Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Education Dissertations and Projects   School of Education

Perceptions of High School Graduates and High School Dropouts Regarding Early Education Experiences

Lori Ann Duncan Nanney
Gardner-Webb University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education_etd
⚙ Part of the Early Childhood Education Commons

Perceptions of High School Graduates and High School Dropouts Regarding Early
Education Experiences

By
Lori Ann Duncan Nanney

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2016

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Lori Ann Duncan Nanney under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

_____   _____

Kelsey Musselman, Ed.D.   Date
Committee Chair

_____   _____

Jason Parker, Ed.D.   Date
Committee Member

_____   _____

Becky Sain, Ed.D.   Date
Committee Member

_____   _____

Jeffrey Rogers, Ph.D.   Date
Dean of the Gayle Bolt Price School
of Graduate Studies

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to give glory to God for His goodness, faithfulness, mercy, and grace. It is through the power of the Son and the Father that I have had the ability to complete this study.

Next, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Kelsey Musselman for her continuous support of this study and research and for her patience, guidance, and immense knowledge. Her leadership as my dissertation chairperson was extremely valuable, and I will forever be grateful for all she has done. In addition, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Becky Sain and Dr. Jason Parker for serving on my dissertation committee. Their insight and knowledge inspired me to deepen my research from various perspectives.

My sincere thanks goes to my colleagues and peers who provided great amounts of support and encouragement.

Last but not least, I would like to recognize my family. My husband, Tommy and son, Adam were a source of encouragement that allowed me to continue this journey when I felt like giving up. I am indebted to all of my family members for supporting me spiritually with their patience, understanding, gentleness, and tolerance throughout the dissertation process and my life in general.

Abstract

Perceptions of High School Graduates and High School Dropouts Regarding Early Education Experiences. Nanney, Lori Ann Duncan, 2016: Gardner-Webb University, Early Childhood Education/High School Dropouts/School Readiness/Early Learning

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding early childhood education. Research shows that dropping out of high school can have negative societal, economic, and emotional impacts. Waiting until a student reaches high school to provide support that may prevent the student from dropping out can have adverse consequences. Children form cognitive, affective, and physical skills and abilities during their first 5 years of life. Known as the formative years, how a child's learning is supported and enhanced during the first 5 years can be essential for school readiness and success.

To explore the relationship of high school dropouts and graduates regarding their early learning experiences and their perceptions of early childhood education, this dissertation analyzed the impacts of early education on a student's high school success. Data were collected through a survey instrument and focus-group interviews for qualitative and quantitative results. Participants in Sample Group 1 were high school dropouts enrolled in an adult high school program at a rural community college in North Carolina. Sample Group 2 participants were high school graduates enrolled in an AAS degree-seeking program at the community college.

Per analysis of the data, it was determined that early learning experiences that occur after age 1 as well as the type of supportive relationship a teacher establishes with students can determine a student's ability to become a high school graduate. In addition, the results indicated that while high school graduates felt that interpersonal skills such as working well with others and following procedures were instrumental in preparing children for school, data indicated that high school dropouts perceived rote skills such as counting and knowing shapes and colors as having the greatest influence on a child's preparedness for school.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Nature of the Problem

It is important to recognize that any high school dropout rate is significant as the repercussions of not completing high school can have lifelong, negative impacts on a person's life (Dropouts, 2011). Those who do not successfully complete requirements for high school graduation are considered to be high school dropouts (Dropouts, 2011). High school dropouts typically earn less than their peers with more education, and they are more likely than those who did graduate from high school to end up in prison (Dropouts, 2011). According to the United States' Census Bureau, the national average of high school dropouts in the 2010-2011 academic school year was 3.3%. In 2011-2012, this rate remained the same. During the 2010-2011 academic year, North Carolina's high school dropout rate was 3.9%. This was 0.6% higher than the national average; however, in 2011-2012, the rate decreased to 3.1%. This was 0.8% lower than the national average. In 2011-2012, the state with the highest dropout rate was Alaska. Alaska's rate of high school dropouts was 6.9%. This rate is 3.3% above the national average and 3.8% above North Carolina's rate. In this same year, New Hampshire had the lowest high school dropout rate with 1.3% of their high school students failing to graduate. New Hampshire's rate was 2.0% lower than the national average during the 2011-2012 academic year and 1.8% lower than North Carolina's high school dropout rate during the same year (Stillwell, 2014).

Research shows that there are economic impacts of high school dropouts as those who dropout earn less than their peers and have a greater chance of receiving government aid, thus placing economic burdens on those employed (Dropouts, 2011). Social and psychological influences are greater as those who dropout have a greater likelihood of

becoming imprisoned (Dropouts, 2011). Because of these statistics, it is important to

recognize the findings of Carplunk and Eaneman (2013):

> Efforts to improve the quality of the nation's workforce have focused on high
>
> school graduation as an important starting point for job readiness. Over time we
>
> are far more likely to achieve that goal if we help children start down the right
>
> path in the first five years of life. This is supported through research that shows
>
> children can be 18 months behind by the start of kindergarten, children who are
>
> not kindergarten-ready are half as likely to read well by third grade, and children
>
> who are not reading proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to drop
>
> out of school. (p. 1)

There are interventions and programs in place to help those who are behind, and

children who fall behind can benefit from intensive help at every age and stage of

development; however, the later the intervention, the harder it becomes for the student to

catch up and achieve their potential (Carplunk & Eaneman, 2013). As stated by Nance

(2009), it is clear from anecdotal, neurobiological, and behavioral perspectives that

human beings' basic personality, intellect, and formation of values, or character are

fundamentally formed by age seven. If one accepts this evidence, then it is understood

that nurturing children during these formative years dictates their future success or failure

(Nance, 2009). The formative years of a child's life, birth through age five, are

considered the most crucial as most of their brain development has occurred by age five

(Ryan, 2008). The experiences a child has during these years have a great impact on the

overall development of the child. About 90% of the child's brain develops during the

formative years; and 85% of the child's intellect, personality, and social skills are

developed by age five (Ryan, 2008). However, many of our children do not receive

optimal learning experiences that are meaningful and engaging during these formative years (Ryan, 2008). Research conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) found that all experiences and learning opportunities a child has during the first 8 years of life will impact the next 80 years. According to Ryan (2008), the lack of educational stimulation during these formative years can have a great impact on a child's academic successes or failures. More than ever, there are greater demands placed on children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and pursue their academic careers (Nance, 2009). Children are facing a more rigorous kindergarten curriculum and are being introduced to skills and concepts that were previously taught in first grade (Rafoth, 2004). This study leads one to ponder and question, "Does preparedness, or lack of, for kindergarten impact the child's level of attainment in future grades?"

Research shows that early childhood education through experiences that meet each child's cognitive, social, emotional and physical needs is crucial to helping them enter kindergarten ready to learn, thus providing a greater opportunity to reach the goal of high school graduation (Carplunk & Eanemen, 2013). According to a study conducted by Ackerman and Barnett (2005), stakeholders at the federal, state, and local levels agree that a child's future success is dependent on their being ready to learn and participate in kindergarten. This leads one to consider the characteristics of readiness for kindergarten. When readiness focuses on skills only, teachers and parents tend to differ on the necessary cognitive skills that constitute readiness; therefore, teachers tend to rely upon the social-emotional aspect of readiness (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Children enter kindergarten with a wide variety of preset skills and experiences. These include skills that are not simply limited to those which can be tested such as letter, shapes, and number recognition and use of language and other academic skills but whether or not they have

participated in activities which prepare children for the transition to kindergarten (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Another factor that contributes to the successful readiness for kindergarten includes a child's age. Because states differ in the age of eligibility for kindergarten, some children enter at age five and some at age four. This gap can have dramatic developmental factors that can limit a child's prepardness and success in kindergarten (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Ackerman and Barnett (2005 examined readiness perceptions of parents, teachers, and kindergarteners and the factors each believes determine prepardness for kindergarten. The authors revealed the top two perecptions of all parents who were surveyed were positive dispositions about school constitute readiness and social adjustment to kindergarten promotes kindergarten success.

However, Ackerman and Barnett (2005) found that once the parents were sorted into groups according to their educational background and socioeconomic status, the study revealed that perceptions for kindergarten readiness were different. Seventy-five percent of parents who did not graduate from high school considered counting to 20 and knowing the letters of the alphabet as being essential to kindergarten readiness, while only 41 or 50% of college parents felt these skills were necessary. Furthermore, Ackerman and Barnett's study examined the beliefs of 355 low income, urban parents in New York and found that over 80% of these parents felt it necessary that children know their shapes and colors and be able to count to 10 or 15 before being ready for kindergarten.

In this same study, the authors found that the perceptions of over 75% of the kindergarten teachers surveyed indicate that they believe academic skills such as counting and letter and shape recognition are less essential standards for kindergarten readiness and being able to communicate needs and thoughts, being able to follow

directions, and not displaying disruptive behaviors are essential for kindergarten

readiness (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). This study indicates that there is a vast

difference in the opinions of parents, especially those of low-income status. Because of

this, the expectations of both parties need to be communicated clearly so that teachers can

help families better prepare their children for kindergarten success and readiness. The

authors deepened this study by gauging the perceptions of kindergartners (Ackerman &

Barnett, 2005). When kindergartners were asked "what it takes" to be ready for

kindergarten, the top answers were

1. Knowing and following a teacher's rules.

2. Becoming familiar with where things were.

3. Becoming familiar with what to do.

4. Knowing how to make friends (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005, p. 8).

Carplunk and Eanemen (2013) revealed in their study that a child's readiness to

enter kindergarten is foundational to their readiness to successfully graduate from high

school. Furthermore, preparing a child to enter kindergarten cannot begin at age four and

must begin with early learning experiences that prepare the child socially-emotionally,

cognitively, and physically for kindergarten success (Carplunk & Eanemen, 2013).

According to kindergarten teachers, researchers, and stakeholders, children are

better prepared for kindergarten if they have attended some type of formal early

childhood education program (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Therefore, the results of this

study may be used to determine if the relationship between early childhood experiences

and high school dropout rates exists. By discussing the relationships of early childhood

education experiences among high school dropouts, one may determine what effects and

impacts early childhood education has on the successful completion of high school

(graduation). The results of this study may be used to determine what type of relationship exists between early childhood education and future school success. This relationship would then ultimately help to serve as a predictor to identifying risk factors for high school dropouts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding early education experiences. During the formative years when early childhood education is so crucial, children learn about the world around them and how they process experiences, build confidence, and recognize their individuality; this is why quality learning environments that are supportive, safe, and provide developmentally appropriate practices (DAPs) are essential for preparing children for a successful future (Ryan, 2008). When students do not successfully graduate high school, the implications this has for their future are drastic as they become an economic burden on our nation and most likely will remain socioeconomically disadvantaged (Dropouts, 2011). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, n.d.) is a national agency that advocates for quality early childhood education and promotes the need for early childhood education in order to prepare our nation's young for a successful future. Research conducted by Nance (2009) supported the importance of early learning and early educational experiences during the formative years and indicated that the type of early educational experiences may have an impact on the child's cognitive development with the quality of the program being the most influential aspect of success (Smith, 2014). Two major types of quality are often measured in early childhood education programs. Structural quality refers to the program's overall structure that can be observed and measured with regulations and

mandates, while process quality refers to the social relationships and interactions within the early childhood setting (Smith, 2014).

Taking this into account, one must consider the enrollment rates of these races in an early childhood setting. A study conducted by Kagan (2008) indicated that there are several inequities in early childhood education programs: who attends early childhood education, who teaches the children, and each state's commitment to the early childhood education program. In looking at who is attending early childhood education programs, a report released by Child Trends discussed trends and rates among American children ages three to six who are not yet enrolled in kindergarten (Child Trends Data Bank, 2014). This report released findings of children in these age ranges in 2007 and then looked at the same ages of children in 2012 (Child Trends Data Bank, 2014). According to the report, the following statistics were noted for the 2007 year: 58% of White children attended early childhood care and education programs; 65% of Black children attended early childhood care and education programs; and 39% of Hispanic children attended an early childhood care and education program (p. 3). In 2012, the rates grew slightly and the following statistics were revealed: 63% of White children attended early childhood care and education programs; 68% of Black children attended early childhood care and education programs; and 52% of Hispanic children attended early childhood care and education (Child Trends Data Bank, p. 3).

One piece of information revealed in Kagan's (2008) study was that while African-American children tended to have early childhood education participation rates in preschool programs that were very comparable to White children, African-American children had a greater tendency of having inconsistent attendance due to families relocating, transient tendencies, or expulsion of the child.

According to a report published by the American Psychological Association (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014), the greatest impact of early childhood education is the contribution these experiences have on a student's ability to successfully graduate from high school. Carplunk and Eanemen (2013) stated that if states and our country wish to help students take the first step toward high school graduation, the help must begin in a child's formative years. The investments we make in early childhood education will create successful students and a greater work force; these will build a stronger nation (Carplunk & Eanemen, 2013). Research conducted by Clemson University (2015) found that the high school dropout problem cannot not be addressed exclusively at the middle and high schools; by this time, it is too late for some students. When early intervention takes place for students who may be at risk for failure, the impacts can be seen in lower retention rates, fewer special education referrals, higher levels of academic achievements, and stronger commitments to completing high school (Clemson University, 2015). Children with prekindergarten experiences had parents who were more involved in their education, and the impact of parental involvement was found to have an indirect positive effect on first-grade achievement and social-emotional development (Clemson University, 2015). Furthermore, students with early learning experiences were employed by age 19, fewer were on welfare, and fewer were involved in the criminal justice system (Clemson University, 2015). Therefore, early education can be a vital link to a child's ability to graduate from high school (Carplunk & Eaneman, 2013). According to Carroll (2012), starting school is a significant event of a child's life and it is often referred to as one of the biggest challenges young children face.

The theoretical framework of this study was based on a positivist's perspective and focuses on the variables of early childhood education and how these impact high

school dropouts. Work conducted by humanistic theorist Abraham Maslow revealed that

the drive to learn is intrinsic and the purpose of learning should bring about self-

actualization (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Maslow's contributions to humanism include

his hierarchy of needs that explains how individuals have certain needs that must be met

before one is prepared to learn and each need supports a subsequent need (Desautels,

2014). It is important for one to recognize that as individuals have basic needs and needs

for safety met, the individual becomes prepared to learn and achieve academically

(Browne & Gordon, 2014). It may be significant to recognize this as if one does not have

needs met, learning may not take place or may be delayed and this can hinder academic

performance and success (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

Cognitive theorist Jean Piaget's work has had major impacts on child

development and early childhood education (Browne & Gordon, 2014). His theory

concluded that cognitive development is progressive and includes mental processes,

biological maturation, and environmental experiences (McLeod, 2015a). Piaget's work

and contributions can possibly help one understand the importance of the environment in

a child's learning and education. Research conducted by the Institute of Medicine and

National Research Council of the National Academies (2015) revealed that early

cognitive development has led researchers to understand the developing mind as

"astonishingly competent, active, and insightful from a very early age" (pp. 4-3). The

study of the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National

Academies further revealed that the connection of relationships and social interactions to

cognitive development is consistent with how the brain develops and how the mind

grows; therefore, the development of young children and their early learning encompass

cognitive development.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory explains how a child is influenced by the settings and environments in which the child spends a significant amount time; and understanding how these settings, or structures, critically impact the child's development is crucial (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Understanding how a child is shaped by the environments, people, and society can help one understand the significance of how the child is prepared for learning and education (Browne & Gordon, 2014). The study conducted by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies (2015) concluded that

> Children learn readily in contexts of social support and emotional well-being, which derive from positive relationships with those who care for and educated them in the family and outside the home. In these contexts, adults can support and encourage developing competencies, convey positive values about learning and school, and help instill curiosity and self-confidence in children. By contrast, learning and cognitive achievement are hindered when children are troubled and stressed. Living in low-socioeconomic environments with poorly educated parents, chronically depressed mothers or in circumstances of family turmoil are hindrances to learning. The negative impacts these socioemotional circumstances have on learning and cognitive achievement are apparent very early, before children have begun school, and continue to be important as children move into primary grades. (pp. 64-65)

The study of the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies also determined that social experiences are fundamentally related to building and developing cognitive skills that are not simply intrinsic traits in a child. This study emphasizes that such social skills are fostered and learned environments where children

have the opportunity to engage in learning opportunities and experiences with their peers;

and the lack of these experiences will potentially ensure the child does not enter

kindergarten prepared to be a part of a social group, learning with and among others.

This can negatively impact the child's elementary, middle, and high school years.

Building social skills strengthens academic skills, and the lack of these foundational

experiences can negatively impact a child's ability to be successful in high school

(Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies, 2015).

Being ready for kindergarten affects everything that follows in life, and the

greatest catalyst for kindergarten readiness is early learning for children (Carplunk &

Eaneman, 2013). How individuals perceive the need for early learning experiences and

their impact on successful completion of high school could help one understand how

perceptions shape a person's ideas of education and its relevance. The purpose of this

study was to analyze the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts

regarding early education. By examining these perceptions, the researcher may establish

how individuals perceive the importance of early childhood education and how their early

learning experiences correlate to their decisions to dropout or successfully graduate from

high school.

Background and Significance of the Problem

The importance of early childhood education has never been greater. A study

conducted by Carplunk and Eanemen (2013) revealed that being ready for kindergarten

affects everything that follows. The study also indicated that when a child enters

kindergarten unprepared and behind, trying to remediate and help the child play catch-up

is very difficult (Carplunk & Eanemen, 2013). The study further revealed that if a child

has not caught up and remains behind in reading and literacy skills in Grade 3, the chance

of this child dropping out of high school is greater than that of peers who are achieving at grade-level standards (Carplunk & Eanemen, 2013).

Research conducted by Kagan (2008) showed that there is a disproportionate number of youth of color who make up the number of American high school dropouts as well as a strong link between those who drop out and the poverty level of the student. Another study conducted by the American Psychological Association revealed that students from low-income families dropped out of high school five times more than those from high-income families (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, the report for the 2011 academic year indicates that the estimated high school dropout rates broken down by race were 2.4% for Whites, 4.8% for African Americans, and 5.8% for Latinos (Stillwell, 2014). North Carolina's dropout rates for the 2011 academic year broken down by race were 1.5% for Whites, 2.5% for African Americans, and 2.7% for Latinos (Stillwell, 2014). Although the rates for North Carolina were comparatively low in relation to the national averages, the three races studied demonstrate the same trend: Latinos have a higher dropout rate, while Whites have a significantly lower rate. This may lead one to conclude that factors relating to one's culture and ethnicity could have an impact on high school dropout rates. Early education for children has grown significantly throughout history and continues to evolve today.

The importance of educating our nation's young children had its greatest significance in the early 1960s when Senator Robert Kennedy began researching how to prevent juvenile delinquency and high school students from dropping out of high school (Head Start, 2015). The results of Senator Robert Kennedy's efforts became known as the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and was signed as public law 88-452 by President

Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 (Economic Opportunity Act, 2004). This was a significant act as it prepared our country to examine the benefits and impacts of early learning for all children, especially those in impoverished areas (Education: Ensuring Quality Education for All, 2011). Later, in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced Project Head Start and declared a "War on Poverty." He used Senator Kennedy's work as a springboard to create a federal initiative to provide early education to our nation's young children in the hope of increasing higher education rates among these children, thus reducing our country's poverty level (Head Start, 2015). In 1994, Senator Kennedy's work with early childhood education continued as he instituted Early Head Start which was formed to serve impoverished and disadvantaged children aged birth through three (Education: Ensuring Quality Education for All, 2011).

The purpose and vision of Head Start has evolved over the years. According to the National Head Start foundation (About Us: Mission, Vision, History, 2015), the entire purpose and vision of Head Start is as follows:

> NHSA's vision is to lead–to be the untiring voice that will not be quiet until every vulnerable child is served with the Head Start model of support for the whole child, the family and the community–and to advocate–to work diligently for policy and institutional changes that ensure all vulnerable children and families have what they need to succeed. NHSA's mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education. (para. 1)

Our nation has recognized the need for early childhood education programs as a way to educate our nation's young and prepare them for their future. As our nation has evolved in its demographics in the last 50 years, so has the need for more focused early

education initiatives and programs. President Barack Obama reinforced initiatives supporting early childhood education by proposing a federal-state incentive, "Preschool for All" (Early Childhood Development:An Office of the Administration for Children & Families, 2015). With this program, all of our nation's 4-year-old children from low to moderate income families will receive free preschool. This will help ensure that all children are ready to enter kindergarten for success. In an effort to help children in the earliest years, President Obama called for a new program, Early Head Start, that would help our nation's young in the years before preschool (Early Childhood Development:An Office of the Administration for Children & Families, 2015).

Early Head Start initiatives would provide quality education and care for children ages birth through age three. Research conducted by Kagan (2008) indicated that our minority children are less likely to receive and maintain early childhood education services. Because of this, our country has recognized and continues to recognize the need to provide quality early learning experiences for our nation's young. According to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, the United States of America ranked 28 among 38 countries for the portion of 4 year olds enrolled in an early childhood education program and fewer than three of 10 are in quality programs (Early Childhood Development:An Office of the Administration for Children & Families, 2015). With the efforts of our nation recognizing the need for early childhood education, one would hope this means our legislators accept that early intervention and early learning are imperative to ensuring academic successes of our country's children. In his State of the Union Address on February 12, 2013, President Obama (2013) stated,

In states that make it a priority to educate our youngest children . . . studies show

students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high

school, hold a job, form more stable families of their own. We know this works.
So let's do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life
already behind. (para. 40.)

In looking at this problem from a global perspective, it is important to recognize
how other nations embrace early childhood education programs and compare high school
dropout rates. It is also imperative to recognize programs and their significance that
these nations are utilizing to ensure school readiness for their young children.

A study conducted by the Organization for the Economic Co-Operation and
Development (OECD) reveled the countries with the highest percentages of their young
people successfully completing upper secondary education during the 2012 year were
Japan, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Korea, Portugal, Slovenia, and the United
Kingdom (Education At A Glance Highlights, 2012). These countries have at least 90%
of their students graduating, with girls having a higher rate than boys (Education At A
Glance Highlights, 2012). This study did not examine the enrollment percentages of
students enrolled in early childhood education programs; however, it did reveal in its
findings that pupils who have attended a preprimary educational program tend to perform
better than those who did not; and of those countries with the highest graduation rates, the
financial support for early childhood education programs is greater.

