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Exploring a Potential Preparedness Gap Between Undergraduate Ministry Programs and Real-Life Ministry in the Southern Baptist Convention

Barton D. Morrison
bdm16c@acu.edu

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

Nannette W. Glenn, Ph.D.

Dr. Nannette Glenn, Dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies

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Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Jackie Halstead, Chair

B.J. McMichael

Dr. B.J. McMichael

Jon D. Schwiethale

Dr. Jon D. Schwiethale

Abilene Christian University

School of Educational Leadership

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by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated, first of all, to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who allowed me the privilege of completing this research. Second, to my parents, Bill and Adelee Morrison, who brought me into this world, loved me, and showed me the importance of education and the sacrifices one makes for the betterment of life for one's family. Third, to my children, Christopher and Hayley, who put up with 3 years of, "I have to go home and write!"

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Abstract

The aim of this multicase study dissertation research was to examine the experiences, perceptions, and feelings of pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention who completed their undergraduate degrees from a Southern Baptist Convention higher education institution. Participants of the study had 3–10 years of full-time church ministry experience in local Southern Baptist Convention affiliated churches and had not yet attended graduate school or seminary. These qualifiers were placed on the selection process to allow the discovery of a possible gap between the pastor's higher education experience and the practical ministry training required for their first local church ministry. Two themes emerged from the undergraduate experiences of participants. First, relationships with university professors and their peers were paramount in terms of mentoring the pastors and having someone to discuss ministry questions. Second, the pastors desired more hands-on experiences in their higher education programs, including experiential learning, real-world ministry experiences, and internships.

Keywords: Pastoral preparedness, ministry, adult learning theory, andragogy, Southern Baptist Higher Education, music pastor, minister, worship leader, mentors, experiential learning

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Chapter 1: Introduction

While ministry is predicated on the concept of God calling the ecclesiastics into vocational, spiritual leadership to serve, it is rare for a pastor to spend their entire ministry leading one church. In the corporate realm, and echoed in the 21st-century American church, a growing number of organizations have come to recognize that they have a responsibility for "supporting [employees] through training and education to help develop new skills for a rapidly changing world" (Business Roundtable, 2019, p. 1). Training and education give ministers tools to engage their congregants and implement the leadership, help, or service their church members need. Wong et al. (2019) stated, "The problem of the disjunction between theory taught in the classroom and professional practice is a matter of concern in a number of professions in which practice and performance are of paramount importance" (p. 417).

The need for bridging the gap between theory and practice has been recognized by industry, and it would be beneficial for the church in America to understand the importance of both theory and practice for training in ministry. Specifically, it would be beneficial for the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) to facilitate a more robustly prepared beginning clergy. With the objective to prepare, it is possible to make a positive difference in the preparedness of ministry students and allow them the opportunity to flourish with a new, as well as proven skill set. To that end, Higgs and Titchen (1995) contended for the suggestion that change needs to occur in the current mindset regarding the belief that learning only happens in academic research and not practical knowledge. Further, they assert that academic research and practical experience and knowledge are equally important to the student's learning experience.

Because of the bias one's experience brings to any given situation, it is important to recognize the bias that I bring to this research. When I began my journey toward becoming a

minister of music, I remember thinking how much I needed to learn, understand, grasp, and experience before my first full-time position. In the decades after those first thoughts, I have experienced numerous ministry dynamics, situations, and leadership opportunities. These real-life scenarios with real people who needed help strengthened my calling to ministry. My calling into ministry has given me 32 years of full-time service and leadership to local churches in the SBC. It is that experience and the desire to help the next generation of pastors that has propelled my interest in this study. It is that same experience that could also lead to potential bias in the research because of my passion for making a difference in pastor's lives and their congregations.

In a study researching students in the creative sector—music, radio, entertainment, communications, marketing, fashion, and so on—Jacobson and Shade (2018) found the majority of participants "engaged in full-time unpaid internships for four months, which is increasingly becoming the norm in the culture of internships in North America as the time period aligns with the college/university semester" (p. 323). In the research by Jacobson and Shade (2018), it is noteworthy that the preparedness gap is something the creative sector has recognized and is now looking for ways to combat.

The phrase *preparedness gap* refers to the difference between what was taught in a student's higher education matriculation and what was needed when they began ministry in the field at a local church. As Wong et al. (2019, p. 416) stated, there can be a disconnect between the issue of how "curriculum construction . . . between theory and practice is conceived and approached" in theological education. This disconnect in knowledge and experience is what new ministers must work through when they begin leadership in full-time ministry. Wong et al. (2019) also suggested that the "problem of the disjunction between theory taught in the

classroom and professional practice is a matter of concern in a number of professions in which practice and performance are of paramount importance" (p. 417).

Since the preparation of ministers, in particular worship ministers, is a function of the creative sector, universities must focus on the increased momentum of experiential learning. Knowles et al. (1998) discussed the importance of understanding the difference between pedagogy and andragogy. *Pedagogy* addresses the way children learn, and *andragogy* addresses the way adults (ages 19–30) learn. Knowles et al. (1998) stated, "Educators have long looked at the college student through pedagogical means instead of allowing the adult learner to have a more appropriate learning experience that would involve them in the learning process itself through experience" (p. 62).

Due to the lack of understanding of the way adults learn and process information, a gap has ensued between academic theory and what truly takes place in a profession, namely, ministry. The preparedness gap in undergraduate theological education is an area that needs to be researched because, as Wong et al. (2019) postulated, "studies show that graduates of theological schools were not fully equipped with the ministry knowledge, skills, and values needed for sustained and flourishing ministry" (p. 415). As stated by Cohall and Cooper (2010):

> The individual pastor is not only a spiritual leader but is also called on to play a complex role, especially in an urban context. Pastors often fail—or can quickly burn out—because of inadequate preparation for leadership and administration within and beyond the parish context. (p. 28)

Cahalan (2011) discussed how students who are majoring in church ministry are "often novices at the study of theology and ministry…some having little religious background…Many come as seekers (of who God is) as well as novices (in terms of ministry experience and

knowledge)" (pp. 344–345). Naidoo (2021) suggested that theological education has lived with constant pressure affecting "the ongoing tensions between theory and practice, education that is not focused on learning, the need for changing competencies and skills that must be mastered, as well as the impact of postmodern society" (pp. 66–67). Having ministry majors who are inexperienced in local SBC church ministry may result in a weak clergy who might not understand how to minister or productively lead their congregations effectively.

New ideas are needed to make a positive impact on pastoral preparedness in the -f-first century. It is possible that preministry majors might not take advantage of their time in college to work in local church leadership to gain valuable first-hand experience. Moreover, HEIs are dealing with their own unique issues: falling enrollment, higher tuition, and a shrinking pool of students from which to draw, among other topics. However, there must be creativity within the curriculum for ministry majors on the part of HEIs because as Thompson (2019) pointed out, "responses to those challenges vary based partly on the ingenuity of the individual administrators and partly on the educational model of each school" (p. 171).

In this multicase study, the goal was to investigate prospective ministers' potential gap between preparation and their first local church ministry experience, including perceived needs regarding ministry preparedness. Using a multicase design helped provide a directed study of a group of people who trained to be ministers through a college curriculum, resulting in a ministerial degree. The research methods allowed the participants to articulate additional knowledge or experience that would have helped them before stepping into full-time ministry, having the potential to help the next generation of ministerial students, faculty, and pastors.

The strength of the local SBC church is dependent upon how prepared the new ministers are—both as pastors and leaders of a local congregation. New pastors' insights that emerged

from the study may boost pastoral success in the local church ministry's ever-changing environment. Such insights include implications of learning about the potential preparedness gap for local church pastors in their higher education experience. The aim of this research was to explore a possible preparedness gap for those preparing for ministry in the SBC. Hopefully, my research will assist local SBC church pastors better understand local church ministry needs as they begin their pastorate.

According to Wong et al. (2019, p. 416), veteran pastors "could or should influence that structure and content of the theological curriculum, such as may help pastoral leaders in training, and ultimately congregations to flourish" in their local church ministries. Du-Babcock (2016) stressed that the need to assimilate knowledge "with [an] internship is critical to the student's preparation for educational and career goal achievement and ultimate employability" (p. 182). According to Wong et al. (2019, p. 416), "There are many benefits for future practitioners who work in some supervised setting." Frenette (2013) contended that these benefits include "an opportunity to gain a credential, learn about the world of work…and be better positioned to seek paid employment" (p. 390).

The SBC does not appear to have a uniform policy or trajectory for ministry. Part of what has set the SBC apart from other denominations was its global insistence upon the idea of independence of the congregation and, ultimately, the individual parishioner. This concept, known as the "priesthood of the believer" (Southern Baptist Convention [SBC], 1963), carries through even to colleges and seminaries in their ministerial training in their independent thinking. Some colleges (Liberty University, University of Mobile, California Baptist University) have internship requirements for their ministerial students, while some colleges have little to no practical experience required in the curriculum.

In a ministry context, Naidoo suggested that “pastoral skills development is important for Baptists, so that a student is not propelled straight from the College into a local church context.” (2020, p. 267). This line of thought comes from the faculty of the Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa (BPTSA). The BPTSA believe their curriculum was “mostly knowledge-based with some practical component. In terms of practical learning, it happens that the time in the classroom is spent talking about ministry, and learning happens artificially” (as cited in Naidoo, 2020, p. 267). To this end, the BTCSA stated:

> BTC has recognized this gap and, since 2018, a new module biblical and church residency was introduced…since Baptist ecclesiology is characterized by covenanting and listening together to find new theological understandings, more attention needs to be paid to how the learning in ministry is brought back to the classroom. This action-reflection cycle was a missed opportunity for integration. This is where the theory-practice breakdown happens; it seems that classroom learning and ministry exposures are separate events. (as cited in Naidoo, 2020, p. 267)

One exception is First Baptist Church in Russellville, Arkansas, which has a program developed by Robert Ramsey, the minister of music. In this program, students at Arkansas Tech University (i.e., a state school with no worship degree) who are interested in becoming worship leaders are allowed to explore the profession with Robert, up to and including a full internship. This program intends to bridge the gap in preparedness between what is taught in a state school music program and a local SBC church's ministry needs. These requirements are addressed through preparedness activities that take women and men called to ministry and place them in situations to garner real-world ministry and leadership skills. These real-life exercises allow them the opportunity to learn and then thrive in local church ministry. In this case study, I

explored the circumstances that facilitate new pastors in their ministry and leadership skill development with the intent of generating better-prepared ministers for their local church pastoral duties.

Statement of the Problem

Students who are called to ministry and start their vocational journey into the professional clergy after their formal undergraduate education need to learn the nuances of local church leadership (Houts & Sawyer, 2012). In general, the educational training students receive seems to be "inadequate in preparing leaders for the challenges and opportunities they will face in their particular ministry settings" (Houts & Sawyer, 2012, p. 66). Ministry majors, who are potential clergy, do not appear to be completing their education "fully trained for the future" (Lincoln, 2014, p. 118). In addition, Wong et al. (2019) stated, "Instead of seeing the theological curriculum in a holistic and unifying way, theological education has fragmented into various sub-disciplines resulting in training clergy who do not know how to connect with congregational practice and life" (p. 421).

Baptist HEIs (a focus of this research) seem to demonstrate "a varied picture, not only because of these major shifts in the world of Baptist higher education, which must be understood within the big picture of higher education in general in North America, but also due to the different Baptist tradition that influenced aspects of Baptist higher education" (Dockery, 2020, p. 18). Additionally, Dockery (2020) stated that Baptists

> Must keep our eyes on cultural and global trends since our work never takes place in a vacuum, and this observation does not begin to address the changes in higher education itself in terms of focus, funding, philosophy, methodology, and delivery systems, much less the changes that will be forthcoming in our post-COVID context. (pp. 22–23)

Using adult learning theory (ALT; andragogy) as a framework for this research study, I examined how ministers are trained and the potential benefit of including an experiential component in the curriculum. Ministry students preparing for local church ministry positions (e.g., student, children, worship, preschool, senior adult, senior pastor, and all other options of ministry) seem to lack a cumulative experience where the combination of educational theories and practical ministerial experience and expertise combine "through immersion in the complex and integrating moments of professional practice" (Campbell-Reed & Scharen, 2011, p. 328).

Among collegiate ministry majors, there is "some discrepancy between practitioners' perceptions and degree program content" (Crosby, 2015, p. 41). This difference may point to a potential preparedness gap experienced by ministry majors when they get out into their first real-world experience of being a pastor. To help offset this preparedness gap, van den Bogaart et al. (2017) suggested that institutions of higher education "could support (student's) development by organizing personalized learning experiences" (p. 288). Wong et al. (2019) found that ministry leaders have expressed that "a dissonance exists between what happens in the theological curriculum, in terms of teaching and learning, and what actually happens in ministerial practice and the disposition that needs to be taken to develop missiological and organizational skills for life-long learning" (p. 427).

This multicase study builds on the previous research conducted by Cohall and Cooper (2010), Naidoo (2020), Wong et al. (2019), and others to explore a possible disconnect between educational theories and practical ministerial experience. In this study, I explored the presence of a possible preparedness gap in Southern Baptist ministry majors who eventually become leaders in local church ministries. The opportunity existed for those with a voice to speak into the

process of educating the clergy or helping to alleviate the preparedness gap. According to Wong et al. (2019), denominational and pastoral leaders feel:

> A dissonance exists between what happens in the theological curriculum, in terms of teaching and learning, and what actually happens in ministerial practice and the disposition that needs to be taken to develop missiological and organizational skills for life-long learning. (p. 427)

In an era when ministry rarely has a typical day, Cohall and Cooper (2010) stated, "Formal schooling and practical preparation for nontraditional leadership roles of clergy in seminaries have not kept up with the changing roles of parish ministers" (p. 28). Researching this problem of practice in a documented multicase study could help future ministers succeed in their chosen profession, directly impacting the local church in a positive direction.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multicase study was to discover if pastors with 3–7 years of full-time local church ministry leadership experience in an SBC-affiliated church describe a gap between their HEI experience and the practical training needed for their first local church ministry experience. According to the research of Wong et al. (2019), "There is no one right way to do theological education" (p. 428). Yet, "how might the theological curriculum be revised so that...students would be better prepared for the realities of professional pastoral practice?" (Wong et al., 2019, p. 428). What is the difference between what was taught in an academic setting and what was required in a local church? Previous research by Cohall and Cooper (2010) determined that "the majority of American Baptist pastors view their seminary training as inadequate in meeting the administrative needs of the church" (p. 50). While this study was exclusive to the American Baptist denomination, a parallel can be drawn to other trained pastors

in the United States, including pastors in the SBC. This potential preparedness gap in ministerial training is the focus of my research. To that end, Foster et al. (2006) stated, “Considering that theological graduates will navigate multilayered issues in changing ministry settings that routinely require integrative thinking and approaches, a more aligned approach to education is needed since it links ‘religious tradition with clergy practice’” (p. 340) supporting “overall professional development” (Naidoo, 2021, p. 68).

This multicase study sought to discover the perceptions of the eight pastors who were the research participants in this case study. Of interest was the central question of how the ministry preparedness content delivered, discussed, and applied to the 21st-century local church minister's practical needs? This focus was the cornerstone of this study, including how the pastors adjusted to local church ministry demands in 21st-century society.

Research Questions

The primary research questions of this multicase study were:

RQ1: How do pastors with 3–10 years of full-time local SBC church ministry experience describe their preparation and experience?

RQ2: Does experiential learning benefit ministers in their preparation for ministry?

Definitions of Key Terms

Adult learning theory (ALT). Several different theories inform the mechanism of how adults process information and learn. These theories can be helpful to teachers and researchers who desire to become more attentive to the learning needs of those out of high school. In 2022, Allen et al. (2022) postulated that ALT demonstrates the importance of using multiple learning techniques to engage the adult learner to meet their needs and expectations.

Andragogy. Malcolm Knowles' ideas about ALT were based on the characteristics that distinguish the mature adult from the pre-adult learner. Specifically, Knowles (1984) called his theory *andragogy*. It is a theory of adult learning meaning "the art & science of helping *adults* learn." (p. 276). While the more common term, *pedagogy*, is the art and science of helping *children* learn. Additionally, in 2006, Marques stated that andragogy contributes to a sharpening of focus when determining elements for a thriving learning environment for adults ages 19–30 (Marques, 2006, p. 39).

Experiential learning. The practice of experiential learning includes "study abroad, undergraduate research, internships, service, and leadership experiences" (Coker et al., 2017, p. 6). In the early 20th century, John Henry Charles Fritz wrote that a new pastor "had no practical missionary experience, and he often fails to see and to use the very opportunities which present themselves unto him to learn by practical experience what he later so much needs" (Hartung, 2014, p. 38). Hartung (2014) went on to say that

> Learning comes by doing, not just by talking about doing. An active experience that pushes the comfort zone is not only important but necessary. But it is not just having the ministerial experience that is necessary; it is also a reflection on that experience, most effectively within a community or peer context. (p. 44)

Higher education curriculum. The design of a course of study in a college or university "as a vehicle to establish a knowledge base and then promote lifelong learning in the content" (Conway, 2020, p. 17). The higher education curriculum for any course of study is approached by carefully considering materials to understand a discipline further. Thus, the course plan and schedule are sequential, starting with general knowledge and more in-depth study within the degree plan.

