

A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON FIRST-GENERATION
NATIVE HAWAIIAN COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERSISTENCE IN ONLINE COURSES

by

Nikki K. Kinoshita

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences and persistence of first-generation native Hawaiian college students (FGNHCS) in their first online courses at the University of Hawai'i Maui College in the Hawaiian Islands. Tinto's student integration theory provided the theoretical framework for the research study. The central research question was: How do first-generation Native Hawaiian college students (FGNHCS) describe their persistence and success in at least one online course? The methodology involved an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences through a phenomenological lens. Using three data collection methods: individual interviews, reflective written assignments, and qualitative questionnaires and data analysis unveiled the intricate interplay between their unique backgrounds, online learning challenges, and their determination to persist. The data collected were transcribed and coded for analysis. Coded terms or phrases described the experiences of the participants. Tinto's student integration theory allowed for examining the multifaceted relationship between diverse factors and the achievement of student success. Critical aspects of the data analysis process involved epoché, horizontalization, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation to cross-analyze themes while the participants' accounts through the lens of academic and social integration were examined. After data was collected, information was transcribed and coded for analysis. Four themes and twelve subthemes emerged: challenges and success, support systems, first-generation native Hawaiian college student persistence, and influences from external factors that contributed to their persistence and success.

Keywords: lived experiences, first-generation, Native Hawaiian, college students, student persistence, online courses

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Dedication

This research project is dedicated to my family: my son, Alika-Jon Kinoshita-Ballao, my daughter, Kali-Kahiau, and the love of my life, Alika Ballao: You supported me through my educational journey through your actions, taking up the slack while I was working two jobs and going to school. You are an amazing dad to our kids – Alika-Jon and Kali-Kahiau: Both of you gave me the strength and purpose to keep pursuing. Your continued forgiveness when I sacrificed time with both of you; I love you so much. My two older sisters, Kym and Sara, thank you for allowing me to vent my frustrations when times were hard during this period of my life. My nephew, Kekoa, and niece, Kanoë: Thank you for keeping your cousins Alika-Jon and Kali-Kahiau company and always entertaining them. Thank you to my Aunty “Moms,” Uncle “Dads,” and cousins who rooted for me. Dr. Phil Sorenson, my Uncle, and friend, this is also for you too! When I met you, you instantly had the warmest welcome and considered me family. The last words you gave me were, “It is hard, but don’t you give up.”

Finally, the best for last. My parents, Myron and Grace: You are my backbone, and I appreciate all the love you have given me, consistently and continuously supporting my education. I hope this accomplishment has made you.

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List of Abbreviations

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

First-Generation College Students (FGCS)

First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Students (FGNHCS)

Grade-Point-Average (GPA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

University of Hawai‘i Maui College (UHMC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Hawai‘i is a hotspot known for its sunrises and sunsets, clear and clean oceans, tropical weather, rare culinary food, tourist attractions, diverse ethnicities, family importance, and a popular higher education location choice for individuals. Hawai‘i is the most racially and ethnically diverse state (Y. Wu et al., 2019). A qualitative study was conducted at the University of Hawai‘i Maui College to understand the experiences of FGNHCS that have succeeded in online courses. FGNHCS are a significant demographic in this research study because of their underrepresentation as a social and cultural crisis. Overall, at all institutions, there is a historical persistence gap in adult postsecondary education attainment from Native Hawaiians in their ancestral homeland (A. Silva, 2020).

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of FGNHCS who were successful in their online courses at the University of Hawai‘i Maui College. Chapter One presents background information on the study topic, including the historical, social, and theoretical context that leads to the problem and purpose statements. The section will also include the reasoning for conducting the research study, the significance of the research, and the proposed research questions—lastly, the chapter will have a list of definitions integral to the study and a summary of the chapter.

Background

Based on the current literature, Native Hawaiians experienced challenges from applying to college until graduation. While facing challenges, there was a possibility of a decline in student persistence. Some related factors necessitated significant research on understanding the successes of first-generation college students (FGCS) experiences (Whittinghill et al., 2021).

Applying pressure for accountability in higher education and a desire for student success has prompted legislative, administrative, and faculty initiatives to identify factors for student success (Kalimullina et al., 2021; Stewart et al., 2020). Higher education institutions face issues with instructor roles within the learning process, whether online or in face-to-face classrooms (Bi et al., 2023). Documenting student success at a higher education level was at the forefront of student retention, attrition, and graduate rates (Gomis et al., 2024). This section addressed three contexts: historical context, the evolution of the topic, the social context of the impacts of specific populations, and the theoretical context that addresses present and future research.

Historical Context

Distance education dates back to 1840, and higher education was subject to growth worldwide (Börjesson & Dalberg, 2021; Coman et al., 2020). To form the basis of learning, instructors used various techniques such as mail to teach and collaborate with students; higher education mutated into a social sector of strategic interest for various stakeholders (Börjesson & Dalberg, 2021). In the mid-to-late twentieth century, historians introduced social, cultural, political, intellectual, and economic perspectives on the history of higher education (Angulo & Schneider, 2021). Historians described higher education as a wide-open field twenty-five years ago; opportunities abounded for emerging scholars (Coman et al., 2020). Publications on higher education and its relationship to research, teaching, democracy, economy, and student movement recast familiar lines of inquiry that created new avenues of research. Most research libraries have long-dated institutional histories and educational evolutions (DerSarkissian et al., 2022). The evolution of systems and technologies was favored, where they were developed and expanded educational opportunities in higher education (DerSarkissian et al., 2022).

Social Context

In previous and current studies, there had been integrated models specifying contributions of First-Generation Native Hawaiian college student (FGNHCS) characteristics and explored predictors of academic integration and institutional commitment; researchers had widely examined student persistence variables in higher education, such as being academically integrated or committed persistence (Braxton & Francis, 2017; Daniels & MacNeela, 2021). First-generation college students face challenges for distinct reasons, such as personal circumstances, unpreparedness for college-level courses, lack of access to support services, low levels of confidence, and poor peer support (Yang, 2022). Motivation and attention were some students' psychological experiences that may differ between traditional classroom environments and distance education (Göksu et al., 2021). A separate study argued that motivated students were eager to follow learning paths consistently (Keppens et al., 2023). Students' attendance in online courses is related to motivation, satisfaction, persistence, and communication with their instructors and counselors (Waalkes et al., 2023). Internal and external factors affected first-generation college students taking online courses (Waalkes et al., 2023).

Theoretical Context

The academic persistence of FGNHCS was connected to Vincent Tinto's student integration theory for this study's theoretical framework, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. In the theoretical context, Tinto's student integration theory was a recognized framework focusing on understanding and improving student retention and persistence in higher education. Tinto's theory proposed that student integration into the academic and social aspects of the higher education environment played an essential role in student success and staying enrolled (Tinto, 1975). However, aside from Tinto's student integration theory, there were

previous theories relevant to understanding the factors influencing student persistence and success in online courses, including technology and cultural theories. Some examples of theories that related to and existed prior are Astin's (1985) Theory of Student Involvement, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Roger's Diffusion of Innovation Theory, and the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory.

Astin's (1985) Theory of Student Involvement

A prominent theoretical model that addressed student retention and persistence was Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement. Astin's (1985) theory indicated that students were likelier to reach their academic goals and remained persistent when involved in extracurricular activities. Astin's theory of student involvement believed this was crucial for the college experience. Astin also conducted studies where students who dropped out of college reported little to no involvement with extracurricular activities (Astin, 1999).

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Initially developed by Fred Davis, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is a theoretical framework in information systems and technology research. F. D. Davis (1989) developed the technology acceptance model, which focused on individuals' acceptance and adoption of technology. According to F. D. Davis (1989), individuals who believed using a particular technology enhanced their job performance or made tasks easier to complete. TAM posited that usefulness and ease of use were critical determinants of an individual's plan to use technology. This model helped explain the factors influencing students' acceptance and utilization of online learning technologies in the context of online courses.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Everett Rogers developed the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. Rogers (1962) proposed the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which explained how new ideas, practices, or technologies were adopted and spread within a social system. The diffusion of innovation theory identified five stages in the adoption process: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation (Rogers, 1962). Additionally, five innovation characteristics influencing the adoption rate are relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (Rogers, 1962). The theory could be relevant in understanding the adoption and diffusion of online learning technologies within the educational context and how they impact student persistence and success.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory is a theoretical framework that originated and was developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978) and expanded by Engeström (1987). The theory explored human activity's social and cultural dimensions and emphasized the role of tools and artifacts in mediating learning and development (Engeström, 1999). The theory provided insights into online learning environments' cultural and social aspects and how they influenced student persistence and success (Engeström, 1999). CHAT emphasized an essential understanding of human activity as a collective and historical phenomenon and posited that human activities were driven by motives and mediated by tools and cultural artifacts (Engeström, 1987). Activities were embedded with specific social and cultural contexts and influenced the historical development of those contexts (Wertsch, 1998).

Problem Statement

The problem was that many FGNHCS were inexperienced in online learning while taking online courses at the University of Hawai'i Maui College and often did not persist in their first year to their second year of college. Previous studies on first-generation college students were limited to academic work, life issues, and students' mental health, in which the participants and settings varied in a unique location or country (Feng et al., 2021). Within the past five years, there has been an increased recognition and need to study the experiences of first-generation Native Hawaiian students in online courses and their persistence (Nākoa, 2020). Previous research by Kahakauwila (2019) and Kame'eleihiwa (2021) highlighted the importance of understanding cultural factors, technological barriers, and the need for community engagement in supporting the persistence of these students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Students (FGNHCS) in their online courses at the University of Hawai'i Maui College in the Hawaiian Islands. At this research stage, FGCS were those enrolled college students with parents who did not attain a bachelor's degree or attend college (Lucas et al., 2020; Ma & Shea, 2021). In this qualitative study, a thorough exploration of FGNHCS experiences was conducted to identify the factors needed to persist successfully through their online coursework. This study explored the unique perspectives and lived experiences of FGNHCS to identify the essential factors necessary for their success in their online coursework.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge related to student persistence because of the importance of understanding the experiences that affected FGNHCS. However, studies conducted relative to FGNHCS was not research focused. This research study had theoretical, empirical, and practical significance for students, educational leaders, society, and families. The focal point of the study was to develop an understanding of the lived experiences leading to the persistence of FGNHCS; the study provided the opportunity to reach out to students for feedback that provided avenues for institutions to implement interventions or programs to help the student population of students becomes successful at the higher education institution. The research study had theoretical significance for higher education institutions that tried to find ways to manage FGNHCS and provide ways to be successful. Applying Tinto's (1987) student integration theory helped to provide context for strategy and contribution to student persistence.

Theoretical Significance

Ongoing concerns about student persistence in online courses in higher education continued to grow as institutions recorded these disparities between student enrollment and degree completion (Parisi & Fogelman, 2021). Vincent Tinto's student integration theory is part of the discussion on college student experiences. Tinto's student integration theory (1975) guides this research study as it relates to the experiences of FGNHCS who successfully took online courses. Integrating academic and social experiences is crucial to student success and is further explained directly. Tinto's student integration theory (1987) was used research perspectives on college student retention (Davidson & Wilson, 2017; Savage et al., 2019) implies that rather than

understanding the difference between academic and social integration and considering them distinctively independent, it is accurate to view them as interrelated and overlapped.

Empirical Significance

Empirically, this transcendental phenomenological research study will explore first-generation Native Hawaiian students' experiences of being persistent and successful in online courses. Researchers had examined various areas that pertained to first-generation college students, to list a few: traditional and non-traditional (Jeong et al., 2023; Keefe et al., 2022), academic self-concepts (Covarrubias et al., 2020), the impact of the family (Suwinyattichaiorn & Johnson, 2022), self-development (Keppens et al., 2023), belongingness (Ahmed et al., 2021), college majors and gender pathways (Wright et al., 2023), low-income (Higginbotham, 2022), literacy preparation (Wahleithner, 2020), and interpersonal characteristics, support provision and educational capital (Hagler, 2023). Each topic was related to FGCS; however, there was no research on FGNHCS, which had been successful in online courses.

Practical Significance

The research study describes FGNHCS' experiences and persistence in being successful in online courses. The research contributes to Tinto's student integration theory, FGCS, higher education, and literature. A wealth of research on student persistence and retention exists, and transcendental phenomenology had a wide range of personal and institutional factors impacting students' experiences, persistence, and retention in higher education (Daniels & MacNeela, 2021). There was a gap in the research investigating factors and driving mechanisms that promoted FGNHCS' persistence and success in online courses. Conclusively, this research study provided theoretical grounds and references for facilitating students' persistence and ethnicity that was underrepresented (Rangel et al., 2020).

Research Questions

This study focused on FGNHCS' persistence in online courses. Based on Tinto's student integration theory. The research questions served as inquiry guidance driving the research and exploration. The research questions aimed to address the gap in knowledge, potentially new insights, or verify existing theories. The research questions were created to consider the research objectives and outcomes. The research questions inquired about relationship comparisons, seek correlations between cause and effect, and seek to understand the phenomena. The following questions were related to the problem and purpose statements describing the phenomenon's factors in this research study.

Central Research Question

How do first-generation Native Hawaiian college students (FGNHCS) describe their persistence and success in at least one online course?

Not only at the University of Hawai'i Maui College, but persistence and retention rates in higher education were national issues requiring local solutions (Hoke et al., 2019). The University of Hawai'i Maui College held Hawai'i's only publicly funded higher education system. It was responsible for increasing Native Hawaiian retention rates, enrollments, graduations, and support centers, providing scholarships, and hiring Native Hawaiian students to cultivate relationships with indigenous communities and cultures (A. Silva, 2020). With technological advances, foreign intervention, and lucrative overseas opportunities, younger Native Hawaiian generations were moving away from ancestral homelands, threatening cultural ties (Kaaloa, 2022).

Sub-Question One

How do FGNHCS navigate and overcome barriers to persistence in online courses?

Several aspects to consider in student experiences were skill development, student engagement, teaching quality, student support, and learning resources. Higher education was attributed to students' perceptions and experiences and strongly influences academic integration (Dias, 2022). Many reasons affect first-generation college retention and completion rates of students in higher education and influence the functionality of society (Lucas et al., 2020). In the rich field of research in retention and persistence, student involvement is a critical factor in helping students persist through their academic careers, and there are other factors contributing to first-generation college students staying and persisting (Dias, 2022).

Sub-Question Two

What are the unique experiences and challenges faced by FGNHCS in online courses?

Exploring the problems, challenges, and barriers first-generation college students face is essential, as well as why there is a possibility of students departing within their first year (Braxton & Francis, 2017). Students who depart from college early fail to experience growth and development as they may become quality employees (Braxton & Francis, 2017). An indication that student challenges help reveal experiences and other adaptive trajectories is that resilience is a general term for adaptive trajectories that operationalize traits or skills that help facilitate first-generation college students (Alam & Parvin, 2021). It is necessary to explore the problems, challenges, and barriers that first-generation college students face and why they may depart within their first year (Alam & Parvin, 2021; Braxton & Francis, 2017). Students who depart from college early fail to experience growth and development as they may become quality employees (Braxton & Francis, 2017). An ongoing dialogue on online education raised essential concerns about online education helping students fulfill their academic goals and continue their persistence (Ma & Shea, 2021).

Sub-Question Three

What influences contributed to academic success in FGNHCS's online courses? This question aligns with the problem statement, which deals with the persistence of first-generation college students and identifies events leading to continuing their studies. Nurhas et al. (2021) discuss that changing student behavior regarding attitude, culture, and working methods has challenges but can provide better intervention strategies. Karadağ et al. (2021) explain that student satisfaction is a structure that evaluates perceived consistencies or inconsistencies and the student attitude resulting from their experiences, services, and opportunities. Several aspects to consider in student experiences are skill development, student engagement, teaching quality, student support, and learning resources.

Definitions

Various terms have been used throughout the literature to understand FGNHCS' experiences in higher education while taking online courses. In the list are definitions for the following terms:

1. *‘āina* – the Hawaiian word for “land” (Kana‘iaupuni & Malone, 2010)
2. *Attrition* – failing a course or program or leaving higher education (Xavier & Meneses, 2020).
3. *First-Generation College Students* – are students whose parents did not attend or earn a college degree (Ricks & Warren, 2021).
4. *‘hānai* – in the Hawaiian language, communal caregiving where extended family or mentors raise individuals to cultivate unity and shared responsibility (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2020)

5. *Higher Education* – is a form of large institutions worldwide with no prescribed national curriculum (Barnett, 2021).
6. *Kānaka* – the Hawaiian term for humankind (Alden et al., 2023).
7. *Kanaka Maoli* – a modern Hawaiian (Nākoa, 2020).
8. *Kulāiwi* – in Hawaiian, Kula means field, and iwi means bones (Alden et al., 2023).
9. *Kumu* – a source of knowledge, inspiration, and wisdom (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2020).
10. *Mana* – a spiritual force that passes through all things (Arista, 2018).
11. *Mu‘o A‘e* – to bud (Mu‘o A‘e – University of Hawai‘i, 2024).
12. *Native Hawaiian* – any descendant of aboriginal people before 1778, occupied and exercised sovereignty in the area, compromising the State of Hawai‘i (Benham & Heck, 1998).
13. *Pae‘āina* – in the Hawaiian language, archipelago (Kana‘iaupuni & Malone, 2010).
14. *Pai Ka Māna* – the power is good (Pai Ka Mana – University of Hawai‘i, 2024).
15. *Persistence* – the continuous enrollment of students in courses to complete their degree or program (Xavier & Meneses, 2020).
16. ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i – Hawaiian language (Alden et al., 2023).
17. *Retention* – the continued enrollment every semester or year (Xavier & Meneses, 2020).
18. *Student Success* – Students' retention, degree or program completion, and reflection of preparedness (Xavier & Meneses, 2020).

Summary

Chapter One introduced the research study, which gave an overview of Hawai'i's unique cultural and educational landscape, focusing on the underrepresented demographic of FGNHCS in higher education. The chapter explored the historical, social, and theoretical contexts framing

the research problem and purpose. It highlighted the significance of the study and presented a set of research questions aimed at understanding the experiences and factors influencing the persistence of these students in online courses. The social context section discussed the challenges and factors that affect first-generation college students in traditional and online learning environments while highlighting the importance of motivation, support, and cultural factors in understanding their experiences. The theoretical context introduced Vincent Tinto's student integration theory as a guiding framework for the study. The problem statement identified the central issue addressed in the study: the lack of persistence among FGNHCS in online courses at the University of Hawai'i Maui College. It underscored the need for research on this demographic to support FGNHCS' educational journey better. The purpose statement outlined the study's aim to describe the experiences of FGNHCS in online courses and identify the factors contributing to their successful persistence. The significance of the study was emphasized in terms of its theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. It is seen as a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge, addressing a gap in research on this specific demographic. The chapter concluded with a set of research questions that guided the investigation into the experiences, challenges, and factors influencing the persistence of FGNHCS in online courses.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A comprehensive literature review explores information related to FGNHCS' problems while taking online courses in higher education. This chapter will present the gathered information about the topic and enable the correlation of relationships to FGNHCS. The first section of this chapter will address Tinto's student integration theory (1975, 1987), focusing on academic integration by defining student performance, level of intellectual development, and perception of having positive experiences in an academic setting. Relevant and related literature regarding the impact of academic and social integration will be presented. The section on academic integration will provide a literature review on retention, first-generation college students, and online learning, focusing on the development, challenges and benefits, student interactions, and student persistence.

Additionally, Hawai'i and Native Hawaiian literature will review the history of Hawai'i, the history of Native Hawaiians, the history of education in Hawai'i, Native Hawaiians and technology, and FGNHCS. The section on social integration will provide literature related to the challenges of first-generation college students, peer interaction, and parent and family influence, in addition to topics discussing Native Hawaiian culture, family, and modern Hawai'i, and a chapter summary. This literature review defines a gap in the current field, establishing the need for this study. Ozaki et al. (2020) indicate that persistence and graduation rates are significantly low despite the function and significant enrollment. First-generation college students are diverse in age, financial independence, dependents, and academic preparation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is an intersection of existing knowledge or previously formed ideas about the complexity of phenomena, epistemological dispositions, and a methodically analytic approach (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Vincent Tinto's student integration theory (1975) guides this study because it is relevant to student behaviors and integration into an academic setting. This theoretical framework provides a lens to understand the persistence of first-generation college students transitioning into higher education and their persistence toward a degree or completing a program. Tinto's framework remains foundational for examining student engagement and retention strategies, particularly for historically underserved populations (Harrison & Mathuews, 2022). Acknowledging the significance of theories within various disciplines is essential to understanding students' experiences better (Z. D. Johnson & Goldman, 2022).

It expands Tinto's theory by investigating the role of digital platforms in fostering social and academic integration among modern college students (Greenland & Moore, 2022). Tinto proposes that student integration into the academic and social aspects of the higher education environment plays an essential role in student success and staying enrolled (Tinto, 1975), while this study focuses on how to improve FGNHCS persistence and retention when taking online courses, thus improving student retention. Tinto's student integration theory has been a prominent theoretical framework in higher education for understanding and improving student retention and success (Samoila & Vrabie, 2023). This theory posits that students' ability to integrate into a college or university's academic and social aspects significantly impacts their persistence and achievement (Samoila & Vrabie, 2023). Integration is a dynamic process involving academic and social dimensions (Tinto, 1975). The academic integration dimension of

faculty-student interactions is crucial in student integration. Students with meaningful interactions with faculty members are more likely to feel academically integrated, enhancing their retention (Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2023).

Academic integration is the student's grade, academic performance, the perspective of any positive academic experience, and social integration (Cotton et al., 2017). Social integration is the student's involvement in college activities while creating peer connections (Leary et al., 2021). Having a sense of community has gained prominence in discussions related to Tinto's theory, and creating a supportive and inclusive campus community can promote student integration and ultimately improve persistence rates (Reynolds & Cruise, 2020). This theory emphasizes integrating academic and social experiences for student success. While some argue for separating academic and social integration, it is more accurate to view them as interrelated and overlapping (Davidson & Wilson, 2017). Tinto's theory has influenced the understanding of college student departure and the challenges students face (Marley & Wilcox, 2021).

Online education has revolutionized students' learning experiences; however, the more significant challenge of improving student retention and academic performance for student success comes with this. Online courses play a crucial role in the experience of first-generation college students, offering greater accessibility to coursework and cost-effective instruction (Fischer et al., 2022), and research on this topic has employed various theories and methods to understand student persistence among new first-generation college students entering higher education. In the evolving technology and online learning environments, Tinto's student integration theory has adapted to the digital context, the role of online communities, and virtual engagement in promoting student integration in online education (Steele & Douglas, 2021).

Vincent Tinto's student integration theory (1975) has been extensively researched as a perspective for understanding college retention (Savage et al., 2019). Understanding diverse student populations' unique needs and challenges is crucial for effectively implementing Tinto's theory in such settings (Huo et al., 2022). In conclusion, Tinto's student integration theory remains a relevant and adaptable framework for understanding student retention and success in higher education (Hadjar et al., 2022). Recent research has expanded our understanding of the theory's dimensions, such as social and academic integration, and highlighted the importance of factors like peer interactions, co-curricular involvement, faculty-student relationships, and a sense of community in promoting student persistence (Emekako & Van der Westhuizen, 2021; Hadjar et al., 2022). Additionally, scholars have explored applying Tinto's theory in various educational contexts, including online learning and community colleges, underlining its versatility and significance in addressing contemporary challenges in higher education (Byl et al., 2022).