The Center for American Progress issued a report comparing preschool and early
education enrollment in the United States to other countries (Herman, 2013). This report
revealed statistics regarding enrollment of children in programs as well as investments
made by the countries (Herman, 2013). According to their findings, in nearly every
element examined, the United States was outranked by other countries in terms of
preschool and early childhood education (Herman, 2013). The report indicated that 69%

of America's 4 year olds were enrolled in early education programs, while Japan and the United Kingdom had a rate of 97%. While in the United States most of our young children do not attend early education programs until age four, in most other countries, the children are enrolled as early as age one (Herman, 2013). As far as expenditures, America spends only 0.4% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on early childhood education programs; while Denmark, Spain, and Israel spend 0.9% of their GDP on early childhood education programs (Herman, 2013). Most educators would agree that young children develop very differently and learn at different rates; however, because of the high expectations placed on kindergarteners in the United States, children are being put at risk before they ever enter school (Carroll, 2012).

Research Questions

1. How do early childhood education experiences of high school dropouts compare to those who graduated from high school?

2. How do the factors that influence a student's decision to drop out of high school as identified by high school dropouts compare to those factors identified by high school graduates?

3. How do the perceptions of high school dropouts regarding early childhood education compare to those who are high school graduates?

Setting

This study examined the perceptions of community college students regarding early childhood education. Statistics from 2014-2015 of Test Community College revealed that 63% of all students are female, while 37% are male; 40% of students are in the 18-22 age range, and 20% are in the 23-29 age range. Over the age of 50 is the lowest group with only 4% represented. Seventy-three percent of all students are White,

20% are Black, 3% are Hispanic, and 4% are listed as "Other." Two sample groups were selected from the population. Group one consisted of students enrolled in adult high school (AHS) programs, and group two consisted of students enrolled in an Associate of Arts and Science (AAS) degree-seeking program. The results of this study could help in defining the impact and perceptions of early childhood education experiences.

Test Community College is located within the city limits of a small, rural county in North Carolina. The institution is located in the southern piedmont area of North Carolina. According to the information from this rural area's latest census statistics, the population of the county in 2013 was 97,076; 76.5% of the residents were Caucasian, 20.7% Black, and 3.1% Hispanic or Latino. While 82% of the population ages 25 and over had a high school diploma, the county had 19.3% of its residents living below poverty level: 1.8% higher than the state's average. According to 2014-2015 statistics, 70% of all students at Test Community College receive some form of financial aid. Two thousand seven hundred forty-four students were enrolled during the spring 2015 semester. The Test Community College's mission statement is, "Test Community College provides diverse and accessible learning opportunities to meet the educational and training needs of our community."

The Learning Center of Test Community College offers programs for those who did not graduate from high school. Currently, there are three types of programs in which a high school dropout may become enrolled: adult basic education (ABE) program, AHS program, and the high school equivalency (General Education Diploma [GED]) program. Students enrolled in these programs are residents of North Carolina but not necessarily residents of the college's county.

At the time of this study, there were 71 early childhood settings in this county.

Thirty-one of these settings include the preschool programs housed within the public elementary schools in the county that serve 3 and 4 year olds. The other 40 facilities are comprised of in-home care; toddler and infant care centers; faith-based centers; and traditional, secular daycare centers and preschool classrooms as well as Mother's Morning Out care. While families do not pay for their children to attend one of the programs housed in a public elementary school, there is a cost for the other types of early childhood education programs. Freeman (2015) of Speak Out for Kids reported that the average cost of infant care in North Carolina is $9,135, and $7,774 is the average for a 4 year old. Freeman also stated that child-care costs equal 10% of a dual income family's budget and 34% of a single parent's budget. North Carolina was not in our nation's top 10 list of states with the highest graduation rate but was within the national average of successful high school graduates at the end of the 2007 academic year (Stillwell, 2014). In 2011, over 11 million of our nation's children under the age of five attended an early childhood education environment (NAEYC, n.d.). In 2013, the total population of residents living in North Carolina was 9,848,960 and 612,295 of North Carolina's children under the age of five attended an early childhood education environment (North Carolina Demographics, 2013). The nation's high school graduation rate is gradually increasing and North Carolina's rate is steadily increasing as well (Stillwell, 2014). According to North Carolina's Division of Child Development and Early Education, the number of children attending early education programs has progressively increased as well (North Carolina Demographics, 2013). This study examined the relationship of early childhood educational experiences of high school dropouts in a rural, piedmont area of North Carolina.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this early childhood education, early learning and early education programs are used synonymously. The following terms have also been identified as needing clarification. The purpose of defining these terms is to allow the reader to comprehend the types of early childhood educational experiences that are available and will be referred to in this study as well as the differences and similarities in these programs. Terms relating to adult education opportunities for adult learners who did not successfully complete high school are also clarified.

Early childhood education. Learning experiences that occur during the formative years.

High school dropout. A person who quit high school and did not successfully graduate.

ABE. Education provided to adults ages 16 and above who dropped out of high school and demonstrate academic skills that are below high school grade level (9th grade).

AHS education. Education provided to adults ages 16 and above who dropped out of high school and demonstrate academic skills at high school level (9th grade and above).

High school equivalency. Adults who dropped out of high school and are 16 years of age or above. These adults may choose to take the GED exam and receive a high school diploma upon successful completion of the exam. A scaled score of 150 in each subject is required for successful completion.

Infant and toddler care. Education and early learning experiences for children ages birth through 30 months.

Daycare. Early education programs that offer care for infants through age five and may include afterschool care for school-aged children.

Preschool education. Early learning for children 31 months up to age five.

Mother's morning out. Early childhood education and learning for all children ages birth through four where children are enrolled on a part-time basis, usually during the morning.

Faith-based childcare. Early learning that occurs in a faith setting such as a church or synagogue.

Prekindergarten or PreK. Early learning and education programs for children ages three and four.

Head Start. A federal funded program for 3- and 4-year-old children who meet eligibility requirements (Head Start, 2015).

Summary

Although the high school dropout rate has decreased over the years (Stillwell, 2014) and there are programs and initiatives being implemented statewide and nationwide to keep high school students from dropping out, preventing dropouts should not begin during the high school years (Ryan, 2008). Understanding the importance of the formative years and how children experience learning and education during these years is crucial to helping one distinguish the benefits of early childhood education and the impact it can have on a student's successful completion of high school (Nance, 2009). Although the implications of early childhood education on high school dropouts are felt globally and nationally (Herman, 2013), one must realize that there are state and local impacts of early childhood education on high school dropouts and these should be examined. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high

school graduates and high school dropouts regarding early education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Understanding the importance of the formative years and how children experience learning and education during these years is crucial to helping one distinguish the benefits of early childhood education and the impact it can have on a student's successful completion of high school (Nance, 2009). The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding early education. By examining these perceptions, the researcher may establish how individuals perceive the importance of early childhood education and how their early learning experiences correlate with their decisions to dropout or successfully graduate from high school. This literature review examines the historical perspectives, programs, and initiatives regarding early childhood education and how learning processes of young children evolve and compare to adolescent learners. Research regarding the importance of early education in identifying students at risk for dropping out of high school is analyzed. This literature review also examines concerns relating to high school dropouts as well as its causes, impacts, and initiatives to prevent students from dropping out. Research regarding the perspectives of early learning and its impact on a student's successful completion of high school is highlighted in this literature review. These issues are relevant as the purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding early education.

The History of Early Childhood Education

Authors Browne and Gordon (2014) elucidated that early childhood education's roots began in Europe in the early 16th century and numerous early European theorists and educators influenced the design and pedagogy of early childhood education. Their

varied approaches and theories impacted the way we perceive early education today as well as how programs are designed and pedagogical competencies are established.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school dropouts and high school graduates regarding early childhood education; and therefore, it is imperative that one understands the roots of early childhood education. Brown and Gordon (2014) stated that education for children was fairly simple and left up to the parents prior to the 15th century, and the importance of early education was first regarded among the Europeans. Martin Luther is probably noted as being one of the very first advocates for the education of young children as he urged parents to educate their children through teaching morals and catechism (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Up until this time, children were seen as being inherently evil and required punishment and correction constantly. With Luther's movement, he influenced Europeans to view children differently and to have concern for their education. In 1658, John Amos Comenius wrote the first picture book for children titled *Orbis Pictus* which was used as a guide to help teachers teach children through the study of nature (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Comenius also advocated for the education of young children and instituted the idea of the "school of the mother's lap" in which he stated that the development of children is unique to the individual and their education should reflect that (Browne & Gordon, 2014). John Locke followed the thought of Comenius who felt children should be educated according to their individual differences and with the intention of educating individuals to be able to think and reason (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Locke also urged parents to see children as a "clean slate" (*tabla rasa),* noting that children were not born evil but rather with a clean slate on which experiences provided by parents, society, education, and the world are written (Connolly, n.d.). Jean-Jacque Rousseau expounded upon Locke's ideas but added

new ideas as well. During Rousseau's time, Europe's thoughts regarding education were changing due to Darwin and the changes he was bringing to science (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Ironically, Rousseau, who was a writer and philosopher and not an educator, proposed the idea that children were naturally good; and he reasoned that a child's education should reflect this goodness. "Rousseau's ideas were innovative for his time as he was the very first person to acknowledge that children learn from firsthand information and experiences, their views are different than adults, and their minds develop in distinct stages" (Browne & Gordon, 2014, pp.10-11).

The basis for many common practices and views of early childhood education were founded on the work of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi who studied Rousseau and agreed with most of his information (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Pestalozzi's ideas included the need to care for as well as educate the child, and he stressed the need for an integrated approach to teaching children so that the whole child would become developed (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Developing the whole child involves teachers teaching with regards to the child's head, heart, and hand. Unlike Rousseau, Pestalozzi was an educator and devoted his work to studying and teaching children where he blended limits with freedom (Browne & Gordon, 2014). As noted in the work of Silber in his biography of Pestalozzi (Silber, 1965), Pestalozzi's ideas and attitudes were quoted as, "I wish to wrest education from the outworn order of doddering old teaching hacks as well as from the new-fangled order of cheap, artificial teaching tricks, and entrust it to the eternal powers of nature herself" (p. 1).

One of the most influential educators who made major contributions to the field of early childhood education is Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel. He had specific ideas regarding learning, teacher preparation, and curriculum. According to authors Gordon

and Browne (2014), Froebel is known to us as the "Father of Kindergarten," not only for giving it a name but for devoting his life's work to developing a system for educating young children as his focus was directed on children less than 6 years of age (Browne & Gordon, 2014, p. 11). Froebel emphasized that play represents the inner necessity and impulse and should be regarded as the highest phase of child development; through these discoveries, he invented the first educational toys which he termed "gifts" (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

It was Maria Montessori, a female physician who worked primarily with poor children and mentally retarded children, who became a catalyst for change and improvement in early childhood education programs during the turn of the century (History of Montessori Education, 2015). Before her, no one had truly made contributions to the field of early childhood education from the perspective of a physician and this allowed her to bring a unique view on how children should be educated or cared for. Montessori's view on child development involved defining a child's sensitive period which included the idea that learning certain activities appeared easier at particular times (The Philosophy, n.d.). One of Maria Montessori's most valuable contributions was her theory which centered on the thought that children learn in small steps and proceed in their learning in a sequential manner (History of Montessori Education, 2015). Montessori and her methods were introduced to America in 1909; however, it was not until the late 1950s that her movement became so widespread, thus creating the American Montessori Society (History of Montessori Education, 2015).

Although a great deal of our American early childhood education ideology has European roots, many American educators and theorists have impacted the structure of early childhood education. During Colonial America, children were educated for the sole

purpose of reading the Bible, and boys were educated before girls (Browne & Gordon, 2014). "Children were disciplined harshly and were viewed as important economic tools; they worked the land and were apprenticed into trades at a very young age" (Browne & Gordon, 2014, p. 15).

John Dewey was the first real American influence on early childhood education. An American philosopher who followed the ideas of Froebel, Dewey believed that children were valuable, childhood was an important part of their lives, and teachers should have a child-centered or learner-centered approach to teaching (Prawat, 2009). Dewey was instrumental in developing a pedagogy for education and teaching. As noted by Prawat (2009), his reform efforts included three major themes or movements: individualism, readiness, and pragmatism. Prawat clarified what each theme meant according to Dewey's ideals. Individualism is comprised of thoughts that with the teacher's guidance, children should make sense of their own learning and experiences. Readiness refers to the notion that children will learn when they are ready to learn, and pragmatism is the philosophy that the worth of learning lies within its contributory value (Prawat, 2009). During Dewey's time, the works of Froebel made it to the United States through the efforts of one of Froebel's students, Margaretha Schurz (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Although it was nearly 20 years after its beginning in Germany, the first American kindergarten was designed for German immigrant children only, but Elizabeth Peabody was so inspired by this approach to early childhood education that she opened the first English-speaking kindergarten (Browne & Gordon, 2014). However, it was American educator Patty Smith Hill who made some of the greatest impacts on the early childhood education movement in America as she intertwined the beliefs of Froebel and Dewey to promote and advocate for kindergarten and primary education (Browne &

Gordon, 2014). The founder of the National Association for Nursery Education (NANE), which is known today as NAEYC, Smith-Hill advocated not only for America's young children and their education but for their teachers and families as well (NAEYC, n.d.)

As America's views on early childhood education evolved, so did the implications of theories and philosophies (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Many theorists who have had major contributions in the field of early childhood education grounded their ideals and principals in the work and movements of the historical European and American forefathers highlighted in this study.

One major theory is the cognitive theory and its ideas are aligned to thinking processes and how thinking occurs. Jean Piaget and his cognitive theory made major implications in the field of early childhood education as this approach explains how children learn in progressive stages where they construct their own understanding of the world around them: through their experiences and discoveries (McLeod, 2015b). Piaget was not an educator; however, his theory and work help the teachers of young children understand how children learn and think. Piaget's work and ideas are grounded in the ideas introduced by Dewey and his contributions to the field of early childhood education (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

> Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson's ideas are grounded in the work of Maria Montessori and his Psychosocial theory of human development explains that life is a series of stages through which each person passes and the stages are built from previous experiences and learning. (Browne, 2014 p. 95)

According to Browne and Gordon (2014), Erikson's psychosocial theory also emphasized finding a healthy balance between what a child wants and needs; and this theory is comprised of the beliefs that there are essentially eight stages through which a person

develops, beginning with birth and ending with old age, where there are challenges and strengths in each age or stage.

The behaviorist theory is probably the most pragmatic and functional theories in which early childhood education ideas and concepts are formed (Browne & Gordon, 2014). The work of behaviorists most resembles the ideas of John Locke and their philosophies describe how children develop and learn and how the two influence each other. The implications of this theory on early childhood education are seen in how children behave and teachers react to their behavior (Mathews, 2015). In essence desirable behaviors can be reinforced though positive praise or reward and negative behaviors can be replaced with positive ones (Matthews, 2015). The behaviorists influence how the early childhood educator practices classroom management and uses the environment, knowledge of child development, and children's needs as a basis for establishing a learning environment where positive behavior is rewarded and undesirable behavior is replaced with desirable behaviors through the use of consequence and modeling.

The theory of humanism studies the whole person and examines human behavior through the eyes of the observer as well as the person exhibiting the behavior (McLeod, 2015a). The humanistic theorist who has had the greatest impact on child development and early learning is Abraham Maslow (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Maslow expanded the ideas of humanistic theorists and developed a hierarchy of needs which ranked the needs of humans and how each individual processes through each rank in accordance to their individuality and life's events (Browne & Gordon, 2014). The hierarchy explains that humans begin with having basic needs such as water and food met and work toward meeting each need that succeeds each rank (McLeod, 2015b). Browne and Gordon

(2014) explained that as children have basic needs that need to be met, early childhood educators must help to ensure each child has their individual needs met before learning can take place. If we want our children to build cognitive and physical skills, we must make sure they have the necessary needs met that will enable them to reach their full potential (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Early childhood educators support young children as they work through each level of need, making sure basic needs, safety needs, and the need of belonging are met so each child can become a self-actualized individual (Browne & Gordon., 2014).

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory explained how children are influenced by the environment and setting in which the majority of their time is spent (Browne & Gordon, 2014). According to Brofenbrenner's work,

> There are four systems that influence human development, nested within each other like a circle of rings. With the child at the center, the relationships of the four settings where the majority of time is spent, the societal structures and the larger contexts in which these systems operate are crucial to acknowledge. Just as in nature, activity in one part affects all the other parts. (Browne & Gordon, 2014, p. 118)

The founding forefathers of early childhood education designed pedagogical competencies that reflected the state of the culture and the family structure. As early childhood educators and child development professionals built upon the work of their predecessors and redesigned ideas and principals, new concepts regarding the nature and education of young children emerged (Browne & Gordon, 2014). As young children were studied, observed, and taught, theories regarding how to educate each child and the importance of educating our young were developed. These theories have shaped how

young children today are cared for, educated, and nurtured. Researchers have examined

these theorists and the implications of their work on early learning. According to a report

published by Clemson University and the National Dropout Center/Prevention (Clemson

University, 2015), one of the most significant findings to emerge from research on early

identification of potential high school dropouts is that early identification is vital to

prevention; and although some may think this problem develops during a student's last

years of high school, many are lost long before. Being able to recognize the impact of

major theorists and their ideas regarding early education may help one understand how

early experiences are designed and implemented. It is in these early, formative years

when a child who may be at risk for dropping out of high school can be identified and

addressed. The earlier these children can be identified, the earlier interventions and

support programs can be initiated so the possibility of high school graduation can become

a reality (Clemson Univeristy, 2015).

Early Years Are Learning Years

In a research study conducted by Carroll (2012), it was revealed that kindergarten

programs today are much more rigorous than those in the past and often are hurrying

children "into academic development before they are truly ready for it" (Carroll, 2012, p.

18). According to NAEYC (n.d.), whether or not children are prepared to enter

kindergarten is based on the type of kindergarten program in which the child is enrolled.

Furthermore, a more standards-based program where DAP is not followed places more

stress on the child and family. Moreover, NAEYC indicated it is imperative that early

childhood programs teach to the whole child concept and follow practices that the meet

needs of each child's developmental domain so children can grow to their fullest

potential: being greater prepared for the expectations of any kindergarten program

(NAEYC, n.d.).

Birth through age five is the period known as the formative period (Brown & Gordon, 2014). According to NAEYC (n.d.), the experiences and learning that takes place during these years are foundational and will impact future learning and education. Furthermore, NAEYC stated that there should be stimulating and foundational learning experiences that will prepare children to be school ready. According to the research conducted by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies (2015), the nation's workforce can be transformed through unified efforts of educators, physicians, psychologists, parents, and our government and must begin with children at age birth.

Authors Ahola and Kovacik (2007) explained that as children grow and develop, there are milestones that must be met in order to determine if the child is developing typically or atypically. At each milestone, there are developmental domains that children reach and learning takes place. Browne and Gordon (2014) explained that these domains are interrelated and impact one another and should not be viewed as separate characteristics of child development and growth that work independent of one another but rather work together, influencing each other. Browne and Gordon refer to this concept as teaching to the whole child.

Early childhood education programs place emphasis on teaching to the whole child, meeting the needs of each developmental domain; and this is the foundation for preparing all children for learning experiences (Browne & Gordon, 2014). The concept of the whole child is based on the principal that all areas of human growth and development are integrated (Browne & Gordon, 2014). There are six developmental domains used to define the whole child and express how children develop:

Social-emotional development: this includes a child's relationship with self and others as well as the ability to express feelings and emotions.

Physical-motor development: includes gross motor (large muscle) activity, fine motor (small muscle) activity, and perceptual motor (involving brain and body) activity.

Cognitive development: includes the ability to perceive and think; includes attention span, problem-solving skills, analytical thinking, beginning reading, computing skills, memory and general knowledge.

Language development: includes vocabulary, verbal ability, pronunciation, receptive language- what a child understands and expressive language-the ability to express ideas, needs and feelings.

Cultural identity development: includes a growing awareness of one's attitudes toward others and growing in one's cultural identity.

Creative development: includes creative moment, dance, music, painting, imagination, originality, divergent thinking and problem solving. (Browne & Gordon, 2014, p. 67)

The National Education Association (NEA) supports the whole child approach to learning and teaching and further advocates for requiring states to develop comprehensive, peer-reviewed plans that include whole child measures (Meeting the Needs of the Whole Child, 2010). Teaching to the whole child allows teachers to integrate learning needs of all young children, making these early years learning years (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

By recognizing the developmental domains established by the whole child approach to teaching, one is able to understand the impacts of developmental milestones

that occur within each domain and how these milestones are crucial indicators in helping

determine a child's potential for being at risk for possible learning, physical, and

emotional deficiencies (Browne & Gordon, 2014). According to the Center for Disease

Control (Learn the Signs, Act Early, 2015), early childhood educators play a vital role in

recognizing when a child is not exhibiting typical development or meeting developmental

milestones at each stage and age of growth. In addition, the CDC found that when early

intervention occurs, the child can receive necessary assistance in closing developmental

gaps, prescribing needed services, and revealing any emotional, physical, or cognitive

disabilities that may exist (Learn the Signs, Act Early, 2015). It is during the formative

years when early education programs make the greatest impacts, that educational

experiences that encourage social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development must

be designed and implemented for the young child (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

Milestone indicators can help the early childhood educator determine if learning

and development are typical or atypical, and this knowledge will impact any

interventions, services, and learning experiences that each child receives, thus better

preparing the child to be school ready (Learn the Signs, Act Early, 2015).

According to the Center for Disease Control (Learn the Signs, Act Early, 2015),

in the first year, babies learn to focus their vision, reach out, explore, and learn about the

things that are around them. Cognitive or brain development means the learning process

of memory, language, thinking, and reasoning. Furthermore, during this stage, babies

also are developing bonds of love and trust with their parents and others as part of social

and emotional development (Dropout Prevention, 2013). Therefore, one can relate that

because this foundational learning can impact future learning, the influence of stimulating

learning experiences could have pronounced effects. Preparing children to enter

kindergarten does not begin at age four and therefore all experiences that occur in the early, formative years are building agents to the success of the child's kindergarten readiness (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005).

