercy, and enabling work. I pray that every word written in this document will glorify His name and advance His Kingdom.

Secondly, I offer my thanks and dedicate this effort to the love of my life, my wife, Sara. The voice of the Holy Spirit's encouragement often sounds like you. Since you believed in me and continue to offer your words of wisdom, I am here today. Thank you for enduring long nights and early mornings. Thank you for watching the children so I could have extra time to study and write. Thank you for always believing in me, even when I did not believe in myself.

Thirdly, this work is dedicated to my children. Your future is my underlying motivation. I hope to inspire you in the same way that my father inspired me. You can do far more than you realize. Give all your efforts to the Lord and commit all your ways unto him; he will guide and prosper you.

Fourthly, I dedicate this work to my parents. Your example of faith and kindness is always before me. Thank you for setting the pace.

Fifthly, I dedicate this work to my mother and father-in-law. Thank you for raising in the ways of the Lord the woman who would one day become my wife. The fruit of your efforts and prayers has had a generational impact. Thank you for your example of courage and passion.

Thank you to every professor and administrator who has helped me in this journey. Your influence in my life has made an indelible mark for good.

Acknowledgments

In recognition of their immeasurable efforts to assist me in this doctoral journey, I honor my committee chair, my committee members, peers, editors, and doctoral mentors. With your patience and time, this work came to fruition. May the Lord bless you in all your efforts and cause all of your heart's desires to manifest for His glory.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Copyright Page.....	4
Dedication.....	5
Acknowledgements.....	6
Table of Contents.....	7
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	12
Overview.....	12
Background.....	12
Historical Context.....	13
Social Context.....	14
Theoretical Context.....	15
Problem Statement.....	16
Purpose Statement.....	17
Significance of the Study.....	18
Research Questions.....	20
Central Research Question.....	20
Sub-Question One.....	20
Sub-Question Two.....	20
Sub-Question Three.....	20
Definitions.....	20
Summary.....	23

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	25
Overview.....	25
Theoretical Framework.....	26
Related Literature.....	30
Summary.....	54
CHAPTER 3 METHODS:	56
Overview.....	56
Research Design.....	56
Research Questions.....	59
Central Research Question.....	59
Sub-Question One.....	59
Sub-Question Two.....	59
Sub-Question Three.....	59
Setting and Participants.....	60
Site.....	60
Participants.....	61
Researcher Positionality.....	62
Interpretive Framework.....	63
Philosophical Assumptions.....	63
Researcher's Role.....	65
Procedures.....	66
Permission.....	66
Recruitment Plan.....	66

Data Collection Plan.....	67
Individual Interviews.....	68
Focus Groups.....	70
Journal Prompts.....	72
Data Synthesis.....	73
Trustworthiness.....	74
Credibility.....	74
Transferability.....	74
Dependability.....	75
Confirmability.....	76
Ethical Considerations.....	76
Summary.....	77
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	78
Overview.....	78
Participants.....	78
Participant 1.....	79
Participant 2.....	79
Participant 3.....	80
Participant 4.....	81
Participant 5.....	81
Participant 6.....	82
Participant 7.....	82
Participant 8.....	83

Participant 9.....	83
Participant 10.....	84
Participant 11.....	84
Participant 12.....	85
Participant 13.....	86
Participant 14.....	86
Participant 15.....	87
Participant 16.....	87
Participant 17.....	88
Results.....	89
Theme 1: Relational & Academic Benefits	90
Theme 2: Relational & Academic Responsibility	94
Theme 3: Relational & Academic Communication	104
Theme 4: Relational & Academic Opportunities	107
Outlier Data and Findings.....	112
Research Question Responses.....	112
Central Research Question.....	113
Sub-Question One.....	113
Sub-Question Two.....	114
Sub-Question Three.....	115
Summary.....	116

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS.....	118
Overview.....	118
Discussion.....	118
Summary of Thematic Findings.....	119
Implications for Policy or Practice.....	123
Implications for Policy.....	123
Implications for Practice.....	125
Theoretical and Empirical Implications.....	128
Theoretical Implications.....	128
Empirical Implications.....	134
Limitations and Delimitations.....	139
Limitations.....	139
Delimitations.....	140
Recommendations for Future Research.....	140
Conclusion.....	141
Appendix 1: IRB Approval Letter.....	144
References.....	145

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Within this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study, Day synthesizes recent scholarly research on the social isolation (SI) of post-secondary students enrolled in online coursework. Within the preceding introduction, Day explains the problems associated with SI and the people most impacted by it. Next, background research coupled with relevant contextual information provides the framework for the study. Once these foundational principles have been set, a list of advanced open-ended research questions will guide the reader to various conclusions and recommendations for further analysis. Finally, the introduction offers definitions for key terms used throughout the study.

Background

The exponential increase in the availability and affordability of online education has made this learning model progressively popular (Yan et al., 2021 & Han et al., 2022). Personal convenience often draws people to remote learning and enroll in this deliverable (Schwam et al., 2021 & Zhang et al., 2022). While there are many documented benefits to distance education, one specific hazard embedded within its framework must be addressed: the issues related to social isolation (Butnaru et al., 2021). Students do not exclusively feel the problematic effects of SI; educators must also be considered (David & Dobson, 2020). Recently, due to the unprecedented impacts of the worldwide pandemic, more than a billion and a half people were forced to participate in the furtherance of education by enrolling in online classes (Aslam et al., 2021). Many online students enjoyed the experience (Yan et al., 2021). However, there is convincing data that offers other perspectives and articulates concerns (Usher et al., 2021). Careful consideration of these viewpoints may benefit those involved in online educational

pathways. Three overarching sections outline the background of the study: 1) Historical understandings of online education and the effects of social isolation are presented. 2) Social background elements for educators and learners establish the research in real-world events. 3) The theoretical aspects of this topic outline futuristic scholarly models for improvement in online educational deliverables. These portions of the introduction bring the reader to the understanding and conclusion that this subject is worthy of consideration and further investigation.

Historical Context

The concerns about social isolation and its connection with long-distance educational correspondence methodologies have been introduced previously (Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006). Though there appear to be innumerable examples of technological advancements in the field of online learning delivery systems and the ever-growing expanse of the Internet of Things (Hosseini et al., 2021 & Sullivan, 2019), teachers and students alike continue to articulate feeling a sense of separation from one another (Kwon et al., 2020 & Osborne, 2021). These emotional impressions of being alone in the educational journey have been shown to influence all involved parties negatively (Petillion, 2020 & Tzafilkou et al., 2021), including higher dropout rates among students (Kim et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2013, & Park, 2009) and professional dissatisfaction among professors (Dayal, 2023). Though online learning has many benefits (Garcia-Vedrenne et al., 2020 & Roy et al., 2022), improvements within the sphere of socialization, cultural integration, and relational connection remain (Farmer et al., 2022). Moreover, given that the schedules and lifestyles of many have become far more complex, active, and transient (Guinta, 2023), online education may be the only option for some (Butnaru, 2021 & Hanif, 2022). Therefore, it is not the purpose of this study to argue against eLearning deliverables. However, the study's author aims to highlight the need for better

socialization within this realm to thwart the negative implications of isolation due to remote online learning.

Social Context

It should be noted that not all participants in online learning have found this pathway to hinder their connection with peers and professors (Khan, 2022). Some online learners have articulated great satisfaction in meaningful social relationships in their online communities (Hosseini et al., 2021). That said, the people who fit within the category of contentment are the minority, according to the research (Hensley et al., 2022). Much of a person's happiness and sense of fulfillment has to do with their preferred style of learning (Behera et al., 2022 & Rath et al., 2019) and the time one may take personally to invest in establishing friendships (Grimaldi, 2021). Therefore, this study takes time to draw attention to the fact that some would greatly prefer online interaction to in-person (Khan, 2022). However, the individual is still responsible for purposefully reaching out to others with meaningful interaction (Garcia-Vedrenne et al., 2020). Researchers show that students and teachers have a much higher sense of satisfaction and achievement if they feel socially integrated into the school's culture (Dayal, 2023; Eun, 2019 & Farmer, 2022). Therefore, should online delivery systems be designed with the development of better relationships in mind, all may profit (Cobb, 2018 & Cridland, 2021). The benefits of social integration should be communicated and emphasized early on with each prospective student (Cridland, 2021), the school must offer technological tools along with the corresponding training needed to accomplish this goal to their educators, and each teacher must require specific levels of interaction as part of their pedagogy (Brinia, 2022).

Theoretical Context

When one cross-examines the problems related to social isolation, remote online learning delivery systems, and how this topic intersects with the teachers and students of Assemblies of God institutions of higher learning, a significant gap in the research is seen. A thorough examination of the existing body of scholarly research on these subjects reveals several potentially negative impacts of isolation if they still need to be addressed (Roy, 2022 & Tzafilkou, 2021). The problems do not exclusively touch students' lives, but rather, professors feel these effects concurrently (Scherer, 2021 & Winters, 2023). It is not the goal of this study to argue for less online education and more in-person education but to show the growing need for online delivery systems to be more purposeful as it relates to the social outcomes that are typically available in in-person classrooms (Tami, 2017). In contrast, some students have shown zero negative ramifications to studying alone and may even prefer online delivery systems instead of in-person; according to the research, this group is in the minority (Behera et al., 2022 & Rath et al., 2019). Therefore, a growing need to address these issues exists. The chosen theory for the study is Tinto's academic and social integration model. Tinto (2007) provides this study's overarching theoretical framework and argues for closer peer-to-peer and student-teacher interaction and collaboration (Tinto, 2007). This framework shows that when students have a great sense of community in and among their fellow scholars and professors, the likelihood of success is dramatically increased (Newman, 2021). Furthermore, teachers have expressed a higher sense of personal and professional happiness when community and collaboration exist between themselves and their class (Leal Filho et al., 2021). This study seeks to refine the research by applying it to students and teachers in Assemblies of God schools of higher learning.

Problem Statement

The problem is that online education may impede formal and informal pathways to academic persistence and social integration for students and professors. Without critical friendships (Baker, 2021), the likelihood of a student successfully achieving their goals and the likelihood of a professor connecting and impactfully teaching their lessons becomes improbable (Baker, 2021). The traditional context of in-person/on-campus education allows for rapid collaboration, connection, and communication with peers and professors (Usher, 2021). Furthermore, when online educators do not promptly respond to student correspondents or offer meaningful feedback on assignments, the effects of isolation can be compounded (Usher, 2021). A person can achieve the best possible educational outcome through the total immersion of one's self into the educational process of collaboration and participation with fellow learners and educators (Paesani, 2020).

Being able to participate in and with the class on time actively is a significant determinant of achievement (Eun, 2019). Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development argues this point. It states that the space between the actual progress of the learner is determined by self-governing problem-solving and the level of potential growth as determined through problem-solving under leadership or in partnership with more capable peers (Eun, 2019). Therefore, the closer a learner can be to their peers and professors within a healthy collaborative environment, the more likely achievement of common goals can be realized (Hedges, 2021; Newman, 2021). However, if the effects of social isolation caused by remote/online learning are ignored, the opportunity to improve upon this ever-growing educational methodology may be missed. Scholars (Cobb et al., 2018; Cridland et al., 2021 & Hehir et al., 2021) agree that online platforms often lack education's social and relational benefits. The problem is that online

educational deliverables are inadequate and may impede formal and informal pathways to academic persistence and social integration for post-secondary students at Assemblies of God colleges. This study will offer potential solutions to this problem.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of post-secondary students and professors at Assemblies of God, USA schools, and how online education may impede formal and informal pathways to academic persistence and social integration within the realms of academic performance, extracurricular activities, faculty and staff relations, and peer-group interactions. Moreover, within this phenomenological study, Day aims to discover the emotional and educational influences of social isolation caused by online/remote learning for post-secondary students and professors at Assemblies of God, USA, schools of Higher Education. At this stage in the research, social isolation will be generally defined as a person's emotional and physical condition whereby they have chosen or been forced to withdraw themselves from all things familiar, like friends and family, for an excessive amount of time (Morese, 2020).

Many scholars have well documented the indelible marks that social isolation due to remote learning can bring to post-secondary institutions' teachers and students (Shen et al., 2022; Barreto et al., 2022; & Hehir et al., 2021). Within this study, Day outlines and chronicles these influences on both groups and discovers potential solutions to the many significant physical and emotional problems social isolation may cause (Butnaru et al., 2021 & Dragolea, 2022). Students who are experiencing the negative impacts of remote learning have much higher dropout rates (Eun, 2019; George, 2021; Hehir, 2021; Leal Filho, 2021 & Newman, 2021), and experience higher levels of fear, anxiety, panic attacks, and depression (Dong, 2022; Mizani, 2022 & Morgan, 2022). Teachers are not without their concerns. Studies reveal their great desire

to connect with and help their students, yet many feel their schools need to adequately equip and empower them at high levels (Ferri, 2020; Lambert, 2020 & Scherer, 2021). Human beings are inherently social creatures that desire to enjoy close and meaningful interaction and deep connection with one another (Cudjoe et al., 2020 & Leal Filho, 2021). This study highlights the problems caused by social isolation for students and teachers at schools of higher learning that the Assemblies of God, USA, oversee. This study also highlights the need for greater social connection in online delivery systems between professors and peers at these schools to mitigate the abovementioned issues and see more students graduate and teachers fulfill their duties.

Significance of the Study

This study draws data from three primary viewpoints, empirical, theoretical, and practical. While these perspectives may crisscross one another at points, each is important to the study in its particular way. Thus, it adds to the broader conversation and research on social isolation and its impact on students and teachers.

Empirical Significance

This topic is empirically significant because of the overwhelming negative impact of social isolation that may result from online learning (Cobb et al., 2018; Cridland et al., 2021 & Hehir et al., 2021). These issues include but are not limited to higher levels of depression, loneliness, fear, anxiety, and overall disconnection from a healthy learning community (Dong, 2022; Mizani, 2022 & Morgan, 2022). Furthermore, the weight of available scholarly research agrees that if significant efforts are not made to connect students relationally with their peers and professors, the successful completion of one's education decreases immensely (Usher et al., 2021). Therefore, this study aims to identify the dangers of unresolved social isolation for online

learners and educators and to make recommendations for AGUSA schools of higher learning to improve online educational delivery systems.

Theoretical Significance

This topic is theoretically significant since it may extend Tinto's model of academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022, & Eun, 2019) to online collegiate learners and teachers. More specifically, if approved, this dissertation will attempt to fill the gap in the literature as it relates to Assemblies of God Colleges and Universities. Since the Assemblies of God has historically been very active in their efforts to educate and remain academically and technologically relevant (Higher education A/G 2022, History - evangel university, 2022), this study may offer critical insights for their continued growth and development of new programs and the improvement of older ones. These findings might improve academic delivery systems and how online developers can innovate and creatively reimagine ways and means of online social gathering. Thus, the significance of the study brings older and well-established learning principles of Tinto into the modern online classroom experience.

Practical Significance

The study's practical significance may be helpful for both the learner and the educator. For example, if students actively engage with their teachers, and if teachers feel they are positively influencing their students, then the successful dissemination of information and completion of a degree is more likely to occur (Hedges, 2021; Newman, 2021 & Paesani, 2020), and the professional satisfaction among teachers grows (Chen, 2022). Furthermore, if all those involved in the leadership of AGUSA schools could understand the previously mentioned dangers of social isolation, they would be able to address the issue through more robust

professional training for all involved in online education and onboarding new students (Lambert, 2020).

Research Questions

Drawing upon the data outlined in the problem and purpose statement sections, the following represents the central research question and subsequent questions.

Central Question: How can online educators improve academic and social persistence between their students and themselves by applying Tinto's Model of Integration?

Sub-Question 1: What methods are you using to evaluate your students' academic persistence and social interaction?

Sub-Question 2: What online extracurricular activities or projects are you currently offering, or have you previously offered?

Sub-Question 3: What online social activities/opportunities have you offered in the past, or do you plan to create and facilitate meaningful connections between you and your students and from student to student?

Definitions

This section lists critical terms and definitions pertinent to the study. Include terms that use abbreviations. An example is provided below.

1. *Academic Engagement:* signifies that the student has a great sense of intrinsic self-motivation to interact with all points of their academic experiences and learning material (Eriksen et al., 2023 & Skinner et al., 2009).
2. *Academic Performance:* refers to the student's ability to fully and systemically comprehend, understand, and apply what they have learned in their class context (Alam et al., 2023; Sotardi, 2022 & Tinto, 2020).

3. *Academic Persistence/Resilience*: In the broadest sense, this refers to the progression of and ability of the student's flexibility and adaptation despite complex challenges (Alcuetas, 2019; Allan, 2019; Howard, 2000 & Martin, 2002). It may also indicate one's aptitude for successfully handling academic setbacks, anxiety, and pressures (Alcuetas, 2019; Allan, 2019; Howard, 2000 & Martin, 2002). Furthermore, it is a student's ability to be blindsided and simultaneously cope and maintain their academic schedule and structure (Alcuetas, 2019; Allan, 2019; Howard, 2000 & Martin, 2002).
4. *Assemblies of God, USA (AGUSA)*: The Assemblies of God, USA, was established in 1914 in Hot Springs, Arkansas. The founding members included 300 men and women. Now the A/G has 13,000 churches globally with 69 million adherences. This statistic makes the AG the world's largest Pentecostal denomination. (Assemblies of God, 2023)
5. *Distance Education*: Officially endorsed and accredited education in which those in the class (learners and leaders) are not in the same physical learning environment (Rath, 2019).
6. *Extracurricular Activities*: events outside the regular curriculum of a school or college: sports, music, clubs, and drama are examples of some of the most prevalent extracurricular activities (Bartkus et al., 2012; Keaton & Gilbert, 2020).
7. *Faculty and Staff Relations*: The faculty and staff of the online program are the principal players in fostering a safe, exciting, and interactive community within the classroom for the students (Berry, 2019; Nicklin et al., 2022 & Snijders et al., 2022). Important relational factors include a sense of trust fostered by honest dialogue, empathy, grace, and a commitment to healthy conflict management (Berry, 2019; Nicklin et al., 2022 & Snijders et al., 2022).

8. *Online/eLearning/remote delivery tools*: the systems that facilitate and strengthen learning with digital technologies (Hensley, 2022).
9. *Intellectual Development*: refers to the personal intellectual growth of the student beyond one's personal firmly held preexisting ignorance, prejudice, or biases as a result of their learning and interactions at school (Felder, 2004; Gobec et al., 2022; Tsai et al., 2023).
10. *Peer-group Interactions*: means having the opportunity to work together in collaborative environments inside the classroom with their fellow learners (Dhanjal et al., 2023, Frith, (2023). Glyn-Jones, 2023; Li, 2023 & Wilson et al., 2023) as well as engaging with them outside the classroom through informal social gatherings (Glyn-Jones, 2023 & Sadykova, 2014).
11. *Remote learning*: refers to giving and receiving education through non-traditional means via technological delivery systems without an in-person/face-to-face classroom experience (Hartong, 2023 & Sofi-Karim et al., 2023).
12. *Social integration*: refers to how a student develops into a fully accepted, respected, and valuable part of the class, group, and overall educational and social structure (He et al., 2023 & Macmillan, 2007). When the learner has attained a high level of acceptance and respect by involving themselves in the institutional social structure and feels a great sense of appreciation and care from their peers and professors, they can be considered socially integrated (Beam, 2023; He et al., 2023 & Macmillan, 2007).
13. *Sense of Belonging*: refers to when the student feels accepted and connected to their peers and professors as well as to the overall social ethos of the institution (Chen et al., 2023). One may be considered connected when they feel they are relating well with the school's community by having high trust and mutual support (Chen et al., 2023).

14. *Social isolation*: refers to a person's emotional and physical condition whereby they have chosen or been forced to withdraw themselves from all things familiar, like friends and family, for excessive time (Morese, 2020 & Tang et al., 2021). SI records and refers to the absence of social interactions or uncommon social contact with other people, accentuated by an acute sense of loneliness (Alshammari et al., 2023; Dong, 2022; Mizani, 2022; Morese, 2020; Morgan, 2022 & Tang et al., 2021).
15. *Student engagement*: when the student gives their utmost focus, care, and thoughtfulness to the study materials being presented and involves the cumulative effort the learner puts into their overall achievement and success. (Hoi, 2021 & Trowler, 2010).
16. *Professor engagement*: This type of interaction involves students' positive back-and-forth relationship with the teacher of the courses they are currently enrolled in (Hoi, 2021).

Summary

Issues about social elements of online educational delivery systems remain a significant concern for students and teachers of post-secondary schools across the globe. Concerns with online students range from higher dropout rates to lower levels of achievement. In contrast, the concerns with educators tend to revolve around feelings of professional dissatisfaction and a loss of connection with their class. With online classes becoming more and more the rule rather than the exception, schools must make purposeful efforts to improve the overall feel of relational connectedness among their constituents. If the issues of social isolation caused by remote learning remain unaddressed, teachers and students may continue to suffer harm, and the school's mission may be misplaced. This phenomenology study addresses the gap in the research about these issues within the context of AGUSA schools of higher learning. The study aims to

highlight the overarching problems of social isolation and make recommendations for practical application and improvement in these areas.

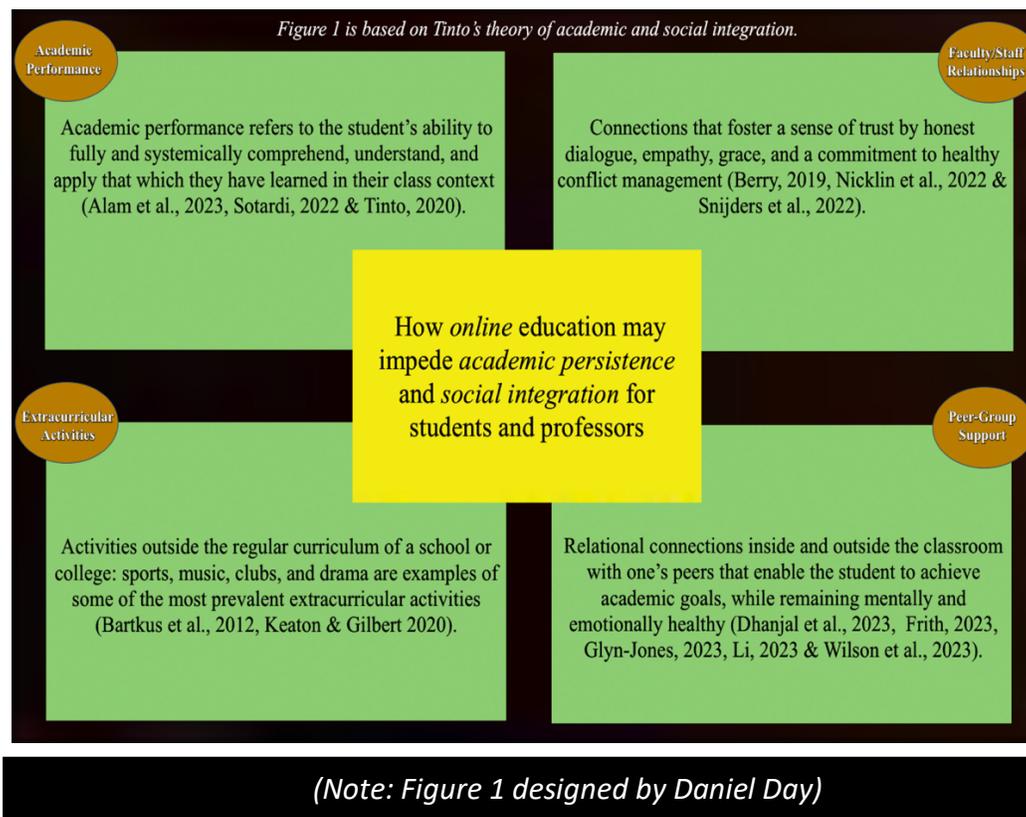
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of current scholarly literature was made to explore the experiences of post-secondary college students and their professors related to their feelings of isolation due to remote online learning. This chapter offers a methodical review of the research on this subject. The study draws upon Tinto's theory of academic and social integration, which has been selected to undergird and support the genuine arguments. Additionally, Tinto's model highlights the connections between academic performance, extracurricular activities, faculty/staff relationships, and peer group support to combat the issues surrounding student persistence and social integration, thus, showing how healthy learning communities and social integration may lead to successful educational outcomes and combat the effects of social isolation due to remote learning. The first section will discuss the primary theory and review recent literature on effective methodologies to help students develop their academic prowess and social integration. Finally, the research surrounding the varying perspectives of professors and students on the intersection of online education, peer-to-peer relationships, professor and staff relationships, online extracurricular activities, and academic performance is offered. Finally, a gap in the literature is identified as it relates to how online education may impede formal and informal pathways to academic persistence and social integration for students and professors at Assemblies of God schools for higher education.

Tinto's theoretical framework is portrayed in the concept map illustrated in Figure 1. The green boxes define and describe the four major components of Tinto's model. These pieces are further highlighted, defined, and explained in the forthcoming sections.

Figure 1: Concept Map



Theoretical Framework

Within this literature review, Day highlights the significance of Tinto's model for academic and social integration (SIT), to the apparent applications for post-secondary students and their professors to assist them in overcoming the obstructions to academic persistence and social integration in online learning. When one considers the volume of writing provided by Tinto, it is vital to narrow the scope of this review to focus on a few specific terms (Moustakas, 1994 & Newman, 2021). Therefore, in the following paragraphs, a thorough description of Tinto's theory is outlined and discussed to show how this theory has informed the literature of this study. Finally, evidence is presented for how the following study may extend this theory.

Solutions may be discovered by applying the theoretical framework of Tinto's sense of collaboration and community to the social isolation experienced by post-secondary college students and their professors due to remote learning. Within this review, Day synthesizes the current scholarly literature as well as the conditions that cause this sense of isolation along with an overview of related literature of Tinto's theory. The proceeding pages combine the ideals of those researchers who have already contributed to the subject. Finally, a gap in the literature is identified, along with recommendations for further study.

Tinto's Model for Academic and Social Integration Theory

What makes for a student's successful and enjoyable experience at a post-secondary institution has much to do with the level at which the student becomes immersed in the school's overall ethos as well as their sense of acceptance and belonging (Lakhal et al., 2020 & Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022). Thus, the essence of Vincent Tinto's academic and social integration theory is revealed (Lakhal et al., 2020 & Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022). Most literature on Tinto's theory is connected to student retention and dropout rates; Day draws connections from the theory to methods for overcoming the impact of social isolation. Firstly, however, a brief history of the theorist and a description of the leading theory must be offered at this point in the study.

Vincent Tinto is a distinguished and highly awarded professor emeritus at Syracuse University, and his contributions to the academic world are nearly incalculable (Davidson et al., 2013 & Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022). In the early to mid-70s, Tinto first began to research and discover the reasons why some universities had better retention than others and then outline the commonalities (Davidson et al., 2013 & Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022). His influence was solidified in the early 1990s as the Academic and Social Integration Theory principles were refined (Davidson et al., 2013 & Lakhal et al., 2020). Detailed research shows that success is far less

likely if a student does not connect beyond the classroom and socially integrate themselves into the full fellowship of the school (Lakhal et al., 2020 & Tinto, 2007). Practical applications of this principle come in the form of social supporters like counselors and teachers (Lakhal et al., 2020 & Tinto, 2007). Receiving advice from fellow learners and mentoring can increase students' sense of belonging, access to understanding, and dedication to the organization (Lakhal et al., 2020 & Tinto, 2007). Should these ideals be applied to the modern-day student, the effects of isolation may be mediated.

At the core of Tinto's theory are the ideals of academic performance, satisfaction with the academic experience, and social integration with one's peers and professors (Liu, 2000 & Tinto, 1987). According to Tinto, social integration is marked by an evident lack of social isolation on the part of the student (Liu, 2000 & Tinto, 1987). Another way to view the theory is to define it as the psychological results of one's interactions with institutional systems and having participated in the progression of those systems in fulfilling the mission and vision of the school (Baird, 2000 & Lakhal et al., 2020). For Tinto, academic integration happens when the learner shows a high level of intellectual growth and perceives their environment positively (Baird, 2000 & Lakhal et al., 2020). Furthermore, the theory explains that the level of involvement marks the student's social integration in extracurricular activities and the constant evidence of constructive relationships with the academic community (Baird, 2000 & Lakhal et al., 2020). With these definitions outlined, the study will now seek to apply these concepts to the issues surrounding the learning environment.

Creating a vibrant working, learning, and collaborative environment for teachers and students is vital. Tinto refers to this environment as having a sense of community (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022). Students feel a sense of belonging when a healthy working and learning

environment or learning community exists. Out of that sense of belongingness, students are inspired to develop and grow academically and personally (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022).

Additionally, the classroom is less about being better than one's peers and learning from and with fellow students (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022). Healthy relationships are at the root of any solution proposed in this study, and Tinto would also infer closeness with one's peers and professors (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022).

At the outset of this work, Day has sought to clearly articulate the problem of isolation within remote learning environments and its causes. These problems have been studied exhaustively, and proven that the effects of isolation and its consequences have become a significant drawback for those participating in remote online learning (Shen et al., 2022; Barreto et al., 2022; & Hehir et al., 2021). In the aftermath of the academic disruption caused by the global pandemic of 2020-21, more than a billion students were physically isolated and in some form of online learning environment (Adi et al., 2022; Hensley et al., 2022 & Sage et al., 2021). Students not used to the tools and mechanisms of remote learning or struggled with self-pacing and motivation had significant bouts of disconnectedness and disengagement (Hensley et al., 2022; Sage et al., 2021). Suppose the problems caused by isolation still need to be addressed. In that case, the academic performance of the student will significantly drop (Hoi et al., 2021; Paesani, 2020 & Sage et al., 2021), the efficacy of the educator will continue to diminish (Hoi et al., 2021; Paesani, 2020 & Sage et al., 2021), and the hurtful impact student dropout rates on post-secondary schools will rise (Hoi et al., 2021; Paesani, 2020 & Sage et al., 2021).

