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SECONDARY E-LEARNING STUDENTS' TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY AND COVID-19 EMERGENCY REMOTE LEARNING

BY

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The future of learning.

Approval of Dissertation

The undersigned certify that they have read the dissertation entitled

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Dedication

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Abstract

Approximately 300,000 Canadian students are currently engaged in K-12 distance learning (Archibald et al., 2019). Despite the growth in secondary e-learning, there is limited research on how students with secondary e-learning experience are transitioning into traditional postsecondary university programs. This research is an exploratory study on how Ontarian students with secondary e-learning backgrounds transitioned into their first year of postsecondary education and Emergency Remote Learning (ERL) and how their secondary e-learning experiences impacted these transitions. Using Giorgi's (2009) Descriptive Phenomenological Method, this study revealed that the structure of the transitional experiences of first-year university students with secondary e-learning backgrounds had four constituents: readiness, barriers, supports and strategies, and development and adaption. In order to overcome transitional barriers, students had to adjust by developing new attitudes, behaviours, and strategies. Students described how their secondary e-learning experiences helped them develop the new skills and attitudes that they needed to adapt to the changes in their new learning environments. This study showed that secondary e-learning positively impacted students' transition to university and ERL.

Keywords: COVID-19, educational transitions, ERL, e-learning, secondary, secondary e-learning, emergency remote learning, first-year transition, high school, Ontario, pandemic, postsecondary, remote learning, university

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Nomenclature and Acronyms

TERMS	DEFINITIONS
blended learning	"Blended learning uses digital learning tools within a classroom setting where students are face-to-face with each other and their teacher. Blended learning can use just a few digital tools, or it may use a wide array of tools, courses, and resources" (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.).
digitally literate	Being digitally literate means having the skills and capacity to access, evaluate, and manage information, the ability to analyse and create media, and the aptitude and skills to effectively apply technology within a 21st Century context (Chen et al. 2014).
distance learning	Educational activity in which the participants are separated by time and distance from their instructor and instruction can be delivered by several different methods or a combination of various methods which may involve technology (Moore & Kearsley, 2005).
emergency remote learning (ERL)	As a result of the 2020 COVID-19 most educational institutions in Canada switched from face-to-face classes to remote learning. This learning became known as Emergency Remote Learning (ERL). ERL is unplanned and a temporary response to a crisis (Rahiem, 2020).
first-year postsecondary students	For this study, postsecondary students were individuals between the ages of 18-24 years of age that are enrolled in their first year of full-time study at a college or university (Finnie et al., 2015).
learning management system (LMS)	A learning management system (LMS) is a software application or web-based technology used for managing the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, and delivery of training programs. An LMS is also used for continuing education, professional development, credentialing, online events, and e-learning programs (Bates, 2015).
online learning	Online learning sometimes known as web-based learning is a non-structured mode of delivery rather than the traditional face-to-face method of teaching and learning. It means that the learner will use a digital device of some kind and log on to the Internet to learn (Bates, 2015; Chen & Gallagher-Mackay, 2014).
phenomenology	Phenomenology: "Researchers search for essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52).
postsecondary education	Refers to academic, technical, and vocational programs and courses taken beyond the secondary-school level (Canadian Council on Learning, 2011, p.17).
retention rate	A measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution (Albert, 2010).

secondary e-learning	E-learning is learning that uses digital technologies such as an LMS to access educational curriculum (full secondary school courses) outside of a traditional bricks and mortar classroom. Students are separated from their teacher by time or space, and includes lessons, activities and assessments that address all Ontario course expectations (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.).
traditional learning environment	Teachers and learners are physically in the same place at the same time, usually in a face-to-face classroom environment.
transition to postsecondary education	Tinto defines the transitional process as "a period of passage between the old and the new, between associations of the past and hoped for associations with communities of the present" (Tinto, 1988, p. 444). During this period, students have begun to separate themselves from the past but have not yet fully integrated themselves into the new communities of college and the associated norms and behaviours (Tinto, 1988).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In the 21st century, the advancement of technology has created a society that demands that its citizens be digitally literate. This movement has required educational institutions to develop programs that can provide learners with digital literacies, such as information and communication technologies (ICT) and media literacies (Chen, 2015). From K-12 to postsecondary education, today's students are exposed, in varying degrees, to technology-enhanced learning (Barbour & LaBonte, 2019; Bates, 2015; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019). Blended learning and e-learning, synchronous and asynchronous methods of teaching and learning, and Emergency Remote Learning (ERL) have changed how learning occurs in Ontario's K-12 schools (Barbour et al., 2020; Chen, 2015; Chen et al., 2014). The integration of these methods of learning in K-12 education is widely fragmented and students' access to these diverse learning experiences can vary widely from school to school.

K-12 and postsecondary institutions are responsible for their students' successful transition into postsecondary education (Albert, 2010; Briggs et al., 2012). Acknowledging the various aspects of both the K-12 educational experiences and the transitional experiences of first-year postsecondary students is crucial in understanding how one experience can affect the other. The Briggs et al. (2012) study on student retention stated, "That support is needed on both sides of the transition bridge to enable students to adjust to university and develop learner identity and autonomy" (p. 6). Students who successfully transition to their first year of postsecondary education are more likely to graduate, consequently, educational sectors must work together to help students adapt to their new learning environment (Briggs et al., 2012). This research first explored how secondary e-

learners transitioned into their secondary e-learning courses to discover what their secondary e-learning experiences were like and how the students transitioned to them. These experiences provided a baseline of the student's secondary attitudes, skills, and behaviours before entering their first year of university. This research then explored how the students transitioned into their first year of university. Investigating students' transition to secondary e-learning and their university, allowed this study to explore how students' secondary e-learning experiences impacted their transition to university.

By March 23, 2020, the Government of Ontario temporarily closed educational institutions in the province owing to health and safety concerns regarding the spread of the Novel Coronavirus disease known as COVID-19 (Van Nuland et al., 2020). During this time, schools and universities in Ontario pivoted to remote learning. The Ontario Ministry of Education's (2020) memorandum No. 164 defines remote learning as

> "Learning that occurs when classes are taught at a distance and when students and educators are not in a conventional classroom setting. Remote learning takes place in times of extended interruption to in-person learning – for example, as a result of a pandemic or natural disaster. Classes can be synchronous or asynchronous and can be taught online through a Learning Management System (LMS) or by using videoconferencing tools. In some cases, they may be delivered through emails, print materials, broadcast media, or telephone calls".

Due to the rapid spread of COVID-19, schools and postsecondary institutions remained closed until the end of the 2020 school year (Office of the Premier, 2020).

Rahiem (2020) used the term Emergency Remote Learning (ERL) to delineate remote learning as a spontaneous temporary form of learning from e-learning which is a pre-planned and well-designed type of online learning. This study used the term Emergency Remote Learning (ERL) to distinguish between the different types of learning discussed in this research. As a result of the abrupt changes to education during this study, the research questions were extended to accommodate the students' new experiences with ERL. Consequently, the research questions were expanded to include a question regarding the students' transition to ERL. This study's research explored how students with secondary e-learning backgrounds transitioned into their secondary e-learning courses, their first year of university, and ERL.

Needs and Theory

For the secondary student, the transition to university can be stressful and fraught with physical, emotional, and psychological changes (Matheny et al., 2002; Wasylkiw, 2015). Young people with little to no experience living away from home may have difficulty adapting to the new challenges of postsecondary life. In Canada, the average age of a first-year postsecondary student is between 18-24 years; 65% identify as female, 44% reported being a visible minority, and 24% self-identify as having a disability (Canadian University Survey Consortium, 2019). The Canadian University Survey Consortium's (2019) study revealed although 95% of the students agreed that they are willing to put in a good effort, only 65% of students are confident that they have the necessary study habits to be academically successful. Academic self-efficacy, the belief that one can perform adequately in a postsecondary-learning environment, has a strong positive correlation with academic success and elevated levels of academic persistence (Chemers et al., 2001). With the integration of modern technologies in secondary education creating new learning pathways

and the COVID-19 pandemic accelerating the demand for ERL, it is important to understand how students' secondary e-learning experiences impact their transition to postsecondary education.

The introduction of blended learning models, ubiquitous in most Ontario postsecondary institutions, can complicate students' adjustment to first-year academic life (Matheos, 2011). The self-regulatory nature of postsecondary blended learning models can be challenging for learners (Van Laer & Elen, 2017). New learning methods and diminishing levels of self-perceptions can affect students with already low levels of academic self-efficacy and impact their academic success (Matheos, 2011). The limited research on K-12 e-learning showed that students who had taken secondary e-learning courses thought that they had become more independent organized learners as a result of these experiences (Kirby et al., 2010; Green, 2013). Secondary e-learning provides students with the opportunity to develop both the technological and independent learning skills needed in a contemporary postsecondary learning environment.

Students who successfully transition to their first year of postsecondary education are more likely to achieve their educational goals and graduate (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1975, 2010). This research explored how secondary e-learners transitioned to university and ERL and how their secondary e-learning experiences impacted these educational transitions. This study's outcomes revealed that there are advantages of secondary e-learning that could help bridge the technological gaps between secondary and postsecondary education. This exploratory research can help inform and improve K-12 and postsecondary institutions' educational policies and practices.

Background

In Ontario, first-year postsecondary students find it challenging to manage the independent learning style, faster pace, and more significant academic workload of university (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2013). However, positive first-year postsecondary experiences help prevent students from dropping out of school, which can negatively affect their future (Elkins et al., 2000; Tinto, 1975). High postsecondary retention rates are crucial to governments that need a steady stream of university graduates to provide skills and knowledge to society (Alberta, 2010). Research shows that the number one reason students choose to attend university is to attain educational credentials to improve future opportunities of obtaining an excellent job (CSU, 2019). According to Levine and Dean's (2012) study, factors that influence first-year students' choice to remain in postsecondary education are first-year grades, interest in courses, access to money, and personal supports. Persisting in postsecondary education is critical to students, educational institutions, and society at large, because it provides citizens with the skills and knowledge that they need to succeed.

Academic attainment is related to students' successful adjustment to postsecondary life and first semester grades are a strong predictor of future academic success (Bandura, 1982). Students with strong self-efficacy skills are more resilient, make better grades, and are committed to their long-range objectives (Bandura, 1982). First-year postsecondary students face new academic and social challenges which require them to be motivated, independent, and self-confident (Briggs et al., 2012; Hughes & Smail, 2016). Students who adapt to first-year postsecondary rigours are more likely to persist in attaining their educational goals (Hughes & Smail, 2016).

The increasing demands of the global world have generated significant shifts in the academic landscape and have impacted how education is managed and executed (Harasim, 2017). Government initiatives and institutional policies have led to the normalization and implementation of blended learning models in Ontario's postsecondary institutions (Harrison, 2017). Blended learning, also known as distributed learning, is a term that encompasses both on-campus and distance courses that are delivered with at least some online components (Bates, 2006). This type of learning provides students with the benefits of face-to-face classes in conjunction with web-based learning environments. These dynamic and complex learning environments provide students with various ways to access global content and differentiate their learning (Bates, 2015; Howell & O'Donnell, 2017).

Although technological change has positive outcomes and prepares students for the real world ahead, it can also have adverse effects—generating additional cognitive overload on students already struggling with the fast-paced learning of their postsecondary courses (Heirdsfield et al., 2008). In addition, the demands of a technologically enhanced learning environment can add elements of stress and feelings of incompetence that can negatively affect students' academic performance (Heirdsfield et al., 2008). Technological innovations have reinvented educational institutions and impacted the way instructors teach and how students learn (Chen, 2015). The advancement of technology has created a new type of digital divide that goes beyond the mere availability of technology and is defined by having the skills and aptitude to use it effectively and efficiently (Chen, 2015; Simon et al., 2016). The paradox of technological innovation is that it provides diverse educational opportunities that heighten learning experiences, but still requires advanced technical skills to access

these experiences. Secondary students who have not had higher-order technological learning opportunities are not well-prepared for postsecondary education (Carter & Graham, 2012).

The Ontario government has initiated various programs and policies to integrate technology into K-12 classrooms. In 2006, Ontario's Provincial e-Learning Strategy, now known as Technology Enabled Learning Organization (TELO), was developed to promote e-learning and blended learning in all publicly funded schools in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). This program provides Ontario's K-12 schools with high-speed Internet, digital devices, and the use of an LMS as a teaching and learning platform. It is, however, up to individual school boards on how they deliver these initiatives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). How school boards choose to adopt and implement these initiatives varies; consequently, students from different boards could have different technological experiences. In addition, a board's geographical location and ability to obtain reliable internet bandwidth and technological devices impact their schools' ability to integrate technology (Chen, 2015). A school board's willingness and ability to provide their schools with reliable Wi-Fi and technological devices are significant factors in their students' abilities to develop technological skills.

Principals are critical players in delivering and implementing blended and e-learning initiatives in Ontarian schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Principals' personal biases, their buildings technological infrastructure, and their teachers' readiness can inhibit them from promoting technological integration in their schools (Chen, 2015). In Ontario's K-12 classrooms, the implementation of technological policies and practices can vary, impacting students' levels of technological expertise and postsecondary readiness (Howell & O'Donnell, 2017). Although students may have access to technology, teachers' low levels

of technological experience and readiness can accentuate the digital divides between learners in different schools and school districts (Chen, 2015). As a result, students in their first year of university may be disadvantaged by their lack of K-12 technological experiences.

The Significance of the Study

There are approximately 98 000 students currently enrolled in e-learning in Ontario's K-12 sector, and with the integration of mandatory e-learning, enrollment is expected to expand accordingly (Barbour & LaBonte, 2020). According to the Ontario Provincial e-learning strategy (2016), e-learning is a mode of distance education delivered completely online through an LMS. Ontario's Ministry of Education perceives e-learning courses to provide flexibility and equal learning opportunities in its vast geographical region (Harrison, 2016). In addition, e-learning provides access and equal educational opportunities to students restricted by location or time constraints (Government of Ontario, 2013).

In 2015, almost half of Ontario's public secondary schools had students enrolled in e-learning courses (Chen, 2015). Boards determine which e-learning offerings they will provide within their district; however, all secondary teachers can access all provincially offered e-learning courses (Ontario Provincial e-Learning Strategy, 2016). Secondary e-learning courses may differ in content and the use of synchronous and asynchronous tools. However, all courses require students to use an LMS proficiently and provides them with educational opportunities that help them become more proficient thinkers, organizers, and self-directed learners (Nikolaki et al., 2017). Secondary e-learning offers students flexibility and diverse learning opportunities similar to those used in postsecondary education.

Recently, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2020) announced sweeping changes to Ontario's secondary education and made secondary e-learning compulsory. Currently all high school students in Ontario must take two secondary e-learning courses to graduate. The Ontario Ministry of Education has invested heavily in promoting and delivering e-learning in Ontario's K-12 schools. As a result of these new government initiatives, there is an urgent need to explore the possible long-term benefits and drawbacks of secondary e-learning experiences and its impact on students' transition to postsecondary education. This study explored how students with secondary e-learning experiences transition to their e-learning, first-year of university, and ERL experiences.

Methodology

This study used a mixed research method known as natural phenomenology. Natural phenomenology allows a phenomenological study to be informed by empirical research to clarify phenomenological outcomes and broaden the research's application (Zahavi, 2019). This research primarily used Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method in psychology (DPP). This phenomenological study was used alongside a demographic survey to understand the interplay between students' geographical and academic data and the students' described experiences. This phenomenological research used an educational perspective and focused on students' transitional experiences.

A descriptive phenomenologically study is exploratory, and the intent is not to interfere with the participants' account of their experiences (Giorgi, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2016). This is done by carefully crafting and using broad opened-ended questions that reflect the research aims. This study stayed loyal to Giorgi's DPP method when exploring the students' transitions to secondary e-learning, their first year of university and ERL. However, demographic questions were used to

provide a more in-depth view of the students' transitional experience and help triangulate the data.

Common transitional indicators such as secondary and postsecondary grades, geographical locations, and course completion are considered in most first-year postsecondary transitional models (Astin, 1984; Bean & Eaton, 2000; Briggs et al., 2012; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975; Wasylkiw, 2015). This study used a demographic questionnaire to consider typical transition indicators alongside students' phenomenological experiences. The data were used to compare the students' academic outcomes with their described experiences. The demographic data and the phenomenological study provided insight into students' transitional experiences and helped develop a complete picture of the students' transitional experiences and the impact of secondary e-learning on these experiences. This study explored how students with secondary e-learning experiences transition into their e-learning courses and their first year of university and ERL.

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Introduction

The goal of this study was to explore the first-year postsecondary transitional experiences of students with e-learning backgrounds. This literature provided an overview of the learners' characteristics, seminal and contemporary student-retention theories, and the limited research literature on secondary e-learners' first-year-postsecondary transitions. In addition, a review of provincial policies and practices showed the need for localized research that accurately reflects Ontarian students' educational experiences. The amalgamation of these factors provided insight into the complexities of students' educational transitions, the impact of secondary learning on these transitions, and the need for more research in this area.

Learner Characteristics

An Overview of Contemporary Students' Characteristics

Technological innovation has profoundly influenced today's secondary graduates, and there is a need for current research that reflects their educational needs and choices (Barbour, 2018). This generation of first-year postsecondary students, known as Generation Z, is highly technical and digitally connected (Levine & Dean, 2012; Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Schweiger & Ladwig, 2018). Born between 1993 and 2011, these learners account for 22% of all Canadian youth (Statistics Canada, 2011). First-year-postsecondary students have never known a world without mobile devices and the Internet, and this experience influences how they perceive themselves and interact with the world around them (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Not all attributes that are general to a generation apply to all individuals in the group (Levine & Dean, 2012). However, an overall understanding of a generation aggregate can help establish specific patterns of behaviour that are common to most people in the group and help identify their needs (Barbour, 2018).

Seemiller and Grace's (2015) extensive study on 1000 of today's students noted that innovations such as computers, mobile devices, and social media have impacted how, when, and what these young people like to learn. Technology has changed who students are and how they learn. Although this cohort of students may have many characteristics of the generations that preceded them, the constant technological connectivity that has permeated their lives has changed their social, emotional, and cognitive behaviours (Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Schweiger & Ladwig, 2018). This portion of the literature review examined the current research on the characteristics of present-day learners and established a need for contemporary research that reflected the reality of these students.

Students' Cultural Characteristics

Now entering postsecondary educational institutions for the first time, this generation of students is the first to be wholly immersed in mobile technology since birth (Levine & Dean, 2012). These learners are also the most racially and culturally diverse generation in the history of North America (Stats Canada, 2016; Levine & Dean, 2012; Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Schweiger & Ladwig, 2018). These young people value individual diversity and choose their friends primarily on shared interests regardless of social class or race and have a more heterogeneous group of friends than previous generations (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Over 80% of these students believe that marriage equality and biracial dating are socially acceptable (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). These students are a diverse and culturally complex group of people who live in a digitally enhanced international world and provide postsecondary educational institutions with unique transitional challenges (Schweiger & Ladwig, 2018).

Students Managing Relationships and Community

Many of today's students use social media platforms to reflect their strong social conscience and share their views with their friends, family, and social groups (Levine & Dean, 2012). Using various social media tools, these students prefer to develop, maintain, and end personal and professional relationships online more than any other generation that has preceded them (Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Schweiger & Ladwig, 2018). This group of first-year-postsecondary students are highly committed to family, and many of them consider their parents to be their best friends (Levine & Dean, 2012; Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Communities matter to these students, and they value their family and friends more than anything else and will strongly advocate for what they identify as important. This generation uses technology to supplement face-to-face relationships, not replace them, and maintain connectivity to their valued communities (Levine & Dean, 2012). Communicating through a variety of social media platforms and their mobile devices, this cohort of first-year learners fluidly interacts with technology to maintain relationships.

Students' Educational Goals and Attitudes

Although this group of first-year postsecondary learners are optimistic, they are also pragmatic about their futures as they have been raised in turbulent economic times (Levine & Dean, 2012; Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Schweiger & Ladwig, 2018). Over 80% of today's students value postsecondary education above anything else, and completing it is one of their top priorities (Levine & Dean, 2012; Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Schweiger & Ladwig, 2018). Goal-driven, these students not only believe that postsecondary education is essential but are highly motivated to earn accreditation towards goals that can provide them with a stable career path (Levine and Dean, 2012).

Students consider quality educational curriculum, good faculty-student relationships, and experiential learning opportunities essential elements to a good education (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Being flexible and adapting to the ever-changing world around them is a necessity; therefore over 70% of these students feel that it is vital to control their educational programs by having flexibility in course choice (Levine & Dean, 2012; Schweiger & Ladwig, 2018). Seemiller and Grace's research indicates that technology, connectivity, and choice are ways in which this cohort of first-year postsecondary learners likes to construct their learning. These students are highly motivated, practical learners whose educational needs are changing postsecondary education to prepare themselves for advancement in a complex global world (Turner, 2015).

Students' Educational Needs

Although the student's world is full of technology and fast access to content, this does not always equate to good learning (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Studies show that this generation of learners has lower levels of attention and patience, limited time management and communication skills, and minimal interest in theory (Abed et al., 2015; Levine & Dean, 2012; Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Although these students are confident and self-assured, they have more digital distractions, are less focused, and have fewer organizational skills than previous generations (Kozuh et al., 2016). Tulgan's (2013) research indicates that this cohort of learners will have more technical and non-technical skill gaps than any other age before them. Helping students develop good work habits and interpersonal and critical thinking skills will become a primary focus of employers in the future (Tulgan, 2013). Today's first-year postsecondary learners are a diverse, bright, optimistic, media-savvy entrepreneurial group; however, they struggle with self-management, organizational and communication skills and will need additional

support transitioning to postsecondary education (Levine & Dean, 2012; Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2015).

Technology has provided today's learners with extraordinary access to content and ideas, yet research indicates that their interpersonal, organizational, and creative skills lag previous generations (Levine & Dean, 2012; Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Tulgan, 2013). For example, Levine and Dean's (2012) study showed that 54% of all first-year-postsecondary learners rated their postsecondary education as difficult, and 46% felt that they were struggling to be academically successful. First-year postsecondary students are Internet savvy; however, they lack the ability to curate information, solve problems, and succinctly communicate in a face-to-face environment, leaving them with limited technological skills and social gaps that may impede their postsecondary education and professional lives (Abed, et al., 2015; Levine & Dean, 2012; Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Tulgan, 2013; Turner, 2015).

At-Risk Students

In Canada, postsecondary students' demographics are changing and presenting new challenges to educational institutions across the country (Michalski et al., 2017). More students from diverse cultural backgrounds and with various learning needs are entering postsecondary education (Michalski et al., 2017). It is especially critical to prepare students from poor social-economic backgrounds and those with disabilities in their transition to postsecondary education, as they are already subjected to higher levels of stress and have fewer academic pathways (Oreopoulos et al., 2014). At-risk students are also more likely to leave postsecondary institutions because they do not have the practical learning skills and self-motivation to overcome complex learning challenges associated with postsecondary education (Bowering et al., 2017).

First-year postsecondary students face various new stressors, such as making new friends, modifying existing relationships, and developing new study and living habits and this can affect their mental health (Parker et al., 2004). Poor adjustment to postsecondary education results in academic stress, loneliness, acute feelings of depression and anxiety, and high drop-out rates (Chemers et al., 2001). Understanding students diverse cultural, academic, social, and backgrounds is important in helping them transition to postsecondary education (Cameron & Pagnattaro, 2017; Levine & Dean, 2012; Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Schweiger & Ladwig, 2018). Consequently, postsecondary institutions must commit to understanding and supporting their increasingly diverse student population.

Students' Emotional and Psychological Needs

Students need self-efficacy and self-determination to be successful in their postsecondary experiences (Poirier, 2015). Although contemporary first-year postsecondary students have access to high-quality information and are confident in their abilities to gather information, they often need constant reassurance to finish projects (Levine & Dean, 2012). Weinstein's (2010) study shows that youth who spend a considerable portion of their time online have limited abilities to manage frustration, fear, and anxiety. These students tend to distract themselves with technology resulting in weak coping skills, hindering their ability to manage adversity (Levine & Dean, 2012). Contemporary students need to be resilient and adapt to their new postsecondary lifestyle (Rahat & İlhan, 2016). Assisting these learners to become independent, well-organized critical thinkers is a crucial aspect of a successful postsecondary transition (Schweiger & Ladwig, 2018). Secondary-learning experiences are crucial when considering students' ability to execute self-control in more liberal postsecondary environments (Rahat & İlhan, 2016).

Providing students opportunities to develop self-efficacy, self-determination, and coping skills should be essential aspects of the academic criteria of all educational institutions.

Theoretical Foundations

To understand how students with secondary e-learning backgrounds transitioned to their secondary e-learning courses, first-year of university and ERL, I developed a theoretical framework which reflected the educational transitional experience. First, I considered Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) human adaption theory to understand how people adapt to change over a lifetime. Then I utilized the seminal works of Astin's (1975,1993) student involvement theory and Tinto's (1975,1986, 2018) student departure theory to consider educational transition from both an institutional and student lens. Finally, I reviewed Bean and Eaton's (2000), Briggs et al.'s (2012), and Wasylkiw's research to consider current perspectives on educational transitions. I then reviewed the limited empirical research on how students with e-learning background transitioned to their first year of university to develop insight into how students with e-learning backgrounds are transitioning into their first year of university.

Schlossberg's Human Adaptation Theory

Research on the retention of first-year postsecondary students shows that a successful transition to the first year of postsecondary education is paramount to them achieving their educational goals (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1995; Tinto, 1998). Schlossberg's (1981) human adaption theory provided a contextual framework to understand how people adapt to the various changes throughout their lifetime. Schlossberg (1981) stated, "A transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires corresponding changes in one's behaviour and relationship" (p.5). According to Schlossberg (2011), there are three types of transitions: anticipated transitions, unanticipated

transitions, or non-event transitions (a transition that fails to incur). How individuals cope with their transitions and what helps them successfully adapt to them is a central theme of this study.

Schlossberg's human adaption theory is widely accepted as an educational framework to understand how young people adapt to the changes that are inherent in their transition from secondary to postsecondary life (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1995; Tinto, 1987). Human adaption theory identifies characteristics of change and explains how individual characteristics, pre-transition and post-transition environments, and personal and institutional supports can help people adapt to transitions (Schlossberg, 1981). Schlossberg's (1981) theory of human adaption helped to understand the interaction of the various components of stress and change and how strategies can support students as they adapt to their new learning environment.

Schlossberg's (1981) theory of human adaption postulated that humans are continually experiencing change throughout their lifetimes. People's ability to adapt to change is influenced by their stage of life, their pre-transition and post-transitional environments, and their characteristics and attitudes. Identifying the specific characteristics of the transition that negatively or positively influence the adaption process is vital to understanding how individuals can manage and adjust to the change (Schlossberg, 1981). Furthermore, accepting the new role, timing, and duration of a transition can affect one's ability to adapt to the change. Examining the pre-transition environment is also essential in understanding if individuals have developed strategies to prepare them for the change. Understanding the relationship between these complex variables is fundamental in helping individuals assimilate into their new surroundings (Schlossberg, 1981). Examining first-year postsecondary students' pre-existing environments, such as their e-learning experiences, helps to understand how these learning experiences influence students' ability to adapt to their new postsecondary environments.

Gender, different life-stages, self and world attitudes, and previous experiences are individual characteristics that can either help reduce or heighten stress resulting from a transitional experience (Schlossberg, 1981, 2011). The way a person views the transition and the supports they have in place to help them adapt to the change influences their stress levels (Schlossberg, 1981, 2011). According to Schlossberg (1981, 2011), for an individual to successfully adapt to change, they must have either internal or external supports that can help them cope with the stressors that accompany the transitional experience. Therefore, understanding how students use their internal coping mechanisms or external supports such as friends and family is vital when advocating supports for first-year postsecondary students as they transition into university (Rahat & İlhan, 2016).

Schlossberg (2011) expanded her human adaption to transition theory to include the 4S system that assessed the deficits or resources that individuals brought to their transitional experience to understand how people cope with transitions. The 4S system identified four categories: situation, self, support, and strategies, as elements that influenced an individual's ability to cope with change (Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1995). The first category of the system recognized that people were in a state of change when they transitioned, and the complexity of an individual's situation during a transition influenced their ability to cope with the changes that occurred (Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

The second category in Schlossberg’s (2011) system was self and referred to a person's inner strength and internal attributes such as resiliency, optimism, and self-efficacy that allow one to deal with complex challenges.

Supports are another pivotal part of Schlossberg's (2011) model, and focused on the importance of having friends, family, institutional, or professional organizations to help individuals more easily adapt to change.

The fourth category of Schlossberg's (2011) system was strategies and recognized that an individual's ideas or plans assisted them in changing their situation or perspective of the event and allowed for a reframing of the transition, which in turn reduced associated stress. Schlossberg (2011) explained the inherent problem of all transitions: "At first, people think of nothing but being a new graduate, a new supervisor, a recent retiree. Then they began to separate the past and move toward the new role, for a while teetering between the two" (p. 60). Schlossberg's 4S system recognized that various factors at different life-stages influenced how a person perceived their transition, adapted to it, and coped with its stressors.

Human adaption to transition theory provided an understanding of how individuals transitioned to the change and how their perceptions of the change influenced their ability to adapt to it. (Schlossberg, 2011). Understanding the types of stressors, issues, and changes experienced by first-year-postsecondary students and how they perceive these challenges is critical to understanding their transitional experiences. Students' previous secondary academic experiences, also influence their ability to adapt to postsecondary academic demands (Finnie & Wismer, 2015). Consequently, recognizing the unique dynamics of students' pre-postsecondary non-traditional online experience is vital in helping them adjust to their new academic environment. Schlossberg's (2011) theory of human adaption to transition provides a model to examine how various conditions and strategies can impact students' ability to transition to postsecondary education.

Astin's Student Involvement Theory

Astin's (1975) extensive work in student development—the way that students gain knowledge and develop during postsecondary education—resulted in the development of a student-involvement theory. Astin (1993) believed that all aspects of higher education, including academic achievement, policy, and research, should focus on helping students be successful by understanding how students develop. He stated, "Student development theory is the theme that binds it all together: how students develop and why: how we can facilitate that process. I think that is the overarching interest" (p. 372).

Student involvement theory focused on the academic development of postsecondary students and understanding the elements that contribute to their willingness to succeed (Astin, 1993). Astin's (1975) desire to improve postsecondary learning environments led him to question why some students persist in attaining their educational goals while others drop out of postsecondary education. "Quite simply, student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1984, p. 518). Students who strive to involve themselves in their new academic, social, or psychological realities are more persistent in achieving their educational goals (Astin, 1975, 1993; Magolda & Astin, 1993). Understanding the various components of transitions and the skills and characteristics needed to adjust to change is vital in assisting students in integrating into their new educational environment (Rahat & İlhan, 2016).

Student involvement theory postulated that students' time is finite, and the demands of life can influence students' behaviours and how they spend their time. Conflicting social, academic, and financial demands of a student's life are also variables that affect the first year of the postsecondary experience. Furthermore, students' pre-postsecondary experiences are a

critical part of their ability to adapt successfully to their new academic environment (Astin, 1984). Previous secondary educational experiences provide a foundation of habits and behaviours that support or diminish a student's ability to adapt to their new academic challenges (Astin, 1975, 1993; Magolda & Astin, 1993).

Astin's (1993) research focused on the practical aspects of time and energy, such as time-on-task, effort, and persistence, rather than emotion, as essential indicators for predicting students' academic success. In addition, different aspects of a student's environment such as job status, living on or off-campus, academic involvement, friends, family, extracurricular activities, personal fitness, and student and faculty interaction also influences a student's commitment to their institutional commitment (Astin, 1975).

Astin's (1975) research on college dropouts identified factors that significantly affect a student's ability to persist in postsecondary education. For instance, students with jobs off-campus are more likely to feel they do not fit in with their educational institution. Another factor that can impact students' ability or desires to stay in school is the number of competing demands they have on their attention. Students who live at home may also have other life factors that competed for their attention and limited their institutional involvement (Astin, 1975). Students who have low levels of institutional involvement and do not feel they fit in at their postsecondary institutions are more likely to leave school (1975).

Students' level of educational involvement also relies on whether students believe that they have control over their situations and if they attribute their success or failures to internal or external sources (Astin, 1975). A student's perception of their circumstances and their ability to change their situation highly influences their ability to adapt and engage in their postsecondary environment (Astin, 1975). Previously held notions of independent learning and self-efficacy are

also important indicators of a student's future academic success (Banduras, 1993). Students' level of educational involvement also relies on whether students believe that they have control over their situations and if they attribute their success or failures to internal or external sources (Astin, 1975). A student's perception of their circumstances and their ability to change their situation highly influences their ability to adapt and engage in their postsecondary environment (Astin, 1975). Previously held notions of independent learning and self-efficacy are also important indicators of a student's future academic success (Banduras, 1993). As a growing number of secondary students prefer to engage in non-traditional learning such as e-learning, it is critical to understand how students perceive their new learning environments and how their perceptions impact their ability to adapt to change.

A learner's ability to dedicate enough psychological and physical energy to generate academic, social, and personal attitudes, strategies, and supports is critical in developing the resiliency needed to complete their educational goals (Astin, 1984). Student involvement theory aligned with Schlossberg's (1981) theory of adaption, as it concentrated on the individual's perceptions of their ability to adapt to their new environment. Both approaches focused on past experiences and behaviours to understand how students 'characteristics, previous experiences and choices impacted the transition to their new situation. Like human adaption theory, Student involvement theory focused on students' ability to deal with competing interests and personal challenges and how this influenced their ability to transition to the challenges of their new educational environment.