Internship. “Internships provide opportunities for students to apply classroom concepts to real-world issues…allowing them to turn their classroom knowledge into applied skills and experiences” (Barbarash, 2016, p. 21). A pastoral ministry internship would be similar to a student teaching experience for professional teacher education or a business internship for a finance major. The ministry student would work with a full-time pastor in the student’s field of study to learn practical aspects of a full-time local church minister's day-to-day tasks.

Mentor. A person who has experience in a given field and is willing to share their insights with a new member of the workforce to help bridge their entrance into the workforce. For the purpose of this research, “A mentor is a person who contributes with her/his knowledge, experience, and perspectives; the basic idea is that the mentor gives the mentee guidance in their personal and professional development” (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017, p. 203). A Biblical example of mentorship would be a Paul and Timothy relationship, mentor and mentee, between a new minister and a more seasoned minister. Their affiliation started in Acts 16:1–2 and was further confirmed in 1 Timothy 1:2, where Paul calls Timothy “my true son in the faith” (New International Version [NIV] Bible, 1984). In this teaching time, the new minister can ask questions about the practical needs of local church ministry. Also, in most circumstances, the more seasoned minister would shepherd the new minister and allow the new minister to shadow through the seasoned minister's daily experiences.

Minister. An individual employed as a full-time member of the clergy in a local church, ministering (working) in a congregation where they are actively involved with the congregants in leading multifaceted situations on a daily basis. This pastor could be assigned to any specific ministry field (i.e., pastoral care, music ministry, youth ministry, teaching pastor, senior pastor, children’s pastor, discipleship pastor, or family ministries pastor). Pastors, clergy, and ministers

> Play an important role in society by assisting those experiencing difficulty or tragedy and in the growth of the church as an organization by equipping its members for the work of ministry in order to edify the body of Christ unto maturity. (Joynt, 2019, p. 111)

Preparedness gap. The gap between what a ministry student learns in their undergraduate education and the abilities they need to be proactive and successful in local church ministry. Inclusive of these ideas, Houts and Sawyer (2012) stated, "The information imparted within formalized theological education can never be enough to get the leader through the first call" (p. 68).

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). A group of 47,456 cooperating churches that are self-governing and independent (Fast Facts, 2019). The SBC is "the largest evangelical protestant group in the United States" (Fahmy, 2019). The SBC is not governed by central leadership but rather by sovereign and autonomous congregations that network together mainly for missions, evangelism projects, and human needs headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee.

Summary

The SBC is experiencing a shortfall in the number of women and men entering ministry leadership training of all types. There is an urgency for HEIs to apportion more resources to target real-world problems faced by pastors in the local congregation. Ministry training with an exploration of a possible preparedness gap and lack of experiential learning with practical application relating to new Southern Baptist pastors is where this research is focused. This multicase study was built partially on the research of Wong, Professor of Practical Theology and Associate Director of the Flourishing Congregations Institute of the School of Education at Ambrose University in Alberta, Canada. In his research, Dr. Wong found

> A fundamental goal of professional education is for students to put together theory and practice, to broaden their range of professional methods, to become ethical in their practices, and to develop a knowledge base—all of which will enable them to become well-rounded practitioners. (Wong et al., 2019, p. 8)

Exploring the precedence, involvement, and participation of the subjects' experiences and recollections of their higher education journey was the hub of this study aimed to chronicle and describe the preparedness gap that exists between ministerial education and new pastors' first local church experience. In this study, I aimed to research the components affecting ministerial preparedness for pastors with 3–7 years of full-time ministerial experience in a local Southern Baptist Church.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to demonstrate how research and scholarship have informed the questions I sought to answer in this study:

1. How do pastors with 3–10 years of full-time local SBC church ministry experience describe their preparation and experience?
2. Would some type of experiential learning have benefited you in your preparation for ministry? Why or why not?

While the far-reaching goal of ministry leadership preparation is to better prepare graduates with ministry concentrations for the work in the local church setting, many levels of exploration must be mined through careful research to understand the phenomenon of ministry preparedness better. In many religious higher education schools, the way pastors were trained in 2022 is similar to that of 1982. Much has changed, including technology, culture, and the speed of information traveling from the source to individuals literally across the globe. With the advent of these changes, the training and instruction of new pastors should be facilitated in ways that reflect these developments. What is being cultivated within ministry curriculums at SBC colleges and universities to prepare graduates for full-time ministry in a local SBC church? The research covering this area of ministry is thin and infrequent, and "The complexities of knowledge and practices from the 'field' have had little or no effect on the construction of the theological curriculum, on faculty pedagogy, or on the spiritual formation of theological students" (Wong et al., 2019, p. 416).

Literature Search Methods

The measures by which this review of the literature was shaped included books and articles, which have been part of my full-time ministry for more than 30 years. However, the vast

majority of relevant research, including peer-reviewed articles, books, and previously completed dissertations, has come from discovery through online scholarly empirical data gathered through the Abilene Christian University Brown Library distance learning portal, which allowed me to access the EBSCO database using keywords and phrases and helped me to form the most complete and pertinent literature review regarding ministerial preparedness in the SBC.

Keywords and phrases used in this research included but were not limited to: *preparedness of ministers (e.g., pedagogy, curriculum, etc.) in higher education/seminaries*; *internships religious*; *a history of preparing ministers*; *pastor's pedagogy*; *pastor's preparedness*, *prepare pastors*; *train, curriculum, ministers field experience*; *experiential learning, internships, and service-learning education, college, seminary, higher education*; *minister preparedness*; *local church ministry preparedness, preparation for local church pastoring*; *career preparedness*; *pastoral care preparedness*; *teaching new ideas, host organization benefits*; *mentorship*; *work preparedness*; *andragogy, adult learning, leadership,* and *ministry training*.

This applied research study was initiated "to improve the quality of practice of a particular discipline" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 3), launching the area of minister preparedness into a more prominent role. This review of the literature begins with the conceptual framework on which the study was based. The next section includes articles and books pertaining to mentorship and internships. The ensuing divisions look at teaching new ideas and pastoral care benefits.

Conceptual Framework

In this research study, I used a conceptual framework to demonstrate the validity of the study by establishing "the study in the relevant knowledge base(s) that lay the foundation for the

importance of the problem statement and the research questions" (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009, p. 126). These ideas are observable and critical to the legitimacy and effectiveness of my research.

ALT is the main theoretical framework used as a foundation for my research. ALT is a subset of developmental psychology. Malcolm Knowles, an education researcher and university professor, postulated a theory published in 1968 about adult learning entailing "andragogy—a new approach to teaching and learning for adult education with a focus on the learner" (as cited in Bocianu & Radler, 2018, p. 58).

In his research, Knowles based his theory on five main qualities that differentiate adult learners from other learners: "(a) self-directedness, (b) accumulated reservoir of experience that becomes a resource for learning, (c) readiness to learn and growing orientation to the developmental tasks of the learner's social roles, (d) application of knowledge that is increasingly tied to application and problem centeredness (pp. 44–45), (e) internal motivation to learn, and (f) the need to know why something should be learned (Knowles, 1984, p. 12)" (as cited in Clapper, 2010, e7–e8). The theory provides a sharpening of focus when determining elements for a thriving environment for adults ages 19–30 to learn (Marques, 2006, p. 39). ALT includes the use of "concrete experiences, continuously available supervision and advising, encouragement of adults to take on new and complex roles, and the use of support and feedback when implementing new techniques" (Trotter, 2006, p. 12).

Knowles hypothesized that there are distinct differences in how adults learn in contrast to how a child learns. The reality is "semantically a contradiction, this phrase (pedagogy of adult education) is descriptive of an unfortunate reality. For the fact is that most adult teaching has consisted of teaching adults as if they were children" (Knowles, 1968, p. 351).

As a pioneer in adult learning, many scholars used Knowles' research to build a stronger case for a teaching system for adults, including Sharan B. Merriam. According to Merriam (2017), Knowles postulated at least six beliefs or expectations about how adults learn:

1. As a person matures, his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being.
2. An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning.
3. The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role.
4. There is a change in time perspective as people mature—from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus, an adult is more problem-centered than subject–centered in learning (Knowles, 1980, pp. 44–45).
5. Adults are primarily driven by internal motivation, rather than external motivators.
6. Adults need to know the reason for learning something (Knowles, 1984, as cited in Merriam, 2017, p. 23).

As applied to this multicase study, ALT notes the importance of using multiple learning techniques to engage the adult learner to meet their needs and expectations (Allen et al., 2022). An overarching issue in the 21st-century workplace is new technology and ways to deploy technology in the workplace. One way this directly affects SBC churches is that "new perspectives are needed to address emerging workplace need and to promote the development of more beneficial human workforce development/deployment strategies for current and future workers" (Ackerman & Kanfer, 2020, p. 486). ALT and the determinants helped reveal the preparedness needs of new ministers in a robust and scholarly way. Trotter (2006) supported the

foundation laid by Knowles with five suppositions that need to be considered when researching adult learners. The three that pertain most directly to this study were: “adults were motivated to learn as they experienced needs and interests…experience was the main resource for adult learning… adults had a need to be self-directed in their learning” (Trotter, 2006, p. 11).

Additionally, workers at the beginning of their professional career “confirmed experiencing stress and anxiety regarding academic performance and increased insecurity when assigned to field training” (Orkibi, 2014, pp. 514–515). The goal of using ALT is to frame ministry preparedness in a specific approach so that ministry preparedness can be studied to refine procedures and practices. According to Ackerman and Kanfer (2020):

> Research is needed to systematically evaluate the impact of different informal, formal, and mixed adult learning methods currently in use (e.g., mentoring, experience-based [on-the-job] training, online training, group simulator training, etc.) on the development and use of new job-related knowledge and skills…(additionally) some traits (e.g., openness to experience, artistic and investigative interests) are positively associated with new learning. (p. 489)

When assessing these concepts through the lens of ALT, it is essential to factor into the analysis “knowledge and skills that take a long time and maybe difficult to acquire but are maintained well into middle-age and beyond” (Ackerman & Kanfer, 2020, p. 491.) need to be cultivated at the beginning of one’s professional ministry journey. With this in mind, students would learn by attaining knowledge, but should also learn by being given opportunities to test their knowledge in practical ways (Sissellman-Borgia & Torino, 2017, p. 4). The body of this research had the overarching goal of helping to explore the potential use of a process on how to

make higher education ministry graduates more productive and prepared for the rigors of leadership in local church ministry.

In general, the goal of applied research was to get the results "used by administrators and policymakers to improve the way things are done" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 4). In this case, research also applies to institutions of higher learning administrators, local senior pastors, other ministers, and any leader who affects change in the process of teaching, learning, evaluation, and implementation of new skill sets, resulting in better-prepared ministers for the local church.

Literature Review

In this research, I explored the data related to pastoral preparedness, the need in the local church, and how those in leadership positions, ministers, HEI professors, and local church mentors can make a legitimate difference in ministerial preparedness of college ministry degree graduates.

Mentorships/Internships

There are internship opportunities across the academic spectrum where experiential learning has been a valued asset. The use of internships is suggested as addressing the experiential component based on the research of Barbarash (2016) who stated, "Internships provide opportunities for students to apply classroom consents to real-world issues and 'complete' the learning process, allowing them to turn their classroom knowledge into applied skills and experiences" (p. 21). One realm of experiential learning or practical education training where there has been success is in the area of clinical therapy.

Hooper (1997) believed "clinical reasoning courses may begin to help students and therapists to better understand their own working view of the world and how it affects their treatment approach" (p. 336). This would bring the idea of the therapist's experience and

coursework together for the betterment of the patient and the therapist. Experiential learning, internships, and service-learning are terms that can be interchanged when investigating the effects of these opportunities on collegiate students, specifically ministerial students. Hefferman suggested that experiential learning contributes to the success of students being able to step into their first professional position with the confidence of book knowledge and experiences that have shaped them and given them a community with others in their chosen field of study before their first job (Heffernan, 2017).

Alcartado et al. (2017) found that connections with real-world practitioners allow the student to experience the scope of at least one real-world situation and become "a potential powerful force in undergraduate education, attempting to connect academic study with community service through structured reflection, which ultimately makes learning deeper, longer lasting, and more portable or meaningful to new situations and circumstances" (p. 32). It appears that students who are looking for their first full-time church ministry in the SBC need to rely upon more than theory and knowledge gleaned from college or seminary coursework, considering "the information imparted within formalized theological education can never be enough to get the leader through their first call" (Houts & Sawyer, 2012, p. 68).

Johnson and Baker (2018) suggested that internships provide real-world experiences for students in their field and also "promote problem-solving experiences, reinforcing relationships, and functioning as a predictor of personal development" (p. 42). Internships have the potential of changing a person's career and how they function in that career.

Wan et al. (2013) analyzed the relationship between a student's higher education learning (i.e., college coursework) and workplace learning (i.e., internship) in the hospitality and tourism sector and found that participating in a collegiate intern program brings about personal growth

and broadens the student's capacities and capabilities. Additionally, this same study found that being part of an internship program helped magnify positive traits and show the student a broader scope of the industry's possibilities. When a mentorship of someone already working in the sector was added, the student's job satisfaction and clarity of work requirements excelled (Wan et al., 2013).

In a study previously referenced in this chapter, "the majority of pastors surveyed felt that mentoring enhanced their pastoral leadership skills" (Cohall & Cooper, 2010, p. 51), including the thought that a mentoring opportunity would complement and reinforce their ministry preparation. When discovering the differences in how humans experience learning throughout life, Malcolm "Knowles came to believe there was a continuum ranging from teacher-directed pedagogy on the one end, to student-directed learning (andragogy) on the other end, and both approaches are appropriate with adults and children depending on the situation" (as cited in Merriam, 2017, p. 24). However, it is essential that as adults, we do not depend solely on either style but recognize the ideal of different learning situations requiring different pedagogy for the betterment of the student and, ultimately, the student's success.

When looking at the Israeli educational system, new teachers paired with seasoned mentors were clearly shown to benefit the mentees and, ultimately, the students they instructed (Shapira-Lishchinsky & Levy-Gazenfrantz, 2016). Applying the internship model to Christian studies curriculum has been shown to have benefits where the skill development was tested (Wong et al., 2019, p. 423). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the knowledge and experience needed for daily ministry and the skill set required need to be deepened further (Wong et al., 2019). Heflin (2011) believed that field experience, or internship, is a necessity since an internship with a local congregation makes practical what the classroom has taught in

theory. Additionally, Keehn (2015) believed the immersive style of internship, representing a nearly full-time internship with a church, has given participants a higher feeling of "self-reported… preparedness" (p. 73) for ministry, as well as simulating a more realistic experience of local church ministry. This type of experiential formation suggests "that initiatives to strengthen continuous learning must take account of both trainee attributes and the training/performance context" (Ackerman & Kanfer, 2020, p. 494) and are enhanced through the lens of ALT.

Teaching New Ideas

One possible aspect of ministry training's current deficit is how one teaches leadership as a quantifiable subject without an experiential component to the curriculum. One way to accomplish the goal of leadership training would be to use a curriculum that uses teaching strategies and interactive workshops to disseminate the concepts of leadership to the students. Hafford-Letchfield and Harper (2014) suggested that through leadership teaching, those who participated were challenged with "how to prepare professionals for leadership roles in a way that engages with learning that may have a direct impact on everyday professional practice" (p. 220). In a Norwegian study of religious educators, Johannessen (2015) discovered that "the process of sharing experiential, situated, and personal knowledge… (the student) was able to grasp and verbalize the value dimension in her experience both on a personal level and on a professional level" (p. 337). The reality of doing the work through experiential learning, in this case, religious education, broadened and enhanced the subject's understanding and execution of the role they need to play, including their leadership skills and confidence.

Additionally, it has been shown that "based on previous and current findings, the question 'Can leadership be learned or can it be taught?'… some scholars concur that leadership

can be taught…continuing professional education is seen as a means of developing professional expertise" (Germain, 2012, p. 38). Continuing in a similar vein of new ideas for course work would help students discover who they want to be, their struggles, their vocational research, analysis, and service to others (Sullivan, 2014). These ideas and many other 21st-century needs are focus points for curriculum striving to meet the needs of newly minted SBC ministers and the churches they will be pastoring.