Therefore, as outlined in this literature review, Day's position is collaboration and community, as defined by Tinto (1974; Tinto, 1993 & Tinto, 2022), will form the constructs upon which the effects of isolation due to remote learning may be successfully managed and

overcome. Specifically, this study applies Tinto's research on academic performance, extracurricular activities, faculty/staff relationships, and peer group support to online learning environments and the challenges found therein. The remaining sections for this theoretical framework will outline the relevant historical context of the theory and its related literature. Additionally, great effort is made to articulate clearly why this theory is pertinent to feelings of isolation among post-secondary students. Finally, best practices for fostering collaborative community-based environments will also be outlined.

Related Literature

Having laid the foundational ideals of the proposed study within the framework of Tinto's theory of academic and social integration (Tinto, 1974; Tinto, 1993 & Tinto, 2022). Day will now move to synthesize pertinent and scholarly literature related to remote learning and social isolation among college professors and students. The following sources outlined in this inclusive review were drawn from the various academic databases available through Liberty University's online library and Google Scholar. After searching these keywords, significant themes began to arise from the previously published works. These themes combine to make up the theoretical underpinnings of the study. Primary topics that form the study include remote learning perspectives from the students and professors, elements of social isolation, elements of online educational platforms, social isolation from the perspective of the student and professor, and the associations between one's connectedness to the school and their successful completion of educational goals. Finally, chapter two concludes with an exhaustive summary of the abovementioned themes.

Components of Remote Learning

The exponential growth and need for new online/remote learning tools are well-documented (Chen, 2022; Kansal et al., 2021; Ospina et al., 2021; & Rath, 2019). These technical deliverables have taken many forms over the years (Grimaldi, 2021; Li, 2023, & Seleznev et al., 2022). Therefore, it is essential to define remote learning as it relates to this study. For this qualitative phenomenological study, remote learning refers to giving and receiving education through non-traditional means via technological delivery systems without an in-person/face-to-face classroom experience (Hartong, 2023 & Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). When these systems are successfully implemented, the student is anticipated to gain insight germane to their area of interest, allowing them to develop and be equipped with the needed skills for their desired career path (Grimaldi, 2021 & Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). Distance education through online platforms has become the norm (Grimaldi, 2021 & Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). Data reveals that most high schoolers will have taken at least one entire class online before they graduate and enter college (Li, 2023 & Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). These students will benefit from various data collection and informational resources (Li, 2023 & Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). Schools that do not have the enrollment, budget, or interest in unique subjects can take advantage of online classes to accommodate the few students who would benefit from such a class (Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). While favorable and advantageous elements of online learning appear to be abundant, that does not mean that varying viewpoints do not exist (Abdullah, 2022; Rath et al., 2019; & Van Wart et al., 2020). It is to those different perspectives that the study now turns.

Perspectives on Remote Learning

Researchers show that students and teachers involved in online learning have varying outlooks on the strengths and weaknesses of remote education (Aydin, 2021 & Bergmark et al., 2018). Upon close examination of the data, there are elements of commonality and vast differences in their vantage points (Aydin, 2021 & Bergmark et al., 2018). The following section of the study outlines students' feelings regarding remote learning environments. Likewise, Day brings attention to the thoughts and feelings of teachers about remote learning delivery systems. To arrive at potential solutions to online learning issues, understanding the lived experiences of those who participate in online learning regularly is beneficial.

Student Perspectives

The study aims to understand the many factors influencing students' perspectives on remote learning (Hopkins, 2008; Rath et al., 2019 & Van Wart et al., 2020). When considering this issue, many operational and relational dynamics arise (Hopkins, 2008; Rath et al., 2019 & Van Wart et al., 2020). Researchers have identified the following items as determining how post-secondary students rate their remote learning experience. These items include the quality of the teacher (Shin, 2021 & Kollalpitiya et al., 2020), the flexibility of one's schedule (Rath et al., 2019 & Van Wart et al., 2020), a sense that the educator is available, and present (Rath et al., 2019 & Van Wart et al., 2020), learning community and a feeling of being connected with fellow peers (Rath et al., 2019; Shin, 2021 & Van Wart et al., 2020), the user-friendly application of the online platform (Rath et al., 2019; Shin, 2021 & Van Wart et al., 2020), emotional and motivational support (Harefa, 2022 & Shin, 2021), access to quality computer equipment and internet (Abdullah, 2022; Harefa, 2022, & Pradana et al., 2021), and timeliness in grading feedback (Sopina, 2015 & Watkins et al., 2014). The findings reveal that when these elements

are in place and functioning at their highest potential, most students have a positive outlook on remote learning (Rath et al., 2019; Sopina, 2015 & Watkins et al., 2014). That said, many of these same students still prefer the in-person/face-to-face experience of a classroom in many cases (Behera et al., 2022 & Rath et al., 2019). Therefore, data reveals a case-by-case and class-by-class preference related to remote learning preferences from the student's viewpoint (Rath et al., 2019; Sopina, 2015 & Watkins et al., 2014). From the student's perspective, some topics may be best learned and experienced in person, while others can be very satisfactorily learned through online platforms (Behera et al., 2022 & Rath et al., 2019). Understanding students' thoughts as it relates to remote learning is only part of the equation of this study; now, the study will focus on the vantage point of the professor.

Professor Perspectives

Vital to the study is attempting to see and comprehend aspects of remote learning from the teacher's vantage point. While those on the frontlines of education see several benefits to online learning, such as autonomy of pace, space, ease of access, and schedule (Snijders et al., 2022; Scherer et al., 2021; & Van Wart et al., 2020) teachers are without their concerns (Snijders et al., 2022 & Scherer et al., 2021). The different approaches that online teaching requires as opposed to in-person methodologies are vast. Only some educators are comfortable and have been adequately taught to utilize new technological tools effectively (Chen et al., 2022; Erdem-Aydin, 2021 & Khan et al., 2022). A call for adaptation in teaching approaches that equips the learner to be more involved and participatory in each class has commenced (Khan et al., 2022 & Kinasevych, 2010).

Furthermore, not all learners or leaders are self-starters and do not quickly motivate themselves apart from an in-person community (Adi Badiozaman et al., 2022 & Huo, 2021), but that does not negate the fact that current cultural and educational paradigms are shifting more and more to online platforms (Adi Badiozaman et al., 2022 & Huo, 2021). Teachers' and their students' concerns regarding remote learning are not without their commonalities. Both groups are concerned about sustaining motivation, confidentiality, security, access to good equipment, and internet connectivity (Chen et al., 2022; Erdem-Aydin, 2021). Researchers show that many choose to enter the teaching profession out of a calling to help, love, contribute to, and empower their students (Bergmark et al., 2018 & Garza-Rodríguez, 2022). This intrinsic desire to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of learners does not change due to the methodologies that online learning requires. However, these desires may be inhibited if the abovementioned concerns are not adequately addressed.

Factors of Social Isolation

According to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory (1978), the closer that one can be to the learning community, including one's professors and peers, the better the chances are that students will achieve educational success (Eun, 2019 & Newman, 2021, Vygotsky, 1978, Vygotsky, 1986). That said, the social isolation caused by remote learning pathways physically and, at times, emotionally removes the student and teacher from one another, which has caused significant problems (Butnaru et al., 2021 & Dragolea, 2022). This section seeks to outline these issues from the perspectives of the student and teacher. However, it is of first importance to define social isolation and the documented outcomes proceeding from it. Social isolation refers to a person's emotional and physical condition whereby they have chosen or been forced to withdraw themselves from all things familiar, like friends and family, for

excessive time (Morese, 2020; Tang et al., 2021). While it is true that distance learning does offer some interaction via the Internet of Things, various apps, and digital meeting tools (Morese, 2020; Tang et al., 2021), this fact does not negate the human need for closer interaction and connection (Cudjoe et al., 2020; Leal Filho, 2021). The mental and emotional health issues spurred on and exacerbated due to the forced remote learning brought on by the worldwide pandemic of 2020 created tremendous problems for educators and learners alike (George et al., 2021; Morgan, 2022). Being alone and connecting in limited ways through their digital devices does not appear to bother students, but the quality and retention of information have been different (Behera et al., 2022; Rath et al., 2019).

Student Perspectives

From the viewpoint of many online learners, the emotional and mental dangers caused by social isolation, such as fear, anxiety, panic attacks, and depression, far outweigh the benefits of accessibility and affordability (Dong, 2022; Mizani, 2022; Morgan, 2022). Due to these issues and more, some students attending live online classes may not feel comfortable having their camera set to the on position, thus removing more elements of interaction and quality of learning (Castelli, 2021; Morgan, 2022; Villa Castaño et al., 2022). Furthermore, during social isolation due to remote learning, students miss much of the on-campus experiences that traditional college life affords the student, such as sporting events and student clubs (Blake et al., 2021; Leal Filho et al., 2021). All of these matters together culminate in an understanding that the social components of a student's experience in college are a vitally important part of their overall educational development and enjoyment. These concerns are not exclusive to the student, and teachers are not immune from the effects of social isolation.

Professor Perspectives

The emotional and mental health issues that weigh upon the student are not exclusively theirs to bear, and teachers feel the pressures (Antonini, 2020; Leal Filho, 2021). Teachers may sometimes feel the same fears, worries, and anxieties as their students (Ferri, 2020 & Winters et al., 2023). However, there are unique challenges facing today's educators that should be noted (Ferri, 2020 & Morgan, 2022). Tinto's sense of community and belongingness is primarily created by the thoughtful and purposeful professor (Hehir, 2021 & Winters et al., 2023). Unfortunately, not all educators have been taught the skills or tools to create meaningful online communities (Ferri, 2020 & Morgan, 2022). As a result, some teachers feel they need help knowing how to succeed (Lambert, 2020 & Scherer, 2021). Not knowing what to do is not the issue for professors, rather how to professionally and efficiently perform their duties (Lambert, 2020 & Scherer, 2021). A lack of training, equipment, and empowerment for these creative elements that add to the sense of belongingness that must be present in the classroom adds to the teacher's overall frustration (Ferri, 2020 & Scherer, 2021). Systems that advance the educator's knowledge of the technological tools must help alleviate some pressure (Ferri, 2020 & Scherer, 2021).

Conditions and Causes Social Isolation

Before moving on to other aspects of this study, it is essential to emphasize a few overarching conditions and causes of social isolation embedded in online learning environments. Attaining newfound awareness and understanding of these issues may be helpful for professors and online classroom designers (Alenezi, 2023; Lim et al., 2022; Saat et al., 2023 & Salimi et al., 2023). Clearly explained and proven within recent academic research (Jafar et al., 2023; Riboldi et al., 2023; & Salimi et al., 2023), mental and emotional health is critical and may influence the

success or failure of the student. This section will highlight the prevailing conditions and causes of social isolation, hoping that those in online education will know and avoid them by all possible means. It should be noted that the following information applies to all involved in post-secondary education, such as professors and administrators.

Those involved with online collegiate education have been known to experience social isolation when the following circumstances exist. These include:

1. The absence of a social support system (Cooke, 1988; Lim et al., 2022; & Ye et al., 2020),
2. The absence of access to resources and training (Alenezi, 2023 & Sofi-Karim et al., 2023),
3. The absence of control over exterior factors (Fülöp et al., 2023; Saat et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2023), and
4. The absence of assistance with preexisting mental health problems (Jafar et al., 2023; Riboldi et al., 2023; & Salimi et al., 2023).

These four foundational points create the prevailing causes and circumstances that have led students and educational professionals into social isolation (Alenezi, 2023; Lim et al., 2022; Saat et al., 2023 & Salimi et al., 2023). In what follows, clear definitions of these circumstances are provided. Should one gain knowledge on the following framework for social isolation, strategies to overcome these obstacles may be created.

The absence of access to a social support system is the primary cause of social isolation among higher online education students (Cooke, 1988; Lim et al., 2022; & Ye et al., 2020). Social support signifies the mental, emotional, spiritual, and educational sustenance an individual may receive through social connections (Cooke, 1988; Lim et al., 2022, & Ye et al., 2020).

Support systems include friends, families, clubs, teams, and organizations (Cooke, 1988; Lim et al., 2022; & Ye et al., 2020). When those involved in online education take advantage of the support structures made available through the aforementioned social opportunities, their chances of success climb (Cooke, 1988; Lim et al., 2022; & Ye et al., 2020). There must be more than just a social support system to guarantee graduation. Three more factors must be at work.

The subsequent obstruction in completing online education is the need for more access to adequate technological resources and training (Alenezi, 2023 & Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). When millions around the world were forced to transition their education to online only, those who did not have the proper equipment, efficient internet accessibility, and training to know how to use these tools suffered greatly (Alenezi, 2023 & Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). Even if an under-resourced individual had a social support system, it would matter little if they were not equipped with the necessary tools and training to implement online education (Alenezi, 2023 & Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). When the student and educators have their support system and resources, achievement at the highest levels becomes possible (Alenezi, 2023 & Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). Even still, there can be factors outside of one's control that can hinder progress. It is to that subject that this study now turns.

Thirdly, having no access to control over exterior factors may hinder one from achieving academic or professional goals (Fülöp et al., 2023; Saat et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2023). One primary example in recent history is the global pandemic caused by COVID-19 (Fülöp et al., 2023; Saat et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2023). However, many examples of non-controllable factors may enter one's life. External Factors refer to those happenings in one's life that did not originate with that person and cannot be altered by that person's actions or will (Fülöp et al., 2023; Saat et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2023). Insufficient institutional infrastructure and support, illness, car

accidents, war, death, and economic recession/depression are all examples of exterior factors that may hinder one's educational goals (Fülöp et al., 2023; Saat et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2023).

Having resilience and the ability to cope with these unexpected difficulties assists one's life when these factors arise (Fülöp et al., 2023; Saat et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2023). That said, there is one more item to consider, and that is the issue of mental health.

Lastly, it is vital to the study to bring attention to and highlight the importance of mental health. When there is an absence of access to assistance with preexisting mental health problems, research reveals major problems (Jafar et al., 2023; Riboldi et al., 2023; & Salimi et al., 2023)

All of the issues previously outlined in this section influence mental health. For example, when the external factor of COVID-19 became the prevailing reality for most, access to school was not the only thing that was cut off (Jafar et al., 2023; Riboldi et al., 2023; & Salimi et al., 2023). In some cases, there was no ability to get one's medication or counseling during this time (Jafar et al., 2023; Riboldi et al., 2023; & Salimi et al., 2023). Even when telehealth was made available through those in the medical field, if the patient had no access to good equipment or an internet connection, it mattered not (Jafar et al., 2023; Riboldi et al., 2023; & Salimi et al., 2023)

Social isolation has been shown to exacerbate mental health conditions, making them more acute and potentially dangerous (Jafar et al., 2023; Riboldi et al., 2023; & Salimi et al., 2023).

Therefore, the causes and circumstances surrounding social isolation are best understood within the framework of these four items (Alenezi, 2023; Lim et al., 2022; Saat et al., 2023 & Salimi et al., 2023).

Academic Performance & Online Learning

Within this section of the study, student and professor perspectives on remote learning and its various pathways to academic performance are put forward. Firstly, it is essential to define academic performance. At a basic level, academic performance refers to the student's ability to fully and systemically comprehend, understand, and apply what they have learned in their class context (Alam et al., 2023; Sotardi, 2022 & Tinto, 2020). It has been documented (Alam et al., 2023; Sotardi, 2022 & Tinto, 2020) that a student's academic performance's efficacy is directly associated with their perception of being accepted into and respected by their fellow learners and teachers. Furthermore, it is argued that the pinacol of a student's academic performance may only be reached after fully integrating into the social and intellectual ethos of the school (Huo et al., 2022 & Tinto, 1987, 2020). These findings are not exclusive but be true for people of varying backgrounds, demographics, languages, and nationalities (Echenique, 2007 & Jieyi et al., 2022). With the factors mentioned above in mind, perceptions from teachers and students about the data are now offered.

How students perceive their online learning environment has implications for their success or failure in the course (Han, 2021 & Yu et al., 2022). If the student can maximize the online learning tools to effectively organize their goals, time, and tasks, gaining the motivation for solid academic achievement may be found (Han, 2021 & Yu et al., 2022). Another factor that enhances academic success for the learner is mentorship and coaching (Gobec et al., 2022 & Park, 2022). When back-and-forth collaborative exchanges exist between the student and their professor, the entire learning experience is greatly enhanced (Gobec et al., 2022 & Pilotti, 2023). Moreover, researchers demonstrate that having a sense of a peer-to-peer community of fellow learners also assists online students in achieving their goals (Guo et al., 2021; Sotardi, 2022 &

Tinto, 2020). Therefore, the more socially connected and accepted students feel with their peers, the more likely they are to maximize their academic potential and finish well. How a student can align these components to academic success largely depends on the engagement of their professors, and it is to their viewpoints that the study now turns.

No one influences a student's sense of belonging within a university more than the professor (Park, 2022 & Sotardi, 2022). There is an inseparable link between students and their professors that may either enhance or hinder the learner's personal health, confidence, incentive, and academic efficacy (Park, 2022 & Sotardi, 2022). If their bond strengthens through a healthy sense of teacher presence, thoughtful feedback, and timely communication, the pathways to social integration and academic success become clear (Park, 2022 & Sotardi, 2022). When teachers are adequately trained to maximize their online tools and equipped with them, the likelihood of engagement and professional satisfaction increases (Chen et al., 2022 & Erdem-Aydin, 2021). Should the teacher take seriously the immense influence that they possess in the life of a student and display how much they genuinely care about their academic achievement and success, the better chances are that the student will achieve their social and intellectual goals in online education (Oducado et al., 2022 & Park, 2022; Sotardi, 2022).

Intellectual Development

Tinto's focus on intellectual development (ID) is of the utmost importance to the study at hand and how it factors into the student's sense of either belonging or isolation in their academic performance (Tinto, 1974; Tinto, 1993, & Tinto, 2022). Many researchers have offered significant contributions to the subject of strategy development concerning ID and how writers of the curriculum can design classes that give the student their best chances of success (Abduraxmanova, 2022; Felder, 2004; Gobec et al., 2022, & Peirce, 2003). Censuses, surveys,

deliberations, interviews, writing, debate, conflict resolution exercises, and journals provide a starting point that creates interactive opportunities for the students and their professors (Abduraxmanova, 2022; Felder, 2004; Gobec et al., 2022 & Peirce, 2003). Often it is the case that young students arriving at college come with firmly held yet ignorant belief systems that could benefit from the perspectives and opinions of their peers (Felder, 2004 & Gobec et al., 2022), and therefore it is vital to the student's ID to have as many opportunities to interact with their peers as often as possible (Felder, 2004 & Gobec et al., 2022). Though many college students enter school with a cursory knowledge of technological tools and the Internet of Things (Hoffman, 2003 & Li et al., 2023), it cannot be taken for granted that everyone has information, computer, media, and communication to thrive in an online class (Abduraxmanova, 2022 & Lakhali et al., 2020). The ability to find and filter the information one needs to succeed academically largely depends on the training and onboarding process of the school (Abduraxmanova, 2022 & Lakhali et al., 2020). When good training and onboarding align with the opportunities to interact socially and academically with peers in safe and trustworthy online settings, ID has its best chance of healthy growth, thereby minimizing social isolation (Abduraxmanova, 2022 & Lakhali et al., 2020).

Positive Perception of Academic Settings

Scholars (Conrad et al., 2022; Espasa et al., 2022; Kaufmann, 2022; Warfvinge et al., 2022 & Yau et al., 2022) have concluded that much of a student's academic success and social integration largely depends upon whether or not they have a positive perception of the educational setting overall (Ni et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2021 & Yau et al., 2022). Several studies have proposed solutions to negative student and teacher attitudes (Ni et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2021 & Yau et al., 2022). These solutions include collaborating with

teachers and students to design communication channels (Ni et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2021 & Yau et al., 2022), developing questionnaires specific to the lived experiences of all involved to gain a better understanding of how to improve (Warfvinge et al., 2022), using video channels to create a higher sense of closeness (Ni et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2021 & Yau et al., 2022), and has focused attention on the quality of the curriculum rather than the quantity (Conrad et al., 2022 & Tan et al., 2021). Further instructions on how to practically achieve these solutions are needed. Through the careful application of the principles of good practice offered by Chickering and Gamzon (1989) to the online learning perception research of Tan (2021), one may discover these solutions. Developing written and signed agreements for teachers and students to sign that outline each other's expectations for the course, fostering formal and informal interactions for the students, offering multiple types of learning strategies that appeal to both the creative as well as analytical mind, and providing multiple avenues for communication and feedback to transpire, have all been shown to build better perceptions of online learning (Chickering, 1989 & Tan et al., 2021). All these factors combine to prove that all parties involved in online education, be it university faculty, staff, administration, or the learners, can benefit significantly from an improved understanding of the felt experiences and perceptions of online learning environments (Aziz et al. 2021 & Kaufmann, 2022).

Social Integration & Online Learning

The idea of social integration (SI) and its effects on adult online learners is well documented (Bergman et al., 2023; Hu et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2020, & Marzouki et al., 2021). This study defines SI by merging ideas from He (2007) and Macmillan (2023). SI is when the student develops into a fully accepted, respected, and valuable part of the class, group, and overall educational and social structure (He et al., 2023 & Macmillan, 2007). Therefore, the

online learner may benefit from new friendships and professional contacts by actively participating in academic activities (Bergman et al., 2023 & He et al., 2023) and getting much higher grades than those who are not socially involved (Bergman et al., 2023 & He et al., 2023). Studies (He et al., 2023; Hu et al., 2022, and Lin et al., 2015) have also shown that the overall mental wellness of the student is directly connected to their interpersonal ties and willingness to involve themselves in the context of their formal and informal social opportunities. Often these opportunities present themselves in extracurricular activities (Bartkus et al., 2012; Keaton & Gilbert, 2020).

Extracurricular Activities & Online Learning

Within this study segment, Day defines online extracurricular activity (OEA) and some student and professor perspectives. While the definition of extracurricular activity (EA) may be self-explanatory or intuitive, a basic outline of the word's meaning is helpful to the study. Generally, EA is said to be outside the regular curriculum of a school or college: sports, music, clubs, and drama are examples of some of the most prevalent extracurricular activities (Bartkus et al., 2012; Keaton & Gilbert, 2020). This study connects this definition with online educational platforms and emphasizes the importance of such bonds. Virtual education often links learners and teachers in unique collaboration and communication patterns whereby they can assist each other in the learning process and even befriend one another (Keaton & Gilbert, 2020). While challenges exist and personal factors that hinder such healthy interaction may be at work, OEA presents a relational open door that has been shown to increase the value of the student's college experience and future relationships (Bondani et al., 2022 & Cao, 2023; Feraco et al., 2023).

The issues of remote learning environments and discovering new ways for social integration through online extracurricular activities have become to focus of many studies

(Almalag et al., 2022; Bondani et al., 2022; Cao, 2023; Feraco et al., 2023; Jacinto, 2023, & Kim et al., 2023). Adding these tools has dramatically improved student academic achievement and social integration (Bondani et al., 2022 & Cao, 2023; Feraco et al., 2023). Minus these extracurricular opportunities, learners have fewer prospects to socialize, express themselves, and develop many necessary soft skills, such as communication, presentation, and leadership, within safe and relaxed environments (Almalag et al., 2022; Isopahkala-Bouret et al., 2023 & Kim et al., 2023). Additionally, when a school offers such activities, the overall health and wellness of the student have been shown to improve (Almalag et al., 2022; Isopahkala-Bouret et al., 2023 & Kim et al., 2023) and have been shown to enhance the student's employability after graduation (Almalag et al., 2022; Isopahkala-Bouret et al., 2023 & Kim et al., 2023). Factors contributing to an OEA's success are team competitions, engaging software, and exciting interactions with peers and professors (Jacinto, 2023 & Pilotti, 2023). As a result of student course evaluations, it has been noted by students that the physical distance of remote learning models presents significant challenges and limits the critical informal exchanges between students and instructors, thereby hindering the number of opportunities for open and honest communication (Jacinto, 2023 & Pilotti, 2023). Thus, the need for OEA continues to present itself at an ever-increasing rate.

Positive Relationships in Online Learning

This section of the study highlights the importance of quality connections between the faculty, staff, and students of online education for the betterment of all involved. Though mentioned briefly in previous portions of the study, this section outlines the elements that activate strong relationships between these groups. These factors include a sense of trust fostered by honest dialogue, empathy, grace, and a commitment to healthy conflict management (Berry, 2019; Nicklin et al., 2022 & Snijders et al., 2022). Should any one of these pieces be included,

relationships may be improved. For staff, faculty, and students to blend and merge well, there must be a willingness by all parties involved to adapt, shift, and change directions quickly so that improvements can be made rapidly (Berry, 2019; Nicklin et al., 2022 & Snijders et al., 2022). The faculty and staff of the online program are the principal players in fostering a safe, exciting, and interactive community within the classroom for the students (Berry, 2019; Nicklin et al., 2022 & Snijders et al., 2022). Should this detail be overlooked, student satisfaction and achievement drop dramatically (Berry, 2019; Nicklin et al., 2022 & Snijders et al., 2022). Clearly defined, prompt, expert, impartial, and constant feedback are vital in producing quality connections in online courses (Berry, 2019; Kranzow, 2013; Nicklin et al., 2022 & Snijders et al., 2022). All of the above essentials for online relationships and community in education are principally initiated and maintained by the staff and faculty (Berry, 2019 & Kranzow, 2013).

Peer-Group Interactions & Online Learning

Throughout this final section of the literature review, Day emphasizes the value of peer-to-peer interactions and their ability to enhance the student's overall health and educational experience. A rising number of studies have highlighted the importance of relational connections with one's peers to be able to achieve academic goals while at the same time remaining mentally and emotionally healthy (Dhanjal et al., 2023; Frith, 2023; Glyn-Jones, 2023; Li, 2023 & Wilson et al., 2023). Having the opportunity to work together in collaborative environments with their fellow learners has proven vital, not only for the betterment of the student, but these settings afford the teacher a good vantage point from which to show equity to each student (Dhanjal et al., 2023, Frith, (2023). Glyn-Jones, 2023; Li, 2023 & Wilson et al., 2023). That said, interacting within a classroom setting is only a part of the healthy student equation. Having opportunities outside the classroom to interact through informal social gatherings has also provided a more

holistic mental and emotional benefit (Glyn-Jones, 2023 & Sadykova, 2014). Research reveals many benefits to designing coursework that offers group projects and opportunities for online social activities (Glyn-Jones, 2023 & Sadykova, 2014). Learning with and from peers within a group context can protect against procrastination and provide accountability in coursework (Lai et al., 2019 & Sadykova, 2014). Moreover, the community that one may discover in online education is nearly limitless, and should a student take advantage of these tools, their overall engagement can rise to new levels (Glyn-Jones, 2023; Greenhow et al., 2022 & Sadykova, 2014).

Factors to Consider for Adult Learners and Online Education

The national average age of an online college student in the United States is between 25 and 38 (Douglas et al., 2023 & Ramos, 2023). With this in mind, it may be helpful to consider a few of an adult online learner's most pertinent life circumstances (Lakhal et al., 2020; Park, 2007; Park et al., 2009, & Rovai, 2003). By better understanding this data, online classroom developers will know how to navigate their chosen pathway better to assist these students to succeed (Lakhal et al., 2020; Park, 2007; Park et al., 2009 & Rovai, 2003). The lives of these adult learners are marked by concerns about money, finding time to fit education into their hectic schedules, managing multiple responsibilities with work, family, and personal time, and how to continue in education during seasons of crisis (Park, 2007; Park et al., 2009, & Rovai, 2003). Furthermore, many adult learners need better communication, technical, and writing skills that may create barriers they must first overcome prior to enrollment (Gunawardena, 2023; Park, 2007 & Park et al., 2009). Should online college classroom developers design their delivery systems to address these concerns, then the academic performance and social integration of these

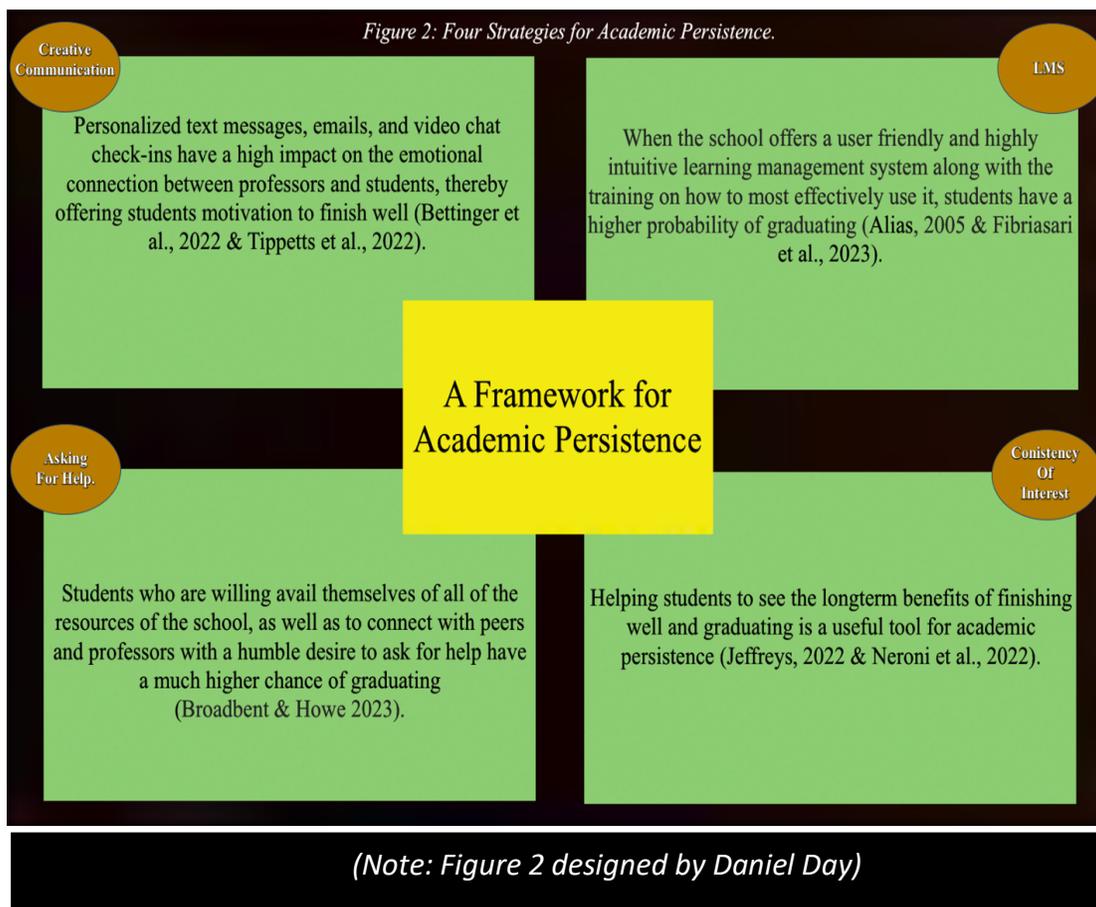
students be given their best chance (Gunawardena, 2023; Lakhali et al., 2020; Park, 2007; Park et al., 2009, & Rovai, 2003).