Tinto's Student Departure Theory

Challenging previous research on student retention, Tinto's (1987) model of student departure theory focused on the complex and diverse reasons students decide to leave

postsecondary education. Tinto argued that previous student departure research was limited because it reflected an institutional point of view and did not encompass types of learners and their perceptions of their unique situations. Tinto (1975, 1987, 1986, 2010, 2016, 2017, 2018) claimed that an effective model of student departure should evolve from a student's lens rather than an institutional perspective. Distinct aspects of student attrition, student retention and persistence must be viewed separately (Tinto, 1987). Students' diverse educational and cultural backgrounds and the variety of innovative and specialized educational programs are changing the reasons students leave or change educational institutions (Tinto, 1987). Tinto's model of student departure delved deeply into the complex issues of student's previous and current life situations to understand how they influenced student attrition.

Postsecondary retention programs may not influence a student's decision to abandon their educational goals as various personal circumstances may determine their choices (Tinto, 1987). Regardless of institutional support, many students move schools or take a break from their studies, and frequently these moves are not tracked or interpreted as students dropping out of school (Tinto, 1987). Student departure theory sought to understand life events from a student perspective and provided a broader lens to explore the relationship between first-year students' secondary e-learning experiences and their transition to postsecondary education. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1986, 2010, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018) work also illustrated discrepancies between a students' personal needs and wants and an educational institution's retention policies.

Students who leave postsecondary educational institutions by choice do not always see the change as undesirable and do not consider themselves dropouts (Tinto's 1987). Tinto's (1987) research showed that most postsecondary institutions equate dropping out with a student's failure or institutional failure and do not account for life's changing circumstances or characteristics

such as age, experience, or culture. Previous student departure models defined student attrition as any student that leaves postsecondary education regardless of the situation (Tinto, 1987). Tinto's research found that the concept of dropping out did not accurately reflect the variety of reasons that students left school. Tinto's studies also revealed that if students control their decision to withdraw from school, it did not constitute a dropping out mentality, and in this case, institutional actions did not influence students' decision to leave. Raised in a time of profound economic, technological, and global disruptions, today's students feel it is essential to control their education (Dean & Levine, 2012). Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1986, 2010, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018) work is a framework to analyze first-year students' complex needs and choices and understand how they impact their postsecondary transitions from their perception.

Tinto's (1978) student departure theory outlined students' transitional experiences as progressing through three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. These stages align with Schlossberg's (1981) human adaption to transition theory. Students must be able to separate themselves in some way from their past, establish new relationships and connections, and incorporate the characteristics of their new learning environment into their lives (Tinto, 1986, 1988). Tinto (1987, 1988) also agreed with Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and believed that students are more vulnerable during their transition, and therefore more likely to leave school.

Tinto's research found that students who have difficulty transitioning to postsecondary education leave because they may experience incongruence and isolation, lack academic or institutional commitment, or have a deficiency in intellectual and academic attributes (Tinto, 1987, 1988). Students who experience incongruence and isolation may feel that they do not fit in culturally, their academic program does not fit with their long-term goals, or that they are not

connecting to the academic or social aspects of the educational institution (Tinto, 2017a). Tinto's (2017a) student departure theory suggested that students' circumstances played a significant role in student persistence and postsecondary institutions must be prepared to support the individual needs of all students.

Students also leave their educational institutions for personal reasons, such as they are not committed to putting enough academic energy into their programs or because they are not committed to that particular school (Tinto, 1987, 1988). In addition, students often leave postsecondary education because they underestimate the academic efforts that it takes to be successful in postsecondary education, they do not have the skills or disposition to be successful, or they are not mature enough to handle the stresses and changes of higher education (Tinto, 1987, 1988). Student departure theory found that students could adjust their behaviours when they developed internal and external supports that helped them adapt to their postsecondary environment's academic and social demands. Tinto's (1987, 1988) theory of departure maintained that antecedent conditions or students' previously adopted attitudes or skills determined their ability to adapt to their first-year postsecondary education. Tinto's (1987, 1988) theory of departure also argued that it is the students' educational institution's responsibility to provide their students with social and academic supports to help them adjust to the demands of their new learning environment.

Contemporary students have more choices and access to information than previous generations, but research shows that they lack perseverance and need additional support to manage their transition to postsecondary educations (Levine and Dean, 2012; Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Weinstein, 2010). Tinto (2017) stated, "Persistence or its active form - persisting - is another way of speaking of motivation. It is the quality that allows someone to continue in

pursuit of a goal even when challenges arise" (p.2). Self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and the perceived value of education are important experiences that shape student motivation and aid them in successfully navigating their educational career (Tinto, 2017b). Banduras (1993) describes the importance of self-efficacy, "Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their level of functioning and over events that affect their lives. Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave" (p.118). High levels of self-efficacy reduce students' academic, personal, or social incongruence with their educational institution and more effectively manage their new learning environment (Tinto, 2017b).

Similar to Schlossberg's (1981) and Astin's (1984) theories, Tinto (1987) believed that student characteristics, strategic supports, and previous and current environments influence students' abilities to evolve and integrate into their new environment. However, Tinto's research recognized these elements from the student's perspective rather than through an educational institution lens, allowing for a more individualized approach to student retention. Austin's (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto's (1987) departure theory offered different explanations for why students persist in their educational goals. Their commonalities, however, suggest that previous experiences, supports and strategies, and personal characteristics impact first-year postsecondary students' ability to change and transition from their former identity to their new one.

Current Transitional Models

Briggs, Clark, and Hall

The Briggs et al. (2012) transitional model of organizational influence articulated how educational institutions can help students develop learner identity. First-year students experience significant social displacement, and for them to successfully transition from high school students

to postsecondary students, they must mature and develop skills and knowledge that support independent undergraduate learning. Briggs et al. developed their concepts of learner identity based on Tinto's seminal principles. The transitional model of organizational influence looked at students' pre-transitional and transitional experiences to understand the relationship between students' secondary and their postsecondary experiences. The transitional model of organizational influence focused on students' pre-transitional experiences, aspirations, and commitment to understand, if they have developed the autonomy, and confidence needed for postsecondary education (Briggs et al., 2012).

The transitional model of organizational influence also explored first-year students' social and academic circumstances and their interaction with their educational institutions (Briggs et al., 2012). Their aim was to understand how learners changed their identities to adapt to their new learning environments. As students transition into their first year of postsecondary education, they had to reorganize how they thought about themselves academically and socially to adapt to their new learning environment (Briggs et al., 2012). By adapting to postsecondary education's new academic and social demands, students start to identify as postsecondary learners. The Briggs et al., research showed that students' secondary education influences their postsecondary readiness and that once they transition to university, they must have the maturity to develop the autonomy and the confidence to adopt an advanced learner persona.

Wasylkiw

Wasylkiw's (2016) research agreed with the Briggs et al. (2012) study that students' readiness is an essential but complex component of students' transitions to postsecondary education. Wasylkiw postulated that features of transitional change cannot be studied in a silo as students' experiences often overlap creating additional levels of complexity. Students experience

significant academic adjustments when transitioning to postsecondary education such as developing learning autonomy, adjusting to bigger class sizes, and a more demanding workload. Students' academic grades and their ability to handle the stress and persistence that it takes to be successful must influence their ability to transition to university (Wasylkiw, 2016). Wasylkiw (2016) identified student readiness as the match or mismatch between students' previous academic culture and new postsecondary learning environment, their rate of maturation, and the development of new skills and personal characteristics. Students' ability to transition successfully to postsecondary education is complex based on many factors such as students' readiness, academic competency, maturity, and resiliency.

The Wasylkiw (2016) study found that the most significant aspect of student transition is student readiness. Student readiness for transition to postsecondary education needs to be considered in terms of both academic preparation and social integration (Wasylkiw, 2016).

Students who are working at higher levels of academic achievement in high school have the skill set and work ethic needed in postsecondary education. However, students must be open to developing new social networks to socially transition into postsecondary education. Wasylkiw (2016) posited that first-year postsecondary students are adjusting to many changes simultaneously, and it is the combination and prioritization of factors that characterized the transition for each student.

Bean and Eaton

Bean and Eaton's (2000) student psychological retention model looked at student retention through a general behavioural lens. Psychological models can be used in sociological theories to explain essential traits such as motivation, self-efficacy, and approach and avoidance models. Their student psychological retention model showed that students' beliefs, over time,

lead to attitudes, leading to intentions leading to behaviours. Bean and Eaton's model of student retention used four psychological theories to help explain the psychological motivations of students to persist or leave postsecondary education. The four psychological theories integrated into the student psychological retention model were attitude-behaviour theory, self-efficacy theory, coping theory, and attribution theory. These four theories represent the psychological processes that can result in students' adopting attitudes that impacts their institutional fit (Bean & Eaton, 2000).

Bean and Eaton's (2000) psychological model of student retention identified distinct characteristics of students' transition that sociological models may overlook. Psychological theories such as coping theory, self-efficacy theory, and attribution theory help explain students' choices and behaviours, affecting their ability to successfully transition into postsecondary education (Bean & Eaton, 2000). Bean and Eaton's psychological model of student retention differs from other social and academic theories as it looks at how psychological influences may prevent or help students fit into their new educational settings. For example, a student may have strong academic qualities, so they may fit in one way, but could be socially awkward, so may be mismatched in other ways (Bean & Eaton, 2000). Students, consequently, must have or develop strategies and coping mechanisms to help them integrate into their new complex environment. Bean and Eaton's psychological model explained how specific behaviours and beliefs lead to successful or unsuccessful postsecondary transitions. The psychological model of student retention looks at students' postsecondary entry characteristics, past behaviours, self-beliefs, and normative beliefs. As first-year students interact with their postsecondary educational institution, they must develop internal processes and strategies to help them adapt to their new academic and social demands (Bean & Eaton, 2000).

The current literature on student transitional models reveals the complex and individualistic nature of student transition. The seminal literature of Schlossberg, Tinto, Astin were reviewed and considered as the theoretical framework for this research. However, current transitional research was also included to consider the complex needs of contemporary learners. As students transition into postsecondary education, they are faced with a variety of new competing and overlapping academic, social, and psychological experiences. Students' previous experiences and their academic, social, and psychological attitudes and abilities all play an essential role in the transitional process. Understanding how modern first-year-university students are transitioning into postsecondary education is important when creating policies and practices that can help them succeed.

Empirical Studies

Introduction to Current Studies

A considerable body of research already exists on how students successfully transition to postsecondary university and how educational institutions can help them succeed (Albert, 2010; Briggs et al., 2012). Little research, however, has been done on the impact of students' secondary e-learning experiences on their transition to postsecondary education (Green, 2013; Kirby et al., 2010). Although e-learning is growing in the K-12 sector, there is a limited number of studies available on it, and the current research primarily focuses on student-learning outcomes, technical problems, and practitioner and student attitudes (Barbour et al., 2012; Dodd et al., 2009; Finnie et al., 2015; Kirby & Sharpe, 2011; van Rooij et al., 2017).

Ontario have had a provincial K-12 e-learning strategy since 2006; however, there is limited research available on the long-term advantages and disadvantages of secondary e-learning and its impact on students' future educational endeavours (Barbour, 2017; Dodd et al., 2009; Kirby & Sharpe, 2011). An extensive review of research revealed only one American study

(Green, 2013) and three Canadian studies (Dodd et al., 2009; Kirby et al., 2010; Kirby & Sharpe, 2011) that explored the relationship between students' secondary e-learning experiences and their postsecondary transitional experiences. Although the findings of the American study focused exclusively on virtual high school graduates, it is important because it developed academic themes that are common to the e-learning phenomena and first-year postsecondary transitional experiences.

Full-time e-Learners and Postsecondary Transitional Experiences

Green's (2013) dissertation research used Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological methodology to examine the first-year transitional experiences of full-time virtual learning students. Twelve graduates who had spent at least one full year exclusively in a virtual high school were purposefully selected from various South Carolinian virtual schools for the study (Green, 2013). Green's study explored how e-learning students transitioned into their first six weeks of university. Green's study's aim was to understand how students' secondary e-learning experiences impacted their academic and social transitions. From Green's research, four main themes arose: time management, learning environment preferences, involvement, and homeschooling misconceptions. All students in the study felt that their secondary e-learning experiences helped them develop time management and stronger communication skills (Green, 2013). The students also thought that their secondary e-learning experiences made them "push themselves" so they were ready for the independent learning inherent in postsecondary education (Green, 2013, p. 92). Overall, the study revealed that students' secondary e-learning experiences helped ease their academic and social transitions to postsecondary education (Green, 2013). However, the students in this study felt that both their peers and postsecondary school faculty did not understand their secondary e-learning experiences.

Green's (2013) research provided insight into the specific skills and strategies that students developed during their secondary e-learning experiences and how these characteristics supported a positive transition to postsecondary education. Green's study's limitations were that it only included a small number of purposefully selected university-bound American charter-school students. Furthermore, it was an American charter-school study that may not reflect the experiences of Canadian public-school e-learning students. Although this study does not mirror the Ontarian public educational experience, its findings provide valuable insights into students' perceptions of how their secondary e-learning experiences impacted their postsecondary transitional experiences. Furthermore, Green's research is a phenomenological study, so it is exploratory and only generalizable to the students in the study (Giorgi, 2009).

The Canadian Secondary e-Learning Experience

Between 2009-2012, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador developed the current Canadian research on the impact of secondary e-learning on students' transition to postsecondary education (Saqlain, 2016). Newfoundland and Labrador's educational system developed a rich history in K-12 distance education going back to the 1930s due to the geographical challenges of providing education to rural areas (Saqlain, 2016). The following research studies resulted from a Canadian Council Grant and focused explicitly on the effects of rural secondary e-learning students' transition to postsecondary education in Newfoundland and Labrador. The findings from these studies provide an overview of Canadian research on the impact of students' secondary e-learning experiences on their postsecondary transitions and justify the need for current research in this area.

The Impact of Secondary e-Learning on Postsecondary Transitions

The first research study done in this series was the first Canadian research to focus on how high school students' e-learning experiences impacted their postsecondary transitional process (Dodd et al., 2009). In phase one of this study, the researchers used postal codes to identify rural secondary students and then used three years of school records from graduating classes to compare the results of students who had taken at least one e-learning course to those that did not take any (Dodd et al., 2009). In addition, the study used students' grade 12 grades to determine if the learners that took online courses differed academically from their peers who did not enroll in online courses. The results of this investigation revealed that students who enrolled in at least one e-learning course had an overall average of 79.98%, while students enrolled in traditional courses scored an average of 77.08%. Although the grades differences were minimal, the comparison showed that students who took e-learning courses were not academically disadvantaged due to online learning and are marginally more successful than their peers who do not take online courses (Dodd et al., 2009).

The second phase of this study followed the students into their first year of university and establishes a relationship between secondary e-learning and their ability to persist in their first year of university. The Dodd et al. (2009) research defined persistence as a students' ability and desire to continue in their postsecondary program until completion. Their study used students' first-year university records to identify two significant differences between students who had taken at least one secondary e-learning course and those who had not. The Dodd et al. study discovered that students with secondary e-learning experiences maintained higher grades and had significantly lower self-voluntary and involuntary withdrawal rates than the students who had not taken secondary e-learning courses). Although this study only focused on university-bound rural

students' academic and attrition results, it indicates that secondary e-learning may support students' transition to postsecondary education.

e-Learning Students' Perceptions of Postsecondary Transitional

The Kirby et al. (2010) exploratory qualitative research was the second phase of this research series and focused on the experiences of Newfoundland and Labrador's rural student e-learning population and their transitional experiences to postsecondary education. Their study followed 142 rural students one year after their high school graduation and compared the experiences of students who had taken at least one e-learning course in high school with students who had not taken any online courses. The Kirby et al. study's objectives were to compare secondary e-learners to those students who had not taken e-learning courses regarding their participation in first-year postsecondary education. The study also compared the participation enrollment rates of secondary e-learners and non-e-learners in postsecondary e-learning courses. Finally, the researchers sought to discover secondary e-learners' perceptions of postsecondary e-learning and compare it to traditional high school students without e-learning backgrounds who were also enrolled in postsecondary e-learning courses (Kirby et al., 2010).

The Kirby et al. (2010) study was divided into two phases. The first stage was a short ten-minute phone survey which asked students if they had secondary e-learning experiences, and if they had intended to enroll in postsecondary education, and if so, what programs they had chosen. The second phase of the study interviewed 43 randomly selected high school graduates from the original 142 graduates who had participated in the ten-minute survey; 23 of the participants had secondary e-learning experiences, and 20 did not, however, they all stated they had intended to enroll in postsecondary education.

The Kirby et al. (2010) study developed two interview booklets. One booklet was for the secondary e-learners' interviews, and the other was for the interviews of the traditional secondary learners who had not taken e-learning courses. Both interview booklets focused on whether students had entered their intended postsecondary institutions and programs. The interviews also asked both sets of participants if they had chosen any postsecondary e-learning courses and preferred them compared to traditional postsecondary courses. The data revealed that all students preferred to take traditional face-to-face courses in their first year of university or college. The second phase of the research also asked the secondary e-learning students to reflect on their secondary e-learning and its impact on their postsecondary transitions. Kirby et al.'s (2010) study showed that 12 out of 18 students with e-learning backgrounds felt that their e-learning experiences had made them more responsible and organized and helped them adjust to their first year of postsecondary education more effectively.

Like Green's (2014) study, the Kirby et al. (2010) study discovered that high school graduates who had an e-learning background thought that their secondary e-learning experiences helped them become more independent, self-disciplined, and supported their transition to postsecondary education. However, almost all participants of the study preferred to take face-to-face postsecondary courses rather than e-learning courses. The Kirby et al. (2010) research supports the findings of the Dodd et al. (2009) exploratory qualitative study and showed that secondary e-learning experiences may positively influence students' transition to postsecondary education but, in the least, does not interfere with it.

Comparing the Postsecondary Transitions of e-Learners to Non-e-Learners

The third phase of the research in this series was Kirby and Sharpe's (2011) qualitative study which also focused on Newfoundland and Labrador's secondary e-learning students'

transition to postsecondary education. The qualitative study's data was collected from student surveys and high school and university records from 2007-2009. Kirby and Sharpe examined secondary e-learning students' plans to enroll in postsecondary education, the rate of their enrollment and their ability to persist in their programs. In addition, Kirby and Sharpe compared the postsecondary intentions, participation, and retention rates of e-learners and non-e-learners to discern if secondary e-learning impacted any aspect of students' postsecondary education.

The first phase of Kirby and Sharpe's (2011) study concentrated on whether students in their last semester of high school were planning on enrolling in postsecondary education. Their study revealed that a higher number of e-learners planned to enroll in postsecondary education than traditional learners (Kirby & Sharpe, 2011). Their research also factored in students' academic averages and revealed that regardless of whether students took e-learning courses or not, those that maintained high academic averages were three times more likely to plan to enroll in postsecondary education (Kirby & Sharpe, 2011).

Phase two of Kirby and Sharpe's (2011) investigated the postsecondary plans of rural secondary students who intended to go to postsecondary education and followed up on whether they did enroll in their chosen institution. Kirby and Sharpe's research showed that students with secondary e-learning experiences had a higher postsecondary enrolment rate than traditional high school students. This phase of the research also reaffirmed phase one's discoveries that regardless of students' secondary learning experiences, those with averages above 80% were ten times more likely to enroll in an undergraduate university program (Kirby & Sharpe, 2011).

Kirby and Sharpe's (2011) study's final phase investigated the differences between secondary e-learners and non-e-learners and their subsequent enrollment in university after their first year of postsecondary education. Phase three of the study revealed that students who

struggled with academic challenges from any high school courses (whether it was e-learning or traditional courses) were less likely to enroll in or stay in postsecondary education (Kirby & Sharpe, 2011). Overall, Kirby and Sharpe's study showed no significant differences between high school e-learners and their traditional counterparts in either first-year or fourth-year-retention rates. Their study also concluded that students' secondary e-learning experiences did not disadvantage them during their postsecondary transitioning. Kirby and Sharpe's (2011) study revealed that secondary and postsecondary academic performance plays a significant role in predicting a successful transition to postsecondary education and students' ability to complete their educational goals.

The Dodd et al. (2009) and Kirby et al. (2010) and Kirby and Sharpe (2011) qualitative multivariate longitudinal study showed that secondary e-learners are more likely to go to university than non-e-learners. Their research also revealed that secondary e-learning experiences did not significantly affect postsecondary retention rates and academic grades were a better predictor of student retention. However, Kirby and Sharpe's (2011) research showed that having secondary e-learning experiences were also not a disadvantage to first-year students' transitioning to postsecondary education (Dodd et al., 2009; Kirby et al., 2010; Kirby & Sharpe, 2011). Cumulatively, this body of research provided a snapshot of how the secondary e-learning experiences of rural students impacted their transition to postsecondary education.

The limitations of the Kirby and Sharpe (2011), Kirby et al. (2010), and Dodd et al. (2009) research was that they only focus on Newfoundland and Labrador's rural secondary e-learning students and do not necessarily reflect the experiences of Ontario's multi-ethnic urban students or northern rural college students. Another limitation of their research was that the postsecondary students they followed were primarily university-bound (Dodd et al., 2009; Kirby

& Sharpe, 2011; Kirby et al., 2010). Studies show that students who enroll in university programs already tend to have prominent personal characteristics such as self-efficacy and independence, which makes them accomplished learners, which limits the research's generalizability (Rice, 2006). Although these studies are limited to university-bound students and may not represent the experiences of Ontario's various postsecondary institutions, they offer insight into the relationship between students' secondary and postsecondary e-learning and exemplify the need for more research in this area.

Demographic Considerations

Canadian e-Learning Policies

The development and governance of Canadian educational policies fall under provincial authority; consequently, educational research is primarily done provincially and may not reflect students' experiences in other provinces. For example, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador's K-12 public distance education program is directly administered by the provincial government, whereas in Ontario, K-12 e-learning is organized and directed by individual school boards. McGreal and Anderson (2007) asserted that provincial initiatives drive decisions regarding e-learning in Canada, and therefore any focus on e-learning must be informed by individual provincial models. "Canada's e-learning programming can be viewed as a patchwork of interesting projects, programs and initiatives. In the worst sense, it is a set of disparate and uncoordinated activities constantly struggling with and reinventing solutions to problems solved elsewhere" (McGreal & Anderson, p. 1). The yearly State of the Nation Report, which focuses on the state of e-learning and blended learning in Canada in the K-12 sector, concurs that there have been vast differences in provincial approaches, initiatives, and investments over the last several years (Barbour et al., 2020). Howell and O'Donnell's (2017) K-12 Canadian study also revealed extensive fragmentation in the availability and use of technology, the acquisition and use of

digital content in schools across Canada. Consequently, educational research focusing on students' e-learning experiences in one province may not necessarily apply to students in a different province.

Ontario e-Learning Policies

Ontario's K-12 e-learning programs are vastly different from the provincially driven Newfoundland and Labrador models. Although several government initiatives have been developed to integrate e-learning into schools, they are executed at the school board level and vary across the province (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Implemented in 2006, Ontario's Provincial e-Learning Strategy has grown to include all publicly funded schools in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Additionally, Technology Enabled Learning Organization (TELO) provides professional development opportunities for teachers and promotes blended learning and e-learning opportunities throughout Ontarian classrooms (eduGAINS, n.d.). This program offers Ontario's K-12 schools high-speed Internet, digital devices, and the use of an LMS as a teaching and learning platform. Individual school boards and schools may differ in integrating these initiatives into classrooms across the province (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

School superintendents and principals are also critical stakeholders in delivering and implementing blended and e-learning initiatives in their schools (Chen, 2015). Consequently, in the K-12 classroom, the integration of technology varies across the province, impacting student experiences and influencing students' postsecondary readiness (Howell & O'Donnell, 2017). Recently, Ontario's Ministry of Education has announced that they intend to centralize secondary e-learning and make it compulsory for all high school students to take two e-learning courses during their four years of secondary education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019). Currently,

there is no research available that examines the postsecondary transitional experiences of Ontario's secondary e-learners. To help bridge the gap in this research, this study explored how secondary e-learners transition into their e-learning courses, their first year of university and ERL and considered the impact of secondary e-learning on these experiences.

Introduction to Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena and is concerned with how an object shows or displays itself to human consciousness (Zahavi, 2019). Phenomenology is a philosophy that embraces subjectivity and reflects the complex human experience. Phenomenology views the experienced world as subjective and believes it is developed through experiences as they are conceived in human consciousness (Creswell, 2013; Seale, 2012). Phenomenology is a good fit for this study because it has been theoretically and practically applied in educational research for over half a century and is very useful for exploring new ideas in research (Gallagher & Francesconi, 2012).

The father of phenomenology is Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and he was interested in how individuals experience phenomena through their daily lives (Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Husserl's phenomenology is a philosophy that attempts to "go back to the thing themselves" and investigate "… the rich and complex source of unspoken meaning associated with being and experiences that shapes an individual's understanding of their lifeworld the lived experiences of humans" (Christensen et al., 2003, pg.115). Phenomenology focuses on people's conscious experiences and how things and experiences are manifested to their consciousness throughout their daily lives (Vagle, 2014). Consequently, using a phenomenological approach allowed this study to focus on the "rich descriptions of the lived experiences and meanings" of the transitional experiences of first-year postsecondary students with secondary e-learning experiences (Findlay, 2009, p. 8).

This study briefly reviewed Husserl's transcendental phenomenology to understand the underpinnings of Giorgi's DPP method. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, which is also known as descriptive phenomenology, is grounded in philosophy and the concept of intentionality (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Husserl believed that consciousness is always conscious of something other than itself, and the nature of thought is intentional because it is always directed towards objects or things (Giorgi, 2009; Zahavi, 2003, 2019). Intentionality is a technical term that defines consciousness as always directed about or towards an object outside of itself (Zahavi, 2019).

Husserl believed that the intentional act had two parts: the object or sense of the object of knowledge itself (noetic) and the act of knowing (noesis), and it was this relationship that needed to be investigated (Zahavi, 2019). It is the nature of this intentional act that defines action towards the object and develops an individual's knowledge, experience, and perceptions of the world as a comprehensive intentional object (Christensen et al., 2017). Objects always present themselves as something, and this something is given or understood in a particular way; intentionality is the link between acts and consciousness (Brinkmann & Friesen, 2018). "A central phenomenological task is to analyze these differences in detail and to map out the way they are systematically interrelated" (Zahavi, 2019, p.17). From a phenomenological perspective, the researcher returns to their experiences and pays attention to an object's experiential givenness and focusing on intentional engagement, known as lived experience, and a philosophical analysis of these lived experiences reveals distinct types of givenness (Zahavi, 2019).

Husserl's phenomenological method describes the phenomena being studied in the many ways that it appears to consciousness rather than by quantitative measurement (Christensen et al., 2003). Zahavi (2019) used the example of an antique alarm clock to explain how the clock can

appear to different people in various ways depending on whether they are seeing it, hearing it, or remembering it. Under no circumstances can one ever see all sides of the clock simultaneously. Depending on how the clock is handled or moved around, only certain parts of the clock can be seen at various times, and when new sides are revealed, formerly viewed sides disappear. More aspects of the alarm clock can also be explored by picking it up and turning it around to see all sides. The clock, however, does exist in isolation and being conscious of the clock also means recognizing that it exists with a background that forms a horizon. "When we attend to the way that we are conscious of thing, we find that consciousness is accompanied by horizons—much like focal vision is accompanied by peripheral vision in a figure/ground relation" (W. Kinser, personal communication. June 3, 2019). The white clock sits on a black desk in a big blue room. The clock is the object of focus, but the desk and room form the horizon from which consciousness of the clock must be drawn out, and this contextual background bestows meaning on the clock and is part of the phenomena (W. Kinser, personal communication. June 3, 2019). An object in the background can also become the object of focus through a change in attention or perspective, and horizons reflect both the perspectival and contextual characteristics of experience (Zahavi, 2019).

In the example of the clock, at all times, the clock has parts and properties that are not always in view, and this interplay of absences and presences creates multi-sided perceptual experiences that reveal aspects of the phenomena (Zahavi, 2019). Although the clock disappears from view, it does not disappear from consciousness, thus forming a variety of backgrounds and making horizons spatial (Zahavi, 2019). Since no single appearance or givenness can simultaneously capture the entire object, these collections of experiences that all possess "object-

directedness" must have objective correlation analyzed, that is, the perceived, doubted, expected object (Zahavi, 2003, p. 14).

According to Husserl, horizons are also temporal as they are composed of the integration of the past (retentions), the present (primal impressions), and the future (protentions) interactions with the intentional object (Dimitriu, 2013).

> Primal impression—the direct access to the present stage of the intentional object—is related to the future and to the past. It is related to the future when it anticipates what we will perceive next, and it is related to the past when it retains what has just been fulfilled hen it retains what has just been fulfilled. (Dimitriu, 2013, p.213).

Protentions, retentions, and impressions work together to form acts of consciousness, such as memories, perceptions, and imagination (Dimitriu, 2013). These operations interact to form a single process in the way in which the different notes in a song work together to form a melody. Although each note can be identified directly as a primal impression, it is also the experience of the protention or anticipation of subsequent notes and the retention of the notes that can be no longer heard that create the coherent unity of all the notes that make up the song (Dimitriu, 2013). "More generally speaking, what we see is never given in isolation but is surrounded by and situated in a horizon that affects the meaning of what we see" (Zahavi, 2019, pg. 11). Although one's consciousness may be focused on the phenomena, they are not oblivious to their surroundings and are conscious of the various components as parts of the background of attending to the phenomena (Zahavi, 2019).

The objects that belong to the background can become themes through a change in attention (Zahavi, 2019). Stream of consciousness can be explained by analyzing the interaction between primal impressions, retentions, and protentions, as the living present contains both

sequences of past experiences and anticipation of future ones (Dimitriu, 2013). Experiences are like songs. The retention of the song is more vivid to the experiencer, the closer it is to its primal impression until it fades into consciousnesses, and new experiences take its place (Dimitriu, 2013). The present is based on past and future expectations, and all these experiences affect how objects manifest themselves (Zahavi, 2019). Husserl developed a phenomenological method that uses scientific investigation to explore objects in the many ways they manifest themselves to consciousness by examining the raw details of the lived experience (Zahavi, 2019).

Husserl believed that intentionality is the orientation of the consciousness of the mind to an object or phenomena and the transference of this awareness to consciousness as objective reality (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Vagle (2014) states, “Much like their concept of phenomena; phenomenologists use the word intentionality to mean the inseparable connectedness between consciousness and phenomena. One is not only conscious of an object, but one is always conscious of it in a certain way, which can be understood from a particular perspective, description, or form (Zahavi, 2019). Looking back at the example of the antique clock, one can think about the physical clock properties and think of it as a source of irritation because it wakes you from sleep, or it could be remembered fondly from a familiar place or time such as your grandmother’s house. An object such as a clock can have several types of intentionality, and several types of objects can have the same types of intentionality (Zahavi, 2019).

The domain of phenomenology is the range of these diverse types of experiences as it investigates the connections and the differences between experiential subjectivity and worldly objects (Giorgi, 2009; Zahavi, 2019). Both spatial and temporal, the horizon of meanings

bestows meanings on things and supplies the general background from which consciousness must be drawn out (W. Kinser, personal communication. June 3, 2019).

Husserl's transcendental phenomenological philosophy views the world as being out there, separate from an individual, and represents the authentic experiences of a person, which evolves from the conscious interaction of the mind and the object on which it is focusing (Giorgi, 2009). Husserl's phenomenology is from the first-person point of view and uses a scientific approach where the researcher analyzes the raw data from their own lived experiences (Husserl, 2008/1937). In all aspects of phenomenology, researchers practice a type of reflectivity that allows them to slow down and open themselves up to how a phenomenon appears in the lifeworld, which means that they must, in turn, break away from their background (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Husserl developed the phenomenological reduction method and attributed the phenomenological attitude as a methodological device to acknowledge subjective bias and provide rigour and validity to phenomenology (Finlay, 2008).

The phenomenological reduction requires a researcher to bracket prior knowledge about a phenomenon and consider the information precisely as it reveals itself through the lived description (Giorgi, 1970, 1997, 2009). To illuminate the phenomenon and avoid using theories, interpretations, and presuppositions, the researcher must turn away from preconceived notions and experiences of the phenomena (Zahavi, 2019). Husserl's transcendental phenomenological method proposes that researchers suspend their biases, subjective experiences, previously held theories, and investigational experiences through phenomenological reduction, also known as the epoche or bracketing. The phenomenological reduction requires the researcher to acknowledge these issues and set them aside to focus on describing and analyzing the experience of

phenomena as it appears to consciousness (Moustakas, 1994; Giorgi, 2009; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Husserl used eidetic reduction and imaginative variation to transform the descriptions of the phenomena from fact to essence and analyze the relationship of object-intentionality through the descriptive experience of the lifeworld (Zahavi, 2019). Dalberg (2006) explained essences as structures of essential meaning that illuminate the phenomenon's characteristics, making it a phenomenon. All phenomena can take on different forms when considered in various ways, whether experienced or imagined. (Dalberg, 2006). Although many people may not be familiar with horses, they can still imagine the various forms of a horse (Dalberg, 2006). Using a form of eidetic reduction known as imagination variation, a person can imagine varied sizes, colours, and types of horses because there exists an original model that sets its boundaries (Dalberg, 2006). There is something constant about the idea of a horse that makes a horse a horse and not a zebra or donkey. As one imagines the multiple features of a horse, there is a necessary general form called an invariant, which makes a horse a horse (Dalberg, 2003). Husserl's phenomenology requires the researcher to refuse to accept the initial meaning of the phenomena and use their imagination and intuition to look at various features of the phenomenon in a variety of ways to understand the fundamental characteristics or essences that make up the structure of the phenomenon (Christensen et al., 2017; Wertz, 2010; Zahavi, 2019).

Looking at the phenomenon in diverse ways enables the researcher to discern characteristics of the description that can be eliminated without the phenomenon collapsing. The invariant components that are left cannot be removed without the meaning of the phenomenon collapsing. (Christensen et al., 2017; Wertz, 2010; Zahavi, 2019).

