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Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Frances Campbell

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2017

Abstract

GED Learners' Perceptions of Support Systems for Encouraging High School
Completion

by

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MS. Ed, Admin., University of South Alabama, 1997

BS, Ed. University of South Alabama, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

November 2017

Abstract

All 7 high schools located in a school district in Alabama have experienced a high dropout rate since 2012. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma. Research questions centered on recent high school dropouts' views on what supports from home and from teachers they could have received to assist them in completing high school and what things they could have done differently to receive their high school diplomas. Bandura's theories of self-efficacy and social learning served as the conceptual framework for this study. Interview data were collected from 10 participants who were selected via purposive sampling from high schools in the Baldwin County school district's local GED program. Data were analyzed using Hatch's 9 step typology for open coding. All of the participants said that they had dropped out or quit school for a variety of reasons, including a change in program, family responsibilities, loss of interest, or to get a job. They reported feeling that their parents could have done more to keep them from dropping out. Only half of the participants said they had received support from teachers. Most participants reported feeling that they themselves could have done something more to complete high school. The results of this study could lead to positive social change as parents and teachers become more aware of how to support students at risk of dropping out and the impact this can have on their communities.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my doctoral study to my grandparents, the late Willis and Callie Anderson. For without their discipline and guidance, I could not have completed this process.

To my family and friends, thank you for your constant support. In every educational journey that I set out on, you were all right there to uplift me, and for that I thank each of you and I love you more than words can express.

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To my children Cordell and Tarmeca thank you for always being there. When I was moody, frustrated, or panicking, the two of you were right there.

To my deceased grandparents, the late Willis and Callie Anderson, thank you for being there for me. Thank you for raising me and steering me in the right path of life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Dropping out of high school is a concern for teachers, parents, and communities. Tas, Selvitopu, Bora, and Demirkaya (2013) reported that dropping out of school is a worldwide issue and that 12 million students globally are expected to drop out of school within the next ten years. Also, Tas et al. explained that dropping out of school has consequences and that many individuals who drop out experience health problems, educational deficiencies, and problems finding a good job. Therefore, there is a need to find viable solutions to retain students that dropout of school.

McMurrey (2014) indicated that approximately 3.5 million students in the United States dropout between the ages of 16 to 25. McMurrey continued to say that students that dropout do not have a bright future. McMurrey further explained that students who do not complete high school are “more likely than their peers to be unemployed, live in poverty, experience chronic poor health, depend on social services, and go to jail” (p.31).

Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2016) explained that in the United States approximately one-third of public secondary students dropout of school each year. According to the America’s Promise (2016), there are factors that cause students to leave school prior to graduation, which include family needs, financial obligations, childbirth, or illness. Other risk factors for dropping out are disciplinary policies, poor academic support, and daily attendance (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). Also, Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela stated that students who do not attend school on a regular basis will fall behind academically. Without suitable interventions or academic support, it is likely that these students may not complete high school.

Background

Featherston (2010) posited that one paramount concern of students dropping out of school is failing grades; when students receive failing grades, they often disengage in the learning process. Many students become dissatisfied with school, which could lead to discouragement from attending classes on a daily basis. Featherston also indicated that increased absences are usually a precursor to students dropping out. Featherston further identified transitioning to high school as a factor that impacts dropout rates. In the U.S., approximately 40% of students entering the ninth grade are not promoted the following year (Featherston, 2010). With the increasing number of high school dropouts, it is important to understand the probable causes for why students are not completing high school (Orpinas, Raczynski, Peters, Colman, & Bandalos, 2015). Factors such as poor academic performance and a lack of motivation skills prior to the transition years may indicate that students will eventually dropout.

Farnan, Hudis, and LaPlante (2014) suggested that to better understand the dropout crisis, teachers should collaborate in grade level teams to discuss the progress of individual students. In these collaborations, teachers should share information about students, address their academic needs, and develop ways to improve instruction for them (Farnan et al., 2014). The interaction of students and teachers is an important factor in understanding why students choose to complete high school or become dropouts (Farnan et al., 2014). Khalkhali, Sharifi, and Nikyar (2013) stated that teachers play an essential role in helping students succeed or fail. When teachers promote students' interests, students become motivated and usually achieve at higher levels in the classroom.

Khalkhali et al. also concluded that students who are motivated engage in learning at a higher level and are most likely to graduate.

Students who lack interest in learning become less motivated and may lose interest in completing high school. Usher and Kober (2012) reported that lack of motivation leads to disengagement, which the authors concluded is troubling, as success in high school should be a goal for every student. Murray and Kennedy-Lightsey (2013) indicated that once students feel a greater sense of belonging they become motivated and will make an effort to achieve their goals. Smith (2008) suggested that when educators nurture students and monitor their behaviors in a positive way, students become self-motivated. Researchers all over the world have examined the importance of motivating students in the classroom.

Regardless of their geographic location, many students do not complete high school. Jordan, Kostandini, and Mykerezi (2012) conducted a study about why students continue to dropout of high school in the United States. Jordan et al. also identified contributing factors, which are as follows: (a) individual and family characteristics, (b) grades not being up to standard, (c) low expectations, and (d) a lack of self-motivation. Jordan et al. further found that single parent households have a negative impact on graduation rates in the metro areas. For example, the association of single parents' income compared to a household of two parents' assets is likely to be lower. According to Flannery et al. (2014) males are less likely to graduate when compared to females. Family circumstances, thus, have a large influence on dropout rates.

Numerous researchers have addressed certain measures to assist in decreasing dropout rates. Flannery, Fenning, Kato, and McIntosh (2014) explained that engaging students in high school is imperative to avoid their dropping out of school. Flannery et al. also suggested that it is important to include students in classroom activities and discussions. Flannery et al. further stated that in high schools student suspension and expulsions are linked to student's dropouts and that discipline practices should be implemented to improve the dropout rates. Flannery et al. finally explained that there should be approaches that are prevention based. Two approaches such as the School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SW-PBIS) are aligned with high schools in focusing on developing an effective school climate to help decrease the dropout rate. Actively including students, while also finding ways to positively alter their behavior, could motivate students to remain in school.

I addressed four research questions to guide this investigation of the participant's perceptions and experiences that influenced their decision to dropout of high school. Understanding what support systems and instructional strategies are needed to deter students from dropping out is at the heart of this study. Data were gathered from high school dropouts who are in a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) program located in the Baldwin County school district in Alabama. The findings of my research can be used to develop strategies and programs to promote student retention and contribute to a decrease in the drop-out rate at all schools in the U.S. that are experiencing this issue.

Problem Statement

The problem is that students are dropping out of high school in a school district in Alabama at an increasing rate. Students who live at the poverty level do not always receive supportive parental involvement (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2014). Students who eventually dropout may experience teen pregnancy, have poor academic skills and low grades, and lack engagement in school (Haan et al., 2015).

All the high schools located in the school district in Alabama are experiencing a high percentage of student dropouts (see Figure 1). In this school district there was a significant increase in dropout rates from 2012-2013 (see Figure 1). In 2012, 95 students dropped out and the percentage of dropouts was 4%. In 2013, 103 students did not complete high school. Thus, there was an increase of 8% for dropouts in 2013. During the 2014 school year, the school district's dropout rate continued to increase in number, with 192 students leaving before graduating. In 2015, the drop-out rate consisted of 172 students. Nationwide, the dropout rate for the same year was 3.3% (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014).

Bridgeland (2010) offered that a dropout rate among high school students in the southern U.S. states continues to be a silent epidemic. This is due to the progress to remedy the situation being too slow and the individual, social, and economic impact continues to escalate. Improved communication between students, teachers, and parents can alleviate or lessen this epidemic. Bridgeland stated that there must be a connection between students' vision and classroom learning. Bridgeland also noted that dropping out of high school was a slow process of disengagement from school. To help prevent

the dropout crisis, Bridgeland noted that service-learning, opportunities for real-world learning, innovative teachers, and better communication between parents and school are missing links for high school completion. Dropping out of high school affects society because dropouts tend to rely on public assistance or earn less money (American Youth Policy, 2012). Therefore, it is essential to identify support systems that will encourage potential dropouts.

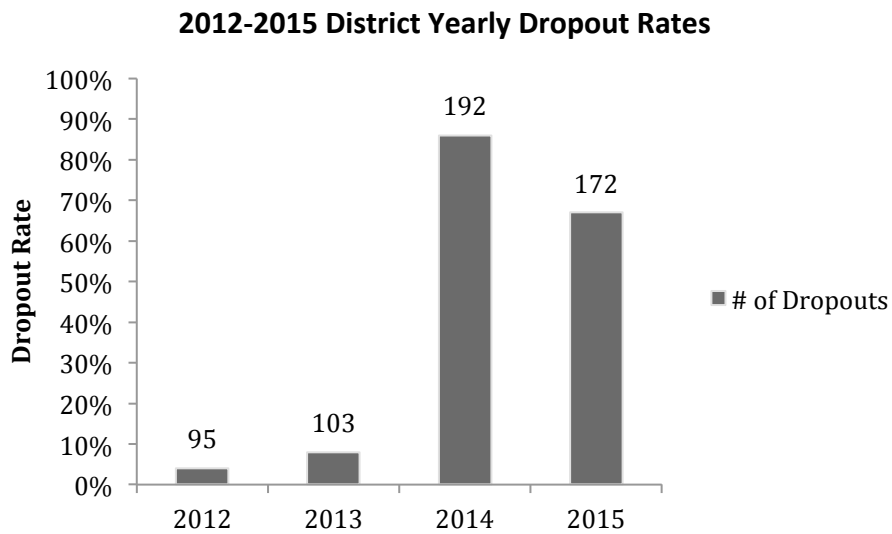


Figure 1. The School District's 2012-2015 yearly dropout rates.

Amos (2008) indicated that by 2012, one third of the students entering the ninth grade in the United States would drop out of high school before entering their next grade level. Also, Amos stated that about one third of the students who do not develop the proper study skills will not become successful in today's workplace. Messacar and Oreopoulos (2013) suggested that students who drop out of high school have to cope with challenges. Messacar et al. continued, noting that approximately 32% of dropouts live below the poverty level and 16% are without a job.