Related Literature

The following is a summary of the literature relating topics to first-year generation college students and the gap in the literature specific to FGNHCS. The topics represent main factors such as academic integration and social integration. Academic integration encompasses various aspects, including retention, first-generation college students, and online learning, with topics covering the development of online learning, challenges and benefits of online learning, student interactions, and student persistence. The gap in the literature focuses on the Native Hawaiian student population, as indicated by the scarcity or lack of recent studies. Concerning academic integration for FGNHCS, the literature review will cover the culture of fusion and modernization, the history of Hawai'i, the advanced technologies of Native Hawaiians and

preserving the culture, and the history of education technology. Social integration has social challenges for online students, such as student engagement in online learning, a feeling of community, instructor and student relations, parental and family influences, peer interaction, and student identity (Resch et al., 2022). Regarding social integration for FGNHCS, the literature review will cover Native Hawaiians, their culture, family, and modern Hawai'i. Relating literature will be first-generation college students, peer interaction, parent and family influence, and Native Hawaiians on culture, family, and modern Hawai'i.

Retention

C. M. Johnson (2021) argues that higher education is diverse, with complexities essential to understanding in any institution. Leary et al. (2021) define student retention as first-time, full-time higher education students returning to an institution for their second year, associated with student persistence and graduation rates. Nearly a third of first-generation college students do not enroll for their second year. When first-generation college students begin their first rigorous coursework, they are vulnerable to retention-related issues. First-generation college students' perceptions of their higher education and students' social fit affect their decisions to persist in a program. To an extent, social integration reflects those students who found social environments at their higher education institution and on-campus aligned with their preferences, often shaped by background, values, aspirations, developing friendships, finding mentors, or connecting with faculty.

Student Interactions (Academic, Social, & Technology Support)

First-generation college students transitioning to higher education are in the initial study phase, which is crucial for their educational career, decisions, achievement, and academic development (Schaeper, 2020). Higher education, first-time encounters, and new circumstances

cause stress to the student because of new tasks, requirements, environments, social relationships, and responsibilities. Tinto (1975, 1987) defines academic integration as students' academic performance, intellectual development level, and perception of positive experiences in an educational setting. Tinto's model (1975) indicates that instructors are vital in academic integration through choices about the course, program contents, supervision, teaching, learning, and assessment strategies. Tinto (1975) suggests that academic integration implies formal interactions between higher education institutions and students, which influence students' academic development in higher education. Student interactions include communication with faculty, academic performance, and student group participation. According to Tinto (1987), academic integration supports students' degree goals and strengthens their commitment. In comparison, poor integration leads to feelings of isolation and incongruence, which lead to dropping out. In addition, higher education institutions follow their students' academic and social development and increase student determination.

Social Support

Cameron and Rideout (2020) say that first-generation college student's academic success, such as study skills and motivation, is predicted by social support. With social support's predictions, it is becoming clear that first-generation college students benefit from a sense of belonging to the higher education community. First-generation college students who are socially integrated have higher academic motivation over time (Hagler, 2023). First-generation college students with higher social support adjust to higher education more successfully (Higginbotham, 2022). Students' feeling of belonging is one factor that matters in their year. Developing a sense of belonging in their first year is an essential aspect of developing an identity for students, and both processes are enhanced through social interactions with other students (Ahmed et al., 2021).

Social interactions with other first-generation college students support understanding of themselves because peers can be a prominent source of knowledge concerning institutional norms and expectations (Reynolds & Cruise, 2020). First-generation college students likely have a stronger sense of identity and community if they have interacted with peers and engaged in activities associated with being university students (Keefe et al., 2022).

Student Engagement

Griffin et al. (2022) claim that colleges and universities are pressured to create pathways to promote student access and completion. A college degree helps individuals manage a complex life and be competitive in a global labor market. Student engagement has been supported throughout literature retention (Payne et al., 2021). Studies in higher education identified that the interaction between faculty and staff is just as crucial as instructor-student interaction; socioeconomically disadvantaged students are unlikely to talk to faculty and staff because they are not comfortable or unfamiliar (Ricks & Warren, 2021; Waalkes et al., 2023). Student engagement creates a feeling and sense of belonging for students and institutions by supporting retention and graduation goals in agreeing that student engagement in social and educational activities helps first-generation college students achieve higher grades and persistence in their second year (McKinnon-Crowley, 2021; Radunzel, 2021).

Sense of Community

A weak sense of community is associated with poor mental and physical health and possibly leads to suicide (Lederer et al., 2021). There is extensive support for engagement in student-centered focus on an active contribution where students make their learning through involvement and participation in activities (Ma & Shea, 2021; W. Wang et al., 2022; Yang, 2022). Students engaging in online learning have various complexities, and with the increase in

students selecting online education over traditional in-person classes, it is essential to understand motivation and engagement. There should be no assumptions that motivation and engagement theories establish a relation to traditional campus classrooms translating to online learning environments. Student perceptions of collaborative learning impacted their satisfaction and connections with peers, leading to the importance of student perceptions or attitudes toward online learning. Student engagement is recognized as valuable to student outcomes.

Kahu et al. (2020) claim that an in-depth understanding of student engagement remains a challenge because of the complexity of factors influencing it. Understanding student engagement relates to their behavior, emotions, and cognitive connections to their learning. Increasing student engagement is becoming a rallying point for curricular and administrative reform. The expectation and economic value of postsecondary degrees continue to rise. Hauck et al. (2020) claim that educational institutions emphasize academic preparedness and retention rates to measure institutional success. The sense of belonging influences college students' social, psychological, and academic outcomes (Hauck et al., 2020).

Higher Education First-Year Assumptions

Cameron and Rideout (2020) claim that the first year in higher education forms the foundations for the students' future and success. The first year is critical to establishing skills and habits to become a self-directed learner. In the first year and beyond, the university education proceeds under the assumption that students already have developed the skills needed to succeed and develop them naturally to progress through their coursework (Keppens et al., 2023).

Student-Centered or Faculty-Centered Methods

Stoian et al. (2021) highlight experts' studies on differences between online and face-to-face learning, emphasizing that online learning is student-centered while face-to-face is teacher-

centered. Alghamdi et al. (2020) note that technology enables flexible learning opportunities, but the impact of social integration on academic performance is often overlooked. There are five principles of inclusive teaching to engage learners: establishing and supporting an online environment for student belonging, setting explicit expectations, selecting course content acknowledging barriers to inclusion, designing all course content and material for accessibility, and reflections on the beliefs about teaching to maximize self-awareness and commitment (Majewska & Vereen, 2021). Online learning and courses have advantages and disadvantages (Mukhtar et al., 2020). Student interactions relate to their relationships, social engagement, and sense of community.

Challenges of First-Generation College Students

Javed (2019) indicates that first-generation college students experience challenges and have gained considerable attention. Over the last four decades, there has been extensive research on the first-generation college experience—the rising concerns regarding challenges faced by these first-generation college students and higher education institutions. Researchers have argued that first-generation college students' challenges increase failure and dropout rates (Hsieh, 2021; Wright et al., 2023). First-generation college students face challenges adapting to new cultures, values, and beliefs (Wright et al., 2023). First-generation college student experience was not positive, and students faced many challenges adapting to the new learning environment (Azpeitia et al., 2023).

First-generation college students at a higher education institution navigate many challenges surrounding and adapting to new living situations, financial needs, academic pressures, and social life demands (Whittinghill et al., 2021). First-generation college students must gain new skills and strategies to adapt to these demands, make good decisions, ease their

transition, live independently, and succeed (Covarrubias et al., 2020). Generally, first-generation college students are less prepared when entering a higher education institution; this presents challenges for these students to overcome and be successful (Yang, 2022). Jun et al. (2021) imply that higher education institutions give students time and space to accumulate different experiences, observe phenomena, and participate in new things to shape their lives. First-generation college students face the task of adapting to college life, and they must adapt to significant course study while building interpersonal relationships with peers and faculty (Ma & Shea, 2021). Psychological characteristics of first-generation college students related to their adaptation to college life are intertwined with their ego identities, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-leadership; failure to adapt can create destructive results (Keppens et al., 2023).

Cole et al. (2020) point out that first-generation college students often face academic, social, and financial barriers due to their historically marginalized backgrounds, leading to persistence and college completion gaps. Cantero-Garlito et al. (2021) mention adapting higher education institutions to face-to-face formats with safety measures, sometimes incorporating hybrid teaching tools. Cameron and Rideout (2020) discuss the challenges of the first year in higher education, including disruptions in students' lives, social networks, and time management, which can hinder their academic success.

Peer Interaction

Lu et al. (2021) defined peer interaction as a form of cooperative learning that develops student-to-student interaction and results in different advantages of learning outcomes, including collaboration and communication skills. Collaboration is where two or more individuals work together and respectfully share perspectives and ideas. Communication is the ability to articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written, and nonverbal communication skills in various

contexts and forms. Social integration allows students to form relationships with peers and instructors and reflect on the sense of belonging that should develop (Byl et al., 2022). Social integration is where students can share attitudes, beliefs, and non-intellectual interaction with peers and instructors in hopes of becoming involved in extracurricular and co-curricular activities. Much research suggests that when a student commits time and energy to academic work, it strongly influences student peers (Steele & Douglas, 2021). Students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors were influenced by being in the presence of others, and the impacts of student belonging and collectivism on self-esteem were discussed (Leary et al., 2021). Both attributes of these friendships were related to graduation rates. Peer interaction, learning, and support may help develop social and academic integration.

Parent and Family Influence

Olmos-Gómez et al. (2021) claim that parent and family influence is central to people's lives. With social transformations over the centuries, families adapt, survive, and remain involved in multiple facets of individuals' lives (A. D. Silva et al., 2021). There are many different concepts of a family; a couple may have children and not be married, and single parenting, leaving aside the family context, is unavoidable (Ruiz Alvarado et al., 2020). Researchers establish relationships between success in higher education and the student's socioeconomic level of origin with higher socioeconomic status (Steele & Douglas, 2021). A primary variable relating to parents is their educational level. Students whose parents have a university degree are likely to attend a university; approximately half of the graduate parents have a child or children who earn the same educational level (Jeong et al., 2023). Socioeconomic status determines the family's situation, which impacts school attendance and dropouts (Davidson & Wilson, 2017). Difficult economic situations play a part in determining the

resources invested in education and the need for their child or children to work (Jeong et al., 2023). Gender is another variable in analyzing educational careers (Jeong et al., 2023).

A. D. Silva et al. (2021) agree that academics have proven that family is essential to academic success. A family's influence on academic performance includes a range of characteristics such as socioeconomic status, parental education, quality of parent relationships, and parental support. Academic performance shows a significant difference between student demographics; students from poor to low-income and socially vulnerable families likely have lower academic performance than those from a privileged home (Xavier & Meneses, 2020). However, a family may also have a protective role against negative contextual influences that affect academic performance. Financial aspects remain one of the most tangible and critical factors affecting students' access to higher education. If a student is under financial pressure, they may enroll in fewer courses, limiting their social and academic integration opportunities and affecting their overall academic performance.

Technological Support Systems

Technological support systems in colleges have become integral to the educational landscape and profoundly impact teaching and learning (Ammar Abdulameer, 2019). Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Blackboard and Canvas are pivotal; these platforms offer a centralized location for course materials, grades, and communication tools (Ammar Abdulameer, 2019). LMS facilitates a more organized and accessible learning environment, allowing students and faculty to track academic progress efficiently (Ammar Abdulameer, 2019). Additionally, LMS platforms often integrate with other educational technologies, enhancing the overall learning experience (Meng & Zhang, 2022). Integrating mobile technology is another crucial element of technological support (Meng & Zhang, 2022). With the increasing use of

smartphones and tablets, colleges are adopting mobile-friendly versions of their LMS and other learning tools (Patra et al., 2021). Mobile apps for LMS, e-books, and other educational resources make it easier for students to stay connected and engaged with their coursework on the go (Patra et al., 2021).

Another critical aspect is the role of digital libraries and online databases. Colleges have expanded their library services to include digital access to various resources, such as journals, books, and research papers (Secreto & Pamulaklakin, 2015). These online libraries are crucial for remote learning, providing students and faculty with the necessary materials for research and study without the constraints of physical location or timing (Bell & Haberer, 2018). This access is particularly beneficial for distance learning programs, where students may not easily access a physical campus library (Bell & Haberer, 218). Many colleges offer access to digital libraries like JSTOR or EBSCOhost, which provide students with a wealth of academic journals, books, and articles necessary for their studies (Saeed Al-Marroof et al., 2021). These resources are vital for research and staying up-to-date with the latest information in their field (Saeed Al-Marroof et al., 2021). Additionally, colleges often provide software like SPSS for statistical analysis or Adobe Creative Suite for design courses, ensuring students have the necessary tools to complete their coursework effectively (Saeed Al-Marroof et al., 2021).

Technical support services are also a crucial component of technological support systems in colleges (Masya et al., 2021). These services ensure that students and faculty can effectively use and troubleshoot the various technologies (Masya et al., 2021). The availability of a competent technical support team is essential for minimizing disruptions in the learning process due to technical issues (Lakhal & Khechine, 2021; Masya et al., 2021). Adequate technical support addresses immediate technological issues and provides training and resources to enhance

digital literacy among users (Lakhal & Khechine, 2021). Support and accessibility services are also crucial components of technological support systems in online colleges (K. F. Johnson & Kalkbrenner, 2017). This includes technical support services, which are essential for troubleshooting issues with software or hardware that students might encounter (K. F. Johnson & Kalkbrenner, 2017). Accessibility services ensure that all students, regardless of disabilities, have equal access to online learning resources (Rodríguez-Alabanda et al., 2019). This can include screen readers for visually impaired students, captioning services for those with hearing impairments, and specialized software to assist students with learning disabilities (Rodríguez-Alabanda et al., 2019).

Lastly, cybersecurity measures in educational technology cannot be overlooked. As colleges rely more on digital platforms, protecting sensitive student and faculty data becomes paramount (Ergüzen et al., 2021). Implementing robust cybersecurity protocols and educating users about safe online practices are essential components of a comprehensive technological support system in colleges (Ergüzen et al., 2021). In conclusion, technological support systems in colleges encompass various tools and services essential for modern education (Loganathan & Bala Subrahmanya, 2022). From LMS platforms to AI-driven personalized learning, these systems enhance the educational experience, facilitate remote learning, and prepare students for the digital world (Loganathan & Bala Subrahmanya, 2022). As technology continues to evolve, colleges must adapt and expand their support systems to meet the emerging needs of students and faculty (Loganathan & Bala Subrahmanya, 2022).

Evolution of Online Learning

Chandra and Palvia (2021), Dziuban et al. (2018), and Picciano (2017) describe the evolution of online education in four phases. In the first phase, which began in the 1990s, some

universities adopted and established distance learning programs that quickly adapted their programs for online delivery leveraging capabilities (Picciano, 2017). Phase two, which lasted between 2000 and 2007, witnessed tremendous growth in online enrollment (Dziuban et al., 2018). Phase three – the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) evolution, was an online education model to offer online education on a larger scale without listing students' costs. Phase four – this online education enrollment continued to grow and outpace traditional higher education enrollments (Picciano, 2017). Morris et al. (2020) argue that an unbundling of higher education learning and teaching has been based on coexisting and conflicting rationales: allowing access to education and marketization.

Chandra and Palvia (2021) mention that information technology impacts all aspects of lives: work, life, drive, entertainment, interacting with others, processing, analyzing, and sharing information. The changes in the delivery of education models have been profound and generated significant interest among researchers, educators, administrators, policymakers, publishers, and businesses. Chandra and Palvia (2021) mention that e-evolution or e-revolution witnesses' emails, e-work, e-commerce, and e-education. In comparison, e-education or online education changed how teaching and learning are approached, whether in-person or online.

Development of Online Learning

Secret et al. (2019) recognize that faculty spent considerable time developing their syllabi, lectures, exercises, material, and teaching techniques for a traditional face-to-face setting. Instructors were apprehensive or eager to begin their courses when moving from traditional to online learning. Audet et al. (2021) indicate that a critical difference between face-to-face and online learning is that the latter's format allows engagement with the instructor's material. Secret et al. (2019) recognize that classroom and online environments are equally complex and

challenging to define, and transferring from one mode to another has fraught pitfalls. Secret et al. (2019) recognize that instructors will likely integrate innovative strategies when newer strategies are connected to practices and experiences, facilitating the transition.

There has been an increase in online instruction since the early 2000's, with over six million students enrolled in at least one online course; however, most students are enrolled in in-person and online courses (Garris & Fleck, 2020). Ashkanani et al. (2021) indicate that online learning had been adapted, which presented as a hindrance. Online learning has been around for the last decade, with many valuable tools and resources to assist instructors in accomplishing their duties. Currently, many lectures are given asynchronously or synchronously by video conference or pre-recorded lectures that students may view on their own time and while working on their assignments.

Challenges of Providing Online Education

Mukhtar et al. (2020) state that the preparedness of higher education institutions to manage the transition from face-to-face courses to online courses requires the help of technological advancement in hardware and software to enable online learning effectively. Many institutions became interested in the best course delivery content online to engage learners while conducting assessments. Online learning systems are web-based applications for delivering, tracking, and managing courses online, implementing technology advancements to direct, design, and provide learners' content, and facilitating faculty and students' communication. These online learning systems contain whiteboards, chat functions, quizzes, discussion board forums, and announcements, allowing instructors and students to communicate synchronously or share course content. With increased online modalities, assessing the effectiveness of teaching and learning from various stakeholders was necessary.

Changes in Instructional Delivery and Assessment

Audet et al. (2021) indicate that a critical difference between face-to-face and online learning is that the latter's format allows engagement with the instructor's material. Assessments were also changed to focus on written assignments rather than exams and minimize direct social contact among students and professors. Students' reactions to the changes in higher education varied depending on their differences and personality traits. Many of these online courses require self-discipline skills because there is no longer a predictable schedule to cue students, and the use of assignments for grading requires planning. Switching to online courses necessitated extensive changes in how students organized, reviewed course materials, and prepared for assignments, which required a capacity to adopt new approaches to better suit an online format.

Transition to Online Learning

Zheng et al. (2021) indicate that the abrupt online learning transition raised several concerns and questions. Hew et al. (2020) state that not all faculty members see the value of online learning, even though online learning has been around for many decades. Pre-pandemic, many faculty and students were skeptical of online learning values. However, there is a likelihood that online learning will persist post-pandemic. Some studies report students' positive attitudes toward online learning. Students were surveyed at a university in New York, where students were satisfied with synchronous web-based lectures. Other students had favorable attitudes toward online learning and wanted to continue online instruction in their future courses. Little attention has been given to factors affecting students' acceptance of online learning.

Prior research demonstrated that one of the most critical factors influencing students' performance in face-to-face or online learning environments was the feeling of belonging, connecting with others, and being supported by their instructor. In higher education, the "new

norm" in teaching and learning performances and instructor readiness must be addressed and evaluated to help educational institutions gauge experiences in online learning during this time. Some academic programs, such as Engineering and Medical Programs, found the transition to online learning more difficult than others, which serve a more hands-on approach to education.

Challenges of Engineering Education Online

In a study in engineering education, Asgari et al. (2021) claim that those engineering courses are content-centered, hands-on, and focused on developing critical thinking or problem-solving. Over the last decade, online education has become a viable engineering component in higher education in subfields such as electrical and computer engineering, information technology, and computer science. Careful evidence-based planning mitigated the impact on engineering education for vulnerable students facing substantial changes and challenges beyond their academic career and responsibilities, including obligations, financial burdens, and seeking additional employment.

Challenges of Medical Education Online

J. L. Wilson et al. (2021) claim that nursing programs in higher education left many nursing faculty in unusual circumstances to transition their content and materials to online formats. J. L. Wilson et al. (2021) claim that the requirement of time to develop effective online instruction was crucial, including implementing institutional support. Instructors should feel comfortable with technology and not be given essential prerequisites to deliver content effectively in their online courses. J. L. Wilson et al. (2021) claim that instructors are comfortable with basic technology and the digital nature of modern society and technology. J. L. Wilson et al. (2021) believe that training is required when it comes to software and application usage, which can be challenging for faculty. Considering the challenges faced by FGNHCS, it is

crucial to understand the various resources and support services used and how they view these tools as beneficial in their persistence (J. L. Wilson et al., 2021).

Olmes et al. (2021) agree that there are challenges posed in medical education facilities, which are also shifting to online learning for routines. Olmes et al. (2021) claim that digital learning options were provided and played a minor part in student education due to a lack of infrastructure and technology and negative attitudes among educators. Studies in digital learning were conducted; it was demonstrated that such understanding improved students' knowledge in domains such as communication skills. Medical students' attitudes toward online education in internal medicine, surgery, and other clinical specialties for digital teaching practice skills and examination are sparse. First-generation college students assimilating into college is a critical transition.

Benefits of Online Learning

Online teaching became a panacea for ensuring that teaching and learning are sustained, making the value of online teaching and learning irrefutable (Badiozaman, 2021). Online coursework offers scheduling flexibility to an adult who juggles work, family, and other life responsibilities and may be viewed as a benefit of online learning (Alsayed & Althaqafi, 2022). Online learning allows students to learn at their own pace and collaborate among diverse perspectives of students and faculty members (Hongsuchon et al., 2022). Online teaching and learning have emerged as indispensable tools in education, particularly in the face of global crises or flexible learning schedules (Eynon & Malmberg, 2021). The benefits of this mode of education are numerous and varied, catering to a wide range of needs and preferences (Hongsuchon et al., 2022).

Firstly, online teaching offers unparalleled flexibility, especially for adult learners who often must balance their educational pursuits with work, family, and other life responsibilities (Goldenson et al., 2022). Unlike traditional classroom settings, online courses allow students to access materials and participate in lectures at the most convenient times (Guo et al., 2016). This flexibility ensures that education is more inclusive and accessible, opening doors for those who might have found it challenging to pursue further education due to time constraints or geographical limitations (Goldenson et al., 2022). A significant advantage of online learning is the opportunity for students to learn at their own pace (Thomson, 2011). In a traditional classroom, the pace of learning is often dictated by the curriculum and the instructor's schedule, which might not align with every student's learning speed or style (Thomson, 2011). Online learning platforms, on the other hand, provide resources such as recorded lectures, interactive modules, and forums that students can access as needed (Goldenson et al., 2022). This self-paced approach allows learners to spend more time on challenging topics and move faster through areas they are comfortable with, leading to a more personalized and effective learning experience (Thomson, 2011).

