An Investigation of Students Perceptions on Connectedness to their School when Learning

Remotely at a City High School in East Tennessee

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Department of Education

School of Social Science and Education

Milligan University, Tennessee

July 2021

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Date of Defense _JULY 21, 2021_

Dissertation Title _An Investigation Of Students Preparation on Connectedness To Their School when Learning Remotely at a City High School in East Tennessee_

Final Approval of Dissertation Defense

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate students' perceptions of connectedness while learning remotely at site school in Northeast Tennessee. The aim of this study was to seek whether students learning remotely felt connected to their school. The participants comprised of grades 10 through 12 and included six total participants. Data were collected via one-on-one interviews, a survey, and one focus group session. Data were analyzed using Creswell's (2013) six step approach for qualitative data analysis. Once organized and coded, three main themes emerged: (1) communication as a foundation for connectedness and relationships; (2) disconnectedness to peers; (3) and readiness to return to in person learning.

These themes provide information for stakeholders involved in remote learning as this mode of education continues to grow beyond pandemic relief.

Keywords: remote learning, virtual learning, connectedness, disconnectedness, social-emotional learning, perceptions, communication

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents, Terri and Rob English. Over the past cumulative 21 years of my educational journey, you have sacrificed, prayed, and shown unlimited support for my endeavors. From the moment I mentioned going on to post-graduate school, your encouragement and prayers have sustained me. Beyond that, you have shown me the love and grace that only a soul filled with Christ is able to render. Thank you.

To my grandparents, Jean and Charles English, that passed away during the completion of this study. They are the embodiment of dedication, hard work, and implementing grit to your craft. Thank you for showing me how much laughter and love can go hand in hand with grit. I miss you every day.

Acknowledgments

I cannot begin without first acknowledging the commitment and support of my dissertation committee members, Dr. Angela Hilton-Prillhart, Dr. Mark Dula, and Dr. Patrick Kariuki. You have created a gracious space for learning, growing, and continual support. I will be forever grateful for how you guided me to through this process and the care you have about me as an individual.

Additionally, this process would not have been the beautiful journey it was without the support of Cohort 3. You each brought joy into my life and challenged me to grow as a professional and personally. I will be forever blessed by the connection and bond we formed as a Cohort. Thank you.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Over the years, school systems have faced many challenges and overcome many obstacles while educating American youths. One of the most challenging obstacles that the educational system faced was the COVID-19 pandemic that flooded the world in 2019 and 2020. By March 2020, in the United States, schools were shutting down all in person learning and quickly pivoted to virtual remote learning in the span of a few weeks (Camera, 2020; E. Green, 2020). This shutdown was necessary to help reduce the spread of the virus, but not all educational institutions and stakeholders were ready to pivot to a completely virtual remote learning environment. This study investigates students' perceptions of connectedness to their school when learning in a remote format.

After March 2020, public schools realized that distance learning was no longer a short-term solution. Administrators and teachers planned to continue distance learning or school closure for the 2019-2020 school year (Camera, 2020; E. Green, 2020). Distance learning, also known as virtual learning, is not a new concept and has been slowly integrated into education over the years. Distance learning originally started as an educational platform for colleges and universities to educate adult learners unable to go to classes in a traditional class schedule (Faibisoff & Willis, 1987).

Blended learning is defined as a combination of technology and traditional instruction modalities (Graham, 2004). While blended learning and project-based learning has increased in popularity over the years among educators, COVID-19 has presented a unique opportunity to investigate how students who are learning from a distance might perceive their schooling, specifically in regards to feelings of connection to teachers, staff, and the larger community that is the school.

For this study, Distance Learning (DL) will be defined as a student equipped with a Chromebook or other learning devices and receives his or her education through a digital learning platform instead of in the brick-and-mortar classroom. According to Greenberg (1998), distance learning is a planned teaching/learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance and is designed to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning (p. 36). Distance learner and remote learner are defined the same and will be used interchangeably for this study. This study will be looking at students who chose to be a remote learner and investigate their perceptions of connectedness to the school they attend.

A body of research supports the importance of feelings of connectedness to school (Arslan, 2017; Zimmerman & Nimon, 2017; Furlong et al., 2011). Connectedness can take on a variety of definitions. The foundational understanding of connectedness for this investigation is found in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which proposes that an individual can function best and be motivated when specific psychological needs are met, specifically in relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These psychological needs being met have been found to have a positive effect on social functioning and personal well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This finding lays the groundwork for understanding that these psychological needs being met are a part of connectedness.

A feeling of connectedness to school has been shown to increase many positive outcomes (Daly et al., 2010). These outcomes include increased emotional well-being, less substance abuse, better physical health, decreased levels of suicidal ideation, reduced depressive symptoms, engagement in more socially appropriate behaviors, reduced risk for teen pregnancy, and are more likely to graduate from high school (Daly et al., 2010; Hodges et al., 2018; Monahan et al., 2010; McNeely et al., 2020). Longitudinal research on connectedness suggests that students that have reported lower connectedness to schools are more likely to experience

mental health issues, like depression, and more likely to have physical and emotional adverse health outcomes (Hodges et al., 2018; Monahan et al., 2010).

Conversely, lacking social connectedness has adverse effects on a well-being. Loprest, Spaulding, and Nightingale (2019) found that feelings of disconnectedness correlate with increased drug use and increased criminal activity. In addition, students who feel disconnected are more at risk for mental health issues (Arslan, 2017; Joyce, 2015; Fosse, 2015).

Researchers, clinicians, and educators have several common indicators of connectedness, including positive and prosocial connection to peers, teachers, and staff at school; a sense of enjoyment and liking of school; a belief that school is important; active engagement in school activities; and a perceived sense of belonging, closeness, and commitment to school (Daly et al., 2010). Connectedness to the school used in this study is defined as the degree to which the student feels socially, emotionally, and mentally connected to their school while they are not physically present learning. Simply put, connectedness is defined as the feeling of belonging and acceptance and the creation of bonding relationships and this is viewed as a positive factor in learning outcomes (Zimmerman & Nimon, 2017).

Longitudinal research has also shown specific school indicators that help increase connectedness, including a safe and supportive classroom environment, teacher support and high standards, and a positive relationship between student and teacher (Monahan et al., 2010). The research conducted on connectedness to school is being used widely to shift pedagogy for teachers and informed decision-making to develop interventions in the schools. However, this research has not included data from a virtual environment. This lack of analysis makes the investigation of connectedness during remote learning a vital endeavor.

Statement of the Problem

This study investigates and evaluates students' perceptions of feelings of connectedness while in a remote learning environment. Research has shown that connectedness is a vital component of adolescents' physical and emotional well-being. Yet, there is a gap in the research on whether students learning from a remote platform feel connected to their school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine students' perceptions of connectedness to their school when in a remote learning environment and identifying areas that help create connectedness or areas that can be improved to provide better connectedness through remote learning.

Research Questions

1. What are the various ways students endorse feelings of connectedness to the school when involved in remote learning? Is there anything different about remote learning that has led to a greater sense of connectedness?

2. What are the factors leading to a sense of disconnectedness during remote learning? Is there anything different about remote learning that has led to a greater sense of disconnectedness?

3. What effect does remote learning have on the students' feelings of connectedness to the school?

Significance of the Study

As the COVID-19 pandemic swept through the world, many changes to the way we work and live our daily lives have shifted. Many educators are making plans to continue virtual academies as an educational path or choice for students and their families. This study could potentially give insights into the benefits and/or consequences of connectedness for students who

choose remote learning. In addition, this study could help parents be more informed of the alternate platforms for education and choose what mode would be more beneficial for their child and family.

This study could provide insights into possible interventions allowing students to engage in higher levels of connectedness if students feel disconnected when participating in remote learning. Conversely, it could provide insights into what is currently working for participants if they feel connected and how to continue that behavior and shift the current pedagogy for future remote learning to thrive and serve the students.

Distance learning is not a new concept and research shows its effectiveness (Hannum & McCombs, 2008; Faibisoff & Willis, 1987). As the popularity and spread of the internet collided with education, blended learning became an effective tool for teachers. Research has shown that blended learning, and the inclusion of technology into the classroom positively affects' students learning outcomes (Graham, 2004). In addition, blended learning has given the opportunities for our students to learn about the world from a new perspective. An example of using a blended learning approach is when a teacher posts a YouTube video of another country for their students to watch and critically engage in learning about a culture in another part of the world. While research has shown that blended learning is an efficient tool for learning, there is less research on virtual learning as a whole, especially primary students and their feelings of connectedness. This study is unique in that it will focus on the social and emotional aspects of remote learning from the perspectives of students participating in remote learning.

Definition of Terms

Many terms that refer to learning from an entirely virtual platform are becoming increasingly common; the definitions below will be the working definitions for this study.

Asynchronous Instruction: This term refers to the education and instruction that does not occur in the same place or the same time (The Glossary of Educational Reform, 2013). This can include discussion posts, pre-recorded video platforms, YouTube videos, reading, emails, and more.

Connectedness to school: Connectedness to the school used in this study is defined as the degree to which the student feels socially, emotionally, and mentally connected to their school while they are not physically present learning. Simply put, connectedness is defined as the feeling of belonging and acceptance and the creation of bonding relationships and this is viewed as a positive factor in learning outcomes (Zimmerman & Nimon, 2017).

Disconnectedness to school: In this study disconnectedness to school is defined as the degree to which the student feels they are not socially, emotionally, and physically supported or valued by their school. As Faller and Wright (2018) stated, disconnection is the red light that inhibits the flow of connection. The world looks and feels very different from the vantage point of disconnection (p. 16).

Distance Learning: Distance learning will be defined as a student that is equipped with a Chromebook, or other learning technology devices and receives his or her education through a digital learning platform instead of in the brick-and-mortar classroom (Holmbeg, 1977; Sadiq, 2004; U.S. American Distance Education Association (USDLA), 2004). This can be used interchangeably with *remote learning* or *virtual learning*.

