IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON REMOTE LEARNING AMONG SECOND-CHOICE

HOMESCHOOLERS IN WEST VIRGINIA: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY

by

Debra Dingess Brennan

Liberty University

A Dissertation Section Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with forced remote learning and homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The label second-choice homeschoolers in this research refers to homeschooling families in West Virginia who have first-hand experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theory guiding this study was Bandura's social cognitive theory, as it aligned with understanding parental homeschooling experiences by focusing on the impact of environmental events on human behavioral patterns. The central research question guiding this study was: What were the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? This study had 14 participants recruited via criterion and snowball sampling. Data was collected through journal prompts, individual interviews, and a focus group. The data analysis process involved using first and second-cycle coding techniques described by Saldana to identify themes and categories aided by memoing. The study contributed to the empirical and theoretical framework. Five significant themes, homeschooling, shutdowns, forced remote learning, academic achievement, and work-life balance, were revealed through thematic analysis. Participants shared positive and negative experiences while using forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results support prior research about the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic closures.

Keywords: homeschool, COVID-19, West Virginia, education, homeschool laws, remote learning

Copyright Page

Dedication

To my husband, Bryan, this would not have been possible without your unwavering encouragement. You are my best friend, biggest supporter, and entrusted confidante.

To my sons Joshua and Jonathan, you inspire me daily. Never give up on your dreams.

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator, from whom all good things flow!

To the memory of my parents, Donald and Barbara, who always believed I could do anything. I miss you and wish you were beside me to celebrate this achievement. I will see you again someday.

To the memory of my grandparents, Woodrow and Audrey, who taught me how to work hard, have fun, and trust God through all things. Your sacrifices and prayers paved the way for the blessings I enjoy.

To my multitude of aunts, uncles, and cousins, your love and encouragement helped me persevere through some of the darkest days of my life while pursuing this degree.

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Thank you to all my friends who encouraged me and celebrated the small victories. You are appreciated more than you know.

Thank you to each of my Liberty University professors. Your willingness to share encouragement and wisdom made this research study possible.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

Christian Home Educators of West Virginia (CHEWV)

Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA)

Learning Management System (LMS)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM)

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

West Virginia Home Educators Association (WVHEA)

World Health Organization (WHO)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In West Virginia, parental rights to homeschool are protected by state law (West Virginia Legislature, 2023). Homeschooling families in this study were separated into two categories: those who opted to homeschool for reasons other than the COVID-19 pandemic and those forced into homeschooling due to the closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Throughout this study, homeschoolers who were homeschooling for reasons other than the COVID-19 pandemic were referred to as first-choice homeschoolers. In contrast, those homeschooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic school closings were referred to as second-choice homeschoolers. Some second-choice homeschoolers saw mixed academic outcomes during their forced homeschool experience, with some reporting deficiencies and others reporting gains (Duvall, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). However, the research revealed that as many as 14 percent of second-choice homeschoolers continued to homeschool post-pandemic even though they did not anticipate homeschooling long-term at the onset of their homeschooling journey (Duvall, 2021; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic was reviewed through Bandura's social cognitive theory. In addition to the overview, chapter one included the background, the problem and purpose statement, and the significance of the study. The chapter concluded with research questions and definitions of terms applicable to the current study.

Background

The background section summarized the most pertinent homeschooling literature to ensure an understanding of the framework of this transcendental phenomenology. The

background section provided insight into the phenomenon's historical, social, and theoretical contexts.

Historical Context

Homeschooling has been an accepted educational method throughout history, with parents serving as primary educators for children for hundreds of years; however, this highly effective method of educating children was nearly non-existent in the middle of the 20th century as parents complied with compulsory education laws present in every state (Bennett et al., 2019; Chen, 2022; Gaither, 2017; Neuman, 2020). In the late 1700s in colonial America, Thomas Jefferson proposed a plan for a national education system funded by American taxpayers (Chen, 2022). Jefferson's education plan for a taxpayer-funded education system was solidified by the expansive works of Massachusetts Secretary of Education Horace Mann and has subsequently evolved into the public education system in use today (Chen, 2022; Heuer & Donovan, 2017). However, parents have schooled their children at home since before the compulsory public education system (Bartholet, 2020; Gaither, 2017; Heuer & Donovan, 2017). The current homeschool movement cannot be fully understood without understanding the roots of educating children in the home (Gaither, 2017). Homeschooling predates compulsory education in America, and research reveals that early homeschooling focused on children learning trades and skills based on the needs of the family (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). In addition to reading and math, girls were likely to learn about housekeeping, while boys were likely to learn about the father's occupation (Heuer & Donovan, 2017).

Massachusetts was the first state to enact a compulsory education statute requiring each city in the state to institute a public education program (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). Interestingly, despite his continual general contention that public schools were the answer to his state's

problems, the recognized founder of compulsory public education, Secretary of Education Horace Mann, homeschooled his children to ensure that they were not corrupted by the masses flooding into the compulsory public education system (Hamlin & Peterson, 2022; Heuer & Donovan, 2017). Research indicates that this hypocritical attitude continues as advocates of compulsory public education opt to homeschool their children or send them to private schools (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). Parental distrust of compulsory public education was widespread upon the system's inception, with many cities opting to pay fines rather than comply with the new statutes based on the belief that compulsory public education would negatively impact the family (Gaither, 2017). Despite the early concerns about compulsory public education, homeschooling was nearly extinct in America in the early 1970s (Ray et al., 2021).

The modern era of homeschooling in America can be traced back to two main developments in the 1960s and 1970s: the conservative Christian movement and the liberal progressive movement (Bartholet, 2020). John Holt, a liberal progressivist, unexpectedly emerged as a prominent advocate for modern homeschooling through his early books, *How Children Fail* and *How Children Learn*, and public appearances touting the benefits of the caring education children receive at home before entering test-centered compulsory public education (Bartholet, 2020; Gaither, 2017; Heuer & Donovan, 2017). Advocacy appeared in the conservative Christian movement from the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) (Bartholet, 2020; Gaither, 2017; Heuer & Donovan, 2017). As a result of pushes from both sides of the political arena, parents began to take their children's education back into their control (Neuman, 2020).

Social Context

COVID-19 impacted Americans across gender, race, ethnicity, education, and income

(Cardel et al., 2020; Girard & Prado, 2022; Price et al., 2021). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, homeschooling was a growing but limited phenomenon; however, closing public schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic thrust thousands of American households into remote learning (Chen, 2022). As a result, many families opted to leave public education remote learning to pursue homeschooling (Girard & Prado, 2022; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021). This study benefits first-choice homeschoolers by evaluating the effectiveness of support attempts offered to second-choice homeschoolers. It also provides insight for public school officials into why families opted out of state-sponsored remote learning in favor of homeschooling.

Theoretical Context

Homeschooling proponents often choose to homeschool to avoid the public school philosophy of education for the masses and instead opt for individualized education for their children (Petrovic & Rolstad, 2017). Classical education focuses on self-directed learning in which the learner discovers knowledge without prompting from an instructor (Klauke, 2019). Homeschooling methodology aligns with classical education and individualized education theory as families focus on life experiences and learner interests to guide the instruction (Pannone, 2017). By freeing themselves from the mass education philosophy of the public school system, parents individualize the instruction to meet their children's specific needs and skills (Pannone, 2017; Petrovic & Rolstad, 2017). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory supposes that learning occurs through interactive processes and external factors in addition to internal cognitive processes (Kurt, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, Maslow's hierarchy of needs related to the theoretical context of homeschooling as a benefit of the individualized education provided by homeschooling. Maslow's hierarchy of needs states that basic needs, such as food, shelter, and security, and psychological needs, such as love and esteem, are prerequisites for an individual to

reach their full potential (Mcleod, 2007).

Problem Statement

The problem is that homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic created stresses related to the virus, with additional distress from the burden of schooling at home, with many reporting chronic stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic lock downs (Deacon et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the public's ability to meet in groups, including schools and after-school activities (Cardel et al., 2020). In addition to feelings of isolation, many experienced difficulties with technology that further isolated them. (Cardel et al., 2020; Deacon et al., 2021). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, homeschoolers often supplemented their home learning with cooperative groups; however, the COVID-19 pandemic limited homeschoolers' ability to meet face-to-face with other homeschoolers (Cheng & Hamlin, 2022). Cooperatives play an essential role in homeschooling and broadening the experiences of those involved (Anthony, 2015). In America, homeschooling has been a legal school choice with recorded success in all 50 states for more than 25 years, yet despite this, public school advocates launch regular campaigns to either increase homeschooling oversight or ban the choice entirely (Bartholet, 2020; Carlson, 2020; Hamlin, 2020; Ray, 2022). One attack against the right to choose to homeschool came in 2020 from Harvard Law Professor Elizabeth Bartholet (Bartholet, 2020). In a review of homeschooling, Bartholet (2020) proposed a nearly complete ban on homeschooling based on assertions that homeschooled children must be protected from abusive, controlling, and manipulative parents. However, in the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic instigated public school districts across America to abruptly transition to remote learning to slow the spread of the virus (Poulain et al., 2022).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second-choice homeschoolers in this research referred to homeschooling families in West Virginia who have first-hand experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theory guiding this study was Bandura's social cognitive theory, which aligns with understanding parental homeschooling experiences by focusing on the impact of environmental events on human behavioral patterns.

Significance of the Study

The following sections shed light on the current study's contributions to the knowledge base from a theoretical, empirical, and practical perspective. The theoretical significance articulates how the research contributes to the theoretical foundations of the problem. The empirical relevance explored how the study was associated with similar studies and how utilizing a phenomenological approach adds to the current literature. Finally, the practical implications highlight the potential significance the knowledge generated from the research may have to the homeschooling community.

Theoretical

This study added to the literature on forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in West Virginia from the perspective of 14 second-choice homeschoolers. Bandura's social cognitive theory was used to evaluate the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Bandura's revised social cognitive theory reflected how individuals develop thoughts and feelings in addition to learning (Bandura, 1978, 1991, 2018; Cherry, 2022). Social cognitive theory introduced the social environment as a critical component of learning, motivation, and self-regulation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). This study aimed to add to the

existing literature on Bandura's social cognitive theory and provided insight for first-choice homeschoolers and public-school officials by increasing the understanding of second-choice homeschoolers' lived experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Empirical

This study added to the empirical literature by expanding the understanding of second-choice homeschoolers' use of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Heuer and Donovan (2021) found that information regarding families who opt for homeschooling as their second choice was scarce. The second-choice homeschoolers in this study were families electing to homeschool based on circumstances beyond their control (Anderson, 2022; Gaither, 2017). Additionally, this study confirmed the frequently cited motivations as individualized education, flexibility, freedom from negative influences, and freedom to use a curriculum that supports the family's goals and beliefs (Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Machovcova et al., 2021; Neuman & Guterman, 2021; NHES, 2019). However, the forced remote learning circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic did not align with traditional motivations to homeschool (Anderson, 2022). Lastly, due to the limited variance in demographics and ethnicities within the state, this research study did not align with national homeschool reports like those included in Eggleston and Fields (2021), Heuer and Donovan (2021), Irwin et al. (2022), NHES (2019), and Ray (2022).

Practical

The primary benefit of this study was to increase the understanding of parents' lived experiences with homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The increased understanding benefited two groups: homeschool support groups seeking to support new and potential homeschool families and public school officials hoping to understand parents' motivations for

leaving the public school system. Homeschool support groups in West Virginia included Christian Home Educators of West Virginia, Homeschool Legal Defense Association, and West Virginia Educators Association (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023). These organizations provided support for various concerns that homeschooled families may have. This research enhanced the current knowledge base to include second-choice homeschoolers at a much higher level. Additionally, this research study gave public school officials insight into the motivations behind second-choice homeschoolers' conversion to first-choice homeschoolers. Neuman and Guterman (2021) found that a leading motivation for parents opting out of public education is dissatisfaction with the declining academic standards within the public school system.

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Research Questions

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One central research question and three sub-questions guided this study.

Central Research Question

What were the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sub-Question One

What were the challenges experienced by second-choice homeschooling families with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sub-Question Two

What were opportunities experienced by second-choice homeschooling families with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sub-question Three

How do parents perceive their child/ren's academic success due to their heightened involvement in their child/ren's education while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Definitions

1. *Phenomenology* - A study that emphasizes a phenomenon to be studied with a focus on participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2. *Transcendental Phenomenology* - Phenomenological research in which the researcher identifies and reserves any preconceived ideas about the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3. *Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory* - This theory is a psychological framework emphasizing an interactive relationship between cognitive and environmental components in learning (Bandura, 1978, 1986, 1991, 2001, 2002, 2018; Cherry, 2022).

4. *Vygotsky's Sociocultural T*heory – This theory is based on learning through internal and external and external interactive processes (Kurt, 2020; Neuman, 2020; Vygotsky, 19778).

5. *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* - This is a model of human motivation based on levels of basic human needs (Mcleod, 2007).

6. *First-choice Homeschoolers* - Families opting to homeschool for reasons other than school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic are considered first-choice homeschoolers (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021).

7. *Second-choice Homeschoolers* - Families opting to homeschool based on reasons related to the school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic are considered second-choice homeschoolers (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021).

Summary

Chapter One explored the historical, social, and theoretical context of homeschooling and then described the problem and purpose statements. The study's significance was reviewed better to understand its theoretical, empirical, and practical importance. Chapter One concluded by listing the research questions and definitions for pertinent terminology. Homeschooling is protected by West Virginia state law and remains a viable school choice for many families dating from Colonial America (Bennett et al., 2019; Chen, 2022; Gaither, 2017; Neuman, 2020). Homeschooling experienced significant growth during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chen, 2022). The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second-choice homeschoolers in this research referred to homeschooling families in West Virginia who had first-hand experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore the problem that homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic created stresses related to the virus, with additional distress from the burden of schooling at home, with many reporting chronic stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns (Deacon et al., 2021). Chapter two begins with the theoretical framework section, examines and synthesizes the literature related to the topic, and ends with a chapter summary. The theoretical framework discusses Bandura's social cognitive theory and examines parents' lived experiences with forced remote learning in West Virginia during the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of Bandura's theory. The related literature section includes an examination of the literature related to the different topics that may impact the participants' lived experiences. In addition to a review and synthesis of the related literature, an explanation of how this research project added to the existing literature was included when applicable by filling any gaps in the existing body of literature, presenting a need for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework section describes the structure used to provide the foundation for the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Bandura's social cognitive theory was selected as the framework of this research because it provided the most effective lens for constructing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenological research topic. The theoretical framework section begins with an overview of Bandura's social cognitive theory, including the theory's history and fundamental components, followed by a discussion of how Bandura's social cognitive theory impacted the related literature. The section concludes with a description of how

Bandura's social cognitive theory relates to this research study, including how this study may potentially broaden the theory for future researchers.

Social Cognitive Theory Historical Context

Bandura's social cognitive theory was introduced in the 1960s as social learning theory as an extension of the 1941 Miller and Dollard theory that proposed learning could be based on the imitation of others (Selinger, 2019). Bandura's updated social cognitive theory considered how individuals develop thoughts and feelings in addition to learning (Bandura, 1991; Cherry, 2022). Bandura reported in the early 1990s that human behavior was primarily controlled through self-influence, self-regulation, and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1991). However, this triangulation depended on the ability to self-monitor accurately (Bandura, 1991). Bandura (1991) stated that self-monitoring behavior can be distorted based on self-efficacy, leading to inaccurate conclusions. Early behavioral theories focused on an input/output model emphasizing environmental impact on behavior (Bandura, 2001). However, the field had a paradigm shift to understand the impact of human agency and intentionality on behavior (Bandura, 2001). Social cognitive theory broke away from the behaviorist supposition that learning only occurred due to experience and reinforcement (Bandura, 1978). Bandura observed learning in humans about topics they had no experience with but had observed others participating (Bandura, 2001; Cherry, 2022). Social cognitive theory introduced the social environment as a critical component of learning, motivation, and self-regulation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Triadic Reciprocal Determination

The triadic reciprocal determination within Bandura's social cognitive theory stated that cognition, behavior, and environment are interdependent (Bandura, 1978, 1986). For the sake of this study, cognition was an individual's internal competencies, such as self-efficacy; behavior

refers to an individual's actions and decisions, and environment refers to any external influences (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). These elements operated as a dynamic cycle of cognitive processes impacting behaviors and environment, while behavior and environment affected cognition (Bandura, 1986; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Social Cognitive Theory and Homeschooling During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Homeschooled students have the unique opportunity to observe and model their teachers' behavior, often parents, during structured learning times and unstructured family times (Boonk et al., 2018; Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). Observational learning was a crucial concept in Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002, 2018). Bandura et al. (2011) concluded that family self-efficacy positively impacts the nature of experiences. This reciprocal interplay between the learner, the parents, and the environment aligned with social cognitive theory determinants: personal, behavioral, and environmental (Bandura, 2018; Bandura et al., 2011; Dennison et al., 2020). Remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic further aligned with social cognitive theory through the interconnectedness of the virtual environment by allowing families to maximize environmental and relationship factors for the benefit of their children through family, friends, church, and other community influences (Dennison et al., 2020). This study used the lens of social cognitive theory to view parental choices surrounding the homeschool remote learning experience.

<div style="text-align:center">**Related Literature**</div>

The related literature was presented as themes with additional sub-themes. The themes included the history of homeschooling in the United States, homeschool legislation in the United States, homeschool curriculum and methodology, parental motivations to homeschool, the academic achievement of homeschoolers, perception of homeschooling, and homeschoolers'

transition to adulthood. Sub-themes were also identified, including the modern history of homeschooling in the United States, homeschool demographics in the United States, homeschool legislation in West Virginia, first-choice homeschoolers versus second-choice homeschoolers, homeschooling criticism, homeschoolers' transition to college and homeschoolers' transition to the workforce. A systematic review of literature related to each theme and sub-theme was conducted in the following sections.

