Qualitative Analysis of the Experience of Minnesota Somali Parents with Students with Disabilities in Distance Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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By

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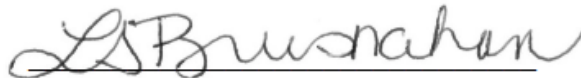
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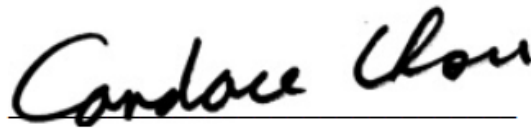
We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality.

We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions

required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative analysis study uses phenomenology methodology to explore the experiences of Somali parents with K-12 students with special needs in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research has shown that all K-12 students faced challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning (Pozas et al., 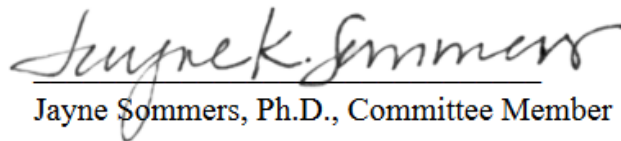2021, p. 35). However, these challenges' impact on specific communities and how they dealt with them was unknown. The use of interview data from parents with special needs children makes a case for addressing the issues within online learning. Access and inclusion for students with special needs in K-12 education have an implicit bias, specifically in marginalized communities during times of crisis. This phenomenological study details the strength and sacrifices parents with children with special needs endured and how they navigated the difficulties of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this study explores the personal stories of Somali parents with K-12 children and how they navigated and made meaning of their new roles and responsibilities during COVID-19 distance learning. Finally, by using disability and stigma theories to unpack challenges and negative experiences, this study recommends that parents, practitioners, and policymakers acknowledge that online learning is a mutual responsibility between home and school. Online learning calls for a greater collaborative approach and understanding of what is needed to make distance learning effective for students with special needs and all students.

Keywords: distance learning; online learning; virtual learning; Somali parents; students with disabilities, students with special needs, and k-12 education.

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DEDICATIONS

This study is dedicated to my mother, Hawo Omar, and my father, Abdikarim Hassan, who were servant leaders in their own way, fighting for social justice and championing self-reliance in our communities. Also, I dedicate this study to my lovely kids, Hamsa, Hanan, Salman, and Abdullahi. Finally, I dedicate this study to all the parents who have experienced challenges and difficulties in distance learning in K-12 education because of their special needs children.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This research study focuses on the Somali parent's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota from 2020-2021. The impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic is unprecedented in humanity's history. Pandemics are a widespread occurrence of infectious diseases all over the world. The infectious disease was Novel Coronavirus Disease, also known as COVID-19, which is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. COVID stands for Corona (CO) Virus (VI) Disease (D), with the 19 indicating the year of discovery, 2019. COVID-19 affected the world by spreading quickly, infecting people, and causing the death of millions and substantial economic losses for every country due to closures from borders to schools. The world completely shut down. In January 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported the confirmation of the first case of COVID-19 in the United States. The CDC stated, "the patient recently returned from Wuhan, China, where an outbreak of pneumonia caused by this novel coronavirus has been ongoing since December 2019" (CDC, 2020). In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic (BBC, 2020). Kuhfeld et al. (2020) reported that due to economic uncertainty and job loss, society had fears about catching the possible life-threatening virus and the psychological impact of social isolation and disruptions to everyday life. To defer the spread of the disease, social isolation was recommended.

As a result of the pandemic, governments worldwide institutionalized unprecedented large-scale global closures due to the pandemic's rapid spread. Kaden (2020) reported that the pandemic forced widespread K–12 school closures to protect the well-being of society. In the United States, all K–12 students interrupted in-person instruction due to COVID-19 during the 2019–2020 school year (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Schools were forced to move teaching and

learning to a virtual format. COVID-related interruptions and closures led to educational challenges and a crisis when nearly all countries worldwide closed their schools (Pozas et al., 2021, p. 35). The State of Minnesota, like the rest of the states in the United States, temporarily shut down schools to stop and reduce the transmission of the COVID-19 pandemic (Viner et al., 2020). According to the Office of the Governor of Minnesota (2020), the Governor signed an executive emergency order, announcing shutdowns of many state institutions, including schools and businesses, social activity, and human interaction, with the exception of essential facilities like hospitals and grocery stores (Simon, 2020). All this was done to contain the spread of the Coronavirus in the community. According to Kaden's (2020) report, school districts in the United States responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in unusual ways based on location, infrastructure, financial resources, socioeconomics, and community needs. The sudden school closures were an unplanned disruption to society and education, burdening students, parents, and educators. Suddenly it changed the work of many teachers in many aspects. School buildings were closed, and teaching was moved to online and distance learning (p. 1). This dissertation will use the terms virtual, online, and distance learning interchangeably.

As the pandemic continued, schools in many parts of the world continued to teach remotely or in hybrid models. Reopening schools for in-person education was a big challenge for districts and schools. In March 2021, many schools in Minnesota were still teaching distantly because the COVID-19 pandemic was not over yet. For example, the first half of the school year 2021-2022 found students still participating in distance learning in Minneapolis Public Schools (back-to-school announcement on August 24, 2021, COVID-19 Health and Safety SY2021-22). The reason for the slow return to in-person schooling was the amount of effort needed for the post-COVID-19 preparation, including facilities, staff, and students, to ensure everyone's safety.

Blanco et al. (2020) reported that districts and schools are given the authority to prepare their facilities for safe, healthy places to which students can return. State officials and school districts developed plans for the closure, cleaning, and reopening of school facilities, both now and in future crises. Many states provided information to ensure that all schools – including districts with less capacity, less knowledge of strategies to limit infectious disease, or not having detailed closure and reopening plans – had guidance to ensure the safety of all individuals in school buildings.

By March 2021, the COVID-19 vaccines were available for all educators in Minnesota. In March 2021, the Acting Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services issued a directive that all states immediately make teachers, school staff, and childcare workers eligible for COVID-19 vaccination across all vaccination providers (DHHS, 2021).

According to the WHO, in 2021, COVID-19 infected almost millions of people globally, resulting in millions more deaths worldwide. New estimates from the WHO showed that the full death toll associated directly or indirectly with the COVID-19 pandemic between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2021 was approximately 14.9 million (range 13.3 million to 16.6 million) (WHO, 2022). The pandemic pushed chaos around the globe, and the crisis transformed into an economic and labor market shock. In March 2021, the CDC (2020) reported more than half a million deaths in the United States with millions infected, including me. When I became sick with COVID-19, my school was already using the hybrid learning model, where students had the option to come to class two days a week and attend distance learning three days a week. At that time, my district was not able to find a replacement teacher for my class during my sickness. I forced myself to teach distance to my students regardless of the difficulties I faced as a teacher infected by COVID-19.

Statement of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak forced schools to close and go to distance learning all over the world, including in the United States. During the 2019-2020 school year, K–12 students had in-person instruction interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Consequently, school districts in Minnesota mandated the adoption of a distance or hybrid model of delivery for all K-12 students. During the last months of the 2019-2020 and continuing into the 2020-2021 school year, school districts provided some remote instruction (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Parents found many challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic online learning phenomenon with unexpected problems and consequences. No one knew the possible impact on student learning.

According to Greenway and Eaton-Thomas (2020), distance learning had a significant impact on parents of students with special needs. Parents reported feeling dissatisfied with the resources and support for their child's educational and psychological needs. Parents said they felt distance learning would have a detrimental effect on their child's mental health and well-being (Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020).

Despite the school districts' mitigation efforts and policies to lessen the burden on parents and fulfill the learning obligations of their children, most parents were overwhelmed by this unique learning environment. Particularly, the impact was greater on parents and caregivers who had children with disabilities than those without children with disabilities (Willner et al., 2020). Willner et al. (2020) compared the parents and caregivers of children and adults with intellectual disabilities with a group of parents and caregivers of children without intellectual disabilities. The study found that the caregivers of children and adults with intellectual disabilities reported mental health problems in excess of what might have been expected pre-pandemic, particularly

in households with more severe challenging behavior and greater financial pressures (Willner et al., 2020). This study highlights the importance of conducting research that finds and understands parent perspectives. In Minnesota, there is a large number of parents from the Somali community who have children with disabilities. Thus, a study examining the experience of Somali parents who had children with disabilities throughout COVID-19 pandemic distance learning because of school closure in Minnesota is called for.

Furthermore, when Minnesota schools switched to distance learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this shift exacerbated communication problems between schools and homes where immigrant families did not speak English as their first language. For example, immigrant students and their families who speak languages other than English at home face participation challenges in online learning, including accessing resources in their home language and contacting school staff who speak their language and who can help as needed (Lowenhaupt & Hopkins, 2020).

As expected, it could be difficult to be a parent and an employee at the same time, performing jobs remotely. Dealing with their children's distance learning during the sudden closure of the schools was overwhelming for some parents with concerns about the extreme disruption of their children's routines (Bhamani et al., 2020). Also, the COVID-19 pandemic caused parents to face the dilemma of balancing between performing their job duties remotely and their parental obligations (Kerr et al., 2021). This dilemma contributed to parents experiencing elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and parental burnout, and mixed emotions such as increased negative emotions, including anger and worry (Kerr et al., 2021). At the same time, simultaneously, parents reported feeling closer to their children and offering more comfort (Kerr et al., 2021). Thus, a phenomenological study investigating Somali parents' experiences

during the school closure of 2020-2021 would shed some light on the impact of distance learning on parents and their K-12 children with disabilities.

Third, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the harsh realities of the economic gap in this country. Many parents in Minnesota, who experience low socio-economic status, including some Somali parents with K-12 students with disabilities, reported distance learning contributed to hardships. They dealt with the lack of learning resources, no access to the internet and technology, and the lack of services and learning spaces to support their children. "The inequity of resources and access to technology was a common topic amongst the teachers. There was wide variation in the amount of support students were given at home" (Schuck & Lambert, 2020. p. 14).

Significance

The recent developments in the world about school shutdowns created a growing need and interest in understanding the impact of distance learning on K-12 students, especially those with disabilities and their parents. Thus, distance learning is an educational issue that calls for urgent research and understanding of its impact on student achievement and their parents. Therefore, it is critical to know how distance learning affects minority students with disabilities and their parents in Minnesota. For example, "the growth in the numbers of students learning online and the importance of distance learning as a solution to educational challenges have increased the need to study more closely the factors that affect student learning in virtual schooling environments" (Cavanaugh et al., 2004, p. 1). Distance learning will be an option for an education past the COVID-19 era due to the technological advances the world has made in the last 30 years.

It is crucial to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota on parents who have K-12 students with special needs. "Parents are thrown into the role of being a teacher, despite their efforts and they were often unable to cope with tasks that are beyond their competences, or with stress that accompanied them and their children" (Parczewska, 2021, p. 10). This research will provide scholars, practitioners, and lawmakers with a broad picture of understanding and meeting the educational needs of parents with school-aged children with special needs during distance learning.

Additionally, the issue that makes this research particularly important is the proportionality of students of color in special education in Minnesota. The number of students of color in special education is growing significantly in Minnesota, especially the Somali-speaking students (Hewitt et al., 2016). In Minnesota, Somali students are being identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) at a higher rate than other racial/ethnic groups (Hewitt et al., 2016). Nonetheless, although all these studies and their findings are necessary to understand this phenomenon, they lack substance on this topic. These studies are generic and don't focus directly on understanding the experience of Somali parents who have children with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, there are no direct findings on how distance learning has affected K-12 students of color with special needs and their parents, particularly the Somali parents with kids with special needs. Thus, this research will shed light on the experience of Somali parents who have K-12 students with special needs during COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. It could also give a picture of similar immigrant communities and create a bigger picture of their experiences with distance learning during COVID-19 school closures in Minnesota.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of Somali parents with K-12 students with special needs in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota. In addition, the study seeks to compile information for the public, including school administrators, teachers, parents, and policymakers, about how to improve the learning experience for K-12 students with special needs in distance learning.

Again, the goal of this research project is to discover the experience of Somali parents who have K-12 students with special needs during COVID-19 distance learning. Ultimately this study will contribute to the ability of parents who have children with special needs to obtain innovative ideas and resources for how to assist their child's educational needs by addressing critical questions related to distance learning. The information gathered from this effort will be shared with a wide variety of community stakeholders throughout the region and the world, including scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.

Research Questions

The research question is "How did Somali parents with K-12 children, who are identified with special needs, experience and make meaning of their parental role and responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures and distance learning in Minnesota?"

Definition of Terms

COVID-19: COVID-19 is a respiratory disease caused by SARS-CoV-2; a new coronavirus discovered in 2019 (CDC, 2021).

Distance Learning: Students, physically separated by distance from teachers, engage in online learning with access to appropriate educational materials and daily interaction with a licensed teacher (Minnesota Department of Education, (2020) and Saykili, (2018)).

Immigration: Travel into a country for the purpose of permanent residence there (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

Immigrant: The United Nations (UN) definition of 'long-term international migrant' is "A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence" (Anderson & Blinder, 2011).

K-12 Students with Disabilities or K-12 Students with Special Needs: Defined as any kindergarten to grade 12 students with an Individual Educational Program (IEP) or 504 plan.

Online Learning or Virtual Learning: Like distance learning, online and virtual learning means the learning procedure takes place on the internet. Online learning is a student receiving academic instruction partially or completely through synchronous or asynchronous interactions over the internet (Rice & Carter, 2015; Schultz, 2019).

Refugee: A person who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

Somali Parent: A Somali parent is a parent who is legally identified as having Somali ancestry.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Background and Context

This research study concerns the experience of Somali parents with K-12 students with special needs during school closures in Minnesota in 2020-2022. I researched the published literature about the phenomenon of remote learning and the impact on Somali parents during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures. To explore the scholarly literature, I searched key terms, which included distance learning, online learning, Somalis in America, Somali parents, Somali parents in Minnesota, and studies of distance learning on students with special needs. Also, I searched for the COVID-19 pandemic effects, parental roles, and experiences. I researched for studies in databases such as Google Scholar, Education Full Text, and the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) databases.

The aim of the literature review was to understand current findings, themes, and perspectives of experts in the field. In addition, this research intends to provide information and guidance to school leaders, parents, and policymakers to influence decisions for distance learning for students with special needs in the future. In this literature review, I will discuss what the current research says about Somalis in Minnesota, the stigma of disability in the Somali community, Somali family roles, immigration challenges, and distance learning including research on students learning English and students with special needs. I then identify the gaps and tension in research literature.

The literature presented the following themes: (a) background and context of the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning during COVID-19; (b) historical perspectives of Somalis in Minnesota; (c) immigrant and refugee challenges; (d) language barriers; (e) cultural barriers; (f) contemporary perspectives; (g) family roles; (h) parental roles; (i) children's roles; (j) extended

network role; (k) parent's school role; (l) disability stigma in the Somali community; (m) distant learning and remote instruction; (n) the ill-preparedness of schools (o) government findings; (p) impact on all students; (q) digital divide; (r) distance learning during COVID-19; (s) impact on families; (t) impact on children; (u) distance learning studies for students who are English learners; (v) distance learning studies for students with special needs; (w) gaps and tensions in literature; (x) theoretical framework; (y) disability theory; (z) and stigma theory.

Historical Perspectives of Somalis in Minnesota

In this section, I will explore the history of Somalis in Minnesota as immigrants and refugees, what they have encountered, and their contemporary perspectives. Minnesota is home to the largest Somali immigrant population in the United States (DeMichele & Cook, 2017; Sunni et al., 2015). Most Somalis live in the metro area, particularly in Minneapolis. The Somalis in Minnesota have unique and complex histories of their time in the United States. At the beginning of 1991, civil war erupted in Somalia. Most Somalians arrived in Minnesota in the 1990s and early 2000s as refugees fleeing the civil war (Sunni et al., 2015). As a whole, the Somali community is a new community to the American customs and culture.