Pastoral Care Preparedness

Exposure to internships, on-the-job training, or real-time learning also helps guide the new pastor by having a wealth of experiences to draw upon when encountering everyday ministry situations. In our striving as churches, denominations, and HEIs to construct the most straightforward pathway for new-to-ministry pastors to be successful,

> A fundamental goal of professional education is for students to put together theory and practice, to broaden their range of professional methods, to become ethical in their practices, and to develop a knowledge base—all of which will enable them to become well-rounded practitioners. (Wong, 2016, p. 8)

Learning to understand a ministry situation and then responding to it is an essential pastoral care skill. This understanding demonstrates how "transformative learning develops autonomous thinking" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). A reason why ministry situational understanding is critical to pastors in the local church is that "when circumstances permit, transformative learners move toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5) all necessary physiognomies of a pastor capable of dealing with real-world problems in a local church congregation. To further demonstrate this

interpretation, Mezirow and Taylor (2009) characterized the development of the adult learning process:

> We make meaning of our experience through acquired frames of reference-sets of orienting assumptions and expectations with cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions that shape, delimit, and sometimes distort our understanding. We transform our frames of reference by becoming critically reflective of our assumptions to make them more dependable when the beliefs and understandings they generate make them problematic. (p. 30)

Experience is vital in our growth as human beings but also as practitioners in our chosen professions. In this gap exploration, specifically ministerial preparation, we will look at what experiences help pastors become better prepared for the rigors of ministry life in a full-time position with a local congregation.

When exploring pastoral care preparedness, especially as an adult learner, it is crucial to keep in focus that "adults may developmentally acquire the capabilities to become critically self-reflective and exercise reflective judgment, the task of adult education is to help the learner realize these capabilities by developing these skills, insights, and dispositions essential for their practice" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 62). This ministry skill set is especially relevant for local church pastors serving in their first positions, sometimes without the availability of other staff members to ask about how to do a task, be a sounding board, or how to best remedy a problematic situation. Laurent A. Daloz's perspective on mentorship (as cited in Marmon, 2013, p. 428) is that "adults need an objective and invested person to walk with ahead of, and behind them."

Having a mentor whom the new minister already has a relationship with through a quality internship would offer a place to ask questions of a seasoned minister and would be a welcome

addition to the training before full-time ministry, such as an internship with a mentor who could lead and guide the prospective pastor through strenuous, unusual, or even common experiences that the new pastor may have never experienced previously. In this way, "if adults bring their experience and dilemmas into a social context of authenticity and mutual respect, then critical reflection, corporate discourse, and holistic change often unfold" (Marmon, 2013, p. 425). When dissecting this idea through the lens of ministry, new pastors need to bring their experiences and questions to a place where those practices and issues can be examined, explored, and diagnosed to arbitrate what could have been done differently or better, then determine what adjustments are needed to minister to the local congregants in a more meaningful way with better results when the next opportunity arises.

The student's success is measured through the academic curriculum. The program of study for prospective ministers is based on a thorough regiment of coursework, including theology, general studies, and electives, but a study in congregational care is not as typical. The Commission on Accrediting of The Association of Theological Schools (2020, p. 5) stated:

> The Master of Divinity degree is broadly and deeply attentive to the intellectual, human, spiritual, and vocational dimensions of student learning and formation in ways consistent with the school's mission and theological commitments. The degree has clearly articulated learning outcomes that address each of the following four areas, though the school may use different terms for these areas: (a) religious heritage, including an understanding of scripture, the theological traditions, and history of the school's faith community, and the broader heritage of other relevant religious traditions; (b) cultural context, including attention to cultural and social issues, to global awareness and engagement, and to the multifaith and multicultural nature of the societies in which

students may serve; (c) personal and spiritual formation, including development in personal faith, professional ethics, emotional maturity, moral integrity, and spirituality; and (d) religious and public leadership, including cultivating capacities for leading in ecclesial or denominational and public contexts and reflecting on leadership practices.

However, for many first time SBC ministers, they are waiting to receive seminary education until later in their ministry or not at all. This reality makes the undergraduate educational experience even more important in the process to bridge the preparedness gap between education and first ministry position because "the learning that is provide in these academic setting is, by definition, inadequate in preparing leaders for the challenges and opportunities that they will face in their particular ministry settings" (Houts & Sawyer, 2012, p. 66).

For senior pastors leading in SBC churches, a standard degree for ministry in a pastoral role is the Master of Divinity or a similar degree from an accredited seminary. For other ministry areas, there are various degree options including, but not limited to: (a) music, Master of Music, Master of Worship Studies; (b) youth/children/education, Master of Arts in Christian Education, Master of Theology; and (c) pastoral care, Master of Arts in Biblical counseling. The degree level and preparation is distinctive for each ministry role.

When looking at congregational care skills, the ministry curriculum in a university or seminary may not have courses that specifically address congregational care. With this in mind, West stated that congregational care should be addressed through practical, experiential learning under the guidance of an experienced pastor (West, 2016, p. 228). In days gone by, "the practice of pairing an inexperienced pastor with an experienced pastor for pastoral formation" (Hall, 2017, p. 43) was the norm; today, there is the mindset of sink or swim (Hall, 2017, p. 43), which is pervasive with new ministers. This way of thinking and operating must be changed for local

churches and new ministers. To that end, “if we care about the presence of faith in the world, the work of theological education must continue to include attention to the formation and leadership” (Ammerman, 2014, p. 32). There must be a better construct to equip new pastors, keeping them engaged in ministry for the foreseeable future.

Summary

When exploring ministerial preparedness in recent ministry graduates of institutions of higher learning, there is “a potential powerful force in undergraduate education, attempting to connect academic study with community service through structured reflection which ultimately makes learning deeper, longer lasting, and more portable or meaningful to new situations and circumstances” (Alcartado et al., 2017, p. 32). This powerful force blends theoretical learning with practical, experiential learning for the broadening of skills of the recent graduate and the benefit to the local congregation they are serving and leading. Using the principles of ALT as a framework for teaching and training individuals who are called to ministry gives hope that our ministers will be fully equipped to minister to churches.

When paired with internships, experiential learning is a potentially powerful force in church ministerial life. It is not possible for a new minister to know everything before working in the local church because “the information imparted within formalized theological education can never be enough to get the leader through their first call” (Houts & Sawyer, 2012, p. 68) no matter how excellent the theological training. No matter how reasonable it is within the realms of higher education, this deficiency suggests the need for practical experience. The practical learning that occurs when participating in an internship under a seasoned mentor's tutelage is a valuable part of the training process.

The practice of teaching current, contemporary ideas is not new. Hafford-Letchfield and Harper (2014) showed through teaching leadership in an academic setting, participants who were confronted with the idea of how to develop industry specialists for leadership roles adequately were successful and had immediate positive repercussions on the way things were accomplished in their respective areas of commerce. This promising research suggests the need to carry out this type of study in the significantly underresearched area of ministerial preparedness.

The gains in ministerial skill will transfer to positive gains in ministerial preparedness. While research and examination are an essential part of how education is imparted, there is the possibility of improving the training of the next generation of ministers with this study. Internships will benefit the individual pastor and the local church and its ability to reach the community effectively and positively. This literature review's driving force was to better understand the needs of recent graduates of ministry degrees and set them up for success in their first local church leadership position. In this study, I sought to discover what is being cultivated within ministry curriculums at SBC colleges and universities to bring graduates to a place of higher ability and confidence for the job of full-time ministry in a local SBC Church.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative, nonexperimental multicase study was designed to explore the first-hand accounts of pastors to document a possible gap between their preparation in an HEI and their experience once they started a full-time local church ministry. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) illustrated six categories of qualitative research methods customarily designated for research in the applied social sciences, including education: (a) basic qualitative research, (b) phenomenology, (c) ethnography, (d) grounded theory, (e) narrative inquiry, and (f) qualitative case studies.

The qualitative case study was the best fit for this research because of its search for answers and understanding of a combination of people's perceptions, ideas, events that brought them to those experiences, and the meaning behind them. A qualitative study was relevant for this research because a case study is generally undertaken to discover answers to the questions of who, what, and why (Yin, 2018). Additionally, a case study helps provide a directed study of a group of people who have been trained to be pastors of all kinds through a college curriculum, resulting in a ministerial degree.

Research Design and Methodology

This research study was a qualitative multicase study, which was "an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a unit, which is aimed to generalize over several units" (Gustafsson, 2017, p. 2). The focus of the research was on 8 pastor leaders. With this group, the case may be established and then possibly replicated, centering on the phenomena of pastoral preparedness. Whereas a case study looks at one individual, a multiple case study approach will include more than one person and allow for wider discovery and replication while investigating the same phenomena. Multiple case studies are "often considered more compelling, and the

overall multiple-case study is therefore regarded as being more robust" (Yin, 2018, p. 54). Additionally, "multiple case studies allow a wider discovering of theoretical evolution and research questions" (Gustafsson, 2017, p. 9).

This qualitative multicase study was defined by bounding the case (Yin, 2018). Bounding the case involved a process where I described and recounted circumstances and details that occurred in the ministry experiences of those pastors interviewed for this multicase study. This research process was formulated to better "understand an event that occurred to a particular person or group at a particular point in time" (Terrell, 2015, p. 158).

The group I studied was comprised of eight local church pastors with varied specializations (e.g., children's minister, senior pastor, worship pastor, youth minister, etc.) who were serving churches affiliated with the SBC at the time of the study. This group of pastors possessed 3–10 years of full-time ministry experience, giving "specific time boundaries to define the estimated beginning and ending of the case" (Yin, 2018, p. 31). The bounded group of pastors graduated with an undergraduate ministry degree before beginning full-time employment as a minister of some kind.

The organization being studied will be churches in the SBC. The event is the possible gap between what skills, facts, and theories the participants were taught in their higher education experience juxtaposed with what skills were required in the new pastor's local church experience. The participants evaluated these events during interviews by answering open questions about their first 3–10 years of local church ministry.

The purpose of this research was to enable ministry higher education faculty to better prepare their students for the realities of service in the local church. Because of the uniqueness of this focal point, the evidence was particularly well-suited to a multicase study "of the

particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. xi).

This multicase study centered on the issues associated with new minister preparedness, including institutions of higher education preparation through the ministry curriculum and experiential learning involvement to discover ways to combat the possible lack of real-world ministry skills new ministers need for a thriving local church ministry as stated in previous chapters. The momentum of this study was driven by the research questions that explored the potential gap in preparedness induced by the curriculum taught in the interviewee's institution of higher education. The research questions were:

RQ1: How do pastors with 3–10 years of full-time local SBC church ministry experience describe their preparation and experience?

RQ2: RQ2: Does experiential learning benefit ministers in their preparation for ministry? In this study, I examined the respondents' ministry preparation, the skills needed to accomplish local church ministry positively, and the ministry profession determining what is helping new local church ministers, what needs to change to make them more viable immediately, and what, if anything, can be tied to a gap in preparedness. The possible deficit in ministry preparedness is a real issue in the university curriculum and for the evangelical pastor. Cohall and Cooper (2010) explained:

> Formal schooling and practical preparation for nontraditional leadership roles of clergy in seminaries have not kept up with changing roles of parish ministers. Today, the individual pastor is not only a spiritual leader, but is also called on to play a complex role, especially in an urban context. Pastors often fail—or can quickly burn out—because

> of inadequate preparation for leadership and administration within and beyond the parish context. (p. 28)

This perception provided further justification of the need for a multicase study within the SBC and beyond, so prospective ministers have a more robust knowledge of what is required in the ever-changing world of local church ministry.

Population

The population for this study consisted of pastors who serve in local congregations affiliated with the SBC. The SBC consists of 47,456 cooperating churches with a total membership of 14,813,234 people (Fahmy, 2019), making the organization the largest U.S. Protestant denomination. The SBC statistically represents approximately 5.3% of the U.S. adult population (Fahmy, 2019). SBC churches are typically affiliated as a loosely joined fellowship of congregations which partner together but do not have centralized leadership with rule coming from a hierarchy to the local church body. Each congregation is autonomous and makes its own decisions based on how that local church chooses to respond to each variable and situation. The organizational structure of the SBC generally has local churches joining together to form an association, working together to minister locally; there are 1,126 cooperating local associations (Fast Facts, 2019).

An example of the mission of an SBC association is found on the Union Baptist Association (Houston, Texas) website, which describes it as: “an association of nearly 300 active congregations supporting the work of the association and sharing the burden of ministry and collaborate for the purposes of missions, evangelism, leadership development, church planting & discipleship” (UBA, 2019). Local SBC churches typically work together but are not bound by decisions made at the association, state, or national level. Those same churches affiliate to form

one of the 41 state conventions. Some state SBC entities (e.g., Kansas–Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists, Utah–Idaho SBC) have combined to share resources and leadership (SBC, 2019). This anomaly is the reason why there are only 41 state conventions.

In this study, participants were pastors (in any ministry area of an SBC church) who had 3–10 years of full-time ministry experience in a local SBC congregation. The basis for my choice of the number of years in service was due to an increase in years of tenure for pastors in the SBC over the last 2 decades. The median tenure for SBC pastors in 1996 was 3.6 years, growing to 4.0 years in 2008. In 2012, tenure reached 6.0 years and was sustained in 2014 and 2016 at 6.0 years of service in the same church (Rainer, 2017). This range, 3–10 years of full-time ministry experience in tenure, helps show the first local church ministry preparedness issues among the study participants.

A set of pilot interviews were conducted using current pastors who work directly with me at a local SBC church. Although this pilot group did not directly emulate the proposed participants of the research study, as a sample, it gave me a chance to work on my interview technique and hone the interview questions to be more thought-provoking and productive because "the way in which questions are worded is a crucial consideration in extracting the type of information desired" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 117).

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling by definition "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). When using this type of sampling, diversity and balance are important to the assessment. I aimed to depict and reflect the most normal or recurring situations in the sample, such as the "average person, situation, or instance of the

phenomenon of interest" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 97). Through this muti-case study research, the results may not be precisely assured to represent the entire population of ministers/leaders who hold undergraduate ministry-related degrees but no graduate school or seminary training and 3–10 years of local SBC church ministerial experience. However, purposive sampling is a way to "select individuals who will best help…understand the research problem and the research questions" (Creswell, 2014, p. 246). In this multicase study, purposive sampling was used to obtain the information desired to help define the characteristics of the eight pastors/ministers/leaders being interviewed.

Qualitative Sampling

Because of the narrow scope of the sample (i.e., SBC pastors with 3–10 years of full-time local church experience), a group of eight pastors who had not received any other ministerial/pastoral training beyond the undergraduate degree, were recruited as participants. The recruitment was accomplished by contacting pastors who fit the sample criteria. In doing so, I assumed the sample's viability, confirming each interviewee met the research criteria. The process of contacting the pastors was done through electronic communications, text, email, and phone conversations. While the pastors were not intentionally from only one region of the United States, 81% of the SBC membership is in the Southern United States, with 85% of its members being White, 6% African American, and 3% Latino (Fahmy, 2019).

For this study, I sought eight to 11 participants who were currently pastors with 3–10 years of full-time local SBC church ministry, who earned an undergraduate ministry-related degree but had no graduate school or seminary training. Eight participants who met the selection criteria were chosen to participate in the study, aimed at exploring a potential gap between higher education preparation and skills needed in their first local church ministry experience. I recruited

participants for the interviews by making personal contact through professors at HEIs and SBC state and associational leadership. These leaders were acquainted with women and men who met the necessary criteria to fulfill the requirements of the study. Participants would be drawn from several institutions in multiple states to represent the diverse path to ministry that is currently available to pastors in the SBC.

Subsequently, after completing the approved consent forms, interviews were scheduled. I contacted the participants regarding the most convenient location to conduct the meeting, including venue location and what atmosphere would be conducive for a comprehensive conversation covering somewhat personal topics about their thoughts, memories, perceptions, and reflections about any aspect of their higher education training and their first years of local church ministry. I required signed informed consent from each participant, including all personal contact information, before the inception of the previously scheduled interview.

Before the interview protocol began, each participant was encouraged to inquire about any questions regarding any aspect of the discussion or the process. I then confirmed the participant's name, age, the institution of higher education, degree obtained, how many years of full-time local church ministry, and had the participant sign the consent form. I used an interview protocol (i.e., a list of open-ended questions to ask each subject) to manage the interview process and not leave out any critical items from the interview (see Appendix A). With this in mind, because of the open-ended questions used and the freedom and complexity of a live interview, I had the freedom to ask follow-up questions that were not included in the interview protocol based on the subject's responses to the interview protocol. I reminded the participants the conversation was to be recorded for the purpose of data analysis, as stated in the informed consent form.

Materials/Instruments (Qualitative)

To collect the data that were analyzed, I used personal, one-on-one interviews, conducted virtually (e.g., by telephone, Zoom, or in person) that were semistructured with open-ended questions. The semistructured interview method was chosen based on the guidance of Merriam and Tisdell (2016) who suggested that such interviews are:

> guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allowed me to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic. (pp. 110–111)

The impetus to use an interview for this multicase study was that "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108), which is the circumstance we find when looking to discover the reasons and answers in this research.

