

2015

# The Experiences of Military Parents Homeschooling Using Online Teaching Resources

Georgia George Watters  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Georgia Watters

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Walden University  
2015

Abstract

The Experiences of Military Parents Homeschooling Using Online Teaching Resources

by

Georgia George Watters

MEd, Boston University, 1992

MEd, National College of Education, 1989

BS, University of Akron, 1978

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

U.S. military members and their families relocate from one duty station to another on average once every 3 years. Children in military families change schools often, introducing potential problems such as struggling to make new friends, having trouble adjusting to new teaching styles, and losing academic credits due to the transition from one school to the next. Homeschooling that incorporates online resources can provide instructional continuity, social interaction opportunities, and submission of required periodic assessments. The primary purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of military parents involved in homeschooling their children using online resources. The research questions were designed to explore these experiences and to create recommendations for other military families. A conceptual framework based on a constructivist learning approach and change theory informed this study. Data were collected from 9 parents with many years of experience homeschooling. The parents were interviewed via phone, e-mail, and Skype. Data were analyzed using open coding, axial coding, and hierarchical coding. Parent participants chose homeschooling due to dissatisfaction with available schools, family location, and flexibility. Online resources were described as making it easier and more engaging for students to learn and as simplifying the parents' instructional and management tasks. These alternative methods replaced or augmented traditional educational methods. Parent participants encouraged other parents to reach out and seek help early in the process. This study promotes positive social change by providing resources for alternative ways children can be educated while one or more military parent is serving and defending the United States of America.

Phenomenological Study of Military Parents Homeschooling Using Online Resources

by

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## Dedication

My brother-in-law Sloan told my son that it does not matter how long it takes you to cross the finish line, as long as you cross. I began this journey in January 2004—11 years to cross! I dedicate this dissertation in memory of the late George and Reachel Carter (my mother and father, who had a fourth and fifth grade education and would always tell me that I could be anything that I wanted to be, if I worked hard, prayed every day, and was respectful to people) and Percy Watters Jr. (my late husband, who was a happy caring person, enjoyed life, and achieved success for his family), as well as to three very special people, whom I love unconditionally: my sons and daughter (niece), Timothy and Thomas Watters and Davina (Burke) Santos. The finish line belongs to you. Continue to set your goals high and accomplish all of your dreams as you model the standards for your children, Thaila, Xavier, and Maxwell.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This phenomenological research study focused on the experiences of military families who homeschool their children using online resources. A need existed for this study because little was known about the experiences of military families involved in online homeschooling. Interviewing military parents who homeschool their children through online resources revealed first-hand knowledge of the processes and perceived outcomes associated with homeschooling military children using online tools.

Subsequently, the gap in knowledge this research addressed concerned military parents' lived experiences and perceptions in homeschooling their children through online resources. The findings should be of interest to other military families who seek an educational option to explore and consider.

### **Background**

According to the 2010 Department of Defense Demographics Report, uniform service members of the military and their families are stationed throughout the world. In 2010, the three primary areas in which active duty members, numbering about 1,417,370, were assigned were the United States and its territories (86.4%), East Asia (7%), and Europe (5.7%; Department of Defense, 2010). More than half of this population consisted of married, active duty military members; more than a third of active duty members (38.8%) were married with children, and an additional 5.4% were single parents (Department of Defense, 2010). This means that almost half (44.2% as of 2010) of all active military families were dealing with educating their children.

Families represent a key component of the U.S. military (Huebner, Mancini, Bowen, & Orthner, 2009). In 2011, the country had 1.9 million military-associated children, 1.2 million of whom were of school age. Among the children attending school, 765,000 had parents who were active duty members. Among these, 85,000 children attended Department of Defense schools; the other 435,000 were dependents of Department of Defense civilians and contract employees. The deployed service members in 2011 had at least 220,000 children. Among those, 116,000 were school-aged children, and 75,000 school-aged children had service member parents who were deployed multiple times (U.S. Government, 2011).

The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC, 2012), which serves as an “advocate for ensuring quality educational opportunities for all military children affected by mobility, family separation, and transition” (p. 1), reported that “military children generally move six to nine times during their K-12 school years” (p. 3). Many families move three to four times during their children’s high school years, and oftentimes moves are made during a student’s senior year. MCEC reports that the consequences of these moves include students giving up friends and routines. MCEC has stated that students often contend with other frustrations as they move nationwide, which includes academic selection of courses, loss of graduation credits, transfer and acceptance of records, as well as denial or delay of entrance into enrichment and special-needs programs (MCEC, 2012). Whereas civilian families define quality education as good achievement in school,

military families perceive quality education in terms of school performance and preparedness to adapt to the next location (National Military Family Association, 2012).

An all-volunteer force (AVF) was enacted more than 30 years ago for U.S. military personnel being stationed overseas, with the resulting consequence being numerous changes in the demography of the military personnel (Hisnanick & Little, 2010). Recently, military leaders have become aware that successful overall recruitment, maintenance and retention, and morale of service members are directly related to the quality of their families' lives (Blank, 2009; U.S. Government, 2011). Closely related to this observation is a statement by the military's commander in chief, who wrote, "Let me be clear, stronger military families will strengthen the fabric of America" (Obama, 2011, p. i). Despite this, military planners and policy makers, in implementing AVF, did not properly envision and plan for married military personnel with families and dependents, or for issues related to dependents such as education for military children (Hisnanick & Roger, 2010). The AVF is worth noting because military members move their families with them. Thirty years after its enactment, technology plays a vital role in educating transiting military children.

Army General John Craddock articulated to a subcommittee of House Appropriations that military members are electing to leave their families in the United States when they (the military members) are assigned overseas. The general stated that military families who have children in high school and middle school are concerned about a lack of honor and advanced placement classes as well as extracurricular activities,

and about aging and dilapidated school facilities. In many cases, administrators in prospective schools recommend a placement for the child, which may be frustrating to the parent, who has little input; the main option is simply to accept the administrative decision. In some cases, children are required to study content they have already mastered, which becomes redundant, or they are expected to learn something for which they have no foundation, which becomes complex or frustrating for them (U.S. Government, 2011). Families have felt that their children would be disadvantaged and would not be competitive in society. Craddock stated that the largest portion of the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) budget goes to the military schools that are located in the United States, though funding is increasingly being reduced (Burgess, 2008).

McReynolds (2007) indicated that when parents homeschool their children, they spend less time worrying about their physical safety and their emotional status. It was further revealed that homeschooled children are more focused on their studies, as they do not have to travel long distances to school. McReynolds also discovered that homeschooling provides a safe and secure study environment and found that parents of military families who homeschool their children decide which courses to enroll them in and which particular books are more suitable educationally. Additionally, McReynolds (2007) noted that military parents who homeschool their children have flexibility—they are not guided on a particular timeframe to study as in traditional schools—ultimately revealing that for military families, homeschooling their children offers an opportunity to

use their children's talents and at the same time dedicate more time to addressing their weaknesses.

McReynolds (2007) documented the many unique technological ways in which transitioning military families may maintain continuity and sustainability in educating their children without comprising and jeopardizing the mission of the military (MCEC, 2012). Military families have the option of homeschooling their children to ensure consistency and continuity in the educational process. Homeschooling may be a viable option for military families given advances in technology, especially the Internet, which provides unlimited online tools for homeschooling families (MCEC, 2012; U.S. Government, 2011). The gap in knowledge that this research addressed was military parents' lived experiences and perceptions in homeschooling their children through online resources. A need existed for this study, as there was limited research on the experiences of military families involved in online homeschooling.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem that this qualitative study addressed was twofold. With continually required mobility on the part of military families, there is a need to determine the best educational strategies available for children who are constantly challenged with a changing instructional environment. There also exists a lack of research that addresses the experiences of military families involved in the choice of online homeschooling.

A total of 32% of the 2 million children being homeschooled are military children (Caban, 2010). Following the negative impacts associated with frequent relocations (U.S.

Government, 2011), some military parents have chosen to homeschool their children (Garrett & Hoppin, 2008; National Military Family Association, 2012). Military families choose homeschooling because its flexibility enhances stability for military children during frequent deployments and constant relocations, and because homeschooling enhances progressive and consistent learning (Armstrong, 2011; Caban, 2010; National Military Family Association, 2012). The Internet provides homeschooled children and their parents with useful tools that affect the homeschooling environment, which have proven to be convenient and flexible in terms of time and location (Geith & Vignare, 2008; Time4Learning, 2012). The gap in knowledge that this research addressed was the military parents' lived experiences and perceptions in homeschooling their children through online resources. The key research topic focused on what experiences military parents encountered in homeschooling their children and achieving positive academic outcomes while using online resources.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of military parents involved in homeschooling their children using online resources. Despite the obvious use of the Internet by homeschooling military parents, little was known about the experiences of these homeschooling military parents using online tools. The study addressed the gap in the literature by examining the experiences of military families who were homeschooling their children through the Internet. A study by Armstrong (2011) reported that all the participants identified the reason for pursuing

online learning as flexibility in the context of the learning environment. Many military parents are using online resources to teach their children through homeschooling. They find these online tools through websites that specialize in helping parents facilitate homeschooling.

One problem that was of interest in this study was the constant and continuous transition of the military family, which caused students to fall behind in their formal schooling. Many students were also required to attend school in substandard school districts. Overall, the transition was a contributing factor toward creating a stressful environment for the entire family. Some military parents with children in public schools were concerned about the quality of education, especially because of frequent relocations (U.S. Government, 2011). Furthermore, MCEC has stated that students often contend with other frustrations as they move regionally and nationally, which include academic selection of courses, loss of graduation credits, transfer and acceptance of records, as well as denial or delay of entrance into enrichment and special-needs programs (MCEC, 2012). Military families move frequently, sometimes in the middle of school years, which has negative effects on the quality of education students receive in traditional schooling. When parents relocate across states or countries, children are also uprooted. Many military parents have been worried about the quality of education and care their children receive in schools. The U.S. government has reported that 34% of military parents had limited confidence that schools were sufficiently responsive to the unique needs of their children as military dependents (U.S. Government, 2011). In addition, the U.S.

government has reported that military children in public schools perceive teachers and nonmilitary students as being unable to understand their issues, especially those occasioned by frequent moves and long absences of a parent (U.S. Government, 2011). Therefore, the ordinary fact that military students contend with frustrations of losing friends, losing academic credits, and facing the possibility of entering a sub-standard school system during transitioning manifested anxiety associated with this social change.

The completed study explored military parents' perceptions, understandings, attitudes, and beliefs concerning online homeschooling. The study described and interpreted such perceptions, attitudes, understandings, and beliefs that constituted experiences of military parents' homeschooling their children through online resources. The aim of the participants' descriptions and interpretations was to understand such experiences so that they can inform other military families in similar situations. The results of this study may provide other military parents information to influence and guide them to an alternative, appropriate option in educating their children in light of relocation.

### **Research Question**

This phenomenological research study focused on the experiences of military families who homeschool their children using online resources. A need existed for this study because little was known about the experiences of military families involved in online homeschooling. There were a limited number of studies that documented that

military children can be successfully educated through homeschooling with the help of online tools or resources. The completed study answered two questions:

1. What experiences do military parents encounter in homeschooling their children using online resources?
2. What recommendations do homeschooling military parents have for other transitioning military parents?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was guided by the work of diffusion of innovations change theorist Rogers (2003) and the theory of constructivism as a paradigm for teaching and learning. Constructivists hold that humans invent concepts, models, and schemes that help in making sense of experience that are continuously modified as new experiences are lived (Halldorsdottir, n.d., p. 1). Constructivism indicates that reality exists as a construction in the minds of individuals and has been constructed through the interaction between people and their world (Halldorsdottir, n.d.). A current common view in constructivism is that learning is embedded in cultural and social aspects of society. This view holds that cognition is socially and culturally situated (Duffy & Cunningham, n.d.).

Rogers (1963a) stated, “All Extension workers are change agents ... professional persons who attempt to influence adoption decisions in a direction they feel desirable” (p. 17). “The four areas of diffusion that Rogers identified as noteworthy consisted of: the adoption process, the rate of adoption of innovations, adopter categories, and opinion leadership” (Rogers, 1963a, p. 17). Rogers (2003) defined an *innovation* as “an idea,

practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (p. 12). Rogers (2003) defined *diffusion* as “the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (p. 12). As Rogers’s innovation and diffusion theory of technology is communicated over a period of time within the social system, this theory aligned with this study of military parents’ use of online resources, for the homeschool process is communicated over a period of time. Likewise, the constructivist view that learning is embedded in cultural and social aspects of society and in the minds of individuals in making sense of experiences, which are continuously modified during new lived experiences, was used to seek answers to the question of what experiences military parents encounter in homeschooling their children using online resources.

The study adopted a phenomenological approach to guide the interpretation of experiences of military families with online homeschooling (Lavery, 2003). Phenomenology, according to Halldorsdottir (n.d.) “is a part of the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. It is both a philosophy and a methodology” (p. 49). The choice of this theoretical framework was strongly informed by the nature and aim of the study. Constructivist learning provides for social negotiation and encourages ownership in learning as well as self-awareness of the construction of knowledge. The methods of instruction include collaborative learning as well as open software (programs available to the public) and course management tools, tools that enable the access and creation of

online content and posting on the web. Computer-supported collaborative learning includes web-based online resources.

### **Nature of the Study**

The completed study was guided by a qualitative phenomenological research method. Researchers who use phenomenological theory study the ordinary life-world, with their primary interest being how people experience their world (Halldorsdottir, n.d., p. 1). Gaining access to other people's experiences involves, for the phenomenologist, an exploration with the respondents, who are then questioned to identify emerging themes for the researcher. Phenomenology, in essence, is concerned with finding the meaning of codes through interpretation rather than creating that meaning. Phenomenology aims at unfolding the meaning of lived experiences (Lavery, 2003). Its primary focus is to "understand or comprehend meanings of human experience as it is lived" (Lavery, 2003, p. 14).

Phenomenology moves from a description of the phenomenon to the interpretation of meaning. The descriptions obtained in this research were those of the experiences of the military parents who were homeschooling. The interpretations involved questioning or analyzing the descriptions to identify the themes that emerged. Establishing common aspects among the themes gave me an opportunity to "crystallize the essential structure of the phenomenon," resulting in "a description of the essential structure of the phenomenon studied" (Halldorsdottir, n.d., p. 50).

Military parents who homeschool their children were selected to participate in an interview process via telephone, email, or Skype (online video conferencing) or in a face-to-face format, in order for me to gain information on each parent's experience. Initial contacts were not made on the military base or associated locations. Interviewing involved the use of questions, and participant responses guided an exchange of ideas, which resulted in joint construction of meaning concerning the research topic. In particular, I used semistructured interviews to collect data from nine purposively selected military parents chosen through snowball sampling. The conversational interview process was recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Follow-up interviews were conducted when needed for clarification.

The collection of information on the lived experiences of military parents was guided by a qualitative phenomenological study methodology (Laverly, 2003; Moustakas, 1994; Manen, 1990; Sokolowski, 2000). Janesick (2004) stated that the interview process needs to include basic descriptive questions, follow-up questions, and clarification questions. The process should result in a "joint construction of meaning about a particular topic" (Janesick, 2004, p. 72).

### **Definitions**

*Duty station:* This term refers to "full-time duty in the active military service of the United States. Such a term includes full-time training duty, annual training duty, and attendance, while in the active military service, at a school designated as a service school

by law or by the secretary of the military department concerned. Such a term does not include full-time National Guard duty” (Legal Information Institute, n.d., n.p.).

*Enlisted member:* This term refers to a member of the military who belongs to the enlisted grade (Legal Information Institute, n.d., n.p.).

*Life world:* This refers to the experiences people have in their daily real world (Halldorsdottir, n.d.; Lavery, 2003).

*Online resources:* These refer to the learning tools available through the Internet. Online tools/resources refer to the Internet resources that are available to homeschooling parents who use the Internet. Examples of online tools include discussion forums, podcasts, mailing, messaging systems, and social and sharing tools, among others (Geith & Vignare, 2008).

*Rank:* This means “the order of precedence among members of the armed forces” (Legal Information Institute, n.d., n.p.).

*Service member:* This is a member of any of the branches of the U.S. military, which include Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard, and Marines (Sheppard, Malatras, & Israel, 2010).

### **Assumptions**

The goal of this study was to elicit homeschooling parents’ experiences using online resources to gain academic success and recommendations. This was a qualitative study relying on interviews, which implied that themes and conclusions were drawn from the responses of the participants. It was therefore assumed that the respondents were

truthful in responding to my questions. Additional anticipated limitations included participants not being available for subsequent interaction due to transfers or unexpected personal situations that might prevent communication.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study was concerned with the experiences of U.S. military parents involved in homeschooling their children through online resources. The scope of the study extended to the experiences of military parents who were actually involved in educating their children through online resources. The delimitations involved excluding military parents who were homeschooling their children without the use of Internet resources. It was not my intention in this phenomenological study to examine the experiences of homeschooling military parents in their general lives as military families; rather, I sought to examine experiences as online homeschool teachers/facilitators for their children. These experiences were explored through in-depth interviews designed to elicit information from the military parents in order to recognize the meaning they attached to online homeschooling, which was constructed from their lived experiences as homeschoolers (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The participants were selected from all branches of the United States Armed Forces. The interviews were conducted in telephone, email, face-to-face, or Skype format. Further, I did not intend to study all the military parents who were homeschooling their children through online tools, but rather to study a limited group of military parents (Air Force) homeschooling their children through online resources.

### **Limitations**

The study had two key limitations resulting from the sampling method and data collection techniques. The sampling technique used for this study was snowball sampling, which is a form of non-probability sampling. Therefore, the generalization of the study results was limited. It is important to note that the sample used for the study was small (nine respondents), which further hindered the representativeness of the study sample. As a result, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to hold true for all the military parents in the United States military. It should be noted that data were collected through interviews. In interviews, the respondents relied on their memory. In the event that they were not able to remember some aspects of their experience, relevant questions might not have been answered sufficiently. This might have negatively affected the accuracy of the study findings.

Further, the study was prone to my personal biases. The data collection, analysis, and reporting processes might have been impacted by my biases. However, I made every effort to ensure that personal biases were at an absolute minimum. I deliberately adopted a stance of neutrality. This required a kind of balancing act that dealt with any kind of biases. In carrying out the study, I did not intend to serve any vested interests, but rather interpreted the experiences of military families with an open mind. Crosschecking for determining themes based on interview responses was also conducted by a professional with research experience to ensure avoidance of bias.

### **Significance of Study**

The recruitment, maintenance, retention, and general effectiveness of the military depend on the quality of life of military families (Park, 2011; U.S. Government, 2011). In its commitment to strengthening military families, the U.S. government has identified the education of military children as priority number two (U.S. Government, 2011). Any effort made toward understanding the education of military children should be seen as a way of enhancing the effectiveness of the military, which contributes to the significance of this study. As has been observed, military families are constantly moving, which negatively affects the education of military children. One way in which the negative effect of these frequent relocations on the education of military children may be reduced is through homeschooling (Park, 2011). Given that the Department of Defense allows military parents to homeschool their children, homeschooling should continue to be an option for military families.

The completed study is of significance and describes a positive social change for military parents who are homeschooling their children or considering homeschooling. The study identifies various online tools used to enrich the learning of military children being homeschooled. Furthermore, I recommend various online tools that parents can use to strengthen their ability to teach their children and promote learning. This may encourage parents to interact with other parents and share their experiences through discussion forums. This examination of the experiences of military parents

homeschooling their children through online tools sheds light on the research questions regarding military parents who homeschool their children using the Internet.

### **Summary**

This chapter established and justified the need for the study. More than 50% of the military consists of married people, with about 10% being married to another service member (Park, 2011). The data showed the total number of American children being homeschooled at 2 million, of which 32% are military children. Homeschooling among military families ensures consistency and progressive education for military children even during relocations, and it ensures that homeschooled military children manage relocations more smoothly than those military children attending traditional schools, which leads to effective families and hence an effective military (Park, 2011). Some homeschooling military parents have made use of the Internet and the various tools it offers to enhance or improve the learning experience of their children. The Internet provides various resources to homeschooling parents. The Internet and access to the Internet have grown significantly in the United States (Geith & Vignare, 2008).

The gap in existing research shows that little was known about the experiences of military parents who were homeschooling their children through online resources. This study contributes to filling this gap in the literature. The chapter has also identified the boundaries of the study as being limited to military parents homeschooling their children through online tools rather than any military parents homeschooling their children in a more traditional way.

The study provides recommendations for social enrichment for military children, homeschooling parents, and organizations supporting homeschooling efforts. The study has identified several limitations including a lack of generalizability because a small sample was selected through nonprobability sampling. Additionally, there was the possibility of memory issues with the participants because the accuracy of the interviews was dependent on the ability of the respondents to remember. Accuracy and honesty of the participants were also concerns and should be considered as limitations.

This chapter has established a basis for the study. In the next chapter, I provide a critical review of both theoretical and empirical literature on homeschooling. Particular attention is paid to the historical background of homeschooling, parental motivations for homeschooling, parental qualifications, achievement of homeschooled and traditionally schooled students, and online homeschooling. The theoretical framework of the study, which draws from constructivism and Rogers's diffusion of innovations, is also discussed in the second chapter. Through the review of previous literature, it is possible to identify the gap in existing literature on homeschooling.

The third chapter, Methodology, describes the methods and procedures used to sample participants and to collect and analyze data, as well as ethical issues within the study. Special attention is accorded to the justifications of the methods chosen as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Further, the phenomenological nature of the study receives an expanded discussion in the third chapter. Chapter 4 represents the process and findings of this study. It includes a description of the setting, the participants'

demographics and characteristics relevant to the study, and a review of the data collection presentation as well as the data analysis process and the evidence of trustworthiness. A summary of the results with supporting data addressing each research question is presented. Lastly, precludes to the interpretation of the findings in Chapter 5 are acknowledged.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is concerned with the critical review of homeschooling literature. In particular, the review focuses on those aspects of homeschooling literature that have a bearing on the completed study. Concepts such as the dynamics of military families, the historical background of homeschooling, parental motivations for homeschooling, parental qualifications, online resources for homeschooling, and methods of assessment are reviewed. The ultimate aim of the chapter is to identify the gap in homeschooling literature. Descriptions of the dynamics of military families help in the identification of forces that shape the education of military children because family dynamics inevitably affect the education of children.

