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Perceptions of Fourth-Year Undergraduate College Students With Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder on Academic Success

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Olympia S. Jenkins

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University

2026

Abstract

Perceptions of Fourth-Year Undergraduate College Students With Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder on Academic Success

by

Olympia S. Jenkins

MA, Colorado University Global Campus, 2016

BS, Barton College, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2026

Abstract

The problem addressed through this study is the low graduation rate of students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) across the United States. Guided by Mezirow's transformative learning theory, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of fourth-year undergraduate college students with ADHD on the academic support or methods that contributed to their perseverance in college. For this basic qualitative design, semistructured interviews were conducted with 10 undergraduate college students who self-reported a diagnosis of ADHD and had successfully completed the first 3 years of their education. Through thematic analysis and open, inductive coding, the following four themes emerged: Students (a) experienced challenges with staying focused, dealing with stress and emotions, and the anxiety to do well in school; (b) explained their perception of academic success broader as just academic grades; (c) noted that they overcame these challenges by being determined, finding methods to handle problems and to cope with difficult situations; and (d) highlighted resources that provided help. The findings of this study have the potential for positive social change by allowing administrators and instructors to support students' efforts and offering a more inclusive and responsive academic support system which, in turn, might lead to academic success for students with ADHD.

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Dedication

This qualitative design and results are dedicated to my daughter, Olivia Jenkins. She is the true inspiration behind my efforts. I wanted to develop a better understanding of her struggles and what she may face as a college student. I love you tremendously, Olivia. I hope you see this one day and it shows you that I try day by day to develop an understanding of what learning is like for a student like you.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank anyone, whoever you are within the Walden community that helped me get this far within my educational journey. This degree means more to me than you can imagine. This has been a lengthy process, but I am thankful for all that helped me succeed and finish this journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurological disorder that results in hyperactivity, inattentiveness, and impulsive behaviors (Drake et al., 2019). Students who are diagnosed with ADHD often struggle with focusing and maintaining self-control and often have difficulty sitting still and being attentive to lessons (Drake et al., 2019). Further, while data from a longitudinal study indicated that 73% of students with ADHD pursued a college education, this underrepresented population has struggled academically (Dorr & Armstrong, 2019; Dvorsky & Langberg, 2019; Gormley et al., 2019). These struggles have resulted in lower GPAs compared with their peers not diagnosed with ADHD and a lack of academic independence, which sometimes ends with academic probation or withdrawing from college (Dorr & Armstrong, 2019; Dvorsky & Langberg, 2019; Gormley et al., 2019). More specifically, students who entered college in the year 2016 who had ADHD had a graduation rate of 22% in comparison to their counterparts with a graduation rate of 77% (DuPaul et al., 2021). At the collegiate level, class instruction is more lecture-based and less material is presented in class, which means this structure requires self-directed learning, often not aligning with the learning style of students with ADHD (Canu et al., 2020). Of course, some students with ADHD are successful in college. Therefore, it was prudent to explore the perceptions of undergraduate fourth-year college students with ADHD on the academic support or methods that contributed to their perseverance in college.

The findings of this study have potential to contribute to positive social change by informing higher institutions on how to better support students with ADHD through

student-centered approaches. Highlighting personal perspectives of students with ADHD may encourage the development of more inclusive practices, improved supports services, and increased awareness among the faculty and peers, promoting greater academic persistence and success within this population.

This chapter introduces the study and includes background on ADHD as well as the problem statement, the purpose, the research question, and the conceptual framework. Then the nature of the study, as well as important definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations are included. This is followed by a description of the significance. Finally, the chapter ends with a summary that contains the chapter's main points.

Background

Students with ADHD are consistently not meeting academic standards necessary for success in their college careers, as many continue to struggle (Dvorsky & Langberg, 2019). Research has shown that even when students are able to identify their challenges related to ADHD, instructors are not always equipped with the appropriate knowledge or understanding of ADHD to apply effective accommodations and instructional supports that promote student success (Joyce & Hackathorn, 2020).

Problem Statement

The problem that was addressed through this study is the low graduation rate of students with ADHD across many colleges throughout the United States (Dass, 2019; DuPaul et al., 2021). Students with ADHD are often more academically challenged and may struggle to complete certain tasks in comparison to their counterparts due to a lack

of study and test-taking skills needed to be academically successful (Eddy et al., 2021). Many students exhibiting these struggles tend to not make it to graduation (Eddy et al., 2021). Although some institutions offer academic support for students with ADHD, the response rate regarding whether these students always accessed or used these services was not always accessible (Dass, 2019). Thus, despite the availability of these supports, there is a limited understanding of how students with ADHD perceive, access, and utilize these services in ways that contribute to their academic persistence, particularly among those who have progressed in their college careers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of undergraduate fourth-year college students with ADHD on the academic support or methods that have contributed to their perseverance in college. I gathered information through the interpretivism paradigm approach. Interpretivism interprets data from the perspective of human behavior and their perceptions, which correlated with the purpose of this study (see Abbadia, 2022).

Research Question

This study answered the following research question:

What are the perceptions of fourth-year undergraduate college students with ADHD on the academic support or methods that contributed to their perseverance in college?

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework in this study was Mezirow's transformative learning theory. This framework focuses on the individual as a learner (Mezirow, 2018). The individual encounters situations from their perspective and become critical of their own beliefs and try to make sense of the situation (Mezirow, 2018). Transformative learning focuses on three key forms of reflection: content, which focuses on pondering and evaluating the problem; process, which reports possible solutions to a problem; and premise, which addresses the importance of the question within the problem and usually leads to transformative learning as the result (Bouchard, 2024). Using these three forms of reflection, a qualitative approach was applied to where a student with ADHD could examine their perceptions of success and determine through the content, the method chosen, and classroom environment (see Bouchard, 2024; Moss, 2019).

Transformative learning promotes the concept that everyone has their own perception of the world (Christie et al., 2015). Mezirow (2018) advocated that transformative learning theory establishes a context in which one creates their own understanding based on perceptions. This understanding is believed to enhance learning, which in turn leads to academic success (Bouchard, 2024). Mezirow's transformative learning theory is beneficial in educational studies involving students because the focus is the student (Mezirow, 2018). This theoretical framework provides a viewpoint for understanding how students reflect on their experiences and their academic growth.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study used a basic qualitative design with semistructured interviews for data collection. The participants were college students who self-reported having been diagnosed with ADHD and who were in their fourth year, meaning they had successfully completed 3 years of college already. These college students were from all around the United States and were found through the snowball sampling process. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling strategy where the initial participants recruit other participants who fit the study criteria when dealing with hard-to-reach populations (Glen, 2022). Snowball sampling was used to gather this research because this allowed students who were comfortable with reporting their ADHD diagnosis and there was no violation of any privacy rights (see Glen, 2022). This sampling technique promoted participant interest and strengthened recruitment outcomes.

Fourth-year undergraduate students with ADHD throughout the United States were invited to participate this study. The sample size consisted of 10 participants. A flyer was made available for all participants, which left them with the option to respond. If a student responded and met requirements needed to be a part of this study, students then proceeded with the process of completing semistructured interviews. Students documented and evaluated their process of learning through their perceptions, and the results were recorded for a qualitative evaluation to be executed. The selected students had successfully completed 2 semesters or more on the collegiate level. These students had to self-report their diagnosis. Through semistructured interviews, participants

provided detailed insights that contribute to the body of research aimed at supporting students with ADHD to advance their educational success.

Qualitative research was appropriate for this study because students gave information from their perspectives based on strategies and skills they chose to promote their success. Qualitative research allowed the participants to provide information about their first-hand experiences with ADHD and being successful (see Mitchell et al., 2021). This allows me to provide useful information for students who are struggling with ADHD and actual methods they could use to also help garner their academic success for future years in their college career.

Definitions

Academic success: Refers to achievement, creativity, and persistence used in an educational setting (Carroll & Finelli, 2021).

Academic support: Services provided by institutions to help enhance a student's academic success in any subject taught on the collegiate level (Newman et al., 2020).

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): Characterized by developmentally deviant levels of symptoms of hyperactivity/impulsivity and/or inattention among children, adolescents, and adults (DuPaul et al., 2019).

Self-reporting: The student on their own cognition provides information (DuPaul et al., 2019).

Snowball sampling: A sampling method where research participants recruit other participants for a study and those participants may use social media to recruit participants (Glen, 2022).

Transformative learning theory: The idea where the student makes meaning through their own personal experiences to provide information through personal reflection to benefit others within any study or field (Mezirow, 2018).

Assumptions

This study was a real-world problem, so making assumptions was an important step because that is just what assumptions do: help solve real world problems (Fortus, 2008). Most assumptions that are found in a study can be out of one's control but are needed for the relevance of any study (Simon, 2011). This study used semistructured interviews to gather information from willing participants. It was assumed that the participant had ADHD through self-reporting. This assumption was necessary because documentation of diagnosis was not feasible for all participants, but self reporting has been supported in previous research as a reliable indicator of ADHD status (Drake et al., 2019). It was also assumed that the participants answered the interview questions honestly. This assumption was necessary to ensure the meaningfulness of the data because inaccurate responses would compromise the study's findings about students' perceptions of academic supports.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of a research study addresses specific areas such as the research question, objectives, and populations to help the researcher see how the results affected the scholarly community; the research is intended to inform and help (Akanle et al., 2020). In this study, the research problem focused on how low graduation rates and academic challenges were experienced by college students with ADHD. The delimiting

factors in this study were the things that I had some control over as well as some boundaries set for this study. The scope of this study included participants who had completed 3 years of college and had a diagnosis of ADHD. These students may have had access to resources provided by their college or institution but found more success based on what they provided or implemented for themselves. Those interviewed were assumed to have information that demonstrated how their success was gained and maintained.