Forced migration is defined as non-voluntary migration from war and conflict (Osman et al., 2016). Many Somalis possess hidden traumas they experienced because of the civil war in their homeland. Since the war, many Somalis have been forcedly migrated and displaced in and outside the country. However, it is crucial to understand that not all Somalis are immigrants and refugees (Minnesota Education Equity Praetorship, 2018).

Immigrant and Refugee Challenges

Guerin and Guerin (2002) reported that immigrants or refugees experience enormous challenges when they move to a new unknown land. Rafieifar and colleagues (2021) reported

that the COVID-19 crisis exerted a top-heavy impact on the lives of migrant populations. Immigrants have limited access or no access to health care. The existence of underlying health conditions puts them at a higher risk for more severe COVID-19 symptoms than the general public in the United States. Some immigrants and refugees have a higher prevalence of mental health problems, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety (Rafieifar et al., 2021). It is important to understand the hidden issues immigrants face in order to develop a better approach and make trauma-informed decisions.

Furthermore, according to Guerin and Guerin (2002), immigrants and refugees face cultural shock, language barriers, inaccessible education systems, and access to adequate child-care services, financial services, employment, and housing problems. They experience difficulties, including being new, feeling alienated, gender roles, power conflicts, and new social challenges. The 2010 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report confirms that refugees and Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) holders who fall under three different U.S. programs encounter difficulties upon arrival. Immigration is defined as when a person leaves their home country and immigrates to a new land, different from his country. Entering a new country and starting a new life is not easy because it brings emotional reactions and challenges for new immigrants and refugees (GAO-10-274 1, 2010)).

Language Barriers

Language barriers affect many immigrant communities in the United States, including Somalis. "Learning a new language and culture, dealing with trauma, lacking education and job skills, and adjusting to the higher latitude climate are a few of the challenges Somali refugees are facing. However, raising children in the U.S. is the most difficult aspect for Somali parents" (Ahamed, 2015, p. 26). Månsson and Osman (2015) found "parents explained that

communication was a major problem and that they avoided visiting the schools despite the fact that they were unemployed and had time during the day" (p. 45). Sahn and Wang (2006), reported that besides language barriers, some immigrants, especially mothers, experience difficulties, such as discrimination issues and limited school and teacher support when they try to participate in their children's school activities.

Cultural Barriers

Moreover, Somali parents' experiences in their new environments in the United States were not free of problems, obstacles, and other barriers. According to an assessment project about Somali community needs at the University of Minnesota, some Somalis identified significant areas of concern included employment, housing, and education (Robillos, 2001). The specific issues identified can be classified into two categories: those faced by all communities and those specific to the Somali community. All communities have issues with age discrimination at the workplace, lack of affordable housing, absence of medical insurance, and wayward children and youth. On the other hand, culture is the leading cause of problems in the latter community. Particularly, Somali religious practices, language, and family structure limit their economic and social opportunities for advancement (Robillos, 2001, p. 15).

Contemporary Perspectives

Regarding Somalis in Minnesota, the Somali Student Achievement Report (MNEEP, 2018) stated that most of today's Somali students in school were born in the United States. Nonetheless, the picture of the Somali immigrant community in Minnesota is significantly different from what it was in the early 1990s when the Somali community was new to the state (Samatar, 2008). Nowadays, the Somali community looks like any other American community in the United States. It is easy to see Somalis in every occupation and every job in every sector of

the economy. The Somali community is a well-established and thriving community with diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds. For instance, the stories of Somali entrepreneurs in the Twin Cities are unparalleled and unique. In the 1990s, seeing and finding a Somali business in Minnesota was difficult. However, it is now estimated that Minnesota has hundreds to thousands of Somali-run and managed businesses. It is an amazing accomplishment for a community that fled from civil war and was forced to leave their families, homes, and assets behind (Samatar, 2008).

In his impressions of the Somali enclave in Minneapolis, MN, Carlson (2007) described the Somalis as hard-working and daring entrepreneurs. He stated that anyone who visits the Somalis in Minneapolis would be impressed by their productivity in their business and belief in the future. At least among Somali community leaders, business people, and employment officers, an attitude finds expression in sayings such as you work hard, and you earn something (Carlson, 2007, p. 187). A report by Boyle and colleagues (2004) agrees that the Somali community in the Twin Cities has worked with the city officials to make a unique retail niche of Somali malls that attracts out-of-town visitors.

Also, another notable example of the Somali community's success in Minnesota is their high number of political participants. According to Greenblatt (2013), a high number of Somalis get involved in politics in the Twin Cities. It is believed that voter turnout is often above 80 percent (Greenblatt, 2013). Key evidence of that is the rise and election of Somali politicians in both the federal and state offices. Ilhan Omar was elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives in 2016 and to the U. S. Congress in 2018. She became one of the first two Muslim women in Congress and the first woman of color elected to represent Minnesota (Schlei,

2020). Other elected Somali politicians include Noor and Hodan for Minnesota House of Representatives.

Family Roles

According to Ingiriis and Hoehne, (2013) Somali society is a patriarchal society; despite many political and economic changes in the 20th century, the situation of women in the family role only changed minimally. Therefore, in this section, I highlight what the literature says about traditional Somali family parental roles, children's roles, the role of networking support, and parents' educational roles.

Parental Roles

Somali families differ in terms of family member roles from contemporary American families. For instance, according to Ahmed's (2013) report, the Somali family structure is a hierarchy system. Gender dynamics are not the same when compared to the American culture. Men are at the top of the family hierarchy system, while women take care of the household activities, such as the children's well-being and education. Parents are the ultimate decision-makers in the household. According to Osman et al. (2015), in Somali culture, the father is the head of the household and the ultimate disciplinarian, and the mother is the nurturer. On the contrary, this changes to an equal relationship in the West (p. 2).

However, in the United States, things are different from traditional Somali family roles. Somali families faced many challenges regarding parenting in their new home country. Connor et al. (2016) reported that shifting gender roles for Somali American families who immigrated to the United States is disputed in the Somali community. Some welcome this newfound power and freedom. They see it as liberating and positive, providing new choices for women. However, others see these shifts as detrimental to the Somali family and their culture, leading to many

divorces (p.23). Osman (2016) said, "as a result of immigration, Somali families face many challenges regarding parenting in their new home country" (p.2). So, there is no agreement on what these changes mean to the Somali community.

Children's Roles

In a traditional Somali family, children are expected to follow their parents' decisions. Renzaho et al. (2010) reported that household chores and household rules are non-negotiable and specific according to children's gender, ages, and stages of development. However, the leading roles are still divided along gender lines. For example, girls usually do domestic chores, like cleaning the house, cooking the food, and serving the family, while the boys do outside tasks such as shopping, mowing the lawn, and heavy lifting (André et al., 2010, p. 6).

The children's roles and relationships in Somali families are unique. Betancourt et al. (2015) explained it very well:

> In Somalia, the parent's strategy was to tell the kids what to do. There was no negotiation or working together. But here [the United States], it is working together. So here it involves the parent understanding the issues the kids are facing, the social problems, all those things that the parents must understand and hear the child's problems. The relationship between parents and their kids is from top to bottom, and there is no collaboration in the decision-making process. (p. 6)

The report sheds light on how Somali parents raised their children and the realities of raising offspring in Western countries. There are cultural differences in terms of family roles and responsibilities. The cultural differences become obvious when dealing with conflicts and making important family decisions.

Extended Network Role

In Somali culture, teachers are the most trusted members of society, especially those who teach at the Koranic schools, because adults in the community are expected to be "in loco parentis" and may advise, feed, and even discipline children (p. 24). Osman et al. (2016) reported that, in Somalia, a neighbor, teacher, or adult might talk to a child who is seen doing something wrong in public. By contrast, in most Western cultures, only parents care for their kids (Osman et al., 2016, p. 3). Therefore, due to cultural, family structure, and differences in methods of child upbringing, Somali parents experience network support losses when they immigrate to new Western countries due to their children's exposure to Western cultures.

According to a study conducted by Betancourt et al. (2015), in Somalia, the advantage of extended family and community networks was essential to helping families raise their children. Participants in this study often described a sense of collective obligation to help raise children in the community in Somalia. But in their new homes in the West, that collectivist culture is a different case. Here is an example of how some Somalis expressed it: "We left one war and came to another: resource loss, acculturative stress, and caregiver-child relationships in Somali refugee families" (Betancourt et al. 2015, p. 7). Similarly, Osman et al. (2016) reported that in Somalia, when the parents were not around, relatives, friends, and neighbors acted and filled the role of the parents (p. 5).

Parent's School Role

According to Ahmed (2015), "Somali parents' perceived role in education was and continues to be limited to sending students to school. Parents expect educators to assume the role of preparing the children for productive and rewarding adult life" (Ahmed, 2015, p. 24). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic school closures caused most Somali parents in Minnesota

to suddenly have to help their children with remote learning. According to Bob and Jones (2020) who examined parent involvement during the pandemic, "Parental involvement increased during homeschool. They [the parents] gained more knowledge about their children's learning, and they had opportunities to play a more significant role than before" (p. 217). According to Education Trust-West (2020), who conducted a Minnesota statewide survey of public-school parents, "a long list of potential concerns among parents amidst the coronavirus pandemic and found academic concerns rose to the top" (p. 1). In the current research, there is no literature on the perspectives of the experience of Somali parents with K-12 students with special needs during school closures in Minnesota in 2020-2022.

Disability Stigma in the Somali Community

In this section, I highlight what the literature says about the stigma associated with having a disability in the Somali community. For instance, according to Aragsan (2016), "In general, mental illness is considered taboo within the Somali community" (p. 7). Consequently, people with disabilities face stigma and open discrimination. Likewise, Hewitt et al. (2013) agreed with Aragsan. They explained this more clearly in the following way: in the Somali community, many parents reported that ASD is "taboo," and parents may feel shame and stigma if their children are given the ASD label. Furthermore, Hewitt et al. (2013) noted that "Somalis who are labeled or present mental health symptoms are isolated or even shunned from their families and community" (p. 14).

Selman et al. (2018) reported social stigma as a common experience among Somali parents with children with autism. Link et al. (2001) explained social stigma as labeling human differences, stereotyping individuals in a group, separating a group based on "us" vs. "them," invoking emotions to discriminate against the labeled group, stigmatizing cognitive differences,

and using power in discriminatory consequences. Participants acknowledged feeling stigmatized and blamed for having a child with autism (Link et al., 2001). Therefore, in the Somali community, this can cause the family to hide a child's diagnosis from the community and service providers because of the significant cultural stigma that is rooted in religious and cultural beliefs against people with disabilities.

In general, parents with kids with special needs experience social stigma, according to Ellen et al. (2018). Therefore, to be specific, I would use the stigma theory. For instance, according to Schuchman (2004), "Significant stigma shrouding mental health issues prevents many Somalis from seeking treatment or assistance. In Somali culture, concepts of mental health only include perspectives on mental illness: one is crazy (*waali),* or one is not crazy" (p.2). This causes many parents in Minnesota not to seek help from state agencies and social programs for special needs children. Another example is the study by Ellen et al. (2017), whose aim was "to understand the nature of stigma experienced by Somali parents of children with autism in the United Kingdom (UK) and to consider how they coped with or resisted such stigma" (p. 1).

In 2016, the CDC reported that the Somali population in Minnesota was experiencing higher than average rates of autism compared to any other recent immigrants in the United States (Hewitt et al., 2016). Literature reflected cultural beliefs about autism, and the stigma associated with the diagnosis influenced the parent's response to seeking professional support. Parents felt the need to hide their children due to the social stigma around mental health within the Somali community. This stigma, coupled with cultural barriers, made it difficult for families to navigate society. Additionally, the barriers included a lack of safe places in the community where their children could play.

Additionally, Fox et al. (2017) investigated how Somali families affected by autism need in terms of health, education, and social care services. In partnership with the Somali community in the United Kingdom, this study reported Somali parents' perception of autism and barriers associated with navigating the system. The results revealed a greater need to understand cultural views of autism and raise awareness to reduce the social stigma families face when seeking support for their children. Parents in this study reported feeling shocked and confused when they received their children's diagnosis. Somalis' social and cultural context of autism can affect acceptance of autism and seeking support (Fox et al., 2017). Fox et al. (2017) described how some Somali families hide their children with autism and are unwilling to talk about them because of fear of stigma. In the Somali community, stigma has strengthened families' tendency to hide their children and delay seeking help. Some parent participants in the Fox (2017) study avoided interacting with neighbors or friends. This unwillingness to seek help was detrimental because it prevented them from getting help early for their children. On the contrary, many other families in the Fox (2017) study talked about their children with immense pride and expressed that they were not ashamed of their child's autism. They were not the kind of parents who hid their children for fear of stigma and shame (Fox, 2017, p. 4). According to Krupar (2016), Somali parents are not experienced in special education, given the stigma attached to it in most Somali communities. Again Krupar (2016) said, "mothers are often blamed for their children's disabilities and may suffer physical or sexual abuse from their husbands or other family members, and be harassed, stigmatized and abandoned as a result" (p. 109).

Distant Learning and Remote Instruction

Bubb and Jones (2020) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a worldwide response from all countries to provide remote instruction during the last months of the school

year 2020-2022. The COVID-19 pandemic was a considerable challenge to education systems because schools needed to respond not only quickly but effectively. Remote learning altered the daily lives of the students, their families, and their educators.

The Ill-Preparedness of Schools

At the onset of the school closures in March 2020, small and large districts scrambled to switch to online and distance learning overnight without prior plans. Malkus et al. (2020) reported how school districts responded during the COVID-19 crisis. The schools ended in-person learning for the school year in March and started distance learning, which continued until the end of the school year in May. The report also documented many services schools and districts delivered through the school shutdowns, including meals, technology devices, internet access, distance learning, and plans for their graduating seniors. The impact of disruption of in-person learning and school shutdowns significantly affected students and their families in the 2020-2021 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is an issue that needs further research.

The results of the closures at short notice were a severe disruption in learning. With the sudden shift of K-12 schools closing and transforming worldwide, there were many educational uncertainties. Some school districts were forced to do remote learning with little notice, while others had to completely shut down. Like the rest of our country and world, schools around Minnesota were closed. In addition, according to Bubb and Jones (2020), the crucial challenges schools needed to address included what preparations institutions could make in the short time that was available to them. School leaders had to rally teachers and staff to teach remotely with little preparation or training time. Also, Frenette et al. (2020) reported that to reduce the impact of school closures and remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic on schoolchildren,

schools scrambled to develop new online learning resources and online materials, including providing students adequate access to the internet at home or to devices.

Government Findings

The U.S. GAO reported to congressional committees that it was important to conduct research on distance learning. The GAO-21-43 (2020) report stated, "This shift laid bare [exposure] both the logistical and instructional challenges of distance learning, particularly for English learners and students with disabilities, both of whom have faced persistent achievement gaps" (p. 1). The GAO-21-43 (2020) report focused on the challenges of providing services to K-12 English learners and students with disabilities during COVID-19 pandemic school closures. According to the GAO-21-43 (2020) report, the study "examined what is known about the challenges of and lessons learned from providing distance learning to English learners and students with disabilities during school building closures in spring 2020" (p. 1).

Impact on All Students

According to Francis et al. (2022), COVID-19 caused to shift to online learning, which resulted in hardships for all U.S. students, including students with disabilities (p. 1). COVID-19 disrupted students' lives in unusual ways, such as their level, course of study, and the point they reached in their programs (Daniel, 2020). Schools had to address students' needs by grade level and field of study. Finally, schools had to consider how institutions could educate students and help parents during remote learning. (Lian, et al., 2019). The COVID-19 disease pandemic affected almost 1.6 billion students, or more than 90% of learners globally (Lian et al., 2019). However, the effect of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic on parents with K-12 students with special needs remains unclear. Unfortunately, Garbe et al. (2020) reported, "many teachers, families, and learners have been unprepared for this sudden shift, bringing some of the

hardships and issues of increased parental involvement while engaging and trying to assist their children in various levels and types of distance learning" (p. 45). Also, Galloway et al. (2020) reported similar impacts caused by the sudden shift to online learning platforms, closing schools without warning. The closures significantly disrupted the lives of students, educators, and researchers alike.

