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Administrator, Faculty, and Veteran Student Perspectives on Barriers Faced by Veterans in Higher Education

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Christie M. McDonald

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Walden University

2023

Abstract

Administrator, Faculty, and Veteran Student Perspectives on Barriers Faced by Veterans

in Higher Education

by

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M.S.A., Central Michigan University, 2011

B.B.A., Northwood University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

November 2022

Abstract

Military veterans' prior experiences can impact their study experiences and result in barriers to entering higher education. Prior research on veteran student barriers in higher education has not included the perspectives of faculty and administrators in addition to veterans. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the barriers that veteran students face in higher education and how those barriers could be addressed. The research questions focused specifically on the perspectives of administrators, faculty, and veterans on the barriers veteran students face and how those barriers could be addressed. The conceptual framework included Tinto's student integration model and Bean and Metzner's theory of nontraditional undergraduate attrition. The semistructured interview process included interviews with five veteran students, three college administrators, and four faculty members from a four-year private learning institution in the state of Michigan. Data collected were analyzed, coded, and inductive data analysis was used to identify themes: (a) veteran resource awareness, (b) generational differences in the classroom, (c) transitional barriers, (d) psychological triggers, and (e) need for a dedicated contact person on campus to assist veteran students. Addressing these barriers may allow more veterans to complete their college degrees, creating a better environment for their families and communities. Therefore, the findings from this study have potential implications for positive social change.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this to my son, husband, parents, sisters, community, and coworkers. I dedicate this to my son Owen: We have been through so much together over the years. Thank you for always being my light through the dark times. I hope that this journey instilled the importance of lifelong education. I dedicate this to my husband, Matt McDonald. He celebrated every milestone and helped me through the many roadblocks. Watching you complete your degrees during my Ph.D. process pushed me to do better and work harder. Your work ethic is unheard of, and I am proud of you. One thing that kept me going was you always saying, “If it were easy, everyone would be doing it.”

My parents deserve dedication. They sent me messages checking in regularly to keep me in check and have always believed in me since I was born. I have great gratitude for their sacrifices and the life they provided me. They have shown me that hard work pays off and that you should always aim high. I dedicate this to my community. During the floods in May 2020, I steered away from my dissertation a little to feed flood victims for 22 weeks. Their faces each week re-sparked my dedication and gave me the energy to push forward and never take anything for granted. We are put on this earth to make a difference, and I was so lucky to have the opportunity to make a very bad situation better. I dedicate this to my sisters; they paved the way for me. They have always protected me and had my best interest in mind. I appreciate their love and support over the years. I dedicate this to my coworkers. They watched the process unfold, gave me pep talks, believed in my ability, and always told me to take some time for myself.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The goal of this basic qualitative study was to explore the barriers veteran students face when entering college after service through three different perspectives. Many veteran students returning from active duty seek the next chapter in their lives, and many turn to education to further their training and use the benefits earned. In this study, I focused on examining the perspectives of veterans, faculty, and administrators on the barriers veterans face entering college after service.

The Post 9/11 Government Issued (GI) Bill has greatly influenced military veterans to enroll in college or technical training (Southwell et al., 2016). Veteran students often face different barriers than non-veteran students on campus. Veteran students often have difficulty relating to others on campus, as they have been removed from the academic setting longer than their peers (Medley et al., 2017). Minimal studies have been conducted to look at the reintegration of veterans who suffer from physical and mental injuries (Medley et al., 2017).

Colleges and universities are attempting to adapt to the growing number of veteran students entering college and the distinct needs and resources of those veteran students (Southwell et al., 2016). Tailored services that serve this special population are influential in retaining and promoting positive veteran student experiences on college campuses (Southwell et al., 2016). This chapter includes the background, study problem, purpose, conceptual framework, nature of the study, research questions, assumptions, limitations, significance of the study, and finally, a summary.

Background

There has been an increase in student veterans entering college over the past decade. In 2018, over 17 million veterans attended college, and 5 million attained a bachelor's degree or higher (Duffin, 2019). In prior research studies, the focus has been on health risks and physical and psychological combat-related injuries among veterans returning to civilian life (Gonzalez & Elliott, 2016). Past researchers mostly focused on veterans' military background and individual characteristics (Gonzalez & Elliott, 2016). A prior study showed that contact between a service member and faculty is rare; however, the more faculty interacted with veteran students, the more faculty felt compelled to help students face challenges in the classroom (Gonzalez & Elliott, 2016). Lingering psychological effects of trauma often affect veterans for life (Medley et al., 2017). Minimal structure in the classroom creates a sense of social distance for veteran students (Medley et al., 2017).

A prior researcher looked at a key event timeline to understand the causal chain of events influencing veteran student experiences (Mobley et al., 2018). The timeline included veterans' barriers and the pathway that leads veteran students to college. Mobley et al. (2018) reported there are circles for comprehending how veteran students talk about the identities that arise when pursuing college degrees. Some barriers veterans face are grounded in their lived experiences, either contemporaneously or across time (Mobley et al., 2018). Veteran students identified that certain unique aspects of their military experiences greatly impact their experiences as college students (Mobley et al., 2018).

Diagnosed and undiagnosed depression were evaluated in veteran students in a campus-wide sample at a private, 4-year liberal arts post-secondary institution (Thomas et al., 2018). Tracking the era in which veterans served was used to understand if certain characteristics for seeking help differed based on era (Thomas et al., 2018). Thomas et al. found that social relationships on and off campus play an important role in promoting better health and reducing depression. Researchers have discovered that positive social support has a positive impact on mental health. Veterans seek help and guidance from military-related peers more often than from civilians (Whiteman et al., 2013). Prior military experiences could have long-lasting social effects on veteran students, and those effects could remain present and create additional barriers as veterans enter higher education (Whiteman et al., 2013).

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was that veterans' prior experiences impact their study experiences, which can result in barriers to higher education. While some prior research has been conducted on veteran student barriers in higher education, researchers have yet to examine the perspectives of faculty and administrators in addition to veterans. There is a gap in the literature regarding the perspectives of veterans, faculty, and administrators and how other vital stakeholders understand veteran student barriers in higher education (Arminio et al., 2018; Gibbs et al., 2019; Gonzalez & Elliott, 2016).

This study was conducted at a Great Lakes region four-year private institution. Retention and persistence rates at this institution are lower for veteran students than for the rest of the student population. Persistence rates for nonveterans in 2018 were 76%

compared to 68% for veteran students. The retention rate for veterans was 56.5%, compared to 65% for nonveteran students in 2018 (Northwood, 2019). The attrition of veteran students may indicate barriers encountered in higher education.

As active-duty service members complete their enlistment, they must navigate the next phases of their lives (Sportsman & Thomas, 2015). Higher education is often a pathway for veterans to return to civilian life and professional careers (Lim et al., 2018). As veterans enter higher education institutions, they often have difficulty relating to others and perceive student peers as uninformed. In some instances, veteran students feel the comments made by others in the classroom are immature and disrespectful (Medley et al., 2017). As student veterans transition to college, they are often adjusting to new civilian responsibilities such as geographic relocation or adjusting their original career path. Some daily and educational stressors of veteran students are readily observable and even typical for new students; however, some may be more specific, subtle, and complex (Sportsman & Thomas, 2015).

Veterans can feel as though they are not as equipped for classroom conversations as other students, often increasing personal stressors (Medley et al., 2017). Some conversations in the classroom that may seem normal can create flashbacks and unwelcoming anxiety for veterans (Falkey, 2016). Transitioning from a structured regime of conformity to a culture that promotes creativity and individualism is frequently problematic for veteran students (Falkey, 2016). One out of three veterans faces deployment and has a higher rate of mental health symptoms (Barry, 2015). Some veterans may deal with mental health symptoms and need additional resources for

depression and anxiety (Barry, 2015). Personal stressors for veteran students increase with exposure to distress. Often veterans feel pressure from academic shortfalls, financial worries, and personal relationships (Barry, 2015). With the increase in veteran students, there has been growing interest from the public in the overall welfare of returning veterans.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the barriers that veteran students face in higher education and how those barriers can be addressed. The unique perspectives gained through this study may help identify opportunities to remove barriers for veteran students in higher education.

Research Questions

This basic qualitative study focused on lived experiences from the perspectives of veteran students, faculty, and administrators. Past studies have been conducted evaluating the experiences of veteran students specifically, but little research has been done to evaluate barriers to entering higher education from three different perspectives. This qualitative research focused on subjective views allowing me to evaluate the phenomenon from the viewpoint of three different perspectives. These research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of veterans, faculty, and administrators regarding the barriers that veteran students face in higher education?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of veterans, faculty, and administrators regarding how barriers that veteran students face can be addressed?

Study findings may provide stakeholders with insight into veteran students' experiences when entering college. The different perspectives on veteran student barriers may also give higher education institutions opportunities to modify or formulate policies to better serve veteran students in college.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I used Tinto's (1975), Bean and Metzner's (1984), and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theories to conceptualize the literature related to the barriers that veteran students may face in higher education. Tinto's (1975) theory is focused on integration. *Integration* refers to how students navigate and engage the cultures of their specific campuses. Tinto's dimensions of institutional action implies that institutions should have an effective retention program to aid students because of the effects of barriers on persistence and retention. Institutions should commit to students and their education and provide resources for staff and faculty development (Tinto, 1975). Bean and Metzner's (1984) theory illustrates several variables that influence a student's decision to persist, including institutional satisfaction, the value of education, and organizational rules. Tinto's and Bean and Metzner's theories can be used to evaluate the decisions and integration of students. Students' reasons for not persisting come from environmental factors and personal determinants. Bean and Metzner believe these factors directly affect institutional commitment and dropout rates.

Nature of the Study

This study was a basic qualitative research study. Qualitative research goes beyond the what, where, and when, allowing a researcher to discover the why and how

behind human behavior and what governs those thoughts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Basic qualitative research allows the discovery of human behavior and the personal experiences of veterans, faculty, and administrators.

After Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted, the data were collected through semistructured open-ended interviews with 12 participants, including five veterans at different points of the educational journey, three administrators, and four faculty members. The data collected through interviews were analyzed using coding to identify and organize categories and themes. The basic qualitative approach allowed me to recognize the barriers veterans, administrators, and faculty perceive to be present during college. The perspectives gathered during the study might give higher education institutions a better understanding of what resources and support veterans need to integrate into college successfully.

