

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON REMOTE LEARNING AMONG SECOND-CHOICE  
HOMESCHOOLERS IN WEST VIRGINIA: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Section Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with forced remote learning and homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The label second-choice homeschoolers in this research refers to homeschooling families in West Virginia who have first-hand experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theory guiding this study was Bandura's social cognitive theory, as it aligned with understanding parental homeschooling experiences by focusing on the impact of environmental events on human behavioral patterns. The central research question guiding this study was: What were the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? This study had 14 participants recruited via criterion and snowball sampling. Data was collected through journal prompts, individual interviews, and a focus group. The data analysis process involved using first and second-cycle coding techniques described by Saldana to identify themes and categories aided by memoing. The study contributed to the empirical and theoretical framework. Five significant themes, homeschooling, shutdowns, forced remote learning, academic achievement, and work-life balance, were revealed through thematic analysis. Participants shared positive and negative experiences while using forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results support prior research about the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic closures.

*Keywords:* homeschool, COVID-19, West Virginia, education, homeschool laws, remote learning

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PREVIEW

### **Dedication**

To my husband, Bryan, this would not have been possible without your unwavering encouragement. You are my best friend, biggest supporter, and entrusted confidante.

To my sons Joshua and Jonathan, you inspire me daily. Never give up on your dreams.

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator, from whom all good things flow!

To the memory of my parents, Donald and Barbara, who always believed I could do anything. I miss you and wish you were beside me to celebrate this achievement. I will see you again someday.

To the memory of my grandparents, Woodrow and Audrey, who taught me how to work hard, have fun, and trust God through all things. Your sacrifices and prayers paved the way for the blessings I enjoy.

To my multitude of aunts, uncles, and cousins, your love and encouragement helped me persevere through some of the darkest days of my life while pursuing this degree.

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PREVIEW

### **List of Abbreviations**

Christian Home Educators of West Virginia (CHEWV)

Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA)

Learning Management System (LMS)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM)

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

West Virginia Home Educators Association (WVHEA)

World Health Organization (WHO)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

In West Virginia, parental rights to homeschool are protected by state law (West Virginia Legislature, 2023). Homeschooling families in this study were separated into two categories: those who opted to homeschool for reasons other than the COVID-19 pandemic and those forced into homeschooling due to the closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Throughout this study, homeschoolers who were homeschooling for reasons other than the COVID-19 pandemic were referred to as first-choice homeschoolers. In contrast, those homeschooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic school closings were referred to as second-choice homeschoolers. Some second-choice homeschoolers saw mixed academic outcomes during their forced homeschool experience, with some reporting deficiencies and others reporting gains (Duvall, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). However, the research revealed that as many as 14 percent of second-choice homeschoolers continued to homeschool post-pandemic even though they did not anticipate homeschooling long-term at the onset of their homeschooling journey (Duvall, 2021; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic was reviewed through Bandura's social cognitive theory. In addition to the overview, chapter one included the background, the problem and purpose statement, and the significance of the study. The chapter concluded with research questions and definitions of terms applicable to the current study.

### **Background**

The background section summarized the most pertinent homeschooling literature to ensure an understanding of the framework of this transcendental phenomenology. The



background section provided insight into the phenomenon's historical, social, and theoretical contexts.

## **Historical Context**

Homeschooling has been an accepted educational method throughout history, with parents serving as primary educators for children for hundreds of years; however, this highly effective method of educating children was nearly non-existent in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as parents complied with compulsory education laws present in every state (Bennett et al., 2019; Chen, 2022; Gaither, 2017; Neuman, 2020). In the late 1700s in colonial America, Thomas Jefferson proposed a plan for a national education system funded by American taxpayers (Chen, 2022). Jefferson's education plan for a taxpayer-funded education system was solidified by the expansive works of Massachusetts Secretary of Education Horace Mann and has subsequently evolved into the public education system in use today (Chen, 2022; Heuer & Donovan, 2017). However, parents have schooled their children at home since before the compulsory public education system (Bartholet, 2020; Gaither, 2017; Heuer & Donovan, 2017). The current homeschool movement cannot be fully understood without understanding the roots of educating children in the home (Gaither, 2017). Homeschooling predates compulsory education in America, and research reveals that early homeschooling focused on children learning trades and skills based on the needs of the family (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). In addition to reading and math, girls were likely to learn about housekeeping, while boys were likely to learn about the father's occupation (Heuer & Donovan, 2017).