As a result, schools had to adapt everything, including teaching, learning, and working with special needs students, including Indigenous communities, who are particularly vulnerable to this pandemic (Galloway et al., 2020). What's more, in the K-12 system, teachers used to teach face-to-face, and many did not have online teaching experience. Marting et al. (2020) reported that one of the challenges during the COVID-19 emergency transition to remote learning was active student engagement. Schools suddenly moved from face-to-face in-person learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic to emergency remote or online learning. Neither students nor teachers were ready for online learning or distance learning. The move caused teachers actively engaging students in online learning to be a significant challenge. Also, the added stress of the pandemic caused some students to disengage from overall academic activities (Galloway et al., 2020).

Digital Divide

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated and shed light on the digital divide issue. For instance, Blunt et al. (2021) explained that a body of reports supports the existence of digital dives well before COVID-19. According to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) (1995) report, "Falling Through the Net: A Survey of the 'Have Nots' in Rural and Urban America," access to technology is dependent not only on the family's economic status, but also their geographic location, race, age,

and education, which could likely lead to having an impact a person's level of access to technology, specifically broadband (NTIA, 1995, Blunt et al. 2021, p. 11).

Furthermore, according to Akbulut et al. (2020), the lack of access to the Internet and computers has been a significant barrier for many low-income families during the COVID-19 school closures. In addition, Akbulut et al. (2020) said, "Inequality of opportunity appears to be the core problem" (p. 35). Many scholars agree that access to technology causes many students not to be able to participate in distance learning (GAO-21-43, 2020). The GAO-21-43 (2020) report stated, "Students who lacked access to broadband, internet service, computers, or other digital devices had difficulty participating in distance learning" (p. 11). The GAO-21-43 (2020) found, "even when families had sufficient access to the internet and devices, they did not always understand web-based instruction formats such as webinars, and the language barrier made it difficult for school personnel to explain how these methods worked" (p. 10). This means those language barriers and technical issues compound the problem. Likewise, the demands of meeting basic family need exacerbated the problem for English learners. For example, GAO (2020) reported, "School district officials and representatives of professional associations told us that English learners and their families were more likely than other student groups to have responsibilities that prevented them from fully participating in distance learning" (p. 11).

Distance Learning During COVID-19 Impact

Current studies recommend conducting further research to understand the experiences of parents with K-12 students on distance learning and the academic impact on children during COVID-19 pandemic school closures. For example, Rogers et al. (2021) study identified three main themes during the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures: (1) Carrying the burden; (2) A time of stress; and (3) Embracing change and looking to the future (Rogers et al. 2021, p.7).

Impact on Families

The COVID-19 impact on families included changes in daily routines, access to technology, increased levels of stress, changes in parental roles and responsibilities, confusion and inaccurate interpretation of online schooling, and disruptions in family connections and support. Bhamani et al. (2020) have described the impact of COVID-19 pandemic school closures on students in three areas as (a) impact on daily routine; (b) difficulty in shifting to the online mode of education; and (c) impact on social development (Bhamani et al., 2020, p. 15). Similarly, Pozas et al. (2021) research revealed that parents assumed new roles during COVID-19 distance learning. Current research on the impact of COVID-19 can be found on the following topics: (a) explores the difficulties faced by stakeholders; (b) provides descriptions of how to respond and adapt to digital teaching; or (c) analyzes stakeholders' experiences (Pozas et al., 2021).

The first notable impact of COVID-19 on families was evident in their daily routine changes. Weaver et al. (2021) reported that the stay-at-home orders caused shifts in family routines, with children engaging in school virtually and parents working remotely from home. In addition, the COVID-19 impact increased parental roles and responsibilities as caregivers. Fegert et al. (2020) noted that one of the impacts of COVID-19 was forcing parents to work remotely from home, keep jobs and businesses running, and simultaneously provide care for their children at home. As a result, parents worked as caregivers to their children to minimize virus exposure risk. Eales et al. (2021) reported that family routines were significantly impacted. For example, activities outside the home were severely curtailed due to community cancellations and voluntary family decisions. These ranged from canceling family summer adventures to preceding typical family spring/summer activities, including activities like children's practice games, to stopping

mundane family activities going out together. But again, the impact on daily routine was the most severe impact on students. Bhamani et al. (2020) stated, "Parents believed that through schools, a formally structured routine is followed on most days of the week, and this helps children to understand the importance of time, scheduling and doing assignments on a given timeline" (p. 16).

So, to mitigate the new daily changes, many parents put efforts to establish new daily routines, some of which pertained to scheduling, such as instituting a new daily schedule to accommodate distance learning or increase consistency and routine (e.g., mimic preschool schedule). Others were direct pandemic responses (e.g., safety routine, family discussions of world events) (Eales et al., 2021). Pozas et al. (2021) also made a comparison of how Mexican and German families were impacted by school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic by resuming new roles as educators. Pozas said, "Mexican and German parents were severely challenged by the pedagogical tasks they had to take over during homeschooling" (p. 46). The authors of this comparison found considerable differences between the country's responses to distance learning (Pozas et al., 2021). Also, Amuedo-Dorantes et al. (2020) found "evidence of significant reductions in the weekly work hours by both mothers and fathers of young school-age children in two-partnered households when face-to-face or physical school was placed on hold" (p. 20). Gabre et al. (2020) stated, "The struggle to balance parent employment demands and learner needs was the single-most reported struggle. Some parents noted difficulty completing job-related tasks and supporting their children in completing schoolwork during the COVID school closures" (Gabre et al., 2020, p. 51).

The second notable impact was that some families experienced challenges accessing technology to access online learning or distance learning. According to Eales et al. (2021),

during the COVID-19 pandemic, media served many functions for families, including social connection, particularly with high-risk family members, work, and distance learning. Some families incorporate media into their family time by watching online media together. In addition, many parents reported dramatic increases in the use and purchase of media and technology (e.g., devices, streaming services) in place of out-of-home activities. As eloquently articulated in these parents' stories, the "iPad has taken over" and "I feel like we are all glued to our devices" (Eales et al., 2021, p. 7).

Third, according to Brown et al. (2020), many parents experienced stress and other mental symptoms, such as anxiety and poor sleep patterns due to the COVID-19 crisis. The most prevalent stressor among parents included changes to their mood and general stress levels because of quarantine or being in close contact with someone who potentially had COVID-19. In the report (Brooks et al., 2020), researchers found various negative responses during the quarantine period: over 20% (230 of 1057) reported fear, 18% (187) reported nervousness, 18% (186) reported sadness, and 10% (101) reported guilt. Few had reported positive feelings: 5% (48) said emotions of happiness, and 4% (43) reported feelings of relief (Brooks et al., 2020, p. 2).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought many parents stress and anxiety. Kolak et al. (2020) described how "the transition on schooling from school to a home caused parents parent's a certain level of confusion and wrong interpretation of online schooling. As a result, many parents started using the term homeschooling" (p. 2). Equally, Brown et al. (2020) found comparable results of parents experiencing increased stressors in many areas, including problems managing children's academics, loss of employment or income and inability to provide for the family, uncertainty about the future, and fear of contracting the virus or hearing about

people dying from the virus. Nevertheless, the most salient stressor was the loss of jobs or income and an inability to support their family. Even families who did not directly contract the virus were likely to experience the indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Brown et al., 2020, p. 2). Furthermore, Chen et al. (2020) found that some parents with kids with special needs suffered mental health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there were "Significant differences in parents' mental health depending on the child's disability. But, overall, children's behavioral problems and the psychological demands of parents were common factors predicting the mental health of all parents" (p. 11).

Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the care burden of women and families. For instance, according to Neece et al. (2020), parents reported that "their biggest challenge was being at home caring for their children with the loss of many essential services. In particular, when schools and nurseries were closed, it showed the delicateness of women's situation in the economy. Some parents reported babysitting their children due to the closures of nurseries, schools, and daycare services. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has crashed the ability of so many dual-earner couples to work in the developed world. Instead, couples will have to decide which one of them takes the hit" (p. 3).

According to Fegert et al. (2020), the pandemic disrupted family connections and support and reorganized everyday life for parents and children. Caregiver resources, including grandparents and the wider family, were restricted during COVID-19 (Fegert et al., 2020). Also, according to McAdams (2020), another COVID-19 impact on families was the separation of loved ones. One notable example was the story of little Charlie, whose mother contracted the COVID-19 virus after being born in the hospital. McAdams (2020) said, "As I gently touched her little hand, I thought about her parents who were quarantined at home. I wondered how this

separation must be causing them tremendous stress and despair" (p. 1). In addition, Garbe et al. (2020) affirmed, "Researchers asked parents about their biggest struggles while teaching their children during the COVID-19 school closure with an open-ended question. After careful analysis, surveyed parents reported balancing responsibilities as their biggest problem during COVID-19 pandemic school closures" (p. 50).

Yet all these parents showed resilience by adapting to working from home. Fegert et al. (2020) noted that all family members must learn how to manage the stress of quarantine and social distancing. In addition, Coyne et al. (2021) described the way most parents quickly adapted psychologically by being flexible and compassionate during COVID-19 (p. 1). According to Bloom (2020), working from home is here to stay. The full-time U.S. workers working from home are now estimated to be 42 percent of the U.S. workforce, making it more than two-thirds of economic activity.

Impact on Children

Almost every student's learning was interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures. Brown et al. (2020) found that many parents reported that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, their children experienced changes to their health and learning. Likewise, difficulties in shifting to online learning caused parents to report concerns, including student engagement in learning, lack of discipline of children, and technology problems, consistent with a study from Bhamani et al. (2020) that reported how parents highlighted other factors that hampered their child's learning in the following words:

> The discipline that kids learn while getting ready for school, engaging in various
> activities, using different methods to understand their subjects in classes is difficult to

maintain when education has become remote. The seriousness that physical presence can instill in their pupils is seemingly not possible with online learning (p. 16).

This means that online learning students lose many learning opportunities compared to in-person learning. For example, teachers cannot see if the students are engaging in the learning and can only redirect them if they get support from someone who is with the students physically, special young students.

Additionally, Bhamani et al. (2020) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic school closures impacted children's social development. The study said, "Many parents were worried the social development of their children was affected at a deep level. Particularly, the younger children's loss of interaction with peers and their normal environment had influenced the development of their social and emotional skills" (Bhamani et al., 2020, p. 17). In addition, all public places, such as libraries, parks, and other public areas, were inaccessible to the kids because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Akbulut et al. (2020) found:

The pandemic has affected social studies education from different angles. Although one of the course's main topics in society, and the virus, has affected society so much, our individual experiences lead us to the fact that social studies teachers do not give enough space to the topic in their lessons (p. 36).

That means school closures and public places impact students' chances of social skills development due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of socializing with peers.

Distance Learning Studies for English Learners

School districts reported facing challenges engaging English learners and students with disabilities during COVID-19 distance learning. According to GAO-21-43, 2020, report, "school

district officials, representatives of advocacy groups and professional associations, and education researchers we interviewed, some English learners and their families had difficulty fully participating in distance learning during spring 2020 due to lack of necessary technology, language barriers, and the demands of meeting basic family needs" (GAO-21-43, 2020, p. 9).

Also, Syer and Braun (2020) reported that at the beginning of the school closures, one of the initial challenges schools faced was establishing reliable communication with students and families to organize the move to remote learning. The most significant obstacle was communication with students and families who spoke a different language at home. For example, the state of Ohio required school districts to translate their announcements to families into common home languages such as Spanish, Somali, Nepali, French, and Arabic (Syer & Braun, 2020, p. 4). Napolitano (2020) reported that Julie Sugarman, a senior policy analyst with the Migration Policy Institute, acknowledged that many schools around the country were having problems serving English Language Learner (ELL) students during COVID-19 school closures and distance learning. For example, she said, "one family might have materials translated into their home language while another might not" (p. 2). All of the above research studies show that the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures, exacerbated the ELL student's distance learning challenges due to the language barrier and limited support they could receive during the process.

Distance Learning Studies for Students with Special Needs

Regarding remote learning during COVID-19 pandemic school closures, Akbulut et al. (2020) stated that the sudden switch to distance learning from in-person learning caused many problems in K-12 education, especially for students with special needs. For instance, lessons primarily were prepared at the mainstream student level and broadcast online, and not considered

satisfying and suitable for students with special needs. The students with special needs needed different teaching methods than other students. (p. 36).

Lagier's (2003) report found online, and distance learning platforms for students with disabilities were not new and existed before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the learning experiences and institutional programs in distance learning for minority students and special education students present various challenges (Lagier, 2003, p. 183). In addition, Yazcayir and Gurgur (2021) said, "most of the students with special needs watched lessons on TV during the COVID-19 pandemic, and few attended online courses. Also, some teachers failed in guiding and supporting and providing them with instructional adaptations for students with special needs and their families" (Yazcayir & Gurgur, 2021, p. 7). Again, distance learning platforms presented many challenges and difficulties to ELL students and students with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the difficulties of providing support through online platforms.

However, distance learning can open the door to many creative possibilities that transform traditional instruction methods (Lagier. 2003, p. 183). Cavanaugh et al. (2020) added that online and distance learning could offer unique benefits and opportunities for students. The benefits of distance learning for students include increased enrollment options and flexibility for students who cannot attend traditional schools, access to resources and instructors not locally available, and increases in student-teacher communication (p. 5). Furthermore, Cavanaugh et al. (2004) said, "the growth in the number of students learning online and the importance of online learning as a solution to educational challenges have increased the need to study more closely the factors that affect student learning in virtual schooling environments" (p. 1). But what Cavanaugh and colleagues argue is that distance learning could offer some options and some specific creative possibilities and opportunities to some students including those with special needs.

Gaps and Tensions in Literature

The gap and tension in the literature on parents' experiences on distance learning during COVID-19 pandemic school closures were noticeable. The literature discussion was mainly based on the mainstream parental experiences around distance learning during COVID-19 pandemic school closures. In contrast, I found a dearth of literature reviews in parents' experiences of K-12 students with special needs on distance learning during COVID-19 pandemic school closures, because this topic is a new phenomenon. There was no such widespread school closure in history because of a pandemic like COVID-19 in 2020/2021.

According to Prithvi's (2014) study, very little research looked explicitly at how autism spectrum disorders are perceived in various communities. Additionally, I haven't come across any specific research on the experiences of Somali parents with K-12 students with special needs on distance learning. In fact, I have only come across very few peer-reviewed literature or research that directly relates to the experiences of Somali parents who have children with disabilities. For example, Prithvi's (2014) study is qualitative research that was conducted on parents who had children on the autistic spectrum belonging to four different ethnic communities (p. 1).

Also, another good study on Somali parents' experience was the Minneapolis Somali Autism Spectrum Disorder Prevalence Project (MSASDPP), by Hewitt et al. (2016). The study was about ASD prevalence in Minneapolis with a focus on children from the Somali diaspora. It highlighted the high autism prevalence of Somali children ages between 7-9 years (p. 2). However, this study was not without criticism. What was surprising about the Minneapolis Somali Autism Spectrum Disorder Prevalence Project Community Report (2013) was the Somali kids with autism had 100% intellectual disability compared to other races, such as whites who, despite having a higher autism prevalence rate, showed only having 20% intellectual disabilities (p. 15). Therefore,

there was almost no literature on the experiences of Somali parents with children with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in the United States and Minnesota.

Equally, there was a considerable gap in the literature regarding the experience of all K-12 students on distance learning during COVID-19 pandemic school closures. Most of the studies did not go deep to understand this phenomenon but touched the surface. The reason for this is apparent since the COVID-19 pandemic is relatively new. Furthermore, obviously, the other area gap area was the experience of K-12 students with special needs experience on distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures. The reason could be for two reasons: (1) the COVID-19 pandemic is a new phenomenon; and (2) online or distance learning used to be optional, not something for every student. Virtual learning appeared and has become widespread due to the technological advances made in the last two decades.