Collaboration and exposure to diverse perspectives are key benefits of online learning (Cook, 2014). Digital platforms often bring together students from varied geographical, cultural, and professional backgrounds, fostering a rich learning environment where diverse viewpoints are shared and debated (Cook, 2014). This exposure enhances the learning experience and prepares students to work in increasingly globalized and culturally diverse workplaces (Eliyawati et al., 2021). The collaboration tools available in many online courses, such as discussion boards, group projects, and peer review systems, encourage active participation and the development of critical thinking and communication skills (Thomson, 2011).

Another significant benefit of online education is the facilitation of personalized learning (Metz & Metz, 2022). Unlike the one-size-fits-all approach of traditional classrooms, online learning allows students to progress at their own pace, spending more time on challenging areas and breezing through topics they find easy (Metz & Metz, 2022). This self-paced nature caters to individual learning styles and speeds, leading to more effective and efficient learning (Kim et al., 2005). Moreover, the digital platform of online education brings together a diverse cohort of students, offering exposure to varied perspectives and fostering a global learning community (Kim et al., 2005). This diversity enriches the learning experience and prepares students for working in culturally diverse environments (Herwiana & Laili, 2022). Additionally, the continuous evolution of digital learning tools and methods, such as interactive simulations and gamified content, enhances engagement and helps develop essential digital skills (Herwiana & Laili, 2022). Online education offers unparalleled flexibility, personalized learning experiences, exposure to diverse perspectives, and access to innovative learning technologies, making it a valuable asset in today's educational landscape (Thomson, 2011).

Faculty Strategies During Online Transition

During the pandemic, many instructors improvised to transition and create learning solutions to deliver their courses quickly. Many instructors uploaded PowerPoint presentations or scanned paper documents into their learning management systems. Other instructors created video recordings of their lectures, and students could asynchronously watch on their own time and were required to answer questions shortly after viewing the recordings. Many instructors synchronously held online with their students for more student interaction. Many online methods deliver content but are ineffective in promoting active learning and interest for first-generation college students (Hew et al., 2020).

Student Persistence in Online Courses

Student persistence in online courses is a crucial quality defined by Daniels and MacNeela (2021) as the ability to continue pursuing educational goals despite challenges. This concept is closely related to Vincent Tinto's theory of student retention. Stephen and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2021) highlight the increasing enrollment in online programs, but they note that online courses still experience higher attrition rates than face-to-face courses, with dropout rates being 10% to 20% higher. This issue is particularly significant for first-generation college students enrolling in online programs. Several factors influence student persistence in online courses, including self-directed learning, online learning, and self-efficacy (Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021). While higher education institutions can influence some of these factors, not all are under their control. Xavier and Meneses (2022) emphasize the importance of student persistence in the first year of college, especially with the growth of online programs, which has led to concerns about increased dropout rates. Time plays a significant role in dropout, persistence, and engagement, affecting first-generation students more due to challenges in managing their time effectively (Tang et al., 2021).

The stress challenges first-generation college students face includes transitions to adulthood and adjustments to academic tasks, study materials, and interactions with professors (Andrade & Fernandes, 2022). Transitioning to online learning and managing time effectively is vital to improving persistence rates (Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021). Social relations with peers and professors are crucial in managing stress levels for these students. Self-directed learning, self-efficacy, and time management influence persistence in online courses (Li et al., 2022). First-generation college students face unique challenges due to their backgrounds.

First-Generation College Students

Bardorfer and Dolenc (2022) imply that self-determination is when humans are active organisms with the tendencies to grow, overcome challenges posed by their environment, and integrate new experiences; however, these natural tendencies do not operate automatically and require support from their social environment. Maryam et al. (2021) allege that self-determination is essential to first-generation college students' planning process for being successful. Even though the gap from high school completion is closing for first-generation college students, it contributes to the lack of persistence and retention; adapting to a new environment creates new challenges. First-generation college students are responsible for requesting support and services and interacting with faculty. Adjusting to a higher education institution presents challenges for all students, often entering unprepared, as they are anxious about the new endeavor. Shin and Johnson (2021) indicate that first-generation college students, even in their first year, seek to be confirmed as valued individuals with potential.

Self-determination is an inherent human tendency towards psychological growth, independence, and well-being improvement based on meeting the basics of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Li et al., 2022). Autonomy is one's ability to self-regulate and adjust behaviors; competence refers to having knowledge, skills, and understanding to accomplish outcomes congruent with one's goals (Pedler et al., 2022). A college student's success attributes include problem-solving or critical thinking skills, persistence, awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, setting short- and realistically appropriate long-term goals, and self-management in online courses (Li et al., 2022).

Hawai'i: A Culture of Fusion and Modernization

Settled in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, with its lush landscapes, pristine beaches, and volcanic wonders, the archipelago's natural beauty is a testament to the power of geological

forces (Kaaloa, 2022). Hawai'i embraces Hawaiian traditions manifested in music, dance, and rituals, fostering a vibrant and deeply rooted culture that continues to thrive (Gibson & Puniwai, 2006). In technology, Hawai'i's strategic position in the Pacific has sparked innovation in renewable energy, marine conservation, and space exploration, leveraging its natural resources for sustainable advancement (Ho-Lastimoso et al., 2019). Hawai'i holds family at its core, emphasizing 'ohana,' a concept that extends beyond blood ties to encompass a sense of community and unity (Kobashigawa, 2005; Mishina, 2017). Traditional family values are entwined with modern sensibilities, creating a society where the past and future coexist harmoniously (J. D. Baker et al., 2021). Hawai'i beckons not merely as a destination but embodies the fusion of land, culture, education, technology, and family—a place where the rhythm echoes the heartbeat of a resilient and evolving civilization (J. D. Baker et al., 2021).

The History of Hawai'i

The late 18th century saw the arrival of European explorers, including Captain James Cook, who established initial contact with the Hawaiians (Riley et al., 2022). Captain James Cook arrived in 1778 to the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom; Native Hawaiians had to abandon many of their cultural practices and modes of living, disfranchised from their lands and traditional sources, disrupting ancestral relationships with the land and ability to practice ancestral responsibilities (Ho-Lastimoso et al., 2019; McCubbin & Marsella, 2009; Riley et al., 2022). In early 1893, a haole businessman, also known as the "missionary party," forcibly abdicated Queen Lili'uokalani. The queen was deposed from the Hawaiian Kingdom throne on January 17, 1893, and the events from that day would create political tension due to the queen attempting to adopt a new constitution based on the desires of her subjects (Hennessey, 2022; Ho-Lastimoso et al., 2019; M. Meyer, 2001; Nitasha, 2019). However, the colonization process

ensued in a foreign political system, overturning the Hawaiian monarchy and restructuring Hawaiian land rights and school system; the shift left many Native Hawaiians stripped of land, language, and culture (Riley et al., 2022; Rothwell, 2013). These changes culminated in the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893, as American interests sought to establish greater control over the islands, eventually leading to annexation by the United States in 1898 (Kawano, 2023; Taira, 2020).

Native Hawaiians have a genealogical connection to pae ‘āina (archipelago) Hawai‘i as the ancestral homeland and elder sibling of Hawaiian aboriginals (Kana‘iaupuni & Malone, 2010; McCubbin & Marsella, 2009). The relationship between Native Hawaiian identity and culture survival is integral and distinctive from other groups who live and work in Hawai‘i (Kana‘iaupuni & Malone, 2010). Historical events shaped Native Hawaiian people's identity and survival over the past two centuries, where the last four decades encompassed the resurgence of Native Hawaiian's reclamation of their traditional cultures and practices to restore their indigenous identity (McCubbin & Marsella, 2009). Over the last several decades, tremendous efforts have been made to revitalize traditional cultural practices to address inequities in self-governance, education, and research (Ho-Lastimosa et al., 2019).

Advanced Technologies of Native Hawaiians and Preserving Native Culture

The discovery of the Hawaiian Islands was that Native Hawaiians lived within the 1,500-mile-long Hawaiian archipelago in the Pacific Ocean had migrated by sea using advanced navigation skills, where they survived and flourished for thousands of years prior to Western contact (Beyer, 2014; Kana‘iaupuni & Malone, 2010). Native Hawaiians are the indigenous people of Hawai‘i; over 1600 years ago, their ancestors settled in the Hawaiian archipelago and developed aquaculture, irrigation terraces for planting, and food cultivation forms (Ho-Lastimosa

et al., 2019; Kana‘iaupuni & Malone, 2010; Kawano, 2023). Native Hawaiians advanced complex resource management systems and developed knowledge-based skills to survive on remote islands with limited resources (Kana‘iaupuni & Malone, 2010).

Regardless of race or ethnic origins or the state they live in, disenfranchised and oppressed cultural populations have alarmingly similar social and economic profiles; indigenous people currently constitute the United States–Native Hawaiians, American Indians, and Alaska Natives- share the history of forced incorporation into the trauma of colonizing people (Browne et al., 2009). Native Hawaiians had practices of valuing formal learning and education before the colonization; parents supposed children's education through oral comprehension and transmission of knowledge (Rothwell, 2013). Despite these challenges, Native Hawaiians have fought to preserve their cultural heritage, language, and traditions (Osorio, 2002; Sasa & Yellow Horse, 2022; Thirugnanam, 1999). In the following decades, the Hawaiian Islands became a focal point for trade, military interest, and colonization (Kaomea et al., 2019; Kobashigawa, 2005; M. A. Meyer, 1998)).

History of Education in Hawai‘i

Over millions of years, the islands were formed through volcanic activity (Kana‘iaupuni & Malone, 2010). The history of education in Hawai‘i dates long before Westerners set foot on the Hawaiian archipelago, thousands of years before Captain Cook, the missionaries, and any printing press (Kaomea et al., 2019; Rothwell, 2013). The indigenous people of Hawai‘i developed a self-sufficient, self-governing, and self-sustaining civilization to support 800,000 people; in addition to developing intricate political and economic systems based on respect for the land, rich cultures and intellectual traditions such as producing experts in voyaging canoes building, astronomy, agriculture, medicine, storytelling, chant, and dance (Kaomea et al., 2019).

The statistics of the Hawai‘i State Department of Education and the University of Hawai‘i Maui College system show that Native Hawaiian students were a fast-growing college population segment (Allaire, 2018). Over time, educational opportunities for Native Hawaiians emphasized language immersion, culture-based teaching, program evaluations, and academic assessments, resulting in an increase in Native Hawaiians conducting psychological research that challenged the conclusions from previous studies (McCubbin & Marsella, 2009). Native Hawaiians face numerous academic and social problems deeply rooted in the history and process of colonization; one of the critical issues is that the Native Hawaiians are fast-growing but disproportionately at a lower rate of higher educational attainment (Rothwell, 2013)

Native Hawaiians

Native Hawaiians, the indigenous people of the Hawaiian archipelago, have a rich cultural heritage deeply intertwined with their connection to the land and sea. Native Hawaiians continue to navigate the challenges of modernity, and preserving their traditional practices and values remains paramount (Gibson & Puniwai, 2006; Thirugnanam, 1999; Zorec, 2019). The Native Hawaiians' spiritual connection to the environment is reflected in various aspects of daily living, from traditional agriculture practices to cultural rituals that honor their ancestors and deities (Ho-Lastimosa et al., 2019). The decline in traditional knowledge transmission underscores the enduring impact of historical trauma on the Native Hawaiian community (Feinga, 2016). In contemporary times, Native Hawaiians grapple with land rights, political autonomy, and socioeconomic disparities (Kana‘iaupuni, 2005; Kauanui, 2008). In conclusion, the resilience and determination of Native Hawaiians to navigate the complexities of modernity while preserving their cultural heritage indicate their deep-rooted connection to the past and their aspirations for a sustainable future (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2020).

The Culture

In Hawai‘i, the Hawaiian culture has been passed down from generation to generation; the 'kuleana' (responsibility) and 'pono' (righteousness) are values that emphasize and educate the people about the interconnectedness to humans and nature, which encourage the people to respect and care for the environment, practice agriculture, fish, and land stewardship, which are rooted in sustainability and nature. Kulāiwi describes the ‘āina of where the ancestral bones are buried; through a ‘āina-based way of life, the Kānaka remain close to ancestors (Alden et al., 2023). In ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language), beyond soil and earth, the ‘āina holds a more profound meaning (Alden et al., 2023). National and global studies explore nature, land, and environmental connectedness in the Hawaiian culture (Antonio et al., 2023). Native Hawaiians resist technological advancements but maintain their cultural identity and preserve ancestral traditions because they could disrupt the balance between humans and natural ways in Hawai‘i (M. A. Meyer, 1998). Native Hawaiians are concerned that adopting technologies could lead to exploiting natural resources, cultural modifications, and erosion of traditional practices (Whyte, 2020).

Modern Hawaiians, known as Kanaka Maoli, represent a diverse and vibrant community deeply rooted in the Hawaiian Islands' cultural, historical, and geographical context; they continue to navigate a complex interplay of tradition and modernity, striving to preserve their indigenous identity while adapting to contemporary challenges (Kobashigawa, 2005; Nākoa, 2020). The blend of indigenous Hawaiians and individuals from various ethnic backgrounds who call Hawai‘i home contributes to the islands' rich cultural tapestry. In recent years, efforts to revive and maintain traditional practices have gained momentum among Modern Hawaiians (Mishina, 2017; Nākoa, 2020). Cultural events, language revitalization programs, and the

resurgence of hula and other traditional arts display their determination to reclaim and celebrate their heritage (Hawkins, 2005). However, these endeavors are not devoid of challenges, as issues like land rights, environmental conservation, and maintaining cultural authenticity in a rapidly changing world persist (Ho-Lastimosa et al., 2019). Modern Hawaiians actively advocate for their rights, pursue social and political changes, and foster a sense of community cohesion in the face of modern pressures (Nākoa, 2020).

Ohana Means Family

Native Hawaiians maintain a deep connection to their ancestral land, culture, and traditions, which are closely linked to family dynamics and socialization practices (Osorio, 2002). Traditional Hawaiian families are characterized by extended kinship networks, where multiple generations coexist and share responsibilities. Core values like respect for elders, land stewardship, and community solidarity were imparted to children through oral narratives, chants, and rituals (Kana'iaupuni & Malone, 2010). Socialization within Native Hawaiian families centered on transmitting cultural knowledge and skills. Elders were vital in passing down traditional practices, language, and spiritual beliefs to younger generations (Hajibayova & Buente, 2017; Kana'iaupuni, 2005). Family gatherings and communal activities facilitated intergenerational bonding and learning.

Presently, endeavors are underway to rejuvenate and safeguard Native Hawaiian culture, traditions, and family values (Nākoa, 2020). Organizations and educational institutions concentrate on teaching traditional practices, revitalizing the language, and promoting cultural arts among youth (Mishina, 2017). Ceremonies, festivals, and community events continue to foster a sense of identity and belonging; furthermore, the reclamation of ancestral lands and natural resources aims to reconnect with tradition and endorse sustainable living (Kauanui, 2008;

Kawelu, 2015; Ohara, 2016;). While colonial influences have transformed Native Hawaiian families, socialization, and traditions throughout history, ongoing efforts strive to preserve cultural practices today; the fusion of family, land, and community remains crucial to Native Hawaiian identity and resilience as they endeavor to sustain their heritage for future generations (Kaaloa, 2022; Kana'iaupuni & Malone, 2010; Kaomea et al., 2019).

Despite challenges from globalization and urbanization, traditional socialization endures, emphasizing the 'ohana concept' that extends beyond blood ties to include close friends and community members (Alo, 2014; Gibson & Puniwai, 2006; Kobashigawa, 2005). This interconnectedness is exemplified by 'hānai,' communal caregiving where extended family or mentors raise individuals to cultivate unity and shared responsibility (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2020). Native Hawaiian families engage in activities like hula, a dance form expressing ancestral stories and land connections (Feinga, 2016). Hawaiian language revitalization efforts strive to reintroduce and preserve the language, which is integral to cultural identity (Ohara, 2016).

However, it is essential to acknowledge that colonialism's legacy still affects Native Hawaiian families and traditions. Socioeconomic disparities, land loss, and limited resources pose complex challenges (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2020). Addressing these issues involves cultural resurgence, as Native Hawaiians seek empowerment through education, activism, and community-building (Stovall, 2017). The history of Native Hawaiian families, socialization, and traditions spans generations and is shaped by a historical legacy; as Native Hawaiians navigate modern complexities, they draw from their cultural roots to nurture resilience, community cohesion, and identity linked to land and heritage (Ho-Lastimosa et al., 2019).

Modern Hawai'i

The 20th century challenged Native Hawaiians as their land was increasingly exploited for agricultural and military purposes (Kawano, 2023; Riley et al., 2022). However, Native Hawaiians persisted in their efforts to preserve their culture and reclaim their land (Kobashigawa, 2005). In the late 20th century, the Hawaiian Renaissance saw a resurgence of traditional arts, language revitalization, and reconnection with ancestral practices (Kawano, 2023). The archipelago's indigenous Hawaiian population celebrates rich heritage through cultural events, hula performances, and language revitalization efforts (Sasa & Yellow Horse, 2022). Additionally, the Aloha spirit, a deep-rooted tradition of warmth and hospitality, remains a cornerstone of Hawaiian society, shaping interactions and attitudes within the community (Hawkins, 2005). Hawai'i has also embraced technological advancements in recent years and diversified its economy beyond tourism and agriculture; the islands have become a hub for renewable energy initiatives, with an increasing emphasis on solar, wind, and ocean-based energy production (Ho-Lastimosa et al., 2019). This shift towards sustainability aligns with the traditional Hawaiian concept of harmonious coexistence of ancestral wisdom and contemporary environmental stewardship (Benham, 2007).

Native Hawaiian and Technology

Geographical challenges and the Native Hawaiian belief system influence the history of technology in education in Hawai'i. There are efforts to align technological implementation in educational settings with these indigenous values. In the mid-20th century, Hawai'i pioneered educational television broadcasts to overcome geographic barriers, allowing students across the islands to access educational content remotely (M. Meyer, 2001). The establishment of the University of Hawai'i Maui College in 1907 also set the stage for incorporating modern technology into higher education (M. Meyer, 2001). The subsequent introduction of computers

and computer-assisted instruction facilitated personalized learning and enhanced student engagement (Almaguer, 2019; M. Meyer, 2001; Mishina, 2017). One of the unique aspects of Hawai'i's educational history is the balance between embracing modern technology and respecting traditional cultural practices (Almaguer, 2019; Alo, 2014). Digital platforms and language learning apps have been instrumental in the resurgence of the endangered Hawaiian language (Almaguer, 2019).

Modern technology, like Internet connectivity and mobile devices, has further transformed Hawai'i's education. Learning management systems implement curriculum delivery and stakeholder communication in higher education; the state's unique cultural diversity preserves the educational apps offering indigenous language resources (Kaakua, 2014; Kaaloa, 2022; Kaomea et al., 2019). Recently, immersive technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) have begun to find their way into Hawaiian classrooms (Kaaloa, 2022). These tools allow students to explore historical and cultural sites virtually, enhancing their understanding of local traditions. In line with culturally responsive pedagogy, educational software, and interactive platforms are designed with sensitivity to Native Hawaiian perspectives; this inclusive approach ensures that technology serves not just as a tool for academic advancement but also to honor and respect the cultural beliefs of the Native Hawaiian people (Kaaloa, 2022; Kaomea et al., 2019; Zorec, 2019).

First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Students

FGNHCS represent a unique and often understudied demographic in higher education; these individuals are the first in their families to attend college, navigating the academic landscape without the guidance of prior familial experience (J. D. Baker et al., 2021). The transition to college can be particularly challenging for first-generation Native Hawaiians due to

cultural, financial, and socio-economic factors (Stovall, 2017). Their cultural traditions can sometimes clash with the Westernized educational system, leading to feelings of isolation (Oliveira, 2005; Stovall, 2017). Financial constraints and limited access to educational resources can also be obstacles (Oliveira, 2005). Despite these challenges, these students often show resilience and a solid commitment to their cultural roots; they may collectively form support networks to address their unique concerns (Allaire, 2019; Nākoa, 2020). In addition, many have significant roles within their 'ohana' (family), which creates a unique set of demands on their time; this makes it crucial for educational institutions to offer flexible scheduling and culturally relevant family support services (Allaire, 2019; Benham, 2007).

Potts (2021) states that higher education institutions play a crucial role in students' cultivation of a sense of belonging. First-generation college students find and develop a sense of belonging on campus, encompassing multiple dimensions and factors (McKinnon-Crowley, 2021). Many students can integrate into higher education social structures but are affected by influences of first-generation, socioeconomic background, interactions with family, friends, peers, and their identity and confidence (Payne et al., 2021). McClusky and Allen (2022) believe that the sense of belonging in higher education relates partially to self-efficacy. Enhancing student motivation requires higher education institutions to understand first-generation college students' perspectives of their experiences. Leary et al. (2021) claim that social integration's role in student retention and success is crucial. Successful social integration relates to more outstanding commitment, and increasing social integration for first-generation college students is critical to retaining students. First-generation college students navigating their first year are developing life skills, and academic strategies have improved retention rates (Hecht et al., 2021).

Summary

This comprehensive literature review has researched various aspects related to first-generation college students (FGNHCS) taking online courses and being successful. Having explored these topics within the framework of Vincent Tinto's student integration theory (1975) and examined the intersection of academic and social integration for these students. Tinto's student integration theory has evolved to address contemporary challenges in higher education, especially in the context of online learning. Academic integration is critical to first-generation college students' success by exploring various elements of academic integration, including retention rates, the challenges and benefits of online learning, and student interactions. Social interactions and a sense of belonging are essential for first-generation college students, and peer interaction, faculty-student relationships, and a feeling of community contribute to student engagement and success in online learning environments. Retention rates for FGNHCS are a concern in higher education and have examined how academic and social integration plays a role in student persistence. Understanding the factors influencing FGNHCS' decisions to continue their education is crucial for improving retention rates. The transition from traditional face-to-face learning to online education has presented unique challenges, and instructors and institutions have discussed how to adapt to support FGNHCS effectively.

The literature review has highlighted the gaps in the existing research and the need for a deeper understanding of the experiences of FGNHCS in online courses and being successful. The following chapters of this study will explore empirical research to address these gaps and contribute to the knowledge base in this area. Online learning has become a valuable tool for increasing access to education, but it also presents challenges. The development of online learning, its challenges and benefits, and the use of technology in education have been explored

in detail. Understanding these factors is essential for improving retention rates for FGNHCS. FGNHCS faces unique challenges as they navigate the transition to higher education.

