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Critical Retention Issues Related to Social Skills in Ghanaian Universities

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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MBA, Strayer University, 2015

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The specific problem addressed through this study is the need for more research examining the potential of poor social skills to influence low retention levels in Ghanaian universities. Reasons for low student retention in Ghanaian universities, including students with inadequate social skills to complete their degrees, were explored in this qualitative study. The first research question asked about the lived experiences of university students in Ghana as they relate to the extent of social development skills in higher education, and the second question asked about the lived experiences of university students in Ghana surrounding decisions to leave or stay in schools. Tinto's student integration theory was used to frame the study. The needed social skills of Ghanaian university students were described through Zoom interviews with 16 participants. The social skills included communication, empathy, confidence, teamwork, critical thinking, and agile thinking. Most students demonstrated commitment to completing their degrees and recognized the significance of social skills in their future professions. However, financial difficulties, a yearning to explore other countries or study overseas, and inadequate guidance were some factors that prompt students to drop out. The significance of the study for positive social change is that degree completion may help students from Ghana compete for jobs in Ghana and beyond. Learning institutions can utilize the results of this study to establish mentorship programs that promote social interaction among students, leading to improved social skills and higher student retention rates in universities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In most universities, globally and locally in Ghana, student retention is one of the fundamental factors influencing higher institutions' short- and long-term sustainability (Arhin & Laryea, 2020). As per Brubacher and Silinda (2019), student retention could be personally or institutionally significant, given its influence on the effectiveness of student experience. Many higher learning institutions in Ghana have focused on student retention as it directly influences workforce and human capital development. Most stakeholders, both in the government and education sector, strongly believe that student retention is critical to the human capital development required to address socioeconomic challenges in Ghana (Edjah et al., 2019). Concerning its significance, Brubacher and Silinda attributed higher retention and graduation rates among students to improved higher learning institutions' positive image. On the contrary, Arhin and Laryea (2020) cautioned that although a high student withdrawal rate could negatively influence an institution's image in the short and long term, it has far-reaching implications for the prospects of students' career-wise. Given the decrease in student retention in learning institutions across Ghana, stakeholders in higher education are grappling with exploring various ways of addressing the problem (Edjah et al., 2019).

Learning institutions in Ghana have, in the recent past, revamped their courses and transitioned into online classes with the anticipation of attracting and retaining more students in different programs. The transition improved students' motivation to continue learning despite their busy schedules (Brubacher & Silinda, 2019). Even though virtual education reforms have continued to be implemented in Ghana, so do the students'

concerns and their retention growth. Previous researchers such as Wijayanama et al. (2020) have established a direct link between program completion and student retention in various institutions across Ghana. Although preliminary studies have provided initial evidence linking students' engagement to social life on campus, these studies have failed to investigate the influence of social skills and campus social integration on student retention in Ghana's higher learning institutions (Wijayanama et al., 2020). Most previous studies have overemphasized student retention strategies but have failed to provide insights into how social skills among students on campus influence their retention (Arhin & Laryea, 2020). Researchers such as Wijayanama et al. have majorly researched factors influencing and motivating course completion. However, the researchers did not focus on the aspect of campus social integration and the influence of students' social skills on their retention.

Most of the studies conducted so far have capitalized on providing distinct characteristics of the student retention phenomenon, with limited focus on researching how students' social skills could influence their retention in higher education. Given the limited research on social skills and student retention in higher education, students' success in local universities in Ghana has become a challenge to both students and universities. Therefore, it is important to address the current gap in the literature by investigating how campus social integration in social skill competencies influences student retention in Ghanaian universities. The lack of research on how social integration on campus influence student retention prompted the need to conduct this study.

Background

Student retention in higher education has become an emerging issue in the recent literature. Student retention has become so important that the success of learning institutions is dependent on it (Sultana, 2019). Learning institutions have implemented various strategies to improve student retention (Arhin et al., 2017). Despite the academic improvements and reforms in Ghana since 2010, student retention remains relatively low. For instance, statistics indicate that student retention in Ghana could be less than 5% (Sritharan, 2020). Low student retention has become an issue of concern to many stakeholders, given its potentially negative effects on students and learning institutions (McLeod, 2019).

Previous researchers have investigated student retention from different perspectives. As an example, Arhin and Laryea (2020) investigated risk and success factors for student retention. The researchers established that student retention was influenced by campus climate, academic success, and quality of instruction on campus. McLeod (2019) reported comparable results, whose findings also revealed a direct link between academic success and students' performance. Although Sultana (2019) established that students' success could directly influence retention, researchers such as Sritharan (2020) have conflicted their findings by asserting that academic success is only one of the factors that could influence low retention and may individually affect student retention. Given the complex nature of student retention, Mohammed et al. (2018) continued to explore the risk factors for low student retention. Synthesizing these studies, it is evident that academic success plays a crucial role in student retention. However, the

relationship between academic success and retention may not be straightforward and may be influenced by various additional factors. Campus climate, quality of instruction, and other individual elements also contribute to student retention rates. The issue of student retention is multifaceted, and understanding the interplay of these diverse factors is essential for developing effective strategies to improve retention rates.

The researcher chose to research the influence of socioeconomic status on students' success and retention. Researchers such as McLeod (2019) have established that socioeconomic status, combined with other demographic aspects, could influence students' decision to drop out. As per their findings, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to drop out of college, given the inability to pay for their college fees and other academic needs successfully (McLeod, 2019). Mohammed et al. (2018) also revealed socioeconomic status as a fundamental risk factor influencing student retention, with students from low-income backgrounds being unable to remain on campuses until graduation. The results indicated that student retention in higher education, particularly in developing countries such as Ghana, could be influenced by socioeconomic backgrounds (Mohammed et al., 2018).

Another key area the researchers have investigated concerning risk factors for low student retention is the campus environment. Previous researchers have investigated the influence of campus environment on students' engagement, academic motivation, and retention intentions (Edjah et al., 2019; Mohammed et al., 2018). The findings revealed a direct link between social integration on campus and the student's willingness to persist in their courses. Based on the findings, Arhin and Laryea (2020) concluded that promoting

social integration on campus where students feel part of the environment, collaborate with peers in the faculty and improve their overall campus experience through positive relations with others improved their retention intentions. However, Edjah et al. (2019) found that low student retention was linked to a lack of campus social integration. As per the findings, researchers reported that most of the students interviewed attributed social integration on campus as one of the factors influencing their engagement and motivation. McLeod reported additional results in their qualitative study on the influence of campus integration on students' engagement. The researchers found that students' engagement was directly influenced by social integration on campus, where they could socially interact with others and create relationships conducive to learning. However, McLeod also found that students who feel that their campus learning environment lacks social integration were more likely to feel disengaged, thereby losing academic motivation.

Although several studies have investigated the influence of social integration on campus on students' engagement, none have focused on exploring how social integration on campus influences student retention in Ghana (Arhin & Laryea, 2020). Edjah et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study on factors influencing student retention in Ghana and recommended further research on how social integration on campus influences student retention. Additional calls for further literature were made by Sritharan (2020), who underscored the need for further research to investigate how social skills, emotional intelligence, and communication competencies on campus influence their retention decision. Given the literature gap, there is a need to investigate how campus integration influences student retention in Ghana. In this study, I investigated this problem and add to

the current literature new information on how social integration on campus influences student retention in Ghana, where limited research currently exists.

Problem Statement

I investigated the low retention of undergraduate and graduate students in Ghanaian universities and how that may be impacted by poor social integration on campuses. Despite significant reforms, many improvements are needed in the Ghanaian education system to improve employment, research, and publication opportunities (Arhin & Laryea, 2020). Although researchers have investigated this issue, the topic has not been explored in this way; there is a lack of research on the relationship between cultural experiences and student dropout (Edjah et al., 2019; Sritharan, 2020). There is no understanding of what societal characteristics may influence the problem (Teichler, 2017). The ability to express oneself and to be able to persuade interlocutors derives from the cultural characteristics of the environment. The culture of the community contributes to or deters students from developing social skills. Cultural background may not be conducive to developing critical thinking, confidence, and emotional intelligence (McLeod, 2019; Wijayanama et al., 2020). The specific research problem addressed through this study is that there is a lack of research examining how students' social integration on campus influence retention levels in Ghanaian universities (Wijayanama et al., 2020). Arhin and Laryea (2020) called for additional research to explore social integration's influence on campus student retention intentions.

Additionally, McLeod (2019) recommended further research on how social skills among students on campus influence their retention on campus until graduation. I

addressed this gap in the literature by exploring how higher education students in Ghanaian universities describe the influence of campus social integration on their retention intentions. The study may provide valuable information on promoting social skills and competencies among students to promote their campus social integration and high retention.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how higher education students in Ghanaian universities describe the influence of campus social integration on their retention intentions. The low retention of students in higher education in Ghanaian universities is problematic and calls for more research on mitigating the phenomenon. This study addressed how social integration on campus influence student retention intentions.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of university students in Ghana as they relate to the extent of social development skills in higher education?

RQ2: What are the lived experiences of university students in Ghana surrounding decisions to leave or stay in schools?

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's (1993) student integration theory was used in this study. Student integration theory has been widely used in retention theory. According to Tinto, three fundamental reasons or conditions must be met to realize or promote students' persistence until graduation. The first condition is the need for students to access

retention programs designed to support them rather than the institutions themselves. The second condition is that retention programs should not only focus on a certain student population, such as those from low-income backgrounds, but also the entire student population. The third condition relates to the retention program, whereby a successful retention program should provide students with the ability to be socially and academically integrated.

Tinto (1993) identified several factors contributing to social and academic integration as key predictors of student retention. The factors include family background, skills and abilities, prior schooling experience, extracurricular activities, peer group interactions, academic performance, and staff/faculty interactions. Tinto hypothesized that if the above factors are coordinated, they would lead to social integration among students and positively influence students' minimum departure decision. In terms of social integration on campus, Tinto believed that informal social integration includes students' interactions with peers, while formal social integrations include students' participation in extracurricular activities. High social integration on campus could increase students' persistence and retention. Social integration indicates compatibility between learning institutions, social systems, and individual students. Student's social skills and interactions influence academic integration on campus. Therefore, the theory of student integration will be used in this study to discuss how students' social skills influence their retention on campus and integration decisions.

Nature of the Study

For this study, I used a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative

methodology refers to a research process or practice of investigating a research

phenomenon using non-statistical data (Law et al., 1998). Qualitative researchers often

focus on investigating a phenomenon through participants' experiences, perceptions, and

attitudes in their natural settings (Patton, 2014). The fundamental characteristic of

qualitative methodology is to allow researchers to provide accurate and systematic

descriptions of a phenomenon where limited research currently exists through thick

descriptions (Erickson, 1985). Thick and rich descriptions are the fundamental strengths

of qualitative studies, given that the researcher provides a detailed description of the

research in terms of methodology, settings, population characteristics, data analysis, data

collection, and other relevant background information that can be used to improve the

understanding of the studied phenomenon (Erickson, 1985). In so doing, qualitative

researchers seek to accurately portray the studied phenomenon from participants as they

experienced it naturalistically. In addition, qualitative researchers seek to investigate a

phenomenon by establishing participants' experiences and the meanings participants

attach to their unique experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). One of the characteristics

of qualitative research methodology is the existence of multiple meanings whereby

knowledge is socially constructed when individuals interact with the environment.

Given the above literature, qualitative research methodology was the best

approach for this study for several reasons. First, as already stated, qualitative research

methodology is used to study a phenomenon from a naturalistic perspective (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2015). Likewise, a qualitative research methodology aligned with my research because I sought to explore how social integration on campus influences student retention in higher learning institutions in Ghana, which became the natural setting of the study. Additionally, qualitative research methodology was selected because I sought to provide accurate and systematic descriptions of how social integration on campus influences student retention using thick descriptions to provide new knowledge in literature where limited understanding currently exists. Additionally, I selected a qualitative methodology has been selected because I did not intend to collect quantifiable data. Instead, I used participants' descriptions to understand better how social integration on campus influence integration; such data cannot be quantifiable.

The primary source of data for this study was virtual interviews via Zoom. Patton (2014) recommended the use of interviews for qualitative studies given the ability to allow researchers to collect in-depth data on the phenomenon. Sixteen participants were recruited through a purposive sampling technique, which was recommended by Dworkin (2012) as an adequate sample size for gathering in-depth data about the study phenomenon. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Throughout the interviews, participants' identities were concealed using coded pseudonyms. Data analysis was conducted using MAXQDA for coding and theme alignment. Throughout the study, data integrity was protected by storing information on a personal computer using a unique password. All hard copies will be stored in a secure cabinet at the my home for a period of 5 years, upon which it will be destroyed.

Definition of Terms

Social Integration: Social integration is the process during which newcomers or minorities are incorporated into the social structure of the host society (Tinto, 1993).

Social Skills: Social skills are the skills people use to communicate and interact with each other, both verbally and nonverbally, through gestures, body language and our personal appearance (Tinto, 1993).

Student Retention: Student retention refers to the percentage of students who are still attending their courses once they are enrolled (Tinto, 1993).

Assumptions

In research, assumptions refer to what researchers consider true yet unprovable. In this study, there were several assumptions that the researcher holds to be true (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Researchers must declare their assumptions to provide future researchers with the information required to promote replicability and transferability to other studies. The following assumptions are related to the study.

I assumed that participants were honest with their responses. Trustworthiness of research participants is key to the credibility of qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative studies, participants are volunteers, and researchers have limited control over the responses provided. Self-reported data could be deceptive, thereby violating the credibility of the study outcomes (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). To account for this limitation, all participants were reminded of their obligation to the study by exemplifying honesty.

I assumed that the selected theoretical framework provided a theoretical lens and foundations to investigate the current research phenomenon. In particular, I assumed that Tinto's students' integration model provided the theoretical lens to understand how social integration on campus can influence student retention. This assumption is important because theories play an important role in discussing research findings.

I also assumed that the selected research methodology will effectively investigate the influence of social integration on campus on student retention. A qualitative research methodology has been selected for this study. My goal in using a qualitative research methodology was that participants would an opportunity to provide accurate descriptions of their views, perceptions, and experiences regarding the influence of social integration on students' academic retention.

Limitations

Limitations are the flaws or potential drawbacks in a study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Although limitations do not necessarily compromise the validity of the study findings, it is technically important for researchers to highlight them (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Most importantly, researchers must provide limitations in their methods, data collection source, and sample for future replicability of the findings.

The first limitation of this study relates to the small sample size. Qualitative studies usually use a small sample size given the breadth of descriptive data researchers collect and analyze. Additionally, qualitative researchers use data saturation to arrive at an adequate sample size which could provide a sample that is not representative of the

entire population. A limited sample size could therefore affect the transferability of the study findings to other settings.

My novice skills could also be another limitation of the study. As the first formal study was conducted, I have limited statistical skills. Such limitations could affect the design and analysis of the findings. I trained in data analysis and consulted data experts to mitigate this limitation.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the study's scope or boundaries set by the researcher to limit the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). In this study, the current research will be delimited by the topic of study. In particular, I only focused on the influence of social integration on student retention in Ghana. The study will also be delimited to the selected location. In particular, the study will be conducted in Accra, Ghana, and only participants drawn from selected universities will participate. The selected qualitative descriptive research methodology and Tinto's integration model limited the study.

Significance

Significance to Theory and Practice

Although several studies have investigated factors influencing student retention, few studies have investigated the influence of social integration on campus on student retention (Arhin & Laryea, 2020). Several researchers have called for additional research to be conducted in this area. As such, the current study should add new information to the current literature about the influence of social integration on campus on student retention. Such findings could be used in teaching practice to implement appropriate social

programs designed to improve integration on campus among students and create a friendly environment for learning. Creating a friendly environment is likely to improve academic motivation and improve retention (Arhin & Laryea, 2020).