The final stage of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is the transcendental reduction, which seeks the ideal. In this analysis stage, the researcher reduces the eidetic absolutes of consciousness to access the transcendental ego and its purity (Shakalis, 2015). Obtaining this level of consciousness means unfolding the constitution of the object by understanding the relationship between the noesis (the sense of the object) and the noema (the meaning of the object) (Shakalis, 2015). Describing consciousness away from the natural world reveals an inner consciousness that allows a transcendental reflection of the noesis-noema relationship and positing a universal meaning (Zahavi, 2017).

Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological method is from a psychological perspective, he stayed loyal to Husserl's philosophical methodology by using description, intuition, eidetic findings, imaginative variation, and phenomenological reduction to find the psychological essences of the phenomenon (Brinkmann & Friesen, 2018). Giorgi's structured approach to data collection and analysis provided this educational study with a qualitative method that allowed for the rigorous exploration of the first-year postsecondary transitions of students with secondary e-learning backgrounds. Understanding Husserl's descriptive phenomenology provided insight into how and why Giorgi developed his descriptive method. I incorporated an overview of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology into the literature review because it was an essential part of the study's theoretical framework and laid the groundwork for the methodology.

Summary

In conclusion, this literature review revealed many of the changing forces influencing learners, their learning choices, and their learning needs. The literature on student characteristics called for a better understanding of how technology impacts contemporary students and the advantages or disadvantages of growing up in a digital age. A review of student transitional

theories reflected the importance of identifying student vulnerabilities and staying vigilant for incongruences during their transitional year. The current research on the impact of secondary e-learning on postsecondary transitional experiences also demonstrated that e-learning does not disadvantage students' postsecondary transitions, but further study is needed in this area of research. An examination of Canadian educational policies and practices revealed that each province has individualized educational programs and there is a need for targeted research that acknowledges these differences. An overview of descriptive phenomenology was also presented which demonstrated the philosophical underpinnings of the Giorgi's Descriptive Phenomenology in Psychology method which is used in this study and why it is a good fit for this exploratory research.

Barbour (2018) argues that even though e-learning continues to grow, educational practices rapidly outpace research development. This study addressed this knowledge gap and presented insight into how secondary students with e-learning backgrounds transition into postsecondary education.

Chapter 3: The Methodology

Introduction

This study explored the first-year postsecondary transitional experiences of students who have taken secondary e-learning courses. This research used descriptive phenomenological interviews and a student questionnaire to consider various aspects of students' transitional experiences. This research used Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological method (DPP) to explore the phenomenon of how students with secondary e-learning backgrounds transitioned into their first year of university. A natural phenomenological approach was adopted, to integrate empirical data with phenomenological outcomes, (Zahavi, 2019). Gallagher and Francesconi (2012) maintained that after pursuing a phenomenological study, it is feasible to use empirical data that clarifies outcomes and illuminates important applications of the phenomena. The DPP qualitative method was used with quantitative data to allow for student voice and a more in-depth discussion of the students' educational experiences.

This section of the study outlines the methodology of descriptive phenomenology, the differences in the transcendental and the DPP methods, including Giorgi's five-step analytical process. This chapter also discusses the study's overall aims, research design, validity, participant selection and recruitment process, and ethical considerations.

Phenomenon Under Investigation

Most of Canada's K-12 e-learning students are in high school (Barbour & LaBonte, 2018; Bates, 2018). The pervasive nature of technology and the changing characteristics of students and teaching pedagogy have contributed to the acceptance of e-learning as a practical alternative to traditional face-to-face high school classes (Barbour, 2018; Chen, 2015; Hawkins et al., 2013; Howell & O'Donnell, 2017). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2019) has committed to integrating compulsory e-learning courses into graduation requirements; consequently, it is

critical to understand how secondary e-learning impacts students' transitions to postsecondary education. Students, parents, school administrators and governments are turning to secondary e-learning for a variety of reasons, yet little research exists that examines the impact of secondary e-learning on students' postsecondary transitional experiences (Green, 2013; Dodd et al., 2009; Kirby et al., 2010; Kirby & Sharpe, 2011).

There may be several advantages for students to voluntarily enroll in secondary e-learning courses, such as students wanting to have a flexible timetable, preferring the online learning format, and developing better technological skills (Barbour, 2019, 2018; Barbour & Reeves, 2009). Students who have taken secondary e-learning classes reported that they developed better time management, communication, technological skills, and self-regulatory natures because of their e-learning experiences (Green, 2013). The limited research on secondary e-learning students showed that they can perform marginally better academically or at least as well as those students who learned in traditional classes (Mulcahy et al., 2016; Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Barbour & Mulcahy, 2009).

In the past, well-organized secondary students with high levels of self-efficacy and motivation made up most of the learners enrolled in e-learning (Barbour, 2018; Barbour, Miron & Huerta, 2017; Rice, 2006). As high school e-learning has become an acceptable method of learning, the characteristics of students enrolling in e-learning courses are diversifying (Levine & Dean, 2012; Barbour & Mulcahy, 2009; Rice, 2006). Secondary e-learning students' characteristics are changing, creating complex educational challenges for secondary e-learning teachers and administrators (Barbour & Mulcahy, 2009; Mulcahy et al., 2016; Cavanaugh, 2009). Research showed that students who do not come into secondary e-learning courses with good study habits and high motivation levels need specific instructions and additional supports to

succeed (Cavanaugh, 2009; Peters, Crawley et al., 2017; Rice, 2006). Supporting students during their first-year transitions helps them adjust to their new educational environment (Clark & Hall, 2012). Secondary e-learning students transitioning into university will need to continue to adapt their attitudes and study habits to accommodate the increasing academic demands (Peters et al., 2017). Understanding how secondary e-learning students transition into university will help secondary and postsecondary educators understand these students and encourage them to provide the appropriate supports and strategies.

Research showed that students' first-year postsecondary transitional experiences and academic performances are good indicators of whether they will persist in reaching their educational goals (Astin, 1975, 1993; Tinto, 1975, 2016). With secondary e-learning becoming mandatory in Ontario's provincial education system, there is an urgent need to understand how technology via e-learning influences learning and impacts these students and the education system at large. With limited research on the impact of secondary e-learning on students' transitions to postsecondary education, this study provided insight into the students' experiences and secondary e-learning on their transition to university. This research also illuminated some of the barriers that students faced and provided an awareness of their transitional experiences (Barbour, 2011; Barbour & LaBonte, 2018; Dodd et al., 2009; Kirby et al., 2010; Kirby & Sharpe, 2011). Furthermore, this study provides educators with recent research that secondary and postsecondary educational institutions can use to inform e-learning and educational transitional policies and practices.

Ontological and Epistemological Reasoning

Phenomenology focuses on the relational, intersubjective, and experiential dynamics of education and contributes to educational research from theoretical and methodological

perspectives (Brinkmann & Friesen, 2018). Phenomenology is a qualitative method that explores people's relationships in the world through their everyday living experiences (Vagle, 2014). Phenomenology is interested in consciousness because it is world-disclosing and reflects how phenomena become intelligible and meaningful to people (Giorgi, 2019). "What it means to be human cannot be captured in language, and by no means numbers, but it is understood in its fullness only through the experience of it" (Dahlberg et al., 2001, p. 17). Therefore, Giorgi's (2009) DPP method was suitable for exploring how secondary students with e-learning backgrounds experience their first-year transition to university.

Giorgi's (2009) DPP method is a modified version of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology. In its purest sense, Husserl's phenomenology is a philosophy that is interested in grounding theoretical and scientific knowledge and articulating fundamental issues (Giorgi, 2007). Husserl believed that there are two ways that perception arises in human consciousness: the perception of external objects that occur in the senses and inner perceptions that arises in reflections (Christensen et al., 2017). Consciousness in phenomenology is always the consciousness of something. This consciousness is not concerned with itself but is self-transcending, and this characteristic is known as intentionality (Zahavi, 2019). Perceptions always occur through the given appearance of something and form an epistemological understanding of the intentional relationship of the everyday lives of people which Husserl calls the lifeworld (Christensen et al., 2017). Husserl's phenomenological philosophy is based on the researcher's experience with a phenomenon, and its epistemological claims are always based on the direct consciousness of the researcher (Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi's (2009) method collects data from participants and uses a psychological perspective during the analysis process. Giorgi (2009)

strictly adheres to Husserl's epistemology as his method focuses on the description of phenomena, and the analysis still comes directly from the researcher's consciousness.

Giorgi's (2009) DPP method requires the researcher to explicitly express its analysis in language that is revelatory of the aspects of the students' described experiences and the discipline of the explored phenomena. "The adoption of the disciplinary attitude brings the proper sensitivity to the analysis, and it provides a perspective that enables the data to be manageable" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 354). This study adopted an educational disciplinary attitude to explore the data for insight or implications that emerged from the described transitional experiences of the participants (Giorgi, 2009). In this study, Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) model of human adaption illuminated the postsecondary transitional experiences of students in the field of postsecondary education. Tinto's (1988) and Austin's (1984) theories of retention and student involvement identified the various ways academic institutions perceive how students transition into postsecondary education and how these perceptions influence their student transitional support systems.

This research explored the first-year postsecondary transitional experiences of secondary e-learners as they transition into their secondary e-learning courses, university, and ERL. Giorgi's DPP method is a qualitative method appropriate for problems that need exploration. The DPP method uses the concrete descriptions of the experiences of the participants who have lived through situations in which the phenomenon has taken place (Giorgi, 2009). Descriptive phenomenology uses the participants' described experiences as raw data and the researcher's analysis shines a light on this data as it relates to the explored phenomena (Giorgi, 2019). The phenomenological method is generic enough to be applied to any human or social science, as one only needs to assume the attitude of the discipline within which one is working instead of a

psychological attitude (Giorgi, 2009). Thus, the DPP method provided this study with a pragmatic method for researching new ideas in education and exploring students' educational transitions.

Natural phenomenology was used in this educational study to compare concrete outcomes such as student demographics and grades with the phenomenological analysis of the students' described transitional experiences. The integration of phenomenology with naturalized models of investigation is known as naturalized phenomenology and is typically used in neuroscience (sometimes known as neurophenomenology) to compare brain scans to patients' descriptions of various experiences during the scientific process (Zahavi, 2019). Zahavi (2019) states that in its simplest form, naturalized phenomenology is the practice of letting phenomenology be informed by or engage with empirical research. The quantitative data in this study were collected from the students and used with the descriptive phenomenological study structure to discuss transitional indicators and educational outcomes. Comparing the participants 'academic outcomes and demographic trends to the phenomenological structures provided a robust discussion of the multi-faceted dynamics of the students' educational transitions.

Giorgi's Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method

In this study, Amedeo Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological research method (DPP) explored the perceptions of first-year postsecondary students with secondary e-learning backgrounds transitional experiences. Giorgi's descriptive phenomenology is an applied phenomenology and a modified version of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. The DPP method grew from an attempt to move the investigation of psychology from the natural sciences towards a human science psychological paradigm (Giorgi et al., 2008; Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi, 2019; Zahavi, 2019). "Giorgi (2009) views method in human science as

requiring the articulation of understandable, sequential research procedures meant to guide the discovery process and ensure rigour" (Applebaum, 2010, p 54). Giorgi developed a systematic human scientific method that would fulfil the scientific requirements of being systematic, methodical, general, and critical (Applebaum, 2010). The DPP method provided this study with a practical approach for exploring the multidimensional and subjective nature of education transitions.

Giorgi's (2009) DPP method researches human experiential and behavioural phenomena in a rigorous and non-reductionistic manner and focuses on how consciousness presents itself to the individual (Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi (2009) used Husserl's description, reduction, and eidetic analysis to guide and structure psychological research (Applebaum, 2010). Giorgi also adhered to Husserl's two fundamental aims: developing a methodological praxis that frames inquiry, and the method is transparent to the things themselves (Applebaum, 2010). Giorgi's method established a scientific framework for phenomenological psychological research rather than focusing on philosophical inquiries (Applebaum, 2010; Shakalis, 2015). Giorgi defines psychology broadly as the study of subjectivity and states that psychology must understand subjectivity precisely as it presents itself in its myriad of ways (Applebaum, 2010). Giorgi (2012) stated, "I project the possibility of an integrated, well-defined psychology based upon the primitive notion that psychology has to do with subjectivity in all its forms and so I seek the presence of subjectivity dominated moments that the individual expresses in description" (p.9). Giorgi, like Husserl, is interested in consciousness; however, he is interested in qualities of human consciousness rather than the transcendental consciousness of philosophy (Giorgi, 2012). Giorgi's (2012) focus on human consciousness restricts his interests to a pre-transcendental level, interested in how human consciousness relates specifically to the human

world. Giorgi (2009, 2012) believed that the DPP method was generic enough to be applied to any human or social science by the researcher assuming the discipline's attitude instead of a philosophical attitude. The disciplinary attitude of this study is postsecondary education with a focus on the first-year transitional experiences of students with secondary e-learning backgrounds.

In a break from Husserl's phenomenological principles, Giorgi uses data gathered from participants and replaces criteria and language from scientific psychology to investigate phenomena from a psychological perspective (Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi et al., 2008). The use of participants means that the analysis will need to accommodate the data from multiple participants and is through the transitional lens and discipline from which the questions evolve (Applebaum, personal communication, October 2019; Giorgi, 2009). One of the main differences between the psychological and transcendental phenomenological methods lies within the levels of consciousness that each method tries to reach (Giorgi, 2012). Husserl's philosophical method attempts to attain the highest level of consciousness and is interested in the relationship of pure consciousness and the intentional object from a philosophical perspective (Zahavi, 2019). However, Giorgi's (2009) DPP method is interested in the consciousness of humans from a psychological (subjective) viewpoint and does not try to achieve the elevated levels of pure consciousness inherent in a philosophical analysis. In human psychology, a person's experiences are intimate to the person, and the person's involvement in the experience is essential to understanding the phenomena (Giorgi et al., 2008; Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi, 2019).

Another difference between Giorgi's and Husserl's methods is in their application of phenomenological reduction. Giorgi (2009) explains the difference between his phenomenological psychological reduction and Husserl's transcendental reduction:

> Philosophically speaking, this reduction is not as radical as the transcendental reduction but is more appropriate for psychological analyses of human beings since the purpose of psychology as a human science is precisely the clarification of the meanings of the phenomena experienced by human persons. (p. 98)

The DPP method highlights the relationship between the participant and their worldly circumstances and explores it from a psychological perspective (Giorgi, 2009).

In the DPP method, the knowledge aimed for is general to the participants' experiences and developed after a careful, systematic examination of concrete examples that support the elucidation of invariant psychological structures (Zahavi, 2017). In Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, the phenomenon is described from the first-person point of view: that is, the lived experiences of the philosopher. In comparison, the DPP method uses the description of the phenomenon from ordinary people who describe their experiences from a naïve natural attitude which is then changed into a third-person's point of view by the researcher (Giorgi, 1970, 1983, 1997, 2009; Giorgi et al., 2008).

In the DPP method, the participants must all have experiences with the phenomena being studied, and their descriptions of these experiences provide the raw data for the research (Giorgi, 2009). In this study, the participants were all first-year university students who have taken secondary e-learning courses. The participants' naiveté to the research goals and the research process allowed them to provide detailed and unfiltered descriptions of their experiences (Giorgi, 2009). "For psychological analyses, one does not need the raw data to be purified a priori, but it needs to be complex and mixed precisely as it is lived, thick with its ambiguities and relationships" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 99). In the DPP method, participants do not have to bracket their experiences because of their naiveté to the project and willingness to supply unfiltered

descriptions, and the researcher then analyzes their descriptions (Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi (2009) notes that although the raw data comes from others, the analysis and meanings of the research come from the researcher's consciousness, satisfying Husserl's transcendental phenomenological criteria.

Husserl and Giorgi agreed that consciousness is intentional and directed at an object that may be real or unreal and that consciousness is non-sensorial and is the medium of how we become aware of both physical and nonphysical objects (Giorgi et al., 2008). Consciousness always focuses on something regardless of whether it is a table or a memory, and when the mind reflects on this object, it begins to form ideas, images, and experiences (Giorgi, 2009). Both Husserl and Giorgi used an eidetic reduction that utilized imaginative variation and intuition to reduce the described experiences to its eidos or essences (Giorgi, 2009). These essences cannot be varied as they are constituents that make up the necessary part of the phenomena (Giorgi, 2009). Zahavi (2019) stated that psychological phenomenology attempts to understand the world of the participants and how they make sense of their lived experiences and provides an example of using this method:

> If faced with an individual with, say, cerebral palsy, the phenomenological psychologist will try to understand what it is like to live with that condition and will seek to explore how it affects the experiential life of the individual, and not engage in an examination of, say, the lesions of the upper motor neurons. (p. 117)

This method differs from Husserl's transcendental phenomenological method, which seeks to identify subpersonal causes and focuses on universal meanings rather than subjective experiences (Zahavi, 2019). Giorgi (2009) postulated that universalizing meanings transcends

psychological interests and does not uncover the pertinent psychological dynamics and nature of the phenomenon, and as such, his method is pre-transcendental, not transcendental.

The DPP's invariant meanings reflect a type of essence or structure that is limited in scope, and the type of the phenomenon rather than its universal characteristics set its boundaries (Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi (2009) stated, “I seek the structure of concrete experiences being analyzed through the determination of higher-level eidetic invariant meanings that belong to the structure” (p.100). Although these meanings are not universal, they are relevant as they provide valuable insights into the experiences of these specific students and may provide insights for further discussions in educational practices overall (Giorgi, 2009). The primary aim of psychological phenomenology is to collect experiences from those who have lived through them and deconstruct these experiences to search out processes and psychological meanings rather than universal epistemological claims (Findlay, 2008; Giorgi, 2009).

In both Husserl and Giorgi’s phenomenological methods, the research’s aim is not to interpret lifeworld experiences but to describe them. “To describe means to give linguistic expression to the object of any given act, precisely as it appears within the act. In other words, through the median of language, one can communicate the objects of consciousness to which one is present as precisely as they are presented” (Giorgi,1997, p. 5). After the data has been collected, the researcher reviews the participants’ descriptions to understand the data overall and become aware of phenomenological clues (Giorgi, 2009). To find meaning, a researcher must remain reflective and intuitive to look at the descriptions from multiple ways (Findlay, 2008). Husserl (1983) called this process imaginative variation and viewed it as the constant shifting of attitudes and perspectives towards the data to analyze all the possibilities of the explored phenomenon. In Giorgi’s (2009) method, imaginative variation allows the researcher to be supple

in their approach to the data, to recognize underlying themes, contexts, and object-intentionality relationships that develop in the individual descriptions and between participants (Findlay, 2008; Giorgi, 1997, 2008).

Another distinction between Husserl's transcendental phenomenological method and Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological method lied within the outcome of the data transformation, which made up the structures of the study. Although Husserl and Giorgi used bracketing and eidetic reduction, Husserl's transcendental reduction used the transcendental constitution of the noesis-noema to reach a field of pure consciousness (Shakalis, 2015). Giorgi (2009) used Husserl's concept of essences and called them structures, as the data collected from participants reflected individuals' psychological subjectivity rather than the high-level truth or consciousness inherent in a philosophical study. "The noetic-noematic relation is a way of entering into the consciousness of the other and accurately exhibiting precisely the sense of the experience that contain lived meanings that are the focus of the descriptive task" (Giorgi, 2009, p.105). Even though Giorgi's (2009) method uses participants' descriptions, the structures are still developed through intuitions into eidetic data that takes place in the researcher's consciousness.

Even though Giorgi (2009) used participants in his method, he also used eidetic generalizations and concrete details from the participants' descriptions to reflect varied aspects of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). These modifications have been so that phenomenological research can be performed in the realm of human consciousness" (Shakalis, 2015). Giorgi's (2009) DPP method adapted Husserl's transcendental phenomenological method to develop a structured scientific approach to understand phenomena from a psychological perspective from within the human sciences.

Giorgi's DPP Five-Step Method of Analysis

Giorgi's (2009) DPP method uses a five-step approach to data analysis that modifies Husserl's traditional transcendental phenomenology. During this study, the concrete steps of Giorgi's (2009) method were followed: 1) assume the phenomenological attitude, 2) read the data for a sense of the whole meaning, 3) determine meaning units, 4) transform the participants' natural attitude expressions into phenomenological psychological sensitive expressions 5) synthesis the psychological invariant constituents of the experiences into a general structure (Broome, 2011).

After the interview process, this study's interviews were transcribed into text (Giorgi, 2009). Throughout the data collection, analytical, and transformational process, detailed records were kept as verification that I remained faithful to the participants' descriptions (Giorgi, 2009).

The first step required me to adopt the phenomenological reduction, where I remained during the data collection and analytic process (Giorgi, 2009). "In order to begin the analysis, the researcher must assume the attitude of the scientific phenomenological reduction, a psychological perspective, and be sensitive to the implications of the data for the phenomenon being researched" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 128). To enter the phenomenological reduction, one has to bracket their experiences. Bracketing does not mean removing all knowledge but putting it aside or rendering it non-influential (Vagle, 2014). I had to bracket my experiences as a secondary teacher and an educational instructor at the postsecondary level. I also bracketed my personal e-learning experiences and my experiences teaching online. Bracketing my past understandings and knowledge allowed me to take a fresh approach to the raw data and enabled the phenomenon to appear from the participants' descriptions.

In the second step, I read the data holistically, to get a sense of the overall raw data before proceeding into the analysis (Giorgi, 2009). While remaining in the phenomenological attitude and with the specific disciplinary attitude in mind, I read the data slowly again and remained present to the given data (Broome, 2011). I reread the text several times to gain a global sense of the description with the students' transitional experiences in mind (Giorgi, 2009).

During the third step of the analytical process, which involved a closer reading of the text, I broke up the participants' experiences and made them manageable by separating them into meaning units (Giorgi, 2009). Meaning units are context-laden units that form the basis for the analysis and the structure of the experiences (Giorgi, 2009). Developing meanings is the process of constituting the parts of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon. To accomplish this, I remained mindful of the phenomena of educational transitions being investigated (Giorgi, 2009, 2012).

Meaning units are arbitrarily developed and carried no theoretical weight (Giorgi, 2012). Giorgi (2009) used James' (1996/1912), analogy that a bird's flight is measured by where it perches more than the actual distance it flies to explain this shift in meaning. These shifts in meanings reflex the way the descriptions change in flow or meaning (Giorgi, 2009). This process can be self-correcting as the researcher rereads the data and may find units of meaning too long or too short as they work with the data (Giorgi, 2009). A meaning unit may need several transformations or no transformations; there is no limit to the number of transformations that a meaning unit may need depending on how rich they are with the features of the discipline being studied (Giorgi, 2009). In this study, the descriptions were laden with meaning relating to students' transitional experiences. During the analysis process, I reread the text many times and

grouped and regroup the data in different ways to develop the meaning units, always remaining true to the participants' described experiences.

In the fourth step of Giorgi's (2009) method, I transformed the participants' natural attitude descriptions into psychologically sensitive invariant expressions of the participants' experiences and from the disciplinary attitude of educational transitions (Broome, 2011). Giorgi (2009) posited that a psychological perspective means the researcher adopts a generic, atheoretical psychological attitude and analyzes the raw data from the perspective of human subjectivity. In this step, I went back to the meaning units and interrogated them to discover how to express them in a way that highlighted the students' educational transitions so that the focus of the analysis elucidated the meanings of the experiences contained in the participant's descriptions (Broome, 2019; Giorgi, 2009). "The raw materials are individuated concrete experiences with halos, margins, and interconnections that offer potentialities for development" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 131). Since a deeper understanding of the first-year transitional experiences of students with secondary e-learning experiences is this study's goal, each unit meaning was interrogated for insight or implications that it may have for students' transition to secondary e-learning, their first of university and ERL (Giorgi, 2009).

Next, using imaginative variation and the researchers' intuitions, meaning units were transformed into constituents to reveal the data's essences (Giorgi, 2009). Constituents are meaning units, which are different from elements as they are context dependent (Broome, 2011). I used imaginative variation to examine the participants' experiences from various viewpoints and my intuition to develop the invariant meanings of the data (Giorgi, 2009). Developing an understanding of what is present in the data and what is absent; that is, what is implicit in the description and inferred from the content is essential to uncovering meaning (Giorgi, 2009). Like

the clock, the descriptions only show one side of the data, which is obviously present in the students' descriptions. However, the raw data, like a clock, has many sides that cannot be seen at the same time, and the logical inference is drawn from being aware of the totality of the presence of the many sides of the students' described experiences (Broome, 2011; Giorgi, 2009). Imaginative variation was used to consider various elements of the students' transitional experiences present in the data by following the phenomenal clues embedded in the participants' descriptions (Zahavi, 2019).

I analyzed all the data by hand and set up an Excel file with columns to handle the data transformations. Each participant had their own Excel page with their transformations until the data was merged. During the first transformation, I changed the meaning units into third-person expressions while remaining faithful to the original data (Giorgi, 2009). The purpose of using third-person expressions was to ensure that I would not be empathetically drawn into the participants' natural attitudes and would focus on the students' transitional experiences and their meanings (Giorgi, 2009). Changing the data into a third-person narrative allowed me to focus on the participants' descriptions of their experiences rather than identifying or empathizing with individual participants themselves (Giorgi, 2009). It took many data transformations to develop meaning units into invariant constituents, as the data was very rich with descriptions (Giorgi, 2009). This step also helped me establish validity by clearly showing that I was analyzing someone else's experiences (Giorgi, 2009).

Using imaginative variation, I determined the invariant constituents of the students' transitional experiences. (Giorgi, 2009). Imaginative variation helped me determine which qualities of the meaning units were essential or accidental to the phenomena (Broome, 2011). Transformations always adhere to the participants' descriptions and how they experienced the

phenomenon (Broome, 2011). After reviewing each description individually and looking at it from different perspectives, I expressed each meaning unit in language that reflected its properties (Giorgi, 2019). During this process, a heightened articulation of the transitional aspect of each meaning unit emerged from the data (Giorgi, 2009).

The main goal of the transformation process was to articulate the transitional aspects that emerged from each meaning unit (Giorgi, 2009). According to Giorgi's (2009) DPP method, I remained in the phenomenological reduction throughout the analysis. During this process, certain meaning units were pregnant with meaning, and they had to go through several transformations before becoming invariant. The best transformations revealed as explicitly as possible how secondary students with e-learning backgrounds experienced their educational transitions.

Giorgi's analytic process method reviews the meaning units with the help of imaginative variation to create an overall general structure or structures of the participants' s described experiences (Giorgi, 2009). At this stage, the individual invariant constituents were clustered into meaning units and used to recognize and organize subthemes to determine which ones are invariant to the structure of the phenomenon (Shakalis, 2015). The structure was expressed in a descriptive paragraph and consisted of invariant constituents whose relationships formed the structure's meanings (Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi (2009) described a constituent "a constituent is different than an element as an element is independent of the whole in which it resides, whereas a constituent is a part that is mindful of its role in the whole" (p.103). The constituents were interrelated, and the structure reflected this relationship. The psychological structure reflected how the phenomenon was lived through the participants' experiences, experiential and conscious moments (Giorgi, 2009). To do this, I remained in the phenomenological reduction and used imaginative variation to scan all of the final transformations of each participant's meaning units

and contrasted and compared them to see if they came from the same type of experience (Giorgi, 2009). Using imaginative variation again, I determined the most invariant constituents of the experience and tested them to see if they were essential to the structure (Giorgi, 2009). To test if the invariant constituents were part of the structure, I removed them and when the structure collapsed, I determined it was an essential invariant constituent (Giorgi, 2009).

Considering intrastructural and interstructural variability helped me determine whether all the data could fit into one structure (Giorgi, 2009). Instrastructural variability means that all the data can fit into one structure, while interstructural variation means that the invariant constituents belong to different structures (Giorgi, 2009). Although the transformations may come from different experiences and maybe concretely different, they could still have the same meanings (Giorgi, 2009). If the constituents are not essentially different, they are instrastructural, and one structure can describe their meanings (Giorgi, 2009). In this study, all of the data were interstructural as the invariant constituents all fit into one structure that described all of the students' transitional experiences.

After I obtained the phenomenological structure, I applied it to the empirical data to highlight its findings and develop the structure more fully. "Rather the structure is pregnant with implications that have to be spoken to just as a fact is surrounded by a horizon of possibilities, and in phenomenology both implications and possibilities contribute to the clarification of meaning" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 202). To provide context to the study's findings, I provided details from the original data and correlated them with the structure.

In summary, I adopted the phenomenological reduction with a sensitivity towards the participant's postsecondary transitional experiences and an educational attitude. I then read the data for a sense of the whole. After rereading the participants' descriptions slowly, I probed the

horizons of the participants' descriptions for the phenomenal presentation of transitional experiences, which I then broke into meaning units. Using imaginative variation, I looked at each meaning unit from an educational perspective to elucidate the transitional meaning from each unit and transformed them as clearly as possible in language relevant to the participants' transitional experiences. Then, I used imaginative variation and scanned the transformations again to explicate similar dynamics of the students' transitional experiences. These eidetic invariants formed the study's constitutions, and the relationship between them formed the structure of the students' transitional experiences. Finally, I tested the structures of the phenomenon by removing the invariant constituents to see if they were an essential part of the structure. Subsequently, I integrated the details from the participants' original descriptions with the structure to clarify and highlight the essential meanings of the phenomenon. Finally, in the study's findings, I examined the students' demographics and academic experiences with the phenomenological findings to triangulate the data and consider other aspects of their transitions.

Research Questions

This study used interview strategies to help the participants, before and during the interview process, develop deeper and more meaningful descriptions of their experiences. In the DPP method, the researcher must seek a complete description of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon being studied (Giorgi, 2009). During the interviews, I used Petitmengin's (2016) interview strategies to help the students provide detailed descriptions of their experiences and help them from theorizing their experiences. During a phenomenological interview, it is important not to lead the participant. However, it may be necessary to redirect them to the phenomenon with guiding questions to develop deeper descriptions (Giorgi, 2009). During the interview process, I also used Petitmengin's (2016) interview strategies to help redirect the students back to focusing on describing specific transitional experiences.

In Giorgi's (2009) DPP method, the focus of the interview is for the participants to describe what happened or what it was like to experience a phenomenon. The participants' naiveté to the interview process and the psychological perspective of the research eliminated the need for pure descriptions and the need for the participants to bracket their own experiences Giorgi (2009). In this study, I used a selection of strategies and interview practices adopted from neurophenomenology to help participants from theorizing their experiences. To assist participants in becoming better observers and describers of their own experiences, I used a selection of Petitmengin's (2006) micro-phenomenological strategies and Bevan's (2014) phenomenological semi-interview questions.

Petitmengin (2006) designed her micro-phenomenological interview strategies to enhance the ability of an individual to describe their subjective experience for the science of consciousness. Micro-phenomenology is a new scientific discipline aimed at discovering ordinary small experiences and getting participants to articulate them very well using descriptive detail (Bitbol & Petitmengin, 2017). Micro-phenomenological interviews enable researchers to help participants better describe their cognitive process in the first person and prevent them from theorizing their experiences. Petitmengin's (2006) micro-phenomenological strategies helped me stabilize the participants' attention and aid them in focusing on *how* their experiences happened rather than *what* happened. The pre-interview protocols and strategies I chose from Petitmengin's work aligned with Giorgi's (2009) DPP method as they do not lead the participant in any way. Petitmengin's (2006) pre-interview protocols and strategies provided me with the language and strategies which helped me guide the participants in providing deeper and richer descriptions.

Petitmengin's (2006) pre-interview protocols also helped me stabilize the attention of the participants attention before the interviews started. Petitmengin's (2006) pre-interview protocols

align with the phenomenological reduction as they require the researcher to remain focused, open, and reflexive to the participant during the interview process. The pre-interview protocols clarify the interview process so the participants can relax and focus on describing experiences. Interviews can be more dynamic when there is a relaxed atmosphere and cordial relationship between the interviewer and the participant (Giorgi, 2009). In this study, I developed and used pre-interview protocols that provided the participants with an outline of the interview process. In the protocols, I described how the natural ebb and flow of participant-researcher interactions might lead to interruptions which helped set the participants at ease when I asked for further clarification of their experiences.

Petitmengin (2006) suggested that the interviewer develop a pre-interview protocol that uses language that directly focuses the participants' attention on the phenomena being studied. The creation of statements such as, "We are here together today, for this time with the specific objective which is to gather a description of this particular experience" (Petitmengin, p. 239). Using Petitmengin's method, I designed a pre-interview protocol that I used before the participants' interviews (See Appendix A). Using this type of dialogue helped stabilize the participants' focus on the phenomenon and articulated the framework of the interview process before the interview began.

Petitmengin (2006) also recommended that every time the participants started to drift towards theorization, the researcher should ask questions that bring the participant's focus back to describing their experiences. To prevent participants from leaving the description to theorize, comment on, or make judgements about the experience, Petitmengin (2006) suggests that the interviewer regularly asks the participant to check the accuracy of what they have said. In the pre-interview session, the researcher may set this up by saying, "I am often going to repeat back

to you what you say to me, which will enable you to check that I understood you correctly and whether anything has been left out. Don't hesitate to interrupt me. So, if I understood you correctly, you began …" (Petitmengin, 2006, p. 240). Using pre-developed questions and statements, I was able to redirect the students' focus to their described experiences without providing contextual clues.

Petitmengin's (2006) strategies align with Giorgi's (2009) DPP method and provided me with protocols and interview strategies to help garner more detailed descriptions. By staying in the phenomenological reduction and focusing on the phenomenon, I reflexively used predetermined language and strategies to help guide the participants away from theorizing their own experiences.

The purpose of a descriptive phenomenological psychological study is to capture the lived description of the phenomena and to derive psychological meaning from these experiences (Giorgi, 2009). In Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological method, the raw data is collecting from willing participants who are naïve to the aims of the interview but share the phenomenal experience. Englander (2012), however, points out that the meaning of a situation requires context, and at times, it may be necessary to guide the participants in providing more details in their descriptions. A semi-interview structure with follow-up questions that delve into the details of the participants' experiences can be help garnering richer descriptions from the participants (Englander, 2012). This study used a semi-interview structure to help the students provide detailed descriptions of their postsecondary transitional experiences (See Appendix B).