The school district selected for this study consisted of seven high schools at the time the data were collected. The high schools have a very diverse student body. The Baldwin County school district schools have a number of students who dropout of high school each year (see Table 1). In the 2014-2015 school year, the dropout rate for schools in the school district was as follows: (a) high school A, 31 dropouts (10%); (b) high school B, 8 dropouts (2%); (c) high school C, 5 dropouts (1%); (d) high school D, 51 dropouts (12%); (e) high school E, 17 dropouts (8%), (f) high school F, 52 dropouts (15%); and (g) high school G, 11 dropouts (4%). According to a county employee, an attendance supervisor, the school district's dropout rate continues to include a significant number of students who choose to leave their school environment for various reasons. High school F seemed to have the highest number of dropouts, followed by high school D. High school C showed the lowest percentage of dropouts during the 2014-2015 school year. A comparison of the dropout rate of all the schools in the district revealed that the high school dropout rates as a whole are increasing.

Table 1

2014-2015 Comparison of School District Dropout Rates

School	# of dropouts	Percentage per school
A	31	10
B	8	2
C	5	1
D	51	12

Table continues

2014-2015 Comparison of School Dropout Rates

E	17	8
F	52	15

Source: The foundation 2014-2015 dropout rates shown per high school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma and what they could have done differently to receive their high school diploma in a school district in Alabama.

Research Questions

The problem is that students are dropping out of high school at a high rate in a school district in Alabama. Family issues, lack of motivation, poverty, and poor academic performance are among the factors that affect some students' decision to complete high school; researchers have found (Bates, Saridaki, Kolovou, Mourlas, Brown, Burton, Battersby, Parsonage, & Yarnall, 2015). The intent of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma and what they could have done differently to receive their high school diploma. To address these issues, I focused on investigating four research questions as follows:

- Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma?

- Research Question 2: What supports from home do recent high school dropouts believe could have assisted them in completing high school and receiving their high school diploma?
- Research Question 3: What supports could teachers have provided to assist dropouts with high school completion?
- Research Question 4: What could students have done differently to complete high school and receive their high school diploma?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was centered on two theories developed by Bandura: (a) self-efficacy theory of 1997 and (b) social cognitive theory of 1986.

These two theories are explained below. Bandura (1997) posited that the self-efficacy theory functions as a motivation tool to improve an individual performance. People are most likely to model their beliefs after someone with whom they feel familiar, namely; teachers, parents, family members, caregivers, and community members (1997).

Bandura further stated that individuals who are socially persuaded have the power to overcome difficult situations. The social cognitive theory supports this qualitative study because individuals are proactively engaged in their own development and can largely determine the outcomes of their actions. I selected the two frameworks to examine support systems that possibly would encourage students to complete high school. In addition, Bandura's theories were helpful in understanding individuals that dropout.

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory is helpful in explaining how individuals express their feelings and reactions about a given situation. The theory was based on his

theory of self-efficacy that demonstrated the effect of learning and behavior. Bandura's self-efficacy theory provided a platform about what type of support systems would effectively assist the participants in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma. Bandura's social cognitive and self-efficacy theory described how participants' beliefs about themselves as learners in the classroom. Additionally, both self-efficacy and social learning theories were used in this study to understand what type of support systems could have prevented at-risk students from dropping out of school.

Bandura (1994) explained that people's attitudes about what they believe can be accomplished impacts their performance. People encourage themselves by establishing beliefs about what they can do with their skills under certain circumstances. Bandura also stated that self-efficacy determines the goals people set, the effort they put forth, and how strong they are if this ends in disappointment. Bandura further stated that those individuals become at risk students who may become victims of depression. This indicated that at risk students demonstrating feelings of inferiority may drop out of school.

It was suggested that two theories are linked together. Lefrancois (2000) suggested that the social cognitive theory serves as a transition for Bandura's theory and believed that the social learning theory is used in various ways, such as learning occurring through the involvement of social interaction. Hence, learning is affected by the environment, which may impact student behavior. Lefrancois also concluded that the social learning theory is a way of explaining human social learning through imitation,

using principles of operant conditioning while recognizing the importance of intellectual activities.

Bandura has provided a bit more about his theories. Bandura's (1997) educational theories focused on the lack of self-esteem of dropouts and how students viewed themselves. Many students who find academics challenging will not have confidence in their own abilities. For that reason, graduating from high school is not important to them. Students will become discouraged and often dropout of school. The benefits of learning were not evident to them; therefore, they could not apply learning to their future goals (Zimmerman, 2000). If the students' lack of self-esteem contributed to their behavioral issues and the success of learning, it could be an imperative area of focus (Bandura, 1994). Hence, self-efficacy theory and social learning theory provide a framework from which to study why and which students may make the decision to drop out of school.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative descriptive study was conducted with diverse students who attend a GED program because they dropped out of high school before earning a high school diploma. Descriptive studies entail description and all description entails interpretation. Sandelowski (2000) noted that understanding the facts is important to understand the phenomenon. The uniqueness of a descriptive study is that the descriptions always accurately convey events in their proper sequence. Sandelowski also noted that researchers doing qualitative descriptive studies often remain focused on the data. When conducting a descriptive study, researchers will find that this type of study oftentimes draw from the principles of naturalistic inquiry. Sandelowski further explained that

naturalistic inquiry is a form of commitment for researchers studying humans or animals in its natural state.

The focus of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school Diploma and what could the students have done differently in a school district in Alabama. Purposeful sampling was used as the sampling method and the criteria were based on students that were attending a GED program.

Definitions

Compulsory attendance: Every child between the age of six (6) and seventeen (17) years are required to attend public school, private school, church school for the entire school every year (Baldwin County Public School System, 2014, p.14).

Dropout prevention programs: The Dropout Prevention Program is to help motivate students so that they can complete high school. There are several innovative programs that have been implemented to warrant graduation. Some are as follows: (a) Credit Recovery, and (b) Academic Flexibility (State Department of Education, 2011).

General Equivalency Diploma (GED): A test that measures what students should know about reading, social studies, math, writing and science. If passing requirements are met, it is the equivalent of a high school diploma (Faulkner State Community College Adult Education, 2014).

High school dropout: An individual who does not complete 12th grade; nor does the individual receive a high school diploma (Hickman & Heinrich, 2011).

Support strategies or academic support: “A wide variety of instructional methods, educational services, or school resources provided to students in the effort to help them accelerate their learning progress, catch up with their peers, meet learning standards, or generally succeed in school” (Academic support, n.d., para. 1).

Support systems: “A network of facilities and people who interact and remain in informal communication for mutual assistance; a network that enables you to live in a certain style” (Support System, n.d., p. 1).

Assumptions

Certain assumptions were made in this qualitative descriptive study. First, the GED program was a representation of selected dropout population of high school students. Second, participants would voice their opinions openly and without bias. Lastly, throughout the interview process, the participants were honest and truthful about the events about their high school experience.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma and what could the students have done differently. The participants for this study consisted of ten students who did not complete high school for various reasons and they were 18 years or older and were in the process of earning their General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Although there were a large number of potential participants, only ten participants were selected.

In this study, themes were derived from semi-structured interviews and the data were analyzed using Hatch's (2002) nine-step typology.

Limitations

This qualitative descriptive study was conducted using purposeful sampling of diverse students who dropped out of high school. In order to gather data, I relied on the memory of each participant that dropped out of school. As a result, all participants shared their experiences about dropping out of school. To resolve limitations, I reflected on any personal bias regarding the high school dropout topic. To conclude, after each interview the recordings were transcribed, coded, and themes, patterns and links were noted.

Significance of the Study

High school dropout rates appear to be increasing and are a serious issue not only for the individual, the community, and the school system, but also society (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007). Students that drop out tend to have fewer employment options (National Education Association, 2008). Employed high school dropouts generally end up as workers with the lowest paying jobs compared to students who completed high school (Suh & Suh, 2007). According to the National Education Association (2008), students who do not obtain a diploma suffer because of their limited education. It was also noted that poor attendance is an indicator of students at risk of dropping out of school (2008). By listening to students' voices, teachers and parents will become aware of supports students may need to complete high school.

Summary

The risk of students dropping out of high school is high for students in a low socioeconomic status. For example, high school students with family income in the bottom quartile dropout of high school at a higher rate than students whose family income are at the top quartile (Lee & Staff, 2007). As a result, Lee and Staff found that school performance and a student's prior socioeconomic background has an effect on future career opportunities.

In this qualitative descriptive study, I investigated the perceptions of students that were 18 years or older that dropped out of high school before completing the 12th grade and are currently enrolled in a GED program in a school district in Alabama. It is vital that students develop academic skills and receive support from home and teachers in order to become productive citizens (Saddler, Tyler, Maldonado, Cleveland, & Thompson, 2011). Accordingly, it is important to discover supports that would encourage high school students to remain in school (2011). Saddler et al. also contended that educators should discover solutions to prevent students from dropping out of school.

The problem addressed in this qualitative descriptive study relates to a high percentage of students dropping out of high school. The participants for this study were students enrolled in a GED program in a school district in Alabama and selected using purposive sampling. Chapter 1 included an introduction, problem statement, purpose of the study, four research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance of the study and the summary to help guide this study. The background consisted of evidence of warning

signs for students who chose not to complete high school. Chapter 2 presents in-depth literature on high school dropouts, including factors contributing to students not completing school. Chapter 3 contains an in-depth look at the methodology that I used in this qualitative descriptive study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem is that students are dropping out of high schools in a school district in Alabama at a high rate. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma and what they could have done differently to receive their high school diploma.

Students who live at the poverty level do not receive supportive parental involvement (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2014). Blondal and Adalbjarnardottir explained the importance of quality parent-child relationships to decrease school dropouts. Teen pregnancy, poor academic skills, low grades, and lack of student engagement in school are some of the reasons why students drop out of school (Hann et al., 2015). Students are dropping out of high school every day and for the above reasons, students tend to drop out.

In this chapter, I present the literature strategy and the conceptual framework. The literature review includes nine topics: (a) positive influence, (b) family influences, (c) socioeconomic disparities, (d) academic achievement, (e) discipline issues, (f) school attendance (g) teen pregnancy, and (h) at-risk students. This chapter concludes with a summary of key points.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review is comprised of numerous journals and books which I obtained from databases. The databases I accessed included ERIC, EBSCO Host Research Databases, Google Scholar, Academic Search Premier, Education Research

Complete, and Walden Dissertations. Throughout this review, I focused on causes that contributed to students that dropout of high school. Peer-reviewed articles published within the past 5 years were also included in this review. Some of the keywords I used when searching databases and the search engine were (a) *high school dropouts*, (b) *at-risk students*, (c) *dropout prevention*, (d) *social cognitive theory*, and (e) *self-efficacy*.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this study was centered on two theories, self-efficacy theory and social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura. The theory of self-efficacy is an instrument in this research used to help understand individuals who may become at risk of dropping out of school. The act of self-efficacy is considered an important factor as to how individuals perceived certain situations and their perception about their ability to attain goals. Bandura (1994) noted that the belief in self-efficacy assists people in setting their own goals. Although individuals in my study population had not completed high school, they did set a goal of successfully earning a high school diploma through a GED program. Bandura's social learning theory has been widely used in the field of education (Lent, 2016). Bandura's theory examined the perceptions of what type of support systems would encourage students to complete high school. Bandura (1977) stated that learning is extremely difficult when individuals have to rely on the outcome of their actions to direct them about what to do. With this in mind, self-efficacy and the social learning theories are perfectly linked this study about the lives of students.