Strategies for Academic Persistence

Many have sought to identify practical approaches that students and teachers may apply to achieve academic persistence (Bettinger et al., 2022; Broadbent, 2023; Fibriasari et al., 2023; Hai-Jew et al., 2023; Neroni et al., 2022 & Tippetts et al., 2022). This section briefly outlines and explains these strategies emphasizing their impact on the matter. Firstly, it has been shown that creative and personalized communication between professors, academic advisors, and students has gone a long way in helping students finish well (Bettinger et al., 2022 & Tippetts et al., 2022). These studies reveal that when students feel personally cared for by those who work for the school, their motivation to graduate exceptionally increases (Bettinger et al., 2022 & Tippetts et al., 2022). Next, researchers have uncovered data that shows that when students are aware that they need help and are willing to ask for help, their chances of graduation rise (Broadbent & Howe, 2023). Though it may seem trivial, not all students take advantage of the resources available, unfortunately opting to attempt their education as a loner (Broadbent & Howe, 2023). Thirdly, a user-friendly and highly intuitive learning management system (LMS) is an invaluable tool for persistence (Alias, 2005 & Fibriasari et al., 2023). An LMS is a computer software or web-based technology used to create, plan, apply, deliver, and measure learning processes (Alias, 2005 & Fibriasari et al., 2023). Other names for LMS include Electronic Learning Management Systems, Course Management Systems, Content Management Systems, and Learning Content Management Systems (Alias, 2005 & Fibriasari et al., 2023). If an LMS is working correctly and efficiently, the delivery of educational content and the communication between professors, students, and peers will be exceptional (Alias, 2005 & Fibriasari et al.,

2023). Fourthly, utilizing methods that foster consistency of interest, such as highly involved, proactive, and engaged teams of faculty, administrators, and staff that continue to show students the many benefits that they may receive upon the completion of their degree program, has been shown to help with persistence (Jeffreys, 2022 & Neroni et al., 2022). More about these benefits will be outlined in the next section. Though these four strategies for academic persistence do not represent an exhaustive list, they do create a framework for persistence that can be applied to online learning communities (Bettinger et al., 2022; Broadbent, 2023; Fibriasari et al., 2023; Hai-Jew et al., 2023; Neroni et al., 2022 & Tippetts et al., 2022).

See Figure 2: Concept Map



Benefits of Academic Persistence

As previously mentioned, one of the most impactful methods of providing the much-needed encouragement and motivation for academic persistence in the student is by helping them to gain a vision for the many long-term benefits that may come to them upon graduation (Jeffreys, 2022 & Neroni et al., 2022). This section will outline a few predominant benefits provided by the literature. Researchers have endeavored to outline a list of the overall outcomes of a successful student who graduates college (Abel, 2019; Andrade et al., 2022; Clark, 2023; Cooper, 2023; Gong, 2023 & Pierard et al., 2022). These studies reveal that due to academic persistence, one may enjoy better pay packages, including higher salaries, health benefits, and retirement savings (Abel, 2019 & Andrade et al., 2022). Secondly, those who persist have more opportunities for upward mobility, diverse career prospects, and superior working environments (Andrade et al., 2022 & Gong, 2023). Lastly, graduates develop higher personal confidence, critical thinking, leadership, and communication skills (Clark, 2023; Pierard et al., 2022). When one considers the vast amount of good that may happen in the life of the persistent student who completes college, it can offer the emotional nudge one needs to move forward in their journey (Jeffreys, 2022 & Neroni et al., 2022).

Strategies for Social Integration

Within the structure of Tinto's theory, social integration and its effects on a student's ability to achieve their academic goals looms large (Tinto, 1987, 1993, 2007, 2020, 2022). When the learner has attained a high level of acceptance and respect by involving themselves in the institutional social structure and feels a great sense of appreciation and care from their peers and professors, they can be considered socially integrated (Beam, 2023; He et al., 2023 & Macmillan, 2007). This section highlights how administrators, educators, and peers can assist in

this goal. There is no shortage of reports from students enrolled in online education who feel an enormous amount of disconnection, distraction, and an overall lack of personal consideration from their teachers and classmates (Arbaugh, 2001; Jaggars, 2016; Means et al., 2014; Picciano, 2019 & Tate, 2022). Therefore, it is pivotal to emphasize known strategies to aid in this problem.

Research suggests several methods to achieve social integration, such as building within the course structure several required interactions through peer-group/small-group problem-solving projects (Tate, 2022 & Walker, 2009). Next, there must be periodic regularly scheduled live session meet-ups so that professors may interact with their students and students may interact with their peers to simulate a face-to-face classroom (Means et al., 2014; Tate, 2022 & Toma, 2023). Another successful method to create connection and integration in online learning is for the professor to keep online office hours as well as optional in-person office hours so that students can address their most pertinent concerns about the class in a way that makes sense to them (Beam, 2023; Cung, 2018; Tate, 2022 & Toma, 2023). Furthermore, when communication happens quickly and includes unique personal touches, students feel more appreciated and connected with their professors (Arbaugh, 2001; Bettinger et al., 2022 & Cung, 2018).

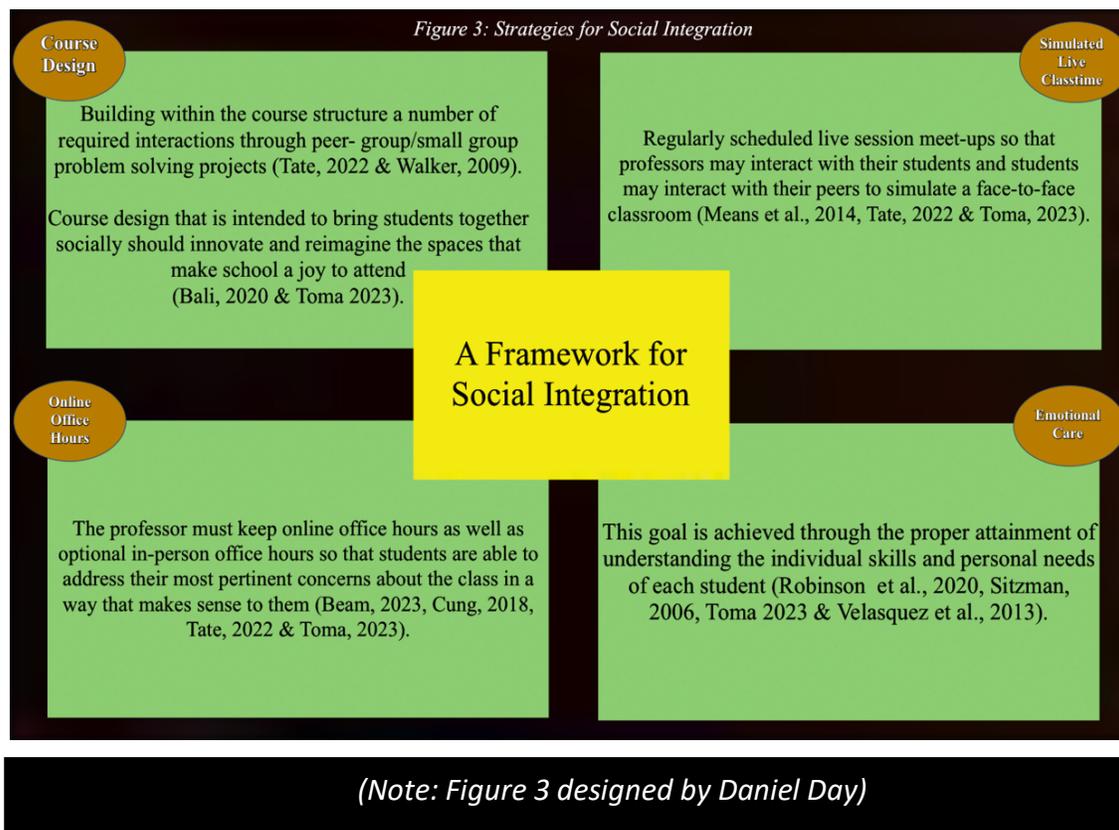
Additionally, the entire course design must be done with the emotional care of the student in full view (Robinson et al., 2020; Sitzman, 2006; Toma, 2023 & Velasquez et al., 2013). This goal is achieved by adequately understanding each student's skills and needs (Robinson et al., 2020; Sitzman, 2006; Toma, 2023 & Velasquez et al., 2013). Finally, online course design intended to bring students together socially should innovate and reimagine the spaces that make school a joy to attend (Bali, 2020 & Toma, 2023). That said, online classroom designers, should think through ways to reinvent the food court, student union, gym, coffee shops, track, sporting events, and field trips and discover digital ways to mimic these structures (Bali, 2020; Mercer et

al., 2023 & Toma 2023). While this may not be an exhaustive list of strategies for social integration, it does offer a robust framework of options to assist in achieving it.

The Benefits of Social Integration

In previous research, three primary benefits of social integration buoy to the surface. These include students attaining a higher academic resilience, a greater sense of social belonging, and a far better level of academic engagement (Greenland, 2022; Luo et al., 2022; Mannan, 2007 & Versteeg et al., 2022). Academic Resilience (AR), in the broadest sense, refers to the progression of and ability of the student's flexibility and adaptation despite complex challenges (Alcuetas, 2019; Allan, 2019; Howard, 2000 & Martin, 2002). AR may also indicate one's aptitude for successfully handling academic setbacks, anxiety, and pressures (Alcuetas, 2019; Allan, 2019; Howard, 2000 & Martin, 2002). Furthermore, AR is a student's ability to be blindsided and simultaneously cope and maintain their academic schedule and structure (Alcuetas, 2019; Allan, 2019; Howard, 2000 & Martin, 2002). Sense of Social Belonging (SB) is when the learner feels accepted and connected to their peers and professors as well as to the overall social ethos of the institution (Chen et al., 2023 & Litevsky et al., 2023). One may be considered connected when they feel they are relating well with the school's community by having high trust and mutual support (Chen et al., 2023 & Litevsky et al., 2023). Academic engagement signifies that the student has a great sense of intrinsic self-motivation to interact with all points of their academic experiences and learning material (Eriksen et al., 2023 & Skinner et al., 2009). These three benefits combine to make social integration a worthy goal that has been proven to assist students in finishing well (Greenland, 2022; Luo et al., 2022; Mannan, 2007 & Versteeg et al., 2022).

Figure 3: Concept Map



Social Isolation, Academic Persistence, and Social Integration.

The influences of social isolation caused by remote learning on professors and their students have been thoroughly researched and documented (Alshammari et al., 2023 & Mecida et al., 2023). SI records and refers to the absence of social interactions or uncommon social contact with other people, accentuated by an acute sense of loneliness (Alshammari et al., 2023; Dong, 2022; Mizani, 2022; Morese, 2020; Morgan, 2022 & Tang et al., 2021). Not only their practical issues stemming from the communication breakdown caused by SI but also numerous mental and emotional health problems, such as stress, anxiety, worry, unhealthy self-talk and thoughts (Dong, 2022; Mecida et al., 2023; Mizani, 2022; Morese, 2020; Morgan, 2022 & Tang et al., 2021). These issues hinder students' academic persistence and social integration in their

prospective learning institutions (Mizani, 2022; Morese, 2020 & Umoh et al., 2023). The obstacles may be navigated and overcome by following the recommended actions in this study as outlined by the most current and scholarly literature.

Summary

The literature review I have provided summarizes background scholarly literature relevant to social isolation and its impacts on post-secondary students and teachers. The theoretical framework for the study is afforded Tinto's Theory of academic and social integration (Davidson et al., 2013 & Tinto, 2022). Related literature on the subject has been offered to define remote learning (Hartong, 2023 & Sofi-Karim et al., 2023), social isolation (George, 2021 & Morese, 2020), academic persistence (Alam et al., 2023; Sotardi, 2022 & Tinto, 2020), and social integration (Bergman et al., 2023; Hu et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2020, & Marzouki et al., 2021). The study emphasizes and synthesizes the varying perspectives of teachers and students on the subject of remote learning while at the same time offering their commonalities (Behera et al., 2022; Hunt et al., 2023); & Rath et al., 2019).

Additionally, the vantage points of both the leader and learner regarding remote learning and social isolation are articulated, highlighting the unique ways each study group experiences this phenomenon (Castelli, 2021; Hehir, 2021; Leal Filho, 2021; Morgan, 2022 & Villa Castaño et al., 2022). These sections cross-examine the findings of the primary theorist and contributors to the related literature and conclude that the more connected a student is, the better they will perform and the more likely they are to graduate rather than drop out (George, 2021; Hehir, 2021 & Leal Filho, 2021). Should the patterns of social isolation carry on for too long in a student's life, dangerous and harmful ramifications may ensue, and the consequences may even carry on into much later in life (Dong, 2022; Mizani, 2022 & Morgan, 2022). These patterns include

loneliness, panic, depression, fear, worry, and anxiety, to name a few (Morgan, 2022 & Winters et al., 2023). At a fundamental level, the human race thrives upon connection and relationships, which crosses over into the world of education (George, 2021; Hehir, 2021 & Leal Filho, 2021). When those critical relational pieces are missing, the student struggles academically and socially (George, 2021; Hehir, 2021 & Leal Filho, 2021). Furthermore, teachers are hindered personally and professionally (George, 2021; Hehir, 2021 & Leal Filho, 2021). While significant benefits to online education exist, a need to address its problems coexists.

Finally, it is vital to study how organizations can better prepare their educators for the online application of their pedagogy and their students for the online academic journey (Scherer et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2023 & Snijders et al., 2022). Thus, a gap in the literature is found. This study seeks to understand better the conditions of social isolation brought upon teachers and students of online education at Assemblies of God, USA, schools of higher learning so that these organizations may address these issues among their staff, faculty, and administrators.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Overview

Social isolation and its effects on the mental health of those engaged in online remote learning platforms have attracted an ever-increasing interest from administrators and educators. However, little research has been found explicitly targeting those students and teachers involved in remote learning at post-secondary schools affiliated with the Assemblies of God, USA denomination. The following phenomenological qualitative study will meticulously examine the lived experiences of those who have been both student and teacher, learner and leader, within the context of online learning platforms at AGUSA schools. The goal is to identify how social isolation may influence the participants' mental health, academic persistence, and social integration to discover pathways of improvement and innovation for post-secondary education. Chapter three summarizes all aspects of the methodology within this phenomenological study, including the research design and questions. Further explanations about the research setting and participants and how these items came to be chosen are offered. My positionality on the subject matter is put forward. Finally, all matters concerning my procedures, data collection, and analysis are explained. Arguments are made that undergird the study's trustworthiness and transferability.

Research Design

A preliminary decision regarding the proposed qualitative report is unquestionably connected to the chosen design and methodology. For this qualitative study, I have chosen an transcendental phenomenological method. Moustakas (1994) defined this approach as attempting to arrive at the authentic experience of a participant so that one can fully understand and be able to describe it and offer a foundational reflective analysis that portrays the essence of the

experience (Moustakas, 1994). This method aims to reveal and clarify the phenomena of behavior as they unfold in their relative immediacy (Moustakas, 1994). A detailed analysis of the components and rationale for this design is articulated throughout the proceeding sections. Next, an explanation of the data collection and analysis procedures is put forward. Then I will explain what I hope to achieve by successfully implementing the study mentioned above while fully acknowledging the prerequisite need to bracket out my biases. It is my foremost goal that a procedure of putting down preferences, biases, and inclinations and allowing items, occasions, and people to enter anew into mindfulness (Moustakas, 1994) would be realized.

Four significant components of this design make up Moustakas' framework for Transcendental study, including epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994). These are the four building blocks upon which transcendental studies are made and help readers and researchers arrive at conclusions. These components provide a steadfast relationship with a viewpoint that puts decisive comprehension in the areas and authorities of the self (Moustakas, 1994). Through the thoughtful implementation of each foundational principle, I will highlight the experiences of students and professors affected by social isolation caused by remote/online learning. I disclose that I am both a student and a professor of online education. Furthermore, I have felt the negative impact of social isolation caused by online learning. Therefore, out of these personal experiences, I not only desire to highlight the experiences of others but I also long to make recommendations that may improve online learning for all involved.

Also known as phenomenological reflection (Creswell & Poth, 2018), epoché or bracketing has to do with the idea of cooperatively and truthfully admitting one's participation in the phenomenon and moderately putting them to the side so that the researcher can hone in on

the involvements of the participants in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By bracketing, researchers annul, stop, and remove all pledges concerning prior knowledge and experience concerning the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). However, it will become evident to the reader whether or not the author has inappropriately inserted their opinions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The reader may judge for themselves if the lived experiences of the participants or the researcher are the primary focus.

Next in Moustakas' framework is Phenomenological Reduction. This step compels the researcher to view and define; look again and explain; look again and describe; always observing textural pieces of evidence and descriptions that present many types of intensities; ranges of shapes, sizes, and unique qualities; time orientations; and colors all within an experiential context (Moustakas, 1994). This process of evaluation necessitates patience. Arriving at what Creswell and Poth (2018) call the essence of a person's experience is the ultimate climactic goal of phenomenological research. Those engaged in this type of study try their best to better and more accurately understand the relationship between experience, meaning, and object (Bower, 2023). In sum, phenomenological reduction is an objective and transcendental synthesis of the shared experiences of others. To achieve this, I will solicit the participation of those who have learned and taught online at an institution of higher learning affiliated with the Assemblies of God, USA Fellowship, in hopes of making helpful recommendations for their betterment.

Thirdly, Moustakas (1994) lists imaginative variation as the next critical element of his Transcendental structure. This step seeks to achieve understanding through every means by employing imagination, fluctuating between frames of reference, implementing divergences and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from varying points of view, different positions, roles, or functions (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, the examiner can develop a framework of themes

from the textural imageries obtained through phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation is necessary to outline the next steps and practical applications for what educators may change or improve upon concerning their online educational deliverables.

Lastly, synthesizing meanings and essences complete Moustakas' framework for a transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). Carefully collecting data by varying means, codifying said data into a unified outline, and interpreting that outline into practical applications is at the heart of this final step (Creswell, 2018). This stage of the study combines all information to delineate that which is collective or general, the state or quality without which a thing would not be what it is (Moustakas, 1994). This is what scholars (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2018) call essence. It is the sincere hope of the author of this study to see innocently and with a fresh perspective as a result of this phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

A listing of the central research question and three sub-questions is provided. These will guide each interview discussion, and follow-up questions may be asked if needed.

Central Question: How can online educators improve academic and social persistence between their students and themselves by applying Tinto's Model of Integration?

Sub-Question 1: What methods are you using to evaluate your students' academic persistence and social interaction?

Sub-Question 2: What online extracurricular activities or projects are you currently offering, or have you previously offered?

Sub-Question 3: What online social activities/opportunities have you offered in the past, or do you plan to create and facilitate meaningful connections between you and your students and from student to student?

Setting and Participants

The following is a summation of the setting and participant criteria for the study. In addition, clear and relevant information is outlined regarding the places and persons involved in the research. This information is vital to the reader for understanding the context in which the study is conducted and the people offering their experiences with social isolation related to online education (Creswell, 2018). Generalized material is used to protect the identities and personal information of those organizations and people who have been gracious enough to involve themselves in this work. All necessary protocols delineated by the Institutional Review Board have been followed.

Site

The study will occur at four-year post-secondary Colleges/universities affiliated with the Assemblies of God USA Fellowship (AGUSA). These schools must offer an online educational option that is 100% off-campus, minus in-person cohorts. The AGUSA has 17 fully accredited colleges and universities Nationwide (Higher Education, ag.org). Not all of them will meet the criteria, but several do. This site location was chosen to facilitate the improvement of online delivery systems, precisely the social elements that make post-secondary education meaningful for students and educators. Since the AGUSA has prioritized higher education and subsequently invested more than 100 into the continued improvement of their Colleges/Universities (History - evangel university, 2021), this research may add to the betterment of the denomination's educational goals.

The schools in focus vary significantly in size, geographical location, leadership structure, and purpose (Higher Education, ag.org). All have certain beliefs, doctrines, living standards, and core values in common, but they may differ regarding demographics, curriculum,

extracurricular activities, and overall future direction. The schools that have prioritized the convenience of an entire post-secondary/graduate degree being made available online within the sphere of AGUSA Higher Education will narrow the focus of this study's site location. In addition, the age of these institutions will diverge from over one hundred years to less than two decades, and many continue to advance their mission by starting new initiatives (Higher Education, ag.org). Therefore, given the range of the geographic locations in question, this study will dissect their online pathways alone.

Participants

Participants in the study must fit the following criteria. First, they must be alumni of an AGUSA institute for higher learning with degrees earned in-person/on-campus and online/off-campus. Next, they will have experience teaching an online course for an AGUSA College/University. By limiting the scope of available participants to those who have experience learning and teaching online for AGUSA schools, Day will ensure that the research findings will provide data on the effects of social isolation due to remote learning from the perspective of students and professors. Existent within the study, there is a goal of gaining a minimum of 12 participants; the analysis will be able to extrapolate commonalities, code and categorize findings, and make recommendations for practical improvements and further study.

Once approvals from the various Deans/VPs of the selected schools have been granted, communication will be sent to prospective participants. Follow-up information on how they may join the efforts of this study will be forwarded to all to meet the criteria above, thus allowing them to decide if they would like to offer their perspectives and experiences. Should further approvals be needed from other administrators or the university IRB, such documentation will be duly submitted. By utilizing a purposive sampling method, which allows the researcher to

narrow their team of contributors by looking at the commonalities and individualities that make them a fit for inclusion in the study (Bickman et al., 2009 & Campbell et al., 2020), I will build a group of qualified participants.

Researcher Positionality

I am a graduate of two AGUSA Universities, an Ordained Minister with the AGUSA, and have been an online professor for many of our AGUSA post-secondary schools over the last five years. These experiences have uniquely situated my life to address the topic of study about social isolation caused by online educational delivery systems and their impacts on students and teachers of AGUSA colleges. I have witnessed the many successful efforts of AGUSA schools to remain on the cutting edge of innovative online educational approaches so that their goals of equipping the next generation are maintained. However, I have also noticed an inconsistency in helping students and teachers connect socially at higher relational degrees. Therefore, I have chosen a qualitative phenomenological research design to ensure that the lived experiences of students and teachers at AGUSA schools remain the entire focus of the study. The study will accomplish this goal through individual interviews, focus group discussions, and journal prompts. There is no conflict of interest present within my study. I have no authoritative power or control over the study participants; therefore, I can receive their clear and objective responses. My presence in the conversations, interviews, or focus groups is good for the study results. There are two underlying assumptions on the part of my research. Firstly, if students are better socialized and relationally connected to their professors, they will have a better overall educational experience and be far more likely to graduate. Secondly, if professors are more connected relationally to their students, they will maintain a higher sense of personal motivation and more professional satisfaction.

Interpretive Framework

A social constructivist research method provides the interpretive framework for the study. The research aims to fully appreciate and objectively understand the lived experiences of students and teachers involved in online education at AGUSA colleges. Therefore, this interpretive framework has been chosen. Social constructivism allows the researcher the latitude needed for such a complex situation that the study requires (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, this theory provides the best methods for knowing and understanding the participants' experiences (Keazer, 2023). The findings should produce a better knowledge base to develop new strategies for the social integration of those involved in online education. The researcher seeks to understand better and learn from those currently involved in online education at AGUSA schools to provide those responsible for developing new online tools that can continue to improve and innovate. By asking semi-structured interview questions, and open-ended focus group questions, I will piece together the mosaic of student and teacher experiences, thereby affording administrators, leaders, and influencers a clearer picture of how to move forward.

Philosophical Assumptions

The "why" behind this research stems from the desire to see more students complete their educational goals and teachers achieve their professional goals. More specifically, those students and teachers involved in online education at AGUSA colleges. Day believes this will be accomplished best when this qualitative study better understands these participants' lived experiences. It is my firm belief and conviction that to be an educator, especially at a Christian school of higher education, is a calling from the Lord God and not just a job to which one applies. With this philosophical assumption woven throughout this study, it should be clearly

understood that I am arguing for the social improvement of online educational deliverables to honor and worship the God of the Bible. Let it be further understood that this study is written from the vantage point that the Scriptural paradigm for education is one of community and not isolation. My underlying Christian worldview has determined to align the findings of this study with Biblically practical application.

Ontological Assumption

My ontological purview is rooted in the Christian/Biblical worldview and the belief in absolute truth that can be found in the God of the Bible as expressed through Jesus Christ. Scholars (Creswell & Poth, 2018, & Hana, 2020) have defined ontology as having to do with the varying views and perspectives of one's reality. While I believe that absolute truth exists and can be found and understood through the continued study of the Bible, it is also my objective and genuine understanding that I am fallible in my quest for this truth. Furthermore, I am open to being corrected and growing further in my understanding. My current reality has been the culmination of a lifelong construct of experiences within the Christian faith, and therefore I acknowledge my own bias.

Epistemological Assumption

Within this study, the researcher attempts to understand better the lived experiences of those on the front lines of online education with AGUSA schools. Day has provided as much information as possible to highlight personal biases. The information gathered in this study is hedged against said biases through the chosen qualitative design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The source of my epistemological methodology stems from my experiences with online education at AGUSA schools as both a student and a teacher.

Axiological Assumption

Everyone has a value system that informs their choices and highlights their motives. Axiological perspectives deal with a person's value system and its effects on a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For Day, the goal is not to argue that in-person/on-campus education is better than online/off-campus education. Nor is it to emphasize the past failures of specific schools, administrations, or individual educators. Instead, as guided by my Christian worldview, my value system is to be helpful and offer specific, positive, and instructive pathways for improving social integration for students and teachers by examining the experiences of those closest to the phenomenon in question.

Researcher's Role

As the principal collector and observer of the data, I must explain how I relate to the subject matter of the study. Over the last 20 years, I have been in full-time vocational ministry as an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God. My educational experiences have included both online and in-person deliverables. Not only have I been an online education student, but my experience includes teaching online. As a student, I have completed nine years of graduate studies online.

Furthermore, I have taught online undergraduate work for five years as an educator. Assemblies of God and non-A/G schools make up my career's educational equation. I have taught at and learned from both; I am eternally grateful. This section serves as my epoche to the reader. My ethical and moral commitment is to bracket these experiences and my past feelings of isolation so that I may better understand what others have felt. Thus, I will arrive at the essence of their lived experience in the clearest, ethical, and most transparent way.

Procedures

Since human subjects were be the primary source of information, the following considerations were made before the study began. First, the dissertation chair and committee member carefully reviewed each element of the study. The institutional approval process, as outlined by the Review Board of Liberty University, also oversaw all parts of the study. Once all necessary and appropriate approvals were granted, contact with the study participants commenced. The AGUSA schools at which the students attend and the teachers' work will be contacted to gain their approval to participate as a site of the study. Then, once site approvals were granted, personal interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts were used to collect data.

Permissions

Only after the approval of the IRB the study officially began. Once consent forms are offered to each participant explaining the type of study, what the results will be used for, and that their identities will be protected, the study will commence. Only those participants who are close to the subject matter, have taught or attended online classes at AGUSA schools, and have experienced social isolation as a result may participate. Security protocols for the protection and disposal of data and the personal information of all involved in the study will be followed.

Recruitment Plan

The following plan will be set for those who may participate and provide data for the study. By reaching out to the academic office of each potential site, I will ask for a list of teachers and students who meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. After the Dean of Academics has reviewed and approved the recruitment email that offers a complete description of the study's purpose, the dean may forward the email to those who meet the criteria or permit me to email them directly. Should those who could participate desire to do so, they can reply

directly to me from the email. Personal/individual interviews will be conducted face-to-face or through an online platform like ZOOM. Each participant will be asked to allow for a minimum of one hour for the initial interview, with the potential for a follow-up conversation later. Audio and video recordings of each conversation will be taken on multiple devices to ensure the data is collected and filed. Before the interviews begin, I will ensure that everyone understands what they are doing and fully understands that they have consented to participate. A word-for-word interview transcription will be made, and data will be analyzed and filed correctly, safely, and securely, thus, allowing for quick recall of the information as needed.

Data Collection Plan

This section outlines the data collection plan used within this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study. The principal methodologies include individual interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts. Following authorization from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board and any other required groups, thus guaranteeing that the dissertation design obeys their procedures for conducting principled research (Creswell, 2018), those available and capable contributors that excitedly acquiesce to contribute to the study will be instructed how to proceed.