Bevan (2014) developed a descriptive phenomenological interview method that used a systematic theoretical approach to data collection. This system is based on the three main concepts of the descriptive phenomenological method of developing, apprehending, and

clarifying the phenomena. Bevan (2014) developed his semi-interview question structure to help researchers prevent analysis errors resulting from the lack of incomplete descriptions. This approach also aligns with Giorgi's phenomenological reduction as it accepts the natural attitude of the participants, and through bracketing, the researchers become reflexive and active listeners (Bevan, 2014). In this research, I used Bevan's method to help me prepare for the interview process and develop better interview questions. At all times during the interview process, I remained faithful to Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological method, stayed in the phenomenological reduction, and used the semi-interview questions flexibly to help elucidated better descriptions from the participants.

Bevan's (2014) descriptive phenomenological interview method uses contextualized questions to consider the phenomena from the context and biography of the participant's life. Bevan's method helps the participants from focusing on isolated experiences without providing the contextual background that may render weak data. Asking contextualized questions aligns with Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method and helps the researcher provide a point of context from which the participants can situate their experiences (Bevan, 2014). My semi-interview structure was separated into three sets of questions which revolved around each of the students' transitional experiences and helped the participants develop narratives full of contextual elements and meaningful information. (See Appendix B)

Each participant in the study may experience the phenomenon differently, and it is the interviewer's job to clarify these descriptions without leading the participant (Bevan, 2014, Giorgi, 2009). Bevan (2014) noted that a single question might not be enough to prompt the participant to provide various aspects of their experiences. Using structural questions when I needed them, I asked the participant to describe an event or activity that could provide depth or

quality to the experience. This type of questioning helped the participants develop their descriptions by asking them to provide examples or details of specific events or activities in their descriptions.

Bevan (2014) also uses imaginative variation during interviews to help participants describe their experiences that are grounded in context. By actively listening to the participant's response and using imaginative variation, the researcher can reflexively generate questions that helped the participants provide different perspectives of their experiences (Bevan 2014). An example of this questioning may be to ask a university student to describe how their university classes were different from high school and provide examples of each experience. Getting the participants to describe different scenarios from the same experience helped me determine the invariant constituents and develop more accurate structures of the phenomenon (Bevan's 2014).

In my research, I used Bevan's (2014) descriptive phenomenological research question guidelines and Petitmengin's (2006) neurophenomenological protocols and interview strategies to develop semi-research questions and an interview question guide. I used the protocols and questions to help the participants provide detailed descriptions of their transition to secondary e-learning, their first year of university and ERL.

This study integrated the participants' phenomenological structures with their demographic and academic data to help understand the students' transitional experiences and the impact of students' secondary e-learning experiences on their transition to postsecondary education. Both phenomenological and quantitative research questions were used to consider the experiential experiences of the students, their demographic profiles, and their secondary and postsecondary academic grades to form a comprehensive understanding of the students' transitional experiences. The participants' demographic data were collected in a survey before

their interviews (Appendix B). In the following phenomenological questions, the word *lived* is used to depict the participants' concrete descriptions of having lived through the phenomena of their educational transitions. The three phenomenological questions on students' transitional experiences are this study's primary questions. The subsequential question on how secondary e-learning impacts students' transition is its sub-question. Then two additional two questions address the influence of students' demographic and academic information on their postsecondary transitions. This study's primary objective was to explore the lived experience of students' transition to secondary e-learning, university, and Emergency Remote Learning (ERL).

Primary Questions

1. What were the described secondary e-learning experiences of students with secondary e-learning backgrounds who are in their first year of university?
2. What were the described first year transitional experiences of students with secondary e-learning backgrounds who are in their first year of university?
3. What were the described experiences of first year university students with secondary e-learning experiences as they transitioned into Covid-19 emergency remote learning?

Subset Question

a. How might participants' secondary e-learning experiences impact their first-year postsecondary transitional experiences?

Two additional quantitative queries will be used to elicit empirical data related to subpersonal events that may affect students' transitional experience to postsecondary education.

Demographic and Academic Questions

1. What were the academic outcomes of students' secondary e-learning experiences and their first semester grades and how do they compare with their first-year

postsecondary transitional experiences?

2. What correlations, if any, link the students' demographic data to their transitional experiences?

In the findings of this study, both qualitative (phenomenology) and quantitative data were used to discuss the impact of secondary e-learning on students' transition to postsecondary education. Using natural phenomenology, I correlated this study's empirical research with its phenomenological structures to provide intersubjectivity. In my study, intersubjectivity provided validity by letting the subjective nature of the research be informed by its objective counterpart (Zahavi, 2019). The quantitative questions can be found in the interview guide (Appendix B).

Axiological and Rhetorical Assumptions

Axiology acknowledges that research is value-laden and questions what constitutes knowledge (Creswell, 2013). In the descriptive phenomenological psychological method, the focus is on the described experiences of the participant of the phenomenon being studied (Giorgi, 2009). Bracketing, which is part of the phenomenological reduction, allows the researcher to acknowledge any personal biases or preconceived experiences regarding the phenomena. The researcher reflects on them, setting aside all preconceived notions, theories, and experiences about the phenomenon to focus on the participant's descriptions (Giorgi, 2009). In this study, I used bracketing to reflect on my beliefs, values, and knowledge and set aside preconceived notions, assumptions or previous experiences regarding the phenomenon. By suspending these beliefs, I opened myself up and was present to the phenomenon as the participants described it.

Rhetorical assumptions assume that the researcher will use terms and a narrative that is unique to the methodology and the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The DPP method uses common everyday language used in the lifeworld (Giorgi, 2009). Using everyday language

assures that the documentation of the transformations of raw data can be easily followed, and the researcher stays loyal to the participants' descriptions (Giorgi, 2009). In this study, I used language that was common to the phenomenon of educational transitions and stayed loyal to the participants' described experiences throughout the analysis process.

The Trustworthiness of the Study

In qualitative research, the researcher is the central figure who collects, analyzes, and interprets the data. Consequently, the researcher's behaviour and perceptions can influence the data and interfere with the study's trustworthiness (Finlay, 2002). Common to all research methods is the need to establish consistent, dependable, and valid research methods to produce high-quality research (Creswell, 2013). Developing validity in qualitative research means using various techniques that proves the study's authenticity and leads to its consideration as sound research (Cohen et al., 2011). There are different forms of qualitative research and diverse ways to substantiate them. However, consistency and validity are considered the main elements of quality control in all of them (Creswell 2007; Cohen et al., 2011; Seale, 2012). Factors of creditability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability ensure a study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1994).

Developing high standards of quality control is the aim of qualitative validity strategies and validating the relationship between one's ideas and the outcome of the research is the main approach (Creswell, 2013). Three factors that impact research validation are the philosophy of the science worked in, the discipline the research belongs to, and the examined subfield of specialization; consequently, concepts such as validation and reliability naturally evolve from the epistemological and ontological of the discipline's underpinnings (Giorgi, 2009; Sousa, 2014). Validation strategies are necessary to confirm a study's trustworthiness and cannot be isolated from the study's context (Creswell, 2013). Consequently, Petitmengin's (2006) pre-interview

protocols, Bevan's (2014) descriptive phenomenological research question guidelines, and Sousa's (2014) validation concepts were used in this study with Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological method to help validate the research.

Giorgi's (2009) DPP approach inherently provides validity through the direct observation and adherence to the participants' descriptions and two main principles of transcendental phenomenology: that all knowledge is based on the given experience and that knowledge is not distorted in any way by the researcher. To do this, the researcher must analyze all of the participants' descriptions, stay loyal to them, and remain in the phenomenological reduction.

Phenomenological philosophy adheres to "the fidelity of the phenomena" and is based on describing the phenomena as it exists (Giorgi, 2002, p. 9). Furthermore, descriptive phenomenology seeks to find the participants' lived experiences and is deductive, limiting the researcher's subjectivity (Giorgi, 2009). Through the phenomenological reduction and the bracketing of the researcher's previous experiences and knowledge, the essence of the phenomena is revealed with limited researcher interpretation Giorgi (2009).

The exploratory nature of the research, the phenomenological reduction, the recording of the data transformations, all provided validity to this study (Giorgi, 2002, 2009). Like other scientific research methods, these records are available for review and replication through the recorded detailed data analysis process (Giorgi, 2009).

The use of structural questions also enhanced the validity of this study. Giorgi (1997, 2009) specified that interview questions could be used if they were broad enough and opened-ended to allow the participant to express their point of view but did not provide any directives for interviews. Bevan (2014) developed a method for using structured questions in a descriptive phenomenological study. The Bevan interview method is a practical approach to descriptive

interviews that allows the researcher to ask specific questions regarding the phenomenon without leading the participants. The questions are structured to maintain the participants' deliberate naiveté and reduce ambiguity and respondent reinterpretation of the experience. The questions are developed to encourage the participants to describe specific situations and actions, not opinions. Structured questions help the participants from theorizing their experience and helps them provide more profound concrete descriptions of the phenomenon. Using structured questions also means less discrepancy between the participants' language describing the phenomenon and the researcher's thematized verbalization of the reflected experience, which minimalizes analytical errors (Bevan, 2014). Bevan's (2014) method of developing descriptive interview questions, used in the study, utilizes phenomenological reduction and structured questions to provide additional validity to the research.

There are six concepts already intrinsic to descriptive phenomenological psychological research, which provide further validation and trustworthiness within qualitative research (Sousa, 2014). These concepts are intentionality, the phenomenological reduction, eidetic analysis, the synthesis of identification, focusing on the phenomena rather than the individual and the development of invariant structures. Staying loyal to Giorgi's (2009) DPP and these concepts provided this study with inherent validity measures.

Validity and Intentionality

Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological method acknowledges that subjectivity can still exist and tries to adjust for it (Giorgi, 2009). The concept of psychological intentionality accepts the participants' subjectivity of their experiences as both behavioural and experiential revealing various aspects of the same situation simultaneously (Giorgi, 2019). Intentionality understands phenomena as it appears to the participant, and the object is

considered in the form it is given; consequently, validation is based on the researcher collecting good descriptions and staying faithful to the participants' descriptions (Sousa, 2014). During this study, I collected detailed descriptions from the participants and remained true to their accounts of their experiences.

The use of structural questions also enhanced the validity of this study. Giorgi (1997, 2009) quantified that interview questions could be used as long as they were broad enough and opened-ended to allow the participant to express their point of view but did not provide any directives for interviews. Bevan (2014) developed a method for using structured questions in a descriptive phenomenological study. The Bevan interview method is a practical approach to descriptive interviews that allows the researcher to ask specific questions regarding the phenomenon without leading the participants. The questions are structured to maintain the participants' deliberate naiveté and reduce ambiguity and respondent reinterpretation of the experience. The questions are developed to encourage the participants to describe specific situations and actions, not opinions (Bevan, 2014). Structured questions help the participants from theorizing their experience and provide more profound concrete descriptions of the phenomenon. Using structure questions also means there is less discrepancy between the participants' language describing the phenomenon and the researcher's thematized verbalization of the reflected experience, which minimalizes analytical errors (Bevan, 2014). Bevan's method of developing descriptive interview questions, used in the study, utilizes phenomenological reduction and structured questions to provide additional validity to the research.

Validity and Phenomenological Psychological Reduction

The phenomenological psychological reduction process provides structure, rigour, and validation to phenomenology (Giorgi, 2019). Adopting the phenomenological psychological

reduction throughout the research process required me to suspend preconceived theories or knowledge about the explored phenomena and remain fully present to the participants' descriptions of their experiences (Giorgi, 2009). I controlled bias and promoted validity by staying in the phenomenological psychological reduction, focusing on the phenomenon from a psychological perspective, and recording all transformations of the raw data (Sousa, 2014). Throughout this research, I remained in the phenomenological reduction and present to the described experiences of the participants. Bevan's (2014) question structure and Petitmengin's (2006) protocols provided me with dialogue and strategies that helped me focus on the students' transitional experiences.

Validity and Eidetic Structures

During the descriptive phenomenological psychological reduction process, I remained in the phenomenological psychological attitude and used an eidetic process to systematically review all the raw data to determine the essence of the descriptions (Sousa, 2014). The eidetic analysis uses imaginative variation to establish the invariant components of the descriptions that determine the structures of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). The eidetic analysis provides verification and validation by imposing limitations on variations of phenomenological meanings (Sousa, 2014). Using Giorgi's (2009) DPP guidelines, I developed a variety of tables in Excel to manage the transformations of the raw data. Staying in the phenomenological reduction and using imaginative variation, I viewed the transformations in various ways until I established the phenomenon's invariant constituents.

Validity and Synthesis

The last step in the analytical process was to describe the participants' experiences by synthesizing the meanings and essences of the texts into an overarching structure (Giorgi, 2009).

I used imaginative variation, removed any accessory characteristics, and descriptively defined the invariant meanings that formulated the structure of the explored phenomenon. I validated and verified the structure by identifying the object in multiple ways while maintaining congruence and conformity despite the same object appearing across different horizons (Sousa, 2014). During the analysis process, I viewed the data in many ways. In this study there were three research questions and one sub-question. First, I analyzed each student's description holistically. Then I analyzed the transformations of each student's description of each educational transition separately and considered the emergence of invariant constituents. After this, I grouped the students' transitional experiences together grouping them by the type of educational transition. I then looked at the descriptions in multiple ways. Then I considered the students' transitions altogether to develop the phenomenon's structure. The invariant constituents and structure remained the same throughout the participants' transitional experiences verifying the transformations and my conclusions.

Validation and Phenomenon Versus Individual Experience

A descriptive phenomenological study focuses on exploring a phenomenon through the participants' descriptions, reflecting their intentional relations with the world (Sousa, 2014). The DPP method focuses on the experiences of individuals, not the individuals themselves, and the analysis is of the phenomena, not the participant (Giorgi, 2009). After the data collection, the first transformation of the data were put into a third-person point of view to separate the participant from their described experiences. Separating the participants from their descriptions helped me focus on the raw data and avoid empathizing with them, further validating this study (Sousa, 2014).

Validation and Invariant Structures

Giorgi's (2009) DPP method uses invariant structures to capture the essence of the participants' experience by establishing relationships between the subject, others that might be involved in the experience, and the situation itself. To develop the invariant structures, I searched through the concrete details of the descriptions to find phenomenal clues which reveal the nature of the students' transitional experiences. The invariant characteristics are formed using imaginative variation and do not change throughout contingencies and contexts that are part of the participants' experience (Vagle, 2014). By revealing the transformations of the meaning units through each educational transition, my highly structured analysis cultivated a rigorous approach to transforming the raw data and helped validate the research.

Creditability, Transferability, and Confirmability

Creditability

The creditability of human science research is obtained through a variety of strategies that include the rejection of a hypothesis during the data analysis stage, persistent observation throughout the study, and ensuring that strong claims are linked to evidence (Cohen et al., 2011; Seale, 2012). Giorgi's (2009) DPP method is exploratory and transforms the descriptions of the participant's experiences through a scientific method that directly links any claims of the phenomenon to the raw data. In this study, I provided an overview of the students' horizons to provide contextual background to the research. I also linked the research claims back to the students' described experiences to verify the analytical and decision-making process. Furthermore, I used the participants geographical and academic backgrounds to triangulate their described experiences.

Transferability

Giorgi's DPP method is only generalizable to the participants in the study that have experienced the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi (2009) states, "Nevertheless, the structures clarify the lifeworld situation in a psychological way and contribute to a deeper psychological understanding of the everyday situation" (p. 102). Although this research may only be generalized to students with e-learning backgrounds transitioning into their first year of university, it illuminated various aspects of students' transitional and e-learning experiences that may be useful for future study.

Confirmability

According to Seale (2012), a researcher can enhance their dependability and confirmability by producing documentation of their work, findings, and decisions that they used throughout their research. The following strategies were used in this study and can be followed for future reproduction purposes.

- data collection strategies
- interview questions, strategies, and guides
- communication strategies
- recruitment strategies
- sources and timing strategies
- validity, confirmability, and dependability strategies
- ethical considerations
- data storage and privacy

Strategies for Data Collection

Participants

During a descriptive phenomenological psychological research study, participants are asked to provide a complete description of their experiences concerning the explored phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). According to Giorgi (2009), all the participants' accounts of these experiences must be transcribed and analyzed. From a practical standpoint, the depths of analysis required in a descriptive phenomenological psychological research study affects the length of the interview and the number of participants (Giorgi, 2009). All participants in a descriptive phenomenological psychological study must experience the phenomenon being explored; consequently, this research used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to access a diverse range of participants' experiences to represent the phenomena better and validate the research more thoroughly (Giorgi, 2009). Creswell (2007) recommends that the appropriate number of interviews for a phenomenological study is between 5 and 25 people. Giorgi (2009) suggests that a descriptive phenomenological study should have at least three participants and be mindful that all raw data collected must be used. This research purposefully recruited twelve first-year university students with secondary e-learning experiences to participate in the study. The participants interviewed in this study were students who had taken at least one secondary e-learning course in an Ontarian high school and were in their first year of university in Ontario.

Recruitment

Recruitment is a critical aspect of any study and finding postsecondary volunteers can be difficult and time-consuming, and may end or delay research (Cyr et al., 2013). Cyr et al.'s (2013) *Recruiting Students for Research in Postsecondary Education Guide* states that a student's willingness to participate in a study can depend upon the way students receive the

request, if they have easy access to the study and if they want to or have the time to participate in the research (Cyr et al., 2013). Developing a student recruitment plan that encourages participation means considering a variety of communication modes, marketing sources, scheduling issues, and message clarity (Cyr et al., 2013). This study had developed a complete research plan which had to be abandoned as a result of new COVID-19 research protocols. As a result of the pivot to remote learning, I had to remain flexible and created an alternative plan, which resulted in the formation of a new research question to accommodate the students' changing circumstances.

Modes of Communication

In the fast-paced world of postsecondary education, students have many competing demands for their time and attention, and it can be difficult for a researcher to direct the research request to the optimal research subjects (Cyr et al., 2013). The Nair et al. (2008) research shows that response rates involving postsecondary research rates have fallen and suggest that multi-engagement strategies may be necessary to acquire the number of participants needed for a research project. During this study, many approaches were needed to attract students; therefore, this research used various methods to reach participants.

A direct approach to recruiting participants often provides better response rates (Nair et al., 2008; Cyr et al., 2013). In a DPP research study, each participant had to experience the phenomenon being studied (Giorgi, 2009). Using this type of research means that the participants must be homogenous and may limit the diversity of the participants and the number of participants available for the study (Creswell, 2013; Giorgi, 2009). Although the participants in this study all had experience with the phenomena, they were self selecting and were from various Ontarian high schools and went to seven different universities.

This study encompassed various direct and indirect recruitment strategies to provide students who have taken high school e-learning courses in Ontario with exposure to the study. A formal request was sent to a university in Ontario, who agreed to participate in the study and used their LMS to promote the study. Furthermore, the researcher asked students and institutional groups to share the study's request for participants on their social media platforms. The researcher also requested that posters and information be posted on several bulletin boards around the university.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, all students were sent home from Ontario's postsecondary institutions. After failing to recruit students through the university's LMS, using various professors' virtual classrooms, and student groups' social media accounts, I pivoted to using social media on a larger scale. I posted my recruitment poster on a variety of university and student led Reddit forums. I tried to post my request for participants to represent all of the 21 universities in Ontario. After reviewing the Reddit forums for appropriate content, I posted my request for participants on various student-controlled or official postsecondary administrator-controlled sub-reddit forums.

As a result of this recruitment drive, three university students volunteered to participate in the study. To recruit more participants, I offered a $25 Amazon gift card as a participation incentive. Seven more students from a variety of Ontarian universities agreed to participate in the study. The snowball or chain effect of recruitment was used as two participants willingly recruited two of their friends. An opportunistic approach was taken until the twelve participants were chosen for the study.

Timing

The timing of the recruitment phase was critical to this study because of the competing demands of students' schedules near the end of their academic year and the sudden transition to ERL. I started my research early enough to promote the study, run a trial study of the questions, and send invitations, reminders, and information to the university, professors, and student groups that agreed to help me. Cyr et al. (2013) state that starting early and having a series of contingency plans allows for the recovery of low participant response, delayed responses, and scheduling conflicts. Although this study started early, ran a trial study of the questions, and promoted the study at the university in various ways, the COVID-19 pandemic ultimately required that I change my recruitment plans. The study was delayed until COVID-19 restrictions, guidelines, and approvals were put in place.

Once the study resumed, the school year was almost over, and student recruitment had to be done online. It was difficult to recruit students at the previously designated university because of the COVID-19 restrictions and the time of the school year. At this point in the study, I turned to social media to recruit participants. The social media aggregate Reddit generated the most volunteer responses, and I used it to recruit most of the study's participants. Flexibility was vital to this study's successful recruitment process.

Clarity

This study used a recruitment message that abided by the descriptive phenomenological psychological method and ensured that participants remain naïve to research outcomes during the data collection process. The recruitment message was clear enough to ensure that all students could make an informed and educated decision before participating in the research. Nair et al.'s (2008) research stated that students want to know why the research is essential and why they

should participate in the study. This study's recruitment message focused on using the experiences of first-year university students with e-learning backgrounds to provide student voice to the study and to help inform educational policies and practices. Petitmengin's (2006) pre-interview protocols and questioning helped students understand the boundaries of the study. The pre-interview protocols clearly described the study's expectations concerning their time and depth of participation. According to Giorgi's (2009) DPP method, the participants will not be informed about the specific aims of the research until the study is completed. Once the research is complete, the participants will have access to the complete study.

Types of Participation and Ease of Response

I provided flexibility and convenience to the study's participants by using various ways to access information and schedule interviews. Providing comfortable, accessible, and flexible avenues of communication is an essential aspect of encouraging participation and in retaining participants (Nair et al., 2008; Cyr et al., 2013).

This study used email, texting, and a variety of social media platforms to communicate with participants and enhance connectivity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to do face-to-face interviews. Although the participants could have chosen various online interview formats or a telephone interview, they all chose to do a telephone interview. The interview times were flexible and based on an agreeable schedule to the interviewer and the participants. Providing links to this information through social media platforms provided the participants with easy-to-use options (Nair et al., 2008; Cyr et al., 2013). The variety of communication methods used in conjunction with the flexibility in interview methods, times, and location helped improve student participation rates. Initially, I communicated with the participants on the reddit forum, but once they agreed to participant in the study we

communicated through email. For the sake of convenience, I emailed the participants all posters, forms, and information and collected the participant's agreement forms using adobe fill and sign forms.

Incentives

Incentives such as food, lottery tickets, money, and gift certificates are sometimes used to attract students to participate in a research study and were eventually used in this study's recruitment process (Cyr et al., 2013). Initially, various communication procedures were used to remind students of the research, their importance in the research, and the importance of the research to the targeted community. These methods are usually more effective in increasing and retaining participants (Nair et al., 2008). Due to COVID-19 recruitment restrictions, and the difficulty of recruiting participants, all participants were given a $25 Amazon gift card as a token of appreciation for their time.

Ethical Considerations

This study used Athabasca University's ethical protocols when using human participants in research. After completing the candidacy oral defence process, an application for an ethics review for the proposal was submitted and accepted by the ethical review committee at Athabasca University for approval. An ethics review was also submitted and accepted by the postsecondary educational institutions considered for this study for their approval.

Seale (2012) states that integration of protocols protects individuals' privacy and prevents further distribution of their personal information and opinions gathered during their participation in a research study. Seale (2012) recommends that guidelines such as the UK's (1998) eight principles of good practice should be incorporated into the study. The eight principles of data collection policies state the data will be "fairly and lawfully processed, processed for limited purposes, adequate, relevant, and not excessive, accurate, not kept longer than necessary,

processed with the data subjects' rights, secure and not transferred to countries without adequate protection" (Seale, 2012, p. 65). This study will abide by these eight practices to respect the participants' opinions and duly protect their data and privacy.

Informed Consent

Before the commencement of all interviews, participants were asked to sign a consent form. The researcher provided participants with a consent form and a letter that described the study's general aims and expectations. The consent form and letters were sent out via Adobe forms and signatures for the participants' convenience. This letter provided transparency and legitimacy to the study (Seale, 2012). In the pre-interview protocols, the study's general focus and the right of the participant to ask questions and leave the interview at any time were outlined. The interviews only started when the participants indicated they felt comfortable enough to begin.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

During this study, I collected, stored, and will only used the data for its intended purpose. Providing the participants with a consent form and letter of information ensured that the participants are aware of the general aims of the study and are assured that all data collection is done legally and ethically. To ensure participants' privacy, they were given a pseudonym, which was used throughout the project. Furthermore, the participants' educational institutions and programs were not identified to ensure the participants' privacy further.

Privacy and Data Storage

All participants' data and backup copies are passcode encrypted, which only the researcher can access. Any hard copies are held in a secured location. According to Athabasca University's (2018) ethical guidelines, all research data will be destroyed after five years. This

data includes audio or video transcripts and written files. At no time will the participants' data be transferred to another country, educational or business organization, or made public for any other reason.

All findings from the report will be published without any individual identifiers and deposited in the Athabasca University Library. The research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Study Room, and the final research paper will be made publicly available. If the participants wish, they will receive a complete summary of the study's findings or the completed study, which will also be available online.

Voluntary Participation

All participants in this study voluntarily provided their time and shared their experiences. In the pre-interview protocols, participants were reminded of their rights to leave the study at any time. Researcher journals and a reflexive attitude were maintained during the interview process providing vigilance against obvious power imbalances and the researcher's influence over the participants. Respecting the participants' individuality and their right to have their perspective recorded accurately, I worked diligently to remain in the phenomenological attitude and work within the rigid boundaries of Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological method to ensure transcript accuracy. I treated all participants with dignity and respect and strived to collect their described lived experiences with integrity and accuracy.

Risks and Benefits

Athabasca University's (2018) ethical procedures state that there are two central considerations when using human participants in research: identifying risks to the subjects and levels of the identified risks. Although this research involves humans, it was exploratory, and the

risks to the participants were minimal. Under the University of Athabasca's (2018) departmental review committee guidelines, a student project such as this study is deemed a minimal risk. Low-risk research is considered minimal, and it only requires the review of the Athabasca Ethics panel and the other institutions that participate in the project. According to the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) key criteria, there is always a need to have respect for the participants during all stages of research (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2018) which is inherent throughout Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological method. Using the guidelines of the TCPS, the recommendations of the University of Athabasca's ethical committee, and the UL Data protection act, this study strived to maintain a healthy researcher-participant relationship and put the participant's needs at the forefront of the research project.

Summary

This research explored the transitional experiences of first-year postsecondary students with secondary e-learning backgrounds. This chapter presented an overview of the study's research method and rationale. It also presented a detailed account of Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological method (DPP) and a synopsis of the study's data collection, analysis, and validity strategies. The DPP method allowed for a subjective understanding of the students' transitional experiences and provided student voice to the study. Natural phenomenology was described as a means to integrate qualitative and quantitative data in the study. The study's use of a natural phenomenological approach allowed for a discussion of students' geographical and academic characteristics in conjunction with the phenomenological analysis of their transitional experiences. This section also covered methods of student selection, recruitment, and communication strategies. Ethical considerations, such as data storage and privacy issues, were outlined to ensure transparency and adherence to the Athabasca University's

ethical standards for research with human subjects. The following chapters of this report detailed this study's process and its outcomes.

Chapter 4: The Findings

Although the number of students enrolled in high school e-learning has increased, there is limited Canadian research on how secondary e-learning impacts students' transition to postsecondary education. My study contributes to the limited research in this area by describing the structure of the transitional experience of twelve university students with secondary e-learning backgrounds as they transitioned into their first-year secondary e-learning course, their first year of postsecondary education, and into ERL. The structure of an experience is a way to understand how the diverse facts and concrete experiences can belong to the same phenomenon (Giorgi, (2009). The findings of this research are presented in five sections:

- the horizontal features of the participants' demographic descriptions
- the horizontal features of the participants' individual experiences
- the development of the constituents of the structure
- the development of the structure of each transition
- the development of the structure as a whole

During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, students and teachers struggled to continue to learn together by using various types of technology or distance learning (mailed or delivery packages) or combining these methods (Hodges et al., 2020). In this study, I used the term Emergency Remote Learning (ERL) to reflect the teaching and learning that occurred in response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic global crisis. ERL illustrates the type of emergency education that took place remotely due to sudden school closures and does not reflect a typical online course that is usually well-planned, developed, and delivered by trained instructors (Rahiem, 2020).

Understanding Horizons: Students' Demographic and Academic Data

It is necessary to have some insights into students' horizons or backgrounds to understand their complex transitional experiences. The demographic data gathered during the interviews provide a snapshot of students' geographical and academic backgrounds. Initially, my research focused on studying students from one rural university and its affiliated college. However, with new COVID-19 research protocols in place, the recruitment process was moved online. Two fundamental changes resulted in the study. I had to recruit university students from a variety of Ontarian universities, and I could not recruit any college students and removed them from the study.

The participants in the study were born between the years 2000-2001, with six identifying as female and six as male. Six students were from rural Ontarian secondary schools, four went to urban schools, and two identified as going to suburban high schools. The students involved in the study went to seven different Ontarian universities and were enrolled in a variety of science, business, arts, and specialized programs. Six participants lived on campus, and five lived independently off-campus, while one participant lived at home with their family. The geographical diversity of the students, where they obtained their secondary e-learning experiences, and post-secondary education provided a way to understand how diverse facts and circumstances can have the same structure of experiences and belong to the same phenomenon (Giorgi, 2000). During the data transcription, the participants were given pseudonyms and became unidentifiable.

All participants in the study were first-year university students who had taken at least one secondary e-learning course. The demographic data were analyzed before the phenomenological study's analysis began. Although all of the students indicated they had some initial struggles with secondary e-learning, they passed all of their e-learning courses, and some went on to take more than one. The data revealed that at least ten out of the twelve students took two secondary

courses, and one student took three e-learning courses, and two of the students took four e-learning courses. Only two students dropped their subsequent e-learning courses because they did not need them or want them.

The data also revealed that most students did academically better or equal in their e-learning courses compared to their traditional face-to-face classes and there were no significant achievement differences. The participants who volunteered for the study were all high achieving students; eight had a secondary GPA of 4, three had a GPA of 3.9, and one had a GPA of 3.3. Eleven of these participants indicated that they had entered their first year of university with a scholarship.

The students' interviews were completed at the end of the second semester of the participant's first year of postsecondary education. The grades provided by the students on their first year of postsecondary study are based on the students' reported second-semester average. Two of the 12 participants indicated that they had a higher GPA than their high school grades as they were in specialized programs and enjoyed the work. Six participants reported that their GPA had gone down 5% to 10% during their first year of university.

The study's participants were geographically from various locations in Ontario. The students were academically successful in both high school and their first year of university. Table 1 reflects the participants' geographical, and academic patterns as they transitioned from secondary e-learning to their first semester of university and then into COVID-19 ERL and provides insights into the type of learners who participated in the study. The averages in this table align with the Ontario Application Center and the Ministry of Education's growing success guidelines.

Table 1

Participant Demographic and Academic Information

Demographic Data Categories	Number of students	Percentage (rounded)
Gender		
Male	6	50%
Female	6	50%
Other Gender Identifications	0	0
Year of Birth at end of first year of university (2020)		
2001 (19)	10	83%
2000 (20)	2	17%
Location of high school		
Urban	4	42%
Suburban	2	16%
Rural	6	42%
Number of secondary e-learning courses taken		
1	2	17%
2	6	50%
3	2	17%
4	2	17%
Number of secondary e-learning courses dropped		
0	10	83%
1	2	17%
Place of residency		
On campus	6	50%
Independently off campus	5	42%
Home	1	8%
Number of students entering their first year of university with a scholarship		
Yes	10	83%
No	2	17%
Secondary Education E-learning Average		
95-100	3	25%
87-94	4	33%
80-86	4	33%
77-79	1	8%
Secondary Graduation Average		
95-100	5	42%
87-94	4	33%
80-86	2	17%
77-79	1	8%
First Year Postsecondary Average (GPA)		
4.0 (94-100)	3	25%
3.90 (85-93)	3	25%
3.70 (80-84)	5	42%
3.20 (74-75)	1	8%

Understanding Horizons: Individual Descriptions

This study provided the horizons, which are the general backgrounds of the participants' described experiences, to help contextualize the data and understand the development of the constituents and their structures. These horizons were developed from the final transformation of the meaning units. The participants' transition to secondary e-learning, postsecondary education and ERL were considered separately. The participants' horizons were not organized or given in any particular order to further ensure their privacy.

Participant 1

Participant 1 (P1) was excited to take their first secondary e-learning course. Although technical issues initially created barriers, they worked through them and enjoyed the flexibility and independence of the course. P1 found that it was beneficial to work with their peers and felt supported by the quick response of their teachers. In addition, P1 adapted to the more heavily weighted assignments of their e-learning course by learning time-management, communication, and organizational skills.

P1 found their transition to university lonely, which surprised them, as they were naturally outgoing and usually did not have issues making friends. P1 also had difficulty adjusting to the heavier workload of their university class. P1 received emotional support from their family and eventually made new friends by working with their classmates on projects and studying with their peers. P1 also received support by going to their professors' office hours and emailing them questions or concerns. P1 described how their high school e-learning courses helped them develop the confidence and communication skills to ask their university professor for help when they felt like giving up.

P1 described the transition to ERL as manageable but stressful as they had to suddenly change the way they were learning and leave their friends and classmates. Most of P1's professors had been using an LMS in some way before the transition, and P1 found this very helpful. Most of P1's professors also reduced their workload and were more flexible with their schedule, and P1 started to find ERL easier. Once P1 adapted to the sudden changes and new learning formats, they preferred the ERL to their traditional classes. P1 described how they quickly adapted to ERL because they were familiar with using discussion boards and how to manage their courses due to their secondary e-learning experiences.