Live Stream: Live streaming is a website video conferencing platform that allows for a synchronous model for interactive voice, video, and data transfer between two or more groups. It enables real-time, two-way video and audio communication. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for content sharing and messaging between instructors and students (Fatani, 2020).

A platform of live streaming used for this study and for distance learning is the Zoom Meeting Platform (2021).

Synchronous Instruction: This term refers to the education and instruction that occurs at the same time but not in the same place for both parties (The Glossary of Educational Reform, 2013). A teacher using Zoom as their live stream platform while the students are learning from home is one example of this.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is generalizability. While there is value in doing a qualitative investigation on connectedness, both the participant number and region in which this study focuses are limited, so there is less generalizability for the greater public. Additionally, it is beyond the ability of the researcher to determine if or how many participants will withdraw from participation in the study before completion.

Another limitation of this study is the limit for in person interviewing due to the COVID-19 pandemic concerns about physical distance. All participants have chosen for their child to learn remotely, so they have less contact with others, and this has the potential to leave the interviews to be conducted via phone and live streaming. Live streaming is a great technological tool to help bridge the gap to in person, as the interviewer can see nonverbal cues from the participants. Still, there is an element to this style of interview that seems cold and less comfortable. Small nuances that could the researcher could observe may be impacted by the facilitation of phone or live streaming interviews. In addition, a live stream connection does have the possibility of failing to connect or having lagging disruptions that would not be an issue with an in person interview and small group session.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 has presented the introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, and limitations. Chapter 2 contains the review of related literature and research related to perceptions of connectedness to their school when working remote or from distance learning. Specifically, the study will investigate remote learning, aspects that may increase connectedness, like teacher and peer connectedness factors. The methodology and the procedures used to gather data are presented in Chapter 3. The results of analyses and findings to emerge from the study are contained in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 summarizes the research and findings, conclusions drawn from the results, a discussion, and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Significance of Connectedness

Establishing feelings of connection to individuals in the world around us is vital in our development as humans. Even during infancy, babies seek to connect emotionally with the individuals in their world through eye contact, a smile, and even laughing (The Gottman Institute, 2013). Research has shown that humans are hardwired for connection and the more success that children have in building relationships is associated with cognitive development and pre-academic achievement (Zinsser et al., 2014; Arslan, 2017). Examples of this are shown in Dr. Edward Tronik's Still Face Experiment in 1975 (The Gottman Institute, 2013). In this experiment, parents connect with their children through facial expressions and smiles, and then they shift to disconnection by not responding to their infants with anything other than a blank face. By the end of the two minutes of this experiment, the children were visibly upset and crying and physically lost their posture (Faller & Wright, 2018). According to Relational-Cultural Theory, all people have an intense desire for connection (Tucker et al., 2011). Humans crave connection.

The Role of Connectedness in the School

Connectedness is a vital element of being in a healthy home. Likewise, it is a vital element of the educational experience when students feel connected to their school. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defined school connectedness as the students' beliefs that adults and peers in the school care about them both academically but also care about them as individuals (CDC, 2009). Simply put, connectedness is defined as the feeling of belonging and acceptance, as well as the ability to build relationships with those around them (Zimmerman &

Nimon, 2017; Furlong et al., 2011). Connectedness is viewed as a positive and protective factor in learning outcomes (Zimmerman & Nimon, 2017; Furlong et al., 2011).

Similarly, as connectedness is to a healthy foundation of a home, this research lays the groundwork for understanding that certain psychological needs being met are a part of connectedness in the school setting. Feeling physiologically and physically safe is the foundation for learning. This is identified in motivation hierarchy (Taormina & Gao, 2013). When a child can get their basic needs met, they can move through hierarchy of needs towards self-actualization or, in an academic perspective, towards agentic engagement performance in the classroom (Cohen et al., 2019; Taormina & Gao, 2013). Agentic engagement is when the student goes beyond meeting teacher instruction based on being told to but instead displays a sense of intrinsic motivation that fosters academic performance and engagement in the content being taught (Cohen et al., 2019). Maslow's original theory of human motivation started with a hierarchy that identified levels of motivation movement. The stages that create his theory are as follows: physiological, safety-security, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization (Taormina & Gao, 2013).

Physiological and safety-security encompass two levels of needs for a child to grow towards self-actualization. Maslow defined physiological needs such as the need for water, oxygen, and salt for physical survival or environmental survival such as temperatures that a human can survive (Taormina & Gao, 2013). Taormina and Gao define safety-security needs as:

> The lack of protections such as shelter from environmental dangers and disasters, personal protection from physical harm, financial protection from destitution, legal protection from attacks on rights to a peaceful existence, or a lack of stability in life. (2013, p. 157)

Certain elements that can be present to satisfy the need for safety-security in a child's life, like protective guardians that will keep them safe. Likewise, having teachers in a classroom that help the students feel safe from harm physically and provide a stable classroom environment is a foundation of meeting the needs of the children. Once the safety-security needs are met academically, it will promote their growth towards belongingness, esteem and connectedness.

Another psychological need that will promote a solid foundation for learning is social connectedness. Arslan defines social connectedness as "an attribute of the self that reflects cognitions of enduring interpersonal closeness with the social world in *toto* and is considered to be the feeling of being human among humans'" (Arslan, 2017, p. 985). The feelings of social connectedness can lead a person to perceive social acceptance, which promotes belongingness (Arslan, 2017). Agentic engagement and extracurricular activities also play a role in social connectedness related to the feelings of connectedness. (Roffey et al., 2019; Lemberger et al., 2016; Dobia et al., 2019). Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is designed to teach emotional intelligence (E.I.), emotional regulation, and social skills that promote better interpersonal skills and engagement in the community (Lemberger et al., 2016; Dobia et al., 2019). Implementing a SEL curriculum into education can bridge the gap where some children may not see socially appropriate interactions modeled at home. It is critical for a child to feel connected socially to their peers and teachers during the learning process.

The ACEs Study

The Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) study, conducted in the 1900s, gave insight to the negative outcomes that come with a child not feeling safe and having a traumatic or multiple traumatic experiences in their youth (Felitti et al., 1998).

This widescale study found that adverse childhood experiences can have a significant impact of their physical health later in life, sometimes even causing early death. The original study had three categories by the final wave of questionnaires which included abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). The category for abuse included emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. The category for neglect included emotional and physical neglect. Finally, the category for family dysfunction included domestic violence, household substance abuse, household mental illness, parental separation or divorce, and household criminality (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020).

The study found that having one ACE would increase a person's risk of eventually having negative health issues. The study also found that with an increased number of ACEs that a person indicated they had, the more at risk they were for a later adverse health related issue. This is called a dose-response effect (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020).

Additionally, ACEs impacted the study participants experience of their schooling, as the risk of early pregnancy, depression, and suicidal thoughts increased significantly with four or more reported ACEs (Felitti et al., 1998). An increase in ACEs was also found to have impacted cognitive development and executive function, like attention, memory and self-regulation (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). All of these areas will impact the ability to learn and make connections to their school and school experience, as children that reported with two or more ACEs were almost three times more likely to repeat a grade in school (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). As the meta-analysis research has shown us, ACEs are common and will impact the whole child and the child's experiences as they walk through the world (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020; Arslan, 2017).

School Connectedness

As ACEs have impacts on the whole child, research shows that a perspective of school connectedness could be attributed to numerous factors and has several positive effects on the student's entire development, including the areas of psychology, behavioral sciences, sociology, physical and mental health (Hebron, 2018; Arslan 2017). For this study, connectedness is seen through the theoretical lens found in Deci's Self-Determination Theory (SDT). This theory proposes that an individual can function best and be motivated when specific psychological needs are met, including relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The findings show that meeting these psychological needs has a positive effect on social functioning and personal well-being. In essence, a perception of being connected to others around them or belonging to social contexts impacts their mental health and well-being (Arslan, 2017).

Zullig, Huebner, and Patton (2011) found that school connectedness is significantly associated with school satisfaction (Hyoyeon et al., 2019). Research shows that the higher the level of connectedness, the higher academic success and performance (Klem & Connell, 2004; Arslan, 2017), lower levels of suicidality (Young et al., 2011), and increased self-worth and self-esteem (Joyce, 2015).

Libbey (2004) reviewed measures of school connectedness and found seven themes among the criteria. The seven measures include: "a sense of belonging and being a part of school, whether or not students like school, level of teacher supportiveness and caring, presence of good friends in school, engagement in current and future academics progress, fair and effective discipline, and participation in extracurricular activities" (Libbey, 2004, p. 281). According to Arslan (2017), social acceptance and social connectedness are positive predictors of subjective well-being for students. In this case, the context of subjective well-being refers to

how the cognition and emotions impact their life, with social connectedness being one of the factors that contribute to more positive well-being (Arslan, 2017). The seven themes are explored below, making it clear that connectedness does not just rely on a sole variable (Libbey, 2004).

The first measure Libbey (2004) found with school connectedness is a sense of belonging. An aspect that plays a significant part in feelings to connectedness is the perception that you belong and are treated as others are treated (Arslan, 2017). Disproportionate numbers appear when looking at the race and ethnic breakdown of discipline records. Research has shown that black males are disproportionately punished with harsher consequences, and in the past decade, black females have experienced the fastest-growing suspension rate among all students (C. Green, 2020). Additionally, according to the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, black females are expelled at a higher rate than other races. They also fell into the category of the only female racial/ethnic group to be disciplined disproportionately (C. Green, 2020). If any student feels they are not being treated the same as others in the school, a wedge forms, potentially blocking connection and bonding.