The participants were employed by local SBC churches at the time of the interview, held an undergraduate ministry-related degree, had no graduate school or seminary, and had 3–10 years of local church ministry experience. This type of questioning allowed the participants to add their own conclusions and stories to the research, which provided a unique perspective on how each minister arrived at the place in ministry where they currently serve, including mental attitudes, emotional difficulties, triumphs, as well as each participant's spiritual journey. This multicase study sought the participant's "experiences, perceptions, feelings, (and) interpretations" (Saldana & Omasta, 2018, p. 180). In this effective qualitative process, the participants spoke about their history and experiences as a part of this case study. This qualitative research was subject to a straightforward explanation of the participant's responses and actions,

in addition to the accumulated illustrations until a representative concept or conclusion was made about the cluster of participants (Stake, 1995).

The theoretical lens used for this study was ALT, specifically, andragogy, which was brought to the United States from Europe by Malcolm Knowles in the 1960s. The ALT applies to students ages 19–30 and who are taking either undergraduate or graduate college-level courses (Marques, 2006). Applying ALT to the potential gap between what was experienced by participants in their ministry preparation and what was required in their first years of ministry was investigated through this case study.

Research has shown "the most frequent topic addressed relating to transformative learning theory and spiritual formation-related activities is that of Christian higher education" (Beard, 2017, p. 251). This conclusion clarifies the purpose of looking at a potential gap in ministerial preparedness under the scrutiny and inspection of ALT. When considering the phenomenon of local church ministry, pastors need to be able to think, reason a problem out, and reach a conclusion that will be a healthy remedy for the parties concerned.

In a 2010 study, it was discovered that "the majority of American Baptist pastors view their seminary training as inadequate in meeting the administrative needs of the church" (Cohall & Cooper, 2010, p. 50). While this study focused on the American Baptist Denomination exclusively, parallels can be drawn between the research of Cohall and Cooper and this multicase study of pastors in the SBC. In general, the curriculum for those in preministry programs has been dissimilar between institutions, and

> Upon completion of the theological programme, students are deemed 'prepared' to advance to an internship or directly into Christian ministry, where they supposedly put all this good classroom learning to use. The reality is that students experience fragmentation,

> as they struggle to put together all the academic pieces and include the vocational dimensions. (Naidoo, 2021, p. 67)

The participating subjects, eight ministers who have not received any other ministerial/pastoral training beyond the undergraduate degree, had been serving in local churches affiliated with the SBC and had between 3–10 years in full-time ministry. This group was interviewed about the combination of higher education preparation and what they had experienced in local church ministry, including the positives and the aspects that would have assisted them in making the transition into full-time ministry with fewer obstacles and complications. In this study, I endeavored to find trends in SBC pastor preparedness in higher education to better serve the new minister population. One of the long-term benefits of this research was aimed to determine additional pastor preparedness paths for ministry majors. In this way, the mysterious road of pastor preparedness will be easier to traverse with an additional roadmap designed by this research study, making full-time ministry in the local church less stressful for new pastors.

Field Test

The field test of the research questions involved four active SBC ministers associated with University Baptist Church, Houston, Texas. While each minister met some of the parameters of this multicase study, none of them met all the criteria. Each gave their answers based on their personal ministry experiences. In addition, they agreed to help define and improve the interview process and protocol through their feedback. Creswell stated that "this testing is important to establish the content validity of scores on an instrument and to improve questions, format, and scales" (Creswell, 2014, p. 161). Through this field test process, I did not prepare

any of the UBC ministers in order to give one more layer of trustworthiness. This also gave the utmost assurance the data were unaffected by any possible researcher bias.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

I used the interview protocol to elicit answers, stories, and feelings from the participants to bring together a picture of each pastor's respective preparedness preparation cycles. With this information, the combination of pastoral experiences formed the foundation of the research I sought in this study. The goal in collecting and analyzing the data was to "make sense out of text and image data" (Creswell, 2014, p. 195).

When the interviews were completed, I assembled and organized the responses of the participants into a sequential narrative describing their experiences and perceptions of their first years in ministry. The data were used to determine ideas, feelings, facts, and influencers that affected the participants in any way through their higher education preparation or their experiences in their first church ministry position. The organization of the data was accomplished through a process of coding in which "the designations can be single words, letters, numbers, phrases, colors, or combinations of these" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 199).

Each aspect of the research was analyzed and coded, including field notes, documents, interactions with the participants, and recorded personal interviews. Coding is "the condensation of a datum into richer, more compact form of meaning" (Saldana & Omasta, 2018, p. 121), which, through my analysis, made the datum more usable and robust. The interviews used the coding method of In Vivo Coding, which "utilizes the participant's own language as a symbol system for qualitative data analysis" (Saldana & Omasta, 2018, p. 121). Thus, after each subject interview, I used the recording of the conversation for the purpose of data analysis and coding.

Before beginning the actual coding process, it is necessary to go through a multistep preparation process. First, I transcribed the interview verbatim, then divided the text into what the interviewer and the subject each said. Next, when there was a discernible change in theme, I divided the interview into stanza-like sections, and added "superscript numbers at the beginning of a datum to be coded" (Saldana & Omasta, 2018, p. 123). With this coding process completed, I coded the pieces of the research puzzle into an easily observed form. As a part of this process, the data must be "winnowed," which Creswell (2014) described as "a process of focusing in on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it" (p. 195).

Researching First Ministry Experience

1. How do pastors with 3–10 years of full-time local SBC church ministry experience describe their first local church ministry experience?
2. Would some type of experiential learning have benefited you in your preparation for ministry? Why or why not?

The description of the lives and experiences of the eight ministry leaders allowed me to use the multicase study model to its fullest in determining the answers to the issues derived from ministry preparation. These descriptions were taken from each of the eight pastors and recorded for accuracy to the point of data saturation or redundancy, which is when "you begin hearing the same responses to your interview questions or seeing the same behaviors in observations: no new insights are forthcoming" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 101). During the course of the interviews, I anticipated that I would reach data saturation in the later stages of the interviews, possibly around interview seven or eight. These descriptions from the interviews were analyzed and coded for further analysis. When coding the data gathered from the interviews, I employed "the traditional approach in the social sciences [which] is to allow the codes to emerge during the

data analysis" (Creswell, 2014, p. 199). The data coding allowed me to look for themes in each interview and cross-check those same themes between multiple interviews to find emergent themes from the participants that were the focus of the research study and writing.

Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness

It is paramount that ethical practices are employed throughout this study to ensure validity and reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To accomplish the goal of validity and reliability or credibility, it is important to affirm "that our study results are believable or credible from the perspective of a participant in the study" (Terrell, 2015, pp. 173–174). I used triangulation to substantiate the trustworthiness of the study. Triangulation uses "different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes" which, in this case, was personal, one-on-one, recorded interviews of pastors with 3–10 years of local church ministry experience (Creswell, 2014, p. 201).

Triangulation was done by using interview data, documents, and secondary forms of data. A field test group of University Baptist Church, Houston-related pastors was used to target the intent of the interview protocol while placing a spotlight on how the questions are formulated to encourage the participants with the most significant amount of freedom for their answers. Additionally, trustworthiness was established with the interview data by how it was examined and interpreted. Trustworthiness was bolstered using documents from each institution of higher education, including academic catalogs and degree plan sheets as secondary forms of data to strengthen the rigor of the data and give further insight into the problem of the preparedness gap of pastors who are leading local church ministry.

This triangulation method was strengthened and intensified by the use of peer debriefing. Peer debriefers are "impartial colleagues…asked to examine…(the) methodology, transcripts,

data, analysis, and report" (Terrell, 2015, p. 174) of the study. Used to reinforce and authenticate the research results, peer debriefers offer optional interpretations of the findings. To bring further clarity to the multicase study procedure, my intention is to use two ordained ministers who hold a Doctor of Philosophy degree and have both taught for institutions of higher education.

Additionally, member checking is intended to be used as a recheck to show the participants "the final report or product and ask if he or she believes it represents their input accurately" (Terrell, 2015, p. 174). I was committed to using the primary data (the interviews) as the basis of data analysis while using secondary forms of data, such as the catalogs and the peer debriefers, as a means of triangulating the data to come up with the most robust interpretation of the data possible.

To be realistic, all researchers have some form of prejudice or bias that encroaches upon their objectivity. My personal experiences taint the lens of my research in life and ministry. Such experiences include more than 30 years of local church ministry, teaching at two SBC affiliated universities, participating in SBC state-level music groups where many friends are made and prayers lifted for difficult ministry situations, and finally, my observations of new pastors beginning their ministries—their depth and grasp, or lack thereof, to be able to have the skills to accomplish ministry in the local church. With this path to discovery, I organized the results into a document designed to advance the knowledge and understanding of pastoral preparedness in new ministers.

Transferability is "attempting to demonstrate that your research findings are applicable in other contexts" (Terrell, 2015, p. 174). To accomplish this facet of the research, it is essential to be as clear and expressive as possible to paint the most precise picture of each situation for the reader. This is known as giving a thick description: "The addition of carefully researched detail

to a report you are writing: this contributes to the validity of your work" (Terrell, 2015, p. 267). In this study, the thick description included the participants' experiences detailed in the most precise fashion to represent their experiences best.

The dependability of the research details how the study procedures so that future researchers can replicate the study. Replicating the research and getting the same responses is not the goal of qualitative research; instead, "A researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense—they are consistent and dependable" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 251). The use of an external auditor to evaluate the accuracy of receiving and recording interview statements helped demonstrate my commitment to ensuring the dependability of the research data. The external auditor for this research study was in addition to the two peer debriefers identified previously. The external auditor assisted me with ensuring continuity and unity of the triangulation process. Finally, confirmability is shown by how "the researcher discusses how he or she ensured his or her neutrality in the study, and how the results reflect those of the participants with no outside influence" (Terrell, 2015, p. 175). Confirmability was demonstrated through my use of triangulation, an audit trail, peer debriefers, an external auditor, and member checking.

Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher is an important one because directing the study can take on many different facets and shape the study and its conclusions. It is critical to acknowledge that the researcher is both subjective and objective in all aspects of the study. This mindset is essential so as not to color the information gathered in any one direction but rather give a fair and accurate accounting of the interviewee's responses, correlating them to others' responses and

determining the best way to combine the answers to provide the most accurate picture of this complex research question.

Realizing there is bias in every researcher, the lens through which I evaluated all the data is an aggregation of my education, training, and experiences. Briefly, I hold the Bachelor of Music Education with an emphasis in voice and organ from Oklahoma Baptist University and a Master of Music in Church Music with an emphasis in Music Education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Currently, I am pursuing a Doctor of Education degree in Organizational Leadership with an emphasis in Higher Education from Abilene Christian University. I have done postgraduate study in vocal pedagogy at the University of Tennessee and Oberlin College Conservatory of Music, with additional postgraduate study in choral conducting at The Julliard School, California Baptist University, and the University of Michigan.

I have been in full-time local church ministry leadership for 33 years and have taught music courses as an adjunct faculty member at Missouri Baptist University (St. Louis, Missouri) and Ouachita Baptist University (Arkadelphia, Arkansas). In my years of pastoring, I have had the opportunity to supervise many people doing healthy ministry, including full-time and part-time employees, volunteers, as well as paid and unpaid interns. I have led worship services categorized as contemporary, blended, and traditional, including working with bands, choirs, orchestras, praise teams, and small vocal and instrumental groups of varying sizes and make-ups.

I have launched two brand-new worship services. In both cases, the new worship services were treated as a church-start and began with a seed group, which developed into a vibrant worship experience. These experiences, combined with many professors and fellow pastors pouring into me, have brought me to the place I am today and are part of the lens through which I perceive and discern ministry and ministry preparation.

Each participant was confirmed to have met all the requirements outlined in the study design. I conducted the interviews using the interview protocol (Appendix A). The protocol included a list of all the open-ended questions to be asked of the participants to manage the interview process and avoid adding to or deleting items from the interview.

Ethical Considerations

In this multicase study, I anticipated minimal risk to the participants in terms of severity or level of harm. Risk to the participants can be attributed to difficulties or unforeseen circumstances within qualitative research and case studies. The participants might have their identity exposed through the research process. However, to mitigate the harm level, I gave each subject a letter explaining the redaction of real names or any other identifying markers. The subject pastors could benefit from the research similarly when explaining and clarifying a situation to me during interviews. Interviews could have a breakthrough effect, much like working with a therapist in a difficult situation in one's life. I am not a trained, certified, or licensed therapist, but have served as a minister, giving comfort and advice to many individuals in crisis situations for more than 30 years. Those who will benefit directly from this research are HEIs that choose to incorporate the ideas and suggestions found in the data of this research study and the current and future students that those institutions of higher education serve.

It is also vital to treat participants as people rather than just items for research. Treating the participants as we would want to be treated is a fundamental Christian tenant based on the Gospel of Matthew 22:36–40, where one of the experts in the law asked Jesus:

> Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as

> yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (NIV Bible, 1984)

With this people-centric outlook toward research, the subject was always treated with dignity, respect, and kindness. Too often, researchers have gone into their studies with the best of intentions only to make unfortunate, even disastrous, mistakes in the treatment of the humans they are gathering information on or about. This positive approach is the

> Kind of ethical regimen, as a commitment to human-to-human engagement, that one subscribes to. In other words, it cannot be just that in a quest for just and equitable human engagement in research, we are all expected to subscribe to a provincial-parading-as-universal code of ethics. (Hlabangane, 2019, pp. 35–36)

Research needs to be as representative as possible of those being studied. Their situations need to be accurately told through the sieve of the researcher's viewpoint; "observations and analysis are filtered through that human being's worldview, values, and perspective" (Merriam, 1998, p. 22). Still, it must also be remembered that social scientists are responsible for honoring the importance of the subject's story while handling it with grace and respect. When this occurs, this type of research becomes "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or social unit" resulting in a scholarly dissertation that honors the people telling their stories (Merriam, 1985, p. xiii).

Participants of this study may have positively benefitted from telling their stories of ministry preparation and the first years of full-time ministry, making this research worth the time and effort. If the participants do not benefit or have no reaction to the retelling of their stories, it is acceptable because there was minimal risk to the interviewee. The results of this study may be used to serve the ministry profession and HEI's ministry preparation division while also gaining

a much-needed perspective on ministers' training process for the 21st century. In research that poses more than minimal risk/harm, the participants and science must benefit; however, in this study, the risk and harm factors were minimal.

To participate in interviews of human subjects, Abilene Christian University requires researchers affiliated with the institution, including candidates for the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership, to submit a request to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval (Appendix B). I accomplished this university prerequisite. Consent forms were constructed, reviewed and approved by the committee, distributed to the prospective participants, explained in detail, agreed to, and were signed by the interviewees. With the consent forms comprised and cataloged and security measures actualized to protect the participants and the privacy of the information they contributed, I was able to minimize potential harm to the subjects from research participation and data analysis.

Assumptions

In qualitative multicase study research, assumptions can be made based on "things we believe to be true, but cannot verify" (Terrell, 2015, p. 41). In this study, positioned in a qualitative case study, it is possible that as the participants investigated their past experiences, because of elapsed time or other reasons, it may not have been possible for them to evaluate their trajectory in an authentic fashion accurately. I recognize that the data must go through additional lenses of supplementary experiences and perspectives to determine the most robust and descriptive picture of the subject's story possible.

The assumptions for the case study research were established by case study authority, Sharan B. Merriam, who, in her article "The Case Study in Education Research: A Review of Selected Literature" (1985), outlined some assumptions which should be taken into account

when performing this type of research. First, the system being explored must be established before any investigation is conducted, and "its selection is determined by the purpose of the research and the interest of the researcher" (Merriam, 1985, pp. 207–208). I collected data through three approaches: (a) interviewing, (b) observation, and (c) document analysis (Yin, 2018). In this inquiry process of the investigation, Merriam (1985) suggested, "through interviewing participants, observing the phenomenon, or analyzing documents, five types of qualitative data most 'relevant' to a case study" can be mined (p. 208). Wilson (1979) identified the following types of data that could be mined:

1. Form and content of verbal interaction between participants
2. Form and content of verbal interaction with the researcher
3. Non-verbal behavior
4. Patterns of action and non-action
5. Traces, archival record, artifacts, documents (p. 198).

This quality and diversity of data and the data being from three different methods (triangulation) resulted in a more robust, thick description of the case study material.