Nonetheless, there were a few studies on this topic of Somali parents with children with special needs experiences with distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Akbulut et al. (2020) asked: "Students with special needs: what about us?" To answer this, the authors reported, "Shifting to distance learning too fast has caused problems in the education of students with special needs. Particularly the lessons were broadcasted on TV, which is mostly prepared for typical students, and not suitable for students with special needs" (p. 36). The study also reported that despite improvement efforts made by the schools on distance learning, some parents with students with disabilities still felt they were not adequate to help their children. For example, the authors reported one parent's social media comment, "There are several lessons for senior students on EBA, but those lessons aren't suitable for my son's level. My kid is struggling because the system mainly focuses on children who experience standard development" (p. 36).

Both schools and parents were not prepared for the sudden shift to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, I will describe my chosen theories for this research and how they link to this research topic. The world recognizes that COVID-19 has brought extraordinary burdens on most parents, especially parents with children with special needs, during distance learning and school closures. Dalia et al. (2021) reported increased physical, financial, social, and psychological challenges facing family caregivers of children with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The major factors contributing to these burdens faced by parents were disability and stigma. Thus, the theories most relevant to researching and making meaning of the experiences of Somali parents who have children with special needs on distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures are disability theory and stigma theory.

The two theories that are most prevalent in the literature I reviewed on the experience of Somali parents who have children with special needs in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures are disability theory and stigma theory. This section shows how these theories helped interpret my literature review findings and serve as a theoretical framework for my study. Thus, I adopted these theories as a foundation for this phenomenological study of Somali parents' experience with distance learning during COVID-19 school closures in Minnesota.

Disability Theory

Before we begin discussing disability theory, let us first talk about its history. The development of disability studies as an academic discipline is inextricably linked with the rise of the disabled people's movement that effectively began in the 1970s (Barn & Oliver, 2010). The

disability theory is defined in two models, one in medical studies and the other in disability studies. For example, Siebers (2008) reports that the medical model defines disability theory as an individual defect lodged in the person, a defect that must be cured or eliminated (p. 8). On the other hand, disability studies define disability not as a personal defect but as the product of social injustice, one that doesn't require a cure or elimination of a defect in the person but a significant change in the social system. Ali et al. (2012) explained that disability had been viewed through a medical model and regarded as an individual tragedy with physical or organic etiology.

Likewise, according to Barnes and Mercer (2004), Mike Oliver first coined the term "social model of disability." He argued that disability is imposed on top of their impairments by the way they are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. The leading cause of the social exclusion of disabled people was how society had not responded to people with impairments. For example, Creswell and Poth (2018) clearly explained the disability theory: "Disability inquiry addresses the meaning of inclusion in schools and encompasses administrators, teachers, and parents who have children with disabilities" (p. 150). Furthermore, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), disability theory focuses on recognizing disability as a dimension of human difference and not as a defect using a disability interpretive lens. Therefore, I will be using Creswell and Poth's (2018) definition of disability theory in this research because disability and inclusion are connected. As a human difference, its meaning results from social construction (i.e., society's response to individuals), and it is one coming from one aspect of human difference (Mertens, 2003). Examples show how these persons with disabilities are seen as different, such as the types of questions asked, the labels applied, reflections of how the data collection will benefit them, the appropriateness of communication methods, and how the data are reported in a way that is respectful of power relationships.

Stigma Theory

Again, let us begin to define the stigma theory. Goffman (1963) defined stigma as an "attribute that is deeply discrediting," a form of discrimination, morality, and social control. It is historically rooted in the societal expectation of what an individual should be, what is typical, expected, reasonable, and desirable (Goffman, 1963). He explained stigma to be a discredited attribute that could be readily discernable, such as one's appearance, including skin color or body size. It could also be hidden but discreditable if revealed, such as one's criminal record or struggles with mental illness. However, stigma may affect individuals and those closely associated with them, such as parents. For example, stigma could be viewed as how parents respond to the negative attitudes of others. When experiencing stigma, parents may respond in two ways: either not saying anything even though they feel uncomfortable or stressed or moving away from the situation as quickly as possible, disassociating with these people (p. 14).

Furthermore, Link et al. (2004) described stigma as people with positional power marginalizing people with less positional power. Yang et al. (2007) explain stigma as a social function that perpetuates discrimination, labeling, and stereotyping and impacts the lives of the stigmatized individual (Link & Phalen, 2001). Likewise, Gordon et al. (2020) reported how several social psychologists have explained and defined stigma as a situational threat. Stigma results from being placed in a social situation that influences the way one is treated (Gordon et al., 2020, p. 3). Also, Jones et al. (1984) conceptualized stigma based on cognitive categorization processes. Stigma occurs when the mark links an individual via attributional functions to undesirable characteristics that lead to discrediting (p. 5). Hence, Ditchman et al. (2013) reported how individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) and mental illness are consistently stigmatized and excluded from most social venues (p. 1).

The Link et al. (2001) model of labeling and stereotyping was used to study the stigma of parents with children with special needs experience in their community settings. The study explained social stigma in two ways; the first was "enacted stigma," a discrimination experience of unfair treatment by others. The second way was "felt stigma," or self-stigmatization, which refers to the shame and expectations of discrimination that prevent people from talking about their experiences and seeking help. Selman et al. (2018) found other perceptions of the behavior of children with autism as a factor of social stigma directed at parents. Therefore, all of these different explanations of stigma theory mean that some parents with special needs children avoid seeking the help they need due to fear of stigma and discrimination in the community.

Summary

In the literature review I identified and reviewed the relevant literature related to parents with children with special needs experiences on distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures. The literature presented the following themes: (a) background and context of the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning during COVID-19; (b) historical and contemporary roles and responsibilities of Somali parents and their children; (c) immigrant and refugee challenges; (d) the stigma of disability; (e) distance learning during COVID-19; (f) the impact on student's learning; (g) government findings; (h) distance learning studies for students who are English learners; (i) gaps and tensions in literature; and (j) review of the literature analytical theory.

Most of the research on parents with children with special needs experiencing distance learning covers broad fields and does not focus specifically on the Somali parents' experience. There is also an absence of research on Somali parents with distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures. My research study fills these gaps and identifies how

Somali parents with children with special needs experience online learning and how these experiences have shaped and improved their child's educational experience. A study with this focus attempts to answer the following question: How do Somali parents, with children who are identified as K-12 students with special needs, experience and make meaning of their roles and responsibilities as parents during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures and distance learning in Minnesota?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Methodology in qualitative research refers to how the researcher interpreters the data. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "the procedures of qualitative research, or its methodology, are characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data" (p. 21). To examine the perceptual experience of Somali parents with K-12 students with disabilities toward distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures, I selected a phenomenological study from the tradition of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 1998). This chapter describes the phenomenological approach to qualitative research methodology. In the subsequent sections, I explained the setting and methods for recruiting and interviewing Somali parents with children with special needs. Next, I described how I protected the confidentiality of the study participants. Finally, I discuss the collection and the methods to analyze the data.

Qualitative Research

Researchers can use qualitative research methods to investigate and understand the lived experience of a group of people. I selected a phenomenological study as my conceptual framework from the tradition of qualitative research in order to understand the lived experience of Somali parents with K-12 students with disabilities in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota. Creswell and Poth (2018) state, "qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Meaning qualitative researchers investigate things in their natural settings. They try to make sense of or interpret phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (p. 7). Also, the "qualitative approach begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive theoretical frameworks" (Creswell & Poth 2018,

p. 8). The researcher needs to deduce the reality and interpretation of the collected data based on the participant's experiences.

Ohrstrom et al. (2005) explained ontology as a branch of philosophy that relates to the nature of being and reality and its characteristics. Ontology is defined as the study of being. The term ontology was created in the circles of German Protestants sometime around 1600. However, ontology is as old as philosophy itself. The construction of the word ontology is as modernized in the classical debate about metaphysics. But this background of metaphysical studies of the idea of being is still essential for understanding modern notions of ontology. (p. 2). The question associated with ontology is, "What is the nature of the reality that is under study?" According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "when studying individuals, qualitative researchers conduct a study with the intent of reporting these multiple realities" (p. 20). Moreover, that is why reality or truth is not a single reality or truth but multiple depending on the participant's experience of the phenomenon. Therefore, I used a constructivist theory in this research because I see the nature of reality as not one but multiple in the topic I am researching.

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that examines the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity. Baumberger et al. (2017) described the new name of the philosophical discipline of epistemology as derived from the ancient Greek word episteme, which translates to understanding (p. 1). According to Passmore and Marci's (1966) description of epistemology, the question associated with epistemology is "How do we know what we know? And it is a philosophy of knowledge whose primary focus is epistemology. How can we know about the external world, taking our consciousness and logical intuitions as a point of departure? This idea is a narrow view of philosophy, but it is also central that speaks to us most directly, at least for intellectuals" (p. 1). For example, as said earlier by Creswell and

Poth (2018), "conducting a qualitative study means that researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants that are under the study" (p. 21). For this research, I did the fieldwork virtually but in a natural setting as close as possible to participants who experienced the phenomenon. I learned from their experiences and viewpoints.

Axiology is the philosophical study of goodness or the theory of value, which relates to the worth of something. According to Aliyu et al. (2015), the question associated with axiology is "What is the value or worth that the researcher brings to the research?" or "How can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever they believe can be known?" (p. 13). Axiology is particularly important in qualitative research for the researcher to admit the value-laden nature of the study by explicitly or implicitly telling their values and assumptions of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The value I brought to this research was that I am an experienced Somali educator with a special education background.

Phenomenology

Moreover, to study the perceptual experience of Somali parents with K-12 students with disabilities on distance learning, I conducted a phenomenological study to understand how distance learning affected them during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in 2020-2021. I selected phenomenology as my research method for three reasons: first, as an educator, I wanted to investigate how distance learning impacts parents and students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota. Second, phenomenology is a good research approach to understanding the essence of Somali parents' lived experiences with distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Where a narrative study reports the stories of experiences of a single individual or several individuals, phenomenology describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon"

(Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). Third, phenomenology is a good approach in this research because of the assumption and the need to address access and inclusion issues during COVID-19 distance learning and to understand the world in which these parents lived and their experiences.

Institutional Review Board

Prior to beginning the data collection, a researcher must seek and obtain permission from an Institutional Review Board (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 151). Thus, I requested and received approval to conduct this research through the University of St. Thomas's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before I started recruitment or interviewing the research participants. IRB guidelines stand to ensure transparency in research. Therefore, as a principal investigator, I followed the IRB guidelines to conduct this study.

Participants and Recruitment

In this research, the criteria for the population I studied were that the participants must be Somali parents who have K-12 students with an Individual Education Program (IEP). In addition, they must have lived in Minnesota during the COVID-19 pandemic school closure in 2020-2021. I recruited nine participants for this study. However, I only recruited and selected participants who spoke English well enough to avoid needing an interpreter. The reason for doing so was because interpretation could impact data due to misinterpretation or the loss of meaning in the interpretation from Somali to English to express the participant's experiences.

Initially, I identified participants who identified as Somali parents with K-12 students whom I met in earlier research. Then, together we reached out to additional participants and individuals I have known from the Somali community who met the criteria for this study. In addition, I used snowball sampling to gain access to enough participants and recruit other participants for this research from the original participants. Parker and Geddes (2019) explained

snowball sampling well "It starts with a few contacts (seeds) who are invited to become participants in the research. Those participants are then asked to recommend other contacts, who then recommend other potential participants" (p. 4). According to Creswell (2007), "snowball or chain: identifies case of interest from people who know people what cases are information-rich" (p. 127). Then, each participant connected me to another participant who had a child with special needs and replicated the process until I recruited 11 potential participants. But later, I eliminated two individuals due to their refusal to participate. Even one of the potential participants asked me for monetary benefits which were beyond my ability to provide to that individual. So, I had the ball rolling. My study picked up more "snow" (participants) along the way and became larger and larger as I added additional participants. Also, some identified potential participants that I contacted rejected to participate in the research. For example, two individuals initially showed interest in participating. Still, one cited the reasons for not participating as a lack of time, and the other asked for monetary benefits, which I could not provide.

Then, as the principal researcher of this study, after I had recruited participants, I carried out the following steps:

- I explained to the participants the purpose of this research.

- I asked participants to commit to an approximately one-hour interview on Zoom.

- The interview was in English.

- I made participants sign the consent form, which specifically stated what participants would be asked to do.

- I ensured that participants were aware that an estimated 7-12 participants would be in the study.

- I asked permission from participants for the interview to be recorded and transcribed.

- I asked participants if they could share their child's individualized education program plan and grade reports.

- I informed participants that there might be a follow-up meeting to check in and clarify if they have questions.

Below is the research participants' demographic information.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

#	Pseudonym	Gender	English proficiency	Years in USA	Employment	Care giver
1	Nuradin	Male	Yes	30	Full Time	Yes
2	Abdihakim	Male	Yes	22	Part Time	Yes
3	Duniyo	Female	Yes	30	Full Time	No
4	Dahabo	Female	Yes	3	Full Time	Yes
5	Shamso	Female	Yes	22	Full Time	Yes
6	Fardowso	Female	Yes	25	Full Time	Yes
7	Haji	Male	Yes	27	Full Time	Yes
8	Amin	Male	Yes	18	Full Time	Both
9	Abiib	Male	Yes	30	Full Time	Both

Data Collection

Qualitative research is distinctive and typically occurs in natural settings (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Creswell, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Also, "we visualize data collection as a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering valuable information to answer emerging research questions" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 148). The first activity was finding and gaining access to research participants who are Somali parents with kids with special needs. I used the snowballing process and my connection to my Somali community to get my research participants. I first reached out to a colleague of mine who had a child with special needs who then connected me with his friend. So, I started with obtaining participants' permission by asking them to sign the consent forms before I interviewed them (see Appendix C).

The second activity was when I interviewed the participants. I conducted and used a semi-structured and standardized interview format (see appendix D). I interviewed nine Somali parents for this study. Because this study is a quantitative research method, where the interviewer asks a set of prepared open-ended and close-ended questions, I read the questions precisely as worded and in the same order as all participants in this research. Close-ended questions structure the answer by only allowing responses that fit into pre-decided categories. On the other hand, open-ended questions do not provide participants with a predetermined set of answer choices. Instead, these questions allow them to respond in their own words. The participants were free to withdraw at any time without any penalty. They were also free to skip any questions I had asked them.

The third activity was minimizing field issues by reaching out to the gatekeepers. I asked many friends to connect me with the right people who could participate and provide me with rich information. In this particular step, I asked only to interview participants who are fluent in the

English language to avoid loss of meaning in translations. My participant selection criteria required the participants to be a Somali parent with a K-12 student with special needs during the COVID-emic distance learning. I dropped some potential participants because they refused to participate or demanded money.

My fourth activity was collecting data in multiple ways, including interviews and archival investigation. I also did an archival investigation obtaining and checking all participants' children's IEPs to confirm their child's special need status and grade. In addition, I kept the records of this study as confidential as possible. I saved the information in the most secure online location available for us at the University of St. Thomas. The research data was stored and held in the University of St Thomas's OneDrive, a secure iCloud storage. I saved any backup and copies of participant data in a secure and controlled computer as backup. However, I could not guarantee confidentiality because data security incidents and breaches may occur. The transcriptions and recordings were saved and kept in folders in OneDrive.

Finally, I recorded and transcribed the interview data and field notes. For instance, I proofread carefully and made sure everything was present in the data before I moved to the analysis part of the data. Then it was time to put them into NVIVO, a data analysis computer software, for analysis. It was a great learning experience for me to use NVIVO for the research; initially, navigating the software was a bit of a struggle.

Data Analysis

The first step in the analysis process of phenomenological study is to collect data through interviews, observations, or other methods. But it is time to analyze the data. So, after completing all the data collection, it was time to describe and analyze my data. I transcribed the

interview data I collected into a written format that needed to be transferred easily. This involved converting any audio or video recordings into a written format that can be analyzed.