During the toddler years, children reach milestones in how they play, learn, speak, behave, and move (like crawling, walking, or jumping) as well as being able to recognize the names of familiar people and objects, form simple phrases and sentences, and follow simple instructions and directions (Why Investments in Early Childhood Work, 2014). According to Browne and Gordon (2014), it is crucial for early childhood educators to understand the significance of helping toddlers to begin to learn how to conduct themselves as social beings and grow their social curiosity they will exhibit in others as this is foundational to building trust in relationships with peers and adults. Therefore one can make the association that these social interactions prepare the child to enter kindergarten more socially aware of others.

As children grow through and into the preschool years, their world begins to open up as new experiences are crucial in all areas of development as they build on previous experiences, connecting new to former learning skills (Clemson University, 2015). Language and cognitive functions work interchangeably and at fast rates as the preschooler takes in and processes new learning at a dramatic rate and at this age want to have more social interactions with others who are outside the family (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Their interactions with family and those around them will help to shape their personality and their own ways of thinking and moving as they want to explore and learn more (Clemson University, 2015). Preschoolers who have had quality early childhood education experiences where learning opportunities stimulate each area of development are better prepared to enter a PreK program than their peers who have had fewer

opportunities to engage and learn in these settings (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies, 2015).

Early childhood education focuses on children ages birth through age eight (Browne & Gordon, 2014). According to NAEYC (n.d.), there are 10 standards that are used to determine high-quality childcare. NAEYC's standards include relationships and how they are formed, curriculum design and implementation, best teaching practices, assessment of the child's progress, health practices, quality of teachers, opportunities for families, community relationships, the learning environments and leadership and management practices; and these all work interchangeably to create an optimal early childhood education program (NAEYC, n.d.). Each early childhood program is multifaceted and comprised of pedagogical competencies that make a particular program attractive to families and the community (Browne & Gordon, 2014). According to NAEYC (n.d.), the type of early learning environment a family chooses for their child is based on the family's beliefs and needs as well as those of the child. No matter the differences in opinions about formal prekindergarten education, children benefit from some type of early education during their developmental years (What is so Important About Early Childhood Education, 2005).

According to Browne and Gordon (2014), there are nine factors that define early childhood programs which include ages of children being served; philosophical ideals; program goals; purpose of the program; requirements of the sponsoring agency; quality and training of staff; location and size of the physical environment; cultural, ethnic, economic and social makeup of the program; and financial stability of the program. Furthermore, these programs exist to serve a variety of needs which include caring for children while parents work, providing enrichment programs, providing educational

opportunities for the parents and child, providing academic and readiness instruction, and providing a definitive focus on a particular culture or religion (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

Programs that serve children ages 2½-5 years of age focus on developmental approaches and encourage self-expression through language, creativity, intellectual skills and physical activities exemplify the traditional nursery school or preschool (Browne & Gordon, 2014). These programs balance activities indoors and outdoors as well as teacher-directed and individual, free choice. Child-care centers provide care for a greater portion of the day than that of the preschool as the program's schedule fits the hours of the working parents (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Because the children are in the setting a greater portion of the day, routines of the setting include meals and naps along with educating the child in accordance with developmental practices. Some examples of child-care centers which meet the needs of both parents and child include preschools, Head Start programs, public school programs, employer-sponsored childcare, and family childcare (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

Infant and toddler care programs provide a combination of physical care and intellectual stimulation as the general intent of these centers is to provide care that is supplemental to family life and supports the child's family structure (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

With the exception of Head Start, the programs for young children are regulated by state mandates, laws, rules, and regulations (NAEYC, n.d.). Head Start is the largest federal, publicly funded education program and began as a part of our nation's attempt to provide education services to children and families who are labeled at-risk and poverty-stricken (Browne & Gordon, 2014). The federal government legislates rules and mandates for the Head Start program, and each state must adhere to and monitor the

implementation of these guidelines (Head Start, 2015).

Faith-based programs may employ any of the ideas, structures, schedules, and curriculum of public programs; but the emphasis of learning includes religion and faith (NAEYC, n.d.). Faith-based programs have state guidelines that slightly differ from those of public programs and are typically governed by less strict rules and regulations (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

In North Carolina, all early childhood programs are regulated by the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (NCDCDEE) (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). According to NCDCDEE, this agency establishes rules, regulations, and guidelines for all types of early childhood education programs in North Carolina; serves program administrators, teachers, staff and families; and supports advocacy for the early childhood educators and programs in the state. Teacher-child ratios, teacher credentials, environment regulations, curriculum mandates, and health and safety guidelines as well as procedures for staff and families are regulated by the agency (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).

All programs and agencies involved in decisions and the governance of early childhood education programs have one common principle which is the foundation for all practices in a child's early learning experiences and education and this unifying principle is known as DAP (Browne & Gordon, 2014). In analyzing this study's purpose of examining the relationship of early childhood education experiences and high school dropouts in a rural area of North Carolina, one must realize the significance of DAPs and the emphasis of this in all early education programs. According to NAEYC (n.d.), DAP is the foundation for all research, work, education, and advocacy in the field of early

childhood education. NAEYC (n.d.) further noted that DAP is an approach to teaching that is grounded in research on how young children develop and learn and establishes what is known as best practices for teaching our young children; it involves meeting children where they are, both as individuals and as a part of a group, and helping each child in meeting challenging and achievable learning goals. In order for DAP guidelines to be followed, the program must adhere to the three core beliefs of DAP: (1) knowing about child development and learning: (2) knowing what is individually appropriate; and (3) knowing what is culturally appropriate (Browne & Gordon, 2014, p. 16).

When young children are not exposed to the ideas and beliefs of DAP, their developmental needs are often not met, developmental milestones may go unrecognized, families and children may not receive appropriate support or services, and children may not be exposed to learning experiences that enhance their abilities (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Following DAPs is simply doing what is best for the child at all times and meeting needs in each developmental domain (NAEYC n.d.).

Understanding that following DAPs is the foundation for all learning and experiences in all early childhood education programs and settings, it is imperative that all those who invest their time, profession, and talents to early childhood education adhere to these practices in order to provide optimal learning during these early years (Browne & Gordon, 2014). The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school dropouts and high school graduates regarding early childhood education. In order to establish relationships of these two populations, one must study the impacts of the early years on their learning experiences as well as programs that have evolved to support early learning and its purpose.

Students as Learners

According to Kihlstrom (2013) behaviorist psychologists defined learning as "a relatively permanent change in behavior that occurs as a result of experience" (para. 1); and with the cognitivist revolution, the definition got revised in one important way: one now thinks of learning as a relatively permanent change in knowledge that occurs as a result of experience. Recognizing how this study's theoretical framework is supported in ways children and adolescents learn and acquire knowledge may lead one to draw conclusions regarding how the learning needs of all students should be supported so that successful completion of high school occurs. When knowledge becomes available for use, learning has occurred (Kihlstrom, 2013). According to research conducted by Kihlstrom, recognizing the differences in short-term and long-term memory will help one differentiate between how the two impact learning. Short-term memories can transfer into long-term memories when they are connected, become meaningful, and build upon each other (Kihlstrom, 2013). Therefore, if the expectation is for our students to learn, one must build meaningful, interconnected, and relevant learning experiences.

Cognitive theorist Jean Piaget's work defined four stages explaining how children learn and develop cognitive skills (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Browne and Gordon (2014) explained that these stages describe how children learn and build meaningful knowledge. The sensorimotor stage (birth-2 years old) is when children acquire knowledge through their movements and senses. This stage connects to the preoperational stage (2-7 years old) where children engage in symbolic play and manipulate symbols so that learning continues to connect but is not yet concrete or logical. The preoperational stage is foundational to the concrete operational stage (7-11 years old) where children begin thinking logically about concrete events but have a little

difficulty understanding the abstract or hypothetical concepts. Stage four is the formal operational stage and begins at adolescence and goes through adult hood. At this stage, the student is ready to make assumptions, hypothesize, rationalize, and reason deductively as well as inductively (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

Federal and State Initiatives for Early Childhood Education

In 2001, under the direction of President Bush, the No Child Left Behind Act was enacted on behalf of Congress which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2014b). This act would ensure opportunities for every child; expand support for schools, teachers, and principals; and preserve accountability for the progress of all students by exposing achievement gaps of underserved and vulnerable students. Although this act set forth mandates and laws providing for disadvantaged students, the emphasis was placed on children kindergarten through twelfth grade and did not include, at this time, preschool or early childhood education support (U.S. Department of Education, 2014b).

President Barack Obama has initiated federal programs which place an emphasis on early childhood education, early interventions, and early learning initiatives (Obama, 2013). According to research conducted per the President's call to invest in early intervention for our nation's young, expanding early learning initiatives would provide benefits to society of roughly $8.60 for every $1.00 spent (The White House, 2014). According to the report released by the White House (The White House, 2014), the President's call for an expansion of quality early childhood education programs has increased an awareness of the benefits of quality education and care and has caused philanthropic and private organizations to commit to working with federal programs and invested over $1 billion to quality education and learning for America's young children.

According to research conducted by Porter (2013), America contributes only $300.00 per child for early education. The Head Start program initiated in 1965 under the direction of President L.B. Johnson has been revised and expanded under the Obama administration (Head Start, 2015). Head Start supports early learning of children, typically aged 3-4 years old and living in poverty, through educational, health, parental involvement, and social services support (Head Start, 2015). President Obama has increased the Head Start funding to include funding for the Early Start program where children ages 0-3 will receive the same benefits and support (Obama, 2013). Although the Head Start and Early Start initiatives provide great support, the assistance is provided only to those families living at or below poverty level and therefore are not available to all children from all backgrounds (What is so Important About Early Childhood Education, 2005). Critics of the Head Start movement also state that research has proven that Head Start children are only at an advantage for just a couple of years and by Grade 3 they perform at similar levels of their peers who did not receive formal preschool education (What is so Important About Early Childhood Education, 2005). In order to help states fund preschool initiatives to increase quality in early childhood education, President Obama initiated the "Preschool for All" initiative where he included over $75 billion to support states in developing and expanding quality early learning programs (Obama, 2013). The Race to the Top grant provided funds to states to advance reforms that would prepare students to succeed in college and compete globally in the workplace, turn around low-achieving schools, provide incentives for recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers, and establishing a system for collecting and analyzing student and teacher performances (U.S. Department of Education, 2014b).

In 1993, North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt signed into law the North Carolina

Smart Start program which provides funding to nonprofit organizations in the state that work to make sure young children enter school healthy and ready to succeed (North Carolina Partnership for Children, 2015). According to the North Carolina Partnership for Children (2015), the Smart Start initiative was North Carolina's response to the Head Start federal initiative and includes the goal of increasing quality early education that is child-focused, family friendly, and fair to providers across the state. The Smart Start initiative provides low socioeconomic families financial assistance for quality childcare and education as well as other programs to support learning experiences and the health of these children from birth through age three.

In response to the issue of quality childcare and education, the state adopted the STAR rated licensing system (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). With this system, early childhood learning environments are rated based on education of staff; quality of environments; learning opportunities for children; health and safety practices; and interaction with children, families, and the community (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). According to the NCDCDEE, a five-star rated facility denotes a facility of highest quality while a one-star facility denotes poor quality. This system is used to rate daycares, preschools, home centers, and any participating faith-based facilities. Smart Start uses this rating system as a basis for determining quality settings where North Carolina's young children and their families can be educated and supported (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Under the Smart Start program, the "More at Four" program was enacted and was designed to provide the same assistance and support to children at the age of 4 (North Carolina Partnership for Children, 2015). This program, now known as NC PreK, provides assistance to facilities and providers to establish a high-quality 4-year-old

program that will prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to succeed (North Carolina Partnership for Children, 2015). The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school dropouts and high school graduates regarding early childhood education. Noting programs that may or may not have supported early learning of these two sample groups was beneficial to this study. Noting programs and the impact of early learning experiences can be vital to this study as the implications and perceptions of early childhood education can potentially impact a person's success in completing high school. The foundational proficiencies children gain during their early years support their learning as they evolve from primary grades up through high school and the benefits of noting any potential risks for dropping out of high school far outweigh any concerns regarding lasting benefits of early learning programs and initiatives (Clemson University, 2015). As the purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding early education, it was imperative that the researcher explore the roles of students as learners, as how one acquires knowledge is built on intrinsic and extrinsic forces and these forces emerge and merge during the formative years (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

The lack of meaningful learning experiences can have negative impacts on a student's perception of education and the need to become a successful learner (Clemson University, 2015). According to a study conducted by Wright (2013) school should be a place where children learn what they love. Furthermore, Wright explained that kids should leave school knowing what they are good at, and this occurs when learning experiences are tailored to fit the learning styles and needs of each student. Recognizing how students learn and how learning preferences influence a student's successes in school can have profound effects on this study.

The researcher had to examine how students learn as this information could lead one to ponder if students do not have their learning needs met, could this impact their success in school and therefore become a determining factor for withdrawing from high school? This study examined how the young, middle, and adolescent student learns and how learning needs can be met among these three groups of learners. How students learn and evolve as learners throughout their academic years can influence future learning experiences and opportunities; if learning needs are not met, the student may never learn to appreciate how learning occurs and may lack in reaching their full potential (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

Jean Piaget's cognitive theory explained the mechanisms and processes by which the infant and then the child develop into an individual who can reason and think logically and critically as they grow and connect experiences and knowledge (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Piaget's theory recognized four major stages in which learning takes place: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational (Browne & Gordon, 2014). According to McLeod (2015b), Piaget's theory begins at infancy and evolves through adolescence; therefore, Piaget's work is foundational for all educators so meaningful learning experiences meet the developmental appropriateness for each stage of cognitive development. McLeod (2015b) explained that very young learners (birth though age 2) acquire knowledge through senses and object permanence; and as they mature these young learners begin to develop preoperational skills (2-7 years), whereby children engage in symbolic play and are able to mentally represent events and objects but are able to focus on only one situation at a time. The next stage, or schema, is concrete operational and, according to McLeod (2015b), is a major turning point in a child's ability to think logically and solve problems in a logical manner;

students are able to be more rational and organized in thought processes but hypothetical progressions are very limited. Finally, the formal operational begins during middle childhood (11) and lasts through the adolescent years. During this time, the student is able to think more abstractly and independently, employing critical thinking skills, reasoning and evaluation skills (McLeod, 2015b). This information can prove to be beneficial to educators as lessons can be designed and implemented which meet the student learning needs based on the schemas represented. Some critics of Piaget's theory have indicated that Piaget's work is biased as observations and research was collected solely by Piaget and therefore is representative of one researcher's ideas and representations (McLeod, 2015b). However, McLeod further explained that Piaget's work has been vital to educators in all realms of education as each stage offers explanations on how students should be taught so learning can be maximized.

Along with recognizing how student learning evolves through progressive stages, it would be beneficial to consider the manner in which students learn content and material. By examining learning styles, one may appreciate how these matriculate with individual preferences for learning concepts and acquiring knowledge. Research shows that people have preferences and strengths in how information is assimilated and processed and these preferences are sometimes referred to as learning styles as these can be used to help one understand the different ways in which individuals learn (Browne & Gordon, 2014). According to Browne and Gordon (2014), there are varied learning style theories which have emerged, and because these have relied on questionnaires individuals must be willing to complete, many researchers have questioned the validity of the learning styles theories. However, the most thorough review of the learning style theory was undertaken by the Learning and Skills Research Centre at Newcastle University

which included David Kolb's 33 years of study concerning learning styles (The Journey to Excellence, n.d.). According to Kolb's findings, depending upon the situation, people prefer to learn in one or more of four types of learning styles: diverging, assimilating, converging, or accomodating (The Journey to Excellence, n.d.). The article further explained that the diverging learner is sensitive to others and learns through feelings. By watching others, the assimilating learner uses a more logical process; ideas are more important than people. Converging learners find problem solving intriguing and use learning to find solutions to practical issues while the accomodating learner is hands-on and relies on intuition rather than logic. Other thoeries have been closely aligned to Kolb's model and have taken these concepts to label learning styles through a student's preferred sense of learning (Browne & Gordon, 2014). These include the visual learner, auditory learner, lingusitc learner, and tactile learner (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Research has examined these styles and determned that while students may prefer one style over another, depending upon the content and material, this does not indicate that students cannot learn in another type of style; they may accommodate one's style in order to acquire new learning (The Journey to Excellence, n.d.). The visual learner prefers to see new knowledge and prefers teachers use visual aids in instructional practices; the auditory learner wishes to acquire new knowledge through listening skills and the teacher using auditory instructional pracitces; the tactile learner learns best when the information can be touched and the teacher uses a hands-on approach to teaching; linguistic learners prefer to demonstrate and understandng by speaking and through language skills and learn best when teachers allow learning to be discussed (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

Because this study analyzed the perceptions of high school dropouts and high school graduates regarding early childhood education experienes, the researcher had to

consider the impact of how students learn as well as the effect of students not being taught in their preferred styles of learning. If teachers are not implementing learning experinces that are aligned to the cognitive development and stages represented in the classroom, it is possible that the cognitive needs are not being met. If students are not receiveing learning opportunities in their preferred learning styles, this may make the experience frustrating for the students, reducing optimal learning and engagement. As students grow and emerge as learners, learning needs become evident as students evlove through cognitive stages of deveopment. If there are gaps or inconsensitices in these processes, learning can be interrupted and these gaps may widen; thus, students may grow to have a sense of frustration and devastation that may contribute to a student's decision to withdraw from or dropout of high school.

High School Dropout Causes and Characteristics

Research shows two sets of predictors of whether students will drop out of or graduate from high school: one set is associated with the institutional characteristics of their families, schools, and communities; the other set is associated with the individual characteristics of the students themselves (Dropouts, 2011). According to the American Psychological Association (Facing the school dropout dilemma, 2014), there were four major trends associated with the two sets of predictors that began to emerge in 2007, including,

Life events – dropout is prompted by something that happens to the student outside the school (teen pregnancy, foster care placement, high school mobility).

Fade outs – dropout is prompted by frustration and boredom with school even though the student has not failed or repeated any grades.

Push outs – dropouts are subtly or explicitly encouraged to withdraw or transfer

away from school because they are perceived to be difficult or detrimental to the

success of the school.

Failure to succeed – dropouts leave after a history of academic failure,

absenteeism, or lack of engagement. (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014,

p. 3)

The APA report (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014) also found that it is

important to consider the student's own perceptions and beliefs in their own competence,

abilities, and motivation while also considering the impacts of peer associations and

relationships as these can impact a student's decision to withdraw from school. Grade

retention or being "held back" has also been found to be highly correlated with dropping

out (Dropouts, 2011). When students were asked why they chose to withdraw from high

school, the reasons for dropping out included

Classes were not interesting;

They were not motivated or inspired to work hard;

They were failing and could not keep up with school work;

They had missed too many days and could not catch up on their work;

They had repeated a grade;

They had to seek employment;

They became a parent;

They had to care for a family member;

They were doubtful they could meet their school's graduation requirements.

(Dropouts, 2011, p. 2)

Parenting practices including monitoring a child's progress in school,

communicating with the school, and knowing the parents of their children's friends play a

role in the family support of their student and these roles are influenced by the level of income or poverty of the family (Dropouts, 2011, p. 2).

A study conducted at Clemson University (2015) indicated that those who withdraw from high school have factors that cause them to drop out and these factors can be categorized into three areas: push out, pull out, or fall out factors. The study defined each one. Being pushed out is a result of the student withdrawing due to adverse situations and consequences that occur within the school environment, while being pulled out results when the facors are within the student. Falling out occurs when a student grows apathetic toward work or begins to show very little academic progress (Clemson University, 2015).

Because this study analyzed the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding early childhood education, the implications of why students choose to withdraw from high school offered vital information for this research.

High School Dropout Rates and Concerns

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), the *status dropout rate* earned a GED. Based on the most current data, the status dropout rate decreased from 12% in 1990 to 7% in 2013. Male student dropout rates went from 12% in 1990 to 7% in 2013, and female rates went from 12% in 1990 to 6% in 2013 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). According to the data, the dropout rate was lower for White students than Black students; however, rates for White and Black students were significantly lower than the rate for Hispanics.

According to a report released by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2015), North Carolina's dropout rate is considerably lower than the national averages. The total dropout rate declined from 3.1%

in 2012 to 2.45% in 2013. The report also concluded that in the 2012-2013 academic

year, the dropout rate for White males was 2.41% and White females was 1.70%. Black

males had a dropout rate of 3.59%, while Black females had a rate of 2.22%. The

Hispanic population had the greatest dropout rates with 4.15% of males dropping out of

high school and 2.65% of Hispanic females dropping out (Public Schools of North

Carolina, 2015). Although the North Carolina rates are lower than national averages, the

trends among ethnic groups are the same. Whites have the lowest dropout rates, and

Whites and Blacks have lower rates than Hispanics living in North Carolina.

　　　　Societal, economic, and emotional concerns for high school dropouts have grown

as the impacts of dropping out of high school have been felt by our governments and

society as a whole (Dropouts, 2011). According to the American Psychological

Association (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014), data from the U.S. Department

of Education shows that among the high school dropout rates, a significant amount of

those dropping out of high school were students with disabilities. In addition, these data

indicated that arrest rates are relatively high for students with disabilities. Another

concern regarding the dropout data is that research shows that students living with both

parents have lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates compared to students in

other living arrangements, and the employment status of parents and the parents' incomes

play roles in the dropout dilemma as do parenting practices (Dropouts, 2011).

　　　　In 2009, the average income for a high school dropout was $17,786.00 compared

to $27,380.00 for a high school graduate, and the high school dropout is bearing the brunt

of the ongoing recession more than the rest of the population (Facing the School Dropout

Dilemma, 2014). This income gap widens when one compares salaries among high

school dropouts to those with bachelor's degrees. In 2009, male and female college

graduates earned $57,714.00-$39,263.00, while male and female high school dropouts earned $21,629.00-$13,943.00 (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014). This information reveals that high school dropouts are living within the poverty level thresholds (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). According to the Education Week Research Center (Dropouts, 2011), the value of a high school education cannot be measured in dollars alone; among 16-24 year olds who were incarcerated during 2006-2007, 6.3% were high school dropouts who did not have a GED. The risk of incarceration (jails, prisons, juvenile detention centers), for high school dropouts is significant (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014).

