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Leaders and At-Risk Students' Perceptions of Online Credit Recovery Opportunities and The Role of Efficacy

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Angelo M. Barcinas

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Leaders and At-Risk Students' Perceptions of Online Credit Recovery Opportunities and the Role of Efficacy

by

Angelo M. Barcinas

MAT, University of Guam

BS, Missouri Valley College

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Leadership, Policy, and Change

Walden University

June 2020

Abstract

Although online credit recovery opportunities are available to high school students enrolled in a United States of America territory credit recovery school, the inability of students to access these courses outside of the school is difficult because students do not have online access. This study examines the role self-efficacy plays on students successfully completing high school through taking advantage of online credit recovery opportunities. The purpose of this general qualitative interview study was to examine at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities and the role of efficacy for students enrolled in online credit recovery school. Using the social cognitive theory and constructivist theory as the conceptual frameworks, virtual individual face-to-face semi structured interviews were conducted with 9 credit recovery students and 5 high school administrators from the district. Individual interviews were transcribed and coded with NVivo. Students had an overall positive perception of online credit recovery courses and believed that their efficacy positively contributed to their success. Administrators had an overall positive perception of online credit recovery courses. These findings contribute to positive social change by identifying how administrators can support their teachers and school staff with the resources provided by the district to increase teaching strategies, social and emotional training, and administrator training, which will lead to at-risk students being successful enrolled in credit recovery programs.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. The meaning of family can be overlooked at times and it must be known that without my family, none of this would have been possible. I would like to thank the Almighty Lord for providing me with the drive and desire to push through tough times, also for giving me the greatest support system a person could ask for. Luke 1; 37- for nothing is impossible with God. To my wife, who has been by my side from day one of this journey, you have been the living example of behind every successful man, is a strong and beautiful woman. To my four amazing and resilient children, all I do is for you and daddy is sorry for always having to lock myself up to complete my studies, I just want to model the importance of education and everything I do is for all of you. To my parents, you both have provided me with the framework to be successful and I am eternally grateful for all of the sacrifices you made for us. Mom, you taught me the importance of unconditional love and being selfless. Dad, you taught me that work ethic and integrity goes a long way and the toughness you have instilled in me will never be lost. You both are the greatest parents that a kid could ask for. To my sister, as we grow older and I look at my children play and fight with each other, it makes me appreciate and love you even more. I want you to know that you are the best little sister I could have ever asked for and it has been a blessing in my life to know that my family knows and loves you and your daughter to the moon and back. To my niece, thank you for being the light in my sister's life and a blessing to my family.

The impact that all of you have had in my life is invaluable and I share my success with you all. Hu guaiya hao, Dejina umotoddo, I love you all.

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Thank you to all of my family for believing in me and motivating me every single time our paths crossed. Your love and support have been invaluable, and I am forever grateful, and I share this success with you. Thank you to my brothers and sisters who have and continue to serve our country, it was an honor to serve with you and our time together created a fire within myself to start this doctoral journey. Thank you to my past and current colleague-educators for allowing me to educate with you side by side, I will always cherish the work you do for our students.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge every student that I have had the honor and privilege to serve. Everything I do as an educator is to make a positive difference in your life. My sole purpose in becoming an educator was to positively impact your lives. You all have been so wonderful, and I wish you all the best in your journeys and it was my honor to be a part of yours.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The consequences of students dropping out of high school costs the United States of America approximately $1.5 trillion in lost wages and billions of dollars in terms of public health, criminal justice, and public assistance (Heppen et al., 2018; Partin, 2017). There is a need for online credit recovery opportunities that increase the likelihood of at-risk students achieving a high school diploma. To address the high school dropout phenomenon in a United States Department of Education district, an online credit recovery program was created to help at-risk students complete necessary credits for a high school diploma. High school dropout rates are still a global phenomenon and will potentially negatively impact over 12 million students within the next decade (Sipma, 2016).

This study expands available knowledge concerning online credit recovery opportunities for students at risk of not completing high school. Participants in this study are high school administrators and 18- to 22-year-old junior and senior students enrolled in an online credit recovery program at a U.S. Department of Education alternative school. In this chapter, I present the background, problem statement, purpose of the study and research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scopes and delimitations, limitations, significance, and summary. In this study, I explain how understanding at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities impacts students completing or dropping out of high school.

Background

According to the United States Territory Department of Education (2014) and the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), approximately 567,000 students between the

ages of 15 and 24 years did not obtain a high school diploma, which constitutes 5.2% of the 10.9 million students in America. With the guidelines set by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) combined with interventions that support state and district efforts to prevent students from dropping out of high school, credit recovery programs are created and offered. Viano (2018) stated that alternative online learning courses are essential to give students more opportunities to succeed in graduating high school. A U.S. territory has experienced high school dropout rates and other factors that contribute to students not graduating in cohorts similar to those of their stateside counterparts. The U.S. Department of Education has encountered challenges regarding understanding at-risk students' perceptions of taking online learning courses that could improve graduation rates of students enrolled in the online credit recovery program. The U.S. Department of Education provides public education services for approximately 30,000 island students. In school year (SY) 2018-2019, United States territory reported that there was a high school graduation population of 1,945 students with a graduation rate of 79%. The dropout rate of students for SY 2018-2019 was 2.8%, which equates to 283 students.

The problem that this study addresses is that 18% of students will not graduate with their original cohorts. Viano (2018) stated that schools in the U.S. are more likely to offer online credit recovery courses over tradition credit recovery interventions to increase high school graduation. This alternative school offers an accelerated credit recovery program that provides additional opportunities for at-risk students to succeed and earn a high school diploma, which creates opportunities for success. In 2016, the alternative school was transformed from a behavioral intervention school for grade 6 to 12 students with truancy or repeated behavioral offenses to a credit recovery school for grade 9 to 12 students who would not be able to meet

graduation requirements due to age constraints. Typically, the courts handle students with attendance or behavioral issues, and these students can be placed in alternative schools to avoid being confined to a juvenile detention facility.

In a U.S. territory, high school credit recovery programs include summer school, Eskuelan Puengi (night school), Asmuyao, an independent study program, and the alternative school. The alternative school in the U.S. territory offers opportunities for at-risk students and has created a distance learning program, blended courses, and traditional courses. Given the lack of online credit recovery opportunities and understanding perceptions of students enrolled in those programs, there is a gap in research between students who are at risk of not graduating and policy makers' understanding of what challenges are hindering students from being successful. Self-efficacy is an important component for at-risk students to possess and whether they can be successful regardless of academic or behavioral problems (Alt, 2015; Laura & Petre, 2017). Horzum (2015) said that the Internet is significant to the field of education, and this is especially true for an online credit recovery program. Webber (2018) said that high school dropout rates remain an educational and social problem for the community, and the expansion of an alternative school online credit recovery program in a United States territory will give at-risk students a better chance to succeed and enter the workforce or attend college.

Problem Statement

The problem is that students continue to drop out of high school even with online credit recovery opportunities. Limited information in terms of how students perceive and react to online credit recovery programs constitutes a clear gap in academic research on this topic. However, to address this subject, it is essential to clearly identify what it means for a student to

be at risk, because the term can differ depending on the context. Credit recovery students are likely to struggle in other areas outside of school as well, having failed to earn sufficient credits to be eligible for a credit recovery program. At-risk students struggle with reading or concentration or face other barriers to successful learning; therefore, input from sympathetic and understanding counselors is essential to building confidence and improving a skillset. Providing dedicated professionals who can support and guide credit recovery students may be needed to encourage and motivate them in such a way that their outcomes improve. It is important to understand the perceptions of at-risk students in online credit recovery programs. Because a high school diploma is essential for students to succeed and for their future careers, dropout intervention programs have been a priority for education policymakers (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Noble, Pelika, & Coons, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this general qualitative interview study is to examine at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities and the role of self-efficacy for students enrolled in online credit recovery school. Before 2016, the alternative school only served public school students with behavioral and attendance issues. This study expands current research about online learning credit recovery programs. In the study, I add research to fill the gap concerning at-risk students not succeeding in a traditional school and their perceptions of online credit recovery programs. In this study, I provide a better understanding of at-risk students' perceptions of taking online learning courses that could improve their learning experiences. Understanding the perceptions of at-risk students in online credit recovery programs is essential because students' perceptions of learning impact their success. Successful students are those who meet all

the requirements to graduate, which creates better opportunities in the workforce or even the possibility of going to college.

It is essential to learn what perceptions at-risk students have of online credit recovery courses to understand how to address these students' needs. Viano (2018) said that an investigation into the perceived factors of credit recovery courses is needed to better understand how online courses influence students' perceptions and therefore the likelihood they will be successful. The purpose of this research is to explore student perceptions of online credit recovery courses. Viano (2018) identified five main factors affecting learning experiences in online courses: pace of learning, learning style, immediacy of feedback, methods of content delivery, and issues around navigating content. Limited research has been conducted regarding the perceptions of at-risk students participating in online credit recovery courses. According to Santoso et al. (2016), although there is growing interest for online courses in student experiences, there are still too few resources available to measure these experiences. This study qualitatively explores the perceptions of at-risk students and high school administrators in a United States territory. This study explores online components of credit recovery opportunities, and more specifically, the unique learning environment of credit recovery courses.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery courses?

RQ2: What role does efficacy play in at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities?

RQ3: What are school administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery courses?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is centered on two theories: Bandura's social cognitive theory and Dewey's constructivist theory. Bandura (1994) said that self-efficacy is the heart of social cognitive theory and functions as an incentive to improve an individual's performance. Dewey's constructivist theory provided a framework for the topic and encompassed key components of an online learning instructional methods with the use of differentiated instruction.

Bandura's social cognitive theory provided a platform for what types of support systems would effectively assist participants in achieving the requirements to receive a high school diploma. Learning takes place through connecting with other students and the environment. Bandura (1994) said that people's attitudes about what they believe can be accomplished through their performance and that self-efficacy determines how people set goals and how they accomplish them. Additionally, he emphasized how people deal with failure, which indicates that at-risk students demonstrating feelings of inadequacy leads to them dropping out of school. These two theories were selected for this study because constructivist theory provided how the school system plays a role in student success. The first and third research question was designed to answer what types of supports are needed. Social cognitive theory provided the necessary information on how self-belief impacts student achievement or student failure. The second research question was designed to understand what role self-belief plays in a student's educational experience.

Nature of Study

The methodological approach for this study involved a general qualitative interview design intended to reveal perceptions of at-risk students enrolled in online credit recovery courses. The study also involved high school administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery courses. Hagaman and Wutich (2017) suggested using a sample size of 16 or fewer for studies of homogeneous groups. Namey et al. (2016) suggested a median sample size of between 8 and 16 students. The case or unit of analysis for this case study is a single alternative high school that offers online credit recovery courses to at-risk students. The first group of participants are credit recovery students who met the following criteria: (a) junior or senior status (18 years or older), (b) identification as at risk, (c) enrolment in an online credit recovery course at the site school, and (d) regular school attendance (i.e., at least 75% of required days). The second group of participants are high school administrators who met the following criteria: (a) currently serve as a high school administrator for the United States territory alternative school, (b) have at least 2 years of experience as a school administrator for a high school, and (c) are knowledgeable regarding online credit recovery opportunities. Data analysis was conducted using two techniques. First, single cases were analyzed through coding and categorization. Secondly, cross-case analysis was undertaken to identify emerging similarities and inconsistencies to inform critical findings of the study and develop themes.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following conceptual and operational definitions are used:

Credit Recovery: Classes students have previously enrolled in the same course but did not earn course credit due to failing the class (Viano, 2018).

Online Learning: Online learning is defined as learning experienced through the Internet and online computers in a synchronous classroom where students interact with instructors and other students and are not dependent on their physical location to participate in this experience (Singh & Thurman, 2019).

Self-Efficacy: Trust in one's ability to decide upon and carry out actions necessary to produce a given result (Uchida, Michael, & Mori, 2018).

Assumptions

This general qualitative interview study was conducted to review the perceptions of at-risk students regarding the support they receive for online credit recovery opportunities within an alternative school setting. The first assumption was that participants were willing to participate and answer interview questions truthfully and without resistance, mainly because of their thoughts regarding online credit recovery opportunities. The second assumption was that students enrolled in this program were facing or have faced various situations that have contributed to their academic problems.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this general qualitative interview study was determined by research needs and questions, and it is important to acknowledge that this study is specific to what a specific United States territory Department of Education is doing to address credit recovery opportunities for at-risk students. Only students who matched the following criteria participated in this study: (a) junior or senior status (18 years or older), (b) identification as at risk, (c) enrolment in an

online credit recovery course at the site school, and (d) regular school attendance (at least 75% of required days). Additionally, only administrators that matched the following criteria participated in this study: (a) currently serve as a high school administrator for the United States territory department of education, (b) have at least 2 years of experience as a school administrator for a high school, and (c) are knowledgeable about online credit recovery opportunities. However, even though this study was conducted in a United States territory in the West Pacific, it is transferable to other schools that fulfill criteria used for this study.

Limitations

Students enrolled in a program at the credit recovery school were the first set of participants. High school administrators were the second set of participants and they were selected from the school district. One limitation of this study was that there were only nine student participants who were all students enrolled in the credit recovery program. There were five administrator participants who were all current high school administrators in the district. The number of participants may not be enough to represent populations' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities. Another limitation is that I had to conduct all of my interviews online through Zoom, and student access to the Internet was a challenge. It was important that I established trust with each participant to get the most honest interview responses.

Significance

This study contributed to closing the gap identified in the problem statement by describing perceptions of at-risk students regarding online credit recovery opportunity programs. Researching at-risk students' perceptions of an online program at a United States territory school provided research-based data presentable to the school district and Board of Education to prove

the need for program expansion to serve all students requiring credit recovery. This information should support the district as it advances its distant learning programs and online learning policies. Additionally, this study provided significant evidence for policymakers in the United States territory when discussing online learning and the impact of accessibility and self-efficacy had on the at-risk population. The information from this study could also be used for partnerships with trade schools and local universities, which are in the early stages of offering online learning programs. Viano (2018) said that multiple states and school districts have established computer-generated learning schools and online course policies and mandates. U.S. territory policymakers could use this data along with data from research in other states and countries to make well-informed decisions for learners in this territory.

Summary

Understanding at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities can provide educational policymakers and school leaders with necessary information to support students in terms of attaining their high school diploma. Additionally, administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities provide the understanding of administrators who facilitate these programs and their roles in delivering educator training and supports. Technology and online courses are partly provided to at-risk students enrolled in the credit recovery program by the U.S. territory school, so they have opportunities to gain required credits to graduate. In this study, perceptions of students are analyzed to determine what at-risk students need to be more successful in online credit recovery courses in this school.

This chapter provided background information that supports the study as well as the problem and purpose statement, which are aligned with the research questions. Bandura's social

cognitive theory and Dewey's constructivist theory were presented along with information regarding how these theories support this study. The nature of the study section included the methodology selected for this study along with descriptions of selected participants. Definitions of key terms were provided to clarify terms used in this study and the context in which they are used. Assumptions of this study were identified and discussed to inform the reader about possible biases or participant views. The scope and delimitations section of the study explained information about participants and the site from which they were selected. Limitations were outlined to inform the reader of potential issues to consider for this study and some of the possible disadvantages that might hinder a clear understanding. The significance section included information about how this study will contribute to online credit recovery education and lead to positive social change through student achievement. Chapter 2 includes the conceptual framework and literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative interview study is to explore at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities. There is significant literature regarding the subject of at-risk students and their potential for dropping out of school. Additionally, there has been excessive research on credit recovery and the merits of online learning in terms of reducing student dropout rates, but there is less information about how students perceive and react to these forms of learning. Limited information regarding how students perceive and react to online credit recovery programs leads to a clear gap in academic research on this topic. To address the subject, it is essential to clearly identify what it means for a student to be at risk since the term differs depending on context. According to McDermott, Anderson, and Zaff (2018), students who are considered at risk lack social support and school engagement and have family, instability and mobility, and individual and peer problem behaviors. Different life experiences contribute to students deciding to drop out of school, such as struggling with difficulties that limit their potential for success such as language barriers, poor academic skills, financial hardships, and low self-esteem (Mcdermott et al., 2018; Polk, 2016).