Another of the seven themes identified is whether or not a student likes school (Libbey, 2004). Research indicates that feelings of liking the school increases feelings of connection to the school and their perspective of the level of teacher supportiveness and caring (Libbey, 2004). Most of the body of research conducted on connectedness focused on the student to a teacher relationship (Sulkowski & Simmons, 2017). When the student feels seen and heard or validated by their teacher, it bridges the gap to connection. Feelings of connectedness expand far beyond the teacher, though, as research has shown that whether a student feels connected to their peers

significantly impacts their perception of connectedness and their perceptions of belongingness (Arslan, 2017).

In addition to relationships developed with those around them, students feel more connected when they succeed academically and see a future in their academic achievement and extracurricular activities (Libbey, 2004). To clarify, when students feel successful academically during their current school experience, they will also start to formulate hopeful thinking for what they would like to achieve in the future, such as going to college or a specific dream career path.

Feelings of connectedness to schools can have a protective effect for students that struggle with mental health issues or mental health disorders. Hebron (2018) noted that students on the autism spectrum reported an overall lower level of connectedness than peers on the autism spectrum and reported an overall lower level of connectedness than peers. Yet, those who reported any level of connectedness proved to be a protective factor in transitioning from primary school to secondary school (Hebron, 2018).

The Significant Impacts of Disconnection

Connectedness, specifically lack thereof, plays a role in other mental health issues, like suicidality. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for adolescents and according to the World Health Organization (2017), suicide is the second leading cause of death worldwide for 15 to 29-year-olds. Students who had a higher perceived level of disconnectedness also had a higher rate of suicidal ideation or suicidal attempt behavior (Gunn et al., 2018). In one study, the researchers looked at the Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (ADD Health) and specifically targeted perceptions of parental connectedness, school connectedness, and social integration (Gunn et al., 2018). While there is still research to be done over time with suicidal

ideation and behaviors, this research shows that school connectedness can be a protective factor against suicidality (Gunn et al., 2018).

Lacking social connectedness has adverse effects on well-being. Loprest, Spaulding, and Nightingale (2019) found that feelings of disconnectedness correlated with increased drug use and increased criminal activity. Arslan reports "socially accepted, included, and welcomed individuals report a variety of positive emotions, including happiness, elation, contentment, and calm, whereas socially excluded, rejected, or ignored individuals indicate negative feelings such as anxiety, depression, grief, jealousy and loneliness" (2017, p. 986). Tucker, Smith-Adcock, and Trepal (2011) go as far as to say that disconnection is the primary source of human suffering.

Alarmingly, research has found some students to be more at-risk for disconnectedness. According to Joyce (2015), some of the of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health results indicate that sexual minority youths reported perceptions of feeing more disconnected to school and to their teachers compared to their peers. This sense of disconnection could play a factor with remote learning as often sexual minority youths are victims of bullying and might prefer an online learning experience instead of an in person learning experience (Birkett et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2010).

There are also concerns that black youth have increased disconnection, estimations upwards of 30 percent, from the job industry and school (Fosse, 2015). Fosse (2015) points out a critical point about our disconnected black youth. He stated, "the findings reinforce the view that structural disconnection interacts with race to impact profoundly the cultural lives of black youth in ways that are deeply worrying" (Fosse, 2015, p. 140). As with all youth participating in remote learning, it is vital that we know students who are more at risk for disconnection and bridge the gap to reach them.

The Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on School Connectedness

The challenges of disconnectedness grew as the world was faced with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 and 2020. In March 2020, the United States shut down public schools nationally and moved to a distance learning platform if they could (Camera, 2020; E. Green, 2020). Nationally, at that time, there were about 50 million students enrolled in public school, which also served as a reliable place for students to get social services and child care, food services, and a place for safety and connection (E. Green, 2020). Eventually, the District of Columbia and 48 states had ordered or recommended strongly that schools close for the rest of the 2019-2020 school year. According to an EducationWeek (2020) article, *The Coronavirus Spring: The Historic Closing of U.S. Schools (A Timeline)*, February 25, 2020, was the official release of the first CDC warning for schools to prepare for the virus (EducationWeek, 2020). On March 5, 2020, the first shift to distance learning began when a Northshore District in Washington state moved to distance learning. Finally, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (EducationWeek, 2020). This shift was the first ripple of a large wave of schools that eventually transitioned to distance learning or closed entirely for 2019-2020 school year.

The History of Distance Learning

Distance learning, also known as remote learning or virtual learning, is a concept that has been around for many years and has taken on various forms over the years. According to Greenberg (1998), distance learning is a teaching and learning experience that uses technology to reach learners at a distance. Initially, distance learning started with paper packets that were sent home, then back to the school for grading when a person could not attend in person. Even more specifically, distance learning was a mode of education for adults with postsecondary

opportunities that could not participate in classes during traditional school class times (Faibisoff & Willis, 1987).

The British Open University (BOU) was a part of the onset of distance learning and modeled the idea of a "university of the air" by utilizing mass communication to teach technologists and quickly pivoted to teaching adult learners (Faibisoff & Willis, 1987, p. 226). The introduction of the internet and access to email and learning management systems broadened the horizons of distance learning. The internet provided the means for connection to vast amounts of information and altered social connection platforms in a streamlined way. Additionally, unlike educational television programs, the internet provided the opportunity for feedback from those learning. Hannum and McCombs (2008) made an interesting connection in technology and connection that if technology cannot meet the needs of the individuals, the potential of distance learning will not be realized. This assertion implies that while the technology is now available, it still takes engagement and feedback from the teacher to make the best out of the learning experience.

Distance learning has quickly evolved from radio, print, and television platforms to learning management systems via the internet. As an example of the rapid increase in usage of the internet, Mouchantaf (2020) reported between 2005 and 2019 the use of social media among U.S. adults increased significantly, from 5% to over 70, emphasizing that the classroom needed to mirror the vast increase in internet usage (Hannum & McCombs, 2008). Distance learning then took a role in a more modern synchronous model with homework and grades posted online using learning management systems (LMS) for students and parents to communicate with the teacher, starting first with colleges and universities then the K-12 level (Hannum & McCombs, 2008).

Colleges and universities took the lead in advancing distance learning, with roots being traced back to the 1919 establishment of the WHA radio station at the University of Wisconsin (Hannum & McCombs, 2008; Faibisoff & Willis, 1987). A study conducted in 2008 by the U.S. Department of Education found that two-thirds of universities and colleges in the United States were offering distance learning opportunities. One of the leaders of distance learning in 2012 was the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), offered 2,100 distance learning courses that had been taken by over 100 million people (West, 2012). Distance learning started at the post-secondary level to create access to education for adults who worked and could not attend classes during traditional school hours. James W. Hall (1995) articulated distance learning as:

> One of the most significant ways that the traditional university has sought to respond to scarcity. Distance education is, first and foremost, a moment that sought not so much to challenge or change the structure of higher learning, but a movement to extend the traditional university, a movement to overcome its inherent problems of scarcity and exclusivity. Distance education developed as creative political response to the increasing inability of the traditional university structure to grow bigger. (Nyíri, 1997, p. 352)

Distance Learning and the COVID-19 Pandemic

As Hall (1995) introduced above, distance learning was created to extended education to those without access. Distance learning expanded and exploded as the world navigated the COVID-19 pandemic (Lassouned et al., 2020). By March of 2020, almost all schools in the United States had quickly pivoted to distance learning platforms or closed entirely due to the necessity of limiting contact and exposure to others of the virus. The SARS-CoV-2 strand could transmit so quickly that the nation responded by limiting as much social interaction as the state governments deemed necessary, including closing schools and other work organizations (CDC,

2020). The CDC guided much of the research and tracking of the spread of the disease and how public gatherings should proceed (CDC, 2020).

Some schools were ready for remote learning by already having technology available and implemented blended learning aspects in their classrooms. Research has shown that many teachers have welcomed technology in their classrooms as educational aides and advanced pre-planned instruction (Graham, 2004). Teachers that had experiences with technology and professional development on how to implement technology appropriately were more prepared when distance learning became the mandate in March 2020 (E. Green, 2020).

Historically, teachers have hesitated to fully embrace technology as the main modality of instruction (West, 2012). When asked about barriers to implementing distance learning through a fully online platform, educators expressed concerns about course quality, development costs, and funding based on attendance as their top three concerns (West, 2012). Teacher's hesitation to embracing technology is an interesting dichotomy to findings from a meta-analysis conducted by the U.S. Department of Education from 1996 to 2008. The conclusions of this meta-analysis showed that students who learned online with distance learning performed modestly better than their peers (West, 2012).

Some schools in March 2020 did not have the funds or resources to go into 1:1 technology device and/or they were not equipped with the appropriate professional development to transition to a distance learning platform that altered their mode of instruction. Additional obstacles were poor infrastructure in many schools and the lack of digital content available and ready to use when schools went into closure (Lassoued et al., 2020). It was the last effort to attempt to bridge the gap to the students when there was no other modality of teaching safe to implement.

While the pedagogy on instruction and ideology around learning may be the same, methods of teaching are different in remote versus brick-and-mortar classrooms. A goal for distance learning should be to increase and/ or maintain a high level of feeling connectedness to the school, environment, and learning, even if that platform is an online platform. It is evident that students' connection to their school, no matter the instruction platform, is critical for their psychological and physical well-being (Arslan, 2017; Sulkowski & Simmons, 2017; Libbey, 2004).

While the world continues to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of this study, distance learning has moved from a short-term emergency educational instruction intervention to a more well-rounded educational model for learners who prefer the virtual environment. Lassoued (2020) described the challenges that are now faced with the continuation of virtual learning as moving from the bare minimum to master quality, creative, and flexible learning environment that enhances lifelong learning.