According to the American Psychological Association (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014), it has been estimated that if dropouts from the class of 2009 had graduated, the nation's economy would have benefited from nearly $335 billion in additional income over the course of their lifetimes. Furthermore, the U.S. ranks eighth from the bottom in a comparison of high school graduation rates among the 30-member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014). The U.S. is underperforming its competitors. It is estimated that approximately 12 million students will drop out of high school over the next decade or so, costing the U.S. about $3 trillion; and dropouts are far more likely to experience reduced job and income opportunities, chronic unemployment, incarceration, or require government assistance than the rest of the population (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014).

High School Dropout Initiatives and Programs

Although research states that in order to prevent one from dropping out of high school and determining if one is at risk for dropping out, assessments, prevention, and

support must begin early (Dropout Prevention, 2013). One may address this issue by

determining what age such intervention should occur. The achievement gap opens in the

earliest years, the period when children's brains grow fastest and when children fall

behind their peers; the later the intervention, the harder it becomes for them to catch up

and achieve their potential (Carplunk & Eaneman, 2013).

Dropout prevention strategies and programs vary widely and begin by identifying

struggling students early and providing them with needed assistance (Balfanze, 2010). A

research team from Johns Hopkins University issued a report that noted the ABCs of

dropout as infrequent attendance, behavior infractions, and course failures; and these can

more accurately predict whether or not a student will dropout from school (Balfanze,

2010). Furthermore, this report found these ABCs of predicting dropouts are more

accurate than using socioeconomic factors to predict dropout rates, and these should be

noted as early as the start of middle school (Balfanze, 2010). The latest trend in dropout

prevention is to establish recovery programs that emphasize multiple pathways to

graduation; and over the last decade, over 31 states have expanded recovery programs

(Dropouts, 2011). One such recovery program targets students with disabilities who are

at risk for dropping out of high school (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014). This

program connects the students with academic support and community service projects to

encourage career readiness (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014). The early

college concept provides first-generation college-bound students the ability to begin work

on a 2-year associate's degree beginning their ninth-grade year where their high school

course work and college level course work takes place on the same campus; these classes

are generally lower in teacher-student ratio and provide great financial help to families

and students (Dropouts, 2011). The U.S. Department of Education (2014a) has

established the High School Graduation Initiative (HSGI) that awards grants to state and local education agencies in order to establish quality, sustainable and effective dropout prevention, and reentry programs for high school dropouts. Alternative schooling is a program many states have selected to fund in order to prevent students from dropping out of high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2014a). This type of program places high school students in an alternative setting where they receive intense academic tutoring and course work along with counseling and behavioral support due to the fact that the majority of these students have been expelled from their traditional school setting due to behavioral and/or attendance issues (U.S. Department of Education, 2014a). Graduation coaches are professionals who are hired by school systems to fulfill two responsibilities: to profile students who are at risk for dropping out or not graduating from high school and to find and match students with needed resources to successfully graduate from high school (Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast, 2008). Once named dropout prevention coaches, these career coaches have produced great benefits; and research suggests this is due, in part, to the relationships each coach works to establish with each individual student (Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast, 2008).

There are varioius programs that are currently being implemented in each high school throughout our nation to prevent students from dropping out of high school and research has established that identifing students at risk for dropping out is essential in providing support and interventions. (Dropout Prevention, 2013).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school dropouts and high school graduates regarding early childhood education. Research conducted by the Department of Education supports the need to recognize early childhood education as

one of the most significant factors for supporting young children and their families and reducing the high school dropout rate significantly (Carpluk & Eaneman, 2013). According to NAEYC (n.d.), our nation's young children need quality, supportive, and engaging environments where DAPs are implemented to encourage each child to develop to his or her fullest potential through exploration, critical thinking, and creative experiences.

Along with the educational environment, support given by teachers, the community, and all stakeholders is required to meet the needs of both child and family: identifying those who may be labeled at risk for failure or are exhibiting atypical development (Browne & Gordon, 2014). Early detection and early intervention will result in early prevention and these, above all else, will be the greatest contributions to future academic success (Dropouts, 2011). In order to fully understand the impacts of dropping out of high school, societal, social emotional, socioeconomic, and academic issues must be examined as these factors can contribute to or become impacted by a person's decision to withdraw from high school before graduating (Dropout Prevention, 2013). Our nation has recognized the need to support children and families who have evident needs relating to these factors and have recognized early education as being crucial to helping children overcome any obstacles or barriers these factors may present (U.S. Department of Education, 2014b). Understanding the importance of the role quality early childhood education plays in preventing students from dropping out of high school will allow state and national legislators to make vital decisions to support our nation's young children in becoming 21st century learners who possess skills that will allow America to grow and prosper (Obama, 2013). The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school dropouts and high school graduates regarding

early childhood education. These perceptions allowed the researcher to determine if the

mindsets of these individuals support the research and related literature.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

A report authored by Carplunk and Eanemen (2013) on behalf of Ready Nation revealed that our country's effort to improve the workforce has focused on high school education as the starting point for job readiness, but improving this readiness will be far more likely achieved if we help children start down the right path during the first 5 years of their life. Determining the educational experiences of high school dropouts can help to establish the importance of early childhood education as a factor for preventing the student from dropping out of school (Carplunk & Eanemen, 2013). The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school dropouts and high school graduates regarding early childhood education.

Participants

For the purpose of this study, the population studied was community college students enrolled at Test Community College. Two sample groups within the population participated. Sample 1 consisted of high school dropouts who were enrolled in an AHS program at Test Community College located in a rural area in the piedmont of North Carolina. Students in this program work toward completing specific course work to obtain a high school diploma, a GED, or to master basic adult education courses to prepare them for high school-level course work. The adult learning programs are facilitated and managed by adult educators at the community college or at an approved off-site facility located in the community. These off-campus sites serve the students within the community who are unable to attend the community college site due to lack of transportation, inability to attend on a consistent schedule due to work or family situations, or who choose the off-site location due to convenience of the location. The

adult learner instructors have at least an undergraduate degree in a field relating to education or adult learning. Sample 1 consisted of students who were at least 18 years of age and therefore parental permission was not required. The researcher secured permission of student participants only. All students in Sample 1 had dropped out of high school and were enrolled in one of the adult learning programs in order to graduate from the high school program with a diploma, complete course work and testing to obtain a GED, or take remedial courses through the ABE programs to prepare for a diploma or GED. These programs are offered during day and evening hours. Surveys were distributed at the beginning of each adult learning class.

Sample 2 consisted of students enrolled in one of the AAS degree-seeking programs at Test Community College located in a rural area in North Carolina. Students enrolled in AAS degree-seeking programs are generally interested in seeking a 2-year associate's degree only. Most are not seeking to transfer to a higher education setting in order to pursue an advanced degree. AAS degree-seeking students prepare for careers that require only a 2-year degree and therefore most often become work-force ready after earning the AAS degree. Depending on the type of program, students are required to complete 68-72 credit hours in order to successfully obtain an AAS degree. At the time of the study, there were 51 different AAS degree programs. Students seeking an AAS degree in education, including Early Childhood Education and School Age Education, and attending day and evening education classes were asked to participate in the survey. These students were older than 18 years of age; and although the researcher did not need to secure parental permission, student permission was obtained.

In the spring semester of 2015, there were 105 students enrolled in at least one of the adult learning programs at the community college. Fifty-two of these students were

male and 52 were female; 27 students were African American, 68 were Caucasian, and 10 were Latino or other ethnic origin. A total of 46 students were enrolled in the AHS/GED program where they were seeking a high school diploma or GED. Fifty-nine students were enrolled in ABE where they were working toward gaining basic academic skills in order to become enrolled in one of the adult learning programs to earn a high school diploma or GED.

In the spring of 2015, there were 74 students enrolled in the Early Childhood Education associate's degree program. These students complete coursework toward earning an AAS degree in Early Childhood Education. There were five students enrolled in the School Age Education associate's degree program. These students complete coursework toward earning an AAS in School Age Education. Fewer than 3% were male students; 54% were White, non-Hispanic; 43% were Black, non-Hispanic; and fewer than 2% were Hispanic/other. These student demographics represent both the Early Childhood and School Age degree-seeking candidates.

Participation was selected on a voluntarily basis. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, identifying information such as name was not included on the survey instrument. Permission to conduct this research was obtained by the institution's Internal Review Board (IRB) and the Dean of Adult Learning. Additional permission to host focus groups and interviews was granted by the institution's Dean of Business, Allied Health, and Education.

Instrumentation

For the intent of this study, the researcher used a survey and focus-group interviews to obtain data and information.

For the purpose of data collection, a survey was created by the researcher to

gather information to support the study. As noted by Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2011), surveys can be used in evaluation and study for a wide variety of purposes. The survey used for this study was designed specifically for this research. After meeting with the institution's Dean of Adult Learning, a series of survey questions addressing the research questions was drafted. Questions were written in a format with language that is concise, coherent, and applicable to allow ease of use by the population. The adult learners need language that is concise, coherent, and applicable. Information should be precise and direct and, upon suggestion of the Dean, should be formatted to one page. This allowed students to complete the survey instrument with ease and comprehension. The researcher followed procedures outlined by Creswell (2014), and a survey method plan was followed. According to the plan, the researcher adhered to procedures that helped establish purpose and rationale for the study. When identifying pertinent questions for consideration on the survey, the researcher employed the technique of relating the variables, questions, hypotheses, and sample items on the survey so that the data collection would connect to the variables or questions (Creswell, 2014).

Establishing Validity

In order to prove validity of the survey instrument, the researcher conducted a pilot study group. The pilot group consisted of 20 adult learners who volunteered to participate and took the survey. This method determined which questions would best provide information that addressed each research question. Upon rewriting the questions, following the suggestions of the Dean and the institution's Director of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, the survey was completed by utilizing the technique of relating variables. In relating the variables, the research questions proposed for this study were aligned and correlated with corresponding survey questions. As research questions

were analyzed, they were aligned to the specific variable each question would address and then correlated with the item on the survey. Questions were labeled as descriptive, quantitative, or inferential. This purpose allowed the researcher to clarify the type of data that needed to be collected and then connected to the variable and survey item.

This process took place because the researcher wanted to ensure the data gathered would be relevant to the study, accumulate the required data, and be applicable for a mixed-methods study. The questions were aligned and a discussion with the Dean of Adult Learning took place. This discussion led the researcher to determine the questions would be appropriate for the adult learning population, could be easily read and comprehended, and did not demonstrate bias or prejudice.

The participants who helped validate the instrument were selected through a purposeful selection of one of the adult learning classes. The class chosen was a lab class where participants were working on course work toward earning a GED or high school diploma and would be graduating during the current semester. These participants were not included in any data collection and analysis for this study. The participants had completed at least one full semester of course work and therefore were comfortable with the instructor, environment, and peers. Humanist Abraham Maslow's research indicated that people have a basic need for safety which includes structure, predictability, and familiarity (Emrich, n.d.). By having these students pilot this survey in their stable learning environment, the researcher fostered a sense of security where no threats were evident.

Appendix A contains a script the researcher read to the pilot group who participated in the testing of the survey instrument in order to produce validity. Participants were introduced to the researcher by the instructor. The researcher read the

purpose and intention of the survey. Directions for completing the survey were read as well as how the surveys would be collected. Participants were told how the survey would be used as well as stored. The participants were thanked for their contributions, and the researcher left the classroom. No participants had questions or comments before, during, or after the piloting of the survey. This procedure took place in order to prove validity of the survey instrument. Twenty-four surveys were collected from the pilot study. The answers of the participants were analyzed and the results were discussed with the Test Community College's data manager. Items did not present bias, variables were aligned, and results matched the intended outcomes as noted by the relating variables method noted in Appendix A. The survey instrument proved to be valid (Appendix B).

In order to triangulate the data on the created survey, focus groups and interviews were held. Using questions from the survey, the researcher conducted focus groups to determine participants' opinions, thoughts, and ideas regarding the importance of early childhood education as it relates to preparing one for successful high school graduation. The focus-group discussions revealed commonalities or themes that are important for the researcher to note and were included in this study. Participants from Sample 1 were randomly selected to participate in a focus group. Students were listed on an attendance roster located in the Adult Learning Center and kept by the Dean of Adult Student Learning. Students were assigned a number and randomly selected. Participants from Sample 2 were also randomly selected to participate in a focus group. The Sample 2 focus group was comprised of students who were high school graduates and enrolled in an education AAS degree-seeking program and who were randomly chosen according numbered participants whose names were located on the course rosters. Any student who was currently enrolled in the education AAS degree-seeking program and who was

previously a student enrolled in the Adult Learning program was not allowed to participate in this study in order to insure that data were not skewed. The researcher hosted two focus-group interviews as the purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding early childhood education.

According to Butin (2010), this type of data collection is extremely important as you have the opportunity to note the body language and expressions of the participants. Furthermore, it is extremely critical to structure the interview protocol so that the potential for bias does not exist and in a manner where the questions asked are open-ended. Butin further explained that proper interview protocol involves the researcher interviewing participants in focus groups and a one-on-one manner whereby the individual tells a story and the researcher serves as a journalist scribing the participants' responses, linking information to research questions so that "rich and deep" data are gathered (p. 97). The researcher should remain focused on obtaining information in a neutral manner which is aligned to survey questions and adhere to open-ended discussions (Butin, 2010). Asking open-ended questions gave the interviewer the ability to gather information about the participants' feelings and experiences, and this information was beneficial to the study. This approach allowed the participants to address survey questions in a reflective manner and provided profound information worthy to be included in this research. Butin urged the researcher to utilize focus-groups and interviewing processes with caution as these must be conducted with thoroughness, practice, and a "strict adherence to scholarly protocols" (p. 97). Following guidelines was crucial to obtaining objective results where participants were not misled or encouraged to respond to questions with reluctance, uncertainty, or hesitancy.

Selection of Participants

Participants who were selected to participate in the study were given a consent to participate in the focus group (Appendix C). This consent highlighted the purpose for the focus group, protocols, and guidelines as well as how the gathered information and data were to be used. The interviewer used a script to conduct the focus group (Appendix D). The script allowed the information to remain focused and direct. It also allowed the scribe (moderator) to collect information as the participants made verbal contributions regarding questions. Participant responses were collected and the scribe wrote comments on a chart form. This served as a log of the focus groups' thoughts and ideas. Participants were identified via a nameless means in order to protect each participant's identity and to ensure confidentiality. Participants who were previously enrolled in Test Community College's AHS program and who were enrolled in the AAS education program at Test Community College were allowed to participate in order to protect data from being skewed.

Interviews were conducted as a means to gather information in a comfortable, nonthreatening environment where the participant was allowed to respond to questions from the survey and identified by the focus groups. Questions that need additional information, clarification, and/or more concentrated responses were asked. Following an interview protocol for asking questions and recording answers during a qualitative interview is essential in conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), the protocol should include a note-taking process even if the interview will be videotaped or audiotaped. A log was kept that was used to record the accounts and perceptions of each participant. This log contained each question to be asked with space for recording each person's responses. As each participant discussed each

question, their responses were recorded and written. As needed, probing questions were asked which aided the participant in elaborating their ideas and thoughts. Butin (2010) elucidated that eliciting narratives from the person being interviewed can depend on subtle cues or prompts and these can include questions such as "Can you give me an example," "Can you explain that again," "What do you think others would think about this," and "What exactly do you mean?" (p. 99). The importance of this data collection method is to allow the participants to talk freely and openly without prejudice or bias.

Procedures

For the purpose of this study, Samples 1 and 2 were given surveys to complete during the third month of the semester. Once permission was obtained to administer the surveys for Sample 1 (AHS learners), copies of the survey were made and distributed at the beginning of one of the class meetings. After speaking with the Dean of Adult Learning, this program's trends and data indicated that higher attendance occurred on the second and fourth days of the week. Therefore, students who attended day classes held on the campus of Test Community College were surveyed during 1 week's second morning class. Evening students who participated and attended classes held on the campus at Test Community College were surveyed during this week's second evening class. Off-campus participants elected not to participate in this study.

Once permission was obtained to administer the surveys for Sample 2 (AAS education students), copies of the survey were made and administered at the beginning of one of the class meetings. Education courses were scheduled for both day and evening classes. Surveys for the AAS students were distributed the week that followed the dissemination of those for the AHS learners.

The researcher distributed the surveys for both sample groups and remained with

each group of participants until all surveys were completed and turned in. Directions for administering the survey were followed to ensure equitable distribution for all groups.

Focus-group interviews were conducted after surveys had been collected. Using class rosters of the adult learning classes, students who gave permission to be included in the focus-group interviews were numbered and grouped according to ethnicity. Two participants were selected from each grouping randomly by selecting every third person. Next, the remaining participants, who were not selected for the first grouping, were sorted into gender groups; and one participant from each of these was randomly chosen by selecting the third person listed. Once participating students were identified by the Dean of Adult Learning, each was notified by the researcher; and all who were notified volunteered to participate in the focus-group interviews. The focus groups were held during the third month of the semester. Participants were interviewed at a time that was convenient for them. The location and setting was in a classroom the students were familiar with and located on the campus of the community college. This procedure was followed for both day and evening adult learning students.

Students enrolled in the education program seeking an AAS degree in education were selected for the purpose of focus-group interviews using the protocol described for the AHS learners. Using rosters of each participating class, students who gave permission to participate in a focus-group interview were numbered and sorted by ethnicity. Each group's third, sixth, and ninth person were asked to participate; therefore, there were three participants from each grouping. Per data regarding demographics of Test Community College, there are fewer than 3% of males enrolled in the education program. Therefore, any male student enrolled in a participating education course was invited to participate in the focus group. Any student data from students who were

previously enrolled in the adult learning programs at Test Community College and who were AAS education students were removed and did not participate in this study in order to prevent data from becoming skewed. These students did not participate in either the survey or focus-group interviews. Because there are so few males enrolled in the AAS education program, all were asked to participate.

Data Collection

The researcher distributed all surveys and remained with all groups until all surveys were completed and collected. Directions for administering the survey were followed to ensure equitable distribution for all groups. Once each participant's survey was completed, the researcher gathered and placed the survey copies in an envelope that was sealed. Each envelope was labeled with AHS/GED or AAS. This ensured that surveys of each group were kept segregated. When the survey administration was complete, the researcher took each sealed envelope and had its contents verified by an assigned administrator at Test Community College. All envelopes were opened and verified by the institution's Early Childhood Education Discipline Coordinator. This administrator verified the count and contents of each envelope.

During the focus groups, the researcher served as moderator and kept the environment open and focused where strict protocol was followed in order to prevent bias. Participants were identified by a number and identifying trait such as gender which protected the confidentiality of the participants and ensured anonymity. Comments and ideas were transcribed by the moderator onto the response log. Perceptions were recorded and noted per scribe's notes taken during the focus-group interviews. Each participant was number coded and responses were recorded. Each focus-group session was audio recorded in order to aid transcribing and data collection purposes. In order to

protect anonymity, the researcher elected not to video record focus-group participants. Once all groups met and information was collected, the researcher had logs verified by the Early Childhood Education Discipline Coordinator. This administrator verified that privacy of participants had been secured and proper protocol was maintained.

Once logs and surveys were verified, the researcher organized the data. Surveys completed by participants from Sample 1 (AHS learners) were organized in a manner that was manageable and clearly represented the answers of each participant. The raw data were organized onto an electronic word document. This made the information clear and coherent. Each survey's results were recorded onto the document in numeric order. Each document was titled in a manner that indicated Sample 1, and each specific research question results were recorded (Sample 1, Research Question 1). Survey items that were aligned to each question were labeled and results recorded onto the document. Each item's answer was recorded and listed with its corresponding research question.

Surveys completed by Sample 2 participants were organized in the identical manner as Sample 1 but were labeled as Sample 2 participants' responses.

Response logs containing focus-group information were organized onto an electronic word document and arranged according to themes, perspectives, or distinctive perspectives that emerged during the focus-group sessions. Each sample group had its own document and was labeled accordingly. Responses from each participant were coded according to how they related to a particular research question. Responses that were aligned to Research Question 1 were coded RQ1. Responses that were aligned to Research Question 2 were coded RQ2. Those that related to Research Question 3 were coded RQ3. Reoccurring patterns and themes that emerged but did not relate to any particular research question was coded as "OI" (other information). This protocol was

followed for both sample groups.

Once data were organized and recorded, response logs from the focus groups were housed with the completed surveys. These were stored in a locked cabinet located in the offices of the education department at Test Community College. The researcher has stored the collected data for the length of time required by the Test Community College's IRB. Again, the same protocol for collecting, organizing, and storing data for Sample 1 (AHS learners/high school dropouts) was followed for Sample 2 (AAS education degree-seeking students/high school graduates).

Data Analysis

Once data were collected and organized, the researcher began analyzing the data according to how they related and aligned to each research question. Each research question and its corresponding data were investigated and examined in order to produce clear, valid, and reliable data. The researcher analyzed the data for trends and commonalities that existed and helped to answer each research question.

Research Question 1, "How do early childhood education experiences of high school dropouts compare to those who graduated from high school," was assessed; and data collected were displayed using a Chi-square analysis. The Chi-square statistical test allowed the researcher to determine if there is an association between the variables within each sample group as well as between the sample groups. Data were collected regarding the type of program each participant attended as well as the age the participant was at the time of attendance in a particular program. The data indicated experiences of high school graduates according to their gender and ethnicity. The data analysis also displayed the experiences of high school dropouts according to their gender and ethnicity. In order to determine which type of early education program occurs the most among the two sample

groups, the researcher secured the mode of the data. The researcher also determined if there is a particular age in which a sample group had more or less attendance in an early childhood education program.

Research Question 2, "How do the factors that influence a student's decision to drop out of high school as identified by high school dropouts compare to those factors identified by high school graduates," was measured using a Likert scale; and data were displayed in a chart format. Survey item 5 allowed the researcher to collect data from Sample Groups 1 and 2 regarding factors for dropping out of high school. These factors have a ranking score and therefore provided data where options were numerically scored and valued. A sum of the values of each selected option contained on the Likert scale were obtained and a score for each respondent collected. The score represented a specific reason listed on the survey instrument for dropping out of high school. In order to analyze the data from the Likert scale, the researcher utilized the Chi-square test for association as this allowed the researcher to determine if any association existed among the variables. Therefore, the association between high school dropouts and how the impact of factors for dropping out of high school rank. This same association was used to determine associations among the high school graduates. The rankings of these two groups were compared and results discussed. Coded responses from the focus-group interviews aligned to Research Question 2 were also utilized as this allowed the researcher to make further conclusions regarding the reasons for dropping out of high school and the associations among the two sample groups.