History Of Homeschooling in the United States

Homeschooling in the United States dates to the colonial period (Gaither, 2009, 2017; Walton, 2021). Through the years, homeschooling has changed significantly, yet in many ways, it has stayed the same since colonial times (Gaither, 2017). Public schools in the United States were introduced in the 17th and 18th centuries as Puritan religious schools, although the educational focus remained within the family, with the father as the primary educator and the minister supporting the educational efforts (Chen, 2022; Gaither, 2009, 2017; Walton, 2021). Despite the addition of public education, the common belief was that the responsibility for each child's education was the right and obligation of the child's parents (Gaither, 2017; Walton, 2021). However, some families opted to include private tutors and other voluntary associations in their children's education rather than relying on an organized public education system. (Gaither, 2017; Renzulli et al., 2020; Walton, 2021). The primary attendees of the New England Puritan schools were the children of parents who were either unwilling or unable to educate their children due to an impoverished financial status (Renzulli et al., 2020; Walton, 2021).

Throughout the early history of the United States, many prominent Americans were homeschooled regardless of the availability of public schools, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, John Quincy Adams, and Benjamin Franklin (Bennett et al.,

2019). Despite the availability of public education, Abigail Adams, the second first lady of the United States, preferred to educate the four Adams children in their home with the occasional assistance from her cousin (Gaither, 2017; Walton, 2021). Her husband, the second president of the United States, John Adams, supported the establishment of public education; however, his beliefs were firmly established that parents held the ultimate authority and responsibility for education (Adams & Adams, 2021; Neuman & Guterman, 2019; Walton, 2021). The Adams family had the unquestionable stance that the public school system's impact was lacking compared to the education that could be presented in the loving environment of the home (Adams & Adams, 2021; Walton, 2021).

The state-supported public education system familiar to Americans today grew from a proposal from Thomas Jefferson (Chen, 2022). However, Jefferson's 18th-century plan for a tax-funded education was not well received (Chen, 2022). The following century saw Horace Mann credited for turning Jefferson's strategy into a reality by establishing a network of schools open to the public and funded by taxpayer dollars (Chen, 2022; Gaither, 2017; Heuer & Donovan, 2017). However, Mann's public education system included an aspect that Jefferson opposed: compulsory education (Walton, 2021). Interestingly, despite Mann touring the country and touting the advantages of the compulsory public education system, he and his wife homeschooled their children to prevent corruption from the masses attending public schools and invading their homes (Gaither, 2017). Biographer Jonathan Messerli described Mann's stance on the need for public schools as originating from the belief that the public could not be trusted to fulfill the traditional role of educator of their children to the same level that he and his social class could (Gaither, 2017). While Jefferson's plan for a taxpayer-funded education was based on the premise that an educated public was necessary for the nation to prosper and should fall under

the control of the family, Mann's vision included the element of state control over what was being taught without input from the family (Walton, 2021).

Modern History of Homeschooling in the United States

Although the compulsory education laws have caused a rift between school officials and families opting to homeschool, conflicts regarding parental rights to homeschool did not rise until the 1960s (Raley, 2017). Regulation of homeschooling proved to be important in legal, political, and social realms, with legislative powers overseeing the conversation regarding homeschooling laws. Homeschooling rates experienced a rapid growth period beginning in 1999 (Eggleston & Fields, 2021; Neuman, 2019). An estimated 1.7 million school-aged children were homeschooled in 2016 (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021). Public school closings due to the COVID-19 pandemic increased the number of homeschooling families from an estimated 3.2 million pre-pandemic in early 2020 to an estimated five million in the fall of 2020 (Duvall, 2021; Eggleston & Fields, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). The lockdown of the public school system beginning in the spring of 2020 created a situation where millions of schoolchildren were either wholly or partially without access to the public school system (Lacomba-Trejo et al., 2022). Pandemic homeschooling numbers peaked at an estimated 11.1 percent of all households with school-aged children in the fall of 2020 before falling to the estimated five million upon the re-opening of the public schools, post-pandemic (Eggleston & Fields, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). It should be noted that an estimated 72 percent of homeschooling families instruct more than one child, so the overall number of homeschooled children differs from the number of homeschooled families (Duvall, 2021). For many families in the U. S., the COVID-19 pandemic served as an unexpected catalyst to re-claim the responsibility for educating their children (Heuer & Donovan, 2021).

Homeschool Demographics in the United States

The National Home Education Research Institute (2022) estimated that there were 3.1 million K-12 homeschool families in the United States during the 2021-2022 school year (Irwin et al., 2022; Ray, 2022). When broken down by race and ethnicity, research revealed that 7.4 percent of White adults, 6.5 of Hispanic adults, 5.1 percent of Black adults, and 3.6 percent of Asian adults homeschool, with an estimated 10.6 percent of adults identifying as other electing to homeschool (Eggleston & Fields, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Irwin et al., 2022; Ray, 2022). COVID-19 had the most significant impact on Black families, with homeschooling increasing to 16.1 percent in the fall of 2020 (Eggleston & Fields, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Research revealed an equally diverse household income of low, middle, and high income, with an estimated 8.8 percent of homeschooling families earning between $25,000 and $49,999, 8.6 percent earning between $50,000 and $74,999, 5.3 percent earning between $100,000 and $149,000, and 5.5 percent earning more than $150,000 annually (Irwin et al., 2022; Ray, 2022; Stewart, 2020). Public school per-pupil spending costs taxpayers an estimated $15,000 annually, while research indicated that homeschoolers spend an estimated average of $600 per student with no taxpayer contribution (Ray, 2022). At least one member holds college degrees in 32 percent of homeschooling families, compared to 36 percent of families opting to enroll in public schools and 64 percent of families opting to enroll in private schools (Hamlin, 2020).

Homeschool Legislation in the United States

Questions arose in the 1960s regarding the legality of homeschooling in the United States (Raley, 2017). Homeschooling has been legal in all 50 United States since 1993; however, what was considered by many to be the modern homeschool movement in the U.S. dates to the 1970s and the works of Dr. Raymond Moore and John Holt (Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Thomas, 2019).

Despite the legal protections available in each state, the National Education Association regularly lobbies for additional homeschool legislation and restrictions (Boyack, 2023; Raley, 2017). Dr. Moore's book, *Better Late Than Early,* criticized the push from compulsory education supporters to mandate younger and younger children attend public schools while actively advocating for parents to re-claim their God-given responsibility to educate their children (Heuer & Donovan, 2021). At about the same time, John Holt, a former public school educator and author, published two books opposing the public school system: *How Children Fail* and *How Children Learn* (Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Thomas, 2019). Holt coined the term "unschooling" during a 1981 appearance on the Phil Donahue Show, where his impassioned interview led to over 10,000 letters from parents wanting more information about homeschooling (Heuer & Donovan, 2021). In the 1980s, homeschooling was technically legal in the United States; however, the law lacked specific protections from compulsory education statutes (Heuer & Donovan, 2021).

The first compulsory education statutes were implemented in Massachusetts in the 1800s; however, additional court rulings in 1893, 1913, and 1922 set a precedent protecting parents' right to control their children's education (Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Tilhou, 2020). Before the 19th century, attending school was voluntary (Tilhou, 2020). Every state in the United States has at least one homeschooling association available to offer resources and advice regarding state-related issues (Carlson, 2020). National homeschooling organizations provide support and advocacy nationally (Carlson, 2020; HSLDA, 2023). National homeschooling organizations collaborate with state homeschooling organizations to organize grassroots movements in cases of pending legislation that would hinder the right to homeschool in the state (Carlson, 2020; CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023).

Homeschool Legislation in West Virginia

Compulsory education in West Virginia was governed by statute §18-8-1 (West Virginia Legislature, 2023). West Virginia offers three exemptions to the compulsory attendance statutes for children aged six through 17 (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). The first compulsory education exemption option allowed families to legally operate a homeschool program after acquiring approval from the board of education (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). When selecting this option, parents requested approval and submitted a detailed education plan to the board of education (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). The education plan included all board of education required subjects, and families adhered to the state-mandated 180 days of instruction per year (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). Additionally, parents provided attendance records, instructional notes, and student progress reports upon request from the board of education (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). Under compulsory education exemption option one, the board of education could deny the request for approval and dictate all educational assessment options (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023).

West Virginia compulsory education exemption option two required the potential homeschool family to submit a notice of intent to homeschool to the board of education before beginning a homeschool program (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). The notice of intent statute was outlined in West Virginia code §18-8-1(A) (West Virginia Department of Education, 2023). West Virginia families applying for an exemption to the compulsory education law using option two submitted proof of high school

graduation for the person providing instruction, a written notice of intent to homeschool in West Virginia, an assessment for each student annually, and submitted evidence of assessment for 3rd grade, 5th grade, 8th grade, and 11th grades (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). Assessments must be on file for three years (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). Parents homeschooling under exemption option two had four assessment choices (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). Assessment option one is governed by West Virginia statute §18-8-1(C)(i) and allows homeschool families to administer a standardized test that has been nationally normed within the past 10 years (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Department of Education, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). The test must be administered per the test publisher's instructions, covering the subjects of reading, language, math, science, and social studies (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). Families may also participate in the public-school system testing program under assessment option two (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). Option two is governed by West Virginia statute §18-8-1(C)(ii) (West Virginia Department of Education, 2023). The third option families may elect to use as their annual assessment is to have a certified teacher review a portfolio of the student's work in the required subject areas and provide a narrative to the family indicating if the student is working at their ability level and listing any content areas needing remediation (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Legislature, 2023). Assessment option three is governed by West Virginia statute §18-8-1(C)(iii) (West Virginia Department of Education, 2023). The final assessment option available to homeschoolers in West Virginia is governed by West Virginia statute §18-8-1(C)(iv) and is an alternative assessment decided by an

agreement between the superintendent and the parents (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023;

WVHEA, 2023; West Virginia Department of Education, 2023; West Virginia Legislature,

2023).

Compulsory education exemption option three allows the parents to enroll their children

in public school remote learning options (West Virginia Legislature, 2023). Students

homeschooled under this option were enrolled in the public school system and may participate in

extra-curricular activities offered by the school district where they live (West Virginia

Legislature, 2023). For this research study, families choosing this option were not considered

homeschooled but public-school families using available remote learning opportunities. Persons

providing instructions in a homeschool setting must submit the required credentials to their

county superintendent of schools (West Virginia Department of Education, 2023). The necessary

credentials are outlined in West Virginia state statute §18-8-1(B), including a high school

diploma, equivalency, or higher degree or certificate (West Virginia Department of Education,

2023).

Parental Motivations to Homeschool

The "typical" homeschooled family does not exist, as the list of reasons why parents

homeschool is nearly unlimited. However, some of the more frequently cited motivations

included individualized education, flexibility for more family time, the opportunity to develop

positive character and values, and freedom from a curriculum that conflicts with family beliefs

(Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Machovcova et al., 2021; Neuman & Guterman, 2021; NHES, 2019).

American stereotypes pinned homeschoolers as overly religious, but research indicated that

families opted to homeschool for various reasons, including safety concerns, peer pressure, and

declining academic standards found in public schools (Ray, 2017; Ray et al., 2021). Research

indicated that one significant motivation for families to elect to homeschool was the declining

academic standards of the public school system (Neuman & Guterman, 2021). The motivations

behind electing to homeschool were not homogeneous (Carlson, 2020). Valiente et al. (2022)

found that the six most common homeschooling reasons included a concern about the school

environment, instruction provided at the school, including religious interests, special needs of

their child(ren) being met, and an inclination toward a non-traditional approach to learning.

Homeschooling families have differing experiences with public and private schools, with some

being homeschooled and having minimal experience with traditional schooling.

In contrast, others attended a public or private school but subsequently decided against

that path for their children (Averett, 2021). Other homeschool parents have used both

homeschooling and public or private school options to educate their children (Averett, 2021). In

her research, Averett (2021) discovered that parents identified each child as unique and that

homeschooling allows parents to focus on each child's needs as an individual. Averett (2021)

included students' academic and social needs in her study. Homeschool students could express

their authentic selves and personalities more freely without fear of peer ridicule (Averett, 2021).

Homeschoolers often participate in social networking through the church, social media,

and blogs, while homeschooling parent-authored books foster information sharing among the

homeschooling community in the United States (Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Overarching themes

for why parents choose to homeschool included academic, pedagogical, religious, socio-

affective, and spiritual, including a more nurturing and supportive environment (Machovcova et

al., 2021; Marks & Welsch, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2021). Homeschooling families

represent diverse cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Jolly & Matthews, 2020).

Other factors influencing the parental decision to homeschool included parents' previous

encounters and the children's experiences within the public school system. (Averett, 2021; Marks & Welsch, 2019; Neuman, 2019). Parents with a negative public school experience or problems with their child(ren) attending public school reported this as a significant consideration when making schooling decisions for their children (Averett, 2021; Marks & Welsch, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2019). Adverse experiences in conventional school settings lead to anxiety and depression among teenagers (Harper & Brewer, 2021). Traditional homeschooling involved parental control over the curriculum and enabled parents to choose to accept or reject online sources; however, families forced into remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic did not have these same options (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, parents often listed concerns such as bullying, school-based crime, overall school environment, and dissatisfaction with the quality of the instruction offered in public schools in their rationale for homeschooling their children (Averett, 2021; Duvall, 2021; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Marks & Welsch, 2019). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, parents expressed the added concern that public schools may compromise their children's health, resulting in more parents opting to homeschool their children (Duvall, 2021). Research indicated that parents were increasingly frustrated with the public school pedagogy focused on outdated assembly line objectives irrelevant to a modern workforce and the history of perpetuated inequality within the public school system (Dennison et al., 2020; Neuman & Guterman, 2021).

Parental Involvement in Education

Parental involvement in education is a complex idea including various aspects, and the idea of parental involvement has been the subject of numerous research studies (Boonk et al., 2018; Fernandez-Alonso et al., 2017; Jensen & Minke, 2017; Krane & Klevan, 2019). Parental

involvement could be an umbrella term that includes grandparents, extended family, or other guardians (Jeynes, 2018). Lui et al. (2020) identified the home as children's first educational and social experience. However, parental involvement often declined as children entered adolescence (Berryhill et al., 2020). During adolescence, it is common for conflict to arise between the adolescent and the parent (Costa & Faria, 2017). Poulain et al. (2022) discussed the potential for increased parent-child conflicts due to forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research of de Jong et al. (2022) found a direct correlation between lower parental self-efficacy and increased parent-child conflicts. Inversely, it was found that higher parental self-efficacy equaled a lower instance of parent-child conflicts (de Jong et al., 2022).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, parental involvement in education increased significantly due to the forced remote learning from the public school closures. Research indicated that active parental participation in education positively impacted children's academic achievement and social and emotional skills (Boonk et al., 2018; Roy & Giraldo-Garcia, 2018). Just as parental involvement can be an umbrella term for who qualifies as a parent, it can also be an umbrella term for what constitutes involvement (Jensen & Minke, 2017; Lv et al., 2018). Involvement can include parental communication with the school, involvement in the school's activities, or assisting the child with schoolwork (Cui & Hanson, 2019; de Jong et al., 2022; Jensen & Minke, 2017; Lv et al., 2018). Homeschooling included an increase in parental involvement (Heuer & Donovan, 2017).

Research has long maintained that parents are vital to the education system (Anthony, 2015; Day & Dotterer, 2018; Heuer & Donovan, 2017; Krane & Klevan, 2019). Unfortunately, many public schools resist direct parental involvement in the school environment, creating an imbalance in responsibility over academic achievement (Anthony, 2015). Resistance often

creates an environment of conflict rather than cooperation between the school system and the family unit (Anthony, 2015). Researchers Neuman and Guterman (2017) reported that parental involvement has steadily increased in recent decades.

First-choice versus Second-choice Homeschoolers

Homeschooling families were separated into categories of those who opted to homeschool for reasons other than the COVID-19 pandemic - often fundamentally religious reasons, first-choice, and those who were forced into homeschooling by the closure of public schools due to the COVID-19, second choice (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Second-choice homeschoolers experienced mixed gains, with some finding their children suffered academic deficiencies and others experiencing academic gains during their forced homeschool experience (Duvall, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). The research showed that homeschooling increased by 63 percent in 2020 but only fell by 17 percent the following school year (Thompson, 2022). The second-choice homeschoolers who continued to homeschool post-pandemic did not anticipate homeschooling long-term at the onset of their homeschooling journey (Duvall, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Research indicates that many second-choice homeschoolers were frustrated with the remote learning options offered due to the pandemic school closures (Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Many second-choice homeschoolers equated their remote learning experience to their children spending hours in front of the computer daily with little academic progress to show for their time and efforts, creating a surge in traditional homeschooling separate from the newly established home-based public school system (Heuer & Donovan, 2021). First-choice homeschoolers referred to this forced homeschooling resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic as school-at-home instead of actual homeschooling (Price et al., 2021). School-at-home seeks to emulate the school environment,

curriculum, and attitudes, while homeschooling seeks to maintain a home environment where learning is inseparable from daily activities (Price et al., 2021).

Homeschool Curriculum and Methodology

Homeschool curriculum and methodology continued to be pedagogically diverse as homeschool families strove to individualize instruction (Burke, 2022; Jolly & Matthews, 2020). However, research indicated that 29 percent of homeschooling families included structured learning for art, foreign language, literature, music, math, and science (Hamlin, 2020). Instruction in the creative arts continued to challenge homeschoolers (Burke, 2022). While the value of creative arts is well-known among homeschooling families, many homeschool families struggle to locate resources for collaborative creative arts, such as music, theatre, and dance ensembles (Burke, 2022). Many homeschoolers relied on community arts programs when collaborative efforts with other area homeschooling families fell short of meeting their needs (Burke, 2022).