Massachusetts was the first state to enact a compulsory education statute requiring each city in the state to institute a public education program (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). Interestingly, despite his continual general contention that public schools were the answer to his state's

problems, the recognized founder of compulsory public education, Secretary of Education Horace Mann, homeschooled his children to ensure that they were not corrupted by the masses flooding into the compulsory public education system (Hamlin & Peterson, 2022; Heuer & Donovan, 2017). Research indicates that this hypocritical attitude continues as advocates of compulsory public education opt to homeschool their children or send them to private schools (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). Parental distrust of compulsory public education was widespread upon the system's inception, with many cities opting to pay fines rather than comply with the new statutes based on the belief that compulsory public education would negatively impact the family (Gaither, 2017). Despite the early concerns about compulsory public education, homeschooling was nearly extinct in America in the early 1970s (Ray et al., 2021).

The modern era of homeschooling in America can be traced back to two main developments in the 1960s and 1970s: the conservative Christian movement and the liberal progressive movement (Bartholet, 2020). John Holt, a liberal progressivist, unexpectedly emerged as a prominent advocate for modern homeschooling through his early books, *How Children Fail* and *How Children Learn*, and public appearances touting the benefits of the caring education children receive at home before entering test-centered compulsory public education (Bartholet, 2020; Gaither, 2017; Heuer & Donovan, 2017). Advocacy appeared in the conservative Christian movement from the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) (Bartholet, 2020; Gaither, 2017; Heuer & Donovan, 2017). As a result of pushes from both sides of the political arena, parents began to take their children's education back into their control (Neuman, 2020).

### **Social Context**

COVID-19 impacted Americans across gender, race, ethnicity, education, and income

(Cardel et al., 2020; Girard & Prado, 2022; Price et al., 2021). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, homeschooling was a growing but limited phenomenon; however, closing public schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic thrust thousands of American households into remote learning (Chen, 2022). As a result, many families opted to leave public education remote learning to pursue homeschooling (Girard & Prado, 2022; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021). This study benefits first-choice homeschoolers by evaluating the effectiveness of support attempts offered to second-choice homeschoolers. It also provides insight for public school officials into why families opted out of state-sponsored remote learning in favor of homeschooling.

### **Theoretical Context**

Homeschooling proponents often choose to homeschool to avoid the public school philosophy of education for the masses and instead opt for individualized education for their children (Petrovic & Rolstad, 2017). Classical education focuses on self-directed learning in which the learner discovers knowledge without prompting from an instructor (Klauke, 2019). Homeschooling methodology aligns with classical education and individualized education theory as families focus on life experiences and learner interests to guide the instruction (Pannone, 2017). By freeing themselves from the mass education philosophy of the public school system, parents individualize the instruction to meet their children's specific needs and skills (Pannone, 2017; Petrovic & Rolstad, 2017). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory supposes that learning occurs through interactive processes and external factors in addition to internal cognitive processes (Kurt, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, Maslow's hierarchy of needs related to the theoretical context of homeschooling as a benefit of the individualized education provided by homeschooling. Maslow's hierarchy of needs states that basic needs, such as food, shelter, and security, and psychological needs, such as love and esteem, are prerequisites for an individual to

reach their full potential (McLeod, 2007).

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic created stresses related to the virus, with additional distress from the burden of schooling at home, with many reporting chronic stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic lock downs (Deacon et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the public's ability to meet in groups, including schools and after-school activities (Cardel et al., 2020). In addition to feelings of isolation, many experienced difficulties with technology that further isolated them. (Cardel et al., 2020; Deacon et al., 2021). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, homeschoolers often supplemented their home learning with cooperative groups; however, the COVID-19 pandemic limited homeschoolers' ability to meet face-to-face with other homeschoolers (Cheng & Hamlin, 2022). Cooperatives play an essential role in homeschooling and broadening the experiences of those involved (Anthony, 2015). In America, homeschooling has been a legal school choice with recorded success in all 50 states for more than 25 years, yet despite this, public school advocates launch regular campaigns to either increase homeschooling oversight or ban the choice entirely (Bartholet, 2020; Carlson, 2020; Hamlin, 2020; Ray, 2022). One attack against the right to choose to homeschool came in 2020 from Harvard Law Professor Elizabeth Bartholet (Bartholet, 2020). In a review of homeschooling, Bartholet (2020) proposed a nearly complete ban on homeschooling based on assertions that homeschooled children must be protected from abusive, controlling, and manipulative parents. However, in the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic instigated public school districts across America to abruptly transition to remote learning to slow the spread of the virus (Poulain et al., 2022).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning and forced homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second-choice homeschoolers in this research referred to homeschooling families in West Virginia who have first-hand experience with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theory guiding this study was Bandura's social cognitive theory, which aligns with understanding parental homeschooling experiences by focusing on the impact of environmental events on human behavioral patterns.