Definitions of Terms

Military-friendly campus: An institution that complies with government regulations, participates openly in one or more media surveys, and strongly supports student veteran and servicemember communities by implementing best practices (Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities, n.d.).

Nontraditional student: According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), this group includes individuals who possess one or more of the following characteristics: enrolled in postsecondary education a year or more following high school, attend part-time, have dependents, work full-time while attending college, and received an alternate form of high school completion (Southwell et al., 2016).

Veteran: A person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, discharged or released from there under conditions other than dishonorable (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2019).

Veteran student: Any student who is a current or former member of the active-duty military, the National Guard, or Reserves, regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use (Robertson & Eschenauer, 2020).

Assumptions

In this research study, I assumed that all veteran student participants would honestly report barriers and challenges they experienced when entering higher education. Collecting honest and raw answers from participants is necessary to help ensure trustworthiness of data. I also assumed that interviewed faculty members would have had experiences with veteran students either in their classroom, online, or in-person classes. Also, I assumed that administrators would have at least minimal understanding of how veteran students are identified at the university and what classifies students as veteran students. There was also an assumption that faculty and administrators would benefit from learning about the results of this study to help veteran students be successful in the future.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was to explore the perspectives of veteran students, administrators, and faculty on the barriers veterans face when entering college. Based on the scope of this study, I chose to use participants from a private 4-year institution in the state of Michigan. The study was limited to veteran students who attended the institution

and administrators or faculty members currently employed at the institution. In this basic qualitative study, I explored the perspectives of administrators, faculty, and veteran students regarding the barriers that veteran students face in higher education and how those barriers can be addressed. When conducting this study, delimitations were considered. The first delimitation of this study was the choice of participants based on their grade level in college and discharge status from the military. Second, the administrators and faculty chosen were based on their level of interaction with veteran students at the university to ensure the participants had considerable interaction with veteran students.

Limitations

When conducting this study, limitations were considered. A limitation of this study was the practicality of the interview participants. Since students can be located across the United States, face-to-face interviews were not feasible. Virtual interviews were used to address this limitation. Additionally, the topic's sensitivity to a portion of the participant pool could limit the data collected from the participants. Veterans could be hesitant to participate in a study that makes them feel vulnerable. The last limitation of the study was my own biases. The participants for the study were selected from the institution where I am currently employed as a staff member and adjunct faculty member. This process required approval to gain access to veteran students, administrators, and faculty, and the approval process was lengthy. As the researcher, the awareness of the separation of roles was crucial to reduce bias during the study.

Significance

Student veterans represent a range of experiences and bring challenges to the traditional college setting. Colleges must understand and adapt to meet the needs of veterans with an appreciation for their future roles in society (Hammond, 2017). Veterans leaving the military are set to embark on a new way of life; military training instills core values aligned with their post-military purpose (Robertson & Eschenauer, 2020). When veterans integrate with non-veteran students, there is a prime educational opportunity to explore generational differences. Veterans often experience dynamic cultural interactions in other countries that could create active classroom discussions. Veterans may bring maturity and a broader understanding of global issues to their learning experiences because of their military service (Falkey, 2016). As veteran students make efforts to transition socially and academically, they are more likely to promote social change by creating a culturally dynamic campus environment for all students.

With additional awareness and support, veterans may experience institutions of higher education as safe and conducive environments to flourish, learn, find their place, and give back to society. This study may contribute perspectives from different viewpoints to understand the types of barriers veteran students face. The findings from this study might create awareness of barriers veterans face when transitioning from active duty to college and may inform higher education institutions on how to address the barriers. Through the understanding of this study, veterans may be more equipped to enter college, be more successful, and enter the workforce to create positive social change by contributing back to society.

Summary

Veteran students often seek education after discharge from the military. Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits were established to help veterans transition to different careers after discharge. A recent change extended post-9/11 benefits for veterans who served at least 90 days after September 10, 2001 (Fredman et al., 2019). The path that veteran students take to college is different from the path of most non-veteran students. Prior experiences and trauma play a role in the barriers that can prohibit veterans from obtaining a college degree or being successful with the transition to college. Veterans often seek a clear path to enroll in college classes; some come with transfer credits and often need assistance to navigate transferring and enrollment processes (Duroske, 2017). Colleges and universities have vast opportunities to create processes to help veterans transition into college. Veterans often prefer to take guidance from others who also have military experience. It is not feasible for colleges to have just staff with prior military service; therefore, creating an environment inviting veteran students might be crucial (Duroske, 2017).

Chapter 2 addresses the literature and research studies completed in the last several years about veteran students and the barriers faced when entering college. Through the literature review, I show why a study to examine the barriers veteran students face from different perspectives may contribute to understanding and addressing these barriers. While researchers have focused on veteran students and barriers, none has looked at the barriers from the perspectives of veterans and faculty and administrators.

Chapter 2 also includes sections that address the literature surrounding veteran student barriers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There has been an increase in student veterans entering college over the past decade. In 2018, over 17 million veterans attended college, and 5 million attained a bachelor's degree or higher (Duffin, 2019). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the barriers that veteran students face in higher education and how those barriers can be addressed. The current literature shows several barriers veterans face as they leave the military. Research has been done on veterans' perspectives on the barriers they face when entering higher education. However, little research has been conducted on faculty and administrator perspectives on veteran barriers. The unique perspectives gained through this study might help identify opportunities to remove barriers for veteran students in higher education.

Literature Search Strategy

In the literature review, I examined current research on veteran student barriers and veteran students' continuous support and needs in higher education. Peer-reviewed articles were identified through searches of multiple databases at Walden University library and open-source searches. The databases used were ERIC, ProQuest, PsycInfo, Sage, and Education Source. The keywords used to search were *veteran students*, *veterans in higher education*, *veteran experience*, *veteran academic performance*, *veteran student success*, *faculty training*, *veteran-friendly campus*, *veteran barriers*, *student veterans*, *veteran disabilities*, and *veteran support*. These keywords were used in various combinations to yield 55 articles for the literature review.

Conceptual Framework

Two theories were useful for this study's conceptual framework. Tinto's (1975) theory is focused on integration—whether a student persists or drops out changes based on the presence of barriers. Tinto's (1975) dimensions of institutional action reveals that because of the effects of barriers on persistence and retention, institutions should be prepared to have resources available to aid students. Bean and Metzner (1984) explored several variables that influence a student's decision to persist, such as the value of education, institutional satisfaction, and organizational roles within a university.

Certain theories can help build an understanding of what barriers and factors contribute to students leaving educational settings before graduating and the different variables and contexts that affect those decisions. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory is used to explore the environmental contexts of human development. Although this theory mostly applies to children, these environmental contexts can apply to adults as they transition from one point in life to another (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory may permit barriers to be categorized based on how close the barriers are to the student, what the student can control, and which barriers cannot be controlled (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This conceptual framework created a guideline for the study.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory is used to identify different environment development systems and helps identify where veterans face barriers in higher education. Bean and Metzner's (1984) theory helps illustrate the outside factors affecting veteran and nontraditional students' persistence in college. Through this research, universities may gain insight into the barriers that hinder student veterans from transitioning to

college. Tinto's theory may help understand barriers and the relationship between how they affect veterans. Tinto's and Metzner and Bean's theories can be used to evaluate the decisions and integration of students.

Literature Review

History of Veteran's Education

Since World War II, the U.S. military has provided education funds to help veterans further their education. Veteran educational benefits were unavailable from 1955 to 1965 between the Korean and Vietnam wars (MacLean, 2005). Once the benefits were reinstated, those who served between 1955 and 1965 were retroactively given educational benefits (MacLean, 2005). A student veteran is "any student who is a current or former member of the active-duty military, the National Guard or Reserves regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use." (Lim et al., 2018, p. 291). In 2009, the Obama administration developed "8 Keys to Success: Supporting Veterans, Military, and Military families on campus" (Dillard & Yu, 2018). This publication offered a list of general steps higher education institutions could follow to ensure a more proactive approach to a successful transition (Dillard & Yu, 2018). In 2017, the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance was passed. This bill is also known as the *Forever GI Bill*; it improves education benefits for veterans by eliminating the expiration date for using benefits and expanding benefits for surviving dependents (Rattray et al., 2019).

Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans are characterized by the unprecedented deployment of National Guard and Federal Reserve troops and many other active-duty

forces. Since 2001, more than 2.5 million service members have deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn (Fredman et al., 2019). This group of U.S. veterans has engaged in the longest and most repeated number of combat deployments in history (Williston & Roemer, 2017). Many service members and veterans are taking advantage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which offers educational assistance to those who served for at least 90 days after September 10, 2001 (Fredman et al., 2019). As of 2019, over one million service members and/or their dependents have used the GI Bill since its inception (Fredman et al., 2019).

Military-Friendly Campus

Military friendly can mean different things to different colleges. Veterans entering colleges often do not know that some institutions have designated individuals on campus to assist veteran students and create relationships that might make the process easier for them (Ackerman et al., 2009). Some colleges provide priority registration to veterans, reduced tuition, student groups specifically for military-related students, and even military transcript review for college credit (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018). Approximately 690 institutions surveyed by the American Council on Education (ACE) provide basic services for veterans, such as counseling assistance (Lange et al., 2017). A few institutions have taken it further and established programs to assist veterans with physical disabilities (Lange et al., 2017). Those colleges and universities prepared to work with veterans and adapt to their needs would be deemed military-friendly and provide an attractive option for veteran students returning to the classroom (Heineman, 2015).

Campuses that assist this student population could see increased enrollments, improved retention, and enhanced completion rates (Heineman, 2015). College leaders must understand the majors veterans are most likely to select to tailor programs specifically for this population (Johnson & Appel, 2020). Universities can create a supportive climate to cultivate veteran student success (Dillard & Yu, 2018). With the number of veteran students growing on college campuses, offering appropriate assistance to this population could enhance the institution's environment.

Over 37% of colleges and universities serving veteran students provide transition assistance (Heineman, 2017). Military students would prefer a simplified, one-stop-shop for all matters dealing with their education. Veteran students prefer to work with someone who understands the complexities of Veteran Affairs and the strict deadlines that must be met (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2019). One service that some colleges offer is a payment schedule aligned to the veteran calendar to ensure students do not have to pay out of pocket while waiting for military payment (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2019).