Distance Learning and Culture

A variable that plays a key role into the use and perception of distance learning is through a cultural perspective. Culture encompasses beliefs, experiences, expectations, relationships to each other in the world, and to the values and norms of that group (Boaca, 2013). Culture will not only influence the pedagogy of teaching, but it will also impact the degree that distance learning is adopted and the modalities that will serve as the platform for learning. Margareta Boaca addressed the importance of having a cultural perspective in the consideration of development and continuation of distance learning, as culture impacts the persons developing the technology as well as those using the technology, like in a virtual classroom (2013).

Areas for Further Exploration

Possible areas of further exploration and research for increasing school connectedness for virtual schools would be investigating a virtual version of the Student Success Skills (SSS) program and have school counselors implement it (Lemberger et al., 2015). Lemberger, Selig, Bowers, and Rogers (2015) found a positive correlation between implementing the SSS program with ethnic minority and low-income students. Specifically, they found that the SSS program effectively improved academic achievement among the ethnicities studied, including African American, Latino, and White (Lemberger et al., 2015).

Another interesting area for further exploration into studying connectedness for remote learning would be implementing a study using photovoice to gain a different perspective into what is making students feel more connected and disconnected (Joyce, 2018). The photovoice technique that was used in the study conducted by Joyce (2018) was a combination of camera photos and focus groups. The students could take the camera with them and they were asked to take pictures of what made them feel connected and disconnected in their school environment. The photographs lead the discussions during the focus groups for data collection. The researchers had students in a brick-and-mortar school use this technique to study connectedness and found evidence of feelings of connection and disconnection related to the physical environment (Joyce, 2018). It would be interesting to see how this could apply to students learning from a virtual environment; what photographic evidence would a student show that helps identify modes of connections and areas of disconnection?

Summary

In summary, connectedness to schools has significant research backing its importance (Arslam, 2017; Klem & Connell, 2004; Young et al., 2011; Joyce, 2015). A perception of

connectedness can be greatly impacted from personal life experiences and possibly even ACEs (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). Their experiences can characterize or inhibit their ability to connect to others and their schools without other foundational needs being met first, including psychological needs, physiological needs, and safety. The connection between motivational needs and high academic performance with the same foundations rooted in needs being met first was explored (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When a student feels connected to their school, this can also serve as a protective factor for that student (Arslan, 2017).

On the other hand, when a student feels disconnected or has an adverse experience that drives disconnection, we see significant negative consequences to that person beyond the classroom walls (Arslan, 2017; Gunn et al., 2018). The negative impact can extend to the degree of thoughts of suicidality (Young et al., 2011). Educational research must continue to explore if students feel a connectedness to their schools, and if not, what is driving the disconnectedness.

Distance learning has been a limited platform of education for some time but has taken off as an essential modality of education when schools were forced into closure during the COVID-19 pandemic (Camera, 2020; E. Green 2020). While most of the nation responded to closure with a distance learning intervention, there is limited research on a perception of connectedness when learning in this manner. This investigation seeks to develop a deeper understanding of students' perceptions of school connectedness when learning remotely. It is worth our efforts to better understand how students' feel connected when learning remotely as we move forward with virtual learning, whether as an intervention during the COVID-19 pandemic or as this platform takes hold as an educational option for our students every year.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

The currently available literature on Remote Learning focuses on the benefits of flexible hours for adult learners and accessibility for learners (Hannum & McCombs, 2008; Faibisoff & Willis, 1987). More recently published literature has focused on the transition of brick-and-mortar schools to remote online schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic (CDC, 2020). A limited amount of literature focuses on the perceptions of the students who are working remotely and if they feel connectedness to their school. A feeling of connectedness or belonging is imperative to the educational experience (Hyoyeon et al., 2019; Klem & Connell, 2004; Libbey, 2004). This study investigates whether or not students feel connected to school while learning remotely in a selected Northeast Tennessee high school.

Research Questions

1. What are the various ways students endorse feelings of connectedness to the school when involved in remote learning? Is there anything different about remote learning that has led to a greater sense of connectedness?

2. What are the factors leading to a sense of disconnectedness during remote learning? Is there anything different about remote learning that has led to a greater sense of disconnectedness?

3. What effect does remote learning have on the students' feelings of connectedness to the school?

Research Design

This study investigated the perceptions of student's experiences while learning from a remote environment, so a qualitative research methodology design was used for this investigative research project. Yilmaz (2013) defines qualitative research as, "an emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations, and processes in their natural settings to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world" (p. 312). Implementing the qualitative research methodology allowed participants to give a personal and rich description of their experiences and perceptions of that experience while learning remotely.

Participants provided data through one-on-one interviews and a survey. Additionally, two students participated in a focus group interview. To analyze and interpret the data, Creswell's (2013) six step approach was implemented. The six steps included the following: (1) organizing the transcribed interviews, (2) reading the transcribed interviews for general understanding, (3) coding and categorizing the data, (4) describing categories and themes, (5) representing qualitative narrative, and (6) interpreting the findings (Creswell, 2013).

Site Selection

One high school in Northeast Tennessee was selected for this investigative study. This school is a public city high school and gave the students the option of being a remote learner for the 2020-2021 academic school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This site was founded in 1867 as a male and female institute. As the years passed, this private school was granted a charter and became a free public school in 1880. The school currently serves around 2,200 students. The schools' demographics for the academic school year of 2020-2021 are approximately 50% female and 50% male students. Around 70% of students identify as white;

under 1% each for the demographic of American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; slightly under 11% identify as Hispanic or Latino; around 13.5% identify as Black or African American, and just under 5% identify as Asian.

Participants in the Study

Milligan University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the dissertation proposal and approved this study, then the school's IRB approved this study to be conducted using students at the high school. Signed approval was gained from both IRB's and the Principal of the school site and the Superintendent of the site school district.

The total number of students that participated in the study was six individuals, ranging from grades 10th-12th. Three individuals were in 11th grade, one was in 10th grade, and two were in 12th grade. All participants for the study chose to be remote learners for the 2020-2021 academic school year. Many of the participants were involved in academic classes that ranged from the general curriculum class level to honors, Advanced Placement (A.P.) classes, State Dual Credit (S.D.C.) classes, and Dual Enrollment classes (D.E.). Dual Enrollment classes are classes that encompass any class that a high school student is taking at a college for college credit. The student is enrolled in the high school and will still receive high school credit, yet also enrolled in the college and receives college credit for their classes. One participant was in D.E. classes. Four students were enrolled in honors classes; four were enrolled in A.P. classes, and two were enrolled in S.D.C. classes while learning from the remote learning platform.

Participants Demographics

The study participants represented a range of demographic categories, including race and ethnicity, nationality, grade, gender, academic achievement, and extracurricular involvement. Two students identified as male and four identified as female. Ethnicities included Arab,

Ethiopian, Indian American, Filipino, and Bisaya. For the race demographic, two individuals identified themselves as white, one as white and black/African American, one as black/African American, and two as Asian.

The ages of the participants ranged from 15 years old to 18 years old, and grades ranged from 10th to 12th grade. Four out of the six were actively involved in extracurricular activities while learning remotely during the school year. Extracurricular activities ranged from after school clubs to school sports. One participant was singularly enrolled as a D.E. student for all classes, so this individual's experience was unique compared to peers.

Roles of the Researcher

The researcher served as a school counselor at the study site, making the researcher a partially active participant in the study. The study involved interviewing students that were enrolled at the site, and one individual was a part of the researcher's student caseload as a school counselor. The other five participants were not on the researcher's caseload. Inherent bias could have played a role since one individual was a current student on the school counselor's caseload. That being said, intentionality was used to create the interview guide to avoid leading questions (Appendix D).

Data Collections Methods

The data collection method for this qualitative study was through various sources, including one-on-one interviews, a survey, and one focus group. Member checking was implemented to establish validity and reliability. All participants chose to participate in a survey of mixed open-ended questions and scaled questions. All participants chose to be remote learners for the 2020-2021 academic school year. Additionally, two of the students decided to participate in the focus group. All interviews and the focus group were conducted via Zoom (2021) live

streaming platform. Interviewing through the Zoom platform not only allowed for the ability to record all sessions to transcribe; it also allowed for the participant to be in a comfortable and natural setting as they had been learning through the live streaming platform all academic year.

Prior to the Study

Before starting this study, the study was approved through Milligan University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and then the site's IRB process. The school site's IRB process vetted the study and approval signatures came from the principal and the superintendent of the schools.

Selection of Participants

The participants were selected using the school counselors at the site school. The school had multiple school counselors with access to students who chose to learn remotely for the academic year, providing a possibility for a heterogeneous sample. The researcher provided the consent forms to each counselor. After describing the nature of the study, the details of the consent form, and that each student participation was voluntary, the counseling team reached out to students learning remotely to gauge interest in participating in the study. Once a student showed interest in participating, their information was given to the researcher. The researcher then gained signed consent forms from the parents or guardians of the participants. All participants and their parents or guardians were informed of their ability to remove themselves from participation at any point in time. They were also informed of the recording of their interview for transcription. Six total individuals chose to participate in the study, and two out of the six chose to participate in an additional focus group.

Implementation of the Study

Once the school counselors had contact information for the individuals willing to participate in the study, each participant's parents or guardians were contacted via phone and via email. Most of the initial phone contacts resulted in participation; some voicemails were left unanswered. During the phone contact, the description of the study and the information regarding the participants rights to remove themselves from the study at any point was explained (Appendix C). Once receiving verbal consent, the parents or guardians were sent a follow-up email with the consent form attached, one for their records and one to sign and send back. After receiving the signed consent, a live streaming session using Zoom (2021) was scheduled for the one-on-one interview. Additionally, an email was sent to each student including a survey using Google Forms (2021) for triangulation. The survey was a combination of open-ended questions and scaled-response questions (Appendix E).