Homeschool pedagogical practice focuses on intentional educational learning experiences based on daily living activities for structured and unstructured homeschool practices, and for many families, the increased availability of internet access provides nearly endless possibilities when selecting a curriculum (Burke, 2022; Jolly & Matthews, 2020). In many cases, parents seek to instill a sense of morality as the foundation of the curriculum based on the philosophy of Montessori (Frierson, 2021). The focus on character development and respect is a critical element of the homeschool experience for first-choice homeschoolers (Frierson, 2021). Research reports that zero percent of homeschooling families used the Internet or online programs of study in 1998; however, by 2008, internet or online programs ranged from 30 percent of rurally located homeschoolers to 92 percent of suburban homeschoolers (Jolly & Matthews, 2020). The highly

customizable curriculum options for homeschoolers allow homeschool families to implement diverse teaching methods (Abuzandah, 2020; Firmin et al., 2019).

Some homeschooling families use complete curriculum packages, while others use curriculum from multiple sources, including resources from the public school and the public library when available (Firmin et al., 2019; Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Unschooling is a method of instruction based on the guiding principle that children learn best when exploring inherent curiosity and interests (Lapon, 2022). According to Lapon (2022), students often enjoy the freedom to explore their interests rather than spend their days sitting at a desk following instructions. Research indicates that homeschoolers use a variety of educational activities, including cooperatives, print materials, online programs, and tutoring (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). In many states, homeschooling parents have access to textbooks through their local school system; however, these resources are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis, and often, there are few options available once the texts are distributed to public schools (Gann & Carpenter, 2019).

Homeschool Cooperatives and Support Groups

Homeschool cooperatives have been a staple among the homeschool community, allowing families to cooperatively plan educational activities and lessons as an extension to their regular curriculum, with an increasing number of homeschooling families supplementing the educational experience through cooperatives and support groups (Cheng & Hamlin, 2022; Gann & Carpenter, 2019; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Homeschool cooperatives range from church or religious groups to academic groups and often involve a similarly wide range of ages (McCabe et al., 2021). Research indicates that many families join cooperatives to increase parental educational involvement (Morse, 2019). However, these activities were disrupted due to the

COVID-19 pandemic, forcing homeschool families to explore other avenues for cooperative efforts, such as science classes, dance, and playgroups (Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Research indicates that 30 percent of homeschoolers use homeschool organizations or cooperatives for a portion of the instruction for their families, allowing families to offer expanded curriculum (Gann & Carpenter, 2019; Hamlin, 2020). These expanded curriculum offerings include field trips, STEM and STEAM clubs, and social activities such as dances and other less formal meetups (Gann & Carpenter, 2019).

Homeschool support groups include informal online forums, state organizations, and national organizations (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; Tilhou, 2020; WVHEA, 2023). In West Virginia, parents use homeschool support organizations Christian Home Educators of West Virginia, Homeschool Legal Defense Association, and West Virginia Home Educators Association (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023). Parents use homeschool support groups to gain assistance with the different aspects of homeschooling while maintaining a high level of involvement with their children's education (Morse, 2019). Some parents banded together during the COVID-19 pandemic-induced remote learning to create small-group learning cooperatives (Watson, 2020). Homeschool cooperatives are often designed to allow families to rotate leadership of coursework designed around the interests and needs of the cooperative (Johnson, 2023). Cooperatives may include activities like field trips, parent education meetings, and play dates (Johnson, 2023).

Academic Achievement of Homeschoolers

Research indicates that homeschoolers' composite standardized scores exceed those of their public-school counterparts; however, a slight gap exists in math scores for homeschoolers (Coleman, 2021; Sande, 1995). Homeschoolers outperformed their public-school counterparts'

Math and Verbal scores on the 2001 SAT; however, homeschoolers' Verbal score average, 566.6, was significantly higher than their math scores, 526.5 (Coleman, 2021). Public-schooled children taking the same exam averaged 502.6 in Verbal and 510.1 in Math (Coleman, 2021). Meanwhile, the public school system boasts declining achievement and increasing attrition, leading to declining graduation rates (Neuman & Guterman, 2021). Homeschool families describe the success of their efforts based on admission to highly selective colleges, standardized test scores, and the perception that their children could avoid common pitfalls of adolescence (Firmin et al., 2019).

The growth of homeschooling has inspired many researchers to investigate the academic validity among homeschooling families (Murphy, 2014; Ray, 2010). Although homeschooled students continue to score within the same or slightly higher average percentile on standardized tests than their public-schooled peers, anecdotal stories exist of homeschoolers falling woefully behind or obtaining remarkable academic achievement (Murphy, 2014; Ray, 2010). Research by Carlson (2020) indicates that homeschooled students scored better in language, math, and reading than their public-school counterparts. Students' academic performance correlates to the learning environment (Abuzandah, 2020).

Perception of Homeschooling

Despite the increase in popularity, perceptions of homeschooling remain controversial, with opinions ranging from homeschoolers being religious fanatics to tree-hugging hippies (McCabe et al., 2021; Myers, 2022). Even though it is prevalent in the United States, homeschooling is often met with skepticism from educators (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021). Over the years, many conversations have developed due to the homeschool controversy (Fletcher, 2021). Some perceive homeschooling as dangerous (Bartholet, 2020). Supporters of

homeschooling assert that students' educational authority should rest with their parents, while they argue that there is insufficient scrutiny of conventional school norms (Bartholet, 2020). Those who perceive homeschooling as dangerous include Harvard Professor of Law Elizabeth Bartholet and the National Education Association, a prominent United States teacher's union (Bartholet, 2020; Walton, 2021). Bartholet supports strict restrictions surrounding homeschooling with increased bureaucratic power to control what, when, and how education is delivered (Bartholet, 2020; Maranto, 2021; Raley, 2017; Walton, 2021). However, research indicates that Bartholet's views lack support for sweeping changes to homeschool laws, except from the National Education Association leadership (Maranto, 2021; Raley, 2017). Many believe that educating their children is a parental right that should not be impeded by the government (Abuzandah, 2020; Powell & Fields-Smith, 2021). Research indicates that homeschooled students perceive learning holistically in line with a constructivist methodology instead of their public-school counterparts' view of learning as separate from life (Neuman, 2020). Families who homeschool often exhibit similar traits, such as parents taking the lead in their child's education, which creates personalized learning plans for each student (HSLDA, 2023). Among families unfamiliar with homeschooling, there is a perception of loneliness and isolation for those homeschooling (Cuadrado et al., 2021).

Homeschoolers Transition to Adulthood

Research indicates that homeschoolers promote civic values and tolerance better than public schools (Maranto, 2021; Ray, 2010). Ray (2022) found that homeschooled students have a higher level of integration into the local community, making the transition into adulthood smooth. Additionally, homeschoolers report engaging in their learning, scoring well on higher education admissions tests, and matriculating to college at or above their public-schooled

counterparts' rates (Ray, 2010). A United States Department of Education survey confirms that homeschooled students are more likely to be culturally active than their public schooled counterparts (Hamlin, 2020). Researchers have over twenty years of data supporting the validity of homeschooling as a means of academic achievement and healthy social, psychological, and emotional development (Carlson, 2020; Sande, 1995; Ray, 2010). Tilhou (2020) revealed that many families believe homeschooling provides a practical education for their children. The academic performance research of homeschooled children has provided mixed data regarding performance compared to public-schooled children (Bennett et al., 2019; Carlson, 2020). Home has proven to be a positive but not statistically significant influence on academic performance (Bennett et al., 2019). SAT scores predict first-year college students' performance and retention equally for homeschooled and public-schooled students (Carlson, 2020). Overall academic performance remains equal between public schooled college students and those homeschooled, dispelling the notion that homeschooling would fail to adequately prepare children for college life (Bennett et al., 2019; Gaither, 2017). Research indicates that homeschooled children are well-prepared for college life academically and socially (McCabe et al., 2021). In 1986, fewer than 90 percent of colleges and universities in the United States lacked an admissions policy for homeschooled students; however, by 2004, over 75 percent did, with many admission departments targeting homeschoolers for enrollment in their institutions (Gaither, 2017).

Effective Remote Learning

Traditional curriculum does not easily convert to online coursework (Procko et al., 2020). The design considerations for online education vary significantly from in-person learning (Bliss et al., 2021). Fontenelle-Tereshchuk (2021) illustrates that the COVID-19 pandemic-related school closures highlighted how unoptimized the remote learning offerings were. Properly

utilized remote learning offerings enhance educational outcomes; however, the remote learning

offerings during the COVID-19 pandemic pointed to the weaknesses of remote learning

(Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021; Hart et al., 2019). Richardson et al. (2021) found five types of

scaffolding commonly used in online course design: conceptual, metacognitive, procedural,

strategic, and motivational. Conceptional scaffolding involves developing the learners' cognitive

processes using problems and illustrations (Lange et al., 2022; Richardson et al., 2021).

Metacognitive scaffolding requires the learners to contemplate the cognitive processes through

reflection (Richardson et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023). Procedural scaffolding involves utilizing

resources and tools and is frequently employed in instructional tutorials (Richardson et al.,

2021). In strategic scaffolding, learners are usually encouraged to devise different problem-

solving approaches to cultivate alternative thinking methods (Lange et al., 2022; Richardson et

al., 2021). Lastly, motivational scaffolding establishes objectives and expertise by regulating

emotions and self-confidence (Meri-Yilan, 2022; Richardson et al., 2021).

Formative assessments are essential to online course development as part of an

intentional online course design strategy (Marquis, 2021). Formative assessment benefits online

learning (Marquis, 2021; Yan & Pastore, 2022). The immediate nature of the COVID-19 remote

learning transition meant that online courses had to be created with limited planning and

forethought (Dhurumraj et al., 2020). Research indicates that the effectiveness of online

education seems to depend more on how skillfully it is integrated into the coursework than on the

technology itself (Johnson-Glenberg et al., 2021). This integration is essential given the variance

in the availability of technology advances among West Virginia families forced into remote

learning due to the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders.

Effective Online Course Design

Effective online course design does not happen accidentally; it must be intentional (Marquis, 2021). Unfortunately, although many school districts have been investigating transitioning some course offerings due to the sudden nature of the forced remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, online courses had to be implemented overnight (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023). An essential feature of effective online course design is the inclusion of a user-friending interface (Ralston-Berg & Braatz, 2021). A well-planned, learner-centered design and interface increases academic achievement (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023; Hodges et al., 2020; Ralston-Berg & Braatz, 2021). Another critical factor in improving student outcomes with online learning is the instructor's involvement and increased instructor presence (Lim et al., 2021).

COVID-19 and its Impact on Education

In early 2020, the coronavirus (COVID-19) spread was officially declared to be a world pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023; Baker et al., 2021; Kovacs et al., 2021). COVID-19 is a respiratory virus known to target the lungs of those infected. The WHO pandemic declaration triggered the closing of businesses and schools and canceling sports activities globally in March 2020 (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023; Carpenter & Dunn, 2020; Nusser, 2020). The school closings forced school districts to develop remote learning strategies immediately (Gouseti, 2021). By April 2020, 1.6 billion students were forced into remote learning (Azevedo et al., 2021). Stay-at-home orders disrupted the lives of families nationwide, and they had a tremendous impact on families relying on traditional public schools (Ettekal & Agans, 2020). In West Virginia, Governor Jim Justice ordered the closure of all pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade schools in the state (Damron, 2020). This sudden transition to remote learning gave parents a unique insight into their children's education while significantly

shifting the burden onto them. (Carpenter & Dunn, 2020; Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021; Kovacs et al., 2021). During 2020, the number of homeschoolers in America nearly doubled, mainly due to stay-at-home orders (Duvall, 2021). In addition to the chance to evaluate what their children were learning, parents were provided insight into the willingness and ability of the school system to provide resources, which often led to parents seeking alternate education options, including homeschooling (Carpenter & Dunn, 2020; English, 2021). The sudden transition to remote learning expanded the concept of homeschooling as parents were required to assist the public schools in implementing the curriculum (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021).

The sudden transition to remote learning proved difficult for families and school systems (Baker et al., 2021; Patrick et al., 2021; Tremmel et al., 2020). Experts agree that the sudden closure of public schools negatively impacted the educational structure of American culture (Hoofman & Secord, 2021; Storey & Zhang, 2021). The disruption was primarily due to the instability in communication between schools and families regarding the facilitation of instruction (Carpenter & Dunn, 2020; Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021; Price et al., 2021). Parents complained that the stresses of the quarantine, professional losses, working full-time, and the demands of remote learning were unreasonable (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). Many lacked the technological know-how and resources to participate in remote learning successfully (Hodges et al., 2020). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, online coursework was meaningfully planned as an alternative to in-person coursework (Ferri et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic school closures created a situation where coursework was forced to be offered remotely in response to the pandemic (Ferri et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). Fontenelle-Tereshchuk (2021) revealed in her research that remote learning during the pandemic lockdown was often shallow and lacked necessary explanations and expectations. Additionally, Norman et

al. (2020) found that many families lacked the technological skillset and experience to navigate the online courses offered during forced remote learning successfully. The disruption to education and daily life caused by the stay-at-home orders during the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented (Engzell et al., 2021; Hammerstein et al., 2021).

Unexpected Consequences of Forced Remote Learning

The impact of COVID-19 on education will be under scrutiny for years. Keierleber (2020) reports that COVID-19 resources cost billions of dollars. The primary goal of this study is to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Precautionary measures included closing schools worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic to minimize the spread of the virus (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023; Baker et al., 2021; Girard & Prado, 2022). This abrupt transition to forced remote learning impacted American families in many positive and negative ways, including requiring parents to participate in educating their children more actively (Carpenter & Dunn, 2020; Letzel et al., 2022). Deacon et al. (2021) found a strong correlation between forced remote learning and increased anxiety, depression, and stress among second-choice homeschooling parents and students. Parents forced into homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown expressed concern regarding their lack of experience and preparation to educate their children (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). On the other side of the research, Duvall (2021) maintains that an equal number of families reported a decrease in anxiety with an increase in the mental stability of their children.

The increase in anxiety, depression, and stress can be attributed to competing family responsibilities, such as work, as well as the uncertainty of the pandemic, and sudden responsibility for their child's education (Baker et al., 2021; Lacomba-Trejo et al., 2022; Letzel

et al., 2022). Additionally, feelings of loneliness added to the stresses of being confined during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cuadrado et al., 2021). Harper and Brewer (2021) found it difficult to compare the mental health of children homeschooled prior to the pandemic (first-choice) with those forced into homeschooling by the COVID-19 pandemic (second-choice). However, research indicates that first-choice homeschoolers may have adapted to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic better than second-choice homeschoolers (Girard & Prado, 2022). Regardless, many families forced into remote learning due to the pandemic discovered homeschooling as a viable option for educating their children (English, 2021; Musaddiq et al., 2022). Many second-choice homeschoolers continued homeschooling after the masses returned to the classroom (English, 2021; Musaddiq et al., 2022). Forced remote learning negatively impacted parent employment as parents, mothers in many cases, were forced to care for their children during the school day when many needed to be at work (Lyttelton et al., 2022; Petts et al., 2021). Working from home while simultaneously educating children proved stressful (Lyttelton et al., 2022). Dorn et al. (2021) also discovered a correlation between the learning disruptions created by the stay-at-home orders and the transition to remote learning and high school dropout rates.

Academic achievement for students participating in forced remote learning suffered during the school closures of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting achievement gaps for students participating in remote learning through the school system (Carpenter & Dunn, 2020; Skar et al., 2022; Wyse et al., 2020). Some families were better equipped to assist their children with forced remote learning than others, drawing attention to learning inequalities (Hammerstein et al., 2021; Sievertsen & Burgess, 2020). Many public school districts attempted to negotiate discounted rates packages or mailed educational materials to households lacking sufficient

resources to mitigate discrepancies in access to needed technology (Carpenter & Dunn, 2020). However, differences in the use of technology and difficulty adapting to remote learning played a role in the disruption of learning (Hammerstein et al., 2021). Research indicates that academic achievement gaps may increase among historically disadvantaged populations due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Musaddiq et al., 2022). Instead of a true partnership with the school system, many parents felt isolated and overwhelmed due to a breakdown in communication channels with the school (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). Additionally, many parents found the remote learning curriculum lacking in meeting their children's educational needs and were forced to purchase supplemental curriculum supplies to fill in the gaps in learning (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021).

In addition to the need for academic remediation, research points to the need for physical strength and endurance among youth participating in forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kabiri et al., 2021; Kovacs et al., 2021). Some school districts excelled at recommending safe outdoor activities, while others failed to prioritize physical activity among the students, leaving much of the responsibility for physical activity to the parents or students (Kovacs et al., 2021; Roe et al., 2020). Research about the physical fitness of students during the forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic is limited; however, it appears that the stay-at-home orders had a limited impact on the physical fitness of students despite a decrease in physical activity during the lockdown (Kabiri et al., 2021; Poulain et al., 2022; Roe et al., 2020).

Increase in Homeschooling Post-COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the education of millions of schoolchildren (Ettekal & Agans, 2020). Homeschooling rates steadily increased year over year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Guterman, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic school closures, students

transitioned to remote learning while maintaining their classification as public school students. While research is still being gathered about the motivations, many second-choice homeschoolers transitioned to first-choice homeschoolers during and shortly following the school closures (Anderson, 2022; Schueler & Miller, 2023). Duvall (2021) found that some families forced into remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic quickly ceased homeschooling once the stay-at-home orders were lifted. This new phase of homeschooling was supported by increased flexibility and technology among families with limited knowledge of homeschooling (Hoffman, 2023). Research indicates that during the fall of 2020, many parents opted not to re-enroll children in the public school system who had been previously enrolled before the pandemic closures (Anderson, 2022; Hoffman, 2023; Schueler & Miller, 2023). Research affirms that many families who have chosen to homeschool after the COVID-19 pandemic contribute to a more substantial decline in public school enrollment rates than observed before the pandemic (Schueler & Miller, 2023). Post-COVID-19 homeschooling families increased from five percent pre-pandemic to 19.5 percent post-pandemic (Anderson, 2022; Schueler & Miller, 2023). The increase in homeschooling post-COVID-19 pandemic is categorized by those who failed to re-enroll when schools re-opened and those who chose not to enroll their children into pre-kindergarten or kindergarten when the public schools reopened (Hoffman, 2023; Musaddiq et al., 2022).