The literature on the historical background of homeschooling helps in establishing the root origin of the homeschooling movement. Additionally, literature on parental motivations is necessary as a justification for homeschooling. This literature allows for the examination of issues such as the academic achievement of homeschooled students and their traditionally schooled counterparts and social concerns in American schools. The concept of parental qualifications relates to state regulations regarding the homeschooling movement, which involve, among other factors, regulations of parental qualifications that affect homeschooling efforts. State regulations are necessary because homeschooling parents, whether military or civilian, are expected to abide by the homeschooling rules of the state where they currently reside. In exploring the parental

qualifications aspect of homeschooling literature, I provide a critical examination of the perceived relationship between the qualifications of the teacher and student achievement.

The other homeschooling concepts that receive considerable attention are online homeschooling and methods of assessment. A focus on online homeschooling identifies online resources and programs that homeschooling parents are using to implement homeschooling efforts. The aim is to highlight the basic issues that characterize and influence homeschooling, with special attention to the military. The review of the literature reveals that scholarly research has neglected homeschooling among military families.

### **Literature Search Strategies**

I conducted the literature search for this study using Google Scholar and other scholarly databases, including ERIC and ProQuest. For this review of existing literature and research studies, strategies employed for searching for literature proceeded as follows. The exact words describing the exact issue being looked for acted as search terms. Examples of the numerous search terms used include the following: *military child education, homeschooling for military children, motivations for homeschooling, reasons for homeschooling, history of homeschooling, homeschooling history, homeschooling online resources, homeschooling resources, military schools falling apart, and lack of funding for military schools*. In the instances in which some combination of key words did not yield the required results, adjustments were made in which some words were replaced with others. For instance, to find information about homeschooling history, the

key words *historical background of homeschooling*, *history of homeschooling*, and *homeschooling* were used. Further, to identify literature on types of homeschooling programs, the key words *the Internet and homeschooling*, *types of online homeschool programs*, and *online homeschooling* were used to search literature. The use of exact words that gave a description of the actual information needed gave better search results.

The search targeted studies published in the last 7 years (from 2008 through 2014), mostly in peer-reviewed educational journals. However, as the subject matter of this study has legal and technological aspects, journals dedicated to legal and technological issues that were found to be relevant to this study were considered. Again, although the date range for the studies was put at 2008-2014, studies published before 2007 were considered if there were no similar studies found to have addressed the issue from 2008 to 2014. The studies have greatly helped in the identification of the gap in literature that this study is intended to fill. The next section addresses the conceptual perspective from which the study was viewed.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was guided by the work of diffusion of innovations change theorist Rogers and the theory of constructivism as a template for teaching and learning. Rogers (1963a) stated, “All Extension workers are change agents ... professional persons who attempt to influence adoption decisions in a direction they feel desirable” (p. 17). The four areas of diffusion that Rogers identified as noteworthy to Extension consist of the adoption process, the rate of adoption of innovations, adopter categories, and opinion

leadership (Rogers, 1963a, p. 17). Rogers (2003) defined an *innovation* as “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (p. 12). The four main elements in the diffusion of innovations consist of the following: the innovation, communication channels, time, and a social system. Rogers (2003) defined *diffusion* as “the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (p. 12). As Rogers’s (2003) innovation and diffusion theory of technology is communicated over a period of time within the social system, this theory aligned with this study of the experiences of military parents’ use of online resources.

Within the adoption process, Rogers expressed that the rate of diffusion is related to how potential adopters perceive innovation. The adopters negotiate five stages to determine if they will adopt the innovation: “Knowledge, Persuasion, Decision, Implementation, and Confirmation” (Rogers, 2003, p. 170). Rogers (2003) stated that the “innovation-decision process is essentially an information-seeking and information-process activity in which an individual is motivated to reduce uncertainty about the advantages and disadvantages of an innovation” (p. 172). Rogers (2003) claimed that an adopter typically asks the following questions: What is the innovation, how does it work, and why does it work? This awareness-knowledge concept guided me to formulate questions concerning homeschooling and online resources. As stated by Rogers (2003), “How-to Knowledge consists of information necessary to use an innovation properly” (p.172). The adopter (military parent) must understand how to operate the innovations

properly (computer as well as software programs). Rogers further explained, “principles-knowledge consists of information dealing with the functioning principles underlying how an innovation works” (p. 173). The military parent must research and be knowledgeable in the functionality of the innovation.

The constructivist view that learning is embedded in cultural and social aspects of society and in the minds of individuals in making sense of experiences, which are continuously modified as new lived experiences, was applied to answer the question of what experiences military parents encounter in homeschooling their children using online resources. Constructivism holds that people learn by constructing their own meaning, understanding, and knowledge about their environment through their experiences and reflection on such experiences (Duff & Cunningham, n.d.). The theory indicates that to create knowledge, people experience the world and then reflect on those experiences so they may better create knowledge, meaning, or understanding of the world. In essence, constructivism views learning as situated in activity.

Constructivism has individual cognitive and sociocultural aspects. Cognitive constructs draw from Piaget’s theory and stress the constructive activity of the person as he or she attempts to make sense of the world (Duff & Cunningham, n. d.). According to Piaget, constructivism views learning as actively constructing and restructuring previous knowledge (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Piaget saw learning as presenting the learner with a multiplicity of opportunities and diversity in processes so that the learner can connect with what he or she is already aware of in the world (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Piaget

saw learning as involving the learner with others and the environment. Furthermore, Piaget viewed knowledge as a changing body, which a learner individually constructs in the social world (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

Bruner (1990) advanced the view that under constructivism, learners' construction of new ideas is based upon already existing knowledge. Like Piaget's work, Bruner's constructivist theory belongs to the cognitive domain. According to Bruner, three stages are involved in learning, and none of these stages is age-specific. The stages include enactive (knowledge in the form of motor senses), iconic (knowledge in the form of visual images), and symbolic (knowledge in the form of arbitrary words, math symbols, and other symbols). In this sense, Bruner's work is unlike that of Piaget, who saw stages involved in learning as specific to ages (Bruner, 1990).

Under this view of constructivism, learning occurs when there is a discrepancy between the learner's expectations and what actually happens; that is, when the learner's expectations are not met. Learning takes place as the learner tries to address the conflict that has just arisen to accommodate such experiences (Duff & Cunningham, n.d.; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). This view does not address the question of learning exhaustively. This is because, as its name suggests, cognition occurs in an individual's head. As a result, this view does not entirely capture the essence of learning, because in learning, a student is often part of a group, is with another individual, or is learning as an individual. In cognitive constructivism, the mind is seen as located in the head, and learning is a process of active cognitive reorganization (Duff & Cunningham, n.d.). Theoretical

attention is paid to the individual psychological processes, while the analyses are focused on the building of an individual student's reorganization of concepts (Duff & Cunningham, n.d.).

The preceding observation leads to sociocultural constructivism. This view places emphasis on the "socially and culturally situated context of cognition" (Duff & Cunningham, n.d., p. 6). This belief is concerned with the social origin of cognition. Under social constructivism, "it is the changes of ways in which one participates in a community which are crucial, not individual constructions of that activity" (Duff & Cunningham, n.d., p. 7).

Vygotsky, a psychologist and social theorist, was among those who advanced the idea of social constructivism (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Vygotsky advanced three views on learning from the social constructivist perspective. First, learning involves collaborative construction of knowledge that is defined through social and cultural means. Second, learning involves student experiences, which are tied to socially and culturally constructed opportunities. Third, learning occurs when an individual interacts with others in social or cultural settings. Social constructivist theory views knowledge as changing while it is being constructed with other people in the social and cultural setting (Tracey & Morrow, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978).

Learning is a social process that makes use of social and cultural artifacts. Learning occurs under this sociocultural construction. This view sees the mind as located in the individual-in-social interaction. Theoretical attention is focused on the social and

cultural processes, while analyses are focused on the participation of the individual in cultural practices and interactions (Duff & Cunningham, n.d.).

Conversely, Siemens (2004) asserted that social constructivism, as is the case with other learning theories such as cognitivism, promotes the individual's principality, which involves his or her physical presence. In this way, argued Siemens (2004), social constructivism promotes brain-based learning. As a result, Siemens (2004) concluded that social constructivism fails to address learning that takes place outside of physical interaction, especially learning that is stored and manipulated by technology. In making these arguments, Siemens (2004) was concerned with the learning that occurs in the networked world. Consequently, Siemens (2004) proposed connectivism, a theory that integrates networked technology.

This completed study was based on constructivism in addressing the experiences of military parents who were homeschooling their children through online resources. Although it is not clear whether the cognitive and sociocultural views on constructivism are complementary, I believe that both aspects are involved in the learning of an individual, as with connectivism, where learning occurs in the networked world. Brooks and Brooks (1993) suggested that constructivist theory has the following attributes, which correlate to this study:

- “Seek out students' understanding and prior experiences about a concept before teaching it to them.

- Encourage communication among the teacher and the students and among the students.
- Encourage student critical thinking and inquiry by asking them thoughtful, open-ended questions, and encourage them to ask questions to each other.
- Ask follow-up questions and seek elaboration after a student's initial response.
- Put students in situations that might challenge their previous conceptions and that will create contradictions that will encourage discussion.
- Make sure to wait long enough after posing a question so that the students have time to think about their answers and be able to respond thoughtfully.
- Provide enough time for students to construct their own meaning when learning something new.” (p. 153)

Finally, Rogers (2003) allowed justification for the online diffusion of innovation as a link to the conceptual framework and defined *diffusion* as “the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (p. 12). The following diffusion steps by Rogers (as cited in Orr, 2003) support the process of this homeschooling study using online resources:

1. “Knowledge—person becomes aware of an innovation and has some idea of how it functions.
2. Persuasion—person forms a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the innovation.

3. Decision—person engages in activities that lead to a choice to adopt or reject the innovation.
4. Implementation—person puts an innovation into use.
5. Confirmation—person evaluates the results of an innovation-decision already made.” (p. 12)

### **Phenomenological Study**

Merleau-Ponty (2005) was a French philosopher and phenomenologist who was of the belief that all of his knowledge was gained from his own particular view or from his experience of the world (p. ix). His contributions to phenomenological research provided a foundation of three major concepts: sensation as a unique experience, association/projection of memories, and attention to judgment. Merleau-Ponty stated that sensation involves understanding the relationship in which one is affected and the experiencing of one’s state of mind. He further stated that the sensation is based on the object perceived, the visible is what is seized upon with the eyes, and the sensible is what is seized on by the senses (p. 7). He described attention as “a general and unconditional power in the sense that at any moment it can be applied indifferently to any content of consciousness” (p. 31). On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty clearly perceived judgment as the taking of a stand as an effort to know something that shall be valid (p. 39). During this research study exploring the experiences of military families involved in homeschooling for their children using online resources for academic success, it was

important to give attention to the judgment aspect, for, according to Merleau-Ponty, the evidence of the phenomena was challenged.

Phenomenology is focused on descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses (Sokolowski, 1999). “Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for an individual’s passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced” (Sokolowski, 1999, p. 14). Van Manen (1990) asserted that phenomenological studies endeavor to unearth the very constitution of the being that holds the phenomenon in existence. The phenomenological attitude is the focus sustained when reflecting upon the natural attitude and all the intentionality that occur within it (Merleau-Ponty, 2005; Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenologists point out that to experience something in its purest form, it is necessary to bracket, or suspend, any preconceptions or learned feelings about the phenomenon until the experience is lived (Lavery, 2003).

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

#### **Homeschooling**

Wyatt (2008) observed that it is difficult to define homeschooling because of the differences among homeschools themselves, their educators, and the students they serve. The term homeschooling should not be used to inform the definition as emphasizing the place or location where learning occurs. Consequently, homeschooling learners do not necessarily receive their education at home. In this light, Wyatt (2008) defined

homeschooling as “an umbrella term that applies to a variety of ways of obtaining an education with the help of one’s family outside formal institutions” (p. 5). This definition is consistent with that of Thomas (2002, quoted in Mills, 2009, p. 19), who viewed homeschooling as concerned with a “rich informal learning environment.” These authors stress the fact that homeschooling takes place outside the school setting, but not necessarily at home, although home is the most common setting of homeschooling (Mills, 2009; Wyatt, 2008).

Following a literature review on homeschooling, Taylor-Hough (2010) concluded that literature on the topic has taken three directions: history, reasons or motivations, and comparisons of student achievement between homeschooled and traditionally schooled students on standardized testing. Based on Wyatt’s (2008) definition and research, three key features are highlighted. First, education in homeschooling is provided in a variety of ways; second, homeschooling is primarily organized by parents, implying that it is the responsibility of parents to organize and facilitate implementation of homeschooling for their children; and third, homeschooling does not necessarily take place at home, instead in a setting outside the formal educational setting (Wyatt, 2008).

Homeschooling is not a new concept. Individuals educated through homeschooling include George Washington and Thomas Jefferson (Lips & Feinberg, 2008). Others are John Quincy, Woodrow Wilson, Abraham Lincoln, Agatha Christie, Pearl Buck, Thomas Edison and Franklin D. Roosevelt (Saghir, 2011). With each passing year, more Americans are adopting homeschooling as a form of alternative education for

their children (Phillips, 2010). Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics showed that the number of homeschooled children rose from 850,000 in 1999 to 1,508,000 in 2007 (Terry, 2011). This is a considerable increase given that in the mid-1980s, educational scholars had estimated that less than 50,000 American children were being homeschooled (Saghir, 2011). Saghir (2011) asserted, “Homeschooling should be considered an equally valid method of teaching children” instead of perceiving public and private schools as the only methods through which children can learn” (p. 2).

### **Dynamics of Military Families**

Military dynamics are likely to impact heavily on the education of military dependent children (Hall, 2008; Murray, 2010; National Military Family Association, 2012; U.S. Government, 2011). Hall (2008) and Park (2011) observed that aspects of the military are key determinants of family dynamics. In addition, Murray (2010) agreed that some family dynamics are unique to military families.

First, one key feature, which is often a source of stress for military families and children, is transition (Beder, 2012; Everson & Perry, 2012; Park, 2011; U.S. Government, 2011). Beder (2012) observed that transition might result from relocation, deployment, and return home after deployment. Each of these phases represents difficult times for the military families. Military service members often change locations and operations, which certainly affects their families (Murray, 2010). The National Military Family Association (2012) estimated that during their high school years, military students live in two or more locations. Further, the association has noted that most children attend

an average of six to nine schools from kindergarten through grade 12 (National Military Family Association, 2012). The U.S. Army conducted a study on this issue and reported that military families move on an average of every three years, and within 20 years, they move nine times. The children attended, during an average 13-year period, two local school districts, two overseas Department of Defense schools, and two continental United States Department of Defense Schools. Military families and their children often find this constant relocation and change of schools stressing (Berg, 2008).

Second, military families are authoritarian. Hall (2008) observed that although the American military live in a democratic society, they themselves do not practice it because they live in an authoritarian military structure. Most decisions in service member's lives are made for them, which they do not question. Hall (2008) reported a military officer noted that although the military were fighting for democracy in Iraq, they did not practice it. Following a literature review, Hall (2008) found that in most military families, military parents often practiced authoritarianism in the family situation. In authoritarian military families, Hall (2008) reported that military parents were intolerant to questions and disagreements, as well as privacy violations. Hall (2008) further found that in such families, special rules govern behavior and speech of the family members.

Third, a key dynamic in military families is the rank structure, which affects the families and brings about a distance within the military ranks as well as between the military and civilian population (Hall, 2008). Military family members are often required to socialize with their counterparts in the same rank without getting involved with

members of another rank, to avoid fraternization. Hall (2008) states that the military is characterized by a strong hierarchical system in which some members dominate while others subordinate their authority, which translates itself into the families.

Fourth, the housing of military families on most military installations is often separated. Single military houses are found in one area, the enlisted family housing is found in another, and the officers' quarters are located in a separate area. These physical distinctions often make interaction between family members of enlisted and officers difficult, if not impossible. This kind of housing affects military children profoundly. Hall (2008) explained that, although military children from both enlisted and officers' backgrounds attend the same schools, their social interactions could be quite limited.

Fifth, parental absence is deeply entrenched in military families (Huebner et al., 2009; Hall, 2008). In most cases these days, world events since the beginning of 1990s have made it necessary that both parents are absent at the same time, if they are in the military. Hall (2008) reported that in Europe, at least 18 graduation ceremonies have been conducted and electronically transmitted to Iraq, Africa, and Afghanistan, where parents of the graduating seniors were deployed. Huebner et al. (2009) and Hall (2008) agreed that it takes time for the military children to get used to this kind of life.

Sixth, it is important to note that the military often shares a particular mission that calls for a total commitment to one's assigned group, hence the cohesion found in military units (Everson & Perry, 2012; Hall, 2008). The dependence of a service member shifts from family to the unit. This aspect of soldiers dedicating themselves to the country

and colleagues has a powerful effect on their families. In most cases, the unit is a kind of second family to the soldier. Should the soldier perceive this second family as more crucial to their life than their family at home, conflicts are highly likely to emerge. Despite research findings that soldiers with solid families perform well at the work place (Hall, 2008), they normally face difficulties in balancing their loyalty to the two families.

Seventh, honor within the military has a profound effect on military families. Most military men and women are strongly committed to the pursuit of honor and the effect is felt at the family level (Everson & Perry, 2012). It should be noted that most pursuits for honor may result in death, but soldiers are committed to that cause. As a result, military parents find it necessary to be excused of some duties and responsibilities at home. For the military parent, the entire family loses in the sense that the wife loses her husband as the husband loses his wife, and that the children lose their parent, as the parent loses his children. In this sense, the military person is married to his or her military unit, not to the recognized spouse. Military officers have reported enjoying time when they are with their colleagues more so than when they are with their spouses and/or children (Hall, 2008).

The literature describes military families as living in denial, and in fact, they may be justified to do so (Hall, 2008). Hall (2008) reports that military families cannot afford to live being aware of the risks the service member is exposed to, especially when deployed. Acknowledging these fears would make the family members vulnerable to psychological disorders that would be difficult to bear. In denying these fears, the family

learns to deny other feelings. In military families, many unexpressed issues often remain buried for a long period of time, and results in more isolation, a case of sequestration. When military children bury pain and grief for a long time, they later experience anger and behavioral issues. As a result, it is generally expected that military families are expected to “understand that readiness means family readiness” (Hall, 2008, p. 57).

Secrecy often found in the military translates itself to the home setting. Hall continues to report that soldiers are advised to be secretive about the very realities of war when talking to their spouses and children. Many soldiers work in military departments that handle classified information, such as military intelligence. These soldiers become secretive even in their personal and family life. As for the spouses of service members, they are advised to watch what they tell their spouses in the military. They are made aware that should they say or write something to their military husbands that may distract him or her during combat, it could result in tragedy (Hall, 2008).

Although parent service members, in the preceding discussion, have been portrayed as often more dedicated to their career than to their families, the National Military Family Association refutes such claims when it comes to the education of military children. The U.S. has about 1.9 million military children (United States Government, 2011). Education for military children has a special place in the life of the family (National Military Family Association, 2012). According to National Military Family Association, the most important family decisions in a military family are made regarding their child’s education. When service members volunteer for duty assignments,

many first consider the education of their child before making such a decision. Whether the family should stay behind or accompany the service member on assignments is often determined by availability and quality of the child's education. Once moved to the new location, the choice of where the family lives is largely determined by the education of the child. In some military families, a child's education may determine whether the family will remain in service or leave the service (National Military Family Association, 2012).

This section has provided a discussion of the dynamics of military families. It has been important to identify dynamics of military families because these characteristics set military families apart from civilian families. These dynamics affect family lives of military families, including educational issues of military dependent children. The section has revealed that features of military life significantly inform military family dynamics. It is important to note that the features discussed in this section demonstrate how military families are negatively different from civilian families. In other words, most military family dynamics have tended to portray military families as experiencing problems that one would not find among civilian families. As a result, this section has seemed to imply that educating military children is a difficult task for military families. The reason for this negative portrayal of military families may be attributed to the kind of sources used in this section. Most of the sources on dynamics of military families are authored from the perspective of counseling psychology and by military counselors themselves, such as Hall (2008). As such, it is possible to expect the authors to be informed by the problems

they have been handling among the military and their root causes. However, military families themselves have refuted the claims that imply they may be dedicated to the unit mission among service members than to the education of their children. Military parents, through their national organizations, have argued that the education of their children informs the majority of the decisions that the service member makes, including whether to stay in the military or not. The section has highlighted features of military families that make them unique, and that may certainly affect the education of military-connected children. The following sections will critically review homeschooling literature. There will be deliberate efforts in each section to identify the gap in the homeschooling literature that the completed study addressed.

### **Background of Homeschooling**

D'Escoto and D'Escoto (2007) observed that if viewed from a historical perspective, the homeschooling concept has been in existence since the earliest recordings of the Holy Bible in Ephesians 6:4. Further, in Proverbs 22: 6, parents are urged to, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (D'Escoto & D'Escoto, 2007, p. 2). Saghir (2011) and Terry (2011) have also agreed that it was the role of the family, the community, and religious institutions to ensure that children were educated. Historically, there appears to be a consensus that education for a child started at home with the child's parents and extended family members acting as teachers (Angelis, 2008; D'Escoto & D'Escoto, 2007; Schetter, Lighthall, & McAfee, 2009).

Home-based learning in American education is traced to the 17th and 18th centuries (Angelis, 2008; D'Escoto & D'Escoto, 2007). Children were taught by informal or professional tutors, hired by parents and at times shared, during specified times in a year (Farenga, 2002). Other parents made use of daily chores, apprenticeships, and internships in educating their children (Farenga, 2002). Starting in the mid-19th century, states, led by Massachusetts in 1850, instituted compulsory schooling legislation. These laws resulted in children being forced to attend school, thus replacing homeschooling. Homeschooling was viewed by the states advocating for compulsory school attendance as truancy (Isenberg, 2007).