Limitations

Limitations are the potential weaknesses to the study, and they are factors that are out of the researcher's control (Akanle et al., 2020). One limitation for this study was using snowball sampling, which is nonprobability sampling. The students in this study were willing participants who had to self-report they had ADHD to participate in this study, making it difficult to fully say there was an accurate diagnosis. Participants were also recruited through referrals, as initial participants shared the recruitment flyer. All information was gathered through an interview process from participants who agreed to participate and willingly share their diagnosis and experiences with ADHD in college. ADHD is considered an invisible disability, so I had to rely on the statements of the willing participants (see Lipka et al., 2020). Snowball sampling facilitated access to hard-to-reach population, specifically ADHD, for this study while its reliance on nonprobability created a participant pool based on convenience. Because of the small sample, the findings may have to be interpreted with caution. Dependability may be

affected by variations in participant responding and interview interactions (Anastopoulos et al., 2020; Hartung et al., 2022).

Significance

Research has indicated that the methods used to promote academic success as well as the failures with students with ADHD on the collegiate level are not fully understood (Dvorsky & Langberg, 2019). This study was unique because it revealed perceptions of fourth-year college students with ADHD regarding academic support or methods that contributed to their perseverance in their academic success. By capturing students' perceptions, this study can contribute to best practices of effective support and methods for students with ADHD (see Lindstrom et al., 2020). There is underrepresented research that supports how a student with ADHD maintains success; therefore, with this study, the results were pertinent on their perceptions, and feedback was provided to evaluate what they considered to progress their academic success in hopes of graduating (see Dvorsky & Langberg, 2019). The goal was to graduate in their desired field and to obtain a job within that field; therefore, their success in graduating with academic success promoted this idea. Walden University's policy of social change encourages diverse professionals to become researchers and create studies to create social change in different communities. Thus, this study aligned with Walden's social change mission by exploring perspectives of students with ADHD on the support and strategies they used to achieve academic success. Insights were fostered that may inform advocacy and practices that promote success for other students with ADHD in diverse educational settings and future professional settings.

Summary

To summarize, students with ADHD tend to struggle academically at the collegiate level. Due to those struggles, some are not academically successful, and they drop out. Although support services are available, faculty are not always equipped with understanding how to incorporate information from those sources in their classroom to help promote their academic success. As a result, responsibility for academic success is mainly placed on the student. There remains a lack in literature regarding how students with ADHD perceive the effectiveness of academic support, strategies, or methods used that contribute to their academic success (Canu et al., 2020). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of undergraduate fourth-year college students with ADHD on the academic support methods that contributed to their perseverance in college. With qualitative research and Mezirow's transformative learning theory, students were questioned and interviewed regarding what they perceived to promote their academic success. This study contributes to the existing literature by centering student perspectives to inform more effective support practices. The next chapter will provide a literature review with information regarding research found thus far on ADHD and how it has been addressed on the collegiate level.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature Search Strategy

To conduct research for this study, I evaluated and analyzed sources from the Walden library as well as Google Scholar. I examined several articles that addressed students with ADHD and their academics. The articles in this review are from the following journals: *Journal of Diversity and Higher Education*, *Journal of Attention Disorders*, *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessments*, *Canadian Journal of School of Psychology*, *Learning and Instruction*, *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *Journal of Psychiatry*, *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, *Psychology in Schools*, *Learning Disabilities, Research and Practice*, *International Journal of Higher Education*, *European Journal of Special Needs*, *NC Medical Journal*, *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, *CBE - Life Sciences Education*, *Psychiatry Research*, and *Learning Disability Quarterly*.

The keywords used included *ADHD*, *college*, *interventions with ADHD on the collegiate*, or anything that had something to do with ADHD and academic struggles. I was able to locate some articles with these key words, but there were a few issues encountered, such as meeting date requirements and finding relevant research that pertained to higher level college students with accurate data. After a few appointments

with librarians through Walden's resources, I reran my search with the following terms: *ADHD as a junior on the collegiate level, graduation rates, interventions, and struggles of ADHD students with ADHD*. This, paired with specific years of searching, created the list of articles used in this study.

It was challenging to find accurate data to support the actual numbers of students who are self-reporting what has promoted their academic success. To ensure the accuracy of information found, the sources were published within the last 5 years, 2019-2023. Resources such as Data Planet as well as a Google and Walden databases were used to help find the information within these dates. As dates were reviewed, it was evident that many of the articles examined lacked sufficient information regarding the time from around 2020 due to Covid-19. It was difficult to find information to support the claim that students with ADHD could self-promote their success because most schools transitioned to online opportunities during the pandemic. Therefore, a basic qualitative design was needed due to a lack of research regarding these students, especially considering the world's circumstances during this time.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in this study was Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory. This theory focuses on the individual as a learner (Bouchard, 2024). According to transformative learning theory, the individual encounters a situation from their perspective and becomes critical of their own beliefs and tries to make sense of the situation. Transformative learning focuses on three forms of reflection that are key: content, which focuses on pondering and evaluating the problem; process,

which deals with taking a rational look at possible solutions to a problem; and premise, which deals with looking at the importance of the question within the problem, usually leading to transformative learning as the result (Bouchard, 2024). Using these three forms of reflection, I applied a qualitative approach in this study for students with ADHD to examine their perceptions of success and determine through the content, the method chosen, and classroom environment what promotes their success (see Bouchard, 2024; Moss, 2019).

With the use of the transformative framework, the three areas of reflection focus, content, process, and premise, were used in this study (see Bouchard, 2024). Content focused on the problem, which was navigated with the student with ADHD and connecting their perspectives of success and what they utilized to be successful. The students told me from their perspective what was effective. Therefore, it was necessary to recognize that this basic qualitative design was student-based. Next, there was a focus on the students' perception and what the student did to be productive and garner success regarding the academic supports and methods that contributed to their academic success. The solutions reflected what was done that accomplished this success, and how it was perceived. Lastly, the transformative framework helped with the gathering of information provided by the students with ADHD, evaluating the information, and declaring how this information can be helpful for students in the future with ADHD.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Introduction

In this study, I examined students with ADHD and what their perceptions of success were. When thinking of a person's perceptions, it is necessary to consider what they may believe to be an effect or cause of a specific issue regarding their point of view. I found many sources that detailed these students, their struggles, and what could be provided to help promote their success. However, there was no focus on the students' actions and what they perceived to promote their own success. The sections below address conceptual frameworks studied with ADHD, challenges faced among students with ADHD, and academic success for students with ADHD. The following themes and literature presented highlight the limited research on students' perceptions of academic success, emphasizing the need for further study. These findings support the current analysis and provide a foundation for understanding the experiences of this population.

Conceptual Frameworks Within ADHD Research

Within the research for this study, I found a few commonalities within the articles. One is the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework allows the reader to evaluate what theories the researcher feels best fit the idea of their topics to help them conduct further research concerning students with ADHD. The following frameworks were relevant: cognitive theory, self-regulation theory, and Tinto's theory. Cognitive theory focuses on self-efficacy. Self-regulation theory focuses on personal mindset and responsibility, while Tinto's theory focuses on social and relationships and how they affect learning. Although these theories have been used by other researchers regarding

the student with ADHD and their behaviors, these theories underrepresent the learner and their perception of methods they feel contribute to their academic success.

Cognitive Theory

Cognitive theory is aligned with self-efficacy and how students perceive certain behaviors in their academic learning and is commonly used when studying students with ADHD (Adams, 2021). This theory allows researchers to observe interventions such as meditation and executive functioning (skills used with organization, time management, etc.) along with pre- and post-testing to help see how a student's cognitive abilities are linked and affect certain behaviors in regard to ADHD once interventions are established and implemented (Anastopoulos et al., 2020; Hartung et al., 2020; Lester & Murrell, 2019; Van der Oord et al., 2020). Within this theory, parental involvement is monitored to see if this affects students and their cognitive behaviors (Buchanan & LeMoyne, 2020). Self-efficacy is better assessed with cognitive theory to monitor certain behaviors that help one see how students with ADHD are academically affected and understand their decisions made through their learning process (Adams, 2021). This approach clarifies how self-efficacy shapes the academic engagement and persistence of students with ADHD.

Self-Regulation Theory

Self-regulation theory focuses on the mindset and personal effort from the student and how creating a positive mindset can influence academic success; in this study, I specifically focused on students with ADHD (see Burnette et al., 2020). Within the framework of the cognitive theory, maintaining a positive mindset is frequently

associated with the idea of a growth mindset. Growth mindsets are influenced by the student's academic success (Burnette et al., 2020). The best way to influence their mindsets is to allow an environment of self-acceptance and determine why negative behaviors are associated with inattention and hyperactivity within a student with ADHD (Shelton et al., 2019; Willoughby & Evans, 2019). Through a positive mindset, personal effort can be influenced to encourage their academic success. With a negative mindset comes frustrations that affect autonomy, and the students' will to put forth personal effort is needed to be successful (Oram et al., 2020). The goal is to promote autonomy so students can make their own choices and positively affect their academic success (Pirozzi, 2022).

Self-regulation theory allows a student to determine what goals they want to accomplish and pushes the student to put the effort into accomplishing them with interventions presented from researchers within the study (Wu & Molina, 2019). Then, the student can determine if they are succeeding with those interventions against their counterparts who are not using the same intervention and if self-regulation helps them academically (Knouse et al., 2020). ADHD symptomology and self-motivation is dependent on the self-regulation theory (Pirozzi, 2021). This perspective helps explain how difficulties with self-regulation can influence motivation, behavior, and academic performance among students with ADHD. Students with ADHD have perceptions and ideals on what has helped them be successful (Burnette et al., 2020). Positive mindsets allow students with ADHD to look at academics differently so they can be successful.

However, further research is needed to examine how mindset influences students with ADHD from their own perspectives.

Tinto's Theory

Tinto's theory deals with the integration of a student's social and academic supports working together to promote retention, which contributes to their success academically (Newman et al., 2020). Tinto's theory suggests that social connections and associating with other students with the same struggles, for example, ADHD, provides a space for students to obtain academic support (Draper, 2008). It helps promote retention. This theory also suggests that interventions and academic supports associated with ADHD led to higher retention rates among students (Newman et al., 2020). If the accommodation is used at an increased length, it will also promote retention, which in turn will increase graduation rates for students with disabilities, specifically those with ADHD (Blasey et al., 2022; Dass, 2019). Providing students with accommodations and applying them to their academics help support for students with ADHD (Blasey et al., 2022). Therefore, the idea of retention was a factor regarding students with ADHD and their academic success regarding Tinto's theory.