In this chapter, I review literature to gain an understanding of existing research and debates relevant to at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities and present that knowledge in the form of a written report. I examined relevant literature to provide a thorough synthesis for this research project. I conducted an extensive review of literature to extract relevant information about social and educational determinants that affect at-risk students. In this study, I used Google's web search to generally locate academic articles,

especially those from sources outside academic journals such as conferences or institutions like the US Department of Education. For academic and scholarly research, I used online databases including ProQuest, Academic Search Complete, and Google Scholar, and EBSCOHost. Search terms used were: *at-risk students*, *self-efficacy*, *Bandura self-efficacy*, *self-efficacy in education*, *Dewey's constructivist*, *constructivism*, *engagement at-risk students*, *online learning at-risk students*, *credit recovery at-risk*, *cultural considerations at-risk*, *identifying at-risk students*, *self-efficacy for at-risk students*, *characteristics at-risk students*, *online credit recovery*, and *online credit recovery guidance.*

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frameworks for this qualitative study were the social cognitive theory and constructivist theory, which incorporate concepts of social and cognitive learning and self-beliefs. The two theories provide a framework that could be applied to contextualize the review of at-risk students' perceptions of credit recovery opportunities. With the advancement of technology, constructivist theory supports schools being innovative, caring, and challenging would increase student success. Social cognitive theory supported the importance of self-belief and self-efficacy and how it impacts a student being academically successful.

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura (1994) said that self-efficacy is of utmost importance to students, especially those who have deep feelings of self-efficacy, because when self-efficacy is improved, more is achieved. Individuals with high self-efficacy believe they can achieve tasks and have a greater

propensity to tackle risky situations and remain motivated to do so. Williams (2016) said persistence and self-beliefs are necessary factors in terms of attaining academic success and every student is an individual who needs to be supported as much as such possible. Self-efficacy is a particularly critical success factor for at-risk students and Bandura (2005) said that the trust of a person‘s individual ability to produce specific levels of performance which influence the events that impact on personal existence. Therefore, students who are believed to be at risk have lower self-efficacy than their peers as well as lower engagement and motivation, which are identifiable factors that can predict success in online credit recovery programs. Bandura (1994) said that students with higher self-efficacy who develop this motivation become more engrossed in tasks, which is a valuable trait for those who have failed before and need to develop engagement in terms of learning to succeed. Bandura said that building self-efficacy not only improves personal achievements but can also act as a barrier to depression and stress.

Without self-efficacy, individuals might blame themselves for low achievement and perpetuate the idea that they are always going to fail; therefore, their motivation to engage with a task decreases (Bandura, 1977). The framework to overcome low self-efficacy involved engaging in activities that present challenges yet can have successful outcomes and motivate students to attempt tasks. However, as Bandura (1994) said, achieving success requires a great deal of reassurance from supporters and encouragement to attempt the task. This is where the role of the educational supporter or counselor can produce positive results.

With Bandura’s social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is a key component of student achievement. Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as trust in one’s ability to decide upon and carry out the actions necessary to produce a given result. Perceived self-efficacy is defined as

people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994). According to Bandura (1994), "self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave" (p. 1). Two critical elements of this self-efficacy are presented. The first is the individual's belief about his or her ability that may align with his or her actual skill in a particular task. The second element is the idea that individuals use their efficacy judgments when referring to the task or outcomes.

Bandura (1986) claimed that individuals may believe specific actions will produce desired results and may also have serious doubts about their ability to perform the necessary steps. According to Bandura (1977), level of self-efficacy determines how much effort will be used, whether coping behavior will be initiated, and length of sustainability in the face of obstacles and other adverse experiences. Bandura (1997) identified four areas that contribute to the formation of self-efficacy: (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) physiological and affective states.

Mastery experiences are the most influential source of efficacy because personal experiences provide evidence of whether the person has what is required to succeed (Bandura, 1997). Mastery experiences refer to how the individual performs specific tasks in the past and the outcomes of each task. There are several factors that determine how individuals perceive prior experiences: (a) preconception of their capabilities, (b) perceived difficulty of the task, (c) amount of effort needed, (d) amount of external support received, (e) circumstances under which they perform, (f) temporal patterns of successes and failures, and (g) the way these enactive experiences are cognitively organized and reconstructed in memory (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura's second source of efficacy-shaping information is vicarious experiences, in which someone else models the skill in question. When the model meets the needs, the efficacy of the observer increases. However, if the model does not perform as desired, the efficacy of the observer decreases. When a person is observed having success, his or her efficacy increases (Srisupawong, Koul, Neanchaleay, Murphy, & Francois, 2018). The failure of role models impacts students' self-efficacy (Srisupawong et al., 2018). Students in disadvantaged neighborhoods may question their self-efficacy due to life circumstances, because they are faced with the challenges of a lack of sufficient employment opportunities and other institutional supports (Merolla, 2017). Life experiences and living conditions impact students' self-efficacy, but the affective state is also an important component for students to overcome barriers (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura's (1997) third source of efficacy-shaping information, affective state, is the level of arousal – either anxiety or excitement – that either adds to or depletes one's efficacy. This source of efficacy deals with individuals' physical and emotional states. When someone is excited about a task, his or her level of efficacy increases. On the other hand, when someone experiences anxiety, his or her level of efficacy decreases. Performance can either increase or decrease depending on the organizations' level of arousal. Individuals interpret their self-efficacy beliefs based on their physical and emotional states such as stress, anxiety, fatigue, and mood (Webb-Williams, 2017). Affective states are very influential on how individuals and organizations respond to the many challenges they encounter (Webb-Williams, 2017).

Bandura (1986) said that social persuasion is someone's ability to convince another to influence student outcomes; this entails feedback from colleagues, community, administration,

conferences, book studies, and other gatherings where educational ideas are discussed regarding teachers influencing students toward higher levels of achievement. Observing someone having success increases the observer's efficacy. Social persuasion is most influential in increasing teachers' perceived collective efficacy when combined with models of success and mastery experiences; this coupling increased a staff's conviction about attaining goals (Webb-Williams, 2017; Won et al., 2017). Expressing encouragement and confidence in a learner's abilities to succeed can increase self-efficacy.

The four efficacy-shaping sources of information provide a means by which personal belief in self-efficacy is developed. Of the four, the most powerful source of efficacy is mastery experience (Bandura, 1997). Individuals who feel they have exhibited past success with a specific task believe they have the ability to successfully perform the task again in the future (Srisupawong et al., 2018). Students who have a stronger sense of efficacy are more open to new ideas and more willing to try new methods to meet their needs than those with a lower sense of efficacy (Webb-Williams, 2017).

The use of Bandura's social cognitive theory is an important starting point for framing the topic at hand. Bandura (1977) said that one's idea of self-efficacy determines the extent to which one believes one can or cannot fulfill a task. Bandura developed his theory based on the idea that if human beings are given tasks that are challenging, they may initially be frightened. However, Bandura (1997) said that by fulfilling these activities, self-efficacy is built and improved through occasional failures that are overcome through determination, which can increase motivation and success no matter the challenge. Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that

exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 2). Bandura (1993) said that self-efficacy is demonstrated in four areas of life and learning, namely "cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes" (p. 117).

At-Risk Students

According to Tillman and Scheurich (2013), the term at risk was derived from "the language of epidemiologists who were studying prevalent diseases within particular communities" (p. 114). Despite this, educational literature has adopted the term at risk to label those students whose educational outcomes are fundamentally inhibited (Lieberman, 2015). For example, at-risk students are defined as those who are at risk of not graduating from high school because they share characteristics with students who have historically failed to graduate high school (Lieberman, 2015). McKee and Caldarella (2016) said that many at-risk students face barriers to graduation that are not necessarily connected with academic ability, although it is a contributory factor.

In much of the literature on the topic, at-risk students are labeled using socioeconomic or other sociological criteria, though scholars have presented a different paradigm to better identify at-risk students without falling into problematic definitions based on external factors. Er (2012) said that attendance and grades are better predictors than demographic characteristics are. Several factors that put a student at risk, namely behavioral issues, learning difficulties, lack of psychological attachment to the school or teachers, and perpetual absence from school (Reed et al., 2015; Scott, 2017). According to Scott (2017), there is considerable research on minority groups struggling academically in school settings. Although more research is needed, there is evidence that African American males often fall into the at-risk category. Scholars have also

highlighted disengagement due to ethnic demographic factors (Scott, 2017). The modern classroom has especially not met the needs of African American male students (Scott, 2017; Williams et al., 2014). Researchers found that this demographic group benefited more from participatory and active learning rather than the traditional constructivist structure applied in the majority of school systems (Holland, 2014; Scott, 2017).

Students at risk of dropping out before completing high school is a worldwide issue (Kattan & Székely, 2015; Reed, Wesel, Ouwehand, & Jolles, 2015; Talbot, 2016). At-risk students share common characteristics (Corrin, Parise, Cerna, Haider, & Somers, 2015; Trussell, Lewis, & Raynor, 2016; Williams, Greenleaf, Albert, & Barnes, 2014). Williams et al. (2014) said that at-risk students face personal difficulties and overcome hardships such as abuse, poverty, and housing and food instability to achieve success. At-risk students generally exhibit delinquent and disruptive behaviors (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). These off-task behaviors contribute to the decreased academic progress of at-risk students when compared to their peers (Reed et al., 2016; Trussel et al., 2016). Kassaee and Rowell (2016) found that at-risk students not purposefully engaged exhibited an increase in negative behaviors.

Despite the controversial aspects of identifying at-risk students, frameworks compatible with Bandura's conceptualization have been investigated. For example, Walker et al. (2005) have identified positive behavior supports (PBS) as a methodology for supporting at-risk students, recognizing that it is "an ongoing approach that can support both effectiveness and sustainability" (p. 203). Stewart et al. (2017) believe that other students may face more specific challenges such as language barriers (if English is not the first language spoken at home), which can negatively impact motivation and perceptions of self-efficacy. According to McGee and Lin

(2017), some students may benefit from placement in alternative education environments with specific support systems that can provide the specific resources that they need, such as supplementary English as a second language (ESL) instruction. McDaniel and Yarbrough (2016) have mentioned that after-school programs that offer mentorship and guidance can be beneficial for at-risk students, because such programs can help form meaningful relationships and improve academic outcomes. Students are provided with multiple interventions to provide the supports necessary to be successful. Positive Behavior Supports (PBS), Positive Behavioral Expectations, Interventions and Supports (PBIS), English as a Second Language (ESL) programs provide accommodations for language barriers, and mentorship programs provide supports to help at-risk students succeed.

Scott (2017) has shared evidence that online learning could be a lifeline for some potentially at-risk students. Scott has noted that the online setting seems to appeal to at-risk students more than traditional learning settings do, contributing to a massive boom in online educational enrollment. Scott has posited that if online learning strategies were adapted to consider the specific needs of African American males identified as at risk, they would be much more likely to achieve success in an online credit recovery program. Similarly, Flynn (2016) has noted that for at-risk students to gain the maximum benefits from these programs, there must be provisions for technical and pastoral support for these students to improve and maintain self-efficacy. While the flexibility of an online course is advantageous for these students, they remain at risk; therefore, there is still a need to identify and support them throughout their online studies. He et al. (2015) have provided a concept for identifying and supporting at-risk online students focusing on the use of metrics and targeted surveys to accurately identify problems and propose

concrete solutions that could identify areas of need and what strategies could be used to overcome challenges.

Barriers to Success for At-Risk Students

Research on the topic of barriers to at-risk students' academic success has been beneficial in conceiving methodologies that can anticipate and resolve problems in the educational process (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Campbell, 2017; Sanders et al., 2018; Schroeder et al., 2016). Ansari and Pianta (2019) have cited absenteeism as a significant contributing factor to a lack of academic achievement and meeting benchmarks. Sanders et al. (2018) have highlighted compulsory absenteeism due to suspension or expulsion as well as voluntary absenteeism. The unfortunate vicious circle in which students from ethnic minorities and poor socio-economic backgrounds and those who are disengaged from school are more likely to drop out or achieve fewer credits than their peers and more likely to be absent from school, making the situation self-perpetuating (Campbell, 2017; Schroeder et al., 2016). Negative behavior can harm school attendance; therefore, students who exhibit negative behavioral patterns need to be brought back into the school family and supported rather than punished, which can increase disengagement (Campbell, 2017; Schroeder et al., 2016). Absenteeism, poor socio-economic backgrounds, disengagement, and negative behaviors characterize at-risk students; therefore, supporting them to achieve better personal and academic success are vital elements in improving their perception of pursuing their educational careers (Campbell, 2017; Schroeder et al., 2016). Barriers that hinder the completion of high school vary for each student and having the appropriate interventions in place could positively overcome those barriers.

Schroeder et al. (2016) have stated that dropping out of school is the last resort for students and should be avoided at all costs, yet many students have reported that they dropped out because they found the work too challenging or could not keep up. Schroeder et al. have mentioned that if through interaction with a counselor or instructor students are led to believe that they can recover and achieve their goals, this can increase self-efficacy and improve outcomes. According to Schroeder et al., the implementation of the response to intervention (RTI) initiative has resulted in better academic grades, suggesting that if a student is nurtured appropriately, engagement with school facilities and staff can improve. Similarly, the graduate coach in an initiative that also improves dropout rates among at-risk students, resulting in more at-risk students successfully completing their studies (Miller, 2016). Nairz-Wirth and Feldmann (2016) concur with the view that dropping out is often attributed to behavioral issues or bad attitudes when in fact a more supportive student–teacher relationship can have a positive impact on retention (Wirth & Feldmann, 2016).

Schroeder et al. (2016) have affirmed that this conclusion is relevant to those undertaking online courses as it suggests that with the correct support, at-risk students are capable of achieving better results. States where these initiatives have been successfully implemented have inspired other states to adopt similar initiatives with similar success, and these findings correlate to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Smith et al. (2019) had reported that the baseline of need is an excellent organizational structure for the online course. Smith et al. (2019) have stated that students need to understand their target and have an achievable goal. Smith et al. (2019) have also mentioned that students found that regular interaction with the instructor was vital to their satisfaction, as was expedient interaction with students when they raised concerns or questions.

Smith et al. (2019) have recommended that facilitators of online courses join together to establish best practices and share suggestions to design and oversee courses that are more attractive to those seeking credit recovery on an online forum. Gunduz et al. (2016) have affirmed that developing best practices is critical to ensure that online provisions meet the needs of students, particularly those who are at risk of abandoning their education altogether. Skordis-Worrall et al. (2015) have identified the prime essential factors in any online learning provision: pace of learning, quick feedback, learning style, content delivery method, and ease of content navigation. By considering these critical factors, facilitators could use their own experience to produce best practice guidelines for online provision content and structure.

Miller (2016) has noted that the high student dropout rate has a detrimental effect on the United States economy, suggesting that it is a matter of institutional interest to assess reasons for dropout and lack of graduation and to identify what can encourage more students to participate in courses to achieve successful graduation. Lack of motivation and self-efficacy is one cause of bad behavior, which then leads to absenteeism, thus putting a child at risk and increasing his or her likelihood of failing to achieve adequate credits (Casillas et al., 2012; Miller, 2016). The advantages of sufficient instructive support for at-risk students embarking on an online credit recovery program are abundant. Tromski-Klinshir and Miura (2017) have mentioned that school counselors need to be an integral part of all credit recovery efforts. Tromski-Klinshir and Miura (2017) believe that this is a key finding of the research they undertook on the subject of credit recovery. Counselor supports in credit recovery plans were an integral component in supporting at-risk students, particularly if they are suffering difficult personal situations such as a disruptive family environment, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, or personal abuse.