The reasons for homeschooling during this period were based on the parents' fears that their children's intellect, creativity, and individual learning styles would be destroyed if they were put through a standardized system of education that assumed children are the same and they could be taught in a group (Farenga, 2002). Those who chose to homeschool their children, noted Farenga (2002), relied on itinerant teachers and books including Griswold's *Fireside Education* published in 1828, and Warren's *Helps to Education in the Homes of our Countries* published in 1863. When states introduced compulsory schooling, homeschooling became an underground phenomenon (Farenga, 2002).

Isenberg (2007) observed that the relationship between homeschooling parents and the state was characterized by antagonism. This kind of relationship prompted homeschooling parents to form organizations that would fight the states in the courts

(Isenberg, 2007). Among these organizations was The Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), and the success of homeschooling advocates in courts eventually led to the legalization of homeschooling in all states (Isenberg, 2007).

The modern-day homeschooling movement is traced to the beginning of the 1960s. Taylor-Hough (2010) provided a comprehensive historical background of the modern day homeschooling in the United States. In particular, Taylor-Hough (2010) discussed contributions of various citizens in the beginning of modern day homeschooling including John Holt and Raymond and Dorothy Moore (husband and wife). Holt, an established educator and author, called attention to the need to decentralize education with a view of granting increased parental autonomy (Taylor-Hough, 2010; Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009). During the same time, Holt was advocating for this radical reform in education, particularly since many of the rebelling young people of the 1960s were moving into communes and hesitated sending their children to the government-supported schools in their localities. Wilhelm and Firmin (2009) claimed that genesis of homeschoolers can be traced from the 1960's liberal communes. Several counterculture Liberal Left homesteaders, who began homeschooling before it was accepted and ultimately adopted by the Conservative Right, contacted John Holt (Taylor-Hough, 2010). These groups were scattered throughout the countryside where they educated their children at home (Taylor-Hough, 2010). John Holt responded to their call by connecting the scattered homeschooling, and in 1977, John Holt published *Growing Without Schooling*, the first newsletter focused on homeschoolers (Taylor-Hough, 2010).

Hough-Taylor stated that the newsletter became a tool that homeschooling families used to share their experiences, receive moral support, and share wisdom (Taylor-Hough, 2010).

As cited by Taylor-Hough (2010), in her research *Are All Homeschooling Methods Created Equal*, the Moores were researchers who have been credited for demonstrating that formal instruction in math and reading was best postponed until the child attained the age of eight (Taylor-Hough, 2010). As documented by Taylor-Hough, the Moores consulted with homeschooling parents and published *Better Late Than Early* (1975) and *School Can Wait* (1979), which were both bestsellers. Further, the Moores later contributed to *Growing Without Schooling*. Taylor-Hough (2010) also discussed how some Christians opted out of secular schools because of the liberalism of the 1960s and sought a kind of education that would not include sending their children to the perceived liberal schools, which led to the birth of *school-at-home* as a form of homeschooling (Taylor-Hough, 2010).

Other scholars have also attempted to explain why parents opted for homeschooling in the 1970s (Lips & Feinberg, 2008; Saghir, 2011). In the 1970s, parents resumed teaching their children in their homes following their disappointments with the country's public education system (Lips & Feinberg, 2008; Saghir, 2011). The re-emergence of homeschooling in this part of the century occurred following growth in the size of public schools when highly bureaucratic systems were perceived as insensitive to parents' issues and cultural variations (Saghir, 2011).

Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* (1970) encouraged some parents. In this book, the author argued that compulsory schooling had to be abolished. The book spurred a debate that resulted in more publications on homeschooling. Since this time, the number of homeschooled students has been on the increase. In the 1990s, the number of children who were being homeschooled has increased by 7 to 15% every year (Howell & Sheran, 2008). According to National Center for Educational Statistics (NCS) data collected from 2002-2003 and published in 2006, 850,000 children were homeschooling in 2002, while in 2003, the children who were homeschooled increased to 1,096,000. The 2003 figure shows that 2.2% of the student-aged children were under homeschooling programs (Schetter, Lighthall, & McAfee, 2008). In 2008, the number of homeschooled children was about 2 million (Howell & Sheran, 2008).

This section has traced homeschooling in the American society to the second half of 20th century. It should be noted that theoretical literature reviewed in this section has not described the origin of both homeschooling among the military and online homeschooling. Previous literature seems to have made assumptions that the origin of homeschooling among the military is tied to the homeschooling movement among the civilian population. However, this leaves a gap that has not been addressed on the historical reasons that have motivated military families to homeschool. Additionally, the section does not give a historical perspective of online homeschooling because literature does not heavily focus on homeschooling. The next section is dedicated to the critical examination of studies that have documented parental motivations for homeschooling.

## **Reasons Parents Homeschool**

Literature seems to be consistent about the reasons why parents are increasingly choosing to homeschool their children (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010; Harmon & Jones, 2005; Klamm, 2012; Saliger, 2010; Schetter, Lighthall, & McAfee, 2009; Sun & Wang, 2006). Anthony and Burroughs (2010) conducted a study examining the motivations of homeschooling families in which they interviewed and observed, for a period of one year, intact religiously conservative families. The authors selected four homeschooling families and explored their individual stories with a focus on identifying the factors that pushed and pulled them as they decided to homeschool their children. Consequently, the study sought to identify the factors that had influenced these families to homeschool their children and to determine how the families had managed the transition from traditional schooling to homeschooling. To be able to achieve these objectives, the authors adopted a case study method for the study. The families were sampled through a purposive sampling technique with the inclusion criteria consisting of three years of homeschooling, presence of currently homeschooled children, and one child or more in college or work after being homeschooled. Data were collected by interviewing parents and children through unstructured interviews, informal discussions in the course of observations and following observations, family observation at home, observing homeschool activities, artifacts that included weekly logs, and student work samples.

Following their findings, Anthony and Burroughs (2010) documented that these parents choose homeschooling over traditional schooling into two broad categories.

These categories were ideological and pedagogical domains. Ideological motivations to homeschooling included parent's concern over perceived lack of religion in traditional schools, social issues, family values, and safety concerns of a physical, mental, and moral nature (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010). While pedagogical motivations were concerned with the process of education such as instruction, the learning environment, curriculum, and the overall structure of learning (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010).

**Social situations.** A number of authors (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010; Beck, 2010; Harmon & Jones, 2005; Klamm, 2012; Olsen, 2008; Saliger, 2010; Shepherd, 2010) have reported that social issues in traditional schools have frightened some parents and discouraged them from allowing their children to attend. Olsen (2008) conducted a case study and analyzed face-to-face semi-structured interview data collected from 31 homeschooling parents through a phenomenological analysis. The findings demonstrated that the primary reasons that most of the 20 participating families selected homeschooling was the negative peer influence in schools. The study found that the homeschooled students had been in traditional schools before disenrollment, following negative influences where they were exposed to from other students (Olsen, 2008).

Following a literature review, Shepherd (2010) found that about one in every three parents cited social issues as the primary reason why they homeschool their children. Additionally, Dumas and Gates (2010) reported survey findings that revealed that 85.4% of the respondents had identified social issues such as safety, negative peer pressure, and drug use as the reasons for homeschooling. Parents have expressed concern

that social issues in public schools will leave their children as victims. Beck (2010) used data from a Norwegian survey to argue that students' related problems motivated their parents to homeschool them. Using the data from two surveys (one in 2002/2003 and the other in 2006), Beck (2010) concluded that parental concern on the social aspects of their children was the most powerful in influencing these parents to homeschool, more so than religious motivations, in Norway (Beck, 2010). Harmon and Jones (2005) and Terry (2011) argued that parents have paid attention to the security of their children following media reports of school shootings and other violent behaviors, as well as the possible exposure of their children to drugs and teen sex. Military parents are aware that teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are common in American public schools (Shepherd, 2010).

Harmon and Jones (2005) asserted that parents are aware that in schools, some students come from unhealthy, troubled families, which may negatively influence the lives of their own children. The implication of these instances of concern and fear is that parents perceive the public school environment as potentially dangerous and immoral. Parents are aware that exposure to these behaviors may have negative effects on the lives of their children; they ultimately find the solution is to have these children homeschooled (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010; Harmon & Jones, 2005; Terry, 2010).

Sun and Wang (2006) argued that the questions of social issues and negative influence are still relevant to parents who choose online homeschooling. As noted, parents withdraw their children from traditional, formal schools for fear of the bad

influence of drugs and teen sex. However, the Internet is potentially as dangerous an environment as one would find in a formal school setting. The Internet exposes the child to a diversity of negative influences including teen sex, drugs, and violence (Sun & Wang, 2006). The option, therefore, of whether to use the Internet or not for homeschooling is a dilemma for those parents who disenroll their sons and daughters out of public and private schools for fear of negative influences (Sun & Wang, 2006). Regarding the experiential and maturity richness, military learners exhibit rich experiential histories through exposure to organizational engagement, managerial involvement, different management styles, decision-making, and, leadership and organizational culture (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Cheng and Yeh (2009) affirm that most of the online learners in military parental groups possess significant management experiences and considerable supervisory attributes. Such elements imply that the military parents gain upper hand in grasping the content while undergoing education by online means.

Conrad (2009) asserted that most of the military learners at parental stages encounter higher levels of intercultural and international appreciation. Therefore, the place and time of service of service mediate the international and intercultural awareness among the military parental groups (Process for Accreditation of Joint Education (PAJE), 2007). DeLoach and Greenlaw (2007) affirmed that personal factors pose further significant implications on the online learning processes. Generally, military learners pose high motivation levels regarding the starting and completion of their coursework

(Crockett, 2004; Crockett, 2005; Gosmire, Morrison, & Van Osdel, 2009). It can be inferred that the military culture of positive outcomes, tenacity and perseverance influence content retention during the online learning processes. McLaughlin (2010) observes that the role of motivation in online learning is crucial among the military groups and applies in course design and informal set-ups. Currently, goal setting forms the most important theory of motivation in online interaction, inclusive of the military parents (Simons, 2005). Therefore, online learning is afforded extrinsic and intrinsic rewards by education experiences among the military parents (Mensch & Rahschulte, 2008). Radford (2009) documented that older military learners are likely to pursue higher education programs, a practice perceived to be in preparation for isolation from the military. In affirmation, Radford and Wun (2009) noted that intense and prolonged experiences of the military learners offer fertile contexts in which deeper appreciations of issues in collaboration, teamwork familiarity, and self-identification with the military are accountable for community building through online set-ups (Richardson, 2009).

**Religious convictions.** Religion forms the basis upon which many parents choose to homeschool their children (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010; Klamm, 2012; Saghir, 2011; Shepherd, 2010). In 2007, about 83% of the homeschooling parents reported that they had removed their children out of public schools to teach them religious and moral issues, which was an increase from 72% of the homeschooling parents in 2003 (Todd, 2012). Another survey reported by Dumas and Gates (2010) found that the need and desire of the parents to provide religious or moral education were cited by 72.3% of the

respondents. This finding is consistent with that of another recent study by Bergstrom (2012) which found that 70% of the participants had religious and moral reasons for choosing to homeschool their students. Anthony (2009) found that most of the parents in the study chose to homeschool primarily because of religious reasons. In addition, following a literature review, Shepherd (2010) found that 30% of parents cited religion as the reason they choose to homeschool their children, making religion the second most cited after social issues. This finding is consistent with that of Saghir (2011) who found that 30% of the interviewed cited religion-related issues as the primary reason why they chose to homeschool their children. Parents are concerned about the religious growth of their children (Philips, 2010; Saliger, 2010; Terry, 2011).

The public school system in the U.S. is perceived as secular following the 1962 ban on prayer and the censor of all religious references (Terry, 2011). As a result, many Christian parents may view the public education system as “void of any moral teachings” (Terry, 2011, p. 4). Parents choose to homeschool their children so that they can “provide their children direct religious or moral instruction” (Shepherd, 2010, p. 20). As a result, the parents choose to homeschool their children (Schetter, Lighthall, & McAfee, 2009).

Saghir (2011) carried out a study on homeschooling using Muslim women. Saghir (2011) reported that Muslims are the fastest growing advocates among homeschoolers in the U.S., probably because public schools are unable to accommodate religious aspects of the students. Given that Muslims prefer teaching religious values simultaneously with

secular education, homeschooling becomes their option. Muslim parents are interested in teaching their children culturally relevant moral values and conduct (Saghir, 2011).

In a study, Uecker (2008) analyzed the effect of Catholic and Protestant homeschooling on the religious lives of adolescents, contradictions emerged concerning the relationship between religious motivations to homeschool and the effect of homeschooling on the religious growth of the homeschooled students. In particular, Uecker (2008) reported that there was little impact of homeschooling on the religious lives of the homeschooled students and yet religion had motivated such parents to start homeschooling (Uecker, 2008). Given that the data were not collected from purely religious parents, this finding can be challenged on the basis the sample did not represent various reasons why parents homeschool (Uecker, 2008).

**Concern over educational excellence.** Parents choose to homeschool their children when they are dissatisfied with traditional schooling (Angelis, 2008; Anthony & Burroughs, 2010; Lips & Feinberg, 2008; Schetter, Lighthall, & McAfee, 2009; Shepherd, 2010). Shepherd (2010) found that 16% of the parents who started homeschooling their children were dissatisfied with traditional instruction (Shepherd, 2010). They see traditional schools as unable, for instance, to teach their children the skills they need to live effectively (Saghir, 2011). Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) collected questionnaire data from parents of 136 homeschooled children to determine what motivated the parents to homeschool. This study reported that the majority of the parents decide to homeschool their children because of a strong sense of self-efficacy in

helping their children learn effectively, modeling an active role construct, and providing positive perceptions of life (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007). However, data from the study by Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) demonstrated that content, adequacy, and methods in traditional public schools were not a major factor contributing to homeschooling decisions as much as was the need to help children learn effectively and be able to live fully and contextually.

In a recent study, Anthony and Burroughs (2012) studied the daily operations of homeschooling families. In the study, which adopted a case study methodology, the authors relied on data collected from four homeschooling families through interviews, observations, and artifacts. The study found that homeschooling parents tended to contradict themselves in that they seemed to engage in the very practice that motivated their decision to homeschool. In particular, Anthony and Burroughs (2012) have found that the homeschooling families had criticized the traditional schools for adopting an outcome-based instruction and yet they appeared to be practicing the same approach (Anthony & Burroughs, 2012). Although the sample and study method puts limitations on the findings of the study to the four families, it provided useful information on the motivations of homeschooling families. The findings of this study confirmed that the concern over traditional schooling is among the primary reason for homeschooling, which Anthony had reported earlier (Anthony, 2009).

Other studies have noted that such parents are driven by the need to have a sense of freedom in the education of their children, particularly because traditional schooling

provides detailed structure and programming for their children (Saghir, 2011). Often parents believe that they offer the best instruction to their children compared to teachers at traditional schools (Saghir, 2011). Saghir (2011) reports that on the issue of the quality of education offered in traditional schooling, parents do not have confidence in the school education's system to meet the aspirations of their children.

In a qualitative study involving ten homeschooling Muslim women, Saghir (2011) found that 20% of the women chose to homeschool their children because of reasons related to academics. The study revealed that homeschooled children have been found to perform better than those educated in traditional schools in standardized exams.

Collom (2005) examined 25 studies on the achievement of homeschooled children compared with that of their traditionally schooled counterparts. These studies demonstrated that homeschooled children outperformed their counterparts who followed traditional schooling. Further, Collom (2005) found that children of politically conservative parents who were homeschooled performed better in mathematics, while those of liberal parents recorded strong performances in languages. Collom (2005) speculates that achievement of homeschooled students may have nothing to do with political ideologies, but rather teaching style perceptions toward standardized testing. Furthermore, Collom (2005) found that students who homeschooled because they became dissatisfied with traditional schooling seemed to score high in reading and languages.

In a qualitative study that adopted a multiple case study design to explore perceptions of twenty formerly homeschooled students on their success, Roberts (2009)

found that responsibility, student self-motivation, independence, and flexibility were the major reasons behind their impressive performances. Other reasons the students attributed to their performances were the individual attention they received and the involvement of parents. With most studies investigating the performance of homeschooled students with that of their traditionally schooled counterparts without seeking to obtain rich data on the experiences of homeschooled students, this study by Roberts (2009) has been useful in explaining the reasons behind the observed better performances of homeschooled students.

Parental involvement, which has been identified as one of the reasons why homeschooled students perform better than their traditionally schooled counterparts, has been studied within the context of civilian education, with little attention given to military education (Morgan, 2012). In an effort to fill this gap, Morgan (2012) examined parental involvement in the education of military children within traditional schooling. Morgan (2012) reported that marital status, age, and military status determine how military parents perceive their role in the education of their child. Homeschooling enhances the degree of parental involvement in the education of the child.

Critics of homeschooling investigated the performance of homeschooled students. In particular, Martin-Chang, Gould, and Meuse (2011) compared the academic achievements of homeschooled children in structured programs with that of those in unstructured programs. The researchers also compared the performance of students in homeschooling programs and those in traditional schooling. The findings demonstrated

that students in structured homeschooling performed better than their counterparts in unstructured homeschooling and for students in traditional schooling. Through exploratory analyses, the data showed that students in unstructured homeschooling programs had low academic achievement compared to traditionally homeschooled students. Using these findings, the authors concluded that the educational outcomes of homeschooling are not that clear. The study concluded that structured homeschooling is more beneficial in terms of academic achievement than unstructured homeschooling (Martin-Chang, Gould, & Meuse, 2011).

**Children with special needs.** Parents whose children are gifted, or have learning disabilities, find homeschooling an option, where their children can fully benefit from individualized, one-on-one instruction. About 14% of parents who homeschool their children cited special needs as the reason for choosing to homeschool (Shepherd, 2010). According to a case study of three families conducted by Shepherd (2010), the families believed that individualized instruction was the most beneficial to their children. In another qualitative case study that collected data from parents drawn from 20 homeschooling families, Olsen (2008) found that a child's special learning needs and disabilities were among the key motivators influencing them to homeschool. For children with developmental disabilities, parents choose homeschooling because they viewed their children as being vulnerable to victimization and problems within the school (Schetter, Lighthall, & McAfee, 2009).

**Family values and beliefs.** Researchers (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010; Klamm, 2012; Saghir, 2011) support homeschooling. Saghir (2011), Lips and Feinberg (2008), and Wyatt (2008) agreed that families who homeschooled, believe that spending time together with their children provides a healthy, nurturing setting for their children. This is of serious concern given that Gorder and Saghir (2011) asserted that the average school age child has only about fourteen minutes a week of talk with their parents. Homeschooling families perceive the family as superior over all other social institutions such as the school (Angelis, 2008).

Wyatt (2008) quoted homeschooling mothers who expressed emotional satisfaction for giving their daughters opportunities to read as they were physically held. Another derived joy from the understanding that homeschooling gave her an opportunity to be with her sons, to know them, and that it fulfilled her desires to be with them. Further, in narrating her personal journey to homeschooling, Colleen Raja has attributed the decision to homeschool to her “care, love, and concern” (Raja, 2012, p. 1). She has further asserted that although she is not anti-government, she believes that children should be free to grow into what they can. Freedom is not available in traditional schools, because children follow a clearly defined system that imprints set ideologies upon them (Raja, 2012). In contrast, Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007), in their study to examine factors motivating parents to homeschool, found that beliefs and values of homeschooling parents were less influential in making decisions to homeschool.

**Lack of funding—substandard schools.** Funding for repairs of DoD schools is still a concern according to Robert Gordon, the top DoD official in charge of family affairs. Merilee Fitzgerald stated that over half of the military dependent schools are over 45 years old. According to Johnson (2011), students attending a DoD school in Oklahoma must dodge water dripping from the rotting ceilings. Large trashcans are placed around the perimeter of the building to catch the drizzling rain. Johnson (2011) reported that over 10,000 children from Georgia to Kansas and from Virginia to Washington State, attended schools on military bases that are falling apart. Johnson (2011) also reported that buildings in Germany were built by the Nazis and have tainted water and foul air; many are overcrowded, forcing teachers to hold classes in hallways as well as in closets or boiler rooms (Johnson, 2011). Lombardi (2011), reported that deplorable conditions at nearly 353 base schools on military installations fail to meet the military's minimum standards and are falling apart from age and neglect (Lombardi, 2011). Schwartz (2011) wrote that “ a top pentagon official acknowledged that DoD is more than \$1 billion short of what is needed to repair the decrepit schools, which are located on the military bases” (p. 1). Over the past 20 years as the United States funded two wars, costing more than 729 billion dollars, military schools budget were cut short, receiving less than 50 percent of the needed amount to fund building and repairs (Schwartz, 2011).

### **Homeschooling for Military Children**

Military families are expected to abide by the laws of a particular state where they are currently residing (Michael & Carsten, 2003). Michael and Carsten (2003) asserted that regardless of whether a military child lives in a military installation or outside in a civilian residential area, military parents are expected to abide by the homeschooling regulation of the state. It has been documented that military families relocate frequently, which becomes a stressor for the students, especially, when they are transitioning between schools (Caban, 2010; U.S. Government, 2011). According to Tyle (2004), frequent relocations can be exhaustive for military families, especially when school-age children are involved.

Counties and cities in the United States follow different curricula and different requirements for each school system (Tyle, 2004). The Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS) assumes the responsibility of the military-dependent education system. Military parents have three options in educating their children: attending school with other military children, attending the local school (where the native language is spoken if in a foreign land, although this may need approval), and homeschooling. Therefore, homeschooling is a recognized option for military families (Tyle, 2004). Homeschooling among the military provides consistency in learning as opposed to the other two methods (Tyle, 2004). Caban (2010) noted that military families choose to homeschool because of the negative impact of frequent relocations on the education of their child.

After making a decision to homeschool, resulting conflicts are of serious concern to parents. The rate of adaptation and adjustment as well as the will to sustain homeschooling is a difficult undertaking. Linsensbach (2010) has used the term *decompression time* to refer to the time the child needs to adjust after changing from traditional schooling to the homeschooling. Students who leave traditional schooling for homeschooling find the new experiences strange, and at times they feel guilty, particularly because the homeschool will seem to have lengthy free time uncontrolled by bells and unmarked by 40-or-so-minute lessons (Linsensbach, 2010).