The two theories were aligned with the four research questions. My review of past and current literature on high school dropouts provided insight on why students viewed themselves as dropouts. Zuilkowski and Betancourt (2014) believed that student dropout problems indicated that if parents are engaged in their child's education process, students are more likely to graduate. All interview questions were designed to uncover underlying causes for why my participants had dropped out of school and supports that would have been effective in helping them complete high school.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

This chapter is comprised of a literature review related to the phenomenon about students dropping out of high school. The literature relates to positive influence among teachers, family and friends, family influences, socioeconomic disparities, academic achievements, discipline issues, school attendance, teen pregnancy, and at-risk students. This current literature consists of information regarding the causes of why students do not complete high school and what support systems are needed to inspire high school completion.

Positive Influence among Family and Friends

According to Terry (2008), a lack of positive influence from families and friends are some factors why students drop out of high school. The qualitative study conducted by Terry was to understand whether families and friends influence high school students' decisions. In this study, the participants provided evidence regarding the effects of their home environment and peers, both in and out of school, of their decision to remain in school. Listening to the voices of students and having dialogue with them may lead to

changes in student behaviors. Terry identified six recommendations to promote change in students' attitudes and to encourage students to complete high school. These recommendations are (a) welcoming students and their family into the school setting, (b) making connections with parents by offering incentives to attend parent-teacher meetings, (c) having school counselors develop workshops for parents after school, (d) having school counselors provide support for students who are having interpersonal problems, (e) developing a student/teacher relationship, and (f) teaching and encouraging students to engage in positive interactions with other peers. Terry argued that families and friends should learn how to provide academic support in order to ensure academic success for students. Also, completing high school is influenced by the role that families and friends play in students' lives.

The research of Rackensperger (2012) supported that students from underprivileged backgrounds tend to dropout of school. Some students will succeed academically if there are engaging parents and families contributing to the success of students. In fact, Rackensperger found that students who are less motivated in the classroom, and lack parental support, are limited to opportunities in life. Parental influences in the lives of students are important to students who want to succeed. Positive parental influence can improve a student's accomplishments and have a significant impact on success throughout high school.

In agreement with Rackensperger, Eisenbach (2014) noted that teachers have the power to build or destroy a student's aspiration in completing high school. Teachers should consider using informative words to maintain students' sense of self-worth.

Eisenbach also reported that teachers want to see students achieve in the classroom. She stated that student achievement stems from having certain attributes within the classroom: (a) an atmosphere of respect and love for one another and one where students are (b) active, (c) excited to learn, and (d) engaged in learning.

Family Influences

Family influence is critical source when studying the issue of high school dropouts. Blondal and Adalbjarnardotti (2009) found that parental expectations play a significant role in their child's education setting. Four parental practices were noted to prevent school dropout: "(a) parental involvement in school activities, (b) parent-child communication about school, (c) parental supervision involving homework, and (d) parents' education aspiration for their child" (p. 743). Blondal and Adalbjarnardotti also believed that with parental involvement students would be able to succeed in school.

In a study to explore at risk students dropping out of school, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, Royer, and Joly (2006) highlighted the importance of family values. Fortin et al. explained that students that might dropout are individuals whose parents lead non-conventional lifestyles, such as having drugs in the home. Fortin et al. also stated that students whose parents have been separated are at- risk in dropping out of school. Further findings of why these students are at risk of dropping out were: (a) lack of communication between parent and student, (b) parental support from family members, and (c) time constraints to help with homework (p. 374).

Socioeconomic Disparities

There are socioeconomic disparities to consider. Brown and Rodriguez (2009) conducted a study on the cultural aspects of adolescents who fail to complete high school. The study included risk factors, which can be attributed to why some students drop out. Some of the risk factors include: (a) school-related disposition, (b) socioeconomic status, (c) language proficiency, and (d) individual characteristics. Brown and Rodriguez also found that factors contributing to students' progressive disengagement resulted from students' interaction concerning academic content, resentment toward each other, and lack of empathy among the staff.

Menzer and Hampel (2009) indicated that one dropout spent three years in the juvenile detention facility. Later, this individual moved to a day-treatment program designed for boys and girls with severe emotional disorders. Pregnancy resulted in another student to drop out. Further, a new mother did not attend summer school because she faced financial hardships, which limited her ability to advance in education. Bridgeland (2010) indicated that in order for teachers to reach unidentified students, what is being taught in the classroom must be more related to real life experiences for the students. Students must be able to explore and relate to real-world experiences through the teacher modeling in the classroom.

Numerous barriers contribute to dropout rates that can be correlated to a lack of social and emotional support, classrooms not being stimulating, and a lack of interest in school (Bridgeland et al., 2010). Bowers (2010) explained that student retention is one of the highest indicators dropping out of school. Other issues identified as affecting student

at-risk dropout rates include academic failure and family economic status. Knesting (2008) reported that some students left school because of the lack of respect and understanding between teacher and student. Additionally, a study by Lessard et al. (2008) indicated that behavior problems contributed to low performing students in high school. The researchers found that instability at home and a lack of student-teacher communication were factors contributing to the dropout problem in high schools. Bergeron, Chouinard, and Janosz's (2011) study found that there is a positive relationship regarding teacher to student relationships. Bergeron et al. also noted that to enhance students learning teachers' need special training to avoid negative relationships with their students. This study also emphasized teachers who demonstrated a positive and supportive relationship among students projected low dropout intentions among students.

Smaller schools can be a stepping-stone in creating closer teacher to student relationships. The classroom size creates a personal bond stimulated by a better sense of student engagement and confidence. Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam (2013) found that students learn challenging concepts and are able to comprehend more in smaller classroom settings. Oftentimes, teachers struggle to gain a positive relationship with students in the classroom. Establishing a positive relationship with a teacher could lead to positive social skills and show positive academic performance. This study indicated that students drop out of school for numerous reasons, and a contributing factor is disengagement in the learning process.

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is important because it help students develop a habit of achieving positive outcomes before graduating from high school. Whannell and Allen (2011) found that achievement and academic engagement might effect a dropout's decision to remain in school. As a result, dropout factors showed that the causes of the failure of students not completing high school were established by poor educational school experience. This factor may be difficult for students who demonstrate poor academic performance. For this reason, students feel disengaged which contributes to low academic achievement.

Also, aggressive behavior can be a factor. Beatriz et al. (2011) confirmed that students who show aggressive behaviors have shown greater likelihood for failure because of poor academic achievement. Beatriz et al. also determined that problem behaviors are associated with learning problems, poor academic performance, and an indicator of students dropping out. However, Haibo (2013) suggested that to strengthen academic achievement with students, teachers should be well trained.

Iachini, Buettner, Anderson-Butcher, and Reno (2013) found that the lack of student engagement and positive support from teachers hindered students' learning. Thus, students seem to learn at higher levels when they are more immersed in the process. In addition, when students are engaged they become successful learners. Iachini et al. also highlighted three frequent risk factors that contribute to students' low academic achievement: (a) family differences, (b) absence of parent/family commitment, and (c) behavioral and self-control encounters.

Discipline Issues

Discipline issues related to students exhibiting various types of behaviors. Finn, Fish, and Scott (2008) stated that when students misbehave in school, it can be damaging to the individual and decreases the students' chance of graduating. Misbehaving in school interrupts instruction, which makes it difficult for students to engage in learning. In fact, this type of behavior creates a negative atmosphere of discomfort among teachers and classroom peers. The researchers continued to say that alcohol and drugs have played a major factor in students' classroom behavior leading negative outcomes to physical aggression. Students exhibiting such outcomes would either provoke classroom fights, or may serve as a signal for some to not return to school. Finn et al. further affirmed that students with disciplinary issues are associated with poor school performance and are inclined to drop out of school. Laursen, Hafen, Kerr, and Stattin (2012) discussed the friendship of students who demonstrated similar behavior. Students who had less-accepted friends appeared to display patterns with antisocial behavior, and students who established positive social skills were accepted by their friends because of high status. Laursen et al. also found that students are influenced by their friends' behavior.

The absence of social support weighs heavily on students with behavior problems. Vitulano, Fite, and Rathert (2010) examined the influence of peer relationships in delinquency and impulsivity. One risk factor is contributed to students who are diagnosed with ADHD. The study indicated that students who are viewed as having ADHD experience peer rejection and demonstrate behavior problems in the classroom.

Students who demonstrate this pattern of behavior may become antisocial within their environment, which increases the risk of dropping out. On the other hand, some students may exhibit bad behaviors such as violent crime and rule breaking, influenced by peers. Also, it was noted that delinquency and impulsivity are related to each other.

School Attendance

President Obama's offered his position regarding the importance of school attendance laws in the United States. Maxwell (2012) reported that President Obama suggested that every student should be required to attend high school until graduation or until the age of eighteen. In fact, the possibility of increasing the required age in state laws sends a message to students and parents about the importance of staying in school. All states have polices on compulsory school attendance which students are expected to follow (Lundenburg, 2011). Lunenburg also examined the enforcement of compulsory school attendance laws within the public school system. He stated that students with excessive absences without proper cause will subject parents and students to legal ramifications based upon their state's compulsory attendance law.

A study showed the difference between low and high income families. Morrissey, Hutchison, and Winsler (2014) conducted a study on low-income families associated with whose children had poor school attendance. This study showed that there was a difference between low-income students and high-income students that are frequently late. Ensuring transportation and following up with students who are continuously absent or tardy may be a means of encouraging student attendance (2014). With that in mind, educators should be proactive in their efforts to support student attendance.

Attendance patterns as it relates to high school dropouts should be considered. Schoeneberger (2012) conducted a longitudinal study regarding attendance patterns and high school dropouts. Participants in the study were from an urban school district in the United States from various ethnic and economic backgrounds. Schoeneberger argued that diverse students of low economic status exhibited high absenteeism rates due to disengagement in learning. Students who were absent and disengaged in learning suffered academically in the classroom.