Veteran students appreciate the ability to meet other veteran students and interact with them on college campuses. Support services on campus are important to veteran students. Veteran students favor a military-only campus lounge or family-friendly mixers for the students (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2019). They create a veteran organization or resource center on campus to provide a risk-free atmosphere to interact with peers with similar experiences (Kirchner, 2015). Veterans' perceptions are key when looking at programs on college campuses; however, institutions must not succumb to the more-is-

better mentality. Creating programs tailored specifically for veteran students may create a more meaningful experience for veterans (Morris et al., 2019).

Colleges and universities may be underprepared for the range of needs among veteran students transitioning back to school. The mental health needs of veterans entering college may vary from student to student (Fredman et al., 2019). A better understanding of how mental health difficulties and academic dysfunctions are associated could inform interventions colleges and universities offer to veteran students (Fredman et al., 2019). Colleges and universities may use the already-created programs for minority students to address and adapt to veteran student needs on campus (Heineman, 2015). The growing veteran population offers colleges a set of new challenges but also provides a set of new opportunities to serve veteran students (Oberweis & Bradford, 2017). Veteran students are looking for institutional-level responses with multi-department support that is easy to navigate (Oberweis & Bradford, 2017).

Challenges Faced by Veterans

Many veterans join the military for education benefits with the long-term goal of improving their employment opportunities (Ellison et al., 2018). Most often, veterans return from service with a maturity level that leads them to believe they are ready for college. However, those same veterans may believe that time at war or in service has caused them to lose certain skills, and this belief can make returning to studies difficult (Parks et al., 2015). Upon returning from service, psychological trauma accompanies veteran students, making integrating into college particularly difficult (Ellison et al., 2018).

Disabilities

In the United States, military veterans have become the biggest population of individuals with disabilities (Flink, 2017). Veteran students with disabilities are retained at a lower rate and have poorer academic performance than students without disabilities (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2017). The amount of persons with disabilities has increased because of a reduction in wartime deaths, ultimately increasing the number of veterans with disabilities after service (Flink, 2017). Insomnia is the most commonly reported symptom of distress among veteran students following deployment (McGuffin et al., 2019). Increased combat exposure and deployment contribute to a higher rate of insomnia in veteran students (McGuffin et al., 2019). Often, veterans must understand how their disability may affect their learning and if it is possible to successfully reintegrate into a higher education institution (Lange et al., 2017).

Veterans with disabilities come from a culture that attaches a stigma to certain conditions (Lange et al., 2017). When veterans transition to an environment where help seeking is encouraged it is difficult (Lange et al., 2017). Veterans are hesitant to self-disclose disabilities caused by military exposures. New disabilities that appear after service sometimes overwhelm veterans and cause them to shut down and not seek help (Kranke et al., 2017). Veteran students experience higher frequencies of health-risk behaviors and higher rates of educational adjustment challenges (Williston & Roemer, 2017). Veterans have a variety of personal stressors, and these vary for each veteran student. Some veterans report a high degree of interest in learning more about strategies for better sleep, understanding benefits, and using exercise and relaxation to manage

stress to combat their barriers (O'Connor et al., 2018). As veterans transition from soldiers to students, stressors hinder veteran students from succeeding in the classroom.

In addition, female veterans have a different subset of stressors than male veterans do. Women may have experienced gender harassment in the military—behaviors that are not necessarily sexual-based but occur when one gender attempts to reinforce traditional gender roles. This, along with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), can cause psychological stressors for female veterans (Heineman, 2015).

Among a convenience sample of over 400 veteran students, 98% of whom served in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom, 34.6% met the screening criteria for severe anxiety, 23.7% met the criteria for severe depression, and 45.6% had significant symptoms of PTSD (Bonar et al., 2014).

Help-Seeking

The military culture emphasizes core values of stoicism, responsibility, and toughness (Currier et al., 2017). Whether due to military culture or premilitary factors, veterans may internalize attitudes of self-sufficiency and look down upon persons who seek help (Currier et al., 2017). A large number of veteran students in college compared to the number of veteran students who have sought some help shows that most veteran students choose not to seek help if struggling in college (Currier et al., 2018). Veterans described reintegration into civilian life as more difficult than combat. There are often high rates of interpersonal difficulties and low quality of life (McAndrews et al., 2019). Veterans struggle with reintegration; some state and local agencies sponsor programs that have demonstrated positive results (Linn et al., 2019). Research shows that only 33% of

American veterans seek care at the Department of Veteran Affairs. These programs developed and the access it creates is a step in the right direction for veteran reintegration (Linn et al., 2019). Early intervention can also help with these difficulties and can improve outcomes. One important early aspect of reintegration is the decision to attend college and the following adjustment period (McAndrews et al., 2019). Veteran students often avoid facing their challenges due to fear of stigma. They often find it easier to seek assistance from private sources than from the Department of Defense or the Department of Veterans Affairs (Albright et al., 2017). Student veterans obtain success in the military setting through the ability to internalize and apply knowledge in high-stress situations.

Environmental Challenges

The learning environment and the theoretical mindset do not mesh well in academia (Blaauw-Hara, 2017). Veteran students often enroll in college to find that the environment is often decentralized and unstructured (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2019). Along with reintegration into a college setting, veteran students are also navigating identity changes, often leaving behind identities associated with their active-duty status and gaining new student self-identities (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2019). As veteran students transition into higher education, they often have to balance additional responsibilities outside of school; more than 60% are married and have dependents (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2019). Since most veteran students enlist in the military as emerging adults and spend many years in a structured environment, many are less skilled at navigating available resources (Borsari et al., 2017). Veteran students frequently struggle with financial concerns, difficulty sleeping, daytime sleepiness, and feeling

generally anxious (O'Connor et al., 2018). These obstacles are problematic alone, but pairing them with transitioning into a new environment can be challenging (O'Connor et al., 2018). Student veteran students can experience disruption as they transition from one environment to another, similar to culture shock. The transition phase encapsulates the disorientation that veteran students sometimes experience when they enter college (Blaauw-Hara, 2017). In addition, veteran students often encounter bureaucratic challenges, such as a lack of clear information regarding benefits, transfer credits between institutions, and general degree completion (Jenner, 2019). Veterans earn their education benefits by serving in the military; this service puts veteran students at a disadvantage in the civilian academic world. Military service is a unique experience, many experiences are often positive, but veteran students typically find it more challenging to pursue an education in a civilian setting.

Faculty Impact

Faculty members represent the institution and work directly with student veterans, which play an important role in supporting this population. Faculty members often have expectations and perceptions of how veteran students should act in the classroom and certain behaviors. Veteran students come from a different structure, and teachers' expectations often differ from the military culture they are used to engaging in (Lim et al., 2018).

Financial and Structure Stressors

Veterans face financial stress related to their finances and educational expenses; many veterans worry about their long-term finances (Terry, 2018). Veterans stated that

financial stress stems from a lack of knowledge regarding available benefits and if they may expire before completing the degree (Duroske, 2017). Veteran students leave the service and enter college looking for the same structure and established procedures. Veterans flourish by having a contact point and a detailed college enrollment guide. Often veterans do not find the structure the same, which causes undue stress on the students (Duroske, 2017). Based on the path veterans came to college after service, some have prior transfer credits to evaluate. Veteran students seek a clear transfer pathway that helps determine which credits transfer and how they are evaluated (Duroske, 2017). When enrolling, veteran students could benefit from some cultural transition guidance help from colleges and universities. This population of students often prefers to receive this type of guidance from those who have been in the military or are familiar with what these students have endured (Duroske, 2017). Higher education institutions could offer a nonjudgmental space for each to share their experiences and provide support to improve relations between veteran students and nonveteran students. Veteran students also expressed that family support was integral to their success in school. Inviting families to attend social events, such as orientations and mixers, could create a family-friendly environment for veteran students in college (Jones, 2016). Veteran students who have been out of school for quite some time have anxiety about coursework that should be easy for students. The large time gap between high school and college creates an added stressor for veterans who fear not completing what they started (Jenner, 2019).

Certain personal characteristics, like age and socioeconomic status, can shape how individuals manage change, making some more likely to navigate successfully than

others (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Within the classroom, veteran students find occurrences on campus, such as activity in and out of the classroom and around the school, seating orientation, crowds of people between classes, and everyday noises to be very disruptive and could act as triggers to certain mental health issues and causes a great distraction for this population (Hammond, 2015). Small things that seem moot points for most can cause severe anxiety and fear for veterans. Banging on the desk causes hyper-vigilance and distraction to change the experience on campus for veteran students (Hammond, 2015).

Generational Differences

Veteran students are considered nontraditional and often first-generation college students (Osborne, 2016). Eighty-five percent of veteran students are between the ages of twenty-four and forty, and almost half are married and have children (Hembrough, 2017). Veterans are considered a diverse population that has unique higher education learning considerations. Veterans tend to be older and sometimes bring a variety of college credits earned at several different institutions and training received while in the military (Hurlbut, 2018). Often, this population brings many strengths and unique experiences that add diversity to the college classroom. The maturity levels are often higher, along with a more determined focus (Hurlbut, 2018). Veterans have uncertainty about how their academic performance would compare to other traditional-aged students in the classroom. Some feel intimidated by the gap in age and years from high school graduation. In addition to being non-traditional-aged students, some veteran students also deal with mental health diagnoses (Jenner, 2019). In addition to the age gap common

between traditional and veteran students, veteran students often have families and attend multiple institutions to attain a degree (Kappell, 2017).

Veteran Student Academic Persistence and Retention

Despite veteran students' challenges in college, they demonstrate a relatively high completion rate. More than half of the veteran students who seek a postsecondary degree complete one. Even though more than half complete the degree they set out for, forty-four percent still do not graduate with a bachelor's degree (Terry, 2018). Compared to the national completion rate for the same period, this population has room for improvement in completion (Stevenson & Le Buhn, 2019). Students expressed that the lack of connection between veteran and civilian students contributes to academic persistence rates. Regardless of the branches served, veteran students need collaboration with like-minded individuals in the college setting (Stevenson & Le Buhn, 2019). Veterans are often at high risk for academic failure due to their barriers. Research shows veterans earn lower GPAs than nonveteran students in similar programs (Killam & Degges-White, 2018).