The study findings could also validate the theoretical framework used. In particular, the study will be based on Tinto's integration model. According to Tinto (1993), students' integration on campus is influenced by family background, skills and abilities, prior schooling experience, academic performance, staff/faculty interactions, and peer group interactions. Tinto highlighted that a social system comprising formal and informal interactions with peers and faculty on campus could influence academic and social integration among students. Students with high social and academic integration are likely less motivated to make departure decisions. In addition, Tinto underscored that students' skills and abilities could influence their social integration on campus. The study outcomes are expected to validate Tinto's student integration theory by validating that students' skills and abilities influence their total campus integration with peers and faculty could either promote retention intentions or students' departure intentions.

Significance to Positive Social Change

The study results may provide insight into gaps in social skills development and may aid administrators and other stakeholders in future to increase the retention and graduation rates. Education has long been a force for social change by addressing inequities in society (Arhin & Laryea, 2020). Supporting their successful attainment of a terminal degree allows improvements to make the education system applicable to employment (Edjah et al., 2019). In addition, the information garnered from the study

may also aid in increasing funding to improve graduation rates and research activities (Teferra, 2017). Degree completion will also help students from Ghana compete for jobs on an international basis and aid in solving some of the challenges humans are facing globally.

Summary

The specific problem I addressed through this study was the lack of research examining the potential of poor skills to influence low retention levels in Ghanaian universities (see Wijayanama, 2020). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how higher education students in Ghanaian universities describe the influence of campus social integration on their retention intentions. The chapter was used to identify the literature gap and the need for the gap to be addressed. In the background section, information on juvenile delinquency, historical and current data was provided. Other sections discussed include the theoretical framework, nature of the study, research questions, purpose of the study, problem statement, and definition of key terms, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature on student retention. The theoretical framework will also be discussed in detail and how it informs different themes supporting the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

According to a review of the literature, there is a lack of research on the relationship between cultural experiences and student dropout. The specific research problem I addressed through this study is there is a lack of research examining the potential of poor social skills to influence low retention levels in Ghanaian universities (see Wijayanama et al., 2020). There is no understanding of what societal characteristics may influence the problem (Teichler, 2017). The ability to express oneself and to be able to persuade interlocutors derives from the cultural characteristics of the environment. The culture of the community contributes to or deters students from developing social skills (Wijayanama et al., 2020). Cultural background may not be conducive to developing critical thinking, confidence, and emotional intelligence (Sritharan, 2020). Despite significant reforms, many improvements are needed in the Ghanaian education system to improve employment, research and publication opportunities (Sritharan, 2020). Although researchers have investigated the issue itself, there is no understanding of what societal characteristics may influence the problem (Teichler, 2017). The ability to express oneself and to be able to persuade interlocutors derives from the cultural characteristics of the environment. The culture of the community contributes to or deters students from developing social skills. Cultural background may not be conducive to developing critical thinking, confidence, and emotional intelligence.

The study is expected to fill a gap in understanding the conceptual processes of the interrelationship of multiple dropout factors. In particular, research is expected to investigate learning strategies that will contribute to the development of social skills

despite the incomplete effectiveness of the educational processes of universities in Ghana (see Wijayanama et al., 2020). Among these, problem-oriented strategies are essential and are recommended for detailed analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a synthesis of the literature on student retention and effects in higher education.

Literature Search Strategy

The databases I searched were Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, JSTOR, Sage Journals, and PsycNet. Search terms included *distance learning, tutoring, retention, student support, student retention, online higher education, student attrition, student success, dropout, academic persistence, student motivation, human rights; students; students with disabilities; sustainable development goals; accessibility; inclusive education; university; Ghana, social development,* and *education*. The articles searched were published from 2018-2022.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's (1993) theory of student integration has been widely used to study student retention factors and strategies to improve student persistence until graduation. Tinto's theory of student integration is based on the premise that to persist, students need integration into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) educational systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems. Tinto hypothesized that the degree to which students are integrated into the academic and social life of the university, and the degree to which a student is committed to her or his studies and the university's goals, are predictive of student persistence. Tinto identified six factors that influence student intention to persist

in their institutions: academic difficulties, difficulties adjusting to college, uncertain goal, external and/or weak commitment levels, family factors, lack of social integration, and academic integration.

According to Tinto (1993), students who find it difficult to integrate into the institution's environment academically and socially are less likely to persist until graduation. The primary reasons most students find it difficult to retain include school policy, administration, faculty, the curriculum, financial obligations, and social and emotional issues (Tinto, 1993). Tinto hypothesized that students need to integrate into the institution academically and socially to guarantee their retention and persistence to graduation. Tinto's work has been widely used to inform institutional strategies to improve student retention and graduation rates (Reynolds & Cruise, 2020). By addressing the factors that hinder academic and social integration, colleges and universities can create a more supportive environment that enhances students' likelihood of persisting until graduation.

Tinto (1993) maintained that students join colleges unprepared for unfamiliar college experiences. To be successful, Tinto noted the need to ensure all students are aware of their academic expectations and university requirements. Learning institutions needs to provide opportunities for all students to achieve academic and social support. Students need to develop a strong sense of identity and belongingness in their interactions with faculty and peers. Students should be actively involved in their learning. Tinto suggested that these factors must be present for students to persist through their involvement on campus and in the classroom. According to Tinto's model, when students

experience difficulties in integrating either academically or socially, they are more likely to consider leaving the institution before completing their studies (Edjah et al., 2019; Sritharan, 2020). Challenges with academic performance, lack of support from faculty or advisors, feeling alienated or isolated socially, and encountering financial or personal issues can all contribute to a student's decision to drop out.

Tinto (1993) also argued that students join college with traits (achievement level in high school, socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity) that directly influence their commitment to the institution. The above factors, including gender, race, and other demographic factors, directly influence how students feel socially and academically integrated into learning institutions. A higher sense of academic and social integration would translate into student retention. According to Tinto, student integration occurs inside and outside the classroom and is crucial for students' retention decisions. Students who are involved or integrated socially, regardless of their race, social, economic status, precollege experience, or family factors, are more likely to retain until graduation. I used Tinto's student integration model to guide my study's research questions and methodology with an objective of understanding influencing minority students' retention at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and strategies that can be used to improve their retention, thus improving learning opportunities. The research questions were based on theoretical constructs such as social integration, academic integration, and preschool experiences such as racism to suggest strategies for improving the retention of minority students in PWIs. By incorporating theoretical constructs such as social integration, academic integration, and experiences of racism during preschool, you can gain valuable

insights into the factors influencing the retention of minority students in these institutions.

Literature Review

Factors Influencing Low Student Retention

Although schools, with their teachers and other academic stakeholders, have developed strategies such as improved support services and extracurricular activities to promote student retention, some scholars have identified several factors that hinder or promote increased student dropout rates (Edjah et al., 2019). Some of the factors promoting low retention of students will be discussed in this section. These include difficulties adjusting to campus life, family conflicts, limited faculty support, lack of financial challenges and low retention of students, socioeconomic status, poor academic performance, and lack of social integration on campus (Sritharan, 2020).

Difficulties Adjusting to Campus Life and Student Retention

Students joining higher institutions of learning, whether in their or a different state, are required to adjust and acclimate to the new environment, something that only a few students can comfortably achieve. Investigating how difficulties adapting to new academic environments affected student attrition, Pratt et al. (2019) investigated the retention of first-generation college students. The findings revealed that first-generation students lacked confidence and self-belief in their academic achievements due to difficulties adjusting to the new environment and increased attrition rates. Gurbuz et al. (2019) investigated the environmental challenges that autistic children faced that impacted their performance and persistence.

With data from 158 nonautistic and 26 autistic students, Gurbuz et al. (2019) reported that limited awareness of autism, complex social life, and limited support increased the attrition rates of students with autism. Comparing student retention internationally and locally, Haverila et al. (2020) reported that besides limited mentoring and academic advisors, difficulties adapting to the new academic environment challenged many students. While investigating how students adjusted to the new university environment, Malau-Aduli et al. (2021) found that for matured students, international students, and female students experienced difficulties adjusting to the campus environment resulting in those who could not keep up leaving before completing their undergraduate programs.

The studies highlight that student retention is influenced by various factors, ranging from the availability of appropriate support services, social dynamics, and cultural adaptation to the academic environment (Haverila et al., 2020; Malau-Aduli et al., 2021). These factors can have a significant impact on both neurotypical and neurodiverse students. Implementing strategies to address these challenges, such as improving support systems, enhancing mentoring programs, and creating inclusive environments, can potentially improve overall student retention rates and promote a more conducive learning experience for all students.

Family Conflicts and Student Retention

Parents play a crucial role in ensuring that their children persist and continue with undergraduate education until graduation (Hackworth et al., 2018). Lara and Saracostti (2019) investigated the significance of parental involvement in improving their children's

academic achievement using a sample of 498 parents of children in 16 elementary schools. Upon analysis of the collected data, Lara and Saracostti revealed that parental involvement enhanced their children's classroom behavior and reduced student absenteeism rates. In previous research, Hackworth et al. (2018) studied the parental influence on students' enrollment, involvement, and retention in schools. Analyzing data from 1,447 community-based parenting programs in Victoria, Australia, Hackworth et al. established that parents increased students' retention, attendance, and engagement while in school. Further analysis of the data collected from 218 parents, Dadds et al. (2018) found that parents' active engagement with their children in online learning mitigated cases of attrition, ensuring complete course attendance of their children. These studies highlight the crucial role that parents play in their children's education. Active parental involvement is associated with improved academic achievement, positive classroom behavior, reduced absenteeism, increased retention, and enhanced engagement in both traditional and online learning settings. Encouraging and supporting parental involvement can be a valuable strategy to promote student success and persistence in their academic journey.

Besides facilitating active students' engagement and performance, evidence suggests that family conflicts may increase student attrition and dropout. To illustrate, van Rhijn et al. (2019) investigated the impacts of school-family conflicts on the retention of students using two samples, with the first group of samples consisting of 339 parents and a sample containing 317 parents. Analyzing and describing the findings of the two samples, van Rhijn et al. (2019) found that conflicts within families that often

include schools, and their teachers' decreased students' intentions and willingness to attend school. Distinct from van Rhijn et al.'s approach, McDermott et al. (2018) investigated reasons for increased school dropout among students of different levels of learning using a mixed sample of 1,047 young adults. McDermott et al. found instability in families due to conflicts resulted in students experiencing psychological trauma affecting their academic outcomes. Despite the negatives of family conflicts, some students have used the challenges as a motivation for academic success.

Gao et al. (2021) extended the findings of McDermott et al. (2018) by studying the relationship between family support and e-learning using a sample of 1,317 students. The findings revealed that low-income family support due to constant bickering discouraged students from attending for fear of being stigmatized, and they tended to isolate themselves, increasing their risk of developing depression. However, adequate family support provided students with a conducive environment that facilitated their learning and retention. Lessky and Unger (2022) examined how working long hours for student parents increased their intention to stop learning. Working long hours interfered with the student's reading timetable, resulting in reduced academic performance and increased intentions to quit. Moreover, the lack of government initiatives to support low-income families increased the number of students dropping out of school. Agreeing with Goa et al. (2021), Cassanova et al. (2022) also investigated how parents improved their children's academic success and persistence during Covid-19. In summary, these studies shed light on the importance of family support, the impact of working conditions on student parents, and the significance of government initiatives in supporting low-income

families and students during their education. Positive family support and a conducive learning environment are crucial for students' academic success and retention. On the other hand, inadequate support, demanding work schedules, and the lack of government assistance can increase the risk of dropping out and negatively affect students' learning outcomes.

Limited Faculty Support

Academic faculties have a special role in mitigating increased student attrition by organizing out-of-class extracurricular activities and championing mentorship and advising services for students (Pownall et al., 2021). Limited faculty support increases the number of students quitting halfway (Crosling, 2018; Roberts, 2018; Pownall et al., 2021). Systematically reviewing eight published studies, Crosling (2018) reported that students depended on members of their respective faculties for mentorship and career advising. The lack of or a small number of counselors and mentors in institutions of higher learning has resulted in students pursuing courses they are not passionate about and are less likely to complete an undergraduate degree with a negative attitude. However, by availing of counseling services and mentoring from faculty members, the students are motivated to persist until graduation (Pownall et al., 2021). Roberts (2018) established that limited support from the faculty resulted in most of the students in Australian universities not performing well academically hence their increased intentions to quit studying altogether. As illustrated, limited faculty support discourages students continued learning as they lack the support necessary for their academic exploits.

Mentoring and advising services are also important areas that faculty members can use to mitigate student attrition by increasing enrollment and retention. However, research has revealed that limited or lack of mentoring and advising programs increase students' intentions to stop learning. Lane (2018) investigated the application of peer mentoring in increasing the retention of first-year students and found that poorly developed mentorship and advising programs coupled with the unwillingness of faculty members to help students increased their intentions to quit. Similar conclusions were reported by Andersen and West (2020), who investigated the role of mentoring in higher education, especially among undergraduate students. In a systematic analysis of 34 published articles, Andersen and West found that peer mentoring improved academic outcomes, but the unwillingness of faculty members to play such roles decreased the number of students finishing undergraduate programs. Comparably, Khan et al. (2021) collected data from 737 faculty members to investigate factors affecting the retention of students. Besides limited financial benefits and family conflicts, limited support from the faculty increased student attrition rates. In summary, mentoring and advising services are crucial in mitigating student attrition and promoting enrollment and retention. However, research has shown that the limited or lack of these programs can lead to increased intentions among students to discontinue their education,

Lack of Financial Challenges and Low Retention of Students

In addition to the difficulties adjusting to the new learning environment, Pratt et al. (2019) also established that limited financial security increased students' attrition rates. As per the findings of Pratt et al. , many students from low-income communities and

families could not support the expensive campus life, hence their voluntary decision to quit. Limited financial aid from the federal government and the institution was insufficient for economically disadvantaged students hence their decision to quit learning altogether. El Zein et al. (2019), while investigating the prevalence of food insecurity among college students in the United States, asserted that food-sufficient students were likely to continue learning compared to food insecurity students who opted for work rather than suffer. Similarly, Hege et al. (2020) also found that food insecure students opted for employment rather than full-time learning. Poor work-academic balance among college students resulted in poor academic performance and subsequent attrition. Therefore, availing of financial aid to financially insecure students enhanced their willingness to continue studying and persist until graduation.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status such as income and level of education may significantly result in low student retention in schools. For instance, Reynolds and Cruise (2020) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the factors influencing student retention among undergraduate students in the United States. The findings indicated that students from low socioeconomic status, such as low income received limited financial support from their families for requisite academic resources, resulting in low performance, thereby leading to school dropout (Reynolds & Cruise, 2020). In summary, socioeconomic status, including factors like income and level of education, can have a significant impact on student retention in schools. Reynolds and Cruise (2020) conducted a quantitative study focusing on undergraduate students in the United States. The

research revealed that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly those with low income, often received limited financial support from their families for necessary academic resources. This lack of financial support led to lower academic performance, ultimately increasing the likelihood of school dropout among these students.

Afeli et al. (2018) also conducted a quantitative study with 342 students and 248 teachers to investigate the relationship between socioeconomic status, academic success, and student retention in the United States. After analysis, the findings revealed that the student's socioeconomic status was a key determinant of low retention rates in school. According to Afeli et al., students from low socioeconomic status experienced low academic success in school, prompting an increased rate of school dropout among these cohorts of students. Studies reviewed indicated that socioeconomic status, such as income and level of education, may significantly result in low student retention in schools.

Low socioeconomic students often receive limited academic resources, leading to low school retention (Reynolds & Cruise, 2020). In contrast to Afeli et al. (2018) findings, Reynolds and Cruise (2020) conducted a quantitative study to explore the influence of engagement in widening participation outreach programs on student retention and success in the United States. The findings revealed that the involvement of students from low socioeconomic status in widening outreach programs enhanced their academic success in school, positively influencing their retention rates (Green, 2018). Zembrodt (2021) conducted a quantitative study to examine the commitment, persistence, and retention of students from low socioeconomic status in the United States. The

researchers found students with low-income status lacked the finances to access key educational materials, negatively affecting their academic performance, hence low retention rate. The articles reviewed thus far indicate that students from low socioeconomic status receive limited academic resources, leading to low school retention.