Pre-COVID-19 pandemic, the majority demographic among homeschool families were white, conservative households (Anderson, 2022; Hoffman, 2023). The post-pandemic homeschool demographic has become much more diverse, with the most considerable growth in homeschooling demographics seen in black households, with pre-pandemic homeschooling numbers of around three percent and 16 percent post-pandemic (Anderson, 2022; Hoffman,

2023). Emerging research indicates that black, low-income, and middle-class families moved away from traditional public schools for their children (Anderson, 2022; Hoffman, 2023; Schueler & Miller, 2023). The increase in homeschooling was most remarkable in areas offering in-person and hybrid learning options during the COVID-19 school closures, indicating that fear of the virus may be a significant contributing factor (Anderson, 2022; Musaddiq et al., 2022). Post-pandemic, many states introduced a hybrid education model, allowing families to participate in public schools while retaining some autonomy over their children's education (Hamlin, 2020).

Summary

Chapter Two begins with a synthesis of the theoretical framework of Bandura's social cognitive theory. The chapter also synthesized the research literature on understanding the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. This literature review explored the literature relevant to the problem of this study, in that the COVID-19 pandemic created stresses related to the virus, with additional distress from the burden of schooling at home, while supporting the use of Bandura's social cognitive theory for the framework of the study of the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter two began with a discussion of Bandura's social cognitive theory as the theoretical framework for this research study. The related literature section included an examination of the literature related to the different topics and subtopics that may impact the participants' lived experiences. In addition to a review and synthesis of the related literature, this section explains how this research adds to the existing literature, including how this study may fill gaps in the existing literature and thereby present a need for this study.

This literature review supports the need for further research regarding understanding the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic by revealing that no qualitative research expressing the voice of West Virginia second-choice homeschoolers exists. Chapter Two lays the groundwork for this transcendental phenomenological research, which aims to fill the existing literature gap.

Homeschooling rates in America have continued to increase, with the most significant increase occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hamlin, 2020). The increase in homeschooling was most significant in areas offering in-person and hybrid learning options during the COVID-19 school closures, indicating that apprehension of the virus is a significant furthering factor (Anderson, 2022; Musaddiq et al., 2022). After the pandemic, many states presented a hybrid education model that offered families a way to participate in public schools while retaining some autonomy over their children's learning needs. The community of homeschooled families continues to maintain diverse motivations and methodologies (Dennison et al., 2020). West Virginia statute §18-8-1 includes provisions for families to legally homeschool within the state (West Virginia Legislature, 2023). Among those homeschooling, no "typical" family exists as parental motivations and methodologies are diverse (Heuer &

Donovan, 2021; Machovcova et al., 2021; Neuman & Guterman, 2021; NHES, 2019). This research classifies homeschoolers as either first-choice or second-choice based on whether the families' decision to homeschool was based on personal decisions or the forced remote learning of the COVID-19 pandemic (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). The available research about homeschooling success and viability is abundant; literature focused on understanding homeschoolers' lived experiences during the pandemic presents a gap

in the literature. This transcendental phenomenological study increases understanding of the

impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on remote learning among West Virginia homeschoolers.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The term second-choice homeschoolers in this research refers to homeschooling families in West Virginia who have first-hand experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary phenomenon studied is the lived experiences of West Virginia parents homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter three begins with an explanation of why a qualitative study is most suitable, followed by the rationale for using transcendental phenomenology as an appropriate general design for this study. The chapter explains why phenomenology is used for this study, followed by a brief history of transcendental phenomenology. The chapter concludes with the setting, participants, procedures, data collection plan, and explanation of the study's trustworthiness.

Research Design

Qualitative research allows the researcher to conduct an exploratory study of a phenomenon in a natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research was used for this study to explore homeschoolers' lived experiences with skepticism, opposition, and misinformation about homeschooling. A phenomenological approach best suits this study of the five approaches to qualitative research because it seeks to understand the participants' lived experiences while describing commonalities among participants as they experience the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological research is defined as hermeneutic (van Manen, 1990, 2014) or transcendental (Moustakas, 1994); however, these types share several features, including an emphasis on and the exploration of a phenomenon among a group

of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research study uses Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology model as I chose to bracket my experiences to provide an unbiased description of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This transcendental phenomenology focuses more on describing the participants' lived experiences and less on my interpretation of the collected data.

Edmund Husserl's writings are often considered the foundation of phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While van Manen's methodology has clear ties to Husserl, Moustakas's writings contrasted with Husserl's (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Despite the differences in perspectives among early phenomenologists like Husserl, van Manen, and Moustakas, one common ground is studying the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After evaluating hermeneutic and transcendental phenomenology, I decided to follow a transcendental approach for this research study to ensure the participants' lived experiences are clearly described without the influence of my preconceived ideas of those experiences.

Research Questions

The following central question and sub-questions were designed to gather rigorous data to address the purpose of the study.

Central Research Question

What were the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sub-question One

What were the challenges experienced by second-choice homeschooling families using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sub-question Two

What were opportunities experienced by second-choice homeschooling families using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sub-question Three

How do parents perceive their child/ren's academic success due to their heightened involvement in their child/ren's education while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

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Setting and Participants

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This section contains a description of the setting and participants for this study. The setting was homeschooling environments in West Virginia, and participants were parents purposefully selected based on their experience with homeschooling in West Virginia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The rationale for the setting and participant selection and an explanation of the selection process are included in the following sub-sections.

Setting

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The setting for this research was homeschool environments in West Virginia. Participants met via Teams platforms. A public library conference room was reserved to accommodate participants who were uncomfortable or could not access video conferencing software; however, this option was not needed. Homeschoolers rely on social media to collaborate and communicate with other homeschool families, making this medium a fitting location for researching this demographic.

There were an estimated 3.1 million homeschoolers during the 2020-2021 school year in

grades K-12, equating to 6.8 percent of all school-aged students (Irwin et al., 2022; Ray, 2022).

When broken down by race and ethnicity, research reveals that 7.4 percent of White adults, 6.5

of Hispanic adults, 5.1 percent of Black adults, and 3.6 percent of Asian adults homeschool, with

an estimated 10.6 percent of adults identifying as other electing to homeschool (Irwin et al.,

2022; Ray, 2022). Research reveals an equally diverse household income of low, middle, and

high income, with an estimated 8.8 percent of homeschooling families earning between $25,000

and $49,999, 8.6 percent earning between $50,000 and $74,999, 5.3 percent earning between

$100,000 and $149,000, and 5.5 percent earning more than $150,000 annually (Irwin et al.,

2022; Ray, 2022). Public school per-pupil spending costs taxpayers an estimated $15,000

annually, while research indicates that homeschoolers spend an estimated average of $600 per

student with no taxpayer contribution (Ray, 2022).

West Virginia homeschoolers were selected based on two main factors. The first factor is

that the state's homeschoolers align with the intent of this research study to understand parents'

lived experiences with homeschooling in West Virginia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The

second factor is the researcher's connection to West Virginia homeschoolers. As a veteran

homeschooler, cyberspace is a convenient way to identify participants, as I maintain membership

in many homeschool social media sites.

Participants

Participants in this study are parents currently or previously homeschooling at least one

child, with experiences homeschooling in West Virginia during the COVID-19 pandemic. After

obtaining IRB approval, I began recruiting 10 -15 participants. All participants had experience

homeschooling. Participants were not explicitly recruited based on age, ethnicity, gender, or

race, although an effort was made to obtain a diverse sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In

addition to a diverse participant sample, I sought to recruit participants with varied experiences with homeschooling methodologies and curriculum. A "typical" homeschooling family does not exist; however, common themes include homeschool parents who elected to rely on a packaged curriculum and those who choose an eclectic curriculum, in addition to families who choose to use a middle ground between those two extremes (Coleman, 2021; Ray, 2017). I sought to select participants who use a variety of curricula and methodologies.

Recruitment Plan

After collecting the required IRB permissions and approvals, I began the purposeful, convenience, snowball participant attainment process. Purposeful sampling was the first-round sampling process as it provided me with participants with whom I had developed a relationship during our shared experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Convenience and snowball sampling were used to increase the diversity and inclusiveness of the participant sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Potential participants were given a study information sheet containing pertinent details about the research study. Appendix C of this document contains a copy of this study information sheet. The study information sheet contains information regarding the voluntary nature of participation, security and confidentiality processes, and why they are under consideration for participation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Security and confidentiality processes included password-protected, multi-authenticated storage and pseudonyms for the participants and institution (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were selected based on their experience with the research phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I selected a group of 14 participants from West Virginia based on Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendation.

Researcher's Positionality

Researcher positionality is a foundational element for qualitative research, providing context to the researcher's position regarding the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Certain assumptions and biases are inherent to the researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By identifying these through reflection, the researcher establishes a framework of honesty and integrity for the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This section describes my motivation and positionality for conducting this study from a worldview and social context.

Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism provided an appropriate interpretive framework for this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A social constructivism framework allowed me to establish subjective meanings based on a broad understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Social constructivism and transcendental phenomenology aligned through the concept of bracketing, allowing the research to focus on the participants' lived experiences rather than the researcher's assumptions (Moustakas, 1994). The social constructivism framework allowed me to ask generalized, open-ended questions to allow the participants to construct the meaning rather than me (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Under the social constructivist framework, I bracketed my interpretations and sought to report the phenomenon through the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Philosophical Assumptions

Each research study contains certain philosophical assumptions, and this transcendental phenomenology was not an exception to that rule (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Philosophical assumptions influence multiple aspects of the research study, from topic selection to what questions to ask and the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following

subsections identify and address three philosophical assumptions that impacted my research study to provide the reader with an understanding of any beliefs I carried into the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ontological Assumption

The ontological assumption sought to understand the nature of reality, understanding that reality was often perceived differently based on lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ontological assumption required me to report any potential differences in perspectives between the participants about reality and me. As a Christian researcher, I understand that not all of this study's participants recognized the same ontological assumption as I do: That reality is based on one universal reality, that God's truth stands alone as a singular reality. Knowing that our understanding of God's singular reality was rudimentary helped me to embrace how some participants may embody the idea of alternate realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological assumptions pointed to the internal motivations held by the researcher about what was true about the research phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Johnson & Duberley, 2000). By identifying my beliefs about what constitutes justified knowledge, I could also identify areas of bias that needed to be bracketed to focus on the participants and data rather than my preconceptions (Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Moustakas, 1994). I was close to the research phenomenon because I was a homeschool parent before the COVID-19 pandemic and remained an active member of several social media-based homeschool support groups. While my proximity to the phenomenon introduced epistemological assumptions into the research, it also afforded me more profound insights into the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Axiological Assumption

Qualitative research is characterized by axiological assumptions of the researcher documenting their values in the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By understanding how my personal experiences may influence my understanding of the collected data, I could better bracket those preconceived ideas and focus on the data presented by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). I was a 53-year-old white female with more than 30 years of teaching experience and over 20 years of experience homeschooling. Because I was a homeschooling parent, I want to be aware of any presumptions I may have brought to the research study to focus on my participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Researcher's Role

My primary motivation for this transcendental phenomenology was to describe the shared experiences of parents' homeschooling in West Virginia during the COVID-19 pandemic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the key instrument in this qualitative study, I did not use data analysis tools created by another researcher. Instead, I was the data-collecting and data-analysis tool (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a 20-year-veteran homeschool mother of two children, I experienced the success of my sons' graduation from their undergraduate degree programs Summa Cum Laude, each having thriving social circles. However, I did not have experience homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. My research study primarily focused on homeschoolers who experienced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic to ascertain if they were first- or second-choice homeschoolers and what impact the pandemic had on their use of remote learning.

My experience as a homeschooling mother inspired me to research homeschooling parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. My experiences homeschooling were all pre-pandemic;

however, a gap existed in the literature regarding homeschooling experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact the pandemic had on their use of remote learning. I had no authority over the study's participants; however, I had an informal relationship with many parents in West Virginia. Therefore, participants were familiar with me and my work outside the research study. I was not currently homeschooling, but many parents knew about my professional career and personal life. This informal relationship could have impacted how data was collected and analyzed and was addressed directly and openly with participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Procedures

To maintain the ethical status of my research, I began with Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, followed by participant recruitment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the IRB approval process, I addressed the identified issues that could occur during this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A competent permission and approval process ensured the trustworthiness of the research as well as the protection of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Fourteen participants were selected via purposeful and convenience sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I contacted the participants for permission to conduct research. Pertinent documentation was attached to this document via an appendix.

After procuring the required permissions and approvals, the participants were secured via purposeful and convenience sampling, as described in the participant section of this document, I distributed the participant journal prompts via email and Facebook Messanger, depending on the convenience of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Security and confidentiality were reiterated throughout the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were given a two-week timeframe for returning journal prompts via email or other methods at their

convenience.

One-hour interviews were scheduled with each participant using Teams Meetings. Voice recordings and transcripts were created with backups for each interview. Upon completing the transcript clean-up, I submitted the transcripts to the individual participants for validation and accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I began to memo and track any codes from the beginning of the data collection process and continued through the end of data collection and into analyses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using the interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups, I triangulated the data based on the data analysis processes described in this chapter (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection Plan

Data collection is an integral part of a qualitative research study. This section reviewed the three approaches used in this study in the order in which they were used and explained why each approach was selected. Three approaches were used to collect data to ensure the collected data was triangulated and valid (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection began with Journal Prompts distributed to and collected from participants electronically via email or Facebook messenger based on the participant's preference. Individual interviews were recorded and transcribed for accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews focused on answering research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were asked to bring completed journal prompts to the interview if they had not submitted them. Participants expanded upon their journal entries during the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, I hosted a focus group of the participants to supplement the data collected during the individual interviews and journal prompts. Starting the data collection process with journal prompts provided insight into the participants' lived experiences. Individual interviews allowed me to answer the research questions and set the tone for the focus group meeting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All collected data is stored and backed up

to secure locations to protect the privacy of all participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Additionally, I reviewed the research purpose statement, privacy standards, and the voluntary

nature of participation of the participants at the beginning of each data collection approach

(Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Journal Prompts

The first round of data collection was conducted via journal prompts. I began by

analyzing participant responses to the prompts. Journal prompts collect participants' perspectives

by allowing them to edit their private thoughts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants completed a

five-question journal prompt and returned their submissions electronically via email and

Facebook messenger before the individual interview and focus group meetings. Participants were

allowed two weeks to complete the journal prompts, providing ample time for the participants to

draft, edit, and submit their responses. A study information sheet describing the purpose of the

research and confidentiality assurance was provided to the participants, along with the journal

prompt questions. (See Appendices).

Table 1

Journal Prompts

1. Please describe your experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19
   pandemic. CRQ

2. What advice do you have for decision-makers should an event like the COVID-19
   pandemic occur in the future? CRQ

3. Please describe one challenge your family experienced using remote learning
   during the COVID-19 pandemic. CR1

4. Please describe an opportunity or benefit your family experienced due to the forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. CR2

5. Please describe the academic achievement of your children while using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. CR3

Individual Interviews

The second round of data collection used individual interviews with the participants. The interview protocol described in Creswell and Poth (2018) was used. The interview protocol allowed me to take notes in a pre-defined format to focus more entirely on the interview process while not forgetting to address any areas of crucial importance to the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview protocol format included fields for the date, place, interviewee name, questions to ask, and a reminder to thank the participant before ending the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were conducted electronically based on the availability and preferences of the participants. Virtual interviews used Microsoft Teams videoconferencing software. The one-hour interviews were recorded using a primary and a secondary recording device and subsequently transcribed with participants informed of the recording process and the voluntary nature of their participation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transcriptions were provided to the participants for accuracy verification before data analysis began (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants of a virtual interview were provided with detailed instructions for accessing the videoconferencing platform before the interview. I conducted the individual interviews via telephone as a last resort for one participant who could not access Teams. I called this participant from the Teams application and used the software's built-in functionality to record and transcribe the interviews like the other participants. Individual interviews allowed me to build a rapport with the participants by enabling them to tell the story of their lived experiences with the

phenomenon based on a grand tour question (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Individual interviews lasted 60 minutes each and included relevant clarifying questions if needed to understand the participants' answers better. Interview questions are included in the table below and Appendix F.

Table 2

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself and your family.