Veteran students returning to college after an extended time after high school have a harder time starting back into subjects such as math. Poor persistence can sometimes be attributed to veteran students delaying taking math courses, even remedial work, due to the uncertainty of the subject after so much time (Jenner, 2019). Currently, little data on enrollment and retention is collected from the federal government unless related to funding disbursement (Massa & Gogia, 2017). The Million Record Report published by the Student Veterans of America in 2014 is a significant exception (Massa

& Gogia, 2017). Researchers supported through a private-public collaboration to match 1 million records from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and the Student Clearinghouse to calculate a 51.7% graduation rate and an average time to complete of 5.1 years for an associate's degree and 6.3 years for a bachelor's degree (Massa & Gogia, 2017). Where there is no one-size-fits-all solution to help all veteran students achieve their goals, many centered programs and policies may improve the rates overall (Norman et al., 2015).

University Challenges Supporting Veterans

Many veteran students are entering higher education; these institutions have an urgent role in this evolution (Caton, 2018). Many resources are needed to cover the needs of veterans transitioning to higher education, which can be troubling to higher education institutions (Caton, 2018). Peer Advisors for Education (PAVE) uses trained peers to provide outreach, support, and a link to resources to assist veteran students (Kees et al., 2017). Through a hybrid technology platform for training and managing programs, PAVE has helped 40 college campuses increase the readiness of veteran students (Kees et al., 2017). Veteran students can benefit from credit streamlining, streamlining of programs and services, faculty, advisor, and counselor training, the awareness of barriers faced by veterans, and a veteran-friendly campus (Caton, 2018). Understanding the experiences of veteran students can inform interventions designed to help veterans achieve the academic goals they seek to achieve (Norman et al., 2015).

Promoting help-seeking to veteran students might not be as effective for the veteran if there are deep-rooted issues beyond academic responsibilities (Currier et al.,

2018). The Community College Survey of Men (CCSM) evaluates predictors of the underrepresented and underserved men in community colleges (DeLaGarza et al., 2016). The survey showed that male students' improved programming and service delivery are needed on college campuses. The newly developed programs need to address the needs of veteran men transitioning to college and civilian settings (DeLaGarza et al., 2016). College counseling centers on college campuses struggle to meet the needs of traditional students dealing with predictable adjustment issues. Counseling centers must stretch their resources to meet the needs of students with more extensive disorders and mental illnesses. (Killam & Degges-White, 2018). Creating the Veteran Resource Center on college campuses has positively affected student veterans. This environment creates a safe and secure spot for veteran students to rest and chat with other veterans who understand the experiences they have endured (Terry, 2018).

University Academic Persistence and Retention

Retention rates at colleges are an important indicator of student success. In addition to being important for student success, colleges and universities often receive enrollment-related funding based on these rates (Fass-Holmes, 2016). Research has identified ten high-impact practices that are effective pedagogies associated with retention and graduation rates (Hope, 2016a). The factors that make high practice impact are; significant student investment of time and effort, substantive interactions with faculty and peers, experiences with diversity, frequent and timely feedback, and periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning (Hope, 2016b).

Colleges and universities take pride in persistence and retention, and low retention rates can deter students from attending certain institutions. Creating relationships and regular contact with students helps ensure student support and accountability. Brandman University believes connecting prospective students by speaking with enrollment coaches is one way to increase retention (Hope, 2016b). Providing all new students with disability services when they enter college has helped show students what is available at the university (Hope, 2016a). Veteran students at Brandman are celebrated regularly through a Wall of Heroes, highlighting veteran students, their service, and their educational accomplishments (Hope, 2016b). Brandman makes it a point to contact veteran students each semester to ask how they are doing and if they need any assistance at the time (Hope, 2016b).

Institutional practices can positively impact retention and graduation, especially by incorporating faculty-led hands-on experiences within the classroom. Service learning can help higher education by improving the quality and productivity of instruction in ways that could increase retention (Mungo, 2017). Many factors play into persistence at higher education institutions. One study shows that ease of transfer/enrollment and the services available for adult learners were key elements that students look to when choosing and staying at a college (Klein-Collins, 2019). Also, adult college learners look for flexibility that allows changes throughout their education to accommodate for life happenings and academic support after six pm (Klein-Collins, 2019).

Administrator and Faculty Training

Veteran students may not transition to college because of a lack of academic guidance during registration or awareness of campus services (Blackwell-Starnes, 2018). Even though some veteran students may learn about these services, they find that staff lack understanding of the needs of the veteran student population (Blackwell-Starnes, 2018). Prior recommendations for administrator training focused on veterans with a diagnosable disability, creating stereotypes. This approach ignored a huge population of veteran students transitioning to higher education who did not record a diagnosable disability (Arminio et al., 2018). Student mentors or sponsors who are also military-affiliated can provide military students with a sense of connection and support. Trained faculty and staff with accurate and up-to-date information about veteran students' needs and benefits would provide a valuable one-stop-shop on campuses (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2019). A benefit for faculty and administrators is a more in-depth understanding of veterans' processes as they transition out of the military (Jenner, 2017). Veterans feel that there should be more outreach from faculty and administrators to make them feel more supported at college (O'Connor et al., 2018). Veteran students face academic-related challenges and can sometimes learn differently than other students. Academic Advisors who work primarily with veteran students may be unaware of the different circumstances that this population of students faces and why they need to alter schedules or withdraw from courses (Parks et al., 2015). Faculty members might not always teach the material in a way that veterans do not fully understand.

The military uses a hands-on approach to teaching and learning, which is the opposite of how some colleges and universities approach teaching material (Killam & Degges-White, 2018). Faculty and students often come from different cultural backgrounds and can sometimes create miscommunication in the classroom. These miscommunications can often be exacerbated in the online learning environment due to faculty/student interaction. Cultural responsiveness in teaching is a key component of meeting the needs of diverse students, such as military students (Heitner & Jennings, 2016).

Training faculty, staff, and administrators are important to set boundaries and understand sensitive topics and when to avoid pressuring veteran students to speak about topics that could be triggered (Kato et al., 2016). In addition to faculty and administrators, college campus counseling centers have faced increasing work, including increased cases of “crisis” (Wilkinson-Truong et al., 2020). Aside from veteran students experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), college students have had an increase in PTSD diagnosis, showing that 12% of college students reported PTSD in some form (Wilkinson-Truong et al., 2020). The increase in the need for counseling centers on college campuses, in general, poses a problem in serving all students, heightened by the dynamics of students’ length of stay and academic accommodations for each student (Wilkinson-Truong et al., 2020). Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a training program originally developed to address the widespread lack of mental illness, particularly in Australia (Mohatt et al., 2017). Training others to recognize behavioral health warning signs and provide basic help, including necessary referrals to those in

need, can be beneficial (Mohatt et al., 2017). MHFA improves participants' knowledge, reduces stigma, and increases the amount of help provided to those in need (Mohatt et al., 2017).

There are several implications for college health research and practice (Barry, 2015). The National College Health Assessment (NCHA) contains vital data to help employ accurate and reliable measures (Barry, 2015). It is important that primary care and counseling centers on campus screen for mental health conditions and further training to be ready to employ best practices in treating veterans' mental health on campus if needed (Barry, 2015).

New Developments in the Area of University Support for Veterans

Programs are slowly being established at higher education institutions that engage faculty, staff, and administrators on veteran student needs and services (Caton, 2018). One program designed by a community college included mandatory faculty and staff development, veteran student recognition at graduation, and veteran student engagement (student panels, student advocacy groups, and other campus activity opportunities). A second program includes a holistic student services program that gives central access to all veteran student services, nontraditional student services, and a case management model of education planning for veteran students (Caton, 2018). Even with programs being established at higher education institutions, the need to continue specialized services and programs that target veteran students and are tailored based on current military operations (DeLaGarza et al., 2016). When educators better understand military culture and lifestyles at all higher education levels, strategies can be created to support

the learning of veteran students (Sherbert et al., 2017). Higher education institutions must create support on all levels, from undergraduate to graduate, to ensure the support is spread amongst all veteran students on campus regardless of degree-seeking level (Sherbert et al., 2017). The goal of servicing veteran students and maintaining the institution's integrity is pertinent; efforts to accommodate these students should not require the institution to lower veterans' expectations (Parks et al., 2015). Veteran students often feel insufficient programs and assistance for transitioning to college and feel overwhelmed by an overabundance of resources to sort through (Perkins et al., 2019).

Research has shown that the diverse engagement between veteran students and faculty on college campuses is important (Chua, 2018). Not only is an ongoing relationship between veteran students and faculty a need, but it is also an opportunity for faculty to enhance their knowledge and understanding of this population on college campuses (Chua, 2018).

Economic and Societal Impact of Education on Veterans

The link between education and health in veterans has shown that those who use the educational benefits granted them have better health (Rumery et al., 2018). Besides, it hypothesized that those who used their benefits to attend college have better health overall than those who used their benefits for non-college attainment, such as trade school or on-the-job training (Rumery et al., 2018). A study showed that those who used the education benefits were 4% less likely to report fair or poor health than those who did not use education benefits (Rumery et al., 2018). Veterans are generally described as

emotionally mature, mission-oriented, and experienced leaders in the classroom and the workplace. These traits, along with education, can set veterans apart from others after graduation (DeLaGarza et al., 2016). Veteran students integrating successfully into college can improve academic outcomes and afford veterans long-term employment (McAndrews et al., 2019). Paired with a degree, veterans have confidence from serving in the military, allowing them to react positively and succeed in new situations. Veterans have taken responsibility for people; this increases leadership and teamwork skills, allowing them to work with various groups in many environments (Terry, 2018). Through education, veterans establish additional peer support, and connecting with new veteran students creates a bond that helps veterans further their success (Lange et al., 2017).

College degree attainment has many other benefits, including economic benefits. Students who obtain a degree past high school have a lower unemployment rate than those who receive a high school diploma. The unemployment rate for students who just received high school diplomas is 8.0% compared to 2.8% for those who have completed a bachelor's degree (Vilorio, 2016). Those who receive a college degree and experience civic engagement within their educational journey are more likely to seek ways to be involved in increasing civic attitudes and other unique contributions to society (Moely, 2018). In addition to earning potential, degree obtainment contributes to better health, volunteerism, and civic engagement. In 2015, 39% of adult bachelor's degree recipients and 16% of high school graduates volunteered, and those who received a bachelor's degree were more likely to vote than those with lower education (College Board, 2017).