The level of economic status among students may influence their retention in schools in the United States. As an illustration, Millea et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the determinants of college student retention and graduation rates in colleges in the United States. In their findings, Millea et al. reported that student retention is determined by academic preparedness, receiving grants, or being funded through a scholarship to stay in school. However, most low socioeconomic status students experienced high school dropout rates because of limited financial resources for their education compared to students from high socioeconomic status (Millea et al., 2018). The findings reported by Millea et al. are inconsistent with Green (2018) who revealed that the involvement of students from low socioeconomic status in widening outreach programs enhanced their academic success in school. Thus, positively influencing their retention rates. Though, Afeli et al. (2018) agreed with Millea et al. (2018) by indicating that the socioeconomic status of the students was a key determinant of low retention rates in school. Studies reviewed agree that the level of economic status among students may influence their retention in schools in the United States.

Poor Academic Performance

Poor academic performance among students may instigate school dropout resulting in low student retention (Barbera et al., 2020). Glew et al. (2019) conducted a

quantitative study with 4,472 nursing students that investigated the association between student retention and academic performance in the United States. In their results, Glew et al. reported that students with poor academic performance were at risk of school dropout because of constant low academic performance in their studies. Low academic performance discourages the majority of students, thereby leading to low student retention in schools (Glew et al., 2019). Comparable findings to Glew et al. were reported by Barbera et al. (2020), who conducted a quantitative study that investigated the relationship between student retention and graduation pattern in the United States. Agreeing with Glew et al. (2019), Barbera et al. established that low academic performance resulted in low motivation for studies among students, which significantly increased intentions to drop out, negatively affecting their retention rate in schools. Overall, poor academic performance among students may instigate school dropout resulting in low student retention.

Further research indicates that poor academic performance among students could lead to low student retention in schools. In corroborative findings to Barbera et al. (2020) and Glew et al. (2019), Li et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative study with 624 students to investigate the association between student retention and high school academic performance in the United States. Li et al. (2019) revealed a significant relationship between poor academic performance and increased school dropout and retention among students. The low academic performance led to decreased academic motivation among students, which increased their dropout rate, negatively impacting their school retention (Li et al., 2019). Belser et al. (2018) conducted a different quantitative study to

investigate the factors affecting college student retention in STEM courses in the United States. The findings indicated that lack of support and poor academic performance in STEM courses contributed to a student dropping out of school, resulting in low retention rates among students in the United States. In sum, the reviewed articles demonstrated that poor academic performance among students could lead to low student retention.

Low academic performance among students may lead to low student retention in schools in the United States. For instance, Hernandez (2019) conducted a qualitative study to explore the factors affecting Latino college student retention in the United States. The findings revealed that racial discrimination, limited support from schools and parents, and poor academic performance instigated the low level of student retention in colleges in the United States. However, Hernandez also indicated that low socioeconomic status and socio-cultural factors negatively influenced student retention in colleges in the United States. The above findings were corroborated in a quantitative study with 4,329 elementary school students to investigate the risk factors of grade retention and student retention among elementary schools in the United States. In their findings, Yang et al. (2018) indicated that students with limited access to learning materials and low school engagement had low academic performance levels, leading to low retention in elementary schools in the United States. Thus far, it is evident that low academic performance among students may lead to low student retention in schools in the United States.

Lack of Social Integration on Campus

Poor social interactions among students may result in low student retention in schools. To support this assertion, Morley (2019) conducted a qualitative study that

explored diverse students' academic and social interaction and their influence on student retention in the United States. The findings indicated that weakened social interactions and integration resulted in low student retention. In addition, the lack of social integration among diverse students led to black students having more likelihood of leaving college compared to white or Asian students. Comparable findings to Morley were reported by Tight (2020), who conducted a quantitative study that investigated the retention and engagement of students in higher education in the United States. Agreeing with Morley, Tight established that poor social relationships with peers and faculty on campus contributed to low student retention. Social interaction among students may improve student performance, enhancing their stay in school to avoid high dropout rates (Tight, 2020). Generally, the findings discussed thus far demonstrated that poor social interactions among students may result in low student retention in schools.

Lack of social integration on campus could result in low student retention among schools in the United States (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). For instance, Sosu and Pheunpha (2019) conducted a quantitative study that investigated the course of university student retention and its effect on academic susceptibility and family support. Extending Tight's (2020) findings, Sosu and Pheunpha reported that family support and social integration in school were key determinants of student retention. Lack of family support and low social integration resulted in low student retention among schools (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). Caruth (2018) replicated Sosu and Pheunpha's findings by indicating that lack of social integration with peers resulted in decreased study motivation, leading to low academic performance, prompting students to drop out of school because of poor academic

performance. Given the findings, it is evident that a lack of social integration on campus could result in low student retention among schools in the United States.

Benefits of Retention to Students

The success of learning institutions depends on their ability to retrain students until graduation. Student retention positively influences academic outcomes and improves future prospects for work and career growth. the discussed below are some of the benefits retention to students, including improved academic performance, increased graduation rate, promotes social integration, and benefits struggling students.

Student Retention leads to Improved Academic Performance

Student retention may result in enhanced student academic performance in schools. Wilton et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study investigating the relationship between improved academic performance and student retention in the United States. After analysis, Wilton et al. established that student retention enhanced student-student and student-instructor interactions and peer-led discussions, thereby improving students' academic performance. Such interactions created a sense of belonging among students and increased student motivation, resulting in improved academic performance. Tudor (2018) replicated Wilton et al. findings by conducting a quantitative study investigating the relationship between increased student retention and graduation rates. Agreeing with Wilton et al., Tudor established that student retention significantly impacted college graduation rates. According to Tudor, increasing student retention helps students meet degree requirements necessary for graduation among the retained students in school, which is done through career coaching and increased support. Overall, the studies

reviewed reveal that student retention may enhance student academic performance in schools by providing academic support from both the family and the school.

High student retention could significantly improve academic performance among students in schools in the United States. Comparable to Tudor's (2018), Al-Balushi and Al-Balushi (2018) conducted a quantitative study with 197 grade eight students that investigated the academic performance, student retention, and effectiveness of brain-based learning in schools in the United States. The findings demonstrated that student retention in schools ensures their availability for consistent learning and career coaching, which improves their mastery of classroom content, thereby leading to improved academic performance. However, students with low retention rates are likely to experience low academic performance (Al-Balushi & Al-Balushi, 2018). Cadenas et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study with 159 graduate students that explored the academic performance, student retention, and persistence of graduates facing class-based subjugation in the United States. Cadenas et al. found that student retention enhanced the graduate student's academic persistence and performance through constant classroom participation, especially among students facing oppression based on socioeconomic status. In summary, studies discussed indicate that high student retention could significantly improve academic performance among students in schools.

Although Cadenas et al. (2020) expanded on the earlier findings, the scholars did not utilize a diversified sample size to generalize the results. Additionally, the investigators used one geographical location and examined the relationship between student retention and improved academic performance from a general perspective

(Cadenas et al., 2020). Based on this limitation, Cadenas et al. advocated for additional research using different geographical settings. Further, Cadenas et al. also suggested that future research use diverse sample sizes with unique characteristics such as gender to generalize the findings. The researchers indicated differing views regarding the relationship between student retention and improved academic performance. For instance, while Tudor (2018) reported that student retention had a significant impact on student's graduation rate in colleges, Al-Balushi and Al-Balushi (2018) and Wilton et al. (2018) indicated that student retention in schools ensures their availability for consistent learning as well as career coaching, which improves their mastery of content taught in the classroom, thereby leading improved academic performance. The findings above demonstrate that student retention may contribute to improved academic performance.

Student Retention Contributes to An Increased Graduation Rate

Student retention may result in an increased graduation rate among students in schools. As an illustration of existing literature, Johnson and Stage (2018) conducted a quantitative study to investigate student retention, academic engagement, and student performance in schools in the United States. The findings indicated that retained students are more likely to persist with their studies until graduation than students who are more likely to drop out of school. Banks and Dohy (2019) conducted a quantitative study with 101 higher learning institutions that investigated the mitigation of barriers to student retention and improvement of retention and graduation rates among students of color in higher education in the United States. In their results, Banks and Dohy showed that student support, adequate preparation, and engagement increase their retention, thereby

resulting increased student graduation rate in higher education, which contribute to high academic performance among the retained students. In contrast, the high-effect practices for student learning and career preparation for retained students could not lead to increased graduation rates among students who intend to pursue their courses in higher education (Banks & Dohy, 2019).

Retaining students in school could mean a high graduation rate among students in higher education. For instance, Grace-Odeleye and Santiago (2019) conducted a quantitative study to examine the academic bridging programs to enhance high student retention and graduation rates in the United States. The investigators established that mentoring programs provide students with effective academic preparation, social support, and enhanced student retention in schools, thereby improving students' academic performance, persistence, and increased graduation rate (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Lisberg and Woods (2018) conducted a quantitative study that explored the mindset, learning, and mentorship strategies to increase student retention and graduation rate in STEM minority undergraduate students in the United States. The results revealed that students who participated in mentorship programs and the integration of students into academic programs and cultures contributed to significantly higher pass rates and increased student retention, thereby leading to a high graduation rate and improved academic performance (Lisberg & Woods, 2018). In summary, the articles reviewed indicate that retaining students in school could mean a high graduation rate among students in higher education.

Research has indicated that student retention may result in an enhanced graduation rate among students, thereby leading to high academic performance in schools. In support of this statement, House et al. (2020) investigated the support needed for mental health college students' retention in schools. The results indicated that students experienced a lack of academic preparation, and limited support from friends and family lowered their retention rate and graduation rate, thereby leading to low academic performance among this cohort of students (House et al., 2020). Contradictory results to House et al. were reported by Jeno et al. (2018), who conducted a quantitative study with 754 students that investigated the relationship between students' academic performance and retention rate in higher education. In their findings, Jeno et al. revealed that providing motivation and support to students increased retention levels and the graduation rates among retained students resulting in improved student academic outcomes. The articles discussed reveal that student retention may result in an enhanced graduation rate among students, thereby leading to high academic performance in schools.

Student Retention Promotes Social Integration

Student retention promotes social integration into the college community, enhancing students' academic performance. For instance, Haverila et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study that investigated the factors impacting the retention intent among students in higher learning institutions in the United States. The findings indicated that a high level of student retention contributes to social integration into the college community and provide opportunities for students to build strong support systems in

learning institutions linked with increased student involvement, engagement, and high student academic performance (Haverila et al., 2020). Comparable findings to Haverila et al. were reported by Chen and Zhou (2019), who conducted a quantitative study that explored the students' sense of belonging and retention in North American higher learning institutions. In their findings, Chen and Zhou found that the students' perceived social-cultural community learning integration resulted in increased student retention and high academic performance, social performance, and mental well-being. In sum, the articles reviewed indicate that student retention promotes social integration into the college community, enhancing students' academic performance.

A high retention rate among students is likely to enhance social integration in schools, leading to improved student academic performance. Lim and Richardson (2021) conducted a quantitative study with 418 participants to support this assertion that investigated the impact of students' perceptions of social cognitive and social integration and student retention on student learning outcomes. Extending Chen and Zhou's (2019) performance, Lim and Richardson reported that student retention increased the level of students' perceived social cognitive and social integration into the college learning community, thereby increasing students' academic achievement in higher learning institutions. Baier et al. (2019) also investigated a cohort of 332 college student first-year students that determined the learning communities and their impact on student retention, developmental courses, and academic performance. In their results, Baier et al. reported that students who had support from the classroom learning community experienced higher degree of college success due to increased retention. Given the results, it is evident

that a high retention rate among students is likely to enhance social integration in schools, thereby leading to improved student academic performance.

Researchers discussed above have indicated that student retention enhances social integration into the college community resulting in improved students' academic performance (Baier et al., 2019; Chen & Zhou, 2019). Although Baier et al. (2019) extended previous results regarding the association between student retention and academic performance, they did not conduct their research from diverse settings to generalize the findings. In this regard, Baier et al. suggested that further studies should be conducted using different geographical locations to generalize results to other locations and populations. In distinction, other scholars such as Haverila et al. (2020) highlighted that a high level of student retention leads to social integration into the college community and provides opportunities for the student to build a strong support system in learning institutions, which are linked with increased student involvement, engagement, and high student academic performance. The researcher suggested that higher learning institutions should provide students with opportunities for social integration to promote high student retention and improved student academic outcomes. Thus far, the findings indicated that student retention enhances social integration into the college community resulting in improved students' academic performance.

Student Retention Benefits Struggling Students

Students with low intention to leave the institution are taught better learning styles for improved academic performance. For instance, Cooper et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative study with 768 undergraduate students that explored the factors predicting

student retention and persistence in their higher education in the United States. The findings demonstrated that several factors such as lack of support and poor social integration results in low student retention (Cooper et al., 2019). However, high student retention provides opportunities for students to learn better studying styles for enhanced academic performance in their studies (Cooper et al., 2019). Hempel et al. (2020) replicated Cooper et al. results and reported that student retention in higher learning institutions provides high chances for students to learn better strategies for improving their academic performance (Hempel et al., 2020). Overall, studies discussed thus far reveal that students with low intention to leave the institution are taught better learning styles for improved academic performance.

Comparable results to Cooper et al. (2019) and Hempel et al. (2020) were reported by Howard et al. (2019) in a quantitative study with 226 college students that investigated the association between positive parenting and student retention and academic performance in the United States. The findings indicated that student retention significantly affects student academic performance, exhibited through better learning styles for retained students. McCabe et al. (2020) also echoed Hempel et al. findings by reporting that students with less dropout rate exhibited promising academic outcomes because of their persistence in studies. In conclusion, studies reviewed indicated that student retention might significantly impact student academic performance.

Benefits of Student Retention to Learning Institutions

The success of learning institutions depends on how successful they can attract and retain students until graduation (Hassani & Wilkins, 2022). Learning intuitions with

higher student retention are likely to have positive public image (Millea et al., 2019). Discussed below are some of the benefits of student retention to learning institutions, including brand image and reputation, improves institution ranking, and improve institutions' financial stability,

Brand Image and Reputation

Research has shown that high student retention is important for the brand image and reputation of learning institutions. High student retention creates learners' loyalty to the institution due to the quality services they receive, improving the brand image (Panda et al., 2019). Additionally, high student retention will determine the graduation rate, which is a determinant of the institution's academic performance and growth, thus reflecting on the institution's image in terms of delivery in terms of academics (Hassani & Wilkins, 2022). Hassani and Wilkins (2022) added that students gave suggestions on factors that could improve institutions' image since they interact with the public, providing immediate feedback and action to protect the institution's image. For instance, when students participate in corporate social responsibility, they get to know the community's perception of the institution (Hassani & Wilkins, 2022). High student retention portrays an image of a reputable institution to the public image (Millea et al., 2019).

Further studies by Millea et al. (2019) indicated that many students create a perception of a reputable institution in the mind of society. Millea et al. further reported that high retention of students would attract more students who will be interested in joining the institution, and through this, the organization's reputation is maintained.

Disagreeing with Hassani and Wilkins (2022) and Millea et al., Bowden et al. (2022) revealed that high retention of students due to poor grades may not promote the institution's image but instead destroys its reputation. Although some studies have shown a negative impact of students' high retention, numerous studies have indicated that high student retention is one factor contributing to an organization's brand image and reputation due to its ability to offer quality service to students resulting in better results.

Improves Institution Ranking

Several studies have been conducted to determine the correlation between students' retention and institution ranking. An institution with a high student retention rate prioritized ranking during resource allocation, such as machine learning (Palacios et al., 2021). Barbera et al. (2020), through a quantitative study, reported that high retention of students formed the basis of institution ranking, especially through academic excellence. Corroborating with Palacios et al. (2021) and Barbera et al., Thomas et al. (2021) conducted a cross-sectional study that established the relationship between high student retention and institution ranking by recruiting 463 institutions through online surveys. The researchers established that high student retention in learning institutions is a leading factor in classifying institutions to enable equitable distribution of resources. Altbach and Hazelkorn (2018) also recruited 633 private and public institutions through online surveys to find the link between high student retention in learning institutions and institution classification. Altbach and Hazelkorn established that high student retention in learning institutions formed a basis for academic performance and quality service

delivery ranking. It is evident that high student retention in learning institutions determines the ranking processes.