Studies reviewed in this section have included civilian parents and civilian students, with none involving military parents. Additionally, the studies have not focused on online homeschooling but rather homeschooling in general. Further, the studies sought to determine the motivations behind the decision to homeschool, with others comparing performance of homeschooled children with that of traditionally schooled students. It has been observed that because of frequent relocations, a considerable number of military families have chosen homeschooling. Despite this fact, the scholarly community has not fully focused on homeschooling among the military parents in general. In particular, researchers have not investigated the experiences of online homeschooling among military parents. Therefore, the results demonstrated that a deficiency in the literature exists regarding the reasons that made military families choose to homeschool their children using online resources and the experiences they have in using online resources to teach their children at home. This demonstrates the gap in the literature filled by the

completed study. The next section is concerned with parental qualifications in homeschooling. The section provides a critical review of studies on the controversy surrounding teacher certification and academic achievement of students.

### **Parental Qualifications**

Concern has been raised among policy makers, school administrators, educators, and parents whether ordinary parents without government certification as teachers can effectively teach their children (Saghir, 2011). This has formed the basis of the primary criticism leveled against the homeschooling movement, according to the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA).

More than half of homeschooling parents may not have college degrees (Klicka, 2011), but they are “well-informed, well-rounded and self-educated individuals who are confident in their ability to facilitate their children’s education” (Saghir, 2011, p. 69). Hence, homeschooled students often outperform their counterparts schooled through traditional education system. Jeynes (2012) reported that homeschooled children perform better on achievement tests than those schooled in public schools (an average of 2 years ahead) and those schooled in private schools (an average of 9 months ahead).

In an effort to determine why the homeschooled children outperform their counterparts, Bergstrom (2012) concluded that the teacher’s ability and qualities profoundly determine how children learn and affect their achievement. For parents to be effective teachers for their children, they need to be responsive to the needs of their children, enjoy their children’s company, and like their children (Saghir, 2011). They

perceive their children as trustworthy friends, have sufficient confidence in them, and are willing to take educating their children as their responsibility (Saghir, 2011).

In the context of homeschooling, parental qualification has a similar meaning to teacher qualifications in public schools. Qualified teachers are those teachers who have obtained full state certification or have obtained a license to teach after having passed a teacher licensing examination, have demonstrated that he or she is competent in the subject matter, and that he or she holds a minimum of a bachelor's degree (Greenberg, Rhodes, Ye, & Stancavage, 2004).

The question of teacher qualifications and their causal relationship with student achievement has been controversial (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Goe & Stickler, 2008; Greenberg, Rhodes, Ye, & Stancavage, 2004; Klicka, 2007; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008). Some scholars and homeschooling support groups have regarded the issue of teacher qualifications and certification and its effect on student performance as a myth (Klicka, 2007). HSLDA, which is dedicated to the promotion of homeschooling, views such requirements as serious violations of the parent's right to teach their children in accordance with the First (Free Exercise Clause) and Fourteenth Amendments, and in addition, a contradiction to numerous academic research studies that have reported no correlation between teacher qualification and student performance (Klicka, 2007).

Authors, such as Chris Klicka, HSLDA Senior Counsel, have demonstrated that teacher qualification has no correlations with student performance (Klicka, 2007). Klicka (2007) faulted the National Education Association for defending the certification of

teachers and high standards of qualifications required for homeschoolers despite the fact that research has shown that teacher qualification has no correlation with student achievement.

Teacher qualification is among the indicators of teacher quality. Other indicators of teacher quality are teacher characteristics, practices, and teacher effectiveness (Goe & Stickler, 2008). Teacher qualifications are defined by teacher credentials, knowledge, and experiences that teachers possess during entry into the profession. These include course work, degrees, test scores, certification, and professional development (Goe & Stickler, 2008).

Palardy and Rumberger (2008) used Early Childhood Longitudinal Study data to examine if teacher background qualifications, attitudes, and instructional practices validated effective teaching. The findings demonstrated that instructional practices are more effective in improving student achievement compared to teacher background qualifications. Using this finding, Palardy and Rumberger (2008) faulted a federal legislation, the No Child Left Behind Act, for using teacher qualifications as indicators of quality education and high student achievement. Another study (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009), reported findings that were consistent with the findings reported by Palardy and Rumberger (2008). Kukla-Acevedo (2009) used administrative data sets that matched individual students with their teacher for a long period of time. In the study, Kukla-Acevedo (2009) found that “only overall GPA consistently, positively impacts students’ math achievement across student group and model specification, making it an important

teacher characteristic” (2009, p. 54) to be considered in educational policy issues. The findings of Palardy and Rumberger (2008) were consistent with those of Stronge, Ward, Tucker, and Hindman (2007) who identified effective teachers as defined by instructional characteristics and behaviors. Klicka (2007) also noted that performance in public schools was declining, yet the teachers there are certified. These observations were confirmed in an empirical study conducted by Ray (2010).

In a nationwide cross-cultural descriptive study, Ray (2010) sought to explore educational history, demographic features, academic achievement of homeschooled students, and their families’ basic demographics. Ray (2010) also examined any possible correlation between the academic achievement of homeschooled students and certain student and family variables. The study used a questionnaire developed from his previously successful surveys. The researcher used two valid and reliable standardized achievement tests: Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS, Form A) and California Achievement Tests (CAT). The findings demonstrated that homeschooled students scored well above their traditionally schooled counterparts. The study found that the test scores seemed to be “notably too high” (Ray, 2010, p. 1). The researcher speculated that this may result from the additional efforts of the parents and the child in the child’s learning. Further, Ray did not find any statistically significant relations between academic achievement and parental certification. In particular, Ray found that children homeschooled by parents without certification as a teacher performed better than homeschooled children of those parents with state certifications as teachers (Ray, 2010).

Klicka (2007) surveyed studies and testimonies to educational commissions by educational experts to document that teacher qualification and student achievement have no significant correlation. Klicka provided information on the qualifications of the scholars he cited, which left no doubt that they have authority over teacher qualifications and student achievement. Klicka (2007) cited a study by Hanushek of the University of Rochester that reviewed 113 studies on teacher qualifications and student achievement. In this study, Hanushek found that 85% of the studies did not find any positive correlation between teacher education and student achievement, and 5% of the studies reviewed reported a negative impact of teacher qualifications and student achievement. However, only 7% of the studies that Hanushek reviewed found that a positive correlation existed between teacher qualifications and student achievement.

For more than two decades, HSLDA has been in the courts fighting for parents to be allowed to homeschool without the qualification required for teachers in public schools (HSLDA, 2006; Klicka, 2007). The organization says it has been fighting for parents to be allowed to homeschool their children without necessarily having a college degree or teaching certification because implementation of such a move would deny more than 50% of parents from homeschooling their children (HSLDA, 2006). In various legal battles on parental qualifications, the Supreme Court found that imposing teacher certification for parents was unconstitutional and ruled in favor of the parents. Further, the courts ruled that teacher certification/qualification measures were not the *least*

*restrictive means* for children's education. Teacher qualification requirements for parents homeschooling were seen as sometimes hindering the child's education (Klicka, 2007).

Other studies have demonstrated that teacher qualifications are correlated to student achievement. Boyd, Loeb, Wyckoff, Lankford, and Rockoff (2008) concluded that schools with poor, low scoring, non-white students have been found to have the least qualified teachers in term of teachers' exam performance, certification, and experience. Boyd et al. (2008) found that improvements in the qualifications of the teacher led to improved student achievement. These findings about the effect of teacher performance on student achievement are consistent with those of Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2008). Clotfelter et al. (2008) reviewed comprehensive data on all teachers and students in North Carolina for a period of ten years to examine the relationship between teacher qualities and student achievement or learning gains. The researchers concluded that teacher's experience, teacher's test scores, and teacher's certification (licensure) had positive relationships with student achievement, with more powerful effects being felt on the mathematics performance of students (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2008). Clotfelter et al. (2008) found that a positive correlation existed between the National Board Certification and student achievement. The results obtained in this study do not demonstrate whether the possession of the certification, or the process involved in obtaining that certification, was responsible for the improved students' achievement (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007). Similar results were reported by Greenberg, Rhodes, Ye, and Stancavage (2004) who gathered data on individual student performance and the

qualifications of teachers. They concluded that teacher certification and competency in subject matter are important indicators of teacher quality and subsequent student gains in learning including student achievement, especially for mathematics (Greenberg, Rhodes, Ye, & Stancavage, 2004).

States regulate homeschooling differently (Angelis, 2008; HSLDA, 2012; Saliger, 2009). HSLDA has grouped the states into three categories in light of the nature of their regulation on homeschooling, including teacher qualification as shown in Table 1 (HSLDA, 2012; Saliger, 2010). The first group has ten states that have very few requirements for parents wishing to homeschool. Such states do not require homeschooling parents to have contact with the local school or have other contact frequently after starting homeschooling. For example, Idaho's Homeschool Statute sees homeschooling as done by the parent or someone under the direction of the parent (HSLDA, 2012). The state does not require parents intending to homeschool to seek approval for their curriculum or make contact with the school district. The state has no specific teacher qualifications and certifications for homeschooling parents and the state does not require standardized tests for homeschooled students (HSLDA, 2012). Other states such as Texas and New Jersey require homeschooling parents to establish a homeschool and have no special requirements for teacher qualifications, recordkeeping, or required instruction days. Other states include Alaska (AK), Oklahoma (OK), Missouri (MO), Illinois (IL), Indiana (IN), Michigan (MI), and Connecticut (CT). The second group consists of states with low regulations for homeschooling including parent

qualifications (Angelis, 2008; HSLDA, 2012). The District of Columbia and some 14 states require only a notification from parents who intended to homeschool. States with low regulations include California (CA), Nevada (NV), Utah (UT), Arizona (AZ), New Mexico (NM), Wyoming (WY), Montana (MT), Nebraska (NE), Kansas (KS), Wisconsin (WI), Kentucky (KY), Mississippi (MS), Alabama (AL), and Delaware (DE) (HSLDA, 2012).

At the time of this study, 18 states were found to be moderate in their requirements for homeschooling. In such states, homeschooling parents are required to submit a notification to the state about their intention to homeschool. They also need parents to provide information concerning student scores and evaluation of the student's progress. Ohio requires that homeschooling parents possess a high school diploma or GED, or have test scores that clearly demonstrate that the parent has qualifications equivalent to high school qualifications. The parent may also work under the direction of a person with at least a baccalaureate degree until that time when the children's performance will be judged as reasonably proficient (HSLDA, 2012). Hawaii deems any parent teaching his or her children at home is a qualified instructor, by virtue of being a parent, the parent is considered a qualified teacher. States in this group include Washington (WA), Oregon (OR), Colorado (CO), Minnesota (MN), Iowa (IA), Arkansas (AR), Louisiana (LA), Florida (FL), Georgia (GA), Tennessee (TN), South Carolina (SC), North Carolina (NC), Virginia (VA), West Virginia (WV), Maine (ME), and New Hampshire (NH) (HSLDA, 2012).

The other group of states consists of those states with high regulation including strict requirements for parent qualifications. Generally, states with high regulations require that parents notify the state education department, provide achievement test scores and/or professional evaluations, obtain approval of the curriculum from the state, teacher qualifications for the parents, and home visits by state education officials (HSLDA, 2012). This group consists of six states including North Dakota (ND), Vermont (VT), Nevada (NV), Pennsylvania (PA), Rhode Island (RI), and Massachusetts (MA). For these states, the parent should be a qualified teacher to be allowed to homeschool (HSLDA, 2012).

Table 1

*State Regulation Levels for Homeschooling*

No notice required	Low regulation	Moderate regulation	High regulation
Alaska (AK)	California (CA)	District of Columbia (DC)	North Dakota (ND)
Idaho (ID)	Nevada (NV)	Hawaii (HI)	Vermont (VT)
Oklahoma (OK)	Utah (UT)	Washington (WA)	New York (NY)
Missouri (MO)	Arizona (AZ)	Oregon (OR)	Pennsylvania (PA)
Illinois (IL)	New Mexico (NM)	Colorado (CO)	Rhode Island (RI)
Indiana (IN)	Wyoming (WY)	Maryland (MD)	Massachusetts (MA)
Michigan (MI)	Montana (MT)	Minnesota (MN)	
Connecticut (CT)	Nebraska (NE)	Iowa (IA)	
Texas (TX)	Kansas (KS)	Arkansas (AR)	
New Jersey (NJ)	Wisconsin (WI)	Louisiana (LA)	
	Kentucky (KY)	Florida (FL)	
	Mississippi (MS)	Georgia (GA)	
	Alabama (AL)	Tennessee (TN)	
	Delaware (DE)	South Carolina (SC)	
		North Carolina (NC)	
		Virginia (VA)	
		West Virginia (WV)	
		Maine (ME)	
		New Hampshire (NH)	

*Note.* From “State Laws,” by Home School Legal Defense Association, 2012, retrieved from <http://www.hsllda.org/laws/>

Glanzer (2008) defended homeschooling parents by arguing that they do not need to prove to the state that homeschooling will meet the educational needs of the state and the child. Instead, Glanzer (2008), who wrote in response to Reich’s argument that parents need to demonstrate how homeschooling meets the educational needs of the child and the state, noted that states should bear the responsibility by clarifying issues to do with commonly agreed-upon outcome measures.

Ray and Eagleson (2008) completed a study comparing academic achievement of homeschooled students using college-admission SAT scores from states with different regulations. The study grouped regulations by low regulation, moderate regulation, and high regulation. The study used students bound for college from the 50 states and the District of Columbia, 6,170, of which 2,887 were males. The findings demonstrated that there was no statistically significant relationship between the type of state regulation on homeschooling and verbal, math, and total SAT scores. This finding was observed for a period of five and 10 years. However, this study faced some limitations that the authors have acknowledged. For instance, the researchers were not able to determine the average number of years that a student had been homeschooled. Additionally, researchers relied on the assumptions that students were honest when they reported their means of schooling (Ray & Eagleson, 2008).

Generally, HSLDA has grouped states into categories in light of their regulations on homeschooling. The categories involve states requiring no notice from homeschooling parents, low regulation states, moderate regulation, and high regulation states. This has been important given that military parents choosing to homeschool must abide by the regulations of the state where they are currently residing. The next section provides a discussion on online homeschooling programs and resources that homeschooling parents are using, with particular attention on military parents.

## **Types of Online Homeschooling Programs**

Educational programs in homeschooling are delivered through a variety of ways including interactive CD-ROMs, DVD or VHS video, online Web-based instruction, or even the traditional textbook method (Teel & Monastra, 2007). The focus of the present study is on online homeschooling. Stange, Oyster, and Sloan (2011) viewed the Internet as “an asset to homeschool families as a source of instructional materials and opportunities,” as well as linking homeschooling families and their children (p. 715). According to Russell (2012), online homeschool education programs for both post-secondary and K-12 levels have been in existence for some time. Technological trends are enhancing the adoption of homeschooling by many American families, including military families (Lips & Feinberg, 2008). Parents find homeschooling an excellent way to manage the education of their children because of the tools that the Internet provides. Parents who find it difficult to meet the demands of homeschooling because of their insufficient skills find online homeschooling resources provide an opportunity for their children to be educated by qualified teachers (Rogers, 2009).

Homeschooling students who used traditional printed media have found other means of learning through the Internet, through interactive online tools (Rogers, 2009). Social networking sites and open educational resources (OER) have provided endless opportunities for homeschooling parents and their children (Manouselis, Vuorikari, & Van Assche, 2010; Thormann & Zimmerman, 2012). Online homeschooling students are able to find virtual tutors, private distance learning schools, online curriculum programs,

homeschool support, among others advantages (Lee, 2005). Broad varieties of online courses exist for homeschool students, which may be chosen a la carte, with some courses being more interactive than others, according to HSLDA (2011).

The Internet has taken homeschooling beyond the parent's teaching skills and education. There are Internet-based homeschool programs and websites that provide links to homeschool tools (Harmon & Jones, 2005). One such Internet-based program is Internet Homeschool, which has received accreditation from North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, a national agency for accreditation, and by the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (C.I.T.A.), an international agency for accreditation. The Internet has profoundly affected homeschooling (Klamm, 2012; Li, Leh, Fu, & Zhao, 2009; Norris & Lefrere, 2011; Otis, 2009). The growth of the Internet has been credited for the increase in homeschooled children (Isenberg, 2007).

The Internet has made it possible to learn in authentic situations, promoting interactions while actively engaging the learner (Klamm, 2007; Li, Leh, Fu, & Zhao, 2009; Norris & Lefrere, 2011). Klamm (2012) reported that the Internet provides homeschooled children with various curriculum options and instructional assistance around the clock. For children to realize the full benefit of the Internet, it necessitates skillfulness in the selection, evaluation, and appropriate use of online tools (Lincoln, 2010). The Internet supports homeschooling parents as it provides a natural environment to interact with other homeschooling parents using online tools to identify with suitable support experiences (Norris & Lefrere, 2011). These efforts ensure that students and

parents are effectively educated, knowledgeable, and socially responsible in a global society (Lincoln, 2010). The improved communication through the Internet has enhanced collaboration among homeschoolers (Klamm, 2010; Li, Leh, Fu, & Zhao, 2009).

The Internet presents homeschooling parents with a wealth of learning and teaching programs. The majority of the tools are designed to enhance interactive and collaborative learning. This section has revealed that scholarly attention has not been paid to the online tools that are used by homeschooling families, and more so, on online homeschooling military families. The completed study addressed this problem by examining the online tools that homeschooling military families use and their experiences with those tools. The next section furthers this literature review by discussing some of the common online resource tools available to homeschooling parents.

### **Online Resource Tools**

The Internet provides learning resources that are capable of meeting individual learning needs. Web 2.0 has provided tools that are useful in online learning. Unlike Web 1.0, which provided static web pages where the person with the access determined what was contained in a website (content) and how it functioned, Web 2.0 encourages collaboration and participation among people in the creation and consumption of web content (Turnbow & Lynch, 2009). Therefore, Web 2.0 tools are participatory and collaborative (Turnbow & Lynch, 2009). Various websites provide various tools that provide resources for both the teachers and students (Kaufeld, 2009). The resources are in the form of videos, teaching guidelines and lesson plans, tutorials, articles, networked

sites with discussion boards, search features, recommendations, interactive and educational games and activities, and math tutorials. Kaufeld (2009) and Kidd and Chen (2009) have observed that to access these online resources, several tools or programs are necessary for both students and parents. These tools and programs are described below. The Internet forms non-proprietary delivery mechanisms in which advancements have been made regarding the creation and delivery of online tools that are engaging (Brindley, Walti, & Blaschke, 2009). The purpose of online learning is to enable the military parents to counter both space and time barriers (Cheng & Yeh, 2009). The Internet-based mechanisms are designed to aid in instructional programs whereby threaded electronic messaging or interactive multimedia displays are used to offer collaborative environments. The latter support groups of learners towards the achievement of common learning goals (Conrad, 2009; Iversen, 2001; Shelton, 2001). However, little systematic research has been formulated to apply online learning strategies among the military parents in some of the remote set-ups (Debnath, Tandon, & Pointer, 2007; Smith, 2000).

According to DeLoach and Greenlaw (2007), unprecedented opportunities have emerged from the utilization of web-based technologies in which distance learning is achieved among the educational providers to the learners. Indeed, the military learner forms a rapid sector that is adopting distance learning, with emphasis on the use of online teaching resources. According to Gosmire, Morrison, and Van Osdel (2009), active veterans and persons represent the practitioners in online facilitation of learning among

the military parents. McLaughlin (2010) documented that adult learner characteristics are exhibited by the military learners while Mensch and Rahschulte (2008) asserted that the military parents may also represent special categories in which unique weaknesses and strengths are evident. The problems and values of categorizing student characteristics in the military parent groups can be explored in such a way that the socially isolated or geographically separated learners would gain opportunity towards engagement in learning communities (Process for Accreditation of Joint Education [PAJE], 2007).

Recently, new web-based technologies and increased Internet connectivity have implied that the quality, attractiveness, and feasibility of online learning strategies are spearheaded among the military groups, with those in parental positions on focus (Moller, Foshay, & Huett, 2008). Therefore, online learning among military parents implies that innovative strategies, instructional flexibility, and cost reduction have been realized (Morisano, Hirsch, Peterson, Pihl, & Shore, 2010). Such developments have not only ensured that the military parent gains knowledge but also offered competitive advantages to the educational practitioners in the sense that they are able to reach the new markets (O'Hanlon & Diaz, 2010; Dierling, 2006; Donahoe, 2005). According to Radford (2009), dramatic increases in student enrollment among the distance learners in military parental groups has been witnessed. Radford and Wun (2009) indicated that in the fall of 2008, about 4.6 million students were admitted for online courses among universities and colleges in America, with the online courses taking up a quarter of the total intakes. Of this group, a significant number constituted the military personnel (Richardson, 2009).

In military learning through online means, attributes include histories of organizational commitments and community senses, motivation, intercultural and international awareness, experiential richness, maturity, and learning contexts (Sadara, Robertson, Song, & Midon, 2009). Therefore, military parents ought to contend with the online coursework's limiting factors, besides goal attainment. Some of the online learning dynamics that military parents experience include operational duties, unpredictable sudden deployment, work flexibility, scheduling, and technical matters such as bandwidth availability and Internet access (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009).

### **Virtual Schooling Model**

The virtual schooling model combines asynchronous and synchronous communication techniques during learning (Chang, Chen, & Hsu, 2011; Wright, Dhanarajan, & Reju, 2009). Synchronous sessions involve interactive sessions that use web 2.0 tools (Waldron, 2011; Li, Leh, Fu, & Zhao, 2009). Virtual schooling is effective in engaging students (Lee, 2009; Wright, Dhanarajan, & Reju, 2009).

A study carried out to examine patterns of student engagement in online classes demonstrated that performance in online classes is closely related to attendance of online classes and engagement (Stewart, Stott, & Nuttall, 2010). Homeschooling parents ensure that their children attend online classes and are in constant engagement with learning tools provided through the Internet. This model allows students to interact with online curriculum, turn in assignments, and receive feedback from the teacher (Ewing, 2010; Li, Leh, Fu, & Zhao, 2009; Wright, Dhanarajan, & Reju, 2009). Homeschooling students

often use media players for the podcast classes that they download from the Internet (Waldron, 2011). Additionally, students use webcams for interactions with their instructor or peers; discussing various issues affecting achievement (Lahoud & Krichen, 2010; Waldron, 2011). Through the online tools, homeschooled students are able to engage in interactive discussions through social interaction tools such as Facebook (Klamm, 2012; Lahoud & Krichen, 2010).