This study assumed that the pastors could accurately tell their personal story of higher education preparation for ministry continuing through their current job position and any crucial facts pertinent to their unique story of ministry preparedness. Additionally, if participants did not understand a question, they were given an opportunity to ask for interpretation, explanation, or simplification to make the question applicable to their situation, bypassing any confusion in the hopes of having as clear a study as possible. Additionally, it is assumed the participants who participated in an experiential learning component in their higher education experience would believe it was a necessary part of the curriculum. In contrast, those who did not have that

experience would wish to have had the opportunity to work under a seasoned pastor's mentorship. There was also the assumption that participants would cooperate and engage in the interview honestly. To accomplish authentic, systematic research, the participants needed to give honest, forthright comments to assist in determining what the gap between minister preparation and local church employment is for the sake of those prospective ministers who are coming into the ministry in the coming years.

Interview

The objective of a personal interview in case study research is to ask questions regarding the topic and gain the "interviewee's perspective on the topic" (Simons, 2009, p. 43). An interview with a person related to the issue is considered a primary resource. Primary resources can also lead to secondary resources as "scholarly conversations," often leading to other resources (Booth et al., 2016, p. 82). The interviewer asks the interviewee questions to achieve an understanding about a given topic to advance the knowledge in a systematic approach.

Limitations

In general, qualitative case study research can be constrained or narrowed "by the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator" (Merriam, 1998, p. 42). Because researchers who gather the data are human beings, it is possible to become prejudiced if not held in check by the researcher himself, a peer debriefer, and/or an external auditor.

This research centered exclusively on pastors in churches affiliated with the SBC who have been trained in SBC-affiliated institutions of higher education and serving in SBC-affiliated local churches. The ministers interviewed for this research study have earned some type of ministry-related degree granted from an SBC-affiliated HEI where coursework related to ministry is part of the curriculum. However, the conclusions of this qualitative multicase study

depicted the involvement and perceptions of the eight SBC local church pastors interviewed and should be studied further to provide additional information to the body of research about the preparedness of local church pastors.

Delimitations

Qualitative case study research has a subjective lens that must be considered by both the researcher and the reader of the final dissertation. With this delimitation in mind, "both the readers of case studies and the authors themselves need to be aware of biases that can affect the final product" of the research study (Merriam, 1998, p. 42). This qualitative multicase study was represented and characterized through bounding of the case (Yin, 2018) with eight participants who identified as local church pastors with any varied specializations (e.g., children's pastor, discipleship pastor, senior pastor, worship pastor, youth minister, etc.). At the time of the study, these pastors served SBC churches and had full-time ministry experience of 3–10 years. This bounded group of pastors completed an undergraduate degree in a ministry-related specialty before the onset of their full-time employment as a pastor.

The institutions studied in this multicase study were churches in the SBC. The event being studied was a potential gap in preparedness between what skills and facts the participants were taught in their higher education study and contrasting those competencies with what proficiencies are required in the pastor's local church ministry experience. The participants evaluated these variations during semistructured interviews which asked open questions about their first 3–10 years of local church ministry. The open-ended questions were used to facilitate the participants having options to express their feelings, perceptions, and memories without being constrained to yes or no answers exclusively.

In this qualitative multicase study, there could have been intractable or uncontrollable aspects, circumstances, or considerations that prevailed during the interview process and could have unintentionally caused the researcher or the interviewee to deviate from the intent of a question. All safeguards and reasonable boundaries were followed in the interview process, which is a "systematic activity that you can learn to do well" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 107) to bring about the most genuine and authentic answers by those being interviewed. The researcher realizes that the interview could become slanted towards a particular viewpoint without this authenticity and the protections built into the mechanism. To this end, "the way in which questions are worded is a crucial consideration in extracting the type of information desired" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 117).

Summary

This study used a qualitative, nonexperimental multiple case study for the research because the exploration of first-hand accounts of pastors with 3–10 years of full-time ministry experience could reveal a potential gap between their preparation in an institute of higher education and their experience once they started full-time local church ministry leadership. Discovering the factors that influence this possible gap in ministry preparedness required the researcher to interview currently employed ministers to determine their impression of their preparedness for local church ministry through their higher education experience and what they needed to offset the potential gap between their education and their ability to serve effectively in full-time ministry. To triangulate the results, I focused on interviewing eight ministers who fit these unique criteria.

The multiple views of the pastor's previous and foundational experiences were bolstered by looking through the lens of ALT. As this research was conducted through a multicase study, it

can demonstrate the goals of the investigation by exhibiting, "the focus of the study is to answer 'how' and 'why' questions… you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). Using a multicase study model for this research yielded an understanding of the possible missing factors in ministerial preparation through robust answers of how and why.

Chapter 4: Results

Christian ministry is a response to God's call to serve others. The 21st-century church in the United States has grown in size and scope from what was accessible or attainable to first-century disciples. Technology, communication, transportation, and human resource governance are just a few of the differences between today's culture and Christianity in the early church.

Those in secular industry, as well as the church, are constantly researching and trying to discover processes to deal with the preparedness of their employees at the genesis of their careers. A study in South Africa supports this conclusion, stating, "there is a need to bridge these gaps by finding suitable strategies to enhance graduates' preparedness. One of the strategies highlighted was the need to explore pedagogical renewal" (Ndlovu & Cupido, 2021, p. 45). Regarding job preparedness, "Universities and their degrees have increasing responsibility to support and prepare students for their post-degree pathways, especially for employment" (Wong & Hoskins, 2022, p. 97).

Higher education cannot prepare anyone to meet every employment situation. In some industries, "differences between being a student on placement [internship] and being a staff member [full-time staff] were also pointed out, suggesting that placement cannot fully prepare one for the workplace" (McSweeney & Williams, 2019, p. 367). Educational institutions that are finding answers to the questions regarding job preparedness create graduates who find themselves prepared to meet challenges in their new jobs.

The gap in preparedness can refer to several different factors when describing a person's lack of understanding or experience regarding a field of study. Students who are ill-prepared might not have taken advantage of opportunities during their time of study, or the talent and ability to learn a particular skill may not be present.

In this case study, I examined the gap in preparedness as a possible disconnect between the academic study of ministry and the daily application of ministry once a person assumes a ministry position at a local church. If there is a lack of continuity between the study of ministry in a collegiate setting and what the student will face in a real-world setting, we must consider ways of closing that possible gap by offering solutions for helping to prepare them in a more circumspect way. Offering internships, practical ministry classes, mentorships, and other hands-on experiences could help prepare students to ease them into their first full-time local church ministry position.

Eduard Lindeman's (1926) said, "Experience is the richest source for adult learning" (as cited in Knowles et al., 2020, p. 22). In my research, I found that HEIs requiring some type of experiential learning within the curriculum had students who seemed better prepared for ministry. In contrast, the pastors who did not have an internship built into their curriculum found it challenging to adjust to the organizational culture and additional stress in their ministry positions.

Churches of all Christian denominations may encounter the same issues with new ministry hires. In some cases, church leaders and members expect staff members, new or long-standing, to possess the same institutional knowledge and, therefore, know what to do in situations, circumstances, and problems. The SBC is not immune to these issues. As in other denominations, the SBC must find more effective ways to prepare future pastors for all types of ministry leadership in the local congregation.

The higher education experience of recently educated and trained pastors is the focus of this research study. This case study seeks to reveal or identify strengths and weaknesses in the education of ministry leaders and could assist those who make curricular changes in ministry

degrees to recognize the need to change the way in which ministry students are trained. These modifications, in turn, could increase the preparedness, and therefore the longevity, of a minister's career.

The SBC is experiencing a shortage of people entering ministry across the country and as such, in 2021, identified as part of the multipoint Vision 2025 plan for the convention "the urgent need to raise up a new generation of pastors" (as cited in Reed, 2023, para. 28). There is a priority in most SBC institutions of higher education to develop more qualified, prepared ministers to meet the demands of local churches. The goal of this research was to discover ways to help prepare ministers in their first full-time local church position.

In this study, I explored the higher-education experience of participants through interviews guided by two research questions. The first research question asked pastors with 3–10 years of full-time local Southern Baptist church ministry experience to describe their ministry training and any gap between college preparation and their local church ministry experience. To ensure the validity of the findings, I only interviewed pastors who fit the selection criteria of the case study. Additionally, I asked the same questions of all participants and kept their personal information and that of their HEIs anonymous.

Each interview was conducted and recorded through the Zoom video communications platform and transcribed in Otter.AI software. I used ALT as the theoretical framework for the research as previously outlined in Chapter 3. In the findings presented, the "text and image data are so dense and rich, not all of the information can be used…Thus, in the analysis of the data, (I) need(ed) to winnow the data" (Creswell, 2014, p. 195).

To make the data as straightforward as possible, it was necessary to window and highlight the most important discoveries of the research. Chenail (1995, p. 3) explained:

> As data analysis turns to data presentation, it can be easy for the researcher and reader alike to lose a sense of place for the data. As the process of winnowing the data begins, the emphasis becomes one of selecting one poignant exemplar after another as all of the significant "wheat" (i.e., that data which is deemed significant or exemplary) gets separated from all of the nonsignificant "chaff" (i.e., that data which is determined to be non-significant or redundant).

Using ALT as a lens for this multicase study of pastoral preparedness allowed the participants' responses to be compared to best practices in teaching adults. Going forward, the participants responses have the potential to redefine procedures and practices in undergraduate ministry education. In this qualitative multicase study, I explored the potential gap between preparation and the participants' first local church ministry position. To interpret the inquiry, in this case study, I focused on two research questions:

RQ1: How do pastors with 3–10 years of full-time local SBC church ministry experience describe the gap between preparation and their first local church ministry experience?

RQ2: Does experiential learning benefit ministers in their preparation for ministry?

This chapter presents the analysis of the data obtained through participant's responses. The data illuminates the disparity between the pastor's HEI curriculum and their first local church ministry experiences.

Research Setting and Demographics

Data collection and analysis were carried out as outlined in Chapter 3. Interviews were conducted following the IRB procedures and predetermined standards (see Appendix B). The purposive sampling methods used to identify the participants involved working with personal and professional acquaintances who are employed in academia as professors and deans (i.e.,

active and retired) of their respective HEIs. Further, two denominational leaders were enlisted to help identify qualified participants for this study. Informed consent was obtained for each candidate prior to the Zoom interviews. Upon receipt of a signed informed consent form, I contacted the pastor/participant.

Following each interview, the audio recording was saved to a password-protected computer to which only the primary investigator has access. Transcription was done using Otter.ai software. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked if they felt they had been represented fairly or if they wanted to change any wording or concepts. Each participant was given the opportunity to revise or edit their interview transcript by responding at the end of the interview or later by email. All eight pastors were satisfied with the answers given in their interviews.

In the weeks following the interviews, each pastor remained steadfast regarding their answers to the interview questions and accompanying discussions. All the pastors indicated support for the research being conducted and expressed gratitude for being a part of the case study. Changes were made to the number of participants and the number of years in ministry due to the difficulty in locating participants.

Research Process

As the primary investigator of this study, I conducted the first three Zoom interviews on April 10, 17, and May 3, 2023. The fourth and fifth Zoom interviews took place in July of 2023. The sixth, seventh, and eighth interviews took place in August of 2023.

In this case study, I originally planned to use 9–11 participants who are currently pastors with 3–10 years of full-time local SBC church ministry experience for the sample. I used multicase sampling, “which allows researchers to analyze whether particular findings hold true

only at a particular site, or more broadly" (Saldana & Omasta, 2018, p. 96). I also used "snowball sampling, a method in which participants are asked to recommend other similar participants to take part in the study in order to gain a larger pool of participants than the researcher originally had access to" (Saldana & Omasta, 2018, p. 97). From the snowball sampling, I was able to add one participant. Ultimately, eight pastors participated in the study.

In following Creswell's checklist for validity and reliability, I used different validity strategies to increase the accuracy of the findings, including (a) triangulation; (b) use of rich, thick descriptions; (c) peer debriefing; and (d) an external auditor to review the entire project (Creswell, 2014). To accomplish this, I worked through the questions and then did a pilot by holding two mock interviews with ministers with whom I work. Conducting the mock interviews also gave me experience in responding to the unknowns of live interviews and countering the interviewee's answers to the study's questions.

I felt prepared to ask questions that did not lead the participants but gave them a clear context for the questions so they could give their viewpoints in the most precise way. This led to rich, thick descriptions from each candidate. In regard to the descriptions given by the pastors, each was given the opportunity to change or clarify their answers at any point during the interview. I used Otter.ai to transcribe the interview verbatim. After the interview, I read through the transcript to check for any part of the conversation that Otter.ai may have misinterpreted. In each case, I found only a few transcription mistakes, which were quickly corrected and thereby helped increase the validity of the data collection process.

By using the data from eight different pastors who attended six different HEIs, live in five different states, and by using verbatim quotes, I was able to triangulate participant responses to the research question and bring a higher degree of validity to the study. I also used two outside

peer reviewers and an external auditor to confirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts and the ways I interpreted the data. All three (both peer reviewers and the external auditor) have served, or are serving, in pastoral roles in multiple SBC churches, and all three have degrees from various SBC HEIs.

Adult Learning Theory

ALT, as outlined in Knowles' book, *The Adult Learner*, asserts that andragogy is a set of core adult learning principles. The six principles of andragogy as described by Knowles et al. (2020) are: "(a) the learner's need to know; (b) self-concept of the learner; (c) prior experience of the learner; (d) readiness to learn; (e) orientation to learning; and (f) motivation to learn" (p. 5). The ALT principles guide the adult learner in their pursuit of a degree from a higher education institute.

An adult's desire to learn in any given field derives from all six of Knowles' learning principles. In this case study, each pastor who participated exhibited the willingness and motivation to learn by attending and completing a ministry degree at their chosen HEI. Beyond the motivation and need to learn, were the prior experiences of these individuals that helped lead them to choose the path of ministry.

As one looks further into the six principles and what they mean, Knowles broke down the adult learning principles even further, suggesting adult learners need to be "autonomous and self-directed" and the adult learner wants their learning to be "life-related" (Knowles et al., 2020, p. 6). Adult learners also need to know the "intrinsic value" of how they will benefit in the future from what they learn (Knowles et al., 2020, p. 6). In other words, adult learners want their learning to be meaningful and helpful as they move into their respective careers.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of an adult learner is that they want their learning to be meaningful and practically related to their profession, and they want to learn in the context of their field. Experiential learning is a way an adult student can see the *why* of learning within the context of their profession in a real-time environment. The applicable principles of ALT are presented further in this chapter.

When looking at the titles of the eight pastors, all have responsibilities in the ministry area of worship or music ministry. All have responsibilities outside of music, including teaching or disciplining and pastoral care of those involved in their ministry areas. However, three pastors have additional responsibilities listed in their job titles.

Pastor 3 said he also works with youth and young adults. Except for his Bible classes at his HEI, all his training in these areas has come from working with his first senior pastor, who would:

> do a small group [Bible study] together or a Disciple Now [a weekend intensive for 6th–12th graders]. I was part of three or four groups, then I helped to lead one group. I was definitely being prepared for the calling in my life.

Pastor 5 is an associate pastor, worship leader, and creative arts minister. Pastor 5 stated, "Our head pastor likes to say we have slashes in our title. We're worship pastor, slash, videographer, slash, social media person, and whatever."

In many ministry situations, when there is a need, someone has to accomplish that task. In most cases, that is an associate pastor because the senior pastor or head pastor already has much to accomplish and needs help. When these types of circumstances arise, the associate minister fills that void and learns, sometimes as they are doing the task, how to navigate the task successfully.

An example of the above was provided by Pastor 5 when he started ministry at his church. In addition to contemporary worship, he began filming and editing the announcements for all the worship services. Pastor 5 reported:

> Recently, we actually hired someone to do a lot of our video work who will be coming on (soon). But the last 7 years or so, I've been our main video person. We do all our announcements around video, all our testimonies for baptisms and any special event like Vacation Bible School, mission trips, stuff like that. I do the recap video and manage all of our social media accounts, as well as lead worship and lead the youth band.

Pastor 6 revealed he has responsibilities in worship and children's ministries. His job is unique. He said:

> [I] lead Sunday morning worship, including putting the slides [together], getting the music ready for the volunteers, and I lead the choir. And then, for the children's ministry, I do a lot of administrative-type tasks. I have a lot of volunteers that I help manage and make sure people are in place with the material that they need and show up when they're scheduled to be there.

Because of the unique combination of these two ministries, Pastor 6 disclosed:

> I'm fully focused on the music ministry area [on Sunday Mornings]. I have a nursery coordinator, a Sunday School director that helps facilitate, and for children's church, I just have to rely on the volunteers. I was not trained in children's ministry at all before my current position. I'm always learning on the go.

Focusing on these three examples, pastors, like other adults, bring the abilities needed to understand and learn in an autonomous way. ALT gives us a way to include self-directed learning. In most learning situations, the teacher decides what a student learns. However, "As

individuals mature, their need and capacity to be self-directing, to use their experience in learning, to identify their own readiness to learn, and to organize their learning around life problems…increases rapidly in adolescence" (Knowles et al., 2020, p. 41).