The multifaceted aspects of Hawai'i were discussed about the historical events that shaped its path, mainly focusing on the impact of European arrival and the subsequent illegal overthrow of the native monarchy. Despite these upheavals, Native Hawaiians have retained a deep genealogical connection to their homeland, marked by a distinctive identity and culture. Recent decades have witnessed a resurgence in traditional practices to preserve indigenous identity and address historical inequities through education, self-governance, and cultural preservation initiatives. Native Hawaiians' advanced technologies and sustainable living practices underline their adeptness in navigation, agriculture, and environmental resource management. Despite these adversities, a determined effort has been made to preserve cultural heritage, mainly through education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences and persistence of FGNHCS in their first online courses at the University of Hawai'i Maui College. The proposed research used the qualitative method through a transcendental phenomenological study by examining the experiences of FGNHCS who had taken online courses. This qualitative research gathered data through individual interviews, reflective written assignments, and surveys. The research participants were FGNHCS transitioning from high school to higher education while taking online courses. The collected data was analyzed using bracketing, considerable statements, text, structural, and multiple descriptions. Chapter three focused on the research design, range of the study, researcher's positionality, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design. Qualitative and quantitative research differed in approaches to collecting and analyzing data. Qualitative research was exploratory and sought to understand human behavior, beliefs, and experiences (Jean Lee, 1992). It searched into the 'why' and 'how' of decision-making, not just what, where, and when (Jean Lee, 1992). It involved collecting non-numerical data like interviews, open-ended surveys, observations, and content analysis to gain insights into people's attitudes, behaviors, and interactions (Jean Lee, 1992; Park & Park, 2016; Runciman, 1993). This type of research was more subjective and was often used to generate theories and understand underlying reasons and motivations (Runciman, 1993). In contrast, quantitative research quantified data and generalized results from a larger sample population (Tacq, 2011). It quantified attitudes, opinions, behaviors, and other defined

variables to formulate facts and uncover research patterns through mathematical, statistical, and computational techniques (Bagherkazemi et al., 2023; Barczak, 2015).

Transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology were two approaches within the philosophical field concerned with the structures of experience and consciousness.

Transcendental phenomenology, primarily developed by Edmund Husserl, sought to explore the essential structures of consciousness and phenomena as they presented themselves (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). This approach aimed to reach a transcendental ego, a pure subjectivity that was the source of all meanings (Valentine et al., 2018). Hermeneutic phenomenology was associated with Martin Heidegger, a Husserl student who took phenomenology differently (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). From the phenomenological view, this was situated in a world that we interpret, and these interpretations shape our experience of reality (Valentine et al., 2018). Hermeneutic phenomenology thus focuses on the existential conditions of human life, such as being in the world, and how our understanding and interpretation are intrinsic to how phenomena appeared to us (Valentine et al., 2018). The key differences lay in their approach to studying phenomena: transcendental phenomenology was more concerned with a direct, first-person exploration of consciousness, seeking to describe phenomena as they were experienced in a purified form (Aguas, 2022). Hermeneutic phenomenology was concerned with the conditions under which understanding, and interpretation occurred, acknowledging that our experiences were always already shaped by our historical, cultural, and existential context (Aguas, 2022).

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology had two methodological concepts, *epoche*, and phenomenological reduction, which derived from reflections on history and the significance of epistemological skepticism (Kidd, 2021). Changes deepened the gap between people, social consequences, and personal activities; college students were impacted and faced difficulties

adapting and adopting online learning with little support or infrastructure (Tran et al., 2021). A transcendental phenomenological approach was integrated into the research study. Data was gathered from the natural setting to understand the meaning from the perceptions of individuals who had experienced a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This research study design was a transcendental phenomenological study. Neubauer et al. (2019) defined phenomenology “as an approach to research that sought to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who had experienced it” (p. 91). Neubauer et al. (2019) defined transcendental as “a state wherein the objective researcher moved from the participants’ descriptions of facts of the lived experience to universal essences of the phenomenon at which point consciousness itself could be grasped” (p. 93).

Henriques (2014) and Husserl (date) developed phenomenology during the first third of the twentieth century, influenced by social theory and linguistics that looked at individuals for social meaning and departed from positive approaches. Transcendental phenomenology pursued the characterization of familiar collective contexts and idiosyncrasies as an initial step. The phenomenological concept included subjective and intersubjective aspects of social and non-social experiences, allowing for the construction of a methodology by considering both aspects of the participants. By applying this research design, the experiences and meanings of the individuals were unveiled transcendently, and the structure contained phases and procedures that were supported theoretically. It did not involve the researcher's comments or thoughts; this was a transcendental phenomenology.

Research Questions

The study focused on first-generation Native Hawaiian college students' (FGNHCS) persistence in online courses through transcendental phenomenological design. Tinto's student

integration theory (1975) was used as the theoretical lens to understand students' persistence. The questions were designed to determine student perceptions of their first-generation Native Hawaiian college student experiences taking an online course.

Central Research Question

How do first-generation Native Hawaiian college students (FGNHCS) describe their persistence and success in at least one online course?

Sub-Question One

How do FGNHCS navigate and overcome barriers to persistence in online courses?

Sub-Question Two

What are the unique experiences and challenges faced by FGNHCS in online courses?

Sub-Question Three

What influences contributed to academic success in online courses of FGNHCS?

Setting and Participants

The leaders of higher education institutions continuously sought knowledge and factors for FGNHCS' persistence. This chapter section describes the setting and participants in this research study. This research focused on the lived experiences and persistence of FGNHCS. The University of Hawai'i Maui College continuously sought to understand specific problems such as retention, persistence, and academic performance that FGNHCS faced when attending college (Hoke et al., 2019). One site and multiple participants were used; the participants must have experienced the phenomenon. Applying pseudonyms to the site initially until permission was provided and participants allowed anonymity, confidentiality, and protected all parties' privacy. The first step was requesting and receiving approval from the Chancellor of the University of

Hawai'i Maui College. Once I received the approval, I contacted Academic Counseling for assistance connecting me to FGNHCS (see Appendix B).

Site Setting

The setting for this research study was the University of Hawai'i Maui College in the Hawaiian Islands because I had access to resources to find participants and research to help validate proposed organizational changes (Appendix B). The organization sought to delineate appropriate organizational segments meeting institutional and student needs. This selection was made because I was currently teaching and previously taught in-person courses but had now transitioned to teaching online courses. For this research study and to safeguard privacy, the university was identified as the University of Hawai'i Maui College. There were an estimated 2,992 students at both undergraduate and graduate levels; 1,006 students were enrolled full-time, and 1,986 were part-time (Data USA: University of Hawai'i Maui College, 2022). The enrolled student population for both undergraduate and graduate consisted of two or more races (29.2%), Asian (26.6%), Hispanic or Latino (15.7%), White (15.7%), Native Hawaiian (6.12%), African American (0.535%), and American Indian or Alaska Native (0.267%) (Data USA: University of Hawai'i Maui College, 2022). In 2019, 244 men were awarded their degrees, and 457 were awarded to women (Data USA: University of Hawai'i Maui College, 2022). The university focused on college and career preparedness and readiness, student success, and self-development, focusing on the number of students transitioning from high school into higher education and the similarity of student profiles (Keppens et al., 2023).

Participants

In a phenomenological study, at least five to thirty participants will fall within the acceptable parameters (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The population sample will be selected by

opportunity or convenience sampling so that students will meet specific criteria through meaningful purposes. FGNHCS will volunteer, be at least 18 years old, have taken at least one online course, and can be in their second semester or year of higher education; sampling will be identified with collaboration with academic support, student affairs, and service advisors until at least ten or more students are secured. The aim of the research study was between 10 and 15 research participants will be FGNHCS enrolled in the core content as long as one semester has been completed and one has taken one online course. Participants will need to be 18 years of age or older. The participants cannot be currently enrolled in any of my online courses.

I was provided a list of 250 students who met the criteria for the research study. A total of 10 FGNHCS participants volunteered to participate in the research study. A list of 250 students was a lot, but the breakdown of enrolled student population is: 29.9% Asian, 29.1% two or more races, 15.7% White, 14.8% Hispanic or Latino, 6.15% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders, 0.728% Black or African American, and 0.202% American Indian or Alaska Native (Data USA: University of Hawai'i Maui College, 2022). The participants who responded to my recruitment emails were first-generation native Hawaiian college students, 18 years or older, none were registered for my course, all had taken 2 or more online courses. All participants completed the individual interview, reflective written assignment, and qualitative questionnaire.

Recruitment Plan

Creswell and Poth (2024) implied that researchers should determine the best type of sampling to use. The inquirer selected individuals and site(s) for their research study because they could purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon. The researcher needed to decide who or what should be sampled, what the form of sampling should be, and how many participants there should be. Convenience sampling, also

known as opportunity or accidental sampling, was a type of non-probability sampling technique wherein the participants were selected based on what was easiest and offered the advantage of being quick, easy, and cost-effective, though it had notable limitations (Emerson, 2015; Goodman, 2011; Stratton, 2021). Snowball sampling was a non-probability sampling technique frequently employed in social sciences and other fields where the population of interest was complex to locate or access (Goodman, 2011). These methods were beneficial when studying hidden or hard-to-reach populations, such as individuals in a specific subculture such as Native Hawaiian. In snowball sampling, initial participants were identified and asked to refer to other individuals they knew who belonged to the target population (Emerson, 2015; Goodman, 2011). The primary concern was that the results may not be generalizable to the larger population since the sample was not selected randomly or was most convenient for the researcher. Additionally, the researcher already had established relationships with the site, administrators, faculty, and staff.

A list of self-reported first-generation Native Hawaiian college students was generated by the Student Affairs and Chancellor's Office from the student population. The list was 250 students, and only 10 participated in the study. Each participant completed the individual interview, reflective written assignment, and qualitative questionnaire. Once consent forms were reviewed, signed, and returned to me, as well as a confirmed interview date, participants received instructions for the written reflection assignment and qualitative questionnaire. Table 4 is an overview of the general commonalities of the FGNHCS. The sample population for this research study was 10 FGNHCS enrolled at the University of Hawai'i Maui College. The goal was to reach saturation while having enough participants in the study for data collection and analysis. Potential candidates were sent a recruitment email (see Appendix D). In this recruitment email,

participants were informed that they would receive a \$100 gift card for participating in all data collection methods. Upon securing the sample population, the researcher obtained an informed consent form (see Appendix C). A schedule was arranged and sent to the research participants, including an email with directions for the reflective written assignment and setting up a team meeting for individual interviews. A qualitative questionnaire was made and used to collect data through SurveyMonkey.

Researcher Positionality

During a certain period, family, faculty, and instructors guided, inspired, and encouraged my educational progress toward earning a baccalaureate degree. In alignment with ontological assumptions, my experiences are related to being guided by multiple perspectives and viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The data collected allowed me to develop viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2024). At 27, I began working as a lecturer in higher education, as my background was in business and information technology. Every semester, I tried to support FGNHCS with leniency and understanding; this was paramount as a professional and personal belief in supporting students. Many FGNHCS were transitioning from high school. A dual credit program was available for high school students. It encouraged high school students to register and enroll in college-level courses to begin their journey in higher education. Under the assumption that FGNHCS were still learning, mistakes were made, such as not understanding the material, being unsure of assignments, facing technological challenges, struggling with time management skills, experiencing a lack of communication, and occasionally missing assignments. With those factors, leniency and support helped give FGNHCS experience and voice to communicate and build on growth.

Interpretive Framework

Various interpretive frameworks were linked to embedded commentary's philosophical assumptions and related to these frameworks and how they played out in actual practice (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Interpretive frameworks could be paradigms or beliefs that brought the research process from the researcher, perhaps theories or theoretical orientations guiding the practice of research (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Interpretive frameworks expanded and did not account for all popularly used in qualitative research; the extensive discussion was on the realist perspectives that combined ontology, epistemological, and axiological (Creswell & Poth, 2024). In this study, the thoughts related to FGNHCS's persistent experiences in college are presented through interviews, observational field notes, and surveys. First-generation Native Hawaiian college student viewpoints were collected to determine themes or value groups using these data collection techniques.

In the context of the study on first-generation Native Hawaiian students' persistence in online courses, the interpretive framework guided my research in interpreting and understanding the students' experiences within the larger socio-cultural and historical context of Native Hawaiian culture and educational systems. By utilizing a transcendental phenomenological approach, the study aimed to explore and uncover the essential meanings and structures of the lived experiences of these students. I conducted in-depth interviews or applied other data collection methods to gather rich and detailed descriptions of the experiences of first-generation Native Hawaiian students who succeeded in online courses. I captured these students' unique perspectives, challenges, motivations, and strategies. I analyzed and interpreted the collected data by considering the socio-cultural and historical context of Native Hawaiian culture and education. It allowed me to identify patterns, themes, and connections within the students'

narratives and interpret how these experiences related to broader social, cultural, and educational factors. These factors may include cultural values, community support systems, family dynamics, personal motivations, and strategies for overcoming barriers.

Philosophical Assumptions

Understanding philosophical assumptions in qualitative research began with assessing the overall process, noting its importance as an element, and considering writing it into a study (Creswell & Poth, 2024). That is why understanding this researcher's philosophical assumptions and articulating the study's underlying qualitative research was essential (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This section addressed my ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions. For this study, engaging in rich communication in different formats provided engagement opportunities to understand the FGNHCS online student experiences, leading to their persistence. I wanted to build rapport with the participants to show support and understanding.

Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumptions pertain to our beliefs about the nature of reality. These beliefs can profoundly shape the lens through which we view and conduct research. Drawing from Creswell and Poth (2024), ontological assumptions examine the foundation, perception of reality, and existence. They question whether a single, universal reality exists or multiple, constructed realities that vary among individuals. In the context of my research, where I sought to understand the experiences of FGNHCS who had completed at least one online course, my ontological assumption was anchored in the belief that an objective reality exists independent of human perception. While some fundamental truths and realities shape our experiences, including those of the FGNHCS, in this study, I also believed that multiple realities could coexist, informed by individual perceptions and interpretations.

The essence of my research was not only to decipher these objective truths but also to unearth the multiple realities shaped by external influences like social structures, cultural norms, and historical contexts. These external factors invariably interacted with the subjective experiences of first-generation Native Hawaiian students, culminating in a complex web of personal experiences. I aimed to explore how such systemic factors, barriers, or institutional support influenced their journey, significantly their persistence and success in online courses. I planned to collate empirical evidence and meticulously analyze the data to identify patterns and themes to achieve this. This would shed light on the objective realities that interplay with subjective experiences. The focus would also be on unraveling critical drivers of their persistence and success, like cultural values, family dynamics, and community support mechanisms. While I firmly believed in an objective reality, I also acknowledged the criticality of subjectivity and the myriads of individual perspectives that existed within it.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption in qualitative research involves the researcher's approach to understanding and generating knowledge. According to Creswell and Poth (2024), it entails establishing proximity to the participants and gathering subjective evidence based on personal perspectives. In pursuing an understanding of student persistence, especially among first-generation Native Hawaiian students, my epistemological assumption hinges on two intertwined pillars: objective observation and subjective interpretation. At the very core, epistemology concerns what I count as knowledge, how I justify these knowledge claims, and the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participants.

I begin by considering what constitutes knowledge. To me, knowledge emerges from empirical evidence grounded in objective data and the intricate nuances of lived experiences.

While empirical data such as interviews or surveys serve as solid pillars providing factual evidence to recognize patterns and trends, the subjective interpretation of these experiences breathes life into these static numbers and facts. This interpretation, rooted in in-depth conversations and qualitative methods, taps into the richness and depth of participant experiences, offering a multi-dimensional perspective.

This takes me to how knowledge claims are justified. Justifying these claims involves drawing from empirical evidence and the personal lenses through which I interpret this evidence. As Creswell and Poth (2024) highlight, understanding is fostered by establishing proximity to the participants and gathering subjective evidence based on personal perspectives. Thus, by actively engaging in multifaceted communication with the students, I aim to intertwine objective facts with their stories' emotional, cultural, and personal threads.

Lastly, the relationship between what is being researched and the experiences of these students and myself, the researcher, is deeply reflexive. I fully acknowledge the inherent biases and personal histories I bring while recognizing the profound effect my background and perspectives might have on data interpretation; I commit to a continuous process of self-reflection. This reflexivity makes me aware of the subjective nature of knowledge generation, pushing me to constantly question my assumptions and interpretations to ensure a balanced and comprehensive understanding. To grasp the experiences that guide student persistence honestly, one must engage deeply, not just with the data but with the participants and oneself. This intricate dance between objectivity and subjectivity, between the researcher and the researched, promises a more holistic understanding.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumptions are inherent in qualitative research, as they acknowledge the value-laden nature of the study and the inclusion of researchers' values and biases gathered in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Education and student persistence are pivotal in individuals' advancement and accomplishments. As the researcher, I bring a background that contributes to my value system and understanding of students' challenges and struggles. With over ten years of experience as both a student and a higher education administrator, I have gained valuable insights into the complexities of the educational landscape. This firsthand experience has helped shape my values and perspectives, providing a nuanced understanding of the issues surrounding education and student persistence.

In this study, I recognize the importance of being transparent about my values and potential biases. I strive to maintain objectivity and minimize the impact of my values on the research process. However, complete objectivity may be unattainable, and I know that my cultural background and personal experiences may shape my interpretations. As a researcher exploring the experiences of first-generation Native Hawaiian students' persistence and success in online courses, my axiological assumption plays a significant role in shaping the research process and the interpretation of findings. My axiological assumption is that research is value-laden and that the values and perspectives of the researcher inevitably influence the research process and outcomes. My values, beliefs, and biases may influence how I frame research questions, select methods, analyze data, and interpret findings.

I adopt a reflexive approach to address this potential bias throughout the research process. I continuously reflect on my values and biases, critically examine my assumptions, and engage in self-reflection to increase awareness of their potential influence. I aim to minimize any undue impact on the findings and interpretations by doing so. Additionally, I recognize and respect the

values, beliefs, and perspectives of the first-generation Native Hawaiian students participating in the study. Their voices and experiences are central to the research, and I approach their narratives with openness and respect. I aim to create a safe and inclusive research environment where their perspectives can be heard and honored.

I acknowledge the potential power dynamics that may exist between me and the participants, particularly in the context of studying marginalized or underrepresented communities. I strive to approach the research humbly, recognizing the importance of representing the participants' experiences authentically and ethically. I aim to engage in collaborative and participatory approaches, where the participants have agency and influence over the research process. My axiological assumption recognizes research's inherent subjectivity and value-laden nature. I strive to be transparent about my values and biases, engage in reflexivity, and respect the values and perspectives of the participants. By embracing these principles, I aim to conduct research that is ethical, inclusive, and representative of the experiences of first-generation Native Hawaiian students in online courses.

Researcher's Role

As a human participant and instrument for this study, it was essential to bracket out my firsthand experiences and circumstances by applying the epoché process by Moustakas (1986) to understand the persistent experiences of FGNHCS. However, as the researcher, I did not supervise FGNHCS, who volunteered to participate in this study. I was a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student, but I am now a lecturer at the site. It should be noted that I had previous knowledge and working relationships with academic counselors, administrators, faculty, and staff. There could be potential for bias in the study, but I have worked with

FGNHCS in higher education and have experience counseling and assisting students as they enter college for over a decade.

Procedures

Before data collection began, all necessary approvals for the study, including Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A), had been obtained. Formal site permission approval to conduct the study at the University of Hawai'i Maui College was received (see Appendix B), with formal site permissions secured following the proposal defense. It was paramount for research participants to participate voluntarily throughout the data collection process, which involved an informed consent form (see Appendix C) for each participant. The consent form outlined the individual interview, reflective written assignment, and qualitative questionnaire components of the data collection process. A recruitment email had been provided to potential participants (see Appendix D). Each participant was required to grant permission to be recorded. Once participants were selected and accepted, informed consent forms were sent and completed before data collection commenced. The procedures in this research study addressed permissions, and the recruitment plan for soliciting participants had been outlined.

The data collection plan involved a multi-method approach to gather comprehensive information from participants. By conducting individual interviews to obtain in-depth personal insights, processing reflective written assignments to capture participants' reflective thoughts, and distributing qualitative questionnaires to gather broad responses on specific topics. Each method aimed to collect rich qualitative data that would provide a thorough understanding of the research questions. The data analysis plan contained coding and thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes within the collected data. By systematically analyzing the data from

different sources, the study aimed to construct a view of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Triangulation was achieved by integrating multiple data sources and perspectives. The study utilized individual interviews, reflective written assignments, and qualitative questionnaires to gather diverse types of data. This multi-method approach allowed for cross-verification of information and provided an understanding of the research topic. By comparing data from the different sources, the study enhanced the credibility and validity of the findings, ensuring that they were well-substantiated and reflected the participants' experiences.

Data Collection Plan

The quality assessment of a study, including its problem and purpose statement, conceptual framework, research questions, data collection, and data analysis, involves a logical introduction that provides context for the problem statement, research purpose, and questions, as well as the constructs that were investigated (J. L. Johnson et al., 2020). Data collection and analysis typically occur concurrently in qualitative research (J. L. Johnson et al., 2020). Qualitative research involves the use and collection of empirical materials such as case studies, personal experiences, interviews, cultural texts, letters, surveys, and interactions to describe every day and challenging moments in individuals' lives and experiences. It utilizes interconnected interpretative practices in hopes of better understanding the subject matter at hand (J. L. Johnson et al., 2020). Developing a conceptual framework facilitates the selection of appropriate study methods to decrease inherent bias and increase trust in the researcher and the research process; this employs flexibility in selecting study methods. It is critical to include best practice methods for ensuring rigor and trustworthiness of results (J. L. Johnson et al., 2020).

The first data source consisted of individual interviews (see Appendix E). Formal or informal interviews provided a dedicated space for participants to speak and articulate their thoughts to the researcher, who listened and asked questions (Anderson & Henry, 2020). Individual interviews allowed participants to respond without fear of judgment, interruption, or censure; this source was an informal conversation but a rare opportunity to speak out (Anderson & Henry, 2020). Some participants might have appeared uninviting and disinterested, which could be interpreted as an unwanted attention vibe with quick extraction of information and moving on; it was helpful to meet in the middle with the participants by becoming vulnerable, disclosing, and building rapport by divulging some personal information during the interview process (Anderson & Henry, 2020).

In higher education, instructors utilized reflective writing as formative and summative evaluation tools for students (Zafeer et al., 2023). Reflective writing allowed students to express their experiences, develop self-awareness and a sense of control, gain self-confidence, and validate their reflections. Student reflection was a fundamental component that helped students become reflective practitioners. Communication and submission through a technological platform for the reflective written assignment were utilized. Students were given this as their final engagement.

Finally, a survey or questionnaire was used as a data source; it was essential to gather demographic information, perceived motivations, structural features of the campus and courses, instructional process, student-instructor relationship, independence, expectations, and communication (Moore et al., 2018). The following data collection methods: individual interviews (see Appendix E), reflective written assignments (see Appendix F), and a qualitative questionnaire (see Appendix G) ensured data triangulation.

Individual Interviews

Anderson and Henry (2020) reported that the first data source would be individual interviews. Formal or informal interviews provided a dedicated space for participants to speak and articulate their thoughts to the researcher, who listened and asked questions. An interview allowed participants to respond without fear of judgment, interruption, or censure; this source was an informal conversation but a rare opportunity to speak out. Some participants were uninviting and had a disinterest aura, which was interpreted as an unwanted attention vibe with quick extraction of information and move on; it was helpful to meet in the middle with the participants by becoming vulnerable, disclosing, and building rapport by divulging some personal information during the interview process. Participating in this research study gave FGNHCS a voice in sharing their experiences. Those participating in the study could expect to be contacted to schedule an interview by meeting online via web conferencing. In-person appointments would have been challenging, and online web conferencing was convenient. The individual interviews were recorded on whichever web conferencing application was used and then saved on a password-protected laptop.