Improve Institutions' Financial Stability

Prior studies have shown that high student retention significantly contributes to various institutions' financial stability through tuition fees. To cite evidence, Kang and Wang (2018) conducted an online survey that investigated how high student retention affects the financial health of an institution. A high number of students translates to more cash flows in the institution through tuition fees payment (Kang & Wang, 2018). For example, high student retention in private learning institutions means revenue generation since private entities are profit-oriented (Kang & Wang, 2018). Similarly, Haverila et al. (2020) reported that institutions with high student retention might attract donor funding to support their activities, thus improving their financial well-being (Haverila et al., 2020). Conquering with Kang and Wang, and Haverila et al., Latino et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of 20 institutions that established the correlation between high student retention and financial stability of learning institutions.

Latino et al. (2020) highlighted that high student retention in learnings institution ensured a constant cash flow within the organization enabling the institution to conduct its activities swiftly without getting involved with the debt burden. Constant cash also enables the institution to pay their expenses without accruing, thus saving on penalties that would have been incurred (Maldonado et al., 2021). High student retention leads to increased cash flow for paying institution staff who assist in service delivery, attracting and retaining many students. Based on the evidence reviewed thus far, one can conclude

that high student retention in learning institutions contributes to financial well-being through revenue generation, for instance, tuition fees payments by students.

Improving Student Retention

The researcher uses student retention to describe the processes and strategies instituted by learning institutions to ensure students' continuous learning. Student retention programs aim to increase student persistence, collaboration and performance while discouraging dropouts (Hoyt, 2021; Lemoine et al., 2019). Besides enhancing student persistence and academic achievement, student retention ensures continuity of revenue for the institutions of learning in terms of school fees and government funds (Lemoine et al., 2019). In this section, a discussion of some of the strategies that institutions of learning employ to retain students by minimizing attrition rates is discussed.

Availability of Support Services

Students are less likely to drop out or quit schools with high-quality and readily available support services, mentoring programs, academic counseling, advising, and peer tutoring. For instance, Trimble (2019) investigated the retention of LGBTQ students in Washington state using a quantitative sample of 2,393 LGBTQ students. As per the findings, Trimble established that rather than isolating themes for being different, encouraging LGBTQ students to attend counseling and providing them with security facilitated their retention. While Lemoine et al. (2019) did not investigate the retention of LGBTQ students, they examined the importance of support services in retaining online learners. With a sample of 154 students learning virtually, availing of academic advising

services and high-speed internet for virtual classes encouraged the retention of online students. Similar to Lemoine et al., Muljana and Luo (2019) reviewed 40 studies and found that academic advising and internet availability facilitated the retention of online students.

Academic advising and mentoring are important support services that promote the retention of students at different educational levels. As illustrated in the study by Lemoine et al. (2019) and Muljana and Luo (2019), academic advising increased students' confidence in their performance capability and encouraged them to continue studying. In previous research, Tudor (2018) investigated the integration of academic advising and career coaching in higher institutions to enhance the retention of students in the United States. The findings were that incorporating academic advising and career coaching positively ensured the retention of students. Comparably, Harris (2018) analyzed data from 77 students from historically black learning institutions and found that availing academic advising to these institutions discouraged dropouts and increased the number of students willing to persist until graduation. Mu and Fosnacht (2019), after analyzing data from 156 undergraduate learning institutions, found that academic advising improved students' attitudes towards learning and overall performance.

Additional evidence of academic advising in increasing student retention was provided by Holland et al. (2020), who investigated the relationship between academic advising and academic attainment for undergraduate students using a sample of seven final-year students. The findings revealed that besides ensuring the students adapt to the learning environment, academic advising facilitated improved academic performance that

increased the students' willingness to remain within the school. Hoyt (2021), with a sample of 110 students, revealed that academic advising and career advising were crucial in retaining students and helping them choose their career paths wisely. Similar conclusions were reported by Troxel et al. (2022), and Renner and Skursha (2022) found that academic and career advising helped students overcome their career fears and improved their persistence and academic success, thus discouraging dropout. Across the different reviewed studies, researchers have evidence that as a support service, academic advising enhances student retention by ensuring their academic needs are met, they are advised accordingly on different career paths available to them, and methods they can employ to improve their academic achievement.

Besides academic advising, career networking and mentoring are also important support services facilitating the retention of students in institutions of learning. Dixon et al. (2019) investigated the role of mentorship programs in retaining female neurosurgery students. Analyzing data collected from 104 female students, Dixon et al. revealed that the availability of women neurosurgeons in learning institutions was motivation enough for students not to quit. Differently, however, Dixon et al. and Renner and Skursha (2022) noted that increased discrimination and inequality in employment demotivated female students from pursuing courses in medicine and engineering. Conducting a different study from Dixon et al., Tight (2019) stated that mentoring programs encouraged student engagement with peers and faculty members who ensured that all the students had all they needed to continue studying.

Additional research by Wilton et al. (2021) revealed that course-based mentoring programs promoted the students' academic performance and subsequent persistence to graduation. In a qualitative single-case study, O'Hara (2020) found that mentoring encouraged academic persistence and promoted academic and personal development. Thus, similar to academic advising, academic mentoring is critical in promoting student retention at different academic levels and institutions. While researchers have shown the availability of support services in promoting and enhancing student retention, Holland et al. (2020) established that underestimation of academic advising and mentoring services for student retention, and their poor roll-out increased student attrition rather than persistence. McGill et al. (2020) reiterated that poor academic mentoring and advising services resulted in poor quality support services and unmet student needs, thus increasing dropouts. Similarly, Kato and Song (2021) reported that while mentoring and advising increased female students' academic scores, the lack of students' poor performance increased their intentions to quit school altogether.

Student Integration and Retention

The length and quality of relationships and interaction between students and their peers improved student retention in higher learning institutions. Researchers have revealed that improving social integration or creating an environment that promotes positive social integration, especially for minority groups, and sexually different students, enhances their persistence in graduation (Duran et al., 2019; Garvey, 2020; Wolf et al., 2019; Xu & Webber, 2018). Xu and Webber (2018) investigated the retention of racial minority students attending a racially diverse campus using a sample of 735 students in

the United States. The findings revealed that besides financial and racial concerns, black students' relationships encouraged persistence and continued learning until graduation. Similar findings were reported by Rasco et al. (2020), who in a randomized controlled study found that positive peer relationships among minority students provided the necessary social support that many needed to continue learning.

In addition to minority students, the peer relationship between trans and queer students positively influenced their persistence in graduation while at the same time discouraging dropouts. Duran et al. (2019) investigated the role of intersectionality in the retention of trans and queer students in the United States. Similar to racial minority students, Duran et al. established that strong peer and faculty relationships facilitated the acknowledgment of this group of students and encouraged the availing of the needed support to help achieve their academic goals. Garvey (2020) reported consistent findings when analyzing data from 102 trans and queer students and found that social integration in institutions of learning ensured the continuity of this group of students to graduation. Denton (2020) concurred with Garvey that positive peer relationships between trans and straight students created a favorable learning environment for trans and queer, encouraging their persistence to graduation. Across the different studies reviewed, social integration and peer relationship are important factors facilitating the retention of racial and sexual minorities in learning institutions.

Besides peer relationships, a positive faculty and student relationship also promote student retention. Evidencing this statement, Stout et al. (2018) investigated the relationship between diversity in the faculty and student graduation rates on campus.

Despite faculty diversity being lower, faculty members who had a positive relationship with their students provided them with the help they needed increasing their performance and decreasing their intentions to quit. Similar findings were reported by Buskirk-Cohen and Plants (2019), who revealed that a positive relationship between faculty members and students created a sense of belonging among students, which in turn increased their academic performance and discouraged dropout. Smith-Wacholz et al. (2019), in a systematic review of 14 studies on the retention of nursing students, found that many students left school halfway due to anxiety, financial constraints, and poor social interaction. However, developing positive faculty relationships and providing mentoring and advising services enhanced peer-faculty integration and retention.

Current researchers have also reported the role of social integration in promoting student retention. For instance, McDaniel et al. (2022) investigated the role of engagement in increasing the retention of students. Comparing two groups of second and third students (2,622) in the experiment and 4,823 students, not in the program, McDaniel et al. revealed that promoting peer-to-peer and peer-to-faculty engagement increased the retention rates of students in the experimental group than in the control group. Similar conclusions were reported by Belandoro-Montoro et al. (2022), who systematically analyzed the findings of 31 articles on barriers and facilitators of student retention and found that besides language training and mentoring, a positive social climate mitigated student attrition. McLean et al. (2022) researched the perceived benefits of social support and stress using a sample of 315 first-year students and found that students with higher social support reported lower levels of stress and their intention to continue with learning

until graduation. Therefore, from the prior studies, researchers have shown that social integration and social support promote the retention of students in institutions of learning.

Improved Academic Integration and Retention of Students

Schools with improved or whose students perform well are likely to attract and retain students rather than students leaving such schools. Cox and Naylor (2018) investigated the significance of intra-university partnerships in promoting students' academic success. With a sample of 5,062 students, Cox and Naylor found that intra-university increased students' academic and social cycle promoting retention rather than attrition. Although Wilton et al. (2019) did not investigate intra-campus relationships but rather explored the impact of improved academic performance on student retention. Wilton et al. combined active-learning approaches with positive student-student and student-teacher interactions to improve students' academic scores and discourage dropouts. Setiawan et al. (2020) extended the above findings by analyzing different factors that promote academic success and whether students' academic performance encouraged or discouraged student retention. In the causal explanatory research, Setiawan et al. established that improved academic performance and quality of faculty interaction enhanced student retention.

Glew et al. (2019) studied the relationship between student retention, academic literacy, and performance using a sample of 4,472 undergraduate students. Glew et al. found that student retention was positively and negatively influenced by performance and literacy levels; that is, students with poor academic literacy and performance levels were likely to discontinue learning for a lack of confidence and self-belief compared to high-

performing students. Millea et al. (2018) also found that high-performing students in institutions of higher learning boosted their self-confidence and efficacy, discouraging dropout and attrition. Comparably, Etherton et al. (2020), using a sample of 141 undergraduate students in Midwestern university, revealed that high-performing schools increased students' resilience regardless of their academic performance. Also, resilience was found to improve the student's self-efficacy, setting of self-objectives, and overall retention. Although reviewed literature has shown a positive relationship between academic performance and student retention rates, more research is needed to explicitly show how students' high or low performance encourages student retention or attrition.

Extracurricular Activities and Student Retention

Researchers have investigated whether improving extracurricular activities, including sports, community services, and educational clubs, facilitates the positive retention of students in colleges and universities. Kulp et al. (2019) investigated the types of extracurricular activities on the retention of first years and their academic successes. Studying the data collected from 1,944 full-time students in Southeastern Universities, Kulp et al. reported that campus events such as signature events and predictable events not only improved their performance but also made learning enjoyable, increasing students' intention to persist to graduation. Like Kulp et al., Van Dyk and Weese (2019) also investigated the role of campus recreation programs on student retention and engagement. Similar to the extracurricular events studied by Kulp et al., engaging in recreational activities such as surfing or swimming promoted positive student engagement, performance, and retention. Consistently, using a sample of 690 surveys and

27 face-to-face semi-structured interviews, King et al. (2020) reported that out-of-class activities made learning enjoyable, reduced class fatigue, increased student social interaction, and promoted retention.

Extracurricular activities are positive destruction that allows students to unwind and refresh their minds before continuing learning. You (2018) studied the relationship between extracurricular activities, academic satisfaction, social interaction, and career motivation using a sample of 343 females and 296 male undergraduate students. An analysis of the collected data revealed that social clubs, community services, and out-of-class extracurricular activities promoted career motivation, student satisfaction, and retention. Similar findings were reported by Sisto et al. (2021), who conducted quantitative research with 50 students to investigate how extracurricular activities promoted a sense of belonging and retention of students. The findings revealed that extracurricular activities promoted a sense of belonging among students, promoted social interaction, and improved student academic performance, promoting retention.

Comparably, by systematically analyzing eight peer-reviewed articles, Hash (2021) investigated the impact of school bands and orchestras in facilitating student retention, engagement, and academic success. Concurring with the findings of Sisto et al. (2021), Hash found that similar to field and community service activities, music and orchestra as extracurricular activities promoted students' resilience and met the needs of different students, increasing their intention to remain in the school rather than quit. Similar findings were reported by Munir and Zaheer (2021), who used a sample of 970 students to investigate how extracurricular activities in increasing student engagement

and promote retention. The findings revealed that students who participated actively in extracurricular activities reported enhanced social and academic integration, reducing the risk of student attrition. Therefore, it is sufficient to note that extracurricular activities improve students' memory and promote social interaction and academic performance, which encourage student persistence and continued learning.

Summary

The specific research problem that will be addressed through this study is there is a lack of research examining the potential of poor social skills to influence low retention levels in Ghanaian universities (Wijayanama et al., 2020). The analysis of literature review revealed that few studies have explored student retention in Ghana despite the increase in student dropout from campuses in recent past (Sritharan, 2020). Given this gap in literature, the current study will address it by exploring the possible reasons for low retention in Ghanaian universities, which may include students having inadequate social skills to complete their degrees (Teichler, 2017). This chapter discusses factors influencing low student retention, the benefits of retention to students, retention to learning institutions, and improving student retention. Chapter 3 presents research methods methodology that will be used to conduct the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The social situation that prompted me to search the literature is the low retention of undergraduate and graduate students in Ghanaian universities and how poor social skills may impact it (see Wijayanama et al., 2020). Despite significant reforms, many improvements are still needed in the Ghanaian education system to improve students' retention and employment (Wijayanama et al., 2020). An analysis of the current literature revealed that there is no understanding of what societal characteristics may influence the problem (Schwab, 2021). As such, the specific problem I addressed through this study was the lack of research examining the potential of poor skills to influence low retention levels in Ghanaian universities (see Schwaberw, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the reasons for low student retention in Ghanaian universities, including students that have inadequate social skills to complete their degrees.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation addresses the research methodology and design I used to conduct the study. Other sections discussed in the chapter include the researcher's role, methodology (participant's description, sampling, sample size, and recruitment procedures), data analysis plans, and trustworthiness issues. In the chapter, I also discuss ethical issues related to the current study. The chapter ends with a transition into Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative research is a methodical approach to studying social phenomena in their natural settings (Patton, 2014). Its goal is to understand these phenomena deeply by exploring the reasons behind them rather than just the facts. Qualitative researchers rely

heavily on people's experiences to understand the meaning they attach to their lives (Law et al., 1998). Rather than relying solely on logical or statistical methods, they use various research techniques to investigate human phenomena. This approach aims to provide an in-depth and meaningful understanding of individuals' social and material circumstances, perspectives, experiences, and histories.

According to Patton (2014), qualitative researchers aim to provide detailed insights about a particular phenomenon by exploring the experiences and meanings of participants. This approach helps researchers accurately describe the characteristics of the situation or group under study, essential for understanding and portraying it (Erickson, 1985). For my study on the issue of low student retention in Ghanaian universities, a qualitative research methodology was the best approach. This approach allowed me to investigate the issue from a naturalistic perspective in its unique setting. It also aligned with my objective of understanding the reasons for low retention rates among Ghanaian university students due to inadequate social skills. Through the use of thick descriptions, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon should appear.

I provided comprehensive and descriptive data by conducting in-depth interviews with participants. This approach helped gather contextual information to enhance understanding of the factors leading to low student retention in Ghanaian universities. Some of the inadequacies studied include emotional intelligence, persuasion, and the ability to teach others. I relied on qualitative research methods to provide thick descriptions of social skills needed by students in Ghana, such as communication, empathy, confidence, teamwork, critical thinking, and agile thinking. Therefore, a

qualitative research methodology aligned with the current study's focus on providing the information needed to improve learning in Ghanaian universities. A qualitative research methodology was also be used to provide a holistic and systematic description of how social skills influence students' retention in Ghanaian universities.