2. Tell me a little about school for your family before the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Describe your interest in homeschooling before the COVID-19 pandemic and how forced remote learning impacted that experience. CRQ

4. How familiar were you with remote learning before the COVID-19 pandemic? CRQ

5. Tell me about your experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. CRQ

6. What challenges did you experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? SQ1

7. Describe one challenge that you experienced with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ1

8. Tell me about your experiences with technology resources available to you during your participation in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ1

9. What opportunities did you experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? SQ2

10. Describe one opportunity you experienced when homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ2

11. Describe your experience with a cooperative or support group during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ2

12. Describe your child/ren's academic achievement while participating in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ3

13. Describe what you consider to be successful practices with remote learning. SQ3

14. Describe your motivations for continuing to homeschool, or if you plan to return to public school, describe those motivations. CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3

15. What else would you like to add to our discussion that we have not discussed? CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3

Questions 1-2 develop a relationship between the researcher and participants while providing insight into the participants' lives before the COVID-19 stay-at-home order. Questions 3-5 explored the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers when participating in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. While questions 6-8, and 14-15 aligned with sub-question one by exploring the challenges experienced by the participants. Questions 9-11 and 14-15 addressed sub-question two by delving into the opportunities experienced by homeschoolers in West Virginia using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions 12-15 aligned with sub-question three by examining second-choice homeschoolers' perceptions of academic achievement while participating in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Focus Groups

The final round of data collection used focus group interviews with the participants. The interview protocol described in Creswell and Poth (2018) was used. As with the individual interviews, the interview protocol allowed me to take notes in a pre-defined format to focus more entirely on the interview process while not forgetting to address any areas of crucial importance to the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview protocol format included fields for the date, place, participant names, questions to ask, and a reminder to thank the participants before ending the focus group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus group met via Microsoft videoconferencing software. The one-hour focus group was recorded using a primary and a secondary recording device and subsequently transcribed with participants informed of the recording process and the voluntary nature of their participation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transcriptions were provided to the participants for accuracy verification before data analysis began (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All focus group participants received detailed instructions beforehand for accessing the videoconferencing platform. The focus group allowed me to continue building a rapport with the participants by allowing them to tell the story of their lived experiences with the phenomenon based on a grand tour question (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The focus group lasted 60 minutes and included appropriate follow-up prompts to understand the participants' answers better.

Table 3

Focus Group Questions

1. Please introduce yourselves to the room, including your name and a few sentences about yourself and your homeschooling journey.

2. Briefly describe your experiences with homeschooling support groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. CRQ

3. Describe one positive experience with homeschooling support groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. CRQ, SQ2

4. Describe one negative experience with homeschooling support groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. CRQ, SQ1

5. Describe a benefit of online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ2

6. Describe challenges you experienced with the online coursework during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ1

7. Describe the opportunities experienced during remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ2

8. Describe the impact you believe remote learning had on academic achievement during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ3

9. Describe the impact you believe remote learning had on academic achievement for your child/ren. SQ3

Question 1 aimed to develop a relationship between the participants to foster collaboration while discussing their shared experiences. Questions 2-4 described the participants' overall experiences with homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions 4 and 6 sought to contextualize the participants' challenges when using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. While questions 3, 5, and 7 described the opportunities experienced with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, questions 8-9 explored parents' perceptions regarding their child/ren's academic achievement while using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the Journal Prompt portion of the data collection process was first analyzed by a memo-level analysis to summarize any identified categories, themes, or comparisons related to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Memos and data were filtered into an Excel workbook to ease the identification of themes, codes, and relevant information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Care was taken to allow additional time for the journal prompt review process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Questions were grouped to guide the participants from introductions and relationship-building questions through questions related to each sub-question central research question. I began by bracketing my preconceived ideas about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The oral interview process required an evaluation and clean-up of the collected interview transcripts, followed by submitting the transcripts to the corresponding participant for certification of accuracy and completeness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once the transcripts were certified by the corresponding participant, I used memoing to record notes in an Excel workbook while reading through the data to highlight pertinent information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I also compared notes taken during the interview with the participants' words (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, I identified codes, followed by reducing the codes into themes to be categorized and reported (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During each re-read of the collected data, I used selective coding to identify recurring themes from the interview process. A final read allowed me to ensure that all coding was well documented into appropriate categories. The category codes were further synthesized into thematic codes to synthesize the phenomenon (Saldana, 2021). During this last reading, I decided on the finalization of themes, categories, and codes to ensure that everything was broken down and documented appropriately, beginning with bracketing my personal beliefs

using the Epoche process, followed by simplifying the language using Phenomenological

Reduction and proceeding with identifying possible variations using Imaginative Variation

(Moustakas, 1994).

Questions were grouped similarly to the individual interview questions to guide the

participants from introductions and relationship-building questions through questions related to

each sub-question central research question. Like the individual interview data analysis plan, I

began by bracketing my preconceived ideas about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

However, the oral interview process required an evaluation and clean-up of the collected

interview transcripts, followed by submitting the transcripts to the corresponding participant for

certification of accuracy and completeness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once the transcripts were

certified by the corresponding participant, I used memoing to record notes in an Excel workbook

while reading through the data to highlight pertinent information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I also

compared notes taken during the interview with the participants' words (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Next, I identified codes, followed by reducing the codes into themes to be categorized and

reported (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During each re-read of the collected data, I used selective

coding to identify recurring themes from the interview process. A final read allowed me to

ensure that all coding was well documented into appropriate categories. The category codes were

further synthesized into thematic codes to synthesize the phenomenon (Saldana, 2021). During

this last reading, I decided on the finalization of themes, categories, and codes to ensure that

everything was broken down and documented appropriately, beginning with bracketing my

personal beliefs using the Epoche process, followed by simplifying the language using

Phenomenological Reduction and proceeding with identifying possible variations using

Imaginative Variation (Moustakas, 1994).

Data synthesis helped me better understand the research phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To assist this process, I created a tracking spreadsheet using an Excel workbook to track codes, themes, and categories that arise as a natural part of the data analysis process. The Excel workbook allowed for a cross-data collection method synthesis, allowing me to quickly identify commonalities among the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) discussed a creative data synthesis based on the researchers' study of the composite data based on the participants' lived experiences. The continual analysis of the data allowed me to view the synthesis of the aggregated data (Moustakas, 1994). The data synthesis ensured that the research questions were answered, as Creswell and Poth (2018) described.

Trustworthiness

Creswell and Poth (2018) reported trustworthiness as a measure of validity in qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1982) also identify several naturalistic criteria for judging trustworthiness, including confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability. This section details the importance of each method in the research study.

Credibility

Credibility can be assessed by gauging its internal validity and achieved using triangulation through data sources, research methods, and researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Saldana (2021) states that credibility can be lost if the researcher fails to demonstrate diverse and long-lasting effects. I used three techniques to establish credibility within my study: triangulation, peer debriefing, and member-checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). These techniques are detailed in the following subsections.

Triangulation

Triangulation established the credibility of the data by cross-checking data sources, perspectives, and methods to identify constructs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Triangulation of data helped the researcher overcome any limitations of the data collection methods by increasing each respective advantage (Shenton, 2004). The collected data was triangulated by comparing the participant questionnaire and interview answers and document data analysis for similarities and disparities (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Peer Debriefing

The peer debriefing after data coding served as a reality check for the researcher and assisted in writing the analytic reflection (Saldana, 2021). Peer debriefing allowed the researcher an external reality check. The peer debriefing was conducted by individuals familiar with the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I scheduled debriefing sessions with individuals familiar with the research study at the end of each data collection step. The peer debriefing sessions allowed me to evaluate and expand approaches as potential flaws and strengths are identified and ensure that the data supports the analyses (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Shenton, 2004).

Member Checking

Member checking included providing interview transcripts to the participants to allow them to validate the accuracy. Associated memoing was updated accordingly based on the results of the member-checking process (Moustakas, 1994). In addition to sharing transcripts with the participants for validation, I shared the themes and conclusions identified to expand the understanding of the phenomenon based on the members' interpretation of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Marshall and Rossman (2015) expressed the importance of scheduling time for member-checking into the research study time frame.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability of other researchers to apply the findings to similar research studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Shenton, 2004). One way I ensured the transferability of the study was to include deep descriptions using rich descriptors of the data findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Marshall and Rossman (2015) indicated that one way to ensure transferability was to include a large, diverse participant group due to setting and participant selection's impact on transferability. Although my participant and setting selection are primarily based on convenience, I strove to include the most diverse groupings possible and provide enough details for future researchers to decide on applicability to future research; however, qualitative research does not guarantee transferability due to the relatively small sample sizes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Shenton, 2004).

Dependability

The dependability of a research study ensures that the findings are reliable (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Shenton (2004) stated that researchers have difficulty demonstrating dependability in qualitative research and should provide sufficient detail for future researchers to build upon. Credibility and dependability are closely related (Shenton, 2004). Because of this close relationship, credibility and dependability support each other in the research process (Shenton, 2004). An audit trail ensured that I could retrace the research process and evaluate the dependability of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability was established by auditing the research process to ensure the findings can be traced back to the initial data and describe the interactions between data elements (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Saldana, 2021). Audit trails ensured the

conclusions were derived from the data, not my preconceived ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Shenton, 2004). My memoing was essential to the audit trail as I actively bracketed my preconceived ideas about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Marshall and Rossman (2015) discussed the difficulty qualitative researchers have directly confirming the findings of another study. In addition to the audit trail, confirmability was established through methods that ensured other levels of trustworthiness, such as triangulation and reflexivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Shenton, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

Marshall and Rossman (2015) discussed the importance of including a section dedicated to any ethical considerations that may arise during the research study. Ethical considerations extend beyond ensuring each participant's informed consent and steps taken to ensure anonymity for everyone involved. (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Ethical considerations refer to any challenges during the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The following sections examine any ethical considerations or implications of the research. A discussion of the required permissions is also considered.

Permissions

Permission was secured from all participants, and documentation is presented in an appendix of this document (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I began an informal conversation with the West Virginia community during the proposal phase of my research study to generate interest. Additional approval was presented from the Liberty University IRB (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All published procedures were followed to obtain this approval, and the required documentation is presented in this document's appendix.

Other Participant Protections

Relationships and power are common ethical considerations in many qualitative studies; however, this was not true for my research study, as I hold no real or perceived power over the intended participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). An essential ethical consideration was to bracket my preconceptions about the phenomenon to maintain respectful relationships free from stereotyping or labeling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). When participants access, it was essential to maintain appropriate boundaries and ensure that I represented myself and my research honestly and ethically (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The same was true when I obtained informed consent from my participants. I carefully and ethically represented myself and the research study to ensure that the participants were fully aware of the voluntary nature of participation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During this time, I ensured that participants knew the identified risks and benefits of participation. An additional ethical consideration concerns how the collected data was stored. All documents are stored and backed up electronically on password-protected devices requiring multi-factor authentication for access. Additional security for data is in that all participants are assigned pseudonyms. Any extraneous data collected was destroyed appropriately.

Summary

Chapter three explained the data choices, collection methods, and analysis procedures followed in this research study. This transcendental phenomenology aimed to understand parents' lived experiences with homeschooling in West Virginia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was collected through journal prompts, individual interviews, and a focus group. Data was analyzed through first and second-cycle coding. This chapter began with an overview of the research design and a reiteration of the research questions, followed by a description of the setting and participants. Next, I discussed my positionality, including my interpretive framework,

philosophical assumptions, and role. Then, the research procedures and data collection plan were

discussed at length, followed by a detailed section about the trustworthiness of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The phenomenological approach allowed the participants' lived experiences to serve as the basis for a common shared experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants recruited for this study were West Virginian parents with at least one child participating in forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. The data presented in this chapter were gathered from journal prompts, individual interviews, and a focus group. All the participants' quotes in this manuscript, including grammatical errors in speech and writing, are presented verbatim to depict their voices accurately. A background summary is provided for each participant to provide context. Themes and subthemes are then discussed, followed by answers to the research questions. Outliers are also noted. A summary concludes the chapter.

Participants

Thirteen parents participated in this research study. Of the thirteen, ten participants were female, and three were male. Each participant had at least one child using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants resumed traditional on-site education for their children upon re-opening the school system. The participants were recruited using criterion sampling from Facebook. The following table and narratives introduce each participant based on data gathered from January 7, 2024, through January 27, 2024, via journal prompts, individual interviews, and a focus group meeting. Not every participant completed all three data collection methods.

Alice

Alice is a West Virginian instructional designer who, during the COVID-19 school closures, had two children enrolled in a public school in Kanawha County, West Virginia. Alice was familiar with homeschooling and remote learning; however, she had no interest in either for her family. Due to her full-time job, Alice expressed a lack of preparedness and interest to lead her children's education. She described her family's experience with the COVID-19 forced remote learning as less than ideal. Her daughter dealt with learning difficulties her entire school career. As a senior in high school, Alice's daughter adapted better to the circumstances of the school closures and forced remote learning than her son. While Alice's daughter's biggest hurdle was accepting a drive-through graduation due to the COVID-19 distancing regulations, her son struggled with motivation to get his assignments turned in. Alice's son also struggled with a lack of consistency with how his teachers set up the Blackboard Learning Management System coursework. Alice stated that her son benefitted because it was much easier for him to get higher grades due to the lowered expectations of the teachers. One teacher gave students full credit for any assignment turned in. Alice admitted that her son received full credit for uploading blank documents into Blackboard. Despite her overall negative experience with COVID-19 forced remote learning, Alice appreciated that they could spend more time together as a family during this time; however, her overall experience with forced remote learning was less than optimal.

Annette

Annette is a nurse practitioner living in Kanawha County, West Virginia, with her husband, a healthcare provider, and her son, an elementary school student. Annette's husband also works in healthcare, and there was significant concern within the family over one of the adults carrying the COVID-19 virus home to their son. Annette initially dropped her son off at

her parent's daily; however, fear of the COVID-19 virus inspired her parents to suggest Annette's son stay with them for the duration of the closures. Annette and her husband would drop off clothes and other supplies on the porch and visit them virtually. While the temporary separation alleviated the fear of spreading the COVID-19 virus with her family, it added to the overall stress of the circumstances of not being able to spend time with her son. She acknowledged that having her parents assume responsibility for her son's education and supervision simplified the family routine because she and her husband were not navigating to see who was available for pick-ups and drop-offs. Annette was familiar with homeschooling and remote learning before the COVID-19 school closures but never considered it an option for her family. Her son's remote learning experience was a live, instructor-led experience with a traditional schedule, and Annette thought this allowed her son an element of familiarity in a time of uncertainty. She felt that the strict schedule followed by her son's school benefited her externally motivated child.

Connie

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Connie was a healthcare professional living in Kanawha County, West Virginia, with her elderly mother and daughter. Connie's daughter was in 11th grade, and her mother required total care and lived in an apartment in the basement of the house at the onset of the COVID-19-forced school closures. Nurses were in and out of the house to assist with her care. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Connie's daughter was active in swimming and theatre. Connie was familiar with homeschooling and remote learning but had no interest in either for her daughter. The COVID-19 pandemic created a trifecta of concern for Connie and her family by combining the fear of Connie carrying the virus from her work as a healthcare professional with concern over her daughter's education and care for her mother.

Circumstances led to Connie's daughter taking a lead role in the care of grandma. Although Connie was distressed at the thought of her daughter being burdened with the extra duties of full-time care of an elderly family member, her daughter reflects fondly on her time caring for her grandmother and is thankful for the bonus time she was able to spend with her due to the COVID-19 closures. Despite the upfront fears, Connie and her family had a positive experience throughout the remote learning. After the initial adjustment period, when the teachers adapted to the technology, Connie admitted that the forced remote learning benefitted her daughter. An unexpected benefit was her daughter's enrollment in online classes, like Japanese, that would not have been available to her in a traditional school setting. The challenges included finding a math tutor, which the family used regularly before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the fears were unfounded as Connie's daughter confidently entered her senior year at the end of the school closures.

Debby

Debby is a single mother working as an instructor in a private school in Kanawha County, West Virginia. She has three children: a set of 17-year-old twins and a 19-year-old. All three children were school-aged at the time of the COVID-19 school closures. Debby states that before the forced remote learning, all three children were straight-A students with an occasional B and were involved in numerous extracurricular activities. Debby was familiar with homeschooling but not remote learning. She confided that a lack of faith in the public school system, based on her experience as a student and teacher, inspired her to consider homeschooling her children. However, circumstances following a divorce led her to pursue a career at a private school, offering her children free tuition as part of her compensation package. During the COVID-19 school closures, Debby's children had aged out of the private school and were

enrolled in public school. Despite her limited confidence in the public schools, her children adapted well. Debby's family did not have a positive experience with the forced remote learning. Debby expressed concern over the lack of accountability for showing up for classes and turning in assignments on time and stated that many days, her children were the only ones present for the scheduled online learning. She attributes the overachieving nature of her children to their success with the COVID-19 forced remote learning rather than the county's success in providing quality education.

Derek

Derek lives in Cabell County, West Virginia, and had two stepsons participating in the forced remote learning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Derek and his wife are healthcare professionals, and one son was in middle school, while the other was in high school during the COVID-19 school closures. Derek's stepsons had active Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) in place pre-pandemic and had minor academic struggles due to learning disabilities, including Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and a Math Disability. Derek stated that the change in structure during the forced remote learning accentuated his stepson's lack of internal motivation. Derek and his wife had zero interest in homeschooling or remote learning for their sons, stating that, based on his personal educational experiences, he understood the importance of the public school structure for students with an academic disability. Despite the challenges associated with completing assignments on time, Derek shared that access to high-speed internet service was the biggest challenge. The family had recently moved to a larger house, and the neighborhood had no high-speed internet providers. The family did not realize until the day they closed on the new house that it was outside the coverage area for high-speed internet. At the beginning of the COVID-19 school closures, the family had to drive the children to the local Panera Bread

restaurant to use the establishment's free internet in order for the boys to complete their assignments. Derek discovered a hotspot workaround option through AT&T; however, the company periodically detected the overage usage of the service and kicked everyone offline. Reliable high-speed internet was unavailable in Derek's neighborhood until after the schools reopened.

Eddie

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Eddie lived with his wife and youngest daughter in Kanawha County, West Virginia. An older daughter lived away at college and was forced to return home for the COVID-19 shutdowns. Their youngest daughter was a senior in high school. Eddie and his wife also converted to remote work at this time. While familiar with remote learning and homeschooling before the COVID-19 school closures, Eddie was not interested in either for their family. Eddie's daughters were older and self-motivated, so that they could take responsibility for their learning with limited parental oversight. His daughter in public school had the use of a county-provided iPad, and she was able to navigate her schoolwork successfully. Although Eddie's family did not like the forced remote learning, they did not experience any significant challenges. Eddie expressed that the initial lack of communication, planning, and coordination on the county's part improved as the semester progressed. One benefit of the pandemic closures for the family was the discovery of their enjoyment of outdoor activities. Their newfound love of the outdoors continues today.