Additionally, students who felt ignored or neglected by teaching staff were more likely to cite this as a reason for failure to acquire sufficient credits, so to perpetuate such a situation would be a recipe for further potential failure and must be avoided at all costs. Students who feel they will be guided and nurtured through their online recovery program are more likely to have a positive perception of such a course. Tromski-Klinshir and Miura (2017) have also suggested that school counselors should have access to mental health professionals and social workers and that the team should maintain an open line of communication so that the student can be supported in multiple areas while undertaking the credit recovery program. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model framework indicates that counselors should be on hand to individually support students as their school life progresses if they are at risk or have failed to gain enough credits for other reasons.

Tromski-Klinshir and Miura (2017) have suggested that school counselors should join a leadership team within school settings to have more power to make positive changes in students' lives. Clapper (2015) has also advocated for a discussion forum for teachers and counselors to share experiences in supporting students and working on elements of best practice. Vinovski (2015) has stated that the government has a role in making sure that at-risk students are included in educational policy provision and providing the necessary funding to facilitate the program. Smith (2018) has noted that although it is recommended for student counselors to be more involved in a student's life and guidance, there are often barriers to this development because of students' personal responsibilities such as caring for relatives, commitments at home, outside work, or having a young child. Smith has also stated that it is vital that counselors find ways to reach their students and that teachers understand the challenges students face so that they can

design online study units to facilitate the most comfortable, most accessible online learning platform to achieve success.

Torre Gibney et al. (2017) have also advocated for a personalized structure for each student being the route to effective academic success, and this is even more significant for at-risk students. Much research has been conducted regarding the low levels of success achieved by minority students or those living in poverty (Torre Gibney et al., 2017). Torre Gibney et al. (2017) have stated that the generic school culture, which is constructivist in nature, does not suit all children, and a more caring and holistic approach is more beneficial, particularly to those in the at-risk category. Torre Gibney et al. (2017) believe that a more caring and individual program for students produces better academic success outcomes. For this to occur, teachers need to show students personal attention, take notice of them, and be enthusiastic and encouraging, all of which improves self-efficacy and ultimately motivation to succeed (Torre Gibney et al., 2017). Students report responding positively to teachers who were well organized and focused, provided a safe space for students, listened to every point of view, and tried to include all students.

Pangelinan (2018) has noted that students with learning difficulties also struggled in a constructivist environment and were more likely to feel isolated in a standard school setting, mainly if they felt it was difficult to engage with their peers. A personalized approach lends itself well to students with specific needs (Pangelinan, 2018). If there is a significant counselor or professional adult such students can rely on for support, they are more likely to feel included, able, and motivated to learn. Lewis et al. (2017) have noted that a positive behavioral program to intervene with behavioral issues experienced by those with special needs can be beneficial and

can prevent these students from underachieving during and after school. Pangelinan has noted that students with special needs find it much more difficult to form relationships with their mainstream peers and are therefore less likely to learn through friendship groups or to feel a sense of belonging in the school environment. An online setting where they are not forced into a peer group setting and can work more independently and at their own pace may suit them much better. Pangelinan has also noted that students with special needs who did not have a supportive and involved family environment were more likely to drop out of school, making them at risk of not graduating due to insufficient credits. Such students are prime targets for an online credit recovery program. It is important that they are supported by someone whom they trust and find it easy to communicate with, because this may not be replicated at home or with their peers.

Turner and Albro (2017) have stated the importance of early intervention to encourage children that they can achieve a college education and their goals. Webber (2018) has argued that school social workers are uniquely positioned to support at-risk students in their attempts to gain sufficient credits to facilitate graduation. Students who drop out of school or fail to gain the required credits are often from ethnic minority groups or low-income backgrounds with little family stability (Webber, 2018). Research has found that these groups have a high propensity to fall into crime, substance abuse, and poverty. Therefore, it is essential to give these students more encouragement to succeed and to facilitate this success with all possible resources to give them all the opportunities their peers enjoy. Webber (2018) has stated that at-risk students who would benefit from an online recovery program come from a multitude of different situations.

Intervention by social workers can be significant in offering students support in these difficult situations. Webber (2018) has mentioned that school policy is ineffective in some cases,

because the students do not necessarily understand that being physically present in school is vital to attain credits. Losing academic credits as a result of nonattendance can lead to resentment toward the traditional school system and a reduction in motivation to comply with policies in the future (Webber, 2018). According to Webber (2018), social workers can support families with information on school attendance policies and the potential of not earning academic credits. Even if parents have received information about school policy, language barriers or time constraints can prevent them from accessing the necessary information (Webber, 2018). According to Webber (2018), if a child is struggling in a bilingual home or if English is his or her second language, it can be challenging for the student to know what is expected of him or her in order to attain his or her credit goal.

Additionally, some parents are reluctant to encourage their children to go to school if they can bring money into the home from work rather than attending school, which is a very challenging situation for social workers to overcome (Webber, 2018). Webber believes that social workers are best placed to be the mediator between school and home in order to emphasize the importance of education for the child and long-term earning capacity. Dupere et al. (2015) have stated that when the desire to work is active in the student and this coincides with disengagement from the school system and a perception of school career failure, it can be difficult to pull students back into education. According to Webber, students who are at risk of dropping out are often those who would benefit from intervention by a social worker and could attain sufficient credits if they utilized an online credit recovery service. Students who appear likely to fail in their credit acquisition or look likely to drop out of school are those who need intensive support, and a social worker can be the person to provide this additional resource

(Webber, 2018). Social workers provide intervention services to at-risk students, and they have the ability to positively impact students' self-efficacy, which could ultimately prevent students from dropping out of high school.

School administrators are responsible for what occurs in schools, and teachers are the backbone of any efficient school. Principals must recruit teachers who value the profession and their role, inspire all students, and believe that children can develop academically, emotionally, and socially (Huguet, 2017). Soini, Pietarinen, and Pyhältö (2016) have stated that building teacher capacity and student growth are valuable and significant when there is unity in the school setting. An example of building teacher capacity would include collaborating on a curriculum that addresses the needs of all students, empowering faculty and staff in understanding the professional community, and utilizing a shared leadership mindset. The principal building the capacity of all teachers can encourage teachers to feel successful and improve their willingness to achieve a common goal in the school (Huguet, 2017; Lai, 2015). According to Hutton (2017), a principal's personality and personal beliefs combined with leadership skills determine the principal's influence on teachers.

Practicing data-informed decision-making is an excellent tool for leaders to build capacity, especially given the importance of accountability in schools being focused on school improvement (Sheng, Ma, Cooley, & Burt, 2015). To keep up with educational changes and external factors affecting students, principals benefit from keeping abreast of global situations that might affect their students, such as poverty and immigration. Teachers' abilities to implement pedagogical practices that are inclusive of real-world, relatable situations and with which students can identify demand initiative and support to categorize them as school priorities

and part of the school's vision and require the principal to plan, implement, and monitor the effectiveness of the pedagogical practices (Simovska & Kremer Prøsch, 2016). To be comprehensive in administering a school where changes occur due to diverse settings, the principal must consider how his or her role and responsibilities might also change with these changes (Miller, Scanlan, & Wills, 2014).

Strategies for Reducing Drop-Outs of At-Risk Students

Substantial research has specifically focused on proposing strategies for the success of at-risk students; such research provides essential considerations that are fundamental in a study on credit recovery. Many scholars have noted that several factors could make dropping out less likely, namely early intervention, making the most of instruction, community, school perspectives, and basic core strategies (Kuo, 2015; Reimer & Smink, 2005). According to Boyd (2015), schools that advocated and participated in dropout prevention systems had better graduation numbers. Aguiar et al. (2015) have added that it is vital to identify the students at risk of falling behind early in their educational career to put strategies in place to support them. According to Capone (2017), early intervention could improve graduation outcomes, and online credit recovery programs have proved beneficial for high school students. While several of the aforementioned studies have demonstrated the benefits of online learning in helping at-risk students improve outcomes, some also consider the marginalization of at-risk students who do not have access to technology in the home environment and therefore cannot take advantage of additional support provided in this way (Kuo, 2015; Ritzhaupt, Liu, Dawson, & Barron, 2013). Such studies emphasize that this phenomenon mainly affects students from low-income families

who are often at risk and reduces technological self-efficacy when considering an online credit recovery program.

Another critical aspect of interacting with at-risk students is the question of engagement. Some studies have noted that engagement was a necessary requisite for creating and supporting a motivated student and that this was best achieved through collaborative methods that relied upon a less formal approach to teaching (De Jong, Moolenaar, Nienke, & Phielix, 2016; Joyer, 2017). Conversely, when students perceived that teachers did not care about outcomes or individual students, motivation and success rates fell (Joiner, 2017; Khan & Irshad, 2018). The research suggests that if educators attempt to improve self-efficacy rather than focusing solely on academic outcomes, students will adapt the skills necessary to cope with failure and be resilient, despite perceived weaknesses and failures. In line with Bandura's (1994) concept of self-efficacy, studies focused on engagement and its relationship with student success decrease, because it is a mechanism through which self-efficacy can be attained. Vygotsky (1978) has stated that the importance of teacher–student engagement has long been recognized; for instance, Vygotsky's zone of proximity theories affirm that students benefit significantly from one-on-one interaction with a teacher, which enhances student learning and understanding. However, there are limitations when putting these maxims into practice; for example, Barnett (2016) has noted that funding and prioritization by administrative organizations can often be a barrier to such resources being implemented.

Nonetheless, clear teacher engagement strategies have been found to achieve more successful outcomes for students, particularly those in alternative schools (Joyer, 2017; Younes, 2015). Teacher engagement is especially essential to those who are at risk, and researchers have

asserted that this should be considered when establishing credit recovery courses for these students, who need to be offered access to teacher support from a designated staff member even when learning online. Some scholars have more directly explored the idea of empathy in the teacher–student relationship. In one example, Joyer (2017) mentioned that teachers often have negative perceptions of at-risk students, and this can negatively impact the students. Additionally, students' cultural background must be considered part of the student-centered approach for at-risk students (Klinger & Edwards, 2006). Researchers have agreed that teachers need to exhibit empathy with at-risk students for them to achieve academic motivation and success (Joiner, 2017; Warren, 2015). Kuo (2015) has noted that of the students who drop out of school or fail to gain the required credits to graduate, minority students made up a more significant proportion of those who dropped out, as did those from low-income families. Joiner has stated that teacher–student engagement was not at an optimum level and that this could be improved. Mercadal (2019) has reaffirmed that a focused student approach is more appropriate for at-risk students and improves student motivation and retention. Mercadal (2019) suggested that computer systems can be personalized to consider students' needs and preferences, though this also assumes that the learner is willing to be self-motivated.

A hybrid combination of teacher support and online learning is another methodology suggested by Mercadal (2019) to improve student support and give the student an additional source of contact should difficulties arise. Lee and Lin (2017) have affirmed that a mentor for at-risk students, particularly those in alternative schools, gives students a feeling that they are supported and listened to, and this creates a more conducive learning environment. Since online credit recovery courses can be taken in a traditional school setting, it is feasible to have school

staff available to those engaging in an online credit recovery program (Lee & Lin, 2017). The ASCA (2013) has stated that counselors serve an important role in increasing student success. Counselors provide content to engage students, which helps them gains confidence and control (Lieberman, 2015). Support provided to students by teachers and counselors increases academic awareness, which leads to student success.

Horzum et al. (2014) have reflected that academic readiness is a crucial factor in determining student success. This readiness, defined as a set of skills determining readiness to learn, includes social and emotional stability. The more readiness a student exhibits, the more successful the outcome; this refers to online learning as well as face-to-face learning outcomes. Multiple researchers have affirmed that readiness for online learning includes students' preferences for types of distribution, faith in electronic communication, and learning skills (Horzum, 2014; Warner, Christie, & Choy, 2014). Horzum (2014) has focused these needs on comfort, skill, and faith in learning resources. To exhibit readiness for online learning, students need to be ready to learn, to be self-motivated, and to have the requisite time management skills. Being academically motivated has a direct impact on students' online learning success. Horzum (2014) has cited motivation as the most critical factor for a successful academic outcome. This motivation is related to a student's perceptions of self-efficacy and predicts student enthusiasm about engaging with the academic task ahead. Horzum (2014) has found that academic readiness improves academic motivation; therefore, it is a vital bedrock for a successful outcome for at-risk students. Academic readiness is a vital component for online learning since self-motivation and taking personal responsibility for achieving tasks on time are essential components for achieving success in an online program.

Highly trained and proficient teachers are the most important influences on student achievement (Khan & Irshad, 2018). Multiple researchers have confirmed that effective teachers and the additional preferred support of the parents of the at-risk student resulted in student achievements (Jones, 2017; Waters, Lester, & Cross, 2013). Researchers have affirmed that teacher beliefs and expectations placed on students have a significant effect on the student (Houtte & Demanet, 2016; Jones, 2017). Torre Gibney et al. (2017) have confirmed that this positive student–teacher relationship fosters a better perception of school, more enjoyment from studying, and better motivation to learn. Students who feel isolated, alienated, or powerless are more likely to disengage from school, play truant, and misbehave. Torre Gibney et al. (2017) have noted that a school with a strong ethos of efficacy promotes a feeling of ownership and belonging among students and inspires them to believe they can achieve; this environment works best when it is taken on board by all stakeholders and filters down to all levels of the hierarchy.

Effective school leadership is embodied by relationships and behaviors that focus on teaching and learning, which include support personnel such as instructional coaches and their roles in the school, especially when accountability is such an important part of the school setting (Bellibas & Liu, 2017; Prezyna, Garrison, Lockte, & Gold, 2017). Significant positive relationships among school leadership, student academic supports, and teachers' perspectives on collaboration and responsibility all have an indirect relationship with student achievement (Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016). Huguet (2017) has emphasized that school principals should develop collaborative environments through trust and teacher leadership.

Constructivist Theory

Another useful perspective for this study is Dewey's constructivist theory, particularly in its application within American school systems (Dewey, 1938). In the United States, a majority of schools have adopted a constructivist pedagogy for teaching students in line with Dewey's suggestion that experimental learning improved through an individual's own experiences. Dewey implied that students learn by constructing the requisite information for themselves, building a framework for additional knowledge. Dewey's theory relates to both social and educational experiences and learning. Dewey's theory provides the additional conceptual context in this chapter through suggestions that it is only relevant to focus on the learners and what they construct in their minds rather than on the subject matter being imparted to them. Dewey suggested that knowledge as a single concept is not an isolated body of information but is rather digested by the individual and constructed into information based on how the learner interprets and constructs it. Dewey emphasized that a student's experiences are the foundation for everything in life. With the advancement of technology, Dewey's idea of schools being innovative, caring, and challenging would increase student success.

The underlying concept of constructivism from other theorists is that learners best gain knowledge by experiencing the world and then creating meaning from their encounters (Miller-First & Ballard, 2017). Constructivism consists of five basic tenets of learning: (a) learning is shaped by the meaning learners attribute to their experiences; (b) problem solving is an opportunity for learning; (c) learning occurs as a social activity in which learners actively participate; (d) as learners engage in activities they are also reflecting, assessing, and providing feedback about their learning; and (e) the responsibility for learning rests on the learner.

Constructivist theorists posit that students who perceive their learning as positive have a greater level of engagement and motivation to learn (Alt, 2015).