Alternative research methodologies, including quantitative and mixed methods, were considered for the study. Quantitative research involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting numerical data (Malina et al., 2011). The common element of the quantitative method is that researchers could use the approach to establish patterns, make predictions, test casual relationships, and even provide results generalizable to the broader populations (Kaplan, 2004). Quantitative research methods aim to test hypotheses and relationships between variables statistically using numbers, graphs, charts, and figures. A quantitative research methodology was discarded for this study as the methodology should align with its pursuit, which was to clarify how inadequate social skills contribute to the low retention of students in Ghanaian universities. Such knowledge cannot be quantified or studied through a quantitative research approach. Thus, I discarded quantitative procedures as they failed to align with the research purpose, questions, and problem statement of definitions of different reasons for low retention of students in Ghanaian universities descriptively.

A mixed methods approach was also considered for alignment with the existing research. In mixed methods research, researchers use quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods to address investigation questions (Greene et al., 1989). In this case, researchers try to capitalize on the strength of one methodology to counter

the boundaries of another (Greene et al., 1989). However, I discarded a mixed method approach since I would not accumulate qualitative and quantitative data. Instead, I only collectrf qualitative data making the mixed methods approach inconsistent with the current study focus.

In terms of research design, I selected a phenomenological research design for this study. A phenomenological research design focuses on providing rich textual descriptions, structural descriptions, and the essence of the study (Husserl, 1989). The phenomenological research design is often used to describe a certain phenomenon utilizing participants' experiences, unique perceptions, and voices (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). The focus of the current study was to investigate participants' lived experiences concerning reasons for the low retention of students in Ghanaian universities. I focused on providing participants with the unique opportunity to voice their perceptions and experiences regarding the influence of inadequate social skills on degree completion among Ghanaian university students. Therefore, a phenomenological research design was best aligned with the study focus and study questions of exploring the lived experiences of university students in Ghana as they relate to social development skills in higher education and their lived experiences concerning factors or decisions to stay or leave universities. I used a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences students have concerning social skill development and how it influences their decision to leave or continue with their graduation, including the meanings they attach to their experiences.

Alternative research designs were considered. The ethnographic research strategy was the first consideration. Researchers employ ethnographic research techniques to examine participants' cultures (Hammersley, 1992). The emphasis is for the researcher to apprehend how cultural conventions differ across the population (Hammersley, 1992). However, an ethnographic research design was discarded for this study because I did not intend to investigate participants' culture but to use students' lived experiences to provide detailed descriptions of reasons for low retention in Ghanaian universities regarding social skills.

The narrative research design was also considered. A narrative research design is used to collect data when researchers intend to use stories from participants (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). In order to understand a research phenomenon, participants are given opportunities to tell their stories in detail (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). However, the focus of the current study was not on stories but participants' lived experiences, making a narrative research design inappropriate for the current study.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers play an essential role in designing a study. In every research query, the researcher's position remains crucial, given their ability to dictate how to execute a specific study (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019). According to Kaplan (2004), doctoral students are implied to add new value to the study's framework and the broad field of study. In this study, I am the primary decision maker and research instrument. I am the one to collect data through interviews with participants.

Researchers must maintain relationships with participants (see Wa-Mbaleka, 2019). My first professional role in this study was to maintain a working relationship with all participants. I initiated rapport with participants to encourage confidence and mutual respect. Trust is a prerequisite in research for a working relationship with participants. Therefore, I preserved positive associations with all participants throughout the study. Researchers need to maintain and support ethical considerations throughout the study. Researchers must maintain appropriate, ethical, and moral norms throughout the study. To accomplish this role, Wa-Mbaleka (2019) remarked that qualitative researchers need to prepare for data collection by (a) asking the right questions, (b) being good listeners, (c) being adaptive, and (d) conducting ethical research. In addition, researchers have moral obligations to society throughout the research process. I used the Belmont report to protect participants for this doctoral dissertation. I ensured that the three principles of the Belmont report, such as beneficence, respect for persons, and justice, are upheld (see Anabo et al., 2019). This included seeking permission and consent and protecting the participant's identity using pseudonyms.

Researchers also must mitigate bias. Wa-Mbaleka (2019) noted that mitigating bias is one of the primary characteristics of ethical research. Scholars such as Rumman and Alheet (2019) advocated that researchers must state their bias to the readers and other scholars to help them mitigate bias when integrating data. In this study, I applied suggestions by Hazen (2000) to determine and state my bias to increase my self-awareness of such biases and how they can affect the outcome. In this study, I avoided personal bias by declaring a lack of personal interest in the study and having no personal

relationships. I also used the bracketing technique to demonstrate all possible reservations to guarantee that such preconceptions do not affect the final analysis and interpretation. I remained open, research solutions to every concern, and present findings with non-format bias. I used the member-checking technique to allow participants to countercheck their interview transcripts' accuracy after completing the transcription process. This helped ensure that the information used for the final analysis represents their thoughts, not the researchers'.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Target Population

The target population for this study was university students from Accra, Ghana. According to statistics, there are nearly 43,000 students in higher education in Ghana (Schwab, 2021). Of this, nearly 30% of them fail to complete their programs. Some completely end up dropping out of university programs, while others would consider rejoining later (Schwab, 2021). Although several education reforms have been implemented in Ghana to improve higher education, the dropout rate remains at 5.3% as of 2020 (Wijayanama, 2020). The high dropout rate implies that more students are dropping out of campuses making their future career prospects more doubtful. Therefore, the target population provides adequate characteristics the researcher needs to conduct the study.

Sample

Sample size in qualitative research is specified through seminal recommendations and data saturation. For instance, Dworkin (2012) suggested a minimum of five to 25 participants for qualitative studies to gather in-depth data about the study phenomenon. Kaplan (2004) also indicated that the researcher recruited at least five participants for their phenomenological research techniques to account for the time required to collect and examine interview responses from participants. In addition, the final sample size for this study was determined through data saturation (Guest et al., 2020). Data saturation refers to the point at which the addition of new participants to the study fails to create new information but replications of already collected data (Guest et al., 2020). At this point, the researcher is believed to have reached sampling sufficiency and adequacy for conducting the study (Guest et al., 2020). Data saturation was reached after collecting data from 16 participants.

Sampling Technique

The target participants were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to recruiting participants because they have the characteristics the researcher needs in the study sample (Etikan et al., 2016). Researchers choose participants because they have the unique characteristics or qualities required in the study (Denieffe, 2020). The fundamental objective of purposive sampling is identifying individuals who are best fit to help researchers answer research questions (Denieffe, 2020). Consequently, the purposive sampling method is an effective strategy for

participant recruitment when researchers have adequate background information about the study, in this case, undergraduate and graduate students from Ghanaian universities.

An inclusion-exclusion criterion was used. Participant inclusion criteria included (a) students in Ghanaian higher education, (b) undergraduate or graduate students in Ghanaian universities, and (c) adults age 18 years or older. Participants were excluded if they were (a) not students in Ghanaian higher education, (b) not undergraduate or graduate students, and (c) below 18 years.

Participant recruitment procedure began after gaining site approval from the selected Ghanaian university and Walden university's institutional review board. Following the approval from Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I recruited participants using flyers posted at the study site. The flyers contained my contact information (e.g., phone number and email) and information about the study purpose and goals. I used emails, phone calls, and virtual meetings such as Zoom and Microsoft teams to communicate with the participants. The first communication was through email, leading to phone call conversations and virtual meetings. The invitation flyer is presented in Appendix A. Interested participants were required to contact me to express their interest in the study. Interested participants werescreened for eligibility and asked to sign a consent form presented in Appendix B.

Instrumentation

I am the primary instrument of data collection. In this study, I am the primary data collection instrument and used interviews to collect data. I developed and adhered to the interview protocol in Appendix C. To develop the interview protocol, I followed Yin's

(2018) example, consisting of friendly, non-threatening scripts addressing the research question. Castillo-Montoya et al. (2016) advised that qualitative researchers use a semi-structured interview protocol to guarantee questions are asked in a standard format. The significant advantages of using interviews to gather data include mitigating bias, reducing communication challenges, and producing rich and thick data (Castillo-Montoya et al., 2016).

In order to establish the self-sufficiency of data gathered via interviews, I employed an expert committee to assess the question's validity. The expert panels included two Ph.D. holders in education and student retention. The expert panel's immediate objective was to study for accuracy and instances of bias in interview questions. In addition, the expert panel verified how well the questions were well-worded and addressed the research questions. Upon welcoming the expert panel feedback, I used it to record questions, deleted duplicative words, and added other questions as recommended by experts. This technique guaranteed that the interview instrument adequately addressed the research questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participant recruitment started after approval from the site administrator from the selected university and Walden university's IRB. The second step was to contact participants. I contacted the participants using an invitation flyer. The invitation flyer contained my research information my contact details. Interested individuals were required to contact me to register their interest. Afterward, I screened all participants for eligibility. Successful participants were given consent forms to sign. Only participants

who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were allowed to participate in the study. Data collection was done through one-on-one interviews. For this study, I conducted interviews with participants for approximately 60 minutes. During the interview process, I (a) followed an interview protocol, (b) recorded conversation, (c) actively listened to participants, (d) asked clarifying questions, and (e) took notes. Permission to audio record participants was settled at the start of the interviews. At the end of the interview, I checked the audio recordings and transcribed it for data analysis. I reviewed all transcripts using member checking to ensure they represent members' opinions. Participants were provided with a summary of their interview transcripts to verify their interpretation of their responses through member checking.

Data Analysis

In this study, data were cleaned before analysis. The data analysis process began by myself transcribing the interviews. Open coding was utilized to code data, and the coding was done utilizing MAXQDA software. Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic techniques were used to examine the resulting output.

The first step was familiarizing myself with the data. I started the thematic analysis process by familiarizing myself with interview responses to include the initial coding process. I familiarized myself by reading and rereading interview transcripts. I also noted critical terms or terms during the familiarization procedure. Generating the initial code was the second step. After familiarizing myself with the data collected and identifying common phrases and repeated terms, and its link to the topic. To comprehensively understand the subject under study, I analyzed the data set for potential

patterns. I pinpointed significant terms and recurring phrases to ensure data accuracy. Additionally, I compared the data analysis's similarities, differences, and outcomes. Searching for themes was the third step in the data analysis process. In order to search for possible themes in the data collected, I explored data generated in previous steps. I combined the data and categories identified to generate possible research themes. All data and categories with similarities and related to research questions were grouped to form themes. Significant and less significant data were also grouped for further analysis. A review of themes was the fourth step. I grouped all categories into significant research themes. I also determined the relevance of each theme generated concerning research questions. Afterward, I generated research themes from the data search collected.

Defining and naming themes was the fifth step. In this stage, I professionally named emerging themes. I read all themes and established their link to the research problem. Professional names from the current literature was attached to them. I also deleted duplicate themes and even combined minor ones to form major themes. The last step was writing the results and implications, which included a link to theory and current literature. Convergence and divergence from current literature was explained within the context of the current study findings.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative studies, the picture of trustworthiness is indispensable. According to Shenton (2004), trustworthiness authorizes the researcher to evaluate the rigor of the study results. There are four significant components for evaluating the trustworthiness of

qualitative studies. The four components include dependability, reliability, credibility, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each of the components examined below.

Credibility

Credibility refers to other people's confidence in the study outcome (Shenton, 2004). Researchers such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) have pinpointed several strategies for accepting credibility, such as member checking. In this study, I achieved credibility through member checking. Member checking refers to assessing the accuracy of a qualitative study by furnishing participants the opportunity to countercheck the accuracy of the interview transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is a primary technique for promoting the credibility of the study findings (Shenton, 2004). In this study, I provided all participants with synopses of their interview transcripts to review for accuracy. In addition, participants were asked to review the researcher's understanding of their answers and be entitled to clarify if their interpretation aligns with their responses. The process above guaranteed the credibility of the findings.

Transferability

Qualitative investigators employees transferability to define the study's results in other studies. Researchers such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) have recommended using thick descriptions to achieve transferability. As Shenton (2004) illustrated, thick descriptions allow the researcher to describe thoroughly the model used in their studies, data collection approaches, and data analysis methods. In this study, I achieved the transferability of the study outcomes by providing a detailed description of all research

procedures, including research method design, sampling techniques, data collection, and data collection plan to guarantee the replication of the study by other researchers.

Confirmability

Shenton (2004) defined confirmability as the degree of neutrality of research findings informed by participants' views rather than the researcher's. Researchers such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) have proposed member checking to ease researcher bias and attain confirmability of the study. Other researchers have suggested external audits to enhance the study's confirmability (Shenton, 2004). I raised confirmability in this study by utilizing interview protocol and member checking to guarantee the results represent participants' viewpoints (Shenton, 2004). I also used committee feedback to improve the study design. In addition, I furnished an audit trail that provides detailed descriptions of essential research procedures. I provided an in-depth description of data collection, participants' demographics, and all other procedures to allow confirmability.

Dependability

The last segment of trustworthiness is dependability. Dependability refers to the researcher's detailed account of changes made to their studies so that other researchers can assess and comprehend their inquiries (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended using an audit trail as the principal strategy for achieving dependability. I achieved dependability in this study by using a change matrix spreadsheet to track entire documents and study design changes. I also used audit trail and member checking to increase the study's dependability.

Ethical Requirements

I executed the study under applicable guidelines provided by Walden University's IRB. Before running and collecting data, I pursued site permission to perform the study from the selected university. Afterward, I sought Walden's University IRB approval. Afterward, I contacted participants and start the data collection procedure. I ensured that the research adheres to Belmont's respect for persons, justice, and beneficence regulations. To uphold the principles of respect for persons, I sought consent from participants. Prior to the interview dawn, participants were asked to sign a consent form after a brief on the study. Participants were informed that their privacy and confidentiality shall be kept throughout the study process using pseudonyms. Concerning beneficence, I informed participants about the study's usefulness and risks. However, the benefits of participating in this study outweighed the minimum psychological risks of a 60-minute interview.

Regarding the justice principle, all interested participants were asked to participate in the study without prejudice. The information obtained from this research will be kept for at least five years and disposed of. Electronic data will be deleted from the hard drive, while physical copies will be shredded. Individuals' identities will be kept anonymous during the research to ensure their privacy.

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Summary

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The specific problem that was addressed through this study was the lack of research examining the potential of poor social skills to influence low retention levels in Ghanaian universities (Wijayanama, 2020). The purpose of this qualitative study was to

explore the reasons for low student retention in Ghanaian universities, including students that have inadequate social skills to complete their degrees.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation addresses the research methodology and design the researcher will use to conduct the study. Other sections discussed in the chapter include the researcher's role, methodology (participant's description, sampling, sample size, and recruitment procedures), data analysis plans, and trustworthiness issues. In the chapter, the researcher also discussed ethical issues related to the current study. Chapter 4 presents the study's results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how higher education students in Ghanaian universities describe the influence of campus social integration on their retention intentions. The low retention of students in higher education in Ghanaian universities is alarming and calls for more research on mitigating the phenomenon. I addressed how social integration on campus influences student retention intentions. The following two research questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of university students in Ghana as they relate to the extent of social development skills in higher education?

RQ2: What are the lived experiences of university students in Ghana surrounding decisions to leave or stay in schools?

The next section of this chapter is a description of the setting of data collection. This chapter then proceeds with a description of the participant demographics, followed by descriptions of the execution of the data collection and data analysis procedures. A discussion of the evidence of the trustworthiness of the findings is then provided, followed by a detailed presentation of the findings. A summary of the findings concludes this chapter.

Setting

The setting of data collection was the online videoconference application Zoom. I conducted the interviews from a locked, private office where they would not be overheard in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants' identities. The participants were invited to join the interviews from any safe, comfortable location where

they would have privacy and few distractions. There were no personal or organizational conditions at time of study that would influence the interpretation of the results.