The focus group (Appendix F) and one-on-one interview guides (Appendix D) were designed as semi-structured and opened-ended questions. The open-ended and semi-structured questions allowed for the participants to explore themes or additional topics that were not originally on the question guides. Each interview was recorded using Zoom (2021) and saved to the researcher's local drive. Sonix, Inc. (2021) transcription was used to transcribe the interviews and focus group. This software is an artificial intelligence software that transcribed the downloaded Zoom session interviews.

Additionally, the researcher listened to all transcriptions to make corrections. Once transcriptions were created, the researcher collected data and coded for themes in the data. For validity and reliability, triangulation of data methods and member checking after the individual

one-on-one interviews were conducted. Member checking allowed for participants to correct or clarify themes emerging during their interview.

Data Management

Data were collected through Zoom (2021) and Google Form (2021). The individual interviews and focus group were saved to the researcher's local drive. Each recording was transcribed using Sonix, Inc. (2021) then reviewed and corrected by the researcher. Upon completion, each transcript was saved on the researcher's local drive. The original Zoom recording will be deleted upon the completion of this study. The Google Form survey results were printed and the original survey document will be deleted from Google Form upon completion of this study. All printed surveys, transcripts, and notes will remain secure in a locked filing cabinet from the date of the successful defense of the research dissertation. The researcher is the only individual with access to the password protected electronic data and the locked cabinet. The data will be secure for five years. Once five years have passed, the researcher will shred all transcripts using a shredding machine.

Data Analysis

Creswell's (2013) six steps for qualitative analysis were used to interpret the data and identify themes. The six steps include: (1) organization of the transcribed interviews; (2) reading the transcribed interviews for broad themes; (3) coding and categorizing the data; (4) describing categories and themes; (5) representing qualitative narrative; (6) interpreting the findings.

The one-on-one interviews and the focus group transcriptions were read and annotated to find identifying themes. The survey results were also highlighted and annotated for emerging themes in the data. The analytical process was repeated multiple times to ensure that no themes were missed and the process of identifying themes in the data dictated the study's narrative.

Chapter Four will include examples and supportive data for themes and subthemes identified in the data analysis process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account for each step of this study, as this not only informs validity and reliability but is a means to protect humans from harm (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study included minors, and the researcher took the following steps to address areas of ethical considerations:

1. Each participant and their guardian were provided a written participation agreement. This document included the purpose of the study, the objectives, and an explanation of the study.

2. Each participant and their guardian signed a consent form that explained their ability to withdraw from participation in the study at any time (Appendix C).

3. The study included questions about feelings of disconnection. The consent had an explanation of possible feelings of discomfort and the participants' ability to withdraw at any time (Appendix C). The participant and their guardians signed this consent.

4. The data collected were password protected and physical copies of the surveys and other notes were locked in a filing cabinet in the researcher's office. Only the researcher can access the locked filing cabinet.

Trustworthiness

This study allowed the participants the ability to give their narrative to their experience participating in remote learning. A focus group allowed participants to explore themes in common or not in common with others who experienced remote learning. A survey was given to

more deeply explore themes in the data and for triangulation. Member checking was used to verify the data and themes that emerged from the data and was conducted after the individual interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data collection was through Zoom (2021), Google Forms (2021), email, and phone calls. The study's credibility and dependability was founded in an open-response semi-structured one-on-one interview. This allowed participants to explore their narrative and follow-up questions tailored to their specific narrative and experience.

Additionally, the Google Form survey was included, giving the participants the ability to answer open-ended and scaled-response questions about their experience. The individual interview was followed by a focus group and member checking. This study was conducted under the presupposition that the participants would not withhold their perceptions of their experience.

Transferability is a term to refer to how this study could be applied to other situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this case, transferability applies to individuals that are currently experiencing their learning from a remote setting. Transferability also applies to the school systems that might be in consideration of a shift to add a virtual school or an option for virtual learning within their district. The findings from the study will also be presented to the site school for transferability.

CHAPER 4

Data Analysis and Findings

This qualitative study was completed to investigate students' perceptions of connectedness to their brick-and-mortar school while learning remotely. The study specifically aimed to investigate perceived feelings of connectedness and disconnectedness while learning from a remote setting. The demographics of participants included students from grades 10 through 12. Qualitative data were gathered from participants via a one-on-one interview and a survey. Two participants also participated in an additional group interview, as outlined in Chapter 3.

The qualitative data for this study came primarily from one-on-one interviews and individual surveys. As stated in Chapter 3, Yilmaz (2013) defines qualitative research as "an emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world" (p. 312). The educational setting for the participants of this study was learning from home all academic year, and this study focused on their perceptions of that experience: how they experienced their education and their world. Six individuals participated from the site school. The demographics of the school are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Site School Demographics

Grade	Male	Female	Total in grade
9	283	314	597
10	287	289	576
11	296	282	578
12	235	230	465
Total enrollment	1101	1115	2216

The one-on-one interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, and the accompanying survey took around 15 minutes to complete. In addition, the data set included one focus group session that was approximately one hour long. In total, six one-on-one interviews, six surveys, and one focus group were included in the data set.

Analysis of Data

Creswell's (2013) six step process for analyzing data was implemented for this study. The six steps include (1) organization of the transcribed interviews; (2) reading the transcribed interviews for broad themes; (3) coding and categorizing the data; (4) describing categories and themes; (5) representing qualitative narrative; and (6) interpreting the findings. Each interview was recorded on the Zoom (2021) platform, then this recording was transcribed and categorized for coding. Through the coding process, overall themes and subthemes emerged from the data.

Research Questions

1. What are the various ways students endorse feelings of connectedness to the school when involved in remote learning? Is there anything different about remote learning that has led to a greater sense of connectedness?

2. What are the factors leading to a sense of disconnectedness during remote learning? Is there anything different about remote learning that has led to a greater sense of disconnectedness?

3. What effect, if any, does remote learning have on the students' feelings of connectedness to the school?

Individual Interview Question Guide (Appendix D)

Interview Guide for Student Interview

1. What played into your decision to choose remote learning? How much input did you have into this decision?

2. What has the remote learning experience been like for you?

3. On a scale from 1 to 5, how connected did you feel to the school environment prior to participating in remote learning? What were factors that led to feeling connected? What were factors that led to feeling disconnected?

4. On a scale from 1 to 5, how connected have you felt to school during remote learning? What are factors that led to feeling connected? What are factors that led to feeling disconnected?

5. If given the choice, would you stay remote for your educational experience or go back to face-to-face instruction? Why?

6. What, if any, benefits have you experienced with remote learning?

7. What, if any, negative outcomes have come from remote learning?

Focus Group Interview Guide (Appendix F)

Interview Guide for Focus Group

1. What has the remote learning experience been like for you? Do others in the group feel similar? How so?

2. What were factors have you feeling connected to the school? What were factors have you feeling disconnected?

3. If given the choice, would you stay remote for your educational experience or go back to face-to-face instruction? Why?

4. What, if any, benefits have you experienced with remote learning?

5. What, if any, negative outcomes have come from remote learning?

Survey Question (Appendix E)

Survey Questions were created on a five-point scale of 1-5. 1- Strongly Disagree and 5- Strongly Agree. Some questions were open-ended responses. Each will be indicated below.

1. First Name (open-ended).

2. Last Name (open-ended).

3. I feel connected to the school (five-point scale).

4. I often have interactions with my teachers via online platform (five-point scale).

5. I feel connected to my peers and others in my classes (five-point scale).

6. I like spending time with my classmates (five-point scale).

7. I feel my teachers care about me (five-point scale).

8. I feel that feedback from my teacher is helpful (five-point scale).

9. I feel that I'm often teaching myself the material (five-point scale).

10. I often seek activities to get involved with at school (five-point scale)

11. I am very involved in activities at school, like clubs or teams (five-point scale).

12. I often talk to an adult at the school about things that are important to me (five-point scale).

13. I feel disconnected to adults at the school building (five-point scale).

14. I feel disconnected from my peers at school (five-point scale).

15. I do not feel that I'm getting feedback from teachers and other adults during my Remote Learning experience (five-point scale).

16. Any other thoughts you'd like to provide about your Remote Learning experience? (open-ended)

17. Date of Birth (open-ended).

18. Your Current Grade (choose one answer).

19. Race (choose all that apply).

20. Ethnicity (open-ended).

21. Gender (choose one answer).

22. Are you taking any of the following types of classes this year? (Check all that apply)

23. Who lives at home with you? (open-ended)

24. Is there anything else you'd like for me to know about you? (open-ended)

An inductive process was used to find emerging themes in the data. The sessions were recorded on the Zoom (2021) platform, then transcribed initially using Sonix.ai (2021). The researcher then went through the transcription for accuracy before coding data. Through the coding process, themes and subthemes emerged from the data. This process was repeated several

times, concluding with identified overall themes and subthemes. The following are identified as overall themes: (1) Communication as a Foundation for Connectedness and Relationships, (2) Disconnectedness to Peers, and (3) Returning to In Person Learning. The following sections will explore identified themes and subthemes with supporting narratives. Participants for the narrative sections will be identified by a pseudonym of "Student" followed by an assigned number.

Research Question 1

1. What are the various ways students endorse feelings of connectedness to the school when involved in remote learning? Is there anything different about remote learning that has led to a greater sense of connectedness?

Communication as a Foundation for Connectedness and Relationships

Communication was a theme identified in both categories of connectedness and disconnectedness. Several subthemes of communication addressed in the data, including (1) communication from teachers being a foundation for connection, (2) lack of communication from the school increasing feelings of disconnection, and (3) lack of communication with peers increased feelings of disconnection. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the number of times the subthemes were coded.