Participant 2

Participant 2 (P2) was overwhelmed and isolated when they took their first e-learning course as they had minimal teacher interaction and technological support. P2 was confused with the way that the LMS worked and frustrated with the limited technological training. P2 worked with their peers through the course discussion boards and received feedback and insights on the course content. P2's teacher was very supportive as they responded to P2's emails very quickly. Although P2 initially struggled with secondary e-learning, overtime, they became familiar with the LMS, better at time management, and chunking and organizing their work.

At first, P2 was overwhelmed with the size of their large classes. This forced P2 to become more accountable for their work. P2 often communicated and studied with their classmates, compared notes, and relied on each other for support. However, P2 had little support and feedback from their professor due to their large class size. P2 was already an independent and self-sufficient learner but had improved these traits during their secondary e-learning courses. During their first semester of university, P2 described how they learned to balance and handle

the multiple learning components of each course and the different teaching styles of their university professors.

At the beginning of ERL, P2 was very frustrated and anxious because of the lack of communication from their professors and the university's administration. Although P2's work was pushed back a week, there was a lack of coordination in their university as each professor provided their work and lessons in multiple ways. Different professors used various teaching modalities and P2 found the lack of teaching consistency confusing and frustrating. P2 preferred learning the content from the PowerPoint voice-over format that some of their professors used as they could work at their own pace. P2 described how their secondary e-learning experiences helped them transition to ERL learning as they were familiar with using technology for learning and had developed good time management and organization skills.

Participant 3

Participant 3 (P3) was overwhelmed with their e-learning course as their teacher had posted all of their course work at once. P3 was isolated as they did not have support from their teacher and connection with other students. Once P3 started working with other students on discussion boards, they felt more connected. P3 was very proactive and reached out to their teacher for support. P3's e-learning class was more work than their traditional classes, but they learned to be more motivated, independent, and responsible for their work due to this experience.

P3 was very anxious about the social and academic changes of starting university. P3 was not very good at making friends. However, once P3 started university and adapted to it, they liked the independence and flexibility it offered. Although P3 did not know anyone, once they started working with classmates, they developed friends and academic support. P3 also took advantage of their professors' office hours and received extra clarification and feedback on their

assignments. P3 described how their secondary e-learning courses helped them develop independent learning and time management skills. P3 found the work easy in their traditional high school classes. However, they found that their secondary e-learning experience more difficult and complex and had to work more diligently to maintain their grades. P3 then develop a better work ethic during their e-learning courses. P3 described how their previous secondary e-learning experiences helped them gain confidence in communicating with their teachers and learning to be a proactive self-advocate.

During ERL, P3's university did not communicate very well with the students. This lack of communication created stress and confusion for P3 as they did not know what was going on. Their professors had minimal experience with the LMS and sent their lessons and instructions through various formats. P3 had limited communication from most professors and found it difficult and stressful to navigate the course content, deadlines, and expectations. Nevertheless, P3 described how their previous secondary e-learning and university experiences had helped them grow into an independent and organized learner, which helped them stay motivated to finish their ERL courses.

Participant 4

When Participant 4 (P4) first started their secondary e-learning course, they had to adjust to the independent learning style of e-learning. Consequently, P4 learned to motivate themselves rather than relying on their teachers and peers to organize them. Consequently, P4 became isolated, as they did not have the opportunity to know their peers and teacher. When P4 worked with other students in the discussion forums and communicated with their teachers, they developed more connections and found the course material more accessible. P4 described how they

improved their time management and organizational skills during their secondary e-learning course and was pleased with their final grade.

P4 was nervous about going to university as they were shy and had trouble making friends. However, the transition to university was more manageable than P4 expected because they were in a specialized program with smaller class sizes allowing them to develop a strong connection with their professors. P4 worked with their peers on long-term projects and developed strong relationships with them. When P4 studied with their peers, they made new friends and learned effective ways to study and learn. P4's secondary e-learning experiences help them be successful in university because they learned not to panic, concentrate on things for prolonged periods, and become more confident in their ability to solve problems. During their first year in university, P4 learned how to be alone and not be lonely and make a variety of new friends.

P4 was luckier than their friends as they were only taking four courses during the COVID-19 crisis. When P4's group work moved online, they were disappointed as they had become a tight-knit group. P4's professors primarily communicated through email and video lecturers. P4 recognized that remote learning was not authentic e-learning and did not garner much from their professors' instructions. P4 struggled to learn independently because their professors provided limited content and instructions. P4 became frustrated with their professors' teaching style as the responsibility of learning the content was totally thrust upon them. P4 described how their secondary e-learning experiences helped in ERL as they were already an independent learner who knew how to manage their own time and use technology for learning.

Participant 5

Participant 5 (P5) was an independent learner before they began their first secondary e-learning class. P5 found their traditional classes and e-learning class very similar. P5 did not like

going to classes and enjoyed working at home. P5 only communicated with their peers when it was mandatory and did not find it helpful. They only emailed their teacher occasionally when they needed clarification. P5's e-learning teachers were supportive, but P5 became frustrated if their teacher did not promptly respond to their queries. Overall, P5 found e-learning a positive experience because they enjoyed working independently at home.

The transition to university was daunting for P5 because everything was new, and they were shy. They were accustomed to having the support of teachers and friends and were nervous about missing classes and deadlines. However, P5 did not find their course workload very difficult and liked the independence of university life. P5 worked with their peers on group projects and assignments but did not reach out to their professors. P5 began to take the opportunity to stay home whenever possible because they learned better through their textbooks and the posted lecture notes, despite finding the notes poorly organized. P5 was already an independent learner and their familiarity with e-learning and learning from home helped them adapt to university life.

There was not much of a transition to ERL learning for P5 because they already lived off-campus and were learning from home most of the time. Initially, P5 was confused and annoyed over the inconsistent scheduling of assignments and exams. P5's professors previously used an LMS before COVID-19, but during ERL, they started using it more, and it improved the delivery of P5's courses. P5's professors also started using the LMS to make announcements and send email alerts to their students, which P5 found helped them stay on track. In addition, P5 described how learning to manage their own time and work at home during their secondary e-learning courses helped them develop a consistent approach to their studies during ERL.

Participant 6

Initially, Participant 6 (P6) was confused and frustrated when they logged into their secondary e-course. P6 had difficulty maneuvering the LMS and became frustrated as they did not have enough technological training. After a week or two, P6 learned to manage the technology, which made learning more accessible. P6 shared ideas and feedback with other students on the class discussion boards. P6 often emailed their teacher with questions but became frustrated with their teachers' response times. E-learning gave P6 flexibility and control over their learning. P6 described how they became more organized and independent during their e-learning experience.

P6 was in a specialized university program and found university easier than high school. Their university program was very structured and required them to work with their peers, teaching assistants, and professors. P6 interacted with their peers on class projects and social media groups. One of their professors communicated with their students through different social media forums, and P6 developed a different type of learning community and more ways to communicate. P6 described how the organizational skills and confidence they gained in their secondary e-learning courses helped them deal with the independent learning style inherent in university and their heavy workloads.

At first, P6 worried about the sudden transition to ERL and thought it would be difficult. However, once P6 adapted to ERL, it was better than they had initially anticipated. P6's professors had previously used an LMS in their classes and worked on improving their online content and enhancing their presence on it. P6's professors also reduced their workload. P6's professors changed their tests to assignments, which reduced P6's stress because P6 struggled with the pressure of test writing. Although the workload was heavier due to the assignments requiring more

time, P6 found the assignments easier than tests or exams. P6 described how learning to stay organized and navigating technology during their secondary e-learning experiences helped them quickly adapt to ERL.

Participant 7

Participant 7 (P7) was an independent learner, and secondary e-learning was a natural fit for them. P7 would often sit with a peer in their school taking the same course and work together to figure things out. In addition, P7 would email their teacher for clarification if they needed it and was supported by their teacher's quick response. Although P7's secondary e-learning course was more difficult than their traditional classes, it helped them become a more independent, responsible, and resilient learner.

P7 was not academically or socially prepared for university and was initially anxious about attending. P7 had difficultly adjusting to the more significant workload in university and described the learning experience as more intense than in high school. P7 also had difficulty adapting to the multiple ways the instructions and content were delivered, such as lecturers, group work, labs, tutorials, readings, and online. On the other hand, P7 found it very helpful to work with their peers face-to-face and through social media groups. P7's professors were accommodating as they provided P7 with lots of feedback and clarification on questions and assignments. P7's professors also used the LMS and posted most of the course content and additional information. P7's described how their secondary e-learning courses helped them in university as they experienced learning opportunities that required them to become self-disciplined and highly motivated.

P7's transition to ERL was more complicated than expected. P7 thought they were competent with online work, and their professors already used the LMS. However, P7 missed the human contact of their friends, classmates, and professors and found it difficult to concentrate. P7 's professors started initiating compulsory synchronous classes, and P7 missed the autonomy of e-learning. P7's synchronous classes were impersonal and did not allow P7 to learn at their own pace. P7's professors did not reduce their workload very much, and at times the online exams did not work smoothly. P7 described how their secondary e-learning experiences had helped them become organized, self-sufficient, and determined. These experiences helped them transition into their ERL courses.

Participant 8

Participant 8 (P8) was nervous and excited to take their first secondary e-learning courses. P8 wanted to accept more responsibility for their learning. P8's traditional classes did not allow them flexibility or to grow as an independent learner, so they wanted to take e-learning courses. P8's online collaboration with their peers gave them insight into their classmates' perspectives and helped them to develop their ideas. P8 reached out to their teachers when they needed clarification on assignments or questions regarding content. P8 felt supported by the quick response of their e-learning teacher, who quickly responded to their questions and concerns. P8 described how their secondary e-learning experiences helped them develop better time management, organization, and communication skills.

P8's transition to university was more challenging than they had expected. Although P8 was an outgoing person, they initially had more difficulty making friends than they thought they would. Many students on P8's floor did not talk about the isolation they experienced in their first few weeks of university. However, once P8 got to know other students, they realized that they

their peers felt the same way. As a result, P8 developed new friendships and found that learning and studying with them helped them better grasp the subjects.

P8 struggled with the lecture style of learning and the lack of technology allowed in their university classrooms. Some of P8's professors did not allow any technology in their classes and did not use it. P8 became frustrated as they were accustomed to using technology to learn. P8 had to take on the responsibility of communicating with their professors and would visit them during office hours or email them for clarification or feedback. P8 described how their involvement with an extracurricular club had a professor who acted as their mentor. This club provided them with experiential learning experiences and a way to meet new friends. P8 described how their secondary e-learning experiences eased their academic transition into university while struggling with loneliness and isolation.

The transition to COVID-19 ERL was emotionally and academically difficult for P8. P8 found it challenging to stay motivated and on task. P8 also had to share the Wi-Fi with their entire family, which made going to synchronous classes and doing their assignments more difficult. One of P8's professors outsourced their workload to other people, making communicating with them more difficult. The lack of communication from their professor and their university made P8 very upset. Transitioning to ERL was made more difficult by P8's professor's lack of technological experience. Trying to follow the various and unorganized ways that their professors sent their course work and instructions caused P8 to become confused, frustrated, and stressed. P8 also missed their friends and the academic collaboration with their peers that they relied on for support. P8 described how the time-management, organization, and independent learning skills they developed during their secondary e-learning experiences helped them manage their stressful transition into ERL.

Participant 9

Secondary e-learning was very challenging for Participant 9 (P9) because it was a totally different way of learning and communicating. P9 worked with their peers on mandatory discussion boards where they learned to interact with their classmates digitally. P9 often asked their teacher for clarification and was well supported by the quick response of their teacher. P9's e-learning course was disorganized and sometimes P9 felt frustrated. P9 described how they become more organized and a technologically astute learner during their secondary e-learning experiences.

University was more accessible for P9 because they were already an independent learner due to their secondary e-learning experiences. These previous experiences helped P9 manage the independent learning that was a result of the large class sizes. The large class sizes also made communicating with their professors more difficult, so P9 reached out to their professors via email or office hour appointments. During one of P9's first classes, they had a student approach them to do group work, and this gave P9 the confidence to collaborate with other students in the future. P9 described how their secondary e-learning experiences helped them develop the time management and organization to manage their university classes and the confidence to work with their professors.

The transition to ERL was frustrating and stressful for P9 as all of their professors used different methods of communication for delivering content and instructions. P9 had so many different things going on in different ways at the same time that their work became complicated to manage. It was challenging for P9 to manage synchronous and asynchronous course loads at the same time. P9's ever-changing course expectations, directives, and assessments created even more confusion. P9 described how they had become highly organized during their secondary e-

learning experiences, which helped them navigate the multiple ways content was delivered during ERL.

Participant 10

Participant 10 (P10) was excited and prepared to take an e-learning course. The clunky technology, however, caused P10 to become frustrated and upset with the course. Once P10 learned how to use the technology, they found the work easier and enjoyed the flexibility and independence of e-learning. P10 collaborated on the discussion boards with their peers and found it an efficient way to review course content. P10's e-learning course was well-organized and easy to follow. P10 would email their teacher if they had any questions or concerns. P10 described experiences that revealed how they had become a more organized and independent learner during their first e-learning course.

P10 was in a specialized university program with smaller class sizes, making the university transition more manageable than expected. Although P10 worked with their peers on mandatory projects, they found it ineffective to study with their peers who would waste time socializing. P10 had much contact with their professors as there were opportunities for discussions and questions in class, and they would visit them during office hours. P10's professors offered support in recommending and offering additional courses for certification that could enhance future job opportunities. P10 described how their secondary e-learning courses taught them to be more independent, organized, and resilient.

P10 's transition to ERL was difficult. P10's courses were poorly organized, and their professors' approach to remote teaching were inconsistent and unorganized. Their professors' lack of technological expertise translated into poor quality PowerPoints and course content, which frustrated P10. After P10's professors switched to essay-based assessment from tests and

exams, P10 found their workload much heavier. P10's secondary e-learning experiences helped them transition to ERL as it taught them to be independent and excellent time managers

Participant 11

In Participant 11's (P11) secondary e-learning course, the course work was much heavier than their traditional classes. P11 described how initially they struggled with time management and self-regulation. P11 collaborated with friends in their school who took the same online courses and found this helpful. P11 often emailed their teacher for help but missed the personal connection and immediate support of a face-to-face teacher. Nevertheless, P11 liked the flexibility of secondary e-learning and became technologically astute and better at time management during this experience.

P11 initially found university easy, but they socialized too much and fell behind in their work. P11 realized that they had to spend more time on their schoolwork and began to work on their readings and assignments early to avoid falling behind. Studying with friends and classmates was very effective for P11 and helped them stay on track. P11 worked with other students face-to-face and through social media forums. P11 was in large classes and only connected with one of their professors through email when they need clarification on an assignment or course concept. P11 described how they developed better time management and organization skills through their secondary e-learning course which helped them manage their university workload. P11's secondary e-learning experiences also helped as they were familiar with working on an LMS.

P11 was shocked with the transition to ERL. P11's classes were cancelled for a week, and during this time, their professors reduced the course's workload. P11's professor already

posted most of their work on an LMS, making it easier for P11 to find and follow the course content and instructions. P11's instructors also enhanced their online presence and started to post their lectures online and have optional Zoom class meetings. Once P11's professors became organized, they relaxed and found the coursework easier. However, P11 missed their regular university classes and thought they would have added an extra dimension to their learning. P11 eventually found their ERL work easier. P11 described how their secondary e-learning experiences helped them transition into ERL as they were familiar with using an LMS and had become an independent and organized learner.

Participant 12

Participant 12 (P12) took their first e-learning course from a different board and expected some challenges but became very frustrated with the complexity of getting online, communicating with their teacher, and viewing their grades. The bureaucracy left P12 feeling vulnerable and out of control. P12 had a minimal connection with their peers because they worked and missed most of the discussion boards. P12's teacher supported them by emailing them with feedback, clarification, and additional resources. During P12's secondary e-learning experience, they had to do most of the course independently due to their work schedule, which helped them become a better communicator and problem solver.

The transition to university was difficult for P12 as they got behind in their coursework. P12 realized that they would need to change their approach to their academics by studying more and managing their time better. P12 was familiar with using an LMS and found this helpful. P12 often worked and studied with their peers and found that it was an effective way to study. P12's professors gave them lots of feedback and support, which helped them improve their writing and research skills. P12 described how the time management and organization skills they learned in

secondary e-learning were enhanced in university to accommodate their busy university schedules.

The lack of communication from P12's university and professors made the transition to ERL confusing and frustrating. P12 became worried about their course timetable because they had pending midterms and did not know what to do. P12's professors had previously posted notes and annotated lectures online, but they started to post full lectures online during the transition to ERL. These online lectures were not as good as P12's in-class lectures, and P12 felt isolated by the limited interaction with their professors. In addition, P12's professors used various ways to deliver course content and instructions. As a result, P12 found they were always catching up and then falling behind in their coursework. P12 described how they managed the chaos of their ERL experiences by using the time management and organization skills they developed during their secondary e-learning courses.

The participants' horizons are a synopsis of their lived experiences as they transitioned through their e-learning courses, their first year of university and ERL. In this study, students described both their e-learning and traditional educational experiences; consequently, some of their experiences may also be similar to students who do not have e-learning backgrounds. Furthermore, students described many sides of their transitional experiences that may be commonly experienced by most first-year students. The horizons, however, provide important contextual background information from which better to understand the phenomenon of the students' transitional experiences and the development of the constituents and structure. This background knowledge also provides insight into how students' e-learning experiences impacted their transitions.

The Development of the Phenomenon's Constituents and Structure

In this section, I discuss the findings of this study and the development of its constituents and structure. Using Giorgi's (2009) DPP method, the transformation process and development of the structure and constituents of the students' transitional experiences were viewed through an educational lens and a sensitivity towards the phenomenon of the students' transitional experiences. The described transitional experiences of the students were used to determine the general patterns of the phenomenon which emerged and created the constituents and structure of the phenomenon. To abstract the invariants from the students' described experiences, I stayed in the phenomenological reduction and concentrated on the phenomenon patterns that emerged. I paid close attention to the number of times and ways the phenomenon was detailed in the students' concrete descriptions. I also distinguished between the particular aspects of the experiences that belong specifically to a student's particular experience and belonged to the phenomenon.

Using imaginative variation, an eidetic form of these patterns was formed that generalized them into invariant constituents. Although there were variations in how students may have experienced these constituents during their secondary e-learning, their first year of postsecondary education, and their ERL experiences, the constituents remained an irreplaceable part of their experiences. The constituents were not singular in nature but presented themselves as a radius on a continuum that ranged from a limited presence to a fully present constituent in the participants' description. These constituents are types of eidos or themes that are only generalizable to the phenomenon of the type of student's educational transition currently being studied. These eidetic generalizations did not distort the students' experiences but illuminated the consistent aspects of the students' transitional experiences that emerged during the analysis and formed the invariant constituents that created the phenomenon's structure (Giorgi, 2009).

In this study, the invariant constituents of the phenomenon that emerged were readiness for the transition, barriers to the transition, supports and structures used during the transition, and developments and adaptations that evolved from new strategies and knowledge gained during the transition. Once these changes have been integrated into the students' lives, the learning environment is no longer new, and the transitional process is complete. These constituents render visible the essential characteristics of the students' described transitions. The constituents are interrelated and formed a structure of relationships that described the students' overall transitional experience. Each constituent was removed from the structure to test whether it was essential. If the structure collapsed due to a constituent being removed, it was essential to describe the students' transitional experience. For example, when the theme of readiness was removed from the overall structure of the students' described experiences, an essential aspect of the experience was removed, and the structure no longer made any sense. Consequently, student readiness was a fundamental part of students' transitional experiences.

The descriptive phenomenological method does not require the use of participant quotes. I incorporated some of the student's quotes into the study, however, to provide student voice to my research (Giorgi, 2000). By clearly defining the researcher's voice from the participants' voice and only incorporating student voice in the development of the constituents, I was able to strike a balance between the methodology of the study and its objectives without compromising the scientific rigour of the study (Jalovcic, 2017).

In this study, three questions were asked concerning how students with secondary e-learning backgrounds experienced their transition into their secondary e-learning courses, their first year of university, and ERL. These questions reflected three unique educational transitions. The analysis of this data revealed that four main constituents evolved throughout the students'

transitional experiences, which depicted these educational transitions. The constituents that emerged were readiness, barriers to learning, supports and strategies, and adaption and development. In the next section, these constituents will be addressed in relation to each experience and how they developed into one overall structure.

Constituents of the Structure

Transition to Secondary e-Learning

Readiness

Student readiness can be understood as a match/mismatch between an individual's abilities and perceptions and the required social and academic expectation of their educational environment (Wasylkiw, 2015). Levels of preparation were at the core of students' experience as they transitioned into their secondary e-learning courses. Levels of independence and confidence were variables that influenced students' perceptions of their abilities to adapt to e-learning. P3 explained how they first struggled with their transition to secondary e-learning,

> It was a little overwhelming for me because I was in the library, and the professor or teacher has posted a whole bunch of work at once. And just looking at them, knowing that I would have to go through it individually and do the work on my own. It made me feel very isolated not to have a teacher or other students there.

Some students experienced isolation and missed the face-to-face interaction and real-time support of the students and teachers in their regular classrooms when engaging in secondary e-learning for the first time. Students who were dependent on external support systems such as their teachers and peers were propelled to become independent learners.

Some students described being prepared for the independent workload of their secondary e-learning courses. For example, P1 was excited and prepared to take an e-learning course, "It

felt good because I enjoyed independent learning. I can do things on my own. I don't have to follow the teacher's guidelines and times. There wasn't a specific time I had to follow". However, whether students expressed feelings of excitement or of being overwhelmed, they all acknowledged that the different learning styles of secondary e-learning required them to change or enhance their behaviours and learning patterns and, to some degree, become more independent learners. The students described their feelings of readiness in different ways and on different levels, and patterns of tension emerged, such as excitement or apprehension, which generated barriers to learning.

Barriers

Four issues that emerged from the students' experiences and created barriers to their learning were technological, time management, communication, and instructional design issues. These barriers are not unique to students' transitioning into secondary e-learning and can be found in many traditional learning classrooms. However, these barriers are also fundamental characteristics of e-learning that must be mastered. New e-learning students must be able to independently manage their time in order to navigate the complexities of their new learning modality successfully. Furthermore, as students adapt to the new characteristics and expectations of e-learning, they must also become increasingly responsible for constructing meaning and confirming understanding (Garrison, 2017). Consequently, these four barriers were the students' primary concerns when describing their transition to secondary e-learning

Students struggled with using new technology and described being inadequately prepared for the variety of new tools in the LMS. Student's previous levels of technological experience impacted the degree of ease and the length of time it took them to transition to e-learning. As would be expected, students who had limited or no experience with technology struggled and

found their transition to e-learning more stressful than those with previous experiences. Even students who felt they were technologically savvy and used other technology such as Google classrooms or Microsoft One Note still experienced initial difficulty using the LMS. Only P8, who had previously used the Desire2Learn (D2L) learning management system in other courses, felt confident transitioning to their first secondary e-learning course. P8 stated, “It wasn’t that much different from the normal as some of my classes were used to using D2L anyways, so it didn’t really matter, and I didn’t feel that different”. Students who had higher technological skills described being more confident and independent in managing the workload of their secondary e-learning courses.

Although the students who participated in this study were strong academic students, they still encountered barriers as they adjusted to the higher levels of work of their secondary e-learning courses. Students experienced varying frustration and anxiety levels as they learned how to manage their own time and course schedules. P9 described their struggle with time management. “I was kind of disappointed with myself because when I had my online course in the first semester, I would have a block in my timetable when I should be working on my online stuff. But I would take that time to work on other classes or work on stuff for clubs or other stuff”. Students struggled with the flexibility of their e-learning courses; yet enjoyed the newfound freedom and independence that came with them. Some students noted that because their e-learning teacher was not always prompting them to get their work in, it was often a drop in their grades due to poor time management that caused them to change their behaviours.

Most students discovered that their secondary e-learning courses were more work than their traditional high school classes or found the coursework more difficult. The bigger workload challenged the students in different ways, and many students described how they did more of

their classwork at home rather than in their scheduled class time. Some students preferred doing their e-learning work at home and used their class time at school for other things, while other students felt that they needed extra time to do their e-learning course work and so did more of it at home. Whether students were using the flexibility of their e-learning courses to do other things or doing additional course work at home, their situation required them to organize their schedules in some way to complete their work in a timely fashion. These previous experiences with e-learning in high school helped the students develop better time-management and organizational skills.

Students also described initiating communication with their teachers as one of the most significant adjustments to secondary e-learning. Initially, many students struggled with not having the immediate support and feedback from their teachers and classmates as in their traditional classes. P7 described this experience “My face-to face classes were entirely on the teacher and we were going at the pace of the class, and I was able to rely on that type of atmosphere. Now we are in front of the computer and the responsibility relies on me”. In their e-learning classes, students had to take on more responsibility for their learning, including reaching out to their teachers for support.

Initially, students experienced feelings of isolation due to the lack of communication between themselves and their teachers. P3 commented on these experiences: “And just looking at them and knowing that I would have to go through it individually and do the work on my own. It made me feel isolated not to have a teacher there and there are no other students”. These feelings of isolation and abandonment varied with the students depending on their teachers' response time and feedback quality. P12 also commented on the importance of this connection “Its hard to get

more connected with your teachers and I think having a personal connection helps with learning". E-learning students had to learn to reach out to their teachers for help and adapt to the time lapse in communication. Students whose teachers responded to them immediately or within a day described feeling less frustrated and more satisfied with their courses. Consequently, the amount of isolation the students experienced varied with the response time of their teachers. Students experienced higher levels of frustration the longer it took a teacher to respond to their queries.

Course design also played an important part in students' ability and willingness to engage in their e-learning courses actively. E-learning courses that were not laid out clearly or that were not constantly updated caused students frustration and anxiety as they struggled to understand the course content and meet deadlines. P10 commented on this issue: "Probably the teachers' understanding of the technology, I feel that if they were provided with more resources for constructing online courses it could have been a bit better laid out and things could have been communicated more clearly". P5 also felt frustrated with the lack of course organization and stated, "In my courses the teachers didn't clearly lay out when you needed to submit work. It was kind of just in a random word document and that created a bit of confusion about when stuff was due…and then I would rush to finish it". However, P11's secondary e-learning course was well organized, and this allowed them to follow the course requirements and successfully finish the course. P11 noted "The biggest thing that helped was that I had the entire course laid out before hand. I had a clear progression of what I needed to do when and what my next step and it was very simple to understand and just have a checkbox". Although poor course design can be inherent in traditional high school courses as well as secondary e-learning courses, its effects are amplified because the teacher is not immediately available to clarify content and instructions to ensure student understanding. Consequently, students described how poor course design caused

them to be frustrated with their secondary e-learning courses, frustrating and hindering their transitions.

LMS tools that created student notifications and reminders were highly effective in helping students stay on track. Communication tools such as discussion boards and emails also played a role in clarifying course content and the interaction of students with each other. However, not all students liked the experience of having mandatory discussion forums, but most agreed that the discussions were a good resource for course clarification and information.

Supports and Strategies

As students transitioned into their secondary e-learning courses, they described how they had to learn new strategies and skills to adapt to their new learning environment. Students described how they struggled with managing the heavy workload and flexibility of their e-learning courses. As students worked through their courses, they developed better communication, organization, and problem-solving skills that helped them develop more confidence in their abilities. Students described changing as a result of both negative and positive consequences. For example, P1 experienced success when they started to become proactive and email their teacher more often. “I had a lot of questions from my homework. So, I did communicate with the teachers a lot back and forth because I wanted a good mark”. On the other hand, P4 changed their behaviour based on negative experiences, “I think the most important change was time management. Like if I fell behind in an assignment or if I got a bad mark on an assignment, it kind of brought me back to reality and made me realize I had to work harder for the next one”. The length of time it took students to adapt to their e-learning experiences varied depending on factors such as student readiness, types of courses, teacher involvement, and personal characteristics. Students described

how they changed their behaviours and attitudes to meet the demands of their new learning environments.

In their e-learning courses, students found they needed good time management skills to get timely feedback from their teachers. Good time management skills helped students communicate promptly with their teachers and prioritize their work. Students described how they learned to organize their time effectively to meet course deadlines and get feedback or clarification from their teachers. P6 described their struggle, “I feel like if you plan to go ahead, and you start the communication early, you would be fine, but as a high school student, you just have a tendency to procrastinate a lot”. As students became better at time management, they became more efficient at handling their workload, including the time needed to get feedback from their teachers. Students who proactively reached out to their teachers described how they received feedback, resources, and deadline extensions. This support motivated students to continue to communicate with their teachers and reduce feelings of isolation and frustration.

Students also found that communicating with other students in the class helped reduce feelings of frustration and loneliness. Some students worked in partnership with other students taking the same course in their school. For example, P7 described how they and a classmate from their school would put their computers side by side and help each other or talk things out as they progressed through the work. Other students collaborated with their friends and peers on the discussion boards, via email, text messages, and social media. Students who collaborated with their peers described how the experience helped them become efficient learners.

As students progressed through their secondary e-learning courses, they described facing technological or instructional design challenges such as poor bandwidth, scheduling issues, disorganized content, or poorly designed assignments. However, students who became proactive,

organized, and responsible learners overcame technological and design challenges by frequently communicating with their teachers or other students to get clarification. For example, P12 discussed the importance of communication “I feel like that its a lot more like you're more responsible for asking those questions. You have to like dive in your work a little more. So, emailing him or her was easy that way because when you email them, and the teacher automatically responded that is helpful”. Some students also found that interacting with the course content and its resources helped them learn, such as P8 who liked learning new terminology through the readings and examples in their course.

In comparison, P10 found the different databases and online sites provided with the weekly assignments very helpful. Learning to independently organize their time, actively engaging with their teachers' peers or course content, and researching new learning resources helped students gain confidence and become better problem solvers. In addition, students learned to use various strategies, technologies, and social networks to connect with people and gain knowledge. These learning networks were unique to each student and were crucial to their success.

Adaption and Development

Students found that the most significant adjustment to e-learning was being responsible for their learning. Students thought that their face-to-face teacher was responsible for organizing and motivating their students. In their secondary e-learning courses, students described having to be more intrinsically motivated and organized as e-learning moved the locus of control away from the teachers to the students. P2 described how their secondary e-learning experiences helped them develop their technological skills and self-confidence, “In terms of navigating the platform, I got better at understanding how to maneuver that as well so that helped me under-

stand the material better as well. And it made me feel more confident about the whole experience". P3 also described how their secondary e-learning experience helped improved confidence and organization skills:

> I was already a pretty organized student before I started the e-learning courses, but having to do the course on my own, so to speak, it really developed my skills with time management and helped me as a student. And it helped me become more independent because I was given the work and it was just expected of me that I could do the work more or less on my own and I could do it in the time that was expected of me.

Students described how they improved their organizational and technical skills during their secondary e-learning experiences and became more confident learners. Developing independently sustained thinking and learning and technological skills are crucial for students' success in post-secondary education.

Other students, such as P10, described their ability to solve problems independently. "I guess the biggest difference would have to be problem-solving. Because sometimes your teacher isn't accessible, and you have to produce solutions to solve your problems yourself". As students progressed through their secondary e-learning courses and became more organized and better at time management, they described becoming more efficient communicators and problem solvers.

Students also gained confidence in their abilities and felt more satisfied with their academic results because teachers were not there "to hold their hand". P9 reflected on their successful secondary e-learning experiences:

> I found that I always finished my online courses with pretty good grades, and I think it's because I am a pretty good independent worker and I tried to stay in touch with my online

teachers as much as I could to try and keep the high grades. But yeah, overall, I found it pretty satisfying, with my final results.

During this study, students described how they overcame the challenges of transitioning to secondary e-learning and adapting to the change of their new learning environment. They also revealed how they changed as learners. During their e-learning experiences, students became more organized, confident, and responsible learners.

Transition to Postsecondary Education

Readiness

Transitioning into their first year of secondary education students were faced with multiple new social challenges and academic challenges. The successful transition from high school to university has been conceptualized as multi-dimensional insofar that it involves ability, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours as they relate to navigating a new academic and social environment (Wasylkiw, 2015). Student readiness for university took on many different facets and the students described varying levels of readiness regarding their academic skills and confidence.

Most students described being worried about the new social and academic challenges of university. Being prepared for these changes can make transitions easier or more difficult. When students first started university, many described their concerns with making new friends. P8 commented on these fears, “I’m not much of a talkative person in the first place, so I was a bit scared I wouldn’t find any friends at first. But then I also worried about missing classes and dates”. P2 was unsure how they would connect with their professor and have the confidence to work without their immediate support. “It was overwhelming, and I realized that this was defi-

nitely a different dynamic in terms of student-teacher relations compared to high school". Students struggled with various levels of confidence and communication skills as they tried to build the learning networks that helped them be successful in high school.

Students had preconceived notions about their academic course loads, their ability to manage their work, and the independent learning style of university, and this led to feelings of apprehension for the changes they faced. P6 described their concerns: "I would probably say the main feeling was anxious. Academically I don't think I was quite ready. I definitely needed to be in a better mindset or have a better idea going in". P5 also had a similar experience "Well, I was really anxious when I started university, because it's a different experience than high school and the fact that it is so independent". Sometimes previous conversations with their peers, teachers, guidance counsellors or parents led to negative assumptions about their university transitions and feelings of readiness. P2 described these conversations: "I'd always been told that when you go to university or college and it is so hard, and no one can learn, and blah blah blah prepare for your profs. to hate you and never know your name, right?" Students described how outside influences and internal uncertainty caused them to question whether they were prepared for the rigours of university.