I used NVIVO and Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to assist in identifying and organizing codes and categories into themes. I revisited the data and evaluated the coding and themes for relevance and completeness. Then, I synthesized the identified categories and themes to comprehensively understand the lived experiences of Somali parents with special needs children in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This involved identifying patterns and relationships between the categories and themes. I completed the data analysis in February 2023. Then, I used a graphic organizer for this research so the reader could visualize the study timeline. I put below the visual as a figure of this study. So, see Figure 1 on the following page.

Figure 1

Study Timeline
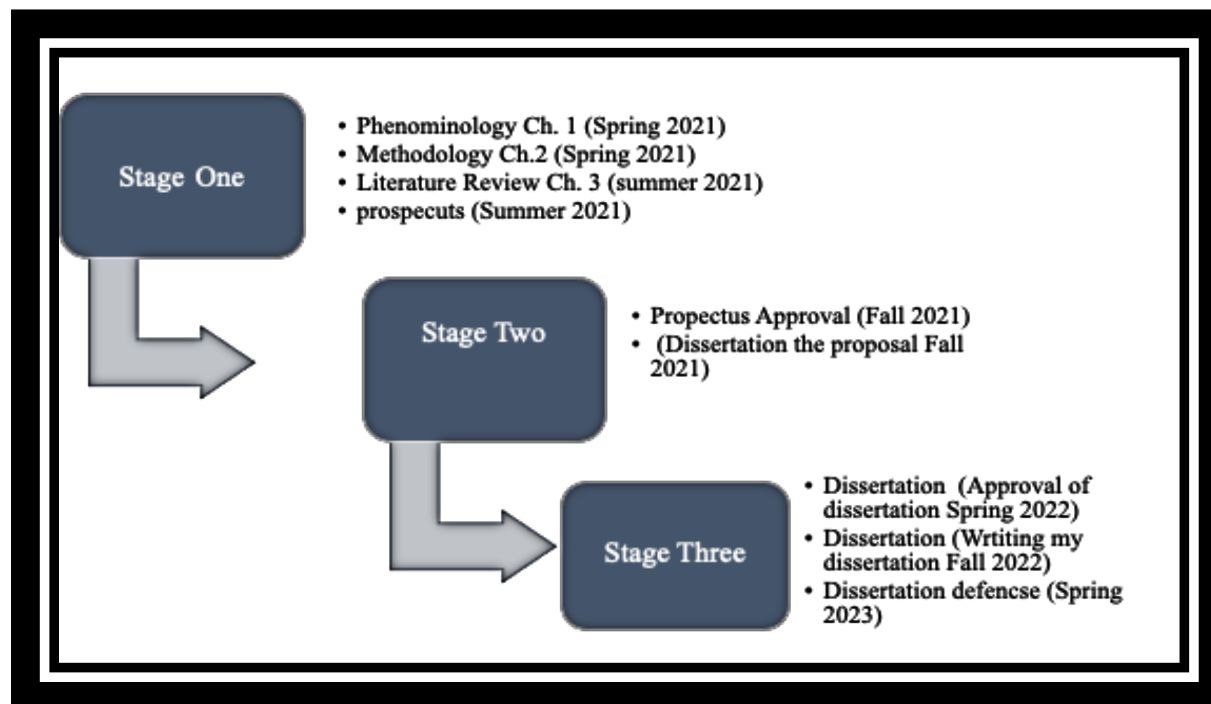
Reflexive Statement

Researchers need to identify and reflect on their experiences and connections to the phenomenon and the research participants. Patel (2016) encouraged researchers to identify their "ontological entry-points and impacts as researchers" (p. 57). Reflecting means the researchers need to tell the readers what connects them to the research. Therefore, as an experienced Somali educator with a special education background, it was straightforward for me to authentically interact with participants and analyze data from an insider viewpoint because of our shared experiences. Also, in my current role as a school administrator, I work with many Somali parents in my schools. Equally, it was easy for me to understand how the Somali parents of K-12 students with disabilities experienced distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota. Therefore, the potential bias on the research question was minimal. The goal was to report how Somali parents experienced distance learning in terms of inclusion, access, and communication with teachers and school administration during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures.

Additionally, I became aware of issues related to Somali culture, politics, and society. I engaged in "self-questioning" and "self-understanding" to challenge my own interpretation of the data. I asked deep questions about understanding if these Somali parents encountered any problems. How did they get help, and from whom did they get help? Like Patton (2015), I have become aware of the importance of "mindfulness" and "empathetic neutrality" (p. 70). I employed the concept of mindfulness and empathetic neutrality to relate to the participants and listen to them.

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, investigators consider several ways to make their research reliable. However, according to Gines (2017, p. 91), the reliability goals are not to yield generalizations. Also, Creswell and Poth (2018) summarized their stance in the following way "We consider validation [reliability] in qualitative research to be an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher, the participants, and the readers" (p. 259). Therefore, in the following section, I will explain the processes I used for reliability in this study.

Gines (2017) reported that qualitative research aims not to have a priori or hypothesis but to ensure high-quality data that are meaningful and reliable for conveying the significant experience of the participants in the qualitative research (p. 91). Similarly, Steve et al. (2016) reported, "The goal of qualitative research is to examine how things look from different vantage points. The student's perspective is just as important as the teacher's; the juvenile delinquents as important as the judge's" (p. 10). Thus, this research aims to convey the participant's lived experience to the fullest possible extent.

Explaining the importance of reliability in qualitative research many different ideas exist regarding the importance of reliability in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 254). For example, Patton (1999) explains triangulation as using multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena in question. Therefore, I used the triangulation method to establish data reliability and validate the themes by conducting interviews and collecting participants' children's IEPs and field notes. Gines (2017) reported, "Qualitative research does not seek objectivity and generalization" (p. 91). Additionally, Creswell and Poth (2018) said, "to make sure the findings are transferable between

researchers and those being studied, a thick description is necessary" (p. 256). It means having multiple pieces of evidence that point in the same direction will create credibility and reliability for the phenomenon. This explains the importance of reliability in qualitative research.

Member Check

Similarly, to validate the themes, I used member checking to validate this study. According to Birt et al. (2016), an exemplary method of member checking is the member check interview. A second interview follows the first interview to confirm, modify, and verify what had been said in the initial interview (p. 4). In this case, I did exactly that with participants and reinterviewed some of them to confirm and double-check some answers they gave in their earlier interviews. I also emailed all participants the interview recordings and transcripts to check their accuracy and asked them if they would like to receive the final interview transcripts and recordings. Only two participants requested the final transcripts and recordings, and I sent them their transcripts and interview recordings.

<div align="center">

Ethical Considerations

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In this section, I discuss and address any ethical concerns that may occur in this research. However, first, what is an ethical consideration in qualitative research? According to Weis and Fine (2000) and Creswell and Poth (2018), the ethical considerations include the following: (1) Asking to consider the role of the researcher as an outsider/insider researcher; (2) Assessing issues participants may find difficult to share; (3) Establishing support and respectful relationship without stereotypes and negative labels; and (4) Acknowledging participant voices in the final report (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 54). Second, I took note of the participants' risks in telling their stories to a stranger, which in this case was me, the researcher. Participants revealed firsthand experiences and challenges that placed them in uncomfortable positions. Therefore, I made sure

the participants felt comfortable by showing them respect and good body language during the interview. Third, I showed sensitivity to the participants' stories by listening openly without judgment. I did not impose my beliefs on their experiences to allow shared experiences to emerge naturally throughout the interview. In general, I got closer to the participants and made positive relationships to alleviate any stress or discomfort they may experience due to their participation in the study.

Another ethical concern was the protection of the data and the privacy of the research participants and how to analyze it. For instance, Creswell and Poth (2000) reported the need for ethical consideration for data analysis (p. 183). As the principal investigator, I used the universal ethical guidelines of "do no harm." and followed the University of St. Thomas' IRB guidelines to solve this. I avoided disclosing any information that would harm participants. Also, I addressed any ethical concerns by dealing with them directly as the research progressed. Before I conducted my research and obtained any necessary consent, I explained the scope of this study, including the risks and the benefits to the participants, by following the University of St. Thomas's IRB guidelines. Next, I told the participants how the data and materials would be stored securely online. Third, I avoided siding with participants and disclosed only positive results. Finally, I respected the privacy of the participants.

Participants' Risks and Benefits

According to Tait's (2010) report, some studies have highlighted the importance of research participants having a good understanding of the elements of consent, particularly the risks, and benefits. The reason is that some research data indicates that the format and framing of research risks and benefits are essential determinants of subject understanding. To solve this, I explained the risks and benefits to each participant in this research. In this research, the risk to

participants was very minimal. The risks for the participants included the following: Participants found sharing information challenging because that caused them to recall difficult memories about their experiences with distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, participants may worry about their thoughts being misinterpreted in English, which was their second language. Third, participants may be apprehensive about sharing information about their child due to stereotypes and negative labels. Fourth and final, participants may be concerned about how their data will be used and made public.

Similarly, I explained the risks to the participants. Therefore, participating in this research had no direct benefits, such as monetary value. However, participants in this research study received the following benefits when they participated in this research. First, they participated in advancing the education of students with disabilities in distance learning. Second, they learned and became aware of distance learning issues. Third, they gained access to information, tools, and strategies to help their children. Finally, they contributed to the research that would benefit other Somali parents with students with special needs.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine and explore Somali parents' experiences with K-12 students with special needs in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota. I collected qualitative data from nine participants using semi-structured interviews, artifacts (e.g., IEPs) reviews, and comments captured during the interviews on field notes to answer the research questions.

With the assistance of NVIVO data analysis software, I coded the interview data and created a list of unique categories. I then grouped the categories into themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Five major themes emerged from the data analysis about the participants' experiences. As depicted in Figure 2, the five themes include (1) environment, (2) roles and responsibilities, (3) barriers, (4) student achievement, and (5) benefits. In this chapter, I present participants' understanding of their distance learning experiences by summarizing the five major themes and 13 sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Figure 2

Emerged Themes
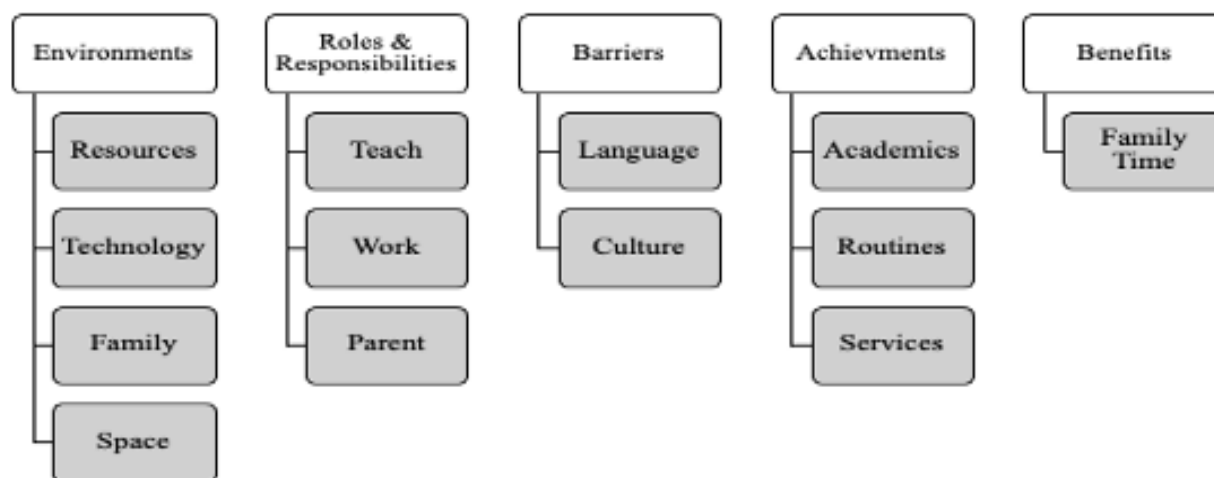
Participant's Home Environments

The first central theme that emerged from my data analysis was the participants' home environments during the COVID-19 learning. All nine participants discussed experiencing distance learning issues related to the home environment during COVID-19. The study's findings revealed that all participants had common home environments experiences that were not conducive to learning during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. According to Doz et al. (2022), "the environment in which students learn significantly impacts their achievement as well as their well-being." In this section, I will provide examples of how home environment issues were noted to have impacted distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Mr. Haji reported that he felt the most significant impact that distance learning brought to his child was changing the school environment to the home environment. He said, "for children with autism, the environment is part of their education, how they see the classroom setting, and where they can sit. So, my child missed all of that, meaning virtual learning did not apply to him." In addition, the data revealed four issues that participants spoke about impeding their children's distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in the home setting. These include (1) resources, (2) access to technology, (3) extended family, and (4) spaces for learning.

Resources

The first issue participants felt was impeding their children's learning virtually was the lack of resources, such as technology devices and the internet. All the participants, except two, expressed the need for additional resources. The data also revealed that all participants experienced an access and inclusion barrier during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. Most participants shared that they needed more resources to benefit from online learning at home. For example, school-provided resources and technologies were not helping their children

with disabilities to learn on online platforms and distance learning. In particular, students with more significant needs require one-on-one assistance to participate and engage in online learning**.** They reported that they needed more resources so that their children could learn and participate the distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Mr. Haji again said, "We did not get any resources except a Chromebook." Furthermore, he felt the help he needed from the school was not there. Similarly, Ms. Fardowso shared that the school's support was minimal. So, unless she used resources from her network of friends and parents, who did not offer her much, she needed to figure out what to do "because their hands were stretched thin." Moreover, Ms. Duniyo said this:

> There was nothing. I felt like they forgot about the special ed kids. I felt like we only got things that we asked for. Like if I didn't ask for it, I wouldn't get it. So, it was hurtful to have low expectations from teachers for my kids. I asked them for age-appropriate reading materials and age-appropriate math materials for my kid. I ended up buying my own books and trying to supplement them on my own.

Ms. Duniyo's feelings and experiences were not an isolated incident but rather a common access and inclusion problem faced by parents of students with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. Also, those who didn't ask the school believed they wouldn't get what they needed to participate and get access to online learning fully.

Access to Technology

With the second issue, access to technology, seven out of nine participants reported that the school did provide them with technology during COVID-19. For instance, Mr. Amin said, "The school provided laptops, so the kids brought laptops on. So, they were using that to connect through Google Meet or Google Classroom. So that was the technology the school provided."

However, other participants shared that not all school districts provided technology to their students. Ms. Dahabo mentioned that "There was no technology provided by anyone from the school district." In her experience, most participants used and provided their own technological devices.

All participants reported that they had no problems accessing the internet and had good internet connections. The number of participants who reported that the school provided internet to the students during the COVID-19 pandemic was zero. As most participants said, they paid for their own services without getting help from their school districts. Also, the lessons provided online delivery differed from school to school. For instance, some schools were offering classes synchronously, (same-time communication where participants interact via video conferencing, zoom, google meet, and WebEx), or asynchronously (time-separated communication such as e-mail, Google forms, streaming video content, posting lecture notes, and social media platforms), while some other schools just provided weekly packets sent home.

Nevertheless, some participants reported that children with special needs had difficulty accessing their classrooms by having login issues into platforms or needing an adult assistant to log in. For instance, Mr. Amin said. "Technology issues and people troubleshooting how to join and mute themselves during the class were ongoing during the day. And then, the assignment and the homework were on top of that. Then, of course, the child with special needs will need extra time and extra help". Similarly, Mr. Haji said, "My son always needed help to sign into the Chromebook and talk to his teacher, and he depended on us. Every time we tried to log in or sign in for him on the Chromebook, he stood up and ran away." This shows that having the technology and access to the internet was not enough for students with special needs to be able to

participate in online and virtual learning because they needed help navigating the platforms, such as help logging into Zoom, Google Meet, or accessing the school websites.