Table 2

Communication as Foundation for Connectedness and Relationships

Comm. with Teachers	Lack of Comm. from School	Lack of Comm. With Peers
8	11	43

Communication with Teachers

Communication, or lack thereof, was a consistent theme in the data. Much of the data discussed the participants perception of feeling connectedness or disconnectedness, which led to the topic of communication. As seen in Table 2, the data support that communication from teachers was a foundation for their learning. Positive comments about the teachers engaging in communication occurred eight times in the interviews, with only a few comments about the teachers lack of communication. The connection with the teacher was a variable in their perceived connectedness to the school, but it was also noted as a theme to the importance of what they were learning. An example of the importance of communication with the teacher came from Student 2.

But I do have a couple teachers that I am more connected with, like, I don't know if I'm

allowed to say names or anything, but my Spanish teacher, she's really great. She kept

me well involved. And she's always making sure I'm well informed on everything.

That being said, Student 2 noted that not all teachers were as good at communication. Student 2 stated, "Some teachers have like…They don't really communicate as much or they're not as involved or as interested." It is worthy to note that the student's communication with their teachers had an impact even if only through electronic means. Student 3 gives an example of when this student would answer in the Chat room on Zoom (2021) for classes.

I could write down my comment in the group chat and only to the teacher. So, I didn't

have, like, the whole class reading it, but I felt like I had more of a one-on-one teacher

than I did if I was in the classroom.

Other participants connected to this theme of electronic communication and having positive teacher connectedness. When asked about feelings of connectedness to teachers, Student 5 stated:

Yes, because I could communicate with them easily, even though it was not necessarily in person, like I could easily reach them through email…For calculus, my teacher had an after-hours tutoring session at night, so if I had any extra questions that couldn't be explained in email, I could go then and ask.

Student 6 echoed this theme in connectedness to their teacher by stating, "When I had Zooms with people in person, I could like hear everyone talking in class. And that made me feel like I was a part of a class. And a lot of my teachers emailed me and they made an effort to kind of communicate well". Teachers who communicated with their Remote students more seems to directly impact their perceived connectedness to the school.

Lack of Communication from the School

A subtheme that appeared in the data was a lack of communication from the school. This impacted perceptions of connectedness with the brick-and-mortar school the students attended. Student 6 captured it below.

I felt academically somewhat connected and I felt connected to my teachers, but I as a whole, I don't really think I felt connected to [site school]. Like, I remember I would hear people in class or I would text some of my friends and they'd be talking about something. I'd be like, I never heard of this. I never got an email; I've never heard about this.

Lack of communication was also addressed in the Focus Group, when Student 5 noted a pattern with communication, stating, "a lot of teachers start Zoom after the school announcements are being given, and even if they Zoom starts while they're being given, the teacher's muted or you can't hear them very well". It appears that the teacher played a bridge between the students and the school in some cases, as observed by Student 6 when the teachers would inform this student of school events. That being said, when the students perceived they were not informed, this appears to have increased disconnectedness. When the scaled-response

question of "I feel connected to the school" was given in the survey, an average of 3 was given by the participants. Additionally, when posed with the question of "I feel disconnected to the adults at the school building", 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), the average answer was a 4, leaning towards "strongly agree" to feeling disconnected to adults at the school building.

Lack of Communication with Peers

One of the most consistent themes in the data was the lack of connection to their peers. This topic was coded in the interviews 43 times. Additionally, for the survey questions of "I feel connected to my peers and others in my class" on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), 50% of the participants answered with a 3 and 50% responded with a 2 indicating a moderate to low connection to peers. Student 3 observed, "It doesn't feel like you're a part of the school. You're just… you just go to the Zoom meeting; you go to class and you go on with your day. You don't really talk to anyone else, really". When Student 2 was asked about feeling connected to peers, they stated:

Not the peers in my class, no. I don't think… I guess, we just don't really get to talk really. I mean, when we do, it's like a breakout room. But people usually don't want to talk whenever we get the breakout room and they have that option of not being able to. Because, like, in-person, you're right there. You know? There's no way to get away from it. But over a computer, you can just turn off the camera and mute yourself and then you don't have to do anything.

Student 5 connected the lack of engagement in classes for peers with the lack of ability to get to know your peers in a more relaxed social environment. This student connected social cues and the ability to talk informally with peers as the bridge to connection that did not seem to be present in remote learning. Student 5 stated this way:

So, I definitely feel like I miss out on getting to see people's personalities, as a friend. I only get to know them as a student who is academically responsible, pays attention in class, and I only get that academic side of their personalities and I never get to know what they are really like through Zoom… So, I guess what's driving emotional disconnection is missing out on those social cues that you get when you're talking to someone you can hear, like, their actual voice. Or like just those cues that you're used to when you have an in-person interaction where, like, you might be able to tell someone's body language. Whereas in a Zoom meeting, you can only see a head or only a person's shoulder. You can't see their legs shaking on the floor or… Yeah, it's missing that physical component.

This same theme was reiterated in every one-on-one interview and in the focus group. It is worthy to note the students that felt a connection to peers were the students that participated in an extracurricular activity. Most of the activities listed were in person meetings for clubs or sports that practiced in person. More on the topic of extracurricular activities will be in the findings section for Research Question 3, found below.

Research Question 2

2. What are the factors leading to a sense of disconnectedness during remote learning? Is there anything different about remote learning that has led to a greater sense of disconnectedness?

Disconnectedness to Peers

The theme of disconnectedness appeared in the data 63 times. The theme of disconnection appeared more than any other theme in the data, with the highest number of codes for participants feeling disconnected from their peers. The global theme of disconnection to peers appeared in the data forty-three times out of the total of sixty-three and was discussed by participants more in-depth than other themes in the data. A subtheme coded in the data is

student's lack of fully engaging in the livestreaming portion of their Zoom classes. An additional subtheme emerged in the data, noting that if students were involved in an extracurricular activity, they felt more connected to their peers. Table 3 shows the amount of coded data for disconnectedness, and Table 4 shows students involved in extracurricular activities and their perception of being connected to peers.

Table 3

Disconnectedness to Peers

Disconnectedness to Peers	Disconnectedness Theme Total
43	63

Table 4

Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Student	Involved in Extra.	Survey Response for Disc. to Peers
1	No	2
2	Yes	2
3	Yes	2
4	Yes	3
5	Yes	3
6	No	3

*Survey question was "I feel connected to my peers and others in my class". Scaled-response was 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Disconnectedness to Peers

Disconnectedness to peers appeared in the data 43 times, making this one of the most identified codes in the data and one that the participants talked about in-depth. Student 5 spoke about disconnectedness to their peers by stating:

> But it does create some difficulties with socializing because it's more of, like, a new frontier for me. And I guess for figuring out how people behave online is different from how they would behave in a classroom or not being able to be in on certain things… I just feel like being remote makes it difficult to, like, get that social interaction in person and I makes it easier for those people to be unintentionally exclusive. They don't mean to hurt you or anything, it's just that when you're in-person, it's easier to create a joke or socialize in ways that don't necessarily translate to online communication or Zoom.

Many participants identified that they did not feel that learning remotely allowed them to talk to their peers or get to know them in the same capacity that would happen naturally with in person learning. A few participants observed the lack of social cues that would be present if participating in person learning. In contrast, others noted that remote learning did not give casual time to get to know your peers like their experience during in person learning. Student 1 observed the theme of not getting to know their classmates:

> I think it's more like…because a lot of us don't know each other. Because when you start the class, you start with a new group of people or like a couple of people, you know, or none at all. So, you learn to get to know these people throughout the semester. So, I don't feel like that non-personal interaction… like, being there with them doesn't happen, so, you don't communicate well.

Student 2 also described their experience of finding it hard to connect to peers during remote learning while honing in on the subtheme of not fully engaging in Zoom's live streaming capabilities during class.

> Because I think people get nervous and like, it's easier to make friendships and talk to people whenever you are kind of forced to in person. But it's harder whenever you're over a screen, especially if the other person doesn't necessarily want to talk at the moment if they, you know, maybe they have something going on in the background at home.

Every participant described, in some capacity, their lack of ability to connect with friends. Student 4 stated, "Probably the first time in my life I've just not been able to go and meet with up with my friends or go study together or anything like that".

Lack of Engagement in the Live Streaming

An interesting subtheme to student's feeling disconnected from peers was observations of the theme of students turning their cameras off for the live streaming part of classes. Using a live streaming platform for class would allow participants to be able to have camera and audio turned on while learning and listening in real-time to the lesson. Additionally, this would allow for real-time conversations and the ability to see facial expressions. Multiple participants noted that peers in their class often did not turn their cameras or audio on for the Zoom class meetings. One student was taking a dual enrollment (D.E.) class and noted this same theme:

> …There was seventy-five people. So, it's a really big class. And out of all of those people, there were only three people with the camera on, and that was me, the professor and another person…It might be anxiety inducing to be like the only person with a

camera on, but I think that for all students to have the cameras on, it would be, I think would help maintain social interaction.

A few students even mentioned that while some would have their cameras turned on, it would not be on their faces. Student 1 stated, "Yeah, I feel like a lot of people don't like to have their camera on, and if they do, it's usually turned down or turned up a little bit. So, you can't really see their full face." Student 3 echoed this theme:

> I think a big part of it is not having people look at them. Like, for the first week or so I was like, "Oh gosh, do I have to have my camera on?" because I don't want someone to, I don't know… I felt like they were looking at me directly. Not the whole class… They may be worried or so. There is a lot of people in my class I did not know because I didn't see their face. I see your face, I recognize you. I can have a conversation with you in the hall. But they didn't turn them on.

While the data show that most of the students felt some kind of connection with a teacher or the school, most participants identified they did not feel connected to their peers.

Extracurricular Activities as a Barrier for Disconnection

Multiple participants identified that they felt connected to some peers through their club or sport in which they were involved. Findings revealed that being involved in extracurricular activities is noteworthy; while students might not have felt a connection to peers in their remote classes, they still had a source of connection to other peers through their extracurricular activities. Student 4 stated, "…so I think through those clubs, I've been able to feel connection to [site school] and not really lose my social interaction".