Barriers

The primary learning barriers that students faced in their first year of university were large class sizes, an increase in their workload, adapting to the independent lecture style of learning, and connecting with their professors. Students described how they struggled in varying degrees with the academic independence and flexibility of university life. Students in specialized programs or smaller universities often had smaller class sizes and established better connections with their peers and instructors. Students in larger universities and traditional programs often

faced larger classes and experienced less connection with their professors. P11 describes his experience: “So I am in a much smaller program and that was easier than other university students. So I have a lot more of that one-on-one connection with my profs like we did in high school, so it was a lot easier”. On the other hand, P1, whose class sizes were large, had a very different opinion “Because in university the teachers don’t care about the students a lot, so you have to take the initiative to communicate with them yourself”. Students who were in larger classes found it more difficult to connect to their professors and peers and described more feelings of isolation and frustration.

In semester one, all students took a full course load. In semester two, eleven students out of the twelve took a full academic workload of five courses, and one student dropped a course and took four courses. Students discussed their experience transitioning to a more significant academic workload. Many students were initially overwhelmed with the amount of work and time they were given to do it. P7 discussed their experience: “It was much more intense because class was so less frequent. They are the same amount of work, but more is required of you, you don’t have hours and hours of class time a day to do that. And I think that was another thing that was an adjustment”. Several students described falling behind in their work as they struggled to adapt to the many facets of university learning, including readings, labs, tutorials, research papers, group work, and online learning. Students often described being frustrated and overwhelmed with their workload and struggled to meet deadlines.

The independent lecture style of learning used in most university programs challenged many of the students in this study. Although students were familiar with independent learning, they were overwhelmed with the big class sizes and limited interaction with their professors. P6 described their experience: “Honestly because the class are so big in the first year, I really didn’t

do that much one-on-one communication". And as P3 stated, "There isn't a lot of hand holding: you're just given the work and you have to do it". Although students felt that their secondary e-learning courses helped them be more independent learners and better at time management, they described struggling to manage the more significant workload and adjusting to the university's independent lecture style of teaching.

University students described being totally responsible for their learning, and although they knew their professors were there to support them, the students knew it was up to them to seek out the help. Students had to manage their time more efficiently to work around the professor's schedule. P2 reflected on this experience: "The self-regulation that I was talking about earlier becomes really important that you developed in an e-learning setting and need as well for a big lecture setting where you realize that you're not really going to be held accountable anymore". Although professors did respond to student queries, the students learned that there were new boundaries in university, and they should not expect an immediate response to their questions or concerns.

Supports and Strategies

Students described adapting to their new postsecondary learning environments by further improving their secondary e-learning skills and developing new support systems. For example, P10 felt that adapting to university was similar to their e-learning classes "in the way that you don't have an extremely personal connection because the class sizes are so big a lot of the time. So that was definitely something that I expected but doing an online course had prepared me for". Students also described how their secondary e-learning experiences helped them develop and enhance personal characteristics such as self-efficacy, problem-solving, and resiliency which helped them develop a positive mindset towards managing their workload.

In university, the students' professors were not always available for immediate feedback, and this required the students to organize their time more efficiently. In order to get help, students had to arrange their schedules around their professors' office hours or allow for time for the return of email queries. Students described how this situation also taught them to become better self-advocates. P3 commented on their experience adjusting: "I really felt that I developed my self-advocacy in high school. In high school I was learning to be a self advocate, but I was still very nervous approaching teachers. Then in university I really got used to it and the feeling of moving past it". To obtain help from their professors, students explained how they had to become more accountable for their work, organize their schedule to allow the time for feedback and have the confidence to ask for help when they needed it. Students described how they learned to become better at self-advocating during their secondary e-learning courses, and this provided them with the confidence and communication skills to connect with their professors.

Adaption and Development

As students transitioned to their first year of university, they learned to become more organized and better time managers and collaborators. Students described how their secondary e-learning experiences helped them in becoming independent and self-motivated learners. During the transition to their first year of university, however, students described having to enhance these skills to accommodate the larger workload and classes and the lack of interaction with their professors. P8 discussed this experience: "And I've gotten a lot better at organizing myself and knowing how to prioritize what I need to get done in a better manner". P9 also described how they changed over their first year of university: "It's kind of weird, but I found that I was a lot more productive as a person towards the end. At the start of the year, I was always dragging on about going to class and I was kind of lazy at the start of the year". As a result of these increasing

demands, the students learned to enhance their previously developed skill sets and develop new attitudes towards their work and personal lives.

In students' first year of university their reliance on and interaction with their professors were reduced and their reliance on their friends and classmates became more significant. All students in the study worked with other students in their programs or used social media groups specific to their program for support. Most students developed both online and face-to-face study groups and relied on each other for course clarification and encouragement. P12 recounted their experience working with their classmates: "You had the textbook at home, but that was all there was, so I had to reach out. I had to reach out to my friends and peers and say, 'Does anyone know what is expected of us for this one assignment and for a paper? Because he would just hand us a sheet". Students learned to gain confidence in their problem-solving abilities by collaborating with their peers and seeking clarification from their classmates.

The initial pressure of adjusting to the demands of university life meant that students had to become proactive learners. Students adapted to these changes by learning to reach out to their professors or each other for support. They changed their attitude towards their work and enhanced their organization and time management skills to meet the university's independent learning style and increased workload. P12 described their experiences adapting to these new challenges: "It's your responsibility to go to class. You don't even have to go to class. They don't take attendance. Like it's totally up to you, and it's like you need to have enough motivation and time management to get the good grades and actually do the work". As the students transitioned into their first year of university, they described becoming more resilient and confident in themselves and their abilities to succeed in their chosen programs.

Transition to ERL

Readiness

As a result of the COVID19 pandemic and switch to ERL**,** the university students in this study were confronted with sudden changes in their social and academic lives and described feeling a sense of loss and isolation. Lack of communication and organization from the university and the students' professors created further confusion and stress in the students' lives as they scrabbled to reorganize their personal, academic, and social lives and adapt to ERL. P12's description reflects the sense of loss and frustration that came with the transition to ERL.

> I felt like it was hard. For me coming home to a place that I always could relax, and now I had to study and now I had to study with my family. Going from face-to face courses with a Prof going to full online courses at home obviously, like a lot of students are going to say the same thing, it was so hard, like if I'm being completely honest it was very hard to stay motivated.

P10 also described their COVID 19 transitional experience as being difficult. "I would say that I felt very anxious. Maybe to almost to the point of panic. Because as I was trying to manage the transition to online learning, I was also having to move out of residence within the time frame". No one was prepared for the sudden transition to ERL due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the students in this study experienced some type of displacement loss or stress as they transitioned into ERL.

Barriers

Students stated that there were many barriers to transitioning to ERL during the COVID 19-pandemic crisis, such as the lack of communication and confusing course delivery methods and instructions.

Students described experiencing a significant breakdown in communication between their classmates, their professors, and the university that resulted in the students experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety. Students explained how the lack of communication, organization and coordination from the students' universities and professors left them feeling worried about the future of their courses and grades. The degree of frustration students described varied with the amount of communication from professors and university administration. P7's experiences illuminated the stress they felt during their ERL transition: "There were professors who had no idea on how we were going to complete them [SIC]. So, it was a very confusing time. And definitely a very stressful one for me". On the other hand, P6 felt that their professors handled the situation better by communicating earlier and found that their ERL experience was not quite as bad as they thought it would be. Students who had little to no communication with their professors developed higher stress levels, where students' professors or universities who reached out to them immediately felt less confused and lower stress levels.

The sudden pivot to ERL resulted in inconsistent course methods and instructions. Although most universities provided a hiatus in classes to allow the professors to prepare new lessons, many students described feeling unsure if they should continue to work on previously scheduled work. Students did not know if they could rely on their pre-existing course syllabuses and timetables. Students found themselves isolated, frustrated, and confused because of their changing course workloads and schedules. Students' frustration levels with ERL varied depending on the timeliness and clarity of the information received from their professors and university administration. P2 described their concerns about their previously scheduled tests and exams and did not know if they should continue to prepare for them or not. P2 described their problem, "But there was definitely a lack of communication; they definitely weren't coordinating in terms of

the classes because information about how they were transitioning was very worrisome as it came at various times through each different class". Before ERL, students had described relying on their course syllabus and timetables. However, during the transition to ERL, students experienced a state of uncertainty and academic flux when changes were made to their courses and schedules.

The unorganized delivery of course content and instructions frustrated and confused the students. P3 described this experience: "Whereas when I went to crisis learning some of my professors were using Blackboard and some of them were emailing notes and some of them were emailing videos which had them doing lecturers. So, there was a range of different ways of approaching the issue". P10 had a similar experience, "It was definitely hard because every professor had a different idea of how to do it. So, I was using different programs from different professors". An inconsistent approach to the design and delivery of ERL and the lack of standardization created feelings of frustration and stress in students. P11 described how inconsistent course design and delivery frustrated them. "It was terrible! I loved online learning in high school. The courses were properly thought out to be online. They were designed from the bottom up to an online course with a proper management system with proper accessible stuff through a website where I can learn in multiple different ways". Although students were familiar with online learning, they struggled to adapt to the different ways professors deliver various synchronous and asynchronous lectures, discussions, and assignments. Students explained how course design and delivery inconsistency created frustration and stress and impacted their transition into ERL.

Students experienced varying degrees of pressure due to their heavier course workloads and changing course evaluations. Some students found this more accessible as they did not perform well on tests, and others found it overwhelming as they were faced with large papers that

had to be completed in a short amount of time. P4 found that their tests and exams were much easier and shorter than they usually would have been. P6, however, found the workload much heavier as a result of their course's shift to assessment-based learning, "I think in general the courses became easier, but the workload became higher. It's kind of hard to explain". P7 described the irony of the situation by noting that writing and researching papers for every course increased their workload, and they had to spend more time on them to get good grades. Other students felt that even though there was an increased workload, the work itself felt easier work as it took the place of high-stake tests and exams. During ERL, students experienced varying levels of uncertainty based on the types of new assessments integrated into their courses.

Students also found the transition to ERL difficult because they missed collaborating with their friends and classmates. The sudden transition to online learning abruptly ended the students' face-to-face collaboration with their peers and interrupted the social systems that they had developed throughout the year. P4's description of this experience reflects the difficulty they had adjusting to this loss: "Yeah and because of the nature of the class we really got to know each other and like we struggled together, and we laughed together. It was a very tight knit class because we're all up and moving and talking and it was three hours in a row once a week. So, it was really hard when that class went online". P12 also found leaving their peers extremely difficult: "Going from face-to-face courses with a Prof and going to full online courses at home obviously, like a lot of students are going to say the same thing, it was so hard like if I'm being completely honest it was very hard to stay motivated". As students transitioned into ERL, they lost the network of friends, classmates, and professors they shared knowledge with and motivated them to stay on track.

Supports and Strategies

During the transition to ERL, all students' courses moved to various types of online learning. Students' learning networks broke down when their classes were cancelled, and they moved away from their friends and peers. These students already viewed themselves as independent and well-organized learners. However, due to the abruptness of the pivot to ERL, students described experiences of initially feeling isolated, confused, and frustrated. To help them adapt to the transition of ERL, students described relying on the communication, technological and independent learning skills they learned in their secondary e-learning courses.

Students reported that most of their professors began gradually reconnecting with them within the first two weeks of the pandemic and adjusting the course assessments and timelines. Consequently, students were able to manage their ERL courses better. Students described how they started to find their course work easier as they could now ask their professors for help or clarification. As professors began to adjust the number and weight of assessments and tests, switch to synchronous lecturers, and became more flexible with deadlines, students were less frustrated and could better manage their time. P1 reflected on the importance of having professor support. "The teachers became more flexible with the time and the courses and homework. So, we could hand in our homework whenever we want, and there were a lot more support for the situation and a lot more notes for the students to help them in the course". P5's professor also changed their grading structure and delivery, which help them cope successfully with their ERL transition. As professors started adapting their courses to accommodate the sudden transition, students found their workload more manageable and felt less frustrated with their ERL courses. Students described how reconnecting with their professors and students and re-establishing their learning network were essential to their success.

The inconsistent delivery of course materials and instructions caused a significant challenge for most of the students in the study. P3 described the difficulty of managing a variety of online instructions.

> And having to adapt to different professors' ways online. Some were keen on discussion boards and meetings at different times whenever it was time to post to the boards. And others wanted to have the same class schedule and on Zoom at 9:30 am, so it was definitely a challenge because there wasn't a standardized way to do things.

On the other hand, students who had professors who had previously used an LMS in their courses described their transition to ERL as easier because they were familiar with the software and all their course calendar and materials were in one place. P12 described this experience: "Obviously when you log into the online bases, they are pretty similar like you have dropboxes; they have all the same format as high school so knowing how that works is super helpful". Even though most of P5's professors used an LMS, they still described the transition to ERL as more complex than they thought it would be because the content was not organized well within the LMS. In this study, the students described how their secondary e-learning experiences provided them with various technological, organizational, and communication skills that helped them transition successfully to ERL.

Adaption and Development

When students first transitioned to ERL, they faced many obstacles, such as learning from their family home, missing their friends and classmates, lack of communication with their professors and university, and a disruption in their course syllabus and calendar, which led to feelings of anxiety, frustration, and isolation. The students overcame these obstacles by using previous skills and personal characteristics that they had developed in their secondary e-learning

courses and further enhanced in their transition in their first year of university. Once they reconnected and re-established communication with their peers and professors, they used their previously developed communication skills to reach out for help and clarification. Students described their secondary e-learning experience as critical in helping them transition successfully to ERL. Students' secondary e-learning experiences helped them develop into technologically savvy problem solvers with strong organizational skills. Students also described how their transition to their first year of university provided them with the opportunity to improve their self-advocacy, time management and organization skills and helped them overcome the new challenges of their ERL transition.

Structure of the Phenomenon

The structure of a phenomenon is the relationship between its constituents (Giorgi, 2009). In this section, the relationship between constituents was examined to determine the structure of how students transitioned into secondary e-learning, their first semester of postsecondary education, and ERL. **"**The structure is meant to depict the lived experience of a phenomenon, which may include aspects of the description which the experiencer was unaware" (Giorgi, 2000, p. 166). Although the participants' description illustrates three different types of educational transitions, one structure of the phenomenon emerged, which represented all of the transitions and considered the relationship among the constituents and a description of its whole. I will first present the structures of students' transition to secondary e-learning, the first year of postsecondary education, and COVID 19 Emergency Remote Learning (ERL) and then discuss the structure that emerged as a whole.

The Structure

Readiness

In this study, readiness is understood as a student's perceptions of their levels of preparation towards their new educational experience. Varying levels of tension, stress, worry, or confidence developed as students were confronted with a match or mismatch between their abilities, perceptions, and the demands of their new circumstances. Students' experiences of readiness exist on a continuum as they each experienced different situations in different ways. Patterns of tension emerged and varied with the levels of excitement and apprehension each student experienced during each transition.

Barriers

As students moved from one aspect of their educational journey to another, they were faced with attitudinal, behavioural, and environmental factors that negatively impacted their transitions (Spurrell, 2012). In this study, barriers to students' transition were also considered within a range of experiences. These barriers were usually uncomfortable and required students to adjust in some way to transition into their new learning environment successfully.

Supports and Strategies

To overcome these barriers, students developed new supports and strategies or further enhanced the ones that had previously helped them succeed. In this research, supports and strategies encompass a wide range of student experiences such as developing new friends and colleagues in both virtual and face-to-face situations, having the confidence to communicate with their professor or peers, developing a knowledge of the service and supports that are available to them, and having the willingness to access these services if needed. Students developed and en-

hanced learning skills such as prioritizing their workload, balancing a social life with an academic one, and becoming a better problem solver to accommodate the heavier workloads. Most importantly, students had to develop the ability to independently manage their time and workload according to the demands of each level of transition.

Adaption and Development

In this study, as students adapted to their new experiences and developed new insights into their abilities, they incorporated new skills, strategies, and knowledge into their lives, making their transitions easier. Students started to independently identify what skills they required to manage their new situation and find the appropriate strategies, skills, and personal or institutional supports to help them. Students developed a variety of learning networks that they could rely on when faced with new challenges. In this study I use the term Personal Learning Network (PLN) to identify all the resources and relationships today's students use as they moved fluidly in and out of virtual and face-to-face environments. A PLN bridges formal and informal learning with virtual and face-to-face learning and include all social capital, connections, and technology that contemporary students use to learn (Kennedy, 2018). As students used new strategies and support, they developed more confidence and independence in their abilities, and they efficiently used and improved them in the next transition. Students gained confidence as they successfully navigated through each transition and were able to thrive rather than survive in their new learning environments.

The Structure-Transitioning to Secondary e-Learning

As students transitioned into their first e-learning course they were unprepared for the technological challenges of using an LMS and the independent learning skills required in an online learning environment. The students had to adapt to the new technology and its various

learning and communication tools. Students also had to adjust to the flexibility of secondary e-learning and learn how to organize their time so they could meet deadlines. Students took responsibility for their own learning by initiating communication with their teacher when they had questions or concerns. Students developed communication skills and took control of their learning by initiating student-teacher interactions. Students primarily collaborated with their peers on mandatory discussion boards, where they posted comments and received feedback, and this provided them with a sense of connectivity. Students also learned to develop online relationships with their peers on the discussion boards, where they gave and received feedback and shared knowledge. During their e-learning course, students also had to independently follow the course content and schedule with minimal teacher supervision and adapt to the rigour of their courses. Students became more independent, resilient, and organized learners as a result of their secondary e-learning experiences.

The Structure-Transitioning to the First Year of University

Students experienced both excitement and apprehension as they transitioned to their first year of university. Students' readiness levels were based on preconceived notions of postsecondary education developed in high school and around their perception of their abilities. Due to large class sizes and limited guidance, students found that they were forced to expand the organization and independent learning skills they had developed in their secondary e-learning courses. Larger academic workloads and limited interaction with their instructors forced students to rely heavily on their peers and friends for support. Most students adapted easily to their universities’ and professors' technology, as they were already familiar with using an LMS. In their secondary e-learning courses, students had become familiar with reaching out to their teacher when they needed clarification, which helped them become more confident to email or visit their professors when

they needed assistance. Students enhanced their organization and time management skills that they had established during their secondary e-learning courses to meet the growing demands of university life. Students learned to be flexible and develop face-to-face and online relationships to support them in their new learning environments.

The Structure-Transitioning to ERL

Students were shocked and confused with their university's unexpected move to COVID 19 Emergency Remote Learning (ERL). In March 2019, student residences were emptied, and all classes were abruptly moved online. Students experienced stress and frustration due to the lack of communication from their professors and university administration. Limited and confusing communication from their academic institutions, and the sudden loss of their friends and peers, left students feeling isolated and alone. The inconsistent use of technology and course materials overwhelmed the students, and they found it challenging to stay motivated and organized. Once the students' professors reconnected with them and gave more direction, they began to find their work easier. Students relied on the learning strategies they had developed in their secondary e-learning courses and enhanced their first year of university experiences to help them in their ERL courses. As students' professors began moving away from exams to assignment-based or test-based assessments, and reduced workloads, this also reduced some pressure for some students. Students' secondary e-learning and postsecondary experiences helped them transition successfully to ERL as they were familiar with using technology to learn and had developed into self-sufficient, organized learners.

The Structure as a Whole

The transition to a new educational experience is created by a student's level of readiness, which is defined by their preconceived notions of the transition, confidence in their abilities, and the match and mismatch between their attitudes, skills and behaviours, and new learning environment. As students transitioned into their new learning environment, they faced many new barriers which propelled them to change. To meet their new learning environments' demands, students had to rely on and enhance their previously acquired knowledge and skills. Students also developed new personal learning networks for support. These networks were comprised of the students' friends, families, peers, professors, teachers, teaching assistants, and institutional supports. Students used social media and the Internet to network and find alternate resources and supports. When students transitioned to secondary e-learning and their first year of university, they relied on each other, their instructor, the structure of the content, and their characteristics to adapt to their new learning environments. However, when the students had to transition to ERL there was a breakdown in their support systems, and they initially had to rely on their resiliency and independent learning skills to cope with the abrupt changes. The students' transitional experiences provided them with opportunities to develop new problem-solving, technological, and communication skills that students valued as critical to their personal and academic growth, which helped them continue to succeed throughout each educational experience.

In this study, the invariant constituents of readiness, barriers, supports, and structures, developments and adaptations formed the structure of the phenomenon and remained constant throughout each transition. The structure of the phenomenon reflected the relationship between these constituents. As students enter an educational transition, their preparation or readiness lev-

els enhance their ability to overcome or accentuate transitional barriers. To overcome these transitional barriers, students established new strategies and supports or improved existing ones. These strategies and supports helped students overcome their transitional barriers and develop new knowledge, self-awareness, and maturity. As students changed their behaviours and attitudes and fluidly integrated these new developments into their life, they started to adapt to their new learning environment. Once the students' environment is no longer new to them, the transitional process is complete. The relationship between the constituents formed the structure of the phenomenon and reflected the process of the students' educational transitions.

Conclusion

The demographic data gathered from this study survey showed that the students in the study were high achieving students from a variety of high schools in Ontario. The students in this study, were able to consistently maintain high grades with only minimal variations throughout their various educational transitions. This study's data also indicated that the location of the students' high schools and the variation in their e-learning experiences did not play a major factor in their transition to postsecondary education. There were indications, however, that rural students who lived on campus were more affected by the transition to ERL, as a result of poor bandwidth at home. Students described organization, time management and self-efficacy as important skills they had developed during their secondary e-learning experiences and used throughout their transition to university.

In a phenomenological study, the student's experiences are on a continuum, and the structure represents the mean of their described experiences. My phenomenological study revealed that as students experienced the transition from traditional classes to secondary e-learn-

ing, from secondary e-learning to the first year of university, and from the first year of the university into ERL they had to face increasing levels of academic and social challenges. These challenges took the form of increased levels of autonomy, workloads, and accountability. Students coped with these changes by improving their learning skills and changing their behaviours and attitudes.

When students transitioned into their secondary e-learning courses, they had to learn how to be independent learners and develop new technological, organization, communication, and time management skills. As students transitioned into their first year of university, they faced heavier workloads, less support, and more flexible schedules. During this transition, students improved the skills and strategies they had previously developed in their secondary e-learning courses and learned how to become more efficient learners and develop new personal learning networks.

Students faced unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 crisis and the transition to ERL. Students were suddenly evicted from their university residences and lost communication with their professors, some of their friends, and peers. Students' support systems collapsed, and they had to rely on their independent learning skills to succeed. Students described using the skills, strategies, and resiliency they had developed in their secondary e-learning and further enhanced in their first-year university experiences to manage their ERL courses successfully.

A structure provides an identical meaning for a phenomenon which can be described in multiple ways (Giorgi, 2009). The described experiences of the students as they transitioned into their secondary e-learning courses, their first year of university, and ERL, revealed that despite the differences in students' backgrounds and individual experiences, there is one structure that represents their transitional educational experiences. The relationship between the constituents

makes up the structure and is necessary for the phenomenon to exist. In this study, the invariant constituents that emerged from this phenomenological research are readiness, barriers, supports and strategies, and development and adaption.

The demographic data gathered in this report supported the students' described experiences and proved that they were successful during each educational transition. Although the students are from urban and suburban schools and went to different universities, their experiences were represented in a single structure with the four constituents of readiness, barriers, supports and strategies, and adaption and development. The analysis of the rich data collected in this study showed that although there is variation in the students' experiences, the structure is stable. Each constituent was removed from the structure to test if it was an essential component. When the relationship between the constituents described in the structure fell apart due to its absence, it was deemed essential.

The findings of this research reflected the described experiences of students as they transitioned from traditional secondary learning to secondary e-learning, and how the skills and characteristics they developed helped them be successful in their transition to their first year of university and then to ERL. The students' transitions to secondary e-learning were explored to understand how students experienced its challenges and opportunities. Students described how the independent, but guided, learning opportunities that secondary e-learning offered challenged them, and they adapted by becoming more efficient learners, time-managers, and communicators. These insights offered a baseline into the students' abilities, as they transitioned into their first year of university and eventually ERL. Throughout their transitional experiences, the students clearly described how their secondary e-learning experiences helped them transition into their new learning environments.

Chapter 5: The Discussion

In this chapter, I discuss the findings of my study by situating the questions in relation to transitional theory, current research, and new government policies. My descriptive phenomenological study was exploratory, and therefore its findings were considered within the context of its delimitations and limitations.

Purpose

The purpose of this study described the lived experiences of students with secondary e-learning backgrounds as they transitioned into their secondary e-learning courses, their first year of postsecondary education, and ERL. A sub-question of the research explored if the students' secondary e-learning experiences impacted their transitional experiences. This chapter first considered the study's findings concerning the transitional theories that were previously covered in chapter 2. Then I considered the study's findings regarding current research and how it can be situated in new educational policies.

The lack of research on how students' secondary e-learning experiences impacted their transition to postsecondary education prompted this study (Barbour, 2018, Dodd et al., 2009; Kirby & Sharpe, 2011; Kirby et al., 2010). Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the research questions were extended to consider the lived experiences of these students as they transitioned to ERL. The research provided a methodologically rigorous description of the structure of the lived experience of students with secondary e-learning backgrounds as they transitioned into their e-learning courses, their first year of postsecondary education, and ERL. The structure of the experiences reflected the relationship between the constituents. The structure of experiences for secondary students as they transitioned into their e-learning courses, their first year of university,

and ERL had the following invariant constituents: readiness, barriers, strategies and supports, and adaption and development.

Discussion According to Theory

The seminal transitional work of Schlossberg (1981), Tinto (1988) and Astin (1995) are the theoretical underpinnings for this study. This study's aim was to understand how students with secondary e-learning backgrounds transitioned to their e-learning courses, their first year of university and then to ERL. Therefore, I will discuss how its findings align with seminal and current transitional theories.

Schlossberg

Transitions are the journey through change and how one lives through it and learns from it (Schlossberg, 2011). Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) model for analyzing human adaption to transition stated that as people move through life, they are continually experiencing changes, and by adapting to these changes, they develop new behaviours, perceptions, and relationships. Schlossberg's (1981) theory described transitions and provided categories of transitional characteristics that can be analyzed to consider the deficits or strengths people bring to a life event. Schlossberg (1981) categorized transitions as anticipated or unanticipated events that happen, and non-events which are expected changes that do not happen. This study focused on the anticipated events of students' transitioning to their secondary e-learning courses and their first year of university. It also incorporated the unanticipated event of the COVID-19 pandemic and the students' transition to ERL. Although individual students experienced some non-events during their transitions, they were individualistic in nature and outside the scope of this study.

The students' transitional experiences in this study aligned with Schlossberg's (2011) transition model and helped understand how three different transitions with three unique educational circumstances resulted in one structure. Schlossberg (1981) postulated that three sets of factors influence people's abilities to adapt to transition: the characteristics of the perception of the transition, the pre and post characteristics of the transitions and the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) work extended this theory by categorizing standard features of transition as situation, self, support, and strategies.

Schlossberg (2011) stated that although the characteristics of a transition may appear differently in different environments, they help identify resources or deficits that one brings to a transition. In alignment with Schlossberg et al. (1995) model, each student in this study described their educational transitions as a unique set of experiences. Nevertheless, common characteristics emerged from each transition that formed a general invariant meaning (structure) for all their transitions. Although each student in this study described their transitional experiences differently, they all discussed them in terms of their previous experiences and confidence. The students described the challenges they faced and how they changed their attitudes and behaviours and developed or enhanced previously existing supports and strategies to cope with the transition. Students also identified how they developed as learners and used their newfound skills to help them manage new challenges. Each transition has unique patterns, but one structure emerged from the students' described experiences, representing a holistic view of their educational transitions.

Schlossberg's (1981) theory states that successful transitions result from people developing new networks of relationships and new ways of seeing themselves. Schlossberg

(1981) postulated that peoples' ability to adapt to change is based on their perception of the transition, characteristics of transition and post-transition environments, and individual characteristics. A person has adapted to a transition when they no longer consider it new and have integrated the changes into their life (Schlossberg, 1981). How people adapt to their transition is not static and exists on a sliding continuum. This continuum moves as peoples' resource-deficits change (Schlossberg, 1981). The ratio of how resource-deficits can change can be seen in how the students in this study transitioned to their first e-learning courses. Initially, when the students in this study took their first e-learning course, they described feeling overwhelmed with learning new technology and missed the face-to-face support of their traditional classroom teachers and peers. However, as students learned to navigate the LMS and its tools, they felt more satisfied with their secondary e-learning courses. The students adopted new skills and behaviours and attitudes, which helped them develop and move their resource-deficit ratio. The more resources people develop, the more likely they are to transition successfully into their new learning environments.

Situation.

Schlossberg (1981) defined a situation as the person's condition at the time of the transition. The elements of a situation trigger an event. The type of event and a person's experience with it determines the timing and duration of the transition. In this study students described transitioning through two expected events, their transition to secondary e-learning and their first year of postsecondary education. They also described their experience transitioning into the unexpected event of ERL. Due to the uncertainty that surrounded ERL and the COVID-19 pandemic in general, students described their transition to ERL, as stressful and frustrating. The transition

to ERL generated additional pressure for the students as it occurred near the end of the semester when their final assessments and exams were due.

Sudden unexpected transitions are more difficult to cope with as higher levels of uncertainty are associated with greater stress levels (Schlossberg, 1981). As students transitioned into ERL, their support systems and their learning environments collapsed, and they experienced high levels of stress, anxiety, and isolation. Students described how their frustrations and isolation created a predominantly negative perception of ERL. Having negative perceptions of events in itself can amplify already existing levels of stress and uncertainty (Schlossberg, 2018). Students described how they relied on the previous skills and strategies they had developed in their secondary e-learning experiences to deescalate their frustrations and reorganize themselves to finish their second-semester courses.

Support

As students transitioned into their new educational environments, they used personal and institutional supports to help them. Interpersonal connections and the development of new PLNs were critical in supporting students as they transitioned into their new learning environments (Schlossberg, 1981, 2018). Students described being supported by family and friends, classmates and teachers and PLNs were an integral part of their success. Interpersonal supports such as intimate relationships, family, and friends, are essential resources in helping students adapt to changes during transitions (Schlossberg, 1981). Students described how working with other classmates was important to their transition. Students often experienced isolation until they established a connection with their classmates or friends that helped them adapt to their new learning environment. Students joined learning groups and developed individual relationships that supported them by sharing notes and ideas and clarifying assignments. According to Schlossberg

(2018), strong personal relationships give students a feeling of purpose and belonging and help them cope with change. In this research, students described how their peers and friends provided them with social support and academic motivation that helped them be successful in their transition.

Students also used institutional supports to help them through their transition to university. Schlossberg (1981) notes that institutions can provide structured supports to help people cope with different types of transitions. However, gaining access to these initiatives may be difficult. For example, during the students' transitions to postsecondary education, some students noted their frustration with large class sizes and how it was difficult to connect with their peers and professors. Two students in the study were in programs that enrolled them in mandatory first-year classes where their professors identified as mentors and were readily available for support. Even a temporary alliance with an authoritative figure can provide other resources and support and guidance to students and help with their transition (Schlossberg, 1981). Students who had access to their professors, teaching assistants, or a mentor in their first year of university described feeling supported and had positive feelings towards their classes.

Strategies

Schlossberg (2018) defined strategies or coping strategies as the ability to control the situation, control the meaning or the problem of the situation, or help manage the stress of the transition. Time management and organizational skills were critical in helping students cope with their ever-increasing responsibilities. Working with their classmates and communicating with their professors were important strategies that students used to be successful. Students who are flexible and use many coping strategies to cope with change are more likely to succeed in their

transitions (Schlossberg, 2018). Students described how they became more independent and organized and managed their time more effectively during their secondary e-learning courses. Students also learned to become better communicators and self advocates by initiating communication with their teachers and peers. Having previous experiences with elements of a transition can help students move through it more easily and quickly (Schlossberg, 2018, 1981). As students transitioned into their first year of university, they described how the skills and attitudes they gained during their e-learning course helped them transition to university and ERL.

The students' transition to ERL was an unanticipated event that impacted the students' learning supports, course content, and learning environment. Schlossberg (2018, 1981) notes that unanticipated events are often more stressful than other transitions as they are unexpected and can cause uncertainty and induce significant stress levels. For example, students described how the sudden loss of their friends, professors, and classmates negatively impacted them and created frustration and confusion. Despite the adversity inherent in the COVID-19 pandemic, students adapted to change by using strategies and skills they developed during their secondary e-learning courses and enhanced during the first year of their university courses.

Self

Self is the inner strength to cope with and adapt to transitions (Schlossberg, 1981). During each student's transitions, they described how they developed from their previous experiences and how those new skills helped them be successful in their next transition. For instance, the independent learning inherent in their secondary e-learning courses required students to adjust their attitude towards their work, their teacher, and their behaviours to be successful. The students were able to use these skills and strategies to help them successfully transition to university. Self-attitude, the belief that one's action can have some causal relation to one's life, is

linked to positive behavioural attitudes and high levels of self-esteem and personal worth (Schlossberg, 1981). As a result of these experiences, students developed new skills that supported their success and described how they became more confident and independent throughout their transitions.

Patterns of self-attitude and behavioural attitude become world attitudes and a basis for the way a person constructs their interaction with the world (Schlossberg, 1981). As students transitioned into their first year of university, they developed positive attitudes towards their learning, gained more confidence, and developed more efficient learning skills. In contrast, the sudden and disruptive transition to ERL left students isolated, frustrated, and confused. When describing their ERL experiences students revealed how they were able to use their previously developed organization, time-management, and technological skills to finish their courses successfully.