Being self-directed while learning a new skill is a needed factor in many areas of ministry and work life in general. Being ready to master a new skill and formulate the learning of that skill around work issues becomes a more common factor in the work life of an adult. In this case, ministry skills are realized and learned as the individual matures.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability of this multicase study is strong because I have "used case study protocol, developed case study database, and maintained a chain of evidence" (Yin, 2018, p. 43), all of which have been accomplished and documented in the notes of this research. As Yin (2018) suggested, "a good guideline for doing case studies is, therefore, to conduct the research so that an auditor could, in principle, repeat the procedures and hopefully arrive at the same results" (pp. 46–47).

To ensure potential replication of the procedures of this study, I benefited from the use of standard case-study protocols learned from the literature and fine-tuned the practice interview stage with ministers currently serving. I used Zoom interviews with open-ended questions to allow the pastor participants to speak to their experiences and feelings.

From the data collected, I developed codes for major themes that occurred in the interviews. Upon completion of the eight interviews, I was able to comb through the data and observe seven themes which are detailed later in this chapter. In addition, I maintained a chain of evidence that is authentic and representative of the pastor's unique feelings and experiences,

speaking to their collective ideas about pastor preparedness through training in Southern Baptist HEIs for service in SBC churches.

Participant Profiles

The names of the eight participants who were interviewed were redacted from the transcripts to maintain confidentiality. Each pastor was given a number, 1–8, which identified them for research purposes. The names of the HEIs that the participants attended, and any other identifying information were also redacted. HEIs were assigned a letter, A–F, for the purpose of this research. Each college or university where a subject attended was, and still is, affiliated with the SBC. The institutions of higher education were in five different states within the continental United States.

While the original design of the study was to recruit pastors in various specializations (e.g., senior pastor, children's minister, youth minister, associate pastor, minister of music), the ultimate response resulted in all eight participants serving as some type of music pastor. The degrees earned by the participants are as varied as the personalities of the pastors who earned them. Years of full-time ministry of the participants ranged from 3 to 10 years.

It was an unexpected revelation that all the qualified participants were male. The original design of this case study was to recruit a more even distribution of male and female pastors, as well as different types of ministries. However, in my search for participants to interview, I found that females who received a ministry-related bachelor's degree at the colleges and universities where I had access went directly to seminary or graduate school or did not pursue ministry after graduation. Interestingly, all the participants of this case study are involved in some type of music ministry with all having some type of music or worship degree. The demographics of the eight participants are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Description	*n*
State Represented	
Arkansas	3
Texas	1
Oklahoma	1
Virginia	1
Florida	2
Degree from HEI	
Bachelor of Arts in Christian Studies, emphasis in Worship	1
Bachelor of Arts in Music, minor in Christian Studies	1
Bachelor of Arts in Music	1
Bachelor of Music in Worship Studies	1
Bachelor of Music in Contemporary Worship Leadership	1
Bachelor of Music in Worship Leadership	1
Bachelor of Music in Church Music	2
Years of Service in Ministry	
3	1
4	1
5	1
6	1
7	2
10	2
Ministry Position/Title	
Worship pastor	3
Minister of music	1
Minister of music, youth, and young adults	1
Associate pastor of music and children’s ministry	1
Associate pastor, worship leader, and creative arts	1
Associate minister of music	1

Participants reported their year of graduation from their HEI, which spanned the years of 2013–2020. Specifically, two participants graduated in 2013, two in 2015, two in 2017, and two in 2020. Through their respective college or university, each subject obtained a bachelor's degree with a ministry emphasis or specialization.

Each of the HEIs are accredited by a standard academic accrediting body. Five of the six institutions are accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). The NASM accreditation influences the curriculum of the degrees at these five schools through rigorous requirements of music programs.

The average attendance of the subject's churches was 120, 125, 250, 300, 350–450, 1100, 1500, and 3850 weekly attenders. The membership ranged from 500+ members (N = 3), 766 members (N = 1), 2000 members (N = 1), to 7000 members (N = 1). Additionally, two participants reported that they did not know their membership totals.

In trying to precisely identify where each church is located, participants could choose from four options: rural, suburban, city, or metroplex. The churches where participants served fell into two groups: rural and suburban. Rural communities surrounding the churches had populations of 2500 residents, 18,352 residents, 13,480 residents, and 2,700 residents.

One church was described as a *rural city*, having a population of approximately 80,000 but being surrounded by farmland and located approximately 1 hour 30 minutes from the next largest city. Three congregations were located in suburban locales: one with a population of 20,000 residents (but it was part of a grouping of cities with a population of more than 540,000 residents), the second with almost 700,000 residents, and the last with 35,000 residents, but that city was part of a group of cities that together have a metro area population of more than seven million people.

The difficulty of delineating this study was made more complex because of the inability to have completely clear categories due to the complexity of the pastor's individual ministries. While all participants were in local church ministry, they reported vastly different experiences in their full-time positions because of the congregations they served. Membership, the scope of ministry or ministries, rural or suburban areas, multisite or single brick and mortar facilities were just a few of the variables that set the service of each of these pastors apart.

The journey of Pastor 3, regarding how he arrived at his current ministry, began in his last 2 years of college when he led worship for a small church. In this small church, Pastor 3 said he was responsible for the Sunday worship service, PowerPoint words, and Wednesday night rehearsal. Pastor 3 recalled:

> I wouldn't even call myself a pastor at that point because I wasn't pastoring. I was more of a worship leader. Then I felt God called me to [add] youth ministry. I didn't want to be a youth pastor. I wanted to be a worship pastor. You know, lead the choir, sing my songs, play guitar, you know, deal with my kind of people, and you know, I had to surrender to it. I looked at those teenagers and the struggles, and God put a burden on my heart for them.

Pastor 3 further elaborated on his path after finishing his degree:

> I began leading the youth Bible study on Wednesday nights when we were out of college, and it went really well. I saw growth in those kids' lives, and then I also saw my wife really take to it, too. So, we pursued it [youth and music ministry] after that.

At the time of the interview, Pastor 3 had served in full-time ministry for 6 years with a ministry leading worship, youth, and young adults. His time between ministry areas was divided between worship (50%), youth (40%), and young adults (10%) approximately, but all areas are

dealing with people. He discovered that he must delegate tasks to volunteers in order to accomplish all that needs to be done in ministry, so he does not burn out. Pastor 3 remarked:

> I just always, unfortunately, had the mentality that if you want something done right, you do it yourself. But unfortunately, our church is on the track to keep on growing. I cannot do that anymore with youth, young adults, and music ministry. Unfortunately, sometime soon, I'm going to have to pass one of them on somebody because they are all growing.

He continues to experience a paradigm that ministry is continually changing, morphing into divergent areas that sometimes lead to atypical pathways of how God worked in the lives of the minister and the congregants.

When relating this pastor's experience to ALT as Knowles et al. (2020) suggested, "There is another, more subtle reason for emphasizing the experience of the learners; it has to do with each learner's self-identity…As they mature, they increasingly define themselves in terms of the experiences they have had" (p. 45). There are many paths to becoming a pastor and multiple strategies to accomplish meeting people where they are, this is ministry.

Interview Questions

In this qualitative, nonexperimental multiple case study, I gathered, evaluated, and interpreted the personal, first-hand accounts of ministers to document a possible gap in their preparation in an institute of higher education and their experience once they started full-time ministry in a local SBC congregation. The beginning of the Zoom interviews began with introductions and a description of how the interview would be conducted. Each pastor expressed a clear understanding of the process and procedures regarding the interview. There were six questions in total, and each is detailed in this section, as well as the responses given by each participant.

The first question asked participants to describe their method of preparation for their first full-time ministry position. All eight pastors felt the need to have training before beginning their first full-time ministries, and each attended a HEI that was within their home state. One participant transferred to an online program to finish his degree because of the COVID pandemic response of his university.

All pastors graduated with an undergraduate degree in some type of ministry-related major. Some of the pastors had no musical training prior to entering college. Pastor 4 found that his "first semesters were very transformative in my musical preparation. With my Dad having a background that was musically robust…he encouraged me to really beef up my musical skills, which I appreciate and I'm thankful for today."

A different experience was had by Pastor 8 as he "started out primarily as a piano player." In the process of completing his degree, his objectives changed. He realized that

> 'One of the golden nuggets was that choral conducting class; that was one of my favorite classes. Conducting, Singers [choral group], and private voice lessons' ended up playing a much bigger part in my ministry because these courses were 'growing me into what I would need to be as a minister.'

The framing and study questions started from a general viewpoint and moved to more specific questions about what each pastor deemed was essential or important in their preparation for ministry. In the answers to the first question referenced above, each pastor started their formal training for ministry in their HEIs. However, many of the participants took piano lessons, participated in children and youth choirs, or played in their worship bands at their local church.

Pastor 5 has a unique trajectory into full-time ministry. He was a volunteer bi-vocational worship leader before going to college to study music ministry. Pastor 5 said his preparation for

the volunteer position "had been in marching band through high school, so I knew how to read music, so I was able to come in with a little bit of knowledge." After being a volunteer worship leader, Pastor 5 knew God was calling him into full-time ministry, and he needed to complete his training at an HEI.

In the principles of ALT, Knowles et al. (2020, p. 46) suggested that motivation to learn comes from adults who "are responsive to some external motivators (e.g., better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, etc.), but the most potent motivators are internal pressures (e.g., the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, etc.)." Such factors are present in most of the pastors' responses and their desire for a more complete local church congregation ministry experience.

The second question asked what prompted participants' pursuit of a music ministry degree. Participant responses are summarized in Table 2. All of the pastors had some sort of involvement in worship or the music program in their home church.

Table 2

Ministerial Experiences Before Undergraduate Training

Experience	*N*
Raised in minister's home	3
Worship/Band leader in high school	3
Church intern prior to HEI	1
Youth choir	1
Part-time church in college	1
Full-time church ministry before HEI	1
Church pianist	1

Although three of the participants were raised in a minister's home, this was not necessarily an impetus for them to go into ministry. On the contrary, Pastor 3, the son of a minister, stated that it "made me want to stay away from ministry… I'll never forget sitting outside of [my Dad's] office, people yelling at him and calling him ungodly, but I knew it was the opposite." That was the reason Pastor 3 started his HEI experience as a music education major.

After more than 2 years of denying his calling, Pastor 5 recalled,

> I was 'fighting ministry the entire time' when two of my professors came to me and asked if I had ever thought about music ministry. I knew in my heart the whole time that was what I was supposed to do.

The fifth principle of ALT, which is the self-concept of the learner, is applicable to this example and others like it. Because, as Knowles stated, adults see themselves as "responsible for their own decisions." Additionally, he said, "they resent and resist situations in which they feel others are imposing their wills on them" (Knowles et al., 2020, p. 44).

The third interview question asked pastors to reflect on their higher education experience and what could have been included that would have been constructive to their full-time ministry. Each pastor had a remarkable musical and personal experience at their HEI, which they indicated they would repeat if they were doing their training again. None wanted their statements to come across as disrespectful or to be perceived as striking back at professors who mentored them. Rather, as gracious recipients of the training they received, they wanted their thoughts and suggestions to be seen as a starting point for positive change in ministry higher education. In short, the pastors wanted to be a help, not a hindrance.

A general weakness that was observed by all the pastors (*N*=8) and articulated in their interviews was the slow way that HEIs changed course to keep up with current trends, especially in technology. Pastor 4 stated, "I didn't have hands-on experience [at my HEI]." Some pastors (*N* = 2) noted areas that needed a more prominent role in the curriculum, such as "technology and role of technology in worship ministry…audio, visual, lighting, all those types of things" (Pastor #). Similarly, Pastor 7 stated:

> Some of the music side of things were a little, a little dated, especially even now. Some things that I would have been able to benefit from—technology in worship, how to use clicks or stem tracks, things like that—we didn't really learn that much about it, but I was able to get a lot more classical training.

The practical application of daily tasks in ministry also seemed to be a much-needed addition to the preparation and training process in the university curriculum expressed by most of the pastors (*N* = 6). The needs and desires of the local congregation should be kept in the forefront of HEI's curriculum choices to help guide further curriculum refinement for the future ministry majors. Pastors who participated in the study expressed their readiness for hands-on, experiential learning, applicable to their daily local church ministry opportunities (see Table 3).

Table 3

Recommendations for Inclusion in HEI Experience

Recommendation	*N*
Practical, hands-on experience	6
Technology training	2

Vaisben (2018, p. 104) indicated it would be advantageous for experiential learning to "address new management skills, such as leading change and the use of technology" for the

future minister to be trained in how to guide their respective congregation through these and other complex yet necessary paths. In keeping with ALT, Knowles et al. (2020) asserted:

> Adults are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in life situations. Furthermore, they learn new knowledge, understanding, skills, values, and attitudes most effectively when they are presented in the context of application to real-life situations. (p. 46)

The fourth interview question asked participants what could have been excluded from their HEI experience. In general, the positive aspects of pastors' experiences in their higher education coursework were communicated, evident in comments such as:

> Basically, every class that I had was useful to my degree or my experience at my church. I already knew some of the practical side because of working in the church, but I think that for the most part, all of the classes…pretty much got it right. (Pastor 1)

Nevertheless, seven of eight participants identified something in their curriculum that they felt was unnecessary, or at the very least, not used beyond the class. Each participant's recommendation, based on their experience, is depicted in Table 4.

Table 4

Recommendations for Exclusion in HEI Experience

Recommendation	*N*
Nothing could have been excluded	1
Upper-level music theory	2
Music history	2
Cross-cultural ministry	1
Hymnology	1
Conducting	1

The NASM requires foundational musical knowledge for accredited music degrees. Standards for accreditation by NASM are addressed in the NASM Handbook and state that music history, music theory, and other areas of a collegiate music program are necessary building blocks for understanding the whole of music (National Association of Schools of Music, 2023). Also, each participant indicated they would rather have had what is necessary to earn an accredited degree than to go through an unaccredited program.

When considering these responses with ALT in mind, Knowles et al. (2020) stated it is necessary that learners know:

> One of the new aphorisms in adult education is that the first task of the facilitator of learning is to help the learners become aware of the need to know. At the very least, facilitators can make an intellectual case for the value of learning in improving the effectiveness of the learners' performance or the quality of their lives. Even more potent tools for raising the level of awareness of the need to know are real or simulated experiences in which the learners discover for themselves the gaps between where they are now and where they want to be. (pp. 43–44)

This ALT principle suggests that a good facilitator helps students understand the reasons courses are included in the curriculum (as integral knowledge in their discipline) and thus, the reason certain courses are required for accreditation.

The fifth interview question asked participants what they felt was the best element of the HEI experience. Table 5 depicts participants' responses. It was not surprising that relationships mattered most to the participants.

Table 5

Best Element of Higher Education Experience

Element	*N*
Relationships with Professors	5
Relationships with other Students	3

The role of the professor in a student's experience *(N*=5) could not be emphasized enough in efforts to engage students in the process of learning. Pastor 6 fondly remembered the importance of the relationships he gained at his HEI in his comment, "The relationships that you build in this time of training, whenever you get out into real life outside of the institution bubble, you rely on those people to help strengthen you."

Pastor 3 declared, "One professor, I'll never forget, showed us how to drive a 15-passenger van, how to hook up a trailer, how to fix things, you know, stuff that I do every day now. He really was intentional." Similarly, Pastor 1 recalled, "I needed a class to graduate, and it wasn't offered that semester, so the Dean said, 'Okay, well, you can just take it one-on-one with me.'"

In the ALT framework, Knowles et al. (2020) suggested, "It is not necessary to sit by passively and wait for readiness to develop naturally, however. There are ways to induce readiness through exposure to models of superior performance, career counseling, simulation exercises, and other techniques" (p. 45). Professors who are intentional and seek to engage with students on a meaningful level make the most significant impact in their lives.

We also cannot discount the value of lifelong friendships made in college (*N* = 3). Pastor 7 commented:

> These are the people that, I mean, more than 10 years later, I still keep in contact with. And you know, I'm singing at their kid's weddings, you know, and things like that. And man, that part of it is truly priceless. You can't put a number, you can't quantify something like that…
>
> If you were able to build a relationship with someone and they call you 7, 8 years later, and their mom just died, and they asked you to come back and sing at the funeral, I mean, what a gift that is—to be such a pivotal part of these people's lives.

The idea expressed in ALT is defined through readiness to learn. While this group of pastors needed to be given tools to learn, Knowles et al. (2020) stated:

> The richest resources for learning reside in the adult learner themselves. Hence, the emphasis in adult education is on experiential techniques, techniques that tap into the experience of the learners, such as group discussions, simulation exercises, problem-solving activities, case methods, and laboratory methods, instead of transmittal techniques. Also, greater emphasis is placed on peer-helping activities. (p. 45)

The final interview question asked participants if they wished to add anything further or modify any part of their previous responses to the interview questions. Participants were given the opportunity to revise or delete any part of their interview. All participants declined to make changes.