### **Discussions or Message Boards**

Discussion boards allow homeschoolers to ask questions of other homeschoolers and assist other homeschoolers by responding to their inquiries (Kaufeld, 2009; Palmer & Holt, 2010). Discussion boards allow homeschoolers to describe ways in which they achieve, which may be beneficial to learning for other homeschoolers (Chang, Chen, & Hsu, 2011; Manouselis, Vuorikari, & Van Assche, 2010).

A study to examine what students value most from online learning experiences found that students valued reading online discussions as well as interacting with various online resources (Palmer & Holt, 2010). Among the discussion boards are VegSource, on America Online (from which discussion boards can be accessed through key words such as homeschooling) and CompuServe (Go Homeschool). In discussion boards, homeschooling students should provide an introduction, post a question or a suggestion, and settle into the community (Kaufeld, 2009).

## **Mailing Lists**

Mailing lists help in organizing conversations for members; the talk goes to their email and they can then join the conversation (Kaufeld, 2009). When homeschoolers sign up for mailing lists with other homeschoolers or support organizations that may provide resources, they receive emails from the group. To obtain mailing lists for homeschooling, it may be helpful to visit Yahoo Groups. Yahoo offers more than 1,000 homeschool mailing lists. Some mailing lists for homeschools include Chevra (for Jewish homeschoolers) where members discuss homeschooling, religious observance, and life generally; Christian focus (for Christian homeschoolers), where members discuss holidays, values, living the Christian faith, and the curriculum; and Homeschool Zone (among the largest on the Internet), where members talk about curriculum choices and encouraging new homeschoolers (Kaufeld, 2009). Members interact regardless of religious faiths. Other mailing lists include Pagan Homeschoolers Unite (PHSU), which supports families using pagan tradition in their homeschooling. In this context, *pagan* refers to the homeschooling parent who “believes in the teaching of the Goddess(es) and/or God(s) and that on our Earth are all sacred beings” (Women’s Journey, 2012, n. p.). Only active pagans are eligible to join. Another mailing list is the Secular homeschool, which consists of those homeschooling parents whose reason for homeschooling was not religion (Kaufeld, 2009).

## **Chat**

Chat is another homeschooling resource. Homeschool chat rooms are full of activity and enthusiasm. Chat rooms may be scheduled with defined topics (Kaufeld, 2009). In such chat rooms, homeschoolers need to note the topic and time (day and time of the day) for accountability and tracking. Some chat rooms mail their members when they miss sessions. Chat rooms may be found at Talk City and in the homeschool section of some online services (Kaufeld, 2009).

## **Homeschooling Online Resources**

Ewing (2010) reviewed research on online learning in K-12 settings and concluded that although research in this area is growing, the limited available data has shown that online learning is an effective learning method. Bullock (2011) conducted a study to determine how technology affected homeschooling. The findings demonstrated that 100% of the homeschooling families who took part in the study were making heavy use of the Internet through chats and online schools (Bullock, 2011). The Internet provides a variety of resources to homeschoolers such as Twitter, Facebook, blogs, discussion boards, You Tube, E-mail, text messaging, video streaming, podcasts, wikis, among other social software tools or Web 2.0 tools (McLoughlin & Lee, 2011).

Most of the online resources are provided by various organizations. First, national organizations that provide homeschooling online resources include Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education, Alternative Education Resource Organization, American Homeschool Association, Homeschool Foundation, National Coalition of Alternative

Community Schools, National Home Education Network, National Home Education Research Institute, and National Homeschooling Association. For children with special needs, online organizations include Children with Disabilities, Institute for the Achievement of Human Potential, and National Challenged Homeschoolers Associated Network. Furthermore, companies such as eTAP and Global Student Network offer homeschooling parents and their children whole curricula and specialized online instruction (Thormann & Zimmerman, 2012).

For military parents involved in homeschooling, the Department of Defense Dependent Schools/Education Activity (DoD/EA) provides support for homeschooling military families (Tyle, 2004). DoDEA acknowledges that service members have a right to homeschool their dependents, and that homeschooling is a legitimate form of education for the military children (DoDEA, 2012). The DoDEA provides homeschooled children with auxiliary resources including scheduled standardized tests, access to media centers, and a variety of activities (DoDEA, 2012).

### **Automated Systems**

Automated systems are useful online programs used by homeschooling parents. Time4Learning provides automated systems that serve four basic functions for the homeschooling child. They enhance lesson sequence, grade the lessons, track progress, and keep reports to be used as portfolios (Time4Learning, 2012). Automated systems achieve their goal through the provision of printable worksheets, interactive activities, and animated lessons that can be used to teach students in homeschooling

(Time4Learning, 2012). The aim of automated systems, especially the one provided by Time4Learning, is to build skills.

### **Parent Forums**

The Internet provides homeschooling parents with online interactive parent forums. Parents receive a platform to share their experiences with other homeschooling parents, including how online homeschooling helps them and their children and tools they employ. The Internet also provides tools such as activity finder, parent reviews, and lesson plans (Time4Learning, 2010).

### **Internet Homeschooling Programs**

Some states provide Internet homeschooling programs. These programs are best suited for parents whose concern of choosing to homeschool has to do with social issues in school such as negative peer influence and cyber-bullying. However, for parents whose aim of homeschooling has to do with customizing an individualized educational plan, then Internet homeschooling program may not be among their chosen method of conducting homeschooling (Russell, 2008).

In concluding this section, it should be noted that the use of these online resources by homeschooling parents (especially military parents) has not received any special scholarly attention. This is despite the fact that there are numerous online resources dedicated to military families. It is important to examine the experiences of homeschooling, military families who use those numerous online homeschooling resources to teach their children, all the focus of this study.

## **Methods of Assessment**

Munawar (2011) noted that the fear of not being assessed is a key obstacle for homeschoolers. Collegeboard and ACT do not discriminate whether a student is being homeschooled or traditionally schooled (Munawar, 2011). Some online schools provide internal examinations to homeschoolers. Homeschooled students have found the online testing a satisfying experience. For instance, in one study, Bullock (2011) reported that participants expressed satisfaction with online schools because they have teachers who return graded assignments in a timely manner. These are best exemplified by the Free Online Secondary School (FOSS) (Munawar, 2011).

As is the case with parent qualifications to homeschool, assessment methods for homeschooled students differ from state to state. The best way in which to understand assessment of homeschooled children is through the categorization of HSLDA. In high regulation states such as North Carolina, homeschooled students should annually take grammar, reading, spelling, and math tests. These states have passed legislations to ensure that all homeschooled students are administered the standardized tests and their scores be sent to the authority by some set deadline (Kaufeld, 2009). Other states require that the homeschooled child be assessed using standardized tests and then the parent keeps the results to show the performance of the child for as long as it will take the establishment to ask for documentation (Kaufeld, 2009). Bergstrom (2012) reported homeschooling parents assessed their students because it was a requirement while others wanted to assess the achievement level of their students. However, it is recommended

that parents test their children, not as a comparison with the so-called average students, but to determine the subjects that require more attention for improvement (Kaufeld, 2009).

There are two traditional forms of assessment: summative and formative assessments. Summative assessment is used to grade and tell students what they have achieved by the end of segment of instruction or grade level. Summative testing gives a summary of what the child has accomplished and achieved (Hunt & Touzel, 2009). Although students are awarded grades based on their performance on summative tests, in homeschooling, summative tests may be used to identify areas that need additional attention for improvement. The use of standardized tests to assess students may also be a form of formative assessment. Formative assessment is intended for the promotion of learning which provides ongoing feedback (Hunt & Touzel, 2009). Formative assessment enables the teacher to plan learning more effectively. Use of quizzes at the end of topics and other similar kinds of periodic assessments represent formative assessment.

One way of assessing homeschooled students is through unit-study portfolios. In these unit-study portfolios, students put photos, stories, poems, and descriptions on identified topics they liked or disliked. Worksheets completed by the student can also be part of the portfolio. Parents are advised to consider oral tests for elementary students; others can work on true/false questions or multiple choices, while older students can be required to write down answers during assessment (Kaufeld, 2010). Other than parents creating the tests, workbooks provide review questions at the end of every section and

chapter. Homeschooling parents can use these books for assessment purposes after they have taught a particular topic.

In some cases, parents have schools or satellite programs that provide books with tests and then score the students' tests after students have completed the tests. Parents are advised to talk to their school or satellite programs that provide the books and score the tests, if for some reason they disagree with the questions, including wording (Kaufeld, 2009).

Another source of assessment for homeschooling students are the companies that set standard achievement tests. Homeschooling parents can purchase tests from such organizations and administer or have them given to their children. The Iowa Test of Basics (Iowa Basics) ranks Kindergarten through 12th grade students on their performance in mathematics, spelling, social studies, language, and science. Provided by Bob Jones University Press, this test is best administered by holders of a bachelor's degree. The Stanford Achievement Test is concerned with tests for each grade on reading, spelling, vocabulary, mathematics, social studies, science, study skills, and some other areas from Kindergarten through 12th grade. The administration of this test is done by an approved tester, unlike the Iowa tests that use testers holding a bachelor's degree.

Most of homeschoolers' groups have an approved tester and, therefore, homeschooling parents should consult them. The California Achievement Test is meant for students in 2nd grade through 12th grade. For administration, the California Achievement Test does not need approved testers, as homeschooling parents can

individually administer the test to their children. However, the challenge is that some states do not recognize the California Achievement Test as a proof of standardized testing.

Standardized tests have one weakness as far as homeschooling is concerned. Standardized tests do not strictly measure the child's performance in homeschooled settings. Such tests are meant to measure what students have normally learned in a given school year. As a result, a homeschooled child may not perform well on a standardized test for a particular grade on some topics but able to perform exceptionally on other topics for another grade (Kaufeld, 2009). It all depends on what the child has learned.

This weakness of many standardized tests is solved by non-standardized tests. Non-standardized tests are designed to inform homeschooling parents what their child knows and what the child does not know and needs to master (Kaufeld, 2009). An example of these tests is the Diagnostic Prescriptive Assessment, which is meant for Kindergarten through 5th grade students. With these tests, parents score them. The test shows the grade at which the child belongs, in light of the child's performance (Kaufeld, 2009).

In an article inspired by *Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology*, Collins and Halversont (2010) summarized prospects and challenges presented by the application of digital technology in education. The authors criticized standardized assessment for using single and traditional paths to assess students. This is because according to Collins and Halversont (2010), assessment technology used in the evaluation of student learning

relies on multiple-choice and short-answer test items for the provision of objective scoring. This testing demands that all students learn the same things. However, information technologies encourage assessors to develop innovative approaches to authentic assessment (Collins & Halversont, 2010).

### **Summary**

The literature reviewed demonstrated that serious attention has been paid to parental motivations for homeschooling and comparison of student achievement on standardized tests in homeschooling and in traditional schooling. For studies investigating parental motivations, none of those reviewed has made use of homeschooling military parents as research participants. This is an indication that studies have not examined the experiences of homeschooling military parents. Again, there is no study among those reviewed that has paid special attention to online homeschooling. These observations lead to the conclusion that scholarly research is limited on online homeschooling, especially among military parents. This is the gap that the present study sought to fill. The next section provides an overview of how the literature reviewed was searched and chosen for review.

In summary, this section provided a critical discussion on homeschooling regulations by states with an emphasis being placed on parental qualifications. Given that most of homeschooling parents have no teacher certification and university degrees, there has been a controversy between parental qualifications and student achievement. Consequently, there has been a debate on the actual effect of teacher certification on

student achievement. On one side of the debate, some states have maintained that homeschooling parents must be certified teachers, while on the other side, proponents of homeschooling have viewed this as highly restrictive and the debates have often been dragged into courts. Proponents of the homeschooling movement have heavily relied on research studies. The majority of the studies demonstrated that teacher certification had no effect on student academic achievement. Such studies have been used by homeschooling proponents to argue that parents do not need to have any qualifications to teach their children at home. Again, courts have held that placing demand on parental certification is restrictive to a child's education, implying that parents do not need teacher certifications to homeschool. It should be noted that none of the studies reviewed in this section used homeschooling military parents, implying that previous studies have neglected this section of the homeschooling population. Again, it should be noted that the studies have not used online homeschooled students, which means that previous studies have not focused on online homeschooling. Lack of studies investigating homeschooling among military parents as well as online homeschooling should be viewed as a gap in the literature.

The review of literature has demonstrated that previous homeschooling research has focused on four basic areas. These include the history of homeschooling movement, parental motivations for homeschooling, the impact of teacher certification and student achievement, and performance of homeschooled students compared with their traditionally counterparts. These studies obtained their samples from the civilian

population, which means that the military families who are homeschooling their children have not been addressed by the scholarly community. Again, the review of the studies has demonstrated that researchers have not sought to study the experiences of homeschooling military parents, especially those using online resources, despite the fact that homeschooling parents are increasingly using online resources to teach their children. The fact that online resources are being used by homeschooling parents is supported by the fact that the Internet contains so many websites that provide online tools for homeschooling parents. In others words, despite the increasing use of online resources by homeschooling parents, little is known about the experiences of homeschooling parents with these online homeschooling tools. Military parents are among the homeschooling parents who are making heavy use of online resources. As such, the completed study explored the experiences of military families who were homeschooling their children through online resources in an effort to address this existing gap in the literature.

The study design identified constructivism and Diffusion of Innovation, by Everett Rogers as the conceptual model on which the present study was viewed. The reason for choosing these theories was supported by the type of learning chosen: online learning. Online learning is performed through collaborative means as tools on the Internet to encourage content creation, and interactive and collaborative learning that are necessary for the creation of knowledge. Given that constructivism encourages creation of knowledge, and Diffusion of Innovation allows members of the social system to encounter innovative decisions by analyzing Rogers' five step process, which includes

“Knowledge, Persuasion, Decision, Implementation and Confirmation” (Rogers, 2003, p. 12), it was determined that these theories were best suited for the study.

Chapter 3 provided a discussion of the methods that were used to collect, analyze, and interpret data that helped in filling the identified gap in the research literature. The literature review revealed that previous studies have neglected the experiences of online homeschooling parents, especially the military. Phenomenology is the chosen method for this study and chapter 3 describes this research methodology in more detail.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of military parents involved in homeschooling their children using online resources. Little is known about the experiences of these homeschooling military parents using online tools. The study addressed this gap in the literature through an examination of the experiences of military families that were homeschooling their children through the Internet. Homeschooling is seen as a possible alternative strategy to replace traditional schooling, but little was known of parents' experiences with this option prior to this study.

I chose a qualitative phenomenological approach as the research methodology for this study. Phenomenology is defined as one or more individuals' consciousness and experiences of a phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 364). Quantitative research tends to involve asking *why* questions, whereas qualitative research tends to involve asking questions of *how* and *what* (Creswell, 2003). According to Christensen (2012), phenomenologists assume that there is some commonality in human experiences and seek to understand the essence of experience (p. 365). I sought to discover the experiences of military families who homeschool their children to determine if there were commonalities in their experiences and perceptions.

The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC), which serves as an advocate to ensure that all transiting military children obtain a quality education, reported that military children generally move six to nine times during their K-12 school years (MCEC, 2012). According to a 2010 Demographics Report (Department of Defense,

2010), uniformed service members of the military and their families are stationed throughout the world. Many families move three to four times during their children's high school years, and often moves are made during a student's critical senior year. MCEC reported that the consequences of these moves could include students giving up friends and routines. MCEC has stated that students often contend with other frustrations as they move from state to state and country to country, which include academic selection of courses, loss of graduation credits, difficulties with the transfer and acceptance of records, as well as denial or delay of entrance into enrichment and special-needs programs (MCEC, 2012). For this research study, I documented and analyzed the experiences and perceptions of military families who homeschooled their children using online resources. The findings should be of interest to other military families considering homeschooling as an educational option.

### **Research Questions**

1. What experiences do military parents encounter in homeschooling their children using online resources?
2. What recommendations do homeschooling military parents have for other transitioning military parents?

The intent of this study was to seek evidence and perceptions of military families who homeschool their children, as well as to establish a pattern of the beliefs of the families who experienced the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). I used the interview questions as a guide to gather the needed information for this study. In asking each

question in the same manner, any possible bias was managed or was alleviated. This also provided a more consistent basis for determining reoccurring themes during the analysis phase.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The research design and rationale originated from the problem statement, which included a lack of literature addressing the experiences of military families involved in online homeschooling and limited knowledge on how homeschooling may alleviate the continual disruption of relocation. Qualitative research, which has gained acceptance in the last three decades, is concerned with questions related to the nature of a phenomenon with an aim of giving a description, explanation, and understanding of the phenomenon in question (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2010). Qualitative research relies heavily on inductive reasoning. In deductive reasoning, conclusions follow from clearly defined procedures. In inductive reasoning, the researcher develops or produces universal claims. An inductive approach allows the researcher to explore a feeling, an insight, an idea, or awareness. Qualitative studies rely on a small number of participants, which limits the representativeness of the study findings (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2010). In qualitative studies, as in this study exploring the experiences of military families involved in homeschooling for their children using online resources for academic success, generalizations of study findings to the target population are not possible because of the number of participants and the non-probability sampling methods employed. Finally, in qualitative research, the researcher actively interacts with participants through

observations, interaction, and participation in long, in-depth interviews (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2010).

Given that the researcher actively interacts with participants during data collection, it is challenging to rule out personal biases and opinions that may compromise the reliability of the results to be obtained. During each phase of this study, every effort was made to be aware of and avoid any form of personal bias. A qualitative approach has unique richness and strength that dictated its choice. The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences that military parents encountered in homeschooling their children using online resources in achieving academic outcomes. In essence, these individuals were the most suited to describe those experiences. The ability of participants to give rich responses, to use their own words in describing their feelings, perceptions, and attitudes, is the essence of the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research allows the researcher to get close to the participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Being in direct contact with the research made it possible to experience in person the subjective dimension of military parents involved with online homeschooling. This was especially important, as the research was dependent on the instrument of data collection (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Another reason for choosing this methodology was that qualitative research acknowledges that knowledge is constructed socially (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). “Qualitative phenomenological research allows for definitive meaning to emerge from personal experiences” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 364). According to Johnson and

Christensen (2012), this is because the construction of knowledge takes place in the process of social interchange. The experiences studied occurred within natural and social environments where the effect of social processes was influenced by the constructive efforts of the participants in their daily lives (Flick, 2009). Furthermore, a “qualitative phenomenological methodology was selected as the research paradigm as the responses to the research questions were driven by the participants’ individual experiences and perceptions. Husserl defined phenomenology as the science of experience” (Husserl, 1962, p. 46). This explanation applies to this present study, as I collected and analyzed data on military families’ experiences of their use of online resources to educate their children to determine if the results lead to academic success.

I conducted a phenomenological study in an attempt to comprehend the perceptions and beliefs of a selected group (military parents who homeschool their children) concerning a particular topic (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2010). The purpose of the study was to examine military parents’ perceptions, understandings, and beliefs concerning resources for online homeschooling and their resulting recommendations. The phenomenological research method was guided by the phenomenological views of researchers such as Hatch (2002), Merleau-Ponty (2005), Merriam (2002), Moustakas (1994), Sokolowski (1999), and Van Manen (1990). Researchers who adopt a phenomenological model to study human phenomena perceive research participants as co-constructors of the descriptions and interpretations of the study being carried out (Van Manen, 1990).

The phenomenological paradigm allows an emergent design to enable the researcher to respond to the multiple realities potentially involved (Lavery, 2003; Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). The lived experiences of the participants were examined through this phenomenological study (Creswell, 2003; Lavery, 2003; Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 1999). The defining characteristic of phenomenological research focuses on describing the essence of a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have experienced it (Lavery, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 2005; Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 1999).

“Phenomenological researchers seek to reveal the essence of human experience by determining the nature of the phenomenon” (Hatch, 2002, p. 30), without preconceived notions (Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 1999). In particular, Hatch (2002) observed that the very essence of a phenomenological inquiry is to answer the question, “What is the nature of this phenomenon?” (p. 30). The methods that are used to gather experiential descriptions from others are mostly participant observations and in-depth interviews, and gather experiential narrative material through conversation (Merleau-Ponty, 2005; Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994).

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher conducting this qualitative phenomenology research study was to answer the question of what was going to be studied as well, why this study was important, and how the study was conducted. I identified why and how this research constructed social change and collected data through the interview process. The data

were transcribed, analyzed, verified and reported with accuracy, integrity, fidelity, and confidentiality, without bias; all data were safeguarded and secured. The results of the study were shared with the participants; they had an opportunity to discuss similarities and/or differences of their views in comparison of other participants.

I clarified bias, used an external researcher to review the study, and presented any negative or discrepant information that ran counter to the themes. I also employed the epoche and bracketing process presented by Husserl (1962), which included setting aside one's own prejudice, preconceived ideas, and biases.

The potential target participants were located in three diverse geographic locations. I was able to maintain objectivity by being mindful of the interview questions, without deviation to ensure reliability; however, I did exercise the option to add follow-up questions for clarification.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The primary purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of military parents involved in homeschooling their children using online resources. Since military parents may be of different ethnic backgrounds and military ranks, the research used snowball sampling from both groups (rank and ethnic background) to ensure diversity. The criterion for inclusion in this study was that the military parent had been conducting online homeschooling for at least three years. The

target pool included nine military parents involved in online homeschooling. These parents volunteered and signed the wavier to participate as explained below.

The completed study employed a snowball (chain or network) sampling technique, which is a type of purposive sampling (Hays & Singh, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010), to select nine military parents from the United States Air Force who were using online resources in homeschooling their children. As per the guidelines for the U.S. Air Force, there was no involvement with an actual military base as part of the gathering of data or identification of participants. There was purposeful sampling which is the most common method in qualitative research because of its ability to provide data sources with rich, in-depth information (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle). The relationship between the sample size and saturation of the study was qualified, for it did not aim to select a large representative sample but rather to select group of participants who could provide the richest and the most detailed information to aid in answering the research question (Lodico et al., 2010).