Schlossberg's (1981) model of adaption to transition aligned with the findings of this study and its structure. As students in this study worked through their secondary e-learning courses, they developed more independent work habits, confidence, better communication skills and became more accountable for their learning. The students had finished the transition when they integrated all of the new changes into their life, and they could easily use them (Schlossberg, 2018, 1981). Entering university for the first-time students were faced with the matched/mismatched of their abilities compared to the demands of university. The students described how they used the attitudes and work habits they had previously learned during their transition to secondary e-learning to help them adapt to the increasing academic and social demands. During their transition to university, the students also developed or enhanced new learning strategies and developed new PLNs that helped them cope with the change. During the

COVID-19 pandemic and rapid pivot to ERL the students were faced with the loss of their academic and personal support systems. Students were forced to rely on themselves and described how the technological and independent learning skills and strategies they had developed in their previous transitions helped them achieve their academic goals. During the three educational transitions studied in this research, the students described their experiences in terms of readiness, social and academic barriers, strategies and supports, and adaption and development, and these patterns reflected their transitional experience.

Astin

Astin's (1975) theory of student involvement focused on the academic development of first-year postsecondary students and the importance of educational institutions understanding the elements that contribute to students' desire to succeed. Student involvement theory postulated that students' time is finite and conflicting demands can affect their academic success. Therefore, students must utilize a variety of resources to succeed (Astin, 1975, 1993). Conflicting social, academic, and financial demands play a role in how much time a student has to invest in their studies. However, students who balance their time and are involved in various physical, social, and extracurricular activities tend to succeed in postsecondary education. Students' previous educational experiences act as an academic foundation and play a large role in students' ability to transition into postsecondary education successfully (Astin, 1995, 1993). Astin's research showed that students who believe in their ability to control their environment and change their situation were more successful in their first year of postsecondary education. Astin's theory of involvement focused on student retention and acknowledges that different students will react differently to different forms and levels of interaction at different times.

The students in this study described how they struggled with the conflicting demands of their academic workload and developing new social lives during their transition to their first year of university. To help balance their academic workload, living independently for the first time, and meeting new friends the students became involved in study groups or/and working with their peers. Research shows that students' commitment to studying and academic pursuits can be significantly influenced by their peers (Astin, 1984). Students in this research described how they used both virtual and face-to-face learning networks to help them develop a sense of belonging and succeed academically. Being academically involved is associated with developing a sense of community and satisfaction (Astin, 1984).

Reaching out to their professors when they needed help was also crucial to the students' development in their first year. Many students regarded professor support as being integral to their academic success. Research shows that student-faculty interaction is more strongly related to student satisfaction than any other characteristic (Astin, 1981). Students in this study who were highly involved with their professors either face-to-face or virtually felt supported and satisfied with their transition to university. Students in large classes who did not have as much access to their professors, described frustration with their academics due to the lack of teacher-student connection.

Students' previous academic experiences, levels of academic abilities, and willingness to be involved in their educational institutions are indicators of whether students will remain in school (Astin, 1984). In this research, students described how they became technological savvy, organized, and independent during their transition to secondary e-learning. They also gained more confidence and were more willing to interact with their professors and peers when they

needed help. During their transition to university, the students described how they used their previously developed skills and personal characteristics to ease their transition to university. Being familiar with technology, an independent learner, and having the confidence to develop new relationships with their professors and classmates indicated that the students were more prepared for university life (Astin, 1984). By developing these skills and personal attributes during their secondary e-learning courses, students had the means to cope with the competing demands of university.

Tinto

Tinto's student departure theory also focused on student retention; however, it looked at it from the students' perspective. Tinto asked how and why students decide to leave postsecondary education. Tinto's (1988) research found that each student has different stressors depending on their backgrounds and as students evolve their goals change. When there is a discrepancy between their personal needs and wants and the academic and social demands of their university, they are more likely to drop out or become dissatisfied (1988).

Tinto's (1988) student departure theory looked at students' first-year transitions in three stages, separation, transition, and incorporation. To be successful in their first year of postsecondary education, students must separate themselves from the past, establish new relationships and skills, and incorporate these characteristics into their present life. In this study, students described how difficult it was to adjust to their university's new social and academic lifestyle. Students were isolated and frustration as they struggled to meet new friends and with increased academic workloads. Although they were excited being in university, they missed the supports of their high school friends and teachers. As they became more familiar with their new environ-

ment, they developed a variety of new relationships. Students described how they developed various new relationships and formed learning networks that helped them cope with the change. Students joined study groups, residential floor groups, and extracurricular groups to help them socially and academically adjust to their new environment. These new relationships helped the students feel less isolated and provided them with a new support community.

Tinto's (1987,1988) departure theory postulated that students must leave the past behind and adapt to their new learning environment to succeed in postsecondary education. Previous experience, willingness to change, and the alignment of institutional and academic values are all factors in students staying in school. The time-management, organizational, and communication skills the students had previously developed in their secondary e-learning courses were enhanced as they struggled to meet their growing responsibilities in university. Students became more organized and efficient with their time as they learned to balance their personal, social, and academic lives. Students struggled with the mismatch between their increasing workload and their abilities to do it. Once students were more organized and efficient, however, they could effectively manage their new responsibilities. Throughout their educational transitions, the students developed learning networks of support, which provided them with a sense of belonging and provided an academic and social support system. The students' abilities and willingness to adapt to their changing learning environment allowed them to find balance and success between their academic and social lives and a sense of belonging to their academic institutions (Tinto, 1987, 1988).

Discussion According to the Questions

In this section the discussion of current research is guided by the research questions of how students with secondary e-learning backgrounds transitioned into their secondary e-learning courses, their first year of post secondary education and ERL.

Secondary E-Learning Students' Transition Into Their First E-Learning Courses

There is limited research on secondary e-learning in Canada and in the Province of Ontario. Farhadi's (2019) doctoral study *"The Sky's the Limit": On the Impossible Promise of E-Learning in the Toronto District School Board'* researched the experiences of secondary e-learners in the Toronto District School Board (TTDSB).

Farhadi's (2019) study used a critical ethnographical approach to consider how students accessed e-learning in the Toronto District School Board (TTDSB) and engaged with their e-learning within the broader context of a school setting, and the possibilities and limitations of e-learning within the board. The study revealed that secondary e-learning intensified race and class inequalities in the TTDSB because it reinforces a merit-based schooling system that reproduces social and cultural hierarchies (Farhadi, 2019). Although this research offers an excellent discussion on current issues regarding race, culture, accessibility and equitability, and educational policies in secondary e-learning, these topics are beyond the scope of this study.

I will discuss my findings within the context of Farhadi's (2019) research regarding their specific observations on student interaction with their e-learning course work within the context of their broader school experience. Farhadi (2019) used purposive sampling to recruit twenty grade 11 and 12 e-learning students from seven different e-learning courses. Farhadi (2019) observed 20 secondary day school e-learning students for one school year (2016-2017) and inter-

view them, their parents, their teachers, and a variety of secondary principals and board administrators. Forty percent of the participants were taking e-learning courses for the first time. All students volunteered to participate in three interviews over ten months. Farhadi (2019) also met with the students face-to-face and online, observed the students' online classes, analyzed the discussions and learning analytics from the students' online classes, interviewed the students and their e-learning teachers.

Farhadi (2019) noted that most of the students who volunteered for their research were university-level students because 79% of the secondary senior e-learning offerings in the TTDSB were university gateway courses. Initially, my study focused on studying both college and university students with e-learning backgrounds, but only university students volunteered for the study. According to Farhadi's (2019) research, many school boards may not offer a variety of e-learning courses to college or workplace students. This insight offered a possible explanation of why it was difficult to recruit college students with secondary e-learning experiences and is an interesting topic for further research.

Farhadi's (2019) research revealed that most students who took e-learning in the TTDSB day school were primarily high achieving students who used these courses as a means to efficient accreditation. Farhadi (2019) concluded that the students in the study were ambivalent about their e-learning courses and that e-learning was something that students did not like or dislike and primarily used as a means to an end. Farhadi (2019) observed that in most cases, e-learning was an afterthought or a task that students attended to after satisfying their face-to-face commitments. Farhadi (2019) asserted that students' feelings of ambivalence towards e-learning can be harmful as it can create additional pressure for struggling students. Farhadi's (2019) research

also observed that although the e-learning students were cognitively engaged in their schoolwork, the students felt limited emotional connections with their online learning environments. "While cognitive engagement might be cited as a measure of success, success is also measured by the intangible emotional life of the classroom, of which there was little to observe" (Farhadi, 2109, p. 179). Farhadi (2019) concluded that the study's participants were ambivalent to e-learning in general because they prioritized face-to-face schoolwork and personal responsibilities over their e-learning studies. Furthermore, Farhadi (2019) observed that the students were only passively engaged in discussion threads and responses. The term ambivalence was not defined in Farhadi's (2019) study but was used to indicate negative rates of student satisfaction with their e-learning courses compared to their face-to-face classroom experiences.

Ambivalence is usually perceived as an unpleasant state of conflicting thoughts and feelings that can lead to negative attitudes regarding a situation, so people are often motivated to reduce or resolve their ambivalence (Reich & Wheeler, 2016). Attitudes are not one-dimensional, and people have mixed feelings about many events in their lives (Dziuban et al, 2012). There are various forces to consider regarding the complexity of students' satisfaction with online learning (Dziuban et al., 2012). Many students may be ambivalent about their e-learning experiences because they have conflicting feelings regarding their experiences. For example, e-learning students may enjoy some aspects of their e-learning courses, such as the flexibility they provide but may also miss aspects of their traditional learning environments like teacher support.

Dziuban et al. (2012) explained that ambivalence exists on a continuum and is "a push/pull situation that "drives an individual toward mutually exclusive courses of decision making an action" (p. 6). At certain times during students' e-learning experiences, it would be

normal to have conflicting feelings regarding their learning experiences, but this should not be translated into student-satisfaction rates (Dziuban et al., 2012). Dziuban et al. (2012) noted that when students rated a variety of aspects of their online courses instead of focusing on a specific element of their courses, their course-satisfaction rate went up compared to students who only focused on one or two aspects of their online experiences then course-satisfaction rate went down. Farhadi's (2019) research used a critical ethnographical approach and geographical lens to understand how e-learning affected student identity in the TTDSB. Critical ethnographical research positions the researcher in the research where they try to portray events as they really are to determine social and cultural constructs (Cohen et al., 2011). Consequently, a limitation of Farhadi's study was that it was not designed to rate students' e-learning course satisfaction and minimizes the complexity of the students' e-learning experiences and various aspects of course satisfaction.

Reich and Wheeler (2016) described ambivalence as a means of strategic self-protection when one is uncertain of outcomes. Consequently, students' ambivalence towards learning can exist equally in both e-learning and traditional learning environments. When uncertain, people will process information differently and balance negative and positive views developing a corresponding attitude towards the situation (Reich & Wheller, 2016). Discounting or enhancing the positive or negative features of developing attitudes towards situations protects people against disappointment and rejection. People will strategically cultivate ambivalence when they are uncertain of attaining the desired outcome because it provides the possibility that they can still achieve their goals but buffers them if they do not (Reich & Wheller, 2016). Thus, ambivalence can play a role in creating positive attitudes and negative attitudes and can propel people to success or failure (DeMarre et al., 2015).

Forty percent of Farhadi's (2019) participants were first-time secondary e-learning students; consequently, their levels of ambivalence would be high as a result of them transitioning to their new learning environment. Students can become ambivalent when entering new learning environments to protect themselves against unknown consequences. However, these feelings of uncertainty can stimulate them towards action, and the consequence of these actions influences their situation. Farhadi (2019) noted that some students who were ambivalent to their e-learning courses were ambivalent to education in general. There were no data presented in Farhadi's (2019) study to indicate whether students were successful in their e-learning courses. There was also no discussion that compared the levels of ambivalence of new e-learning students compared to students who had previously taken e-learning courses. Consequently, Farhadi (2019) did not prove that students' ambivalence towards e-learning negatively impacted the students' academic outcomes or that they developed negative attitudes toward e-learning in general.

Farhadi's (2019) study noted that students were turning to e-learning not because it was their preferred learning modality but merely as a means to an end. Farhadi stated: "Students are ambivalent about e-learning. Except for students who were not attending school regularly, e-learning was referred to as an afterthought or a task that students attended to after face-to-face commitments" (pg.178). Current research shows that many of today's students no longer consider the learning format when choosing courses as long as they are equal educational opportunities (Dziuban et al. 2012). There is currently a blurring of boundaries between traditional and non-traditional learning modalities and students are choosing different ways of learning for a variety of reasons, and their feelings of ambivalence may be due to student not differentiating between learning modalities (Cavanagh, 2012). Farhadi's (2019) case studies revealed that the students in the study took e-learning courses for a variety of reasons including mental health issues,

preferring to work from home, academic accreditation, and conflicting schedules. The variety of reason that students chose secondary e-learning courses reflects their willingness to fluidly move in and out of learning modalities to satisfy their needs. Farhadi's (2019) study failed to show that students' ambivalence towards e-learning as a preferred learning modality negatively impacted their e-learning experiences or influenced their attitudes towards their e-learning courses in any-way.

My study used a descriptive phenomenological approach, and the focus was on gathering students described lived experiences without considering their psychological origins and causal explanations. Similar to Farhadi's (2019) research, my participants were high achieving university-bound students. Students were not asked why they took a secondary e-learning course, and the students did not describe themselves as being ambivalent to their secondary e-learning experiences. However, students described the difficulty and challenges of balancing the demands of e-learning with those of their face-to-face responsibilities. Students inadvertently described their ambivalence to e-learning by observing specifics deficits and advantages of their e-learning experiences. They also described the competing demands of their virtual classes and their face-to-face commitments as barriers to their success.

Students' ambivalence toward online learning reflected both their positive and negative feelings towards their online experiences and the conflicts between these competing factors (Dziuban et al., 2012). Reich and Wheller (2016) state that because ambivalence is an uncomfortable state, people are typically motivated to reduce it and seek information and strategies to lower the amount of conflict between the positive and negative experiences that are causing tension. Feelings of ambivalence motivate people to change. In my study, students described how they developed strategies such as calendars, setting up alarms, developed learning networks that helped

them balance the competing demands on their time. The students became more organized and developed time management skills due to the competing demands of virtual and face-to-face time conflicts, and these new skills helped them throughout their e-learning courses and traditional courses. Students recognized the competing demands on their time and were engaged in their courses enough to motivated themselves to develop the skills and attributes to overcome these obstacles.

Feelings of ambivalence exist on a continuum, and as students transitioned into secondary e-learning, they are driven to develop strategies to balance the competing demands of their virtual and face-to-face worlds (Dziuban et al., 2012: Reich & Wheller, 2016). In contradiction to Farhadi's (2019) conclusions that students are ambivalent to their e-learning courses and this ambivalence is negative in nature, my study found that students' ambivalence prompted them towards positive change. Although the students in my study also experienced mixed feelings regarding their e-learning courses, they still developed skills and strategies to help them manage the difficulties of working between different learning modalities, which aided them in developing positive attitudes towards their e-learning experiences.

Secondary E-Learning Students' Transition Into Their First Year of University

Although there is a great deal of research on how students transition to postsecondary education, there is a gap in how students with secondary e-learning experiences transition to their first year of university. Within the context of my findings, I considered the limited research on how secondary e-learners transition to their first year of postsecondary education that were covered in the literature review.

Green's (2013) phenomenology study followed twelve full-time secondary e-learning students as they transitioned into their first six weeks of face-to-face university. Four themes emerged from Green's (2013) study; time management, learning environment preferences, involvement, and homeschooling misconceptions. Green's (2013) study revealed that students' secondary e-learning experiences helped them develop better organization, time-management, and communication skills, which helped them successfully transition to the first six weeks of postsecondary education.

Green's (2013) study focused on students who had taken at least one full year of e-learning, while this study's participants were secondary students who had taken at least one e-learning course. Green's participants identified as e-learners as a result of their full-time e-learning status, while the students in my study recognized e-learning as only one modality of their secondary learning experiences. Although the participants were different, the outcomes of the two studies were similar as students described how their secondary e-learning experiences helped them develop better time management, organization and communications skills that bettered prepared them for university.

In my study, the four constituents of readiness, barriers, supports and strategies, and adaption and development reflected the students' transitional experiences. These constituents are similar to the themes in Green's (2013) study as they reflected barriers that students faced during the transition to university and identified strategies and skills that students developed during their secondary e-learning experiences that helped them overcome these barriers. The students in both studies also describe how secondary e-learning moved the locus of control away from their teacher and pushed them to become more responsible for their learning. Both Green (2013) and

my study revealed that during their secondary e-learning experiences, students developed a specific set of skills and personal characteristics that helped them transition into their first year of postsecondary education. However, Green's study did not consider the relationship between the themes in the study or articulate how they interrelated with each other.

My research went beyond the scope of Green's (2013) research by examining the students' transition to their secondary e-learning courses and emergency remote learning. This study established an educational transitional process that evolved from the students' descriptions of three different educational transitions. My research defined four constituents of these transitions that remained invariant despite each transition's uniqueness. I also clearly established a relationship between each of the constituents which formed the structure of the phenomenon of educational transition. In contrast to Green's (2013) study, my research developed the constituents, explained their relationship, and developed a structure which delineated a process of educational transitions.

The longitudinal study done at Memorial University (2009-2012) was also covered in Chapter Two, as a series of three research papers that focused on how rural high schools secondary e-learning experiences impacted their transition to university. The first phase of this study compared the grades of secondary e-learners to non-e-learners. The study revealed that e-learning students had a slightly higher-grade average at 80 % compared to 77% for non-e-learners. This data is similar to my study that showed that eleven out of twelve students had grade averages over 80% (Dodd et al., 2009). Secondary students who are academically motivation are more likely to enroll in e-learning (Barbour, 2010).

The second phase of the Dodd et al. (2009) study established a relationship between secondary e-learning and the ability to persist in their first year of university. University records revealed that students with secondary e-learning experiences had higher grades and retention rates than non-e-learners (Dodd et al., 2009). Their findings also align with the data of my study, whose participants maintained high first-year averages.

In 2010, Kirby et.al published a second paper which compared students' secondary e-learning participation in postsecondary university compared to non-e-learners. The participants were interviewed to determine what they thought about their secondary e-learning experiences and their perceptions of postsecondary e-learning. The Kirby et al. (2010) study revealed that students thought their secondary e-learning courses helped them develop into more organized independent learners. Similarly, the students in this study thought that the skills and characteristics developed due to their secondary e-learning experiences helped them transition to university.

Kirby et al. (2010) also determined that students with secondary e-learning backgrounds were not likely to enroll in postsecondary e-learning courses. Their research aligns with my study, where only two students out of twelve mentioned they took e-learning courses in their first year of university. Kirby et al. (2010) postulated that if students did not want to enroll in e-learning in their first year of university, perhaps they did not prefer e-learning as a learning modality. However, research shows that students transitioning into new learning environments need to develop new social and emotional networks to succeed (Astin, 1975; Schlossberg, 1981; Tinto, 1988). Students may choose to go to face-to-face classes to meet other students, find new friends, and develop new networks to support their learning. In this study, the students who took postsecondary e-learning courses chose not to expand on their experiences in them. Todays' secondary e-learning students are familiar with transitioning in and out of different learning modalities and

are accustomed to mixing types of courses to accommodate their educational needs (Dziuban et al., 2012). Students may not differentiate between learning with online modalities and traditional courses because they are familiar with e-learning and do not consider it a different learning experience.

The third phase of this research series examined the postsecondary plans of secondary e-learning students to non-e-learning students plans, their rate of enrollment and the rate of university retention. Kirby and Sharpe (2011) first examined students' intention to enroll in university, if they did enroll, and how they did once there. Their research showed that secondary e-learners were more likely to enroll in a university. However, Kirby and Sharpe's (2011) findings also showed that regardless of whether students had an e-learning background, students with high secondary academic averages above 80% were more likely to enroll in university than none-learners. This research aligns with my demographic data, revealing that eleven out of 12 participants in the study had high school averages above 80%.

Kirby and Sharpe's (2011) used the participants' university records to compare the retention rates and grades of secondary e-learners and non-e-learners in their fourth year of university. Kirby and Sharpe's (2011) research indicated no significant difference between university students with secondary e-learning backgrounds and non-secondary e-learning rates regarding long-term university retention rates. Kirby and Sharpe (2011) concluded that there is no transitional disadvantage for secondary e-learning students, and secondary academic performance plays a significant indicator of postsecondary retention.

Although my research did not specifically cover student retention, it did reveal how secondary e-learning experiences positively impact students' transition into university and possibly influence retention rates. The students in this study described how their secondary e-learning

courses provided them with the opportunity to develop technological, time management, and communication skills. Furthermore, the students consistently described how they learned to develop learning networks that supported them through each educational transition. When students are successful in their academic pursuits and fit in at their university, they are less likely to leave. (Astin, 1975, 1993; Tinto, 1975, 2016).

Secondary E-Learning Students' Transition Into Emergency Remote Learning

During this research, the unprecedented event of the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, and in March 2020, Canadian postsecondary institutions were shuttered, and students' courses were cancelled, postponed, or moved online (StatsCan, 2020). The intent of this study was only to explore how secondary students' secondary e-learning backgrounds transitioned into their first year of university, but with the sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants had to transition to ERL. To acknowledge this disruption in my participants' education, I integrated a new question into the study to explore how the students experienced their ERL and if secondary e-learning impacted these experiences.

In Canada, the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted postsecondary students' social, psychological, financial, and academic lives. A StatsCan (2020) crowdsource study of 100,000 Canadian students informed the development of an infographic that reflected the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canada's postsecondary students. According to the StatsCan study (2020), 92% of all Canadian postsecondary students involved in the study had some or all of their courses moved online, 26% had courses postponed or cancelled, 35% had work placement delayed or cancelled, 10% were not able to complete some or all of their courses, and 11% were not able to complete their credentials as planned.

The OUFCA (2020) study indicated that 62% of the students thought that Ontario's quality of university education had declined since the pandemic. As students transitioned into ERL, many students had to move; 48% lost their job or were laid off, 26% worked fewer hours, and 49% lost potential job opportunities (StatsCan, 2020). The pandemic disrupted students' postsecondary education and changed many aspects of their lives, and students became worried about their studies, financial situation, and jobs (StatsCan, 2020).

During the COVID-19 lockdown, students' professors were also severely impacted by the sudden switch to remote learning. Professors worked hard to manage the complexity of suddenly moving curricula that were not designed for online learning to a form of ERL (Besser & Zeigler, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020; Openo, 2020; Rahiem, 2020). However, 77% of the professors who participated in the OCUFA study felt that COVID-19 impacted their ability to teach effectively and negatively impacted education in Ontario's universities. During the transition to ERL, the faculty also struggled with isolation, stress, and a lack of institutional support (OCUFA, 2020). Over 63 % of professors in the OCUFA study also felt that their workload had increased, reducing their ability to teach and support their students. Professors felt that the quality of the course content, their teaching, and their interaction with students diminished during the 2020 COVID-19 crisis (OCFUA, 2020).

In the pivot to ERL, professors and universities had to find ways to provide remote learning opportunities for students quickly. The development of ERL provided immediate temporary access to instruction and instructional supports during the pandemic crisis (Hodges et al., 2020). However, these temporary measures lacked the student supports that are typically designed into a contemporary e-learning course. Both students and professors alike indicated that isolation and the lack of communication were the most significant factors impacting the negative quality of

teaching and learning during ERL (OCFUA, 2020). In the OCFUA (2020) study, the number one reason students did not like ERL was the lack of teacher-professor communication. Students also felt that their work was more difficult than their regular classes and felt they were teaching themselves (OCFUA, 2020). The OCUFA's study results aligned with the findings of my study and accurately described how university students in Ontario struggled with their transitions to ERL. However, the students in my study also described how the skills and strategies they gained during their secondary e-learning experiences helped them overcome some of the barriers they faced during their transition to ERL.

Although there are several new studies on ERL, the Besser et al. (2020) research focused on how 1217 postsecondary Israel students adapted to synchronous learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study defined adaption as students successfully adapting to new circumstances rather than recovering from disappointment. The Besser et al. study focused on examining individual differences in adaptability to ERL. The study modified the Adaptability Scale so that their participants reported their adaptability to the COVID-19 health crisis and its impact on their educational experiences. Their findings indicated that students' adaptability rates were significantly associated with personability variables and perception of learning experiences. Students who perceived that they could adapt to the different learning formats reported being attentive, focused, motivated, and developing a greater depth of learning. Students who reported higher levels of adaptability also reported lower levels of negative moods, isolation, and neuroticism (Besser et al., 2020). Believing that one can adapt to change or develop the capacity to adapt is crucial in adaptability and is fundamental to a successful transition to an unanticipated event such as ERL (Besser et al., 2020; Schlossberg, 2019).

The average age of the participants in the Besser et al. (2020) study was 27 as Israel youth must do three years of mandatory military service before entering university, generally work for a year, and then travel for a year and are typically older than most Canadian university students. Due to their multiple past experiences, this study's participants have been exposed to many different life events and had the opportunity to adapt to many different types of change. The Besser et al. (2020) research showed that the transition to ERL was a very different type of experience that manifested high-stress levels in their participants. "When viewed from this perspective, those students who are finding it difficult to adapt to the pandemic are likely experiencing feelings and a form of stress unlike their past experiences" (Besser et al., 2020, p. 5). Besser, et al. (2020) concluded that normalizing adaptability and proactively integrating it into educational programs is necessary to increase adaptability among students, allowing them to cope and thrive in new educational situations.

The students in my study were much younger and more inexperienced than the participants in the Besser et al. (2020) study; however, their experience with secondary e-learning and their ability to adapt to mulita-media learning modalities helped them successfully cope with ERL. In this research, the students described how knowing how to use an LMS, organize their time, and learn independently helped them succeed in ERL. In addition, e-learning provided the students with the confidence to manage new technological situations and organizational challenges, consequently raising their adaptability levels which helped them deal with the uncertainty of ERL. Although ERL was a new experience, students successfully adapted to the change because they had previous experiences with e-learning and had the skills and confidence to help them succeed.

Another relevant study on ERL, Rahiem (2020) was a phenomenological study that explored the lived experiences of Indonesian students learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rahiem (2012) coined the term Emergency Remote Learning (ERL) to differentiate between the chaos of COVID-19 crisis learning and programmed e-learning courses. The 80 participants in this study were social science students in their second year of university. Rahiem (2020) could not do any interviews due to COVID-19 restrictions, so the students were asked to do daily journals for two weeks documenting their experiences, and some students participated in focus group interviews.

Two themes emerged from Rahiem's (2020) study, that non-traditional blended learning took place during the pandemic and that students' ERL experiences were paradoxical. Typically, blended learning is viewed as using technology to enhance face-to-face learning (Rahiem, 2020). However, as a result of Universities' COVID-19 protocols, face-to-face learning was eliminated. Rahiem's research found that professors provided their course content in many different ways. The students used conventional and nontechnical ways of studying to accommodate the different ways they received their course materials, such as note-taking, printing out course content, and reading textbooks to augment the various ways their professors dispersed course content and instructional content. Consequently, a new type of blended learning emerged that included blended technology and non-technological teaching and learning methods but did not include face-to-face instructions.

Rahiem's (2020) study also revealed that students found their ERL experiences paradoxical. Although students liked the flexibility of ERL, they found they were given more work and were expected to be responsible for their learning. Rahiem's findings also revealed that the students' university was not well prepared for ERL as courses. Some of the problems with ERL

were that university courses designed for conventional classes did not conform well to online delivery, professors and students needed technological training, and students had limited access to learning resources. Rahiem's (2020) study recommended that professors incorporate elements into their studies that will help strengthen the students' ability to learn independently outside of the classroom, design curricula and resources developed for online use, and provide students with reasonable course expectations with instructor feedback. Another recommendation was that postsecondary education institutions should encourage students to learn independently by having their professors incorporate various methods and media to help their students become more active and efficient learners.

Both the Rahiem (2020) and Besser et al. (2020) research recommended that universities prepare students for unexpected events such as pandemics by providing them with learning experiences that enhance self-efficacy, independent learning opportunities, and technological skills. In my study, students described how their secondary e-learning courses shifted the locus of learning away from their teacher and how they had to become more responsible for their own learning. Students described the many ways this experience enhanced their self-confidence and problem-solving abilities. These students also described how secondary e-learning helped them develop the time-management and organizational skills that helped them be successful in their first year of university and ERL courses. Although these students faced many of the barriers of the Rahiem (2020) and Besser et al. (2020) studies, my research showed that the students adapted to these new circumstances by using the skills and resilience they developed in their secondary e-learning courses. Secondary e-learning already incorporates many of the technological experiences and independent learning opportunities recommended in the Rahiem (2020) and Besser et al. (2020) research.

The Impact of Students' Secondary E-Learning on Their Transitional Experiences

This research explored the transitional experiences of first-year postsecondary students with e-learning backgrounds and considered how secondary e-learning impacts their transitional experiences. The word "impact" was specifically chosen to describe the transitive and sequential nature of the secondary and postsecondary relationships. Impact also explains how e-learning can positively or negatively change, not merely influence, the postsecondary transitional experience. Students' first-year postsecondary transitional experiences are complex, and a students' ability to successfully transition to postsecondary education can be impacted by various sociological, academic, and psychological factors (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Briggs et al, 2012; Wasylkiw, 2015). Students' ability to transition to higher education requires them to develop a new learner identity and socially and academically integrate into their new learning environment (Tinto, 1975; Spady, 1971). Sociologists' such as Tinto (1975) and Spady (1971) focused on social influences such as pre-existing and new friendships, family support and circumstances, previous educational background, academic potential, and normative congruence as aspects of students lives that allowed them or prevented them from integrating into their new environment and adopting new learner identities. The students in this study clearly identified that their e-learning experiences helped them develop better communication, organization, and self-efficacy skills which supported them in their transition to university and ERL.

Bean and Eaton (2000), Briggs et al (2012), Spady (1971), Tinto (1975) and Wasylkiw's (2016) transitional models of student retention focused on students 'previous educational experiences and attitudes, individual characteristics, personal and institutional strategies and supports, and students' normative beliefs about themselves and their educational institution as factors that play an essential part of adapting to postsecondary education (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Briggs et al,

2012; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975; Wasylkiw, 2016). Studying students' first-year transitional experiences is a complex endeavour, and these student retention models reflected the relationship between the students' psychological, social, and academic transitional experiences. These transitional models supported the emergence of the constituents of readiness, barriers, supports and strategies, and adaption and development that emerged during this study and how their relationship formed its structure. The students in this study described how they became more mature, independent, and self-sufficient learners during their secondary e-learning courses. The students' secondary e-learning experiences helped reduced transitional barriers and scaffold the development of new supports and strategies.

Application of Demographic Data

This study used both a demographic survey and a descriptive phenomenological study to consider the complexity of the participants' transitional experiences. The demographic survey collected both geographical and academic data. The students in this study went to various rural, suburban, and urban Ontarian high schools and attended an assortment of small and large Ontarian universities. The data also revealed that the participants in this study were high achieving secondary students who maintained high grades throughout their academic transitions. The participants' consistent academic performance aligned with their described experiences and reflected their ability to cope with educational change successfully. Furthermore, the lived experiences of these students revealed that their secondary e-learning experiences positively impacted their ability to transition to their first year of university and ERL

During this research, four constituents emerged that described the lived experience of the students as they transition into secondary e-learning, their first year of university and ERL. Each

students' transitional experiences were unique and experienced in a variety of ways. In this research, students experienced their transitions on a continuum that reflected varying levels of readiness, barriers, skills and supports, and development and adaptation that emerged during each transition. These constituents of the phenomenon remained stable regardless of the students' urban, suburban, or rural background or the university they attended. The four constituents of this study illuminated the complex and overlapping academic, psychological, and social needs of students, as illustrated in Bean and Eaton (2000), Briggs et al., (2012), Spady (1971), Tinto (1975), and Wasylkiw's (2016) transitional research.

The students in this research described how e-learning provided them with opportunities to develop organizational, time-management, and self-efficacy skills that helped them successfully transition to university. They also described developed communication skills that helped them create learning networks of support. Furthermore, students also described how they enhanced their skills and support to adapt to new academic and social challenges. Finally, students described how their secondary e-learning technological skills helped them successfully manage the unanticipated transition to ERL. Secondary e-learning positively impacted students' transitions to university and ERL by providing them with the opportunity to develop technological expertise, independent learning skills and confidence in coping and succeeding in new circumstances.

Consideration of the Community of Inquiry Framework

The Community of Inquiry framework establishes cognitive, social, and teaching presence as essential components for successful online educational learning experiences (Garrison et al., 2001). Cognitive presence refers to how learners construct knowledge through discourse and reflection; social presence is the ability of the learners to feel connected to others and feel part of

a group, and teaching presence is “the design, facilitation and direction of the cognitive and social process” (Anderson et al., 2001). “The function of teaching presence is to bring the elements of a community of inquiry together in a balanced and functional relationship congruent with the intended outcomes, while respecting the needs and encouraging active engagement of the learners” (Garrison, 2013, p. 27). The students’ experiences transitioning to ERL illustrated what happens when this framework collapses. The unanticipated transition to ERL caused the students' educational system to buckle. Students found that their syllabus and curricula were in a state of flux; they temporarily lost the support system of their classmates and friends and communication with their professors. Some students remained in contact with friends and classmates, but they were also confused by the sudden changes. However, most students described a lag in communication with their professors and universities. Different professors used different modes of instruction and communication, which presented the students with sometimes incoherent learning methods. The cognitive, social, and teaching presences inherent in e-learning were absent from students’ remote learning experiences. However, the students in this study relied on the time-management, organizational, technological, and independent learning skills they had developed during their secondary e-learning courses to help them cope with these sudden changes. This research’s findings illustrated that the complex dynamics of e-learning positively impacted students’ transition to university and ERL.