Another key concept in constructivist theory is that students assign meaning to their experiences and, depending on the quality of those experiences, set personal goals for themselves (Miller-First & Ballard, 2017). Students construct knowledge and interpret their learning experiences based on the quality of their relationships with the peers, teachers, and individuals with whom they interact throughout their educational journey. The value of these relationships may influence their perceptions and subsequently their motivation to complete high school. Constructivists theorize that students who perceive their learning as positive have a greater level of engagement and persistence to graduate (Miller-First & Ballard, 2017).

Credit Recovery

According to Stallings et al. (2016), credit recovery offered students the chance to obtain necessary credits for academic progress in a second-chance scenario for those who have failed in the standard academic setting or school term. Stallings has mentioned that credit recovery students are less likely than other students to be economically disadvantaged, and a more significant proportion entered high school proficient in math and reading. Kuo and Kuo (2015) have stated that the number of distance learning facilities for the public school system has increased. It is noteworthy that 62% of online courses were for credit recovery, yet Powell et al. (2015) have stated that there is no federal definition for credit recovery, indicating that this is an area that needs more research and government involvement.

However, there is evidence that online learning has a higher dropout rate than face-to-face learning (Kuo & Kuo, 2015). Kuo and Kuo (2015) have suggested that course design is not

appropriate or that there is not enough support offered and that improvement needs to occur. Roblyer (2006) and Kuo and Kuo (2015) have suggested that there are four necessary components for a successful and motivational online course, namely “basic assumptions, curriculum and instruction, management, and evaluation and assessment.” Kuo and Kuo (2015) have also noted that the higher the interaction in the course, the better the perception by students and the more successful the outcome. While online courses have gained popularity among many students in recent years, Tornatore (2016) has highlighted that some students, such as those living in remote areas or those confined to their homes, have little option but to learn online.

Noble et al. (2017) have mentioned that the difficulties of assessing the efficacy of such courses across the United States are due to few results being published about the outcomes of student participation in online compared to face-to-face programs. However, Malkus (2018) has noted that graduation rates have improved in the United States across the board, implying that there is a general trend toward improved results overall. Kuo and Kuo (2015) have assumed that the rates of success are high for those engaging in online learning for credit recovery programs. This outcome was achieved through an active support system for students where their individual needs were considered and catered to and where interventions were available for at-risk students (Archambault et al., 2010; Kuo & Kuo, 2015). Tromski-Klingshirn and Miura (2017) have mentioned that while success rates are satisfactory for at-risk students, this is not the case for everyone. Credit recovery is often time-sensitive for students wanting to get back into school and is also goal oriented (i.e., the students want to graduate) (Sapers, 2014; Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017).

Viano (2018) has affirmed that credit recovery students are going over old material rather than learning something new, which is a different scenario from being a student in an online program where the goal is to learn new information and retain it. Viano (2018) has also mentioned the fact that many credit recovery students come from the at-risk group, and this group is often technologically disadvantaged, particularly if they come from a low-income family where there is no computer or internet access. Students enrolling in an online credit recovery program must be given adequate access to a computer to gain the necessary skills that build confidence in studying online. Stevens and Frazell (2016) have noted that students engaged in credit recovery programs when there was a facilitator present to support their learning. According to Viano (2018) and Bowers, Sprott, and Taff (2013), credit recovery students are likely to struggle in other areas as well, having failed to obtain sufficient credits to be eligible for a credit recovery program. These scholars agree that it is probable that students struggle with reading or concentration or face other barriers to successful learning; therefore, input from sympathetic and understanding counselors is essential to building confidence and improving a skillset. For a credit recovery student, the research suggests that providing dedicated professionals who can support and guide them may be the difference they need to encourage and motivate them in such a way that their outcomes improve.

Administrators' Roles Involving Implementing Online Learning Opportunities

School administrators make every effort to pursue protective practices to ensure the safety of students in their care; however, their restricted access can limit the opportunity to learn how to use technology appropriately, and schools have a responsibility to provide such learning (Glasheen, McMahon, Campbell, Rickwood, & Shochet, 2018). In the past, school principals

oversaw the physical aspect of a school; however, they are now relied upon to be curriculum leaders and to manage the school, they are responsible for making the necessary changes to meet the needs of every child and teacher, and they are expected to be understanding of the changes and be willing to make decisions that are in the students' best interests (Huguet, 2017; Hutton, 2017; Soini, Pietarinen, & Pyhältö, 2016). Leadership has considerable influence on the climate, priorities, and personnel within a school, and to keep up with educational changes and external factors affecting students, principals must know their teachers' abilities to carry out best teaching practices that are inclusive of real-world, relatable situations and with which students can identify. Principals demand initiative and support to categorize their school priorities and part of the vision and requires the principal to plan, implement, and monitor the effectiveness of the pedagogical practices (Nadelson et al., 2020; Simovska & Kremer Prøsch, 2016).

Framework for Online Learning

According to Ware (2014), over half of American schools use some form of online teaching in their curricula, and the success and frequency of use of these online courses have offered students a better-designed selection of courses. Ware also found that when students encountered online credit recovery programs, they regarded positively the possibility of taking courses using the online platform and relish the chance to work with teachers with whom they had built a good rapport. Henrie et al. (2015) have confirmed this, adding that it is important for students to have clear, precise instructions as to how to navigate online programs. Negative comments came from students who felt that the online courses would take them away from activities they enjoyed more than learning, such as social interactions with peers, debates, classroom activities, conversations, et cetera (Henrie et al., 2015). However, Ware (2014) has

mentioned that students noted positive outcomes from participating in online learning classes including enjoying the informal setting, the ability to work at one's pace, and the support provided on a more individual basis.

Ware (2014) has found that students who faced retention – that is, repeating a year and moving into a lower grade year than their peers – faced this possibility with a mixture of anger, embarrassment, and shame. Therefore, the opportunity to repeat credits already offered them a motivational impetus to avoid the possibility of retention. Despite some online recovery programs taking place during summer vacation, many students felt it was worth the sacrifice to avoid retention in the following academic year. Those in line for retention enjoyed the chance to work in a non-traditional setting with the support of a professional whom they felt cared about the outcome of their program. Ware's (2014) research also concluded that retention caused students a great deal of distress. Teachers need to understand the importance of integrating technology in school and support the change to help students transition to online learning. Francis (2017) has stated that online courses offers a viable alternative to face-to-face learning to motivate students to perceive online learning as a viable option.

Online Credit Recovery

According to Cullum (2016), the popularity of distance education has increased in recent years, leading to an increased number of online courses. In addition to the literature on credit recovery in education, there is a growing body of research specifically focused on the topic in online educational settings. Buckley (2012) has stated that online credit recovery refers to credit recovery programs that incorporate technology to allow students to earn credit for courses they previously failed. Brown et al. (2019) have stated that computer-based programs can be taken in

isolation, solely online, or as a blended course that involves partial participation in a classroom environment with teaching staff on hand to support students. By making the content more attractive to the student and having a supportive staff member on hand to offer support, these courses can be useful and appealing to students. If self-efficacy of at-risk students is increased, their motivation can be increased (Bandura, 1994; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Lieberman, 2015).

There has been significant growth in the number of online courses and programs offered in higher education during the past decade, and that number is continuing to grow (Collins, Weber, & Zambrano, 2014). Lieberman (2015) has affirmed that online credit recovery programs are one of the fastest-growing forms of education in America, indicating a clear trend. Noble (2017) has noted that "schools have increasingly opted for Online Credit Recovery Programs (OCRPs) over traditional face-to-face courses" (p. 1). Allensworth et al. (2014) have confirmed that more districts are resorting to online courses to assist failing students. Allensworth et al. (2014) have also stated that a shift is being made to improve graduation figures and avoid the negative societal impact of failing students being left to fend for themselves. He et al. (2015) have highlighted that motivation is essential to ensure the completion of online courses. Non-completion of courses is an issue among at-risk students, and teacher supervision and engagement can help to facilitate program completion, which dovetails with Bandura's (1994) idea of high self-efficacy being a prerequisite to increased success if the correct support is available.

Student Perceptions of Online Education

Kauffman (2015) has defined online learning as "courses in which all of the instruction/materials are presented online." Kauffman (2015) has also noted that some students

perceive online learning in a somewhat negative way based on abilities and experiences. Abrams et al. (2015) have stated that "perception is believed to scale the world to reflect one's capabilities for action – objects that are more effortful to obtain are perceived as further away." Kauffman (2015) has described a successful online student as "self-motivated, self-directed, exhibiting an internal locus of control with above-average executive functioning, communication, interaction, and technological skill, yet the courses they undertake need to be designed to counteract the lack of physical presence of a teacher and to be motivational and focused as well as user friendly." Kauffman (2015) has stated that for typically developing and behaving students, the outcomes for online learning seem to be comparable to those of face-to-face instruction. Aside from having an appropriately designed course, time management is another essential component for a student to achieve success while learning online (Kaufmann, 2015). Kauffman (2015) has stated that learning style and feedback from instructors are necessary components for successful outcomes.

According to Kauffman (2015), when studying what personality characteristics contribute to student success, students with high levels of emotional intelligence (EI) fared better, while those who rated lower in EI and were prone to aggression did not have such successful outcomes. Kauffman (2015) has stated that this is a concern for at-risk students, many of whom have emotional damage and barriers that are beyond their control. However, if Bandura's theory is to be adopted, these difficulties are not a definite barrier to success; perhaps the information students have constructed during their school career can be viewed in a more positive light if self-efficacy is improved. More research is needed, there is a gap in the current literature in this specific area. More research is needed on how at-risk students construct their information and

how this construction impacts learning. This specific group of students appears to struggle with self-efficacy, and if a sample of students were given the opportunity to focus on improving self-efficacy, it would be interesting to study the academic success resulting from such intervention.

User Experience of Online Learning

When considering online credit recovery, it is necessary to consider research that provides a framework for user experience in online learning in general since user abilities can be an essential factor in affecting outcomes. Online course design contributes to participants' perceptions, and the learning program must be user-friendly and easy for the student to use for it to be successful (Cullum, 2016; Santoso et al., 2016). Schroeder et al. (2016) have found that students were not necessarily looking for contact with other students when attracted to an online course; however, they did appreciate the connection with teaching staff in a supportive capacity. A positive connection with staff enhanced connectivity with the program (Park et al., 2015; Schroeder, 2016). While academic marks accurately measure success, Schroeder has also concluded that other environmental factors such as social and emotional progression should also be considered when measuring student success. According to Schroeder et al., feelings of isolation could be a negative contributing factor for student success. Similarly, Mayberry, Patrick, and Chittleborough (2009) and Schroeder et al. (2016) have stated that a comfortable, safe, and nurturing environment is essential for students to achieve academic success, but this can be difficult to achieve with an online learning program, and this feeling of belonging is more important to a student than literal connectivity to a technological resource is.

In a research project, Schroeder et al. found that 48% of students engaging in an online course wanted close connectivity with a supervisor, and 52% of students wanted less interaction

with other students. Miller (2016) has confirmed that the student's relationship with an instructor is an essential factor in achieving success and progression and also that early intervention in establishing this relationship is vital to support students as they progress through school; otherwise, students are at risk of disengaging from school and are potential dropout candidates (Campbell, 2017). Early intervention can set learning patterns for life, which encourages students to become more motivated (Rumney et al., 2016). Miller (2016) has cited a graduation coach program to support students that reduced dropout rates, which has positive implications for online study among at-risk students who may benefit from such a program as part of their online learning. In Australia, a successful program was introduced utilizing a student support officer who is allocated to at-risk students to provide a resource for care and support during studies (Victoria State Govt. Education and Training, 2019). This officer is also available for counsel in other areas such as personal issues and career progression (Konovalov et al., 2017).

In addressing reasons for students dropping out, it is important to examine reasons for students failing to attain credits since this can be a reason for dropouts; therefore, to establish what might appeal to an at-risk student, it is useful to examine reasons for disengagement with school. Aside from fostering positive support at school, Schroeder (2016) has also cited support from family as being a contributing factor and belonging to a minority ethnic group or poor socio-economic group as being a negative factor in determining school retention figures. Sahin, Arseven, and Kiliç (2016) have noted that if students had a lack of experience in forming positive relationships at home, this was transferred to the school environment (Schroeder, 2016). Therefore, it is important to identify students who are at risk in this way and support them to be

able to form relationships and achieve academically. This is concurrent with the response to intervention initiative (2013) and the government's 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act.

Research has shown that a motivational factor for an online learning environment is preferred over the traditional school setting and could be a factor for moving away from a traditional school environment, which researchers found "immature" (Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017). This may indicate that some students do not engage with Dewey's constructivist environment as well as others. The same study showed that many who suffer from learning difficulties such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) also struggled with a traditional classroom setting and thus preferred an online forum (Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017). Other adverse effects of a classroom setting were that students found that they came away from classes without the requisite knowledge and needed additional support, perhaps as a result of limited self-efficacy (Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017). Tromski-Klingshirn and Miura (2017) have stated that some of the students who were questioned mentioned that they felt the classroom environment involved too much tutoring, which was a concurrent theme. Oliver and Kellogg (2015) have reported that at-risk students found that they learned more from online courses than face-to-face teaching in a classroom environment.

Student perceptions of online learning have also been associated with conditioning the user experience. For example, Smith (2019) has reinforced that students' perceptions of online courses were proportional to their engagement with instructors and engagement with discipline as well as comfort with technology, which again dovetails with Bandura's suggestions. Kassaee et al. (2016) have confirmed this, affirming that students who did not feel engaged were more likely to exhibit harmful behavioral patterns. In the same study, Kassaee et al. mention that

study, student isolation, frustration, and boredom were all factors that made students disengage with online learning and thus lessened the quality of the student experience. Kassaee et al. have stated that students need to feel engaged with their instructors, who need to be very mindful when structuring courses and support for at-risk students. When an instructor is careful about helping students to reach their full potential, they succeed in many ways and are more likely to continue their education (Smith et al., 2019). Strategies such as using visual aids, answering questions promptly, and using the students' first names were all simple yet effective processes that helped to improve student engagement in an online course and thus improve their user experience (Smith et al., 2019).

Summary

The problem is that there is substantial literature on the subject of at-risk students dropping out of school, and there has been much research on credit recovery and the merits of online learning. However, there is less information on how students perceive and react to these forms of learning, which leaves a clear gap in the academic research on this topic. The purpose of this general qualitative study is to determine at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities. The purpose of Chapter 2 was to provide an exhaustive review of the literature, and in Chapter 3, I present the methodology for this qualitative narrative inquiry research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative interview study is to address the three research questions that seek to identify at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery courses. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research design and rationale for the study, my role as the researcher, and the selected methodology used to gather participants' perceptions. Additionally, this chapter includes information regarding instrumentation, issues of trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

This study used the following three questions to identify at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery courses:

RQ1: What are at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery courses?

RQ2: What role does efficacy play in at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities?

RQ3: What are school administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery courses?

This study identifies possible discrepancies in terms of at-risk students' and school administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities by conducting semi structured interviews with students enrolled in the credit recovery school and high school administrators in the United States territory school. Accessing participants' perspectives about interactions with the world through interviews allows researchers to put different phenomena in context (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Merriam and Grenier (2019) described qualitative research as an inductive process where themes and categories are determined and not as a process where the researcher

deduces and derives a hypothesis or theory based on gathered data. The sample size was chosen based on the principle that additional data does not necessarily mean more information; 14 participants were interviewed. In this study, participants' responses based on their perceptions were recorded and transcribed, and analysis of themes was organized using NVivo.