While Tinto's theory does allow the researcher to evaluate information to see that students with ADHD can be successful if they have their social and academic needs met there is a lack of research from the perspective of the student with ADHD and their lived experiences regarding how they were able to be successful with having their social and academic needs met to obtain academic success (see Blasey et al., 2022). Therefore,

further research is needed to explore the lived experiences of students with ADHD to understand how the social and academic aspects affect them.

Cognitive, Self-Regulation, and Tinto Theories Connection and Relevance

Conceptual framework theories are of great importance to all research. They allow the researcher to have a basis for how information will be gathered and evaluated (Adams, 2021). Cognitive theory deals with self-efficacy and how others perceive certain behaviors in academic learning. Self-regulation theory deals with personal effort from the student and their mindsets (Burnette et al., 2020). Tinto's theory deals with integration of student's social and academic supports working together to create academic success (Draper, 2008). Although self-regulation has been associated with academic success through development of a positive mindset within the cognitive theory for students with ADHD, the lived experiences of students with ADHD and how their mindsets develop overtime need to be further evaluated concerning their academic success.

Challenges Among Students With ADHD

Students with disabilities encounter many barriers when entering college, no matter their major or degree path (Pfeifer et al., 2021). The study of ADHD involves many theories that deal with different ideologies and concepts that provide the steps one may think will help a student be successful academically. The theories often recognize challenges or difficulties these students possess and how the theory concepts can help with those challenges. Thus, it is essential to identify and address these challenges or difficulties to understand their impact on the academic success of a student with ADHD. The following section addresses these challenges in greater depth, specifically centering

on the key areas of college readiness, study skills, organization, adapting to stress, and quality of life (see Canu et al, 2020). These areas represent domains in which students with ADHD appear to struggle, thereby influencing their academic success.

Lack of College Readiness Among Students With ADHD

Students want to be prepared for what college may bring. They must be prepared academically, socially, and emotionally, but this also means facing some new challenges and tasks along the way. Students with ADHD are responsible for those levels of preparation as well as coping with the underlying factors of their diagnosis, which can be overwhelming (Mana et al., 2022). Studies have shown that students with ADHD tend to be less prepared for college, and their symptoms have been linked to reduced school performance (Rigoni et al., 2020). These students typically need some type of intervention on the high school level, 12th grade specifically, to help them prepare for college (Canu et al., 2020). Once the college/university is aware of students with ADHD, it is important the institution acknowledge these students and incorporate some type of intervention to help these students be successful (Drake et al., 2019). Institutions need to also collect research that reveals these students' perceptions of the interventions implemented.

Limited Development of Effective Study Strategies

Even though some students successfully transition from high school to the collegiate level and overcome certain academic struggles, academic demands do not diminish upon entry into higher education. There must be some motivation to get to this level and stay successful, and to be a productive college student, one must have sufficient

notetaking and test-taking strategies, which lead to effective study skills (Dou et al., 2022; Eddy et al., 2021). In a high school setting, there is more structure and academic support that help students maintain accountability for their academic habits; however, when in college, more responsibility is placed on the student, which means the structure and support students are used to is no longer offered (Willoughby & Evans, 2019). With that responsibility, these students may feel more pressure and have often admitted to a lack of confidence in their test-taking abilities (Spenceley et al., 2020). Successfully reaching college represents a significant accomplishment for students with ADHD; therefore, understanding their perceptions of how they manage these challenges is essential.

Limited Organizational Skills as a Barrier to Success

Study skills are important for students once they hit the collegiate level, but it is not the only skill that is needed for them to be successful. Organizational skills are also a necessity for these students and are important predictors in academic functioning (Dvorsky & Langberg, 2019). With organization, the student can take materials created from note and test taking and use study skills in hopes of organizing information accurately, thus promoting academic success. Organization is a cognitive skill that requires flexibility. Cognitive flexibility is the ability to adapt concepts from one task to another, successfully contributing to the organization of specific concepts or ideals, specifically in an academic environment, to help the student become successful (Roshani et al., 2020). Therefore, while effective study skills are essential for academic success,

organizational competence plays a critical role in enabling students to manage, access, and structure information in preparation for studying (Roshani et al., 2020).

The literature has indicated that organizational skills are among primary challenges experienced by students with ADHD (Hartung et al., 2020). Although existing research has demonstrated that the implementation of structured organizational strategies can enhance academic outcomes for this population, there is a lack of attention to how students themselves identify, develop, and sustain organizational methods that align with their lived experiences (Dvorsky & Langberg, 2019). The most effective way to gather these perceptions is to obtain first-hand accounts from students with ADHD who have achieved success, highlighting the need for additional research focused on the lived experiences of these students.

Adapting to Stress or Anxiety

Stress should be considered a factor among some of the problems associated with students with ADHD (Oster et al., 2020). The higher the level of ADHD, the higher the levels of stress seem to be (Hamilton, 2019). Students with ADHD do not just struggle academically due to their symptoms, they also struggle emotionally (Moradi-Siah-Afshadi et al., 2022). High anxiety/stress levels also contribute to their self-efficacy, which in turn affects how they function on the collegiate level (Harris et al., 2019). Therefore, students with ADHD and their stress and anxiety levels are contributing factors to their success. Although research has shown that stress and anxiety contribute to their academic success, more knowledge needs to be generated regarding how students with ADHD deal with stress and anxiety (Oster et al., 2020). Understanding their

perceptions of stress and anxiety and how it is handled is essential in promoting academic success. A design focused on their lived experiences and perceptions is necessary to determine how these factors affect their academic functioning and how they can be addressed to support success.

Quality of Life Among Students With ADHD

When evaluating ADHD, existing research has suggested that an individual's academics as well as social and mental aspects of life are interconnected, thereby affecting their quality of life (Lipka et al., 2020). Those with ADHD often become frustrated with their lack of ability to control certain characteristics, such as organization, stress, and anxiety, affecting working and academic relationships (Robello, 2019). Research has highlighted that students' perceptions of their quality of life influence their school-related productivity, inherently affecting their academic success (Goffer et al., 2019). They are often stigmatized for their lack of ability to cope in different areas (Langlois, 2020). Although these findings are well-documented, there remains a lack of research addressing the lived experiences of these students from their own perspectives.

Academic Success Among Students With ADHD

All students have their own perception of academic success, and this includes the students diagnosed with ADHD. However, academic success is a challenge for many students, specifically students with ADHD. As outlined above, students with ADHD often struggle with study skills, organizational skills, and stress and anxiety, which affects preparedness for college (Lagace'-Leblanc et al., 2022). These challenges have been associated with reduced academic self-efficacy among students with ADHD,

potentially impacting their persistence at the collegiate level and contributing to lower graduation rates (Newman et al., 2020). Within this context, existing research has highlighted institutional efforts to support students with ADHD through targeted services and monitoring practices. The subsequent sections explore graduation rates, the engagement of students with ADHD in available support services, and the processes that institutions use to assess and sustain these supports.

Graduation Rates

In 2016, the graduation rate for students with ADHD was 22% in comparison to the 77% without ADHD who graduated (Barkley & Fischer, 2016). These differences emphasize the gap between students with ADHD and their counterparts. Students with ADHD have been reported to demonstrate lower achievement scores at the collegiate level (Arnold et al., 2020). This pattern suggests the need for greater attention to the factors that influence academic achievement among students with ADHD. Academic factors such as study skills, organizational challenges, and experiences with anxiety and stress have been identified in influencing their achievement scores, consequently affecting their grade point averages (DuPaul et al., 2021). These challenges have contributed to lower academic performance and grade point averages. Reduced academic performance, as reflected in lower GPAs, can affect success in future coursework and their self-perception of academic success, and in some cases lead to withdrawal, thereby influencing overall graduation rates (Safer et al., 2020). As a result, academic difficulties have lasting effects on students' persistence and overall educational outcomes. While the existing literature has provided insight into factors such as study skills, organization,

anxiety, and stress associated with low achievement scores affecting students with ADHD, there remains a lack of research capturing the perspectives and perspectives of students with ADHD.

College Students With ADHD Seeking Support

Most students with ADHD are aware of their learning related challenges and recognize the need for academic supports (Fleming et al., 2018). Although literature has suggested that institutional support can contribute to academic success when accessed by students with ADHD, many students do not utilize those services. Reluctance to disclose their diagnosis is often influenced by the stigma or concerns of social judgment, which in turn may limit the use of support that could otherwise promote academic success (Ajjawi et al., 2019). This reluctance may prevent students from receiving the assistance needed for academic success.

Although students experience success through available support services, the literature has indicated that many students with ADHD do not access these resources (Fleming et al., 2018). The research has provided limited insight into students' lived perceptions beyond the stigma-related explanation (Newman et al., 2020). Along with this support, student perceptions are vital. Another challenge for students who are seeking support to help with their ADHD connects with self-advocacy as a factor. Self-advocacy is the ability to assert oneself in educational needs to pursue education and be successful (Pfeifer et al., 2021). Some students lack the inner motivation to push themselves educationally, which also causes issues with their success in seeking support. The lack of motivation and self-advocacy to be consistent with those supports on their own (Pfeifer et

al., 2021). Langlois (2020) found that most participants expressed peer interactions helped with their lack of motivation and self-advocacy. However, further research is needed that focuses on students with ADHD, examining the steps they take to access supports and how they utilize these resources to promote academic success, and ultimately, progress toward graduation.

College/University Responses to Students With ADHD Seeking Supports

Students with ADHD go into a college or university not knowing what or even if there will be any interventions available for them due to their academic issues. In contrast to the previous research regarding students with ADHD having awareness of their learning challenges and potential need for assistance, other research has suggested that some students with ADHD do not engage with the available institutional resources due to limited awareness or understanding of support systems offered by colleges and universities (Joyce & Hackathorn, 2020; Toutain, 2019). Given that students with ADHD may not consistently possess the knowledge or confidence required to effectively self-advocate, institutions and instructors may need to adopt more proactive and transparent approaches to communicate how to utilize available services (Morina & Biagiotti, 2021; Nash-Luckenbach, 2019). Although enhanced institutional guidance may benefit students with ADHD, existing literature has highlighted the influence of the stigma of a students' willingness to disclose their diagnosis and access accommodations (Pfeifer et al., 2021). Therefore, there is a need for research that centers on the lived experiences of students with ADHD and examines how they approach and engage with institutional supports.