Absenteeism is another element to consider. Cook (2014) noted that approximately 7.5 million students did not attend school for at least one month during the school year. He went on to say that absenteeism has increased drop out rates tremendously. Cook also believed that this problem would improve if schools would do the following: (a) communicate with parents early and often about the importance of school, (b) assist teachers and administrators to find innovative techniques to motivate students, and (c) communicate with the students to determine the cause of chronic absenteeism. To increase school attendance, administrators and teachers should be supportive and connect with the students so that students can value education.

Teen Pregnancy

The impact of teen pregnancy in high school is often overlooked. Marcotte (2013) suggested that practically 660,000 American students drop out of school each year. This concern centers on schools providing little attention to teen pregnancy. Marcotte stated that administrators and teachers should understand how education could affect a teen mother. To address these issues, research has proven teens that are childbearing will

encounter negative consequences. Examples of consequences are: (a) annually, the costs for teen childbearing in the U.S. for taxpayers are approximately \$7.3 billion, and (b) adolescent girls who are childbearing have the potential to end up in a correction facility and/or the foster care system. Teen mothers are likely to dropout. They are likely to drop out high school and experience poverty compared to girls who complete their education (Tolma, Stoner, McCumber, Montella, Douglas, & Digney, 2014). These researchers believed that other factors teen mothers will encounter are health risks and economic outcomes. To help prevent these issues, future consequences should be addressed. The role of having a case management model may encourage high school completion. Case management programs are comprehensive school-based programs implemented for parenting teens and childbearing mothers. This program increases the opportunity for girls to become successful in academics and increase their chances of completing school.

At-Risk Students

At-risk students face many life-changing challenges concerning academic success. DeNisco (2013) explained the importance of education at an early age for low-income families, which would increase the graduation rate for at-risk students. Students who repeat a grade, exhibit behavior problems, and live among violence and poverty are identified as at-risk students. To prevent at-risk students from dropping out of high school, DeNisco also noted that dropout prevention programs are needed at an early age to increase graduation rates. For example, at-risk students who live in poverty enter school at a lower reading level compared to their middle class peers. A nationwide

intervention program called Reading Recovery, a program to teach children to read and write has been implemented for meeting the needs of struggling first graders. DeNisco further acknowledged that 80% of at-risk students reached their grade level before ending the program.

Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin, and Marcotte (2014) suggested that 40% of high school students are at risk of dropping out of high school before earning a high school diploma. Some students are from underprivileged families, and exhibit low academic achievement scores that contribute to them not completing high school. To improve the graduation rate of at-risk students, prevention approaches should be taken into consideration. One approach would be to establish a positive relationship among teacher-student, parents and peers. Lessard et al. also suggested that guidance counselors can influence the lives of at-risk students. Counselors can assist students by identifying their values, interests and beliefs concerning their life plan. Teachers can be of assistance by building a relationship among students to help stimulate learning. As educators, we should seek available opportunities to meet the needs of at-risk students.

Summary and Conclusions

Students are dropping out of high school at an alarming rate in a school district in Alabama. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma, what supports from home do recent high school dropouts believe could have assisted them to complete high school, what supports could teachers have provided to assist dropouts with high

school completion, and what could the student have done differently to receive their high school diploma. Unfortunately, once some at-risk students reach the legal dropout age they drop out and never return to high school. Dropping out can negatively impact individuals in various ways such as poorer health, face higher juvenile crime rates and poverty levels. In addition, dropouts are more likely to require public assistance. Royal and Lamport (2012) explained that dropouts have existed since the institution of high school but were not a prominent issue until the 1960s. Unfortunately, a large array of student attitudes, behaviors, and aspects of educational performance were factors contributing to this common cause.

Education is an essential component of a productive society. Students who are at-risk of dropping out of high school do not understand the benefits of earning a high school diploma, and the knowledge they can use and develop throughout their lives. School must incorporate support strategies to help students remain in school. At the Foundation, students are not completing high school and it is imperative that educators understand how to decrease this phenomenon. Rumberger (2011) emphasized that there is a reason that students. Rumberger explained that many of them show patterns such as failing grades, disruptive behavior and other factors. In addition, Rumberger indicated that dropping out of high school is more of a process than an event. Solutions must be put into place to increase high school completion.

This chapter provided factors leading to students dropping out of high school and support strategies to decrease the dropout rate. Chapter 3 will consist of an introduction, research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology and design. Also, the

data collection, data analysis plan, forms of protective measures for participants, summary, and conclusion.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma and what they could have done differently to receive their high school diploma in a school district in Alabama. In the certain areas of this chapter, I provide a description of the research method I used in this study. The research design, rationale, and the role of the researcher are also described. In addition, I described the participants, instrumentation and procedures for recruitment. In Chapter 3, I also include the data collection and the data analysis plans. Issues of trustworthiness and the ethical procedures I used are also included. The end of the chapter includes a summary of key points.

Research Design and Rationale

Design

Yin (2011) explained that qualitative research embodies situations about people lives. Creswell (2009) described qualitative research as a journey to understanding the meaning people assign to human problems. In conducting this qualitative descriptive study, I wanted to understand why students dropped out of school and what strategies may have assisted them in remaining in school to acquire a high school diploma.

Rationale

In order to provide a rich holistic account of the study phenomenon, I used a qualitative descriptive design. A mixed methods study is defined as one in which a

researchers collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data as part of one study (Creswell, 2009). Creswell noted that mixed methods require the collection of quantitative and qualitative research. I did not plan to collect quantitative data; therefore, a qualitative descriptive study was the appropriate design for this study. The use of mixed methods would not have allowed me to obtain a deeper understanding of my study problem.

A qualitative descriptive study design allowed me to collect information for the purpose of understanding the experiences of a selected group. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, I was able to gather data to answer the research questions and obtain personal insight from students who did not receive a high school diploma. In this study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 GED students.

Phenomena

Students are dropping out of high school. Students who live at the poverty level do not always receive supportive parental involvement (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2014). Students living at the poverty level may experience teen pregnancy, have poor academic skills and low-grades, and lack student engagement in school (Haan et al., 2015). The school district in Alabama has a high percentage of student dropouts prior to graduation (see Figure 1). From 2012–2013, there was a significant increase in dropout rates in the school district (see Figure 1). In 2012, 95 students dropped out and the percentage of dropouts was 4%. In 2013, 103 students did not complete high school, reflecting an increase of 8% in the number of dropouts. During the 2014 school year, the high school dropout rate continued to increase with 192 students leaving before

graduating. In 2015, the dropout number consisted of 172 students. Nationwide, the dropout rate for the same year was 3.3% (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014).

Research Questions

The four research questions that guided this study and provided insights for solutions were as follows:

- RQ1: What are the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma?
- RQ2: What supports from home do recent high school dropouts believe could have assisted them in completing high school and receiving their high school diploma?
- RQ3: What supports could teachers have provided to assist dropouts with high school completion?
- RQ4: What could the student have done differently to complete high school and receive their high school diploma?

Role of the Researcher

Currently, I am a 5th grade gifted education specialist at an intermediate school located in a school district in Alabama. I have served in this position for 21 years, which has allowed me to build and uphold a positive working relationship with students and faculty members. The participants in this study were individuals with whom I had no relationship. The connection between the researcher and the participants should be built with respect and trust (Nolen & Talbert, 2011). As explained by Nolen and Talbert

(2011), trustworthiness is strengthened by an honest and informative account of how the researcher interacts with the participant.

Glesne (2011) stated that a researcher is someone that has a curiosity that can be nourished from the participants. Glesne also noted two principles for qualitative researchers: (a) the researcher should pay attention and listen carefully to what is being said during the interviews and (b) the researcher is expected to approach the participants through conversations and ask probing questions. After greeting each participant, I sat face-to-face with each participant so that we could see and hear each other. I reminded the participants again of their right to withdraw from this study. If the participant was still willing to take part in the interview, I proceeded with conducting a one-on-one interview.

Methodology

Participant Selection

I purposefully selected 10 participants who met specific inclusion criteria. These criteria included the following: (a) the participants must be 18 years old and older and have not completed high school and (b) participants must be enrolled in GED program in a school district in Alabama. Baker and Edwards (2012) recommended a sample size between eight to 10 participants for a research case study. I obtained permission to conduct my research study from the director of the GED program. The director was aware that the participation would be voluntary. Flyers were presented, which included my contact information and requested participants' name, age, gender, phone number(s), physical address, and e-mail address. Once the potential participants contacted me, a

face-to-face meeting was held to explain my research study. The participants who voluntarily agreed to participate were informed of their rights to withdraw during the study. In addition, a consent form was given to each participant to sign before the research study was initiated.

Instrumentation

The data collection instruments for this qualitative descriptive study were based on an interview protocol, audio-taping and note-taking. King and Horrocks (2010) noted that interviews allow the researcher to observe both verbal and non-verbal cues, and document in transcribed material. This descriptive study addressed four research questions (Appendix A). I gained an understanding about the perceptions of recent high school dropouts and support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma, and what could the students have done differently to complete high school and receive their high school diploma.

Eleven interview questions were presented to ten participants. Interview questions were developed to address students' perceptions on why they dropped out of high school and what support systems could have been used to help them graduate. The interview questions were open ended and allowed each student to elaborate and voice his or her opinions. The use of semi-structured and open-ended questions enabled me to collect rich, thick and in-depth data from each participant. A copy of the interview questions can be found in the appendices (see Appendix A).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I recruited ten participants from the GED Program in a school district in Alabama. The director and I communicated weekly. Therefore, he was well aware of the participants' participation. During my first initial visit with the director, flyers were placed in a visible area so that all students were able to view them. The flyers were created to invite students who are earning their GED to participate in my study. Ten participants voluntarily agreed and were selected. They were contacted individually for an initial interview.

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit ten participants from the GED program for this study. Merriam (2009) stated that a researcher can use purposeful sampling to help understand, discover and gain insight into meaningful situations. Utilizing purposeful sampling, the intent was to better understand the perceptions of students who did not complete high school and what supports would be effective in order to reduce the dropout rate. Purposeful sampling enabled me to develop a detailed understanding from each individual because the participants were readily available and met the selection criteria.

I conducted all of the initial interviews in a private setting. The semi-structure interviews were held in the following: (a) local public library and (b) Adult Education Building. Ten interviews were conducted within two-three weeks. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. To maintain confidentiality, all of the participants were given pseudonyms. The participants were asked a total of eleven interview questions and each interview was a one-phase process. There was no need for a follow-up interview.

Immediately following each interview, I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews word-for-word and provided each participant a copy to read in order to confirm the transcription was accurate.