Research Question 3, "How do the perceptions of high school dropouts regarding early childhood education compare to those who are high school graduates," was analyzed using data obtained from focus-group interviews of Sample Groups 1 and 2.

Data produced were analyzed so the researcher was able to determine how the perceptions of each gender's survey responses compared within each group (high school dropouts and high school graduates) studied. An analysis of the perceptions of differing ethnic groups of high school graduates was compared with the perceptions of differing ethnic groups of high school dropouts. The perceptions of high school graduates were compared with those of high school dropouts; and the researcher discussed the findings, themes, and patterns that emerged during the focus-group interviews regarding perceptions. Responses were coded by analyzing the transcript of the interviews and color coding phrases, topics, sentences, and ideas that were reoccurring and were relevant to Research Question 1. Once all phrases were identified and coded, responses were typed onto an electronic document. Using the documents where responses were numbered, recorded, and organized according to a particular theme or pattern, information regarding the two groups was compared. The document also contained demographic information of each participant and this was correlated with the participants' responses. Once data were coded according to responses and correlations to research questions, the researcher was able to identify any similarities and differences that existed among the two groups. The researcher also looked at additional analyses among subgroups.

The Chi-square statistical test allowed the researcher to determine if there is an association between the variables within their respective categories. This helped to determine themes that emerged during focus groups and interviews. The Chi-square analysis allowed the researcher to determine if Sample Groups 1 and 2 were significantly different in their responses in relation to independent variables of gender and ethnicity. The Chi-square test of association determined if the variables are statistically independent

and, more specifically, how likely a particular group perceived early education. This was

conducted by using the coded data and by grouping responses according to the

participant's gender and decision to drop out or graduate from high school as well as

grouping coded responses according to a participant's ethnicity and high school dropout

or graduate status.

Limitations

This study was met with limitations that must be considered. The population

studied was from one remote, rural area of North Carolina where the community college

is located. The results only pertain to this area and cannot be generalized to represent

other areas of North Carolina. The outcomes should not be considered universal

conclusions as national or global populations were not studied. A second limitation to

consider is the significance of education, and educational opportunities are subjective to

different types of familial and socioeconomic amalgamations. The regard that cultures

have for education differ, and this survey did not measure such perceptions nor

investigate their importance. A third limitation which should be ruminated is that Sample

2 population consisted of a particular group of high school graduates. Those students

who were enrolled in an education program and were seeking an AAS degree were

studied. Because all 51 AAS degree programs were not included in the study,

perceptions among those enrolled in other AAS programs may differ from those enrolled

in an education program. The final limitation one should contemplate is the importance

of quality of early childhood education programs. State and national early childhood

educators have gone to great measures to ensure that indicators are in place to determine

early childhood education program quality. NAEYC promotes high quality education

experiences for children, and this study did not examine this variable. Quality measures

are established at the local, state, and national levels and are comprised of a number of standards. The type of program participants attended was measured; however, this factor was not analyzed as a part of this study in order to produce correlations or relationships.

Summary

Preparing students to enter a global economy has become an imperative goal of America's educational system over the years (Carplunk & Eaneman, 2013). Research indicates that high school dropouts negatively impact the economy, workforce, and success of our nation's families to resist government financial assistance (Carplunk & Eaneman, 2013). Although many states and countries have high school programs that coach students and support their abilities to successfully graduate from high school, the emphasis on identifying potential dropouts should focus on the early years of a child's life. Supporting a child's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth should begin during the formative years (Clemson University, 2015). Learning during these years is crucial, and these experiences can form the foundation for successful high school graduation (Dropouts, 2011). Therefore, the methodology of this study sought to analyze the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding early childhood education.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of high school dropouts and high school graduates regarding early childhood education. A report authored by Carplunk and Eanemen (2013) on behalf of Ready Nation revealed that our country's effort to improve the workforce has focused on high school education as the starting point for job readiness, but improving this readiness will be far more likely achieved if we help children start down the right path during the first 5 years of their life. The following data were collected and analyzed to determine if there is a significant relationship regarding early education experiences of high school graduates and high school dropouts. This study focused on two sample groups. Sample 1 consisted of 35 high school graduates who were enrolled in the AAS education degree-seeking program at Test Community College. Sample Group 2 consisted of 41 high school dropouts enrolled in the AHS program at Test Community College. Data were collected and analyzed to determine if there are commonalities regarding the perceptions of early childhood education among these two sample groups. The findings are organized by research question.

Findings

Research Question 1: "How do early childhood education experiences of high school dropouts compare to those who graduated from high school?" To address this question, the following data were compiled and analyzed.

Table 1 compares the early childhood experiences during birth through 1 year of age among high school graduates and high school dropouts.

Table 1

Early Childhood Experiences Birth to 1 Year Old

	Status			
	Graduate		Dropout	
	Count	Column N%	Count	Column N%
Family home daycare/center	6	17.1%	2	4.9%
Preschool/daycare in community	6	17.1%	6	14.6%
Family member/family friend	23	65.7%	33	80.5%

Of the 35 high school graduate survey participants, all responded to this question regarding early childhood experiences birth-1 year old: 65.7% of these participants indicated they were kept by a family member or family friend; 17.1% indicated they were enrolled in a family home daycare/center; 17.1% were enrolled in a preschool/daycare center located in their community. Of the 41 high school dropouts who participated in the survey, all responded to this question regarding early childhood education experiences birth-1 year old: 80.5% indicated they were kept by a family member of family friend; 14.6% indicated they attended a preschool/daycare center located in their community; and 4.9% indicated they were enrolled in a family home daycare/center.

Table 2 shows Chi-square results.

Table 2

Chi-Square B-1-Year-Old Experiences

	Status
Chi-square	3.333
Df	2
Sig.	.189[a]

Note. *An association is present at the p ≤ 0.05 level.

Per the Chi-square analysis, there is no association between the two sample groups regarding early childhood experiences birth-1 year old.

Table 3 compares the early childhood experiences of high school graduates and high school dropouts during their 2-3 years of age.

Table 3

Early Childhood Experiences 2-3 Years Old

	Status			
	Graduate		Dropout	
		Column		Column
	Count	N%	Count	N%
Family home daycare/center	2	5.7%	2	4.9%
Preschool/daycare in community	20	57.1%	4	9.8%
Family member/family friend	13	37.1%	35	85.4%

Of the 41 high school dropout survey participants, all responded to this survey item: 57.1% of these participants indicated they attended a preschool/daycare in their community while they were 2-3 years old; 37.1% indicated they were cared for by a family member or friend; and 5.7% indicated they were enrolled in a family

home/daycare center. Of the 41 high school dropouts who were surveyed, all participants responded to this question: 85.4% indicated they were cared for by a family member or friend; 9.8% of the participants were enrolled in a preschool/daycare located in their community; and 4.9% were enrolled in a family home/daycare center.

Table 4 shows the Chi-square results.

Table 4

Chi-Square 2-3 Years Old Experiences

	Status
Chi-square	20.403
Df	2
Sig.	.000[*,b]

Note. *An association is present at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

Per the Chi-square analysis, there is an association among the sample groups at α=.05 regarding early childhood experiences during their 2-3 years of age *p=.000.*

Table 5 compares the early childhood experiences of high school graduates and high school dropouts when they were 4 years old.

Table 5

Early Childhood Experiences 4 Years Old

	Status			
	Graduate		Dropout	
	Count	Column N%	Count	Column N%
Family home daycare/center	1	2.9%	2	4.9%
Preschool/daycare in community	19	54.3%	5	12.2%
Family member/family friend	6	17.1%	18	43.9%
Four year old school setting	9	25.7%	16	39.0%

Of the 35 high school graduate survey participants, all responded to this survey item: 54.3% of the participants indicated that they attended a preschool/daycare in their community; 25.7% indicated they attended a program for 4 year olds that was located in a public school setting; 17.1% were kept by a family member or family friend when they were 4 years old; and 2.9% indicated they were enrolled in a family home/daycare center. Of the 41 high school dropouts who participated in this survey, all responded to this survey item: 43.9% indicated that they were kept by a family member or friend when they were 4 years old; 39.0% indicated that they attended a program for 4 year olds that was located in a public school setting; 12.2% were enrolled in a preschool/daycare located in their community; 4.9% were enrolled in a family home daycare/center.

Table 6 shows the Chi-square results.

Table 6

Chi-Square 4-Year-Old Experiences

	Status
Chi-square	16.087
Df	3
Sig.	.001[*,b]

Note. *An association is present at the p ≤ 0.05 level.

Per the Chi-square analysis, there is an association among the sample groups regarding early childhood experiences when they were 4 years old at p=.001.

Table 7 compares the early childhood experiences birth-1 year of age among high school graduates and high school dropouts analyzed according to ethnicity.

Table 7

Early Childhood Experiences Birth to 1 According to Ethnicity

		Status			
		Graduate		Dropout	
		Count	Column N%	Count	Column N%
Family home/daycare center	African American	2	33.3%	1	50.0%
	Caucasian	4	66.7%	1	50.0%
	Hispanic	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Asian	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Other	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Preschool/daycare community	African American	1	16.7%	1	16.7%
	Caucasian	5	83.3%	3	50.0%
	Hispanic	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Asian	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Other	0	0.0%	2	33.3%
Family member/family friend	African American	3	13.0%	11	33.3%
	Caucasian	18	78.3%	16	48.5%
	Hispanic	2	8.7%	4	12.1%
	Asian	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Other	0	0.0%	2	6.1%

Of those participants who were enrolled in a family home/daycare center during birth-1 year old and who became a high school graduate, 33.3% were African American and 66.7% were Caucasian. Of those participants enrolled in a family home/daycare center during birth to 1 year old and who became a high school dropout, 50% were African American and 50% were Caucasian. Of those participants who attended a preschool/daycare located in their community and later became a high school graduate,

16.7% were African American and 83.3% were Caucasian. Of those who became high school dropouts, 16.7% were African Americans, 50% were Caucasian, and 33.3% selected "other" regarding ethnicity. Of those participants who were kept by a family member/friend and graduated from high school, 13% were African American and 78.3% were Caucasian. Of those who were kept by a family member/family friend and dropped out of high school, 33.3% were African American and 48.5% were Caucasian.

Table 8 shows the Chi-square results.

Table 8

Chi-Square Birth to 1-Year-Old Early Childhood Education Experiences According to Ethnicity

		Status
Family home daycare/center	Chi-square	.178
	Df	1
	Sig.	.673[a,b]
Preschool/daycare in community	Chi-square	2.500
	Df	2
	Sig.	.287[a,b]
Family member/family friend	Chi-square	5.753
	Df	3
	Sig.	.124[a,b]

Note. *An association is present at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

Per the Chi-square, there is not an association among the sample groups regarding ethnicity and their early childhood experiences during their birth-first year.

Table 9 compares early childhood experiences of the sample groups according to

ethnicity at 2-3 years of age.

Table 9

Early Childhood Experiences 2-3 Years Old According to Ethnicity

		Status			
		Graduate		Dropout	
		Count	Column N%	Count	Column N%
Family home/daycare Center	African American	0	0.0%	1	50.0%
	Caucasian	2	100.0%	1	50.0%
	Hispanic	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Asian	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Other	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Preschool/daycare community	African American	5	25.0%	1	25.0%
	Caucasian	14	70.0%	2	50.0%
	Hispanic	1	5.0%	0	0.0%
	Asian	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Other	0	0.0%	1	25.0%
Family member/family friend	African American	1	7.7%	11	31.4%
	Caucasian	11	84.6%	17	48.6%
	Hispanic	1	7.7%	4	11.4%
	Asian	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Other	0	0.0%	3	8.6%

According to these results, of those who were enrolled in a family home/daycare center when they were 2-3 years of age and who became a high school graduate, 50% were African American and 100% were Caucasian. Of those participants who were

enrolled in a family home/daycare center when they were 2-3 years of age and became a high school dropout, 50% were African American and 50% were Caucasian. Of those who attended a preschool/daycare located in their community and later became a high school graduate, 70% were Caucasian. Of those who became high school dropouts, 25% were African Americans, 50% were Caucasian, and 25% selected "other" regarding ethnicity. Of those participants who were kept by a family member/friend and graduated from high school 84.6% were Caucasian. Of those who were kept by a family member/friend and dropped out of high school, 31.4% were African American and 48.6% were Caucasian.

Table 10 shows the Chi-square results.

Table 10

Chi-Square 2-3 Years Old Early Childhood Education Experiences According to Ethnicity

		Status
Family home daycare/center	Chi-square	1.333
	Df	1
	Sig.	.248[a,b]
Preschool/daycare in community	Chi-square	5.400
	Df	3
	Sig.	.145[a,b]
Family member/family friend	Chi-square	5.489
	Df	3
	Sig.	.139[a,b]

Note. *An association is present at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

Per the Chi-square statistical analysis, there is not an association among the

sample group regarding early childhood experiences when they were 2-3 years old according to ethnicity.

Table 11 compares the early childhood experiences of the sample groups at 4 years old according to ethnicity.

Table 11

Early Childhood Experiences 4 Years Old According to Ethnicity

		Status			
		Graduate		Dropout	
		Count	Column N%	Count	Column N%
Family home/daycare center	African American	0	0.0%	1	50.0%
	Caucasian	1	100.0%	1	50.0%
	Hispanic	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Asian	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Other	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Preschool/daycare community	African American	3	15.8%	0	0.0%
	Caucasian	14	73.7%	4	80.0%
	Hispanic	2	10.5%	0	0.0%
	Asian	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Other	0	0.0%	1	20.0%
Family member/family friend	African American	1	16.7%	5	27.8%
	Caucasian	5	83.3%	8	44.4%
	Hispanic	0	0.0%	3	16.7%
	Asian	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Other	0	0.0%	2	11.1%
Four year old school setting	African American	2	22.2%	7	43.8%
	Caucasian	7	77.8%	7	43.8%
	Hispanic	0	0.0%	1	6.3%
	Asian	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Other	0	0.0%	1	6.3%

According to these results, of those participants who were enrolled in a family home/daycare center when they were 4 years of age and who became a high school graduate, 100% were Caucasian. Of those participants who were enrolled in a family home/daycare center when they were 4 years of age and who became a high school dropout, 50% were African American and 50% were Caucasian. Of those participants who attended a preschool/daycare located in their community and later became a high school graduate, 15.8% were African American and 73.7% were Caucasian. Of those who became high school dropouts, 80% were Caucasian and 20% selected "other" regarding ethnicity. Of those participants who were kept by a family member or family friend and graduated from high school 83.3% were Caucasian. Of those who were kept by a family member/friend and dropped out of high school, 27.8% were African American, 44.4% were Caucasian, and 16.7% were Hispanic. Of those participants who attended a 4-year-old program located in a public school setting and graduated from high school, 22.2% were African American and 77.8% were Caucasian. Of those who attended a 4-yeear-old program located in a public school setting and dropped out of high school, 43.8% were African American and 43.8% were Caucasian.

Table 12 shows the Chi-square results.

Table 12

Chi-Square 4 Years Old Early Childhood Education Experiences According to Ethnicity

Family home daycare/center	Chi-square	.750
	Df	1
	Sig.	.386[a,b]
Preschool/daycare in community	Chi-square	5.137
	Df	3
	Sig.	.162[a,b]
Family member/family friend	Chi-square	3.145
	Df	3
	Sig.	.370[a,b]
Four year old school setting	Chi-square	3.057
	Df	3
	Sig.	.383[a,b]

Note. *An association is present at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

Per the Chi-square statistical analysis, there is not an association among the sample groups regarding their early childhood experiences when they were 4 years old according to ethnicity.

Research Question 2: "How do the factors that influence a student's decision to drop out of high school as identified by high school dropouts compare to those factors identified by high school graduates?" To address this question, the following data were compiled and analyzed.

Table 13 displays the rank order preferences associated with the factors that contribute to a person's decision to withdraw from high school.

Table 13

Factors That Contribute to a Person's Decision to Drop Out of High School

		Status			
		Graduate		Dropout	
		Count	Column N%	Count	Column N%
Family Support	Greatest Impact	12	34.3%	15	36.6%
	2nd Choice	2	5.7%	4	9.8%
	3rd Choice	4	11.4%	5	12.2%
	4th Choice	5	14.3%	6	14.6%
	Least Impact	12	34.3%	11	26.8%
School Support	Greatest Impact	3	8.6%	5	12.2%
	2nd Choice	6	17.1%	11	26.8%
	3rd Choice	9	25.7%	6	14.6%
	4th Choice	10	28.6%	10	24.4%
	Least Impact	7	20.0%	9	22.0%
Attendance Issues	Greatest Impact	5	14.3%	5	12.2%
	2nd Choice	4	11.4%	13	31.7%
	3rd Choice	13	37.1%	15	36.6%
	4th Choice	7	20.0%	5	12.2%
	Least Impact	6	17.1%	3	7.3%
Poor Grades	Greatest Impact	10	28.6%	7	17.1%
	2nd Choice	14	40.0%	10	24.4%
	3rd Choice	2	5.7%	7	17.1%
	4th Choice	6	17.1%	14	34.1%
	Least Impact	3	8.6%	3	7.3%
Conflicts with Teachers/ Administrators	Greatest Impact	5	14.3%	9	22.0%
	2nd Choice	9	25.7%	3	7.3%
	3rd Choice	7	20.0%	8	19.5%
	4th Choice	7	20.0%	6	14.6%
	Least Impact	7	20.0%	15	36.6%

According to the factor of family support, 34.3% of high school graduates ranked this as a factor that could have the greatest impact on a person's decision to withdraw from high school. Thirty-four point three percent of high school graduates also ranked

this factor as having the least impact on a person's decision to withdraw from high school; 36.6% of high school dropouts ranked this factor as having the greatest impact on a person's decision to withdraw from high school, while 26.8% of the dropouts ranked this as having the least impact on a person's decision. Regarding support received from school faculty, staff, and others associated with the school environment, 8.6% of high school graduates indicated this had a great impact on a person's decision to drop out from high school, while 20% felt it had the least impact. Of high school dropouts, 12.2% felt that support from the school had a great impact on a person's decision to withdraw and 22% indicated it had the least impact on a person's decision to drop out of high school. Regarding attendance issues, 14.3% of high school graduates indicated this factor had a great impact on a person's decision to withdraw from high school and 17.1% felt this issue had the least impact on a person's decision to drop out of high school.

Of high school dropouts, 12.2% indicated that attendance issues greatly influenced a person's decision to withdraw from high school and 7.3% felt attendance had very little influence. Regarding poor grades as being a factor that influences a person's decision to with draw from high school, 28.6% of high school graduates indicated this factor had a great impact and 8.6% indicated it had very little impact. Regarding high school dropouts, 17.1% indicated that poor grades had a great influence on a person's decision to withdraw from high school and 22% felt this factor had very little bearing on one's decision to drop out of high school. Furthermore, 14.3% of high school graduates indicated that conflicts with teachers and administrators had a great influence on a person's decision to withdraw from high school and 20% indicated that conflicts with teachers and administrators had the least impact on a person's decision to drop out.

Table 14 shows the Chi-square results.

Table 14

Chi-Square Test of Factors That Contribute to a Person's Decision to Drop Out of High School

		Status
Family Support	Chi-square	.777
	Df	4
	Sig.	.942[a]
School Support	Chi-square	2.362
	Df	4
	Sig.	.670[a]
Attendance Issues	Chi-square	5.803
	Df	4
	Sig.	.214[a]
Poor Grades	Chi-square	6.742
	Df	4
	Sig.	.150[a]
Conflicts with Teachers/ Administrators	Chi-square	6.764
	Df	4
	Sig.	.149

Note. *An association is present at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

According to the Chi-square statistical analysis, there is not an association among the sample groups regarding factors and their level of impact on a person's decision to drop out of high school.

Per the survey item number 9, "What additional factors do you feel contribute to a person's decision to drop out of high school," two participants from Sample Group 1 (high school dropouts) indicated that being in foster care and having transient experiences during the school year could impact a person's decision to withdraw from high school. Three survey participants who were also a part of Sample Group 1 indicated that peer pressure impact a person's decision to withdraw from high school.

During focus-group interviews, the researcher asked Sample Group 1 participants to clarify this finding. Per participants' responses, pressures from peers regarding clothing and dress as well as pressures to take part in drug and alcohol use were common themes which emerged. One participant indicated that family finances would not allow for expensive clothing purchases and peers taunt students who were at a socioeconomic status that could not purchase trendy clothing and shoes. Per focus-group interviews, teacher-student relationship was another theme that emerged. Several participants indicated that teacher perceptions and treatment of students played a great role in their decision to withdraw from high school: indicating unfair treatment due to bias, "My teacher thought I cheated to win the spelling bee when I was in fifth grade because I am black and a white kid went to the district office to compete" (Appendix E). When the researcher conducted focus-group interviews with Sample Group 2 and addressed this item, the theme of peer pressure emerged among this group. Participants indicated that pressure to be a part of a clique and not being accepted by peers during middle and high school years put a great amount of stress on students. Sample Group 2 interview participants also indicated that teacher relationships with students impacted a student's success. One participant stated, "You knew if a teacher really cared about you or not and if a teacher did not like you, it was very difficult to be successful in the class" (Appendix E). Therefore, patterns associated with peer pressure and teacher relationships existed among both groups as factors that can impact a person's decision to drop out of high school.

Table 15 displays the rank order of characteristics that best define a successful student, organized by participant group.