Hazel

Hazel is a married systems analyst for a local healthcare system. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hazel worked full-time onsite, was a full-time remote college student, and had three school-aged children living in their Cabell County, West Virginia home with her and her

husband. The three daughters attended three different schools in two different counties. Hazel's

husband is a first responder who works 24-hour shifts. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hazel

and her husband had seventh- and ninth-grade daughters attending school in Wayne County but

at different schools, and one seventh-grader was attending Cabell County. Hazel was familiar

with homeschooling and remote learning but was not interested in those education models for her

family. The COVID-19-forced remote learning for the girls was complex for the family because,

many days, neither parent was available to be home with the girls during the day. Eventually,

Hazel could transition to remote work for the healthcare system to ease the burden of having

their daughters home alone all day. Hazel's daughters struggled academically during the

COVID-19 forced remote learning, and she expressed frustration with the teacher's response.

Math and foreign language courses provided the most challenge for Hazel's daughters. Her

family's experience included teachers who assigned and collected assignments but provided no

teaching. The family was responsible for figuring out how to do the assignments without input

from the counties or teachers. Hazel's straight-A, advanced-course daughters failed classes for

the first and only time in their school years. An unfortunate benefit of the teachers' lack of

involvement was the family bonding to get through the experience together. Another benefit

Hazel identified in hindsight was that COVID-19-forced remote learning may have prepared her

daughters to enroll in online coursework for their undergraduate degrees.

Jeff

Jeff's stepdaughter, Lucy, participated in COVID-19-forced remote learning in Cabell

and Kanawha Counties, West Virginia. Jeff and his wife moved from Cabell to Kanawha County

at the end of the COVID-19 school closures. Lucy faced significant academic challenges while

participating in remote learning, slipping her grades from As to Ds. She also struggled with

social isolation. Jeff noted that Lucy's academic difficulties stemmed from the lack of assistance from her teachers and the challenges of completing the coursework without input from the teacher. Instead of an opportunity for individualized instruction from the teacher, forced remote learning resulted in a figure-it-out-yourself situation. When the announcement was made that students would return to in-person learning, Lucy became highly anxious because of her slipping grades and fear of contracting COVID-19. Her anxiety resolved over time after the move from a larger school in Cabell County to a smaller school in Kanawha County. Jeff acknowledged that COVID-19-forced remote learning benefitted the family by simplifying the family's schedule for drop-offs and pick-ups. In hindsight, another benefit is that Lucy gained valuable insight into what is needed to succeed with self-directed learning and is subsequently doing well with her college coursework.

Joy

Joy is a single mom living in Logan County, West Virginia, with two children. Her son was in Kindergarten during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures, and her daughter was in preschool. Joy works in a local restaurant and was familiar with homeschooling before the forced remote learning but was not familiar with remote learning. She did not have any interest in homeschooling for her family. Despite her early reluctance to educate her son at home, Joy found the experience rewarding to be present for his educational milestones. Her challenges with COVID-19-forced remote learning included difficulties keeping her son focused and on a consistent schedule. However, Joy noted that an added benefit was her daughter could experience kindergarten early and learn along with her brother. They enjoyed the extra time together that the COVID-19 closures created but did find it challenging to be in the house so much. Joy experienced early technology issues because the county had not issued tablets to the

kindergarten students, and the family did not own adequate technology to run the required

remote-learning software. Joy found that the Logan County school system was quick to respond

to the technology needs of the families and provided needed hardware and tech support.

Transitioning back to in-person learning was stressful for Joy as she had a significant fear of the

COVID-19 virus; however, she found that the routine and normalcy of returning to school

benefited her family.

June

During the COVID-19 pandemic, June lived in Kanawha County, West Virginia, with her

husband and two daughters. June is a certified public accountant in the banking industry and

worked on-site at a local branch while her husband worked from home. June's daughters were

enrolled in fifth and eighth grade in Kanawha County. June was familiar with homeschooling

and remote learning but was not interested in either for their family. The girls had positive

experiences in the public school system. June's oldest daughter struggled to transition to middle

school because of the emphasis on submitting school work through an online learning

management system named Schoology. However, at the beginning of her eighth-grade year, she

had adapted and was doing well. Unfortunately, COVID-19-forced remote learning was a

setback for both girls, despite June's early hopes that it would work well for their family. June's

daughters struggled to maintain a consistent schedule because of the lax requirements set by the

schools for engagement in online courses. June and her husband would often take days off work

to focus time supervising the girls' schoolwork. The girls' lack of motivation to complete their

assignments was exacerbated by the school's lack of communication and efficacy in providing a

practical online learning experience. Upon returning to on-site school, June's oldest daughter

participated in a credit recovery program to attempt to regain missed credits for graduation. In

addition to the challenges experienced with motivation during the COVID-19 shutdown period, the family also struggled to balance life with extended family members' compromised health statuses.

Karen

Karen is a single mother with four children enrolled in a small private school in Kanawha County, West Virginia. Karen had experience as a homeschooler and enrolled them in traditional school after a divorce. The school issued iPads and used Google Classroom to manage the COVID-19-forced remote learning. Karen worked full-time outside of the home and found the daily management of coursework a struggle to maintain with her work schedule. Communication with the school was a pain point, as Karen often felt excluded from assignment updates because of the lack of a centralized learning management system. The forced remote learning allowed the family to slow down and spend more time together. The family found an additional benefit in the children's gaining valuable skills in managing their coursework independently.

Mark

Mark lives with his wife and daughter in Cabell County, West Virginia. Mark is familiar with remote learning and homeschooling but was adamant that the homeschool population should be restricted to families where the parents were trained as educators. Mark and his wife work full-time outside of the home. Mark is an executive director for a healthcare center, and his wife works for a nonprofit. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the family struggled with fears of carrying the COVID-19 virus home from Mark's work, managing extended family relations with relatives with compromised health, and the unknown world of elementary school via iPad. Before the pandemic, Mark's daughter was a good student and benefited from a structured home life but struggled with the forced remote learning. While her grades dropped during the COVID-

19 shutdown, they quickly improved upon her return to face-to-face instruction. The family's most significant challenge was the negative emotional impact of the lack of socialization and the ongoing negative news about the COVID-19 virus. Mark's daughter struggled with depression as a result of the separation from her grandparents and friends and the onslaught of negative news stories. A bright spot emerged amid the experience of the opportunity to travel out of state off-season without taking time off from school.

Mary

Mary lives in Kanawha County, West Virginia, with her husband and two children from a prior marriage. Before the COVID-19 school closures, her children were enrolled in a local public elementary school and participated in the school gifted program. Both children have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) diagnoses. Mary considered homeschooling her children, but work logistics and complex family dynamics led her to enroll in public school instead. Mary's children struggled with paying attention to the structure of remote instruction; however, the children's grandmother was a certified teacher and opened up her home to help manage the remote learning. Academic struggles with COVID-19 forced remote learning, resulting in her oldest child having to repeat a grade. Repeating a grade caused significant damage to her daughter's self-confidence.

Additionally, the family struggled with the required increase in electronic device use. Mary found it difficult to ensure the children were working on schoolwork and not non-school-related device use. As her oldest daughter transitioned out of elementary school and into middle school during the pandemic, Mary once again found herself contemplating homeschooling to circumvent the traditional middle school girl drama. She ultimately chose to continue public

education, finding value in her children's learning to navigate the intricacies of social interactions at an early age.

Molly

Molly is a married project manager living in Kanawha County, West Virginia, with her husband and daughter during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her daughter was a senior at a local high school. In addition to the stresses of the pandemic and forced remote learning, Molly was also undergoing chemotherapy and radiation treatments while caring for an elderly family member. Molly's daughter was an excellent student and had completed only a few credits so she could attend high school with a limited schedule. Molly was dissatisfied with the education provided by the Kanawha County school system and had often considered homeschooling but feared that she lacked the skills to provide a quality education for her daughter. She was familiar with remote learning and had opted for several for her daughter before the pandemic. When Kanawha County schools transitioned to remote learning, Molly's adapted quickly. The school provided iPads, and the family had access to adequate high-speed internet. While remote learning did not pose a challenge for the family, the COVID-19 pandemic was described by Molly as a trauma event, with fear of the COVID-19 virus triggering an agoraphobia-like response for the family. Additionally, Molly noted that the school relied on a Facebook post to inform families about commencement plans rather than sending out a notification through the school learning management system for all to see. In hindsight, Molly wishes she had homeschooled her daughter from a young age.

Table 4

Participants

Participant	Gender	County	Number of Children Using Remote Learning

Alice	Female	Kanawha	2
Annette	Female	Kanawha	2
Connie	Female	Kanawha	1
Debby	Female	Kanawha	2
Derek	Male	Cabell	1
Eddie	Male	Kanawha	1
Hazel	Female	Cabell and Wayne	3
Jeff	Male	Cabell and Kanawha	1
Joy	Female	Logan	1
June	Female	Kanawha	2
Karen	Female	Kanawha	2
Mark	Male	Cabel	1
Mary	Female	Kanawha	1
Molly	Female	Kanawha	1

Results

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The shared experiences of 13 West Virginian parents were examined using journal prompts, individual interviews, and a focus group to provide the basis for emerging themes and sub-themes. The individual interviews and the focus group session were conducted using the Microsoft Teams software, while the journal prompt answers were collected via email. I created audio recordings and transcripts for the individual interviews and the focus group session using the built-in transcription functionality of the Teams software. A backup

recording of the sessions was created using the voice recording feature on my cellphone. This section contains the themes and sub-themes identified from the data triangulation process. The section concludes by examining the research questions from the lens of the data collected. Direct participant quotes are provided to support the findings.

Table 5

Themes & Subthemes

Theme	Sub-theme
Homeschooling	Perception
COVID-19 Shutdowns	Emotional Stress
	Opportunities
	Hindsight
Forced Remote Learning	Familiarity
	Technology
	Other Challenges and Opportunities
	Parent, Student, and Teacher Engagement
	Returning to School

Academic Achievement	Learning Styles
	Academic Rigor, Struggles, and Successes
Work-Life Balance	Benefits and Challenges
	Working in Healthcare

Homeschooling

All participants of this research study were familiar with homeschooling before the shutdowns and forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mary commented, "I knew that it existed even way back in the 90s." However, the study data indicated that the participants believed that few parents have the skillset to homeschool full-time and that children's education should remain in the hands of trained professionals. Of the fourteen participants, eight indicated they lacked what it takes to homeschool their children successfully. Five participants admitted they considered homeschooling but ultimately enrolled their children in public or private schools. June stated, "We had kicked around homeschooling because our kids had trouble in elementary school, and until we found the perfect elementary school, we considered homeschooling." Among the five participants contemplating homeschooling, one had initially chosen homeschooling but, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, shifted to traditional school enrollment for her children.

Perception of Homeschooling

The perception of homeschooling was positive, with all participants acknowledging it as a valid choice for quality education. Hazel noted, "From what I've observed from people who have homeschooled, you know, I've always thought that their kids always seem smarter." Molly added to the conversation, stating, "Now that we've done it, I wish we would have

homeschooled her from the 8th grade because I think we could have taught her more than what she learned in public school." Other participants made it clear that homeschooling is not for everyone. Derek emphasized, "True homeschooling is a world different than a high school graduated mom who just simply wants to stay at home for the kids." While participants acknowledged homeschooling as a valuable educational option, they also highlighted the importance of genuine commitment, planning, and dedication to see the best outcomes for their children. All participants viewed homeschooling positively; however, it was acknowledged that it may not be a suitable alternative for every family due to differing family circumstances and educational approaches.

COVID-19 Shutdowns

The COVID-19 pandemic forced shutdowns left an impression on the research study participants. The emotional toll of isolation was exacerbated by separation from friends and family members and compounded the stresses experienced by the participants because of the pandemic's health concerns. Hazel remarked, "It was an incredibly difficult time for our family." Annette goes even further in her description of the shutdowns:

> "I feel like mentally it probably was not good for us to hyper-focus on that kind of thing, and just the fact that it took your basic life choice away – like we can't go to the mall because the mall is closed, we can't do things that were always an option, now they are no longer an option. It was mentally fatiguing and draining."

Despite the stresses of the shutdowns, participants shared silver linings discovered at the slower pace of life. Looking back on the COVID-19 shutdowns, participants expressed a lingering sense of loss and reflected on missed milestones and academic setbacks resulting from the disruptions. Participants highlighted the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their families.

Emotional Stress

Isolation from friends and family members added to the emotional stress of the participants. Mark reflected on his daughter, "Mentally, it was a toll on her because she was without her friends and time out of the house. I think that was the worst part." Participants expressed additional emotional stress due to health concerns within their household and for family members. June, Connie, Mark, and Molly each had someone in their families with compromised health prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, causing additional emotional stress for the family during the shutdowns as isolation became a necessity. June's parents were in a nursing home, and she noted, "I would go down occasionally and visit with them outside their door or outside their window at the nursing home." The enforced isolation during the COVID-19 shutdowns increased the emotional strain experienced by the participants. Participants noted that they particularly missed the social interactions and the ability to visit closely with loved ones outside their households. Participants also expressed a feeling of loneliness and a longing for connection with themselves and their children. Pre-existing health conditions added another layer of emotional stress for the participants and their families. Participants expressed fears about the well-being of vulnerable family members intensified during the shutdowns because they could no longer visit in person but had to rely on getting their loved ones' health updates from a distance.

Opportunities

Despite the emotional toll of the shutdowns, participants also noted opportunities due to the COVID-19 shutdowns. Eddie's family discovered a love for outdoor activities during the shutdowns. He stated, "I think we coped well because we started doing more outdoor things like hiking where there were not a lot of people around." In addition to outdoor activities, participants

discovered unexpected opportunities found in the slower pace of the shutdowns. Karen

remarked, "We were able to slow down and spend more time as a family. Walks in the evening

were a necessary outlet without extracurriculars. However, I enjoyed not feeling forced to stay in

'taxi mode'". Amidst the stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants recognized

unexpected opportunities, including a newfound love of outdoor activities such as hiking. A

slower life rhythm also gave families more time to cherish moments spent together and foster

deeper connections within the household.

Hindsight

In hindsight, the participants felt a sense of loss. Participants expressed a lingering sense

of missed milestones, academic setbacks, and personal and financial loss from the disruptions of

the COVID-19 shutdowns. Molly stated:

> "So, we have all these kids getting ready to graduate college who do not know what a
>
> graduation ceremony is. I wish I would have done more for her during that time, but we
>
> had so many other things going on with me being sick."

Even years later, Annette expressed concerns that her son had not made up for the losses

academically. She said, " I just still feel like it just put, put him behind." Participants expressed a

lasting impact of the unforeseen circumstances of the COVID-19 shutdowns.

Forced Remote Learning

The COVID-19 shutdowns prompted an immediate adoption of remote learning among

West Virginia school systems. Thirteen of the 14 participants were familiar with remote learning

before the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this familiarity with remote learning, participants

expressed concerns about the efficacy of using remote learning in their families. Participants

highlighted concerns about accessibility, engagement, and academic outcomes. Throughout the

data analysis, sub-themes emerged, including technology, challenges and opportunities, engagement, and returning to on-site learning.

Familiarity

While 13 of the 14 participants were familiar with remote learning before the COVID-19 pandemic, five had completed coursework using remote learning—three of those five completed graduate degrees from higher education institutions with remote learning options. At the same time, one participant was enrolled in undergraduate studies using remote learning. Connie remarked, "I got my first post-masters degree in a blended program, so there was some requirements to show up in person, but a lot of our classes was online." Mark also completed a master's degree using remote learning. He stated, "I did that for a couple of years and got my master's degree, so I was kind of familiar with it, but a lot of things changed." Participants expressed confidence in navigating the technology needed to implement remote learning.

Technology

Participants expressed challenges with technology during the forced remote learning ranging from minor to significant. June noted that navigating the technology at first was challenging because they did not have school-issued devices, but once the county distributed tablets to all the students, the schoolwork was much easier to navigate. She said, "It was hard to even do it, but once we got their tablets from school, it was better." Debby's family had minimal technology challenges, but she wondered, "I guess one thing that in my mind that always popped up to me was the people who didn't have Wi-Fi and how they handled it." Derek's family was just such a family. He stated, "It was very challenging, mostly due to technology. We had recently purchased a new home in a new neighborhood. We can see the mall from our house, so we never imagined we wouldn't have internet available." Derek's family often resorted to using

free Wi-Fi at a local restaurant to complete schoolwork. Overall, the participants' shared experiences highlight various technology challenges experienced during the COVID-19 forced remote learning, including resource limitations and high-speed internet availability.

Other Challenges and Opportunities

Forced remote learning introduced challenges to the participants' lives. Mary noted, "Yeah, there were more hurdles doing the remote learning." While many of these challenges were technology-based, participants also reflected on issues such as communication with the school, sloppy implementation, and the need to plan for future returns to forced remote learning. Jeff complained, "It hurts students. There has to be a better plan in place next time." Regarding communication Molly stated, "The school did a Facebook announcement that they were going to do a ceremony outside, but they did not individually contact the students." According to Molly, the only families who knew about graduation were those on a singular social media platform rather than sending an announcement through the learning management system.