Summary

Veteran students attending college face several barriers that could hinder their ability to complete a college degree. Veteran students enter college campuses with different obstacles than traditional first-year students, making the transition from military to civilian college life difficult (Hurlbut, 2018). Colleges and universities have an opportunity to service this population to help both the persistence and retention of veteran students. Creating a safe and forthcoming environment can reduce veteran students' barriers (Caton, 2018).

There has been an increase in veteran students interested in obtaining a higher education degree. With the increase, new and innovative programs can assist colleges and universities in addressing the needs of these students (Caton, 2018).

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the barriers that veteran students face in higher education and how those barriers can be addressed. The unique perspectives gained through this study might help identify opportunities to remove barriers for veteran students in higher education. In this chapter, I outline the research design used for this study. Trustworthiness enhancement strategies are described, and ethical considerations indicate the commitment to best research practices. Chapter 3 also includes a description of the intended participants and the process for participant selection and recruitment. Additionally, the procedures that may contribute to this study's results are offered as data collection, data analysis plan, and information that might lead to the data generation necessary to respond to the research questions.

Research Design and Rationale

This study was a basic qualitative study focusing on the experiences of veterans attending college and the administrators and faculty interacting with veteran students. This study was based on descriptive data derived from understanding different perspectives. The study was designed to make sense of the barriers veteran students face during their transition into college. Research has focused on the veteran perspective on barriers, but few researchers have examined the barriers veterans face and included administrator and faculty member perspectives (Arminio et al., 2018; Gibbs et al., 2019; Gonzalez & Elliott, 2016).

In this study, the rationale for using a basic qualitative approach was that it enables researchers to explore perceptions and how individuals process situations and meanings. Basic qualitative research also allows for a rich and detailed understanding of people's experiences, allowing a researcher to investigate subjective experiences and opinions that cannot be measured statistically (Majid et al., 2017).

A case study was not used in this research. Although a case study offers conceptual validity, it is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions based on specific case studies (Starman, 2013). Ethnography is one of the most popular qualitative research methods but was not chosen for this study. Ethnography requires researchers to embed themselves into the daily life and routine of the subjects (Vashishtha, 2019). Although this would answer the research questions, in this study, I was looking at the overall picture instead of day-to-day routines. The narrative method was also not selected. Narrative research relies on data collection over a period, and this study was focused on experience as a whole and not over a certain time (Vashishtha, 2019). Lastly, the phenomenology method was not chosen; this study reflects the experience and not as it happens (Vashishtha, 2019). Instead, a basic qualitative study was conducted to focus on experiences and participants' meaning ascribed to those experiences.

Role of Researcher

I had a role to identify and recruit participants, conduct one-on-one interviews to collect data, and then analyze and code the data to identify categories and themes. I was the sole researcher and responsible for all communication with the participants and

interview transcription. I have been employed full-time in the financial aid department and as an adjunct faculty member at the study site institution. I have had no prior working relationship with the participants of the study. Biases could concern the closeness to the focus of the study; however, minimizing potential biases can occur through reflexivity. The participants in this study were recruited through the student service department at the college and through the university's social media platform. Bias in this research was avoided by ensuring that interviews were professional in context and that personal information was not shared with the participants. Because I am an employee of the school and closely connected with the veteran community, this could have presented a challenge. However, I strictly followed the interview script, not allowing for conversation outside the interview questions to ensure biases and personal experiences did not enter the results. Reflexivity allows a researcher awareness of their influence on what is being studied (Mackieson et al., 2019).

Methodology

Guaranteeing that veteran students enter college with the least barriers requires involvement among institutions and veteran students. In the methodology section of this study, I discuss the actions taken to investigate what barriers veteran students face entering college, including the participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for data collection, and data analysis plan. For each, I provide details of the process I applied.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The population selected for the study included every undergraduate student enrolled at a 4-year university identified as a veteran student. Faculty members and

administrators would meet the criteria for the study if they were full-time faculty members/administrators at a 4-year university. I contacted institutional effectiveness, requesting the names and emails of each veteran student, full-time faculty member, and a full-time administrator. Once I received the list, I sent a solicitation for participation to the list provided. The solicitation for participation included the name of the study, the participant's role in the study, the time commitment for the interview, and the informed consent form for participation.

Once potential participants responded to the solicitation via email, I used simple random sampling to select my sample. Simple random sampling is used to make statistical inferences about a population. This method ensures high internal validity (Thomas, 2020). Simple random sampling uses randomization and allows all respondents to have an equal probability of being selected for the study (Thomas, 2020). Using a random number method, I selected five veterans, four faculty members, and three administrators separately from the participant pool.

Every participant who responded was assigned a number; using a computer program, a random number was chosen to identify the selected participant. This process was repeated until five veterans were selected. In addition to the veteran students and faculty, I also solicited three full-time administrator members by inviting them to participate in the study. The sample size of five veterans, four faculty members, and three administrators was chosen to allow a variety of perspectives, offering richly textured information relative to the research questions without redundant data. Using a small sample size for each perspective allows for several different perspectives, expectantly

yielding useable data while obtaining saturation through no new themes or data emerging.

Instrumentation

Researchers need a technique and strategy that creates balance and uncovers and probes respondents' perspectives while accomplishing researcher objectives (Bourgeault et al., 2010). The primary data source was the participants' responses to the interview protocol (see Appendix B) that I designed based on the research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework for this study. To ensure the interviews were connected to the purpose of the study, I sought an expert review of the instrument. Three individuals who have their Ph.D. or Ed.D. and are currently employed in an education setting, but are not associated with the study, reviewed the interview protocol. Based on the experts' feedback, I added an additional question to ensure that veterans who did not use resources were identified. In addition, questions for administrators and faculty were combined to reduce any confusion for the interviewees.

Face-to-face interviews were used when feasible for the participants. Virtual interviews were conducted when necessary using a video platform. Video conferencing allows researchers to access larger and more diverse populations and interview more participants in a shorter time (Gray et al., 2020). Regardless of the interview platform, all interviews were recorded. The interviews began with an overall summary of the study, including the purpose of the research. The participants had time to ask questions before the interview began. Follow-up questions were used as probes related to the research questions.

Data Collection

Once IRB approval 10-13-21.0709928 was obtained and potential participants were identified, I emailed all participants. The email sent to the participants included the study's title, the purpose of the study, criteria for participation, contact information, and the research questions. The email had a deadline to respond within 10 days. Those interested in participating in the study were instructed to respond to the email stating, "I agree." After the 10-day deadline, I selected five veteran students from the respondents. Next, the interviews were scheduled either in person or through a video platform based on participant availability.

I began data collection by introducing my role as a doctoral student at Walden University and explaining the research was to fulfill my requirement for completing my dissertation. I then explained the purpose of the study and asked each participant if they had any questions before we began the interview. I reminded interviewees they had the opportunity to decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study. The interviews were recorded by cell phone or video platform recording to ensure data were not lost. All information remains confidential to protect the participants, and pseudonyms were used for each participant to protect their identities.

Once each interview was complete, I transcribed the recording. To ensure accuracy, each participant was emailed a copy of the transcript to review and provide feedback if applicable. Each participant was asked to respond through email concerning changes or additions within 5 business days. In the data collection process, I followed all

regulations approved by IRB, which are fundamental to the ethical standards of this research study.

Data Analysis Plan

Once each participant reviewed and responded to their interview transcripts, I began the process of qualitative content analysis. The data were organized and categorized into meaningful groups and patterns to identify emerging themes. The idea was to move the raw text into categories in small steps, each step building on the previous step (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Microsoft Excel was used to organize and analyze the data. After reading the transcripts, a theoretical narrative was used to bridge the questions and the participant's subjective experience (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). This tells the story of the participant's subjective experience using their own words (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Excel allowed me to manage the data by organizing ideas, querying data, modeling, and reporting the data. I used an open-coding process to analyze the research questions.

Organizing the data from the perspectives of the veterans, administrators, and faculty and defining the importance of what barriers veterans face transitioning to college may help adequately prepare institutions and veterans for success. Additionally, I used a research journal during the interview process, which helped in the coding process. To conclude the data analysis, I summarized the barriers veterans face that were supported by the literature and identified through the interview process; these findings might aid veterans and institutions in understanding the barriers better.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Creating respectful relationships with the participants and transcript review are ways a researcher can ensure credibility in a study. Credibility asks how congruent the findings are with reality?” Member checking was used to promote credibility in this study (Stahl & King, 2020). To maintain credibility for the duration of the study, I established relationships with the participants and built on the desire to explore the barriers veterans face in college. I maintained contact with the participants throughout the study and provided them the interview transcripts for review and feedback. Through continual contact, I remained faithful to the participants’ perspectives, and completing transcript reviews increased the transferability of the study.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research provides readers with evidence that the research study’s findings could apply to other contexts, situations, or populations (Statistical Solutions, 2017). All interview protocols were followed to establish transferability, using the exact interview questions for each participant. The variation of the participant selection entailed different veterans from different branches of the U.S. military and veterans at different points in their educational journey. Establishing transferability and creating a strict plan to stick to the approved research questions allows for easier transferability to different contexts or settings (Stahl & King, 2020).

Dependability

A second reader reads the interview and data analysis processes to ensure that the data is unbiased (Stahl & King, 2020). Awareness that a peer reviews the work and the data ensures the researcher is vigilant that the interviews and data analysis recording process is thorough and accurate (Stahl & King, 2020). Also, dependability was met through research questions and interview questions that align with the interview study, data collection, data analysis, and the researcher's journaling. Lastly, after the themes and codes were identified, they were sent to a second reader for review to confirm that the data supports the identified themes.