Findings

After the interviews were completed, it became evident that certain commonalities existed in the findings of this case study. While each pastor's experience was unique, there were enough similarities in their experiences that emerged. Specifically, several commonalities and two themes were synthesized. Table 6 depicts a summary of the findings of this study.

Table 6

Summary of the Findings

Commonalities	Themes
Necessity of studying for ministry	Relationships with university professors &/or peers
Calling	More hands-on experiences, experimental learning
Adding applicable courses to the curriculum (Hands-on experiences and experiential learning)	
Courses not applicable to day-to-day ministry	

Necessity of Studying for Ministry

All participants were pastors, and each one had a ministry-related degree from an HEI. In addition, each one was some type of worship leader, or music was a part of their job description. Pastor 3, as an example, stated, "I do worship and youth ministry," while Pastor 1 stated, "I am a worship pastor. My main responsibility is to lead worship service with a band every Sunday morning and every Wednesday night with our youth services." There was variety in the pastor's job responsibilities, but they also shared the common element of being their respective congregation's worship leader.

Calling

All eight pastors spent the majority of their youth active in church. Five pastors had some type of music training before starting their undergraduate degrees at their HEIs. Three of the

pastors were raised in homes where their father was a pastor of some type. Two of the pastors mentioned that having a parent in ministry and seeing how congregants treated that parent was a deterrent to going into the ministry themselves; however, God's calling was stronger—and they became pastors, even knowing many of the difficulties they would encounter.

There were no other overriding themes in the responses to this question. One pastor started college as a Music Education major, and two served on a worship team in college. Pastor 3 discovered God was calling him into ministry. He explained, "I had to surrender… God put a burden on my heart… and I couldn't really explain why…I mean, if you ever told me when I was junior [in high school], I would have told you, you were crazy."

The calling of God into ministry happens in a variety of ways. No two callings are the same. However, each called minister is serving the same God, and He moves in miraculous and mysterious ways as revealed by Pastor 3 in his interview.

Adding Applicable Courses in the Ministry Curriculum

When asked what could have been included in their HEI experience that would have contributed to full-time ministry, all eight pastors mentioned wanting more practical, hands-on experience, including experiential learning opportunities. Leading in chapel, playing in a school/faculty lead band, or singing in a contemporary ensemble were all discussed as possible alternatives for worship/church music majors.

Five pastors stated that they could have used more theology or Bible classes. Pastor 8 interjected that he "would have included more theology classes." Pastor 4 felt that "the pastoral side of things definitely could have been more prominent and more central to my specific degree plan." Participants emphasized the need for counseling, psychology, and classes that teach how to deal with people. The human needs of those involved in their new ministries were

unanticipated by the pastors when they graduated from their HEIs but quickly became a stark reality when confronted by the needs of their local church congregants.

Courses Not Applicable to Day-to-Day Ministry

When asked what could have been excluded from their HEI experience, all participants had some classes or courses that came to mind quickly. There was no hesitation in answering the question. Four of the pastors named a specific class that was not helpful, including a song classification course, an online worship ministry class, a conducting class, and a missions minor that was specific to one particular HEI. Pastor 5 described a course that was not useful:

> [A] multigenerational worship leader course… it was more under the idea of choir, not multigenerational, as in congregational, but groups, you know, children's choir, youth band, adult choir…every assignment was just a fake calendar I put together and looking at Lifeway to find music.

The other four pastors expressed that upper-level music core classes have not served them in ministry. In particular, Music History and Music Theory, while being some of the most difficult in the curriculum, have never been used in their full-time ministries. Pastor 2 suggested, "Theory three and four…since I've been in ministry, I know that not everybody is going to subscribe to this thought, but I haven't really had to decipher that Italian sixth chords…I did not find those to be helpful." Each of these four pastors acknowledged that in order to have an accredited degree, sometimes there are courses required by an accrediting body (NASM) that do not necessarily "make sense" to the student. While accreditation is understood after graduation, the feeling of these pastors was that if it were possible, they would rather spend their time in a practical or hands-on type of course that was more relevant to ministry.

Relationships

Two facets developed in this part of the interview, and both revolved around relationships with people. Four of the pastors felt the best element of their undergraduate education was their professors—the ways in which their professors cared for them and invested heavily in them as a person and, ultimately, in their ministries. Pastor 5 recounted, "the professors, you know they love you. They want you to do well and see you succeed. It was important that they cared."

A second facet revolved around the relationships they had with their classmates—people they did life with for their years of study. Three of the pastors referenced a time when people made a difference in their education. Pastor 8 recounted that "Singers (college choir) particularly eloped. We became like a family…that was really a highlight." The camaraderie brought about by the shared experiences of college life made life-long friends out of these students, who eventually became graduates and now still seek positive exchanges with each other. The interdependency experienced in college now has become friendship and rapport.

Summary of the Study Results

Chapter 4 began with an overview of the reason for the research and data collection. The data collection, the timeline, and participant profiles were examined before moving into the answers of the eight Southern Baptist pastors who participated in the study. Two themes were discovered in the data.

The data reported in this study represented the experiences and impressions of those who engaged in the research interviews. A side note is that while six HEIs are represented, and those HEIs are in five different states spanning over 1,000 miles between the two furthest locations, the findings were similar in both positive and negative responses. While there are things to be

learned from the findings of this research, SBC education is solid and similar in scope and process.

It is interesting to note that all the pastors interviewed wanted some type of experiential learning built into their degree plan. In response to RQ2 about whether experiential learning benefits ministers in their preparation for ministry, this group of ministers all wanted some type of hands-on or experiential learning as a part of their formal preparation for ministry. Whether it was on campus or within a church in the community, the sincere desire was for guided learning that would simulate what their real-world experiences might look like. Pastor 4 described:

> More hands-on work was needed. I think a lot of universities are scrambling to either bolster this in their degree plans or add it because it was non-existent. Technology and the role of technology in worship ministry, there were some classes that touched on those topics but definitely nothing that really bolstered my understanding.

Pastor 8 stated that his college "didn't do much with technology…" He added, "That would have been helpful, I think. One of the things that would be helpful was just something as simple as [learning to] set up and run a soundboard…practical stuff, things we use every day in ministry."

Each participant gave reasons for why they thought having a type of intern experience as students would have helped prepare them for full-time ministry. Additionally, the participants wanted more practical courses that would help them minister to people, such as counseling, psychology, or some type of course that would help them deal with difficult situations or people.

Finally, an overwhelming theme of the ministers was their appreciation of the relationships they cultivated during their undergraduate experience. To that end, Pastor 7 stated, "The most important part of my undergraduate experience were the relationships." Whether the

relationships were with influential professors who mentored them or friendships with peers, the relational aspect of their undergraduate education was extraordinarily meaningful to their positive higher education experiences.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative, multicase study was to examine the descriptions of their experiences provided in interviews of Southern Baptist pastors who detailed their experiences between the higher education preparation they received and their first years of ministry experience in a local SBC congregation. Through semistructured interviews, the eight pastors were able to characterize both positive and negative aspects of the training that influenced their years of ministry, postgraduation.

The study parameters were based on the literature review presented in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 includes discussions, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for practical application. Chapter 5 also includes possibilities for future research based on the findings in this study.

The importance of this case study research lies in identifying strengths and weaknesses in the education of ministry leaders. Trying to meet the needs of ministers in training is sometimes a changing goal for HEIs. In evaluating curricular choices and how to best serve the needs of the local SBC church, it might be advantageous to look to the most recently graduated pastors to discover their ministry demands and how their training has helped them meet those demands. In doing so, this research could assist those who make curricular changes in ministry degrees in examining the offerings that might be changed or added to the current curriculum. In this effort, the HEIs could possibly find additional ways to support the local SBC church through the methods and classes to train future SBC pastors.

Discussion of the Findings

The research questions were explored through the lens of eight SBC pastors who have worked in full-time ministry for at least 3 years but no more than 10 years. While each pastor's

experiences and life situations are unique, similarities can be made from the findings of this research. These participants answered the research questions based on their experience.

RQ1: How do pastors with 3–10 years of full-time local SBC church ministry experience describe the gap between preparation and their first local church ministry experience?

RQ2: Does experiential learning benefit ministers in their preparation for ministry?

The experiences, feelings, and ideas expressed by these eight pastors are unique to their situations. Through the triangulation process, I have data from three diverse sources (Saldana & Omasta, 2018) that add dimensions to the collected data. Validity and reliability are shown to exist in this study through the similarity of the answers, which also represent the themes discovered in this multicase study. The rationale for using multicase research was to conduct the study within the context of each pastor's ministry experience, where they could speak from their perspective. As Yin stated, this demonstrates "an in-depth study of a phenomenon in this real-world context" (Yin, 2018, p. 127).

The findings of the investigation were reported in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I discuss the findings through the lens of ALT and the perceived needs that pastors expressed. The participant profiles were as expected. The participant selection parameters were identified for the study, and to participate, the pastors had to meet those qualifications.

Demographics of the Participants

The eight ministers met the criteria outlined previously for this case study research. Each pastor attained their undergraduate degree at one of six SBC-affiliated HEIs located in one of five states in the contiguous United States. Through their study, the eight pastors were awarded seven different degrees, each minister having 3–10 years of experience in local SBC-associated churches.

All eight pastors were active members in their respective churches during their adolescent years. Three of the participants were raised in homes where their father was a pastor of some type at the church they attended. Five pastors had some musical training before starting their undergraduate degree at their HEI. While not everything about their church experience was idyllic, the sense of God's calling played into their decision to become a minister and follow God's direction for their lives.

Through the interview process, five areas of commonality were discovered:

1. All participants were in some type of music/worship ministry.
2. All grew up in church.
3. Five of the eight had some type of music ministry training before coming to college.
4. Seven of the eight wanted practical, hands-on experience from their HEIs.
5. Relationships with their professors and peers proved to be invaluable to them personally and ministerially.

From these five areas, two themes emerged in the findings of this case study. The emerging themes discovered in the interviews provided me an opportunity to reflect on what I had learned in my undergraduate studies, the continued relationships, and what I needed in my first ministry experience. The human experience does not change much over time. It can be a beneficial experience to have mentors and peers who walk alongside us in the ministry journey to help, teach, and provide relationships. The pastors in this study discussed their need for practical, helpful teaching and friendship in ministry. Generally, an assertion of ALT as stated by Merriam, is that "an adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning" (Merriam, 2017, p. 23).

The relationship between these pastors' ministry duties, time spent in ministry, and their specific ministries is an intriguing correlation. The size of one's congregation does not necessarily equate to more or less time spent in ministry during the week. Here is a comparison of two participants: one ministering at a suburban, multisite congregation and one ministering in a rural congregation.

Pastor 1 is a minister for a multisite, multistaff ministry. His primary responsibility is to lead worship services with a band each Sunday morning and one student service each Wednesday night at their largest campus. Pastor 1 relayed, "A big part of my job is that I am over all of our youth services. So, we have five physical locations as well as an online location, and I coordinate all of those different campuses for Wednesday nights."

Pastor 1 described another big part of his job, "I make all of our backing tracks so everything that we use is live in our Ableton sessions…I create those for all of our services, and that includes Sunday morning adult services as well as youth services." Since he leads one campus, he mentors four additional worship leaders who lead the other campus' worship services. He mentioned they are in "constant communication, just talking about how services went; things that could be better, things that went well."

Pastor 2 started in a small church and transitioned quickly on two different occasions. He described:

> Twenty-two-year-old (me) was, it was a very interesting thing. You know, experience is a great teacher. And that's something that I've certainly gained a lot from in these 7 years of ministry is… not only in the music side of things but also in dealing with people, and really, a lot of it is on myself just because we were all 22 once and very prideful.

Pastor 2 discussed his experience while still in his undergraduate program, before taking his first part-time church:

> All my experience was in a large church, over 1,000 in attendance each week. I formed my thinking around that large church, and when I try to do things at a bigger scale, it just doesn't work at certain places. I thought I would just come in here and change a whole lot of things. I didn't have the people skills that I do now, and I also didn't have just the experience of being a minister.
>
> I had a lot of head knowledge (from my) music courses, but there was a disconnect in how you can judge certain people. School prepares you to have the head knowledge to do ministry, but whenever you step in, you got to be able to do well and work with people.
>
> Experience is a great teacher. Interacting with a praise team member, there's not really something in the classroom setting unless you do it in some sort of a practicum level, which I did not do. There wasn't any internship for me. I was going to do that, but I didn't have that while I was in school.

While having vastly different ministry experiences, Pastor 1 and Pastor 2 shared several commonalities. Both pastors wear many different hats during the week while mentoring those who are part of their respective local congregations. Dealing with people and learning how to lead them effectively is a necessity, regardless of the size of the local church body.

As demonstrated in their responses, "adults first gravitate towards learning things that are directly relevant to their job or personal life" (Knowles et al., 2020, p. 6). Both pastors learned how to deal with situations they had never encountered previously. Both found that learning on the job had to become part of their weekly focus, in addition to time spent in preparation for their

ministry meetings; whether it is a worship service, a student Bible study, or counseling season, preparation is vital. Administration and staying connected with other pastors or staff takes time and needs to be cultivated.

Other similar ministry between the large and small congregations included ministering to: (a) hurting ministry members; (b) those going through the loss of a family member, divorce, or a cheating spouse; (c) long-term illness—either a family member or themselves; (d) weddings, I child dedications; and (e) praying with members who are facing these or other difficulties. All of these real-world situations were part of the ministries of each pastor who was interviewed.

Learning Through the Curriculum and Hands-On Experience

In keeping with Knowles's principles of adult learning, the eight pastors' most common response when asked about what could have been included in their HEI experience was a combination of practical courses with more hands-on experience, including experiential learning. This aligns with Knowles's principle of the "self-concept of the learner" being "self-directed."

There was extensive discussion about the need to understand why pastors minister the way they do, coupled with the "why," there was the "how" regarding the very present reality that new pastors need practical training in ministering to their local congregants. So much of the adult learning experience centers on why they need to know a particular set of information and how it applies practically to the person's work and career (Knowles et al., 2020). These new ministers stated they could use a constructive set of tools to help their local congregations flourish.

The full-time ministry has many variants, which could make it challenging to prepare ministers for every scenario they might encounter. Still, after serving between 3 and 10 years, all eight pastors desired some type of practical, hands-on experience from their HEIs. The idea of

coursework being designed with a more practical objective is consistent with the premise from ALT as described by Lindeman (1926):

> Every adult person finds himself in specific situations with respect to his work, his recreation, his family life, his community life, et cetera—situations, which call for adjustments. Adult education begins at this point. Subject matter is brought into the situation, put to work, when needed. Texts and teachers play a new and secondary role in this type of education; they must give way to the primary importance of the learners. (pp. 8–9)

Practical experiences the pastors suggested included leading in chapel or playing in a school/faculty lead band or contemporary ensemble. These were discussed as additional hands-on learning opportunities for worship/church music majors. Additionally, more theology or Bible classes were requested among a significant number of participants to help with questions about the Bible and the Christian life. Courses in counseling and psychology were mentioned as possible additions to the ministry curriculum. It was thought-provoking to hear the ministers talk about how ill-equipped they felt when trying to help people with issues beyond the scope of their experience.

Engaging Students in Compelling Courses

There was no hesitation in answering which courses could have been excluded from their college degree programs. All eight participants had at least one example. Four pastors conveyed that upper-level music core classes have not served them in their local church ministry. Specifically, upper-level music history and music theory were named. While being some of the most arduous in the degree program, pastors indicated that the information learned in these courses was not drawn upon in their full-time ministries. Nevertheless, the four pastors

acknowledged that to have an accredited degree, sometimes there are courses in the curriculum prescribed by an accrediting body (i.e., NASM) that students may not understand at the time. While accreditation is now understood by these ministers, they suggested spending the credit hours of the curriculum in a more practical or hands-on type of course, more applicable to local church ministry.

In addition, the other four pastors noted one distinct class that was not helpful in their degree programs. These courses included (a) a song classification course, (b) an online worship ministry class, (c) a second conducting class, and (d) an entire missions minor that was specific to a particular college. Not every course will be a student's favorite. Still, the progression of classes may help students understand the reason for the inclusion of all classes in the particular undergraduate degree curriculum.

In the principles of ALT or andragogy set forth by Knowles, is the principle of *orientation to learning* in which "Adults are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that learning helps them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations" (Knowles et al., 2020, p. 46). This principle was evident in participants' interview responses as they spoke about learning music and ministry and then trying to apply their knowledge to real-world issues and problems.

Themes of the Importance of Relationship

It was revealing to note that relationships play an integral role in how the ministers feel about the value of their undergraduate experience, shifting from the extrinsic learning in the classroom to the intrinsic value of relationships (Merriam, 2017). All the participants mentioned relationships of one kind or another as vital and imperative to the positive way in which they viewed their HEI experience.