Data Analysis Plan

According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtler (2010, p. 180), researchers should follow seven steps in performing data analysis:

1. prepare and organize the data,
2. review and explore the data,
3. code data into categories.
4. construct thick descriptions of people, places and activities.
5. build themes and test hypothesis.
6. assign each participant a pseudonym, and
7. report and interpret the data.

Once the data were recorded and transcribed, I established themes for this qualitative study. Glesne (2011) noted that in qualitative research coding distinguishes relationships between participant responses. Therefore, I used descriptive words and phrases to sort, define and categorize the data throughout the coding process.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness of this qualitative research study, I allowed each participant to view the draft findings in order to allow each to determine if their own data used in the findings was true to their intent and meaning. Also, I maintained objectivity in the data collection and analysis process. Trustworthiness in qualitative research is

confirming that the source of data supported the researcher findings. Several attributes were established and recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as to the trustworthiness of data as follows: (a) credibility, (b) dependability, and (c) confirmability. In this qualitative descriptive study, credibility was established by confidence in the truth of the findings and by explaining the purpose of this study to the ten participants and allowing each to ask questions. Member checking allowed the participants the opportunity to confirm or disconfirm the written interpretation of their data that is presented (Glesne, 2011). Therefore, I used member checking to build trust and to eliminate the thought of any potential hidden agendas with participants. I did this by transcribing the interviews and had the participants review the transcripts. Next, I sent the findings to the participants for member checking. This qualitative descriptive study revealed that there were no discrepancy case(s) pertaining to data provided by the participants.

Ethical Procedures

This qualitative descriptive study was guided by the ethical guidelines approved by Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB). Lodico et al. (2010) suggested that regardless of the type of study a researcher is conducting, ethics must be taken into consideration. Creswell (2009) noted that when conducting research, if any ethical dilemmas are found, they must be addressed. To alleviate dilemmas, a disclaimer was signed by each participant (see Appendix C). The disclaimer explained the participants' right to withdraw from the study at anytime and the assurance that no harm was intended. Creswell also noted that the researcher should develop a trust with the participant. To

further ensure ethical protection and confidentiality, each participant were assigned an alpha code and a pseudonym.

Seidman (2012) stated that it is paramount to build a researcher to participant relationship to facilitate communication. Positive communication promotes unity among the researcher-participant interview process. Once I obtained approval to conduct the study from Walden Institutional Review Board, information was sent to the college requesting approval for my study. My IRB approval number for this study was 06-02-16-0276164. I scheduled a time to meet with students at the local junior college to present my proposed study and invited students to participate in the study. Creswell (2009) explained that researchers should develop an Informed Consent Form for each participant to sign before engaging participants in the research. For students who agreed to participate in the study, individual meetings were scheduled to obtain a signed Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C). To avoid coercion, participants were given sufficient time to review the Informed Consent Form and had the opportunity to ask questions prior to agreeing to participate in this study. Once participants signed the form, a scheduled time through email or phone was established for individual interviews. Before starting the interviews, I introduced myself and once the interviews were completed I transcribed verbatim the interviews from audiotapes. All participants were asked to review the transcripts for reliability and accuracy.

Summary

Chapter 3 included an introduction, research questions, and the methodology that I used in my study. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand

the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma, what supports from home do recent high school dropouts believe could have assisted them to complete high school, what supports could teachers have provided to assist dropouts with high school completion, and what could the student have done differently to receive their high school diploma. Chapter 3 included an introduction, research design and rationale, role of the researcher and the methodology that I used in my study. Included in this chapter was the design I used to conduct my study. In addition, this chapter included a description of the data collection instruments, procedures for recruitment, data collection, and the data analysis. Finally, this chapter included trustworthiness and an explanation of ethical procedures that I followed to conduct this study. Results are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 also includes an introduction, description of the setting, procedures for data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and a summary.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma and what they could have done differently to receive their high school diploma. Chapter 4 includes my study results and evidence of trustworthiness. In the conclusion of the chapter, I restated the key points and provided a transition to Chapter 5.

Four themes emerged from the coded interviews:

- 1) support systems
- 2) support systems from home
- 3) support systems from teachers
- 4) making my own choices, whether good or bad.

In reporting results in this chapter, I provided tables in which I have aligned participants' responses to the interview questions. The tables are accompanied by a narrative description. I assigned pseudonym names to maintain confidentiality and to protect individual's identity. Participants' gender, age, and ethnicity are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Participants' Gender, Age, and Ethnicity

Participants	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Nannie	Female	20	Caucasian
Gus	Male	26	African American
Sande	Female	28	African American
Pamela	Female	19	Hispanic
Roddy	Male	42	Hispanic
Park	Male	19	Caucasian
Wynny	Male	19	Caucasian
Dalis	Female	19	African American
Janeva	Female	44	African American
Neddy	Female	42	Caucasian

Note. I obtained these data from the adult education director at the study site in August 2016.

Setting

The setting selected for this study was a GED program in a school district in Alabama. Students enrolled at this site were pursuing their high school diploma by completing GED requirements after having dropped out of high school.

Data Collection

I collected data in this study from 10 participants by using purposeful sampling. These interviews served as the source of data for this descriptive study. A qualitative descriptive study is used by researchers to collect detailed information using a variety of data collection methods over a certain period of time (Creswell, 2009). I initiated data collection by seeking participants who were eligible to receive a GED diploma from a school district in Alabama. I spoke with the director and asked permission to post flyers and speak to the students that dropped out of high school and are currently in the GED program. I posted flyers with my contact information in the Adult Education Building and gave each participant their own personal copy. The invitation to participate included questions about demographic information such as participants' names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. I made initial contact with prospective participants via phone and e-mail and by being present at the Adult Education Building during regular, scheduled hours.

An interview protocol approach with 11 questions was used for each semi-structured interview. All questions were open-ended and recorded, and each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Prior to conducting interviews, I followed these procedures:

- 1) restated the purpose of the study with each participant
- (2) reviewed the consent form
- (3) informed participants that all pertinent information would be protected and held in confidence.

(4) stated that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time.

During the month of July, I conducted semi-structured interviews with all the selected participants. I greeted each participant with a pleasant smile and informed them that I would be using my cell phone and an audio recorder throughout the interview process. Four of the initial visits were accomplished in a private setting at the Adult Education Building. The building was open from 4:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m., 2 days a week. The initial visits were performed on different days because of the participants work schedule. Two participants were interviewed on Tuesday and two more Wednesday. The remaining six participants and I mutually agreed to meet at the public library for their initial visit. Prior to meeting at the library, I reserved a quiet place for the initial interviews. I believe that the interviews went well and that the participants were eager to share their responses to the interview questions.

Data Analysis

Ten participants answered a total of 11 interview questions. The participants did not receive a copy of the questions prior to the interview. All of the interview questions were asked exactly as written.

The data analysis were prepared, gathered, and transcribed verbatim from participant interviews immediately after each interview. I decided to seek an editor within my school system and chose someone who has earned a doctoral degree within the last five years. I hired an editor who assisted me with significant improvements with my grammar and writing style. Transcription of the audio-recorded interviews was used as a

vital element of data collection. Glesne (2011) noted that the transcription should occur immediately after the interview. The interview data were transcribed in relation to each research question. Data were reviewed and explored numerous times to ensure enough data had been collected. Through the initial review, I was able to capture the important aspects of the data. During this process, some of the codes appeared to be redundant and were joined or split. This approach allowed me to discover personal experiences of each participant and to gain an understanding of each participant's perspective as to why he or she did not complete high school.

Merriam (2009) explained the importance of using categories and codes to report data. I coded data by first creating a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet consisted of colored highlights to distinguish labeled words and short phrases. Coding schemes used in this study included underlining, highlighting, circling, or coloring rich quotes from participants. Coding data in qualitative research consists of tagging or labeling the descriptive information the researcher has collected during the study (Basit, 2014). Using a coding structure enabled me to condense the data sets into smaller analyzable units through the creation of categories and concepts derived from the data. Data will be stored in a securely locked cabinet located in my home for a period of five years.

Hatch (2002) noted that data analysis is "a systematic search for meaning" (p. 148). Two types of qualitative analysis in research are typological and inductive analyses. By using typological analysis, I was able to analyze participants' data by sorting and coding information into different categories. Patton (2005) stated that

inductive analysis derives from and interlocks with patterns and themes. As the result of reviewing and exploring the data, I identified four themes:

- 1) support systems
- 2) support systems from home
- 3) support systems from teachers
- 4) making my own choices, whether good or bad.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma?

When asked about their educational experiences, all of the participants reported that they “dropped out” or “quit school” for a variety of reasons –change in program, family responsibilities, lost interest, or to get a job. Seven of the 10 participants said that friends and classmates had no influence on the decision to drop out. Participants mentioned more lessons/homework, closer check by the teacher, more music, individual tutor, or counseling may have kept them in school. Only three participants indicted that a teacher or coach wanted them to stay in school, others commented that teachers contributed to their dropping out by not caring or actually telling them to quit.

Table 3

Research Q1 with interview questions and participant responses

Participants	Interview Q1: Educational Experience	Interview Q2: Influences by friends and classmates	Interview Q3: Programs offered to assist	Interview Q4: Teachers contribution to you dropping out
Nannie	Dropped out in senior year due to change in program	No influence	Resource room and benefits I could have used but didn't.	Stayed on top of me
Gus	Lost interest and dropped out in the 12 th grade.	No influence	More lessons and homework would have helped me at test time.	Wanted me to stay
Sande	Dropped out in the 12 th grade.	No influence	Teachers should have checked on me.	Didn't care
Pamela	Quit school in grade 12 due to family responsibilities.	Gangs, guns and violence in my neighborhood	Music programs would have kept me in school.	Didn't care
Roddy	Quit in grade 11 to go get a job.	Friends said I was stupid to quit school.	I would have needed my own	Coaches wanted me to stay because I'm good in sports.
Park	Dropped out in 12 th grade.	I was stubborn	More time with counseling would	Dropping out would be the best thing.
Wynny	Quit school during my senior year	No influence	It was me being lazy.	Happy
Dalis	Dropped out in 11 th grade	No influence	It was more of a "me" thing.	Told me to earn a GED
Janeva	Dropped out in 8 th grade	No influence	None	Didn't have anything to say
Neddy	Quit school in grade 8	No influence	Didn't try to help	Told me to quit

Theme 1: Support Systems

Theme one addressed the first research question:

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma?

The findings for this theme were related to the following interview questions:

Interview question one sought student responses to their educational experiences. Six participants indicated that they quit high school in the 12th grade, two dropped out in the 11th grade and two dropped out as early as the 8th grade. Also, seven students said that their friends had no influence on their decision to drop out of high school. In addition, Pamela suggested that “gangs, guns and violence in my neighborhood” contributed to dropping out. Roddy mentioned that friends said “I was stupid to quit school”, and Park explained that “I was stubborn”.