Interventions Used to Promote Academic Success

Students with ADHD tend to struggle at the collegiate level due to lack of access or knowledge of academic supports offered by the institution. Research has revealed that students with ADHD who receive academic support tend to have more success and better GPAs (De Los Santos et al., 2019). However, students may not provide documentation that they have ADHD and need assistance, which interferes with interventions (Gabriely et al., 2020). Mindfulness workshops, DGB training, and academic accommodations are all interventions to help with academic success for students with ADHD (Gabriely et al., 2020; Lipka et al., 2019; De Los Santos et al., 2019). Therefore, further qualitative research is needed to analyze the college experience from the student's perspective and what is used to help gain academic success (Carroll & Finelli, 2021). It is necessary to explore what interventions are in place to improve the academic outcomes for students with ADHD (Canu, 2020). Through the exploration of these interventions that connect to student perceptions, additional strategies may be developed to enhance the academic success of students with ADHD.

Summary and Conclusions

Within this literature review, there was a common theme that students with ADHD struggle and need support services to help garner and guide their success. However, I found no research on what was effective and helped promote their academic success (see Dvorsky & Langberg, 2019). There has been some guidance on how to use resources to help students feel successful. However, many students with ADHD feel unsupported or unmotivated when things become difficult (Pirozzi, 2022). Moreover,

some of these students develop stress and anxiety due to their struggles (Harris et al., 2019). What students with ADHD believe contributes to their academic success based on their own experiences and perspectives remains unknown. Therefore, further investigation was needed to target these students and their struggles with the ADHD diagnosis to show what strategies they used successfully. Understanding these perceptions could help future students with ADHD be successful at the university level (see Serrano et al., 2023).

Chapter 3: Research Method

Students with ADHD have been entering the collegiate level at a higher rate than their counterparts, students without ADHD, but are often not as successful as their counterparts (De Los Santos et al., 2019). There are student resources offered, but those resources do not guarantee academic success because they are not always accessed (Dass, 2019). Therefore, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of undergraduate fourth-year college students with ADHD on the academic support or methods that contributed to their perseverance in college. This chapter describes the methodology and use of a basic qualitative design to answer the research question. A basic qualitative design was appropriate for this study because it allowed for in-depth exploration of the participants and their perceptions related to academic supports and methods used to obtain academic success (see Naeem et al., 2023). I begin this chapter with the research design and rationale followed by participant selection, instrumentation, procedures, analysis, and ethical procedures. This chapter also includes strategies used to establish trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this basic qualitative design was to explore the perceptions of undergraduate fourth-year college students with ADHD about the academic support they used that contributed to their perseverance of academic success. The research question for this design was as follows: What are the perceptions of fourth-year undergraduate college students with ADHD on the academic support or methods that contributed to their

perseverance in college? This basic qualitative design provided an explanation for how students with ADHD in their last level of college promote their academic success. In this study, I examined the lived experiences of students with ADHD to develop an understanding of how these students navigated and achieved academic success. This study was grounded in a basic qualitative research tradition within an interpretivist paradigm (see Abbadia, 2022). This approach aligned with the purpose of the study by focusing on how participants interpret and make meaning of their academic experiences.

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher in this study, I conducted semistructured interviews and analyzed the data to explore the perceptions of students with ADHD regarding their academic success. In this role, I served as collector and observer, interpreting participants' responses while maintaining focus on accurately representing their perspectives. My professional background provided a strong foundation for understanding and interpreting these experiences. I am a certified English teacher in North Carolina, qualified to teach Grades 6-12, and I hold a master's degree, allowing me to serve as an adjunct instructor on the collegiate level. This dual experience has allowed me to engage in both high school and college-level educational contexts and analyze data related to students' academic trajectories.

I have 17 years of experience teaching K-12 English, including 10 years at an early college program, where high school students simultaneously take college courses and aim to graduate within 5 years with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree. In this setting, I served students with diverse backgrounds, including those

diagnosed with ADHD. These experiences have allowed me to observe first-hand the challenges these students encounter in academic settings, particularly related to organization, study habits, and self-advocacy. I had no relationships with the participants, and no participants were recruited from institutions where I currently teach or have any professional connection.

In addition to my professional experience, I am a parent of a teenager with ADHD. Observing my child's academic journey has provided a personal perspective on the challenges students with ADHD may face. While I strive to support her at home, my approaches do not always align with her learning style, allowing me to witness first-hand the difficulties in identifying effective strategies. These personal insights, combined with my professional observations, inform my understanding of how students navigate the academic challenges and utilize support systems. This dual perspective enhances my ability to interpret the data and contribute to knowledge that may guide strategies for supporting future students with ADHD in both high school and postsecondary settings. However, these experiences may also introduce potential bias in interpreting participant responses in relation to assumptions about effective strategies, methods, and behaviors.

Recognizing the personal significance I have to this topic, deliberate steps were taken to prevent my personal experiences from influencing the study to preserve the integrity of the participants' voices. To minimize potential bias, all interviews were conducted with volunteer students who did not have any type of connection to the school or the school system where I am currently employed. Snowball sampling was used, allowing participants to join without my control or input. The students responded to the

flyer and decided whether they wanted to participate. The only interaction that occurred between the participants and me was through email communication to confirm participation and during the semistructured interviews. Additionally, personal notetaking was used throughout the research process to monitor personal assumptions, and member checking was used to ensure accuracy of participant responses. Ethical considerations included ensuring informed consent, maintaining participant confidentiality using pseudonyms, and securely storing all data in password protected formats. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The nature of this research was a basic qualitative research design study. Qualitative research helps generate meaning and understanding through the perspectives of the participants (Burkholder et al., 2016). The primary focus of this study was to discover fourth-year college participants' perceptions of academic support and methods that contributed to their academic achievement and gather this information through semistructured interviews. The population for this study consisted of undergraduate students diagnosed with ADHD who were enrolled in 4-year institutions in the United States. A snowball sampling strategy was used to recruit participants, as this approach is effective for accessing hard to reach populations such as college students with ADHD who may not easily be identified through traditional recruitment methods (see Parker et al., 2019).

The purpose of this design was to evaluate and analyze the perceptions of students with ADHD and explore what support and methods contributed to their academic success. This means there was no instrumentation used to generate empirical data or descriptive data. Empirical focuses on analyzing numerical data gathered and descriptive data provides statistics to help with analyzing numerical information (Taherdoost, 2022). Other than information from interview questions from willing participants, no numerical data were gathered, aside from the total number of participants and ages. All information was on student perception and was collected solely for informing purposes. Therefore, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate method for analyzing information obtained. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: They had completed at least 3 years of undergraduate study, they had a self-reported diagnosis of ADHD, and they were currently enrolled in or recently attended a 4-year college or university. Participants were identified as meeting these criteria through self-report during the recruitment process. A total of 10 participants were included in this study. This number was appropriate for a qualitative study, as it allowed for in-depth exploration of participant experiences while reaching the data saturation (see Siedlecki, 2022). A nonprobability sampling strategy was used for this study, incorporating both the convenience sampling and snowball sampling. This sample of convenience through snowball sampled allowed me to recruit participants who were accessible and willing to voluntarily participate in the study (see Siedlecki, 2022). Snowball sampling was also used to help identify additional participants who met the study criteria. Snowball sampling occurs when participants recruit or refer other individuals who meet the

requirement for participation (Glen, 2022). This sampling approach was appropriate because a student's disability status is considered confidential information and cannot be disclosed by educational institutions without the student's consent. Therefore, I could not obtain participant information directly from colleges or universities. As a result, participation relied on individuals who were willing to voluntarily disclose their ADHD diagnosis and participate in the study.

Participants were recruited through the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram. The flyer included specific details regarding what the participants had to meet pertaining to certain criteria. That criteria consisted of having a diagnosis of ADHD in addition to being enrolled in their fourth year of their undergraduate program. Participants in this study agreed to complete a semistructured interview that lasted 30 to 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted separately for each participant. They were asked questions about their academic experiences as students with ADHD. Participation was voluntary and individuals who met the requirements were to contact me through email for additional information. Snowball sampling was used to support the recruitment process. Participants who met the criteria for the study were asked to share the recruitment flyer with other students they knew who had ADHD and were in their final year of college. This process allowed potential participants to decide whether they wanted to participate in the study without their information being disclosed. Once potential participants contacted me, they were presented with access to a consent form approved by IRB for the design. They were asked to read over the contents of the consent form and respond with "I consent" if they felt they met the requirements. Those who met these criteria and sent

the “I consent” to my email provided in the flyer and the consent form scheduled an interview at a mutually agreed time. Once interviews were completed, a follow-up email was sent as well as a gift card for their willingness to participate.

Instrumentation

Data for this study were collected through semistructured interviews (see Appendix A). This interview protocol was designed to evaluate and analyze the perceptions of students with ADHD and explore what support and methods contributed to their academic success. The primary data collection instrument for this study was a researcher-developed semistructured interview protocol. The sole data source for this study was the participants’ responses to the interviews. Participants were required to review and sign a consent form prior to participation.

To assist with the development of the interview questions, the Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale – V1.1 (ASRS V1.1) Symptoms Checklist served as a guiding resource. The Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale–V1.1 (ASRS-V1.1) Symptom Checklist was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a screening instrument designed to identify symptoms associated with adult ADHD (Dorr & Strong, 2019). The ASRS-V1.1 was used only as a developmental guide for framing interview questions related to ADHD symptom-related academic impacts and was not used as a data collection instrument. This study did not use any previously available instruments; therefore, a semistructured interview protocol was used for data collection. The semistructured interview format allowed participants to provide detailed, in-depth responses regarding academic supports,

strategies, and methods that contributed to their academic success. Participants were eligible for up to two interviews to allow for further clarification if needed.