Interestingly, half of the pastors felt the best element of their undergraduate education was relationships with their professors, and half of the pastors felt the relationships they had with their peers were the most important. The ministers who felt connected to their professors were drawn by the concern the faculty members showed to them individually and how they felt the faculty engaged and invested in them. The relationship and the personal investment the participants felt with their professor continues to this day. Pastor 1 stated:

> The professors at my school were just really invested in the students. I needed to take a class, and the Dean said, "you can just take it one one-on-one with me." We had some really good conversation and good session of talking thought, and I feel like that was a really formative thing for me.

Glass et al. (2022) stated, "the notion of trust and the trusting relationship that must be cultivated by the educator and the adult learner" is important to the learning process because "adult learners must be able to trust the educator in order to maximize the potential for experiential learning" (p. 49).

Relationships with their peers were a second area the pastors were passionate about. Fellow students that the pastors had been in class with, studied with, and laughed and cried with, were the people for whom they were grateful. The companionship, togetherness, and shared experiences of college brought them to a place of comradery and led them to life-long friendships. These friendships were spoken of in such glowing terms by the pastors that it isn't hard to understand that they still seek each other's advice and knowledge today. Pastor 6 stated:

> There are a couple of people that I've met at the institution that have been through college, COVID. We've gone through all these very challenging times, and they've been

> "how can I pray for you?" and "how are things going?" and "what can we help each other with?" We all came together and, you know, became very close and still talk to this day.

In the following sections, the limits of the case study are discussed in detail. While there may have been other important experiences in the undergraduate HEI studies of the participants, those were not probed by the interviews and subsequent rich data that developed in this case study.

Limitations

Social scientists focus research on exploratory, illustrative, intrinsic, and descriptive case studies; however, Saldana and Omasta stated, "some qualitative studies and reports do indeed have limitations, but we reconceptualize that our work also has parameters" (Saldana & Omasta, 2018, p. 168), which are the parameters that have become the limitations. In this case study, six areas were identified that could be considered limitations: (a) prescribed list of requirements, (b) oral responses, (c) small sample group, (d) only male participants, (e) only worship pastors, and (f) researcher bias. This case study considered the possible ramifications and restrictions in which these six areas were subjected. This helped clarify the findings and served as a reminder not to overgeneralize the details to broader populations (Saldana & Omasta, 2018). Because case study research explores certain questions regarding a topic, it is possible that certain factors are potential detriments to the viability of the data. Below are the perceivable limitations within this multicase study.

Prescribed List of Requirements

A limitation of this research study is its application to ministry tenure. This was purposefully specified in order to allow an opportune amount of time from the completion of participants' undergraduate experience. Thus, this limited the ministers to a set amount of local

church ministry experience to look back on and determine what would have helped them prepare more completely for their first years of ministry.

The prescribed list of requirements each participating pastor needed to meet included completing an undergraduate degree from a HEI that is related to the SBC. Their degree had to be in an area related to ministry, such as religion, Bible, education, music, or counseling. Additionally, the participants needed to have 3–10 years of full-time ministry experience in a local SBC church. Pastors with less than 3 years and more than 10 years of experience were excluded from this research. This parameter created a limitation of not receiving input from pastors with less or additional ministry experience than the prescribed parameters dictated.

Oral Responses

All responses were given orally, so participants could not review their responses before submitting them. The participants had to think in the moment. With follow-up questions, the pastors were able to clarify their responses, giving rich discussion and additional facets to their feelings and concrete answers. Additionally, each pastor was given the opportunity to change or completely edit their response to any question during the interview. However, the oral responses were still in the moment limiting time to reflect or refine their answers.

Small Sample Size

Eight pastors were interviewed for this case study. While the number was large enough to gather information pertinent to this research, it is too small to apply to ministry students in general. Additionally, it is not possible to make overarching conclusions about how the HEIs curriculum impacts students beyond the six SBC HEIs attended by the participants in this case study.

Only Male Participants

The work of ministry is done by both male and female ministers in the SBC. However, through the recruitment process, only male participants met the specified criteria for the sample. This case study research was designed for both female and male subjects to be included. While females were invited to participate, responses suggested that females either went directly into graduate school or were no longer practicing ministers in a local church. The scope of the research did not include women, at least with these HEI employees. Therefore, the male-only subject pool became a drawback because there are women who are ministers in the SBC, who are not represented in this case study. Including women would have been beneficial for including a female perspective and experience. Since men and women have different paradigms and processes, the female perspective could have been valuable had we been able to locate qualified participants for this research study.

Only Worship Pastors

Due to the difficulty of finding pastor participants through the research process, this case study only included one type of pastor—those whose ministries center around music and worship. The scope of this case study was designed to give an opportunity for representation to all types of pastors in different categories of ministry and undergraduate degrees. While deans and professors in disciplines other than music and worship were contacted, those who responded to the research study emails and phone calls were faculty members in HEI schools of music.

Researcher Bias

As presented in Chapter 3, interviews led to data that could be prejudiced or influenced by my personal bias. Although best efforts were made to remove researcher bias, bias could still be present due to the nature of my profession. It is important, as a social scientist, to have

epoche. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that being able to have a subjective, honest narrative allows the researcher to set aside personal judgment and everyday experiences. By attempting to make *epoche* happen in this case study, I was able to "clarify the bias" (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). Creswell (2014) also stated, "interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background, such as their gender, culture, history, and socioeconomic origin" of the researcher (p. 202). Additionally, with the help of a recruiter, two peer reviewers, and an external auditor, the intention was to accept the data as the participants intended and, hopefully, provide useful information for pastors who intend to minister in the years to come.

Implications

In the findings of this multicase study, there are indications that suggest Southern Baptist Colleges and Universities could provide an even higher rate of satisfaction in the undergraduate experience for those who were trained in SBC-affiliated HEIs. Time spent preparing for actual, hands-on, real-world ministry is a stated need among the participants. While it is important to have a deep understanding of the philosophy and history of ministry, preparing pastors for problems and issues they may encounter is a need of these recently graduated ministry professions that should not be overlooked.

The participants believed relationships with both professors and peers were critical to new ministers. The wisdom from professors who had been in the combination of ministry and academia for decades was a resource the study group affirmed as a rich asset that needed to be accessed in stressful and difficult times of ministry.

The camaraderie that occurs in the shared experiences of going through higher education together gives peers from this era of a student's life substantial capital from which to draw upon. The reality that no one goes through life alone was present in these interviews. As these pastors

encounter opportunities never experienced before, they call on those they know, professors and friends, to help guide them through the challenges of local church ministry.

For faculty, accreditation requirements, and the needs of those in local church ministry, the participants suggested HEIs find a balance between courses taught and experiential learning opportunities. Particularly in the case of music ministry courses, the possibility of evaluating the use of upper-level core music courses in tandem with the quickly changing technology requirements of the local church is an operation that is a balancing process. Undergraduate students may also need to take into consideration that learning the history of their chosen area of expertise and the complexities of the music they present may make them a better representative in the ministry area into which they have been called.

Recommendations

This case study research revealed some possible deficiencies between formal education and real-world expectations, particularly in the area of pastoral preparedness. The following recommendations could assist professors and HEIs as they move forward in preparing students for full-time, local church ministry.

Recommendations for Practical Application

A subset of ALT is the Humanistic Orientation (HO). In HO, "the purpose of learning from a humanistic perspective is for each individual to find their purpose, grow, and mature, and ultimately to become self-actualized" (Allen et al., 2022, p. 261). In these processes, students begin to realize "their goals, motivations, strengths, and values. As their self-awareness capacity grows, later stages consist of fine-tuning and continued unfolding of self-knowledge. Within each stage, however, its focus rests on developing the 'whole person'" (Allen et al., 2022, p. 261).

The concepts above are partially expressed by the participants as they went into their first ministry position. Most HEIs teach in a cognitivist orientation of ALT where it is

> The instructor's role to design educational experiences that present theoretical content in a logical and appropriately staged format…the learner's role is to build an accurate mental mode of the presented theoretical content. The primary goal within the orientation is for learners to master theoretical knowledge and employ their own mental processing abilities, analyze and diagnose a novel situation. (Allen et al., 2022, p. 258)

Pastors need more hands-on experience, and professors at HEIs might help students, allowing them more time in practical ministry exercises they will encounter in their undergraduate experience; it would be recommended that HEIs look carefully at the way student relationships are forged and diligently work to find ways to encourage students to build bonds with their peers and their professors. Being proactive will allow HEIs to give students a more robust circle of friends and mentors, which follows Proverbs 15:22: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers, they succeed" (NIV Bible, 1984).

One of the recommendations that emerged was the desire for more experiential learning opportunities. In support of how adults learn, "andragogy an adult learning theory—informs teaching methodology developed to focus more on learner-based practices that grow from the content of lessons" (Livingston & Cummings-Clay, 2023, p. 9). Some possible practices may be having prospective pastors conduct "practice" weddings, funerals, mock counseling sessions, learning how to ask someone if you can pray with them, lead a Bible Study, plan and execute a worship service. These are skills local church pastors are expected to be able to accomplish on their first day of ministry.

Livingston and Cummings-Clay (2023) suggested that "while many academic institutions in various disciplines have successfully graduated competent candidates in foundational subjects, the aspect of ensuring entry-level candidates' comprehensive preparation and equipping them with skills to confront real-life challenges in their disciplines has its deficiencies" (p. 1). This pastoral preparedness research study illustrates that very few participants had exposure to these practices, and they articulated a desire to have training and guidance in these practices to help them navigate their first local church ministry.

The research conducted with the eight pastors can make a difference in HEIs and influence the culture and training of the next generation of ministers. Guiding ministry students through the higher education coursework and instructing them in current best practice scenarios may bring about a more qualified clergy. Local congregations may also benefit from new pastors being prepared for the rigors of local church ministry.

Two themes of this research were that pastors wanted to have more hands-on experiences, including experiential learning, to prepare for real-world ministry situations; and that they wanted to learn about the technology that they would be ministering through in their local SBC church. Thus, classes focusing on technology that is in use in the SBC church today are recommended to help with new pastor preparedness.

Another recommendation is to offer classes with a focus on learning to deal with congregant's fears, problems, tragedies, and joys. This type of training would be advantageous to the pastor who will be working, many times solo, in a local church within the next few years. New pastor preparedness might be strengthened with a course or courses focusing on parishioners' realities, being able to advise or counsel them through these life challenges. There is apprehension about the unknown of new experiences, but helping the new pastor understand

that these situations happen in many local church ministries will strengthen the new minister's depository of options to help their new congregants through the hardships and challenges of life.

Additionally, round table discussions between currently practicing pastors and those being prepared for ministry would be a focus for HEIs for a two-pronged purpose. The first purpose is based on the theme that the pastors indicated they would like more hands-on experiences in their curriculum. A possible remedy would be round table discussions, allowing the prospective pastors to ask questions of ministers with experience and be able to ask follow-up questions. This would enable robust conversations over the areas of ministry that are of concern to the ministry students.

Based on the findings of this study, the second purpose is to give pastors in training an opportunity to develop ongoing mentor relationships. Examples of areas the participants felt unprepared for were weddings, funerals, counseling situations, and hospital visitation. The ability to build a group of more experienced pastors in which they can ask questions now and later when they are in their own ministries would be of great value to both the preservice pastors and their local church.

A possibility for curriculum development would be an increase in courses directly related to the areas of counseling and Biblical studies. The pastors who participated in this study felt this was a need in their undergraduate experience and would be beneficial to their pastoral preparedness, ultimately helping them serve their local church.

Recommendations for Future Research

It has been disclosed that "employers... report many students completing graduate school are ill-prepared for the workforce. This disconnect presents an opportunity to explore the relationship between service-learning and career preparation" (Roe, 2021, p. 183). If this is a

problem for workers who have completed graduate degrees, how much more of an issue might it be for those who have not had the education and experience brought about through graduate study?

None of the eight pastors in this study have had any graduate school education. As observed in the interviews of eight pastors, their feelings and expectations are supported by the literature. According to Roe (2021), “Students want opportunities that allow them to apply their learning in a real-world context and better position them for their future professional goals” (p. 189).

A widening of the research window for pastoral preparedness would include those ministers who are working on their professional theological training or have completed it. While these themes are prevalent in undergraduate experience, it would be compelling to find if these themes were consistent in seminary and graduate school. It would suggest a broader scope of research, at least concerning this multicase study, and would be a much larger group of pastors who would fall into the graduate education group.

The themes in my case study research were the pastor’s desire to have more technology, hands-on experience, and relationships with professors or peers. It would be of interest to compare pastors’ responses with an undergraduate degree only to the responses of those pastors who had completed a seminary or graduate school degree to see if they also felt the need for additional training in these areas of the curriculum.

A second area for additional research could be a study of women who received undergraduate ministry degrees to see their ministry or educational trajectory postgraduation compared to their male counterparts. Specific study areas could be why females seem to make the decision to move directly from undergraduate study into seminary or graduate school.

Another facet of research could be what, if any, differences there are between male ministers' full-time employment and female ministers' full-time employment opportunities. In this time when the role of women in ministry, particularly in the SBC, is under intense analysis and investigation, it could be a benefit to future ministers and local congregations to find the answers to these questions.

A third area for future research could include a detailed investigation of the curriculum at different Southern Baptist HEIs to discover what is being taught to future ministers (i.e., the outcomes, use of technology, theology course in relation to practical ministry courses, the use of experiential learning) and how prospective ministers are making their transition into full-time ministry at the local church level.

A fourth area for possible additional research could be a deeper dive into pastoral preparedness by including pastors with a broader spectrum of ministries and ministry degrees, including the Master of Divinity, Master of Theology, Master of Arts, Doctor of Ministry, and Doctor of Philosophy.

Lastly, a fifth area of future research could explore the difference between those pastors who received experiential learning in their HEI experience and those pastors who did not. A comparison study could shed light on a possible need for pastors to have more simulation and demonstration exercises of real-world ministry situations prior to their first full-time local church ministry positions.

Conclusions

Through the course of this research study, I investigated the knowledge, feelings, and perceptions of eight currently practicing pastors. These pastors were educated at HEIs connected

to the SBC and are serving in ministries at local churches affiliated with the SBC. The focus of this research study centered on two research questions:

1. How do pastors with 3–10 years of full-time local SBC church ministry experience describe the gap between preparation and their first local church ministry experience?
2. Does experiential learning benefit ministers in their preparation for ministry?

In this study, pastors indicated their desire for hands-on, experiential learning, especially in technology and dealing with their congregants' personal problems. HEIs are doing a good job preparing new pastors, but there is room for improvement, especially in terms of adjusting the curriculum to meet the changing needs of pastors in the 21st century. Equipped with this information, it is possible for HEIs related to the SBC to analyze their specific circumstances and meet the pressing needs of ministers being prepared for service today so they can better adapt to the conditions of the local Southern Baptist Church.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol—Revised Based on Actual Interviews

Framing Questions:

1. What is your name?
2. How many years have you been in full-time ministry since you graduated from your institute of higher education?
3. What degree did you obtain at your institution of higher education?
4. What ministry are you in currently?
5. What is the size of the church you currently serve?
    a. Average attendance?
    b. Total membership?
    c. Where are you located—rural, suburban, city, metroplex?
6. Was ministry training a part of your college/university curriculum?

Study Questions:

1. Explain your preparation for your first full-time ministry position.
    a. How were you formally prepared?
    b. What did you enjoy?
2. What ministerial experiences have you had pre- & post-undergraduate training?
3. Reflect on your higher education experience and what could have been included that would have been constructive to your full-time ministry.
4. What could have been excluded?
5. In your opinion, what was the best element of your higher education experience?

Final Questions/Comments

1. Is there anything you would like to add or any questions you have?
2. Is there any answer or thought you had that you would like to modify or change?
3. Thank you for your participation in this research project.

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Date: November 22, 2022

PI: Barton Morrison:

Department: 17220-Marriage & Family Therapy Online, ONL-Online Student

Re: Initial - IRB-2022-95

"Exploring a Potential Preparedness Gap Between Undergraduate Ministry Programs and Real-Life Ministry in the Southern Baptist Convention"

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for "Exploring a Potential Preparedness Gap Between Undergraduate Ministry Programs and Real-Life Ministry in the Southern Baptist Convention". The administrative check-in date is --.

Decision: Exempt

Category: Category 2. (ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Research Notes:

Additional Approvals/Instructions: This study meets the criteria for an exempt study. The study methodology uses a survey type design (single measurement, no intervention), and the questions are minimal risk for causing civil, criminal, or psychological harm.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit it to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the Institutional Review Board. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any and all of the following:

- When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Exempt, Non-Research, or Non-Human Research, email orsp@acu.edu to indicate that the research has finished.
- According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
- It is the Investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to confidentiality should be minimized.

For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp...

or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.

Sincerely,

Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board