### **Significance of the Study**

The following sections shed light on the current study's contributions to the knowledge base from a theoretical, empirical, and practical perspective. The theoretical significance articulates how the research contributes to the theoretical foundations of the problem. The empirical relevance explored how the study was associated with similar studies and how utilizing a phenomenological approach adds to the current literature. Finally, the practical implications highlight the potential significance the knowledge generated from the research may have to the homeschooling community.

### **Theoretical**

This study added to the literature on forced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in West Virginia from the perspective of 14 second-choice homeschoolers. Bandura's social cognitive theory was used to evaluate the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Bandura's revised social cognitive theory reflected how individuals develop thoughts and feelings in addition to learning (Bandura, 1978, 1991, 2018; Cherry, 2022). Social cognitive theory introduced the social environment as a critical component of learning, motivation, and self-regulation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). This study aimed to add to the

existing literature on Bandura's social cognitive theory and provided insight for first-choice homeschoolers and public-school officials by increasing the understanding of second-choice homeschoolers' lived experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

### **Empirical**

This study added to the empirical literature by expanding the understanding of second-choice homeschoolers' use of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Heuer and Donovan (2021) found that information regarding families who opt for homeschooling as their second choice was scarce. The second-choice homeschoolers in this study were families electing to homeschool based on circumstances beyond their control (Anderson, 2022; Gaither, 2017). Additionally, this study confirmed the frequently cited motivations as individualized education, flexibility, freedom from negative influences, and freedom to use a curriculum that supports the family's goals and beliefs (Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Machovcova et al., 2021; Neuman & Guterman, 2021; NHES, 2019). However, the forced remote learning circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic did not align with traditional motivations to homeschool (Anderson, 2022). Lastly, due to the limited variance in demographics and ethnicities within the state, this research study did not align with national homeschool reports like those included in Eggleston and Fields (2021), Heuer and Donovan (2021), Irwin et al. (2022), NHES (2019), and Ray (2022).

### **Practical**

The primary benefit of this study was to increase the understanding of parents' lived experiences with homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The increased understanding benefited two groups: homeschool support groups seeking to support new and potential homeschool families and public school officials hoping to understand parents' motivations for

leaving the public school system. Homeschool support groups in West Virginia included Christian Home Educators of West Virginia, Homeschool Legal Defense Association, and West Virginia Educators Association (CHEWV, 2023; HSLDA, 2023; WVHEA, 2023). These organizations provided support for various concerns that homeschooled families may have. This research enhanced the current knowledge base to include second-choice homeschoolers at a much higher level. Additionally, this research study gave public school officials insight into the motivations behind second-choice homeschoolers' conversion to first-choice homeschoolers. Neuman and Guterman (2021) found that a leading motivation for parents opting out of public education is dissatisfaction with the declining academic standards within the public school system.

### **Research Questions**

One central research question and three sub-questions guided this study.

#### **Central Research Question**

What were the lived experiences of second-choice homeschoolers in West Virginia with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

#### **Sub-Question One**

What were the challenges experienced by second-choice homeschooling families with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

#### **Sub-Question Two**

What were opportunities experienced by second-choice homeschooling families with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

### Sub-question Three

How do parents perceive their child/ren's academic success due to their heightened involvement in their child/ren's education while remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

#### Definitions

1. *Phenomenology* - A study that emphasizes a phenomenon to be studied with a focus on participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
2. *Transcendental Phenomenology* - Phenomenological research in which the researcher identifies and reserves any preconceived ideas about the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
3. *Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory* - This theory is a psychological framework emphasizing an interactive relationship between cognitive and environmental components in learning (Bandura, 1978, 1986, 1991, 2001, 2002, 2018; Cherry, 2022).
4. *Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory* – This theory is based on learning through internal and external and external interactive processes (Kurt, 2020; Neuman, 2020; Vygotsky, 19778).
5. *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* - This is a model of human motivation based on levels of basic human needs (McLeod, 2007).
6. *First-choice Homeschoolers* - Families opting to homeschool for reasons other than school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic are considered first-choice homeschoolers (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Heuer & Donovan, 2021).