Extended Family

The third issue in the home environment that participants reported was related to other or extended family members in the home, including siblings and sometimes grandparents, who needed their time. For example, seven out of nine participants reported various issues or concerns in this area that impeded their special needs child's distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Fardowsa, when asked about the other factors that hindered providing education for her special needs child, responded, "I had other kids that were also needing my attention and my support. Kindergarten, first grader, I had to also attend to my newborn baby." She added that she had many other family members at home, including extended family members. Similarly, Ms. Dahabo talked about how difficult it was to help her child with special needs while caring for her other family members. She said, "I have another child. I have relatives. I had an elderly parent who was also sick to take care of." There were others in the home that needed her attention and care. In addition, Mr. Amin described the difficulties sick members of the family had with their children's learning during the COVID-19 distance learning. He reported that his family got sick with COVID-19 and were isolated at home. On the days they were unable to teach their children due to sickness, they were supposed to teach them during distance learning. Those days they were not getting a substitute teacher if they got sick and could not help their child during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that became an issue because the child was asked to miss class as well.

Ms. Shamso, another participant, also shared how she isolated her special needs child from other family members in the home to protect his health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

He had a medical disability called severe combined immune deficiency. As a result, he had a bone marrow transplant, leading to his cognitive delay. These stories show how other family members in the home caused different issues for different families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Spaces For Learning

With the fourth issue, more than half of the participants reported a lack of suitable spaces for learning at their homes during distance learning. Similarly, the data revealed that almost half of the participants had extended family members living with them in their homes, such as elderly parents or other extended family members, without enough space affecting the learning environment during distance learning. In addition, the data also revealed that all participants experienced learning space problems for their children during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. Most participants' common experiences were the need for more learning spaces in their homes due to large family size members and smaller available areas. In addition, sometimes, one child would be in class via online learning sitting next to another child who was also learning in a different online class. That causes a lack of focus and concentration issues. For example, Mr. Amin said, "finding a place and creating a learning space for the child in an extended or large family was very hard." In addition, Mr. Abdihakim talked about how difficult it was for his family to find quiet and distraction-free learning spaces for all his seven children during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. Similarly, Mr. Haji said, "We were tested extremely hard. Managing children all the time, or even in the home, was exceedingly difficult." Likewise, Mr. Amin shared how difficult it was for his family to share a small space and do their job by saying the following:

You are not able to get the full-time attention that you need. At the same time, as I said, you are dividing among other kids and other children of different grade levels, sharing a small space. So sometimes, you must attend to this one to do their homework while trying to keep this one in the classroom. So, time is taking a lot of energy out of us and, you know, it has affected a lot of our production. But you must be responsible for your job. And at the same time, you are obliged to educate your child at the same time. So that was a stressful time, which took a lot of personal and professional sacrifice to educate our children.

Similarly, Mr. Abiib pointed out how the home environment was not conducive for learning for special needs children during online learning because of the many distractions at home. Examples of distractions at his home included the television, passing by cars and traffic, and high-level noise in his neighborhood. Lastly, Mr. Amin also said that it was challenging to share a small space among children of different grade levels who needed full attention and concentration to engage in their lessons.

Roles and Responsibilities

In addition to participants' frustrations with home-setting distractions and issues, this study revealed that all participants experienced sudden role and responsibility changes during COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. All participants reported having difficulty balancing parental and work responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures, and stay-at-home orders. The data analysis revealed that participants had common experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic with school closures and stayed at- home orders. In addition, all participants described positive and negative experiences while staying at home with their children. The three subthemes that emerged are (1) becoming a teacher and facing the challenges

of teaching; (2) working from home and meeting work responsibilities; (3) parental responsibilities that never go away. For example, data showed that most participants became their children's teachers overnight because of the sudden school's sudden move to online learning. Parents with special needs children played a significant role in providing their children with disabilities online education in the position of the teacher while still struggling to balance their work responsibilities and teaching responsibilities. They shared how they needed help to fulfill the new teaching responsibility placed on them to teach their children during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning.

Teaching Responsibilities

Five of the nine participants reported not having any teaching experiences before COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. They reported that they suddenly found themselves in a new reality of becoming their children's teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. The teaching responsibilities were placed on them because the teachers were physically away from the students. Francis et al. (2022) noted that teachers "appreciated" parents of students with disabilities acting as paraprofessionals and teaching assistants during online instruction (p. 5). So, all participants grappled with the difficulties in their new reality of becoming their children's teachers overnight. For example, Mr. Amin expressed frustration with his new teaching responsibility when he took the role of a teacher. He said, "my teaching responsibility was to be able to get the information, make the children understand the information and do their work on their homework and then submit it online electronically so that the teacher can receive the work." In addition, it was new for children to be connected to a computer or a small screen and to join a class from 8:00 a.m. to about 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon every day, keeping them glued to a small square screen for eight hours a day.

Furthermore, understanding online learning took much time for some participants, including Amin and his wife, because they were not trained teachers. So, all they could do was play the role of a parent, ensuring the child was doing his homework, but playing the role of a full-time effective teacher was a big challenge for them. Mr. Amin said that "it was particularly challenging to make the child pay full attention during the class. Stay attentive, listen, and follow what was taught." So, there was much chaos for everybody, including the teachers trying to engage students. Distance learning was not only new to parents, including those parents with children with special needs, but it was incredibly challenging and frustrating for all parents.

Similarly, Mr. Abdihakim, who was not a trained teacher, put his experiences with distance learning this way: "I was co-teaching. I took the role of setting up and preparing the learning materials and made sure my children followed the lesson plan. Also, I played the role of a parent and teacher at home." Sometimes it was challenging for his child with the disability to follow the lesson plan. Moreover, he was not trained as a teacher. This was because when the kids were in-person learning before the pandemic, they had a paraprofessional or an adult who supported them in the classroom and directed their behavior. He did not have the skill set to teach them.

Ms. Dahabo also reported a similar experience with her newly imposed responsibility. She said, "My responsibility was to teach my child the lesson plans. I sat down with him and went through the lesson plans. I checked how he learned that lesson plan and then reported back to the teacher." That shows that all participants handled the teacher's job by doing prep, instruction, monitoring, redirecting, and communicating with the child's online teachers. In addition, Ms. Fardowso summarized her newly imposed teaching responsibility in a beautiful way:

Basically, I was myself. I become my child's case manager, teacher, mother, role model,

and behavior therapist. I made basic mistakes with that responsibility. I will be with him

eight hours a day, teaching him and trying to navigate online learning and figuring out

how to instruct a child with a disability for the first year of being in an academic setting.

Ms. Fardowso's words show how frustrated parents with children with special needs were with

online learning. The reason was the parents' need for teaching skills and experience, plus

struggling with new online platforms that were challenging even to experienced teachers.

However, the trained participants reported fewer issues guiding their children with

disabilities because they already had teaching experience. But still, they were not problem-free,

and they reported frustration with having their new responsibility of teaching their children

during the COVID-19 pandemic. Distance learning was primarily due to a lack of time to fulfill

this responsibility. For example, Mr. Nuradin said, "I have taken the role of a teacher because my

son was in a setting four (segregated school setting), and he needed one-on-one assistance to do

his schoolwork. So, playing the teacher's role during the day was immensely difficult. As a

result, he struggled to learn from virtual learning." Ms. Duniyo shared similar experiences when

it came to teaching her children with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic distance

learning in Minnesota. She reported that online learning was difficult, and she was not prepared

for it.

Moreover, there was a need to make more effort to include children with special needs in

programming. Ms. Duniyo felt like his teachers did not know him. She fought hard with the staff

to provide access to her child's activities for him to do. They did not know her son had a

developmental cognitive disability (DCD). Furthermore, he used to have paraprofessionals that

were supposed to work with him in the classroom, but that kind of support was not available in

online learning. Her husband did the online schoolwork while she did the parent work herself. All that shows that all participants had experienced some difficulties guiding and teaching their children with special needs, mainly to a lack of experience and training in teaching and lack of time to fulfill that duty and responsibility.

Work Responsibilities

All participants spoke about their harrowing experiences and the challenges of overcoming balancing work responsibilities and parental responsibilities. For example, Mr. Amin reported how he and his wife were navigating the challenges of working from home and, at the same time, teaching their children. He said, "We both had jobs (referring to his wife), and my wife was a student then. So, it was not a lot of fun. But, of course, you must divide your time between ensuring the child attends school and doing our jobs from home." In addition, Mr. Abiib, a trained teacher, put his experience this way when it comes to balancing work and parental responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. He said:

> Well, you do not know whether you should be the parent or whether you should be the teacher. On the other hand, at times, you have your responsibility. I am also a teacher. So ironically, I know what other teachers are going through. While I am just trying to deal with my child, I am also dealing with other kids simultaneously. I had my own caseload to deal with, and my child was just next to me. So, I was not exactly sure whether I was the teacher, ally, or parent.

Mr. Abiib's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning sums up how challenging it was for parents to balance different responsibilities. They were working from home and, at the same time, were teaching and helping their children with online learning.

Ms. Shamso, who works a full-time job, said, "My biggest challenge was adjusting my work schedule or other commitments during the workweek." Moreover, much of her work schedule had to change to accommodate her son being home. She did not have time to do anything else or take him somewhere, like therapist appointments. That would be mostly it: he was always home, and they could not just ask other family members or other people to help him because of his weak immune system. They had to protect him. So much of his time, he just stayed at home, and she stayed with him. Equally, Ms. Duniyo, who had difficulties balancing work and parental responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning, shared that working full-time and other children prevented her from doing more access and learning for her special needs children. So, when she was helping her child with special needs, the children in general education didn't get the guidance or structure they would get from a general education teacher or parent who was not busy.

Likewise, Nuradin, a single parent raising three of his kids, including one with special needs, alone in Minnesota, while the rest of his family lives in another state, shared what he considered the biggest hindrance to meeting his child's educational needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. He reported that he worked full-time as a mental health practitioner, and at the same time, he was trying to help his son meet his educational goal through online distance learning. So, he needed more time to devote to his son's educational needs, and at the same time, he needed more time to focus on his job and work responsibilities.

Parental Responsibilities

Many participants shared how difficult it was to balance parental and work responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic school closure and distance learning in Minnesota. For example, Mr. Abiib, a trained teacher himself, said, "I did not really know

whether I should be the parent or whether I should be the teacher. While trying to deal with my own child just next to me, I was dealing with other kids or children." Furthermore, Ms. Duniyo, also an educator, shared some difficulties. She stated that she worked full-time from home and had struggled to balance work and parental attention to her children. She said, "When I was helping my child with special needs, the children with general education did not get the guidance or structure they would get from a general ed teacher or parent who was not busy. So, it was just too much on the family dynamics." Other participants shared related stories of how they struggled to balance work and parental responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures, and distance learning.

Barriers

This study discovered that Somali parents with children with special needs experienced some barriers during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. In addition, as they described any additional information based on their Somali background that might have impacted their child's distance learning at this time, most of the participants spoke about experiencing some kind of barrier. The subthemes in this area were (1) language barrier and (2) cultural barrier.

Language Barrier

Francis et al. (2022) noted that "Communication was really challenging among parents who did not really understand English, making communication challenging, even among bilingual participants." For example, several participants, based on their experiences, described experiencing a language barrier during their child's online learning, although they spoke English as a second language. Mr. Abdihakim said, "There was a language barrier. It added on it and some costs. We had to request an interpreter, and the interpreter was not available. So, it had a negative impact on my children's online learning." He added that he knew the language, but interpreting the material and making them understand it was a different skill set than what he

had. Additionally, Ms. Fardowso mentioned that they had extended family members helping the child, and there was a language barrier. She said, "I have my mom to help, but she cannot because she does not speak English." Therefore, this shows the extent to which language barriers can exist in the family even when the participants reported they had not experienced any language barrier.

Cultural Barrier

Likewise, describing and answering if there was any additional information based on their Somali background that may have impacted their child's learning during the distance learning, only one of the nine participants mentioned experiencing any cultural barriers. For example, Mr. Haji put his experience toward distance learning during the pandemic this way:

> So far, I know that there are many things we can say that are barriers. However, the most significant one I can mention is the cultural barrier. Sometimes the biggest problem we face in education is a cultural barrier. The language barrier is not a problem for me. I can read and communicate with the teachers. Moreover, we need to create awareness of that because my Somali background, language, and culture do not exist here in Minneapolis or Minnesota curriculum.

Some participants felt they had experienced cultural and communication barriers. Even if their language was not a barrier, culture seemed to be a barrier.

However, contrary to Haji's experiences, some other participants didn't share any cultural barriers during the distance learning. For example, Ms. Shamso said, "I did not feel like the barriers there were because of any cultural barriers. It was morally more for me. It was more skills. I did not have the skills to be a teacher to instruct my son." Cultural barriers turned out to be almost non-existent, as I thought before the data analysis.

Impact on Student Achievement

Participants reported distance learning had negatively impacted their child's achievement as another major theme that emerged through data analysis. In addition, all participants described negative E-learning—experiences while their children were distance learning. The three subthemes that emerged are impacts on (1) services, (2) routines, and (3) students' academics.

Impacts on Services

The first subtheme was overcoming services-related challenges caused by distance learning for their children while distance learning**.** All participants shared that they struggled and faced difficulties in not receiving related services for their children with special needs due to the social quarantine laws imposed by the state to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The challenges made their children miss vital services and forced them to learn other coping methods. The second subtheme was participants experiencing challenges with the changes in routines. Some participants with children with autism reported they had experienced significant challenges due to changes in routines. The third and most crucial subtheme was that all participants reported a negative impact on their children's academics and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. Participants went further and shared that their child with special needs experienced regression during the COVID-19 online learning.

When participants were asked to describe how their school districts provided access and how they and their child participated in the related service with providers, for example, speech-language occupational therapists and physical therapists during distance learning, participants reported mixed experiences. Primarily, participants spoke about special education-related services challenges and how they tried other ways to fill those needs for their special needs child. For example, some participants tried to provide the services themselves with the provider's

online help and guidance. However, several participants never received any related services or help from their school districts, and their children did not receive any related services at all.

Participants who reported receiving special education-related services for their children during the COVID-19 distance learning stated it was not online but blended, sometimes online and sometimes in person. Mr. Amin reported that his special needs child was getting services from both his school and Fraser (an autism specialist institution). He reported that specialists would come from the school or Fraser. They all come to the house a few months or every few months, or they will call over the phone or have a video interaction with the child.

Furthermore, some participants shared their frustration of receiving little or no services at all. For example, Mr. Abdihakim reported that his school district did not provide related services for his special needs children, except for the speech services that he described were not effective at all. Similarly, Ms. Duniyo said, "I didn't get any of that stuff," refereeing to the related services. In addition, Mr. Haji also reported a similar experience when he described how his school provided access to the related service during distance learning. Mr. Haji said:

> My child did not get any speech. He did not get any occupational therapy. He did not get any other services related to his IEP. So, everything was complicated for us. And we have yet to receive any services besides a Chromebook. And when the teacher saw he was not engaging in the Chromebook and could not respond to the teacher, the teacher said I am not able to sit with him through Chromebook. So, after only two days, they give up.

Others also described similar experiences and how not getting those services impacted their special needs child. They alluded to how this was causing them much frustration.

Impact of Student Routines

All the participants quickly learned how to adapt to their new routines and realities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine and homestay orders, but that devastated their children with special needs because of their routine changes. Explaining their experiences about the impact of distance learning on their children, parents shared related stories about routine changes during the pandemic. For example, whether their child continued learning and growing or saw a regression of learning during those distance learning, most of the participants shared negative experiences in their special needs child routine changes. For example, Mr. Haji described his experience with distance learning during COVID-19 as being incredibly challenging. His son experienced regression during the COVID-19 pandemic online learning because his son's understanding of the situation was low. One of the areas that Mr. Haji's son used to enjoy was having a routine, riding the school bus from home to school. In addition, Mr. Haji's son missed the environment. His schedule was messed up. Every time his son requested to go to school, he cried if he did not get his request. He tried to go outside the home; he was not sitting and had become out of control, behavior-wise. For instance, he used to wake up at 6:00 a.m., catch his bus at 6:30 a.m., then return at 2:30 p.m.