Implications for New Government Policies

E-learning policies vary from province to province and are driven by provincial initiatives (McGreal & Anderson, (2007). Ontario’s Ministry of Education has announced that remote learning will continue to be an option for children in the 2021-2022 school year, and school

boards may be mandated to offer it permanently (CTV News, May 4, 2021; People for Education, 2021). Furthermore, the Government of Ontario (2020) has determined that secondary students who started high school in the year 2020-2021 will need to take at least two mandatory courses in order to graduate unless their parents opt them out of their e-learning courses by specifically unregistering them (People for Education, 2021). Students also may use their 2020-2021 experiences as one e-learning credit towards their compulsory graduation requirements.

Ontario's Ministry of Education is also making sweeping changes to its education system by introducing a new regulatory authority that will dictate the rules that govern the coordination of online and remote learning and changes to the Education Act (People for Education, 2021). This authority will make decisions on software, information systems, and resources to support online learning and establish data-sharing processes (People for Education, 2021). The People for Education's (2021) report also indicates that the province intends to shift e-learning and remote learning from school boards to TVOntario (TVO). TVO is a provincially funded educational network and media organization and a registered charity governed by the Ontario Educational Communications Authority (OECA) (Wikipedia, May 26, 2021; TVO, website 2021). Since 2002, TVO has been responsible for the Independent Learning Center, which disperses distance education and uses multimedia and paper forms of elementary and secondary correspondence courses. By February 2022, secondary students will have the option of choosing synchronizing e-learning from their boards or online correspondence courses through TVO (People for Education, 2021). Although these new approaches to education are subject to change, these reforms reflect the Government of Ontario's initiative to modernize learning in Ontario's education system (Ministry of Education, 2019).

As the Ontario Ministry of Education works to modernize education, it is critical to put students' educational experiences at the forefront of policymaking. This research explores the lived experiences of students with secondary e-learning backgrounds as they transition into secondary e-learning, university, and ERL. My findings revealed that students' secondary e-learning experiences positively impacted their transition into university. However, the study also indicated the importance of identifying and supporting students' educational transitions. Consequently, it is crucial to recognize that taking a secondary e-learning course for the first time is a major educational transition that can help students throughout their educational experiences. Like all significant educational transitions, teachers and administrators must be prepared to help students succeed. Therefore, teachers have an obligation to become aware of the transitional process of taking an e-learning course which includes, the level of students' readiness, barriers they may experience and the strategies and supports that can help the students develop into organized and independent learners.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed my findings and situated them in the study's research questions regarding seminal and current transitional literature, current empirical research on student transition, and new government policies. I have aligned this research with the students' demographic data and phenomenological findings to triangulate the study's data. I have also discussed how the constituents of the structure of student transition identified specific characteristics of the transitional process that can support students and help them support themselves. In this chapter, I also applied the Community of Inquiry's framework to the students' ERL experiences to

show how crucial good e-learning practices are to students' transitional experiences. Finally, I discussed how this research could inform new government policies and the importance of viewing secondary e-learning as a significant educational transition.

Chapter 6: The Conclusion

In my conclusions, I present a summary of my study, its contribution to literature, its limitations and delimitations, and its implication for future research, practices, and policies. I also conclude this chapter with some personal thoughts on my findings.

Summary of the Study with Conclusions

The gap in current research on how secondary e-learning students in Ontario transitioned into their first year of university prompted this study. The central focus of my study was to understand how students with secondary e-learning experiences transitioned to their first year of university. One of my research goals was to understand how secondary e-learning impacted students' transitions to postsecondary education. First, I explored how students transitioned to secondary e-learning as I wanted to understand how students adapted to their e-learning experiences, and also how they developed or regressed due to these experiences. This provided me with an opportunity to develop a baseline of the students' skills, attitudes, and behaviours before entering university.

Next, I explored how students with secondary e-learning backgrounds transitioned to their first year of university and ERL. Although these two events were part of the same school year, I decided to view them as two distinct experiences because ERL was an unanticipated transition that needed special consideration as it was not a traditional educational experience. The constituents that emerged during the anticipated events of secondary and postsecondary transitions were very similar. This similarity meant that although students went through different educational transitions differently, the constituents that emerged were the same. Consequently, students' transitional experiences were represented in a singular structure.

Furthermore, exploring students' transitions to ERL allowed me to test the stability of the constituents of both their expected and unanticipated educational transitions. Despite the

different circumstances between the students' traditional university experiences and their ERL experiences, the students still described their ERL transitional experiences in terms of readiness, barriers, strategies, and skills, and how they adapted or developed during these experiences. Consequently, I developed a structure that represented all of the students' educational transitions that remained consistent even when students moved in and out of different learning modalities and learning environments.

One of the critical concepts that emerged during this study was that students' secondary e-learning experiences positively impacted their transition to postsecondary education. However, this did not mean that students did not struggle with secondary e-learning or enjoyed all aspects of it. The students' descriptions of lived transitional experiences showed that they became independent learners with good communication, time management, and organizational skills, despite their struggles or learning preferences. Students described how their secondary e-learning courses provided them with the opportunity to develop as independent learners. The independence and self-efficacy that students developed during their secondary e-learning experiences prepared them for the challenges of university. The students also described how the skills, strategies and attitudes that they developed in secondary e-learning helped them transition to different learning modalities and learning environments.

The constituents of the structure of experience emerged from the students' lived experiences. The relationship between the constituents reflected their educational transition experiences. At the beginning of each educational transition, different student-readiness levels emerged that influenced how they viewed the transition and adapted to it. These levels of readiness either created barriers or reduced barriers. Students developed or enhanced skills, strategies, and relationships to help them overcome these barriers in order to succeed. The

students incorporated these newfound skills and strategies into their everyday lives and used them fluidly to help them adapt to their new learning environments. The relationship of these constituents represents a pattern of experiences that are inherent in students' educational transitions. This study showed that secondary e-learning is a significant educational transition. Consequently, supports and strategies should be integrated into secondary e-learning courses to further support students as they transition into e-learning. Furthermore, secondary e-learning teachers need to be trained to recognize how prepared students are for their e-learning course and how to support their level of readiness.

Students described how their level of preparedness for postsecondary education created barriers to their transition. Students describe their transition to university as a spectrum of overlapping experiences. Previously developed skills such as organization and time management helped students transition to their larger class sizes and workloads. A significant factor of student frustration that emerged was student-professor communication. Consequently, professors should communicate with their students promptly in order to know where they are in the transitional process and to be able to offer the appropriate learning strategies and supports. Postsecondary professors also must become knowledgeable about the transitional process to support students' transitions. It is also crucial that professors provide students with the opportunities to develop transitional awareness, coping skills, and PLNs.

The transition to ERL was challenging for students as they suddenly shifted to remote learning. Students described how the lack of communication with their professors and university exacerbated already difficult learning conditions. Students were familiar with using technology to learn but found it difficult to manage the various ways professors distributed their course content and instructions. As a result, students experienced isolation and confusion during their

remote learning. Students explained how they relied on the technological, organizational, and time management skills they developed in secondary e-learning to succeed. Once professors started reconnecting with the students and reducing or altering their workloads, students found their ERL experiences easier. The lack of student-professor communication was the primary source of students' frustration. Although students indicated that all of their universities offered an LMS, not all of their professors utilized them. The inconsistent delivery of learning materials and instruction created an additional source of stress and irritation for students. Students were clear: the inconsistent delivery of course materials created more work for them. The outcome of this research revealed that students who had professors who used an LMS before the transition to ERL found the transition to ERL less difficult. Consequently, all professors should be trained to use their university's LMS, preparing them for future emergencies. Furthermore, professors should also be trained in e-learning instructional design principles to create materials suitable for online learning.

An unexpected aspect of research that emerged during this study was the emergence of student PLNs. The concept of PLNs describes how students use technology to independently gather, filter, and organize content and share it in formal and informal ways with various social groups via social media or web applications (Kennedy, 2018). In this study, the students' learning networks consisted of an eclectic group of social groups comprised of friends, family, classmates, teachers, professors, and formal institutional supports. Students also described using social media and the Internet to research and augment course content and instructions. When students needed support, they described moving fluidly between their face-to-face relationships, formal online relationships, informal online relationships (social media and gaming), and the direct messaging of friends and classmates.

Although the emergence of PLNs was not a focus of this study, it is noteworthy that students frequently described various relationships and means of communication as essential to their success. Furthermore, the necessity of the students' PLNs became evident when all the support systems the students had developed in their first year of university collapsed during their transition to ERL. Students became isolated and confused when they suddenly pivoted to remote learning without notice. Students turned to the Internet, social media, and digital communication with their classmates for support. Although, students re-established a critical part of their learning network once they reconnected with their professors, they continued to use their PLNs for additional support. Developing personalized learning networks is a new 21st-century skill that goes beyond conventional institutional supports and provides students with strategies and opportunities to develop their learning supports in a way that makes sense to their current learning situation. Kennedy (2018) writes "Core to fostering a personal learning network is the ability to see and harness affordances of the social web for learning and to cultivate openness to the intrinsic motivation of curiosity (p.22). Understanding how PLNs work and helping students become aware of them and develop them are critical topics for future development.

Contributions to the Literature

This study contributes to the limited research literature on how students with secondary e-learning backgrounds transitioned to their first year of university. My study provides insights into how students with secondary e-learning developed during their transitional experiences and provides a structure of these experiences. The research revealed that secondary e-learning positively impacted students' transition to university and ERL. Previous literature on secondary e-learning did not consider the students' transition into secondary e-learning itself. Exploring the transition into students' secondary e-learning experiences allowed me insight into how students

developed as learners during their educational transitions. This learning process was reiterated throughout the students' transition to their first year of university and ERL and formed the constituents of the structure of the students' transitional experiences.

My research also contributes to the literature on secondary e-learning by providing evidence that secondary e-learning provided learning opportunities that helped students develop into more organized and independent learners. The research revealed specific skill sets and strategies that were needed to be successful in secondary e-learning. During the students' descriptions of secondary e-learning experiences, they described barriers such as lack of teacher-student interactions, poor course design, and lack of technological instructions as barriers to their learning. The study showed that the independent nature inherent in secondary e-learning resulted in the students developing or enhancing their time-management, technological, and organizational skills, which helped them overcome educational barriers and better prepared them for university and ERL.

Although secondary e-learning has the potential to support and enhance students' future educational transitions, much work needs to be done on supporting students during their transitions. Teachers and professors also need to be supported and trained to develop better communication and course design skills. Consequently, educational administrators, teachers, and professors must become more aware of the learning needs and preferences of the modern-day learner. Educational institutions must also create learning opportunities that move the locus of control of learning away from the instructor and back to the student.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research

Delimitations

Giorgi's (2009) Descriptive Phenomenology method and the boundaries and conditions set by the COVID-19 pandemic research rules delimit this research. In Giorgi's (2020) DPP, the

findings result from the participants' described experiences; consequently, they are descriptive rather than interpretive. In descriptive phenomenology, the boundaries are set by a type of phenomenon, not its universal characteristics. The findings of this research are not generalizable because the goal of descriptive phenomenology is to reflect the holistic invariant constituents that are essential to the structure of the phenomenon being studied as the participants have described it. Consequently, it is only generalizable to first-year university students with high school e-learning backgrounds and the phenomenon of educational transitions.

This study's research objectives were to explore how students with secondary e-learning backgrounds transition into their first year at university or college. This research was to be done at one university and its associated college using various traditional recruitment methods. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced universities to develop new research standards that required all recruitment of students and communication with students to be done online, which redefined this study's boundaries. The development of these new research policies and the pivot to ERL delayed this study's recruitment process. The result of this delay meant that the recruitment process resulted during the last two weeks when the university was shuttered. University and college professors posted, and the student association posted my request for participants on their social media accounts, yet only one university student volunteered for the study. I then decided to use social media to recruit more participants and posted my approved recruitment poster on college and university social media accounts all over Ontario. I receive a large response from the Reddit discussion forum after offering a small token of appreciation for the participants in the study. Using social media has its advantages as students were recruited from all over Ontario rather than one university. However, social media also has its disadvantages, as it only allowed for

the recruitment of students who use a particular social media forum and are familiar with the technology and used to communicating in online forums.

Limitations

Participants in this study were twelve university students who had taken at least one secondary e-learning course. One of this study's limitations was that it focused on students who had secondary e-learning backgrounds from Ontarian high schools and went to Ontarian universities. All of these students were high achieving first-year university students with secondary e-learning backgrounds. These students' experiences may not reflect the experiences of students who cannot maintain high academic averages, students with disabilities, or other social or economic disadvantages. The eligibility for participation also eliminated first-year Ontarian students who had secondary e-learning experiences from other provinces and countries. Having these boundaries on participants also disallowed international students in their first year of university in Ontario from participating in the study. This study only focused on students in their first year of university in Ontario; consequently, it also did not reflect the first-year transitional experiences of college and trade students with secondary e-learning experiences.

Another limitation of this study was that it had only twelve participants. Although this is a large number of participants for a descriptive phenomenological study, and it provides a deep understanding of students' transitional experiences, it still only provided a systematic analysis of the experiences of twelve students. This study is also limited because it did not ask the students about any learning disabilities or factors in their gender, cultural, or social-economic backgrounds.

One of the limitations of this study is that the findings were exploratory in nature and can only be generalized to secondary students with e-learning backgrounds that transitioned to their

first year of university. The study does not consider issues of equity and support that are necessary for different types of learners. However, it provides a structure of the students' transitional experiences that can be used for future research in this area. This research can also be used by students, teachers, and administrators to recognize the different features and stages of educational transitions and incorporate various supports to help the transition.

This study identified a transitional learning process that encompassed the students' transition to secondary, postsecondary, and ERL. This transitional process can be useful when considering how to support students, but more importantly in teaching students how to support themselves. Teaching students to be independent learners is a key recommendation of the current literature on students' transition to university and ERL. This research also contributed to the literature on ERL by providing insights into the students' educational experiences during the COViD-19 pandemic and could be useful for university administrators and professors as they reform their remote learning. The findings of this study are also important for secondary and university educators, as it provides them with insight into the advantages and disadvantages of secondary e-learning and could help them improve and design new e-learning practices and policies.

Key Implications

The results of my study had three key implications and one new finding for future consideration. The first implication is that students experience a particular process when going through an educational transition. The students' experience was identified by the constituents of readiness, barriers, supports and strategies, as well as adaption and development. The interconnectivity among these constituents formed a structure that identified students' transitional experiences as a specific set of experiences that can be identified and supported.

Students' awareness of the transitional process, the barriers they may encounter, and the supports and strategies they are able to use can help them adapt to the change. Administrators and educators can also use the structure of educational transitions to consider integrating new learning opportunities into curricula that will help students grow into independent learners.

The second implication of this study is that it showed that secondary e-learning positively impacted students' transition to university and ERL. Students described how having a secondary e-learning experience helped them through their transition to university and ERL. It also revealed that a student's experiences are interconnected, and previous experiences are essential in helping them adjust to their new learning environment. This finding is significant for educators and administrators as they develop secondary e-learning practices and policies and consider issues of equity and equality.

Furthermore, secondary e-learning should be considered a major educational transition. Transitioning to secondary e-learning requires the development of a new set of learning skills and personal characteristics. Therefore, secondary e-learning courses should be developed with this transitional structure in mind. Issues of student readiness and potential transitional barriers should be at the forefront of course designers' and teachers' minds. Teachers should also acknowledge that students' first secondary e-learning courses are essential transitional experiences in which students may need additional support and guidance. When developing secondary e-learning courses for all students at all levels, the transitional process should be considered, and systematic opportunities for developing independent growth, organization, and time management should be built in the course.

A finding that emerged during this research is that students developed PLNs to supplement their learning. Students frequently described how they learned from an educational

institution's virtual and face-to-face learning environments and social and personal networks. Using a 'whatever it takes attitude', students used various learning modalities and relationships to build learning networks for different learning environments. As this is a phenomenological study that does not allow for theorization, I only presented the descriptions of these relationships and how students used them as an additional discovery. However, these findings could be used for future study when considering research regarding theories of connectivity or collaborative constructivism, as they described how students interacted with each other, their professors, their content, and the technology (Garrison, 2017, Sieman, 2005). Integrating formal and informal communication and learning methods within course design could provide students with learning opportunities that help them develop personalized learning networks that could be useful in helping students adapt to any educational environment or future employment opportunities.

Although this study is exploratory and cannot be generalized across populations and contexts, there is a generalizability level for secondary e-learning students who are transitioning into their first year of postsecondary education. Consequently, the study's findings could be used to improve policies and practices regarding secondary e-learning and postsecondary transitions.

Each student interviewed had taken at least one secondary e-learning course, and several had taken more than one. Each interview was between 35-50 minutes in length, and there was an abundance of research that was not used as it went beyond the scope of this research. Each student was generous with their time and described various experiences that reflected three very different educational transitions. Although the participants in this study were high achieving students from various Ontarian high schools, there is much to be learned from their struggles and successes. I am very thankful to them for their time and willingness to share their experiences.

Technology has impacted the way people interact with each other and resulted in

transformations in education, business, politics, and cultures across the world (Harasim, 2017). My exploratory research on how students with secondary e-learning experiences have transitioned to their secondary e-learning experiences, their first year of university, and ERL, reflects the impact of technology on contemporary students. This research has identified that a secondary e-learning transition is a significant transition that must be recognized and supported. This study also showed that secondary e-learning positively impacts students' transitions to university and ERL. Consequently, secondary e-learning may be a way for schools to bridge the technological gap that currently exists in Ontario's schools. However, for all students to have access to e-learning and a pathway to success, it is essential to reduce social, economical, and educational barriers. To do this means moving beyond the current state of e-learning and developing e-learning pedagogy that can provide accessible, valuable, and meaningful learning opportunities for all students.

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Appendix A: Pre-Interview Protocols

This study used Petitmengin's (2006) pre-interview protocols that were designed to help a study's participants relax, stabilize their attention, and focus on their descriptions. Petitmengin's (2006) pre-interview protocols are meant to help participants turn their attention to their experience without theorizing them, drifting away from the experiencing, or from focusing on the *what* of the experience rather than the *how* of the occurrence. Petitmengin (2006) suggested that researchers develop a pre-interview strategy and use questioning techniques to help participants describe their subjective experiences with more precision.

Petitmengin et al. (2017) stated that there were two ways of helping participants re-orient and focus their attention: 1) ask them to focus on a particular phase of an experience that they have chosen to describe; 2) every time the participant moves away from describing a concrete experience towards justification or explanations the researcher will ask questions to draw their attention back to the experience. "The interview situation and the mere presence of the interviewer will throughout the interview act as a container for the attention of the interviewee and help him to remain within the boundaries of the experience being explored" (Petitmengin, 2006, p 239).

The pre-interview protocols developed in this study helped me prepare for the interview process, develop better questioning skills, and guide the participant, when necessary, back to the experiences being explored. The following interview strategies from Petitmengin's method were used to help the participants from theorizing their experiences and remain in the boundaries of the research without interfering with their descriptions.

Pre-interview Protocols

This script was developed to help the participants relax and prepare them for the interview process.

We are here for approximately one hour to discuss your secondary e-learning experiences and your experiences in your first year of university and COVID-19 Emergency Remote Learning. You will be asked to describe your high school e-learning experiences and your more recent experiences in university and emergency remote learning . A twenty-minute timeframe has been allocated for each main question, but these time frames are flexible and will depend on if you and if you feel you need more time to describe your experiences. You may stop and contemplate your answers or ask me any questions at any time during the interview. I want you to relax and feel free to ask me about any concerns you might have about the research.

During this interview, I may stop and read your answer back to you to make sure that I understood what you were saying. I may also stop you and ask you for more details regarding an experience that you are focusing on or ask you additional questions. There are no wrong answers or experiences. You may stop me at any time and ask questions for clarification. At any time during this interview process, you may stop and ask questions and if you are not comfortable you may leave the interview at any time.

At the end of the interview, ten minutes has been set aside for you to answer a brief survey on your high school and university grades, where you went to school, and some demographic questions. Do you have any questions or concerns about what is going on here today? When you are ready to start, please let me know.

Interview Strategies

Throughout the interviews I remained in the phenomenological reduction and listened attentively to the participants descriptions. I stayed flexible and used a semi-structured interview and when necessary used interview strategies to help the participants describe richer experiences.

1. If the participant digressed, was having difficulty describing their experiences, and started to try to theorize their experience in some way, I listened carefully to their descriptions. I then reformulated their experience and repeated the descriptive elements of the experience back to them for accuracy. This helped the participants stay focused on the describing their experience and expand or correct alter it if they feel it is necessary.
2. If the participant attempted to drift from their experience as they described it, make judgements on it, or explain away their experience, I listened carefully and asked questions about their descriptions that helped bring the participant's focus back to their description.
3. If necessary, I helped guide the participant to provide richer descriptions of their experiences by asking them to describe the *how* of their experiences rather than the *what.* I asked the participants to describe specific components of their experience that related to the phenomena using language such as: " Could you please describe how that happened" or "Could you please give me an example of that experience".
4. I used a semi-structure interview and phenomenological designed questions to guide the participants to describe specific experiences that were relevant to their transitional experience. This type of careful question helped the participant deepen their description of the experiences and provide the raw data needed to explore their transitional experiences.

Appendix B: Research Question Guide

Primary Phenomenological Questions

1. What were the described secondary e-learning experiences of students with secondary e-learning backgrounds who were in their first-year of university?
    a. Could you describe your high school e-learning experiences?
    b. Could you describe how it first felt to take a high school e-learning course?
    c. Could you describe a situation in which you communicated or worked with your peers during your e-learning course?
    d. Could you describe a situation in which you communicated with your teacher during your e-learning course?
    e. Could you describe any similarities or differences between your secondary e-learning experiences and your traditional face-to-face classes and provide examples of them?
    f. Could you describe the last time that you logged onto you secondary e-learning courses? What did it feel like to finish the course?
    g. Could you describe any positive or negative experiences that arose during the course that may have hindered or helped your success in your e-learning course?
    h. Could you describe any changes that you felt you progressed through during your e-learning course? If so, can you provide examples of them?
2. What were the described transitional experiences of students with secondary e-learning backgrounds who were in their first-year of university?
    a. Could you describe how you felt you adapted to your first-year university? Can you give me an example of this experience?
    b. Could you describe a situation where you communicated or worked with your

peers during your first-year of university?

c. Could you describe a situation where you communicated or worked with your professor during your first-year of university?

d. Could you describe any similar experiences between your secondary e-learning courses and your first-year of university?

e. Could you describe any differences in your experiences between your secondary e-learning courses and your first-year of university?

f. Could you describe any experiences from your secondary e-learning courses that may have helped you be successful in your first-year of university?

g. Could you describe any experiences from your secondary e-learning courses that may have hindered your success in your first-year of university?

h. Could you describe any changes you felt you progressed through your first-year of university and provide examples of these changes?

3. What were the described experiences of first year university students with secondary e-learning experiences as they transitioned into Covid-19 emergency remote learning?

a. Could you describe how you felt you adapted to ERL? Can you give me an example of this experience?

b. Could you describe a situation where you communicated or worked with your peers during ERL?

c. Could you describe a situation where you communicated or worked with your professor during ERL?

d. Could you describe any similar experiences between your secondary e-learning courses and ERL?
e. Could you describe any differences in your experiences between your secondary e-learning courses and ERL?
f. Could you describe any experiences from your secondary e-learning courses that may have helped you in your transition to ERL?
g. Could you describe any experiences from your secondary e-learning courses that may have hindered your success in ERL?
h. Could you describe any changes you felt you progressed through during your time in ERL and provide examples of these changes?

Appendix C: Students' Demographic Survey

1. What is your date of birth?
2. What is your gender identification?
3. Where did you go to high school?

Background Information: Secondary Education

1. Was your high school located in an urban or rural location?
2. What was your preferred area of study?
3. How many online courses have you taken in secondary school?
4. What course level and subjects of online secondary courses have you completed?
5. Did you finish all the secondary e-learning courses that you started?
6. If you did not finish an e-learning course, what was the reason for not completing it?
7. What were your final grades in your online courses?
8. What learning management system did you use in your e-learning courses?
9. How did your secondary grades in your online courses compare to the grades in your traditional face-to-face secondary courses?
10. What was your academic average when you graduated from high school?

Background Information: Postsecondary Education

1. Where are you currently attending college or university?
2. What is your major or area of study?
3. How long will it take you to complete your program of study?
4. Do you live on or off campus?
5. Do you live at home or independently?
6. What learning management system did you use in your e-learning courses?
7. Are you currently receiving an academic scholarship at your postsecondary institution?
8. What are your current academic grades at your postsecondary institution?

9. How do your first-semester college or university grades compare to your high school grades?

Appendix D: Invitation to Participate Letter

Subject: Invitation to participate in a research project on your secondary e- learning, first-year of university, and emergency remote learning transitional experiences.

Hello,
Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in my research project. My name is Bonnie Marlow, and I am a doctoral student in the distance education department at Athabasca University. I am working on a research project under the supervision of Dr. Rory McGreal and Dr. Susan Bainbridge.

I am writing to you today to invite you to participate in a study titled "A Descriptive Phenomenological Study on How Students with Secondary E-Learning Backgrounds Transitioned into Their First Year of University and Emergency Remote". The aim of this study is to understand students' perceptions of their secondary e-learning and first-year postsecondary transitional experiences and any insight into any perceived advantages, barriers, and issues that may have occurred because of these experiences.

This study involves one 60-minute interview that will take place in a mutually convenient, safe location. With your consent, your interview will be audio recorded.

While this project does involve some professional and emotional risks, care will be taken to protect your identity. This will be done by keeping all responses anonymous and allowing you to request that specific responses not be included in the final project.

You will have the right to end your participation in the study at any time, for any reason, up until your personal identifiers are removed from the data. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will be destroyed.

All research data, including audio-recordings and any notes, will be encrypted. Any hard copies of data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. Research data will only be accessible by the researcher and the research supervisor.

The ethics protocol for this project was reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board, which provided clearance to carry out the research.

If you have any ethical concerns with this study, please contact Athabasca Ethics Review

Office: (**Research Ethics Office, rebsec@athabascau.ca, 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718).**

If you would like to participate in this research project or have any questions, please contact me at [redacted]

Sincerely,
Bonnie Marlow

Appendix E: Letter of Information/Informed Consent Form

A Phenomenological Study of the Postsecondary Transitional Experiences of Students with Secondary e-Learning Backgrounds

Date:

Principal Investigator (Researcher):	Supervisor	Supervisor
Bonnie Marlow	Dr. Susan Bainbridge	Dr. Rory McGreal
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]		

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled “A Phenomenological Study of the Postsecondary Transitional Experiences of Students with Secondary e-Learning Backgrounds”. This letter is part of the process of informed consent. The information presented here should give you the basic idea of what this research is about and what your participation in it will involve, should you choose to participate. It also describes your right to withdraw from the project at any time. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research project, you should understand its risks and benefits and what it requires of you to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this letter carefully as it is important that you understand the information given to you. Please contact the principal investigator, Bonnie Marlow, if you have any questions about the research project or would like more information before you consent to participate.

It is entirely up to you whether you wish to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part, or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you now or in the future.

Introduction

My name is Bonnie Marlow, and I am a doctoral student in the distance education program at Athabasca University. This research is a program requirement for the completion of my degree. I am conducting a research project on the impact of secondary e-learning on students' transition to postsecondary education. I am conducting this project under the supervision of Dr. Susan Bainbridge and Dr. Rory McGreal.

Why are you being asked to take part in this research project?

You are being invited to participate in this project because you are a student who has taken at least one secondary e-learning course and are in your first year of postsecondary study at an Ontario college or university. Your perception of your secondary e-learning and first year postsecondary transitional experiences and your insight into any advantages, barriers, and issues that may have occurred as a result of these experiences is the topic of this study.

What is the purpose of this research project?

The purpose of this research is to improve our understanding of secondary e-learning experiences and first-year postsecondary experiences and explore any relationship between them. The project aims to capture what secondary e-learning and their following first-year transitional experiences are like for students, describe those experiences from the students' perspectives, and share the results with secondary and postsecondary students, academics, researchers, and policy- makers. The study aims to give a voice to students with secondary e-learning experiences with the potential of shaping educational policies, online programs, and

transitional support services for students.

What will you be asked to do?

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to take part in one hour interview which will consist of a 50-minute interview and a ten-minute survey. This interview may occur face-to-face, or via phone or Skype. In the first part of the interview, the purpose of the study and the nature of your involvement will be discussed, your questions about research will be answered, and demographic data will be collected. Then you will be asked to describe what your secondary e-learning was like and what your first-year transitional experiences to postsecondary education have been like and if you feel that there is any relationship between them that may have helped shaped your ability to adapt to postsecondary education. The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed, either by the researcher or a transcriptionist and all personal identifiers will be left out. Your interview will be arranged at a time that is convenient for you. If there are any barriers to participation in the research, the researcher will diligently attempt to provide alternative times and formats to ensure your participation.

What are the risks and benefits?

By participating in this study, you may be exposed to a potential risk of experiencing emotional stress by talking about uncomfortable learning experiences. One of the aims of the project is to give students a voice and an opportunity to speak about their learning experiences which provide insights into students' secondary and postsecondary academic successes and issues. However, at any time you do not have to share anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. You are not obligated to answer any questions that you do not want to answer for any reason. The benefits to you are that you will have a chance to share your experiences with the researcher who will describe them and report on them in publications and

presentations. In this way, an opportunity will be created for your voice to be heard, which will contribute to a better understanding of how to best support other secondary e-learners who are transitioning into first-year postsecondary education.

Do you have to take part in this project?

Involvement in this project is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, without any negative consequences. If you decide to withdraw from the research project after completing the interview, the transcription of your interview will be deleted.

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected?

During this study, the researcher will collect, store, and use the data for the purpose for which it was intended. All participants' data will be kept encrypted with a passcode that only the researcher will have access to on a passcode-protected hard drive. Any backup copies will also be password protected, and any hard copies will be kept in a secured file drawer under lock and key. The only other person who will have access to some of this data may be a transcriptionist, hired to transcribe the audio files. If a transcriptionist is used, they will sign a confidentiality agreement and only have access to files stripped of the participants' identifiers wherever possible. All interview notes, and students' transcripts will be stripped of any personal information. The pseudonym that you have chosen will be used as your identifier throughout the research process. Identifying information and the document linking personal information to the data will be encrypted and kept separately in password-protected folders, on a password-protected laptop.

Only the researcher will have access to the participants' identifying information. All information will be held confidential, except if legislation or a professional code of conduct requires that it be reported. After the data is used and the dissertation is finalized all data will be destroyed after

five years according to Athabasca University's (2014) guidelines. This data includes audio or video transcripts and written files. No participants' data will be transferred to another country, educational or business organization, or made public for any other reason. All findings from the report will be published without any individual identifiers and deposited in the Athabasca University library

How will my anonymity be protected?

To protect your anonymity, you will choose a pseudonym that will be used throughout the research process. This pseudonym will replace any of your individual identifiers immediately after your interview. Any of your statements or descriptions quoted verbatim in the interview will be used anonymously any publications. Your university or college's information will also not be specified in the research to aid in protecting your anonymity.

How will the data collected be stored?

In your face-to-face interview, a digital recorder will be used to collect your descriptions. During a telephone or Skype interview screen capturing or a digital recorder will be used to capture the conversation. Your interview will be transcribed and stripped of any identifiers and replaced with your chosen pseudonym. After the data is used and the dissertation is finalized all data will be destroyed after five years according to Athabasca University's (2014) guidelines. This data includes audio or video transcripts and written files. No participants' personal identifiable data will be transferred to another country, educational or business organization, or made public for any other reason. All findings from the report will be published without any individual identifiers and deposited in the Athabasca University library.

Who will receive the results of the research project?

This research will be posted online at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and

Project Room, and the final research paper will be publicly available. As previously noted, none of your personal identifiers or your school's identifiers will be used in this research and included in reports, publications, and presentations that may occur as a result of this research. Open access to these findings will be facilitated through my web press blog, open-access websites, and publications. To facilitate open access to these findings, this research it will be disseminated through my web press blog, conferences and in open access publications. You will be able to access the executive summary, the completed study, and all participant documents on the following website [redacted]

Who can you contact for more information or to indicate your interest in participating in the research project?

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me by email at [redacted] or by phone at [redacted], or either of my supervisors listed above. If you wish to participate in this research, please complete and sign the attached consent form and return it by email to [redacted].

Sincerely,

Bonnie Marlow

Doctoral Student

Athabasca University Centre for Distance Education

This project will be reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this project, please contact the Research Ethics Office.

Research Ethics Office
rebsec@athabascau.ca
1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718.

Athabasca University
RESEARCH CENTRE

Appendix F: Certification of Ethical Approval

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: **23812**

Principal Investigator:
Ms. Bonnie Marlow, Graduate Student
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences\Doctor of Education (EdD) in Distance Education

Supervisor:
Dr. Susan Bainbridge (Supervisor)
Project Title:
A Phenomenological Study of the Postsecondary Transitional Experiences of Secondary e-Learning Students

Effective Date: February 14, 2020 **Expiry Date**: February 13, 2021

Restrictions:

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete *(i.e. all participants contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable))* or the research is terminated.

Approved by: **Date: February 18, 2020**

Michael Lithgow, Chair
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, Departmental Ethics Review Committee

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Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
University Research Services, Research Centre
1 University Drive, Athabasca AB Canada T9S 3A3
E-mail rebsec@athabascau.ca
Telephone: 780.675.6718

Athabasca University
RESEARCH CENTRE

Appendix G: Certification of Ethical Approval – Renewal

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: 23812

Principal Investigator:

Ms. Bonnie Marlow, Graduate Student
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences\Doctor of Education (EdD) in Distance Education

Supervisor:
Dr. Susan Bainbridge (Supervisor)

Project Title:

A Phenomenological Study of the Postsecondary Transitional Experiences of Secondary e-Learning Students

Effective Date: February 14, 2021 **Expiry Date**: February 13, 2022

Restrictions:

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.
A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete *(i.e. all participants contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable))* or the research is terminated.

Approved by: Date: January 06, 2021
Carolyn Greene, Chair
Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

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