Demographics

The participants were a purposeful sample of 16 undergraduate or graduate students in Ghanaian universities, above 18 years of age. Table 1 indicates the demographic characteristics of the individual study participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Year in university	Area of study
P1	20	Male	Dagaaba	3	Agricultural extension
P2	44	Male	Akan	2	Accounting education
P3	27	Female	Akan	2	Diagnostic imaging technology
P4	22	Male	Akan	2	Agricultural engineering
P5	25	Male	Akan	4	Law
P6	28	Male	Fanti	3	Financial accounting
P7	21	Male	Hausa	2	Information technology education
P8	20	Male	Akan	3	Natural resources management
P9	20	Male	Ewe	2	Agriculture
P10	20	Male	Ga	3	Economics
P11	18	Female	Akan	2	Nursing
P12	18	Female	Hausa	4	Engineering
P13	21	Male	Fanti	2	Information and Communication Technology

P14	22	Male	Ga	3	Biotechnology Procurement
P15	21	Female	Guan	3	Engineering
P16	18	Male	Frafra	2	Civil Engineering

Data Collection

One interview was conducted with each of the 16 participants. The setting of the interviews was Zoom. The interviews were audio-recorded using Zoom's integrated audio-recording feature. The average duration of the interviews was approximately 60 minutes. There were no deviations from the data collection procedure described in Chapter 3, and no unexpected circumstances were encountered during data collection.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed in MAXQDA software using the inductive, thematic procedure recommended by Braun and Clarke (2012). The first step involved gaining familiarity with the data. Familiarity was gained by reading and rereading the interview transcripts in full. Notes were made on repeated terms, phrases, and ideas during the familiarization process.

Generating initial codes was the second step. The interview transcripts were broken down into segments of text, each consisting of a phrase or group of phrases that expressed one idea relevant to addressing a research question. A total of 141 such segments of text were identified across the 16 transcripts. Each of these segments of text was assigned to a code in the MAXQDA code system pane. When two different segments of text expressed similar, relevant meanings, they were assigned to the same code, and in

this way, different excerpts from the data that expressed similar ideas were clustered inductively, according to the emergent patterns of meaning that were recognized in them. The codes to which the text segments were assigned were labeled with brief, descriptive phrases to summarize the meaning of the data assigned to them. Overall, the 141 segments of relevant text identified in the data were assigned to 19 initial codes. Table 2 indicates the initial codes and how many segments of text from the data were assigned to each of them.

Table 2

Initial Codes

Initial code	n of participants contributing data (N=16)	n of data segments assigned to code
Counseling	4	4
Coursework	10	13
Discrepant data - No change	1	2
Financial constraints may affect degree completion	6	6
Future work requires social skills	12	13
Group collaboration opportunities	4	5
High commitment to finishing degree	15	15
Improved social skills	13	15
Mentorship programs	4	4
Opportunities to meet people	6	8
Opportunity to travel	4	4
Poor social skills before university	9	9
Poor supervision	2	2

Public speaking opportunities	5	5
Socially competent before university	7	7
Stress	1	1
Student associations	6	6
Student organizations	12	15
Teachers create environment for skill development	6	7

The third step of the analysis involved forming themes. Themes were formed by grouping related initial codes into a smaller number of broader categories to identify larger patterns of meaning in the data. For example, the codes "financial constraints may affect degree completion" and "poor supervision" were grouped together to form a theme because they both indicated reasons why students might not complete their degree. The initial codes "counseling," "mentorship programs," and, "student organizations" were grouped to form a preliminary theme because they all indicated university-level supports for students social-skills development that were not currently offered that the participants wanted the university to offer in the future. The three initial codes "group collaboration opportunities," "public speaking opportunities," and, "teachers create environment for skill development" were grouped into a preliminary theme because they all indicated teacher-level supports for students social-skills development that the participants indicated they wanted teachers in their universities to provide more of. Table 3 indicates how the 19 initial codes were grouped to form the five themes used to address the research questions.

The fourth step of the analysis involved reviewing the themes. First, the themes were checked against the original data to make sure that they accurately represented patterns in what the participants were saying. Second, the themes were compared to one another to make sure that they did not overlap. Third, each theme was reviewed to make sure that it expressed only a singly, coherent idea, rather than multiple ideas that would be better presented as two or more smaller themes.

In the fifth step of the analysis, the themes were identified. The themes were identified by reviewing the data assigned to them to assess its meaning. Then, the data and its meaning were compared to the research question to identify each theme's significance as an answer addressing a research question. Table 3 indicates the finalized theme names.

Table 3

Grouping of Initial Codes to Form Finalized Themes

Theme Initial code grouped to form theme	*n* of participants contributing data (*N*=16)	*n* of data segments assigned to theme
Theme 1: Participants developed their social skills through university attendance	7	25
Coursework		
Discrepant data - No change		
Improved social skills		
Opportunities to meet people		
Poor social skills before university		
Socially competent before university		
Student associations		
Theme 2: More university-level development of students' social skills is needed	7	14
Counseling		
Mentorship programs		
Student organizations		
Theme 3: Teachers can contribute more to the development of students' social skills	6	10
Group collaboration opportunities		
Public speaking opportunities		
Teachers create environment for skill development		
Theme 4: Decisions to stay in school are based on commitment to earning the degree and the future career need for social skills	7	14
Future work requires social skills		
High commitment to finishing degree		
Theme 5: Decisions to leave school are based on financial and supervisory factors	4	4
Financial constraints may affect degree completion		
Opportunity to travel		
Poor supervision		
Stress		

The sixth step of the analysis involved reporting the findings. The findings were reported by writing this chapter of the study. The results section of this chapter includes a detailed report of the findings.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In qualitative studies, the concept of trustworthiness is indispensable. According to Shenton (2004), trustworthiness allows the researcher to assess the rigor of the study outcomes. There are four major components for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative studies. The four components include dependability, reliability, credibility, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each of the components discussed below.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence other people have in the study outcome (Shenton, 2004). Researchers such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) have identified several strategies for obtaining credibility, such as member checking. In this study, credibility was achieved through member checking. Member checking refers to assessing the accuracy of a qualitative study by providing participants the opportunity to check the accuracy of the interview transcripts (Lincoln Guba, 1985). Member checking is a primary technique for promoting the credibility of the study findings (Shenton, 2004). In this study, I provided all participants with summaries of their interview transcripts to review for accuracy. In addition, participants were asked to review my interpretation of their responses and were allowed to clarify if the interpretation aligned with their intentions. This process enhanced the credibility of the findings.

Transferability

Qualitative investigators used transferability to describe the study's results in other studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have recommended using thick descriptions to attain transferability. As explained by Shenton (2004), thick descriptions permit the researcher to comprehensively describe the sample used in their studies, data collection approaches, and data analysis methods. In this study, transferability of the study outcomes was achieved by providing a detailed description of all research procedures, including research method design, sampling techniques, data collection, and data collection plan to facilitate the replication of the study by other researchers.

Confirmability

Shenton (2004) defined confirmability as the degree of neutrality of research findings informed by participants' views rather than that of the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested member checking to reduce researcher bias and achieve confirmability of the study. Other scholars have also recommended external audits to improve the study's confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability was achieved in this study by using interview protocols and member checking to ensure the results represented participants' viewpoints (Shenton, 2004). Committee feedback was also used to improve the study design. In addition, an audit trail was provided, which refers to providing detailed descriptions of key research procedures. In-depth descriptions are provided of data collection, participants' demographics, and all other procedures to allow confirmability.

Dependability

The last component of trustworthiness is dependability. Dependability refers to the researcher's detailed account of changes made to their studies so that other researchers can evaluate and understand their inquiries (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended using an audit trail as the major strategy for achieving dependability. In this study, I enhanced dependability by using a change matrix spreadsheet to track key document changes and study design changes. An audit trail and member checking were also used to increase the study's dependability.

<div align="center">

Results

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This presentation of the results is organized by research question. Table 4 is an overview of how the themes were used to address the research questions.

Table 4

Alignment of Themes with Research Questions

Research question	Theme used to address question
RQ1: What are the lived experiences of university students in Ghana as they relate to the extent of social development skills in higher education?	Theme 1: Participants developed their social skills through university attendance. Theme 2: More university-level development of students' social skills is needed. Theme 3: Teachers can contribute more to the development of students' social skills.
RQ2: What are the lived experiences of university students in Ghana surrounding decisions to leave or stay in schools?	Theme 4: Decisions to stay in school are based on commitment to earning the degree and the future career need for social skills. Theme 5: Decisions to leave school are based on financial and supervisory factors.

Research Question One

RQ1 was "What are the lived experiences of university students in Ghana as they relate to the extent of social development skills in higher education?" Three themes were used to address this question, including: (a) participants developed their social skills through university attendance, (b) more university-level development of students' social skills is needed, and (c) teachers can contribute more to the development of students' social skills. The following subsections are presentations of these themes.

Theme 1: Participants Developed Their Social Skills Through University Attendance

A slight majority of participants reported that they had poor or average social skills prior to their university attendance. In attending university, they indicated, they improved their social skills. Aspects of university life that participants perceived as contributing to improved social skills included opportunities to meet more people, as well as a more diverse set of people, than they had prior to attending university; opportunities to participate in student associations; and coursework that included a focus on communication strategies and opportunities to collaborate on group projects or practice public speaking.

Nine participants perceived themselves as having poor social skills prior to attending university, they indicated. P1 said, "I was not sociable and wanted to do things alone." P3 reported that she did not know how to interact with peers: "Concerning my social skills, before entering the university, I didn't know much about social skills and

how to interact with other lady colleagues." P7 reported being shy and isolated prior to university:

> I was mostly at home. I wouldn't go out to play with friends . . . those that I saw were my parents, my younger siblings, and then just a few friends who lived closer to me. But for the greater majority, I had few friends, and whenever we went out, I was very shy, so I couldn't speak in public. So, that is how my life was prior to university.

P9 described poor social skills in saying, "Had low level of confidence in interacting with people and had hopes to better that in the university." P12 described a pattern of neglecting social skills development in favor of academics, saying that social skills prior to university were, "Not so good, because my focus was on academics that lead to a neglect of social skills, particularly I had to spend too much time studying in isolated academic pursuits." P15 said that her social skills development was uneven because, "I was more comfortable talking to girls than boys since I went to a single sex school."

Seven participants described themselves as having average or competent social skills prior to attending university. P2 said, "My social skills were good. I can get many people around me." P5 reported, "Average" social skills. P6 reported being reticent but still having adequate social skills prior to attending university: "I'm a bit reserved, but then I was able to fit in in any group where I found myself. I was OK." P16 described himself as having strong social skills prior to university, saying, "Prior to entering the university, I was able to establish a rapport with colleagues and build trust with teachers and deal with social situations with ease."

Whether the participants reported that they had adequate or poor social skills prior to attending university, 15 out of 16 of them reported that attending university led to improvements in their social skills. P1, who reported having poor social skills and "wanting to do things alone," said, "But now it has improved, because the university community has diverse cultures, which makes one open up." P2, who reported having good social skills prior to entering university, indicated that attending university, "Improved my social skills . . . I could live with many people right now from different countries. I met people from different backgrounds, which has increased that area socially." P4 said of participation in a peer counseling initiative at the university, "It has improved my communication skills. It has really improved because I was able to join a peer counseling unit to learn and get to know people and build my skills of communication." P6, who reported having good social skills despite being "reserved" prior to entering university, said that since starting university, "I can relate better. When I'm in a group, I'm able to talk. I'm able to relate, able to use all the expressions I need to use with the body language." P7, who reported having poor social skills before university, said that since entering postsecondary education, "I have come to realize that some of the things which I felt shy about, there is no need for that [feeling shy]." P8 said that since coming to university, "I've improved my communication and cooperation skills." P9 described better interpersonal skills: "There's been massive improvement in diverse ways especially with eye contact and cooperativeness. Overall, developing strong social skills, including eye contact and cooperativeness, has helped me to navigate social situations with confidence and build positive relationships with others." P14 said of university, "It

has developed my social skills. It has helped me develop my communication skills in public." P15, who felt constrained when speaking to males prior to coming to university because of her attendance at a single-sex secondary school, felt more at ease socializing with males after having more opportunities to interact with them: "It's better now. I enjoy talking to boys more than girls and I sometimes start conversations unlike before." P16, who described himself as having excellent social skills in interactions with both adults and peers prior to attending university, said that through university attendance, "My social skills have improved."

One participant, P5, provided partly discrepant data. Asked whether attending university had led to improvements in social skills, P5 stated, "Still average. No changes." However, as will be seen in the remaining discussion of this theme, when P5 was asked what aspects of the university experience they perceived as contributing to improving their social skills, they cited two, including student associations (sports teams) and coursework (class presentations).

Six participants cited student associations and other student-driven social activities and events as contributing to improving their social skills at university. P2 said, "It's the [student] associations I joined here when I came that have helped me integrate into the university system, and the Christian fellowship that I also joined." P3 cited student leadership associations as promoting integration and social skills development: "Concerning integration, my involvement with activities in student leadership in the university system has helped me to integrate well." P4 also cited the student leadership association, saying of activities that promoted social skills development, "Programs that

the university organizes such as leadership have helped me build up [social skills], and also activities of the student representative council." P5, despite claiming in one discrepant response that university attendance did not contribute to improvements in his social skills, stated in a different response that his social skills were improved across multiple dimensions through participation in student athletics:

> I will say sport [has improved my social skills] because it builds teamwork, and participating in team sports requires you to work together and rely on each other to achieve a common goal. This has helped me develop teamwork skills, such as communication, collaboration, and trust.

P8 said that he had gained opportunities to assume a prominent role and interact with others because, "Being the head coach of my hostel, I play a major role during football tournaments."

Six participants indicated that an aspect of the university experience that they perceived as improving their social skills was the opportunity to meet more people, as well as the opportunity to meet a more diverse set of people, than they had typically encountered prior to starting their postsecondary education. P2 reported diverse encounters even within a domain as small as a student's living quarters:

> Right now, due to all the cultural encounters on campus, I can relate better with people now. Like, I live with people from East Africa, for instance, my roommates. Last year, one of my roommates was from Ivory Coast and two were from South Sudan. And I come from the Gambia, so you come to see different

people within just a room. So, I've been able to live with anyone right now, and the university has helped me.

P3 suggested that seeing other students flourish in a diverse social environment motivated her to integrate and succeed there as well: "The social terrain where you see other students progressing, you will also want to advance when you analyze yourself and others in society and how they are moving on. You are compelled to move along with it." P7 described opportunities to meet new people as contributing to social skills development and a sense of belonging at university: "University has a positive impact on my social skills by providing opportunities to meet new people, develop communication skills, build confidence, learn about resources, and foster a sense of belonging." P9 said that his social skills had improved through opportunities to meet diverse people during, "Social gatherings [and] getting to meet people with different perspective of life." P10 agreed, saying, "Different people from different fields helps your social skills development, socializing with new people each day."

Ten participants cited aspects of their university coursework as contributing to their social skills development. P1 cited a required communication skills course as beneficial:

Communication skills is a course taught in the first year that allows students to have group discussions and presentations with a teacher's supervision. Even if you are not presenting with a group, the teacher ensures that each [student] contributes. And that has helped [to develop my social skills].

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P5, despite saying in the discrepant response quoted previously that university did not contribute to an improvement in his social skills, said that giving presentations in his classes helped to improve his social skills across several domains: "Course presentation has helped me, presentations being an effective way for students to develop their social skills, including communication, interpersonal, confidence, public speaking, and critical thinking skills." P6 indicated that collaborating with other students on group work contributed to social skills development: "The assignments that are given [to students] as groups, the university's assignment on community work, those things expose you. It helps develop your social skills." P8 cited oral presentation and collaborative work as effective in building social skills: "With series of oral presentations and having work as a team in groups in building essential social skills in both academic and professional settings." Like P8, P11 cited collaborative projects as effective in building social skills: "University has helped me improve on social skills through projects being assigned to us by the lecturers which enables me to collaborate with my colleagues to bring out possible solutions." P14 stated that his social skills improved in a class project that involved both public speaking and collaborative effort: "When I was asked to do a group presentation." P15's social skills had improved, she said, "because we tend to have a lot of projects forcing me to interact with my peers." Thus, the participants cited a combination of opportunities to meet new people, coursework, and student associations as contributing to their social-skills development. However, the participants also indicated that in their experience, the university and their teachers could have done more to help students develop their social skills, as will be discussed under the following two themes.