Clandinin (2016) said narrative research as a methodology and a way of understanding human experience as communicated by the participants. This design is applicable for the current study because the goal is to report each participant's perceptions. Flick (2018) said that qualitative research involves text and people's perspectives, reality, and life experiences as empirical data and this data reveals different perspectives. I analyzed and coded the interviews so I could inform perspectives of at-risk students enrolled in online credit recovery programs.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher in this study was to collect data and understand the perceptions of at-risk students enrolled in an online credit recovery program. As a former educator in the United States territory Department of Education, I was fortunate to serve as a teacher and school administrator. Currently, I do not have a role in the school sites from which participants were selected. According to Ravitch (2016), positionality involves the researcher's role intersecting with identifying who they are in relation to the context and setting of the research. While I identify with the teachers administrators, my role in this research was to plan the research, identify participants, interview them, collect and analyze data, and report results. As a researcher, I communicate personal experiences of my participants to the reader in an objective manner.

Methodology

This section explains instrumentation and collection instruments, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and the data analysis plan. The overall approach was to interview participants to gain an understanding of their perspectives regarding online credit recovery opportunities. Reasoning for the selection of methodology and participant selection follows.

Participant Selection Logic

The participants selected for the study were nine students enrolled in a credit recovery program in a United States territory alternative school that primarily serves at-risk students above the age of 18 as well as five high school administrators that have experience with online credit recovery programs. Kozleski (2017) said that qualitative methods support educational researchers' descriptions of events happening in the learning environment and how certain activities impact participants. Hagaman and Wutich (2017) suggested using a sample size of 16 or fewer for studies of homogeneous groups. Namey et al. (2016) have suggested a median sample size between eight and 16 students. The case or unit of analysis for this case study is a single alternative high school location that offers online credit recovery courses to at-risk students. Participants were credit recovery students who matched the following criteria: (a) participants must be juniors or seniors (18 years or older), (b)identified as at risk according to Lieberman's definition, (c) must be enrolled in an online credit recovery course at the site school, and (d) must attend school regularly (at least 75% of required days). The other participants were high school administrators who matched the following criteria: (a) participants must serve as high school administrators for the United States territory Department of Education,

(b) must have at least 2 years of experience as a school administrator for a high school, and (c) must be knowledgeable about online credit recovery opportunities.

My Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number is 04-06-20-0476966; I contacted the research, planning, and evaluation division at the subject school district to receive study approval from the research review board. Once I received approval, I began the recruitment process at a school that met the criteria for the study. After permission was granted, I contacted potential participants through the school administration and counseling department. I informed participants of the objective of the study and assured them that their privacy was protected and all responses would be anonymous and collected to confirm study results. Participants' names are not identified in the study, and they are referred to as pseudonyms like S1 and S2 or A1 and A2 where it is necessary to label them. Confidentiality was used to disguise participants' identity, and anonymity will ensured that the reader cannot identify participants because data are aggregated and not individually presented. After I received agreement from students to participate in the study, I provided them with a consent form that restates responses are kept confidential and anonymous along with possible dates for virtual interviews and estimated duration of time of interviews.

Currently, I do not have a role in the United States territory district from which I selected the participants. Once I was granted permission from the IRB to conduct research and recruit, I invited participants to take part via written invitations. Once invitations were accepted, I scheduled individual interview meetings with participants and recorded, transcribed, and analyzed themes using NVivo. I shared transcribed interviews with participants for their review and approval.

Instrumentation

The instrument for data collection was a semi-structured and open-ended question interview about the participants' perspectives on online credit recovery program opportunities. The questions addressed what supports are necessary from an online school credit recovery program. I also asked about the supports needed to be successful with online learning and credit recovery to earn a high school diploma. I constructed the interview questions for the purpose of obtaining perspectives from at-risk students enrolled in online credit recovery programs. I asked open-ended questions about their perspectives on online credit recovery programs and their leading to a high school diploma. The questions include follow-up questions to clarify any participant misunderstandings or to elaborate on answers.

Table 1

Research Questions and Interview Question Alignment

RQ1: What are at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities?	Students • How long have you been at the credit recovery school? • What are your thoughts of credit recovery opportunities? • How did you feel when you enter the credit recovery school? • What types of support do you require from your principal and teachers when attending the credit recovery school? • What were you missing from your previous school? • Who provides you with the necessary supports to succeed at the credit recovery school? • What aspects of online credit recovery courses do you believe will help you successfully graduate?

table continues

RQ2: What role does efficacy play in at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities?	Students • How did you feel when you entered the credit recovery school? • How does your belief in yourself impact your completion of online credit recovery courses? • What are the reasons for wanting a high school diploma? • What challenges have you previously faced? • Are you still having challenges? • Do you believe that you can be successful in online credit courses? Why or why not?
RQ3: What are school administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery courses?	Administrators • How long have you been a school administrator and what intrigued you to become one? • Can you tell me about any experiences you have with online credit recovery courses? • Have you ever taught an online course? If so, what was your experience? • What are your thoughts of how a successful credit recovery program looks like? • What are your thoughts of online credit recovery courses? • What types of supports do you think are necessary to provide students with, so they are successful in online credit recovery courses? • What supports do you provide teachers who teach credit recovery students? Why those supports? • What supports do you think are necessary to provide teachers so that they are effective when teaching students that are enrolled in online credit recovery courses?

table continues

	• What supports do you wish you could provide teachers with to increase their success in the classroom?

Interviews

Gaudet and Robert (2019) said that narrative analysis is diverse and focuses on the stories of participants' lives. The questions for the interviews were specifically drafted for this study, their open-ended nature allowed the interviews to be conducted as conversations, and follow-up questions could be asked to clarify meaning or elaborate on responses. There is one set of questions for students, the interviews were conducted with each participant individually, and each participant was assigned an identifying code to differentiate between the participants. Each participant was sent his or her transcribed interview for review, approval, and potential revisions to their answers. After collecting the data, I analyzed and coded it using NVivo. The interview protocol refinement includes the alignment of interview questions with research questions, the creation of a conversation based on inquiry, and having the protocol reviewed by others (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The purpose of this instrument was to have in-depth, structured conversations that aid in the identification of the participants' perceptions and experiences. Participants were given instructions to answer in accordance with their experiences only. In an effort to increase validity, the participants were given the opportunity to review their interview responses and make revisions if necessary. After the results were coded, the responses were categorized based on the number of references to each theme and subtheme.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Ravitch (2016) said that the systematic recording of conversations through interviews has proven to be an important component of ongoing reflection that becomes a part of the research

process. Each participant had an individual online face-to-face interview that was audio recorded. Thirty-minute interviews were conducted depending on any follow-up questions or additional details from the participant. According to Creswell and Creswell (2019), the total number of questions should be between five and ten. I transcribed the interviews with NVivo and provided a copy of the transcription along with the audio recording to the participants for their review and possible additional comments. If the participants wanted to meet again after the online face-to-face interview, I accommodated them accordingly and scheduled another time and date when we could connect virtually. After the participants approved their transcriptions, I coded and ranked their responses according to the references to each theme and subtheme for each of the groups. The research was conducted with students from the credit recovery school. After all the interviews were held, recorded, and transcribed, I contacted each participant via email to thank them for their participation.

Data Analysis Plan

Open-ended question interviews were used for this general qualitative interview study to gather the participants' perspective on online credit recovery program opportunities. All common perspectives and different perspectives were analyzed and coded since both are significant and inform this study of the perspectives of at-risk students enrolled in online credit recovery programs. Next, I read, transcribed, and revised all the interviews with NVivo Transcription. I identified all the similarities, common thoughts and perspectives, general ideas, and themes that I could classify from the participants' word responses. I looked for common terms and themes on my own and used NVivo to analyze the text and look for developing themes and subthemes. Cascio, Lee, Vaudrin, and Freedman (2019) stated that a code is a translation of the data and

gives meaning to information gathered for the purpose of identifying patterns, developing theories, or categorizing, and identifies primary content in a set of data. Seven attributes of a qualitative researcher are organizational skills, perseverance, being good at dealing with ambiguity, flexibility, creativity, rigorous ethics, and an extensive vocabulary (Saldana, 2016).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility, dependability, and transferability are key components of trustworthy qualitative research (Ngozwana, 2018). Rossman and Rallis (2017) said the importance of the research to be trustworthy can be verified "through a process that is meticulous, conscientious, careful, diligent, attentive, scrupulous, exact, precise, accurate, thorough, sensitive, and particular" (p. 51). To attain trustworthiness, Saldana (2016) has suggested conducting in-depth interviews that explore why participants believe something is occurring, and even if some are unaware, others might speculate, and some might provide answers. Saldana (2016) has mentioned the importance of incorporating other studies and theories in comparison with the current study to assess how this predicts and explains human action, which addressed transferability. I achieved dependability by providing the participants with their transcribed interviews for their review and further comments and conducting the same process and procedures throughout the research. Ravitch (2016) has stated that qualitative researchers want data that can be confirmed. I achieved confirmability by maintaining detailed records of procedures and interviews so that the data can be confirmed through recordings. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to review their transcribed interviews and provide feedback, additions, or exclusions.

Ethical Procedures

Ngozwana (2018) has stated that good ethical practices considered in "a qualitative small-scale study were: informed consent, withdrawal from the study, confidentiality and anonymity" (p. 25). The first step for conducting my research was to get approval through the institutional review board. Once approval was received, I contacted the United States territory school district and submitted a request to conduct my research and gain access to participants. Once the United States territory school district gave me permission to access the participants, I sent a formal invitation via email to every individual who met the criteria for this study. After I made contact with the participants required for the study and they either agreed to receive more information on the study or to participate, I sent an informed consent form to participants, all of whom are above the age of 18.

During this process, I ensured that the participants understood that I am unbiased in order to gain their trust. I did not want the participants to think I was interviewing on behalf of their principals, teachers, counselors, or the school district. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable answering questions honestly and without fear that their identity or responses would be shared. Although ethical codes guide qualitative research, communication with the study's participants is what makes research ethical (Glesne, 2016). Since I am no longer an educator in the United States territory school district where I conducted the study, I was not concerned about creating bias or an imbalance of power for the participants. I protected the privacy of each participant to ensure that they felt comfortable sharing their true perspectives. The interviews were conducted online through Skype or Zoom in a private room at the school or a location of the participant's choice, which prevented there being any witnesses from the participants' school.

The research process was transparent, and participants had the opportunity to ask any questions. They were informed of their choice to opt out of the study at any point. If participants chose to opt out of the study or if they did not want their participation to be included in the results, their decision was respected and none of their data was used. All participants completed the interview process and approved audio recording responses and transcriptions. Participants were assured that their transcribed interviews would be secured in a password-protected computer. In addition, their personal information will not be shared with anyone. The participants received detailed information about the study and its objective, and any information they provide will remain secure and inaccessible to anyone but myself. After five years, the data and transcriptions gathered will be destroyed.

Summary

Chapter 3 included the design and rationale for this research. It restated the research questions, defined the central concepts, and detailed the interview process for this study. Once I received IRB approval, I actively sought to interview nine at-risk students enrolled in an online credit recovery program and five administrators from the United States territory district. This chapter also includes my role as a researcher, the methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures I follow. The results of the data collection and analysis are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative interview study was to examine the perceptions of at-risk students and high school administrators regarding online credit recovery opportunities. A qualitative interview study of students and administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities may be helpful for understanding how self-efficacy and personal experiences influence the online credit recovery environment and ultimately impact the development of a successful online credit recovery program. This chapter provides a description of the study findings, including major themes that emerge from interviews.

The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What are at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery courses?

RQ2: What role does efficacy play in at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities?

RQ3: What are school administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery courses?

This chapter includes results of the qualitative study based on findings collected through individual virtual face-to-face interviews with high school students enrolled at the credit recovery school about their perspectives regarding online credit recovery courses. I also conducted individual virtual face-to-face interviews with high school administrators regarding their perceptions of online credit recovery courses. This chapter first presents any conditions that influenced candidates' choice of whether or not to participate. Second, it presents the demographics of participants and characteristics significant to the study. This chapter also

includes the data collection process and data analysis along with trustworthiness and results collected from interviews.

Setting

The participants in this study either worked for or attended school in the school district located in a U.S. territory. This territory is rich in multiple cultures, which creates demographics in schools that include English language learners and economically disadvantaged students. Participants work at or are enrolled as students in a district that educates 29,710 students; all schools participate in free meal programs, and 63% of students are English language learners (The U.S. Territory Department of Education, 2019).

The school selected for this study served at-risk students in need of credit recovery opportunities. The credit recovery school served approximately 130 students, and the dropout rate was 14.7% (U.S. Territory Department of Education, 2019). I did not encounter any personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experiences at the time of data collection or analysis that would influence interpretation of study results. After sending out invitations to students and administrators, I realized that I would probably encounter unwilling participants due to the pandemic that caused the participating district to close all schools and forced administrators to work from home. However, I did not encounter any administrators who were unwilling to participate; the challenge was getting students to respond to email correspondence and agree to participate.

Demographics

This study included five high school administrators and nine at-risk students enrolled at the credit recovery school. The U.S. territory Department of Education has encountered

challenges in terms of understanding at-risk students' perceptions of taking online learning courses that could improve graduation rates of students enrolled in the online credit recovery program. The United States territory Department of Education provides public education services for approximately 30,000 island students. During SY 2018-2019, they reported a high school graduation population of 1,948 students with a graduation rate of 87.3%. The dropout rate of students for SY 2018-2019 was 3.2%, which is equal to 302 students. The remaining 9.5% are students who did not meet the graduation requirements of their original cohorts.

Data Collection

When IRB approval was granted (04-06-20-0476966), I sent invitations to 20 high school administrators and 168 students who were above the age of 18 and enrolled in the credit recovery school within the district. Five high school administrators and nine students responded and agreed to participate in this study. A total of 14 participants were interviewed and contributed to the data pool. The first set of questions was used for administrators and a second set was drafted for students, resulting in a total of two sets of interview questions. I met with each participant on an individual basis, and virtual face-to-face interviews ranged from approximately 15 to 30 minutes. All interviews were captured using only an audio recording device because participants felt more comfortable with this method in comparison with video recordings. After the completion of each interview, audio recordings were transcribed using NVivo and quickly emailed to each participant for his or her review and approval. None of the participants wanted a second interview, but some wanted to add more of their thoughts through email when they replied to approve their interview transcriptions.

The participants demonstrated an understanding of all interview questions; however, there were times when I needed to restate or simplify questions, and I had to ask followup questions. With time differences, it was difficult to schedule interview times and dates because I sent out invitations at the time of the shutdown of schools due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The administrator participants were busy with end-of-the-year school activities, and students were difficult to contact due to Internet access challenges. Nonetheless, I was able to coordinate through email, and all 14 interviews took place within a 1-week period.

I used NVivo after collecting data because the program is simple and useful and provided quick results for transcribing interviews. NVivo was effective in identifying trends and common themes from interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded only, and participants felt comfortable with this method. Throughout the data collection process, there were no unusual events.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved transcribing the audio-recorded interviews with NVivo. Additionally, error corrections were made using Microsoft Word by matching transcriptions with interview audio recordings. Audio recordings and transcriptions did not include participants' names or any identifying information. On the few occasions that participants mentioned the names of schools or people, these were changed in transcriptions. Each participant was given a code such as S1 for students and A1 for administrators. Once all transcriptions were finalized, a new project file was created on NVivo that included categories for participants. Based on responses to interview questions, I established thematic codes by thoroughly reading every line and response until every interview was analyzed through NVivo. Each transcript was categorized

with common themes. NVivo allowed me to see common perceptions of participants as well as how their responses answer this study's research questions.

Student interviews generated several themes that I gathered and used to code all the interviews. The themes throughout all the student participant interviews include several ways that the credit recovery school could provide support. According to students, they need better support systems that provide wi-fi, school materials, and online preparation courses to be effective in online courses. They also need schools to be more flexible, which based on their responses means more online classes and course-by-conference opportunities due to students working or caretaking for family members. Students also wanted continued credit recovery school supports from their principal and teachers, but feel that the school believes in them, and that gives them hope to graduate.