After all pertinent information is gleaned from the semi-structured individual interviews, a secondary method will be employed: small group discussion, also known as focus groups. These follow-up group discussions allow the researcher to circulate initial findings and collect feedback to inform the framework modification (Creswell, 2018). Lastly, one final data collection approach will allow all parties involved to contribute to the study and deliver any content previously forgotten or left out to the researcher. The final method will be to provide journal prompts to each participant to stimulate new material. This final step will contribute to

the study's qualitative reliability (Creswell, 2018). Should one not select multiple data collection methods, research procedures may result in unacceptable findings and mistaken suppositions (Mwita, 2022). Therefore, individual interviews, group discussions, and journal prompts will guide this study's data collection process.

Individual Interviews

Day will begin the individual interviews by utilizing a semi-structured approach, thus giving each participant the same question bank and allowing me flexibility for follow-up questions (Baker et al., 2020). By the thoughtful and purposeful utilization of this method, I am afforded my best chance to understand the world from the participant's vantage point, uncover the meaning of their knowledge, and unearth their life experiences and worldview (Creswell, 2018). This exchange of views between myself and the participants will aid the study in fully understanding the phenomenon from the point of view of others (Kvale, 2006).

The Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method will be employed to properly analyze and thoroughly examine the information gleaned from the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Firstly, and most importantly, I will explain in great detail my knowledge and experiences in dealing with the phenomenon of study, thus making my best effort to bracket any biases that may taint the findings. Through meticulously following the recommended steps Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen, a methodical reduction of the information gathered will allow the reader to funnel their way to the essence of the shared experiences of those involved in the interviews. Following the application of epoche, the following steps include transcribing each interview in a word-for-word verbatim format and, finally, building a mixed textural-structural explanation of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating all individual textural-structural definitions into a universal depiction of the experience representing the group as a whole. The Van Kaam

approach recommends that the researcher clusters all relevant information together in groups while disregarding information that does not transcend the conversations as a whole ((Moustakas, 1994). This strategy allows me to filter out non-vital information and arrive at the core meaning of the interviewee's words.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your online educational experiences at AGUSA schools. RQ
2. Describe your experience, if any, with social isolation due to remote learning. SQ3
3. What help or training did you receive to make your online educational time successful?
SQ1
4. Describe your access to quality equipment/technology. RQ
5. How confident were you when you first began your online educational journey? SQ1
6. In what ways were you socially nervous or fearful in class? SQ3
7. What were some of the daily/weekly disciplines that you employed to achieve your goals and succeed? RQ
8. How could your superiors have better prepared you for your online ed. experience? RQ
9. Please share your favorite online class experience and share what made it your favorite.
RQ
10. What could you have done better to foster closer relationships in your online classroom overall? RQ
11. What else would you like to contribute to this study? RQ

Individual Interview Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred during and after all the information was collected from qualified participants. As the number one data collector and analyzer, I aim to understand the phenomenon. That is the lived experiences of students and teachers who have dealt with the effects of social isolation caused by online learning environments at AGUSA schools. Once word-for-word transcripts have been recorded and non-verbal cues have been noted. I will code important groups of keywords/phrases to help me recall important patterns and recurrences of essential facts.

Focus Groups

Small group discussions, also known as focus groups (Creswell, 2018), comprise the study's second primary data collection form. These group talks are beneficial when the communication among candidates likely yield the best data when interviewees are alike and supportive with each other when the time to gather information is narrow, and when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be cautious or nervous about offering information" (Creswell, 2018). Baker agrees and offers three principal advantages of focus groups, including 1) Questions being posed to groups for interaction rather than an individual, 2) More information being collected at a more rapid pace, and 3) Many people feel more at ease in a group of peers than alone (Baker et al., 2020). Though there may be potential risks involved in group discussions, such as privacy and confidentiality (Hicks, 2019), new and pertinent information about the topic of study may be discovered that would not otherwise have come to light if not for this format.

It is vital to the data collection and analysis process that all interviewees "share their ideas freely, not constrained by predetermined scales or instruments" (Creswell, 2018, p. 181). The environment for free-flow conversation and in-the-moment interaction is created through active involvement in a small group discussion. By methodically working my way back and forth between the individual and group discussions, I can deduce themes and patterns that naturally begin to emerge and take precedence (Creswell, 2018 & Moustakas, 1994). Data will be collected on multiple audio and video devices, along with written analysis. This allows me to inspect and filter the data into usable groupings, causing the vital information to rise to the top while disregarding unneeded portions (Creswell, 2018 & Moustakas, 1994).

Focus Group Questions

1. Take a moment to introduce yourself and share your experiences teaching or taking an online class at an AGUSA school. SQ3
2. What were some of the hallmarks of your favorite classes? SQ2
3. How did you make friends and close connections with those in your class? RQ
4. What was required of you as a student or by you as a professor to foster relationships in class? SQ3
5. What have been your biggest challenges concerning social isolation regarding online classes? SQ3
6. How did you overcome feeling socially isolated while in an online classroom? SQ3
7. Please describe any creative ideas for online students' healthy socialization and integration. RQ
8. Describe any hurdles that you faced relationally connecting with others in your online classroom beyond the typical discussion board post. SQ3

9. Was there ever a time that made you uncomfortable when attempting to socialize with your online class? If so, could you describe those circumstances? SQ3
10. What strategies would you recommend to online content creators and teachers to help overcome the effects of social isolation? RQ

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

The focus group analysis plan will follow the abovementioned pattern for individual interviews. The purpose of focus group discussions is to clarify further and understand what has already been stated and to provide another opportunity for group synergy. Being in a group can bring to mind other facts that were not remembered in the individual interview. Also, there may be information that a participant will be willing to share only after they see that others have experienced similar situations. New discussions may occur that allow for coding significant words/phrases and then collapsing these into unique categories and themes.

Reflective Journals

Lastly, journal prompts will be given to all willing participants. This brief exercise allows all involved a time of deep reflection on their sincere feelings and offers last-minute insights. This methodology was chosen to demonstrate the researcher's best efforts to fully understand the lived experiences of those involved in the study. An example of the journal prompt is outlined as follows:

"In 250-500 words, honestly and succinctly respond to the following questions. 1) If you could speak to students gaining their post-secondary education completely online, how would you advise them on the importance of building relationships with peers and professors? 2) If you could speak with a group of online professors, what encouragement would you offer them as to the importance of going the extra mile and reaching out to the students beyond the requirements

of the syllabus? 3) Please describe your ideal online educational experience. 4) Please describe your negative experience due to online education and social isolation?" These reflective journal entries will be sent and collected electronically via email or messaging.

Data Synthesis

Within this study, Day seeks to discover the effects of social isolation on both the student and teacher, thus adding to the literature specifically for those involved in online education at Assemblies of God Colleges/universities. The final step of my phenomenological model requires incorporating the multifactorial textural and compound structural explanations, synthesizing the significance and implications of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994). Day will accomplish this portion of the study by following Moustakas's four steps: bracketing, reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing means that the primary researcher, in this case, Day, will do everything possible to separate himself from any past knowledge or experiences concerning the subject matter of the study in an attempt to see things as objectively as possible (Bednall, 2006). Phenomenological reduction refers to the process that allows the researcher to categorize the essential pieces of the given experience and organize and code important information from nonimportant (Oksala, 2023). When the researcher begins to take the data points of the information gleaned from the above methodologies and then begins to use imagination to analyze the phenomenon for what it could be on a multitude of variations, the researcher uses imaginative variation (Cudjoe, 2023). Finally, the researcher must bring all of the above information together to clearly articulate the essence/reality of the phenomenon in question through synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). The research design and data collection methods outlined above will allow Day to integrate each participant's experience into the research flow

and glean the lessons they offer. By doing this, Day hopes to provide new mitigating measures for online educators and students to avoid the negative impacts of isolation.

Trustworthiness

The following section outlines five significant components that congeal the study's trustworthiness. These elements include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, and they conclude with ethical considerations. These factors ensure the reader that this study's efforts correctly align with each participant's feelings, thoughts, experiences, and convictions. It is my firm commitment to make every effort to accurately and honestly put forward only that which can be supported and affirmed by the data gleaned from the study.

Credibility

A full disclosure of the data collecting and analysis processes will be offered, assuring those reading that the study is transparent, precise, and credible (Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, I add to the credibility of the findings by taking all appropriate measures to explain the study design, outlining any potential risk of biases, and showing patterns of inconsistency (Antoniou et al., 2020). Furthermore, all study limitations will be articulated along with all data that may indicate a need to go deeper and discover new perspectives (Rudolph, 2021). Finally, let the reader understand that I wholeheartedly agree with researchers (Closa, 2021; Rudolph, 2021; Sun, 2021) that it is my moral and ethical responsibility to earn trust by following through with the abovementioned commitments to credibility.

Transferability

The findings and conclusions of the study will have transferability, sometimes called replicability, to other educational contexts (Closa, 2021). Given the meticulous and detailed methods of data collection and analysis with their step-by-step informational audits, my goal is

to offer research that can benefit many other schools and their online deliverables. The transferability factor of the trustworthiness equation is one of the highest goals of qualitative research. However, it can only be achieved when there is a transparent and open disclosure of the facts and how they are gathered (Closa, 2021). This is achieved by offering the reader adequate communication on all the processes taken to gain information and sharing all relevant information on the participants, their backgrounds, and their credentials to speak to the phenomenon in question (Cope, 2014). By following these qualitative research protocols, replication of this study will be given its best chance.

Dependability

I will triangulate the data collected through individual interviews, group discussions, and follow-up journal entries to ensure the study findings are dependable. Information gleaned from these three data collection methods will then be corroborated to offer the reader explicit confirmation of the report. This ensures that all conclusions come directly from the verbatim extracts of the participant interviews and not the author's biases. Furthermore, prolonged engagement with each participant will be easily noticed throughout the study. This is the process by which a researcher takes ample time to build the necessary rapport with every interviewee to produce the most accurate responses (Cope, 2014). Throughout the report, I will keep an organized and detailed audit of every conversation, document, audio/video recording, personal observation, transcript, and journal, thus adding another layer to the study's trustworthiness. This step will then lead to the opportunity for any participant/member of the research to observe the process and confirm or correct the analysis in real-time. Should there be any informational outliers, these methods of attaining dependability will enable me to identify and disregard them.

Confirmability

The following steps will be taken to ensure that the study is confirmable: The researcher will attempt to collect only data relevant to the study from reputable participants whom all the necessary institutional authorities have preapproved. My committee chair and the member will be asked to offer their wise counsel and give advice based on their extensive experience.

The researcher will utilize the following three techniques to add multiple layers of legitimacy to the study. These methods include triangulation, reflexivity, and reviewing documents. I have had years of experience with social isolation and its relation to remote learning environments at AGUSA schools, so this gives me a healthy vantage point as a researcher and data collector (Hogan, 2021). The study participants, students, and teachers will have multiple opportunities to let their individual and collective voices be heard by following the data collection procedures outlined. The reader will be able to decide about the study's trustworthiness and if I have adequately and objectively bracketed myself from the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hadi, 2016). All appropriate steps, as have been outlined by my institution, will be taken to ensure confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

The following steps will ensure that all parties participating in this study are safe, beneficial, and duly authorized by the necessary groups and administrators. Firstly, I commit to engage in my research only after gaining approval from the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University. Should access to a site or group be needed to conduct the study, full disclosure of the goal and purpose of the study will be offered in writing to the administration, and the commencement of the study will move forward only after their approval. Secondly, consent forms will be given to each participant that outlines the entire study. Before acquiring

their signatures, opportunities for clarifying questions and assurances will be given to explain all study components. These forms outline not only all aspects of the study and data collection methods but their rights as participants to continue or withdraw from the study at any point they desire.

Furthermore, at any point, should an interviewee feel unsafe or uncomfortable, clear off-ramps to exit the study will be given periodically. Methods for protecting the personal information of the participants will also be outlined in these forms to add yet another layer of confidence. This includes but is not limited to how the information is stored and for how long the information will be kept prior to the destruction of the data in question. Finally, my doctoral supervisors will summarize these processes to bring accountability to every part of the study.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study aims to investigate the effects of social isolation on the mental health of students and professors involved in online/remote education at Assemblies of God institutions of higher learning. Chapter three has fully discussed all aspects of my chosen methodology and design. The reasons for this phenomenological framework are clearly outlined, and the step-by-step approach to gathering, analyzing, and synthesizing each data detail is articulated. All necessary elements of the chosen setting and participants are explained, and the plan for undergirding the study with all appropriate ethical standards is put forward. I have revealed my own experiences with the phenomenon in question in the hopes of bracketing out my biases, thereby adding further credibility to the study. Once all interviews, focus groups, and follow-up journal entries have been gathered and processed. I will offer the study's findings in chapter four. My goal is that the data will reveal solutions to social dilemmas that are connected to online learning platforms.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview

In the proceeding study, Day aims to explore the lived experiences of post-secondary students and professors at Assemblies of God, USA schools, and how online education may impede formal and informal pathways to academic persistence and social integration. This chapter presents the study findings gleaned from data collection methods and means of analysis previously outlined in chapter three, which included one-on-one interviews, group interviews, and written journal prompts. A total of 17 participants formally consented to be involved in the study. 15 participants responded to journal prompts, 14 were interviewed and recorded in one-on-one conversations via Zoom Video Communications, and 15 were interviewed and recorded in group chats via Zoom Video Communications. A narrative of participant responses, along with the corresponding theme development process, is meticulously outlined in chapter four. Academic and Relational Benefits, Academic and Relational Responsibilities, Academic and Relational Communication, and Academic and Relational Opportunities comprise the four primary themes that answer the research questions.

Participants

The study participants comprised 17 people who have served as online professors, administrators, classroom designers, or students at schools affiliated with Assemblies of God USA. Each participant was decisively selected and met the following criteria for one of two sample groups: a leader group and a learner group. Some participants met the qualifications for both sample groups. A qualified leader group participant will have at least one year of experience with post-secondary online education. Faculty, staff, and administrators were welcome to participate if they have at least one year of experience facilitating online education for their

school/college. The learner group comprised men and women who had taken at least two online classes that required no in-person class time. Each person involved in the study understood that participating in this work was entirely voluntary, and the participant could decide to exit the study at any point in time should they decide it was in their best interest. None of the 17 participants exited the study. Among those in the leader group, there was an average of 7.6 years of online teaching experience and 5.4 years of online classroom design and administration and employed at 2.2 Assemblies of God colleges/universities. Among those who have been online education students at AGUSA schools, the participants averaged 2.7 years of experience taking classes online.

Participant 1

Interviewee 1 holds an earned Doctorate, served as a seminary president for more than 15 years, was on the teaching faculty for another AGUSA University for more than 20 years, and has been employed as an administrator/faculty member of three distinct AGUSA schools of higher learning. Interviewee 1 has six years of online teaching experience and six years of online classroom design experience and holds an earned degree from an AGUSA College. On the subject of the importance of this study, Interviewee 1 said that online education is here to stay and is not going anywhere. However, participant 1 still argues that human relationships are a critical part of the learning process."

Participant 2

Interviewee 2 served as a founding director/dean of the Leadership Ph.D. and Ed.D. program at an AGUSA University. Interviewee 2 has six years of online teaching experience, five years of online classroom design experience, and has been employed by five unique AGUSA schools of higher learning. Interviewee 2 has earned a Ph.D. at one AGUSA University

and a Doctorate of Ministry at another AGUSA University. Interviewee 2 found it tremendously valuable to ask questions about the motivation behind the online student's decision to seek an online pathway to further education. Interviewee 2 states: "I would begin the conversation by asking them about their 'why.' Why did they select an online path to school online? What was their motivation? Was it expense, distance, or something very practical? Was their motivation a philosophical decision where they do not see the value of being in person?" Once Participant 2 gained an understanding of the student's motivations, interviewee 2 would "tell them, having been on both sides of the equation, that this is very different relationally than an in-person experience." Interviewee 2 takes time to outline the importance of explaining the value and benefits one may gain in "leaning into" relationships in the short and long term.

Participant 3

Interviewee 3 has been teaching online for more than four years, has four years of online classroom design experience, and has worked for six different AGUSA schools of higher education. Interviewee 3 earned a Master of Divinity and a Doctorate of Ministry from an AG seminary. Interviewee 3 articulates the experience and belief that the relationships one gains during the educational experience significantly impact one's future. Interviewee 3 states, "Many of the opportunities to minister or teach that I have today have arisen out of a direct result of the relationships I forged through my years of education." Even the relationships that Interviewee 3 formed with students opened future doors for teaching and ministry. Interviewee 3 shares that "the more one engages in relationship building, the more one will reap those benefits. Relationships are paramount."

Participant 4

Interviewee 4 earned a Master's degree online at an AGUSA university, has 13 years of online teaching experience at an AGUSA college, has 13 years of experience with online classroom design, and has been employed by one AGUSA university. Interviewee 4 is a co-founder of an online school of ministry and leadership. Interviewee 4 pointed out the benefit of sharing each other's struggles and stories as the class progresses through the semester together. Interviewee 4 states, "One of the beauties of online education is that we are not taking them out of their [various real-life contexts]...and they desperately need to know that they are not alone in their struggles."

Participant 5

Interviewee 5 earned a Doctorate in Education from an AGUSA university, has five years of online teaching experience, three years of online classroom design experience, and has been employed by one AGUSA university. Interviewee 5 is a co-founder of an online school of ministry and leadership. One of the major concerns that Interviewee 5 brings to light is their experiences with students feeling as though their professors are unapproachable or unreachable. Interviewee 5 states, "The students feel as though their professors are too busy and are being a bother when they reach out due to the distance that is hardwired into online education. Often people are in a desperate situation and need to know that they are not alone." Interviewee 5 found it essential to point out that professors should use empathy toward their students and "be quick to communicate and respond to them and remember that online students are amid their real-life pressures." Interviewee 5 highlighted how critical it is that professors model relationship-building for their classes.

Participant 6

Interviewee 6 holds an earned Doctorate of Education and has eight years of online teaching experience, eight years of experience as an online student, designed two online courses, and has been employed by one AGUSA university. Interviewee 6 brings years of administrative and educational experience to this study and has been the director of several educational initiatives. Interviewee 6 related these thoughts to relational elements of online learning. Interviewee 6 stated, "Online learning can be very lonely. Finding ways to build a collegial and collaborative atmosphere in online learning is still something that we have yet to figure out completely. In online learning, students have to make more effort to build friendships because of the lack of in-person interaction that an on-campus experience affords. Most online classes I have taken and taught have relational elements, such as online office hours or chat rooms that were rarely used. It would be helpful if the existing structures for relational building were fully utilized." These insights add credence to the need to communicate to students and professors about the value and benefits of building friendships.

Participant 7

Interviewee 7 has a Doctorate of Ministry degree, 13 years of online teaching experience, 13 years of online classroom design experience, and has been employed at three separate AGUSA colleges. For more than a decade, Interviewee 7 was an administrator and a dean at an AGUSA University. Interviewee 7 offered a balanced approach while expressing their experiences in remote learning—one degree this participant earned required zero in-person interaction. At the time of Interviewee 7's remote learning experience, there was no regret associated with the fact that the relational element of education was absent from the degree. However, looking back on it now, Interviewee 7 believes strongly that they "missed out" on a

critical piece of the learning journey. Interviewee 7 remarks, "I can envision some people choosing to do their degree online because they need maximum flexibility, and doing relationships will impair that flexibility. That said, the level of learning that you are going to receive if you have the opportunity to interact and build relationships and there is a gift and take is going to go to another level."

Participant 8

Interviewee 8 has an earned Doctorate, four years of online teaching experience, two years of online classroom design, six years of experience as an online student, and has been employed at two different AGUSA schools of higher learning. Furthermore, Interviewee 8 brings years of educational administrative experience to this study. Interviewee 8 highlights the importance of taking personal responsibility and initiative in building friendships in online learning. Interviewee 8 says, "If students are going to get the kind of educational experience they need, they will need to find ways to interact with others. No student should expect their peers or professors to chase them down to initiate friendship; the student's responsible for taking the initiative."

Participant 9

Interviewee 9 has an earned Doctorate, 12 years of online teaching experience, four years of experience as an online student, eight years of experience in online classroom design, and has been employed at one AGUSA university. Interviewee 9 directs a business and leadership program at an AGUSA university. Interviewee 9 emphasizes the importance of encouragement, accountability, and support structures that many online students feel the need to have while they are on their educational track. "Oftentimes students will want to connect with other students because they are going through the same thing, they feel the same pain, so to speak, and there is

much empathy to experience as they interact with each other." Interviewee 9's contribution to the study offers evidence supporting the idea that when encouragement, accountability, and support structures are in place and utilized, better academic performance and persistence result in the student's life.

Participant 10

Interviewee 10 holds an earned Doctorate, has 19 years of online teaching experience, 12 years of online classroom design experience, and has been employed by one AGUSA school of higher education. Interviewee 10 is a department chair at an AGUSA university. Regarding non-required social interaction opportunities, Interviewee 10 remarks, "I have to be honest though, I see that it is very seldom actually used. After having been with this university for nearly 20 years, I rarely see students take advantage of online social opportunities. I have found that it is hard to get students who are strictly online to start forming those social connections. I am not sure that students understand the benefits of forming friendships or believe that friendships will be worth the time it takes to form relationships."

Participant 11

Interviewee 11 has earned two degrees from two separate AGUSA universities and holds a Doctorate of Ministry from a non-AGUSA school. Interviewee 11 has been the President of an AGUSA seminary, has held multiple other administrative/VP roles in other AGUSA schools, and has been employed by two AGUSA Universities. Interviewee 11 has 12 years of experience in online teaching and 12 years of experience in online classroom design. Interviewee 11 highlighted the professor's role in creating opportunities, venues, and environments for relationship building. Interviewee 11 emphasized the need for the online class teacher to take the lead and show the way. Interviewee 11 stated, "We should look to form whatever venues of

connection we can make. I think the more the professor engages with their student, the better it is for the student. Creating times of interaction between students and professors before class officially begins so that there are at least the beginnings of friendship and connection would be helpful."

Participant 12

Interviewee 12 will soon have a doctorate. In addition to the forthcoming doctorate, Interviewee 12 holds two Master's Degrees and a Bachelor's Degree from an AGUSA University. Interviewee 12 comes to this study with 12 years of experience in online teaching, five years of experience in online classroom design, and multiple years of administrative experience at an AGUSA university. Interviewee 12 has been employed by one AGUSA university for nearly 20 years. Interviewee 12 brought out a few points highlighting the future impacts of relationships formed while in school. Interviewee 12 stated:

"Regardless of the modality, be it online, in-person, or a cohort model, most people are going to college to prepare for a vocation. Therefore, networking and relationships are ultimately quite important to getting anywhere within that vocation. The network of relationships built with peers and professors will continue to serve you within that vocation. Interviewee 12 went on to underscore the value of relational support structures and future learning when stating:

"Often, the people I find myself turning to or collaborating with are folks that had been in my educational program with me. Beyond the degree program, these relationships are going to be something to pull on."

Participant 13

Interviewee 13 has an earned Doctorate and more than 25 years of educational experience, which includes being a college president, vice president, registrar, and faculty member. Interviewee 13 has 16 years of experience as an online teacher, four years of experience with online classroom design, and has been employed at two AGUSA colleges. From the point of view of Interviewee 13, one of the major benefits of forming relationships with peers is "longevity" in one's career. For Interviewee 13, those who fail to form relationships with their peers often do not remain in their prospective callings or jobs for the long term. Interviewee 13 states, "The onus or burden of responsibility to form relationships is on the student, but it is the professor's job to create the platforms and opportunities within the class to get together socially." Interviewee 13 argues that when the student takes advantage of the open doors to connect created by a fully engaged professor who is maximizing the tools available in the learning management systems, the likelihood of friendships forming is higher, and longevity is attainable.

Participant 14

Interviewee 14 is an online college student at an Assemblies of God affiliated school. Interviewee 14 has two years of online education experience with 12 credits earned towards a degree. Speaking of relationally connecting with fellow peers, Interviewee 14 laments that there needs to be more interaction beyond the discussion board posts. Interviewee 14 suggested that it would be helpful to know if anyone in the class was geographically nearby so that they could form in-person study groups. Interviewee 14 shared how exciting it was to meet up at a coffee shop with a fellow online student who was part of a local church taking the same course to have a study group. Further suggestions by Interviewee 14 included online Zoom study groups to gain a better connection with fellow peers. In the mind of Interviewee 14, there should be written

interaction coupled with virtual video interaction to achieve an ideal online classroom experience. Being many years removed from formal education, Interviewee 14 would have liked an onboarding/orientation class to help them feel more confident and less isolated. Interviewee 14 stated, "Social isolation was experienced at the beginning of the semester because I did not know what I was doing."

Participant 15

Interviewee 15 is an online college student at an Assemblies of God affiliated school with one and a half years of online educational experience and nine credits earned thus far.

Interviewee 15's opening statement said: "We were created for relationship and connection with people. When education is online, I feel like you can lack that connection piece. Screens can be a barrier to communication, especially for people who read social cues or what we call reading the room and facial expressions. It is hard to evaluate those things when you are online." Interviewee 15 expressed the importance of time management and the pitfalls of procrastination, a major problem in online education. "It is possible to feel that because it is online, it is not as important; therefore, one must have a plan to manage time well." Interviewee 15 admitted to being a natural introvert, and the idea of not having to connect personally with people online was initially appealing. Then, once classes began, Interviewee 15 lamented, "I realized that I was missing something. I felt a missing connection with the people I was learning with."

Participant 16

Interviewee 16 comes to this study with seven years of online educational experience and 155 credit hours earned at an AGUSA university. Interviewee 16 has earned a Master's degree and a Doctoral degree at an AGUSA university. Interviewee 16 made it a point to emphasize the need for one to be intentional with relationships, and yet Interviewee 16 states, "There is a real

difficulty in building relationships when you are in online classes. In my experience, most people do not want to be intentional or do not have time to be intentional because they have other [social] communities. Therefore, many students I have encountered appear not to need that, and the only time they communicate is if they need or want something. Forming relationships was my biggest challenge." Due to a lack of continued connection, Interviewee 16 reported that many of her classmates fell behind in their studies and needed to complete their coursework. They told Interviewee 16 that because they did not maintain contact with friends, they "lost motivation, encouragement, hope, and we just drifted." These same students who fell behind confided in Interviewee 16 that if they had the opportunity to do things over again, they would focus more on relationships. In Interviewee 16's mind, having good relationships "is the most important factor to completing a degree online."

Participant 17

Interviewee 17 comes to this study with five years of online educational experience and has earned a Master's Degree and a Doctorate of Ministry at an AGUSA university. Furthermore, Interviewee 17 has served as a doctoral chairperson and has recently been added to the adjunct faculty of an AGUSA university. It became apparent in Interviewee 17's experience that the success or failure in one's online classroom experience largely depended on the leadership of the class, namely the professor. Interviewee 17 stated: "My favorite professors always communicated well, but I remember one professor who never communicated with the class and would not answer emails. It was not a good experience; fortunately, they no longer teach. The severe lack of communication made things very difficult. Thankfully, that professor was the minority. Most of my professors communicated well and expressed genuine concern for each student. People never forget how someone makes them feel."

Results

In this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study, Day explored the lived experiences of post-secondary students and professors at Assemblies of God, USA schools, and how online education may impede formal and informal pathways to academic persistence and social integration. This study's sample consisted of 17 purposively selected participants who met the abovementioned criteria. All 17 contributors who began the study completed it, and 0 participants withdrew. Sample criteria for the leader group included a minimum of one year of experience with post-secondary online education. Faculty, staff, and administrators were welcome to participate if they have at least one year of experience facilitating online education for their school/college. The learner group comprised men and women who had taken at least two online classes that required no in-person class time. Thirteen of the 17 participants had life experiences that qualified them to contribute to the leader and learner groups. Four of the 17 participants qualified for only the learner group.

All 17 participants signed an official consent form prior to data collection. Participating in this study was voluntary, and no one would be faulted or punished in any way if they chose to withdraw from the study for any reason. No collected data will be permanently stored and destroyed per all IRB-recommended protocols. Data were collected through one-on-one interviews, group chats, and journal entries. Zoom Video Conference software was used to record all interviews and group chats. Interviewees 14, 15, and 17 were the only three participants who did not complete all three data collection methods. However, interviewees 14 and 15 completed two of three, while interviewee 17 could only accomplish one of the three data collection options. Eidetic reduction was employed in examining the data, which unveiled four primary themes and their succeeding sub-themes. The four primary themes include Relational &

Academic Benefits, Relational & Academic Responsibilities, Relational & Academic Communication, and Relational & Academic Opportunities. Theme development, data descriptions, and excerpts from the data are put forward in the next section.

The thematic outline of the research resulted in four primary topics: academic and relational benefits, academic and relational responsibilities, academic and relational communication, and academic and relational opportunities. These themes resulted after a meticulous analysis of one-on-one and group interviews along with their corresponding journal prompts. Once the gathered data has been carefully analyzed and coded, textural descriptions of each participant's lived experience are offered (Moustakas, 1994). Several subthemes were identified and classified under each main heading. Finally, this section puts forward each participant's structural and textural descriptions, which allow the phenomenon's essence to emerge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following is a narrative explanation of the lived experiences of each participant resulting from the data collection.

Theme 1: Relational & Academic Benefits

Various benefits for online professors, students, and administrators were noted throughout the participants' journals, interviews, and group chats. All 17 contributors to the study believed that their online educational experience was greatly enhanced or hindered due to having formed or not formed relationships with peers and professors along their journey. Five sub-themes were generated from the participants' talking points, which included finding and keeping employment, future networking opportunities, social and spiritual support systems, lower attrition/higher graduation rates, and higher professional satisfaction. As the data collection process unfolded, it became clear that there was significant personal, professional, and spiritual value to having strong relational connections throughout the online educational experience.