Participants were in their fourth year of undergraduate study because they had sufficient academic experience to reflect on the challenges and supports encountered throughout their college journey to ensure relevance and details of data collected. Cultural and contextual factors were considered because ADHD experiences and perceptions of academic support may vary based on the institutions' environment, available resources, and individual backgrounds.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants were recruited from a private Facebook group established for students with ADHD seeking peer support and academic guidance. Access to this group required requesting membership and obtaining approval from the group administrator. Once membership was approved, an announcement was posted inviting students who identified as having ADHD and were interested in participating in this study to discuss their academic experiences. Participants who responded and participated were asked to share the study flyer with peers who might also be interested, creating a snowball sampling approach.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to each interview. Participants were provided with an electronic consent form via email, which outlined the purpose of the study, procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of the study. Participants indicated consent by responding to the email with the statement, "I consent," prior to scheduling an interview.

Data collection occurred virtually using Google Meet in a single session with each per participant, lasting 30 to 60 minutes. Each interview was conducted using a semistructured interview protocol aligned with the research question to guide the participants' responses regarding their perceptions of their academic success. Interviews were audio recorded with participant permission, and recordings were stored securely and labeled using participant pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Upon completion of each interview, participants were debriefed and thanked for their contribution and reminded they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants did not review transcripts. Follow-up procedures included sending additional check-ins through email and follow-up questions through email. Participants received gift cards as an incentive in appreciation for their voluntary participation.

Data Analysis Plan

All data for this study were collected through semistructured interviews, allowing participants to respond to prepared questions while also providing opportunities for open-ended input. Interview questions were aligned directly to the research question: What are the perceptions of fourth-year undergraduate college students with ADHD regarding the academic support or methods they used that contributed to their perseverance in their academic success? The ASRS -V1.1 was used only as a guiding framework for questions developed and not as a data source. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling, a method recognized as effective for identifying participants from social media platforms (see Parker et al., 2019). Email communication occurred with each participant to

schedule virtual meetings, during which the interviews were conducted with Google meet.

All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and enhance the credibility of the data. Each recording was labeled using a pseudonym rather than the participant's real name. No identifying information was included in the file names or transcripts. All identifying details shared during the interviews were removed during the transcription process. Recordings were supplemented with field notes taken during the interviews and organized within a Google document for preliminary data management.

Data analysis followed a structured coding approach. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, and open coding was conducted first to identify initial concepts and recurring ideas across transcripts (see Siedlecki, 2022). After completion of all interviews, coding labels were refined and finalized based on frequent themes across participants responses. Coding by category was then used to group related codes and identify relationships among themes. The analysis process was guided by Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework, allowing systematic identification, organization, and interpretation of patterns within participant responses (as cited in Naeem et al, 2023).

The analysis of the coded data was conducted using printed transcripts and google documents to facilitate examination of the thematic patterns. No qualitative analysis software was used. Data were managed manually using Google Docs and printed transcripts for coded and theme development. Data were stored on a flash drive with each interview identified by the pseudonym assigned as well as in OneDrive. These two resources are password protected. This approach ensured that qualitative insights were

retrieved, organized, and aligned with this study's research question. Discrepant cases were examined separately and compared with developing themes. Responses that did not fit the main patterns were still included and reported to ensure and transparent representation of participants' perspectives.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility was established repeated review of interview transcripts to ensure accuracy of interpretation. Each transcript was reviewed multiple times and compared against the audio recordings to confirm consistency in participant responses and to reduce information being misinterpreted. These strategies enhance the credibility of qualitative research by ensuring that findings accurately reflect participant's meaning and lived experiences (Siedecki, 2022). Participants and their diagnosis of ADHD were based on self-reporting, and their responses were accepted as a truthful representation of their experiences, which is consistent with qualitative research practices that rely on participants and their perspectives.

Transferability

Transferability was achieved in this study based on information provided by the participants. I provided descriptions of participants that included their age, sex, and academic status to show representation of the population presented. Descriptions of the recruitment procedures and data collection were also provided to give information on how the study was conducted. Information was provided by participants that focused on specific ideals, quotes, or understandings that were revealed through their interviews.

This allowed me to focus on what the participants highlighted to be their struggles as well as what they deemed needed to be understood regarding the student with ADHD.

Providing these detailed descriptions allows readers to determine whether the findings in this study could be applicable to other similar populations, specifically college students with ADHD in 4-year institutions (see Akanle et al., 2020).

Dependability

Dependability was achieved in this study through recorded interviews. The most effective way to ensure that all information presented came directly from the participants. All interviews were saved on a w drive designated for this study as well as through OneDrive connected with my Walden student account. This was to make sure the information given was only accessible to me. Through these recordings, I was able to thoroughly examine each participant's perspective and accurately present the insights and experiences reflected in this study. Each participant was asked the same set of semistructured interview questions to maintain consistency with data collection while still allowing participants to elaborate when needed. Notes were taken during each interview, transcripts were reviewed, and recordings were consistently reviewed for note taking as well. This documentation supports dependability by allowing the research process to be reviewed for consistency and logical progression over time (see Siedlecki, 2022). Repeated reviews of transcripts and recordings supported consistency in the coding process by ensuring that themes were developed in a reliable way within participant responses.

Confirmability

Confirmability was strengthened through self-made notes and systematic documentation of coding decisions to reduce researcher bias. These strategies ensured that findings were grounded in participant responses rather than researcher assumptions or personal experiences. Confirmability in qualitative research is achieved when findings can be traced directly to the data rather than researcher interpretation alone (Adams, 2021).

To further support confirmability, notes were taken through interviews, transcript reviews, and audio recordings to ensure consistency across data. All participants were provided with the same flyer, consent form, and interview questions to keep the data collection procedures uniform. Participants were selected through snowball sampling, and no prior relationships existed to reduce potential bias. These steps ensured that findings were based on participant responses and could be connected back to the original data. Because this study utilized a single researcher for data collection and analysis, intercoder reliability was not applicable. Intra-coder relies on consistency on coding and interpretation by the same researcher across multiple reviews of the same data. Intra-coder reliability was strengthened through repeated coding cycles, reexamination of transcripts, and comparison of coding decisions across multiple time points. This repeated process helped ensure consistency in interpretation and reduced potential drift in thematic analysis over time (see Naeem et al., 2023, Siedlecki, 2022). These steps supported consistency in how data were interpreted and ensured the codes and themes remained stable across data analysis.

Summary of Trustworthiness

Overall, trustworthiness was established through credibility, transferability, and confirmability strategies aligned with qualitative research standards. These procedures ensured rigor in interpretation of participant experiences and strengthened the overall validity of the findings within the context of a basic qualitative study exploring college students with ADHD (see De Los Santos et al., 2019).

Ethical Procedures

Before interviews were conducted, participants were provided with a consent form consistent with Walden University's Review Board (IRB) requirements for research involving participants. The study received the IRB number 10-11-24-0673221. The consent form highlighted the purpose of the study, procedures involved, potential risks, confidentiality protections, and participants' rights. Participants provided their informed consent before participating in the interview process. All recruitment procedures followed ethical guidelines to ensure voluntary participation. Recruitment occurred through a private social media group, and no incentives were used in a manner that could be considered pressure or improper influence on participants.

During the data collection process, participants were informed that interviews would be recorded and would be solely used for research purposes. Each participant was asked permission to record the session and was given the autonomy to keep their cameras on or off. Participants were informed that their responses would be used only for academic purposes and that all data would be made anonymously to protect

confidentiality. Participants were also informed that they could skip any question or discontinue the interview at any time without penalty.

Audio recordings, interview notes, and transcripts were stored securely using password-protected digital storage. Research files were secured in a OneDrive account and backed up on a flash drive. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to remove identifying information from the transcripts. Only I had access to data files, and no identifying information was shared or disclosed in any presentations of findings. Based off Walden's requirements, files are scheduled for destruction within 5 years after the study's completion. All electronic and physical files will be permanently deleted or destroyed at that time to ensure continued protection of participant confidentiality. Additional ethical considerations included minimizing risk to participants by ensuring questions focused on academic experiences.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented information about the study as a basic qualitative design that focused on fourth-year college students who found some academic success with their diagnosis of ADHD through their own efforts and merit. Information was also presented on how this study was conducted through snowball sampling as a primary recruitment strategy. Through Walden guidelines I provided the flyer and interview guide showing how students were reached regarding social media as well as what they were asked once they agreed to be in the study. Institutional ethical procedures, including IRB approval and informed consent, were also followed prior to the collection of the data.

Interview questions were answered and recorded for coding. The coding method used for this study was thematic coding because codes were determined based on the information provided in the interview that correlated with the study and were later grouped into categories and themes aligned with the research question. The analysis process was guided by a basic qualitative design to ensure consistency and alignment with the purpose of research.

I addressed how the students had to be honest and give their ADHD diagnosis on their own accord due to not breaking any laws within the disability act, their education, and what the college was allowed to do. Participants voluntarily self-reported their ADHD diagnosis, and no institutional records were accessed to verify disability status in accordance with ethical research guidelines and their privacy.

In Chapter 4, I present the results of the interviews, their labeling, and the research findings as well as the key themes found within the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings organized by the research question, including participant responses, emerging themes, as well as the data analysis process and results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of fourth-year undergraduate college students with ADHD regarding the academic support and methods that contributed to the perseverance to academic success. The study investigated one specific research question: What are the perceptions of fourth-year undergraduate college students with ADHD on the academic support or methods that contributed to their perseverance in college?

Chapter 4 will detail the study settings, outlining the environment and context in which data were collected. It will also describe the methods used for data collection and analysis. Additionally, this chapter will present the findings of the study, highlighting key results and insights found that support the research question.

Setting

The participants in this study were students in colleges and universities from all over the United States. Recruitment efforts were made through social media platforms through snowball sampling. The participants consisted of fourth-year undergraduate college students diagnosed with ADHD. Additional demographic information such as age range and gender was considered to provide characteristics of the participants.