The administrator interviews produced another set of thematic codes including educator training such as integrating technology in the classroom, instructional techniques, and standards-based grading. Administrators think it is necessary to increase accessibility for students, which includes providing Wi-Fi, laptops, instructional materials, and highly trained teachers. Administrators also mentioned district support in the form of more teacher training opportunities, which would enhance their abilities to deliver online credit recovery courses, innovative instructional practices, and professional development. Administrators consider accessibility and teacher training important components for increasing student engagement. They also mentioned that school supports and admin empathy are important for developing school-student relationships. According to the administrators, they must also have high expectations of teachers

and students to have a successful credit recovery program that will lead to highly effective teachers and increased student growth.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of this study were addressed by coding the transcribed interview data and providing the participants with the opportunity to review their interview transcriptions. I established credibility by using multiple sources of data through interviewing not only students about what they needed from online credit recovery opportunities but also high school administrators about their perspectives on the issue and how they support credit recovery opportunities. Additionally, I established credibility by emailing each participant their transcribed interview along with their audio-recorded interview for their review and approval. All student and administrator participants approved their interview transcriptions.

Incorporating and comparing multiple studies and theories with current studies to assess how predictions explain human action showed transferability. I established transferability by detailing the importance of the participants to this research, the methodology used to obtain responses to the research questions, and every aspect of the research. Before each interview, I provided participants with definitions for online credit recovery courses and at-risk student needs so that they would respond appropriately.

I ensured dependability in this research by transcribing recorded interviews. I used NVivo to transcribe interviews and after the program transcribed, I thoroughly read the transcription while listening to the interview audio recordings to ensure that the transcription was accurate. This thesis outlines the comprehensive process of collecting data, transcribing

interviews, coding, and compiling thematic codes to provide a transparent process that can be replicated in another study.

To achieve confirmability, I kept detailed records including the informed consent forms of all participants. All of the audio-recorded and transcribed interviews are stored on a password-secured MacBook Pro to which only I have access. All records are confidential, secure, and only accessible to me. Once the interviews were completed, thematic codes were created for the data analysis, and participant responses that corresponded to the codes were added to the participant statements. NVivo labeled each participant's responses and statements with the code given to that participant so that the complete transcription can be accessed and confirmed. Developing these codes identified the themes that helped answer the three research questions.

Results

The results presented are based on the research questions for this study. Common themes in both of the participant groups were accessibility to technology, flexibility of school programs, teacher and school supports, online courses training, and support systems, though both participant groups' responses produced their own subthemes. RQ1 was intended to discover student perspectives on online credit recovery opportunities. Student responses produced five themes. RQ2 was intended to discover student perspectives on self-efficacy. The results generated four themes in this regard. RQ3 was intended to discover administrator perspectives on online credit recovery opportunities. The administrator responses generated six themes.

RQ1*:* What are at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery courses? This question involved perspectives from students' responses, which produced five themes including support systems, barriers, credit recovery, online courses, and accessibility.

Student Perceptions

Students answered questions about their perspectives on online credit recovery courses. They were asked about the supports they need, the barriers to their success, accessibility issues, credit recovery experiences, and online course experiences. A total of nine students contributed to these responses.

Support systems. With regard to support systems, all nine students listed several support systems that help them, including school, family, teachers, relatives, girlfriend, boyfriend, and many others. The school being supportive was mentioned on several occasions. S1 mentioned that the school has a "family atmosphere that makes me feel better about myself and I worked harder." S4 stated, "I'm really grateful for the school." S2 said, "Counselors, office staff, school aides, and teachers made me feel welcomed and it helps a lot." S8 mentioned that "the principal is important because they support our teachers." Family support was another item mentioned; S3 shared, "My grandparents really motivated me to get school done." S6 stated, "My parents helped with watching my child and my girlfriend pushes me to complete all of my work."

Barriers. Throughout the interview process, students shared several barriers that hindered their ability to be successful in earning a high school diploma. These barriers were identified in four areas: (a) barriers in traditional schools, (b) barriers of students, (c) barriers to online courses, and (d) barriers of credit recovery school. S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S7 all mentioned that they faced multiple challenges in their traditional school setting. S1 stated, "I would get in trouble for being absent and not turning work in on time." S2 said, "When I did go to school, I had too many assignments to make up. Teachers gave me the work, but they had no time to help me understand it." S3 shared:

I didn't care about whatever anyone said about me getting along with the teachers. I didn't really have my full attention at that time, so I felt, like, peer pressure to do other things, and I always procrastinated. Very rarely, I went to school.

S5 said, "I was missing a lot when I went to school – I was missing, I think, 13 or 14 credits." The responses concerning students' barriers to success varied and included "moving house to house," "homelessness," "sick family members," "fighting," "having a child," "having to work," and "making bad choices." S8 shared, "Moving from house to house and having to change schools and then again fights with students." S5 said:

> My grandma, she was very ill, so at the time my family was working, and my mom had to work too. So, I had to stay home, which was not really an excuse, but I chose to help my family out instead of attending school.

S9 said:

> I was taking care of my family members, or I would miss the bus. Our family did not have a car at the time, so I only had one way of going to school unless I walked, but that is way too far.

Barriers to online courses were identified in two areas, namely "lack of internet" and "lack of online learning experience." Eight out of the nine students stated that they did not have adequate internet to complete the assignments even though the school provided laptops and training in how to complete online courses. Two students identified having challenges with online courses. S2 shared, "Some of the online classes are hard, and I don't know to do everything on the computer." S1 stated, "It was really complicated because we had to, we had to watch videos on how to learn. It was like learning on my own."

S3 shared:

> Completing my online courses all depends if I have access to internet. The school was able to lend me a computer, but I could not access internet from home, so I would go to my friends or relatives' house to use their internet.

Barriers to credit recovery school were minimal, but three student participants mentioned several barriers. S2 stated, "The principal is a little hard on us." S4, S5, and S7 all felt that the credit recovery school could offer more if Wi-Fi devices were provided to students who want to take online courses to complete credit requirements more quickly. Another mentioned barrier is how far the credit recovery school is from the students. Although bussing is provided, S7 mentioned, "It is challenging to get to the bus stops, especially because my family cannot drive me there and I have to walk four miles to get to the bus stop."

Accessibility. Accessibility to internet access to complete online courses was referenced as a problem for eight student participants. S1 explained, "If I have everything I need, like internet access and a laptop, and teachers being flexible, I can be successful." S2 stated, "I do not have internet, so I have to do all of my work at school." With the current pandemic that has caused school closures, students like S2 are unable to go to school to complete assignments. S4 shared:

> Since the pandemic happened and shifted everything downhill, but I have been talking to teachers on the phone, and I've been doing some work for them when I can get online, but most of my teachers have not been contacting me. Also, with the school being closed down, I am unable to go online and do assignments. I need to go places where Wi-Fi is available, and I do not have a vehicle to go to places.

S9 said, “The school offered me online classes, but then I lost my phone, and my computer has no Wi-Fi, so I have no access to my classes.” S7 stated, “If they gave us the right technology, there’s really no excuses” and said, “Not all students are fortunate enough to have Wi-Fi or access to technology.” Additionally, S7 stated:

> At the moment, I don’t feel like right now. But like I said, here at home I don’t have that kind of technology. I have a laptop that the school gave me, and the teachers showed me how to do my work online, but I don’t have internet at home.

Credit recovery. Students enrolled in credit recovery shared two major thoughts throughout the interviews: “credit recovery experiences” and “feelings about the credit recovery school.” All nine students have been enrolled at the school between one and three school years, with the average being 1.5 years. S1 mentioned that “teachers were more understanding and the school allowed us to still complete work even if attendance was an issue.” S3 shared, “I felt pretty comfortable, like they really made me feel welcome and they made it known that they were there to help me through anything.” S3 said:

> If it wasn’t for the staff and principals, you know, my fellow students, I wouldn’t, as you know, make me work hard. They always, always helped me from every side, I find, and they pretty much like a family. And so I don’t know what it’s like for us to help each other now.

S4 shared:

> I first entered to actually to see what they had in their school set up; it was not so bad. But it would be better if they had a cafeteria, like a science lab and stuff like that. And yeah, more rooms, to be honest. I felt good knowing that I had a great chance to graduate.

S2 said, “the school treated me and others well; they treated us like adults.” S6 stated, “The smaller class environment helped me focus more.” S5 shared, “I knew that by going here, I would have more opportunities to graduate.” Additionally, S2 stated,

At the credit recovery school, we now have a way to help ourselves enough to finish schoolwork on time during our time at school. This program has been a big help, and they have even provided me with a computer.

Online courses. S6 and S7 both shared that online classes have allowed me to work and provide for my family. S2 stated that online courses “allows us to work if we have to, or it allows us to help our families. As long as we can get online to complete the work, we will be good to go.” S6 said, “The flexibility of doing online courses allows me to do what I need to do for my family.” S8 mentioned that “online classes offer flexibility, and that is what makes the credit recovery school so great.” S8 also stated, “Doing classes online allows me to do what I needed to at home – I help watch my siblings and my grandmother.”

S6 shared:

> The teachers and school staff have been so helpful. I never knew how to complete assignments online, but they showed me how to do it because they know I work. Also, the counselor tells me exactly what I need to do to graduate, and that motivates me to work harder because I know that I can do it.

S3 stated, “if it wasn’t for online courses, I do not think I would finish as much as I have this quickly.” S6 said, “I never knew how to use online courses,” but “my teachers explained to me how to do it” and now “I am only doing online courses.”

S8 shared:

> The teachers have made it their mission to make sure that I am successful, and that was the first thing that they showed me how to do. They took their time and walked me through how to do online classes.

RQ2*:* What role does efficacy play in at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities? This question obtained perspectives from students' responses, which produced four themes including self-belief, personal goals, supports systems, and barriers.

Student Perceptions

Students answered questions about the role efficacy plays in their success in online credit recovery opportunities. They were asked about their self-belief, personal goals, support systems, and barriers. A total of nine students contributed to these responses.

Self-belief. According to all nine students, belief in one's self is an important component to being successful in the credit recovery school. S3 shared that prior to being in the credit recovery school, "I didn't believe in myself as much as I do now." S3 said:

> I believe in my abilities now, but it did take a while for me to push myself in school. The credit recovery school helped me build confidence. You know, I didn't really know how to ask teachers for help when I was struggling, and I didn't have a voice or anything in me. It made it easier for me to believe in myself that I could do it, and I went through a lot to get here.

S3 also mentioned:

> I was always doubting myself and like I said, if it wasn't for how the credit recovery school recognized my weaknesses and how they made it their priority to show me the right way, I would not believe that I could be as successful.

Entering the credit recovery school helped students "straighten up and believe in themselves." S5 explained, "My confidence has gotten better and now I am on track to graduate." S6 stated, "I am more focused now because I really want to graduate, and I believe in myself." Additionally, S6 said, "I want to prove to myself that I can do it and to prove the doubters wrong." S1, S2, and S9 all shared that "the credit recovery school improved their confidence and belief in themselves." S2 stated, "I would rate myself a 10 out of 10" but also said "I was not always so confident, but I have always believed that I could be successful in school." S7 explained, "My belief in myself plays a big role in me being successful." S4 stated, "Since entering the credit recovery school, my confidence is really high."

Personal goals. Every student who was interviewed had the common goal of earning a high school diploma. The interview process also revealed the students' other personal goals. S3 shared, "I want to get my high school diploma so I can join the United States Navy." S5 has a similar goal: "I want to join the United States Air Force after I graduate." S9 stated, "A high school diploma will give me opportunities to go to college, join the military, or get a good job; I just want to have options." S1 said:

> My high school diploma is one thing that I've always wanted, because looking up to my older relatives and elders, like in this community, not everybody has their diploma. I want to have a good life, and a high school diploma is what is needed to get a good job here.

S6 said:

> I just get up every day and do it because, you know, I have a kid now and a high school diploma is something I need to provide for my child and other half. So, yeah, that is

> really my motivation as I'm trying to finish school, of course. I did not always believe in myself, but this school has given me hope. Also, in my culture, education is not as important as having a good job, but what I have learned through the credit recovery program is that a high school diploma is a must if you want to get a good job.

S7 stated, "I cannot drop out or give up because I am a dad now" and "a high school diploma will help me get a good job and give my kid nice things."

Support systems. In reference to RQ2, students were asked what types of support systems impact their self-efficacy or belief in themselves. All but one student referenced family supports as their primary support system. Most student participants indicated that the credit recovery school faculty and staff all contributed to providing support to them. S3 did not indicate family as a support system but stated:

> If it wasn't for the staff and principals, you know, my fellow students, I wouldn't, as you know, make me work hard. They always, always helped me from every side, I find, and they pretty much like a family. And so, I don't know what it's like for us to help each other now.

Barriers. Barriers that impact students' self-efficacy include "feeling unimportant," "peer pressure to do negative actions," "attendance," "moving homes and schools," "ill family members," and "poor behavioral choices in school." S1 explained, "My old school was not going to put enough time to help me, which caused shame." S1 also stated, "I got distracted and fell behind all the time." S2 said, "I was the oldest sibling and had to help take care of my siblings and older family members, which made me miss a lot of school." S2 also stated, "I cannot get help from the teacher when I return because there is so much work to make up." S5 also "cared

for older family member." Additionally, S5 said, "School was not important at that time because I did not have any goals of graduating or joining the Air Force." S3 mentioned that "procrastination and peer pressure caused many problems." S8 explained, "Moving from house to house and to new schools caused me to miss school, and being the new kid, I got into many fights, which led to getting suspended from school." S6 ***said:***

I was at school to be with my friends, and I did not follow the rules. I would get into fights because my friends were fighting. I would go to school intoxicated from alcohol and marijuana because I partied with my friends the night before; I didn't go to class and would skip a lot because I didn't do my assignments. Also, I would get suspended from school often.

RQ3*:* What are school administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery courses? This question involved the perspectives of administrators, which produced six themes including administrator support, educator training, accessibility, student needs, credit recovery, and challenges.

Administrator Perceptions

Five high school administrators were asked questions about their perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities for at-risk students. They were asked about administrator support, educator training, accessibility, student needs, credit recovery, and challenges.

Administrator support. School administrators are the building leaders of their schools and based on the interviews, all five high school administrators felt that "administrator support" was a vital component of successful school programs. In this study, the focus is on credit recovery programs, which includes online courses. Four subthemes were identified through the

interview process: (a) administrator experience, (b) administrator expectations, (c) administrator empathy, and (d) administrator online experience.

The administrators' years of experience ranged from two years to over 22 years, with the average being approximately 11 years. A1 said:

> I never really wanted to become an administrator, but I realized that there is more I can do for a school as an administrator and that in order to help more teachers, I decided that I wanted to become an admin because it really broadens the scope of influence.

A1 also mentioned that "the more teachers you influence, the better experience for students." A2 mentioned the challenges that administrators face with "operational responsibilities" but stated that "it is imperative that we support teachers and provide professional development opportunities." A2 said:

> The right principal asked me to become an administrator, so I guess you could say that I became an administrator because I finally found a leader, I would be willing to work with or work under, rather. So, I was just very picky, because I've had my credentials to become an administrator since 2009 but didn't do it until 2011.

A3 stated that they have been administrator over 15 years and explained:

> A leadership role, I think, in that I wanted to do a little more than just working with the students in my classroom, in the confines of my classroom. I thought I had more to share with colleagues and teachers and other students. I just felt it was a natural progression for me to share what I was doing in my classes with other teachers so that it would affect other students. And that's kind of how it started.

A4 shared that they have been an administrator for 10 years and "needed a new challenge" prior to becoming an administrator, stating, "I got bored of teaching." A4 stated, "As a teacher, I served in several leadership roles, to include accreditation chair and teacher leader." A5 has 22 years of experience and said:

> What pushed me to become an administrator, which I never really planned on doing that. You know, even pursuing this. My route started in an acting capacity and then I happen to like the job that I was doing. I had good peer support and took certification classes together, and then eventually I got certified to be an administrator.