Though mentioned several times by participants 4, 5, 7, and 15 that people with introverted personalities or incredibly complex schedules may not have the time nor the desire for relationships, all 17 participants agreed that the learning experience that comes from leaning into relationships is more beneficial in the long run.

Finding and Keeping Employment

Participants 7 and 12 took ample time to explain that students have an easier time finding employment upon graduation when strong bonds of relationships have been formed. Participant 12 states, "If you lack a network of peers, that can be detrimental to you being hired in the field. Once you are done with your program, your peers often become colleagues in whatever you are doing. When students do not have those friendships or some level of connection with their peers, it could put them at a disadvantage if they do not have those working networks before graduation." Participant 7, a former dean of a major AGUSA university, was acutely aware of the importance of professor-to-student relationships and the ramifications those relationships had for the professor's employment. Participant 7 says, "Many schools will be basing their hiring on the course evaluations, and the students will give you evaluations based on many things. Moreover, if you are an online professor, there is a good chance you are not creating content. Furthermore, you are not just there to give grades but to help students learn. You get a contract to teach again the next semester because you got a 4.9 and not a 4.1 on your course evaluation scores. So you keep your job. We are getting more contracts if you are an adjunct because it is not a matter of keeping the job; it is semester to semester. You live or die by that."

Future Networking Opportunities

The second sub-theme for this category pointed to the benefit of professional networking. Participants 9, 12, and 13 specifically drew attention to the advantage of friendships gained during the online educational experience. Participant 13 states, "The networking capacity is long-term to continue." Participant 12 agreed, saying, "Networking and relationships are ultimately quite important to getting anywhere within a vocation. I think that relationships are important for anyone going through an educational journey, especially in an online program, because beyond your degree program, your network and those relationships that you have built with peers and professors will hopefully continue to serve you beyond that." Participant 9 recalls, "For those that might be looking for new employment opportunities or something, they interact with other students in their field. There are some networking opportunities there, and another opportunity could be recommendations."

Social and Spiritual Support Systems

The third subtheme that emerged from several participants is a support system. Participants 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, and 17 emphasized the tremendous role that social and spiritual support systems played in their online education. Participant 16 states, "I really think it is vital to the student success, not just academically, but spiritually, emotionally, mentally, just staying in a healthy place." Furthermore, they went on to say, "I am not alone. Other people on this journey are experiencing the same thing. It is hard, but I can get through this now because I am journeying with others." Participant 5 recalled that "...there were days I was going to quit, and we would just cheer each other on. So, as far as completing the schooling, we also had each other's support." Participant 9 brings to light that students "...need that social interaction and accountability. Often, students will want to connect with other students because they are going

through the same thing, they feel the same pain, and there is a lot of empathy, interaction, and encouragement for one another."

Lower Attrition/Higher Graduation Rates

In this category, the connection between relationships and completing an online program was brought forward by Participants 5, 13, and 16. Interviewee 5 saw, "the percentage of students staying in the course, pressing through, it increases." Additionally, Interviewee 13 highlighted the "longevity factor" and believes that when strong relationships exist, there is an increase in graduation and one's longevity in their prospective occupations after graduation. Participant 16 stated that relationships formed in the online program "have been the most important factor for success or finishing on time at least and doing it in a semi-healthy way." Participant 16 was concerned about the experience of so many who do graduate, having spent their mental and emotional capital entirely and crossing the finish line burned out.

Higher Professional Satisfaction

Under the category of relational benefits, Participants 3, 6, 8, 9, and 12 all showed that their sense of professional satisfaction was much higher when relational connections were strong. Interviewee 6 brought out, "I agree that for your average professor who does want to connect with people, and particularly in a Christian educational environment, I am sure the reason the professor is doing it is because he or she wants to have some kind of life on life influence beyond just what they have written and how they respond on assignments." Interviewee 6 continues, "I need to have a sense that I am influencing, encouraging, and lifting people. Moreover, the only way to get that sense is through feedback that comes through the relational feedback cycle. Thus, that is a deterrent to me even wanting to teach because it just does not fit my personality. So I would say the overall negative relational and authentic

relationships make all the administrative parts of teaching online classes even more onerous because I do not see the return on investment. Thus, it pushes me away from even wanting to teach online and investing my time elsewhere where I can connect with people." In the life experience of Participant 8, the belief is "If I am called to [teach] if I am called to be a teacher...then, I get my fulfillment from doing what I am called to do. Thus, the goal isn't the information we're unpacking; it is the person we're bringing to maturity. Now, yes, we are using knowledge to impart to them to bring it to maturity, but it is still about the person, not about the knowledge. So if we as teachers do not have that as our driving motivation, we are in the wrong place." Participant 12 agrees and states, "Most of the people I have engaged with and worked with as instructors got into online teaching because they had some desire to pass on knowledge and experience to the next generation of ministry leaders." This philosophy was further reinforced by the experiences of Participant 9 when they said, "I think anyone in the teaching vocations can be a difference between a job and a calling. Moreover, a job means, all right, I'm just going to check the boxes, give them minimum input, get through this course so I get paid for it. However, if it is a real calling and you want to develop your students, it is important to stay connected with them as much as possible." Participant 3 remarked, "I just think the more you engage, the more you will reap. Moreover, I believe that with all my heart that it [relationships] is just really a vital part of that [online education]."

Theme 2: Relational & Academic Responsibility

The study revealed that the burden of responsibility does not rest on one person or group. According to the findings, online students and professors have the best chance of being socially engaged when the following three entities cooperate to bring people together. These groups include school administration, professors, and students. While the research suggests that no

group holds all of the responsibility, it only takes one group not doing their part to hinder significantly the relational potential that might be there if they were to fulfill their role. The study found that students and professors have the best chance of forming meaningful relationships when the following three groups do their part.

Administrative Responsibility

Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, and 16 all highlighted the importance of school administration and their role in equipping professors with the tools needed to facilitate quality online education and relational experiences. In building relationships with others in the online class, Participant 16 says this issue is "probably the biggest hurdle to online education in my experience." The findings reveal the need for administrations within AGUSA schools to look at the bigger picture of online education, reevaluate it, and consider it in a new light. According to Participant 6, "I am concerned. I am honestly concerned in the big picture that the rush to accessibility and affordability has decreased the authentic holistic value of an education. Moreover, it is unfortunately created or lent to the creation of a very transactional approach to learning. Moreover, online learning is so susceptible to transactional learning." The findings suggest four areas online administrators need to consider.

Issue 1: Technology. Throughout the interview process, the apparent disconnect between those who create the online LMS and classroom design and those who do the actual teaching feels like a great divide. Participant 2 states, "I want to put this delicately. I do not know if I have ever met a senior administrator in an AG school who has created or taught an online class. It really bugs me. We lose all of our best teachers to administration because that is how you get noticed and promoted, and we end up decapitating the academic house. Five to ten years down the line, we have an administration that has not been in a classroom for five to ten years."

Participant 1 lamented, "I spend more time navigating learning management systems than teaching. And that is the most significant frustration of teaching online. Learning management systems have all kinds of bells and whistles created by technology wizards that are all cute and exciting. However, when it comes to using those in a learning system, they have been created by technology experts rather than educational experts. So, my intrinsic motivation is not there when I spend half my time navigating an LMS. I will find ways to continue my work without the burden of all that technological side.

Issue 2: Classroom Assistance. Secondly, there was an overall sense among online professors that they could not give their students the full benefit of their wisdom and experience due to the time needed to read and grade assignments. Participant 2 relayed this excellent experience: "The optimal arrangement is a professor and a teaching assistant. The teaching assistant can do a lot of the grading, or in my case, I had a wonderful assistant. She would pre-grade things for me going through and kind of get a general feel of where the work was, and then I would be responsible for the primary grade. Moreover, I focused on student feedback." Therefore, because Participant 2 was not overly burdened with the initial grading, creative ideas like individual video/podcast feedback from the professor to each student could transpire. This allowed for more one-on-one and undivided attention to be given to all in the class.

Issue 3: Peer Mentors. Thirdly, the findings revealed among online professors that they felt the most isolated, not from their students, but from their school's administrative leadership. Participant 3 believes that "One of the challenges of institutions that utilize online instruction is how do we come together and make people feel apart and sense the value of the different people with which we interact. However, Participant 5 lamented that while working at a prominent AGUSA university, "It was awkward to ask for help. It did not seem like they [the

administration] wanted to help me. That is where I did feel isolated. I understood that the culture of that [university] tended to be more standoffish, and they are not warm and welcoming." While working for a different AGUSA university than was mentioned by Participant 5, Participant 3 shared this good experience. "It is nice in a community where you can provide feedback and have consistent periodic meetings. You have that opportunity to glean from others that have been farther down the road than you have in education." In this case, Participant 3 enjoyed regular staff/faculty/administration meetings for mutual professional development. This was an example of a positive peer mentor experience. Participant 8 encourages all those in administration, "Everything rises and falls on leadership. [It] goes back to the leadership of the schools setting up their staff, that they are not even imparting the importance of [relationships], even though you are an online professor? I have always been encouraged to create, to provide opportunities for peers to connect."

Issue 4: Flexibility. The data revealed an overwhelming consciousness of rigidity from those in higher educational administration about their approach to and philosophy of online education. Professors were made to feel that their superiors were only interested in continuing to do what has always been done when new ideas may improve online programs. According to Participant 12, "I think it [online education] has to continue to innovate. I think it would become negative for me if we were no longer interested in innovating, and we just wanted to do what we have always been doing, and we were no longer offering a good product to our students." While it is true that no one entity can force relationships upon any participant in online education, the findings of this study reveal that it is the responsibility of AGUSA educational administrators to equip professors with the necessary tools for the job. One participant suggested, "I would love to see a class in every program on doing this and instruction for professors on how to create the

experiences virtually that would make it easier for relationships to develop." Participant 13 states, "The burden of this [making friends], the onus is on the student, but the opportunity is certainly being provided on [by LMS] platforms." Therefore, if the tools for continued professional development, accountability, and relationships are given to the professors, the professors and their students will likely form meaningful relationships in class.

Professor Responsibility

Participants 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, and 17 underscored the significance of the online professor and the indelible part that they play in facilitating strong relational connections for themselves and their students that can lead to higher levels of learning for the student and professional satisfaction for the teacher. The central issue of motivation was strongly addressed by Participant 13 when they said that it is all about "investing in the next generation" and how a professor must have a personal "stake in the success of those who follow after you." If the online professor only performs the "minimum online requirements," they only provide a sub-par or "minimal online experience" for their students. The research findings revealed four primary practices that successful online professors employ in their classes to create meaningful interaction between themselves and their learners.

Practice 1: A Personal Connection. For participants 4, 6, and 12, adding a unique personal connection could not be overemphasized. Offering multiple avenues by which the students can reach the professor can put students at ease, thereby removing one more layer of stress from the student experience. Participant 12 recalled, "One of the things that I have heard in my few years in online education leadership is that students dislike courses where it was hard to contact the professor, or it seemed like the professor was absent from the course. It, for some students, causes a great deal of anxiety because they are wondering, okay, what grade do I have

in this class?" The remedy for such worry was easy for Participant 6. It meant they made a little extra space in their schedule for the students to ask questions and process material. Participant 6 says, "I do feel like when I extended myself with more access, and people would take advantage of that, that did help to give a sense of different kinds of relationships again." When this type of access and communicative rapport exists between students and professors, the connection takes on a new importance. Participant 4 noted that students "are hungering for a mentor ." The closer the student relates to the professor, the more Participant 4 believed that the class could become a "transformational" experience for the student. As Participant 11 recalled multiple educational moments at more than one AGUSA college as a student, "when I think back, I don't think about who the administrator was. I think about who my professor was, and that's my identity with the school itself. So, there's tremendous influence at that point." Therefore, according to the findings of this study, it is the professor who wields the bulk of the influence, good or bad, in the life of the student. That said, the study revealed that more than giving access is needed. Communication must be prompt and personal to achieve this transformational and inspirational level of connection.

Practice 2: Prompt and Personal Feedback. Two major factors contributing to feelings of isolation in online students pertain to the timing and content of feedback the students receive on their assignments and questions about them. For Participant 16, prompt and personal feedback was "vital to the student's success, not just academically, but emotionally, mentally, just staying in a healthy place. One of the difficulties that my [online educational experience] is when professors who were not checking in or engaged just completely went MIA." That is why, for Participant 9, "I always make it a practice to respond within 24 hours. Suppose a student tries to contact me. It is usually much sooner than that because I always check my email, but at most 24

hours. Consequently, Participant 6 admonished all online professors that "in an ideal world, a student would never get back a paper without some kind of personal comment, as opposed to APA or formatting errors, those things being highlighted. An ideal online educational experience will convince the students that they are not just working with AI." Participant 12 agreed, "I think having that connection with the professor can give you some context to whatever you are studying. We are not just asking you to grade and be in discussion forms. We want you to share your unique experiences. I think that it not only makes things more enjoyable for the instructor, but it also makes things more enjoyable for the student." For Participant 17, the majority of professors "communicated often and responded right away," and this greatly enhanced the online learning experience, made participant 17 feel valued, and reduced feelings of anxiety and isolation.

Practice 3: Curators of Class Culture. The findings have made clear that the responsibility for cultivating a healthy class culture is primarily upon the professor. Participant 13 says, "Well, I think it is on the professor. They are responsible for creating the kind of community they want. Moreover, the truth is it takes more work to build community." Words that participants used to describe this kind of healthy community included collaboration, vulnerability, nurturing, inspiration, understanding, and encouragement. The study exposed the fact that very few people in the student's life can influence and inspire like a fully engaged professor. Participant 1 highlights this point and states, "I think that you ought to be professionally motivated enough to know that and have common sense enough to know that there are limits to the kinds of influence you can have by just communicating and facilitating the learning content. You just need to be more motivated to see your students as more than a consumer of information. Moreover, part of nurturing their full potential goes to understanding

the context in which they learn, the motivations which they learn, the barriers to learning that they may have so that you can facilitate the learning experience with greater effectiveness."

According to the study, this kind of healthy online learning can only happen if the online professor has built-in personal solid discipline. The following section will list several healthy self-leadership practices offered by the participants.

Practice 4: Healthy Self-Leadership. The following is a summation of regular daily and weekly exercises from ten of the participants who are actively teaching online classes.

Participant 1 noted the importance of "regularly updated auxiliary resources for the students to support the key unit content." Participant 3 kept "a journal for each class that I would update after each class on areas to improve on, challenges I had, and what worked well." Additionally, Participant 3 followed a strict schedule of grading assignments and prep for live stream classes. Participant 5 "set aside time each day to complete assignments, and I sometimes used the spreadsheets provided to organize assignment due dates." Participant 6 asked when to "interact on discussion boards, grade assignments, etc."

Additionally, Participant 6 "sought to answer emails within 24 hours." Participant 7 "set blocks of time on certain days aside to complete the work." Participant 8 stated, "It is my nature to set up the structure, boundaries, calendar reminders, lists of assignments and dates due. Holding myself accountable comes naturally to me." Participant 9 selected "approximately 1/3 of the students each week to respond to their discussion posts. I track it so that the next week, it will be a different third, etc., so by week 3, I interacted with each student.

Moreover, I never go more than one day without checking on the class and starting to review discussions and assignments as they come in. That way, the students get grades back promptly." Participant 11 made it a point to regularly communicate on the community dashboard

with students to remove as much ambiguity as possible. Participant 11 would go to the LMS site each weekday to go over the site, check for student messages, and respond promptly. Participant 11 says, "Communication is vital for online students and teachers. It is a two-way street."

Furthermore, Participant 11 is more than willing to be redundant sometimes to ensure clarity in communication. Participant 12 says, "I employed regular student-professor communication in my courses (i.e., course week introduction emails, short videos overviewing the weekly content to give some reasons about the content's importance, course week conclusion videos summarizing what had come up in discussion forums/weekly assignments), I gave personalized, actionable feedback to students (i.e., recorded video feedback, written feedback that engaged their work through), and I invested a good amount of time of interacting with students in the discussion forums (i.e., recording video responses, referring them to resources to dive deeper, encouraging students to interact with each other)." Participant 13 reiterated the importance of staying "on schedule and keeping an accurate record of course dates, times, and media."

Participant 13 says, "I have had to block out large amounts of time to ensure that I met deadlines." The research findings show that when the professors regularly maintained these disciplines, the online learning experiences for all involved improved dramatically. However, one final group that must be emphasized as it relates to relational responsibilities: the students themselves. Even if the administration has fully equipped and trained the professors and professors to perform all of the practices mentioned above perfectly, there remains an onus upon the students to avail themselves of the relational opportunities before them.

Student Responsibility

Participants 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 12, and 13 stressed the importance of the online student and their responsibilities in building meaningful relationships with their peers and professors. There is little doubt that knowledge and information can be adequately disseminated through remote online means. However, the findings of this study suggest that there is a higher level of learning when that information can be processed in the context of a solid educational community of peers of professors. Participant 7 encourages online learners to "Build the relationships. You will grow more; you will learn more. So, some of that is the professor's initiative. Some of that could be your peer's initiative. However, let me say the vast majority is going to be you." Participant 6 makes it priority one at the beginning of each class to "find someone in your class that you feel like you might be able to connect with and then reach out to them to ask for permission to swap contact information, start some conversation." There is a tremendous short-term benefit when this takes place for the student when they take this initiative. However, participant 12 highlighted that "the people who are your peers now as you are going through your program, those are going to be peers in the vocation later on. One of the clearest items that emerged from the interviews and journal entries is the belief that friendships play a major role in taking a student over the finish line in school and keeping them in their prospective callings/professions later. However, if the student does not avail themselves of the opportunities before them, there is little that the administration or professors can do about it. Participant 8 states, "If a student is using online to be able to hide somewhere, that is a different story. However, if they really want to get the full experience they need for their educational experience, they are going to need to connect with others. Participants 2, 6, and 8 concur, stating, "A student really has to make an effort. The burden of this the onus is on the student. It [personal effort] has to be added by the student."

Students have already articulated complaints in previous sections regarding feelings of social isolation caused by what appeared to be disengaged and distracted professors. However, teachers share that there are times when everything has lined up just right for students to connect, and the students still need to take advantage of the opportunity. Participant 6 laments, "I would offer an hour each night where as many students as want to could come and join me on Zoom, and I will share a little bit about the class, myself, my heart and get to know everybody. I was quickly disappointed by how few people did it and how few came. Nevertheless, for those that did, our online mediated relationship definitely had a different ethos. For the rest of the course, I think I felt more of a connection to them." Participant 7 agreed when they stated, "But what you may be surprised with just making yourself available says something in only a fraction, less than 5% of the students are going to take advantage of it, maybe 2%." Therefore, the frustration arising from disconnected students is not only felt by the students themselves. Online professors have created chances for students to get to know one another but have yet to be successful. According to Participant 13, "by and large, the student has to initiate the conversation." Though the entire burden of responsibility to create meaningful interactions in an online class does not rest upon one group, the study found that when administration, professors, and students do their parts, friendships are far more likely to transpire in an online class.

Theme 3: Relational & Academic Communication

Within the following section, Day aims to answer the question of communication, more specifically, the question of timing, what should be communicated, and when it should be communicated within the calendar of an online class. Many participants felt that this is the primary area of focus to either prevent or cause a sense of social isolation and its varying forms of anxiety and stress. For this study, the timeline of one online class is broken down into three

parts: the pre-start of class, the start of class, and post-class communication. These three sections articulate what the participants of this study felt should be communicated before class begins, during class, and after the class is finished to help all involved be better connected. As previously mentioned, communication is not a one-way street; therefore, administrators, teachers, and students alike all contribute to the overall success of excellent and timely communication.

Pre-Start of Class

Ideally, according to the findings of this study, good communication between online professors and their students must begin long before day one of the class. Participant 12 reiterates this point: "An ideal online class starts with the professor proactively reaching out to the students before the class begins, welcoming them, getting them ready so that nothing catches them off guard so that there is a good start to that course." As soon as contact information is made available to the online professor, sending informal correspondence offering prayer, encouragement, and scriptural devotional thoughts can add substantial relational value, according to Participant 11. At a minimum, and if at all possible, according to Participant 12, "the professor is reaching out a month before class begins," introducing him or herself, letting them know what books or other resources are needed for the course, and anything else that they may need to alleviate anxiety and helping them to know what it takes to be successful in the course.

Start of Class

In Participant 14's experience, this is the stage in the timeline that they felt the most socially isolated. Participant 14 "felt socially isolated" due to a lack of understanding regarding all aspects of the class and not knowing who the first point of contact would be should there be a problem. Participant 14 states, "I did feel separated. I felt like I did not know who to turn to, who to talk to. I was even very insecure about what I got myself into." One of the first priorities for

Participant 9, when they teach an online class, is to "have a live session with the students" via an online streaming portal like Zoom or Google Meet. Doing this has allowed Participant 9 "to connect with them more personally, as opposed to just a faceless name in the course as the professor." To add another point of value to the social connection and corresponding support throughout the class experience, Participant 6 would like to see a peer mentor assigned to this point in the class timeline "that follows them through every single part of the course. I had collaborative conversations from my first course until [to the end]. Thus, if there were some way that programs across the board could either require that or provide that, man, that would be gold."

During Class

For Participant 15, feelings of social isolation and disconnection were most strongly felt after the class had begun. "Sometimes I think people do not exist on the other side of a screen." Admittedly, participant 15 is a natural-born introvert, and one of the main reasons for choosing to gain an education online was for the "benefit" of not having to deal too much with people. However, once the class began, this natural-born, self-proclaimed introvert began to feel that something from the educational experiences needed to be improved. Participant 15 recalled, "I prided myself on being a huge introvert, so I love being alone. However, after getting into it [online class], I realized I was missing something. I felt a missing connection with the people I was learning with." According to the findings, the solution to this problem is constant, timely, and personal communication. Participant 4, 5, 8, 9, and 12 all reiterated their practice of keeping an email or voicemail to from going unanswered beyond 24 hours. Participant 8 recalled the most aggravating thing about online professors being those who would not respond quickly, who wouldn't interact, and appeared indifferent to their students. When reasonable, timely, and

personalized communication is taking place, general feelings of being valued, recognized, and appreciated were mentioned by several participants. Participant 6 states that every successful online professor must "always seek to add a personal touch to every touch point," be it grading comments, bulk emails, or announcements.

Post Class

Finally, two leader group participants, who have had many years of online teaching and administrative experience, brought up the importance of a post-class debrief or review. Participant 6 stated, "I need to have a sense that I am influencing, encouraging, and lifting up people. Moreover, the only way to get that sense is through feedback that comes through the relational feedback cycle." It is typical for professors to receive a post-class survey review from their students that semester; however, if the professors are not given access to that information, they cannot benefit or improve. Participant 13 states, "On a professional level, the professor gains feedback from students regarding the effectiveness of her or his teaching method based on the conversations they have with students outside the minimum requirements." Based on the findings of the study, there was a general sense that more conversations between administration, fellow teachers, and students were desired regularly to innovate and improve the online course in question continually.

Relational & Academic Opportunities

In this final primary thematic section, approaches taken by the participants to foster relationships in their online classes are revealed. Five sub-categories surfaced multiple times throughout the interviews and journal entries. They include online office hours, optional online social times, synchronistic class time, written and video discussion boards, and optional opportunities for in-person meet-ups. Each of these sub-headings saw varying amounts of

success based upon the willingness of administrators, professors, or students to enact the responsibilities mentioned above of each group. It must be noted that the findings reveal that each of the proceeding sub-categories was suggested not by any individual group but by all groups. This means that each sub-category is viewed in a positive light by each group of participants. Furthermore, they were recommended practices for a better online educational experience.

Online Office Hours

For the online student, the study revealed that having regularly scheduled online office hours significantly alleviated feelings of isolation. Participants 6 and 7 strongly suggested virtual office hours. Alternatively, as Participant 8 recommends, "I will just open my Zoom Room, and it will be open for 30 minutes every day." This creates a relaxed online environment for students to "pop in" and out at their convenience to ask quick questions about assignments or to benefit from personal mentorship moments. Participant 3 says, "You are not just a professor, you are a mentor. Furthermore, to me, one of the greatest joys is speaking into the lives of young men and women and those who are not so young in their calling and [sharing] life lessons that I have learned over the years. As a professor, I think you are so much more than just somebody who is regurgitating knowledge you have learned over the years in a sterile environment." The findings of this study reveal that having regularly scheduled virtual office hours is a tool that both students and professors alike have come to appreciate. Not only does it help academically, but participants noted that the relational connection was at another level for those who took advantage of this tool.

Optional Online Social Times

The study shows that no one can force another person into authentic friendship. Participants agree that the best a leader can do is curate the online environment and make it as conducive as possible for connection. "Online learning can be very lonely. Furthermore, one of the values of in-person learning that we have yet to figure out how to encourage in online learning would be that of the collegial atmosphere, meaning the collaboration and the relationships students are given," says Participant 6. It is otherwise noted by Participant 3 that one of the significant benefits of a person's college career is having the opportunity to mingle with people from different cultures regularly. There is potential, Participant 3 notes, for this to happen at an even greater level with online learning if teachers create informal optional social times and glean "insights from others who have such a different worldview." As Participant 8 says, "The most valuable relationship is going to be to connect with someone that's taking the same subject you are at the same time you are." However, according to Participant 2, it is the students' decision "to engage each other, especially in informal ways. That is the foundation. Participant 15 called for a "virtual lounge or "virtual happy hour" where class members could connect simultaneously over a Zoom call to get better acquainted, especially at the beginning of the course. An interesting and somewhat unexpected finding of the study is expressed in the next section: administrators, teachers, and students all agree that their online experience would have a greater sense of social connection if there were a few live/required online class times during the semester. As Participant 7 says, students must be given "chances to interact, to build relationships."

Synchronistic Class Time

Thirdly, participants 6, 7, 13, and 15 highly recommended synchronistic online class time to advance better online educational experiences. Participant 6 stated, "In an ideal world, I would love for there to be requirements for synchronous [online classes]. Students are required to be together online, not in person, but at least synchronous connections, whether once a week or once every two weeks. Furthermore, Participant 6 said, "I almost want to put an asterisk next to an online degree. Not that it is any less work and any less valid in terms of that, but as far as the holistic life-shaping value, unless you, like I even said before, have friends that you can talk to and process with what you are learning, I think you are missing out." Participant 13 agrees, "I think that the ideal online education experience is where you have multiple students in a live forum online where they get to interact with each other and the professor... a mix between live education and recorded lectures on scene." Participant 15, a self-proclaimed introvert stated, that it would be a huge improvement to online education to have "a combination of both" [synchronistic and asynchronistic] class time. While it may take a little extra effort for professors to create these opportunities, the long-term relational and educational benefits appear well worth it. Participant 7, someone with over a decade of online teaching experience, excitedly stated, "Let's get on live; let's do some live interaction."

Written and Video Discussion Boards

Though there were mixed feelings about the effectiveness of discussion board posts from all participating groups, no one felt it was time to entirely do away with them. Instead, most felt that they still play a vital role in the socialization of students and disseminating information if all fully maximize them. As Participant 5 puts it, "Well, I think one of the reasons we wanted not to eliminate the discussion board was because we wanted students and professors to be able to

interact and provide that sense of community within their coursework. We want the mentorship. There is a sense of responsibility. These are not just students who are taking the course. We want them to be mentored." Participant 4 agreed and said, "Yeah, I think that part of that ideal experience would be that the discussion board conversations would be provocative and truly engage people's lives, not just the content." One suggestion to innovate and update the discussion board experience that several participants brought out was to add a video discussion component. Participant 4 stated, "I was excited to learn that the LMS included a way to integrate Zoom in the classroom so that professors who want to do that can add that aspect because it does bring another level." Participants 7 and 8 agreed that discussion boards can "facilitate that relational connection "gives opportunity for [the student] to even know who [their] peers are." Overall, adding recorded video discussions rather than a required written work count may add another valuable relational and learning component.

Optional In-Person Meet-ups

One talking point that arose from the interview process was a strong desire to meet up with classmates and professors in person if members of the class were geographically near each other. At times, in the natural course of the introductory section of an online class, members discover that they live near one another. In those cases, one participant, number 14, actually arranged for an impromptu coffee shop study group. As a result, participant 14 said, "It benefited my educational experience to have some in-person connection." Participants 1, 2, 4, and 6 shared the same vantage point: "the online was much richer because I had those in-person experiences." At the same time, it may not be possible nor allowed to make in-person gatherings a required element of online learning; most felt it should be an optional benefit whenever possible. Participant 1 states that the optimal online classroom delivery system includes "solid content that

is delivered in an organized way, reinforcement of that content with learning experiences that are done in small group settings." According to Participant 2, for this to work, "I think it rises and falls with the student commitment and the amenities made available by the school and by the professor."

Outlier Data and Findings

While the majority of students and professors shared mild frustration as it relates to the various aspects of feelings of disconnection and isolation, two participants articulated something much more, something that Participant 16 described as "teacher abuses" of power. This outlier data point is undoubtedly in the minority of participant experiences in the study; however, as Participant 13 states, this form of "Christian hazing" and student mistreatment is unacceptable and cannot be ignored. Phrases like, "Well, nobody helped me, so I am not going to help you. And, well, this is a rite of passage that you have to go through" were examples of things said to Participant 16 when complaints of a sense of absence and a lack of communication were brought to the attention of Participant 16's professor. This caused great disillusionment in Participant 16 and their fellow students, and they wondered if there was any safe avenue of appeal for help. Participant 16 was confounded when their professor said, "Instead of correcting [the bad behavior], we are now going to pass that down to the line because you are not going to earn this [degree] and not have to suffer the way that I suffered." These findings strengthen the argument for more accountability that is called for by Participant 13. Participant 16 emphasized, "When you do not have community, the character lacks, people get lazy, they get undisciplined, and their motivations are often wrong. I feel like online education has only further perpetuated the wrong motives of obtaining degrees because it is so easy now."