Purposive sampling demands that the researcher develop specific criteria that will guide the selection of participants who possess the richest and representative detailed information before gathering data. According to Punch (2010), in snowball sampling the participants will identify individuals who will enhance and contribute to the study. This implies that a snowball sampling technique involves some already selected participants asking others among their friends and acquaintances who possess the inclusion criteria. In snowball sampling, the researcher finds a particular information-rich case for the study

and then asks the individual if they know others with the same qualifications that would be willing to take part in the study. The sampling method continues until the researcher has obtained enough participants who possess the richest and most detailed information on the issues for the study.

The advantage of this method is that it can allow the researcher to quickly access potential participants. One disadvantage of snowball sampling is that, if not checked, the variation of the sample collected can be highly skewed (Punch, 2010). However, in the completed study, I focused on ensuring a level of diversity. Hays and Singh (2012) advised that researchers may use snowball sampling to construct disparity. To achieve this, I initiated snowball sampling in more than one diverse group, instead of starting it in one group. For instance, the groups were representative of different racial groups as well as groups in other geographic locations.

I first obtained written approval from these military parents to volunteer for the study and then proceeded to request recommendations of other military parents who were homeschooling and possessed the characteristics for inclusion. The ones who were selected also were asked to refer others and the chain continued until nine military parents from different ranks, ethnic backgrounds, and geographic locations had been selected to form the study sample. According to an article from National Military Family Association (2012), there are nearly 500 military installations around the world. The Armed Forces is the epitome of diversity. The researcher was selective in the referral process, asking the participant demographic and ethnicity questions. Therefore, a

tendency to limit candidates to a homogenous group was eliminated. This method was expected to yield results because homeschooling parents often tend to know each other and are connoisseurs when it comes to networking.

### **Instrumentation Data Collection**

The instrument for data collection in this study was the interview protocol, which I used to discover what experiences military parents encountered in homeschooling their children using online resources in achieving academic outcomes and in attempting to answer the research questions: The study answered two questions:

1. What experiences do military parents encounter in homeschooling their children using online resources?
2. What recommendations do home schooling military parents have for other transitioning military parents?

The importance of interviews is that they allow the researcher to focus on a small number of participants who possess the required information at a deep and rich descriptive level. Interviews allow the researcher to individualize data questions and seek clarification while also clarifying the questions to the respondent (Hartas, 2010). The disadvantages associated with interviews are centered on the size of the sample and time. Interviews use small samples that hinder generalization of the findings to the larger target population. Second, interviews are time consuming during their administration/data collection and analysis of the collected data (Lodico, et al., 2010). Data for answering the

research questions were collected through semistructured interviews, which have a considerable degree of flexibility (Hartas, 2010).

### **Research Protocol**

Researchers plan semi-structured interviews before they start data collection (Lodico et al., 2010). Semistructured interviews are guided by a predetermined set of open-ended questions, but allow the researcher and the participants' freedom to alter the order, structure, and the wording of the open-ended questions if such alteration would result in a collection of rich and detailed data for answering the research question(s) (Swanwick, 2010). The researcher develops an interview protocol before beginning to collect data (Hartas, 2010). The interview protocol consists of a list of questions or topics that should be addressed relative to the conceptual framework or on which data should be collected from every participant in the study.

For the completed study, interview questions were formulated based on what the researcher wanted to understand. In this study, the interview questions were based on the experiences that military families encounter using online resources to achieve academic success. The purpose of the interview protocol was to guide the researcher so that data collection was carried out systematically and in a focused manner (Lodico et al., 2010). The study adopted a 2-level interview protocol, when necessary.

In this kind of data collection, the first part of the interview is conducted for the purposes of introductions and the collection of background information from the respondents. In the second part of the interviews, the aim is to explore the research

questions by collecting data through the interviews with the respondents. If the researcher feels that the participant is comfortable with the process, both interview phases will most likely occur at the same time. If needed, the researcher may feel it is necessary to talk with the participants later to collect data that will help in filling gaps identified in the previous interviews or for clarification. A follow-up interview was used primarily if the researcher needed additional information or clarification during the transcribing or analysis process. A copy of the semi-structured initial interview questions was given to the participants in advance. Any question that the participant could not answer or refused to answer was annotated in the analysis (Lodico et al., 2010).

The sense of semi-structured implies that the researcher can alter the sequence of the questions to be asked, as well as introduce others to probe issues that may arise during the interviews. The ability of the semi-structured interviews to allow for rephrasing the question for clarification or introducing other questions to seek more information has been highly influential in choosing semi-structured interviews as tools for data collection (Hartas, 2010; Lodico et al., 2010). In this research study, the following example of questions were rearranged or stated in a different way:

- What experiences have you had to make you feel positive or negatively about homeschooling your child? Has there been a time that you were tempted to place your child in a structure school system?
- Talk about a situation where you replaced or decided not to replace a traditional teaching resource with an online resource. What led to you making

that decision? Or tell me of a situation when there might have been a problem in deciding the best-suited resource for your child.

- Describe the benefits or challenges of using online resources. What would be your reaction if your child did not have access to online resources? Has there been a time when your child resisted online resources?

This kind of flexibility could not be possible with structured interviews, which have a set of questions with no room for deviation (Hartas, 2010). With this type of rigidity, structured interviews would have hindered in-depth data collection on the perceptions, beliefs, disappointments, and other kinds of experiences for military parents as they homeschool their children using online tools. Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews will allow the researcher to word the interviews with sensitivity to unfolding discourse (Hartas, 2010). Semi-structured interviews have the ability to be systematically focused. This ensured that data collection remained the primary focus of the study and that any deviation was only made to generate rich and detailed information for answering the research questions.

This need for quality data makes it inadvisable to use unstructured interviews because unstructured interviews are unplanned and require a great deal of flexibility as well as skills in interviewing, questioning, and probing. They often take the form of conversations and chances of deviating fully from the focus of the research study are high, and as such, it was used in this study. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtler (2010)

advised beginning researchers to use semi-structured interviews rather than unstructured because of this almost uncontrolled flexibility.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews ensure that the researcher develops a kind of a relationship with research participants (Borg, 2006). Being flexible, the semi-structured interview allows some degree of conversational interviews that are effective in data collection because articulation of the information is guaranteed as opposed to a structured, formalized exchange of questions and responses in structured interviews with little or no degree of articulation (Borg, 2006).

The interviews were conducted one-on-one (Lodico et al., 2010). Each interview lasted between 35 and 60 minutes. During the interviews, the researcher encouraged the respondents to express their thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs about their experiences with online homeschooling. Each interview session was taped for later transcription.

### **Interview Questions**

The research questions were based on Constructivism and Diffusion of Innovation in studying the experiences of military parents who were homeschooling their children through online resources. The views on constructivism which includes searching out student's understanding, assessing prior experience on a concept before it is taught, encouraging critical thinking, allowing students the opportunity to challenge prior concepts which will entice contradictions and encourage farther discussions, and provide ample time for students to construct new meaning were part of the focus of the

conceptual framework (Rogers, 2003). Learning new material drove the constructivism interview questions.

Rogers' definition of diffusion is "the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system Rogers' 5-step process, which consists of Knowledge, Persuasion, Decision, Implementation, and Confirmation guided the interview questions and data analysis which related to Diffusion of Innovation" (Rogers, 2003, p. 12). The above definition of diffusion aligns the online innovation as a link to the conceptual framework and guided the research questions.

This research study focused on the experiences of military families who homeschool their children using online resources. The key research questions were as follows:

- What experiences do military parents encounter in homeschooling their children using online resources?
- What recommendations do home schooling military parents have for other transitioning military parents?

I interviewed nine military families who homeschool their children. Both parents or either elected to be interviewed. The interview was conducted by phone, SKYPE, and email. I informed the participants that the primary purpose of the phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of military parents involved in homeschooling their children using online resources. Despite the obvious use of the Internet by

homeschooling military parents, little is known about the experiences of these homeschooling military parents, who used online tools to educate their children. The study addressed the gap in literature by examining experiences of military families that were homeschooling their children through the Internet and the alternative of using online resources in homeschooling to avoid the negative aspects of frequent relocation. I stated: “I would like to ask you a series of questions in order that I may gather data on your experiences in using online resources to homeschool your children to achieve academic success, and to ascertain if there is advice and/or recommendations that you can share with other military parents who are seeking to homeschool their children.” The following questions were asked:

Demographic Questions:

1. What are the grade level of your children which you homeschool?
2. Since homeschooling your children, how many times have you moved?
3. Why did you elect to homeschool your child/children?

The following guided data related to Rogers concerning what parents have experienced at each stage of the diffusion process in relationship to using online resources guided the interview questions listed:

- Knowledge—Person become aware of an innovation and has some idea of how it functions.
- Interview Question: When did you become aware of online resources for education in homeschooling your child/ren and How?

- Persuasion—Person forms a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the innovation.
- Interview Question: What experiences have you had to make you feel positive or negative about homeschooling your child. Please provide some examples of those experiences.
- Decision—Person engages in activities that lead to a choice to adopt or reject the Innovation—Person puts an innovation into use.
- Interview Question: Talk about a situation where you replaced or decided not to replace a traditional teaching resource with an online resource. What led to you making that decision? What were the results of that decision?
- Confirmation—Person evaluates the results of an innovation-decision already made (Rogers, 2003, p. 199).

Interview Question: Describe the benefits or challenges of using online resources. What would be your reaction if your child did not have access to online resources?

The following questions are related to constructivism and what parents have experienced at each stage of the learning process in relationship to using online resources.

This instructional theory will guide the interview questions (Brooks, 1993).

- Determine related student's level of understanding and experiences prior to teaching a new topic (construct new knowledge on what is already known)

Interview Question: Given a particular topic, how much did your student know before hand and how much did they know afterward? What do you think contributed to the process? How much did you interact, and would you describe that interaction?

- High levels of communication between student-teacher and student-student

Interview Question: How much discussion do you have with your child about the topic you are presenting? Is there an opportunity for him or her to communicate with another student or other adults to increase his or her level of understanding?

- Critical thinking and inquiry is encouraged through open-ended questions and facilitating further collaborative questioning.

Interview Question: How much of your instruction involves open-ended questions and collaborative inquiry? Can you provide some examples?

- Encourage creation of situation that contradict previous conceptions and encourage discussion.

Interview Question: How do you handle situations that challenge and contradict previous student understanding? Give an example of when you might have created an experience that required your student to rethink previous understandings.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Data analysis was done inductively wherein categories “emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent” without imposing predetermined themes (Thomas, 2003, p. 2). Recurring issues or themes were identified during data

analysis. Particular care was taken to ensure that the categories or themes had not been imposed. The themes or categories followed from the data being collected (Dey, 1993).

In sorting through the interviews (the raw qualitative data), I used open coding, axial coding, and hierarchical coding in analyzing the data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), open coding is described as codes or label words and phrases found in the transcript, axial coding is used to create categories by grouping codes or labels to given words or phrases, and hierarchical is using several codes grouped together as types or sub-codes to prevent repetition or overlapping. I used open coding first, then axial coding to identify several main categories or themes to focus on, the core phenomenon. Axial coding helped to identify the experiences which military parents encountered while homeschooling their children.

I asked the questions as stated above in this current study. Lewins, Taylor, and Gibbs (2005) cited the following 12 descriptive examples of *things*, which the researcher can code that will support explaining the phenomena: Behaviors, Events, Activities, Strategies, States, Meanings, Participation, Relationships, Conditions, Consequences, Settings, and Reflections. For this research study, which focuses on the experiences of military families who homeschool their children using online resources, I utilized many of the descriptive examples as codes to assist in determining what experiences military families encountered in homeschooling their children using online resources in achieving academic outcomes.

I also connected Rogers' Typology of Diffusion with the data analysis process. Hatch (2002) stated that a well-executed typological analysis will produce a set of one-sentence generalizations that capture the patterns, relationships, and themes discovered in the data. Typological analysis is best suited for interview data, and it involves searching and verifying generalizations characterize by the participant (Hatch, 2002). Rogers' (2003) typology of diffusion was established on five perceived attributes (relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trailability, and observability) which affected the rate of the diffusion adoption.

The study adopted a phenomenological approach to guide the interpretation of experiences of military families with online homeschooling (Lavery, 2003). Phenomenology, according to Halldorsdottir (n. d), is a methodology as well as a philosophy and is connected to constructivism. The choice of this conceptual framework was strongly informed by the nature and aim of the study. Constructivist learning provides for social negotiation, encourages ownership in learning, as well as self-awareness of the construction of knowledge. This study was also guided by Roger's innovated diffusion process, which is based on perceived attributes of innovations, communication channels, time, and social systems.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Johnson and Christensen (2004) stated that validity in a qualitative study refers to "plausible, credible, trustworthy, and defensible data collection" (p. 140). Hatch (2004) proposed that the researcher utilize one or more strategies in determining the accuracy of

a study. Some of the strategies includes the following: “member-checking to determine the accuracy; use of rich, thick description to convey the findings; clarification of the bias the researcher brings to the study; presenting negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes; spending prolonged time in the field; and use of an external auditor to review the study” (p, 153). I clarified bias, used an external auditor to review the project, and presented negative or discrepant information that ran counter to the themes. I also employed the epoche and bracketing process presented by Husserl (1962), which includes setting aside one’s own prejudgment, preconceived ideas, biases, and common-sense.

### **Credibility**

The weakness with interviews is that they rely entirely on the memory of the respondent (Swanwick, 2010). As a result, the respondents may be unable to provide crucial information about their online homeschooling because they are not able to remember, in detail, the information requested or verbalize the experiences. However, every effort was made to ensure that the respondents were comfortable with the interviewer and had time to respond to questions. This enabled them to remember some issues that they would not have if they had been rushed into answering the questions with a structured approach. Furthermore, I conducted the interviews several times, if needed. This additional interview step was intended to present an opportunity for me to validate previous responses or ask for clarification. The interview was transcribed and a copy of the transcription was emailed to the participant for verification. When I had additional

questions, after the conclusion of the first interview and after viewing the transcript, I contacted the participant, requesting permission for an additional interview. The interview procedures were given to the participant prior to the first interview along with the required consent forms. Having an opportunity for multiple interviews also provided a way of cross-checking of previous responses to increase the validity of the information and to allow the participants to restate their responses or to change their account. It should be noted that a participant might have elected to have only one interview. They had the option to pass on an additional interview, if they felt that the data were conclusive and the transcribing was accurate. It should be noted that there was no formal process for the participants to withdraw from the study; the participant could withdraw from the study at any time with no questions asked. Upon completion of the study, I shared the findings with all participants. The confidentiality of the participants was safeguarded at all times.

### **Dependability**

It is essential that the researcher set aside all predetermined concepts or experiences in order to comprehend the participant's experiences. Consistency is a key factor that produces dependability. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for further analysis, as analysis started during data collection (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The respondents were encouraged to look at their own transcribed interviews to determine if the information they had given had been properly transcribed or if they would like to rephrase or delete any response. This was done to ensure the data

collected retained accuracy and avoided bias or misinformation. The number of interviews was noted in the analysis report. In an effort to enhance the accuracy of the transcribed data, I invited an independent verification to crosscheck portions of the transcribed interviews and analysis to ensure that the transcription did not compromise the accuracy of the interviews or reflect bias.

### **Transferability**

I ensured that all data collected was recorded and transcribed accurately. Step-by-step, detailed notes were written and organized. The research study was completed in a manner that another researcher will be able to replicate the steps to determine the reliability of the study or repeat the study.

Transferability relates to the results from this study being applicable to a similar situation. Not all military parents have the same experiences with online resources, and some general findings from the study are applicable to others in a similar situation. Of special benefit may be the recommendations provided from homeschooling military parents.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Although, none of the interview questions were sensitive in nature, I was sensitive to ethical issues that may have arisen during the course of the study. The Internal Review Board, (IRB) approved consent form (IRB 05-05-14-0020702, expiration date: 05/04/15) also made it clear that the information provided remained confidential. Further, the potential participants were made aware that participation in the study was entirely

voluntary and that anyone could withdraw from the study anytime, at any stage if they wished. From the completion of the study, data will be kept for a period of at least five years, as required by the university, and then will be destroyed. Ethical considerations were made in light of the standard requirements for ethical issues in research including human subjects, especially in the areas of informed consent and confidentiality.

### **Informed Active Consent**

Research participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, possible risks, benefits, and confidentiality issues before being asked to participate. The aim was to describe all the features of the research that would make it possible for the prospective participant to make an informed decision on whether to take part in the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2010). Prior to the study, I informed the potential participants about the aim of the study and the kind of questions that would be asked. A copy of a sampling of interview questions was provided to the participants.

The information about the study was described on the consent form that the potential participants read. If they needed further clarification, verbal explanations about the nature of the study were provided when requested. In particular, the consent form contained information on the purpose of the study and the procedures that were followed in meeting that purpose. Further, descriptions of any potential psychological or physical harm that may result from the study were included. No physical harm was expected to be caused to the participants. However, there were chances that some minimal degree of psychological harm would be caused to participants. Because given that the study sought

to examine experiences of military parents involved in homeschooling, recalling some experiences that may not be pleasant for the military families may have been psychologically harmful to them. Therefore, particular emphasis was placed to avoid this possible source of harm. I however, did everything possible to keep this potential for harm at the absolute minimum. This was done by rephrasing the questions or engaging the parent in questions and discussions designed to help them with the issue.

The consent form also made it clear to the parents that the information they provided would remain confidential. Further, the participants were made aware that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that anyone could withdraw from the study anytime, at any stage, if they wished. The participants were also allowed to ask questions and have their concerns addressed to ensure that they had an understanding of the nature of the study and what was expected of them during the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2010).

### **Confidentiality**

The privacy of this research study's participants was respected. The names of the subjects were removed from every data collection form. I used pseudonyms to refer to the research participants. A password-protected form contained the research participant's legal name and the cross-referenced pseudonym for the purposes of guiding the research. It should be noted, however, that this file with actual names was stored electronically in a password-protected computer with only myself having access to that computer and file. However, for the forms with collected data with pseudonyms, they were stored at a

password-protected computer at the university. The audio recordings were stored according to the university policy. The participants were made aware that data collected from them would be held with utmost confidentiality and that their names or any personal identifier will never be used anywhere during the research study, including the reporting of the findings (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2011). At the completion of the study, data will be kept for a period of at least five years, as required by the university, and then destroyed.

### **Summary**

This chapter described the phenomenological research methods employed in accomplishing the completed study, which was to examine experiences of military parents who were homeschooling their children through online resources for academic success and subsequent recommendations to other military parents. Based on the work of Moustakas, Yin, Hatch, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Sokolowski, this chapter has identified phenomenological qualitative research as the chosen methodology and justified its choice and the weaknesses associated with qualitative research of this nature. The chapter identified the data collection instrument as interviews, using a snowballing participant selection technique. The steps of the interview process and procedures were outlined as well as the data analyzing process. Anticipated ethical issues were outlined with explanation on how I addressed such issues when selecting the participants as well as during the interview process. In Chapter 4, the results of the interviews are discussed and supported by examples. In Chapter 5, I included discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter represents the process and findings of this study. It includes a description of the setting, the participants' demographics and characteristics relevant to the study, and a review of the data collection presentation as well as the data analysis process and the evidence of trustworthiness. A summary of the results with supporting data addressing each research question is presented. Lastly, precludes to the interpretation of the findings in Chapter 5 are acknowledged.

The primary purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of military parents involved in homeschooling their children using online resources. Little is known about the experiences of these homeschooling military parents using online tools. The study addressed the gap in literature by examining the experiences of military families who homeschooled their children through the Internet.

Homeschooling is seen as a possible alternative strategy, replacing the traditional schooling, but little was known of the parents' experiences with the option of continual relocation. The research questions for this study were based on the guided data related to constructivism (Brooks, 1993) and Rogers' diffusion of innovation (Orr, 2003) concerning what parents have experienced at each stage of the diffusion process in relationship to using online resources.

### **Setting**

This qualitative phenomenological study involved interviews that were conducted in 2014 during the end of the school year and during the peak of summer vacation. Eight

homeschool administrators were contacted via email, and only one administrator responded. This response led to one participant, which snowballed into another participant.

I reached out again to the seven online home school administrators who had not responded, but again they did not respond. After a month of no additional responses, I posted an advertisement on Facebook asking for participants. Within the next 2 days, 18 individuals responded to the posting. Educators who recognized me posted on Facebook to other known homeschooling families to help. They also provided additional names of potential participants. An IRB-approved email invitation to participate and an IRB-approved letter of consent were sent to each responder. As I am located in Japan, I scheduled telephone interview appointments for the first four participants, who were located in England, Germany, and across the United States, which was a daunting task. As I communicated back and forth with the participants, it took nearly a week to schedule and to complete each telephone interview. Although there was flexibility in each participant's schedule, the conflicts in scheduling the interviews also revolved around ending the school year with testing or interference with summer traveling plans. All participants had the convenience and freedom of interviewing in the setting of their own home.

### **Participant Demographics**

To protect the identity of and to provide confidentiality and fidelity to the participants, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant (see Table 2). As the goal of

this study was to examine the experiences of military parents involved in homeschooling their children using online resources, rank, age, qualifications, and geographic location were not important. The defining characteristic of phenomenological research is its focus on describing the essence of a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have experienced it (Laverty, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 2005; Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 1999). The lived experiences of the participants were examined through this phenomenological study (Creswell, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 1999). It was therefore imperative to this study to annotate relevant characteristics, occurrences, and terminologies that the participants referenced.

Table 2

*Participant Demographics*

#	Pseudonym	# of students	Grade level(s)	Years home schooled	Times moved	Interview medium	Comment
1	Crystal	2	10th, 11th	16	5	phone	3 older children who were previously home schooled
2	Wilma	2	3rd, 9th	2	2	phone	
3	Nancy	4	2nd, 3rd, 7th, 11th	11	9	phone	
4	Angela	2	8th	6	2	phone	According to their age they would be in 5th (twins)
5	Rosemary	2	2nd, 5th	7	1	phone	
6	Linda	1	5th	6	2	phone	
7	Tiffany	2	2nd, 8th	8	1	email	
8	Toby	1	9th	3	3	online	Skype
9	Dolly	1	1st	3	2	online	Used online resources since 3 years old

The participants and their reasons for choosing homeschooling are introduced in the next section in the order in which they were interviewed.