Table 1

Individual Interview Questions

Questions

Introductory Questions

1. Please introduce yourself by telling me your background, including where you are from, your major, and your future career goals. (Icebreaker question)
2. What is your educational goal? Earn an associate, undergraduate, or graduate degree? (Icebreaker question)

3. Why did you choose to attend the University of Hawai'i Maui College? (Icebreaker question)
4. What online courses did you take online? (Icebreaker question)

Questions Regarding Sub-Question One

5. How would you characterize your high school preparedness level that benefited your higher education transition?
6. Describe the challenges you experienced in the online course(s).

Questions Regarding Sub-Question Two

7. How would you describe your academic accomplishment in your first year?

Questions Regarding Sub-Question Three

8. Describe the experiences that were the most impactful on being successful and persistent in your online course(s).
9. Suppose you have committed to enrolling again (whether you are still in your first or second year). How would you describe the experiences that shaped your decision to persist?
10. How would you describe your overall experience as a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student enrolled in an online course(s)?

Questions one through four served as icebreaker opportunities between the researcher and the participant. These icebreaker questions supported qualitative inquiry through interviews based on the conversation between the researcher and participants. Once the researcher and participant became acquainted, the discussion of ideas and context occurred in subsequent questions. According to Walton et al. (2022), despite significant conceptual and empirical

evidence in qualitative research, individual interview questions illustrated how researchers used specific techniques to intersect identities and build rapport.

Questions five through ten specifically gathered data from FGNHCS. These questions sought to establish the nature of the students' persistence, their lived experiences at their higher education institution, and the interventions fueling their decision to re-enroll. The questions also established a beginning level of connectivity and laid the groundwork for a more in-depth examination of engagement and interaction. These questions supported the formation of a foundation for creating discussion parameters built on what students knew and were willing to discuss with the researcher. Furthermore, the questions helped identify activities reinforcing student success and encouraging re-enrollment for the following year. Understanding the likelihood of students' persistence was essential in identifying mitigating factors that supported success and re-enrollment.

Reflective Written Assignment

This method of data collection was a student-reflective written assignment. Educators integrated reflecting written assignments; reflection was a modality for teaching professionals and was understood as a metacognitive process creating an understanding and a leverage tool helping to nurture reflective practices and remediate lapses (Moniz et al., 2021). Reflective writing also influenced the lived experiences for meaning making of safe learning. In higher education, instructors used reflective writing as formative and summative evaluation tools for students (Zafeer et al., 2023). This reflective writing allowed students to express their experiences, develop self-awareness and a sense of control, gain self-confidence, and validate their reflections. Student reflection was a fundamental component that helped students become

reflective practitioners. Communication and submission through a technological platform for the reflective written assignment were used. Students were given this as their final engagement.

Table 2

Reflective Written Assignment– (Central Research Question)

“Please describe, in detail, your experience during one online course that you have been successful in. Please describe your experience in a minimum of 500 words.” (CRQ)

Qualitative Questionnaire

Braun et al. (2021) implied that qualitative questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions created by the researcher, with the topic at the center of them, and were self-administered with fixed and common questions for all participants; participants responded by writing or typing responses in their own words, which produced rich and complex accounts of the participants' experiences, narratives, practices, positioning, and discourses. Lastly, a qualitative questionnaire (see Appendix G) was used as a data source; perceived motivations, structural features of the campus and courses, instructional process, student-instructor relationship, independence, expectations, and communication were essential. An online, easy-to-use, fill-out format covered the student demographics, information, college experience, and study style. The rationale of this qualitative questionnaire was to hope that after the interview, the participant would have time and opportunity to reflect, and their response to this round of questions would be more profound.

Table 3

Qualitative Questionnaire Questions

Central Research Question

1. What factors influenced you to enroll in online rather than traditional in-person courses?
2. Describe your initial expectations and motivations when starting online courses as a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student.
3. What strategies have you developed or utilized to overcome barriers and maintain your persistence in online courses?
4. Describe a situation where you overcame challenge(s) during an online course.
5. What online tools and strategies did you find the most effective in understanding course materials?

Sub-Question One

1. What support systems have you utilized during your online courses? (e.g., academic advisors, tutoring services, online forums)
2. How would you describe the effectiveness of these support systems in fostering your development and success in online courses?
3. What support systems or resources do you believe are particularly beneficial for first-generation Native Hawaiian students in online courses? Why?
4. In what ways did instructors and courses demonstrate supporting diverse needs in the online environment?
5. How did online peer interactions contribute to the overall experience?

Sub-Question Two

6. In your opinion, what do first-generation Native Hawaiian students face during their experiences and challenges in online courses?

7. What cultural or identity-related challenges did you face in the online learning environment?
8. How do these unique experiences and challenges impact your motivation and persistence in online courses?
9. What are helpful strategies or approaches you have found to overcome these challenges?
10. What do you suggest should address disparities in technology access and resources?

Sub-Question Three

11. What factors have contributed to your academic success in online courses?
 12. How has your background or cultural identity influenced your academic success in online courses?
 13. What external factors did you encounter (e.g., family support, community support) that have positively influenced your academic success in online courses?
 14. What are the key factors driving you to excel academically in an online environment?
 15. What recommendations or changes would you suggest to enhance the academic success of first-generation Native Hawaiian students in online courses?
-

Data Analysis

The primary aim of this study was to assess the experiences of FGNHCS. The research utilized individual interviews, reflective written assignments, and a qualitative questionnaire as data collection methods to gain in-depth insights into the participants' perspectives and narratives. Creswell and Poth (2024) explained that data analysis consisted of organized and thorough data coding, development of themes, data representation, and interpretation. Epoché

was applied, where I set aside all my opinions, feelings, judgments, and perceptions. Data were collected, analyzed, and synthesized from the reflective written assignment, interviews, and qualitative questionnaire by applying Moustakas and Husserl's methods. The data in this research study were analyzed using epoché, phenomenological reduction, textural and essential descriptions, and imaginative variation. In conclusion, data collected using themes to understand the phenomenon of lived experiences of FGNHCS and addressed the study's research questions.

The first data collection method was an individual interview. Questions for the interview had been carefully crafted and validated through a rigorous process to ensure they were relevant and applicable to the target population. The individual interviews were conducted virtually using either Teams or Zoom, which facilitated ease of access for participants who might be geographically dispersed. Virtual platforms also enabled the interviews to be recorded, ensuring accurate data capture and the ability to revisit the interview content during the analysis phase. The data analysis process followed a systematic and iterative approach guided by the framework proposed by Ribeiro et al. (2021), where interview transcripts were coded for identifiable descriptions of conflicts, decisions, actions, behaviors, and attitudes exhibited by the participants. Multiple coders were involved in the analysis to ensure the coding process's validity and reliability. Inter-coder reliability was established, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2024), to ensure consistent and unbiased interpretation of the data. This collaborative coding process helped identify preliminary themes from the participants' responses, providing a deeper understanding of their experiences.

The next step in the analysis involved transferring the coded data into an Excel spreadsheet, facilitating data organization and management. As the primary researcher, actively translating the interviews and engaging in discussions with other coders contributed to a richer

comprehension of the emerging themes. It also aided in identifying potential gaps in the data, which might require additional exploration through follow-up interviews or supplementary research. Maintaining research rigor and adhering to ethical guidelines was a priority throughout the process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their confidentiality and anonymity.

The second data collection method, reflective written assignment, explored the data analysis process in qualitative research, focusing on utilizing Moustakas' approach to Husserl's concepts, known as epoche or bracketing. The aim was to set aside my preconceived notions and experiences and adopt a fresh perspective when examining the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2024). I also examined reflective practice, reflexivity, and reflection, as they were crucial in understanding past events, improving oneself, and enhancing future research endeavors (Zafeer et al., 2023). Epoche, as proposed by Moustakas, was an essential aspect of phenomenological research. It involved suspending the researcher's personal biases, beliefs, and preconceptions about the phenomenon being studied. I could approach the subject with a fresh and unbiased perspective, enabling a deeper exploration of participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Reflexivity was crucial because it helped me maintain objectivity and transparency throughout the research journey. Reflective practice was a systematic process of introspection and evaluation of past experiences and behaviors to improve future performance and outcomes. In data analysis, researchers engaged in reflective practice to identify potential biases or shortcomings in their approach and refine their analytical techniques (Zafeer et al., 2023). Incorporating reflective writing into the data analysis process further enhanced my understanding and interpretation of the data. Reflection involved actively tracking and evaluating formal

learning and practices, leading to new insights contributing to knowledge and experience (Zafeer et al., 2023) and as the researcher, gaining deeper insights into the data's patterns, themes, and relationships by documenting their thoughts and reflections during the data analysis.

To organize and analyze the data, I employed a systematic coding process. The coding process typically started with significant precoding statements, where I identified key concepts and themes within the data. Data formatting and initial organization were then conducted to facilitate the subsequent analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Thematic analysis was commonly used in qualitative research to identify patterns.

Epoché

Epoché is a crucial methodological step in phenomenological research that involves the researcher suspending their preconceived notions, biases, and interpretations to approach the data with a fresh perspective. As explained by Husserl (date), the founder of phenomenology, the *epoché* enables the researcher to set aside their subjective experiences and engage with the data as the participants present it. This process allowed me to focus on the essence of the participants' lived experiences and gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. By practicing *epoché*, Creswell and Poth (2024) assert that the researcher can adopt a more open and receptive attitude, fostering a more transparent and accurate interpretation of the data. This methodological rigor enhanced the credibility and validity of the findings and contributed to a more comprehensive analysis of the lived experiences of FGNHCS.

In qualitative research, *epoche* allowed researchers to better understand the essence of the participants' experiences. By bracketing their assumptions, researchers can avoid imposing their interpretations on the data and allow the participants' narratives to emerge naturally (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This approach ensured that the findings were grounded in the participants' lived

experiences, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. In qualitative research, reflexivity refers to the capacity and propensity of the researcher to be self-aware and critically examine their role in the research process. It involves acknowledging biases, values, and assumptions that may influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Zafeer et al., 2023).

In conclusion, using epoche in qualitative research enables researchers to approach their study with fresh perspectives, enhancing the credibility of findings. Reflexivity and reflective practice ensure that researchers maintain objectivity and continuously improve their analytical techniques. Employing thematic analysis and data organization techniques, such as using Excel, can streamline the data analysis process and facilitate the identification of key themes and patterns in the research data. By integrating these approaches, researchers can gain meaningful insights into the nature of experiences and contribute to the body of knowledge in their field.

Phenomenological Reduction

In phenomenological research, phenomenological reduction, also known as bracketing, is another crucial technique to achieve a more profound understanding of lived experiences. As articulated by Husserl (date), phenomenological reduction involves the researcher setting aside their assumptions about the phenomenon being studied and temporarily bracketing out any preconceived ideas or biases that may influence their interpretation of the data. This bracketing process allows the researcher to approach the data with a fresh and unfiltered perspective, delving deeper into the essence of the experiences described by the participants. Creswell and Poth (2024) emphasize that this suspension of judgment is essential to grasp the vital meanings and structures inherent in the lived experiences of FGNHCS. By applying phenomenological reduction, I can maintain a more open and neutral stance, which contributes to the rigor and authenticity of the data analysis process.

Textural and Essential Descriptions

Textural and essential descriptions are fundamental components of data analysis in phenomenological research. Textural description involves a detailed and systematic account of the surface-level experiences and perceptions described by the participants. This process focuses on the explicit elements of the data, providing a comprehensive overview of the participants' lived experiences. On the other hand, essential description moves beyond the surface-level accounts. It aims to identify the underlying structures, patterns, and meanings that constitute the phenomenon's essence under study. As Creswell and Poth (2024) explain, through textural and essential descriptions, I can gain a deeper understanding of the shared experiences and unique aspects of the lived experiences of FGNHCS. These two levels of analysis complement each other, as the textural description provides a rich and detailed context for the essential themes. In contrast, the critical description reveals the core aspects that give meaning and coherence to the participants' experiences.

Imaginative Variation

Imaginative variation is a creative and exploratory aspect of phenomenological data analysis. After identifying the essential themes and gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon's essence, the researcher engages in an imaginative process of considering alternative perspectives or variations. Creswell and Poth (2024) suggest that this step allows the researcher to broaden their understanding of the phenomenon and explore potential implications or interpretations of the lived experiences. By engaging in the imaginative variant, the researcher can enrich the analysis by incorporating additional insights and possibilities, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive interpretation of the data. This creative step emphasizes

phenomenological research's dynamic and iterative nature, where the researcher continuously refines and expands their understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Data synthesis plays a crucial role in empirical research, offering a structured methodology for amalgamating, analyzing, and interpreting a wide range of data sources. The process aims to comprehensively understand a subject by systematically combining data from various studies and surveys. Data synthesis summarizes the findings of a more complex level of analysis, focusing on identifying patterns, contradictions, gaps, and emergent themes across multiple sources. Data synthesis is a cornerstone in empirical research, serving as a robust and structured approach for collating, interpreting, and analyzing data from diverse. It aims to extract the essence from each study and integrate it into a comprehensive framework, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of a research question or phenomenon.

Following the three data collection methods, an analysis was conducted to understand the data. The transcripts, reflective written assignment were read over again several times to become familiar with the participants experiences. Excel and SurveyMonkey were used to help me analyze the data collected. Both programs were used initially and in the synthesis of data analysis. After the initial data analysis from the three data collection methods, further examination was conducted from the terms that were coded and categorized. The themes were created from the coded terms that emerged from repeated appearances across all three data collection methods. Then recurring subthemes from coding emerged. SurveyMonkey in the paid version has the capability to analyze and summarize the responses. I compared the transcribed data from the individual interview, with reflective written assignment alongside the SurveyMonkey summary. Reading the coded data connected the themes and concepts.

Trustworthiness

Creswell and Poth (2024) agree that using unique terminologies such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability is equivalent to the word's internal validation, external validation, reliability, and objectivity. Validation is a distinctive strength of qualitative research in which an account is made through extensive time in the field, thick descriptions, and close relationships between the researcher and participants that add value or accuracy to the study. Validation arises in different approaches to qualitative research but is often not thought of as distinct validation approaches exist for five approaches to qualitative research. Narrative research has less emphasis, while grounded theory, case study, and ethnography, when authors of these approaches employ systematic procedures.

Stahl and King (2020) imply that reading qualitative research reports can be a variable experience; methodologies organize qualitative findings and rhetorical structures written with guidance, while some researchers make lists, make a map, and use a narrative approach to create a relevant story. The thick description intends for the reader to be treated to text so richly in the description of the event or object that is palpable. Different writers may generate different outcomes when data is collected and analyzed because qualitative researchers construct reality. Qualitative researchers strive for a less explicit goal of trustworthiness, which means readers will interpret written work and have confidence in the researcher's report.

Credibility

Korstjens and Moser (2018) define creditability as confidence in the truth of research findings, establishing whether the research outcomes represent plausible information drawn from participants' original data and the correct interpretation of the participants' original views. Credibility is equivalent to internal validity in quantitative research and is concerned with truth

value. Connelly (2016) implies that establishing credibility involves prolonged engagement with participants, observation persistency if appropriate, peer debriefing, member-checking, and reflective journaling. Evidence should be presented for iterative data questioning, returning to examine it several times; negative case analysis or alternative explanations should be explored. Triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking will be applied as there are multiple data sources, keeping the researcher honest and convening and organizing participants' reflections.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a research method in various disciplines to enhance the credibility and validity of findings by drawing multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes, constructing a validation to recognize constructs rather than imposing theories or constructs (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Triangulation aims to help identify inconsistencies or holes in emergent patterns in the findings, leading to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Triangulation is valuable in enhancing the credibility of research findings in qualitative studies, and when integrating multiple perspectives and data sources, the researcher can increase trustworthiness (Padgett, 2017). As the researcher, I integrated triangulation of qualitative methods, data collection, sources, and theories to explore the experiences shared by college students in in-person, online, and hybrid courses. Data collection method triangulation was used during individual interviews and the college students' focus groups, challenges, and experiences.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is an individual method that keeps the researcher honest by asking challenging questions about the methods, meanings, and interpretations and provides the opportunity for catharsis by being sympathetic while listening to the researcher's feelings

(Creswell & Poth, 2024). Peer debriefing is employed in qualitative research to enhance the rigor and credibility of data analysis and interpretation (Borkan, 2018). The structure and format of peer debriefing sessions can vary depending on the research context and the researchers' preferences (Hennink et al., 2017). Some debriefing sessions might involve formal presentations followed by structured discussions, while others may take a more informal, conversational approach (Tracy, 2019). In either case, the primary goal is to foster an open, constructive dialogue that challenges the researcher's assumptions and offers alternative viewpoints (Nowell et al., 2017). Data available in modest and modern literature provides similar or matching corroboration for any findings, and other colleagues who are familiar and experienced with my research provide perspectives to help interpret my findings.

Member Checking

Member checking enhances rigor in qualitative research, which proposes that credibility is inherent in description accuracy and phenomenon interpretations (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking is a research methodology involving research participants in validating study findings to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research outcomes (Birt et al., 2016). It is considered a form of triangulation, where researchers seek participant feedback to confirm the accuracy and interpretation of collected data (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). By including participants in the process, member checking helps to reduce potential biases and ensures that the research reflects the lived experiences and perspectives of those involved (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). This strategy will organize the participants in the study and request them to reflect on the accuracy of the account and not take back the transcripts of the raw data, but preliminary analyses consist of the descriptions or themes (Creswell & Poth, 2024). As the researcher, I have gone through the same experiences and transitions those students experience during college courses, whether in-

person, online, or hybrid delivery—reflecting with the participants and improvising by asking other questions to capture more of the experience.

Transferability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) define transferability as the degree of results of qualitative research that may be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents; using thick description, the researcher facilitates the transferability judgment of the potential user. Connelly (2016) reports that transferability extends to findings helpful to persons in other aspects of research in which the readers determine how applicable findings are to their situation. When using this strategy in qualitative research, the researcher focuses on the participants and their story without saying it is the same story as everyone else; the researcher will support the study's transferability with rich details, description, location, and participants studied by being transparent with analysis and trustworthiness. This study strengthened transferability because of the pertinent details about the sample, participants, settings, and interview questions.

Dependability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) define dependability as stability over time of findings; dependability involves participants' evaluation, interpretation, and recommendations of the study findings supported by participant data. Connelly (2016) studied a phenomenon experienced by a participant that may be similar; dependability procedures include maintaining audit trails of process logs and peer-debriefing with colleagues. The researcher's notes will go through a process log of all activities and decisions about the study, such as who did the interview and what to see. Enhancing dependability in this study, design and methods were described, in addition to the literature review, theoretical framework, and purpose statement.

Confirmability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) define confirmability as how other researchers confirm the research study's findings; concerns with establishing data and interpretations are not figments but not derived from the data. Connelly (2016) implies that in qualitative research, the researcher keeps detailed notes of decisions and analysis as it progresses. The colleague reviews these notes in some studies, and in other studies, peer-briefing sessions are discussed with respected qualitative researchers; these discussions prevent biases of one person's perspective on the research. Additionally, the researcher may conduct member-checking with similar participants. Reviewing the data collected for accuracy and reflexivity was essential to obtaining confirmability, where participants' responses and reflections were vital.

Ethical Considerations

The criteria discussed above are foundations of qualitative trustworthiness; other considerations exist; ethical implications of the study affect integrity and use (Connelly, 2016). The importance of recruiting procedures is obtaining groups of people capable of articulating their experiences, and conducting the data analysis is another critical issue that affects trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016). When reading and critiquing articles, reviewing the procedures used for trustworthiness must suit the research design (Connelly, 2016). Trustworthiness protocols and procedures used in phenomenological studies are similar but not identical to grounded theory, ethnography, or qualitative descriptive studies (Connelly, 2016). Regardless of the approach, researchers face ethical issues during data collection, analysis, and dissemination of qualitative reports (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Planning and conducting ethical studies mean the researcher considers and addresses any anticipated and emerging ethical issues; ethical issues usually relate to three principles that guide

ethical research: respect for the individuals, welfare concerns, and justice (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This study and placing ethical considerations into the intersection of the data collection proves the need to address ethical considerations across the phases (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Before collecting data begins, there are important ethical considerations. The critical activity is seeking and obtaining permission from the institutional review board to provide evidence to the review board that the design follows guidelines for conducting research (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Informed consent from the participants is required because there will be an explanation of the purpose of the study, how data will be used, and measures to protect their privacy. I am responsible for protecting participants' anonymity by creating pseudonyms and assigning fake but real Hawaiian names. My laptop computer is password protected or has a fingerprint requirement. By gaining support, the researcher will explain the purpose of the study and not engage in deception about the nature of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The confidentiality of the data will be saved on an external hard drive that is password-protected for three years; after the three years, the files will be deleted.

Permissions

Permission was required from the site, and the Liberty University Institutional Review Board required study approval (see Appendix A). A site permission letter was sent to the University of Hawai'i Maui College to request access to FGNHCS for those who had taken online courses. Information detailing the elements of this research study was sent, including data collection methods, procedures, participant criteria, and potential risks. I obtained the formal site permission approval from University of Hawai'i Maui College executives and administrators to introduce the study and perform the research study on their campus following the University of Hawai'i Maui College approval letter (see Appendix B).

Summary

This chapter provided details of the research methodology used to establish FGNHCS's persistent experiences in taking an online course. The research design will be qualitative as it focuses on exploring, understanding, and describing the shared experiences of students' persistence, which is fundamental to the transcendental phenomenology method. The collected data will help provide insight into helping the institution's faculty and staff better identify the complexities and challenges students faced, what helped them succeed, factors if they failed, and their persistence. The participants in the study will be assured of anonymity, the option to opt-out, and specific ethical practices will be followed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Students (FGNHCS) in their online courses at the University of Hawai'i Maui College in the Hawaiian Islands. Moustakas proposed epoche, which is an essential aspect of phenomenological research. Epoche involves suspending the researcher's personal biases, beliefs, and preconceptions about the phenomenon being studied. I can approach the subject with a fresh and unbiased perspective, which enables a deeper exploration of participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This chapter will explain the research findings and data analysis that connect the participants' lived experiences in this research study. The following section will delineate the 10 participants' perceived lived experiences.

The design of transcendental phenomenology is applied to protect participants and reduce bias from any data collected and analyzed within the study (Moustakas, 1986). The transcendental approach allows the researcher to utilize several methods to develop, obtain, and understand the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The findings and themes were obtained from transcribing the individual interviews, reflective written assignments, and qualitative questionnaires. The chapter will conclude by examining emerging themes from the data collected.

Participants

A list of self-reported first-generation Native Hawaiian college students was generated by the Student Affairs and Chancellor's Office from the student population. The list contained over 250 students, and only 10 participated in the study. Each participant completed the individual

interview, reflective written assignment, and qualitative questionnaire. Once consent forms were reviewed, signed, and returned to me, as well as a confirmed interview date, participants received instructions for the written reflection assignment and qualitative questionnaire. Table 4 is an overview of the general commonalities of the FGNHCS.