Interview question two sought students responses to influences by friends and classmates. Nannie said that “there was a resource room and benefits that I could have used but didn’t”. Gus offered that “more lessons and homework would have helped me at test time”. Sande stated that “teachers should have checked on me”. Pamela indicated that “music programs would have kept me in school”. Roddy explained that “I would have needed my own tutor”. Park suggested that “more time with counseling would have helped”. Wynny said that “it was me being lazy”. Dalis explained that “it was more of a “me” thing”. Neddy said that “friends and classmates didn’t try to help”.

Interview question three sought responses to programs offered to assist. Each participant shared something different. For example, Nannie said “resource room and benefits I could have used but didn’t”. Gus explained that “more lessons and homework would have helped me at test time”. Sande indicated that “teachers should have checked on me”. Pamela offered that “music programs would have kept me in school”. Roddy said “I would have needed my own tutor”. Park suggested that “more time with

counseling would have helped”. Wynny said “It was me being lazy”. Dalis explained that “it was more of a “me” thing”. Neddy offered that “didn’t try to help”.

Interview question four sought responses to teacher’s contributions to dropping out. Four students said that the teachers did not care, told me to quit, didn’t have anything to say, or dropping out would be the best thing. Nannie said that “the teacher stayed on top of me”. Gus explained that “the teacher wanted me to stay”. Roddy explained that “coaches wanted him to stay because he was good at sports”. Wynny said that “the teachers were happy”. Janeva said that “teachers did not have anything to say”. Dalis said that “the teachers said to earn a GED”. Research Question 2: What supports from home do recent high school dropouts believe could have assisted them in completing high school and receiving their diploma?

When asked about how parents could have been more motivating to their child to receive their high school diploma, eight of the participants felt that their parents could have done more to keep them from dropping out. Two participants reported that it was their decision to drop out. Seven participants reported that their parents provided no encouragement to stay in school and three other participants said that the family structure provided encouragement to succeed.

Table 4

Research Q2 with interview questions and participant responses

Participants	Interview Q1: What do you think your parents could have provided you with as far as motivating you to achieve your high school diploma?	Interview Q2: How did your childhood family structure impact your life as far as encouraging academics?
Nannie	Couldn't do anything	More attention was needed
Gus	My parents did all they could. It was my decision.	It was good. I wanted to do my own thing.
Sande	Mom could have been a little stronger	Not encouraging.
Pamela	Being on my side and keeping me focus.	My mom was on drugs. I didn't have a childhood.
Roddy	Mom was sick all the time and stepdad on the road.	They wanted me to go to college. I wanted to make money.
Park	My decision!	It made me want to succeed.
Wynny	Didn't put enough effort.	My parents were divorced.
Dalis	Showing me love and telling me I can do it!	Mom didn't really care.
Janeva	They could have made me go to school.	My mother dropped out in the 9 th grade.
Neddy	They could have made me go to school.	Not well!

Theme 2: Support Systems from Home

Theme two addressed the second research question: Research Question 2: What supports from home do recent high school dropouts believe could have assisted them in completing high school and receiving their diploma?

Data findings for this theme related to the responses from the following interview questions:

Interview question one sought responses for what do you think your parents could have provided you with as far as motivating you to achieve your high school diploma.

Nannie's explained that "her parents couldn't do anything". Gus said that "they did all they could". Park suggested that "they could have put in more effort". Sande said "my parents could have been a little stronger". Pamela indicated that "my parents could have been more on her side and kept her focused". Roddy explained that "my mother was sick all the time and his father was always on the road working". Janeva and Neddy indicated that their "parents should have made them go to school". Finally, Dalis said "my parents should have showed her love and telling me that I could do it".

Research Question 3:
What supports could teachers have provided to assist dropouts with high school completion?

When asked about what tutorial assistance was offered by teachers, five participants reported they did not receive help from teachers and five others felt that they did. Five participants felt that teachers didn't care if they dropped out of school and five participants mentioned the consequences of dropping out.

Table 5

Research Q3 with interview questions and participants responses

Participants	Interview Q1: What tutorial assistance was offered to you by your teachers?	Interview Q2: How did your teachers explain to you the consequences of dropping out of high school?
Nannie	One teacher gave me all of her free time	Told me some side effects
Gus	Informed me more about test taking	Said it's hard to find a job
Sande	None	Didn't care
Pamela	None	Tried to influence me not to drop out
Roddy	None	Said life would be a lot Harder
Park	After school programs and special ed teachers	Said it was my choice

Table continues

Table continues

Wynny	Online classes were offered	Didn't care
Dalis	I had one-on-one with some teachers	Said I couldn't get a good job
Janeva	None	Didn't care
Neddy	They didn't try to help	Told me to quit

Theme 3: Support Systems from Teachers

Theme 3 addressed the third research question:

Research Question 3: What supports could teachers have provided to assist dropouts with high school completion?

Data findings for this theme related to the responses from the following interview questions:

Interview question one sought responses to what tutorial assistance was offered to you by your teachers. Four student explained that teachers provided no support and one said they offered no help. Nannie said “a teacher gave her all her free time”. Gus stated that “a teacher informed me more about test taking”. Park said “a teacher spoke about after school programs and special education teachers”. Wynny explained that “online classes were offered”. Dalis mentioned that “there were one-on-one sessions with some teachers”. Research Question 4: What could the student have done differently to avoid dropping out of high school?

When asked about life's events that made it difficult to complete high school, three participants reported there were family issues. Five participants felt that they could

have done something more to complete school and one participant there was nothing they could have done. Seven participants didn't care about dropping out. Two participants were disappointed they dropped out. Six participants reported that they were not the type of student considered not to complete high school. Four other participants felt that they were considered to be students that would eventually drop out of high school.

Table 6

Research Q4 with interview questions and participant responses

Participants	Interview Q1: What events happened in your life to make it difficult for you to complete high school?	Interview Q2: How did your attitude affect your decision to drop	Interview Q3: Were you ever considered the type of student who probably would not complete high school? If so, what support did the school and/or teachers offer to help prevent you from dropping out?
Nannie	Could have buckled down and studied	I didn't understand the results	Yes! I felt that people looked at me and said he's not gonna make it.
Gus	Adjusted my attitude	Didn't care	No
Sande	Rather not say because of family issues	Didn't care	No! 3.3 GPA
Pamela	More stable home environment	Didn't care	No! 4.5 GPA
Roddy	Taken my medication and a stable home environment	Didn't care	No
Park	Nothing	Didn't care peers and teachers	Yes! Told to me by my
Wynny	Taken my medication	Didn't care	No
Dalis	Nothing because of family issues	Disappointed	No!
Janeva	Studied more	Didn't care	Yes!
Neddy	Family issues	Disappointed	Yes! None!

Theme 4: Making My Own Choices Whether Good or Bad

Theme four addressed the fourth research question:

Research Question 4: What could the student have done differently to avoid dropping out of high school?

Data findings for this theme related to the responses from the following interview questions.

Interview question one sought responses on what events happened in your life to make it difficult for you to complete high school. Roddy and Pamela stated they had a “stable home environment”. Sande did not offer anything because of family issues. Nannie said that “I could have buckled down” and Gus said “adjusted my attitude”. Wynny indicated “taken my medication”. Janeva suggested “to study more”.

Interview question two sought responses on how did your attitude affect your decision to drop out. Seven participants noted that they did not care. Neddy and Dalis said “disappointed”. Nanny explained that “I didn’t understand the results”.

Interview question three sought responses about being considered the type of student who probably would not complete high school? If so, what support did the school and/or teachers offer to help prevent you from dropping out. Six participants said “no”. Four participants said “yes”.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this qualitative descriptive study was based upon four constructs: (a) credibility (internal validity), (b) transferability (external validity), (c)

dependability (qualitative counterpart to reliability), and (d) confirmability (qualitative counterpart to objectivity, which includes reflexivity).

Credibility

Throughout the data collection process for this study, and to avoid my own bias, credibility was established by using member checking. I asked each participant to review the interview transcripts. Creswell (2009) referred to member checking as “rich and thick descriptions to reveal the findings” (p. 191).

Transferability

To improve the transferability of this study and because I am the one that judges transferability, I used rich, thick descriptions to make judgments about the similarity of the school, and other characteristics of the research site. “Transferability refers to the degree of similarity between the research site and other sites as judged by the reader” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 173). It is the interpretive equivalent of generalizability (Bitsch, 2005; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Bitsch (2005) explained that the “researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through ‘thick description’ and purposeful sampling” (p. 85). Also, Lodico stated that transferability is not whether the study includes a representative sample; it is how well the study has made it possible for readers to decide whether similar process will be at work in their own communities by understanding in depth how they occur at the research site.

Dependability

Dependability is about if one can track the procedures and process of data collection and being able to understand the data (Lodico et al., 2010). To improve the

dependability of this study, I explained how the participants were nurtured and how the interviews were structured. The following information was provided in the appendices: the interview questions (see Appendix A), Certificate of Completion for National Institutes of Humanities Web-Based Training Course, (see Appendix B), letters of intent to participate, (see Appendix C), and recruitment flyers, (see Appendix D). In addition, I maintained a researcher's log.

Confirmability

Merriam (2009) noted that confirmability could be used as a strategy for researchers in order to bring a unique perspective to the study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of an inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Confirmability is “concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer’s imaginations, but are clearly derived from the data” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392). Studies suggest that confirmability of qualitative inquiry is achieved through an audit trail, reflective journal and triangulation (Bowen, 2009; Koch, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the results of qualitative descriptive study. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma, what supports from home do recent high school dropouts believe could have assisted them to complete high school, what

supports could teachers have provided to assist dropouts with high school completion, and what could the student have done differently to receive their high school diploma. Ten participants from a GED program shared their life experiences as to dropping out of high school, and their support systems from home and teachers. Four themes emerged from the coded interviews of each participant. The four themes that emerged from the study were: 1) support systems, 2) support from home, 3) support systems from teachers, and 4) making my own choices whether good or bad. For this qualitative phase, I assigned pseudonym names to protect the anonymity of each participant.