Research Question Responses

In preparation for the conclusions outlined in Chapter 5, the proceeding section provides a narrative of participant answers to the primary research questions. Additionally, significant themes derived from the study were undergirded by the provision of input from each participant.

Central Research Question

How can online educators improve academic and social persistence between their students and themselves by applying Tinto's Model of Integration? The findings show that the participants believed that online education will continue to grow in popularity and practice. No participant viewed online means of education as a fad or something that will soon go away. Therefore, the need to continue to innovate and improve this means of education is paramount to all 17 study participants. Participant 1 states, "Well, first of all, the online education component is here to stay. It is not going away. So, the idea of either [in-person or online] is not a conversation. All education moving forward will be hybrid, and you will have technology in all its forms as part of education." Participant 7 reiterates, "The next generation may learn in a different way than you did. Therefore, [those in leadership] must always be students of how to make that connection, what seems to be getting through, and how we can do that. How can we [best] be a facilitator of the students learning?"

Sub-Question One

What methods are you using to evaluate your student's academic persistence and social interaction? For this question in particular, much depends upon the level of engagement from the professor. Participants 4 and 5 articulated the need for online professors to regularly check in on their students, especially on what they called "at risk" students who have shown a pattern of not turning in work or not turning in work on time. Participant 15 shared an experience like this

when they needed to catch up in their work. When the teacher went the extra mile to check in and follow up, participant 15 said, "It made the biggest difference...It made me feel valued. It made me feel recognized and that I existed as an individual and person and that I am more than just a statistic or a number that pops up on the screen." This support structure and emotional safety net in place kept Participant 15 from potentially failing the class. Another creative tool utilized by Participant 2 to evaluate and provide feedback to their students was an individually curated video podcast. Participant 2 would make a recording from themselves for each student, which included "a list of the four or five improvements that they needed to make and make that into a podcast and then publish it to every person in the class." Participants said this gave each student the best chance to improve and excel in the class. Incidentally, Participant 2 added that the students absolutely loved this feedback method as it provided a very personal touch point.

Sub-Question Two

What online extracurricular activities or projects are you currently offering, or have you previously offered? Generally speaking, the idea of doing or having any personal experience with an online extracurricular activity was still novel to the study participants. However, projects designed to bring students together were different. For Participant 2, the gauge to measure the success of an online class was based on "how rapidly I could pass the teaching role off to them." In the mind of Participant 2, students learn more when they have to process the information as a group and then teach it to one another. Participant 7 would create space for video interaction by replacing written discussion boards with live Zoom classes. One or two video options instead of written discussions led to better interaction. In addition, Participant 7 required their students to upload their video work, and then they would gather as a group to evaluate and provide feedback on the video. When the professor curates this type of class culture, "Students light up the course,

which offers content that helps the student interpret meaning; they become engaged and fun to teach," according to Participant 13.

Participant 1 highlighted that the most beneficial online class projects happen when students share their research and mutually benefit from each other's best efforts. Participant 16 agrees that "significant dialogue, including [online] small group breakouts, resulted in a more engaging learning environment.

Sub-Question Three

What online social activities/opportunities have you offered in the past, or do you plan to create and facilitate meaningful connections between you and your students and from student to student? For this portion of the study, it must be noted by the reader that all the participants are Christian believers, have attended Christian schools, and taught at AGUSA schools of higher education. Therefore, their worldview as it relates to this section of the study is more spiritual in nature than if this was asked of a secular university. Participant 3 quickly articulated, "I think creating space where shared spirituality can take place can create a greater sense of community than many other things." Participant 3 elaborated on their experience with such matters, bringing students together for prayer, encouragement, and biblical reflection. Participant 13 shared that I "really loved our prayer time and having divine moments to speak into students' lives or have a student stay "after class" to share some difficulties and ask my advice. Helping students with personal and spiritual challenges is the highlight of my teaching experience." Participant 17 agreed, "I think prayer binds people together in an extraordinary way. Thus, it was very meaningful to me to have the professor do more than just [the minimum] whether in person or online, open up the class in prayer." Additionally, participant 17 went on to describe one online professor who "shared his own life and asked for prayer. He also asked the students what he

could pray for each of us, and then through email, he would keep in touch with us to ask how the situation, whatever we were praying for, was going." Several participants mentioned these types of spiritual connecting points many times as the social touch point that meant the most to them. As Participant 2 reiterated, those of us at AGUSA schools must introspectively ask the question, what is 'Christian' online Higher education? How would I know it if I saw it? I think that's why relationships have to be the number one [priority], because it can't be Christian without relationships."

Summary

Four primary thematic elements emerged as a result of the study. They include Relational & Academic Benefits, Responsibilities, Communication, and Opportunities. These themes came about following a meticulous review of each interview, transcript, video recording, and journal entry offered by the participants. These primary themes have been utilized to construct textual descriptions of each participant's lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). Following this, these same constructs help to build and describe the overarching essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). 17 participants, comprised of men and women of varying ages, backgrounds, and understandings, could clearly and safely share their experiences with online education at AGUSA colleges/universities. While most of the interviewed reflected positively on their overall experiences, all agreed that there were areas of needed improvement.

The majority of participants agreed that online education was here to stay, and that fact is a good thing. All agreed that information can be adequately disseminated using online education methods without in-person interaction. However, all believed that relationships create a better learning experience and greatly enhance the overall educational time. About this matter, participant 2 states, "Having worked with many students in every [conceivable] format

throughout many years, it is impossible for me to believe that [relationships] do not make a difference. That is not a world I am aware of in which [relationships] matters not at all." The linchpin of the study emerged as it relates to responsibility. Specifically, who is responsible for bringing people together more socially? According to the findings, the answer is that it is a shared responsibility that administrators, educators, and students must bear together. Suppose even one of these groups is unwilling or unable to play their prospective roles. In that case, the relational connection is greatly hindered, feelings of social isolation increase, and the proceeding consequences are felt by all involved.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of post-secondary students and professors at Assemblies of God, USA schools, and how online education may impede formal and informal pathways to academic persistence and social integration within the realms of academic performance, extracurricular activities, faculty and staff relations, and peer-group interactions. Moreover, within this phenomenological study, I set out to discover the emotional and educational influences of social isolation caused by online/remote learning for post-secondary students and professors at Assemblies of God, USA, schools of Higher Education. In chapter five, I conclude my research by offering the reader my interpretations and recommendations for the previously outlined findings. Additionally, this chapter methodically lays out my interpretations of the findings, and also lays out implications for AGUSA stakeholders in policy and practice, as well as theoretical and methodological implications and the study's limitations and delimitations. Finally, the chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research.

Discussion

My purpose in the proceeding sections is to deliberate my study's findings. The four major themes, Relational & Academic Benefits, Responsibilities, Communication, and Opportunities, provide the framework for the study. By thoroughly examining and reexamining the lived experiences of this study's 17 participants, I acquired a deep and full understanding of the influences of remote online learning upon professors and their students in AGUSA schools. This knowledge provides research-based innovations and recommendations that may assist the Assemblies of God reach their educational goals. This chapter puts forward my interpretation of

these findings, implications for policy and practice stakeholders, theoretical and methodological implications, limits and delimitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

This section contains a succinct overview of the thematic findings in chapter four. Following the summary of themes, my interpretations of the findings, as gleaned from 14 one-on-one interviews, five focus groups, which included 15 study participants, and 15 written journal prompts, are offered.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Those involved in the study were gracious and candid in their responses to all questions about their individual and collective experiences at AGUSA schools of higher learning. More specifically, I want to know their lived experiences with online education at AGUSA schools. Varied feelings of social disconnection and isolation were articulated by all 17 participants, along with their thoughts on the importance of relationships as it relates to higher levels of online learning and professional satisfaction. The themes of Relational & Academic Benefits, Responsibilities, Communication, and Opportunities emerged from these conversations.

Numerous relational and academic benefits were outlined by all participants, including finding new employment and retaining one's employment, future networking opportunities, social and spiritual support systems, higher graduation rates, and high professional satisfaction. Under the relational and academic responsibilities category, findings suggested that administrators, professors, and students are equally obligated to put forth specific efforts to bring about quality and close relationships. Should even one group not fulfill their prospective duties, relational connections were shown to suffer. Thirdly, the benefits of clear and timely communication are put forward in the relational and academic communication section. The

findings, as articulated by the participants, indicate that for healthy relational connections to transpire between peers and professors of online classes, efforts must be made by the professor to alleviate student anxiety long before class begins through to the post-class teacher reviews. Finally, academic and relational opportunities carefully engineered to unite students were highlighted. Project-based assignments, synchronistic online classes, extracurricular activities, online social gatherings, and non-required in-person meet-ups were put forward as healthy and engaging methods to bring everyone in the online class closer in relationships. These themes combine to disclose the true essence of the lived experiences of the study participants.

Relational & Academic Benefits

Laced throughout each conversation was the common thread of relationships and whether or not they genuinely matter or hold any bearing at all for those involved in the online classroom at AGUSA schools. Multiple scholarly sources (Arbaugh, 2001; Jaggars, 2016; Means et al., 2014; Picciano, 2019 & Tate, 2022) indicate that many of those enrolled in online education feel a considerable amount of disconnection, distraction and an overall lack of personal value from their teachers and classmates. The question before the leadership of AGUSA schools is simple: Does it matter? Can information be adequately given through online means and retained by online students in the absence of online relationships with peers and professors? While it is true, according to the participants, that information can without a doubt be disseminated and retained by online students absent of relationships, all agreed that, by having a greater relational connection with one's peers and professors, the educational experiences was not only informationally beneficial for the student but transformational and inspirational.

Furthermore, the benefits of having and developing friendships with one's peers and professors appear to have short-term and long-term benefits that make the extra investment of

time well worth it. Students attain greater academic resilience, a higher sense of belonging, and improved levels of academic engagement (Greenland, 2022; Luo et al., 2022; Mannan, 2007 & Versteeg et al., 2022). Additionally, the study revealed that many choose to enter the teaching profession out of a sense of calling to help, love, contribute to, and empower their students (Bergmark et al., 2018 & Garza-Rodríguez, 2022). The findings show that this kind of professional satisfaction may only be attained when a greater relational connection exists between the professor and students.

Relational & Academic Responsibilities

Three primary groups emerged as having a shared responsibility about making friends and connections in an online classroom: Administrators, Educators, and Students. Throughout the study, I sought to discover exactly who was responsible for facilitating the connection between learners and their leaders. Observing the remarkable candor and careful consideration with which each participant responded was refreshing. Instead of blaming one group or another, each participant was swift to look introspectively at themselves and articulated how they could have personally done better at facilitating healthy connections. Should one group fail to uphold their duties to the academic or relational process, peer and professor connections may fail to materialize.

According to the findings, it is ultimately the administration's responsibility to fully outline expectations, provide accountability, train and equip their teams with the necessary tools and rules of relational engagement, empower professors to act creatively, remain flexible and innovative, and potentially the most important of all; they must model healthy relationships between themselves and their teams. Secondly, it is the teacher's responsibility to curate the class culture and maximize the tools provided by their administrators. Being accessible, quick to

respond, offering clear and concise communications, and being gracious, helpful, and understanding were qualities outlined by the participants as most conducive to forming healthy connections. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the students to avail themselves of the resources provided to them by the above groups and take the initiative in making connections. The first two groups can do their jobs perfectly, but if students do not take advantage of the opportunities before them, their overall educational experiences are downgraded significantly.

Relational & Academic Communication

Progressing through the data points, I came to see that it not only mattered what and how items were communicated from the above three groups, but the question of timing when something was communicated was equally important. Should administrators grant access to student contact information upon student enrollment, professors will reach out and connect with said students as soon as they can, preferably weeks before class begins. Then, the feelings of fear, stress, disconnection, and isolation experienced by all in the online class may be entirely negated. The findings show that different personality types and age groups may experience feelings of isolation at different points of the class calendar. However, prompt communication and accessibility from the professor have been shown to alleviate these negative experiences quickly.

Relational & Academic Opportunities

In conversations with each participant, what makes for great social experiences for all at in-person universities materialized. Sporting events, clubs, teams, dorm vs. dorm competitions, social hours, field trips, fine arts performances, and impromptu interactions were suggested as part of what makes in-person education unique and enjoyable. However, according to Participant 2, these items can have an online equivalent due to recent technological advances if all three

groups uphold their end of the responsibility spectrum. Additionally, participants believed that if online equivalents to such things were added to online schools, it would significantly enhance the general experience. There was an overall sense that AGUSA schools were behind in this regard and only now beginning to see the potential benefits of such opportunities. That said, there was an overarching sense of excitement about future innovations that may soon result.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The proceeding sections include informed recommendations for policy and practice designed for all relevant stakeholders in AGUSA higher education. The study has clearly shown and definitively argued that greater relational connections yield a better online educational experience for all involved. Additionally, students have higher levels of academic performance and social integration into the school's overall ethos when elements of isolation are illuminated. Therefore, the following implications and recommendations are put forward.

Implications for Policy

Given the multitudinous benefits of having close relationships outlined in this study to the online student's academic performance and social integration and to the professor's professional satisfaction and effectiveness, the following policy recommendations are made. Firstly, policymakers must prioritize building relational components into their pedagogical philosophy, beginning with those hired to design and teach online classes. In the hiring process, interviews should include questions about the candidate's beliefs and practices regarding connecting with their students and assisting them to connect with each other. Furthermore, this study shows that it is in the best interest of every employee, every staff member, faculty member, and administrator to foster such an approach. By implication, schools need enrollment to remain viable. This study has argued for and offered evidence that stronger relationships equate to lower

attrition and higher graduation rates. This talking point alone strongly implies that the making and building relationships between students and their peers/professors benefit the organization.

Therefore, policymakers should prioritize relationships in every component of their operation. Secondly, the study implies that policymakers must emphasize the value of relationships with their online classroom designers, educators, and learners. High-level stakeholders in AGUSA school cannot afford to overlook this pivotal communication recommendation. Participants in the study believed that if administrators, staff, faculty, and students fully grasped and understood the value of relationships, they would make every effort to engage in such connections. The study reveals that part of the problem with regards to social isolation currently experienced by leaders and learners in AGUSA schools is directly related to ignorance about the benefits strong relationships yield in one's life. Policymakers must list and communicate all known and potential benefits to their employees and students of connecting to others in the online journey. It is further recommended that it is not in any school's best interest to retain employees who will not align their pedagogy or classroom design with this relational component, as it may undercut the overall goals and growth of the school should such an employee remain.

Thirdly, the study strongly implies that extraordinary levels of accountability should be created and applied. One participant lamented the need for more oversight offered in online education to ensure that students receive the best possible educational product. From the participants' perspective, it became clear that it is very easy for programs and people to be stagnant and far outlast their relevant shelf life. Therefore, I recommend creating robust feedback systems where each group, from administrators to students, can offer suggestions for improvement and innovation. It is also recommended that regular consults be done between

groups for the further improvement of each educational unit. For example, those who create online content should consult with the actual deliverers of that material to the students. This could ensure the online tools are user-friendly and accessible to the teacher. Multiple professors who participated in the study believed a great disconnect exists between the designers and deliverers of online content. Additionally, administrators should consult with students one to two times a semester to ensure that the professor fulfills their agreed-upon social goals for the class. Knowing that these levels of accountability are present may strengthen future relational goals and connections. Thereby strengthening the entire school.

Implications for Practice

Participant 6 firmly states, "In the race to get and keep more students through online courses, universities have sacrificed an essential element of authentic learning – life-on-life influence. Rethinking this should be a high priority." Reevaluating a school's true purpose is paramount as it relates to forming the most effective and efficient modes of online education. For AGUSA schools to truly accomplish their goals, their purpose and practice must align. While it is true that not all AGUSA schools of higher learning have the same mission or purpose, the general principle of aligning one's organizational policy with organizational practice is a transferable concept. As Participant 13 says, "While online education has been around for some time now, it is still the Wild West when it comes to AG higher educational institutions. There is no commonality between institutions regarding expectations for instructors, pay scale, etc. I think a standardization process would be an important step forward." Therefore, the following general recommendations for practice based on the study's findings are put forward for the reader's consideration.

Care Providers. Based on the study's findings, it is my informed recommendation that community care providers be added to the general budgets of our AGUSA schools. Depending on the school's needs, these care providers may serve in different capacities. However, generally, their job would involve the insurance that no one falls through the relational cracks and feels personally cared for by the institution. Participant 13 recalled a non-AGUSA university that they are very familiar with that "has a full-time staff that does nothing but member care for students. It is amazing to me the amount of effort and energy they put into the well-being of students." Additionally, Participant 13 said, "I think AG higher education is becoming aware of this but is not owning it as yet as a justifiable expense." Furthermore, Participant 5 highlighted their experience with another non-AGUSA university that provided them with a personal advisor who was constantly available to help them in any given situation about the school, be it academic or otherwise. Participant 3 agrees that a community care individual provided by the institution to the students and professors committed to the emotional well-being of all would be a tremendous benefit.

Training Opportunities. Participant 13 mentioned a need for general standardization across the board of AGUSA online education. I concur with this statement, especially concerning professional training opportunities for students and teachers. The overall training experiences of the study participants were, at best, inconsistent. Some, like Participants 3, 11, and 13, had wonderful onboarding experiences at some schools, while others were absent. Participants 6, 14, 15, and 16 articulated feelings of grief and incredible frustration that they had received no onboarding or orientation training for the online educational experience. Participant 4 lamented the feeling of making things up as they went. One Participant said that they had to depend on others in the class to figure things out, and another had to call a cousin who was totally

unconnected with their school for help learning the LMS. As one Participant stated, "We can do better than that." Based on the inconsistencies experienced by most study participants, a standardization of onboarding training should be provided to all involved in the online education process at AGUSA schools.

Online Networking Events. An unexpected moment occurred during a group chat between 3 participants when someone who has been in and around AGUSA higher education for more than 20 years met someone else in AGUSA higher educational administration for the first time in that group chat. Both participants were mystified that in all the years that they had been involved in AGUSA schools, they had yet to meet before this group chat, and they felt this to be a significant problem that must be addressed. One remarked, "I cannot believe I have gotten this far and never met you. It tells me that we need a much better way of personally connecting people in the online discipline to each other. I do not mean necessarily a convention, but something. The first person who does that is going to lead this field in our fellowship because it is just not out there." In a separate interview, Participant 13 agreed with this sentiment when they said, "I think that we are still producing Lone Rangers because we are being taught by Lone Rangers. Old timers in this thing, by and large, did not have that benefit and so did not sow that seed in those that they trained." In their prospective area of leadership, Participant 9 goes above and beyond to help train adjunct faculty by sending out a document of "Best Practices" at the beginning of each semester that they have developed over many years to assist and enhance the online experience for both them and the students. This type of professional synergy is not the norm, according to the findings of this study. Therefore, I recommend that a network of online class content creators, administrators, and teachers from all AGUSA schools form an AGUSA

Cohort of leaders that periodically meet together for mutual encouragement and sharing new ideas.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The proceeding section addresses the theoretical and empirical implications of the study. Theoretically, my study employed Tinto's theory of academic persistence and social integration to investigate the lived experiences of online post-secondary students and professors at Assemblies of God, USA schools. Additionally, the study shows how online education may impede formal and informal pathways to academic performance, extracurricular activities, faculty and staff relations, and peer-group interactions. The study confirmed that students and faculty at AGUSA schools have observed and experienced the effects of social isolation in online learning. Furthermore, the study corroborates previous research by showing that those who are relationally close to their professors and peers experience a higher level of learning than those who do not. The empirical implication of the study adds to the phenomenological research by extending Tinto's Theory to online collegiate learners and teachers at AGUSA schools. Thus, the study fills the gap in the literature as it relates to the importance of relationships and the role that relationships play in enhancing the academic persistence and social integration of online stakeholders at AGUSA schools.

Theoretical Implications

The study utilized Tinto's theory of academic persistence and social integration, and eight primary implications were gleaned out of Tinto's theory. *See Figure 4.* These implications were confirmed throughout the findings of the study. In no way did the data found in the study deviate from or contradict the initial theoretical research.

Figure 4: Table of Theoretical Implications

Table of Theoretical Implications	
Implication #1	Having a healthy learning community accentuated by social integration leads to successful educational outcomes and combats the effects of social isolation due to remote learning. (Lakhal et al., 2020 & Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022).
Implication #2	Academic success is far less likely if a student does not connect beyond the classroom and socially integrate themselves into the full fellowship of the school (Lakhal et al., 2020 & Tinto, 2007).n
Implication #3	By giving students access to social supporters like peer mentors, counselors and coaches, the greater likelihood of academic success (Lakhal et al., 2020 & Tinto, 2007).
Implication #4	The theory explains that the level of involvement marks the student's social integration in extracurricular activities and the constant evidence of constructive relationships with the academic community (Baird, 2000 & Lakhal et al., 2020).
Implication #5	Students feel a sense of belonging when a healthy working and learning environment or learning community exists. Out of that sense of belongingness, students are inspired to develop and grow academically and personally (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022).
Implication #6	Healthy relationships are at the root of any solution proposed in this study, and Tinto would also infer closeness with one's peers and professors (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022).
Implication #7	According to Tinto, social integration is marked by an evident lack of social isolation on the part of the student (Liu, 2000 & Tinto, 1987).
Implication #8	For Tinto, academic integration happens when the learner shows a high level of intellectual growth and perceives their environment positively (Baird, 2000 & Lakhal et al., 2020).

Implication 1: A Healthy Learning Community. The remaining portions of this section will highlight the many connections that exist between the eight primary theoretical implications and the study findings. The study validated implication 1 when Participant 3 emphasized the importance of the class "feeling as though it is a community" seeking to improve themselves together and "helping each other move along the same path." Participant 5 concurs and stated that one of their primary goals when designing online coursework is for "students and professors to be able to interact and provide that sense of community." About this study, Participant 2 stated, "I think it is a step forward to reaching a sort of sense of we are an online educator community" rather than a "scattering" of unknown people. One unique way this study adds to the theoretical literature on community concerns shared spirituality to create community. Participant 11 believes that when the school creates opportunities for prayer and devotional time for mutual encouragement through Scripture reading, it becomes the "quickest way to develop community and also to foster the call to why the degree is being taken in the first place." Participant 12 concurs with this notion of shared spirituality when they state, "It was not just an educational process, but a [spiritual] formational process. Moreover, part of Christian formation is being in a Christian community." Though the study did not contradict Tinto's theoretical framework, it did add a spiritual component that was not there previously.

Implication 2: A Healthy School Culture. Implication 2 speaks to the need for the student to be fully socially integrated into the overarching culture of the school to have their best chance at completing the academic journey. Thus connecting the social component to academic success. The study confirms this component of the theoretical framework. Participant 15 calls for more online social meet-ups like an "online lounge, meeting room, or happy hour" where fellow students can get to know and make friends. Additionally, Participant 15 encouraged all online

students to "take advantage of every opportunity to make the connection." Otherwise, according to Participant 15, one is missing out on one of the most dynamic elements of the educational process. Participant 9 emphasized the great benefit of mutual encouragement when stating, "Often students want to connect with other students because they are going through the same thing; they feel the same pain. Furthermore, there is a lot of empathy and interaction and encouragement for one another."

Implication 3: Healthy Support Systems. Implication 3 highlights the importance of having emotional care support systems to ensure students can make healthy social connections. This includes peer mentors, counselors, and coaches. Participant 13 calls for AGUSA schools to budget for a community care individual that looks out for the social side of things with students, mainly if you are aiming at a young demographic." Participants 3, 4, 5, 6, 13, and 16 all call for varying levels of mentorship to enhance the likelihood of not only achieving academic goals but also doing so without having to experience emotional burnout. Participant 6 argues that every online student should be assigned a peer and professor mentor from the very beginning of their program who could walk with them through every challenge.

Implication 4: Extracurricular Activities. Implication 4 of the theoretical framework points to one vital indicator of the student's successful social integration: the level of involvement in extracurriculars. How does one know that a student has been fully assimilated into the school's overall ethos, especially when that student is not physically present? Previous research shows that if schools desire for students to connect healthily, online course designers must reimagine how to re-create online equivalents to shared spaces that make in-person schools a joy to attend (Bali, 2020 & Toma, 2023). Things like food courts, student unions, gyms, coffee shops, fine arts performances, sporting events, and field trips must find their online counterparts.

While participants in this study agreed with the data mentioned above and believed that it was possible to create such online environments, no one could point to a specific example of how this was currently being achieved at AGUSA schools.

Implication 5: A Sense of Belonging. The fifth implication from the theory deals with the student's sense of belonging and how a student is inspired to personally develop and improve academically in a healthy working environment (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2022). From the perspective of Participants 6, 7, and 12, these collaborative and collegial environments are critical. The findings concur with the theory as participants described this healthy community as collaborative, vulnerable, nurturing, inspirational, understanding, and encouraging. Tinto's sense of community and belongingness is primarily created by the thoughtful and purposeful professor (Hehir, 2021 & Winters et al., 2023). However, the study revealed that not all professors are willing to pay the price with their time and effort to curate such a culture.

Implication 6: Healthy Relationships. Sixthly, the theoretical framework shows that there is a healthy relational connection at the foundation of any academic or social solution. According to the findings, quality communication is the solution to students feeling disconnected or isolated. More specifically, it is constant, timely, and personal communication. The study revealed that participants felt the lack of this type of communication was the primary cause of social isolation and its varying forms of anxiety and stress. Participant 16 states, this kind of communication is "vital to the student's success, not just academically, but emotionally, mentally, just staying in a healthy place." The study found that when reasonable, timely, and personalized communication is taking place, general feelings of being valued, recognized, and appreciated are experienced by all. That said, the study reveals that three primary parties must communicate back and forth: administrators, faculty, and the students. If any of these groups,

even one fails in constant, timely, and personal communication, relationships break down. Thus further perpetuating the ramifications of social isolation.

Implication 7: Best Practices for Social Integration. The seventh implication that emerges from the theory pertains to how one may know that social isolation issues are being well managed. How does one know that a student has become fully integrated into the culture of a school? What metrics could one view to know that relational progress is being made in a student's life? According to Tinto's theory, social integration is marked by an evident lack of social isolation on the part of the student (Liu, 2000 & Tinto, 1987). The findings of the study confirmed this point. Participants gauged their pedagogical effectiveness by examining how quickly they could get their students to interact with each other in meaningful ways and get the students to teach one another the class content.

Additionally, participants felt that they had done an excellent job of teaching when they transitioned from being the chief teacher/focal point of the class to being a facilitator of passionate conversations that assisted the students in processing the material together. According to Participant 4, these conversations should be "provocative and truly engage people's lives, not just the content." Participant 1 affirmed this finding and said that great content could only be thoroughly massaged into a learner's heart when "solid content is delivered in an organized way, reinforced by learning experiences that are done in small group settings."

Implication 8: Best Practices for Academic Achievement. Academic achievement was the eighth and final implication that rose to the forefront. How does one gauge that they are meeting and exceeding their academic goals? According to the research, this happens when the learner shows a high level of intellectual growth and perceives their environment positively (Baird, 2000 & Lakhal et al., 2020). Furthermore, potential growth is determined through

problem-solving under leadership or in partnership with more capable peers and professors (Eun, 2019). Additionally, the theory says that one may gauge development by measuring the personal intellectual growth of the student beyond their firmly held preexisting ignorance, prejudice, or biases (Felder, 2004; Gobec et al., 2022; Tsai et al., 2023). Again, these theoretical propositions are further confirmed in the study.

One of the most effective ways to accomplish this kind of growth, according to the participants' input, is by getting the students engaged with other students from very different cultures. Participant 3 recalls that one of the most significant opportunities for college students to grow beyond their previously held biases is when they have the chance "to mingle with people from different cultures regularly." There is potential, Participant 3 notes, for this to happen at an even greater level with online learning if teachers create informal optional social times and glean "insights from others who have such a different worldview." Others within the study agreed that online education provides beneficial social interactions with people worldwide, thus allowing students to expand their intellectual horizons.

Empirical Implications

The study drew upon the most recent and relevant scholarly literature to enhance one's understanding of the theoretical framework and undergird its thematic findings with empirical evidence. *See Figure 5.* The study highlights five primary empirical implications that materialize from the literature review. This section presents a brief outline of these implications, along with evidence as to how the study corroborates each one. In no way did the study contradict or deviate from the findings of the literature. While the study participants did not offer any data contrary to the literature review, they did offer a uniquely Christian perspective on how their faith informs the overarching motivation to pursue the recommendations now put forward with excellence.

Figure 5: Table of Empirical Implications

Table of Empirical Implications	
Implication #1	The quality of the teacher (Shin, 2021 & Kollalpitiya et al., 2020), the flexibility of one's schedule (Rath et al., 2019 & Van Wart et al., 2020), a sense that the educator is available, and present (Rath et al., 2019 & Van Wart et al., 2020)
Implication #2	The user-friendly application of the online platform (Rath et al., 2019; Shin, 2021 & Van Wart et al., 2020), access to quality computer equipment and internet (Abdullah, 2022; Harefa, 2022, & Pradana et al., 2021). Not all educators have been taught the skills or tools to create meaningful online communities (Ferri, 2020 & Morgan, 2022). (page 35)
Implication #3	Emotional and motivational support (Harefa, 2022 & Shin, 2021),
Implication #4	Timeliness in grading feedback (Sopina, 2015 & Watkins et al., 2014).
Implication #5	The ability to find and filter the information one needs to succeed academically largely depends on the training and onboarding process of the school (Abduraxmanova, 2022 & Lakhali et al., 2020).