Despite the challenges stated, the participants also identified many opportunities for their families due to the forced remote learning. One such opportunity that Connie and Hazel mentioned was that forced remote learning prepared their children for online coursework in higher education. Connie stated, "Kids should know how to be flexible with learning platforms because higher education is going the route of online instruction." While Hazel said, "I do feel like the future is remote learning, and I feel like, if anything, the good thing that came out of that was to introduce them to it." Participants also found opportunities in an expanded curriculum and travel. Connie's daughter was able to enroll in Japanese as a foreign language. This class was not offered at her school but was available during forced remote learning. Connie would like to see this practice continue. She stated, "I think that opening up opportunities for classes that are not

available locally should be a practice that is encouraged." Mark's family could travel to visit family without interruption to school or work. He stated:

> "I mean, this was well after the big risk was over with, but during the main risk, you
>
> know, we went to, we went and spent two weeks in Florida, and I got to remote into work
>
> and spend some time with my mom and dad right before they both passed away."

Parent, Student, and Teacher Engagement

Participants often mentioned engagement in the course of data collection. All participants were involved in their child(ren)'s remote learning at some level by helping them navigate getting assignments turned in on time or with instruction on the course material. While the first triggered conflicts between the parent and child, the latter evoked feelings of inadequacy for the participants. June remarked about helping her daughters get their assignments submitted on time: "There was a whole lot of, yeah, there was a whole lot of yelling and screaming and, you know, it was rough." When it came time to help with content understanding, Derek related, "Our youngest was using Common Core, which is way different than how I learned growing up, and I never really got some of the lessons down." Mark echoed, "We would struggle trying to keep up because that's a long way back to go back to 4th grade and some of the math that they were sending out. I think that was a huge struggle."

Participants were also concerned about the limited engagement of the teachers. While they expressed sympathy for the difficult situation the teachers were in, the participants were often frustrated at the seeming teacher apathy. Hazel shared one situation with an apathetic teacher in her comment, "There was one math assignment our youngest didn't understand. When she reached out to her teacher, she replied, 'I gave you the instructions; follow them.' That's not teaching." Participants also struggled with student apathy during the forced remote learning. June

revealed that her daughter "would be on, but she wouldn't be doing anything. Like she would be looking at the iPad and acting like she was doing something, but she would be completely distracted and not doing a thing."

Returning to School

Returning to in-person instruction was a slow process for the study's participants. Mary commented, "They went back and did remote learning during the later quarantines, which happened a lot because people kept getting exposed." Some counties returned to full-time, in-person instruction in the fall of 2020. However, all participants could choose a hybrid schedule or remain 100 percent remote. The participants were thankful for their children's return to normal. Hazel remarked, "I feel like almost, for our youngest especially, I feel like she needed the structure to go back to school." The gradual return to in-person instruction presented options for participants to tailor an educational experience best for their families. Participants expressed a sense of relief from the stability provided by returning to school after experiencing the uncertainties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Academic Achievement

Participants had much to say about academic achievement during and after COVID-19 forced remote learning. During the data collection, participants expressed concerns that the instruction offered during forced remote learning did not meet the needs of various learning styles. Concerns included a lack of hands-on assistance for learning disabilities, delays in receiving help, and student difficulties with instructional delivery methods. Participants also expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of academic rigor presented during the COVID-19 forced remote learning, citing concerns about the quality of the instruction. Despite the concerns,

participants did note positive outcomes in reading skills. Important sub-themes included learning styles, academic rigor, struggles, and successes.

Learning Styles

Six participants discussed the concept of learning styles during the data collection process, with each noting that the forced remote learning did not fit the needs of all learning styles. Connie noted, "Not all students can follow a lecture at home." While Derek commented, "Both of our boys struggled with learning disabilities and needed more hands-on attention and assistance." Hazel was concerned with the delay in getting help when needed. She commented, "Being in the classroom and being able to raise your hand and say I have questions about this and get an answer right then is better, instead of messaging the teacher and waiting on a reply." Participants also discussed difficulties with the instructional delivery methods. June stated, "There were a lot of times they couldn't find where they were supposed to be, and we would have to help them, and we'd all be searching, messaging the teacher, saying 'we're coming'." Participants noted an incongruity between COVID-19-forced remote learning and their child's learning style. They expressed concerns about accessibility for students with learning disabilities and reported delays in receiving assistance from the teachers. Participants also reported difficulties with the delivery of instructional materials.

Academic Rigor, Struggles, and Successes

Many participants were not impressed by the academic rigor of the instruction during the COVID-19-forced remote learning. Participants complained about the amount of assigned worksheets and the limited or no feedback given about the students' progress. Hazel felt her children were expected to teach themselves using worksheets with vague instructions. She commented, "I don't feel like they should have had to teach themselves." Derek was also

unimpressed by the rigor of the instruction provided to his sons. He said, "I don't feel that they've learned much." Alice echoed this sentiment in her Journal Prompt answers. She stated, "Honestly, I'm not sure he learned much. He got passing grades, but that was not hard to do." Molly commented, "From the pandemic to the end of the semester, only one teacher assigned any work, and basically, she was told whatever grade you had when you went home at Easter is the grade you're gonna have at the end of the year."

However, Mary, Connie, Mark, and Joy each had positive perceptions to add to the data collection process. Mary and Mark had struggling readers at the pandemic's beginning, but the circumstances of the forced remote learning turned that around. Mark said, "She wasn't real proficient before, and she loves reading now, and I think between the love of it from her mom, but I think she read so much that she learned how to read, and read quick to try to keep up, which was a good thing." Mary revealed that her son also increased his reading skills during the pandemic. She stated, "He loves reading now, and even on the Kindle, he read Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban in like, five days." Joy and Connie discovered that their children thrived academically in the remote learning environment. Joy summed it up by stating, "They adjusted really well." Connie reflected on her daughter's academic progress during the pandemic, stating, "My daughter felt that she was keeping up with the teacher's expectations and was able to complete her work successfully."

Work-Life Balance

The final theme to emerge from the data analysis was work-life balance. The Participants acknowledged the benefits and challenges associated with the COVID-19 shutdowns and forced remote learning. Benefits included increased family time and a sense of self-reliance for their children. Challenges were diverse and included struggles with balancing their home and work

life because of struggles juggling existing responsibilities with the added task of educating their children. Sub-themes emerged, including benefits and challenges experienced, as well as challenges as a healthcare professional. The participants' lived experiences underscored the complexity and strain placed on families navigating the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Benefits and Challenges

Participants identified some unexpected benefits from the shutdowns and forced remote learning. Derek noted, "My wife did appreciate being able to be home with the boys more often, cooking, and spending time together." Other participants were not as fortunate as having an adult with their children and were thankful they were old enough to stay home alone during the day. Karen commented, "I was a single mother working a full-time job out of the house, and so my children were forced to rely on what information they were getting through the school." Participants emphasized unforeseen advantages stemming from the COVID-19 shutdowns and foray into forced remote learning. An increase in family time was an often stated benefit, while struggles with childcare during the school day were an often stated challenge.

Working in Healthcare

Mark, Derek, Connie, and Annette, dedicated healthcare providers, struggled to safeguard their families and patients from the potential spreading of the COVID-19 virus. Participants noted the added burden of not carrying the COVID-19 virus into their homes from work. As essential workers, they were responsible for protecting the public and their families. Reflecting on her experiences, Connie stated, "I had to keep going to work because I work in healthcare." Mark was an administrator for a nursing home, and he expressed his experiences by saying, "I work in a nursing home, so we were pretty much secluded at work, 16-20 hours a day, to try to

keep it out of there and our homes." These participants worked lengthy shifts, up to 20 hours a day, as they diligently worked to shield their families and the public from the COVID-19 virus.

Outlier Data and Findings

The data collection and analysis revealed three outliers. The first was a family facing primary caregivers' compromised health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second outlier highlighted a situation where a student received full credit for any submission, even when submitting a blank document during the forced remote learning. The third and final outlier involved a family lacking access to high-speed internet during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Family Crisis Beyond COVID-19

Molly and her family faced the additional challenge of cancer during the COVID-19 pandemic. While other participants experienced concerns for the compromised health of extended family members, Molly's family was the only family struggling with an immediate family member with cancer. Molly recalled, "My manager sent me home to work, so I was home with my daughter during the day, but I had to do my chemo treatments by myself. I had to do radiation by myself because nobody was allowed in." These experiences underscore the diverse and often profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the participants' lives. Molly's journey exemplifies the added complexity of isolation and vulnerability experienced by families facing health challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lack of Rigor

While many participants expressed concern over the lack of rigor with the forced remote learning coursework, Alice's experience stands out as having the most disengaged teacher. Molly's son received passing grades, but she did not assign much value to those grades. She explained, "He had one class where the teacher gave full credit for turning anything in. My son

would turn in blank papers and would get full credit." Alice's encounter with a disengaged teacher was an outlier related to the lax grading policy by starkly contrasting the other participants' expressed concerns over academic rigor and the quality of the remote learning coursework.

Lack of High-Speed Internet

Derek's family stood alone among participants due to a lack of high-speed internet at their house. The family purchased a new house shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic forced remote learning and did not realize until closing on their new house that there were no high-speed internet service providers for their new neighborhood. The children were in middle and high school and struggled to access their lessons, meet online for classes, and submit assignments. Derek stated, "We were able to purchase a SIM card that allowed us to create a mobile hotspot, but it was spotty at best. Getting a good consistent signal was difficult." The family resorted to visiting a local restaurant to use the free Wi-Fi for school.

Research Question Responses

This study of the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic was designed to answer a central research question and three sub-questions. The questions were designed to understand the lived experiences of the participants. Findings from the journal prompt answers, individual interviews, and a focus group session were used to answer each research question.

Central Research Question

What were the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? The second-choice homeschoolers who participated in this study shared a range of experiences during the forced remote learning caused

by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of the COVID-19 shutdowns and emergency transition to forced remote learning, 13 of the 14 participants were familiar with remote learning. The collected data revealed that five participants had completed coursework using remote learning. All participants were familiar with homeschooling, but only one family had experience as a first-choice homeschooler. Of homeschooling, Molly stated, "I didn't want her to go to public school anyway, so my husband and I were already in a battle. I wanted to put her in private school if I couldn't homeschool." Mary's thoughts on homeschooling included, "I really did contemplate homeschooling with middle school because it is the absolute worst time in anyone's life." Mary thought she could mitigate some of the middle school mean-girl drama by teaching her daughter.

Despite a prior familiarity with homeschooling and remote learning, participants acknowledged that the transition to forced remote learning was difficult for their families. The school closures and sudden shift of responsibility onto the parents added to the emotional stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were already dealing with feelings of fear and isolation because of the COVID-19 virus, and the shutdowns increased their feelings of fear. In addition to navigating the changing work environment and virus transmission, the participants had the added duty of navigating the unknown circumstances of forced remote learning. Mark stated, "The years 2020 and 2021 was probably the worst years of my family's life – losing 15 different people in our family, including my parents." About the pandemic circumstances, Amy remarked, " I feel like mentally that was fatiguing and draining and probably not overall good." The turmoil of navigating the pandemic's emotional toll and personal losses left the participants in unfamiliar territory and compounded their overwhelming burdens.

Sub-question One

What were the challenges experienced by second-choice homeschooling families using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? The challenges experienced by second-choice homeschool families participating in this study included the social and emotional impact on their children and navigating a new work-life balance. Participants listed the lack of socialization, separation from family members, and negative news about the pandemic as socio-emotional challenges. Mark reflected on his daughter's struggle with isolation by stating, "Mentally, it was a toll on her because she was without her friends and time out of the house." Additionally, many participants commented about balancing their work responsibilities with their children's educational needs. Karen summed up the challenges associated with forced remote learning by stating, "It was certainly new territory, both for administration, teachers, students, and parents. Since COVID-19 more or less blindsided us, remote learning was designed on the fly." The challenges added a layer of complexity to an already demanding situation.

Sub-question Two

What were opportunities experienced by second-choice homeschooling families using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? Second-choice homeschoolers found opportunities during the forced remote learning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Opportunities seized by the participants included off-season travel to be closer to out-of-state family members without disruption to school or work schedules as a benefit of newly discovered remote technology. Participants also experienced a strengthened parent/child bond as the families slowed down and spent more time together. Karen stated, " We were able to slow down and spend more time as a family." A third opportunity revealed by participants was an increase in outdoor family activities and recreational pursuits. Eddie noted, "I think we coped well because we started doing more outdoor things like hiking where there were not a lot of people around."

The participants found flexibility in the remote learning environment not available to them when participating in on-site instruction, allowing them to bond as a family in unprecedented ways.

Sub-question Three

How do parents perceive their child/ren's academic success due to their heightened involvement in their child/ren's education while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? Participants perceived their child/ren's academic success was impacted by their heightened involvement in their education. Participants expressed strong opinions about parental qualifications for educating their children. Including Derek, who commented,

> "I think there's a lot of parents who romanticize the concept. You know, be a
> homeschooler. Stay home with the kids. I have a degree, but I'm not as good at is as
> someone who has actual experience teaching and has a degree in it."

Hazel expressed similar thoughts about her ability to teach her children and lamented, "They weren't prepared to teach themselves." Participants commented on the school system's lack of communication and involvement by the teachers in the daily assignments. Jeff expressed concerns about disengaged teachers. He noted the most challenging part of the forced remote learning was " just trying to help her when she didn't receive assistance from her teachers." Alice was also frustrated with the teachers' lack of engagement. She noted about her son, "He had one class where the teacher gave full credit for turning anything in. My son would turn in blank paper and would get full credit." Participants also noted academic struggles. Annette remarked, "I think he would have been in a different place academically now had that not happened. Mark expressed a similar sentiment regarding his daughter's experience with remote learning. He stated, "She struggled a lot. She is a very smart kid, but her learning style is in front of a teacher and being able to have personal conversations and one-on-one interaction. Her

grades dropped that year." The perceived lack of support from the school system hindered the participants' ability to effectively take charge of the instruction.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with forced remote learning and homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants in this research study discussed their experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic through journal prompts, individual interviews, and a focus group session. Participants included West Virginians from four counties. During the data analysis process, themes and sub-themes emerged and were documented in chapter four. Five significant themes, homeschooling, COVID-19 shutdowns, forced remote learning, academic achievement, and work-life balance, emerged through thematic analysis. The sub-theme perception was identified under the homeschooling theme. The COVID-19 shutdown theme included the sub-themes of emotional stress, opportunities, and hindsight. The third theme, forced remote learning, included the sub-themes: familiarity, technology, other challenges and opportunities; parent, student, and teacher engagement; and returning to school. The fourth theme was academic achievement, including sub-themes, learning styles, academic rigor, struggles, and successes. The final theme discussed in chapter four was work-life balance, including the sub-themes, benefits and challenges, and healthcare work. The participants revealed positive and negative aspects of their experiences while expressing an overwhelming relief that it was over. Two significant findings include how forced remote learning added to the participants' emotional stress over the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of teacher engagement with the learning process during forced remote learning.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second-choice homeschoolers in this research referred to homeschooling families in West Virginia who have first-hand experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The problem was that the forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic created stresses related to the virus, with additional distress from the burden of schooling at home, with many reporting chronic stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns (Deacon et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the public's ability to meet in groups, including schools and after-school activities (Cardel et al., 2020). In addition to feelings of isolation, many experienced difficulties with technology that further isolated them. (Cardel et al., 2020; Deacon et al., 2021). This chapter includes a discussion section, an interpretation of the study findings, implications for policy and practice, empirical and theoretical implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The discussion section outlines the findings associated with the themes and sub-themes identified during the data analysis. The first sub-section begins with a summary of the thematic findings discussed in chapter four. The summary of thematic findings highlights themes to be interpreted in the following sub-section. The critical discussion sub-section discusses the thoughts, comments, and perspectives of the research findings from the researcher's point of view. The following section explores the implications for policy and practice, with

recommendations for potential changes. The following sub-section involves a discussion of the research study's empirical and theoretical implications to support the interpretations of the findings. Next is a discussion of the study's limitations and delimitations. The chapter ends with a discussion of the recommendations for future research and a conclusion.

Summary of Thematic Findings

In the data analysis process, the findings revealed alignment of themes and sub-themes related to the participants' experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Five themes were identified: homeschooling, shutdowns, forced remote learning, academic achievement, and work-life balance. Homeschooling included two sub-themes: familiarity and perception. COVID-19 shutdowns included three sub-themes: emotional stress, opportunities, and hindsight. Forced remote learning included five sub-themes: familiarity; technology; other challenges and opportunities; parent, student, and teacher engagement; and returning to school. Academic achievement included two sub-themes: learning styles; and academic rigor, struggles, and successes. Lastly, work-life balance included two sub-themes: benefits and challenges; and working in healthcare. Interpreting these themes and sub-themes provides insight into the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Bracketing the researcher's personal bias aligns with Moustaka's (1994) transcendental phenomenology model and allows the research to focus on the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's assumptions.

Critical Discussion

This transcendental phenomenology aimed to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Not surprisingly, the 14 participants were familiar with

homeschooling before experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic; one was a first-choice

homeschooler when her children were younger. However, none of the participants considered

themselves homeschoolers throughout their experiences with forced remote learning during the

COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the lack of self-identification as homeschoolers, participants cited

common motivations for first-choice homeschoolers as unexpected benefits of the experience.

Earlier research revealed why parents homeschooled, including academic, pedagogical, and

socio-emotional factors (Machovcova et al., 2021; Marks & Welsch, 2019; Neuman &

Guterman, 2021). Participants echoed these themes as unexpected benefits in recounting their

experiences.

The Impact of the Covid Shutdown

Precautionary measures during the COVID-19 pandemic included closing schools,

businesses, and other public events worldwide to minimize the spread of the virus (Adedoyin &

Soykan, 2023; Baker et al., 2021; Girard & Prado, 2022). The participants acknowledged that the

shutdowns impacted their families in a significant way. Emotional stress was reported by each

participant, ranging from struggling with isolation from extended family members, uncertainty

about the education of their children, and fear of catching or spreading the virus. Interestingly,

the participants displaying a positive attitude also reported a lesser impact on the family's socio-

emotional well-being. However, most participants seemed overwhelmed with the experiences of

the COVID-19 shutdowns despite the passage of nearly four years. Reliving those experiences

by re-telling their stories through individual interviews and focus group sessions upset the

participants. Earlier research indicated that homeschoolers often participated in social groups

such as cooperative learning events and church; however, the participants could not enjoy the

benefits of these organizations due to the COVID-19 shutdowns (Heuer & Donovan, 2021). The

participants in healthcare displayed an unwavering dedication that exemplifies the sacrifices made by frontline workers to protect their families and communities amidst the pandemic's challenges.