The results of the data collected were supported by four research questions, which were the foundation of this qualitative study. Purposeful sampling served as a tool used to gather data related to this descriptive study. I collected data by audio recording and note taking to ensure the quality of having the accurate results. Research Question 1 referred to their educational experience, influences by friends and classmates, programs offered to assist, and teachers contributions to dropping out. Research Question 2 indicated what supports from home do recent high school dropouts believe could have assisted them in receiving a high school diploma. Research Question 3 examined the understanding what supports could teachers have provided to assist dropouts with high school completion. Research Question 4 asked what students could have done differently to avoid dropping out. In chapter 4, I also discussed evidence of trustworthiness in relation to four constructs: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Chapter 5 will include a description of the key findings from Chapter 4. In addition, the interpretation of the findings from each research question will be answered.

In Chapter 5, I will also describe the limitations of the study, recommendations for practice, implications for social change, and a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma, what supports from home recent high school dropouts believe could have assisted them to complete high school, what supports teachers could have provided to assist dropouts with high school completion, and what they student could have done differently to receive a high school diploma. Ten participants (six females and four males) who were enrolled in a GED program participated in the study.

Key Findings

A key finding for RQ1 was that all of the participants reported that they had “dropped out” or “quit school” for a variety of reasons, including a change in program, family responsibilities, lost of interest, or to getting a job. Also, a key finding for RQ2 was that participants reported feeling that their parents could have done more to keep them from dropping out. In addition, a key finding from RQ3, was that half of the participants felt they did not receive teacher’s support while others reported that they did receive help. Finally, a key finding from for RQ4 was that all but one participant felt they could have done something more to complete high school while one felt there was nothing they could have done.

Interpretation of the Findings

Interview questions were presented to students who dropped out of high school. The interview questions were designed to seek the students' perceptions of the regarding support systems and resources that would have motivated them to remain in high school to acquire their diploma. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma and what they could have done differently to receive their high school diploma. Finn (1989) noted that dropping out is the result of a long "process of disengagement" (p. 133). As discussed in Chapter 2, factors such as family and positive influences, socioeconomic disparities, academic achievement, discipline issues, school attendance, and teen pregnancy pose obstacles to high school completion (Terry, 2008; Blondal & Adalbjarnardoti, 2009; Whannell & Allen, 2011; Fin et al., 2008; Maxwell, 2012, and Marcotte, 2013). Researchers have studied innumerable support systems that are necessary for decreasing the dropout rate such as student-teacher relationships, building students' self-esteem and student involvement. Whannell and Allen (2011) noted that one support system to high school completion is the connection of student-teacher relationships. Finn (2008) stated that when teachers involve students in the learning process, this support system builds students self-esteem. In this study, I focused on 10 examined participants' and their thoughts, feelings, and experiences they encountered throughout high school. The interpretation of the findings of this qualitative descriptive research study supported the conceptual framework based on each research question.

Research Question 1

The first research question was:

What are the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma?

The majority of the participants indicated that they quit high school in the 12th grade, but others said they dropped out as early as 8th and 11th grades. Also, the majority of the participants said that their friends had no influence on their decision to drop out of high school. In addition, some participants mentioned that a variety of programs would have assisted them in high school completion. Finally, other participants stated their lack of participation to justify their actions. Student learning was not important; therefore some participants made wrong decisions such as dropping out of high school. Three participants said that their teachers wanted them to succeed and they showed demonstrated this desire by constantly communicating with participants. Furthermore, one participant reported being encouraged to stay in school because of the student's athletic abilities while some participants were told to quit and felt that teachers simply did not care. Several teachers knew the students were dropping out and displayed happiness. Some participants said their teachers seemed happy upon learning that the students would be dropping out.

Knesting-Lund (2013) suggested methods of support systems such as counseling or support groups for students' needs. Other support systems such as relationship building, communicating caring, motivation, and encouragement are essential for

building student, teacher and parent relationships could also be beneficial to students. According to Knesting-Lund, relationship building between a teacher and student can promote student learning. Supporting teachers has an empowering influence, and when students perceive themselves as being connected, or having a sense of belonging, they feel a positive relationship.

Relationship building is a connection between two or more individuals (Knesting-Lund, 2013). With that being said, “if a relationship is established or exists, some students may conference with teachers for support” (Knesting-Lund, 2013, p.1). In the study, several participants felt believed that having a positive adult relationship at school could have provided a support network, which would have encouraged them to earn a high school diploma.

When teachers’ display communication and show they care for the welfare of students; it can be vital for at-risk students. These support system behaviors revealed reinforcement to students that teachers are concerned about their future. One participant stated, “When I feel loved and that teachers care about me, I work harder to succeed in school”. Knesting-Lund (2013) also noted that students are woefully in need of caring, supportive adults in their lives. Therefore, establishing a positive school and family connection with students could reduce the high school dropout rate. Communicating and caring relationships between teacher and students is a great avenue for reaching high school goals.

Teachers with the ability to motivate students can inspire, challenge and stimulate student’s willingness to learn in the classroom. Knesting-Lund (2013) emphasized the

importance of teachers motivating and encouraging students throughout school. Because teachers can have an effect on students' self-confidence, they may impact their decisions related to dropping out of school. One participant emphasized that she dropped out because she was not motivated to do her best in the classroom. She continued to say that motivating and encouraging students to complete high school should be a positive support for all teachers to implement in school.

The findings in this study suggested that the teachers did not provide adequate opportunities for participants to succeed in high school. The findings from this study confirmed Bandura's theory (1994), which explains how children learn whether by observing, motivation, or imitating the behavior of others. Self-efficacy gives teachers the confidence to effectively develop a curriculum and respond to the social and emotional well-being of their students (Bandura, 2007). The findings of this study also showed that the form of positive relationships between teachers and student are important, and that strategies to improve teaching are needed if for the growth of high school completion rates are to increase.

Research Question 2

The second research question was: What supports from home do recent high school dropouts believe could have assisted them into completing high school and receiving their diploma?

A key finding was the lack of parental support. Several students reported that if they had parental support at home and at school, they would have chosen to complete high school completion would have been their choice. Also, some students mentioned

that their parents were very supportive, and encouraging and showed love wanted them to succeed. However, others made the decision to drop out on their own because of a lack of attention from their parents.

Lund (2014) believed stated that a lack of support from parents and family problems are important reasons why students are dropping out. Family support is one of the most important support systems for success and school completion (Lund, 2014) (CITE). Three participants indicated that they could have passed more classes and earned more credits if their parents had been more supportive of education. Not having the parental support caused them to exhibit poor attendance and academic failure. Based on these findings, I recommend that to reverse the epidemic of high school dropouts, school administrators provide networks to help build closer relationships between families would be a useful support system for schools to implement.

Another key finding was that students must put forth the effort to do their best in school. Without positive attitudes and communication, there is little chance of learning proficiently. In the study, a participant implied that throughout his high school term he did not show a good attitude. Hence, the student felt that his schoolteachers could have made provisions to help him cope with or alter his behavior. In a study they conducted, Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) conducted a study and found that after-school and summer programs lead to school success and work against the findings of early warning factors linked to dropping out of school. Durlak et al. concluded that after-school and summer programs are more likely to deter students from dropping out and give them a better chance of completing high school.

The findings in this study revealed the importance of Bandura's (1994) self-efficacy theory. Parental support provides a sense of worth and competence to the child, which enhances self-efficacy. Supportiveness from parents makes an individual develop a sense of identity and a sense of belonging. The findings in this study of parental validation warranted why students did not earn a high school diploma.

Research Question 3

Research question three was:

What supports could teachers have provided to assist dropouts with high school completion?

Several participants reported that their teachers did not offer any tutorial assistance and didn't seem to care. On the other hand, the majority stressed that their teachers expressed the consequences of dropping out and their teachers worked with them one-on-one, during their free time and with after school programs.

Bowen, Hopson, Rose, and Glennie (2012) indicated that reinforcement and support from teachers was found to be effective in promoting high school completion. One participant suggested that teachers should have been cognizant of the program he was taking towards earning high school credits. Educators' lack of information and inexperience hindered the individuals who are striving for success and caused him to fail. Therefore, in this particular occurrence, the teacher did not offer the necessary support for high school completion.

Medoff (2016) found that one positive realistic comment from a teacher can echo for years with students who struggle in school. When students feel a sense of value from

teachers the support builds closeness, warmth, and a positive teacher-student affect.

Blum and Jones (1993) believed that counselors should intervene by establishing small groups in the school and meet the needs of those who are in crisis by providing them with coping strategies. Teachers should be trained as mentors to adapt their teaching style for at-risk students. The mentors and student relationships could collectively involve monitoring student progress and tutoring.

The findings of this study supported the conceptual framework based on Bandura's (1994) self-efficacy theory. Bandura brought this theory into the forefront of education. Meaning, teachers should practice the self-efficacy theory within a behavior intervention plan (for example, modeling conversations and helping students' self-regulate conversations and behaviors. Behavior is self-directed and students behave in certain ways to reach goals). The findings of this study also pointed out that teachers should be dedicated to building high self-efficacy levels with every student by recognizing their behavior. In doing so, this will allow students to feel stronger teacher-student relationships and students will more than likely graduate from high school.

Research Question 4

Research question four was:

What could the student have done differently to avoid dropping out of high school?

Several participants reported that having a positive attitude and having a stable home environment would have prevented them from dropping out of high school. Two of the participants indicated that they were easily distracted from learning because they

were diagnosed as ADHD. The majority of the participant's attitude did not affect their decision to drop out. One participant was disappointed and another participant didn't realize what her life would be like without earning a high school diploma. Six out of the ten participants felt that they were not identified as the type of student who would be considered a drop out. The remaining four were told by their peers or teachers that they would not complete high school.

Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2014) highlighted that it is extremely important for high schools to implement structures and programs to meet students' developmental needs, social and academic needs. In doing so, this creates opportunities for students to experience success in school. Another small group of participants felt that if only they attended school more and received good grades life would be different. Hallinan (2008) concluded that students who like school demonstrate higher academic achievement. One way to improve academic outcomes is to increase students' attraction to school.

Absenteeism was seen as a roadblock for participants from high school completion, too. In order for students to be successful in school, it is essential for students to attend school regularly. Kearney and Graczyk (2014) explained that students who attend school on a regular basis can be successful. Hence, they were successful in achieving work-related skills and the ability to work with others to accomplish their goal. Participants found from later experience that attending school on a day-to-day basis had a major influence on their educational outcome.

Bandura's (1994) social learning theory supported the conceptual framework, which focused on the school experiences of ten high school dropouts. The findings

underscored the fact that Bandura's theory served as an explanation of how students learn when they are in social contexts. Students should avoid negative distractions that could hinder positive academic outcomes. It is therefore important for students develop positive attitudes and attend school on a regular basis in order to accomplish their goal.