In the five administrator interviews, answers regarding administrator expectations were consistent. They all agreed that "clear and defined expectations," "feedback," and "modeling the expectations" are important components of being a successful administrator. A1 stated, "The expectations for teachers needs to be clear all across the board with all teachers. This is what I'm looking for, and this is how you view success or that framework is very important." A3 stated, "We must clearly define expectations, especially in regard to credit recovery courses." A2 shared, "I wish I could be in the classroom to model my expectations and provide immediate feedback to increase the abilities of my teachers."

Administrator empathy is another subtheme that was identified through the interview process. This study focuses on at-risk students enrolled in credit recovery courses, and they are challenged with their own unique circumstances. A1 said:

> You have to really just be understanding of student situations. Not to the point, though, where they take over and take advantage of you. But at the same time, you have to be aware that not every student learns the same way that traditional learners do.

A5 shared that empathy must be also be extended to teachers:

> I don't ever want my teacher to experience the difficulties of logistics because, you know, you'll see that there are some administrators that will just say "Let's do a new program" and tell the teachers to figure it out. Now, that's the worst, you are in the pits, because you leave the teacher alone. Leave the teacher to what they are good at, teaching, and I will take care of logistics.

Administrator online experience is the last subtheme identified, and because the focus of this research question is administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery courses, it was important that the administrators had some sort of online experience. All five administrators have "online experiences," though some have more than others. A1 shared that their experiences as a tech-savvy teacher help with understanding how online courses work. A1's experience at the credit recovery school has benefited them as an administrator:

> We were building a credit recovery program, and we started online courses by conference classes, so I was in charge of basically all of the social studies classes that were online at the credit recovery school, and I developed all the lessons.

A3 stated, "I don't have experience taking online course," but "we do have credit recovery online courses at the school and at the community college." A2 shared, "Online classes are definitely not for everybody," but "it is a great opportunity for self-starters and self-motivated students." A3 said:

> I never taught an online course, but I did do adjunct work at the university. They have an online platform where students have to submit artifacts, and they had to build an online

> portfolio, so that was part of the way I had access or that I tapped a little bit in an online platform.

A5 shared their experience of piloting online credit recovery social studies classes. A5 stated that "in order for online credit recovery courses to be successful, both teachers and students need to be efficient at online platforms."

Educator training. Teachers are on the frontline of educating students, and effective school administrators ensure that their educators receive the necessary training to be successful in delivering the various programs. A3 said:

> We have a very supportive deputy superintendent of curriculum, and professional development is embedded in our school calendar, so teachers are provided with ongoing professional development that they can use towards improving instructional practices and towards their certification.

A5 said that "consolidated grants provide educator training opportunities." A5 also mentioned that "training teachers on technology grows capacity within the building to deliver online courses." In addition, "teachers that are willing to be trained can earn the opportunity to submit grants for the district to purchase and provide mobile laptop carts for their students." A2 stated that "choosing and training your faculty to be a part of a system that is going help kids will help in the long run, and the students will go the extra mile for these teachers." A4 mentioned that "you have to train teachers to be prepared with teaching multiple ways, because all learners are different." A4 said:

> We have teachers doing Professional Learning Communities so that they talk to each other, but when it comes to online teaching, that's different – you know, it's a different

> world, and you know that is where students are most comfortable. We need to prepare our teachers to be digitally competent.

A1 said:

> I'm thinking of the, you know, average teacher that's going to go into credit recovery and online courses, and they really need first to be solid in their pedagogy and how they teach the content. They need to know what the standards are and expectations of delivering the content. You really need to train teachers with technology.

Accessibility. The role of a school administrator is to provide the teachers and students they serve with the best opportunities to be successful. A2 stated,

> Teachers need to be able to look at the student grades in their regular day classes and or if they're not in school anymore, previous grades, so that they have an overall idea of where the student is lacking so that they can target specific areas instead of just going in and shooting blind.

A3 stated, "Teachers in the district have access to technology at the school, but more needs to be done to address student accessibility." A1 said "a lot of credit recovery students still have no access to technology outside of the school" and "our problem is the access part." A4 stated, "We need to be able to provide our students with online access outside of the school." A4 said:

> Nowadays, kids don't really need a social studies teacher to learn history. They just – they need access to internet, you know. Social studies is a dying breed because the information is readily available to them at the touch of a button.

A3 stated that students need "reliable internet and devices" and that "accessibility to technology should be provided to all students in the district." A3 said:

> Everything we have now is at the touch of a button, and it's at our fingertips, so technology should be bridging the gap between the what we didn't know and what we know now. Technology is the bridge, I think, in education, because really learning is at your fingertips.

Student needs. A3 stated, "Our expectations of traditional school students obviously shown it hasn't been effective for the at-risk population, so we need to meet the needs of students." A3 also explained, "We need to provide intervention and enrichment to have students learn." A5 stated, "model, model, model what you expect students to do; they need to know and be shown how to be successful." A4 agreed about modeling and said:

> I always modeled what I wanted students to do if I wanted them to do something some particular way. I trained them first, and I never assumed that they would know how to do something the way I want them to understand the expectations; they're more likely to be successful.

A1 said:

> They need really good teachers like they need the support within the program to be successful. They also need a counselor just to guide them through what classes to take and what they need, those kinds of support as well as to be taught, as we called it, village circle, where you have like one teacher that kind of follows you throughout the year, like a class sponsor.

A1 said "you have to really just be understanding to students' situations." All administrators agreed that students need to know we care, that teachers care, and that counselors and school staff cares.

Credit recovery. There are many reasons students fall into the at-risk category, and this study shares many different scenarios. Credit recovery is used to give students lacking required graduation credits an opportunity to make them up without having to take the course again another school year. A2 said:

> Online credit or a credit recovery program, just to be able to adapt and not just be so stringent, because that's why they need the credit in the recovery in the first place, is because they are not able to meet those requirements – the stringent requirements set by the board. So, it just needs to be adaptable and flexible.

A5 mentioned that the challenges of a "traditional classroom setting is not for every student, but we can offer another way where they could earn credit." A3 said:

> The flexibility at the credit recovery school is we are able to offer course by conference. We're not necessarily sticking to a board policy that says "face-to-face contact for so many minutes in English or math" or even by courses because they're using their real-life experience and tying that in and making the life experience connect with their classroom learning and experiences as well.

Challenges. A2 said "administrators get caught up doing operational stuff, and that leads to putting being an instructional leader second, third, or fifth." A5 stated that "administrators are challenged with enticing teachers to the necessary training to keep up with the technology needs of online courses." A5 stated that "older teachers are harder to provide technology training that is

understandable." A4 mentioned that "one of the biggest challenges that teachers face is not understanding how to utilize technology in the classroom, and it leaves dead time, which turns into unstructured time and leads to students getting off task." A1 stated that "some teachers still don't know how to deliver online content, even though it will improve their instruction."

Students' challenges come in many forms, and A3 shared that "students that work or have families don't have time to sit in traditional classrooms" because "they have the information, they just need to show they're proficient." A3 stated that "students in the credit recovery program are young adults, and they still face attendance and truancy issues, and with no internet capabilities, they are unable to complete their assignments." A2 shared multiple challenges that students face, such as "getting pregnant," "homelessness," "substance abuse," and "caring for family members." A2 said:

> Purely online credit recovery system may not be successful for all students because they are potentially going to get distracted, and they're not going to be accountable if they don't have somebody in person holding them accountable to do work.

A4 said "students need to be taught online etiquette and safety, because students are not always safe online."

Ranking of Themes

Table 2

Summary of Major Themes Related to RQ1

Theme 1: Support Systems	Theme 2: Barriers	Theme 3: Accessibility	Theme 4: Credit Recovery	Theme 5: Online Courses
Parental support	Attendance and disciplinary issues	No internet or Wi-Fi capabilities	Credit recovery school provided a family atmosphere	Allowed flexibility to work or care for family members
School personnel (principal, teachers, counselors, and peers)	Caretaking of ill family members or working to provide for family	Laptops were provided by the school	More opportunities to earn required credits for high school diploma	Difficult at times, but teacher and counselor support were given
Friends and relatives	Homelessness	Student training provided to those taking online courses	Credit recovery school treated students with respect and like adults	

Table 3.

Summary of Major Themes Related to RQ2

Theme 1: Self-Belief	Theme 2: Personal Goals	Theme 3: Support Systems	Theme 4: Barriers
Students believed in themselves	Joining the military	Family members	Access to Wi-Fi to complete online courses
Care about being successful	Finding a good job to provide for family	The credit recovery school personnel	Family responsibilities (work to provide or caretaker of ill family member or child)

table continues

Since enrolling at the credit recovery school, students' attitudes have improved	College or trade school	Relatives, friends, and peers at the credit recovery school	Transportation to school

Table 4

Summary of Major Themes Related to RQ3

Theme 1: Administrator Supports	Theme 2: Educator Training	Theme 3: Accessibility
Experienced administrators	Build technology and online learning capacity in teachers	Advocate for more technology for students
Clearly and defined expectations	District supports for professional development	Give teachers access to student records so they can plan for each student
Theme 4: Student Needs	Theme 5: Credit Recovery	Theme 6: Challenges
Model expectations for teachers and students	High expectations must be set for credit recovery	Administrator operational responsibilities
Understand and empathize for teachers and students, show that you care	Adapt to student needs	Students' life challenges
Technology is the bridge; students need access to the internet outside of school	Program must be flexible and understanding	Educator abilities to deliver effective lessons

Summary

Chapter 4 included results regarding at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities. Two sets of interviews were conducted with nine credit recovery school students and five high school administrators to gather information about their perspectives on online credit recovery opportunities. Based on the data analysis procedures, there were common

themes in terms of both participant groups such as accessibility to technology, flexibility of school programs, teacher and school supports, online courses training, and support systems, though both participant groups' responses produced their own set of themes. RQ1 had five themes and RQ2 had four themes. RQ3 had six themes. The 14 interviews lasted between approximately 15 and 30 minutes. Chapter 5 includes interpretations of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative interview study was to examine perceptions of at-risk students and high school administrators concerning online credit recovery opportunities. A qualitative interview study of students and administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities may be helpful to understand how self-efficacy and personal experiences influence the online credit recovery environment and ultimately impact the development of a successful online credit recovery program.

The perspectives of 14 participants were collected through individual virtual interviews that took no longer than 30 minutes each. Each of the interviews was recorded and later transcribed with NVivo. Two different sets of interview questions were used for credit recovery school students and high school administrators. The questions focus on experiences and perspectives of each set of participants regarding supports needed, self-beliefs, and supports provided for online credit recovery opportunities. Perspectives of each group of participants were required to identify support needs for online credit recovery opportunities for schools working with at-risk student populations and educators that are responsible for teaching these students. Administrators work with teachers and school staff; their perspectives are important since they are the building leaders and must ensure that their employees deliver effective instruction to at-risk students enrolled in online credit recovery courses. Credit recovery students' perspectives are important because the credit recovery program directly impacts them, and their insights can lead to impactful changes that will improve the success of the program.

Three research questions guided my study. RQ1 was about at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery courses. RQ2 was about the role efficacy plays in at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities. RQ3 was about school administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery courses. After interviews were conducted, student and administrator responses were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo. After an analysis of reference frequency for themes, RQ1 produced five themes, with support systems ranking at the top. RQ2 had four related themes, with self-belief being at the top. RQ3 produced six themes, with administrator support and educator training being the most frequently referenced.

Interpretation of Findings

To gain access to student and administrator perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities, I designed this general qualitative study with three research questions and two sets of interview questions for students and administrators. I interpreted the study's results in the context of constructivist theory (Dewey, 1938) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989). This section is organized by research question, the responses of the participants, and connection to the conceptual framework.

RQ1*:* What are at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery courses? To answer this question, I asked students about their thoughts concerning credit recovery opportunities, the support they need from principal and teachers, who supports them, the supports necessary to succeed at credit recovery school, and how online credit recovery courses can help them graduate. The top five themes were support systems, barriers, accessibility, credit recovery, and online courses.

Support Systems

With regard to support systems, all nine students listed several support systems that help them, including school, family, teachers, relatives, girlfriend, and boyfriend. The school being supportive was mentioned on several occasions. Nairz-Wirth and Feldmann (2016) said that more supportive student-teacher relationships can have a positive impact on retention. All nine student participants expressed how important teachers are and how they felt comfortable and willing to take positive risks to be successful in those classes. Another important support system that was identified throughout interviews was the support of family members. The simple gesture of having a family member or teacher believe in them led students to desire to graduate and care about their futures.

Barriers

Throughout the interview process, students shared several barriers that hindered their abilities to be successful in terms of earning a high school diploma. These barriers were categorized in four areas: (a) barriers in traditional schools, (b) student barriers, (c) barriers to online courses, and (d) barriers in credit recovery school. In the traditional school setting, students faced challenges that hindered their success. They mentioned attendance, caretaking of family members, disciplinary issues, and working to provide for their families. All these barriers led students to fall too far behind and left them too discouraged to continue and meet graduation requirements. The barriers the students faced at the credit recovery school include transportation and lack of technology to complete assignments from home.

Accessibility

Eight of the nine student participants referenced Internet accessibility as a problem. Many credit recovery students come from the at-risk group, which is often technologically disadvantaged, particularly if they come from a low-income family where there is no computer or internet access (Viano, 2018). These eight students all confirmed that although the school provided them laptops, they did not have wi-fi access, which made it nearly impossible to complete assignments from home. Throughout the interview process, it was clear that students needed access to a wi-fi device that could be issued from the credit recovery school.

Credit Recovery

Students enrolled at the credit recovery school shared two common responses throughout the interviews: credit recovery experiences and feelings about the credit recovery school. Stallings et al. (2016) said that credit recovery offers students the chance to obtain necessary credits for academic progress in a second-chance scenario for those who have failed in a standard academic setting. All students enrolled at the credit recovery school had to apply for acceptance, and all nine participants were thankful and driven to succeed because they understood how fortunate they were to have a second chance. Student participants shared feelings of thankfulness, and they appreciated the challenges of the credit recovery school.

Online Courses

A major component of this study was to understand the perceptions of both students and administrators concerning online credit recovery opportunities. A key component of the credit recovery school is offering online courses. Distance education has increased in popularity in recent years, leading to an increased number of online courses (Cullum, 2016). Although

Kauffman (2015) said that some students perceive online learning in a negative way based on their abilities and experiences, participants in this study shared how teachers prepared and supported them throughout online coursework. Kauffman (2015) described a successful online student as "self-motivated, self-directed, exhibiting an internal locus of control with above-average executive functioning, communication, interaction, and technological skill" (p. 2), yet the courses students undertake need to be designed to counteract the lack of physical presence of a teacher and be motivated and focused as well as user friendly.

RQ2*:* What role does efficacy play in at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities? To answer this question, I asked students about the role efficacy plays in online credit recovery opportunities as well as their beliefs in self-efficacy, reasons for wanting a diploma, challenges, and what needs must be met to be successful in online credit courses. The top four themes were self-belief, personal goals, support systems, and barriers.

Self-Beliefs

The students all agreed that believing in themselves is necessary to succeed in school and life after high school. According to all nine students, belief in one's self is an important component of being successful in the credit recovery school. To address this research question, students were asked how important their self-belief is, and all nine students expressed and shared the importance of believing in themselves. Bandura (1994) emphasized that self-efficacy is of the utmost importance to students, especially those who have deep feelings of self-efficacy, because improving self-efficacy leads to greater achievement. Prior to entering the credit recovery school, students did not have a strong belief in themselves, which hindered their ability to be successful. Without self-efficacy, individuals might blame themselves for low achievement and perpetuate

the idea that they are always going to fail; therefore, their motivation to engage with a task decreases (Bandura, 1977). Belief in self was the most referenced response throughout the interview process, and the research states the importance of self-efficacy and its role in student success.