Theme 2: More University-Level Development of Students' Social Skills Is Needed

Fourteen participants indicated that in their perception, more university-level development of students' social skills was needed. The participants cited three specific ways in which they believed the university administration should coordinate initiatives to develop students' social skills more effectively. One way to further develop students' social skills would be through increased promotion of student associations and organizations, most participants indicated. Participants also suggested that the university should invest more in counseling and mentorship programs to help students improve their social skills.

Twelve participants indicated that more effective promotion of student associations, organizations, and social events was needed to further develop students' social skills. P1 believed that universities should engage in more purposeful promotion of student associations and activities because students could thereby make friends: "Universities can provide a wide variety of student organizations that cater to different interests and hobbies. Joining a student organization can help students connect with like-minded individuals and make friends." P1 also recommended that the university engage in a more purposeful promotion of student activities and events in order to help students feel more connected to the university community as a whole: "Universities can organize campus events such as sports games, concerts, and cultural festivals that unite the entire community. Attending these events can help students feel more connected to the university and its community." P2 noted that many student associations existed, but that they often formed spontaneously, without significant university support, through the

initiative of students who felt disengaged from the university: "When they [students] are sidelined, and they are not given attention, they tend to form groups . . . So, those associations, most of these are formed because they [students] see themselves as not being engaged by the university." P2 perceived this situation as an opportunity for the university to engage students more effectively by actively promoting student organizations: "Just give them [students] something to do to feel that [they are included], like putting them in your activities." P4 corroborated P2's response, speaking of the benefits of purposefully promoting student organizations and activities at the university level:

> The university should organize programs for inclusion that provide students the opportunity to develop their social skills, meet new people, and build meaningful relationships. By participating in clubs, group activities, attending social events, and volunteering, students can develop skills that will benefit them inside and outside the classroom.

P5 felt that the focus of the university administration was too one-sidedly academic: "The university should not make our activities only academic because if the focus is [only] on getting good grades, then students will not be able to develop any meaningful skills to fit well in our community." P7 agreed, saying that to help develop students' social skills,

> The university can help students feel more connected to the university community and improve their overall academic experience. Encouraging student-led initiatives can help students feel more empowered and invested in the university

community. For example, universities can provide resources and support for

student organizations or student-led projects.

P8 recommended that the university should add more, "social clubs and organizations,"

for students. P9 recommended holding gatherings similar to the kinds already being held,

but conducting them more frequently: "Increasing the rate at which gatherings will be

held. By increasing the rate of gatherings in the school, students can have more

opportunities to practice and develop their social skills." P12 agreed with P9, indicating

that the university could assist students in developing their social skills by increasing the

number of events, or, "Organizing more events and student organizations to help meet

more people." P15 also agreed with P9 and P12, recommending that the university

engage in, "Holding more interactive social gatherings."

Four participants suggested that to help develop students' social skills,

universities should invest more in counseling services. P3 suggested, "The university

could advance the way of counseling because most students probably need something.

Create avenues where students can walk in to seek help and make the students aware of

counseling units." P8 said, "The university can provide supportive services such as

counseling that can help us in our personal behaviors." P4 suggested developing a peer

counseling program to strengthen relationships and build social skills among students:

Peer counseling should be developed well, and that can be a valuable tool for

creating a sense of community among students. By providing emotional support,

fostering friendships, encouraging engagement, and providing information and

resources, peer counselors can help students feel more connected and supported within the university community.

Four participants suggested that universities implement peer mentorship programs. P1 said, "Universities can offer mentorship programs where upper-level students can mentor incoming students. This can provide new students with a support system and help them adjust to university life." Like P1, P8 suggested peer mentoring: "Supportive services such as peer mentorship can help students to build their social skills." P6 suggested that a mentorship program be implemented to pair students with faculty members, to diversify students' acquaintanceships and gain them the benefit of a more experienced individual's guidance:

Probably it [the university, to improve students' social skills] can be offering mentorship programs that pair students with faculty or staff members. This can provide students with role models and opportunities for guidance and support. Foster a culture of inclusivity by encouraging diverse perspectives and providing opportunities for students to learn from and interact with individuals from different backgrounds and cultures.

Thus, the participants indicated that the university should more purposefully promote and invest in student organizations, associations, and activities to provide students with more opportunities to connect with one another and with the university as a whole, as well as implementing counseling and mentorship programs to gain newer students the guidance of more experienced peers and faculty. The following theme indicates ways in which the

participants indicated that their teachers could take the initiative to support their social-skills development.

Theme 3: Teachers Can Contribute More to the Development of Students' Social Skills

As discussed under Theme 1, some participants perceived their teachers as contributing to their social skills development, either through curriculum on communication skills, through opportunities for group work that led them to collaborate with other students, or through opportunities to practice public speaking. However, 12 out of 16 participants expressed the perception that their instructors could do more to promote the development of students' social skills, and their suggestions for teacher-led initiatives to do so are the topic of the present theme. Some participants indicated that teachers could promote students' social skills development by providing more opportunities to practice public speaking in classes. Some participants also suggested that teachers more purposefully turn classes into environments for the development of social skills, and that teachers provide more opportunities for social skills development through student group collaborations.

Five participants indicated that teachers could contribute more to students' social skills development by providing students with more opportunities to practice public speaking. P2 said of ways that teachers could contribute to students' social skills development, "It might be when it comes to public speaking with a large audience. That is one thing that is lacking here." P3 corroborated P2's perception that public speaking opportunities were needed but lacking: "With presentations, students could use public speaking skills and other skills that could help them. But our system mostly centers on

examinations and quizzes, which doesn't help students." P5, who reported (see Theme 1) that he had already benefitted from opportunities to practice public speaking in class, believed that students would benefit from more such opportunities:

> Public speaking, I think that [would help students develop social skills]. The theoretical work can be translated to give students opportunities to practice their public speaking skills in a supportive environment, such as in a class presentation or debate. By receiving feedback from peers and instructors, students can refine their skills and improve their delivery.

P6 regretted the omission of public speaking practice from their education: "I should have been introduced to public speaking. Developing public speaking as a social skill would have helped me plan and prepare speeches. It could have helped me engage the audience by asking questions, soliciting feedback, and encouraging participation." P6 reported observing success among former classmates who were given the opportunity to practice public speaking while in university: "Student friends who had these skills during our undergraduate years have had the opportunity to secure public sector jobs quickly and they are doing very well." To remedy the omission of public speaking skills from some students' education, P6 said, "I believe that public speaking should be added as a course for all undergraduate students to be exposed to it, so it becomes part of your developmental skills." P9 recommended public speaking opportunities as a way to increase students' confidence, saying that instructors could help students improve their social skills, "By organizing more class presentations to help boost the confidence level of students."

Six participants expressed the perception that teachers could help to develop students' social skills by purposefully making their classrooms environments for social skills development. P1 suggested, "Teachers can create a classroom environment conducive to developing social skills. This includes encouraging open communication, active listening, and respect for diverse perspectives." P6 suggested that instructors could also create forums for online interaction and social skills development: "Foster a sense of community by creating an online discussion forum where students can engage with each other and with the professor, even outside of the physical classroom. This can help create a sense of community and encourage active participation." P10 recommended, "A full course for everyone to take part," and P14 suggested, "Organizing seminars to help develop students' social skills."

Four participants suggested that teachers could promote social skills development in students by providing opportunities for group work and collaboration. P1 suggested that professors engage in, "Developing group meetings skills and building more team effort activities." P7 proposed that faculty, "Encourage students to work together and collaborate on group activities. This will help us develop our communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills." P12 stated a desire for opportunities to engage in, "Practicing cooperation to build my social skills, because that is to be involved in working with others towards a common goal, which requires effective communication, empathy, and conflict resolution skills." Thus, the participants believed that teachers could help develop students' social skills through implementing more group work, public

speaking opportunities, and intentional dedication of the classroom environmental (whether virtual or in-person) to social skills development.

Research Question Two

RQ2 was: What are the lived experiences of university students in Ghana surrounding decisions to leave or stay in schools? Two themes were used to address this question, including (Theme 4) decisions to stay in school are based on commitment to earning the degree and the future career need for social skills, and (Theme 5) decisions to leave school are based on financial and supervisory factors. The following subsections are presentations of these themes.

Theme 4: Decisions to Stay in School Are Based on Commitment to Earning the Degree and the Future Career Need for Social Skills

When asked about factors that influenced their decision to remain in university, almost all of the participants expressed that one such factor was their personal commitment to completing their degree. A second factor, most participants indicated, was their perception that the improvements in their social skills that had occurred during their time in university would benefit them in their future careers. The participants believed that the development of their social skills was valuable and ongoing, and they hoped to gain as much of this benefit as possible before entering the workforce because they believed that it would make them more successful in their chosen fields.

Fifteen participants indicated that a factor in their decision-making to remain in school was their personal commitment to completing their degree. P1 said of earning a degree that they were, "Very committed to it," and P2 also said of earning the degree, "I

am very, very committed. As somebody who likes reading, I put all my best into what I do, from school to studies." P3 said, "My commitment to finishing my degrees toward attaining good grades because here good grades count for being committed to that academically with a significant development in my social skills." P4 reported being, "100%" committed to earning the degree and added, "The commitment is very high." P5 also described himself as being, "100% committed" to earning a degree. P6 said of earning a degree, "I'm seriously committed, I want to get this done and move on with my life. I'm seriously working hard." P7 also described himself as, "Very committed because I see my life depended on it. I am putting my very best to complete my program." P8 also described himself as, "Very committed" to finishing his degree, and P9 said, "I'm giving all my best to finish this degree I'm pursuing." P10 described himself as, "Fully committed." P11 was, "Highly committed to my course," and P12 said, "I'm very committed." P15 said, "I'm trying my best in all criteria because after all that I've gone through I must finish and finish hard or else I've just wasted my time." P16 said he was, "Very committed, since I want to graduate with a first-class [degree]."

Twelve participants also indicated that they remained in school to further develop their social skills, which they believed would benefit them in their future careers. P1 spoke of needing to develop social skills to help patients feel at ease in the healthcare field: "I must develop my communication and interpersonal skills with others because the health service is a comforting environment where one needs strong interpersonal skills." P3 wanted to develop social skills that would translate into strong negotiation skills: "I think I have social skills in negotiations and could negotiate well before my argument."

P4 wanted to develop social skills to succeed in the human resources field: "As an HR professional who possesses strong social skills, I can use them as powerful tools in the workplace to build relationships, resolve conflicts, attract, and retain top talent, and facilitate employee training and development." P5 wanted to continue to develop his social skills because, "Collaboration with people is essential in the workplace. Being able to work effectively with others, share ideas, and compromise when necessary is key to achieving common goals and completing projects successfully." P7 wanted to continue to develop a range of social skills to promote future professional success: "By developing effective communication skills, conflict resolution skills, empathy, collaboration skills, and adaptability, I can build strong and supportive relationships with others, which can lead me to be coming a greater person and build my professional success." P8 said he wanted to remain in university to continue to improve his social skills because, "Having strong social skills can be an important factor in securing a decent job, as many employers value employees who can effectively communicate, collaborate, and build relationships with others." P16 said of his future degree and his university experience, "I'll use it together with my social skills in search of a well-paid job, since it'll help build a healthy relationship with my clients."

Theme 5: Decisions to Leave School Are Based on Financial and Supervisory Factors

As indicated under the previous theme, participants' commitment to completing their degrees was high. However, 13 participants were able to think of circumstances under which they might consider leaving university without completing their degree. For six of those participants, the circumstances in question were financial barriers to

continuing their education. Four participants cited opportunities to travel or to complete their education abroad as potentially causing them to leave their current university without their degree. For two participants, ineffective or neglectful supervision from professors, if sufficiently severe, might influence a decision to quit.

Six participants cited financial barriers as reasons why they might consider quitting university without first earning their degree. P4 said, "The only reason [that I would drop out] will be financial constraints." P5 said of reasons why he might leave school, "That will be financial." P9 said he might quit because of, "Lack of funds to cater for my basic needs," and P10 said, "Financial constraints" could conceivably cause him to quit early. P11 and P13 both cited, "Financial problems" as a possible reason for leaving university without a degree.

Four participants indicated that they might leave their current university without a degree if they had an opportunity to travel or complete their education abroad. P8 said of reasons why he might leave his current school, "I think it might be related to traveling outside the country for a better education in an advanced country like the USA or UK." Similarly, P16 said he might leave his current university for the purpose of, "Probably travelling outside the country to continue my studies." P14 spoke of potentially leaving university in the event that, "Maybe there's an opportunity for me to travel," and P12 likewise spoke of potentially leaving university early to, "Travel."

P6 and P7 both cited ineffective or neglectful instruction or supervision from professors as reasons why they might consider leaving university prematurely. P6 said, "The bottom line is the poor supervisory rule over a student's thesis [or poor] lecture

supervision can have a significant impact on students' ability to complete their education." P6 added that when instructors were not engaging, students could lose motivation: "If students feel that their lectures are not engaging or informative, they may lose interest in the subject and become less motivated to complete their education." P7 said he might consider quitting due to, "Not having accountability and motivation from academic supervisors," because, "I believe a supportive supervisor can help me stay accountable and motivated to complete the degree."

Summary

Two research questions were used to guide this study. RQ1 was: What are the lived experiences of university students in Ghana as they relate to the extent of social development skills in higher education? Three themes were used to address this question. The first RQ1 theme was: participants developed their social skills through university attendance. Most participants reported that they had poor or average social skills prior to their university attendance. In attending university, they indicated, they improved their social skills. Aspects of university life that participants perceived as contributing to improved social skills included opportunities to meet more people, as well as a more diverse set of people, than they had prior to attending university; opportunities to participate in student associations; and coursework that included a focus on communication strategies and opportunities to collaborate on group projects or practice public speaking.

The second RQ1 theme was: more university-level development of students' social skills is needed. Most participants indicated that in their perception, more

university-level development of students' social skills was needed. The participants cited three specific ways in which they believed the university administration should coordinate initiatives to develop students' social skills more effectively. One way to further develop students' social skills would be through increased promotion of student associations and organizations, most participants indicated. Participants also suggested that the university should invest more in counseling and mentorship programs to help students improve their social skills.

The third RQ1 theme was: teachers can contribute more to the development of students' social skills. Most participants indicated that teachers could promote students' social skills development by providing more opportunities to practice public speaking in classes. Some participants also suggested that teachers more purposefully turn classes into environments for the development of social skills, and that teachers provide more opportunities for social skills development through student group collaborations.

RQ2 was: What are the lived experiences of university students in Ghana surrounding decisions to leave or stay in schools? Two themes were used to address this question. The first RQ2 theme was: decisions to stay in school are based on commitment to earning the degree and the future career need for social skills. When asked about factors that influenced their decision to remain in university, almost all of the participants expressed that one such factor was their personal commitment to completing their degree. A second factor, most participants indicated, was their perception that the improvements in their social skills that had occurred during their time in university would benefit them in their future careers. The participants believed that the development of their social skills

was valuable and ongoing, and they hoped to gain as much of this benefit as possible before entering the workforce because they believed that it would make them more successful in their chosen fields.

The second RQ2 theme was: decisions to leave school are based on financial and supervisory factors. As indicated under the previous theme, participants' commitment to completing their degrees was high. Thirteen participants were able to think of circumstances under which they might consider leaving university without completing their degree. For six of those participants, the circumstances in question were financial barriers to continuing their education. Four participants indicated that they might leave their current university without a degree if they had an opportunity to travel or complete their education abroad. For two participants, ineffective or neglectful supervision from professors, if sufficiently severe, might influence a decision to quit. Chapter 5 includes discussion and interpretation of these findings.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how higher education students in Ghanaian universities describe the influence of campus social integration on their retention intentions. The low retention of students in higher education in Ghanaian universities was alarming and calls for more research on mitigating the phenomenon. I sought to address how social integration on campus influences student retention intentions. The situation or issue that prompted me to search the literature is the low retention of undergraduate and graduate students in Ghanaian universities and how that may be impacted by poor social integration on campuses. Despite significant reforms, many improvements are needed in the Ghanaian education system to improve employment, research, and publication opportunities (Arhin & Laryea, 2020).