Limitations of the Study

As I stated in Chapter 3, I am a 5th grade gifted education specialist and have served in this position for twenty-one years. My role as the researcher did not have any effect on the ten participants being interviewed. Throughout the interview process, I demonstrated friendliness, and remained unbiased. It was important to prioritize what questions were asked next so that there would be no awkward pauses throughout the interview. Although the interviews were in different settings, I do not feel that the participants were intimidated or influenced by the surroundings in any manner. Experiences were shared as to what contributed to them not completing high school. The participant responses were transcribed in order to determine any limitations.

Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted them in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma. Based on this study's findings, the following recommendations could assist in reducing the dropout rate in the Foundation.

Recommendations for Practice

1. *Encourage parent and child relationships.* Bubic and Tomic (2016) noted that

the role of parental involvement in children's school life represents a relevant contributor to students' academic achievements. Parents should always take an active role in their child's education. One pattern parents can develop to help reduce the dropout rate is for them to become more aware of their child's progress by checking grades regularly. Parents should establish a communication with the teacher so that they could be contacted if their child's grades are dropping. This way, if grades are not up to standard parents can become more involved and encourage learning. Another pattern is that parents can establish graduation as a priority. Parents will have to keep track of their child's credits throughout the school year. Family involvement is one of the most important contributors to school completion and high school success.

2. *Developing Positive Teacher-Student Relationships.* Caring, knowledgeable teachers can establish a climate of trust and support to prevent at-risk students from dropping out of school. Teachers should play the roles of a leader and mentor, explaining the concepts and acting as a motivator to every student (Dessoiff, 2009). Teachers can also help increase students' perceptions toward school by maintaining a positive classroom culture for learning. For example, teachers should make it clear to their students that they are there to help them achieve their dreams.

3. *Offering Students with Internal Support.* School counselors should be concerned about the well being of high school students. To help reduce the dropout rate, one support system counselors can use is conducting exit interviews. Contact students one to two weeks after dropping out and hold one-on-one conferences to help determine

whether or not their choice was a good decision. In addition, counselors should inform students of alternative school and programs, if they choose to return to high school.

4. *Clear Standards to help Improve Behavioral Issues.* Most discipline issues become behavior problems. This issue disrupts the learning of the rest of the class or the responsibilities of the teacher. To avoid such problems, teachers can address the problems that arise with interactions by being consistent, authentic, and fair. Venable (2009) noted that a means of lowering discipline issues in the classroom would be to set clear, precise standards. When setting clear standards, teachers will be able to incorporate a proactive approach for student behavior. Students are prepared for success when teacher expectations are clear. To decrease classroom behavior problems, teachers must create learning activities that generate student interest. Teachers should implement support systems such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which will create a positive culture in schools. In fact, PBIS helps prevent negative behavior from occurring in the classroom.

Recommendations for Further Research

The crisis of students dropping out of high school will continue to be a critical area of research for the anticipated future.

1. Further research needs to be conducted to help identify prevention programs that work for high school girls who may have these issues.
2. A quantitative casual-comparative study comparing the differences between race, gender, religion and students that drop out of high school should be conducted.

3. A quantitative correlational study seeking the relationship between race, gender, and religion between students that drop out of high school should be conducted.

Implications

Implications for Social Change

Several implications for positive social change in education emerged from this qualitative descriptive study. Social change involves the individual, family, educators, and the community creating a deeper understanding about the high cost of dropouts. McKee and Caldarella (2016) uncovered that when students drop out of high school there are negative results and implications for individuals and the society. For example, they are more likely to develop financial or support issues. In addition, they may become financial burdens to their communities, states, and nation. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2010) noted “that more than 12 million students who drop out of school could cost the nation about \$3 trillion.”

Individual. When students drop out of high school, this poses a negative impact on the society as a whole. Discovering causes as to why students do not complete high school is important, as this can help prevent every student from being left behind. The America’s Promise Alliance (2009) affirmed that individuals who do not complete high school receive less income than those who earn a high school diploma. Approximately 37% of dropouts are unable to maintain a job in the workplace (The America’s Promise Alliance, 2009). Ten individuals expressed their stories based on lived experiences and understanding of the social and educational aspects of the schooling process. If more of

these individuals graduate, many positive outcomes can transpire in the communities surrounding this Foundation.

Family. Sahin, Arseven, and Kiliç (2016) conducted a study and found that the lack of family care for students is a major factor for why students are not successfully graduating from high school. Some students lack parental support and the parental love, which may cause them to exhibit meaningless attitudes toward becoming a dropout. It was also observed that the children of families who do not have positive communication between each other, families who have no authority over their children, and have accepted the failure of their children show considerably high cases of absenteeism (Sahin et al., 2016). To assist in this effort, parental interaction with a child promotes positive behaviors. Social change would be generated when parents understand the factors, reasons and causes of parent-child relationships.

Organizational. Earning a high school diploma is free in this Foundation. The work of social change is a continuous process. Werblow, Urick, and Duesbery (2013) emphasized that tracking academic progress can impact some students at the expense of others. Therefore, it is important for educators to develop programs addressing the needs of at-risk students. If needs are addressed appropriately, there is a possibility for growth and an increase in graduation rates.

Society/Policy. Policy makers have emphasized the importance of improving high school graduation rates because school dropout is associated with various negative outcomes (Bjerk, 2012). To help identify student at-risk of dropping out teachers and/or administrators can create specific interventions, and implement relevant public policies to

increase graduation. The high school dropout rate is relevant to social change because understanding and focusing on the problems related to this phenomenon could lead to well-educated people who could generate positive contributions to society.

Implications for Methodology

Qualitative methods allow researcher participants to answer open-ended questions deciding on the content and descriptions of the response (Myers, 2009). Thus, it is essential that the researcher develop a clear understanding of the participants' perspectives. Throughout this qualitative descriptive study, the goal has been to obtain a clear understanding of the problem possibilities.

Implications for Practice

In an effort to reduce the dropout rate, preventive measures can be taken with the help of collected individuals such as teachers, parents, families and community members. It is important for collected individuals to become more involved in the segments for schools. In doing so, the diversity of parents and others can be valued resources in schools. The collective efforts of individuals can help reduce the dropout rate by establishing a variety of practices and programs in schools to help address students' strengths and needs.

Another implication for practice would certainly be for schools, families and community partnerships to establish support systems to help overcome the difficult challenges students are facing in today's society. Fall and Roberts (2012) noted that one-third of all public secondary students in the United States fail to graduate each year. The most important measure to be taken into consideration is the support of parents, teachers,

and stakeholders working together as one. It is imperative to explore non-threatening avenues, remain connection with students and continue ongoing collaboration and partnership between students and the school.

Conclusion

A rising number of high school students are dropping out of school. There are various reasons that many of them dropped out including: (1) teen pregnancy, (2) family issues, (3) teacher and school problems, (4) boredom or lack of interest, and (5) disciplinary issues or lack of discipline. The tragic costs of dropping out are enormous. DePaoli, Fox, Ingram, and Maushard (2015) stated many students fail to graduate or are not ready for college. To help lessen the dropout rate, teachers and leaders must understand the importance of teacher-student support for academic success of students who are at-risk of dropping out of school.

If parents, teachers, administrators, stakeholders, and community leaders take the initiative of showing acceptance, building connections, and providing community resources that are available to all students, this may help reduce the dropout rate. Additionally, teachers could participate in professional development workshops to help learn innovative solutions for those who are having difficulties in academics, and collaborate with other teachers on implementing differentiated instruction to build a better rapport with at-risk students. It will take a combined effort of all those involved to help combat the student dropout rate and to improve the number of students who wants to successfully complete high school.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of recent high school dropouts about support systems that could have assisted students in completing the requirements to receive a high school diploma?

1. Please describe your educational experiences.
2. How did your friends and/or classmates influence your decision to drop out of school?
3. What type of programs could the school have offered to assist you in completing high school?
4. How did your teachers contribute to your decision to drop out?

Research Question 2: What supports from home do recent high school dropouts believe could have assisted them in completing high school and receiving their high school diploma?

5. What do you think your parents could have provided you with as far as motivating you to achieve your high school diploma?
6. How did your childhood family structure impact your life as far as encouraging academics?

Research Question 3: What supports could teachers have provided to assist dropouts with high school completion?

7. What tutorial assistance was offered to you by your teachers?
8. How did your teachers explain to you the consequences of dropping out of high school?

Research Question 4: What could the student have done differently to avoid dropping out of high school?

9. What events happened in your life to make it difficult for you to complete high school?

10. How did your attitude affect your decision to drop out?

11. Were you ever considered as the type of student who probably would not complete high school? If so, what support did the school and/or teachers offer to help prevent you from dropping out?

Appendix B: Certificate of Completion for National Institutes of Humanities (NIH)

Web-Based Training Course



Appendix C: Letter of Intent to Participate

Dear Participant:

You are invited to take part in a doctoral research study, and the purpose is to explore the perceptions of students who dropped out of high school before completing the 12th grade. The title of this study is “GED Learners’ Perceptions of Support Systems for Encouraging High School Completion.” Frances Campbell, a doctoral student attending Walden University, is conducting this study.

I am requesting your participation in a 30 to 60 minute individual interview. The interview will be audio recorded. The questions I will ask during the interview will relate to your experiences during high school. Any information you provide will be kept confidential. I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of this study

Please respond by calling or emailing me this invitation, if you are willing to participate in my study. For interested participants, I will select the first ten participants and will need demographic data from each of you. The demographic data will consist of the following:

- Your Name
- Address
- Phone Number(s)
- Email Address
- Age
- Gender

If you are selected to participate in this study, I will meet with you individually to explain the procedures before do decide to participate. If you decide to participate, a consent form will be given to you to sign as an indication of your willingness to participate in this study. I appreciate your support in this effort. If you have any concerns or questions, please contact me at the phone number or email address provided below.

Frances L. Campbell Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

U.S. GED Learners' Perceptions of Support Systems for Encouraging High School Completion



Frances Campbell, a doctoral student at Walden University, is conducting a research study on “GED Learner’s Perceptions of Support Systems for Encouraging High School Completion.” The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of students who dropped out of high school before completing the 12th grade. Dropping out of high school is a concern for teachers, parents, and communities.

If you are interested in taking advantage of the opportunity to express your perception on this topic, you may contact Frances Campbell at:

Requirements for participation:

1. Student’s 18 years old and older who did not complete high school.
2. Student’s enrolled in the GED program in a school district in Alabama.

Interview Process:

1. 30 – 60 minutes
2. The interview will take place in a quiet, private setting scheduled and agreed upon with the participant.

Your name and responses will be kept confidential!

By: Frances Campbell