Table 15

Factors that Identify a Successful Student

		Status			
		Graduate		Dropout	
		Count	Column N%	Count	Column N%
Attendance	Most Important	3	8.6%	20	48.8%
	2nd choice	7	20.0%	7	17.1%
	3rd choice	10	28.6%	12	29.3%
	4th choice	12	34.3%	2	4.9%
	Least Important	3	8.6%	0	0.0%
Behavior	Most Important	15	42.9%	7	17.1%
	2nd choice	9	25.7%	22	53.7%
	3rd choice	9	25.7%	8	19.5%
	4th choice	2	5.7%	4	9.8%
	Least Important	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Grades	Most Important	7	20.0%	11	26.8%
	2nd choice	12	34.3%	10	24.4%
	3rd choice	11	31.4%	18	43.9%
	4th choice	5	14.3%	1	2.4%
	Least Important	0	0.0%	1	2.4%
Relationships	Most Important	10	28.6%	3	7.3%
	2nd choice	5	14.3%	1	2.4%
	3rd choice	5	14.3%	2	4.9%
	4th choice	12	34.3%	31	75.6%
	Least Important	3	8.6%	4	9.8%
Extra-Curricular Activities	Most Important	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	2nd choice	3	8.6%	0	0.0%
	3rd choice	0	0.0%	1	2.4%
	4th choice	4	11.4%	3	7.3%
	Least Important	28	80.0%	37	90.2%

Regarding attendance as being a factor that defines student success, 48.8% of the high school dropouts who responded to this item ranked it as having a great impact on student success. Of the high school graduates who addressed this survey item, 8.6%

ranked it as having a great impact. Regarding behavior, 42.9% of high school graduates

indicated this factor had the greatest impact on student success while 17.1% of high

school dropouts indicated it had the greatest impact. In terms of student grades, 26.8% of

high school dropouts felt this had a great impact on student success and 20.0% of high

school graduates indicated this factor had a significant influence. Regarding relationships

with others, 28.6% of the high school graduates who responded to this item indicated this

factor had the greatest impact on defining student success and 7.3% of student dropouts

indicated this factor had the greatest impact on student success. Both sample groups

indicated that extracurricular activities had the least impact on student success.

Table 16 shows the Chi-square results.

Table 16

Chi-square Test of Factors that Define Student Success

		Status
Attendance	Chi-square	22.557
	Df	4
	Sig.	.000[*,b]
Behavior	Chi-square	8.667
	Df	3
	Sig.	.034[*,b]
Grades	Chi-square	5.991
	Df	4
	Sig.	.200[b,c]
Relationships	Chi-square	15.885
	Df	4
	Sig.	.003[*,b]
Extra-Curricular Activities	Chi-square	4.946
	Df	3
	Sig.	.176[b,c]

Note. *An association is present at the p≤0.05 level.

As indicated by the Chi-square test, an association exists among the variables of

attendance, behavior, and relationships that were measured at *p=.000.* There is no

association regarding grades and extracurricular activities.

When the researcher conducted focus-group interviews, this survey item was

investigated further. The high school dropouts in Sample Group 1 were asked to

elaborate on factors that contribute to student success; 90% of the respondents indicated

that teacher relationships and support had significant impact on student success. Student

five indicated,

> Having a good teacher on your side will help keep you in. No teachers ever had
>
> anything to do with me until they knew I wanted to quit then they wanted to help
>
> me and talk with me and I just wanted to leave. I went to other high schools to
>
> get in but I didn't play sports so I couldn't get in to other schools. (Appendix E)

Student two responded with the following: "I have had teachers who cared and tried to

help but I had some who I knew did not like me and didn't care if I failed or passed. If

they don't care, why should I" (Appendix E)? Student four stated the following: "Having

a teacher who believes in you really makes a difference" (Appendix E). Therefore a

theme or pattern of teacher relationships and involvement was established among the

high school dropouts. When the researcher investigated the factors that contribute to

student success among high school graduates, no consistent themes or patterns were

established. Student one stated that "someone motivating" (Appendix E) supports

student success. Student three indicated student "determination," student four indicated

that "confidence and happiness, financial stability" contributes to student success, and

student seven responded that "support" contributes to student success (Appendix E).

Research Question 3, "How do the perceptions of high school dropouts regarding

early childhood education compare to those who are high school graduates?" To address

this question the following data were collected and analyzed.

Table 17 indicates how important high school graduates and high school dropouts perceived early childhood education.

Table 17

Importance of Early Childhood Education

	Status			
	Graduate		Dropout	
	Count	Column N%	Count	Column N%
Important	33	94.3%	36	87.8%
Unimportant	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Unsure	2	5.7%	5	12.2%
Other	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Of the high school graduates who participated in this survey, 94.3% indicated that early childhood education is very important, while 5.7% of this population were unsure of the importance of early childhood education experiences. Of the high school dropouts who participated in this survey, 87.8% indicated that early childhood education is very important.

Table 18 shows the Chi-square results.

Table 18

Chi-square of Importance of Early Childhood Education

	Status
Chi-square	.948
Df	1
Sig.	.330[a]

*Note. *An association is present at the p ≤ 0.05 level.*

According to the Chi-square statistical analysis, there is not a statistical significance among high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding the importance of early childhood education. Therefore, according to this analysis, there is not an association between the two sample groups regarding the importance of early childhood education experiences. Realizing that both sample groups find early childhood education experiences, the researcher analyzed factors that would keep families from placing their young children in early education experiences.

This item was further investigated in focus-group interviews. There was no theme or pattern which emerged among Sample Group 1 regarding the importance of early childhood education. Student three responded with the following: "I think babies need to be home but you need to go just before you start to school, like 4 or something" (Appendix E). This was the only participant who responded to the importance of early childhood education. When the importance of early childhood education was explored with Sample Group 2 participants, two themes emerged: socialization and attachment. Of these respondents, 57% indicated that children need the socialization that early childhood education provides and 43% designated that helping children with separation anxiety

when beginning school is an important significance of early childhood education

(Appendix E).

Table 19 is an analysis of the factors that prohibit families from placing their

young children in early childhood education environments.

Table 19

Factors that Prohibit Families from Placing Their Children in Early Childhood
Education Environments

		Status			
		Graduate		Dropout	
		Count	Column N%	Count	Column N %
Finances	Most Important	26	74.3%	30	73.2%
	2nd choice	5	14.3%	5	12.2%
	3rd choice	2	5.7%	2	4.9%
	4th choice	0	0.0%	3	7.3%
	Least Important	2	5.7%	1	2.4%
Family Dynamics/Culture	Most Important	4	11.4%	6	14.6%
	2nd choice	15	42.9%	18	43.9%
	3rd choice	6	17.1%	7	17.1%
	4th choice	6	17.1%	3	7.3%
	Least Important	4	11.4%	7	17.1%
Time	Most Important	1	2.9%	2	4.9%
	2nd choice	4	11.4%	8	19.5%
	3rd choice	8	22.9%	18	43.9%
	4th choice	9	25.7%	9	22.0%
	Least Important	13	37.1%	4	9.8%
Location	Most Important	2	5.7%	1	2.4%
	2nd choice	2	5.7%	4	9.8%
	3rd choice	12	34.3%	7	17.1%
	4th choice	11	31.4%	23	56.1%
	Least Important	8	22.9%	6	14.6%
Availability	Most Important	1	2.9%	2	4.9%
	2nd choice	9	25.7%	6	14.6%
	3rd choice	8	22.9%	6	14.6%
	4th choice	9	25.7%	3	7.3%
	Least Important	8	22.9%	24	58.5%

Regarding the impact of finances on a family's decision to enroll their children in

an early childhood learning environment, 74.3% of high school graduates felt this factor

had a great impact, while 73.2% of the high school dropouts felt this had a great impact

on a family's decision. Regarding family culture or dynamics, 11.4% of high school

graduates indicated this factor had great influence on a family's decision to place their

children in an early childhood education environment, while 14.6% of high school

dropouts regarded this factor as having a great influence. Concerning the factor of time,

2.9% of high school graduates indicated that this factor had a great impact on a family's

decision to place their children in an early childhood education environment, and 4.9% of

the high school dropouts who participated in this survey felt time had a significant

importance in the decision. While 37.1% of high school graduates felt time had very

little impact, 9.8% of high school dropouts indicated the impact was minimal.

In regards to location, 5.7% of high school graduates and 2.4% of high school

dropouts indicated this factor had significant influence on a family's decision to enroll

their children in an early childhood education environment. Concerning availability of

early childhood education environments, 2.9% of high school graduates felt this factor

had a great impact on the decision to place a child in an early childhood education

setting, and 4.9% of high school dropouts indicated this had a significant bearing on the

decision. Furthermore, regarding the factor of availability, 22.9% of high school

graduates indicated this factor had very little impact and 58.5% of high school dropouts

felt availability of early childhood education environments had very little impact on a

family's decision to place their children in an early childhood education setting.

Table 20 shows the Chi-square results.

Table 20

Chi-Square Test of Factors That Impact a Family's Decision for Early Childhood Education

		Status
Finances	Chi-square	3.165
	Df	4
	Sig.	.531[a]
Family Dynamics/Culture	Chi-square	2.107
	Df	4
	Sig.	.716[a]
Time	Chi-square	9.865
	Df	4
	Sig.	.043[a,*]
Location	Chi-square	6.403
	Df	4
	Sig.	.171[a]
Availability	Chi-square	11.819
	Df	4
	Sig.	.019[a,*]

Note. *An association is present at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

According to the Chi-square test of statistical significance, there is no association among high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding the impact of finances on a family's decision to enroll their children in an early childhood education environment. Regarding family dynamics or culture, there is no statistical association among high school graduates regarding its impact on a family's decision to place their children in an early childhood education setting. According to the Chi-square test of significance, there is a statistical significance among the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding the influence of time on a family's decision

to place their children in an early childhood learning environment at p=.043. In terms of location of early childhood environments, there is no association among high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding its impacts on the family's decision to place their children in these settings. According to the Chi-square test for association, there is a statistical significance among high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding the impact of the availability of early childhood environments at p=.019.

The researcher held focus-group interviews with both sample groups in order to gain further perceptions regarding factors that would prohibit families from placing their children in early childhood education environments. Both Sample Group 1 and Sample Group 2 had common themes regarding finances and affordability (Appendix E). Patterns of cost and inability to pay for early education emerged as factors that would most likely keep families from placing their young children in early education settings.

To analyze factors that best prepare a child for school readiness, the researcher examined results from survey item 13 (Appendix B). Table 21 shows the analysis of this item.

Table 21

Factors That Best Prepare a Child for School Readiness

		Status			
		Graduate		Dropout	
		Count	Column N%	Count	Column N%
Knowing Colors and Shapes	Most Important	1	2.9%	19	46.3%
	2nd choice	2	5.7%	3	7.3%
	3rd choice	7	20.0%	5	12.2%
	4th choice	11	31.4%	7	17.1%
	Least Important	14	40.0%	7	17.1%
Counting	Most Important	1	2.9%	3	7.3%
	2nd choice	1	2.9%	22	53.7%
	3rd choice	6	17.1%	8	19.5%
	4th choice	19	54.3%	8	19.5%
	Least Important	8	22.9%	0	0.0%
Writing Their Name	Most Important	4	11.4%	7	17.1%
	2nd choice	3	8.6%	4	9.8%
	3rd choice	17	48.6%	23	56.1%
	4th choice	2	5.7%	2	4.9%
	Least Important	9	25.7%	5	12.2%
Knowing How to Work Well With Others	Most Important	20	57.1%	8	19.5%
	2nd choice	10	28.6%	4	9.8%
	3rd choice	3	8.6%	5	12.2%
	4th choice	1	2.9%	21	51.2%
	Least Important	1	2.9%	3	7.3%
Following Routines and Procedures	Most Important	9	25.7%	4	9.8%
	2nd choice	19	54.3%	8	19.5%
	3rd choice	2	5.7%	0	0.0%
	4th choice	2	5.7%	3	7.3%
	Least Important	3	8.6%	26	63.4%

Regarding shapes as having a significant impact on their overall readiness for entering school, 46.9% of high school dropouts regarding this as having a great importance and 2.9% of high school graduates indicated this was of great importance.

Concerning the ability to count, 7.3% of high school dropouts felt this had significant impact and 2.9% of high school graduates indicated this factor significantly impacted a child's readiness for school. According to the survey participants, 17.1% of high school dropouts indicated that being able to write their name significantly impacted children's readiness for school and 11.4% of high school graduates felt this factor had a great impact. Concerning knowing how to work well with others, 19.5% of high school dropouts indicated this factor had great significance on children in terms of their readiness for school, while 57.1% of high school graduates specified that this factor had a great impact. Regarding following routines and procedures, 9.8% of high school dropouts felt this factor had great influence on a child's school readiness and 25.7% of high school graduates indicated this factor had significant impact on school readiness.

Table 22 shows the Chi-square results.

Table 22

Chi-square Test of Factors That Best Prepare a Child for School

		Status
Knowing Colors and Shapes	Chi-square	19.604
	Df	4
	Sig.	.001[*,b]
Counting	Chi-square	32.671
	Df	4
	Sig.	.000[*,b]
Writing Their Name	Chi-square	2.546
	Df	4
	Sig.	.636[b]
Knowing How to Work Well With Others	Chi-square	27.091
	Df	4
	Sig.	.000[*,b]
Following Routines and Procedures	Chi-square	26.538
	Df	4
	Sig.	.000[*,b,c]

Note. *An association is present at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

According to the Chi-square test for association, there is a statistical difference which indicates an association between high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding the impact of a child knowing shapes and colors on school readiness at p=.001. There is also a statistical significance regarding a child's ability to count as a factor for school preparedness at p=.000. Regarding a child's ability to write his name, there is no statistical significance among high school graduates and dropouts regarding the impact of this factor to influence school readiness. Knowing how to work well with others and

following routines and procedures are factors which indicate a statistical significance and therefore establish an association among high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding their perceptions of the impact these factors have on a child's ability for school readiness at p=.000. In focus-group interviews, one participant in Sample Group 1 (high school dropouts) indicated that "Reading to your child every day and night helps to get them ready for school because she can be reading really early" (Appendix E).

Summary

When analyzing perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding early childhood education experiences, the results suggest that there is not a statistical significance among high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding their early childhood experiences during birth-1 year old. When looking at the early childhood experiences during their 2-3 years of age and their experiences at age four, there is a statistical significance that exists among high school graduates and dropouts.

Regarding factors that contribute to a person's decision to drop out of high school, results indicate there is not a statistical significance regarding the level of impact of factors among high school graduates and high school dropouts. Therefore, results show that there is not an association among these variables and the sample groups.

Concerning the importance of early childhood education, findings imply that there is no significant difference among the perceptions of high school dropouts and high school graduates. However, results suggest that there is a statistical significance among high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding the factors that prepare a child for school.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

As stated by Nance (2009), it is clear from anecdotal, neurobiological, and behavioral perspectives that a human being's basic personality, intellect, and formation of values or character are fundamentally formed by age seven. If one accepts this evidence, it is understood that nurturing children during these formative years dictates their future success or failure (Nance, 2009). It is important to recognize that any high school dropout rate is significant as the repercussions of not completing high school can have lifelong, negative impacts on a person's life (Dropouts, 2011). The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding early education experiences. The implications of the findings are organized by research question.

Implication of Findings

Research Question 1. How do early childhood education experiences of high school dropouts compare to those who graduated from high school?

This study sought to compare the early childhood education experiences of high school dropouts to the early childhood education experiences of high school graduates. Results of a survey instrument which assessed the experiences of high school graduates and high school dropouts as well as focus-group interviews among these populations were analyzed per a Chi-square test of association where statistical significance and the implications of an association existing among the populations is established (*$p \leq 0.05$ statistically significant). Per Tables 1 and 2, there is no statistical difference regarding the early education experiences of high school dropouts and high school graduates during the age birth-1 year. The majority of both populations indicated that they were kept at

home by a family member or family friend during this age. Of the high school dropouts who participated in the study, 80.5% were kept at home and 65.7% of high school graduates had this same experience. This was reiterated during focus-group interviews when participants indicated that it was important for infants to be kept at home. Browne and Gordon (2014) noted that infant and toddler programs provide a combination of physical care and intellectual stimulation as the general intent of these centers is to provide care that is supplemental to family life and supports the child's family structure.

Moreover, research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.) explained that most families feel that the threat of sickness, maltreatment, and lack of nurturing by the caregiver are factors that keep families from placing their young children in child-care environments during the infant and young toddler years. Findings of this study support research as there was no association among the sample groups regarding the type of early learning experiences during their birth through first year. Of the high school graduates who participated in this study, 23 were kept at home by a relative or family friend; and 33 of the high school dropouts who participated in this study were kept at home by a relative or family friend. Research conducted by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies (2015) found that the best care for infants most often occurs at home where individulaized attention, cognitive stimulation, and concerns for health and safety as well secure attachment and bonding occur best. Furthermore, the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies found that when facilities are not quality environments, the care can actually have negative effects on these children during this age.

The results from this study indicated that there is an association among the two

populations studied regarding their early childhood education experiences during ages 2-3 years. Of the high school respondents who participated, 57.1% attended a preschool or daycare located in their community and 37.1% were kept by a family friend or family member (Table 3). This table also indicates that 85.4% of the high school dropouts indicated that they were kept by a family member or friend during 2-3 years of age and 9.8% attended a community preschool or daycare. According to Table 4, the Chi-square test of association p=.000, an association exists between the high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding their experiences during the ages of two to three. These results align with research findings of Porter (2013) who indicated that in order to have a better return from education, the emphasis must begin during early education; and currently the United States spends less than $300.00 per year on children under three. There needs to be a greater emphasis on education for children under age four. Research conducted by the Head Start (2015) organization found that to make a greater impact for children in 4-year-old Head Start programs, the same benefits for these children should be extended to the child before age four.

Programs that serve children ages 2½-5 years of age and focus on developmental approaches and encourage self-expression through language, creativity, intellectual skills, and physical activities exemplify the traditional nursery school or preschool (Browne & Gordon, 2014). In 2013, President Barack Obama expanded the efforts of Lyndon B. Johnson's Head Start initiatives to include Early Head Start in order to provide services for children birth through age three (Obama, 2013). Although critics of the Head Start and Early Head Start initiatives stated that research has proven these programs only help those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and these programs provide an advantage for these children for only a couple of years (What is so important about early

childhood education?, 2005), the state of North Carolina expanded funding for the state's

young children to include more Early Head Start programs for 2015 (North Carolina

Partnership for Children, 2015). Results from the current study support the need for early

learning programs where the emphasis is placed on children ages 2-3 years as this is

where there is an association among the high school graduates and high school dropouts

as 37.1% of high school graduates did not attend an early childhood education setting,

while 84.7% of high school dropouts did not attend an early education setting.

     Cognitive theorist Jean Piaget established that during the ages of 2-7, children are

learning and acquiring knowledge by means of the preoperational stage of cognitive

development where children engage in symbolic play and manipulate symbols so that

learning continues to connect but is not yet concrete or logical (Browne & Gordon,

2014). Participants in this study who had no opportunities for stimulation which would

enhance cognitive development during the ages of 2-3 lacked possible opportunities to

connect learning that would build from concrete to logical thinking. Furthermore,

NAEYC (n.d.) advocated for hands-on experiences with manipulatives and experiences

in quality early childhood education environments where learning is supported and

enhanced based on each child's needs and interests. The results of this study align with

the findings of NAEYC as 84.7% of high school dropouts were not afforded

opportunities in early learning environments where learning is supported through

materials, resources, and experiences.

     This study sought to compare the early childhood experiences of high school

dropouts and high school graduates. When comparing the experiences of these two

sample groups during 2-3 years of age, the results of this study indicate there is a

significant difference among those who graduated and attended a preschool or daycare

located in their community and those who dropped out of high school and were kept by a

family member or friend. The results of this study suggest that the learning that occurs

during the ages of 2-3 impact the child's future success as a high school graduate.

Therefore, according to the current study, those children who do not have experiences in

an early learning environment during the ages of 2-3 will have a greater chance of

becoming a high school dropout.

Similarly, there is an association among these populations regarding early

childhood experiences during age four. According to "What is so important about early

childhood education" (2005), critics of prekindergarten claim that although children who

are enrolled in Head Start programs and similar PreK programs may be at an advantage

for only a couple of years; but after that, their classmates perform at similar levels.

Research further indicates that children who were behind their peers in regards to

academics and attended only a prekindergarten program may "catch up" to their peers by

the time they reach kindergarten but most often will fall back behind by second grade

(What is so important about early childhood education?, 2005). However, a study by

Carplunk and Eanemen (2013) found that children enrolled in a prekindergarten program

in either a school setting or other preschool/daycare setting received the support needed

for future academic success. Furthermore, the Institute of Medicine and National

Research Council of the National Academies (2015) indicated that programs for 4 year

olds such as Head Start not only support the young child but provide crucial connections

for the family as family and parent involvement are included in these programs. By

connecting families to school, the child receives the greatest benefits and the path to

future academic success is created (Carplunk & Eanemen, 2013).

This research supports the findings of Carplunk and Eanemen (2013) as it was

found that those children who had early childhood learning experiences during age four at a preschool setting within or outside a school setting had a greater chance at becoming a high school graduate than those who did not attend an early learning environment during age four.

Tables 5 and 6 display the relationship among high school graduates and dropouts regarding their early childhood experiences during age four. Per the Chi-square, there is a relationship among high school dropouts and high school graduates. Of those who were high school graduates, 54.3% attended a preschool or daycare in their community and 25.7% of this population attended a program for 4 year olds in a public school setting. Of the high school dropouts, 43.9% were kept by a family member or friend, 12.2% attended a preschool or daycare located in their community, and 39.0% attended a program for 4 year olds that was located in a public school setting. According to the Chi-square, the significance of these populations in regards to experiences at 4 years of age, there was a significance of 001[*,b] where statistical significance is *p≤0.05*. Therefore, there is a relationship between the populations regarding their experiences. A greater percentage of high school graduates attended a preschool or daycare in their community before they began kindergarten with a 4-year-old setting in a public school being the program type that had the next most attendance. A greater percentage of high school dropouts were kept by a family member or family friend before they entered kindergarten. The program that had the next most significant attendance during their 4 years of age was a program for 4 year olds that was located in a public school setting. According to the national Head Start (2015) organization, a goal was to have a Head Start classroom for preschool children in every elementary school in America and in order to achieve this, there must be additional funding on the national and state levels.

According to the Head Start (2015) organization, the benefits of quality early learning experiences for children during the age of 4 will be seen during each year of this child's academic career. Not only will children receive academic support, nutritional health, physical, and emotional support will be provided; and according to the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies (2015), when the "whole child" is supported and each domain is enhanced through stimulating and DAPs, the child will be able to have academic and future successes.