This section will underscore the connections between the five primary empirical implications and the study findings. These implications include characteristics of a quality online professor, a learning management system, an emotional support system, a communication/feedback loop, and onboarding/orientation processes for students and professors. The study's findings fully corroborate the research while adding spiritual elements that undergird what the participants felt to be the proper motivation behind all of their online educational efforts. Furthermore, this study revealed that when these empirical elements are fully communicated and understood by the three main groups, administrators, teachers, and students,

all parties are given their best chance to meet and exceed their online educational goals.

Additionally, the findings show that if even one of these empirical implications is ignored, the student's academic achievement and relational integration suffer greatly.

Empirical Implication 1: A Quality Online Professor. Throughout the literature review, a common informational thread woven throughout was that of the professor's perceived and actual availability. The study's findings fully concur with the literature on the point that students must know that the educator is available and present (Rath et al., 2019 & Van Wart et al., 2020). Participants 6 and 7 highlighted the importance of having and keeping regularly scheduled online office hours. Participants 6, 7, 13, and 15 call for periodic synchronistic class time, which may offer extra time for the professor to engage personally and spiritually. The most essential quality of an online professor, per the literature review and the findings of this study, pertains to engagement. More specifically, the professor goes above and beyond to ensure that each student knows they will not be ignored or mistreated by the teacher.

Empirical Implication 2: The Learning Management System. Another common hindrance that was not only brought out by the literature review but also by the study's participants was that of a non-user-friendly LMS. Participant 1 highlighted this point several times and even said that the difficulty of using learning management systems has made him think twice about being involved in online teaching. Furthermore, participant 1 believed problematic learning technology is the worst part of online education. Participants 6 and 14 also agree with the literature review that when an LMS is not user-friendly and designed with elements of social connection in mind, the very tool with which the school is attempting to teach becomes a significant deterrent. The findings of the study agree with the literature review that the LMS must be used to create, plan, apply, deliver, and measure learning processes (Alias, 2005 &

Fibriasari et al., 2023) for the delivery of educational content and the communication between professors, students, and peers to be exceptional (Alias, 2005 & Fibriasari et al., 2023).

Empirical Implication 3: An Emotional Support System. Embedded within the most successful online educational programs, according to the scholarly literature, is an emotional support system reinforced with academic counselors, mentors, and social coaches. The study agrees that attaining high levels of trust and mutual support (Chen et al., 2023) is vital for the online learner. Multiple participants from both sample groups brought out this point. Participant 9 stresses the importance of encouragement, accountability, and support structures that many online students need while on their educational journey. Participant 12 pointed to the short-term and long-term benefits of these relationships forged during the online college experience and how these relationships carry over into one's professional life. Participants 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, and 17 accentuated the remarkable role that social and spiritual support systems played in their online education. Furthermore, Participant 16 states, "I really think it is vital to the student success, not just academically, but spiritually, emotionally, mentally, just staying in a healthy place." These findings are in sync with the empirical data of the study. However, this study brought out the need for spiritual support systems and the typical social systems that any academic community may offer.

Empirical Implication 4: Communication/Feedback Loop. The literature review revealed a shared frustration that both students and professors felt: a lack of constructive and helpful feedback. It is argued that defined, prompt, expert, impartial, and constant feedback are fundamental to producing superior connections in online courses (Berry, 2019; Kranzow, 2013; Nicklin et al., 2022 & Snijders et al., 2022). In the minds of those studied and documented in the literature review, timeliness in grading feedback (Sopina, 2015 & Watkins et al., 2014) is one of

the most important aspects of the learning process. While it is true that all participants in the study agree that this kind of feedback is paramount, there was one slight deviation between the literature review and the findings. The difference pertains to the recommendation for a written and signed agreement between teachers and their students that outlines each other's expectations for the course (Chickering, 1989 & Tan et al., 2021). None of the participants of this study brought out this point or mentioned that they had ever done anything like this in their teaching career. Participant 6 stated, "I need to have a sense that I am influencing, encouraging, and lifting people. Moreover, the only way to get that sense is through feedback that comes through the relational feedback cycle.

Empirical Implication 5: Best Practices for Onboarding/Orientation. The study's findings and the literature review call the reader's attention to the need for improving onboarding and orientation practices for school employees and new students. In the literature review, data reveals the need to address the effects of social isolation through robust forms of professional training for all involved in online education and onboarding new students (Lambert, 2020). Additionally, when the needed preparation and onboarding strategies align with safe and trustworthy opportunities to interact, one's intellectual development benefits (Abduraxmanova, 2022 & Lakhali et al., 2020). The findings of the study concur. In the words of Participant 14, "I would have liked an onboarding/orientation class to help feel more confident and less isolated." Participant 14's greatest sense of social isolation came at the beginning of the semester. Therefore, the empirical implication from Participant 14 and others within the study is that social isolation can be mitigated for the student before it becomes an issue should the correct resources be offered before the class begins.

Limitations and Delimitations

Qualified participants were invited to join the preceding study voluntarily by offering their unique stories regarding online education at AGUSA schools of higher learning. There were two primary sample groups and two primary site locations. The sample groups and site locations are associated with the Assemblies of God, USA denomination. No participants or site locations were unaffiliated with Assemblies of God, USA denomination. Sample group 1 is the Leader Group, comprised of online administrators, staff, and faculty from AGUSA-affiliated schools. Sample group 2 is the Learner Group, comprised of online students at AGUSA-affiliated schools. Individuals had to meet specific criteria to participate in one or both groups. These conditions helped narrow the study's scope and define its goals. In what follows, the limitations and delimitations of the study are put forward.

Limitations

This section communicates the potential weaknesses of the study that were outside the researcher's control. After following all IRB recommendations about gaining access to site locations and recruiting participants, the following age-specific limitation emerged. It was the researcher's hope that, to participate in group 2, one should be between the ages of 18 and 23. Though dozens of emails from department leads in both site locations were sent to this age group, only three responded that they were interested in participating. That said, once these three individuals understood the time commitment required to participate and saw the length of the participant consent form, all three chose not to involve themselves in the study. In consultation with Liberty University's IRB on this matter, it was recommended that the researcher move forward with the study so long as the participants met all the other criteria and that no changes were made to the pre-approved study goals, data collection, and recruitment plans. In total, 17

people who met the study's criteria signed official consent forms. The only limitation of the study that was outside the researcher's control was their ages.

Delimitations

This section expresses the delimitations of the study. The following criteria set the self-imposed boundaries of the study made by the researcher. Firstly, all site locations needed to be AGUSA-affiliated schools of higher learning that offer online classes with no required in-person meet-ups. Secondly, all participants need to meet the following sets of criteria. A qualified leader group participant needed to have at least one year of experience with post-secondary online education in an AGUSA-affiliated school. Faculty, staff, and administrators were welcome to participate if they have had at least one year of experience in facilitating online education for an AGUSA school. For the learner group, qualified individuals must have taken at least two classes online at AGUSA-affiliated schools requiring no in-person gatherings. All participants in both groups needed to be 18 or older. Some participants met the criteria for both groups and, therefore, were able to make contributions to the study as leaders and learners.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the study's findings, limitations, and delimitations placed on the study, I make the following recommendations and directions for future studies. During the recruitment of participants, it became clear that the data-collecting methods were problematic for the youngest college students regarding the perceived time commitment and personal effort it would take to be included. In a future study, one might consider a quantitative approach while utilizing brief surveys and questionnaires that would take less time to complete and may be less intimidating to younger participants. Based on the findings of this study, it is my informed opinion that different age groups experience feelings of social isolation and its corresponding problems uniquely. As

Participant 13 brought out in their interview, "[Students] are very sensitive at the undergraduate level. They are very sensitive to connectivity with other human being. They are perfectly okay if it is online, but they want to have a level of communication that far surpasses the expectation of an older student oftentimes." Therefore, future studies should recruit participants from differing age groups using methods that appeal to those age groups and perform the study to ascertain the effects of social isolation on those in remote learning.

Secondly, after further examination of the outcomes of the study and its corresponding thematic evidence, I recommend that a new qualitative study be made regarding innovative online approaches to extracurricular activities. Though participants were agreeable and amenable to offering online extracurriculars, all of the participants in this study had yet to personally experience or offer an example of an online equivalent to clubs, sports, fine arts performances, online lounges, and food courts. In speaking of these extracurriculars, Participant 12 stated that "there are online parallels to all of those kinds of things if you choose them." The study revealed that these are the places that in-person campuses offer to create spaces for students and staff to naturally gather and interact with one another. These environments must be reimagined for the online frontier of education. One Participant referred to online education as the "wild-west" of AGUSA schools of higher education, meaning there is still a lot to learn and new things to discover. I recommend a new qualitative study that focuses on discovering these online environments so that they can be applied where needed in AGUSA schools.

Conclusion

The preceding transcendental phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of 17 highly qualified and purposefully chosen participants who have taught and taken online courses at AGUSA schools of higher learning. The primary focal point of the study was to see how online education may impede formal and informal pathways to academic persistence and social integration within academic performance, extracurricular activities, faculty and staff relations, and peer-group interactions. Moreover, this phenomenological research exposes the emotional and educational influences of social isolation caused by online/remote learning and how those at AGUSA schools may form strategies to overcome these relational barriers. The thematic and empirical data agree with the results of the data gleaned through one-on-one interviews, group chats, and journal entries from the participants. The culmination of these findings concurs that healthy online academic environments are built upon the principles of strong social integration. These ideals include administrators who equip and empower their teams, supportive and available professors, user-friendly learning tools, emotional and spiritual support structures, and extracurricular activities. According to the findings, these elements coalesce to strengthen the academic performance and social integration of the student and the professional satisfaction of the professor. The research suggests that the most important element that threads through all of these principles is personal, open, honest, and timely communication from three parties. These groups include administration, professors, and students. The data is conclusive. All three parties have particular responsibilities about communication. If one fails to uphold their part, academic performance and social integration break down for the student, and professional satisfaction for the professor suffers. Future research that targets explicitly different

generations and how they view the content of the study is suggested, along with efforts to discover new methods for online extracurricular activities.

Appendix 1

Date: 9-26-2023

IRB #: IRB-FY23-24-213

Title: REMOTELY CLOSE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF HOW ONLINE EDUCATION MAY IMPEDE ACADEMIC PERSISTENCE AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION.

Creation Date: 8-9-2023

End Date:

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Daniel Day

Review Board: Research Ethics Office

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type Initial	Review Type Limited	Decision Exempt - Limited IRB
--------------------------------	----------------------------	---

Key Study Contacts

Member Patricia Ferrin	Role Co-Principal Investigator	Contact [REDACTED]
Member Daniel Day	Role Principal Investigator	Contact [REDACTED]
Member Daniel Day	Role Primary Contact	Contact [REDACTED]

References

- Abdullah, F., & Kauser, S. (2022). Students' perspective on online learning during pandemic in higher education. *Quality & Quantity*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-022-01470-1>
- Abduraxmanova, S. A. (2022). Individualization of professional education process on the basis of digital technologies. *World Bulletin of Social Sciences*, 8, 65-67.
- Abel, J. R., & Deitz, R. (2019). *Despite Rising Costs, College Is Still a Good Investment*. Liberty Street Economics. <https://libtystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/>
- Adi Badiozaman, I. F., Leong, H. J., & Wong, W. (2022). Embracing educational disruption: A case study in making the shift to a remote learning environment. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 14(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-08-2020-0256>
- Aguas, P. (2022). Fusing approaches in educational research: Data collection and data analysis in phenomenological research. *Qualitative Report*, 27(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5027>
- Alam, F., Lim, Y. C., Chaw, L. L., Idris, F., & Kok, K. Y. Y. (2023). Multiple mini-interviews is a predictor of students' academic achievements in early undergraduate medical years: A retrospective study. *BMC Medical Education*, 23(1), 187-187. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-023-04183-7>
- Alcuetas, E. S. (2019). *Becoming a better version of me: A study on the resiliency of reunified young adult Filipino immigrants in Norway* (Master's thesis, University of Stavanger, Norway).
- Alenezi, M. (2023). Digital learning and digital institution in higher education. *Education Sciences*, 13(1), 88.

- Alias, N. A. & Zainuddin, A. M. (2005) Innovation for better teaching and learning: Adopting the learning management system. *Malaysian Online Journal of Instructional Technology*, 2(2), 27-40.
- Almalag, H. M., Saja, M., Abouzaid, H. H., Aljuffali, L., Alzamil, H., Almater, L., Alothman, L., & Alzamel, F. (2022). Evaluation of a multidisciplinary extracurricular event using kolb's experiential learning theory: A qualitative study. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, 15, 2957-2967. <https://doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S389932>
- Allan, J. F., & McKenna, J. (2019). Outdoor adventure builds resilient learners for higher education: A quantitative analysis of the active components of positive change. *Sports*, 7(5), 122.
- Alshammari, M. K., Othman, M. H., Mydin, Y. O., & Mohammed, B. A. (2023). The Effect of Social Isolation on the Mental Health of International Students.
- Andrade, M. S., Miller, R. M., McArthur, D., & Ogden, M. (2022). The impact of learning on student persistence in higher education. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 24(2), 316-336. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025120915576>
- Antonini, F. O., & Heideman, I. T. (2020). Paulo Freire's research itinerary: Contributions for promoting health in the teaching profession. *Revista Brasileira De Enfermagem*, 73(4). <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2019-0164>
- Antoniou, S. A., & Antoniou, G. A. (2020). The GRADE approach to appraising the evidence or how to increase the credibility of your research. *The American Journal of Surgery*, 220(2), 290-293. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjsurg.2020.01.021>

- Arbaugh, J. B. (2001). How instructor immediacy behaviors affect student satisfaction and learning in web-based courses. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 64(4), 42-54.
- Aslam, S., Akram, H., Saleem, A., & Zhang, B. (2021). Experiences of international medical students enrolled in chinese medical institutions towards online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. *PeerJ (San Francisco, CA)*, 9, e12061-e12061. <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.12061>.
- Aydin, İ. (2021). Investigation of higher education instructors' perspectives towards emergency remote teaching. *Educational Media International*, 58(1), 78-98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2021.1908501>
- Aziz Ansari, K., Farooqi, F., Qadir Khan, S., Alhareky, M., C. Trinidad, M. A., Abidi, T., & Muzaheed, M. (2021). Perception on online teaching and learning among health sciences students in higher education institutions during the COVID-19 lockdown - ways to improve teaching and learning in saudi colleges and universities [version 1; peer review: 2 approved]. *F1000 Research*, 10, 177. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.28178.1>
- Baird, L. L. (2000). College climate and the Tinto model. *Reworking the student departure puzzle*, 62-80.
- Baker, B., & Chenery-Morris, S. (2020). Understanding research: 8. methods of data collection in qualitative methodologies: Observation, interviews and focus groups. *The Practicing Midwife*, 23(11) <https://doi.org/10.55975/MNRQ8297>
- Baker, C. K., & Bitto, L. E. (2021). Fostering a critical friendship between a program coordinator and an online adjunct to achieve reciprocal mentoring. *Studying Teacher Education*, 17(2), 188-207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2021.1903413>.

- Bali, M. (2020, April 16). *Literacies teachers need during Covid-19*. <https://blog.mahabali.me/>.
<https://blog.mahabali.me/pedagogy/critical-pedagogy/care-is-not-a-fad-care-beyond-covid-19/>
- Barreto, D., Oyarzun, B., & Conklin, S. (2022). Integration of cooperative learning strategies in online settings. *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 19(6), 574-594. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20427530221104187>
- Bartkus, K. R., Nemelka, B., Nemelka, M., & Gardner, P. (2012). Clarifying the meaning of extracurricular activity: a literature review of definitions. *American Journal of Business Education (AJBE)*, 5(6), 693–704. <https://doi.org/10.19030/ajbe.v5i6.7391>
- Beam, A. P. (2023). Creating Meaningful Relationships in the Online Environment: Building Rapport With the Adult Learner. In *Motivation and Momentum in Adult Online Education* (pp. 18-34). IGI Global.
- Bednall, J. (2006). Epoche and bracketing within the phenomenological paradigm. *Issues in Educational Research*, 16(2), 123-138.
- Behera, A. K., de Sousa, R. A., Oleksik, V., Dong, J., & Fritzen, D. (2022). Student perceptions of remote learning transitions in engineering disciplines during the COVID-19 pandemic: A cross-national study. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, ahead-of-print (ahead-of-print), 1-33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03043797.2022.2080529>
- Bergman, B., Negretti, R., Spencer-Oatey, H., & Stöhr, C. (2023). Integrating Home and International Students in HE: Academic and Social Effects of Pair Work PBL Assignments Online. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10283153221150117.

- Bergmark, U., Lundström, S., Manderstedt, L., & Palo, A. (2018). Why become a teacher? student teachers' perceptions of the teaching profession and motives for career choice. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *41*(3), 266–281.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2018.1448784>
- Berry, S. (2019). Comparing and contrasting the perspectives of online students and faculty. *Online Learning*, *23*(4). <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v23i4.2038>
- Bettinger, E. P., Castleman, B. L., Choe, A., & Mabel, Z. (2022). Finishing the last lap: Experimental evidence on strategies to increase attainment for students near college completion. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *41*(4), 1040-1059. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22416>
- Bickman, L., Rog, D. J., & Best, S. J. (2009). *The sage handbook of applied social research methods*. SAGE.
- Blake, H., Knight, H., Jia, R., Corner, J., Morling, J. R., Denning, C., Ball, J. K., Bolton, K., Figueredo, G., Morris, D. E., Tighe, P., Villalon, A. M., Ayling, K., & Vedhara, K. (2021). Students' views towards SARS-COV-2 mass asymptomatic testing, social distancing and self-isolation in a university setting during the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(8), 4182. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18084182>
- Bondani, M., Chiofalo, M. L., Ercolessi, E., Macchiavello, C., Malgieri, M., Michelini, M., Mishina, O., Onorato, P., Pallotta, F., Satanassi, S., Stefanel, A., Sutrini, C., Testa, I., & Zuccarini, G. (2022). Introducing quantum technologies at secondary school level: Challenges and potential impact of an online extracurricular course. *Physics (Online)*, *4*(4), 1150-1167. <https://doi.org/10.3390/physics4040075>

- Bouchrika, I. (2022). *What is the oldest university in the world?* Research.com. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://research.com/universities-colleges/oldest-university-in-the-world>
- Bower, M. E. M. (2023). Phenomenological reduction and the nature of perceptual experience. *Husserl Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10743-023-09324-w>
- Brinia, V., & Psoni, P. (2022). Online teaching practicum during COVID-19: The case of a teacher education program in greece. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, *14*(2), 610-624. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-07-2020-0223>
- Broadbent, J., & Howe, W. D. (2023). Help-seeking matters for online learners who are unconfident. *Distance Education*, 1-14.
- Butnaru, G. I., Haller, A., Dragolea, L., Anichiti, A., & Tacu Hârșan, G. (2021). Students' wellbeing during transition from onsite to online education: Are there risks arising from social isolation? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(18), 9665. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18189665>
- Butnaru, G. I., Niță, V., Anichiti, A., & Brînză, G. (2021). The effectiveness of online education during covid 19 Pandemic—A comparative analysis between the perceptions of academic students and high school students from romania. *Sustainability (Basel, Switzerland)*, *13*(9), 5311. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13095311>
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, *25*(8), 652-661. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206>

- Cao, X. (2023). Case study of china's compulsory education system: AI apps and extracurricular dance learning. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction, ahead-of-print*(ahead-of-print), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2023.2188539>
- Castelli, F. R., & Sarvary, M. A. (2021). Why students do not turn on their video cameras during online classes and an equitable and inclusive plan to encourage them to do so. *Ecology and Evolution, 11*(8), 3565–3576. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.7123>
- Chen, D. (2022). Application of IoT-oriented online education platform in english teaching. *Mathematical Problems in Engineering, 2022*, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/9606706>
- Chen, T., Luo, H., Feng, Q., & Li, G. (2023). Effect of technology acceptance on blended learning satisfaction: The serial mediation of emotional experience, social belonging, and higher-order thinking. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 20*(5), 4442.
- Chen, V., Sandford, A., LaGrone, M., Charbonneau, K., Kong, J., & Ragavaloo, S. (2022). An exploration of instructors' and students' perspectives on remote delivery of courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 53*(3), 512-533. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13205>
- Chickering, A.W.; Ginzom, Z.F. Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education: Faculty Inventory. *Inst. Inventory*; 1989; 17, pp. 140-141. [DOI: [https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0307-4412\(89\)90094-0](https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0307-4412(89)90094-0)]
- Clark, K., & Breiland, A. (2023). “I want my PRC”: engagement of undergraduates with and assessment of the peer research consultant program. *Reference Services Review*, (ahead-of-print).

- Closa, C. (2021). Planning, implementing and reporting: Increasing transparency, replicability and credibility in qualitative political science research. *European Political Science*, 20(2), 270-280. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-020-00299-2>
- Cobb, C. A., Watson, C. T., & Ellis, S. R. (2018). Establishing best practices for effective online learning modules: A single institution study. *Medical Science Educator*, 28(4), 683–691. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40670-018-0613-7>
- Conrad, C., Deng, Q., Caron, I., Shkurska, O., Skerrett, P., & Sundararajan, B. (2022). How student perceptions about online learning difficulty influenced their satisfaction during Canada's Covid-19 response. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 53(3), 534-557.
- Cooke, B. D., Rossmann, M. M., McCubbin, H. I., & Patterson, J. M. (1988). Examining the definition and assessment of social support: A resource for individuals and families. *Family relations*, 211-216.
- Cooper, K. L. (2023). The Benefits of Hybrid Picking in an Undergraduate Guitar Curriculum to Equip Students for a Diverse Performance Career.
- Cope, D. (2014). Methods and Meanings: Credibility and Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 2014, 98-91. <https://onf.ons.org/pubs/article/233111/download>
- Creswell, J. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN: 1506386709
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

- Cridland, C., Drape, T., Marine, S., & Gillaspay, G. (2021). Ten best practices for taking experiential learning online. *Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Education*, 49(1), 9–14. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bmb.21477>
- Cudjoe, E. (2023). Making Sense of Husserlian Phenomenological Philosophy in Empirical Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, 16094069231171099.
- Cudjoe, T. K. M., & Kotwal, A. A. (2020). “Social distancing” amid a crisis in social isolation and loneliness. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society (JAGS)*, 68(6), E27-E29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.16527>
- Cung, B., Xu, D., & Eichhorn, S. (2018). Increasing Interpersonal Interactions in an Online Course: Does Increased Instructor Email Activity and Voluntary Meeting Time in a Physical Classroom Facilitate Student Learning?. *Online Learning*, 22(3), 193-215.
- David Carlson, J., & Dobson, T. (2020). Fostering empathy through an inclusive pedagogy for career creatives. *The International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 39(2), 430-444. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12289>.
- Dayal, S. (2023). Online education and its effect on teachers during COVID-19-A case study from india. *PloS One*, 18(3), e0282287-e0282287. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0282287>
- Davidson, C., & Wilson, K. (2013). Reassessing Tinto's concepts of social and academic integration in student retention. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 15(3), 329–346. <https://doi.org/10.2190/cs.15.3.b>

- Dhanjal, R., Dine, K., Gerdt, J., Merrill, K., Frykas, T. L. M., & Protudjer, J. L. (2023). An online, peer-mentored food allergy education program improves children's and parents' confidence. *Allergy, Asthma, and Clinical Immunology*, *19*(1), 47-47. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13223-023-00800-8>
- Dong, Y., & Ishige, A. (2022). Studying abroad from home: An exploration of international graduate students' perceptions and experiences of emergency remote teaching. *Education Sciences*, *12*(2), 98. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12020098>
- Doolittle, P. E. (1994, November 30). *Understanding cooperative learning through Vygotsky's zone of proximal development*. ERIC. Retrieved November 23, 2022, from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED384575>
- Douglas, B. D., Ewell, P. J., & Brauer, M. (2023). Data quality in online human-subjects research: Comparisons between MTurk, Prolific, CloudResearch, Qualtrics, and SONA. *Plos one*, *18*(3), e0279720.
- Dragolea, L., & Topor, D. I. (2022). perspectives on implementing kaizen method for the improvement of academic online teaching. *Annales Universitatis Apulensis : Series Oeconomica*, *24*(1), 96-106. <https://doi.org/10.29302/oeconomica.2022.24.1.8>
- Erdem-Echenique, F. , & Fryer, R. G. (2007). A measure of segregation based on social interactions. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *122*(2), 441–485.
- English Standard Version Bible, (2001). ESV Online. <https://esv.literalword.com/>
- Erdem-Aydin, İ. (2021). Investigation of higher education instructors' perspectives towards emergency remote teaching. *Educational Media International*, *58*(1), 78-98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2021.1908501>

- Eriksen, E. V., & Bru, E. (2023). Investigating the links of social-emotional competencies: emotional well-being and academic engagement among adolescents. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 67(3), 391-405.
- Espasa, A., Mayordomo, R. M., Guasch, T., & Martinez-Melo, M. (2022). Does the type of feedback channel used in online learning environments matter? Students' perceptions and impact on learning. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 23(1), 49-63.
- Eun, B. (2019). The zone of proximal development as an overarching concept: A framework for synthesizing vygotsky's theories. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 51(1), 18-30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1421941>
- Farmer, P. C., King, D., & Mattos, M. (2022). Virtual PLCs at work: A guide to effectively implementing online and hybrid teaching and learning. Solution Tree Press.
- Felder, R. M., & Brent, R. (2004). The intellectual development of Science and engineering students. part 1: Models and challenges. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 93(4), 269–277. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2168-9830.2004.tb00816.x>
- Feraco, T., Resnati, D., Fregonese, D., Spoto, A., & Meneghetti, C. (2023). An integrated model of school students' academic achievement and life satisfaction. linking soft skills, extracurricular activities, self-regulated learning, motivation, and emotions. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 38(1), 109-130. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-022-00601-4>
- Ferri, F., Grifoni, P., & Guzzo, T. (2020). Online learning and emergency remote teaching: Opportunities and challenges in emergency situations. *Societies (Basel, Switzerland)*, 10(4), 86. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc10040086>

- Fibriasari, H., Andayani, W., Putri, T. T. A., & Harianja, N. (2023). Learning Management System Now and in The Future: Study Case from the Indonesian University Students. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology (IJJET)*, 13(1), 158-165.
- Frith, K. M. (2023). *Examining adult learners' engagement in an online course: A qualitative study*.
- Fülöp, M. T., Breaz, T. O., Topor, I. D., Ionescu, C. A., & Dragolea, L. L. (2023). Challenges and perceptions of e-learning for educational sustainability in the “new normality era”. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1104633.
- Garcia-Vedrenne, A. E., Orland, C., Ballare, K. M., Shapiro, B., & Wayne, R. K. (2020). Ten strategies for a successful transition to remote learning: Lessons learned with a flipped course. *Ecology and Evolution*, 10(22), 12620-12634. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.6760>
- Garza-Rodríguez. (2022). Pre-Service Teachers’ Narratives: Why Did I Decide to Become an English Language Teacher? *How : a Colombian Journal for English Teachers.*, 29(2), 101–117. <https://doi.org/10.19183/how.29.2.718>
- George, A., McEwan, A., & Tarr, J. (2021). Accountability in educational dialogue on attrition rates: Understanding external attrition factors and isolation in online law school. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 37(1), 111-132. <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.6175>

- Glyn-Jones, S. (2023). *An Ethnographic Study of 'Resurface' : a Wellbeing Intervention for University Students* (Order No. 30532225). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2810062296).
- Grimaldi, E., & Ball, S. J. (2021). Paradoxes of freedom. an archaeological analysis of educational online platform interfaces. *Critical Studies in Education*, 62(1), 114-129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2020.1861043>
- Gobec, C., Turnbull, M., & Rillotta, F. (2022). Lessons learnt from transitioning to online mentoring and learning at university during COVID-19 for adults with intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 26(4), 869-884.
- Gong, J., & Pan, J. (2023). The returns to an additional year of education for college graduates. *Journal of Public Economics*, 218, 104796.
- Greenhow, C., Graham, C. R., & Koehler, M. J. (2022). Foundations of Online Learning: Challenges and opportunities. *Educational Psychologist*, 57(3), 131–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2022.2090364>
- Greenland, S. J., & Moore, C. (2022). Large qualitative sample and thematic analysis to redefine student dropout and retention strategy in open online education. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 53(3), 647-667.
- Grimaldi, E., & Ball, S. J. (2021). Paradoxes of freedom. an archaeological analysis of educational online platform interfaces. *Critical Studies in Education*, 62(1), 114-129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2020.1861043>
- Guinta, B. (2023). *Who's responsible for your busy schedule?*. Uloop, Inc.
- Gunawardena, M., & Dhanapala, K. V. (2023). Barriers to Removing Barriers of Online Learning. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 52(1), 17.

- Guo, P., Saab, N., Wu, L., & Admiraal, W. (2021). The community of inquiry perspective on students' social presence, cognitive presence, and academic performance in online project-based learning. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 37(5), 1479-1493. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12586>
- Hadi, M. A., & José Closs, S. (2016). Ensuring rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research in clinical pharmacy. *International Journal of Clinical Pharmacy*, 38(3), 641-646. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11096-015-0237-6>
- Hai-Jew, S. (2023). "Future Is Yours": Motivating Online Learners in Higher Education Through a Package of Goods (in the COVID-19 Pandemic). In *Handbook of Research on Revisioning and Reconstructing Higher Education After Global Crises* (pp. 34-84). IGI Global.
- Haim-Litevsky, D., Komemi, R., & Lipskaya-Velikovsky, L. (2023). Sense of Belonging, Meaningful Daily Life Participation, and Well-Being: Integrated Investigation. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 20(5), 4121.
- Han, F., & Ellis, R. A. (2021). Predicting students' academic performance by their online learning patterns in a blended course: To what extent is a theory driven approach and a data driven approach consistent? *Educational Technology & Society*, 24(1), 191-204.
- Han, H., Lien, D., Lien, J. W., & Zheng, J. (2022). Online or face-to-face? competition among MOOC and regular education providers. *International Review of Economics & Finance*, 80, 857-881. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iref.2022.02.061>.