Table 4

First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Students

Participants	Online Courses Taken	Financial Support	Most Challenging Part of Online Courses
Alika	2+	Student Support Services: Mu‘o A‘e and Pai Ka Māna	Time management
Kahiau	2+	Student Support Service: Mu‘o A‘e	Miscommunication between instructor and student
Kekoa	2+	Student Support Services: Mu‘o A‘e and Pai Ka Māna	Course organization
Kanoe	2+	Other financial support	Balancing time, work, family, and friends.
Koa	2+	Student Support Services: Mu‘o A‘e and Pai Ka Māna	Dealing with mental health while completing coursework.
Auli‘i	2+	Other financial support	Creating interaction with other peers.
Ke‘ala	2+	Other financial support	Prioritizing course assignments.

Kauna	2+	Other financial support	Course communication with instructor and students.
Leimomi	2+	Student Support Service: Mu‘o A‘e	Not procrastinating.
Māhie	2+	Other financial support	Learning to communicate.

The data collection began with reaching out to colleagues for assistance in putting a list together. A colleague sent me a list of students who met the criteria but were a part of the Mu‘o A‘e program, which is a student support service that helps Native Hawaiian students with unique educational opportunities and provides a sense of place that nurtures and enhances self-identity and connections to achieve excellence. I received a handful of interest within the first couple of days, and I responded with the recruitment email (see Appendix D) and informed consent form (see Appendix C). I followed up with students who did not respond. Within the next few weeks, I received more interest, and all 10 participants signed the consent, and individual interviews were scheduled. The participants were informed that the data collection methods could be completed in any order.

Alika

Alika is a first-generation Native Hawaiian born and raised in Maui. Alika is finishing his associate’s degree in Hawaiian studies from the UHMC and pursuing a bachelor's degree in Natural Sciences. Alika decided to attend college to set an example for his children, showing them that obtaining a degree is possible even if it was not initially desired or thought possible due to their family's financial situation and the lack of college graduates in their family. Alika

faced challenges in managing online courses alongside work and family responsibilities. Alika received additional financial support to attend UHMC through a scholarship from the Mu‘o A‘e student support services and financial aid. Alika emphasized the importance of seeking financial assistance and the impact of student support programs for Native Hawaiians and first-generation students. Despite the challenges, Alika’s educational journey has only begun, and hopes their experience can inspire others to pursue higher education.

Kahiau

Kahiau currently lives in Maui. Initially, pursuing a career in musical theater and then realized the significance of education. Kahiau expressed an early absence of college guidance, the adversities encountered after relocating to the mainland, and how job rejections due to a lack of education catalyzed their decision to pursue higher education. Kahiau mentioned the importance of seeking financial assistance and the impact of student support programs for Native Hawaiians and first-generation students. Kahiau received financial support to attend UHMC through a scholarship from the Mu‘o A‘e student support services and financial aid. Kahiau shared the pros and cons of online learning, the effort to manage family responsibilities, and the drive to elevate academic achievement. Kahiau’s reflections on the importance of education, influenced by family and societal expectations, established an educational endeavor. Kahiau’s commitment to earning a degree illustrates resilience and motivation.

Kekoa

Kekoa, originally from Oahu but mainly raised in Maui, is pursuing a degree in business administration with career goals in marketing or hospitality. Kekoa is currently working towards an associate's degree. Kekoa mentioned the importance of seeking financial assistance and the impact of student support programs for Native Hawaiians and first-generation students. Kahiau

received financial support to attend UHMC through a scholarship from the Mu‘o A‘e student support services and financial aid. Kekoa elaborates on high school preparation, mentioning participation in a college prep class called AVID. While being a triathlete, he believes it was to prepare for the challenges of college. Despite the challenges of online college courses and the lack of physical presence with instructors and peers, he still adapted well. Kekoa prioritized education with support from scholarships, mentorship, and a strong support system, including student support services, as key to success and persistence in online courses. Reflecting on the overall experience as a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student, Kekoa highlights the importance of self-determination, community support, and utilizing available resources.

Kanoe

Kanoe is a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student from Maui pursuing a bachelor's degree in Sustainable Science Management. Given the dynamic learning environment, Kanoe wants to make positive contributions to their community and is open to future educational opportunities. Kanoe selected this college due to the unique offering of their desired program while acknowledging the challenges of returning to school with substantial personal commitments. Kanoe has taken several online classes using different learning formats. Kanoe shares insight into the challenges and advantages of online learning, emphasizing the importance of teacher engagement and the difficulty of adjusting to asynchronous classes. Kanoe shared that transportation issues and balancing responsibilities as a single parent are challenging. Kanoe reflects on the journey as a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student, aiming to set a positive example for their son and overcome educational barriers. Kanoe provides valuable insights into the complexities of navigating higher education as a non-traditional student while

highlighting the significance of community support, adaptability, and a strong personal drive toward achieving educational goals.

Koa

Koa is a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student born and raised in Maui. Koa initially struggled with mental health issues and substance abuse. Since graduating high school in 2005, Koa began college, driven by those personal experiences with mental health challenges, including the loss of a brother to suicide in 2019. These personal experiences motivated him to pursue a major in human services and aim to support youth mental health in Hawai'i. Koa chose to attend UHMC because of a deep connection to the island and family. While having taken both in-person and online courses, Koa prefers in-person courses because of the lack of interaction in online settings. Koa credits his success to the support of instructors and personal motivation, emphasizing the importance of feedback and personal connection. Koa highlighted the importance of personal and institutional support systems in overcoming barriers to education.

Auli'i

Auli'i lived in Portugal but lived on Moloka'i (still part of Maui County). Auli'i's educational goals include earning a bachelor's degree. As a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student, Auli'i takes pride in her unique educational path, viewing it as an opportunity to inspire family members. She believes in obtaining a degree to enhance her business and provide for her child while working from home. Auli'i chose UHMC for its online course offerings and flexibility. Despite the challenges, Auli'i acknowledges the importance of persistence and the role of student support services, such as time management courses offered by the college. Auli'i emphasizes the significance of good grades and the benefits of accessing financial help and guidance counseling. Auli'i's experiences highlight the challenges and learning opportunities

associated with online learning, the importance of student support services in navigating higher education, and the personal motivations driving her pursuit of academic and professional success.

Keala

Keala lives in Lanai but has spent significant time in California and Guam. Keala is majoring in Applied Business and Information Technology. Keala's experience with online learning, primarily asynchronous courses, involved self-discipline, which required time management. Keala shared a lack of preparation and motivation; her high school experiences did little to prepare her for the challenges of higher education. With the influence of friends and other encounters with individuals, she changed her mind about the value of education by playing pivotal roles in her decision to pursue and persist in her studies. Keala faced challenges in online courses, such as time management and adapting to the demands of the courses. Keala's experiences as a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student revealed both the challenges of navigating financial aid and scholarship applications and the opportunities that scholarships provide to ease the financial burden of education.

Kea

Kea currently resides and is working on her degree in Moloka'i, and this student's experiences and thoughts exemplify the determination and adaptability of a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student navigating the complexities of higher education through online learning. Her online courses consisted of Hawaiian studies, criminal justice, and early childhood education before she became a medical assistant due to her involvement in caregiving. Kea emphasized the importance of instructor support, engagement, and self-motivation. She reflects on the adaptability required to manage different teaching styles and technology uses across

courses, highlighting her proactive approach to learning and her competitive nature to excel academically. Kea shares her aspirations to improve healthcare services on Molokai by opening a business to provide in-home care, motivated by the island's acute need for healthcare providers. Despite the challenges faced by some of her peers in adapting to online education, Kea's overall experience has been positive, attributing her success to the flexibility online courses offer in balancing her work, studies, and caregiving responsibilities.

Leimomi

Leimomi, originally from Oahu and now residing in Maui, is pursuing a degree in natural sciences with a focus on biology. She expressed a solid aspiration to become a forensic pathologist and is potentially considering further education beyond a bachelor's degree, including a master's degree. The decision to attend UHMC was driven by convenience, proximity to existing job opportunities, and the flexibility offered by the institution's online courses and resources. As a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student, Leimomi reflects positively on the experiences, crediting supportive instructors and a program connecting them with their cultural heritage as critical factors in their success. Leimomi shared that she has extensive experience with online education, having completed numerous online courses during high school and college. She highlights the challenges faced in the online learning environment, including limited teacher support, connectivity issues, and miscommunication, emphasizing the difficulty in resolving misunderstandings in a non-physical face-to-face setting. Even with these challenges, Leimomi acknowledges the preparation and adaptability skills gained from high school, facilitating their transition to college-level online learning. Leimomi admitted to being underprepared for the administrative aspects of college life, such as applying for colleges, scholarships, and financial aid. The opportunity and experience of taking a dual-credit English

class in high school significantly contributed to my success and persistence in college. Hu and Ortagus (2023) state that allowing high school students to accumulate college credits allows some potential to reduce the time to earn a degree, college costs, and level of student loan debt. Policymakers have identified dual credit as a promising mechanism to increase college access and completion (Hu & Ortagus, 2023).

Mahie

Mahie is a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student majoring in sustainable science management with a concentration in marine science. She described her preparedness and transition from high school to college during the pandemic, where the high school provided limited preparation for the independent and computer-based work required for college. Mahie mentioned taking various online courses during their first year, including math, communications, history, and English, in which there was a mix of synchronous and asynchronous formats. She reflected on the difficulties of staying motivated and managing their time effectively in an online learning environment. Even with the challenges faced, including anxiety and social isolation, Mahie found support from instructors, family, and counselors. Mahie receives financial support from scholarships for Native Hawaiian students focusing on STEM and financial aid. She expressed a sense of resilience and determination to continue their academic journey despite obstacles.

Results

The results of this transcendental phenomenological study aim to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Native Hawaiian college students' persistence in online courses. The results from this research study are straightforward and consistent. I used three data collection methods: individual interviews, reflective written assignments, and a qualitative

questionnaire. A total of 10 participants volunteered. All participants engaged in individual interviews turned in their reflective written assignment and completed the qualitative questionnaire. The quotations throughout this section are the participants' words and errors in their speech to present their verbal and typed responses accurately.

Four main themes emerged from the data analysis of this research study. Participants shared related themes during the individual interview, reflective written assignment, and qualitative questionnaire. The participants shared their lived experiences of persistence in online coursework, including challenges, success, adaptation, learning strategies, student engagement, student interaction, and help from student support services. In the following table, themes and codes are discussed.

Table 5*Themes and Codes*

Theme	Subthemes			
Challenges and Success	Online versus In-Person courses	Expectations and Motivations	Overcome Barriers and Challenges	Tools and Strategies to Help Understand Course Materials
Support Systems	Student Support Services	Effectiveness of Support Systems	Support from Course Instructors	
First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Student Persistence	Facing Challenges, Experiences, and Impacts	Cultural and Identity Challenges	Addressing Disparities in Technology Access and Resources	
Influences of External Factors	Students Background and Cultural Identity	Key Factors Driving Students to Succeed		

Challenges and Success.

This theme aligns with the central research question: How do first-generation Native Hawaiian college students (FGNHCS) describe their persistence and success in at least one

online course? Challenges and success align with the central research: How do first-generation Native Hawaiian college students (FGNHCS) describe their persistence and success in at least one online course? There will be at least 3 out of the 10 participants' results and how they relate to the central research question and subthemes. The responses include their experiences in online and in-person courses, expectations and motivations, overcoming barriers and challenges, and maintaining their persistence. Their responses include:

Online Versus In-Person Courses

The participants shared their lived experiences when they took online courses and in-person courses. All 10 participants had various responses and their reasonings for taking online and in-person courses; many responses were common answers, and a few were not expected. In the interview, Kekoa shared, “Personally, I didn't have a choice at first, for Covid was a factor when I began college. I then accumulated to online schooling and favored it more than tradition in-person courses because it was more convenient for my work schedule.” Another participant, Kahiau, from the reflective written assignment, has already taken more than two online courses added, “I have a 1-year-old, I’m expecting another child and my life at home is very busy. This was convenient for me to do everything online.” Keala, who shared their response on the qualitative questionnaire, who is going for their baccalaureate degree, stated, “The main one was location. I did not want to go into debt due to moving and living expenses. I was also not fully prepared to apply to university when I was in high school.”

Expectations and Motivations

First-generation Native Hawaiian college students generally had expectations and motivations for persistence in their academic journey. Some students think that online courses are supposed to be easier. Some students felt nervous about taking their first online courses.

Online courses can be more complicated than others. However, their motivation to persist and pass their courses also had various reasons. Alike shared from their reflective written assignment, both their expectation and motivations, “as a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student my motivation has always been my children.” Aulii who did not have any expectations shared from their individual interview, that being raised in a low-income family and a single parent; explains their motivation; “despite the challenges and barriers, I may face as a first-generation student, I saw online learning as a pathway to expand my knowledge, enhance my skills, and ultimately, achieve my academic and career goals.” Another participant, Kea, who has no children but is eager to support and help their community, stated from their individual interview, as a Native Hawaiian student, “I expected the online classes to be more difficult than in person but allow for more flexibility with schedules. Wanting to finish my degree in order to help our native community made attending online an easy choice even though I don’t particularly enjoy online classes.” Another participant, Kanoe, shared from the qualitative questionnaire, the same motivation would be “setting an example for my son, representative of my culture in the degree I am presuming. Expectations only on myself and my work ethic in school.”

Overcome Barriers and Challenges

Being a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student comes with barriers and challenges. Barriers and challenges come whether a student is taking an online or in-person course. The following participants shared the barriers and challenges they experienced during their online courses. All the participants had their barriers and challenges to share. Sharing all their experiences in this section is crucial. Alike stated from the reflective written assignment, “Hawaiian Language 202 was difficult for me not because the curriculum was difficult.”

The next participant, Kahiau, shared from the reflective written assignment, “the more I saw how successful I could be, the more it motivated me to get past that initial "hitting the wall" feeling when you first start something and it’s hard.” The next participant, Kekoa, shared from qualitative questionnaire, “I have overcome barriers and maintained persistence in my online classes by staying very disciplined and remembering my "why.” The next participant, Mahie, shared from the reflective written assignment, “I try to manage my time better, finish things right away, and communicate with instructors regularly.” Kea shared their barriers and challenges and stated from their individual interview, “setting boundaries for myself to do homework on time. Time management, not to procrastinate.” Kanoë shared from individual interview: “my challenge for online learning was making time to do the work, time management, and not procrastinating.”

FGCS are faced with various challenges and barriers while taking online courses; therefore, it is crucial to continue to share the challenges and barriers that FGNHCS experience. Participants have shared that, at times, assignments have been challenging. Sometimes, being disciplined, staying on task, and remembering their why is their motivation. Leimomi, who prefers to take only online courses shared from the reflective written assignment, “I was struggling with miscommunications the most.” Another first-generation Native Hawaiian college student, Keala, stated from their individual interview, “the biggest challenge I have encountered so far is having to do classes for a teacher, whose teaching style did not seem to be geared towards online courses.” Another participant, Kea, shared from the individual interview, “lots of emails to instructors asking for help, posting in discussion boards to classmates for help, always making a couple of friends in classes to buddy up and keep each other on track and up to date.” Lastly, Aulii shared from the qualitative questionnaire, “time management, staying off of my phone, and not reaching out to people to check how the waves are.” All the participants had

some influence in selecting online courses; their expectations for online courses varied on different levels with assumptions to prior experience in at least one online course, their motivation was driven by being a positive role model for their child or children and earning a college degree.

Tools and Strategies to Help Understand Course Materials

Instructors at the University of Hawai‘i Maui College provide their students with valuable tools and recommend helpful strategies to be successful in their courses. However, the University of Hawai‘i Maui College cannot provide everything. Students can find a way to complete their assignments and understand the material, technology resources, and tools for their courses. The following 3 out of 10 shared the tools and strategies that helped them succeed in their online courses. Kekoa stated on their reflective written assignment, “I found that emailing is a very important factor/tool while online schooling, for it is the main source of communication. I also think that Laulima is great and is very easy to navigate while scrolling through class courses.” Another participant, Mahie, stated in their qualitative questionnaire, “some of my instructors for a course started the semester with a scavenger hunt on how to use Laulima which helped me a lot with all my courses.” Another participant, Kahiau, shared in their individual interview, “I always stay in communication with my teachers. Follow the course calendar and when the assignments are due, and you‘ll be fine.”

Support Systems

Support systems are an integral part of higher education (Colvin et al., 2024). Additionally, higher education institutions have had to provide grants, loans, counseling, administrative, and similar services to students (Colvin et al., 2024). University of Hawai‘i Maui College has support services that range from mentorship, financial, tutoring, and scholarships for

Native Hawaiians. This theme aligns with the Sub-question one: How do FGNHCS navigate and overcome barriers to persistence in online courses? Leimomi, who is majoring in Natural Sciences, states in their reflective written assignment, “my first semester of college I utilized the UHMC tutors for chemistry. This semester, I used tutor.com for math help.” Also adding from Leimomi, from the individual interview, “the tutoring sessions always helped in some way whether it was actual help getting an answer or just talking.” Another participant, Alikea, stated in their qualitative questionnaire, “my largest support systems were my peer mentors. I have to also thank my academic advisors they have been a god sent with finding classes that fit into my schedule and also directly contribute to my degree.”

Lastly, Kekoa, expressed gratitude for financial assistance for being Native Hawaiian and stated in their reflective written assignment, “I have found student support services, such as Mu‘o A‘e and Pai Ka Māna, was a strong push and foundation during my online classes.”

Student Support Services

The information given by half of the participants resulted in repeated answers in naming two student support services for Native Hawaiian college students. Participants were able to apply for both student support services. 5 out of 10 participants shared how grateful they were for the opportunity and financial support. Student support services have always been momentous (Colvin et al., 2024). Mu‘o A‘e and Pai Ka Māna are two available student support systems for Native Hawaiian college students, whether or not first-generation.

Mu‘o A‘e. Mu‘o A‘e is one of a few student support services available at the University of Hawai‘i Maui College (Mu‘o A‘e – University of Hawai‘i, 2024). Mu‘o A‘e focuses on increasing Native Hawaiian students' success. Mu‘o A‘e supports student’s educational goals and offers a challenging but rewarding experience. Kahiau, who applied for Mu‘o A‘e stated in

during the individual interview, “I’m a part of Mu‘o A‘e! I’ve also spoken on several occasions with the counselors. I discovered Mu‘o A‘e because they sent out an advertisement email saying that they supported Native Hawaiians going to school.” Another participant, Leimomi, also stated during their individual interview, “I really enjoyed the Mu‘o A‘e program located at UHMC. They provide tutoring, peer mentors, checkups 3 times a semester, and just an ear to talk to.”

Pai Ka Māna. Pai Ka Māna is a federally funded program to assist students who are first-generation, have financial needs, or have a disability (Pai Ka Māna – University of Hawai‘i, 2024). Qualifying students who participate in the program receive various services such as personalized graduation plans, academic support and advising, tutoring, career exploration, priority registration, financial aid, workshops, cultural experiences, and supplemental grant aid.

Effectiveness of Support Systems

First-generation Native Hawaiian college students navigate through financial circumstances that impact their experiences in higher education (Kamalumpundi et al., 2024). Some of the participants were able to apply for both Mu‘o A‘e and Pai Ka Māna student support systems; having that extra support made an impact on student persistence and success. Kekoa shared that applying for Mu‘o A‘e and Pai Ka Māna helped pay for college and stated the following:

Another participant Koa, who registered for both student support services stated in their qualitative questionnaire, “being able to utilize resources through Mu‘o A‘e and Pai Ka Māna are a big help as they are tailored to Native Hawaiian students and offer additional support and resources not otherwise available to non-Hawaiian students. Lastly, Alika expressed how much Mu‘o A‘e and Pai Ka Māna helped and stated in their qualitative questionnaire:

The Mu‘o A‘e program who has been with me from the beginning. They offered me wrap around services helping me with supplies like books and materials I needed for classes. They not only offered me things for school but workshops and excursions that directly connect to my degree. Pai Ka Māna also helped me throughout my journey and an employee from the Pai Ka Māna program was my academic advisor throughout my journey and helped me every step of the way.

Support from Course Instructors

Support from college instructors is crucial for the success of first-generation college students (FGCS) in online courses. These students often face unique challenges, such as navigating unfamiliar academic environments and lacking the social capital that comes from having family members with college experience (Watts et al., 2023). Instructors can play a pivotal role by creating an inclusive and supportive learning atmosphere (Gutierrez Keeton et al., 2022). This begins with clear communication of course expectations and availability for guidance (Gutierrez Keeton et al., 2022). For instance, providing detailed syllabi, assignment rubrics, and regular updates can help FGCS feel more in control and less overwhelmed by the online format (Bano et al., 2024).

Instructors can further support FGCS by offering flexible office hours and being accessible through various communication channels like email, forums, and virtual meetings (Goldman et al., 2022). Personalized feedback on assignments and proactive check-ins can help build a strong student-instructor relationship, encouraging FGCS to seek help when needed (Mireles, 2023). Additionally, integrating resources such as tutorials on navigating the learning management system and workshops on study skills can bridge the gap in technological and academic preparedness (Verdín et al., 2024). These strategies not only enhance the learning

experience for FGCS but also contribute to their overall academic success and retention in online courses (Brookover et al., 2022).

First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Student Persistence

The first-generation college student community is continuously growing with a diverse and complex population (Kamalumpundi et al., 2024). First-generation Native Hawaiian college students experience anticipation when beginning their higher education journey. There are many benefits to online learning, such as convenience and flexibility for students' schedules, especially for those who are employed (Leary et al., 2021).

Facing Challenges, Experiences, and Impacts

Challenges that FGNHCS faces vary at different times, levels of difficulty, and in different areas of academia. Students who face challenges such as technology access, preference for in-person courses over online courses, facing the unknown, and more. The FGNHCS that were interviewed shared and discussed their challenges and experiences. Kekoa, who is an FGNHCS, shared on their qualitative questionnaire, "I think that the most challenging part about being a first-generation Native Hawaiian student doing online courses would be knowing who to ask for help and important questions and knowing where to start." Kea had the opposite result when taking online courses and stated from their individual interview, "for me, I didn't find it any more challenging than an in-person course as far as the content. But the experience, I'd prefer online over in-person due to the convenience and time scheduling." Keala shared that time management was a challenge, and the reason was stated in their reflective written assignment, "I think the challenges we face are mostly financial, which leads to challenges with time management." Lastly, Kahiau expressed more encouragement and support and stated in their

qualitative questionnaire, “know their limits on how many classes they can really keep up with, be committed to putting in the time and know their

Cultural and Identity Challenges

The Hawaiian culture dates back many years, but throughout history, the culture has emerged with many distinctive cultural features that were predicted to become lost (W. H. Wilson & Kamanā, 2024). However, over the years, the thoughts and beliefs of the participants that the majority did not have any cultural and identity challenges. Mahie, who is proud to be Native Hawaiian, shared their thoughts and beliefs and stated in their qualitative questionnaire, already the American education system is challenging for Hawaiian cultural and identity-related challenges because it is the opposite of how Hawaiians have been learning for generations. Leimomi had a similar response and stated in their individual interview, “I didn't really have any cultural challenges, but when I took a Hawaiian language class, I came face-to-face with the fact that I knew nothing about my own culture or who I really was as a person.” Alika’s response related to the other two participants and stated from their qualitative questionnaire, “my success taking this journey all online will be my biggest accomplishment as a First Generation Native Hawaiian College Graduate in my life and in my family.” Koa believed there were no cultural challenges but stated in their reflective written assignment, “being able to read other peers discussion pieces who are of other cultures may sometimes be different, whether it’s a lack of understanding of their perspective or even language barriers at times.