**Crystal.** Crystal was the first participant interviewed. Her level of excitement to tell her story brought laughter to every word that was uttered. She was eager to share her experiences, saying, “Do you want to know specifics?” Crystal proudly announced that she had a teaching background that validated her ability to be an effective teacher. Her information indicated that she had a track record of success in homeschooling her

children; she had three older children who had been home schooled and were successful in college, maintaining honor status in all classes.

**Wilma.** Wilma was the second to be interviewed. Like Crystal, it was evident in her voice that she was excited to be in a position to help her children who had been bored in school, often staring in space and not paying attention. Wilma also proudly stated that her oldest child was very studious and would have been diagnosed with ADHD, but since being home schooled had no related issues. Wilma bragged about how appealing and wonderful it was that her friend (who also homeschooled and had children the same age as her children) believed in homeschooling. Wilma claimed that she had called her friend and stated, “I’m really thinking about this, what you think?” She stated that her friend had been supportive, and they had spent hours discussing resources and curriculum in advance of the interview.

**Nancy.** Nancy was eager to tell of her experiences. She started homeschooling when her daughter missed the cutoff for school enrollment. Nancy stated that her daughter had already been in preschool for two years and was a “sponge” who loved to read and learn. Nancy stated that she had told herself that she could never homeschool her children, because she was not the type to just sit and do those types of educational things. With conviction, Nancy stated that she was a perfectionist and did not think she was patient enough to homeschool. She chuckled when she stated, “Okay, for my daughter, I can do this for 1 or 2 years.” Nancy talked of endless hours of researching for online resources for her ninth grade daughter. She stated that there was no way that she

would let her daughter travel on a bus for three hours in a foreign country. Her desperation to find an online program became a matter of urgency. Nancy's joy at the resulting achievement beamed in her voice as she discussed her daughter's successes in learning during her 9th grade year, during Nancy's husband's tour of duty overseas.

**Angela.** Angela started the interview by telling of her experiences, particularly her frustrations, yet how she ended up victorious. She stated that the school's principal was not willing to keep her son at grade level, even though he was reading at age 3. Instead of promoting her son to first grade, there was an attempt to retain him in kindergarten. She angrily stated, "There was no reason for the system to hold him back." Not pleased with the way the school system operated, she homeschooled her children. Angela told of several situations where she had placed her children in a public school system, only for the stay to last less than a week due to what Angela described as "a lack of administrative support in knowing how to differentiate instruction for individual students' needs." Angela was pleased that her children were homeschooled year round. They could take a vacation while others were in school. She joyfully talked of a situation where the family went on vacation during low season and the family was able to visit many educational sites without standing in long lines. She stated that her children had the best of both worlds.

**Rosemary.** Rosemary's experiences were similar to Angela's experiences as well as her frustrations. Rosemary stated proudly that her son excelled early. When it was time for him to enter kindergarten, he surpassed the standards and was ready for a grade that

was appropriate for his learning progression. Rosemary stated that she “somehow stumbled across Nevada Virtual Academy and felt very confident that I was capable of teaching my children and giving them a better education at home.”

**Linda.** Linda adamantly stated that she elected to homeschool her child because “she did not feel like they (the teachers) were capable of teaching properly.” A younger child was crying in the background during the interview, stating she wanted to go outside to play. It was clear that this young mother was multitasking as she verbally shared her homeschooling experiences, and simultaneously nurtured her younger child into a state of calmness. She stated that she did not feel as if she had the faith in producing a traditional curriculum, therefore, she went online and found a curriculum that accommodated the essences of what she was seeking. Linda was firm in her belief that homeschooling her child using online resources was the best thing for her children.

**Tiffany.** Tiffany had a difficult time allocating the amount of time needed to conduct the phone interview. She elected to provide her homeschooling experiences by Word document over a period of several days. Tiffany’s words were precise, meaningful, and in some cases exhaustive. In an attempt to work with the staff in a traditional setting, she explained, “we had tried hard to make modifications within the classroom to better assist our children, but they all failed.” She stated that she became aware of online resources “once we started to have issues with our oldest son in a traditional school setting.” She further stated that, “I was able to find a program that met the need needs of my child.”

**Toby.** Toby was adamant that he had to homeschool his daughter because of issues around the on-base public schools as well as the off-base public schools, “their rules were not as flexible as he thought they should be.” He stated, “being a military member and a transitioning family, I expect the administrators, counselors, and teachers to have more of a listening ear; of all people they should know that one size doesn’t fit all.” He stated “my daughter has moved and changed school, three times in the last 3 years and I am determined that her education will not be jeopardized because of my career.” He further stated that he moved often as a “military brat” and the “schools were excellent” however, “I remember that my father was always at the school advocating for me that I had the best teachers,” as he attended schools over-seas, with the Department of Defense. Toby stated that he was serious about his daughter’s education and the public schools were not doing enough. He further stated, that the school at his next assignment has very high standards and that he is proud that he has control over the fact that he can home school now, so his daughter will be prepared for the future rigor that she will receive.

**Dolly.** Dolly is an energetic mother who had her only child late in life. She shared that she had waited her entire life to have a child and she wants nothing but the very best for him. We shared several emails trying to establish a time for a phone interview, to no avail. She also shared that she has researched online material since her child was born and would continue to do so. When her son was three, he was already reading. Dolly placed him in a pre-school program and her critique of the pre-school program resulted in

her deciding that she would have to be her son's mother and teacher. She shared that "I will ensure that he will know everything, because on the outside of my home, there are too many other children the teachers have to care for and they will not give my son the extra attention that I will give him."

The overall description of the participant pool consisted of nine military family members. Eight were military spouses and one a military soldier. All nine participants wanted more for their children and did not support the complete process in which their children were being taught within the traditional school setting. The participants' children being homeschooled ranged from 1st through 11th grade. They were all willing to participate freely regarding their experiences of homeschooling their children.

### **Data Collection**

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews. Phenomenology is focused on descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses (Sokolowski, 1999). "Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for an individual's passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 59). Nine participants were interviewed as part of this study. The first six interviews, after a series of emails, were conducted by phone. After several e-mails to the last three participants, a time and day could not be set. In two situations, after the interview was scheduled, the interviewee was not available. For the last three interviews,

the participants elected to document their answers using an electronic Word document and emailed the answers to me.

Each participant was contacted once by email or phone for a follow-up via email.

During the initial interview, the participants answered the following questions:

1. What are the grade levels of your children which you homeschool?
2. Since homeschooling your children, how many times have you moved?
3. Why did you elect to homeschool your child/children?
4. When did you become aware of online resources for education in homeschooling your child/ren and how?
5. Talk about a situation where you replaced or decided not to replace a traditional teaching resource with an online resource. What led to you make that decision?
6. Describe the benefits or challenges of using online resources. What would be your reaction if your child did not have access to online resources?
7. How much discussion do you have with your child about the topic you are presenting? Is there an opportunity for him or her to communicate with another student or adult to increase his or her level of understanding?
8. From your experiences of the responses which you have given me, and from your experiences of using online resources to homeschool your child/ren, what recommendations can you provide to military parents, who may be considering using online resources to home school their children?

The oral interviews were recorded on a digital tape recorder and downloaded to a professional transcribing service. The transcribing service provided a Word document of the transcript within a three-day period for a nominal fee. The cities of the participants' locations were not disclosed; however, the geographical locations were cited.

The duration of the interviews varied from participant to participant. I encouraged the participants the opportunity to answer the questions freely, without interruption, therefore, the length of time varied according to the participants' comfort level of expanding thoroughly upon the question. Some participants gave more simplistic, direct answers, then waiting for the next questions. There were nine participants.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Christensen (2004), phenomenologists assume that there is some commonality in human experiences, and the researchers seek to understand the essence of this experience. I sought to discover the experiences of military families who homeschool their children to determine if there are commonalities in their experiences and perceptions.

The coding process included coding the responses, key phrases, as well as key quotes from each participant. A large amount of words that produced commonalities was revealed. I used a word cloud software, *Wordly*, to get a visual image of the most commonly used terms. In each coding process, the word bank simplified the identified terms to a smaller data bank. Several categories and themes became evident through the course of the interviews.

These themes or categories produced light on the thought process of parents in choosing to home school their child/ren and the extent of the use of online resources to augment or replace traditional teaching methods. These themes also reveal the shortcomings of public and private schools in catering to the individual needs of children, especially those from a military family. The parents spoke freely and in some cases proudly of their decision to homeschool their child/ren and the subsequent struggles and benefits of the decision.

The first part of the interviews addressed the motivation behind the parents' decision to homeschool their children. The answers of the parents were diverse and unique to the situation of the family in question. However, there remained an underlying commonality in the views from the parents, which stemmed from the fact that they were military families. Several parents questioned the ability of regular "brick and mortar schools," public, private or charter schools as they were referred to by several parents, to cater to their child/ren's specific needs. Several parents stated that their children were too advanced in their learning and so the local school's curriculum would just be redundant and boring to the children. Parents also questioned the classroom environment and suggested it suppressed the individuality of children and that teachers were not able to give the children the attention they required. One parent stated the commute time to the local Department of Defense school was the factor that pushed him/her to homeschool.

The second part of the interviews addressed the process of diffusion with regards to the parents learning about and using online resources to aid the education of their

children. Parents were asked about how they discovered various online resources, their experience with using said resources, and the extent of their interaction with the child/ren during the homeschooling process. A majority of the parents stated that they discovered the online resources through friends or local homeschool networks. They discussed the benefits of using these resources and a recurring theme among these parents in this aspect was that such resources kept their child/ren engaged and catered to their individual needs.

### **Decision to Homeschool Their Child/ren**

A recurring theme in the answers provided by the parents showed that the decision to homeschool was driven by the inability of traditional schools to cater to the individual needs of the child/ren. Crystal stated “We really felt like we could get more accomplished in an individual way that really met their personal needs, that they couldn't get in that large classroom setting.” Several of the children in question were advanced learners; hence, the standard course curriculum bored them leading the parents to consider alternative education methods. Several parents pointed to administrative deficiencies in schools. Angela stated that a school principal decided to hold back one of her children because the school frowned upon twins being in the same class. She said, “So with that, we decided to homeschool the rest of the year, because that was basically the straw that broke the camel's back. There was no reason to pull him back.”

Some parents pointed to developmental issues in the children as the reason for homeschooling. Their dissatisfaction with the local schools to cater to their child's requirements led to their decision to homeschool. Tiffany responded, “We had tried our

best to make modifications within the classroom to better assist, but they all failed. After thoughtful consideration, the option of attending an online public school from home presented itself.”

### **Use of Online Resources**

The interviews revealed that Rogers’s diffusion process was evident in the parents’ decision to adopt the use of online resources in their homeschooling process. Several parents got the idea of homeschooling from friends or groups. Tiffany attributed her discovery to a network of military friends. She stated that:

We had tried our best to make modifications within the classroom to better assist, but they all failed. After thoughtful consideration, the option of attending an online public school from home presented itself ... we just spent about an hour on the phone one day and she told me all these resources that she used.

Angela discovered these resources from families in her church. “We had a couple families in our church, at the time, they were homeschooling their children and that's how I found out,” she said. Some of the parents, however, came across these resources through their own research. Crystal stated the lack of a local homeschool network in their region resulted in her coming across several options online. She said, “I was feeling a little overwhelmed. The military moved to a community that didn't have a strong homeschool network, so I felt kind of isolated and needed some support.”

All of the parents stated that these online resources have either replaced or augmented traditional teaching methods. Crystal stated that the extent of use depended on the nature of the child. She stated that while one of her two children responded to use of online tools and classes such as *Khan Academy*, the other desired a physical connection to books. Wilma, another parent, used online resources to formulate a curriculum that was specifically tailored to cater her child's needs. Wilma stated:

I had a daughter that was struggling with the traditional curriculum and how it was set up, and the standards that they had. She just wasn't grasping material that was being taught. So, basically I found a book, and then went online, gathered information from different websites, and made up my own test and curriculum.

Angela adapted interactive tutorials and games to engage her children because:

traditional spelling of writing the words over and over and over again, one, it was disinteresting to them; they didn't like doing it; you know, they hated practicing it that way, and too, I think they actually learned it faster by just playing the game, because they wanted to beat the games. So that was one thing I definitely completely replaced, which was spelling, and I will no longer buy a spelling curriculum.

The interviews revealed that the parents were satisfied with using the tools provided online to augment or replace traditional education, and they explicitly stated on numerous occasions that homeschooling resulted in a better learning environment for

their children. The parents' dependencies on the Internet varied; however, they all made it evident that Internet access was a requirement to their homeschooling methods.

### **Extent of Interaction of the Students With Parents and With Other Children**

This part of the interview explored the “theory of constructivism” in relation to the homeschooling environment. It revealed that the parents generally reviewed or actively discussed the activities undertaken by the students online. Parents' responses suggested that parent-child discussions generally depended on the education level of children. That is, high school children generally learned on their own with limited monitoring from the parents to ensure that they were progressing. Children of middle school or lower levels needed greater involvement from the parents. Crystal stated:

My philosophy with my high schoolers, when my kids are in high school, I try and let them be as independent as possible so they don't feel like I'm hovering. I want them to be able to go to college where I'm not going to be there to hover.

Rosemary, whose children are younger, stated,

How much discussion we have about the topic being presented depends on what the topic is and what's being learned. But, generally, since my children are still really young we discuss the majority of everything that's being learned.

In relation to interaction with other children, parents tried to involve their children in various activities. Some parents employed the use of online classrooms to promote

active discussion between their children and other students as well as with tutors. Wilma stated:

My son had the opportunity to work in online classrooms this year that were run much more efficiently than they had been in the past with a teacher and other students, and he really enjoyed learning that way. He learned how to work as a team and had the opportunity to interact with the students that was something that was new to him.

Discussions between students using electronic communication such as SKYPE were also promoted by the parents, as was the case for Nancy who said, “We've even talked about doing this Skype class with friends of ours, and us, take a curriculum and we teach the basics at home, and then we Skype on a regular basis to have that group interaction.” The parents’ responses in the interviews generally suggested a satisfaction with their children’s ability to interact with others, not only of their own age group, but also with adults, something that is lacking in a conventional school environment as stated by several parents.

Table 3 contains keywords and quotations that were revealed during the first interview. These key themes channeled alignment during the interviews, constraining me to focus on the purpose as well as the research questions at hand. The interaction of the participant led to an opportunity to share their experiences as well as challenged them to make a choice on what was appropriate or inappropriate to share of their online experience.

Table 3

## Keywords and Quotations That Revealed the Key Themes During the Interviews

Key terms	Quotes
Inappropriate interaction	We really felt like we could get more accomplished in an individual way that really met their personal needs, that they couldn't get in that large classroom setting.”(Stated by Crystal)
Opportunity, Involved	There are so many resources, and so many people out there that are willing to help. Find a Facebook board,
Self-directed, Online	But find what works for your children, and most people are very willing to go above and beyond to help.
Choice, Challenged	They actually weren't learning anything new. So again we decided homeschooling just works so much better, because we're not holding them back

While the parents generally stated the shortcomings of local schools as the main reason to adopt homeschooling, Nancy stated the commute distance and location as the primary reasons. The concerned family was stationed in Korea and the time by bus to the local Department of Defense School was 1 hour and 40 minutes. Nancy stated, “And I told her there's no way that I am going to put you on a bus in a foreign country for over three hours a day.” Although this case was different from the others in the sense that the parent did not express particular dissatisfaction of the school, the problem still stems from the fact that the family in question is a military family and thus relevant to this study.

Most parents expressed complete satisfaction with the use of online material to aid homeschooling with the general problems being a set timeframe to attend online classes thus limiting the inherent flexibility that comes with homeschooling. Angela,

however, expressed the need to preview any content online before showing it to the children. She expressed the need to “protect the children from the dark side of the Internet.” Angela stated during the interview:

The challenges that we've come across using online resources would be making sure that your child remains safe from the dark side of the Internet. This year we were asked to use an online resource called ToonDoo to create a cartoon from a previous writing assignment. When my husband went to review the work he observed that the site was filled with pornographic and sexually suggestive cartoons; this is an alarming problem, seeing as the website primarily catered for children of a sensitive age.

The result of this incident was not, however, to put parents off from using the Internet but rather caused parents to more strictly review any material being adopted from various resources to ensure a safe learning environment for their children.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

The initial interviews shed considerable light on the parents' experiences in homeschooling their children. Parents were able to recall a significant amount of information regarding the reasons for homeschooling and usage of online resources and were able to give recommendations to other parents looking to homeschool their children by relating their own experience and outcomes. Parents were even able to recall the

names of software or websites that they used for their children. Parents presented their arguments with firm recollections of their experiences.

As stated in chapter 3, any ambiguity was clarified by follow-up interviews. Additionally, transcripts from the interviews were sent to the parents in order to verify the authenticity and accuracy of the collected data. In addition, the questions to be posed in the interview were given to the parents beforehand so that they had significant time to prepare concise and relevant responses at the time of interview. Instead of using an ad-hoc strategy and putting parents on the spot, they were given time to properly think about their responses and hence give accurate responses during the actual interviews. The interviews were conducted in a comfortable environment and participants were given the option to withdraw from the study without stating cause.

### **Dependability**

The transcribed copies of the interviews were sent to the participants for verification, and they were encouraged to delete or edit any information that they felt did not effectively and accurately portray the discussions. The transcripts and analysis were also crosschecked by myself as well as by my chairperson to remove any further problems of accuracy or any personal bias and to ensure the data collected retained accuracy and avoided bias or misinformation. The number of interviews (nine) was noted in the analysis report.

### **Transferability**

A third party transcribed the interviews, and the transcripts were sent to the parents for verification. Only upon their approval were the interviews included in this study, ensuring accuracy of transcripts. The steps undertaken to conduct the interviews including the consent form format and process of contacting prospective participants have been carefully explained in previous sections ensuring that other researchers are able to replicate the steps, if required. An in-depth analysis of the data has been carried out which provides not only results of the endeavor but also explains in detail the interviews linked with the study. The last question of the interview asked parents for recommendations for other military parents looking to homeschool their children. This question is one that allows for further research work and allows for a comparison between this and other studies of the same subject.

The interviews, conducted in a manner that was consistent with the conceptual framework of this study (as stated in chapter 3), showed how the diffusion process applied to using online resources in homeschooling. The parents' responses highlighted the steps of the diffusion of online resources in homeschooling. The parents described how they learned of these resources from other parents or by researching individually. The parents then decided to adopt these alternative methods, replacing or augmenting the traditional educational methods, and spoke of the different ways they implemented the techniques in their teaching methods. The parents judged the effectiveness of using these methods with all of them stating that using online resources not only made it easier and

more engaging for students to learn but also simplified the parents' tasks. They gave recommendations to other parents, all of them supporting the use of online resources in homeschooling stating its effectiveness in comparison to the traditional schooling system.

The interviews shed light on aspects of connectivism and constructivism in home schooling environments, especially in military households. The parents were able to comprehensively describe their situations and link the problem to their military background. They described how they came to the solution of homeschooling and how using online resources aided them in their endeavor. They also shared the results of this decision with several parents using their children's performance in college as a benchmark.

The reliability and objectiveness of the data and analysis was ensured by using independent transcriptions, cross checking and verification by the participants themselves. In this way I ensured that personal bias did not in any way affect the findings and conclusions of this study.

### **Research Findings**

The conceptual framework of this study reflects on Rogers' diffusion process whereas innovation is communicated through different channels over time with members of the social systems. In this case, it was military parents who homeschooled their children. The study also tailored around constructivism where learning was embedded in cultural and social aspects of society and in the minds of individuals in making sense of experiences that are continuously modified during new lived experiences. After the

interviews, and over a period of time, using the diffusion process, as well as viewing and analyzing the knowledge, persuasion, decision, and confirmation of the constructivist, I was able to add insight to the research questions of this study:

1. What experiences do military parents encounter in homeschooling their children using online resources?
2. What recommendations do home schooling military parents have for other transitioning military parents?

In answering the first question, I discovered in my findings, that nine military families shared the following experiences, in homeschooling their children using online resources.

1. Frustrations at the beginning when parents realized that they were on a new adventure with their children's future for success in their hands.
2. Doubt in wondering and believing that the correct decision was made in the selection of the homeschooling program.
3. Doubt in their ability to be an effective teacher for their children. Although some parents had an educational background, they questioned their confidence level.
4. Success in reaching out to other homeschooling parent for networking and collaborations.

5. Trial and error of what program worked best for their children. In one household, one child was successful with online resources, whereas the other child worked best and was successful with a book in her hand.
6. Several families experienced the knowledge of detecting when a program was not a correct fit for their child and had the wisdom to switch programs without prolonging the process.
7. Parents also experienced a sense of partnership with their children, whereas the children had a say in what and when they would study a particular subject. The parents had standards and a curriculum to follow; however, there was flexibility in the sequences of events.
8. Parents experienced the interaction of meeting with other families during the course of the week at different locations in order for their children to collaborate socially, emotionally, and academically.
9. Parents experienced that they bonded with their children through daily communication and discussions from a vast array of subjects.
10. In using the Internet, parents experienced the fact they were responsible for censoring the websites that their students would visit.
11. Parents experienced the fact that the Internet provided a comprehensive selection of all of the resources that they needed to educate their children.
12. Parents also experienced the enjoyment and security of taking a vacation at any time of the year, in particular during the off-seasons where the

surroundings were not as crowded and the expenses more affordable. Parents also discovered that their children's classroom traveled whenever and wherever they traveled without worrying about how many days of schools their children would miss, and how would they make up the work.

13. Several parents experienced the fact that they were extremely successful in homeschooling their children with the core classes, and there was latitude for their children to attend the traditional school, for the elective classes, which include music, art, theater, sports, and computer classes.
14. There was a split in the parents' views and experiences in standardized test taking. Several believed that standardized testing did not measure the knowledge of the child, stating that test anxieties occur often. Another parent's child scored in the 90th percentile in both the ACT and SAT.
15. Several parents experienced academic success with their special needs children through using online resources. However, one of these parents feared the social and emotional withdrawal of her child. The child often clung to her side and was possessive of her time and existence.
16. Parents experienced freedom in homeschooling their children using the online resources. In many incidents, parents stated that in the traditional school, the administrators and teachers were not always willing and flexible to meet their child's needs in opportunities for growth and for differentiating instruction.