When Student 2 was asked about their involvement in extracurricular activities, they stated, "That's the way I felt connected to the school is through running because that's my sport

and cross-country… So, most of my friends run with me. So, that's the way I've felt very connected to the school". Student 5 echoed this theme. When asked about feeling connected through extracurriculars, Student 5 observed,

> Definitely because I felt like I was, even though I wasn't necessarily there for classes, I still felt like I was able to maintain social connections with other people through extracurriculars. And a lot of my friends also participated in the same extracurriculars that I do. So, I was able to get to know them better that way and spend time with them after school, especially for [club], because that's something I really like to do.

> Students that were involved in extracurricular activities felt more of a connection to their peers while learning remotely. All clubs and sports that were discussed by participants that increased their connectedness were conducted in person at the school.

Research Question 3

3. What effect does remote learning have on the students' feelings of connectedness to the school?

Ready to Return to In-Person Learning

Disconnection was coded most often in the data, and feelings of disconnectedness impacted the participants' decisions about wanting to return to in person learning. While many participants identified reasons they enjoyed remote learning, including more freedom with their time during the day, most participants indicated they would want to return to in person learning. Experiencing a reduction of testing anxiety and impact on mental health were subthemes that emerged in the data. Three of the participants noted that being able to take tests at home helped them feel less anxious about the test, or being at home helped them fight social anxiety and stress that they might experience in a typical brick-and-mortar school day.

When asked about returning to in person learning, every participant indicated they would like more social interaction. Table 5 shows the theme of participants responses when posed the question, "Would you do remote learning again or go back to in person learning and why?"

Table 5

Remote Learning vs In-Person Learning

Student	Remote	In-Person	Connectedness to Peers
1	No	Yes	Yes
2	No	Yes	Yes
3	No	Yes	Yes
4	No	Yes	Yes
5	No	Yes	Yes
6	No	Yes	Yes

Every participant in the study indicated that they would choose to go back to in person learning. Each participant indicated social connectedness to peers as one of the main reasons. Student 4 stated,

I would take in person learning again. I would take in person learning over remote learning and I think the reason is that it facilities learning… I think the social factor, it's really forced that to work with peers and connect with the teacher. You can't just be isolated and really introverted.

Student 1 stated it this way, "Definitely in person…It's the environment and the people that are there. It's not just me and the computer screen". When asked if they would do remote learning again, Student 5 expressed,

Oh, no. Not really. I mean, I can do it, but I just don't really enjoy the fact I had to… I'm

looking back now and I spent basically the entire year in my room and I'm impressed at

what I did in my room. I took calculus, I took English and I did all my classes. But I just

don't want to be locked up again… The social aspect, yes.

While the participants expressed positive features about learning remotely, feeling

disconnected was a driving factor in the desire for in person learning. Student 6 stated the

following about coming back to in person learning: "yes, definitely. Because I want to get to

know more people".

Impacts on Mental Health

While codes of disconnectedness emerged the most in the data, positive subthemes about

remote learning were also present. A subtheme in the data appeared concerning participants

experiencing a reduction of anxiety or impact on their mental health in some capacity while

learning remotely. Two students indicated a decrease in testing anxiety and general anxiety.

Student 5 stated,

Like, if I wanted to cry in class, I would use to do that, especially during math because

math stresses me out a lot. Yeah, because I usually have trouble with feeling

overwhelmed, I don't, like, move our and calm myself down. I just stay there and I freeze

and I don't really help myself. But with remote learning, it's easier to retreat to your own

space and calm down. I guess because I'm already in my room. I know this place is safe

and it's not, like, I don't ever feel trapped in the social situation or like I can't avoid

people sometimes.

Student 5 and Student 6 indicated feeling less anxious taking tests while learning

remotely. Student 6 explained,

I feel like I have more time to complete my assignments and at home I'm in a kind of safe environment. So, when tests or really big assignments come around, I feel like I don't have as many anxious feelings. And I feel like I have a lot of testing anxiety and I get really, really nervous on tests. But that's really lessened a lot since I'm doing it in the comfort of my own room.

Student 5 echoed the same theme saying, "The only test subject I was ever really nervous about taking tests in would definitely be math and taking tests at home has definitely helped me to become more comfortable with taking math tests."

Student 2 identified a lower level of stress in being able to participate in remote learning. Student 2 stated that their mental health had been less negatively affected by a more flexible and less rigid school day schedule. Student 2 explained,

I feel like people who get to stay at home, like for me, it's been a lot better for my mental health sometimes. Because, I don't know, I feel like school can really drain me sometimes. And just being in here [the school] for seven hours every single day, it gets pretty tough sometimes. So, being able to be at home instead of a really busy working environment, it just… I just feel like it's better for my health, my mental health, sometimes.

While each participant indicated they would return to in person learning, benefits were also identified during the coding process in favor of the remote learning experience. Each individual could identify positive aspects, but there was not enough data in the coding to support each subtheme.

Summary

Chapter Four summarized the findings found in the data from the study. The overall themes presented are (1) Communication as a Foundation for Connectedness and Relationships,

(2) Disconnectedness to Peers, and (3) Return to In Person Learning. Communication and subthemes were coded 59 times; Disconnectedness and subthemes were coded 106 times; Return to In Person Learning and subthemes were coded 12 times. The tables, narratives, and excerpts included provide a detailed description of the qualitative data found in this study.

Chapter Five will provide a discussion of the implications and limitations of this study. Additionally, areas for further exploration will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5

Summary of Findings, Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusions

Models of education have shifted over the years; most recently, districts have begun using remote learning as an educational platform due to high demand (Faibisoff & Willis, 1987; Camera, 2020; E. Green, 2020). When COVID-19 restrictions began in March of 2020, schools nationally turned to online remote schooling if they had the resources (Camera, 2020; E. Green, 2020). A short-term online option has become a model of education for over a year.

An important aspect of a student's experience in school is connectedness. When students feel connected to their school, they may also gain some protection against adverse health outcomes and mental health issues (Arslan, 2017; Klem & Connell, 2004; Young et al., 2011; Joyce, 2015). Feelings of connectedness can also increase the students' academic performance and engagement in instruction (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

While most of the nation responded to closure with a distance learning platform, there is limited research on a perception of connectedness to the school when learning this way. This study aimed to develop a deeper understanding of students' perceptions of school connectedness when learning remotely. The modality of this study was qualitative, which allowed students to explore perceptions of their experiences in detail.

The analysis and findings in Chapter 5 are written through the interpretive lens of the researcher. The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the various ways students endorse feelings of connectedness to the school when involved in remote learning? Is there anything different about remote learning that has led to a greater sense of connectedness? (2) What are the factors leading to a sense of disconnectedness during remote learning? Is there anything different about remote learning that has led to a greater sense of

disconnectedness? (3) What effect does remote learning have on the students' feelings of connectedness to the school?

The qualitative data gathered for this study were from three primary sources: (1) individual interviews, (2) one focus group, and (3) individual surveys. The participants ranged from 10th grade to 12th grade and took various classes while learning remotely for the 2020-2021 school year. Once all the data were transcribed, analysis and coding were completed using Creswell's (2013) six steps to discover themes and subthemes in the data.

Summary of the Findings

The study's findings presented below identify the themes and subthemes found in the data. Analysis and presentation of the data that support the themes and subthemes are included in Chapter Four.

Discussion of Findings

Communication as Foundation for Connectedness and Relationships

A theme that covered much of the interviews with students was *communication*. When asked about feelings of connectedness, the participants perceived more connection with the teachers who communicated than those who did not communicate. When a student participates in remote learning, they have to connect to others electronically. The main modes of communication for remote students are email, a learning management system, and a live streaming platform. One student commented about a teacher's contact:

> She's, she's really great. She kept me well involved. And she's always making sure I'm well informed on everything. I could say that she's probably the best teacher I've had for remote, like all year.

The student's statement above aligned with the definition of school connectedness by the CDC (2009), which connects the teacher's care for the student going beyond their academic performance. It was evident to this student the teacher cared. Another participant noted that they wished more teachers communicated in this way:

> I kind of miss check-ins for like… back in remote learning, way back in March, when teachers used things like Flipgrid or canvas discussion just to ask something like 'what did you do last week?'… or something like tell us about yourself and how you're doing while at home.

That student noted that they are aware it's not relevant to the content of the class but that they felt this was an important communication that was not present in their personal experience. Another participant suggested the inclusion of team-building activities as a part of the remote learning experience to increase socialization. This participant felt that one of the aspects missing for remote learning was the socialization and a lack of connection to peers in the classroom. Implementing team building techniques and focusing on the whole child supports the research that implementing a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum can help students feel more connected to their teachers and peers (Lemberger et al., 2016; Dobia et al., 2019). Implementing SEL while learning remotely needs further research to find the best practice for implementing it.

Lack of communication emerged in the data as the foundation of feelings of disconnectedness. For example, two students commented about the lack of communication for daily school announcements during the focus group. One student expressed feeling very disconnected from the school and school events because they did not know that events were happening. One student stated, "And then there's some teachers who just log on to the Zoom to teach…Like, they don't ask how the students are doing."

Two other participants commented that they felt more connected with the teachers that communicated well during remote learning. One student mentioned, "I could write down my comment in the group chat and only to the teacher… but I felt like I had more of a one-on-one teacher." Another noted that they felt "more connected to the teacher" because the teacher was their primary contact. When a peer or teacher did not communicate often, the participants perceived feeling disconnected. One student mentioned feeling disconnected when they took a class that did not have a live teacher portion (an asynchronous class): "I'm just kind of doing the work because there was no live instruction. And in those classes, I kind of feel like I subconsciously pushed them down on my priority list because I wasn't getting any communication from them."