Confirmability

Confirmability aims to ensure that the results reflect the participants with enough detail for replicability (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). In this study, I used a reflexive approach to establish confirmability. Reflexivity as a process is introspection on the role of subjectivity in the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017). As I interviewed the participants, a journal was used to keep notes from the interviews. Additionally, all interviews were recorded and then transcribed using a transcription service. Consistently using journal notes and transcriptions in each aspect of the study assured confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical considerations should be at the forefront of qualitative data collection. An application was submitted to IRB for approval to conduct interviews and begin the study. Once approved, a list of current veteran students was requested from the Registrar's Office at the 4-year private institution. Ethical procedures during the selection, interview,

and analysis process included a signed consent form from each participant to ensure that the participants knew the information provided during the interview process would be used only for research purposes. Throughout the invitations, letters of consent, and follow-up emails, each participant was treated with respect and appreciation for their involvement and time spent on the study. The identification and demographic information of the participants may only be used for research purposes and may not be shared within the study. The research data was housed on a secure device and password protected. The use of pseudonyms for each participant was also used to protect the participants' identities. After completing the study, all interviews and associated documentation about the participants will be destroyed within five years.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I shared the research design and rationale to identify veteran students, administrators, and faculty perspectives on veterans' barriers when entering college. My role as the researcher was to identify and recruit participants, conduct interviews, and analyze and code the collected data by categorizing emerging themes. The methodology for this study included semi-structured interviews with 12 participants. The study was methodically designed to ensure an ethical study and establish trust with the participants for the duration of the research. The next chapter will discuss the results found in the data after the interviews and the data analyzed.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the barriers veteran students face in higher education and how those barriers can be addressed. To accomplish the purpose of this study, 12 participants from a four-year private institution in the state of Michigan participated in interviews to discuss barriers veteran students face. Data were collected from the perspectives of administrators, faculty, and veterans. I chose a basic qualitative design as it aligned with my purpose statement and research questions and allowed me to interact with participants directly. The research questions for this study were:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of veterans, faculty, and administrators regarding the barriers that veteran students face in higher education?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of veterans, faculty, and administrators regarding how barriers that veteran students face can be addressed?

Chapter 4 is organized into five major sections covering aspects of this study, including data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results.

Setting

The setting of this study was a four-year private institution in the state of Michigan. This institution has 203 veteran students currently seeking an undergraduate degree in a business discipline. The institution has 2,554 undergraduate students in total (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Veteran students who participated in the study were enrolled full-time seeking a bachelor's degree. In this study, I focused on

interviewing veteran students, administrators, and faculty currently employed full-time at the institution, interacting with veteran students within their current job responsibilities. Each interview was conducted virtually and recorded. The COVID-19 pandemic was a slight factor in scheduling interviews with faculty and administrators; not all employees had returned to the office full time.

Demographics

The 12 individuals who participated in this study responded to the solicitation for participation. Participants were selected based on their roles and responsibilities or enrollment status within the institution. In this study, the administrators represented different departments across the university and were full-time employees at the institution's campus. The faculty members interviewed each taught a different discipline at the institution and were full-time faculty members. Veteran students who responded to the invitation were all men, represented four of the six military branches, and were all full-time students seeking a bachelor's degree. Table 1 shows the participant demographics branch of service or positions.

Table 1*Participant Information*

Participant	Title
Institution Administrator 1	Dean of students
Institution Administrator 2	Academic advisor
Institution Administrator 3	University registrar
Faculty 1	Faculty member, operation and supply chain
Faculty 2	Faculty member, prior learning
Faculty 3	Faculty member, English
Faculty 2	Faculty member, organizational leadership
Veteran 1	Army veteran
Veteran 2	Marine veteran
Veteran 3	Air Force veteran
Veteran 4	Navy veteran
Veteran 5	Navy veteran

Data Collection

The data collected for this study were gathered using semistructured, open-ended interviews. The study site's institutional review board (IRB) department and registrar's office identified the administrators, faculty, and veterans who met the criteria on a list of potential participants. I chose interviews to understand the perspectives of the 12 participants and identified themes associated with veteran student barriers in higher education. The interview questions helped expand my understanding of the many barriers veteran students face entering college, what can be improved to decrease or eliminate these barriers, and how the institution can improve practices and procedures to help veteran students.

Each interview conducted lasted no more than 40 minutes. I recorded the interviews using the Microsoft Teams online recording platform and downloaded the

recording after each interview. Each interview recording was transcribed using a transcription service. Following the transcription process, each participant was sent a copy of their transcribed interview to review for accuracy of interpretation. Two participants returned their transcripts with adjustments that included additional clarification. During the interview process, I kept a journal of keywords participants spoke. All data collected were stored on a password-protected laptop. I maintained the confidentiality of the participants and their perspectives throughout the data collection process. There were no changes to the data collection process outlined in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

According to Saldana (2018), coding connects the qualitative data collection phase with the data analysis phase of a study. Instead of NVivo by QSR International, I used an open-coding method to analyze the data in an Excel spreadsheet. I moved inductively from coded data units to more extensive data categories and then determined the emerging themes associated with the research questions. Using color coding in Excel allowed me to easily identify which category the quote belonged in and then sort the categories and move to themes easily. I also looked for words and phrases that more than one participant repeated. Along with the transcripts, I used an updated journal to pinpoint key points within participant responses throughout the interview.

First, I coded the units of data by identifying reoccurring words used throughout the interviews. Next, I aligned each data unit with categories corresponding to key concepts found within the literature. In addition to the transcripts, my journal emphasized keywords that emerged.

The themes that emerged through the data analysis suggested numerous barriers in the processes and procedures within the institution and with a veteran's pathway entering college. The participants' responses regarding barriers were based on their experiences within their professional position within the higher education institution or their experiences as a veteran student attending the institution. No discrepant cases were observed through the data analysis process. Table 2 shows the codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Table 2*Codes, Categories, and Themes*

Codes	Categories	Themes
The point person is important One person to help navigate the entire process from start to finish Specific advisor for veterans People are not always available Separate orientation for veterans	A person trained thoroughly on veteran's needs Disability services Success coaches	Dedicated contact person to provide additional support for veteran students
Not sure where to find resources available Resource page or veteran center Flyer with resources listed Not sure whom to talk to about resources Comprehensive help for veterans	Daunting process Location of available resources Navigating the benefit process	Veteran resource awareness
Age gap between veterans and other students Time between high school and college is greater Not a lot of communication between veterans on campus Forgot military tools taught to transition to civilian life Afraid of failure Mentoring program for veteran students	Accommodations No barriers were reported from students or students did not contact administration or faculty with barriers present Confidence Communication leadership	Generational difference in the classroom
Do not know what benefits are available to veteran students University-wide initiative to learn about veterans Currently had minimal training Limited resources to assist veterans Understand veterans' paths better	Identification of veteran status Generalized training for administration and faculty Sensitivity training campus-wide Veteran navigation training to outline benefits	Training employees on veteran student needs
Identify possible triggers Not comfortable in group work settings Emotional transition is difficult	Different levels of PTSD Other psychological barriers besides PTSD (depression, anxiety, ADHD, and panic attacks) Civilians' viewpoint of veterans	Understanding and identifying psychological triggers
Social stigmas Routine changes from military to civilian life Socialization transition Decision making is daunting Major life changes in addition to college	Help seeking Adaptability Social integration Sensitive topics	Transitional barriers

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a research study must be established. In this study, I executed the criteria for trustworthiness across the subcategories of credibility, transferability, dependability, and reflexivity, as stated in Chapter 3. Credibility was achieved throughout data collection by respecting participants and upholding the confidentiality agreement. From the invitation to join the study throughout the data collection process, mutual respect was established to obtain the data for the same goal of identifying the barriers veteran students face in higher education. Each participant was asked to review their transcripts to ensure the transcript represented their perspectives accurately. During the interviews, I remained unbiased and respected participants' perspectives.

Transferability

This study brings transferability through awareness of veteran students in higher education. The findings of this study should be beneficial for the study site institution. Focusing on the veteran student population and sampling different viewpoints, I ensured that several perspectives were represented. Different subject disciplines were represented through the faculty participants. The administrator participants represented various departments and interaction levels. Lastly, the veteran participant group represented four of six branches of military service. The findings from this study can be adapted to address other populations with similar barriers when entering higher education.

Dependability

The dependability of this study was achieved by data consistency with the research questions in the study. I collected data from three perspectives: administrators, faculty, and veteran students at the university. Each participant from each perspective group was asked the same set of questions. Journal notes were kept throughout each interview to refresh my thoughts about information collected during the interviews, and the interviews were audio recorded. This allowed for various perspectives but stayed true to the purpose of the study by exploring the barriers veterans face and how those barriers could be addressed.

Confirmability

In this study, I established confirmability by using a reflexive approach. Throughout each interview, I noted keywords and points and then submitted each recorded interview to a transcription service to be transcribed. I then reviewed each transcript to ensure the transcription aligned with my interview notes. This process allowed me to reflect on the responses and perspectives and ensured that others could confirm the study.

Results

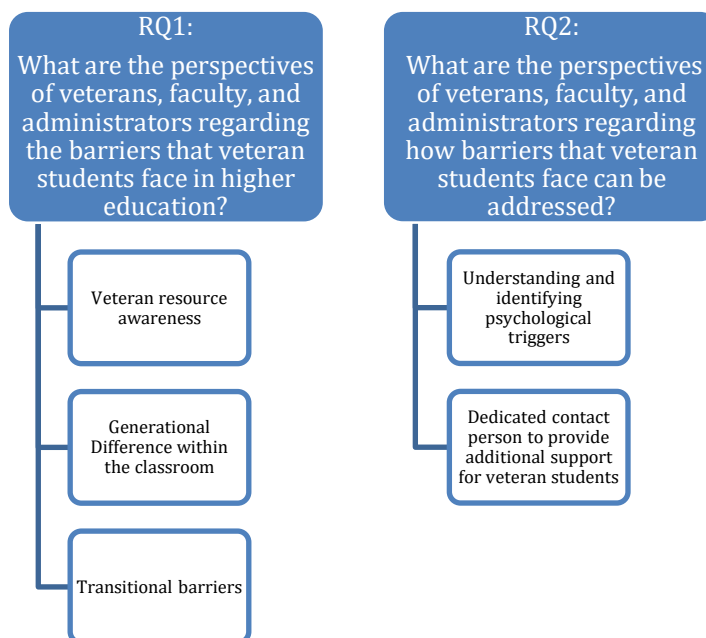
In this study, I aimed to explore veteran students' barriers to entering higher education. The study was guided by the conceptual framework of Tinto and Bean and Metzner's theories. Tinto's (1975) theory focused on integration and how students navigate and engage the cultures of their specific campuses. Tinto's dimensions of institutional action implies that institutions should have an effective retention program

because of the effects of barriers on retention. Bean and Metzner (1984) illustrated several variables that influence a student's decision to persist. Through the interviews and listening to the participants' lived experiences, I captured veterans' perspectives as they spoke about barriers faced when entering higher education. Also, through the interviews, I was able to learn about existing knowledge among faculty and administrators regarding current practices and resources related to veteran student barriers.