- Hanif, A., & Imran, M. (2022). when technology-based learning is the only option: Evaluating perceived usefulness of social media. *The Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education TOJDE*, 23(2), 107-119. <https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.1096252>
- Hanna, M. A. (2020). *Investigating new CTE teachers' training and support and how it influences teacher efficacy* (Publication No. 28029055) [Doctoral dissertation, Liberty University]. ProQuest Dissertation.
<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertationstheses%2Finvestigatingnewcteteteacherstrainingsupport%2Fdocview%2F2449437137%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>
- Harefa, S., & Sihombing, G. L. A. (2022). Students' perception of online learning amidst the covid-19 pandemic: A study of junior, senior high school and college students in a remote area [version 2; peer review: 1 approved, 1 approved with reservations]. *F1000 Research*, 10, 867-867. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.52152.2>
- Hartong, S., & Decuypere, M. (2023). Platformed professional(itie)s and the ongoing digital transformation of education. *Tertium Comparationis*, 29(1), 1–21.
<https://doi.org/10.31244/tc.2023.01.01>
- He, S., Jiang, S., Zhu, R., & Hu, X. (2023). The influence of educational and emotional support on e-learning acceptance: An integration of social support theory and TAM. *Education and Information Technologies*, 1-21.
- Hedges, H. (2021). Contemporary principles to lead understandings of children's learning: Synthesizing vygotsky, rogooff, wells and lindfors. *Early Child Development and Care*, 191(7-8), 1056-1065. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1849169>

- Hehir, E., Zeller, M., Luckhurst, J., & Chandler, T. (2021). Developing student connectedness under remote learning using digital resources: A systematic review. *Education and Information Technologies, 26*(5), 6531-6548. doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10577-1
- Hensley, L. C., Iaconelli, R., & Wolters, C. A. (2022). "this weird time we're in": How a sudden change to remote education impacted college students' self-regulated learning. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 54*(S1), S203-S218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2021.1916414>
- Hicks, L. (2019, January). *Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE Liberty University - Social & Behavioral Researchers*. CITI. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.citiprogram.org/members/index.cfm?pageID=665&ce=1#view>
- Higher education*. Assemblies of God (USA) Official Web Site | Higher Education. (n.d.). Retrieved October 29, 2022, from <https://colleges.ag.org/>
- History - evangel university: Your calling. our passion*. Evangel University. (2021, September 30). Retrieved October 29, 2022, from <https://www.evangel.edu/about/university-overview/history/>
- Hoi, V. N., & Le Hang, H. (2021). The structure of student engagement in online learning: A bi-factor exploratory structural equation modelling approach. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 37*(4), 1141-1153. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12551>
- Hoffman, M., & Blake, J. (2003). Computer literacy: Today and tomorrow. *Journal of Computing Sciences in Colleges, 18*(5), 221-233.

- Hogan, D. A. (2021). *A Qualitative study of secondary administrators' perceptions of career and technical education* (Publication No. 28316782) [Doctoral dissertation, Liberty University]. Pro Quest Dissertation.
<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertationstheses%2Fqualitativestudysecondaryadministrators%2Fdocview%2F2533378605%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>
- Hopkins, E. A. (2008). Work-related learning: Hearing students' voices. *Educational Action Research, 16*(2), 209-219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650790802011858>
- Hosseini, S., Peluffo, D., Okoye, K., & Nganji, J. T. (2021). The impact of technological advancements on educational innovation (VSI-tei). *Computers & Electrical Engineering, 93*, 107333. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compeleceng.2021.107333>
- Howard, S. & Johnson, B. (2000). What makes the difference? Children and teachers talk about resilient outcomes for children 'at risk'. *Educational Studies, 26*, 321-337.
- Hu, X., Song, Y., Zhu, R., He, S., Zhou, B., Li, X., Bao, H., Shen, S., & Liu, B. (2022). Understanding the impact of emotional support on mental health resilience of the community in the social media in Covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 308*, 360–368.
- Huo, Y., Messenger, R. A., & Miller, D. (2022). Students' perspectives on why they drop out and possible retention strategies. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning, 12*(5), 849-865. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-10-2021-0189>

- Isopahkala-Bouret, U., Siivonen, P., & Haltia, N. (2023). 'some people may feel socially excluded and distressed': Finnish business students' participation in extracurricular activities and the accumulation of cultural capital. *Journal of Education and Work, 36*(1), 52-64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2022.2162017>
- Jacinto, H. (2023). Engaging students in mathematical problem solving with technology during a pandemic: The case of the Tecn@Mat club. *Education Sciences, 13*(3), 271. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13030271>
- Jafar, A., Dollah, R., Mittal, P., Idris, A., Kim, J. E., Abdullah, M. S., ... & Vun Hung, C. (2023). Readiness and challenges of e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic era: A space analysis in Peninsular Malaysia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 20*(2), 905.
- Jaggars, S. S., & Xu, D. (2016). How do online course design features influence student performance?. *Computers & Education, 95*, 270-284.
- Jeffreys, M. R. (2022). Nursing universal retention and success (NURS) model: A holistic, discipline-focused framework. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 24*(3), 650-675. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025120939254>
- Jieyi, H., Kiu, C. C., & Baojian, X. (2022). How academic performance influences social integration: The moderation effect of cultural distance among chinese cross-borderers. *Brain and Behavior, 12*(10), e2759-n/a. <https://doi.org/10.1002/brb3.2759>

- Kansal, A. K., Gautam, J., Chintalapudi, N., Jain, S., & Battineni, G. (2021). Google trend analysis and paradigm shift of online education platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Infectious Disease Reports, 13*(2), 418-428. <https://doi.org/10.3390/idr13020040>
- Kaufmann, R., & Vallade, J. I. (2022). Exploring connections in the online learning environment: student perceptions of rapport, climate, and loneliness. *Interactive Learning Environments, 30*(10), 1794-1808.
- Keaton, W., & Gilbert, A. (2020). Successful Online Learning: What Does Learner Interaction with Peers, Instructors and Parents Look Like? *Journal of Online Learning Research, 6*(2), 135–136.
- Keazer, L. M. (2023). Creating a context for graduate student learning through constructivist inquiry: Introduction to academia as learning through play. *Theory into Practice, 62*(1), 50-61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2022.2135908>
- Khan, S., Kambris, M. E. K., & Alfalahi, H. (2022). Perspectives of university students and faculty on remote education experiences during COVID-19- a qualitative study. *Education and Information Technologies, 27*(3), 4141-4169. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10784-w>
- Kim, S., Jeong, H., Cho, H., & Yu, J. (2023). Extracurricular activities in medical education: An integrative literature review. *BMC Medical Education, 23*(1), 278-278. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-023-04245-w>

- Kim, T., Yang, M., Bae, J., Min, B., Lee, I., & Kim, J. (2017). Escape from infinite freedom: Effects of constraining user freedom on the prevention of dropout in an online learning context. *Computers in Human Behavior, 66*, 217-231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.09.019>
- Kinasevych, O. (2010). The effect of culture on online learning. *Proceedings Cultural Attitude Towards Communication and Technology* 420–427. School of Information Technology Murdoch University, Australia.
- Kollalpitiya, K. Y., Partigianoni, C. M., & Admond, D. A. (2020). The role of communication in the Success/Failure of remote learning of chemistry during COVID-19. *Journal of Chemical Education, 97*(9), 3386-3390. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.0c00772>
- Kranzow, J. (2013). Faculty Leadership in Online Education: Structuring Courses to Impact Student Satisfaction and Persistence. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 9*(1).
- Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12*, 480-500.
- Kwon, R., Zhang, M. L., & VandenBussche, C. J. (2020). Considerations for remote learning in pathology during COVID-19 social distancing. *Cancer Cytopathology, 128*(9), 642-647. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cncy.22289>
- Lai, C.-H., Lin, H.-W., Lin, R.-M., & Tho, P. D. (2019). Effect of peer interaction among online learning community on learning engagement and achievement. *International Journal of Distance Education Technologies, 17*(1), 66–77. <https://doi.org/10.4018/ijdet.2019010105>

- Lakhal, S., Mukamurera, J., Bédard, M.-E., Heilporn, G., & Chauret, M. (2020). Features fostering academic and social integration in blended synchronous courses in graduate programs. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-0180-z>
- Lambert, D., & Rosales, B. M. (2020). California school districts struggled to prepare teachers for distance learning this fall. *EdSource: Oakland, CA, USA*.
- Lambert, S. R. (2019). Six critical dimensions: A model for widening participation in open, online and blended programs. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 35(6), 161–182. <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.5683>
- Larreameydy-Joerns, J., & Leinhardt, G. (2006). Going the distance with online education. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(4), 567-605. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543076004567>
- Leal Filho, W., Wall, T., Rayman-Bacchus, L., Mifsud, M., Pritchard, D. J., Lovren, V. O., Farinha, C., Petrovic, D. S., & Balogun, A.-L. (2021). Impacts of covid-19 and social isolation on academic staff and students at universities: A cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11040-z>
- Lee, Y., Choi, J., & Kim, T. (2013). Discriminating factors between completers of and dropouts from online learning courses. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 44(2), 328-337. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2012.01306.x>
- Levykh, M. G. (2008). the affective establishment and maintenance of vygotsky's zone of proximal development. *Educational Theory*, 58(1), 83-101. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2007.00277.x>

- Li, J., & Wang, R. (2023). Machine learning adoption in educational institutions: Role of internet of things and digital educational platforms. *Sustainability (Basel, Switzerland)*, *15*(5), 4000. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15054000>
- Li, L., & Huang, W. (2023). Effects of undergraduate student reviewers' ability on comments provided, reviewing behavior, and performance in an online video peer assessment activity. *Educational Technology & Society*, *26*(2), 76-93. [https://doi.org/10.30191/ETS.202304_26\(2\).0006](https://doi.org/10.30191/ETS.202304_26(2).0006)
- Li, L., Shi, J., & Zhong, B. (2023). Good in arts, good at computer? Rural students' computer skills are bolstered by arts and science literacies. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *140*, 107573.
- Li, Y., Li, S., Wei, C., & Liu, J. (2020). How students' friendship network affects their GPA ranking: A data-driven approach linking friendship with daily behaviour. *Information Technology & People (West Linn, Or.)*, *33*(2), 535-553. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-03-2018-0148>
- Lim, L. T. S., Regencia, Z. J. G., Dela Cruz, J. R. C., Ho, F. D. V., Rodolfo, M. S., Ly-Uson, J., & Baja, E. S. (2022). Assessing the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, shift to online learning, and social media use on the mental health of college students in the Philippines: A mixed-method study protocol. *Plos one*, *17*(5), e0267555.
- Lin, T. C., Hsu, J. S. C., Cheng, H. L., & Chiu, C. M. (2015). Exploring the relationship between receiving and offering online social support: a dual social support model. *Information & management*, *52*(3), 371–383.

- Liu, C., & Ma, J. (2020). Social support through online social networking sites and addiction among college students: the mediating roles of fear of missing out and problematic smartphone use. *Current Psychology*, *39*(6), 1892–1899.
- Liu, R., & Liu, E. (2000). Institutional Integration: An Analysis of Tinto's Theory.
- Luo, N., Li, H., Zhao, L., Wu, Z., & Zhang, J. (2022). Promoting student engagement in online learning through harmonious classroom environment. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, *31*(5), 541-551.
- Macmillan English dictionary for Advanced Learners*. (2007). Macmillan.
- Mannan, M. (2007). Student attrition and academic and social integration: Application of Tinto's model at the University of Papua New Guinea. *Higher Education*, *53*(2), 147–165.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-005-2496-y>
- Martin, A. (2002). Motivation and academic resilience: Developing a model for student enhancement. *Australian journal of education*, *46*(1), 34-49.
- Marzouki, Y., Aldossari, F. S., & Veltri, G. A. (2021). Understanding the buffering effect of social media use on anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *8*(1), 1–10.
- Means, B., Bakia, M., & Murphy, R. (2014). *Learning online: What research tells us about whether, when and how*. Routledge.
- Mecida, S. V., Barron, K. R. O., Lemana, H. I., Oberez, A. E. O., Sampulna, A. K., Huesca, S. M. M., ... & Baculi, O. L. E. W. (2023). Contextual Effects of Video Tutorials on The Academic Performance of STEM 12 Students.

- Mercer, T. G., Kythreotis, A. P., Harwood, J., Robinson, Z. P., George, S. M., Sands, D., & Sims, T. (2023). The benefits of virtual fieldtrips for future-proofing geography teaching and learning. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 47(2), 330-338.
- Mizani, H., Cahyadi, A., Hendryadi, H., Salamah, S., & Retno Sari, S. (2022). Loneliness, student engagement, and academic achievement during emergency remote teaching during COVID-19: The role of the god locus of control. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, 9(1), 305-305. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01328-9>
- Morese, R. (2020). *Social isolation: An interdisciplinary view*. IntechOpen.
- Morgan, H. (2022). Alleviating the challenges with remote learning during a pandemic. *Education Sciences*, 12(2), 109. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12020109>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks: CA. Sage Publications. ISBN: 9780803957985.
- Mwita, K. M. (2022). Factors to consider when choosing data collection methods. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 11(5), 532-538. <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v11i5.1842>
- Neroni, J., Meijs, C. J. C., Kirschner, P. A., Xu, M., & de Groot, R. H. M. (2022). Academic self-efficacy, self-esteem, and grit in higher online education: Consistency of interests predicts academic success. *Social Psychology of Education*, 25(4), 951-975. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-022-09696-5>
- Newman, S., & Latifi, A. (2021). Vygotsky, education, and teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching : JET*, 47(1), 4-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1831375>

- Ni, A. Y., Van Wart, M., Medina, P., Collins, K., Silvers, E., & Pei, H. (2021). A profile of MPA students' perceptions of online learning: What MPA students value in online education and what they think would improve online learning experiences. *Journal of Public Affairs Education : J-PAE.*, 27(1), 50
71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2020.1820288>
- Nicklin, L. L., Wilsdon, L., Chadwick, D., Rhoden, L., Ormerod, D., Allen, D., Witton, G., & Lloyd, J. (2022). Accelerated HE digitalisation: Exploring staff and student experiences of the COVID-19 rapid online-learning transfer. *Education and Information Technologies*, 27(6), 7653-7678. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-10899-8>
- Oducado, R. M. F., Amboy, M. K. Q., Penuela, A. C., Dela Rosa, R. D., Fajardo, M. T. M., & Temelo, D. R. F. (2022). Instructors' caring behaviors, burnout, satisfaction, and academic performance of nursing students in online education and the pandemic era. *Frontiers of Nursing*, 9(4), 431-437. <https://doi.org/10.2478/fon-2022-0054>
- Oksala, J. (2023). The method of critical phenomenology: Simone de Beauvoir as a phenomenologist. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 31(1), 137-150.
- Osborne, S., & Hogarth, K. (2021). Mind the gap: The reality of remote learning during COVID-19. *Accounting Research Journal*, 34(3), 323-334. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ARJ-09-2020-0303>
- Ospina García, N., Díaz Velásquez, M. F., Tavera Romero, C. A., Ortiz Monedero, J. H., & Khalaf, O. I. (2021). Remote academic platforms in times of a pandemic. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)*, 16(21), 121.
<https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v16i21.25377>

- Paesani, K. (2020). Teacher professional development and online instruction: Cultivating coherence and sustainability. *Foreign Language Annals*, 53(2), 292-297. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12468>
- Park, J., & Choi, H. J. (2009). Factors influencing adult learners' decision to drop out or persist in online learning. *Educational Technology & Society*, 12(4), 207-217.
- Park, S., & Robinson, P. A. (2022). The effect of online academic coaches on supporting graduate students' performance in intensive online learning environments: A three-course comparison. *European Journal of Training and Development*, 46(1/2), 70-85. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-10-2020-0144>
- Peirce, W. (2003). Strategies for teaching thinking and promoting intellectual development in online classes. *Electronic learning communities: Current issues and best practices*, 301-347.
- Petillion, R. J., & McNeil, W. S. (2020). Student experiences of emergency remote teaching: Impacts of instructor practice on student learning, engagement, and well-being. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 97(9), 2486-2493. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.0c00733>
- Picciano, A. G. (2002). Beyond student perceptions: Issues of interaction, presence, and performance in an online course. *Journal of Asynchronous learning networks*, 6(1), 21-40.
- Pierard, C., Baca, O. and Schultz, A. (2022), "Connecting student employment to student learning and post-graduation goals: findings from a multi-semester study", *Journal of Library Administration*, 62(5), 633-655, doi: 10.1080/01930826.2022.2083441.

- Pilotti, M., & El Alaoui, K. (2023). Lessons learned from online and face-to-face courses: To what extent is students' academic success just a matter of showing up? *The International Journal of Assessment and Evaluation*, *30*(1), 15-32. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7920/CGP/v30i01/15-32>
- Pradana, M., Rahmawan, M. D., Wahyuddin, S., & Imam, R. (2021). Gap analysis of university online learning website from students' perspectives: A case from telkom university, indonesia. *Journal of Physics. Conference Series*, *1752*(1), 12069. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1752/1/012069>
- Ospina García, N., Díaz Velásquez, M. F., Tavera Romero, C. A., Ortiz Monedero, J. H., & Khalaf, O. I. (2021). Remote academic platforms in times of a pandemic. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)*, *16*(21), 121. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v16i21.25377>
- Ramos Salazar, L., & Meador, A. (2023). College students' grit, autonomous learning, and well-being: Self-control as a mediator. *Psychology in the Schools*, *60*(1), 53-77.
- Rath, L., Olmstead, K., Zhang, J., & Beach, P. (2019). Hearing students' voices: Understanding student perspectives of online learning. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, *22*(4)
- Riboldi, I., Capogrosso, C. A., Piacenti, S., Calabrese, A., Lucini Paioni, S., Bartoli, F., ... & Taylor, C. (2023). Mental health and COVID-19 in university students: findings from a qualitative, comparative study in Italy and the UK. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *20*(5), 4071.

- Robinson, H., Al-Freih, M., & Kilgore, W. (2020). Designing with care. *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology*, 37(3), 99–108.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/ijilt-10-2019-0098>
- Roy, A. K., Breaux, R., Sciberras, E., Patel, P., Ferrara, E., Shroff, D. M., Cash, A. R., Dvorsky, M. R., Langberg, J. M., Quach, J., Melvin, G., Jackson, A., & Becker, S. P. (2022). A preliminary examination of key strategies, challenges, and benefits of remote learning expressed by parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. *School Psychology*, 37(2), 147-159. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000465>
- Rudolph, C. W. (2021). Improving careers science: Ten recommendations to enhance the credibility of vocational behavior research. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 126, 103560. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2021.103560>
- Saat, R. M., Piaw, C. Y., & Fadzil, H. M. (2023). Creating a grounded model of performance quality of scientist-teacher-student partnership (STSP) for STEM education. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 1-21.
- Sadykova, G. (2014). Mediating knowledge through peer-to-peer interaction in a multicultural online learning environment: A case of international students in the US. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 15(3).
<https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v15i3.1629>
- Sage, K., Jackson, S., Fox, E., & Larissa, M. (2021). The virtual COVID-19 classroom: surveying outcomes, individual differences, and technology use in college students. *Smart Learning Environments*, 8(1)
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1186/s40561-021-00174-7>

- Salimi, N., Gere, B., Talley, W., & Iriogbe, B. (2023). College students mental health challenges: Concerns and considerations in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 37(1), 39-51.
- Scherer, R., Howard, S. K., Tondeur, J., & Siddiq, F. (2021). Profiling teachers' readiness for online teaching and learning in higher education: Who's ready? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 118, 106675. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106675>
- Schwam, D., Greenberg, D., & Li, H. (2021). Individual differences in self-regulated learning of college students enrolled in online college courses. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 35(2), 133-151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08923647.2020.1829255>.
- Seleznov, P. S., Naumov, V. N., Zorin, V. Y., Zelenov, V. I., Tsyplenkov, D. S., & Vasiliev, V. G. (2022). Research and development of a unified methodology for assessing the resource efficiency of international digital platform promotion for E-learning. *Symmetry (Basel)*, 14(3), 497. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sym14030497>
- Shen, H., & Li, L. (2022). Influence of self-regulated strategy development on the performance of virtual reality-based teaching in online learning. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 17(11), 312. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v17i11.31759>
- Shin, M., & Hickey, K. (2021). Needs a little TLC: Examining college students' emergency remote teaching and learning experiences during COVID-19. *Journal of further and Higher Education*, 45(7), 973-986. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2020.1847261>
- Silva, J. M., Silva, C. de, & Monteiro, F. O. (2023). Teaching programming for students remotely during social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Emerging issues related to the corona virus pandemic (*COVID 19*). <https://doi.org/10.56238/emerrelcovid19-003>

Sitzman, K., & Leners, D. W., *Student perceptions of caring in online baccalaureate education.*

Nursing education perspectives. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17036683/>

Skinner, E. A., Kindermann, T. A., & Furrer, C. J. (2009). A motivational perspective on engagement and disaffection: Conceptualization and assessment of children's behavioral and emotional participation in academic activities in the classroom. *Educational and psychological measurement, 69*(3), 493-525.

Snijders, I., Wijnia, L., Dekker, H. J. J., Rikers, Remy M. J. P., & Loyens, S. M. M. (2022). What is in a student-faculty relationship?: A template analysis of students' positive and negative critical incidents with faculty and staff in higher education. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 37*(4), 1115-1139. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-021-00549-x>

Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System;
National Academies Press: Washington, DC, USA, 2020; ISBN 978-0-309-67100-2.

Sofi-Karim, M., Bali, A. O., & Rached, K. (2023). Online education via media platforms and applications as an innovative teaching method. *Education and Information Technologies, 28*(1), 507-523. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11188-0>

Sopina, E., & McNeill, R. (2015). Investigating the relationship between quality, format and delivery of feedback for written assignments in higher education. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 40*(5), 666-680. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2014.945072>

Sotardi, V. A. (2022). On institutional belongingness and academic performance: Mediating effects of social self-efficacy and metacognitive strategies. *Studies in Higher Education, 47*(12), 2444–2459. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2022.2081678>

- Sullivan, R., Fulcher-Rood, K., Kruger, J., Siple, G., & van Putten, C. (2019). Emerging technologies for lifelong learning and success: A MOOC for everyone. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems, 47*(3), 318-336. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239518821065>
- Sun, J. (2021). Research on the credibility of social media information based on user perception. *Security and Communication Networks, 2021*, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2021/5567610>
- Tami, S., & Lecturer, Kibbutzim College of Education, Tel-Aviv, Israel. (2017). Training the teachers of tomorrow in an era of rapid technological advancement. *I-Manager's Journal of Educational Technology, 14*(1), 35. <https://doi.org/10.26634/jet.14.1.13585>
- Tan, D. Y., & Cheah, C. W. (2021). Developing a gamified AI-enabled online learning application to improve students' perception of university physics. *Computers and Education. Artificial Intelligence, 2*, 100032. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeai.2021.100032>
- Tan, K. H., Chan, P. P., & Mohd Said, N. (2021). Higher education students' online instruction perceptions: A quality virtual learning environment. *Sustainability (Basel, Switzerland), 13*(19), 10840. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su131910840>
- Tang, K., Hsiao, C., Tu, Y., Hwang, G., & Wang, Y. (2021). Factors influencing university teachers' use of a mobile technology-enhanced teaching (MTT) platform. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 69*(5), 2705-2728. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-021-10032-5>
- Tate, T., & Warschauer, M. (2022). Equity in online learning. *Educational Psychologist, 57*(3), 192-206.

- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89–125.
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, Chicago University Press, Chicago.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*, (2nd ed.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Tinto, V. (2007). Research and Practice of Student Retention: What Next? *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8(1), 1-19.
- Tinto, V. (2020). “Learning Better Together.” In *Transitioning Students Into Higher Education: Philosophy, Pedagogy, and Practice*, edited by A. Olds, 13–24. Routledge.
- Tinto, V. (2022). Increasing student persistence: Wanting and doing. In *Student Support Services* (pp. 53-70). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Tippetts, M. M., Davis, B., Nalbone, S., & Zick, C. D. (2022). Thx 4 the msg: Assessing the impact of texting on student engagement and persistence. *Research in Higher Education*, 63(6), 1073-1093. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-022-09678-8>
- Toma, R., & Berge, M. (2023). Online Teaching in a Time of Crisis: Social Capital and Community Building Tools. *International Journal of Advanced Corporate Learning*, 16(1), 65.
- Trowler, V. (2010). Student engagement literature review. *The Higher Education Academy*, 11(1), 1-15.

- Tzafilkou, K., Perifanou, M., & Economides, A. A. (2021). Negative emotions, cognitive load, acceptance, and self-perceived learning outcome in emergency remote education during COVID-19. *Education and Information Technologies, 26*(6), 7497-7521. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10604-1>
- Umoh, M. E., Prichett, L., Boyd, C. M., & Cudjoe, T. K. (2023). Impact of technology on social isolation: Longitudinal analysis from the National Health Aging Trends Study. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, 71*(4), 1117-1123.
- Usher, M., Barak, M., & Haick, H. (2021). Online vs. on-campus higher education: Exploring innovation in students' self-reports and students' learning products. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 42*, 100965. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2021.100965>.
- Van Wart, M., Ni, A., Medina, P., Canelon, J., Kordrostami, M., Zhang, J., & Liu, Y. (2020). Integrating students' perspectives about online learning: A hierarchy of factors. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 17*(1), 53-53. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-00229-8>
- Velasquez, A., Graham, C. R., & Osguthorpe, R. (2013). Caring in a technology-mediated online high school context. *Distance Education, 34*(1), 97-118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2013.770435>
- Versteeg, M., Kappe, R. F., & Knuiman, C. (2022). Predicting student engagement: the role of academic belonging, social integration, and resilience during COVID-19 emergency remote teaching. *Frontiers in Public Health, 10*, 849594.

- Villa Castaño, L. E., Durán, W. F., & Arohuanca Percca, P. A. (2022). Perception of the quality of remote lessons in the time of covid-19: A comparative study in Latin America quality of remote lessons in the context of covid-19. *PLOS ONE*, *17*(6).
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0268966>
- Vincent Tinto. Syracuse University School of Education. (2022, November 23). Retrieved November 24, 2022, from <https://soe.syr.edu/about/directory/vincent-tinto/>
- Vygotsky, L. S., & Cole, M. (1978). *Mind in society: Development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard university press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). *Thought and Language*, translated and edited by A. Kozulin. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. *Warf B (2001) Segueways into cyberspace: Multiple geographies of the digital divide. Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, *28*, 319.
- Walker, A., & Heather, L. (2009). A problem based learning meta analysis: differences across problem types, implementation types, diciplines, and assessment levels. *The Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, *3* (1), 12–43.
- Warfvinge, P., Löfgreen, J., Andersson, K., Roxå, T., & Åkerman, C. (2022). The rapid transition from campus to online teaching—how are students’ perception of learning experiences affected?. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, *47*(2), 211-229.
- Watkins, D., Dummer, P., Hawthorne, K., Cousins, J., Emmett, C., & Johnson, M. (2014). Healthcare students' perceptions of electronic feedback through GradeMark. *Journal of Information Technology Education*, *13*, 27-47. <https://doi.org/10.28945/1945>

- Winters, Joanara Rozane da Fontoura Joanara Rozane da Fontoura, Nogueira, Débora Rinaldi
Débora Rinaldi, Heidemann, Ivonete Terezinha Schülter Buss Ivonete Terezinha Schülter
Buss, Durand, Michelle Kuntz Michelle Kuntz, Magagnin, Adriana Bitencourt Adriana
Bitencourt, & Arakawa-Belaunde, Aline Megumi Aline Megumi. (2023). Remote
teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic: Repercussions from professors'
perspective. *Revista Brasileira De Enfermagem*, 76 (1) <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2022-0172>
- Wilson, C., Arshad, R., Sapouna, M., McGillivray, D., & Zihms, S. (2023). 'PGR connections':
Using an online peer- learning pedagogy to support doctoral researchers. *Innovations in
Education and Teaching International*, 60(3), 390-
400. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2022.2141292>
- Xie, K., Nelson, M. J., Cheng, S. L., & Jiang, Z. (2023). Examining changes in teachers'
perceptions of external and internal barriers in their integration of educational digital
resources in K-12 classrooms. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 55(2),
281-306.
- Yan, H., Lin, F., & Kinshuk. (2021). Including learning analytics in the loop of self-paced online
course learning design. *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in
Education*, 31(4), 878-895. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40593-020-00225-z>.
- Yau, A. H. Y., Yeung, M. W. L., & Lee, C. Y. P. (2022). A co-orientation analysis of teachers'
and students' perceptions of online teaching and learning in Hong Kong higher
education during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 72,
101128.

- Ye, Z., Yang, X., Zeng, C., Wang, Y., Shen, Z., Li, X., & Lin, D. (2020). Resilience, social support, and coping as mediators between COVID-19-related stressful experiences and acute stress disorder among college students in China. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being, 12*(4), 1074-1094.
- Yu, J., Huang, C., He, T., Wang, X., & Zhang, L. (2022). Investigating students' emotional self-efficacy profiles and their relations to self-regulation, motivation, and academic performance in online learning contexts: A person-centered approach. *Education and Information Technologies, 27*(8), 11715-11740. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11099-0>
- Zhang, L., Ye, J., & Wang, J. (2022). A grounded theory study of the psychological distance in online education. *Educational Technology & Society, 25*(3), 91-104.