Personal Goals

Every student interviewed had the common goal of earning a high school diploma. The responses differed in terms of what other personal goals they had, especially after completing high school. Self-efficacy of students has proven to be influential in the efforts, engagement, and performance of future college or career paths (Webb-Williams, 2017). Four of the nine students interviewed wanted to join the military after graduating. Three students wanted to continue their education through a trade school, community college, or university. The other two students wanted to find a better job, especially because they needed to provide for their children and families.

Support Systems

In reference to RQ2, students were asked what types of support systems impacted their self-efficacy or belief in themselves. All but one student referenced family supports as their primary support system. All student participants indicated that the credit recovery school faculty and staff all contributed to providing support to them. Family support ranged from financial support, providing shelter and food, or providing childcare while the student worked or attended school. Support systems were a common theme in the responses applicable to RQ1 and RQ2.

Barriers

Barriers that impact students' self-efficacy include feeling unimportant, peer pressure to do negative actions, attendance, moving homes and schools, ill family members, and poor behavioral choices in school. The student participants shared about multiple barriers that hindered them from succeeding in school. Ansari and Pianta (2019) cited absenteeism as a significant contributing factor to a lack of academic achievement and meeting benchmarks. Students mentioned that when they would return to school, they were overwhelmed with makeup assignments, which created negative and hopeless feelings. Three of the student participants mentioned they would get suspended from school for fighting, skipping class, or other reasons. Compulsory absenteeism is common due to suspension or expulsion, as is voluntary absenteeism (Sanders et al., 2018). Homelessness or transitioning from home to home was another common experience that students shared. Absenteeism, poor socio-economic backgrounds, disengagement, and negative behaviors can be present in at-risk students; therefore, supporting them to achieve better personal and academic success are vital elements in improving their perception of pursuing their educational careers (Campbell, 2017; Schroeder et al., 2016). Barriers that hinder the completion of high school vary for each student and having the appropriate interventions in place could positively overcome those barriers. Barriers were a common theme in the responses applicable to RQ1 and RQ2.

RQ3*:* What are school administrators' perceptions of online credit recovery courses? To answer this question, I asked administrators about their thoughts regarding credit recovery opportunities, the support they provide their teachers and students, who supports credit recovery school, thoughts about credit recovery school, and support for online credit recovery courses.

The top six themes appearing in the administrators' responses were administrator support, educator training, accessibility, student needs, credit recovery, and challenges.

Administrator Support

School administrators are the building leaders of their schools and based on the interviews, all five high school administrators felt that administrator support was a vital component of successful school programs. In this study, the focus is on credit recovery programs, which include online courses. Four subthemes were identified through the interviewing process: (a) administrator experience, (b) administrator expectations, (c) administrator empathy, and (d) administrator online experience. Leadership has considerable influence on the climate, priorities, and personnel within a school. In order to keep up with educational changes and external factors affecting students, principals need to know their teachers' abilities to carry out best teaching practices. Practices that are inclusive of real-world, relatable situations and with which students can identify demands initiative and support to categorize these practices as school priorities and part of the vision and requires the principal to plan, implement, and monitor the effectiveness of the pedagogical practices (Nadelson et al., 2020; Simovska & Kremer Prøsch, 2016). Three of the administrator participants stressed the importance of believing in teachers and being willing to accept that they will fail or make mistakes. However, the participants stated that as a leader, being present and showing unlimited and unconditional support goes a long way in having teachers follow you toward making positive instructional changes.

Educator Training

Teachers are on the frontline of educating students, and effective school administrators ensure that their educators receive the necessary training to be successful in delivering the various programs. Educator training was a common theme throughout the interview process, and one administrator emphasized that teachers are the backbone to great schools and we need to provide them with professional development in increase building capacity. By providing professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators ensure that teachers will be efficient and productive. Efficient teachers who create content that is more attractive to the student and who can offer the necessary supports can make courses useful and appealing to students. Training educators requires district supports, and all five administrators understand the value of training and do not hesitate to ask for the necessary supports such as substitute teachers or trained professional development coaches. According to the administrators, professional development impacts best practices in instruction.

Accessibility

The role of a school administrator is to provide the teachers and students they serve with the best opportunities to be successful. School administrators make every effort to pursue protective practices to ensure the safety of students in their care; however, their restricted access can limit the opportunity to learn how to use technology appropriately, and schools have a responsibility to provide such learning (Glasheen, McMahon, Campbell, Rickwood, & Shochet; 2018). Administrators need to ensure that students have a safe school, efficient and caring teachers and counselors, technology, and internet. All five administrators mentioned each area, but wi-fi was the most commonly referenced. Online course design contributes to the perceptions

of participants, and the learning program must be user-friendly for the student to be successful (Cullum, 2016; Santoso et al., 2016). All administrators indicated that students need to be given access to Wi-Fi devices because without Wi-Fi, the school-issued laptops are useless since the student does not have access to information. Accessibility was a common theme relating to RQ1 and RQ3.

Student Needs

A5 mentioned that successful teachers have the ability to teach excellent content and create positive student-teacher relationships that build students' confidence. If self-efficacy of at-risk students is increased, their motivation can be increased (Bandura, 1994; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Lieberman, 2015). When a person is observed having success, it increases that person's efficacy (Srisupawong, Koul, Neanchaleay, Murphy, & Francois, 2018). Miller (2016) said that a student's relationship with an instructor is an essential factor in achieving success and progression and also that early intervention in establishing this relationship is vital to support students as they progress through school; otherwise, students can be at risk of disengaging from school and being potential candidates for dropout later on (Campbell, 2017). In their responses, the administrators shared that students need care and support beyond the educator-student level. According to A1, A3, and A4, students enrolled in the credit recovery school require a higher level of care compared to a student that is successful in a traditional school setting. Additionally, students need to be given access to the digital world, and A3 stated that "technology is the bridge for credit recovery students."

Credit Recovery

There are many reasons students fall into the at-risk category, and this study shares many different scenarios. Credit recovery is used to give students lacking required graduation credits an opportunity to make them up without having to take the courses again in another school year. For a credit recovery student, the research suggests that providing dedicated professionals who can support and guide them may be the difference they need to encourage and motivate them in such a way that their outcomes improve (Viano, 2018). The administrators stressed that credit recovery initiatives need be school-driven and district-supported. Students who fall behind by failing classes was a common theme mentioned by all administrator participants, and more needs to be done to improve the issue. Credit recovery was a common theme in relation to RQ1 and RQ3.

Challenges

In the past, school principals used to oversee the physical aspect of a school; however, they are now relied upon to be curriculum leaders as well as manage the school. They are responsible for making the necessary changes to meet the needs of every child and teacher; additionally, they are expected to be understanding of the challenges and be willing to make decisions that are in the students' best interests (Huguet, 2017; Hutton, 2017; Soini, Pietarinen, & Pyhältö, 2016). Based on the responses from the participants, the challenges that administrators now face are the challenges of providing professional development to all teachers due to substitute teacher shortages. Another challenge is the overwhelming number of students that are in need of credit recovery opportunities. Finally, the administrators stated that if they are

to offer online credit recovery courses, students need to be given access to Wi-Fi, which requires financial obligations that are decided at the district level.

Limitations of the Study

In the U.S. territory school district, high school administrators from seven campuses and all students 18 years or older and enrolled in the credit recovery school were invited to participate. One of the limitations of this study is that family supports was a highly ranked theme for eight of the nine students. The findings from this research could be lacking an important perspective that family member participants could provide towards understand at-risk students requiring credit recovery opportunities. In future studies, researchers might add family member participants.

Researcher bias was a second limitation in this study, because I was the only person emailing interview invitations, scheduling and carrying out interviews, analyzing and transcribing data, and categorizing the results. Although I had no preconceived notions about what the results would be, I ensured that the data was categorized consistently for every interview transcript and that key words and themes were treated similarly for every participant.

In this study, a third limitation concern is that while participants understood that their identity would not be revealed and that the study would not include any participant identifiers, the administrator participants felt nervous about revealing anything that could be referred back to their superintendent. They were assured that the purpose of the study was not to uncover any negative practices at their current school or to discuss their district specifically. They were also reminded that they could opt out of the interview at any time, as the informed consent form states. All participants felt comfortable enough to discuss and share their experiences and

perspectives. I assume that all 14 participants answered truthfully and willingly, sharing their true perspectives.

Recommendations

The first recommendation to future researchers based on the results of the current study is that the participant sample size be increased and that other administrators who work with at-risk students in need of credit recovery courses, along with teachers, counselors, and district leadership, be included. This would broaden the perspectives included and would provide the researcher with other narratives from those who work with and provide support to the at-risk student population. The second recommendation is that future research be done in more than one school district in other United States territories. It is not recommended to add any other variables since the purpose of the study is to understand the perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities. This would allow the results to be generalized to a larger population. The third recommendation is that future research study the correlation of the perspectives of family members of students enrolled in credit recovery programs. The student participants all shared that family support was a key component in their support systems. Understanding the perceptions of family members would determine whether family support increases high school graduation rates of students enrolled in credit recovery courses.

Implications

The results of this study contribute to the literature and address the knowledge gap regarding the perspectives of students and administrators who use online credit recovery opportunities. This study can lead to positive social change by identifying what support at-risk students enrolled in credit recovery programs want from their school. Additionally, this study

could lead to social change by identifying how principals can support their students, teachers, and school staff with the resources provided by the district to improve teaching strategies, social and emotional training, and administrator training, which could improve student success.

First, at the individual level, to promote an atmosphere of trust and support, students shared that they want the school and their families to believe in them. They want to be treated with respect and dignity, and they want everyone to trust that they are doing what is required of them to graduate. They also want to be honest with their teachers if they are having difficulties without fear of judgment. Some students suggested that they want to be treated fairly and to be held accountable for their actions. Second, at the organizational level, credit recovery programs and technology learning initiatives could be addressed, and professional development could be provided to all school personnel designing online curriculum to address specific academic and student needs. All participants suggested that students receive Wi-Fi devices that could meet student needs to complete online assignments from home in order to graduate. Administrators also mentioned that they do not know how to provide adequate online training to their older teachers who work with credit recovery students. Finally, at the societal level, if district and school personnel including teachers, counselors, and administrators know how to address online credit recovery opportunities to improve high school completion rates for at-risk students, students will succeed in graduating. High dropout rates and students not graduating has a detrimental effect on the economy (Miller, 2016). Therefore, the community benefits by improving credit recovery opportunities and increasing graduation rates. It is important that school districts and school leaders be able to identify academic gaps in students as well as specific training needs and what types of instructional supports of teachers and staff, including

counselors and school aids. Interventions to answer students' needs, whether academic or emotional, will benefit the community and society.

The conceptual framework for this study is centered on two theories: Bandura's social cognitive theory and Dewey's constructivist theory. Bandura (1994) has theorized that a person's belief in themselves improves individual performance. Dewey's constructivist theory was chosen because it provides a framework for the topic of differentiated instruction. The constructivist theory encompasses the key components of an online learning instructional method with the use of differentiated instruction. With the advancement of technology, Dewey's idea of schools being innovative, caring, and challenging would increase student success. Another key concept in constructivist theory is that students assign meaning to their experiences and, depending on the quality of those experiences, set personal goals for themselves (Miller-First & Ballard, 2017). Students construct knowledge and interpret their learning experiences based on the quality of their relationships with the peers, teachers, and individuals they interact with throughout their educational journey. The value of these relationships may influence their perceptions and subsequently their motivation to complete high school. Constructivists theorize that students who perceive their learning as positive have a greater level of engagement and persistence to graduate (Miller-First & Ballard, 2017). Self-efficacy is a particularly critical factor for at-risk students' success, and Bandura (2005) expanded on the trust of a person in their individual ability to produce specific levels of performance which influence the events that impact on personal existence.

Conclusion

Students enrolled at the credit recovery school understood and accepted the many challenges they have faced in life, but regardless of their situation, they deserve an adequate education. In this study, it was clear that the student participants were disadvantaged. It was significant to hear the perspectives of students enrolled in credit recovery courses as well as high school administrators' experiences with online credit recovery opportunities. At-risk students enrolled in credit recovery courses need a flexible education that allows them to earn credits in a variety of ways outside of the traditional model, such as online courses or courses by conference. Flexibility in school helped students recognize they can play a role in creating their future, and it allowed them to earn the same high school diploma as every other student. Students enrolled in the credit recovery program need to know that they are resilient and that no matter what challenges they face, they can be successful.

Administrators have the potential to help students and teachers be successful regardless of their situation. Administrators help students by ensuring that teachers are productive and efficient. Providing professional development opportunities empowers teachers and builds capacity within the school. Caring for and supporting teachers while setting high expectations leads to a positive learning environment, which in turn leads to students successfully graduating. I recommend that school leaders should use the results of this study to guide their planning and school practices at the beginning of the school year and monitor any changes that are implemented and revise areas of difficulties throughout the school year. Addressing student needs as a team and providing adequate training will promote and create positive changes that are sustainable.

The study's findings are focused on at-risk students enrolled in credit recovery courses, but it also focused on administrators' perceptions of credit recovery opportunities. Administrators can support teachers through professional development, including education regarding online teaching strategies and educating at-risk students with multiple challenges. By supporting teachers, administrators purposefully give their students efficient and knowledgeable teachers who will positively impact them. Understanding both perspectives can guide school and district-level initiatives and provide students with better opportunities to succeed and overcome any disadvantages they may have. It is important to understand the perceptions of at-risk students in online credit recovery programs, because a high school diploma is an essential component for students to succeed in their community and for their future careers, which is why dropout intervention programs have been a priority for education policymakers.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participants

Hello There,

I hope all is well with you, I am currently conducting a qualitative research study on at-risk students' perceptions of online credit recovery opportunities. I would like to invite you to be a participant in this study and take part in a one-on-one interview. The interview will take no longer than thirty minutes of your time. We can meet via online at a time that is convenient for you and at a place where you feel safe. Your identity and confidentiality will be strictly protected. If you would like to learn more before making a decision, I will provide you an Informed Consent statement via e-mail.

I am truly thankful for your consideration to participate in my study. Please contact me by phone at 011-973-3710-7355 or by e-mail angelo.barcinas@waldenu.edu if you have any questions.

Si Yu'os Må'åse',

Angelo M. Barcinas

Appendix B: Letter of Permission to Institution

Date: 03 March 2020
Research, Planning, and Evaluation Division, Guam Department of Education
RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Håfa Adai Dr. Natividad:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution. I am currently enrolled in the Ph.D. in Education: Leadership, Policy, and Change program at Walden University and I am in the process of writing my Dissertation. The study is entitled At-Risk Students' Perceptions of Online Credit Recovery Opportunities.

I hope that this district will allow me to recruit ten students that meet the criteria that are enrolled in the credit recovery school and five high school administrators. Interested participants who volunteer will be given a consent form to be signed by them and returned to me at the beginning of the recruitment process.

If approval is granted, the participants will take part in one-on-one online interviews in a private and safe setting such as a private room at a library or place identified by the participant. These would be conducted at a time convenient for the participants and they would not interfere with their work schedule.

Please find sample interview questions enclosed. The interview process should take no longer than thirty to sixty minutes. The interview results will be transcribed, and participants will be provided with a copy of their transcribed interviews for their approval before their responses are coded and analyzed. These results will remain confidential and anonymous and there will be no identifiers included in any of the responses. Should this study be published, only coded results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by the school district, the schools or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me via telephone at 011-973-3710-7355, or at my email address: angelo.barcinas@waldenu.edu.

If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form to me at your convenience. Alternatively, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study at your institution.

Si Yu'os Må'åse',

Angelo M. Barcinas