Ms. Shamso claimed the biggest distance learning impact on her child's learning was the impact on his routine. She reported that it was frustrating for her son because he learns by routine. Moreover, the routine was changed without warning or adjusting it. Her son had a tough time, and he did not participate much in distance learning because it required him to pay attention. Ms. Shamso said, "I feel like it was not working for him because she needed to be trained or know what to do." Thus, across the board, all the participants shared experiencing difficulties in their special needs child routine changes during the COVID-19 pandemic distance

learning and shared how that contributed to their child experiencing not being able to fully participate in the online learning.

Impact on Student Learning

The third and most important theme that emerged from the data analysis was the impact on student learning. I asked participants to describe their experiences with the impact of distance learning on their child's learning and achievement. For example, did they see continued growth or regression during distance learning? All participants spoke about seeing regression in learning, especially the social skills in their child's learning.

Mr. Nuradin spoke about how distance learning negatively impacted his son's learning. He talked about how his son used to receive one-on-one support when he was in-person learning because he was in setting four (segregated school). He said, "In online learning, my son did not understand that he was in class when he was in the online sessions. So that is why he experienced some regression in his social and academic skills, so it was negative." In addition, Nuradin specifically mentioned one of the negative experiences was that his son did not receive social skills during the COVID-19 pandemic online learning. His son experienced some regression regarding social skills, because he did not get any social skills and activities during the pandemic.

Like Mr. Nuradin, Ms. Fardowso talked about how distance learning affected her entire family's mental health, including her special needs child. She said:

Distance learning really affected my entire family's mental health—how the house functions. The main importance was that my son's mental health affected his behavior and skills as he learned would regress. It put a lot of pressure on us or put a lot of stress on my other children and me because the demands of homework and demand for

deadlines were unbearable. It was not something we could do it. It was intense. And the

pressure was high, and the demand and distance learning really stressed all of us

including my child.

In addition, she fears distance learning may cause mental health problems for her special needs

child.

Furthermore, Ms. Duniyo also shared similar frustrations about academic regression with

distance learning during the pandemic. She saw much regression in her children's learning during

the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. Some goals and objectives were never met because

of online distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, her children

experienced weight gain when they were at home. There was a lack of social skills and academic

skills. Some did not even take the state test (MCA) or the first screening test as they did at the

end of an event. So, it was just too much for her family. As I described earlier, participants stated

differently, but talked about similar issues they experienced with distance learning during the

COVID-19 pandemic that impacted their children's learning and academic achievement.

Nonetheless, they all agreed distance learning was not something suitable for their special needs

learning and would not consider distance learning for their child in the future.

Distance Learning Benefits

Besides experiencing challenges and stress, participants also reported some positive

experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning and stated that not all of them

were about discomfort and struggles. They identified having more time with their children and

their families as a positive experience. Most participants shared how enjoyable it was to have

their children with them all day during the COVID-19 pandemic, school closure, and distance

learning.

Time with Family

When describing any positive experiences as parents during distance learning, most participants reported having extra time with their children and families. For example, Ms. Shamso said, "I would say the only positive thing I would say was, it gave us time to spend with our son. But that was it." Like Ms. Shamso, Ms. Fardowso reported similar positive experiences and said:

On the positive side was that I could teach my son what 25 plus 27 was. I was able to teach him how to do big numbers. I was able to teach him all the social questions. I was able to have some schedule between him and me because he is like we built a bond when it comes to me. You know, we bonded well. Furthermore, I learned to enjoy my son and make that something we do in the future for fun for him.

Mr. Nuradin also mentioned that online learning was easier in some ways. He said, "The online was, in that sense, more accessible at home. So that is the only positive thing I can imagine. And the accommodations my son received while distance learning were positive experiences for him." These showed that not all participants' experiences of distance learning were negative. Some participants liked the idea of having their child with them all the time and having more time together.

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Summary

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Five major themes and 13 subthemes emerged through the data analysis. The first major theme, participant's home environments, has five subthemes: (1) availability of resources, (2) access to the internet, (3) access to technology, (4) issues with family, and (5) environmental spaces for learning. The second major theme, roles, and responsibilities, has three sub-themes (1) teaching, (2) working, and (3) parenting roles. The third major theme, barriers, has two sub-

themes (1) language and (2) culture. The fourth major theme, impact on student achievement, has three sub-themes, (1) services, (2) routines, and (3) academics. Finally, the last major theme, distance learning positives, has one sub-theme, (1) time with family. To my surprise, I found that not all participants had similar experiences and views regarding the cause of their child's academic regression during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. For example, for social skills losses, some highlighted the lack of social interaction opportunities for students during online learning, while others attributed it to the lack of access and inclusion. In addition, some participants with one child reported how difficult the distance learning experience was for their child because of not interacting with their peers face to face. In the next chapter, I will analyze the findings of my study using two theoretical frameworks: disability theory and stigma theory.

CHAPTER FIVE: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine and explore the experiences of Somali parents who have K-12 students with special needs in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota. The findings of this study have revealed the participants' experiences with distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota. An in-depth analysis of the data collected produced five major themes, including (1) environments, (2) roles and responsibilities, (3) barriers, (4) student achievement, and (5) benefits.

In this chapter, I provide a high-level summary of nine stories told by participants who have K-12 students with special needs toward distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures. All nine participants shared their challenging experiences with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, participants shared that distance learning had a negative impact on their children's learning and achievements during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota. However, they also reported it had some positive benefits.

Also, prior research supported this (Porter et al., 2021) because, in the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic caused an interruption of educational services to students with disabilities due to policy decisions and interpretations of the law. Table 2 provides a summary of the relationships between the findings and the two theories. Thus, I analyze and interpret the thematic results throughout this chapter using disability and stigma theories. Then, I connect these theories and tenets to the main findings. Also, I summarize the tenets of the theories as they relate to students with disabilities and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. Thus, In the following sections, I will examine each of the identified main themes using disability theory (Siebers, 2008), (Barn & Oliver, 2010) and stigma theory (Goffman, 1963).

Table 2

Relationships Between Findings and Theories

THEORIES	*RELATED FINDINGS*
Theory 1 Disability Theory	***Access and Inclusion***
Theory 1 - Tenet 1	Challenges for parents
• Focuses on recognizing disability as a dimension of human difference and not as a defect using a disability interpretive lens.	• Resources, technology, spaces, • Teaching, working, and parental responsibilities
Theory 1 - Tenet 2	Suggestions for parents
• Addresses the meaning of inclusion in schools and encompasses administrators, teachers, and parents who have children with disabilities.	• Get educated about your rights, • Seek help from professionals if you need it.

Theory 2 Stigma Theory

Theory 2 - Tenet 1

- An attribute that could be readily discernable, such as one's appearance, including skin color or body size, or hidden but discreditable if revealed, such as one's criminal record or struggles with mental illness (Goffman, 1963).

Theory 2 - Tenet 2

- May affect individuals and those closely associated with them, such as parents and other family members (Goffman, 1963).

Access

Challenges

- Language and cultural barriers.
- Achievement impacts academics, routines, and services.

Benefits

- Time with family

Suggestions for parents

- Get educated about your rights.
- Seek help from professionals if you need it.

Environments

Now I will elaborate on the connection between the participant's home environments findings and disability theory. Some of the parents in this study mentioned that their child was not able to participate in online learning due to their disabilities and the learning environment. The environment further disabled the child's learning. Disability studies define disability as the product of social injustice, which doesn't require a cure or elimination of a defect in the person but a significant change in the social system. Parents in this study shared social injustices in

access and inclusion toward distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, as their children with a disability did not receive the support they needed to be successful in distance learning. It wasn't that they couldn't learn, but the structure of the online learning environment didn't give them a suitable setting to learn. As a result, some significant changes need to be made to remove the challenges.

To discuss the home environment issues and how they relate to the disability theory, tenet 1 of disability theory focuses on recognizing human differences, meaning access and inclusion should address those differences of the child with special needs. Creswell and Poth's (2018) disability theory tenants focus on recognizing disability as a dimension of human difference and not as a defect using a disability interpretive lens. It rationalized how the tenants of disability and inclusion relate to human differences resulting from social construction (i.e., society's response to individuals). The reason was to understand how access and inclusion were addressed by school districts and how Somali parents perceived inclusion and access during distance learning.

Moreover, as an example, participants in this study reported they had experienced inclusion and access issues, such as resources, technology, and spaces, during the COVID-19 distance learning of their child with special needs. For example, some participants shared that their children did not fully participate in distance learning due to their disabilities and the learning environment at home. Some participants even shared how their child did not get one-on-one support during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning, although their IEP requires it. The circumstances made it impossible to provide these students with the attention they needed.

Roles and Responsibilities

Again, in this section, I used the disability theory. Creswell and Poth (2018) held that disability inquiry addresses the meaning of inclusion in schools and encompasses administrators, teachers, and parents with children with disabilities. For example, I found that some participants felt overwhelmed by becoming teachers to their children while working from home. They shared that when they tried online learning, it was not a meaningful way to educate their children with special needs due to experiencing access and inclusion barriers. Moreover, some participants even stopped trying to join online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning because of the new responsibilities of becoming their children's teachers during online learning.

Furthermore, to discuss the roles and responsibilities of participants, access and inclusion were issues as participants shared how they had experienced difficulties balancing the different responsibilities, such as teaching, working, and parental responsibilities, during the COVID-19 pandemic homestay orders. Besides, the data revealed that only four of the nine participants had some teaching experience, and still, they needed help to fulfill it. They also shared having difficulty fulfilling all those responsibilities, including teaching their special needs child. In addition, some participants avoided asking for help, and their children with special needs did not get the help they needed. For example, some related services providers, such as developmental adapted physical education (DAPE), speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy services, did not provide related services during the COVID-19 pandemic online learning via Zoom or other online communication apps. In addition, most teachers and assistant teachers did not provide one-on-one support due to the pandemic restrictions and online learning situations.

Lastly, school districts' sudden implementation of distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic caused parents, like teachers, to struggle with the new online learning platforms.

For instance, Aliyyah et al. (2020) reported that teachers have lesson plans that are not easily transferrable from the face-to-face learning system to the distance learning systems because this was the first time this was widely implemented. As a result, a teacher must learn and overcome all the knowledge and understanding challenges required in online learning platforms, such as Zoom and other ways to post the lessons, so that the teaching continues to achieve its intended goals (Aliyyah et al., 2020, p. 1). This means many lessons and related special education services cannot be done via online platforms.

Barriers

For the purpose of this study, I also employed the stigma theory. Participants of this study reported avoiding confrontation with schools about their children's special needs services not being provided during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning due to existing barriers in the system. Gordon et al. (2020) noted how several social psychologists had explained stigma as a situational threat that results from being placed in a social situation that influences how one is treated (p. 3). In addition, Selman et al. (2018) found other perceptions of the behavior of children with autism as a factor of social stigma directed at parents. Moreover, Link et al. (2004) used the model of labeling and stereotyping to study the stigma that parents with children with special needs experience in their community settings.

Goffman (1963) explains the stigma theory tenant as an attribute that could be readily discernable, such as one's appearance, including skin color or body size, or hidden but discreditable if revealed, such as one's criminal record or struggles with mental illness. Also, it may affect those closely associated with the individual. For example, what surprised me was that only two participants reported experiencing language barriers. However, that does not mean it was less than other types of barriers. I was surprised to see that most of the participants reported

experiencing a cultural barrier. By responding and describing their experience based on what they see as additional barriers that impacted their children's learning during the COVID-19 distance learning, some participants explicitly explained that the biggest problem they faced was a cultural barrier. They stated that the Minnesota curriculum does not include the Somali language and culture in the curriculum.

Student Achievement

Similarly, for the purpose of this research, I used stigma theory again to look at why participants had negative experiences toward distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Minnesota and why services, routines, and academics were impacted. The American Psychiatric Association agrees with Goffman's (1963) stigma theory explanation and states, "Stigma not only directly affects individuals with mental illness but also the loved ones who support them, often including their family members." For example, stigma could be viewed as how parents respond to the negative attitudes of others. When experiencing stigma, parents may respond in two ways: either not saying anything even though they feel uncomfortable or stressed or moving away from the situation as quickly as possible, disassociating from these people (p. 14).

To discuss this study found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning many students experienced academic regression due to distance learning access and inclusion barriers, and parents avoided seeking help to avoid stigma to their children and themselves. For instance, participants knew how to overcome services, routine, and -related challenges caused by distance learning for their children with special needs while distance learning. However, many participants had minimal experience in teaching and doing instruction, causing them to stress and lose confidence in distance learning, contributing to a learning loss for their children with special

needs. Most participants in this study shared their disappointment with distance learning and how they believed their child with special needs experienced regression during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning. Social skills were among the common academic areas that most participants mentioned about their child's academic regression during distance learning. Most of them reported that their children with special needs were not getting meaningful social skills lessons during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the school closure and the loss of in-person social opportunities they used to receive. Some participants added how difficult it was for low-cognitive children to lose routines, services, and essential academic lessons during the COVID-19 distance learning.

Benefits

Contrary to my prior perception of distance learning unsuitable for K-12 students with special needs, I found online learning had some benefits to K-12 students and their parents. For instance, participants in this study reported that having their child with them all the time and spending more time with them during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning was a positive benefit they had received.

Moreover, I used the stigma theory to discuss the benefits of distance learning. As I mentioned earlier, disability stigma is prevalent in the Somali community. This data revealed that some parents avoided asking for help because of fear of stigma. As a result, their children with special needs did not get the help they needed. Hewitt et al. (2013) noted that many parents within the Somali community feel that ASD is "taboo." Therefore, some Somali parents may feel shame and stigma if their children are given the ASD label. Samatar (2016) also mentioned that, "Mental illness is considered taboo within the Somali community" (p. 7). Therefore, to shield

their child with a special need from stigma, some participants reported not asking for help from anyone, including their extended family members.

For the above reasons, most participants reported avoiding asking questions to their schools and seeking help to avoid the stigma related to having a child with a special need. However, Serchuk et al. (2021) reported that parents of children with disabilities still experience stigma. Serchuk and colleagues (2021) reported the existence of two kinds of stigma: (1) public stigma, which is prejudice and discrimination that are given as a labeled group when the public endorses stereotypes about that group; and (2) self-stigma, damaging to self-esteem and self-efficacy when someone internalizes these stereotypes. Therefore, most Somali parents who participated in this research agreed that the only positive they experienced during the COVID-19 distance learning was having more time with their children who were staying with them at home. They enjoyed a safe and stigma-free home environment with more time to be with their children.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I summarize the research findings of this study. I then discuss implications for practice, such as how parents, practitioners, and policymakers could use this information. Next, I discuss the limitations of this research and suggest possible areas in which parents with special needs children could use virtual learning. I end this chapter by highlighting the contribution of this study to academia and recommendations for further studies on this topic and provides some closing thoughts that focus on my own growth and learning through this research.

Summary of Study and Findings

This study aimed to examine and explore the lived experiences of Somali parents with K-12 students with special needs toward distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota. To achieve this, I adopted a phenomenological study method. I started with a review of the literature on this topic. Then, I conducted semi-structured interviews and an archival investigation of nine parents with children with special needs. My research participants shared their individual experiences with distance learning during the pandemic school closures.

In this study, I used phenomenology to understand the essence of how Somali parents with children with special needs experienced distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Only four of the nine personal interviews with participants (i.e., parents) revealed that they had some teaching experience. Participants' stories varied in duration, impact, and lessons learned, but all proved valuable lessons from the participant's perspective. Data analysis revealed that all participants had shared experiences with distance learning, creating the emergence of similar themes and categories, such as home environment issues that impeded learning for their special needs child. Also, the parents experienced changes in their roles and responsibilities, which

caused barriers and impacted student learning. There was only one identified benefit during distance learning, which was having more time together at home with the family. This research identified ideas that parents, who experienced challenges during virtual learning with their child with special needs, may utilize to be more successful in providing distance learning in the future. Exploring multiple parents' voices provided the opportunity for the researcher to learn from their experiences and stories.