I used a qualitative research methodology in this study. Qualitative researchers often investigate a phenomenon through participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes in their natural settings (Patton, 2014). The qualitative research methodology was selected because tIsought to provide accurate and systematic descriptions of how social integration on campus influences student retention. The primary source of data for this study was virtual interviews via Zoom. Patton (2014) recommended using interviews for qualitative studies, given the ability to allow researchers to collect in-depth data on the phenomenon. The participants were a purposeful sample of 16 undergraduate or graduate students above 18 years of age in Ghanaian universities. Data analysis was conducted using MAXQDA for coding and theme alignment.

After conducting data analysis, the results demonstrated that students developed their social skills through university attendance. The participants reported having poor or average social skills before university attendance. In attending university, they indicated, they improved their social skills. Aspects of university life that participants perceived as contributing to improved social skills included opportunities to meet more people, as well as a more diverse set of people than they had before attending university; opportunities to participate in student associations; and coursework that included a focus on communication strategies and opportunities to collaborate on group projects or practice public speaking. The results revealed the need for more university-level development of students' social skills. One way to further develop students' social skills would be through increased promotion of student associations and organizations. Participants also suggested that the university invest more in counseling and mentorship programs to help students improve their social skills.

Teachers can contribute more to the development of students' social skills. Teachers could promote students' social skills development by providing more opportunities to practice public speaking in classes. Some participants also suggested that teachers more purposefully turn classes into environments for the development of social skills and that teachers provide more opportunities for social skills development through student group collaborations. Decisions to stay in school are based on the commitment to earning the degree and the future career need for social skills. Personal commitment influences students to complete their degrees. Student perception led to improvements in their social skills during their time in university, benefiting them in their future careers.

The participants believed that developing their social skills was valuable and ongoing, and they hoped to gain as much of this benefit as possible before entering the workforce because they believed that it would make them more successful in their chosen fields. Circumstances under which students might consider leaving university without completing their degree include financial barriers to continuing their education. If sufficiently severe, ineffective or neglectful supervision from professors might influence a decision to quit. Chapter 5 presents the discussion and interpretation of these findings, study limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

The discussion and interpretation of findings were based on the research questions presented below.

Research Question One

RQ1 was: "What are the lived experiences of university students in Ghana related to the extent of social development skills in higher education?" The findings revealed that students developed their social skills through university attendance. Students had poor social skills before attending university education. However, in attending university, they improved their social skills by meeting other people through social integration and socialization on campus, thereby improving their social skills. Getting opportunities to meet diverse people on campus through student associations and coursework focused on communication strategies allowed students to collaborate on group projects or practice public speaking. The results imply that attending university improves students' social

skills through social integration, collaboration, and meeting diverse people with diverse levels of social skills.

Consistent with current study findings, past research demonstrates that student retention programs aim to increase student persistence, collaboration, and performance while discouraging dropouts (Hoyt, 2021; Lemoine et al., 2019). While current findings demonstrate that student associations and communication strategies can improve student social skills and retention, Sritharan (2020) posited that emotional intelligence and communication competencies on campus influence student retention decisions. There was a need for more university-level development of student's social skills, as reported by student participants. Students perceived that the university administration should coordinate initiatives to develop students' social skills more effectively. One way to further develop students' social skills would be through the increased promotion of student associations and organizations and investing more in counseling and mentorship programs to help students improve their social skills. Research findings imply that universities could enhance and develop students' social skills by promoting student associations and organizations and investing more in counseling and mentorship programs (Lemoine et al., 2019).

The findings are consistent with the previous literature about strategies to enhance student retention. For example, other studies revealed that mentoring programs provide students with effective academic preparation, social support, and enhanced student retention in schools, thereby improving students' academic performance, persistence, and increased graduation rate (see Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). My study has added to

past studies by establishing that universities could enhance and develop students' social skills by promoting student associations and organizations and investing more in counseling programs. The findings concur with Lisberg and Woods (2018), who indicated that students who participated in mentorship programs and the integration of students into academic programs and cultures contributed to significantly higher pass rates and increased student retention. Such an increased retention rate led to a high graduation rate and improved academic performance (Lisberg & Woods, 2018).

On the other hand, the findings contradicted other researchers, such as House et al. (2020), who indicated that students experienced a lack of academic preparation and limited support from friends and family, which lowered their retention rate and graduation rate, thereby leading to low academic performance among this cohort of students. Other than mentorship programs, the current findings add to past literature by revealing that increasing the promotion of student associations and organizations. However, in contrast to current findings, Jeno et al. (2018) revealed that providing motivation and support to students increased retention and graduation rates among retained students resulting in improved academic outcomes.

Further, the findings demonstrate that teachers can contribute to developing students' social skills by providing more opportunities to practice public speaking in classes. In addition, some participants also suggested that teachers more purposefully turn classes into environments for the development of social skills and that teachers provide more opportunities for social skills development through student group collaborations. Participant responses implied that providing more opportunities to practice public

speaking and turning classes into developing social skills through student groups and collaborations.

Like current study findings, previous researchers have indicated that improving extracurricular activities, including sports, community services, and educational clubs, facilitates the positive retention of students in colleges and universities (see Kulp et al., 2019; Van Dyk & Weese, 2019). Kulp et al. (2019) reported that campus events such as signature events, including practicing public speaking and predictable events, improved their performance and made learning enjoyable, increasing students' intention to persist to graduation. My results also coincided with previous findings by revealing that engaging in recreational activities such as surfing or swimming and student group collaboration promoted positive student engagement, performance, and retention (see Van Dyk & Weese, 2019). The findings have contributed to the body of knowledge and past literature by establishing that increasing the promotion of student associations and organizations and investing more in counseling programs.

Research Question Two

RQ2 was What are the lived experiences of university students in Ghana surrounding decisions to leave or stay in schools? Study results demonstrated that the decisions to stay in school are based on a commitment to earning the degree and the future career need for social skills. One factor influencing participants decision to remain in university was their commitment to completing their degree. Participants understood that improving their social skills during university would benefit their future careers. Some participants believed that developing their social skills was valuable and ongoing,

and they hoped to gain as much of this benefit as possible before entering the workforce, which would make them more successful in their chosen fields. The findings imply that personal commitment to completing a degree and the perception of gaining social skills would help students become successful in their chosen fields. The finding disconfirms previous researchers regarding students' decisions to leave university. Cox and Naylor (2018) found that intrauniversity programs increased students' academic and social cycle promoting retention rather than attrition in universities. Wilton et al. (2019) opined that positive student-student and student-teacher interactions improved students' academic scores and discouraged dropouts from universities. Setiawan et al. (2019) established that improved academic performance and quality of faculty interaction enhanced student retention.

However, the decisions to leave school are also based on financial and supervisory factors, including financial barriers to continuing their education, making it difficult for students to remain in university, negatively affecting their retention (Latino, 2020). Another factor making students leave the university was ineffective or neglectful supervision from professors, if sufficiently severe, might influence a decision to quit. Findings imply that financial difficulties and ineffective supervision from professors might influence a decision to quit the university.

Research findings support previous literature about reasons for increased student turnover in universities. In addition to the difficulties adjusting to the new learning environment, Pratt et al. (2019) established that limited financial security increased students' attrition rates. Pratt et al. reported that many students from low-income

communities and families could not support the expensive campus life hence their voluntary decision to quit. Similar to my findings, earlier research inducted that inadequate financial assistance from the federal government and the institution was insufficient for economically disadvantaged students hence their decision to quit learning altogether. In contrast to current study findings, Hege et al. (2020) found that food-insecure students opted for employment rather than full-time learning leading to poor work-academic balance among college students resulting in low academic performance and subsequent attrition.

The previous literature results are also inconsistent with the current study indicating that ineffective or neglectful supervision from professors, if sufficiently severe, might influence a decision to quit. However, the current study findings agree with past studies such as Gurbuz et al. (2019), which indicated that complex social life and limited support from supervisors increased the attrition rates of university students. Malau-Aduli et al. (2021) established that for matured students, international students, and female students experienced difficulties adjusting to the campus environment because of a lack of support resulting in students leaving before completing their undergraduate programs. Weakened social interactions and integration resulted in low student retention (Morley, 2019). The findings support authors such as Tight (2020), who established poor social relationships with peers and faculty on campus and contributed to low student retention. As a result, improving social interaction among students may promote student performance and enhance their stay in school to avoid high dropout rates. The study

findings add to the previous literature by establishing that financial difficulties and ineffective supervision from professors might influence a decision to quit the university.

Limitations of the Study

The small sample size limited the study. Given the breadth of descriptive data researchers collect and analyze, qualitative studies usually use a small sample size. Additionally, qualitative researchers use data saturation to arrive at an adequate sample size which could provide a sample that is not representative of the entire population. Limited sample size could therefore affect the transferability of the study findings to other settings because the participants may not represent the whole population.

The topic of study also limited the study. In particular, the researcher only focused on the influence of social integration on student retention in Ghana. The study was also limited to the selected geographical location. In particular, the study was conducted in Accra, Ghana, and only participants drawn from selected universities participated, thus negatively affecting the transferability of findings. The target participants were selected through purposive sampling. The limitation is that purposive sampling is based on the researcher's judgment, which may result in researcher bias, affecting the reliability of study findings.

Recommendations for Future Research

The small sample size limited the study. Given the breadth of descriptive data researchers collect and analyze, qualitative studies usually use a small sample size. Limited sample size could therefore affect the transferability of the study findings to other settings because the participants may not represent the whole population. Based on

this imitation, although qualitative study uses a small sample size, further research should be conducted using a representative sample size to enhance the reliability of findings.

The researcher only focused on the influence of social integration on student retention in Ghana. More research should focus on other factors affecting student retention in universities. The study was also limited to the selected geographical location. In particular, the study was conducted in Accra, Ghana, and only participants drawn from selected universities participated, thus negatively affecting the transferability and generalizability of study findings. Future research should consider different geographical locations in Ghana other than Accra.

Implications

Implications for Practice

Teachers or professors could use the study findings in teaching practice to implement appropriate social programs designed to improve integration on campus among students and create a friendly environment for learning. Creating a friendly environment will likely improve academic motivation and retention (Arhin & Laryea, 2020). The findings indicated that attending university improves social skills by meeting others through social integration on campus, enhancing their social skills. Students may use the findings to enhance their determination to remain in universities to improve the social skills needed for their career success.

By improving mentoring programs, institutions can promote student retention because student groups and mentorship programs enhance social skills, promoting students' intention to remain in universities. Study findings revealed that investing more

in counseling and mentorship programs could help students improve their social skills. Thus, students may use the findings to understand the importance of mentorship and counseling programs to improve their social integration skills. Students who participated in mentorship programs and integrated into academic programs and cultures contributed to significantly higher pass rates and increased student retention, leading to a high graduation rate and improved academic performance (Lisberg & Woods, 2018).

Implications for Positive Social Change

The study results have provided insight into gaps in social skills development and may help administrators and other stakeholders increase retention and graduation rates. Education has long been a force for social change by addressing societal inequities. Supporting their successful attainment of a terminal degree allows improvements to make the education system applicable to employment. In addition, the study findings may aid in increasing funding to improve graduation rates and research activities (Teferra, 2017). Degree completion may also help students from Ghana compete for jobs on an international basis and also aid in solving some of the challenges humans are facing globally. Organizations such as learning institutions can use this study's findings to implement mentorship programs to increase students' social interaction for improved social skills, thereby promoting student retention in universities. Research findings are beneficial to students who may use to learn the need for social integration, thereby guiding them to be leaders in their respective societies.

Theoretical Implications

The study findings validate the theoretical framework used. In particular, the study was based on Tinto's integration model. According to Tinto (1993), students' integration on campus is influenced by family background, skills and abilities, prior schooling experience, academic performance, staff/faculty interactions, and peer group interactions. Tinto highlighted that a social system comprising formal and informal interactions with peers and faculty on campus could influence academic and social integration among students. Students with high social and academic integration are likely less motivated to make departure decisions. Current study findings support this theory by stating that opportunities to meet diverse people on campus through student associations and coursework focused on communication strategies provided students the opportunities to collaborate on group projects or practice public speaking. Tinto (1993) underscored that students' skills and abilities could influence their social integration on campus.

The study findings validate Tinto's (1993) student integration theory by validating that students' skills and abilities influence their total campus integration with peers and faculty could either promote retention intentions or students' departure intentions. High social integration on campus could increase students' persistence and retention. Social integration indicates compatibility between learning institutions, social systems, and individual students. Student's social skills and interactions influence academic integration on campus. Therefore, the study findings have validated the theory of student integration, indicating that providing opportunities for social integration promotes social skills among

students on campus and that students' social skills influence their retention on campus and integration decisions.

Conclusion

The study needed to address how social integration on campus influences student retention intentions. Despite significant reforms, many improvements were needed in the Ghanaian education system to improve employment, research, and publication opportunities (Arhin & Laryea, 2020). The study has added knowledge about social integration and university student retention. The study findings revealed that students developed their social skills through university attendance. Aspects of university life that participants perceived as contributing to improved social skills included opportunities to meet more diverse people than before attending university. The opportunities to participate in student associations; and coursework, including a focus on communication strategies and opportunities to collaborate on group projects or practice public speaking. The results revealed the need for more university-level development of students' social skills. Increased promotion of student associations and organizations could improve their social skills. The study findings demonstrate that universities should invest more in counseling and mentorship programs to help students improve their social skills.

Teachers can contribute more to developing students' social skills by providing more opportunities to practice public speaking in classes and turning classes into environments for developing social skills. Such can happen by teachers providing more opportunities for social skills development through student group collaborations. The study has also provided information that decisions to stay in school are based on the

commitment to earning the degree and the future career need for social skills. Personal commitment influences students to complete their degree, while student perception leads to improvements in their social skills during their time in university, benefiting them in their future careers.

Developing students' social skills were valuable and ongoing, and they hoped to gain social skills because they believed that it would make them more successful in their chosen fields. Circumstances under which students might consider leaving university without completing their degree include financial barriers to continuing their education. If sufficiently severe, ineffective or neglectful supervision from professors might influence a decision to quit. The research has answered the research questions and addressed the purpose of this study by providing crucial information on how students can enhance their social skills during situations in which attaining social skills might be difficult.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Demographic Questions

What is your age?

What is your grade?

What is your gender?

What is your race and ethnicity?

What is your area of study?

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your social skills prior to entering university?

2. How would you describe your social skills now?

3. Do you think university helped you develop your social skills? If so, how?

4. What aspects being in university have impacted your social skills?

5. Do you feel like you are integrated into the university community? Why or why not?

6. Can you describe a challenging social encounter that happened while you were in university?

7. How did this encounter impact your feelings of belongingness at the university?

8. How would you describe your commitment to finishing your degree?

9. How do you plan to use your degree once you graduate?

10. Do you think your social skills will be an assent once you graduate?

11. Is there any aspect of social interaction you wish you had more practice at?

12. What role do you think universities should play in helping students develop social skills?

13. What do you think the university could do to make you feel more apart of the community?

14. If you were to leave university without finishing your degree, what do you think the reason would be?

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Volunteers Needed for Research Study on Social Integration and University Retention.

Are you an undergraduate or angraduate student in Ghana? You may be eligible to participate in a study to better understand social integration and university retention. This study is being conducted by a Walden University student for their dissertation.

You May Qualify If You

- Are an undergraduate or a graduate student in a Ghanaian university, and
- Are above 18 years of age.

Potential Benefits

The findings of this study could be used in teaching practice to implement appropriate social programs designed to improve integration on campus among students and create a friendly environment for learning.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact Samuel Essah-Hienwo at +

Participation Involves

- Completing a short pre-interview demographic questionnaire (10 minutes)
- Participating in one 30-to-60-minute audio recorded interview.

Location: To be determined by participants or via Zoom