Addressing Disparities in Technology Access and Resources

The evolution of online learning, students’ satisfaction, and performance have been the focus of educational research, and one determinant was technological issues (Alam & Forhad, 2023). Technology is one of the most influential drivers of economic growth and development;

the internet accelerated the spread of knowledge and information transmitted (Alam & Forhad, 2023). Technology access and resources in higher education have the potential to offer individual instructions or educational materials (Alam & Forhad, 2023).

The participants shared their suggestions addressing disparities in technology access and resources. Aulii expressed more of a financial concern and explained, “Having subsidized programs to provide low-income families and individuals with affordable access to computers and internet services.” Mahie, who lives on another island with technology access and other resources, stated, “Providing students with free computers and hotspots will give the students access when they don't have the means to have it.” Koa, who has taken several online courses expressed in their reflective written assignment, “I think the marketing of availability of resources. I utilize them and they’ve been a huge help for me especially to save money, but the technology is up to date and works really well.”

Influences of External Factors

There are many external factors, causes, and reasons for students being successful in their online courses; online courses are not free from limitations and may not fit all learners (Baruth & Cohen, 2023). Primary infrastructure conditions and technological skills are needed to learn online, and students may need organizational skills, motivation, and self-discipline to be successful in online courses (Baruth & Cohen, 2023). This theme aligns with Sub-question three: What influences contributed to academic success in FGNHCS's online courses?

Student's Background and Cultural Identity

Learning is characterized by energy, focus, and dedication, which is achieved by devoting oneself to learning tasks (Yin et al., 2022). Students who choose to attend college and study in a field such as technology, education, engineering, science, and medicine have strong

influences on their educational and professional outcomes (Tătar et al., 2023). The history of Hawai‘i describes colonization as erasing cultural knowledge and creating an adverse reality in education unique to Native Hawaiians (Peters & Lord, 2023). Some of the positive influences’ participants shared relate to family, friends, culture, and finances. Kanoë appreciated her family rooting for her during her college journey by sharing from the qualitative questionnaire, “My family is cheering me on, this new chapter in my life is one I made for myself so more than anything I need to be supportive of me.” Kekoa shared the same about external factors and added from the reflective written assignment, “ my family and my friends has played a huge influence on getting my degree. Everyone that I surround myself with has encouraged me and supported me in ways I never knew I needed.” Mahie emphasized how much family, friends, classmates, and coworkers provided encouragement, shared from the individual interview, “some external factors that helped me a lot is study groups with friends, family and classmates, coworkers helping me, and resources online suggested by others.”

Key Factors Driving Students to Succeed

Student success in higher education drives students to succeed in their courses. The participants had more personal vital factors driving them to succeed; however, some academic factors were driving them to succeed, too. In higher education, support systems provide necessary guidance to students. Kahiau is married with one child and another on the way and stated in their individual interview, “being able to do things on my own time! Some of the classes I have are asynchronous where I don’t need to meet with my teachers or classmates.”

Student support services helped first-generation Native Hawaiian college students.

Over decades, there has been a continuous increase in online course enrollment that requires student support services to help adjust or transition to the online environment (Colvin et

al., 2024). Higher education institutions provide grants, loans, counseling, administrative, and similar services to students even though they are not on campus (Colvin et al., 2024). Higher education institutions have been seeing a larger scale of student support services, where these services are helping to bridge and build foundations with students, provide counseling and career guidance, clear and explicit expectations and criteria for assessments, and different pedagogies to assist first-generation students (Chetty & Kepkey, 2023). The participants acknowledged how grateful they were for financial support and guidance. Koa stated from the reflective written assignment, “being able to utilize resources through Pai Ka Mana or Mu’o A’e are a big help as they are tailored to Native Hawaiian students and offer additional support and resources not otherwise available to non-Hawaiian students.”

Research Question Response

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of FGNHCS students who were successful in their online courses at the University of Hawai‘i Maui College. Three data collection methods, individual interviews, reflective written assignment, and qualitative questionnaire were used to describe the lived experiences of FGNHCS associated with the research questions. The findings and explanations of these questions are presented below.

Central Research Question

The central research question asked, “How do first-generation Native Hawaiian college students (FGNHCS) describe their persistence and success in at least one online course?” Addressing the quality and attrition rates of online courses is essential, in addition to researching factors related to student success (Mejri & Borawski, 2023). Whether a course was asynchronous or synchronous, the impacts on students' outcomes and success varied (Xu et al., 2023). The

success of online courses relies on students' self-regulation during the learning process; self-regulated learning requires constant analysis of the learning situation, setting meaningful goals, using appropriate strategies to be successful, and reflecting and adjusting their learning process as more courses are taken (Xu et al., 2023). The 10 participants of this research study met the selection criteria as FGNHCS and had taken at least one online course. The distinctive attributes of the 10 participants add literature to the academic persistence of FGNHCS.

The findings of this research reveal that FGNHCS endured and persisted by learning and understanding the importance of student support services, family, friends, and other academic support resources. The term *persistence* was not a heavily used term in this research study; however, they described their persistence as a notion for their lived experiences. Kekoa revealed in their qualitative questionnaire response, "having such a supportive and encouraging foundation has driven me to do things that I may not have thought I would be capable of, such as getting a college degree." College student resilience is attributed to academic motivation and college outcomes, where family is often a source of support for success and degree attainment (Tsai et al., 2023). Kahiau shared that their spouse was their biggest supporter and stated during their individual interview, "Don't listen to what anyone says. You can be whoever you want to be, and you can do whatever you set out to do. You're smart and beyond capable. I support you 1000%!." First-generation experience significant levels of stress and anxiety, face enduring financial adversities, sparse social networks, and sometimes experience unfavorable outcomes (Tsai et al., 2023).

Sub-Question One

Sub-question One asked, "How do FGNHCS navigate and overcome barriers to persistence in online courses?" The reason for this question was to determine what factors and

attributes helped FGNHCS be successful in an online course(s). The findings of this research study indicated that all participants overcame barriers and persisted academically. The participants of this research study acknowledged their motivation to persist while taking online courses. Aulii shared from their qualitative questionnaire responses, “as a first-generation college student, I approached these courses with a blend of determination, curiosity, and a thirst for knowledge.” All participants shared their experiences to overcome barriers and persist. Alika wanted to share a piece of advice and stated from their qualitative questionnaire responses, “my advice to any First-Generation College Student is to think about what your interests are and find a degree within the same area.” Another participant, Keala, gave their advice for academic perspective and stated from their reflective written assignment, “I overcame these challenges by reading the rubric very carefully and writing accordingly. I am careful not to distract myself with too many questions about the reason of learning Hawaiian history/ethics.”

Sub-Question Two

Sub-question Two asked, “What are the unique experiences and challenges faced by FGNHCS in online courses?” Even before the pandemic, higher education experienced incremental evolution; students are faced with challenges and demands in new skills such as critical thinking, communication, creativity, and teamwork (Sholes et al., 2023). Even with a positive attitude, minority and first-generation college students can have some unique challenges to overcome (Sholes et al., 2023). Leimomi gave an example of their unique experiences and challenges in one of their online courses previously taken, stated in their qualitative questionnaire responses, “last semester and the previous semesters before, I have always had an online class that was not good whether the issues were with the internet or the teacher, something always went wrong.” Keala provided a different experience from their qualitative questionnaire

response, “this semester, however, an online class that I have had success in has been my chemistry class. I am succeeding in more ways than one.”

Another participant, Kanoe, gave different levels of challenges and overcoming barriers but shared from their qualitative questionnaire, “by setting the class up like this we were not able to go through the semester thinking we could hide behind our cameras with it off and not engage in the lesson.”

Sub-Question Three

The demand for online courses has been growing in popularity as students recognize flexibility and value; there will always be a concern for student retention and success in higher education (Rosser-Majors et al., 2022). Students who struggle to pass their online courses often experience financial challenges and have a lower success rate (Rosser-Majors et al., 2022). Sub-question Three asked, “What influences contributed to academic success in FGNHCS's online courses?” All the participants shared their experiences and influences that contributed to their academic success in online courses. In the online learning world, the shift in learning mode exposed learners to challenges and revealed barriers in an online learning environment (Kaewsard, 2022). Koa appreciated and stated from their reflective written assignment “the flexibility of online courses and shared a factor that contributed to their success in online courses and stated the ability to tailor my learning around my work schedule and the instructor's thorough feedback.” Another participant, Keala, added from their qualitative questionnaire response, “the main factor that contributes to my success is the simple fact that I have always managed to land a living situation where I am mostly rent free.” Another participant, Leimomi, shared during the individual interview, “my ability to adapt has definitely helped with my success in college.”

Summary

The purpose of Chapter Four was to share the lived experiences, reflections, and narratives produced through individual interviews, reflective written assignments, and qualitative questionnaires. A total of 10 participants participated in this research study. The following themes emerged in this research study: challenges and success, support systems, first-generation Native Hawaiian college student persistence, and influences of external factors. The themes provided answers to the central research question and three sub-questions that supplied a more in-depth understanding of persistence in first-generation Native Hawaiian students. In this research study, the findings were provided in a narrative form with categorized themes and sub-themes that emerged. The participants of this research study provided positive and negative experiences that affected their persistence in online courses. Overall, the participants shared their needs for academic support and services support from family and friends. All participants of this research study found motivation to persist while receiving encouragement and gaining confidence. The following chapter will provide the research study's implications, future research, recommendations, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and the conclusion.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of FGNHCS who were successful in their online courses at UHMC. Vincent Tinto's (1987) student integration theory for this study's theoretical framework was discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. In the theoretical context, Tinto's student integration theory was a recognized framework focusing on understanding and improving student retention and persistence in higher education. This research study explored factors that influenced the persistence and success of FGNHCS. This chapter will provide a summary of the research study findings from individual interviews, reflective written assignments, and qualitative questionnaires. The goal of the research questions was to gain insight from FGNHCS on their persistence and success in at least one online course. This chapter reviews the results of the research study and explores and discusses the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data provided by the participants. The discussion will begin with an interpretation of the findings that includes a summary of the themes from Chapter Four. Epoché, as proposed by Moustakas, is an essential aspect of phenomenological research. Implications will be presented, and the data will be explored in terms of how they can be applied to both policy and practice. The application of these results to theoretical and empirical research is presented, and an interconnection of this research study with other experts is made. Then, the limitations of this research study will be explored, and recommendations for future research will be made.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings that reflect on the experiences of the participants who are FGNHCS at the UHMC. Moustakas (1986) explained, "Perception is regarded as the primary

source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (p. 52). These findings presented encouraging feedback from FGNHCS providing supporting evidence of their experience in online courses. FGNHCS, which took at least one online course, gained and developed skills to be successful. In previous studies, FGCS were less prepared academically for college because they did not take advanced high school courses and earned low test scores (Bano et al., 2024). There were additional student support services through programs that also helped in resulting in their success. The growing attention of FGCS highlights barriers students face regarding persistence retention; higher education institutions are attempting to improve the outcomes of students by focusing on student mentoring (Opsal et al., 2023). Other factors influenced FGNHCS's success in their online courses. Four themes emerged: challenges and success, support systems, first-generation native Hawaiian college student persistence, and influences from external factors. The implications of these results are also discussed in this chapter. How the data supports the theoretical framework is presented, and the limitations and delimitations of the research study are shared.

The central research question designed to be answered was, “How do first-generation Native Hawaiian college students (FGNHCS) describe their persistence and success in at least one online course?” The FGNHCS did persist and were successful in their online courses; their lived experiences comprised overcoming trials, challenges, and tribulations (Kame‘eleihiwa, 2021; Oliveira, 2005). The 10 participants of this research study faced obstacles ranging from missed assignments, poor grades, miscommunication, finances, work balance, and time management. The need for student support services to academically thrive was stated by more than half of the participants, and supportive family and friends followed. Koa’s individual interview shared “I have never been more persistent to continue my online education. In fact, it

encourages me even more because I need and want to succeed in life and in my community. There really are not that many Native Hawaiian doctors, and I want to be one of them.” Aulii shared from their reflective written assignment and stated “I’m pretty self-determined to complete the things I set out to do and I try my best, especially now. At age 41, I feel there’s no time to be fooling around and just breezing through things. So, a lot of my experiences have taught me that time and money is valuable and shouldn’t be wasted.” Keala responded in the qualitative questionnaire and stated that “These experiences help with my motivation to online schooling because it makes me think, “If they can do it, so can I.” I think that having a open and positive mindset also helps with motivation because it teaches you discipline and helps challenge you for life outside of school.”

The first sub-question was, “How do FGNHCS navigate and overcome barriers to persistence in online courses?” Persistence is defined as continuing enrollment or completion of a degree at a higher education institution (C. R. Davis et al., 2024). Persistence is used to describe the participants of this research study and their efforts to thrive academically and earn a college degree. The participants were able to persist when their needs were met, and if they were not, they found another way to navigate and overcome barriers (Daniels & MacNeela, 2021). From an individual interview, Kahiau, a first-generation native Hawaiian college student, shared their motivation to persist and “... enjoys online courses, but I find it challenging to balance schoolwork with personal life; my drive comes from my family’s dependence on their success and their desire to provide a better life for them.”

Research among a diverse sample found that higher levels of mentoring support were associated with social and academic integration (Hagler et al., 2024). The second sub-question was, “What are the unique experiences and challenges faced by FGNHCS in online courses?”

The 10 participants of this research study shared their unique experiences (i.e., social interactions, academic integrations, peer mentoring, faculty-student relationship) and challenges, sharing what they faced in online courses. Even though FGCS face unique experiences, they bring assets to enrich higher education institutions, such as resilience and valuing the importance of community (Rockwell & Kimel, 2023). Kea shared, from individual interview, “It has been an unconventional journey, including switching majors and careers, and my current goal of becoming a licensed practical nurse (LPN) to provide healthcare services on Molokai.” Adding to resilience, from the transcribed individual interview, Kekoa faced challenges during COVID and shared, “My experience with online classes during COVID was "second nature" after starting in high school and continuing in college.”

The third sub-question was, “What influences contributed to academic success in FGNHCS's online courses?” All the participants shared what influences contributed to their success in their online courses. Leimomi shared in their response from the qualitative questionnaire, “My ability to adapt has helped with my success in college. Another factor includes my will to succeed, quite literally helps me succeed. Will power is a strong thing. Previously being able to navigate technology also helps.” The participants acknowledged their achievement in positive, encouraging, and helpful tools and skills that helped, and they want and hope their responses help others (Higginbotham, 2022). College life factors present numerous new ideas, beliefs, and values that may differ from what the FGCS experienced within their family and motives for attending college (Capik & Shupp, 2023).

Mahie’s response from the qualitative questionnaire, stated:

One that influenced my academic success with both my background and culture is where I lived during online courses. I grew up in Keanae and moved to Waihe'e and both areas

don't have good internet, so we had to go to other places to do work or go on Zoom. It limited my time at home in Keanae mainly where I am busy working in the Kalo patch or collecting opae for my grandma.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The thematic findings from the data collection and analysis provided insight into the FGNHCS and their experiences and successes in online courses. From the individual interviews, reflective written assignments, and qualitative questionnaires, four themes and twelve subthemes emerged. Some participants began college with those who valued education, while some families did not value education. At least half of the research participants mentioned the importance of student support services. All participants were self-reported first-generation Native Hawaiians, and external factors that influenced them to be successful in their online courses were also discussed.

Success in college is a topic of great interest in measuring trends and factors and narrowing them down; when higher education institutions report student success, there is often where it is more career-oriented, such as time to degree and obtaining a job after graduating (Langhout et al., 2023). Rockwell and Kimel (2023) state that academically, first-generation disparities arise in terms of lower grades and lower degree completion. Current research found that FGCS make up a large population, more than one-third, and often experience many difficulties differing from continuing-generation peers in college (Capik & Shupp, 2023). Within the larger body of research on FGCS, there has been a considerable amount of attention given to differences in completion rates, such as FGCS are less likely to complete a degree or complete within a specific time as compared to students who are not FGCS taking online courses (Ogden et al., 2024).

Interpretation of Findings

College is described as an exciting time involving renewed exploration of a person's academic identity development, personal values, and future aspirations (Kornbluh et al., 2022). In college persistence research, there are theories of why students drop out and focus on what they lack, which keeps them from focusing on their higher education (Kellogg, 2024). This research study successfully explored FGNHCS's experience and success in online courses. From the data collected, four themes and twelve subthemes emerged, leading to the following interpretations. FGCS are given additional responsibilities that challenge and create barriers to success in online courses; however, the population proved a great need for flexible student support services, remedial tutoring services, and additional support in the use of technology, hardware, and software (Hutson et al., 2022).

The Importance Of Family And Friends' Support

In this research study, all the participants reported the importance of family and friends' support, emphasizing how it encouraged them to pursue their goals. Participants shared that they were raised in a low-income household and are still living there. Receiving support from family, whether financially or emotionally, facilitates students to be successful; living in a low-income household, students prioritize work to help their families financially forgo their college aspirations (Salazar, 2024). Research has shown that in families who make financial sacrifices and cover some college expenses, students are likely to succeed (Salazar, 2024). Additionally, emotional support from family and friends plays a crucial role in providing the encouragement and motivation needed to persevere through the challenges of balancing work, family responsibilities, and academic commitments (Wahl, 2023). This support network helps students develop resilience and maintain a positive outlook on their future despite the economic hardships

they face (Amirkhan et al., 2023). Furthermore, the sense of obligation to contribute to their family's financial well-being often instills a strong work ethic and determination in these students, driving them to excel academically and professionally. An obligation has two distinctive features: a demanding force or a feeling of failure leading to a sense of guilt, and the other feature is bound by agreements between individuals (Tomasello, 2020).

Mahie stated, "I believe getting help through connections like your teachers, tutors, classmates, and advisors is the best for first-generation Native Hawaiian students because naturally Hawaiians learned and taught orally and by doing. It may be hard making connections online so having some in-person and some online classes makes it balanced." Additionally, Kekoa agreed and stated, "I believe that both Pai Ka Mana and Mu'o A'e programs benefit specifically first-generation Native Hawaiian students who take online courses because that is what they mainly look for. Although I believe that both support systems help other students who don't necessarily fit the criteria, they are helping me, so I think that they are a great resource."

Support Services Helped First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Students

Over decades, there has been a continuous increase in online course enrollment that requires student support services to help adjust or transition to the online environment (Colvin et al., 2024). Higher education institutions provide grants, loans, counseling, administrative, and similar services to students even though they are not on campus (Colvin et al., 2024). Higher education institutions have been seeing a larger scale of student support services, where these services are helping to bridge and build foundations with students, provide counseling and career guidance, clear and explicit expectations and criteria for assessments, and different pedagogies to assist first-generation students (Chetty & Kepkey, 2023). The participants acknowledged how grateful they were for financial support and guidance. Koa stated,

Being able to utilize resources through Pai Ka Mana or Mu'o A'e are a big help as they are tailored to Native Hawaiian students and offer additional support and resources not otherwise available to non-Hawaiian students. They also provide mentoring if needed to help students connect with other tutoring opportunities or even help with class assignments.

Students Have The Skills And Capabilities To Be Successful In Online Courses

The FGNHCS had their own experiences in online courses, but their responses from all three data collection methods have been analyzed and synthesized. I started this research study thinking that many students struggle and are not successful in online courses. As a lecturer, over the years, and having taught many sections online semester after semester; many students would withdraw from the course or stay enrolled but not finish any or minimal assignments or they completed assignments only receiving lower grades. I interpreted a few perspectives. I wondered if students were not completing work because the number of assignments or life and time got the best of them. Maybe students did not like that courses are asynchronous, synchronous, or hybrid. The 10 participants I worked with were driven, focused, and determined to earn a degree. Tinto's (date) student integration theory was the framework focusing on understanding and improving student retention and persistence in higher education. Tinto's theory proposed that student integration into the academic and social aspects of the higher education environment played an essential role in student success and staying enrolled. Relating Tinto's student integration theory improvement was proven in students' retention and persistence in higher education when analyzing the data.

Implications for Policy or Practice

As the researcher, I strived to understand the lived experiences of the 10 first-generation Native Hawaiian college students at the University of Hawai‘i Maui College. This research identified key factors that contributed to each first-generation Native Hawaiian college student’s persistence and success in at least one online course. I found that all 10 participants faced challenges that required them to have support from family, friends, and instructors, as well as financial assistance. However, all participants overcame the challenges and succeeded. First-generation Native Hawaiian college students had positive and negative experiences in their online courses. However, they persevered through all the challenges and were determined to be successful. The purpose of this section is to provide recommendations for policy and practice for administrators in higher education to provide proper and continuous support, encouragement, and motivation needed for first-generation Native Hawaiian college students.

Implications for Policy

Programs such as Mu‘o A‘e and Pai Ka Māna, which are federally funded initiatives, have been particularly influential not only for Native Hawaiian students but also for first-generation and first-year college students. These programs provide crucial resources that address the unique needs of these student populations, enhancing their educational experience and fostering resilience (Chetty & Kepkey, 2023). The University of Hawai‘i Maui College should maintain and enhance its support for Mu‘o A‘e and Pai Ka Māna, recognizing their vital role in student success. Continued investment in these programs is essential to ensure that first-generation Native Hawaiian students, along with their peers, receive the necessary support to navigate and thrive in their academic pursuits (Kahakauwila, 2019). Furthermore, expanding these services to include comprehensive financial counseling, flexible scheduling options, and

targeted time management workshops could further alleviate the specific challenges faced by these students (Gonzalez & Xuefei, 2023). By strengthening these support structures, the institution can help mitigate the barriers to success for first-generation Native Hawaiian students in online courses, ultimately promoting higher retention and graduation rates.

The experiences of first-generation Native Hawaiian college students in online courses underscore the critical need for robust and ongoing student support services tailored to both academic and financial requirements. One critical area for policy focus is the facilitation of robust student-instructor interactions. The research indicates that students who experience positive and supportive interactions with their instructors are more motivated and empowered, contributing to higher persistence rates in online courses (Lee et al., 2022). Policies should, therefore, mandate and support the creation of opportunities for meaningful engagement between students and instructors (Kumi-Yeboah & Amponsah, 2023). It is essential for policies to promote training and professional development so that instructors can effectively manage and deliver online courses (Kumi-Yeboah & Amponsah, 2023). Instructors should be equipped with the skills and tools necessary to foster an interactive and supportive learning environment, which includes training in the use of digital platforms, pedagogical strategies for online teaching, and methods for engaging students in virtual settings (Schmitz & Hanke, 2023).