Extracurricular Engagement

The participants who were involved in *extracurricular activities* felt more connected to their peers. This finding aligns with research that supports agentic engagement and extracurricular activities as variables in feelings of connection (Roffey et al., 2019; Lemberger et al., 2016; Dobia et al., 2019). Connectedness through extracurricular activities supports Libbey's (2004) school connectedness measures one and seven: "A sense of belonging" and "being a part of school and participation in extracurricular activities" (p. 281). Each student who participated in an extracurricular activity noted they did not feel connected to their classroom peers, but they still maintain social connections through their extracurricular activities. One student expressed, "So, I think through those clubs, I've been able to feel connection to [site school] and not really lose my social interaction".

Disconnectedness to Peers

Feelings of connection to peers influence a student's perception of connectedness and belonging (Arslan, 2017). The theme of disconnectedness to peers was one of the strongest themes found in the data. Every participant disclosed they did not feel connected to their peers in the classroom while learning remotely. Research indicates that lacking social connection can adversely affect the student's well-being (Loprest et al., 2019; Tucker et al., 2011; Joyce, 2015). One of the participants expressed their disconnection by stating, "You don't talk to anyone else, really." Another student said, "I would never hear about it." And another commented, "it must have been an inside joke with the class."

Return to In Person Learning

This study was limited to investigating students who had participated in remote learning for a short period, so long-term effects of disconnection are unknown. However, when asked whether the student would rather stay a remote learner for the next year or return to an in person learner, every participant indicated they would want to return to in person. The most cited reason in the data for returning to in person learning was to engage and interact more with peers and with their teachers. One student stated, "definitely in person… it's the environment and the people that are there and the fact it's not just me and the computer screen." When asked why they would return to in person learning, another student commented, "Probably just like the relationships and friendships and stuff like that with people around me. And, like, the teachers especially. That's really important to me." This finding supports Libbey's (2004) measure of school connectedness of "level of teacher supportiveness and caring" and "presence of good friends in school" (p. 281).

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted using the Zoom (2021) live streaming platform to interview the students on their perceptions of connectedness when learning remotely. Data were also collected using surveys and focus group for triangulation purposes. This mode of data collection limited the observation of nonverbal cues from the students. This study was also regionally located and examined students at a single high school. Therefore, remote learners in other parts of the United States, and/or other grade levels, may share different perceptions than those represented in this study.

Conclusions

This study's primary conclusion found that disconnection from peers and teachers influenced impacted their perception of connectedness while participating in remote learning. Each participant noted aspects of remote learning that they enjoyed, yet the findings show they did not feel connected to their peers, teachers and sometimes the school in general.

Communication with teachers was an additional theme that emerged in the data. Students who felt more connected noted that they perceived this connection due to having strong and consistent communication with their teacher. The participants felt connected to their teacher whether it was communication through email or the live stream. For the classes that the teachers were not engaged, the participants noted feeling less connected or the class not being a priority. Thus, while remote learning was useful as an instruction model during the COVID-19 pandemic, it still has areas of improvement to be made in the areas of social-emotional learning (SEL) and communication to be a viable alternative to in person learning.

Recommendations for Practice

The following practice recommendations are based on the findings of this study. Three universal themes and subthemes emerged from the study. The universal themes include (1) Communication as a Foundation for Connection and Relationships; (2) Disconnection to Peers; (3) Return to In-Person Learning.

It would be recommended for school systems to engage their teachers in professional development on best practices for communicating with remote learners. As a part of this professional development, teachers would likely benefit from specific models of how to communicate effectively with remote learners. Additionally, the professional development should cover how to communicate best with students via email, phone, and through the learning management system (LMS).

School systems with remote learners may also benefit from investing in a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum to implement virtually. The findings indicate students felt more connected to teachers who communicated effectively and that implementing appropriate SEL would bridge the connection to the student beyond how they are performing academically. In addition, the school district may want to provide a SEL professional development for the remote teachers so they will be able to identify warning signs for students that might start experiencing social and emotional difficulties while learning remotely.

A recommendation for the school system would be to include a specific location on their LMS system that updates the student body for school events and information. This location should be easily accessible by students and guardians to streamline communication. Finally, it is recommended that school systems still provide remote learners with the same accessibility to join or participate in person extracurricular activities.

Recommendations for Future Research

The participants for this study engaged in remote learning for one academic year, so long-term effects were not studied. Additional research is needed to study the long-term effects of academic and SEL performance while learning remotely. This study also included a limited number of participants at a single high school, so it is recommended to conduct a similar investigation with a larger sample size. It is recommended to examine students in other grade bands, like elementary or middle school, to investigate their experiences while learning remotely.

Furthermore, additional research is needed to investigate the most effective way to implement SEL while students learn remotely and which best practices should be implemented for remote SEL implementation and communication. While this study identified that communication is a foundation for perceptions of connection, more research should be conducted to connect the findings with the best practices for remote communication.

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APPENDIX A

Milligan IRB Approval Letter

APPENDIX B

Johnson City Schools Permission to Conduct Research Letter of Approval

APPENDIX C

Participation Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research

You are invited to have your child participate in a research study of the perceptions of connectedness to the school when being a remote and distance learner. This form is a part of the informed consent process, which allows you to understand more about the study before you choose to participate or not.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Holly English, who is a doctoral student at Milligan University, and is a school counselor at Science Hill High School. This study is separate from the role of school counselor at Science Hill High School.

Background Information:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate perceptions of connectedness to the school for students that are learning through a remote learning platform.

Procedure:

If you agree to participate in this study, your child will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, Holly English. This interview will be audio recorded, and will be transcribed for the purposes of collecting the data.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. You and your child can volunteer to participate. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not to choose to be in study. If you choose to participate, you can change your mind and stop your participation at any time during the study. The expected time of participation is approximately 1 hour for individual interview, 1 hour for Focus Group interview, and 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Risk and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Participation in this study could involve some risk of minor discomforts during discussion of feelings of disconnection or connection to the school. This could include the risk of talking about feelings of discomfort with remote learning, stress, or general fatigue.

This study will benefit educators to help understand how students that are learning remotely feel, or do not feel, connected to their school. This could benefit in changes in the way remote learning happens in the future to best support education from a remote learning platform. In addition, it could help to understand the best ways for educators to bridge the gap between the home life and school life of our students.

Payment:

There will be no monetary or gift payment for participation in the study.

Privacy:

Any information your child provides will be kept confidential, and the researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Audio recording and data will be kept secure by keeping the transcripts in a password protected or locked location. Data will be kept for a period of 5 years, as required by Milligan University.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now, or contact the researcher with any questions as they arise. You may request the outcomes determined in the study upon completion of defense by contacting the researcher at at englishh@jcschools.org. For a private discussion about the participation of your child and your rights, you can contact the Milligan University Institutional Review Board at IRB@milligan.edu. You may also contact Dr. Patrick Kariuki, Director of Educational Research at Milligan University, (423) 461-8744.

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 signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms

described above. I am also acknowledging that I understand that I can drop out of participation at

any time during the study.

Printed Name of Parent/ Guardian _____

Date of Consent _____

Participant's Signature _____

Parent or Guardian Signature if participant is under 18 years old

_____

Researcher's Signature _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Question Guide

Interview Guide for Student Interview

8. What played into your decision to choose remote learning? How much input did you have into this decision?

9. What has the remote learning experience been like for you?

10. On a scale from 1 to 5, how connected did you feel to the school environment prior to participating in remote learning? What were factors that led to feeling connected? What were factors that led to feeling disconnected?

11. On a scale from 1 to 5, how connected have you felt to school during remote learning? What are factors that led to feeling connected? What are factors that led to feeling disconnected?

12. If given the choice, would you stay remote for your educational experience or go back to face-to-face instruction? Why?

13. What, if any, benefits have you experienced with remote learning?

14. What, if any, negative outcomes have come from remote learning?

APPENDIX E

Survey Questions

Survey Questions were created on a five-point scale of 1-5. 1- Strongly Disagree and 5-

Strongly Agree. Some questions were open-ended responses. Each will be indicated

below.

1. First Name (open-ended).

2. Last Name (open-ended).

3. I feel connected to the school (five-point scale).

4. I often have interactions with my teachers via online platform (five-point scale).

5. I feel connected to my peers and others in my classes (five-point scale).

6. I like spending time with my classmates (five-point scale).

7. I feel my teachers care about me (five-point scale).

8. I feel that feedback from my teacher is helpful (five-point scale).

9. I feel that I'm often teaching myself the material (five-point scale).

10. I often seek activities to get involved with at school (five-point scale)

11. I am very involved in activities at school, like clubs or teams (five-point scale).

12. I often talk to an adult at the school about things that are important to me (five-point

    scale).

13. I feel disconnected to adults at the school building (five-point scale).

14. I feel disconnected from my peers at school (five-point scale).

15. I do not feel that I'm getting feedback from teachers and other adults during my Remote

    Learning experience (five-point scale).

16. Any other thoughts you'd like to provide about your Remote Learning experience?

    (open-ended)

17. Date of Birth (open-ended).

18. Your Current Grade (choose one answer).

19. Race (choose all that apply).

20. Ethnicity (open-ended).

21. Gender (choose one answer).

22. Are you taking any of the following types of classes this year? (Check all that apply)

23. Who lives at home with you? (open-ended)

24. Is there anything else you'd like for me to know about you? (open-ended)

APPENDIX F

Focus Group Question Guide

Interview Guide for Focus Group

6. What has the remote learning experience been like for you? Do others in the group feel similar? How so?

7. What were factors have you feeling connected to the school? What were factors have you feeling disconnected?

8. If given the choice, would you stay remote for your educational experience or go back to face-to-face instruction? Why?

9. What, if any, benefits have you experienced with remote learning?

10. What, if any, negative outcomes have come from remote learning?