The interviews were conducted through Google Meet. Participants were allowed to turn off their cameras during the one-on-one interviews to ensure their comfort. Quite a few participants shared their camera with me during the introductions, but when the interview started, cameras were cut off. A semistructured interview guide was used, allowing each participant to provide in-depth responses. All the interviews were audio

recorded, transcribed, and summarized to support each analysis and the accuracy of all data. The semistructured interview format allowed participants to share their experiences openly, ensuring that responses given in the data reflected their personal perspectives at the time of the study.

Participants' experiences may have been influenced by personal factors such as the severity of their ADHD symptoms, access to academic support services, and their individual coping strategies. These factors may have impacted how participants perceived and described their academic success and perseverance. Virtual interviews conducted through Google Meet with an option to keep cameras off may have influenced participant responses in a positive way by increasing their comfort. However, it could also be a limitation with cameras off due to not being able to observe a participants' body language or mannerisms, which could affect interpretation of responses.

Data Collection

Upon receiving approval from Walden University's IRB, the data collection process began with recruitment. I aimed to recruit 10 participants who were 18 years or older and diagnosed with ADHD. Participants were required to be in their fourth year of college. Recruitment was conducted through snowball sampling to reach college students with ADHD from institutions across the United States.

A total of 10 participants were included in this study, and all 10 participants completed one semistructured interview, which was the only data instrument used. Semistructured interviews were conducted one-on-one via Google Meet. Participants were not required to use video. All interviews were conducted remotely due to

participants being located across regions of the United States. Each interview conducted was aligned with the research question. Some chose to share their camera during introductions but turned them off for the remainder of the interview and before recording for privacy and comfort. Participants were encouraged to request clarification if they did not fully grasp a question, to ask for a question to be repeated, or to view the questions on the screen to help encourage their comfort throughout the interview. Each participant engaged in one interview session, with follow-up communication conducted and collected through email when needed.

Interviews were audio recorded with participant permission, and recordings were stored securely and labeled using participant pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. Google Meet's transcription feature was used when available. All data were securely stored and reviewed for accuracy before the analysis began.

Upon completion of each interview, participants were debriefed and thanked for their contribution. They were also reminded they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants received gift cards as an incentive in appreciation for their voluntary participation.

Variations in data collection included differences in participant comfort with camera use, requests to view questions on screen, or need for repetition of questions. Minor technical issues such as background noise or connectivity interruptions occurred but did not significantly impact the data collection process or the quality of the interviews.

Data Analysis

Within this study, semistructured interviews and thematic coding were used to break down all information. Thematic coding is the method chosen to analyze data for this study. Thematic analysis is a form of coding that allows the researcher to label key terms and verbiage commonly found in interviews (Naeem et al., 2023).

All data for this study were collected through semistructured interviews. This allowed participants to respond to prepared questions while also providing opportunities for open-ended questions and input. Interview questions were aligned directly with reflecting on the perceptions of fourth-year undergraduate college students with ADHD regarding the academic supports or methods they used that contributed to their perseverance in their academic success. The ASRS-V1-1 was used only as a guiding framework for questions developed. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling, a method recognized as effective for identifying participants from social media platforms (see Parker et al., 2019). Email communication occurred with each participant to schedule virtual meetings, and interviews were conducted through Google Meet.

Every interview was recorded. The objective was to use Google Meet. However, I discovered after scheduling the interviews that Google Meet only records on a computer. It does not record on a tablet, iPad, or phone. To balance that error, I recorded on my tablet while still conducting the interview through Google Meet to have record of audio for the interviews that had to be done on other devices. This ensured that all participants' responses were consistently captured and preserved for accurate analysis even though there are differences with the recording methods.

Each interview was given a number based on the order conducted. The interview was transcribed into transcripts as well. If I was able to record in Google Meet properly, it transcribed the interviews for me. If I had to record another way, I used an app called Smart Noter to take my audio and create a transcript of each interview. All transcripts were reviewed and compared to audio recordings to ensure accuracy as well as complete data.

The first step in this process of breaking down the information from the interview and transcripts was listening to each interview while taking detailed notes. After listening to each interview, I compared notes to see if I saw common words or phrases given by each participant. Those common words were identified and noted. This was repeated through the note-taking process for all 10 interviews. This reflects the coding process, where initial codes were developed from meaningful terms within the data.

After completing the note-taking process from each interview, each transcript was utilized. Personal notes were compared to each transcript to see if common terms or verbiage were missed while listening to each interview. After completing the initial two steps, information was compiled of all the common keywords and phrases into a Word document. Once printed, the document was reviewed alongside personal notes and interview transcripts repeatedly to further identify recurring terms across the interviews, paying close attention to words that were either identical or similar in meaning. This process allowed clusters of common phrases to be identified and drawn upon for analysis. This demonstrates the process of creating specific codes to identify patterns within the data.

To further refine and identify commonalities within the information gathered, information was systematically reviewed in all notes/data, and I conducted a word search within my notes to identify terms and expressions that appeared with the greatest frequency. This process required continuous review and repeated examination of all data.

For example, expressions such as “forgetting deadlines,” “time blindness,” and “zoning out” were grouped. Similarly, references to “anxiety connected to ADHD,” “feeling overwhelmed,” and “emotional regulation challenges” were clustered together. These codes were then grouped into broader categories such as time management challenges and emotional regulation difficulties.

As I continued to compare codes across all 10 interviews, categories were refined into larger themes that captured shared experiences among participants. This process involved repeatedly reviewing transcripts, comparing notes, and re-examining codes for consistency and overlap. Final themes that emerged included patterns related to self-developed coping strategies, structured routines, and emotional or academic support contributing to student success. These themes represent interpretations that emerged directly from the participants’ responses.

Participant questions were used to support and emphasize these themes. For example, one participant described “constantly forgetting deadlines,” while another shared feeling “overwhelmed trying to manage everything at once,” highlighting time management and emotional challenges. These quotations ensured that the participants’ voices were central to the findings.

Data analysis followed a structured coding approach guided by thematic analysis, which allowed for systematic identification, organization, and interpretation of patterns within the participants and their responses (see Naeem et al., 2023). Data were managed manually using Google Docs and printed transcripts for coding and were later transferred to an Excel document to confirm thematic patterns.. No qualitative analysis software was used.

Data were stored on a flash drive with each interview identified by the pseudonym assigned. The interviews were also stored on a flash drive. Both storage methods were password protected to ensure confidentiality as well as secure the data collected. This ensured that the information was retrieved, organized, and aligned with the research question.

Responses that did not fit the main patterns were still included and reported to ensure all participants and their perspectives were represented. This information was used to determine whether these participants' perspectives were similar or different from existing themes and commonalities, and they helped show credibility by giving account to all participants and their thoughts and perspectives shared.

Results

The purpose of this study was to answer and explore the following research question: What are the perceptions of fourth-year undergraduate college students with ADHD on the academic support or methods that contributed to their perseverance in college? Participants were identified according to their sex and age to maintain confidentiality. This approach preserved anonymity, which was particularly important

given that the study focused on ADHD, a condition protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Table 1 gives the participant demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Sex	Age
Participant 1	Female	60s
Participant 2	Female	43
Participant 3	Female	27
Participant 4	Female	52
Participant 5	Female	26
Participant 6	Female	24
Participant 7	Female	25
Participant 8	Female	24
Participant 9	Male	25
Participant 10	Trans female	24

Within this study, four themes were derived from the data collected through a repetitive process of reviewing transcripts, identifying recurring words and phrases, and grouping similar responses across participants. These themes directly address the research question by highlighting the challenges students faced and the ways they responded to those challenges.

Theme 1: Challenges Maintaining Focus and Attention Impacted Learning

Theme 1 revealed that participants consistently described early struggles with maintaining concentration, often recalling such challenges dating back to their earliest learning experiences. Many participants reported being unable to sit still or show interest for extended periods. For example, Participant 1 stated, “I would catch myself looking

out the window or daydreaming.” Participant 4 shared, “I just couldn’t focus. I would get very easily distracted.”

Several participants noted that their teachers frequently observed these behaviors, while others personally recognized their tendency to “zone out” or have difficulty maintaining attention on a single task. Participant 7 mentioned, “Teachers always thought I wasn’t paying attention when I didn’t get something” as she was not paying attention; however, the teachers did not recognize that she could not focus long enough to grasp the information. Participant 9 also recognized issues with focus by saying, “Staying focused through long lectures or assignments is another challenge to me also.” These findings align with existing research indicating that difficulties with focus are among the most common challenges experienced by students with ADHD and often serve as a primary factor contributing to their academic struggles.

Given that all 10 participants in this study identified focus-related issues as a significant barrier to their learning, this theme was appropriately recognized as a central finding within the research. While most participants described ongoing struggles with attention, a small number indicated that their focus had improved over time once they developed structured routines or strategies, suggesting that focus challenges were not the same across all participants academically.

Theme 2: Anxiety and Emotional Impact Connected With Their Experiences

In Theme 2, participants described feeling pressure to meet academic expectations or to perform in ways they believed were required of them, which often intensified their emotional stress. Participant 4 mentioned, “I was always second-guessing myself,” while

Participant 5 described having issues with “emotional regulation” due to her diagnosis and frustrations.

Six of the 10 participants indicated that anxiety significantly influenced their academic performance. Participant 6 commented on the “emotional turn of always feeling a step behind,” while others explained how frustration and self-doubt impacted their ability to stay engaged. These emotional challenges often led some participants to develop coping mechanisms, showing how they stayed persistent with their academic success.

Not all participants stated anxiety as a major barrier. A few participants focused more on behaviors such as time management or focus rather than emotional challenges, indicating how ADHD continued to impact their perspectives in their academics.

Theme 3: Academic Pressure and Performance Expectations

Regarding Theme 3, several participants reflected on how difficulties with focus during adolescence negatively affected their academic performance, often resulting in grades that did not reflect their effort or potential. Participant 8 reflected on how she was “falling behind in ways I couldn’t understand.”