Decreased Quality of Instruction

Participants reported a lack of satisfaction with the instructional delivery of forced remote learning. While acknowledging the shared stresses of the teachers, they also expressed great disappointment in the quality of the instruction, often reporting busy work assignments, lack of communication, lack of availability of instruction, and inconsistencies in the use of the learning management systems. Existing research indicated that traditional curriculum does not easily convert to online learning (Procko et al., 2020). However, from the data collected, this is what the participants' children were offered as instruction during the COVID-19 forced remote learning. While design considerations for online education differ significantly from in-person learning, according to the participants, the teachers were not guided on how to modify the existing coursework to best suit online learning (Bliss et al., 2021). According to Marquis (2021), effective online learning must be designed intentionally. Unfortunately, the sudden shutdowns and transition to forced remote learning did not allow for adequate preparation for the transition.

Loss of Academic Achievement

As a result of the poorly planned implementation of remote learning, participants expressed frustration with their children's academic achievement. Participants reported dropped grades and failures among their children, who had received higher grades before the shutdowns. This frustration is not surprising considering the academic achievement of students participating in forced remote learning across America suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic (Carpenter &

Dunn, 2020; Skar et al., 2022; Wyse et al., 2020). Fontenelle-Tereshchuk (2021) reported that the instruction during the forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was shallow and lacked necessary explanations and expectations. Participants confirmed these findings in their stories.

Other Stresses of Quarantine

While this research study did not explicitly seek to learn the economic status of the participants, specific details about their lives, jobs, and families were revealed throughout the discussion. Interestingly, among the participants, access to appropriate high-speed internet technology for remote learning was not dictated by economic status but by geography. The geographical delineation is unsurprising considering West Virginia neighborhoods' mountainous and often isolated nature.

Fontenelle-Tereshchuk (2021) reported that participants complained that the stresses of the quarantine, professional losses, working full-time, and the demands of remote learning were unreasonable. The experiences of the participants of this research study aligned with those of Fontenelle-Tereshchuk (2021). Participants of this research study expressed concerns over their lack of experience and preparation to educate their children. This concern combined with the stress of competing family responsibilities, such as work, and uncertainty about the pandemic (Baker et al., 2021; Lacomba-Trejo et al., 2022; Letzel et al., 2022).

Implications for Policy and Practice

This study identified implications for policy and practice, leading to recommendations to first-choice homeschoolers, school administration, and school policymakers. Implementing these recommendations could have a two-fold effect. First, the recommendations may enhance communication between first-choice homeschoolers and traditionally schooled families and

improve communication between school administrators and the families they serve. Secondly,

the recommendations may increase the effectiveness of future educational policy development.

Following is a discussion about the implications for policy and practice.

Implications for Policy

In this study, participants reported that the school system did not have a policy suitable

for dealing with a long-term closure of the school system. Stakeholders, such as higher education

teacher preparation programs, state legislators, state teaching union representatives, and school

administrators, should prioritize several vital measures, beginning with a comprehensive

evaluation of the current policy regarding extended school closures. This evaluation should

include feedback from experts in remote learning, teachers, parents, and students to determine

the current policy's strengths and weaknesses. Next, stakeholders must prioritize implementing

changes to the existing policy framework based on a complete analysis of the feedback collected

during the evaluation process. Contingency plans should include remote learning scenarios by

grade level that ensure all resources, technology infrastructure, and support systems are in place

to ensure seamless transitions between in-person and remote learning. Based on the reports from

the study participants, teacher training will be crucial for the successful transition between

remote and in-person learning. Participants reported a lack of engagement from the teachers and

theorized that the disengagement could be from a lack of training and support for their new role

as remote educators. Professional development should be designed to equip educators with the

skills necessary to deliver high-quality instruction using a virtual environment. As highlighted by

participants, another vital aspect of easing the transition between remote and in-person learning

is the consideration of diverse learning needs and styles among the students. Stakeholders should

prioritize efforts to ensure that the updated policy and contingency plans adequately address

equity concerns. Participants reported that, while socio-economic backgrounds are often considered in West Virginia, geographic location plays an integral role in determining access to resources. Potential future disruptions to the traditional school system must be proactively planned, including procurement of essential supplies, establishing standardized communication protocols, and implementing and training on appropriate remote learning platforms. Ensuring smoother transitions between remote learning and in-person learning will require a multifaceted approach, beginning with a thorough evaluation of the current policies, implementing adaptations, investing in teacher training, understanding student needs, and establishing robust contingency plans for future disruptions.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice propose a significant change within the first-choice homeschooling community. Participants of this research study unanimously expressed that members of the first-choice homeschooling community failed to offer assistance to second-choice homeschooling families. This oversight should serve as a wake-up call for first-choice home-schooling support groups that did not extend help to families facing unexpected and unwanted homeschooling. The tone of the response by participants when asked what assistance they received from the first-choice homeschool community was incredulous, almost confused, as if they had not considered the potential benefits of speaking to families who elected to homeschool versus those who were forced into it by circumstances. The incredulous tone of participants' responses indicates a critical gap in understanding and empathy on behalf of first-choice homeschoolers and represents an unfortunate oversight. First-choice homeschoolers did not realize the potential benefits of reaching out to families thrust into remote learning. The oversight provides an opportunity for reflection for future practice, should the unprecedented

COVID-19 school closures occur in the future. An essential step for the first-choice

homeschooling community is to reconsider its approach and actively engage with families facing

a sudden transition to remote learning and second-choice homeschooling. The active approach

could include outreach programs, mentorship, or resource sharing to support families navigating

unfamiliar circumstances. The first-choice homeschool community can address this oversight

and embrace a more inclusive and supportive environment for all families, regardless of their

initial educational choices.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This transcendental phenomenological study contributed to the knowledge base from an

empirical and theoretical perspective. The following sections explore the empirical and

theoretical implications that surfaced while studying the lived experiences of second-choice

homeschoolers participating in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The empirical

implications section discusses how the study is associated with similar studies and how using a

phenomenological approach added to the current literature. The theoretical significance section

articulates how this research study contributes to the theoretical foundations of the problem.

Empirical Implications

The findings of this study supported and potentially added to the empirical literature. This

study confirmed the frequently cited motivations for homeschooling as individualized education,

flexibility, freedom from harmful influences, and freedom to use a curriculum that supports the

family's goals and beliefs (Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Machovcova et al., 2021; Neuman &

Guterman, 2021; NHES, 2019). Nearly half of the participants, six out of 14, said they

considered homeschooling for the above reasons. Four of the eight remaining participants,

although holding no interest in homeschooling for their families, commented during the data

collection process that the above motivations were reasons some families opted to homeschool their children without prompting. None of the participants participated in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic for the above motivations; instead, they only participated because there were no other choices with the forced shutdowns caused by the pandemic, confirming Anderson's (2022) findings that the circumstances of the pandemic forced remote learning did not align with commonly stated motivations to homeschool. The limited variance in demographics and ethnicities within the state of West Virginia diverged from the national homeschool statistics, with all participants identifying as white with less than a 15-year age difference (Eggleston & Fields, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Irwin et al., 2022; NHES, 2019; Ray, 2022).

Theoretical Implications

This study added to the literature on forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in West Virginia from the perspective of 14 second-choice homeschoolers with forced remote learning. The phenomenon was evaluated through Bandura's social cognitive theory (Moustakas, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Bandura theorized that the social environment was a critical component of thoughts, feelings, and learning (Bandura, 1978, 2001, 2002, 2018; Cherry, 2022; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). This study provided insight for first-choice homeschoolers and public-school officials by increasing their understanding of second-choice homeschoolers' lived experiences with forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Bandura's social cognitive theory was selected as the framework of this research because it provided the most effective lens for constructing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenological research topic. Homeschooled students have the unique opportunity to

observe and model their teachers' behavior, often parents, during structured learning times and unstructured family times (Boonk et al., 2018; Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). Unfortunately, for the research study participants, the modeled behavior often included overly stressed, often scared, and unsure adults. From the participants' perspective, the children suffered from the unpreparedness of the adults. The 14 participants mentioned uncertainty 38 times, frustration 18 times, and stress 11 times. The unfortunate aspect of Bandura's social cognitive theory is that modeling applies to positive and negative aspects of the modeled behavior, and the participants confirmed seeing these attributes in their children.

Limitations and Delimitations

The following sections provide an overview of the limitations and delimitations recognized in this transcendental phenomenology. The limitations section outlines potential weaknesses that were identified and beyond the researcher's control. Conversely, the delimitations section outlines the intentional constraints imposed on the study to narrow the research scope. The rationale for each delimitation is also discussed.

Limitations

This transcendental phenomenological research had six limitations that call for consideration. First, remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic did not occur in a centralized location; therefore, the setting for this study includes counties across the state of West Virginia. An attempt was made to recruit participants from a wide geographic area within the state. However, the decentralized location of the participants introduced challenges in terms of diversity. Second, the transferability of findings may be limited due to the specificity of the context and may not apply to situations other than the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, while data saturation was achieved in the sample size, the small sample may limit the generalization of

results. Fourth, the subjective nature of transcendental phenomenology introduces a degree of interpretation variability; therefore, the results may not represent a broader population like a quantitative study. Fifth, the summaries provide a snapshot of the participants' lived experiences, but they may lack comprehensive details on certain aspects, like quantitative data, that could provide a more in-depth analysis of trends and patterns. Lastly, the data collected is based on lived experiences during a specific period, reflecting the challenges and circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic. The relevance of these lived experiences may change as conditions evolve. Addressing these limitations was a crucial step in interpreting the study findings.

Delimitations

Delimitations purposefully limited the scope of the research study. This transcendental phenomenology had four delimitations. First, the study was limited to West Virginia residents so that viewpoints could be collected from a rural state perspective. Secondly, participants had to be over eighteen. The participants' ages ranged from 40-53, providing insight from an adult perspective. Thirdly, only parent/family perspectives were considered, eliminating the perspectives of teachers, school administrators, and students but providing a specific lens to view the lived experiences. Lastly, the qualitative nature of the research study provided rich narratives but lacked quantitative measurements.

Recommendations for Future Research

A review of the study findings, limitations, and delimitations revealed four recommendations for future research. The first recommendation relates to the delimitation of second-choice homeschoolers' lived experiences in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Future researchers may find it beneficial to include the experiences of teachers, school administration, or students to expand the

understanding of the impact of remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic on the social, emotional, and academic well-being of children in West Virginia. Secondly, future researchers may find it pertinent to expand the geographic area of the participants to include additional states.

The third recommendation to future researchers is based on emerging research indicating that black, low-income, and middle-income families presented the most considerable growth in numbers post-pandemic; however, the present research study did not include any black participants. Future researchers may find significance in changing the participation criteria to elicit black participants (Anderson, 2022; Hoffman, 2023; Schueler & Miller, 2023). The last recommendation for future research includes a longitudinal study to allow future researchers to understand better any lasting social, emotional, or academic impact of the forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study could follow the stories post-high school graduation or beyond to share the long-term experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second-choice homeschoolers in this research referred to homeschooling families in West Virginia who have first-hand experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. A transcendental approach for this research study ensures that the participants' lived experiences were clearly described without the influence of my preconceived ideas of those experiences. Data were collected from 14 second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia who had experience with forced remote learning during the

COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected via journal prompts, individual interviews, and a focus group session. The data were analyzed using Moustakas (1994) and Saldana (2021) methodology. Thematic analysis revealed five significant themes with various sub-themes. Within the homeschooling theme, the sub-theme of perception was identified, reflecting participants' diverse views on the practice. The COVID-19 shutdown theme encompassed sub-themes of emotional stress, opportunities, and hindsight. Forced remote learning emerged as the third theme, comprising sub-themes including familiarity, technology, other challenges and opportunities, parent-student-teacher engagement, and transitioning back to traditional schooling. Academic achievement constituted the fourth theme, incorporating sub-themes related to learning styles, academic rigor, struggles, and successes. Lastly, the theme of work-life balance included sub-themes exploring both the benefits and challenges, with a specific focus on those working in healthcare. Throughout these themes and sub-themes, participants articulated positive and negative aspects of their experiences, ultimately expressing a sense of relief as the COVID-19 pandemic ended. The most significant takeaway was that the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented stress on the family; however, the participants persevered while finding the silver lining among all the chaos. Implementing plans for remote learning before the need arises was the most significant recommendation for future policy and practice.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 14, 2023

Debra Brennan

Rachel Hernandez

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-758 Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Remote Learning Among West Virginia Homeschoolers: A Transcendental Phenomenology

Dear Debra Brennan, Rachel Hernandez,

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

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d): Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of

public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

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

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP

Administrative Chair

Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON REMOTE LEARNING AMONG

WEST VIRGINIA HOMESCHOOLERS: A TRANSCENDENTAL

PHENOMENOLOGY

- Are you 18 years old or older?

- Do you have experience with remote learning during the COVID-19

  pandemic?

  If you answered **yes** to the questions listed above,

  you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

- The purpose of the transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- At this stage in the research, second-choice homeschoolers are generally defined as adults who have experience schooling their children at home due to the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Complete a journal prompt. Prompts will be submitted via email, and the questions will take no more than 10 minutes each to complete.

2. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded, individual interview conducted via remote teleconferencing software that will take no more than one hour.

3. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded focus group meeting via remote teleconferencing software that will take no more than one hour.

If you would like to participate, please get in touch with Debra Brennan at the following email for more information:

An information document will be emailed to you in response to your request for information.

Debra D. Brennan, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Debra for more information.

Appendix C

Study Information Sheet

Title of the Project: IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON REMOTE LEARNING

AMONG WEST VIRGINIA HOMESCHOOLERS: A TRANSCENDENTAL

PHENOMENOLOGY

Principal Investigator: Debra D. Brennan, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty

University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or

older and have experience homeschooling in West Virginia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in

this research.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The purpose of the transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the

lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and

forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. At this stage in the research,

homeschoolers are generally defined as adults with experience schooling their children at

home.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

4. Complete a journal prompt containing five questions. Prompts will be submitted via email, and the questions will take no more than 10 minutes each to complete.

5. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded, individual interview conducted via remote teleconferencing software that will take no more than one hour.

6. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded focus group meeting via remote teleconferencing software that will take no more than one hour.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Benefits to society include first-choice homeschoolers by evaluating the effectiveness of support attempts offered to second-choice homeschoolers. It will also provide insight for public school officials into why families opted out of state-sponsored remote learning in favor of homeschooling.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.

- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

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

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Debra D. Brennan. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Rachel Hernandez.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is

██

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered, and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Appendix D

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What were the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sub-question One

What were the challenges experienced by second-choice homeschooling families using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sub-question Two

What were opportunities experienced by second-choice homeschooling families using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sub-question Three

How do parents perceive their child/ren's academic success as a result of their heightened involvement in their child/ren's education while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Appendix E

Journal Prompt Questions

1. Please describe your experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. CRQ

2. What advice do you have for decision-makers should an event like the COVID-19 pandemic occur in the future? CRQ

3. Please describe one challenge your family experienced using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. CR1

4. Please describe an opportunity or benefit your family experienced due to the forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. CR2

5. Please describe the academic achievement of your children while using remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. CR3

Appendix F

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself and your family.

2. Tell me a little about school for your family before the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Describe your interest in homeschooling before the COVID-19 pandemic and how forced remote learning impacted that experience. CRQ

4. How familiar were you with remote learning before the COVID-19 pandemic? CRQ

5. Tell me about your experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. CRQ

6. What challenges did you experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? SQ1

7. Describe one challenge that you experienced with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ1

8. Tell me about your experiences with technology resources available to you during your participation in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ1

9. What opportunities did you experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? SQ2

10. Describe one opportunity you experienced when homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ2

11. Describe your experience with a cooperative or support group during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ2

12. Describe your child/ren's academic achievement while participating in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ3

13. Describe what you consider to be successful practices with remote learning. SQ3

14. Describe your motivations for continuing to homeschool, or if you plan to return to public school, describe those motivations. CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3

15. What else would you like to add to our discussion that we have not discussed? CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

1. Please introduce yourselves to the room, including your name and a few sentences about yourself and your homeschooling journey.

2. Briefly describe your experiences with homeschooling support groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. CRQ

3. Describe one positive experience with homeschooling support groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. CRQ, SQ2

4. Describe one negative experience with homeschooling support groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. CRQ, SQ1

5. Describe a benefit of online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ2

6. Describe challenges you experienced with the online coursework during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ1

7. Describe the opportunities experienced during remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ2

8. Describe the impact you believe remote learning had on academic achievement during the COVID-19 pandemic. SQ3

9. Describe the impact you believe remote learning had on academic achievement for your child/ren. SQ3

Appendix H

Timeline

Date	Entries
12/14/2022	Prospectus Approved
11/08/2023	Proposal Defense Passed
12/14/2023	IRB Approval Received
12/15/2023	Recruitment Ad Posted
1/15/2024	Recruitment Ad Reposted
1/20/2024	Interviews Completed
02/05/2024	Journal Prompts Completed
01/27/2024	Focus Group Completed
03/08/2024	Data Analysis Completed
03/10/2024	Data Synthesis Completed
03/10/2024	First Edit Completed
3/18/2024	Final Edit Completed
3/26/2024	Final Defense Passed