According to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (2015), the United States of America ranked 28 of 38 countries for the portion of 4 year olds enrolled in an early childhood education program and fewer than three of 10 are in quality programs. Research conducted by Kagan (2008) indicated that our minority children are less likely to receive and maintain early childhood education services. However, the intention of Head Start (2015) initiatives are to target minorities and children of low socioeconomic situations in terms of providing 4-year-old programs to prepare for kindergarten readiness. Of the high school dropouts who attended a 4-year-old setting in this study, 50.1% indicated they are minority and 43.8% indicated they are Caucasian. Of those who were high school graduates and attended a program for 4 year olds located in a public school setting, 22.2% indicated they are minority and 77.8% indicated they are Caucasian. According to these results, findings in "What is so important about early childhood education" (2015) appear to be supported, as the advantages of the Head Start programs may not have a lasting impact. The results of this study indicate there is no association regarding ethnicity and a child's attendance in an early learning setting for 4 year olds. Therefore, ethnicity had no bearing on the successes of those who participated in this current research study and who attended an

early learning environment for 4 year olds.

Research Question 2. How do the factors that influence a student's decision to drop out of high school as identified by high school dropouts compare to those factors identified by high school graduates?

This investigation looked to compare factors that could influence a student's decision to drop out of high school among high school graduates and high school dropouts. Previous research indicated that there are two sets of predictors of whether students will drop out of or graduate from high school: one set is associated with the institutional characteristics of their families, school, and communities; the other set is associated with the individual characteristics of the students themselves (Dropouts, 2011).

According to the American Psychological Association (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014), it is important to consider the student's own perceptions and beliefs in their own competence, abilities, and motivations while also considering the impacts of peer associations and relationships as these can impact a student's decision to withdraw from school. According to the American Psychological Association (Facing the School Dropout Dilemma, 2014), grade retention or being "held back" is also highly correlated with dropping out of high school. Abraham Maslow's humanistic theory and his work with the fundamentals of the hierarchy of needs explained how each human has basic needs that must be met before the person can become a self-actualized person who feels important to self, others, and society (Browne & Gordon, 2014).

Recognizing the importance of factors that could impact a person to withdraw from high school before successfully graduating, the researcher analyzed the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding factors. Table 13 displays

an analysis of how factors that can contribute to a person's decision to drop out of high school were ranked according to high school graduates and high school dropouts. Of the high school graduates who responded to this item on the survey, 34.3% ranked family support as having a great influence on a person's decision to withdraw from high school, while the same percentage (34.3%) listed family support as having the least impact. Of the high school dropouts who responded to this item, 36.6% ranked family support as having a great influence. The factors that were analyzed included family support, attendance issues, conflicts with teachers and administrators, poor grades, and school support.

According to the Chi-square test of statistical analysis, there was no statistical significance of these factors and these did not have an apparent association among high school graduates and high school dropouts. This information was further analyzed by the researcher during focus-group interviews. Those who were high school graduate participants indicated peer pressure as having a tremendous impact on a person's decision to withdraw from school. This pattern also emerged among the high school dropouts. The high school dropout participants echoed the importance of peer pressure on a person's decision to withdraw from school and made specific mention to peer pressure regarding student dress.

The most meaningful impact that surfaced during focus-group interviews of high school dropouts was the pattern of teacher impact and student-teacher relationship. One participant indicated a sense of judgment toward his ability to have academic success because of his color. A teacher felt this participant cheated to win a school spelling bee because he is a minority. This treatment by a teacher had significant impact, as this participant indicated that because the teacher did not believe in his potential, a resolve to

live down to the teacher's expectations emerged and thus the road to becoming a high

school dropout was fashioned. Another high school dropout echoed this participant's

thoughts and explained that if a teacher does not care for a particular student, it makes

learning very difficult for the student as every student needs a teacher's support. This

finding is supported by the research conducted by Clemson University (2015) where a

program to establish graduation coaches who would work to support high school students

who have been identified at risk for dropping out of high school has been created. These

coaches have produced great benefits; and research suggests this is due, in part, to the

relationships each coach works to establish with each individual student (Clemson

University, 2015). This study also suggests that teacher support and treatment of students

have a great impact on a student's potential success as a high school graduate.

The researcher further investigated the perceptions relating to factors that

contribute to a person's decision to withdraw from high school by analyzing factors that

could contribute to student success. The U.S. Department of Education (2014a) has

established the HSGI that awards grants to states and local education agencies for

effective dropout prevention and reentry programs. However, critics of this initiative

state that support must be given to students in order help each identify what student

success is: helping students set future career and life goals (Dropouts, 2011). In this

study, characteristics that define a successful student, Table 16 displays results of

perceptions among high school dropouts and graduates and the factors that could define

student success. Several factors had statistical significance among the population. Of the

high school dropouts who responded to this item, 48.8% indicated that grades impacted

student success while 8.6% of high school graduates ranked this factor as having a great

influence. In terms of behavior, 17.1% of high school dropouts felt this factor had

significant impact in a student's success while 42.9% of high school graduates felt it impacted a student's ability to be successful. Relationship with others was the other factor that had a statistical significance as 28.6% of high school graduates felt this had great influence on a student's success and 7.3% of high school dropouts indicated relationships had an impact. To investigate this further, the researcher addressed this question during focus-group interviews. Sample Group 1 (high school dropouts) indicated that teacher support was important to being a successful student while Sample Group 2 (high school graduates) indicated characteristics such as confidence, determination, and perseverance as being influential in defining student success.

Research conducted by the Education Week Research Center (Dropouts, 2011) found that there are two sets of factors that may be predictors of whether students will drop out of or graduate from high school: One set is associated with the institutional characteristics of their families, schools, and communities; the other set is associated with the individual characteristics of the students themselves. This current study aligns with these findings as participants who dropped out of high school found that teacher support and relationships determined student success, while the high school graduates found that intrinsic values and characteristics were influential in being successful as a student.

Research Question 3. How do the perceptions of high school dropouts regarding early childhood education compare to those who are high school graduates?

The importance of early childhood education has never been greater. A study conducted by Carplunk and Eanemen (2013) revealed that being ready for kindergarten affects everything that follows and when a child enters kindergarten unprepared and behind, trying to remediate and help the child play catch-up is very difficult. Furthermore, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) stated that what happens in a

child's life during the first 8 years will impact the next 80 years. In the United States, most of our young children do not attend early education programs until age four; in most other countries, most other children are enrolled as early as age one (Herman, 2013). As far as expenditures, America spends only 0.4% of its GDP on early education programs while Denmark, Spain, and Israel spend 0.9% of their GDP on early education programs (Herman, 2013).

When comparing perceptions regarding the significance of early childhood education, Table 18 displays how important high school graduates and high school dropouts perceived early childhood education. Of the high school graduates who participated in the study, 94.3% indicated they felt early childhood education is very important and 87.8% of high school dropouts indicated that early childhood education is important. According to the Chi-square test of association, there is no relationship among how high school graduates and high school dropouts perceived the importance of early childhood education. With this result, the researcher analyzed barriers that may keep families from placing their young children in early childhood education environments.

Because both sample groups had a substantial percentage of its participants indicating the importance of early education, the researcher studied potential barriers that would prohibit families from placing young children in early learning environments. Regarding the decision to place children in early learning environments, 74.3% of high school graduates ranked finances as having a great impact on a family's decision to place their children in an early childhood learning setting and 73.2% of high school dropouts indicated finances had a great impact. The second most important factor that could have a bearing on a family's decision to place their children in an early childhood education

environment was family dynamics or family culture. Of the high school graduates who answered this item, 42.9% ranked family dynamics and culture as being the second most important barrier, while 43.9% of high school graduates ranked it as being the second most important factor. Regarding high school graduates and high school dropouts, there was no statistical significance regarding these two factors and the perception that these factors would prohibit families from placing their children in early learning environments. When the researcher addressed this issue in focus-group interviews, it was established that finances and the inability to pay have a great impact on a person sending their child to a preschool or daycare. It was indicated that many families simply cannot afford to have their children placed in early learning environments.

Research conducted by the Head Start (2015) organization found that in order to create greater academic success for students, it is imperative that our nation provide quality early learning experiences for young children who are socioeconomically disadvantaged at no cost. Families who are living in poverty, with an emphasis on serving minority populations, would become this organization's primary focus when determining who would be eligible for free preschool services. According to President Obama (2013), the education for these children should begin earlier than age four, making early learning initiatives crucial in developing productive and educated citizens. The findings of this current research study support the need for cost effective or no cost early learning experiences. This study also supports considerations for the universal preschool model that has been established in many of our neighboring nations, as this model provides early learning for all children, not just those who are minorities living in an impoverished situation.

Realizing that barriers exist for many families when there is a decision to place

young children in early education environments, the researcher analyzed components that best prepare a child for school readiness. Highly significant relationships were established regarding the variables or factors and their influences on preparing a child for school readiness. Of the high school dropouts who took part in this study, 46.3% of these participants indicated that knowing colors and shapes have the greatest influence on a child's preparedness for school, while 40% of high school graduates indicated this factor had the least influence. With regard to counting, 7.3% of high school dropouts designated being able to count as having a great effect on school readiness and 22.9% of high school graduates indicated that being able to count had little effect. In terms of being able to write their name, 17.1% of high school dropouts and 25.7% of high school graduates indicated this factor had great significance in a child being ready for school. Regarding knowing how to work well with others, 57.1% of high school graduates indicated this had a great impact on school readiness while only 19.5% of high school dropouts felt it had impact. The last factor analyzed, following rules and procedures, was represented as having a great impact on school readiness by 25.7% of the high school graduates and by only 9.8% of the high school dropouts. According to the Chi-square test of association, there is a relationship between high school graduates and dropouts with regard to the factors they perceived as being important in preparing a student for school readiness.

The results of this study align with the study conducted by Ackerman and Barnett (2005), as this research found that of the parents who were sorted into groups according to their educational background and socioeconomic status, 75% of parents who did not graduate from high school considered counting and knowing the letters of the alphabet as being essential to kindergarten readiness while only 50% of college parents felt these

were necessary skills. Furthermore, this study established that 80% of families from low socioeconomic status indicated that it is necessary for children to know their shapes and colors before being ready for kindergarten (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005).

Therefore, this study supports the importance of how educated families perceive needed skills for school readiness and success in comparison to the perceptions of parents who were not high school graduates. Those families with very little educational experiences felt that low-level, rote academic skills were beneficial for their young children in preparing them to enter kindergarten and having success as a learner. On the contrary, educated families placed very little emphasis on such skills. Rather, these families indicated that interpersonal abilities, rather than academic skills, were essential. High school graduates who participated in this study indicated the abilities of their child to work well with others and establishing relationships with other children and teachers as being crucial to student success. This may help one determine how to support families in preparing their young children for school readiness. Placing importance on building relationships rather than practicing prekindergarten academic skills is supported by this study, and this finding can be associated with a child's ability to successfully complete high school.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, the population studied was located in one rural area of a southern state and therefore no comparisons of a similar population within the same state or other states were made. Additionally, both sample groups were located in the same Test Community College. Therefore, results are limited to the perceptions of students who are either enrolled in an AHS program or AAS education degree-seeking program. These perceptions were not compared to other

students in other programs or other colleges. The outcomes should not be considered

universal conclusions as national or global populations were not studied. This also

indicates the significance of education and educational opportunities being subjective to

different types of familial and socioeconomic amalgamations.

Secondly, when discussing early childhood experiences, quality was a factor that

was not analyzed or assessed. Many studies and organizations indicate the importance of

quality early learning experiences for young children. If the researcher had studied the

quality of the programs the sample groups attended, the need for quality environments

could have been supported. By analyzing the characteristics of a quality early childhood

learning environment, the results could have indicated the importance of quality and the

impact of quality environments on a person's success as a high school graduate.

One final limitation comes from the sample group. There was a total of 76

participants in the total population studied with 35 representing Sample Group 1 and 41

representing Sample Group 2. The majority of participants were females and therefore

equitable perceptions among genders could not be established. No males were included

in the high school graduate focus-group interviews and therefore a deeper investigation in

relation to the perceptions of males could not be established.

Recommendations

Taking all of the results from this study into account, it can be implied that early

childhood education experiences that occur from ages two through four can have a

significant impact on a student's success as a high school graduate. Although one could

not disseminate among the quality of programs, the importance of early experiences for

young children in preparing them for school success is apparent. Those who work to

provide optimal experiences for young children, supporting the cognitive, social,

emotional, and physical growth in each individual child, have a great impact on their abilities to enter school prepared.

A second recommendation is to investigate the prospect of universal preschool for all children. Although our nation has recognized the need for free early education for 4 year olds who are socioeconomically disadvantaged as well as those who are minority, there is an established need for free early education for all young children. This concept follows the universal preschool concept which has been established in many nations throughout the world where financial support for early learning initiatives occur. Studies involving legislative policy and support should take place as having such judicial support could potentially impact the promise of free early education for all children.

Factors for dropping out of high school that were determined by the participants of this study should be identified and supported as potential risk factors in order to prevent future students from dropping out. The nation has many initiatives and programs available for those who are at risk for dropping out of high school, but these are available to high school students only. There should be an examination of potential programs or initiatives to support potential dropouts before the high school years begin. Analyzing early education experiences of students, or the lack of, could be a factor in determining a potential high school dropout. This information should be gathered and analyzed when a student enters school so that support for the student with little or no early childhood education experiences could be offered as indicated.

Additional studies on the importance of teacher-student relationships and the impact of these relationships should take place. This study revealed the effects and impacts of a teacher's perception of student achievement and ability. When a teacher negatively impacts a student's perception, this can lead to catastrophic events. Teachers

have the capability of validating and inspiring our nation's future; and this ability should

be met with high regard for ethical, moral, and professional treatment of all students,

respecting and appreciating diversity of all students. How student-teacher relationships

impact student perceptions and success has been determined in this study and further

implications should be examined in order to evaluate the full impact teacher treatment of

students has on a student's decision to withdraw from high school. Teachers of all

grades, ages, abilities, races, and cultures are met with many demands of our nation and

families; however, these stresses should not negatively impact the relationships

established with students.

Because this study implied that those who dropped out of high school perceived

academic skills as having a great impact on the successes of children entering

kindergarten, research to correct any misconceptions should be investigated. Those who

graduated from high school indicated that social skills have a greater impact on school

readiness. Because a vast difference regarding school readiness was revealed in this

study, there should be a deeper analysis of the implications of this and the perceptions of

such skills among all populations. One should study the factors for school readiness as

perceived by early educators and compare these to the findings in this study.

Summary

In determining relationships among high school graduates and high school

dropouts with their perceptions of early childhood education, this study suggests that

while these groups have similarities, there are vast differences in how they perceive

factors that contribute to student success and school readiness. In addition, the early

learning experiences of these two groups are also statistically different. As Carplunk and

Eanemen (2013) suggested, the impacts of high school dropout rates are felt throughout

all aspects of society and culture; and quality early education experiences could be the one factor that could have the greatest impact in stopping the spread of this epidemic.

When analyzing the perceptions of high school graduates and high school dropouts regarding early childhood education experiences, the results suggest there is a significant relationship that existed in early education experiences during 2-3 years of age and 4 years of age. When determining barriers that may exist for families when placing their children in an early education environment, the study revealed that finances is the greatest factor that would prohibit children from being placed in an early education environment. The study revealed that high school graduates and high school dropouts feel that early childhood education is very important. However, these groups perceive factors that best prepare a child for entering school very differently. In examining factors that impact a person's decision to withdraw from high school, the results of this study suggest that the relationship the teacher has with a student has a great impact on a person's decision to withdraw from high school and the family support plays a great role in a student's decision to drop out of high school. Furthermore, it is the mission of the Head Start (2005) organization to support family involvement and engagement in supporting their young child. According to this research, the impacts of family involvement will be felt throughout the student's academic career. Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory explained how a child is influenced by the settings and environments where most of the child's time is spent (Browne & Gordon, 2014). This study aligns with this theoretical framework as those who have great influence on a child will also have a great impact on the educational successes of a child.

As revealed in this study, the support a student receives from those adults who have direct impact and contact matter. Whether the intentions are to help a child enter

kindergarten ready for school or to prevent a child from dropping out of high school,

support from adult relationships have been established as vital links for student success as

the student begins the educational journey and makes preparations for its ending.

References

About us: Mission, vision, history. (2015). Retrieved from https://www.nhsa.org/about-us/mission-vision-history

Ackerman, D. J., & Barnett, W. S. (2005). *Prepared for kindergarten: What does readiness mean?* New Brunswick: National Institute for Early Educational Research.

Ahola, D., & Kovacik, A. (2007). *Understanding child development: A child study manual.* Farmington Hills, MI: Cengage Learning.

Balfanze, R. (2010). *Builidng a grad nation: progress and challenges in ending the high school dropout epidemic.* Johns Hopkins University.

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2014). 3 myths that block progress for the poor. Retrieved www.gatesfoundation.org/Who-We-Are/Annual Letter 2014

Browne, K. W., & Gordon, A. M. (2014). *Beginnings and beyond.* Boston, MA: Cengage.

Butin, D. (2010). *The education dissertation.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin

Carplunk, K., & Eanemen, W. (2013). *The vital link: early childhood investment is the first step to high school graduation*. Retrieved from http://readynation.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/ReadyNation-Vital-Links-no-endnotes1.pdf

Carroll, K. M. (2012). *The impact of preschool education on students' kindergarten readiness and subsequent kindergarten performance*. Ann Arbor: ProQuest Information & Learning.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Essentials for childhood. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/essentials_for_childhood_framework.pdf

Child Trends Data Bank. (2014). *Early childhood program enrollment: Indicators on children and youth*. Washington, DC: Early Childhood Program Development.

Clemson University. (2015). National dropout prevention center/network. Retrieved from www.dropoutprevention.org

Connolly, P. J. (n.d.). *John Lock*e. Retrieved from http://www.iep.utm.edu/locke/

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design.* Thousand Oaks,CA: SAGE.

Desautels, D. L. (2014, February 06). *Addressing our needs: Maslow comes to life for educators and student*s. Retrieved from http://www.edutopia.org/blog/addressing-our-needs-maslow-hierarchy-lori-desautels

Dropout Prevention. (2013, March 31). Retrieved from http://www.ccrscenter.org/products-resources/blog/research-practice-dropout-prevention-and-early-warning-indicators

Dropouts. (2011, June 16). Retrieved from www.edweek.org/ew/issues/dropouts

Early childhood development: An office of the administration for children & families. (2015, July 1). Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/early-learning/early-learning-initiative

Economic Opportunity Act (2004). 78 U.S.C. § 2642, 1964. Retrieved from http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Economic_Opportunity_Act.aspx

Education at a glance highlights. (2012, September). Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/edu/highlights.pdf

Emrich, M. (n.d.). *Abram Maslow*. Retrieved from http://www.muskingum.edu/~psych/psycweb/history/maslow.htm

Ensuring quality education for all. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.tedkennedy.org/service/item/education

Facing the School Dropout Dilemma. (2014, September). Retrieved from www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/school-dropout-prevention.aspx

Fitzpatrick, J. L., Sanders, J. R., & Worthen, B. R. (2011). *Program evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.

Freeman, E. (2015). Child care costs surpass college tuition. Retrieved from http://www.blueridgenow.com/article/20150211/ARTICLES/502111007

Head start. (2015). Retrieved from http://sitemaker.umich.edu/356.bell/home

Herman, J. (2013, May 2). *Issues: The United States is far behind other countries on pre-K*. Retrieved from https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2013/05/02/62054/the-united-states-is-far-behind-other-countries-on-pre-k/

History of montessori education. (2015). Retrieved from http://amshq.org/Montessori-Education/History-of-Montessori-Education.

Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies. (2015). *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifyiing foundation*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences.

The Journey to Excellence. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/resourcesandcpd/research/summaries/rslearningstyles.asp

Kagan, S. L. (2008). *American early childhood education: Preventing or perpetuation inequity*. Retrieved from http://www.equitycampaign.org/i/a/document/9833_EquityMatters_Kagan_Final.pdf

Kilhstrom, J. F. (2013). *How students learn and how we can help them.* GSI Teaching and Resource Center. Berkley: University of Berkely. Retreived from http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~kihlstrm/GSI_2011.htm

Learn the signs: Act early. (2015, February 12). Retrieved from http://educationvotes.nea.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/WholeChildBackgrounder.pdf

Mathews, L. (2015). *Behaviorist theory of childhood educatio*n. Retrieved from www.everydaylife.globalpost.com

McLeod, S. (2015a). *Jean Piaget*. Retrieved from http://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html

McLeod, S. (2015b). *Simply psycholog*y. Retrieved from www.simplypsychology.org

Meeting the needs of the whole child. (2010, 04). Retrieved from http://educationvotes.nea.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/WholeChildBackgrounder.pdf

Nance, R. (2009). *The importance of early childhood education: Roles of play, language, socialization, formation of value*s. (Abstract). Quest Club Paper. Retrieved from http://www.fwquestclub.com/welcome_files/papers/childhood_education.pdf

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (n.d.). About NAEYC. Retrieved from www.naeyc.org

North Carolina Demographics. (2013). Retrieved from www.ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). Retrieved from www.ncchildcare.nc.gov

North Carolina Partnership for Children. (2015). Retrieved from
www.ccpartnershipforchildren.com

Obama, P. B. (2013, February 12). *Remarks of the president in the state of the union address.* Washington, DC: The Office of the Press Secretary of the United States of America. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/12/remarks-president-state-union-address

The Philosophy. (n.d.). Retrieved from www.montessori.org.uk

Porter, E. (2013, April, 2). *Investments in education may be misdirected.* Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2013/04/03/business/studies-highlight-benefits-of-early-education

Prawat, R. (2009, December 23). *Dewey, John 1859-1952*. Retrieved from http://www.education.com/reference/article/dewey-john-1859-1952/

Public Schools of North Carolina (2015). *Report to the NC general assembly: Consolidated data report 2012-2013*. Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Retrieved from http://www.ncleg.net/documentsites/committees/JLEOC/Reports%20Received/20 15%20Reports%20Received/Consolidated%20Data%20Report_Dropout%20Rate s_Corporal%20Punishment%20(2).pdf

Rafoth, M.A. (2004). *Kindergarten-full day versus half day-information for parents.* Retrieved from www. naspcenter.org/assessment/kindergarten_ho.html

Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast. (2008, September). *Evidenced based education.* Retrieved from http://www.serve.org/uploads/docs/EBE%20Responses/359_Graduation_Coaches _9.26.08.pdf

Ryan, M. (2008, September 28). *Most vital part of education takes place early*. Retrieved from http://www.statesmanjournal.com/article/20080928/NEWS/809280322/Most-vital-part-education-takes-place-early-Child-s-first-five-years

Silber, K. (1965). *Pestalozzi: The man and his works.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Smith, M. (2014). *Johann Henrich Pestalozzi: Pedagogy, education and social justice*. Retrieved from http://infed.org/mobi/johann-heinrich-pestalozzi-pedagogy-education-and-social-justice/

Stillwell, M. C. (2014). *Public high school four year on-time high school graduation rates and event dropout rates*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014391.pdf

United States Department of Education. (2014a, August 04). *High school graduation initiative*. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/dropout/index.html

United States Department of Education. (2014b, March 25). *Programs: Race to the top funds*. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html

United States Department of Education. (2015). *National Center for Education Statistics*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=16

What is so important about early childhood education? (2005). Retrieved from www.educationcorner.com/importance-of-early-childhood-education.html

The White House: Office of the secretary. (2014, December 10). Fact sheet: Invest in US: The White House Summit on Early Childhood Education. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/10/fact-sheet-invest-us-white-house-summit-early-childhood-education

Why investments in early childhood work. (2014). Retrieved from http://www.theounce.org/who-we-are/why-investments-in-early-childhood-work

Wright, S. (2013, November 14). MindShift. Retrieved from http://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2013/11/14/why-academic-teaching-doesnt-help-kids-excel-in-life/

Appendix A

Script for Piloting Survey

Script for Administering Survey

"Welcome. My name is L. Nanney and I am a doctoral student who is wanting to use a survey to collect data." "You have a consent to participate form before you and at this time, I will go over this consent to make sure each of you understand what you are consenting to, how the results will be used and the procedures that will be followed." "Please know that you may stop participating and may withdraw your consent at any time." "Should you decide to withdraw, your decision will not be held against you in any way."