During the COVID-19 distance learning, the study first found that all participants struggled with home environment issues, including (1) a lack of learning resources, (2) limited access to technology, (3) the absence of learning spaces, and (4) distractions from extended family members. Second, the study found that participants experienced challenges with the learning roles and responsibilities thrust upon them. For instance, the challenges parents experienced forced them to take on new roles, such as becoming their children's teachers. Third, the study found that participants struggled to balance work and parental responsibilities, which included becoming teachers and facing the challenges of teaching, working from home, meeting work responsibilities, and dealing with parenting responsibilities. For example, the study found that even those with teaching experience faced challenges. All the parents had children with disabilities, which created additional difficulties, including the lack of special educational support that was previously available in in-person learning. This led to the regression of skills in the children being taught at home by their parents. Also, during the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning, students with special needs struggled and experienced a loss of skills and academic regression. Participants reported that the regression was due to the lack of resources, loss of services, and distractions in the home environments. Fourth, the study found participants faced barriers due to language and culture. Fifth, participants reported some benefits of online

learning, including spending more time with children. Lastly, the data analysis chapter presented the participants' understanding of their distance learning experiences by summarizing the major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Limitations of the Study

The study had several limitations, including the narrow demographics of the participants, who were all Somalis who had lived in the United States for a long time, had college degrees, and were predominantly male. The study excluded non-English speakers to avoid losing meaning in translation, reducing the eligible participant pool. To improve the scope of the study, future research could include a more diverse range of participants in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, and location. In addition, by interviewing more Somali parents with K-12 students with special needs who did distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures, the study might be expanded and reach a broader audience.

Additionally, the timing of the interviews, some of which were conducted outside of the distance learning period, may have affected the accuracy and detail of the participants' stories. Furthermore, my personal and professional relationships with some participants may have impacted the participant's willingness to share openly and honestly. Finally, the possibility of participants exaggerating their stories or inaccurately recalling events should also be considered.

Implications

From this study, several implications can be drawn. The first implication is that during online learning, families need a good learning environment with enough resources, such as access to technology in adequate and distraction-free learning spaces. This conclusion is drawn as all participants in this study experienced difficulties with these factors during the COVID-19 pandemic distance learning.

The second implication of this study is that parents need more support in their teaching roles and responsibilities because they are also juggling work and parental responsibilities at the same time. This conclusion is drawn as parents struggled and felt they did not provide an adequate education for their special needs child during the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning. This finding is consistent with earlier studies on parenting experiences during COVID - 19 (Kerr et al., 2021). Parents need more direction and instruction on how to provide an education to their children during online learning and need to learn how to balance competing responsibilities, such as working from home, teaching, and parenting, to be effective and feel more comfortable educating their children.

The third implication that can be drawn from this study is that barriers need to be removed for a more optimal learning experience for students and their parents during distance learning. Removing language and culture barriers would provide students with special needs with more opportunities for access and inclusion in online learning. The literature presents direct connections between student regression and barriers during distance learning (Lowenhaupt & Hopkins, 2020). Thus, eliminating hurdles and barriers will allow full participation in e-learning by students with special needs and their supporting families.

The fourth implication that can be drawn from this study is that educators can improve the online learning experiences for students with special needs and families, due to interruptions in routines, services, and academics, by establishing consistent routines, delivering needed related services, and providing structured lessons. A study focused on home learning during COVID-19 found similar parental experiences and concerns about the extreme disruption of their children's routines (Bhamani et al., 2020). This support can help avoid students experiencing academic regression. Educators can use consistent lessons in the classrooms working off the

same online learning platforms during in-person learning to make the transition to distance learning easier and more structured. Educators can show platforms during school open houses, intake meetings, IEP meetings, and parent-teacher conferences. This would give parents some familiarity with the online learning platform. This could avoid achievement and opportunity gaps for students with special needs as they would still have a consistent routine and structured lessons.

The final implication that can be drawn from this study is that all distance learning aspects during the COVID-19 pandemic were not negative. For example, most participants shared how enjoyable it was to have their children with them all day during the COVID-19 pandemic, school closure, and distance learning.

Recommendations

The literature on parents' experiences with distance learning needs expansion. Given the lack of research in this area, my intention for pursuing this topic of study was not only to provide data regarding Somali parents with K-12 students with special needs experience and attitudes toward distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic but also to establish a basic methodological template for researching and analyzing online learning experiences. It would be remarkable to interview the parents of K-12 students from other minority groups. Most often, the experiences of minority parents with children with special needs experiences get ignored in the literature about "distance learning."

More research is needed on the distance learning experiences of parents with children with special needs and how they have navigated those experiences in school systems. In addition, other parents, practitioners, and policymakers might use distance learning from experience using

Somali parents with children with special needs. Too often, we do not know "how students with special needs learn in online learning," instead of focusing on typical student online learning.

I recommend that future research be done to expand the scope of my original study. By interviewing many parents with K-12 students with special needs from various geographical locations, races, genders, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds, the data would be more substantive and increase the reliability of my study. More studies of distance learning problems and the lessons learned may open new areas of understanding regarding what it means to be a parent with a child with special needs during distance learning. This standard of engaging in critical reflection around parents' experiences toward distance learning may be helpful for parents, teachers, and administrators**.** Online learning is clearly the most obvious mutual responsibility between home and school, calling for a greater collaborative approach and understanding of what is needed in order to make distance learning effective for students with special needs and all students. Overall, the impact of distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has been significant, and further research is needed to better understand its effects on families and children including K-12 students with disabilities.

Closing Thoughts

It was a personally rewarding and highly informative learning journey for me to dive deep into the process of completing a dissertation on Somali American parents with K-12 students with special needs experience toward distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this study has reinforced the importance of maintaining a growth mindset, meaning believing that any individual could develop further his/her intelligence (Blackwell et al., 2007; Dweck, 2006).

This study asked the following question: How do Somali parents with K-12 children with special needs experience and make meaning of their parental role and responsibilities as parents during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures and distance learning in Minnesota? Nine parents took part in semi-structured interviews, and an archival investigation was conducted. The study found that participants experienced home environment issues that impeded distance learning, struggled with their new roles and responsibilities, faced barriers due to language and culture, and had distance learning challenges that led to a loss of skills and academic regression. However, online learning had some benefits, such as families having more time together at home. The study identified five major themes: (1) home environment, (2) roles and responsibilities, (3) barriers, (4) student achievement, and (5) benefits. This study recommends that educators and policymakers develop more effective strategies and interventions to support marginalized communities during times of crisis. This study had several limitations, including a narrow demographic of participants, limited timing, and the potential for bias due to personal and professional relationships with some participants. Further studies are recommended to explore these findings and expand the study's scope.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: CITI Certificate

Completion Date 09-Feb-2021
Expiration Date 08-Feb-2025
Record ID 40894764

This is to certify that:

Hassan Hassan

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Subjects Research (HSR)
(Curriculum Group)

Human Subjects Research Training: Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of St. Thomas - Minnesota

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wca6e5e1f-a491-41b8-a571-2db49a103186-40894764

Appendix B: Structured Interview Protocol

Location: Virtual Zoom_____ Date/time_____

No. of people attending   _____

Researchers conducting session   _____

My name is Hassan Hassan, and I will be facilitating this interview. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. I will be conducting a structured and standardized interview format. This study is a quantitative research method where the interviewer asks a set of prepared open-ended and closed-ended questions. I will be reading the questions exactly as worded and in the same order as all participants in this research. Closed-ended questions structure the answer by only allowing responses that fit into pre-decided categories. On the other hand, open-ended questions do not provide participants with a predetermined set of answer choices, instead of allowing them to respond in their own words. You are free to withdraw at any time without penalty and you are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

The goal of this research project is to discover the experience of Somali parents who have K-12 students with special needs during COVID-19 distance learning. Ultimately this study will contribute to the ability of parents who have kids with special needs to get and obtain innovative ideas and resources of how to help their child's educational needs by addressing critical questions related to distance learning. The information gathered from this effort will be shared with a wide variety of community stakeholders throughout the region and the world, including scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.

You were selected because you are a Somali parent with a child identified as a K-12 student with special needs. Approximately between seven to twelve individuals will be participating in this research. Prior to the interview, you were sent an introductory letter and two consent forms (one to sign and return and one to keep) before today's session. The interviews will take approximately 60 minutes and will follow a designed interview protocol. Did you bring your consent letter? If not, I have come here for you. (Copies distributed). Do you have any questions? If there are no further questions, let's get started with the first question.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate or not will not affect your current or future relations with Hassan Hassan or the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. You are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will be destroyed unless it is already de-identified or published, and we can no longer delete your data. You can withdraw by emailing Hassan Hassan at hass8135@stthomas.edu.

Appendix C: Consent Form

Research Participation Key Information

Title: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOMALI PARENTS WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES' EXPERIENCE OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN MINNESOTA.

What you will be asked to do:

We ask participants to answer questions about their experience with distance learning.

The time commitment is about one hour, and the study will take place on Zoom.

Participating in this study has risks:

- Participants may find it challenging to share information because it may bring up difficult memories about their experiences.
- Participants may have their thoughts misinterpreted in a second language.
- Participants may be apprehensive about sharing information about their children due to stereotypes and negative labels.
- Participants may be concerned about how their data will be used and made public.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be on the study.

You are invited to participate in a research study. This study will examine the experiences of Somali parents who have K-12 students with special needs toward distance learning during COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota.

The title of this study is Qualitative Analysis of Somali Parents with Students with Disabilities' Experience of Distance Learning in Minnesota.

You were selected as a possible participant and are eligible to participate in the study because you are a Somali parent with kids with special needs in Minnesota. The interview will take place in English; participants should be comfortable speaking in English during the study.

The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether you would like to participate or not.

What you will be asked to do:

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

- Commit to an approximately one-hour interview on Zoom. The interview will be in English.

- Be aware there will be an estimated 7-12 participants in the study.

- With your permission, the interview will be recorded and transcribed.

- Participants will be asked if they can share their child with a disability's individualized education program plan and grade reports.

- There may be a follow-up meeting to check in and clarify the interpretation of the data or answer any questions you may have.

What are the risks of being in the study?

Participating in this study has risks. Participants may find it difficult to share information because the information may bring up difficult memories about their experiences. Participants may have their thoughts misinterpreted because English is their second language. Participants may be apprehensive to share information about their child due to stereotypes and negative labels. Participants may have some concerns about how their data will be used and made public.

In the event that this research activity results in an injury, emergency treatment will be available. The University of St. Thomas is not able to offer financial compensation nor absorb the costs of medical treatment should you be injured because of participating in this research.

Here is more information about why we are doing this study:

This study is being conducted by Hassan Hassan. The research advisor is Dr. Lynn Stansberry Brusnahan. Both are from the University of St. Thomas School of Education. This study was reviewed for risks and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

The purpose of this study is to explore the realities of COVID-19 affecting Somali parents who have kids with special needs in Minnesota. This study will examine the experiences of Somali parents who have K-12 students with special needs toward distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Minnesota. The study seeks to create a research report that informs the public, including school administrators, teachers, parents, and policymakers, about enhancing and increasing K-12 students with special needs learning experiences during COVID-19 distance learning.

Research Question:

How did Somali parents with children identified as K-12 students with special needs experience and make meaning of their educational role and responsibilities as parents during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures with distance learning in Minnesota?

There are no benefits to you or your child if you decide to participate.

While we can never guarantee complete confidentiality in research, we believe your privacy and confidentiality are important. Here is how we will do our best to protect your personal information:

Your privacy will be protected while you participate in this study. You will have control over the date and time of the interview and what you choose to share. We will protect the participant's privacy; we will not share any of your information without the participant's consent and approval. We will not disclose any information that would harm the participants. We will make the names and other personally identifying information confidential by removing identifiers such as names. In any reports we publish, we will not include information that will make it easy to identify you.

The records of this study will be kept as confidential as possible. We save your information in the most secure online location available to us at the University. The research data will be stored and saved in the University of St Thomas's OneDrive, a secure iCloud storage. We will save any backup and copies of participant data in a secure and controlled computer as a backup. We cannot guarantee confidentiality because data security incidents and breaches may occur. The transcripts and recordings will be saved in folders in OneDrive. The data will be kept for three years and then deleted.

All signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years once the study is completed. Institutional Review Board officials at the University of St. Thomas have the right to inspect all research records for researcher compliance purposes.

This study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the research with no penalties of any kind.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate or not will not affect your current or future relations with Hassan Hassan or the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will be destroyed unless it is already de-identified or published and we can no longer delete your data. You can withdraw by emailing Hassan Hassan at hass8135@stthomas.edu. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Whom you should contact if you have a question:

The person to contact if you have questions, is Hassan Hassan. You may ask any questions you have now and at any time during or after the research procedures. For example, if you have questions before or after we meet, you may contact Hassan Hassan at 612-483-1205 or hass813@stthomas.edu. My faculty advisor is Dr. Lynn Stansberry Brusnahan. Her contact information is 414-759-8917 or llstansberry@stthomas.edu. Information about study participant rights is available online at https://www.stthomas.edu/irb/. You may also contact Sarah Muenster-Blakley with the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu with any questions or concerns (reference project number 1760208-1).

STATEMENT OF CONSENT:

I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. **I give permission to be audio recorded during this study.**

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

_____

Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

_____

      Print Name of Study Participant

_____

Signature of Researcher   **Date**

Appendix D: Interview Questions

I am going to start to get some demographic information about yourself and your child.

1. What is your name?

2. How many kids are in your household?

3. Are you the mother of the father?

4. What is your child's disability?

5. What grade is your child?

6. How long have you lived in the US (United States)?

7. What is your current employment?

8. How is your English proficiency on the scale of 1-10, 1 being very low and 10 being very fluent?

9. Did you attend school in the U.S.? If yes, what is your highest level in school?

10. Who is the primary care giver of the child or who was responsible for educating your child during distance learning?

I will now ask about your child with disability about their education during COVID-19 distance learning.

11. Describe the role you took in your child's education during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures and the move to distance learning?

12. Describe the educational responsibilities placed on you as a parent during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures with distance learning.

13. Describe COVID-19's unexpected problems and consequences on you as a parent during your child's distance learning?

14. Describe COVID-19's unexpected problems and consequences on you as a parent during your child's distance learning?

15. Describe the impact of distance learning on your child. For example, did your child continue to learn or did you see regression of learning during distance learning?

16. Describe any additional impact that your child's disability had on their learning or your role as their educator during distance learning.

17. Did you think you were able to meet the educational needs of your child with a disability during distance learning? Why or why not? For example, did employment hinder your ability to monitor or provide education to your child during distance learning?

18. Did the number of children in the household impact the amount of time you could devote to the child with the disability?

19. On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you think you were able to meet the educational needs of your child with a disability during distance learning?

20. Did the school provide any technology to use at home during distance learning? Yes, or no?

21. If yes, what was provided? If not, what difficulties with access to technology did you experience? What did you not have that you needed for distance learning?

22. Did the schools provide you with enough resources and information so you could meet the educational needs of your child with special needs during COVID-19 pandemic distance learning? Yes, or no?

23. If yes, what resources and information were most helpful? If not, provide details on what resources and information that was not provided were needed.

24. Did the school provide access to related service providers as well as special education teachers during distance learning?

25. Describe your child's participation in their related services online during distance learning?

26. Was your child provided access to speech and language services, occupational therapy, social skills groups during distance learning?

27. Describe how you think your child with a disability benefited or did not benefit from this related services instruction?

28. Describe your child's participation in the special education teacher's instruction online during distance learning?

29. Was instruction provided synchronously (live online) or asynchronously (at your own pace online) during distance learning?

30. Describe how your child with a disability benefited or did not benefit from this online instruction?

31. Describe what you see as additional barriers. based on your Somali background. that impacted your child's learning during distance learning.?

32. For example, were language and translation a barrier to access to the educational materials provided to the parents?

33. Did the fact that you did not attend a US schools impact your ability to take on the roles and responsibilities of educating your child?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview. And if you have any questions about this interview, don't hesitate to get in touch with me at 612-483-1205 or email me at hass8135@sthomas.edu. Information about study participant rights is available online at https://www.stthomas.edu/irb/.