As the interviews progressed, participants emphasized a shift in their understanding of academic success, recognizing that achievement was not solely defined by earning high grades but by genuinely retaining knowledge and engaging with the learning process. Participant 4 stated that she realized “success is not just making good grades. You have to understand, learn, and apply information.” With this acknowledgment, it was evident quite a few participants believed that if they were

learning, they were defeating half-the-battle. Participant 5 shared, “It is all about growth.” Participant 6 mentioned that “success is not a GPA,” further pushing the narrative that learning and retention are the goals.

Six of the 10 participants expressed that success should be individualized, tailored to the learner’s unique strengths and needs. They further revealed that true learning involves growth, comprehension, and consistency within one’s personal learning environment. Participant 6 also mentioned, “I see that success isn’t a GPA. It’s not quitting, it’s pushing even when you don’t feel like it.”

This theme connects to the research question showing how participants defined their success in ways that supported their perseverance despite their academic challenges. A small number of participants continued to associate success primarily with grades and their performance. This showed that some participants did find the traditional definitions of success regarding their academic success.

Theme 4: Impact of ADHD on Academic Functioning

Concerning Theme 4, a motivating factor for the students in this study was their ability to persist and continue striving toward success, even when academic challenges felt overwhelming or unattainable.

Six of the 10 participants explicitly emphasized the importance of finding internal strength and determination to persevere. Participant 1 mentioned in her interview, “I don’t give up.” Their journeys were described by continual trial and error, requiring them to modify strategies and adapt until they discovered methods that effectively supported their learning. Rather than viewing mistakes as failures, participants described them as

valuable learning opportunities that promoted resilience and personal growth. Participant 6 stated that she developed the understanding that she had to “recover from failure and not be defined by it.” Additionally, Participant 7 reflected, “I give myself grace if I mess up. I don’t fire up. I just restart.” The mindset of persistence and adaptability contributed to their progression toward graduation. The recurrence of this sentiment across more than half of the interviews emphasizes its significance as a key theme within this study.

Participants also described using strategies such as reminders, alarms, note-taking, and taking breaks to manage their workload. Participants discussed a range of strategies, including notetaking, musical expression, the use of reminders and reward systems, and reframing their perception of time from an obstacle to a resource. Participant 2 set alarms to stop and finish assignments, while Participant 4 stated, “I have reminders to the reminder to keep me on task.” Additionally, Participant 3 mentioned how she “takes a break from school or other tasks when needed.”

These participants consistently emphasized that, despite individual determination and perseverance, the presence of a reliable support system played a crucial role in their academic success and persistence. Participant 4 mentioned, “Encouragement from friends and my husband helped me keep going after I failed two classes,” while Participant 9 stated she “built a circle of support like profitability.” Participant 10 also mentioned she had to learn that taking advantage of certain resources to help her being a single parent also helped her along her journey of school while dealing with ADHD. She stated, “Like those connections really kept me alive and still do today.” The certainty as well as

consistency of this idea expressed an importance of support needed within different avenues which verified this is a meaningful theme within this study.

This theme directly answers the research question by identifying the specific strategies, methods, and supports the participants used to persevere and reach their fourth year of college. Although many participants relied on external strategies and supports, a few participants relied on internal motivation, self-discipline, which shows how some students adapted to their environments to achieve academic success.

The recurrence of these practices among most participants reinforced the significance of this finding, establishing it as a key theme within the research.

Table 2 presents the most frequently used terms alongside the demographic characteristics of all study participants.

Table 2

Research Themes

Surfacing themes	Number of applicable participants
Participants describe challenges with maintaining focus and attention.	10
Participants describe anxiety and emotional impact connected with their experiences.	6
Participants provide information regarding academic pressure and performance expectations	7
Participants highlight several strategies and coping mechanisms that supported their well-being and will to be persistent.	8
Participants identified essential support systems that contributed to their academic success.	5
Participants reflected on the impact of ADHD on academic functioning	8

Across the four themes, several recurring phrases emerged where participants used nearly identical wording. This pattern of overlap was evident in most themes

identified during the data analysis process. Table 3 shows the commonly expressed participant phrases aligned with the themes.

Table 3

Commonly Expressed Participant Phrases Aligned With Themes

	Surfacing themes	Recurring participant phrases within identified themes
1.	Participants describe challenges with maintaining focus and attention.	Forget deadlines; memory issues; anxiety that comes with it
3.	Participants provide a variety of definitions of what academic success means to them.	Not just grades, but growth/learning/understanding
4.	Participants exemplify perseverance and resilience in overcoming the challenges faced.	Keep pushing; don't give up; push through; trial and error; finding what works for me
5.	Participants highlight several strategies and coping mechanisms that supported their well-being and will to be persistent.	Time management is key, notes, reminders, alarms

These findings provide a clear introduction to Chapter 5. The results will be interpreted in connection to the existing literature as well as suggested implications for practice.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, I followed strictly the guidelines established by the IRB. The research process involved several steps: posting a recruitment flyer, obtaining informed consent, and conducting recorded interviews. I intentionally avoided interviewing individuals with whom I had prior personal relationships to reduce potential bias and maintain objectivity, allowing me to focus solely on the data provided. Prior to each interview, participants were informed about the

recordings and were given the option to disable their camera to preserve anonymity. Because participation required individuals to self-disclose their ADHD diagnosis, I relied on their honesty and self-reporting, which was necessary to respect their rights under the ADA. Given the sensitive nature of the study, establishing and maintaining trust with participants was a critical component of the research process. These procedures were consistent with the strategies outlined in Chapter 3 and were implemented during the data collection process and analysis.

Credibility

Credibility in this study was established through careful attention to accurately representing each participant's comments, thoughts, and interpretations. Each transcript was reviewed multiple times and compared against the audio recordings to confirm consistency in participant responses and to reduce information from being represented. These strategies enhanced the credibility of the qualitative research by ensuring the findings accurately reflected participants' meanings and lived experiences (see Siedlecki, 2022).

Participants' diagnosis of ADHD was based on their self-reporting. Their responses were accepted as a truthful representation of their experiences with ADHD, which allowed qualitative research to be used considering it relied on their perspectives. Member checking was not conducted; however, repeated transcript reviewing and comparison to the audio recording served as a strategy to strengthen the accuracy and alignment with the participants and their responses.

Transferability

Transferability was achieved in this study based on information provided about the participants. I provided detailed descriptions of the participants that entailed their age, sex, and academic status to show a clear representation of the population presented.

Information was provided from the participants that centered around specific ideals, quotes, or understandings that were revealed through the interviews. Presenting key terms and themes revealed common information repeated throughout all interviews. This allowed me to determine what the participants highlighted to be their struggles as well as what they deemed needed to be understood regarding the student with ADHD.

Providing these detailed descriptions allows readers to determine whether the findings in this study could be applicable to other similar populations, specifically college students with ADHD in 4-year institutions (see Akanle et al., 2020). Detailed descriptions of the participants and their experiences and direct quotations were used to provide more depth to their responses.

Dependability

Dependability was achieved in this study through the audio recorded interviews and the transcripts. Repeated reviews supported the consistency in the coding process by ensuring that the themes were developed to be reliable within the participants and their responses. Notes taken during the interviews, transcript reviews, and recordings were used to support how consistently the data collected were examined. This process ensured that findings were based on a stable and consistent interpretation of the data (see

Siedlecki, 2022). This process allowed data to be reviewed, showing how data were collected over time.

Confirmability

Confirmability was shown by ensuring the findings in this study were grounded in participant responses. Themes were determined based only on the information provided through the interviews and transcripts. Self-made notes and documentation of coding was used to reduce researcher bias and ensure that findings were not influenced by personal assumptions (see Adams, 2021). To further support confirmability, interview transcripts and recordings were continuously reviewed. This ensured that the data findings were traced back to participants and their responses.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I described the experiences of students with ADHD from their perspective. The study focused on how these students defined success and the strategies they employed to achieve it, particularly as they neared graduation. The findings revealed that students with ADHD experience challenges with focus, emotional regulation, and academic pressure; however, they develop strategies, coping mechanisms, and support systems that help contribute to their perseverance in their academic success. Collectively, these findings reflect how students defined and pursued their own academic success. The results also provide insight into practices and approaches that may be beneficial for other students with ADHD in similar academic environments.

Chapter 5 will provide an overview and interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 4. This chapter addresses the study's limitations, offers recommendations, and

discusses the implications of the research. In addition, I will present a concluding summary and suggest directions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of fourth-year undergraduate college students with ADHD regarding the academic support and methods that contributed to their perception of academic success. The design focused on how these students defined success and the strategies they employed to achieve it, particularly as they neared graduation. One guiding research question shaped the inquiry: What are the perceptions of fourth-year undergraduate college students with ADHD on the academic support or methods that contributed to their perseverance in college?

Participants were recruited through social media groups, snowball sampling, and flyers distributed in both physical and digital spaces, with permission sought before posting to ADHD-related communities. By January 2025, the first interview was conducted, and recruitment continued until the final interview on July 1, 2025. A total of 10 participants were recruited, representing colleges and universities across the United States. From the interviews, seven prominent themes were identified as recurring patterns throughout the data.

Interpretation of the Findings

The data analysis process began with listening to each interview and compiling notes, followed by a comparison with transcripts to identify recurring words and phrases. This repetitive process of coding and refinement provided deeper insight into the ways students with ADHD adapted, developed strategies, and utilized support to achieve academic success.

Existing research on students with ADHD primarily emphasized the identification of the condition and outlined strategies aimed at promoting academic success. Much of this literature also examined college outcomes, such as graduation rates, and explored the role of institutional support services in facilitating student achievement (Gormley et al., 2019). However, there was an absence of direct input and lived perspective of the students themselves, the very individuals expected to implement these strategies and utilize these services. While the existing literature provided significant insight into ADHD, its characteristics, and various institutional interventions designed to support affected students, lack of attention had been given to how students themselves evaluated and defined their pathways to success, including their own perceptions of self-advocacy and personal strategy development (Pfeifer et al., 2021). These findings extend to the literature because they provide insight into how students personally defined success, and how they identify the specific strategies and methods they used. The findings also suggest that while institutional supports are important, students relied on self-developed coping mechanisms and their personal persistence, adding to current understanding of student-centered strategies and methods used to be successful.