If you need assistance or additional information, please indicate this by raising your hand and I will come to you."

"When you have completed this survey, please exit the room, leaving the survey on your desk."

"Again, thank you for your assistance and should you have any questions or comments, please contact:

XXXXXXXXXXX

Appendix B

Survey

Early Childhood Education Survey

The purpose of this survey is to determine the perceptions of early education among high school dropouts and high school graduates. The populations studied are students enrolled in the Adult Learning Program and AAS Degree seeking program at a rural community college... This instrument is part of a study being conducted by L. Nanney as a part of gathering data for the dissertation topic. Participation in this survey is strictly voluntary however, your input is greatly appreciated. For more information please contact
L.Nanney: XXXXXXXX

1. Which age range best fits you?
   - o 18-22
   - o 23-29
   - o 30-40
   - o 40-50
   - o 50+

2. What is your gender?
   - o Male
   - o Female

3. What is your ethnicity?
   - o African American
   - o Caucasian
   - o Hispanic
   - o Asian
   - o Other

4. Did you graduate from high school?
   - o Yes
   - o No

5. Please select the one that best describes your experiences birth-1year old: (If unsure, leave blank)
   - o I attended a family home daycare/center
   - o I attended a preschool/daycare in my community
   - o I was cared for by a family member/family friend

6. Please select the one that best describes your experiences 2-3years old: (If unsure, leave blank)
   - o I attended a family home daycare/center
   - o I attended a preschool/daycare in my community
   - o I was cared for by a family member/family friend

7. Please select the one that best describes your experiences as a 4 year old: (If unsure, leave blank)
    o I attended a family home daycare/center
    o I attended a preschool/daycare in my community
    o I was cared for by a family member/family friend
    o I attended a four year old program at an elementary school setting

8. Please rank the following factors, 1-5, that could contribute to a person's decision to drop out of high school; 1 as having the greatest impact and 5 as having the least impact.
    _ family support
    _ school support
    _ attendance issues
    _ poor grades
    _ conflicts with teachers/administrators

9. What additional factors do you feel contribute to a person's decision to drop out of high school?
    _____

10. Please select the best one that describes your opinion about the importance of early childhood education experiences for children birth through age 4.
    o I feel that these experiences are important
    o I do not feel that these experiences are important
    o I am unsure
    o Other _____

11. Please rank the following factors 1-5 that could keep families from placing their children in Early Childhood Education environments with 1 being the greatest factor and 5 being the least.
    _ Finances
    _ Family dynamics/culture
    _ Time
    _ Location
    _ Availability

12. What additional factors do you feel keep families from placing their children in Early Childhood Education environments?
    _____

13. Please rank the following factors 1-5 that best prepare a child for school with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.

    _ Knowing colors and shapes
    _ Counting
    _ Being able to write their name
    _ Knowing how to work well with others
    _ Following routines and procedures

14. What additional factors do you feel prepare a child for school?

_____

15. Please rank the following factors 1-5 that identify a successful student with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.
    _ Attendance
    _ Behavior
    _ Grades
    _ Relationships
    _ Extra- curricular

16. What additional characteristics do you feel define a successful student?

_____

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in Research

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of the Project: Perceptions of High School Dropouts and High School Graduates Regarding Early Education Experiences

Principal Investigator: Lori Nanney: Doctoral Candidate, Gardner Webb University; Education Instructor, Cleveland Community College

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

I invite you to be part of a research study about early childhood education experiences as well as factors that may impact a person's decision to withdraw from high school before completing graduation experiences.

Description of Your Involvement

If you agree to be part of the research study, I will ask you to complete a survey which does not require you to submit any identifying information. You may also be asked to take part in a focus group interview regarding the study and relevant topics.

The survey will be completed during one of your class times and will be given by me, the researcher. You are not required to take this survey as it is strictly voluntary. The survey should only take a few moments of your time. If you wish for someone to read the survey aloud, someone will be provided to assist you. Once all surveys are complete, I will collect each one. These will be verified and kept in a sealed envelope and locked cabinet. Students who complete the survey will be randomly selected and invited to participate in focus group interviews. The focus group will be a small selection and participation is not required. If you are selected to participate and do not wish to contribute to the focus group interviews please inform the researcher. The focus group will be made of approximately 6 -8 students. During the focus groups you will have the opportunity to discuss questions listed on the survey. This process should not last more than one hour.

Benefits of Participation

Although you may not directly benefit from being in this study, others may benefit because we can determine if there are commonalities and/or differences in how high school dropouts and graduates perceive early education. There are no risks or discomforts associated with this research and your participation. Participation is on a volunteer basis and no compensation will be given.

Confidentiality

I plan to publish the results of this study as a part of the dissertation process. I will not include any information that would identify you as this information will not be collected. Your privacy will be protected and the research surveys and focus group results will be confidential. Once collected and analyzed, the results/data will be placed in a sealed envelope. The envelope will be in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office and will remain there for one calendar year. After the one year, all information will be shredded and destroyed. Should you want to receive the results of the data, this will be provided to you per your request.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer a question you do not want to answer nor do you have to agree to participate in a focus group interview. Should you decide to withdraw this consent form, please let the researcher know. This decision will not be held against you in any way.

Contact Information of the Researcher/Investigator

Lori Nanney- Doctoral Candidate

Gardner Webb University

110 S. Main Street

Boiling Springs, NC 28017

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact:
Dr. Kelsey Musselman
Adjunct Professor
Gardner Webb University
110 S. Main Street
Boiling Springs. NC 28017

Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. I will be glad to give you a copy of this document for your records at your request. I will keep one copy with the study records. Be sure that I have answered any questions you have about the study and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

I agree to participate in the study.

_____
Printed Name

_____
Signature   Date:

Appendix D

Focus Group Outline

Focus Group Outline

(To be used with Sample 1 and Sample 2 focus groups)

I.   Introduction of moderator: *Hello, my name is Lori Nanney. I will serve as moderator for this focus group. I will be using an audio recorded to record responses and discussions. This will enable me to gather and report clear and concise data. Please note that you will not be video recorded and you will remain anonymous.*

II.   Purpose: *The purpose of this focus group is to allow each of you to discuss the Early Childhood Education survey you participated in. As we discuss each item, you will be able to give more detailed information, deeper thoughts and opinions regarding the question... The material gathered will serve as evidences for the research study I am conducting. Please note that no names or will be used in this study and your anonymity will be protected.*

III.   Selection of participants: *Each person who participated in the survey was eligible to participate in the focus group. You were randomly selected to attend this interview.*

IV.   Guidelines: *Please note there are no right or wrong answers, just differing opinions. Please allow one person to speak at a time. You do not need to agree with others but please listen respectfully as others share their opinions and views. I ask that you turn off all phones and cellular devices. Should you need to answer a call or step away from the group, I ask that you do so quietly; returning quickly making sure you do not distract the group. I also ask that you talk with each other and respond to one another. My role as the moderator will be to guide the discussion and listen.*

V.   Icebreaker: *Before we begin, I would like for each of you to tell us if you have children and if so their ages. Also, tell us a favorite food you like to eat or cook.*

VI.   Warm up question: *I would like to begin by asking you to discuss what you feel to be the biggest barrier for people when considering early childhood education opportunities for their children. What factors keep families from placing their children in early childhood education environments?*

VII.   Transition: *Now I would like for you to talk a bit about your early childhood education experiences.*

VIII.   Question Set 1 (RQ 1): *Please tell me, what were your child care experiences as an infant? What were your child care experiences as a toddler (1-2 years)? What were your childcare experiences as a preschool aged child (3-4 years)?*

IX.   Transition: *Now I would like to hear your thoughts regarding early education for children; the need for and importance of early childhood education.*

X.   Question Set 2 (RQ 3): *Please tell me what are your impressions and opinions regarding the need for early childhood education for infants? What are your thoughts regarding the need for early childhood education for toddlers? What are your opinions regarding the need for early childhood education for preschoolers?*

XI.   *What do you think most prepares a child for school?*

XII.   Transition: *Now I would like to switch gears a bit and get your ideas about dropping out of high school.*

XIII.   Question Set 3 (RQ 2): *In your opinion, what do you think are the most important issues or factors that may cause a person to drop out of high school? What do you feel could be the best methods for keeping a person from dropping out of high school? What do you think the worst effects of dropping out of high school are?*

XIV.   *What factors or characteristics do you feel contribute to a student being successful?*

XV.   Wrap up: *We have addressed all questions I have for you. Do you have any additional information you would like to share or do you have questions for me? I have enjoyed meeting each of you and your responses will help me greatly with this study. Thank all of you so much for coming and participating in this focus group. Have a good day.*

Appendix E

Focus Group Transcribed Notes

Sample Group 1 and Sample Group 2

Transcribed Notes

Sample Group 1: High School Dropouts

M=Moderator; S1=Student 1, S2=Student 2 … Student 6

I.   Introduction of moderator: *Hello, my name is Lori Nanney. I will serve as moderator for this focus group. I will be using an audio recorded to record responses and discussions. This will enable me to gather and report clear and concise data. Please note that you will not be video recorded and you will remain anonymous.*

II.   M: *The purpose of this focus group is to allow each of you to discuss the Early Childhood Education survey you participated in. As we discuss each item, you will be able to give more detailed information, deeper thoughts and opinions regarding the question... The material gathered will serve as evidences for the research study I am conducting. Please note that no names or will be used in this study and your anonymity will be protected.*

III.   M: *Each person who participated in the survey was eligible to participate in the focus group. You were randomly selected to attend this interview.*

IV.   M: *Please note there are no right or wrong answers, just differing opinions. Please allow one person to speak at a time. You do not need to agree with others but please listen respectfully as others share their opinions and views. I ask that you turn off all phones and cellular devices. Should you need to answer a call or step away from the group, I ask that you do so quietly; returning quickly making sure you do not distract the group. I also ask that you talk with each other and respond to one another. My role as the moderator will be to guide the discussion and listen.*

V.   M: *Before we begin, I would like for each of you to tell us if you have children and if so their ages. Also, tell us a favorite food you like to eat or cook.*
S1: no kids and spaghetti, S2: no kids and pizza, S3: 3 children and lasagna, S4: No kids and cheeseburgers, S5: 2 kids and chicken, S6: 4 kids and lasagna.

VI.   M: *I would like to begin by asking you to discuss what you feel to be the biggest barrier for people when considering early childhood education opportunities for their children. What factors keep families from placing their children in early childhood education environments?*
S1: Money, it is too expensive. S2: Yeah, it is the money, it costs a lot for a baby to go to daycare. S3: I was kept at home so my babies were kept at home until they started school. S6: My mom kept my kids cause I could not afford it anyway.

VII.   M: *Now I would like for you to talk a bit about your early childhood education experiences.*

VIII.   M: *Please tell me, what were your child care experiences as an infant? What were your child care experiences as a toddler (1-2 years)? What were your childcare experiences as a preschool aged child (3-4 years)?*

S2: Home till I was 4. S3: Home till I was 4. S4: NC Pre-K preschool daycare

IX.   M: *Now I would like to hear your thoughts regarding early education for children; the need for and importance of early childhood education.*

X.   M: *Please tell me what are your impressions and opinions regarding the need for early childhood education for infants? What are your thoughts regarding the need for early childhood education for toddlers? What are your opinions regarding the need for early childhood education for preschoolers?*

S2: My son started school in August (Young Parent) I felt as he went on through school he was less mature than his peers. Nephew does not want to go to school. Infants at home, S4: YouTube technology helps get kids ready for school. S3: I think babies need to be home but you need to go just before you start to school, like 4 or something.

XI.   M*: What do you think most prepares a child for school?*

S1: Sitting down and reading to them, my cousin's kid knows her ABCs and she is just 3. S6: Helping them with their name and being away from you so they don't cry.

XII.   M. *Now I would like to switch gears a bit and get your ideas about dropping out of high school.*

XIII.   M: *In your opinion, what do you think are the most important issues or factors that may cause a person to drop out of high school? What do you feel could be the best methods for keeping a person from dropping out of high school? What do you think the worst effects of dropping out of high school are?*

S1: Trifold; what goes on at home stress, time consuming, Peer pressure. Diligent in their work great attitude encouraging people involved in other activities and getting them involved in other things than just school. Having good friends. S2: Peer pressure $200 pair shoes want to be like them, Uniforms should be in all schools because this would keep kids from making fun of other kids' clothes. S4: I think students don't care what it takes for some parents to get the expensive clothes and they are just fads for a while. S3: It's about the label on your clothes. S5: Teachers through middle school pick on students; they do not believe are not smart enough, uniforms do not work out real well didn't stop nothing in high school. When I was in 5th grade, I won the spelling bee in school but the

teacher accused of me cheating. I know it was because I am black and a white kid needed to go to the county office and compete. I didn't care about the spelling bee but I won fair and square. I said if they think I am a bad person, then I will be. S6: Not getting a job is the worst thing that can happen if you don't get your diploma.

XIV.   M: *What factors or characteristics do you feel contribute to a student being successful?*

S1: Student activities helps keeps kids in school and it is important that the student not make straight A's. You need to know there is more than grades and studying. S5: Having a good teacher on your side will help keep you in. No teachers ever had anything to do with me until they knew I wanted to quit then they wanted to help me and talk with me and I just wanted to leave. I went to other high schools to get in but I didn't play sports so I couldn't get in to other schools. S4: Having a teacher who believes in you really makes a difference. S2: I have had teachers who cared and tried to help but I had some who I knew did not like me and didn't care if I failed or passed. If they don't care why should I? S6: If a teacher will help you in the beginning then you feel like you can make it. They don't want students who have been in any kind of trouble or who just don't want to sit in a desk all day long.

XV.   M: *We have addressed all questions I have for you. Do you have any additional information you would like to share or do you have questions for me? I have enjoyed meeting each of you and your responses will help me greatly with this study. Thank all of you so much for coming and participating in this focus group. Have a good day.*

Transcribed Notes

Sample Group 2: High School Graduates

M=Moderator; S1=Student 1, S2=Student 2 … Student 7

I.   Introduction of moderator: *Hello, my name is Lori Nanney. I will serve as moderator for this focus group. I will be using an audio recorded to record responses and discussions. This will enable me to gather and report clear and concise data. Please note that you will not be video recorded and you will remain anonymous.*

II.   M: *The purpose of this focus group is to allow each of you to discuss the Early Childhood Education survey you participated in. As we discuss each item, you will be able to give more detailed information, deeper thoughts and opinions regarding the question... The material gathered will serve as evidences for the research study I am conducting. Please note that no names or will be used in this study and your anonymity will be protected.*

III.   M: *Each person who participated in the survey was eligible to participate in the focus group. You were randomly selected to attend this interview.*

IV.   M: *Please note there are no right or wrong answers, just differing opinions. Please allow one person to speak at a time. You do not need to agree with others but please listen respectfully as others share their opinions and views. I ask that you turn off all phones and cellular devices. Should you need to answer a call or step away from the group, I ask that you do so quietly; returning quickly making sure you do not distract the group. I also ask that you talk with each other and respond to one another. My role as the moderator will be to guide the discussion and listen.*

V.   M: *Before we begin, I would like for each of you to tell us if you have children and if so their ages. Also, tell us a favorite food you like to eat or cook.*
S1: No children and pizza, S2: No children and pizza, S3, No children and any grilled chicken dish, S4, No children and Italian, S5: 1 child and any Mexican food, S5: No children and pizza.

VI.   Warm up question: *I would like to begin by asking you to discuss what you feel to be the biggest barrier for people when considering early childhood education opportunities for their children. What factors keep families from placing their children in early childhood education environments?*

       S1: Money, S2.; Financial, S4: The Wait list, S5: They are afraid their kids won't be interested, S3: They are scared to trust anyone else, S6: They think their children aren't going to be cared for, The media blows it up when something goes wrong

VII.   Transition: *Now I would like for you to talk a bit about your early childhood education experiences.*

VIII.   M: *Please tell me, what were your child care experiences as an infant? What were your child care experiences as a toddler (1-2 years)? What were your childcare experiences as a preschool aged child (3-4 years)?*

S2: My grandma kept me S3: I went to daycare and I remember it, I was so afraid and I clung to my mom's leg, I did not want her to leave. The next year when I had to go to another teacher, S1: I had the same experiences, I did not want to leave the other teacher. S6: I went to La Petite, I did not like it at first S4: I went to a church daycare but did not get to go long because my mom, was young and it may have been finances but my nana and my mom together kept me after I spent some time in the church daycare. S7: I went to preschool but not as a baby.

IX.   M: *Now I would like to hear your thoughts regarding early education for children; the need for and importance of early childhood education.*

X.   M: *Please tell me what are your impressions and opinions regarding the need for early childhood education for infants? What are your thoughts regarding the need for early childhood education for toddlers? What are your opinions regarding the need for early childhood education for preschoolers?*

S1: I think they need the social, S4: They need to be around other babies, S7: Yes, They need to be around other babies S3: I will want to keep my babies until they are 2. S2: Helicopter mommy S1: Take them to the park, you have this class and you know what to do.

Toddlers: S2: YES! Put that child in a daycare, they need to trust people S3: Although it's not big exaggeration with academics, there is a focus on working with others. S1: Toddlers learn so much so fast, if they are sitting at home, it's going to be hard for them to learn new experiences.

Preschoolers: S7: You need it. S1: Put them in preschool they need it. S2: If you don't go to preschool then you are not going to know how to act when you got to school. S2: I was lucky I stayed with my grandma did not go to preschool. I adapted ok but others in my family done the same thing and when they got to school they did not know what to do or how to act. S2: The whole separation aspect, emotional stuff from being separated from nana and papa counting down hours to go home.

XI.   M*: What do you think most prepares a child for school?*

S2: Not being stuck under mommy and daddy all the time, because they will expect mommy and daddy to be teaching them. S3: My cousin is attached to his dad I tell them they need to stop that now. S1: Shapes, Colors, Have fun at learning at home S: Interested then they will learn, Social.

XII. M. *Now I would like to switch gears a bit and get your ideas about dropping out of high school.*

XIII. M: *In your opinion, what do you think are the most important issues or factors that may cause a person to drop out of high school? What do you feel could be the best methods for keeping a person from dropping out of high school? What do you think the worst effects of dropping out of high school are?*

S4: Pregnancy S1: High Schools not for everybody. People, Social, Depression, anxiety were not right for my mom so she dropped out, now she is in early childhood. Teenagers got all of the other stuff going on that's a whole other world every day. S2: Stress kids are under now you are pushing them to go take college classes and get college credits, they are trying to push them to grow up. S3: Play sports, Get a job, help around the house, and get sleep. S2: If you don't do it then in this generation you can't really do anything. If you do not have a diploma there is not much you can do. They are forcing you to get an education and maybe some people they can. S6: Men can get mill and construction jobs but if I am as qualified as a man I cannot get them same jobs they do. Easier for boys to drop out of high school and then go make $14 and hour working at a furniture store when I'm going to be going through college and everything to be making the same exact amount or even less.

S3: Having options, not going to school for 7-8 hours a day. S1: When you are in high school you should have more say so to what classes you have to take because you are forced to take classes you have no interest in you are not going to do well in it. If you had an opinion or even a choice in what you will take maybe you would do better in it.

S2: You can't get a job unless you are working toward a high school diploma or you already have it. S1: You are looked on by other people your age if you don't graduate high school. S3: Low self-esteem, it will follow you even if the GED is something to be proud of, but it's still going to haunt you, if you don't get your diploma, or you didn't do prom, or didn't walk across the stage. It's going to put pressure on your future kids. Cycle repeats itself. S7: My oldest hated high school I had to make her walk across the stage. She lost friends, she was miserable, she did the college program she almost refused. I didn't get to walk across the stage. She begged to be homeschooled. Went to one prom but didn't want to hang out with other kids. S2: High school is that miserable S3: When you go to prom it's always drama. S: social drama. S1: Can it be the high schools? Is it the kids? The teachers? Or the Kid?

XIV. M: *What factors or characteristics do you feel contribute to a student being successful?*

S4: Confidence and happiness, financial stability S3: Determination to get it done S1: Somebody motivating them. S7: Support.

XV.   M: *We have addressed all questions I have for you. Do you have any additional information you would like to share or do you have questions for me? I have enjoyed meeting each of you and your responses will help me greatly with this study. Thank all of you so much for coming and participating in this focus group. Have a good day.*