17. The parents experienced success by using online resources to augment or replace the traditional education in educating their children.

The constructivist learning provided for social negotiation and encouraged ownership in the learning as well as self-awareness of the construction of knowledge. In answering the second question, I discovered in my findings that nine military families homeschooling their children had the following recommendations for military parents who anticipate homeschooling their children:

1. Give homeschooling a good deal of thought and investigate according to the needs of your child.
2. Ask yourself why, and list the pros and cons on paper.
3. Really, consider your time. It takes lots of time and it is not easy to homeschool your children. You have to monitor your child at home, and the parent must be a partner in the educational process with their children.
4. Parents must advocate for their children, therefore, they must stay current on methodology, educational regulations, and college admission requirements.
5. Parent should allow for socialization with other students and adults, and parents must teach their children to advocate for themselves and to provide opportunities for this process.
6. Parents must talk with their children and discuss the educational process. Students must be aware of curriculum and standards and to understand why they are learning what they are learning.

7. Parents should make a weekly, monthly, quarter, semester plan for their children. This plan should become a yearly plan, and from there, a long-term graduation plan should be outlined on a time line chart. There are many online templates available to complete this task.
8. Parents must ensure lessons and grades are documented. Parents should monitor and ensure that their children are building and adding to their portfolio.
9. Parents should network with neighboring teachers to ensure that they are aware of the latest trends and occurrences. Parents could request to be added to the mailing list of daily bulletins and parent newsletters.
10. Parents should become members of local homeschooling cohort groups for homeschooling support and collaboration.
11. It is recommended and encouraged that parents reach out and seek help early.
12. Homeschooling is a process and a commitment; it is a full time job and should be analyzed carefully.
13. If possible, shadow a family who is homeschooling their children before making the final decision.
14. Explore many different programs to see the best fit for your children. Parents may consider merging several programs together in order to provide a comprehensive program for their children.

15. Find an ongoing systematic way of assessing and monitoring your children's progress.
16. In the relaxation of your own home, ensure that a learning environment of rigor and an atmosphere of academic excellence is provided.
17. Constantly evaluate your children's progress and be open to change.

In the conceptual framework of Rogers' diffusion process, the military parents gained knowledge and became aware of the homeschool process. The successes of other military families, who elected to homeschool their children, persuaded other military families to pursue the options. Nine military homeschool families decided, over time, to replace the traditional teaching method by using online resources. The military homeschool families evaluated their success, and by confirmation offered to share their experiences with other military families, as well as offered suggestions and recommendations for their consideration.

### **Summary**

This chapter represented the process and findings of this study. It includes a description of the setting, the participant's demographics and characteristics relevant to the study, and a review of the data collection presentation, as well as the data analysis process and the evidence of trustworthiness. A summary of the results addressed each research question.

In the next chapter, a comparison between the findings of this study and the literature review conducted in previous sections was reviewed. Detailed interpretations of

the findings in relationship to the conceptual framework of the study were conducted and recommendations for further study were provided based on the success or limitations of this study and those conducted in the past.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this chapter, I discuss conclusions and compare the findings of the previous section to the literature review of Chapter 2. In the literature review section, several key variables were introduced and discussed, which included homeschooling, dynamics of military families, background of homeschooling, the reasons behind parental decisions to homeschool, concern over educational excellence, special-needs children, family values and beliefs, the lack of funding which leads to substandard schools, parental qualifications, and online resources such as mailing lists, virtual classrooms, tutorials, and so on. In this chapter, I compare the literature review with the data obtained for each variable mentioned.

The limitations of the study are explored in context of the data gathering and analysis. In addition, limitations related to the scope of the study are explored, and recommendations are made for further research to be conducted on the subject.

Lastly, the impact of homeschooling using online resources is discussed in the context of the military family environment as well as society as a whole. This subsection addresses the growing trend of homeschooling and the impact that the availability of online resources has had on this trend.

### **Interpretations of the Findings**

#### **Homeschooling**

The data gathered shed significant light on the reasons behind homeschooling. Parents generally showed dissatisfaction with conventional schools, specifically related to

their administration, the quality of education, and the inflexibility of the system to cater to children's needs, whether they are of an advanced learning level or special-needs children. The inability of teachers in schools to pay the appropriate amount of attention to students in overcrowded classes also contributed to the problems that parents had with conventional schooling. In some cases, the location of the family led to the family's decision to homeschool the children. Although not initially apparent, many parents' decision to homeschool their children stemmed from their background as a military family.

Some of the families were stationed outside of the United States, where the available schools were the local Department of Defense Schools. Lombardi (2011) reported deplorable conditions at nearly 353 base schools on military installations, all of which failed to meet the military's minimum standards. Such schools had problems of lack of proper infrastructure, lack of facilities, and overcrowding.

Apart from the Department of Defense schools, parents were also dissatisfied with traditional schooling, whether public or private. In previous studies, as discussed in Chapter 2, it was found that 16 % of parents started homeschooling their children because of dissatisfaction with the instruction of local schools. In a study by Saghir (2011) conducted on 10 Muslim women, the results showed that homeschooled children performed better than those in the traditional schooling system in standardized exams. Children with special needs find it difficult to learn in standard schools because of a lack of or mismanagement of special-needs programs. In such cases, parents believe that the

best solution for the children is the individualized attention they can only receive in a homeschooling environment.

The data gathered in Chapter 4 mainly supports the arguments put forward in previous research about the reasons parents decide to homeschool. Parents expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of education in local schools. One such parent wanted his child to be able to keep up at schools with higher standards than the local ones and hence decided to homeschool. Parents were also unhappy with the inflexibility of local schools in dealing with children, especially those who were learning at a more advanced level and those with special needs or developmental issues. One mother stated that her children, who would be in Grade 5 if they attended a regular school, were studying at an eighth grade level at home. She attributed this to the flexibility in the curriculum in homeschooling and the ability to work all year instead of on a fixed schedule, as is the case in conventional schools. This is supported by a study indicating that such parents are driven by the need to have a sense of freedom in the education of their children, because in traditional schooling they are not listened to because everything is already structured and programmed for their children (Saghir, 2011). It is also supported by another study reported by Lips and Feinberg (2008, cited in Saghir, 2011) indicating that 20,760 homeschooled children scored at the 70th to 80th percentiles on their academic achievement tests. Another parent decided to homeschool her child because of developmental issues and as a result created an effective environment in which the child could learn. Some parents also pointed to administrative shortcomings in local schools.

One parent was told by the principal of a local school that one of her children was being held back because school policy did not allow twins in the same classroom. Geographic location also played a significant role in a parent's decision.

The data revealed supports the arguments presented in previous research, as both this study and past research show dissatisfaction with local schooling, relocation due to military background, and inflexibility of curriculum as the primary reasons behind parents' inclination toward homeschooling.

### **Use of Online Resources**

Online resources provide a new dynamic to the homeschooling environment, which is sometimes lacking in traditional schooling. Innovations in technology and the Internet have resulted in numerous webpages that are interactive and engaging for students, especially younger ones. Many virtual classes are now online, where the student not only has access to tutorials but also can participate in a live class environment and can discuss various topics with other children as well as with their tutors. Many games and interactive learning tools are available, which develop an interest in the subject within the children. The Internet is a useful tool not only for children, but also for homeschooling parents, who can access the large amount of information online to better plan their curriculum. In addition, numerous opportunities are available for parents to connect with other parents in similar situations for advice using tools such as Facebook. Smarthinking (2013) is a parent and student connection resource that is available 24

hours a day, 7 days a week from the Internet and offers a live, on-demand tutoring service.

Virtual schooling is one tool afforded by the Internet. It allows students to “work from home” in a sense. Lessons are taught using podcasts, and students can discuss lessons with their instructors and other students in live video sessions. The parents’ involvement in this case becomes minimal in the sense that the parents just have to monitor their children and ensure proper attendance. Virtual schooling was also very popular with the participants of this study, but it was not the only resource used by parents. “Khan Academy” was popular among the parents because of its well laid out structure. Some parents, however, preferred not to use material “that required children to log in at a specific time.” The parents in question preferred more flexible methods, such as interactive tutorials and games. Kearsley (2012), in his system view of online learning, established open entry programs, which educate students who are not on campus. Useful resources for parents in planning their curricula were mailing lists or other online forums such as Facebook. One parent described Facebook as a “necessary evil,” as it allowed her to discuss plans with other homeschooling parents.

The results of the data analysis showed that evidence backed up findings of previous studies with regard to the use of online resources for homeschooling. In addition, some parents suggested the use of Skype for interactions between children. When asked how parents would feel if they did not have access to the Internet, responses varied and depended on the nature of the child and his or her affinity with the online

resources. However, a majority of the participants described the situation in terms such “unimaginable” and “difficult,” highlighting the affect that these resources have had on the homeschool environment.

In the context of the conceptual framework of this study, the data gathered highlighted the diffusion process (Rogers, 2003) of online resources. Parents gathered knowledge of these resources, whether from friends or research, and were persuaded to use those resources. They were convinced of implementing the new resources to replace or augment traditional teaching methods in their homeschool environment and evaluated the performance of their children to judge the effectiveness of using the stated resources.

In following with the constructivist theory (Brooks and Brooks, (1993), use of online resources in homeschooling allowed children the freedom to learn at their own pace and to experience concepts in real life rather than just learning from a textbook. Virtual classrooms allowed for active participation between students and their teachers and children were free to discuss the concepts with their parents, who played a more active role in their children’s studies. The lack of a set timeframe allowed children the time to digest what they were learning.

The findings of the study also highlighted aspects of connectivism in the homeschool environment that is contrary to the common belief that homeschooled children are socially awkward. As revealed by the parents that participated in the study, homeschooled children had plenty of opportunities to interact with other children using Internet-based tools. For example, in virtual classrooms or chat rooms, homeschooled

children were also involved in other activities, which afforded them the opportunity for live interactions with other children, as well. In addition, homeschooled children appear to be more proficient at interacting with adults, one parent stated.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The major limitations of the study were the sampling method and sample size, a problem that resulted in the data not conclusively being able to represent all military families in the U.S. The questions of personal bias skewing the results of the data analysis, and the accuracy of the data have been answered effectively through the techniques employed for data gathering and analysis. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were afforded the right to withdraw without question. Questions that were to be posed in the interviews were sent to each participant beforehand so that they could give well thought out answers, thus offsetting the issue of recollection during the interview. The interviews were conducted by phone or by email. The interviews were transcribed by a third party, ensuring that they were free from any personal bias. The transcripts were then sent to each participant for verification and they were given the option to delete or edit any part, which they thought misrepresented their views, again guarding against problems of personal bias and accuracy. The data were analyzed using different software and the analysis was crosschecked independently. In this way, I have ensured the dependability of the data.

### **Recommendations for Further Studies**

The limitations faced by this study mainly stemmed from practical implementation problems during the data gathering part of the study. The method employed for sampling was snowball sampling rather than probabilistic sampling. In addition, the sample size (nine families) was too small to represent all military families. In future studies, a greater sample size should be used for data gathering, which would help paint a more complete picture of the circumstances and experiences of military homeschooling parents.

This study also did not factor in situations of single parents involved in homeschooling their children, which is particularly pertinent in military households. A correlation between being single parents and homeschooling can be further explored and is an area where this study is lacking.

The statistics for use of online resources could also be further explored to discover trends in the use of those resources. Such statistics could include the enrollment in online classes and user traffic on different webpages.

Military children of the appropriate age from both conventional school and homeschool environments could also be interviewed to gauge the effectiveness of homeschooling methods and the online resources employed for this purpose. These children do not necessarily need to be ones who are currently being homeschooled but rather can be people who have been homeschooled in the past.

### **Implications**

This study can prospectively have several positive social implications on the current educational dynamic in the country, specifically in military families and schools. The study addresses the root causes of the shift in military households from conventional schooling to homeschooling. From the interviews, I highlight the experience of military parents who have decided to homeschool their children and include recommendations for other parents. I explored the benefits and struggles associated with homeschooling from a parent's perspective and discuss the outcomes of homeschooling. This study also addresses the use of online resources for both parents and children and the role that resources have played in the education of children and the ability of the parents to plan curriculum effectively. Pannone (2014) in her study listed a plethora of effective homeschool resources.

Studies showed an increasing trend in homeschooling, specifically in military households, and this study addresses the causes behind this trend. In addition to the constant relocation associated with military families, the dissatisfaction of parents with existing schools, whether they be Department of Defense schools or otherwise, was cited as a major factor in persuading parents to adopt homeschooling. Studies showed deplorable conditions in Department of Defense schools and the low standard of education in schools in general was a major reason for this dissatisfaction. This study addresses said issues with the hope of a solution to these problems.

The study also explored the parents' experiences with homeschooling and included recommendations from the participants for other parents considering homeschooling. It allowed the parents to express their experiences of homeschooling and with the use of online resources. This will allow other parents to judge the effectiveness of homeschooling and the recommendations provided by the participants will allow other parents who are hesitant to adopt homeschooling as an alternative to conventional schools to make a decision.

### **Summary**

This study explored the various aspects homeschooling in relation to military families. It explored the motivations behind the parents' decision to adopt homeschooling their children, the deficiencies of the traditional schooling system, and the use of online resources to replace or augment traditional teaching methods. The study also explored in detail the experiences of parents who have homeschooled their children and included their recommendations for other parents as well.

The various online resources available to parents and students have also been thoroughly explored which included virtual classrooms, interactive games, live online discussions between students, and forums to assist parents in curriculum planning. The study explored the impact that those resources had on the homeschool environment and on teaching methods. During data collection, participants of the study were specifically asked how the concerned resources have replaced or augmented existing teaching methods. Previous literature was carefully studied and comparisons were drawn between

findings in previous literature and those of this study. This allowed for a more accurate interpretation of the results of this study.

The recommendation given by parents during the course of this study suggests that homeschooling is a very effective method of education because of several reasons. Firstly, it caters for the individual needs of a child and allows children to express their individuality without becoming “one of a crowd” as is the case in conventional schools. Secondly, the flexibility inherent with homeschooling allows each child to work at his/her own pace, thus ensuring more effective learning without the pressure of working on a fixed schedule. Students, in this way, become more independent and self-directed in their study. Lastly, contrary to the stereotype, homeschooled children are not socially hindered, but rather they have sufficient opportunities to interact with other children of their own age group and also deal better with situations that require children to interact with adults.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent

### **CONSENT FORM**

You are invited to take part in a research study of “The Experiences of Military Parents’ Use of Online Teaching Resources.” This research study focuses on the experiences of military families who homeschool their children, using online resources. The research study will document and analyze the knowledge and perceptions of military families who homeschool their children through the use of online resources. The findings should be of interest to other military families as an educational option to explore and consider. The researcher is inviting 15 military families who are homeschooling their child/children and who have done so for the past three or more years to participate in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Georgia Watters, who is a doctoral student.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of military parents involved in home- schooling their children through the use of online resources. Despite the obvious use of the Internet by homeschooling military parents, little is known about the experiences of these home- schooling military parents using online tools.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to: Set aside up to one hour for the interview process and up to 30 minutes to participate in the follow-up interview, based on the data collection from the 1st interview. The interview will be conducted via phone, Skype, or e-mail and interviews done via phone or Skype will be audio recorded.

The following questions were asked:

1. What are the grade level of your children which you homeschool?
2. Since homeschooling your children, how many times have you moved?
3. Why did you elect to homeschool your child/children?
4. When did you become aware of online resources for education in homeschooling your child/ren and How?
5. Talk about a situation where you replaced or decided not to replace a traditional teaching resource with an online resource. What lead to you making that decision?
6. Describe the benefits or challenges of using online resources. What would be your reaction if your child did not have access to online resources
7. How much discussion do you have with your child about the topic you are presenting? Is there an opportunity for him or her to communicate with another student or adult to increase his or her level of understanding?

8. What advise/recommendations can you share that will help other military parents who may elect to homeschool their children?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. The researcher will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may exit from the process at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Participating in this study would not pose a risk to your safety or wellbeing. There are minimal risks to participating in this study. Minimal risks, such as disclosure of confidential information about the homeschooling process could be discussed and will be kept confidential. There is no risk of coercion to participate, as participation is voluntary.

The proposed study is of significance to the military parents who are homeschooling their children or who are considering homeschooling. The study will identify various online tools used to enrich the learning of military children being homeschooled. Further, the study will recommend various online tools that parents can use to enhance their ability to teach their children and promote learning. This will allow parents to interact with other parents and share their experiences. Furthermore, an examination of the experiences of military parents' home- schooling their children through online tools will shed light on the "research question" which military parents attach to homeschooling their children through the Internet.

**Payment: no payment****Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be stored electronically in a password protected computer with the researcher only having access to that computer and file. However, for the forms with collected data with pseudonyms, they will be stored at a password-protected computer at the university. The potential participants will be made aware that data collected from them will be held with utmost confidentiality and that their names or any personal identifier will never be used anywhere during the research study, including the reporting of the findings. Data will be kept for a period of at least five years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now, or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can contact the Walden University representative. Walden University's approval number for this study is 05-05-14-0020702 and it expires on May 4, 2015.

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this email with the words, “I consent”, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

## Appendix B: Data Collection Tool—Guided Interview Questions Data

This research study focuses on the experiences of military families who homeschool their children, using online resources. The key research topic “What experiences do military parents encounter in homeschooling their children using online resources.” The proposed study seeks to answer two questions:

1. What experiences do military parents encounter in homeschooling their children using online resources?
2. What recommendations do home schooling military parents have for other transitioning military parents?

I will be interviewing 9 Air Force military families who homeschool their children. I would like to ask you a series of questions in order that I can learn of your experiences in homeschooling your children.

Demographic Questions:

What are the grade level of your children which you homeschool?

Since homeschooling your children, how many times have you moved?

Why did you elect to homeschool your child/children?

The following guided data related to Rogers (Orr, 2003) concerning what parents have experienced at each stage of the diffusion process in relationship to using online resources will guide the interview questions, which are listed below:

Knowledge—Person become aware of an innovation and has some idea of how it functions.

Interview Question: When did you become aware of online resources for education in homeschooling your child/ren and How?

Persuasion—Person forms a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the innovation.

Interview Question: What experiences have you had to make you feel positive or negatively about homeschooling your child.

Decision—Person engages in activities that lead to a choice to adopt or reject the

Innovation—Person puts an innovation into use.

Interview Question: Talk about a situation where you replaced or decided not to replace a traditional teaching resource with an online resource. What lead to you making that decision?

Confirmation—Person evaluates the results of an innovation-decision already made.

Interview Question: Describe the benefits or challenges of using online resources. What would be your reaction if your child did not have access to online resources

The following guided data related to Constructivist and what parents have experienced at each stage of the learning process in relationship to using online resources will guide the interview questions (Brooks, 1993).

Determine related student's level of understanding and experiences prior to teaching a new topic (construct new knowledge on what is already known)

Interview Question: How much did your student know before hand and how much did they know afterward and what contributed to the process? How much did interact, and what was the quality of the interaction?

High levels of communication between student-teacher and student-student

Interview Question: How much discussion do you have with your child about the topic you are presenting? Is there an opportunity for him or her to communicate with another student or adult to increase his or her level of understanding?

Critical thinking and inquiry is encouraged through open-ended questions and facilitating further collaborative questioning.

Interview Question: How much of your instruction involves open-ended questions and collaborative inquiry?

Encourage creation of situation that contradict previous conceptions and encourage discussion.

Interview Question: How do you handle situations that challenge and contradict previous student understanding? Give an example of when you might have created an experience that required your student to rethink previous understandings.

Allow extended amount of time for reflective responses and for time to create own meaning of new learning.

### Appendix C: Guided Interview Follow-Up Questions for Data Collection

As stated in the first interview, this research study focuses on the experiences of military families who homeschool their children, using online resources. If necessary, the following guided interview question will be used for clarification. The key research topic “What experiences do military parents encounter in homeschooling their children using online resources?” The proposed study seeks to answer two questions:

1. What experiences do military parents encounter in homeschooling their children using online resources?
2. What recommendations do home schooling military parents have for other transitioning military parents?

I interviewed 15 Air Force military families who homeschool their children. I would like to ask you a few follow-up questions to understand your experiences in homeschooling your children using online resources for academic success.

You stated that...

Can you farther explain...

Help me to understand what you meant when you stated...

After reviewing your notes is there anything that you would like to add or clarify? Are there any additional comments would you like to make?

#### Appendix D: Email Invitation for Research Interview

My name is Georgia Watters; I am a doctoral student, inviting military parents who homeschool and used online resources for at least three years to participate in the study. Below are some particulars of the study and the process. If you agree to participate I will send you the consent form, and from there we can establish a day and time for the interview.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of military parents involved in homeschooling their children through the use of online resources. Despite the obvious use of the Internet by homeschooling military parents, little is known about the experiences of these homeschooling military parents using online tools.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study:

Set aside approximately one hour for the interview process and to participate in one follow-up interview based on what I learn from the first interview.

Participation in the study is strictly voluntarily.

Exiting the process may freely occur at any time, with no explanation.

The following interview questions will be asked:

What are the grade level of your children which you homeschool?

Since homeschooling your children, how many times have you moved?

Why did you elect to homeschool your child/children?

When did you become aware of online resources for education in homeschooling your child/ren and How?

Talk about a situation where you replaced or decided not to replace a traditional teaching resource with an online resource. What lead to you making that decision?

Describe the benefits or challenges of using online resources. What would be your reaction if your child did not have access to online resources

How much discussion do you have with your child about the topic you are presenting? Is there an opportunity for him or her to communicate with another student or adult to increase his or her level of understanding?

From your experiences of the responses which you have given me, and from your experiences of using online resources to homeschool your child/ren, what recommendations can you provide to military parents, who may be considering using online resources to home school their children?

I look forward to finding out more about your homeschooling experiences.

Sincerely

Georgia Watters