The research question asked within this study was as follows: What are the perceptions of fourth-year undergraduate college students with ADHD on the academic support or methods that contributed to their perseverance in college? The students in this study seemed to be open and honest about their experiences as well as what they felt helped them progress to their fourth year in hopes of graduating. It was evident that all participants shared core themes that surrounded their experiences.

The findings of this study affirmed the importance of incorporating the perspectives of students with ADHD, as their voices provided essential insight into their academic journeys. Although the sample included 10 participants, the data highlighted that everyone's experiences were distinct. While certain common attributes associated with ADHD were identified, the impact of these attributes varied among participants, shaping their academic pathways in unique ways. The results further highlighted that students with ADHD perceived themselves as the most authentic representatives of their collegiate experiences. Because they lived these challenges firsthand, they were uniquely positioned to articulate strategies, offer advice, and share insights that not only validate the experiences of their peers but also reinforce the message that academic success was attainable.

The interpretation of findings affirmed that students with ADHD viewed themselves as the most credible sources of knowledge about their academic journeys. Their insights highlighted the nuances of living and learning with ADHD and underscored that while common attributes existed, the way those attributes influenced academic success varied between individuals. These findings were interpreted within the data and were limited to the experiences shared by the participants in this study. Regarding the conceptual framework, these findings support the idea that students construct their academic success through their life experiences, personal challenges, and adaptive strategies. Participants showed that their success was achieved based off of their personal growth, persistence, and self-awareness.

The consistency of these responses suggests that while each student's journey was unique, there were notable commonalities in how students with ADHD defined success, described their challenges, and articulated the strategies they found most effective. These findings highlight the resilience and adaptability of students with ADHD. Overall, the findings confirm existing knowledge, while focusing on the participants' perspectives, which provides a clear understanding of how students with ADHD perceive and navigate their academic success.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study was the use of a convenience sample, which required reliance on participants' self-reported information. As a result, the only means of confirming participants' ADHD diagnoses was through their own disclosure. In alignment with ethical guidelines and legal considerations, participants' self-reported information was utilized. If a student disclosed having an ADHD diagnosis, the information was accepted to protect their confidentiality, uphold compliance with the law, and include them as a participant in the study. As a result, 10 participants were recruited, although the process required additional time, as it was essential that everyone felt comfortable disclosing such personal information.

This limitation may affect credibility and confirmability because the diagnoses noted were independently verified, meaning the findings had to be relied upon based off the participants and what they self-reported rather than a clinical confirmation. Another limitation to trustworthiness was the potential for self-selection bias because participants who chose to participate may have been more willing to share positive perspectives

regarding their academic success in comparison to the those who declined due to their lack of a positive perspective.

Recommendations

Existing research has established a foundational understanding of ADHD, including its attributes and the various institutional methods available to support students at the collegiate level (Canu et al., 2020). However, a clear absence of research exists between the strategies proposed by institutions and the lived experiences of students. Addressing this absence in research served as the central motivation for the present study.

To address the absence of research between institutional strategies and the lived experiences of students with ADHD, future research and practice should prioritize centering the student's voice in both the design and application of academic support. The findings of this study demonstrated the value of incorporating student perspectives, as they provided authentic insight into the challenges, strategies, and pathways that contributed to academic success. By grounding future efforts in the firsthand experiences of students, researchers and practitioners can ensure that interventions move beyond generalized institutional approaches and instead reflect the realities of those directly impacted.

The four themes that centered around focus and attention challenges, anxiety and emotional impact, definitions of academic success, perseverance and resilience, strategies and coping mechanisms, support systems, and identity and self-understanding should be used by colleges and universities to develop adaptive resources that account for the diverse ways ADHD influenced students' academic journeys.

After analyzing the interview data, the findings revealed the value of incorporating student perspectives into research on ADHD in higher education. By using firsthand accounts of students with ADHD, this study revealed what they perceived as strategies or methods that contribute to their success, offering insights that extended beyond common practices used by institutions.

Continuing research should focus on the voices of students with ADHD, positioning them as central contributors. Doing so not only advances academic knowledge, it also ensures that practical interventions are influenced by those who navigate these challenges daily. Participants expressed that they needed to figure out what worked for them and needed to stick with it and be consistent with their methods. They were extremely appreciative of the fact this study completely focused on the student with ADHD and their opinions. Therefore, this action-oriented approach has the potential to allow a space for more effective support systems that will improve success rates for students with ADHD in higher education.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of fourth-year undergraduate college students with ADHD regarding the academic support and methods that contributed to their perception of academic success. Specifically, I sought to identify the methods and strategies these students developed and utilized throughout their academic journeys to support their persistence and success because research has indicated the methods used to promote academic success and the failures of the students with ADHD on the collegiate level (see Dvorsky & Langberg, 2019).

The findings of this study reveal several important implications for research, practice, and policy in higher education. The results affirmed the importance of centering the voices of students with ADHD in both scholarly inquiry and institutional practice. Existing research has often emphasized symptomatic attributes, academic outcomes, and institutional interventions (Rigoni et al., 2020). However, this study demonstrated that the students themselves were the most authentic and credible sources of knowledge regarding the strategies and support that contributed to their success. By evaluating lived experiences of students with ADHD, higher education institutions can design support services that more accurately reflect the realities of those navigating academic challenges.

Future qualitative research should continue to prioritize participant centered data collection methods that allow students with ADHD to describe their perspectives in their own words because this approach adds depth and authenticity to findings. Although each student described unique struggles and pathways, recurring themes such as perseverance, adaptability, coping mechanisms, and the role of support system do illustrate patterns that can guide more targeted interventions (see Canu et al., 2020). Colleges and universities may consider developing flexible, student-centered supports that allow individualized academic accommodations while still addressing common challenges experienced by students with ADHD.

Most importantly, this study showed the role of students with ADHD as active contributors to advancing knowledge and practice. Recognizing students with ADHD as partners in shaping support strategies can enhance institutional practices, reduce stigma, and promote academic persistence and success. Acknowledging this absence in literature

is needed because it contributes to the fact that student perspectives were essential to understanding ADHD in higher education. The potential positive change from this study is the recognition of students with ADHD as essential contributors to higher education practice, which may promote more their academic environments. With the implementation of these conversations, the insights can move toward a more empathetic, effective, and sustainable support systems that will utilize the insights of students with ADHD on the collegiate level. This study provides firsthand qualitative data of how students with ADHD define their success and use strategies and methods that support their academic success as well as show their persistence to succeed.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of undergraduate college students with ADHD regarding academic support and methods that contributed to their perception of academic success. The research examined how these students defined success, the strategies they employed to achieve it, and the support systems that contributed to their persistence as they approached graduation. Data were collected from 10 participants through interviews, and analysis revealed seven recurring themes: focus and attention challenges, anxiety and emotional impact, definitions of academic success, perseverance and resilience, strategies and coping mechanisms, support systems, and identity and self-understanding. These themes highlighted both each student's journey and their shared elements that shaped their academic progress, which led to their success.

Findings affirmed the importance of the voice of the student with ADHD, as participants offered insight into their lived experiences with ADHD in higher education.

While previous literature has largely emphasized diagnosis, outcomes, and institutional strategies, this study addressed a critical absence of research and literature by accepting the perspectives of students themselves. The results revealed that although students experienced common ADHD-related challenges, the ways in which these challenges influenced their academic pathways varied across individuals. The consistency of certain responses also underscored that students with ADHD viewed themselves as the most credible sources of knowledge about their experiences, positioning them to provide valuable guidance on effective strategies, support, and approaches to success.

This basic qualitative design carries important implications for research, practice, and policy. Higher education institutions should adopt more flexible and student-centered approaches that reflect the diversity of ways ADHD influences academic life. By recognizing students as active contributors in shaping support services, colleges and universities can design interventions that are both empathetic and effective. Future research should continue to center around student voices to expand academic understanding of ADHD in higher education as well as strengthen equity and inclusion. This study demonstrates that incorporating the lived perspectives of students with ADHD is essential for creating support systems that promote persistence, resilience, and long-term academic success.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Date:

Interviewee:

Google Meet/Zoom:

Start Time:

End Time:

Introduction and Warm-Up

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. For the record, could you state your current year of study and major?
4. What is your confirmed graduation date?
5. What is something you would love for me to know about you?
 - a. We will be working together for a few months, so it is nice to know a little about you the person.

Background and Diagnosis

6. Have you been clinically diagnosed with ADHD?
 - a. If so, what age were you diagnosed?
7. When did you notice you were struggling or having issues in school due to this diagnosis?
8. How long did it take you to fully understand or grasp what ADHD is and how it affected you?
9. What are some differences you have noticed between high school and college in reference to your diagnosis and how it affects your studies?
10. What do you notice are your main struggles with ADHD diagnosis now?
 - a. What symptoms do you notice the most?

Academic Experience, Challenges, and Coping Mechanisms

11. What is your idea of academic success? How do you define academic success regarding your academics?
12. What does perseverance mean to you? How does it apply to your academic success?

13. What are some ways you were able to overcome? Do you have specific strategies or resources offered? Specific people?

Strategies for Success

14. You volunteered to be interviewed because you believe you have found a way to be academically successful?
- a. How did you find this way?
 - b. Was it given to you, or did you figure it out on your own?
 - c. Are you willing to document your academic progress and method/strategy used to help maintain this success?
 - i. If so, how often are you willing to document your progress?
 - ii. Are you willing to share this information with me?
15. What methods or strategies do you use to help you with academic success?
- a. How long have you used those methods?
 - b. How do you know they are working?
 - c. Are you willing to document or share your success with me? (grades)

Future Goals and Aspirations

16. What is your main goal once you graduate from college?
- a. What is your career plan?
 - b. Do you plan on expanding your educational journey?
17. How do you plan to try to continue success in your desired field of work regarding your symptoms experienced with your ADHD diagnosis?

Follow Up Questions

18. What is the main thing you feel should be known regarding your success and your struggles with ADHD after these observations have been evaluated?
19. Why is it important to hear firsthand from a student with ADHD?
20. Any other thoughts or opinions you would like to share?