Furthermore, the integration of continuous feedback mechanisms from students should be institutionalized. Policies should require the collection and analysis of student feedback to identify areas for improvement and to make data-driven decisions that enhance the online learning experience (Schmitz & Hanke, 2023). In summary, for online education policies to be effective, they must be flexible, inclusive, and centered on fostering positive student-instructor interactions. Continuous assessment and adjustment of these policies will be crucial in ensuring

that online courses remain engaging, accessible, and capable of meeting the diverse needs of all students.

Implications for Practice

These students encountered a myriad of challenges, including financial constraints, the necessity to balance work and academic commitments, time management issues, and personal life responsibilities (Xu et al., 2023). Students consistently expressed appreciation for the support services available to them, emphasizing the importance of both academic assistance and social support from family. There are policies in place for online courses, but continuous assessments and needed adjustments should be made to benefit students. Students were motivated and empowered when there was excellent student-instructor interaction, which led to students being persistent in their online courses (Feubli et al., 2024). Existing policies must be dynamic, accommodating the evolving needs of students and technological advancements in online education (Cheng et al., 2023). Continuous assessments and periodic adjustments should be instituted to ensure that these policies remain relevant and practical (Grim et al., 2024). Such expression could be considered a cultural trait or gratitude.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This research study confirmed that previous research was conducted regarding first-generation Native Hawaiian college students who were persistent and successful in online courses. Prior research incorporates the theoretical framework like this research study. Tinto's student integration theory (1975) guided this research study as it relates to the experiences of FGNHCS, who successfully took online courses. Tinto's student integration theory (1987) is used widely to research perspectives on college student retention (Davidson & Wilson, 2017; Savage et al., 2019). There were gaps in the literature prior to this research study concerning

first-generation Native Hawaiian college students. However, there was minimal previous research on first-generation Native Hawaiian college students' persistence and success in online courses. There have been other research studies done based on the persistence of college students taking online courses on other ethnicities such as Chinese (Yin et al., 2022), African American, Hispanic, and White (Ortagus, 2023), European (Koris et al., 2021), and French (Nerušilová, 2022); generations such as second-year and third-year (Galve-González et al., 2024); locations around the world such as: North America and Africa (Rich et al., 2022), China (B. Wang, 2022), and Canada (Lux et al., 2023). This research study confirmed the importance of exploring first-generation Native Hawaiian college students' persistence and success in online courses and how their experiences can help motivate and inspire prospective students. All data collection methods, such as individual interviews, reflective written assignment, and qualitative questionnaire provided in-depth information and validated what was expressed from their experiences.

Empirical Implications

Qualitative research suggests that FGCS are less likely to seek help when needed; however, when seeking help, they are more likely to engage in passive help (waiting for assistance) rather than active help-seeking (requesting assistance promptly) (White & Canning, 2023). Research suggests that contextual factors such as parental support, role models, elements in an environment, instructional experiences, and student support services are likely to influence students' interests and gain confidence in higher education as well as their academic and career decisions (C. R. Davis et al., 2024).

Hagler et al. (2024) state that despite challenges and barriers for FGCS, some enter higher education with positive networks and help-seeking beliefs that facilitate and support mentorship. As opposed to previous research, the FGNHCS has been successful and has

persistently passed its online courses. A previous research study investigated FGNHCS lived experiences in being successful in online courses; previous research examined reasons that students were not successful and left college (Gehring et al., 2022). In a research study, FGCS showed less self-efficacy beliefs due to a lack of social support that influenced their dropout decision (Wittner et al., 2022). Arguably, FGCS has been gaining momentum as a research category for several reasons, such as demonstrating a strong relationship between parental education and higher education and drawing attention to challenges they face from their previous academic journey to arrival at a higher education institution (Patfield et al., 2022). Previous studies address mainly family or structural support by older mentors, though most young adults gather support not only from a few family members but also from more extensive networks of friends and peers (Wittner et al., 2022). The empirical implications of this research demonstrate that first-generation Native Hawaiian college students in online courses exhibit success and persistence despite various challenges. Participants highlighted that effective time management, online tools, tutoring access, instructor support, and peer interaction significantly contribute to their academic success in online learning (D. J. Wu et al., 2024). They also emphasized leveraging student support services for both academic and social well-being (Garriott et al., 2023; Kornbluh et al., 2022). The findings suggest notable improvement in students' resilience and positivity when facing academic challenges compared to prior experiences (Omotoy, 2023). After completing an initial online course, participants applied the skills and knowledge gained to subsequent courses, further enhancing their academic journey.

This study enriches existing literature by providing deeper insights into the experiences of first-generation Native Hawaiian college students in online education (Zorec, 2024). It underscores the need to address the unique experiences, strategies, tools, and resources that

facilitate their success, filling a significant gap in current research (Colvin et al., 2024). Furthermore, the study emphasizes the necessity for higher education institutions to tailor support mechanisms to the unique needs of first-generation Native Hawaiian students (Kawano, 2023; Nariman, 2021; Zorec, 2024). This includes designing culturally responsive online learning environments that integrate students' cultural backgrounds and experiences (Chadha et al., 2021). Institutions can foster a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere, enhancing student engagement and success (Sheehan, 2023).

The findings also highlight the potential benefits of developing targeted interventions and resources, such as specialized advising, mentorship programs, and culturally relevant curriculum, to further bolster the academic achievements of these students. In a study, an exploration of how a diverse sample of FGCS adapted by placing responsibility for student success on organizational policies, structures, and practices shaping the experiences of FGCS (Grim et al., 2024). Diverse experiences and perspectives in academic communities promote personal, social, and cognitive growth to improve key learning outcomes of higher education institutions (Henrichsen & Keenan, 2023).

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications for this study focused on Vincent Tinto's student integration theory (1975). Tinto's student integration theory suggests three primary conditions to achieve student persistence are the following: students should have access to retention programs that aim to support them rather than the institution; retention programs focusing on all students; and retention programming (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's student integration theory is social and academic integration relating to a student's commitment to higher education; if students have informal and formal social and academic integration, they are able to re-examine their commitments and goals

(Tinto, 1987). Academic integration is conceptualized as the extent to which students perceive their academic experiences as positively influencing their intellectual growth, whereas social integration is perceived as positively influencing their intellectual growth because of their interactions with others (Gehring et al., 2022).

According to Tinto's student integration theory, students are likely to persist in college if they are academically and socially integrated into the institution (Samoila & Vrabie, 2023). Based on the results from this research study, participants described their persistence and experiences while taking an online course; students described their social and academic integration factors leading to success. Tinto (1987) argued that three factors influence students' personal and psychological characteristics, as well as academic and social factors. Tinto's student integration theory suggested that higher education institutions provide appropriate levels of support to facilitate student transition (Samoila & Vrabie, 2023). Students who are receiving student support services are required to meet with counselors and peers during the semester to check in on progress and if any other additional support is needed.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations existed in this research study. Limitations refer to the potential weaknesses or problems in the research that are out of the researcher's control, which relate to methodology, data collection, or external factors that might affect the study's results (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Limitations are significant and provide transparency to help readers understand the boundaries and constraints. Some examples of limitations may include sample size, access to participants, or the subjective nature of qualitative data. Delimitations help to focus the study and make it manageable, and the researcher sets them to narrow the study's focus

and make it more feasible (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Examples of delimitations may include the geographic location, the time studied, or the population targeted.

Limitations

The limitation of this transcendental phenomenological study was related to the participant sample and participation levels. A limitation of this study was the limited number of participants, explicitly seeking first-generation, Native Hawaiian, 18 years or older, and having taken at least one online course. Utilizing additional first-generation Native Hawaiians, 18 years or older, and taking at least one online course was difficult to find. Over 200 emails went out to students who fit the category; it was a struggle to have timely responses. Another limitation was the lack of gender diversity among the participants. Though the participant criteria were first-generation, Native Hawaiian, 18 years or older, and those who have taken at least one online course.

Delimitations

Delimitations of this research study were to use first-generation Native Hawaiian college students who were over 18 years old and had taken at least one online course. This research study was limited to a sample size of 10 participants. Each participant self-identified as being a first-generation Native Hawaiian who met the criteria. Transcendental phenomenology was used because I wanted to understand the deeper meaning of others' lived experiences of a phenomenon in which first-generation Native Hawaiian college students persist while taking online courses. Even though I am not a first-generation Native Hawaiian, hermeneutical phenomenology was not used because there were no moral phenomena that caused interpretations and created judgment or assumptions when transcendental allows for openness and receptive experiences (Moustakas, 1986).

I believe FGNHCS voices should be heard without any bias, thoughts, or comments from the researcher. Their descriptions allow readers to hear about their challenges and a peek into their personal life of upbringing, concerns, appreciation for student support services, and achievements. Research has identified several different academic preparations and performances among first-generation college students, where they experience academic integration into the environment, student-faculty interactions, social interactions, and tutoring centers (Bamberger & Smith, 2023).

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the study's findings, limitations, and delimitations placed on the study, I make the following recommendations for future studies. During participant recruitment, contact was established with several colleagues at the university. They were approached for support, and a few were enthusiastic about helping. Some referred others, which was beneficial, while others did not respond, leading to poor communication. Subsequently, referrals were made to additional colleagues, and three provided a long list of candidates. A mass email was sent to recruit participants, revealing impatience within a week when only one response was received. It became evident that, even with the incentive of a \$100 gift card, multiple rounds of mass emails were needed before responses were obtained. Over approximately a month, communication with 10 participants involved scheduling individual interviews, awaiting their reflective written assignments, and completing qualitative questionnaires, typically within 2-3 days post-interview. The data collection process underscored the importance of patience and persistence in email follow-ups.

One recommendation for future studies is to enhance participant recruitment strategies by leveraging diverse communication channels beyond email. Email is an appropriate tool, but it

does not always generate prompt responses. Future studies should consider using other methods, such as phone calls, social media outreach, and face-to-face interactions, to engage potential participants more effectively. Establishing a dedicated communication plan that includes follow-up schedules and personalized messaging could also increase engagement and response rates. This multi-faceted approach can help mitigate the issue of delayed responses and improve the overall efficiency of the recruitment process.

Another future recommendation is that collaboration with colleagues should be reinforced and developed. The initial informal referrals were helpful, but a more structured approach could enhance the recruitment process. Future studies could benefit from setting up formal partnerships with university departments, student organizations, and faculty members who can act as recruitment ambassadors. These ambassadors can help identify and refer suitable candidates more systematically. This approach can also help build a robust network of participants, reduce reliance on mass emails, and increase the likelihood of timely responses.

Based on the research study focused on the lived experiences and persistence of first-generation Native Hawaiian college students in their online courses, several comprehensive recommendations for future research can be made to build on the findings. One significant finding was the crucial role of financial support from two student support services, highlighting an area that merits further exploration to understand the broader impact of financial assistance on student success. Future studies could replicate or expand this research with a diverse range of participants, including first-generation students at different academic stages (first-year, second-year, third year), traditional and non-traditional students, and those from various higher education institutions. Additionally, future research could examine a mixture of factors related to

online and in-person learning environments, as well as asynchronous and synchronous online courses, to identify the most effective modalities for different student populations.

Another recommendation is to investigate the impact of cultural support systems and community engagement on the persistence and success of Native Hawaiian students. Understanding the role of family expectations, cultural identity, and community ties in educational attainment could provide deeper insights into their unique challenges and strengths. Exploring how cultural competency and inclusivity in curriculum and support services affect student outcomes would also be valuable. Additionally, examining the effectiveness of various teaching methodologies, technological tools, and online platforms in enhancing learning experiences for not only Native Hawaiian students but ethnicities, can help identify best practices that promote academic achievement.

A longitudinal study tracking the progress of the existing participants until graduation would provide valuable insights into how they maintained their persistence over time, identifying key factors that contribute to long-term success. Furthermore, examining the psychological and emotional resilience strategies employed by these students can offer an understanding of their academic journey, highlighting areas where additional support may be needed. Comparative studies involving similar demographics from other indigenous or underrepresented communities could shed light on broader trends and unique interventions that support student success across different cultural contexts.

Additionally, exploring other relating topics to broaden the research: various identities, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and geographical location. Investigating the impact of mentorship programs, peer support networks, and faculty engagement on student persistence and success could also offer insights into effective support mechanisms. Finally, policy-oriented

research that examines the implications of educational policies and funding structures on the access and success of Native Hawaiian students can inform more equitable practices and interventions. The recommendations not only deepen but broadens the understanding of the factors contributing to the success of first-generation Native Hawaiian college students and other diverse student populations in higher education, ultimately informing strategies to enhance support systems and educational outcomes.

Conclusion

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of first-generation Native Hawaiian students in online courses at UHMC. It aims to understand their challenges, persistence, and success, highlighting aspects of their upbringing, concerns, appreciation for support services, and achievements. Research indicates that first-generation college students generally face unique challenges in academic preparation and performance, including academic and social integration and interactions with faculty and tutoring centers (Bamberger & Smith, 2023). Compared to peers with parents who have post-secondary education, these students often show lower degree aspirations and face cognitive and psychological disadvantages (Payne et al., 2021). However, they also exhibit resilience and positive development during higher education (Payne et al., 2021).

Data collection involved individual interviews, reflective assignments, and a qualitative questionnaire. The key themes that emerged were challenges and success, support systems, persistence, and the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic factors on students' persistence and success in online courses. A critical implication of the study is that it supports Tinto's student integration theory by demonstrating how social and academic integration can motivate persistence and success in online courses. The research highlighted the necessity of ongoing

student support services to build rapport and support first-generation Native Hawaiian students. In contrast to earlier studies suggesting that first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to succeed and more prone to drop out, this study found positive outcomes. Participants showed a willingness to share their experiences and help others succeed, providing a more optimistic perspective on the success of first-generation students.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL FORM

Firefox

<https://outlook.office.com/mail/inbox/id/AAQkAGIxYTQ0NDUwL...>

[External] IRB-FY23-24-985 - Initial: Initial - Expedited

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>

Tue 1/30/2024 11:20 AM

To: Woodbridge, Jerry L (Doctor of Education) [REDACTED]; Kinoshita, Nikki [REDACTED]

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 30, 2024

Nikki Kinoshita
Jerry Woodbridge

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY23-24-985 A Transcendental Phenomenological Study On First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Students' Persistence In Online Courses

Dear Nikki Kinoshita, Jerry Woodbridge,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: January 30, 2024. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

For a PDF of your approval 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 stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: FORMAL SITE PERMISSION APPROVAL

Office of the Chancellor



UNIVERSITY of HAWAII*
MAUI COLLEGE

December 19, 2023

University of Hawai'i Maui College
 310 W. Kaahumanu Avenue
 Kahului, HI 96732

RE: Request to Conduct Research for Doctoral Dissertation

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter acknowledges that I have received and reviewed a request by Nikki Kinoshita to conduct a research study at the University of Hawai'i Maui College, "A Transcendental Phenomenological Study on First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Students' Persistence in Online Courses".

Ms. Kinoshita provided a participant informed consent and recruitment to provide more in-depth details on the research study. I have corresponded with Ms. Kinoshita regarding her research and discussed the proposal and process. We discussed proposed data sources as well as protected student records/directory information. Ms. Kinoshita stated information would be gathered through individual interviews, reflective written assignment, and qualitative survey. I am aware that participation is voluntary.

Ms. Kinoshita informed me that she completed successful her proposal defense. I am in support of her research study and agree to provide access for the approved research study. If you have any concerns or need additional information, please contact me.

Sincerely,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the Chancellor.

Lui K. Hokoana, Ed.D.
 Chancellor, UH Maui College

310 W. Kaahumanu Avenue
 Kahului, HI 96732-1017
 Telephone: 808 864-3055
 Fax: 808 864-3540
 Website: www.mau.hawaii.edu

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Kinoshita, Nikki -Doctoral Research Site Approval Request

Final Audit Report

2023-12-20

Created:	2023-12-20
By:	[REDACTED]
Status:	Signed
Transaction ID:	CBJCHBCAABAAJcH9e8f3rEX5U1qfPgSiZxOa-IEp1wC
Number of Documents:	1
Document page count:	1
Number of supporting files:	0
Supporting files page count:	0

"Kinoshita, Nikki -Doctoral Research Site Approval Request" History

-  Document created by Lo [REDACTED]
 2023-12-20 - 7:16:41 PM GMT - IP address: 166.122.243.149
-  Document emailed to [REDACTED] signature
 2023-12-20 - 7:17:40 PM GMT
-  Email viewed by [REDACTED]
 2023-12-20 - 7:25:41 PM GMT - IP address: 172.226.77.13
-  Agreement viewed by [REDACTED]
 2023-12-20 - 7:36:12 PM GMT - IP address: 166.196.68.8
-  Document e-signed by [REDACTED]
 Signature Date: 2023-12-20 - 7:36:21 PM GMT - Time Source: server - IP address: 166.196.68.8
-  Agreement completed.
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APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study on First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Students' Persistence in Online Courses

Principal Investigator: Nikki K. Kinoshita, M.Ed., Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University School

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be at least 18 years old, may self-identify as a first-generation Native Hawaiian when registering and on student file, and a student who is currently in their first year enrolled at the University of Hawai'i Maui College. Students may be full-time or part-time in the Spring 2024. Students must have taken one online course. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Participants must be able to read and write English

Participants cannot be enrolled in the researcher's course(s) when participating.

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 study's purpose is to examine the experiences of First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Students in their first year in online courses.

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:

1. Participate in an individual interview with the principal investigator/researcher. This interview should be no more than 60 minutes in length and administered over Zoom or

Microsoft Teams platform. The interview will be recorded. You will be assigned a pseudonym (first name only).

2. Complete a reflective written assignment of 500 words addressing your persistence and experience in your online courses. A prompt will be provided and request a due date back to the principle investigator/researcher within 5 days via email as an attachment in Microsoft Word or Portable Document Format (PDF).
3. Participate by completing a qualitative questionnaire that may take up to 60 minutes to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

The societal benefit of participation includes the opportunity to provide important feedback on First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Student persistence in online courses and participating in a qualitative study that will provide information to research, knowledge, and help educational leaders enhance services for students.

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.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. The confidentiality of your participation will be maintained. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

Interviews will be conducted in private Zoom or Microsoft Teams rooms and will not

be accessed by anyone outside of the researcher and participant(s). Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years.

- Notes, data, and manuscripts from the reflective written assignment will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After two years, all records will be deleted.
- The principal investigator/researcher will work to maintain the confidentiality of participants.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Each participant will be provided with a \$100 gift card at the conclusion of data collection and when the researcher confirms the full completion of the participant's response to the individual interview, reflective written assignment, and qualitative questionnaire.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

The researcher is currently a Lecturer at the University of Hawai'i Maui College and could have an authority position over participants. As stated, students cannot be currently enrolled in principal investigator/researchers' courses.

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 or the University of Hawai'i Maui College. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Nikki K. Kinoshita. You may ask any questions now or later. You are encouraged to contact her at nkinoshita@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jerry Woodbridge at [REDACTED]

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[s], you are encouraged to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

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.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher[s] will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the

study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT LETTER

January 30, 2024

Dear Student:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the doctoral degree requirements. My research study's title is "A Transcendental Phenomenological Study on First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Students' Persistence in Online Courses." The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Students (FGNHCS) in their online courses at the University of Hawai'i Maui College.

Participants must be first-generation Native Hawaiian college students who are 18 years old or older, enrolled either full-time or part-time, and are not currently enrolled in any of the researcher's current course(s) offerings. If willing, participants will be requested to complete three of the following:

- Participate in an individual, recorded interview through Zoom or Teams meeting concerning their experiences. There are 10 questions. Individual interviews will last at least 60 minutes.
- Complete a reflective written assignment consisting of 500 words. The completion time varies depending on the participant.
- A qualitative questionnaire consisting of 20 questions. This should take no more than 60 minutes. All information will remain confidential.

Each participant will be compensated with a \$100 gift card after I have confirmed that all three methods have been completed. If you are willing to participate, please reach out to Luana Kawa'a Ikawaa@hawaii.edu or Melia Mattos meliam9@hawaii.edu.

Sincerely,

Nikki Kinoshita

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

Introductory Questions

1. Please introduce yourself by telling me your background, including where you are from, your major, and your future career goals. (Icebreaker question)
2. What is your educational goal? Earn an associate, undergraduate, or graduate degree? (Icebreaker question)
3. Why did you choose to attend the University of Hawai'i Maui College?
4. What online courses did you take online? (Icebreaker question)

Questions Regarding Sub-Question One

5. How would you characterize your high school preparedness level that benefited your higher education transition?
6. Describe the challenges you experienced in the online course(s).

Questions Regarding Sub-Question Two

7. How would you describe your academic accomplishment in your first year?

Questions Regarding Sub-Question Three

8. Describe the experiences that were the most impactful on being successful and persistent in your online course(s).
9. Suppose you have committed to enrolling again (whether you are still in your first or second year). How would you describe the experiences that shaped your decision to persist?
10. How would you describe your overall experience as a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student enrolled in an online course(s)?

APPENDIX F: REFLECTIVE WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

Please describe, in detail, your experience during one online course that you have been successful in. Please describe your experience in a minimum of 500 words.

APPENDIX G: QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What factors influenced you to enroll in online rather than traditional in-person courses?
2. Describe your initial expectations and motivations when starting online courses as a first-generation Native Hawaiian college student.
3. What strategies have you developed or utilized to overcome barriers and maintain your persistence in online courses?
4. Describe a situation where you overcame challenge(s) during an online course.
5. What online tools and strategies did you find the most effective in understanding course materials?
6. What support systems have you utilized during your online courses? (e.g., academic advisors, tutoring services, online forums)
7. How would you describe the effectiveness of these support systems in fostering your development and success in online courses?
8. What support systems or resources do you believe are particularly beneficial for first-generation Native Hawaiian students in online courses? Why?
9. In what ways did instructors and courses demonstrate supporting diverse needs in the online environment?
10. How did online peer interactions contribute to the overall experience?
11. In your opinion, what do first-generation Native Hawaiian students face during their experiences and challenges in online courses?
12. What cultural or identity-related challenges did you face in the online learning environment?

13. How do these unique experiences and challenges impact your motivation and persistence in online courses?
14. What are helpful strategies or approaches you have found to overcome these challenges?
15. What do you suggest should address disparities in technology access and resources?
16. What factors have contributed to your academic success in online courses?
17. How has your background or cultural identity influenced your academic success in online courses?
18. What external factors did you encounter (e.g., family support, community support) that have positively influenced your academic success in online courses?
19. What are key factors driving you to excel academically in an online environment?
20. What recommendations or changes would you suggest to enhance the academic success of first-generation Native Hawaiian students in online courses?

APPENDIX I: THEMES

Theme	Subthemes			
Challenges and Success	Online versus In-Person courses	Expectations and Motivations	Overcome Barriers and Challenges	Maintaining Persistence
Support Systems	Student Support Services	Effectiveness of Support Systems	Support of Instructor and Courses	
First-Generation Native Hawaiian College Student Persistence	Facing Challenges and Experiences	Cultural and Identity Challenges	Addressing Disparities in Technology Access and Resources	
Influences of External Factors	Students Background and Cultural Identity	Key Factors Driving Students to Succeed		