Each participant had the opportunity to respond to the interview questions. The questions aligned with the research questions. The 12 participants' responses were consistent with one another, suggesting saturation was achieved. This section contains the results from the codes and themes that emerged from the data. Five themes emerged from the interviews with 12 participants, including five veterans, three administrators, and four faculty members. The themes were (a) veteran resource awareness, (b) generational difference within the classroom, (c) transitional barriers, (d) understanding and identifying psychological triggers, (e) training employees on veteran student needs, and (f) dedicated contact person to provide additional support for veteran students.

Figure 1

Research Question and Themes



Research Question 1

Theme 1: Veteran Resource Awareness

A participant from every group, veterans, administrators, and faculty, spoke about awareness of veteran resources being a barrier for veteran students. There is a lack of awareness among the students, administrators, and faculty members. Administrator Two and Administrator Four spoke about the veteran's education benefits and their lack of knowledge on how to instruct veteran students to apply for or inquire about their benefits. When veterans were asked about barriers in higher education, resource awareness was mentioned by all five veteran student participants. Veteran Four described their experience:

The hardest navigation process was, what if I got stuck? What if I am having trouble with something? Who do I reach out to? I was not sure about the resources I have available here.

Like the veteran students, Faculty One felt veteran resources awareness was an issue in aiding students. Veteran benefits are an example of a resource that could cause a barrier for veteran students, as Veteran One mentioned. Faculty One stated, “They can always come to me, but I do not have the answers. I would have to look it up or ask someone.” Veteran Four stated that their biggest resource barrier was:

With the VA benefits in general, there were issues. It was a struggle for me to get everything approved. I ended up paying either out of pocket or through student loans for the first year and a half before the GI Bill finally got approved.

Just like Veteran One, Administrator Four stated that the most frequent questions they receive from veteran students are regarding applying for educational benefits and veteran students asking what they qualify to receive. The overall input from the participants stated that the lack of awareness about veteran resources was a barrier to veteran students attending higher education.

Theme 2: Generational Difference Within the Classroom

Administrators and veteran students mentioned generational differences within the classroom as barriers veterans face in higher education face. Administrators and veteran student participants spoke about the length of time from when the veterans have been in school and the differences in learning since they had attended last. Administrator

One talked about the differences they see with veteran students who had a large gap between high school and college:

Veteran students have many barriers that adult learners face. There has been a long time since they have been in school. They have challenges with technology, including Blackboard. Many military veterans have not even been in school since we learned management systems in schools.

Administrator Three discussed the differences between high school students and veteran students in the classroom regarding the discussion of issues. Veteran students are more likely to not agree with a topic or have it trigger some unwanted feelings. Veteran One spoke about entering college as an older adult:

Entering school as an adult was a challenge compared to right out of high school. When you enter high school, admissions counselors, guidance counselors, mentors, teachers, parents, and others are all helping you through the process. In addition, all your friends and peers are going through the same process. When you enter as an adult, especially a veteran student from the military, that support system is largely gone.

Veteran One stated their fear before entering college, wondering how they would fit into a lecture hall full of 18-year-old kids and if they were going to understand the material. They thought they might experience humiliation if they were unsure of the material. The veteran student was unsure of how they would personally react. The fear of the unknown was hard on this participant.

The comment about age gaps was raised several times during the interview. There can be differences in addition to just the age gap resulting from lived experiences in the military. Generational differences can be present with veteran students as well as non-veteran students. In addition, some participants stressed the different thought processes or reactions that veterans might have to certain topics in the classroom compared to younger non-veteran students. Veteran Three stated:

In my case, since there was a bit of a gap between my exiting the military and enrolling in school, I think veteran orientation, like freshman orientation, would be helpful. It would remind you of things you need to know if you have not been to school in a long time.

Theme 3: Transitional Barriers

The veteran students, faculty, and administrators mentioned many transitional barriers during the interviews. Each participant described a transitional barrier that affected veteran students in higher education. Faculty One and Faculty Four described that they could notice when veteran students are uncomfortable in the classroom. They each said it was fairly evident during their first college course. Faculty One said, "I am more tentative in asking questions about military experience and how I use it in class. I will say things like. You do not have to share if you do not want to. It is up to you. I never want them to feel obligated if they are already uncomfortable in the environment."

Veteran One spoke about transitional barriers: one of the barriers mentioned was the fear of failure among veteran students. They come from a structured environment with a set schedule and know the expectations. Entering college and a different pace and

environment can be troublesome. Administrator Three talked about how they have witnessed the fear of failure firsthand. They have been contacted by veteran students who, at the first sign of failure, want to drop the courses they are enrolled in.

There is a huge transition point that you go through when you get off active duty and then enter the civilian world. That is where many people struggle. It is not so much the education piece, but you are coming from a very structured, up at five in the morning, off work at five every day. Eating in the chow hall, you do the same thing every day. There are many changes from housing to relationships and everything in between. Then you start throwing education in there too, and they are trying to balance benefits, pursuing an education, and maintaining the ability to pay bills.

Just like Veteran One, Veteran Four expressed they struggled with transitioning from being with their military colleagues daily to not being with them and being told what to do and where to go daily to not being directed was difficult. Veteran Four stated, “Nobody was guiding me, no one is directing me. I did not have any friends; I had to figure it out all for myself, which was one of the most difficult things I encountered going to college.” Veteran Two expressed their experience transitioning to college after the military:

I would say that for me, the barrier was social stigmas. I was afraid to ask for help and allow myself to be vulnerable. I was a product of my environment. I brought in all the social stigmas around the military and the military culture. I always looked at asking for help as a weakness and did not want to be seen as weak. Especially being an older student, I did not want to be looked at as being dumb.

Research Question 2

Theme 4: Understanding and Identifying Psychological Triggers

The faculty and administrator participants in their interviews mentioned understanding and identifying psychological triggers. Faculty One and Faculty Two stated that they could not pinpoint what the veteran students are dealing with, affecting how they communicate with students. Faculty Two stated, “It informs how I approach the student, the levels of communication or the frequency of communication. The motivational tone of what I write, even if it is an email. It is that totality because I have had a little experience with some of this.” Faculty Three talked about their unawareness of veteran students’ triggers. They would like to be more aware of what triggers they may face and how that could affect assignments or anything they should be conscious of. Faculty Three also spoke about mental health training and the importance of understanding veterans’ psychological triggers in college. Faculty Four spoke about a personal experience in the classroom with a psychological trigger:

The biggest or best example I can think of is when I started teaching, and a veteran student approached me in the middle of class and asked to speak to me in the hallway. We had just broken into groups and did a lot of group work. She stated she almost had a panic attack and attempted to explain that it was based on her military experience. She could not function in a group. I had just started teaching, and I feel like I know better now, but I used the word disability with her, which made it worse. She grabbed her things and left the class.

Administrators Three and Four are hopeful to learn about the different disorders that veteran students could come with and how to identify them. In addition, learn more about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the different measures, how to deal with people who might have it, and how we can help them. Veteran students also spoke about the identification of psychological triggers when interviewed. Veteran One spoke about veteran students' counseling when they leave the military. The military provides some training on mental health and transitions. Veteran One believes colleges and universities could benefit from similar training to help identify and address veteran students' barriers to higher education. In addition to PTSD, Veteran Three spoke about struggling with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) which made their transition to college even harder. They felt they just dealt with the struggles because they were unfamiliar with where to seek resources or how familiar the faculty and staff were with these situations.

Theme 5: Dedicated Contact Person to Provide Additional Support for Veteran Students

Veteran students, administrators, and faculty all spoke about having a dedicated person on campus who deals with veteran students as a benefit in the higher education setting. Administrator Four spoke about this importance:

I would like to see a dedicated person run a veteran office. We do not, as a small university, have a huge veteran population, but it is a growing population. I do not feel like we serve them as best as we could, based on the fact that the people that

are helping the veteran also have another full-time positions. It is just part of their role but not their main function.

Administrator One and Administrator Three expressed that veteran benefits change so frequently that it is important to have a dedicated person on campus who can stay updated on changing rules and regulations. In addition, having a more targeted focus on campus and the military may help become more focused on best practices, and having a specialist might help coordinate these efforts.

The benefit approval process has been described as lengthy with frequent changes; subject matter experts could help this process be less frustrating. The veteran students interviewed also felt frustrated not having a dedicated person on campus that specialized in just military-related resources. Veteran Four explained their thoughts on a dedicated person on campus:

Having a person who is a veteran connected as a contact person is a good idea.

Someone who understands the military and stigmas to help other veterans seems a good fit. Someone who understands the pathway can create a foundation of trust and knowledge. I think there need to be veteran counselors as well. Not everyone can relate to veterans, and veterans cannot relate to everyone else.

All four faculty members expressed the desire to be aware of a dedicated person on campus to whom they could direct veteran students if they needed additional assistance. Faculty One believes that veteran students should have a separate onboarding or orientation process that introduces them to a dedicated person on campus who could be their go-to person for any military-related need. This dedicated person could bridge the

gap at the university, and we may be able to better serve veteran students within the classroom and campus-wide.

Summary

The results of this study were presented in Chapter 4 and were guided by the research questions. The chapter explored the perspectives of administrators, faculty, and veteran students about the barriers veteran students face in higher education and how to address those barriers. I answered the research questions upon conducting the study, collecting the data, coding the data, organizing the data into categories, generating five themes from the data, and further describing evidence of trustworthiness.

Two themes emerged from the interview questions related to RQ1 about how to address the barriers that veteran students face in higher education. Three themes emerged from the participant's responses to the interview questions related to RQ1 regarding veteran students' different barriers. Quotations from the interview transcripts provided support for the themes generated.

The results revealed that of the 12 participants who participated in the study, all the participants identified at least one barrier that veteran students face. Veteran students spoke about many barriers they faced in higher education and gave valuable input on how those barriers could be addressed. Administrators and faculty members felt that the lack of knowledge about veteran students' needs was a barrier that shaped how they interacted and addressed the needs of veteran students.

The data showed that identifying psychological triggers was an area that all participant groups thought could have further attention. In addition to veteran students,

this training could help students across campus. The data also showed that all participant groups felt that a dedicated veteran resource person on campus would benefit the transition of veteran students to higher education. The dedicated person could be the subject matter expert, allowing administrators and faculty members to direct students seamlessly to receive the necessary resources.

A wide variety of transitional barriers were identified. Administrators, faculty, and veteran students all felt that the age gap in the classroom or the time between high school and college for veteran students played a part in the ease of transition to higher education. Also, as it relates to resource awareness, all of the administrators and faculty members felt they lacked awareness about veteran resources. Four out of five veterans mentioned their lack of awareness or felt that the staff at the university had a lack of resource awareness.

The study's key finding indicated that veteran students face various barriers to entering higher education. Another key finding is a great opportunity to increase awareness of barriers and offer additional training to administrators and faculty on addressing them to serve the veteran student population better. In Chapter 5, I will provide the interpretation of the finding, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications and reflections, and conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to explore the perspectives of administrators, faculty, and veteran students regarding the barriers veteran students face in higher education. Data were collected from 12 participants, consisting of administrators, faculty, and veteran students, to provide meaning to their perspectives regarding the barriers veteran students face. I followed a semistructured interview protocol that included guided questions that allowed for follow-up and clarification questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interview questions were designed for the participants to identify their views and experiences regarding veteran student barriers in higher education. The recorded interviews were uploaded for transcribing to a transcription service. Each transcription was analyzed, coded, and categorized to identify themes.

I completed analyzing the data into codes and transitioned the codes to categories. These descriptive categories became the basis for the thematic findings of the study. The key findings of this study were that veteran students enter higher education with various barriers and the awareness and understanding of these barriers are important to help veteran students transition to higher education successfully. Additionally, this study's findings revealed that training administrators and faculty regarding understanding these barriers is crucial to having more resources throughout the campus to help veteran students.

Interpretation of the Findings

The conceptual framework was considered when addressing the findings of the study. The conceptual framework was formed from two theories. In Tinto's (1975) theory focused on integration, integration refers to how students navigate and engage the cultures of their specific campuses. Tinto's dimensions of institutional action implies that institutions should have an effective retention program to aid students because of the effects of barriers on persistence and retention. Institutions should commit to students and their education and provide resources for staff and faculty development (Tinto, 1975). Bean and Metzner's (1984) theory illustrates several variables that influence a student's decision to persist, including institutional satisfaction, the value of education, and organizational rules. Tinto's and Bean and Metzner's theories were used to evaluate the decisions and integration of students. Students' reasons for not persisting come from environmental factors and personal determinants. Bean and Metzner believed these factors directly affect institutional commitment and dropout. My interpretation of the findings is focused on the relationship between the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and how the themes disconfirm, confirm, or expand the knowledge in the discipline.

Theme 1: Veteran Resource Awareness

The 12 participants gave their perspectives on veteran resource awareness and their experience interacting with veteran students or seeking resources as veteran students. Each participant spoke about the importance of faculty and staff members being aware of what resources are available on campus for veteran students and where to direct them to seek resources. The literature review described the added stress experienced by

veteran students from the lack of knowledge regarding available benefits and if they may expire before completing the degree (Durosko, 2017). The literature suggests that veteran students find that staff lack understanding of the needs of the veteran student population (Blackwell-Starnes, 2018). Veteran students may not transition or persist in college because of a lack of academic guidance during registration or awareness of campus services (Blackwell-Starnes, 2018).

Research shows that programs are slowly being established at higher education institutions that engage faculty, staff, and administrators on veteran student needs and services (Caton, 2018). Specialized training programs might provide faculty and administrators a more in-depth understanding of veterans' processes as they transition out of the military and into higher education (Jenner, 2017). The literature indicates that veteran students prefer to work with someone who understands the complexities of Veteran Affairs and the strict deadlines that must be met. Military students would prefer a simplified one-stop shop for all matters dealing with their education (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2019).

There is a relationship between Tinto's dimensions of institutional action and the participants' descriptions of veteran resource awareness. The theory states that institutions should have an effective retention program to aid students because barriers affect retention and persistence (Tinto, 1975). The lack of resource awareness within the institution does not allow faculty and administrators to effectively address veteran student barriers. In addition, veteran students do not have the awareness or confidence about where they can seek assistance.

Theme 2: Generational Difference Within the Classroom

Participants shared their perspectives on veteran students' generational differences within the classrooms. Their perspectives explained the length between high school and college compared to other college students. The difference in life experiences and how it affects classroom conversations was discussed. The literature describes veterans having uncertainty about how their academic performance compares to other traditional-aged students in the classroom (Jenner, 2019). Some veterans feel intimidated by the gap in age and years since their high school graduation. In addition to being older than their peers, some veteran students also deal with mental health diagnoses (Jenner, 2019). Eighty-five percent of veteran students are between ages 22 and 40, and almost half are married and have children (Hembrough, 2017). Research shows that veteran students compared to traditional-age students attend multiple institutions to attain a degree (Kappell, 2017). Veteran students returning to college after an extended time have difficulty resuming study in certain subjects (Jenner, 2019). There is a relationship between participant descriptions and Bean and Metzner's (1984) theory. The time between high school and college for veteran students and their perceived insecurities and added responsibilities can be a variable that influences veteran students not to persist.

Theme 3: Transitional Barriers

Each participant gave their perspective on multiple transitional barriers veterans face when entering college. The faculty and administrators spoke about the transitional barriers they have observed when working with veteran students. The veteran students spoke about the various barriers they faced when transitioning from military life to the

college setting. The participants explained that transitional barriers vary based on the veteran and their experiences before college. The participants discussed the social stigma, socialization transition, and the structure from the military lifestyle to a less structured environment.

The literature describes that faculty members play an impactful role in veteran student transition. Faculty members often have expectations and perceptions of how veteran students should act in the classroom and certain behaviors they should possess (Lim et al. 1, 2018). Veteran students, however, come from a different structure, and faculty expectations are often different from the military culture they know (Lim et al., 2018). When enrolling, veteran students could benefit from some cultural transition guidance help from colleges and universities (Durosoko, 2017). In the literature, veteran students have also expressed that family support is integral to their success in school. Inviting families to attend social events, such as orientations and mixers, could create a family-friendly environment for veteran students in college (Jones, 2016).

The transitional barriers veteran students face can require them to make decisions that shape the success of their college experience. There is a relationship between participants' descriptions and Tinto's (1975) and Bean and Metzner's (1984) theories. Both theories evaluate the decisions and integration of students. Faculty and administrators play a vital role in creating an environment where veteran students feel secure and comfortable making decisions and seeking help with the transitional barriers they face.

Theme 4: Understanding and Identifying Psychological Triggers

The participants in the study spoke about the different psychological triggers that veterans face and the uncertainty of how to identify those triggers. In addition to PTSD, veteran student participants talked about attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and depression, making their transition to college harder to navigate. Veteran students spoke about dealing with struggles instead of seeking help because of the uncertainty of where to seek help and who would understand their situation.

The literature indicates that students with disabilities are retained at a lower rate and have poorer academic performance than students without disabilities (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2017). Often, veterans must understand how their disability may affect their learning and if it is possible to successfully reintegrate into college (Lange et al., 2017). Veterans with disabilities come from a culture that attaches a stigma to certain conditions, transitioning to an environment where disabilities are evaluated and help seeking is encouraged (Lange et al., 2017). Veteran students are hesitant to self-disclose disabilities caused by military exposures. New disabilities that appear after service sometimes overwhelm veteran students and cause them to shut down and not seek help (Kranke et al., 2017).

Psychological triggers are just one of the variables that veteran students face when entering college. There is a relationship between the participants' perspectives and Bean and Metzner's (1984) theory. The satisfaction that veteran students face can influence their decision to persist. Sometimes, with untreated PTSD, veterans can feel less satisfaction, resulting in impacts on their retention or academic performance.

Theme 5: Dedicated Contact Person to Provide Additional Support for Veteran

Students

Each participant shared their perspective on the importance of having a dedicated contact person on campus to provide additional support for veteran students. Due to the lack of awareness regarding resources, triggers, and transitional barriers, all participants felt that having a dedicated person on campus would alleviate the fear of guiding veteran students incorrectly and give them timely answers to their questions and concerns. In addition to the dedicated person, many participants felt that veteran students should have a separate onboarding or orientation process designed to equip them with the resources and introduce the dedicated contact person.

Prior research shows that veterans flourish by having a contact point and detailed college enrollment guide (Durosko, 2017). Veteran students prefer to receive guidance from those who have been in the military or are familiar with what these students have endured (Durosko, 2017). Universities with a specified person or veteran for veteran students can create an environment where they can meet other veteran students and study in a risk-free atmosphere that can cultivate relationships with peers (Kirchner, 2015). Where there is no one-size-fits-all solution to help all veteran students achieve their goals, many centered programs and policies may improve the rates overall (Norman et al., 2015).

There is a relationship between the participant's perspectives and Tinto's (1975) Dimensions of Institutional Action. The effects of barriers can impact a veteran student's likelihood to persist. The institution must be prepared with services that can support

veteran students and create an environment where they can seek the services they need to succeed.

Limitations of the Study

The limitation described in Chapter 1 was the feasibility of in-person interviews with the participant based on geographical location. In response to the limitation, all interviews were conducted using a virtual platform. The second limitation was the conversation's nature and the potential vulnerability of talking about these topics. Each veteran student participant was told at the beginning of the interview that they might stop the interview at any time, take a break or ask to skip a question if they felt uncomfortable. The participants could all answer all the interview questions during the interviews. Another limitation might be my current role at the university. I worked to reduce my bias by maintaining a journal and remaining aware of my positionality within the phenomenon.

Recommendations

The experiences of three administrators, four faculty members, and five veteran student participants produced five themes (a) veteran resource awareness, (b) generational differences within the classroom, (c) transitional barriers, (d) understanding and identifying psychological triggers, (e) dedicated contact person to provide additional support for veteran students. These themes and the study's limitations can recommend additional research. A recommendation for further research is conducting quantitative or mixed-method research and collecting data through surveys or focus groups to refine the

themes identified in this study. Using the five themes identified above in future studies, researchers could conduct a quantitative study to enhance generalizability.

Participants described the importance of veteran resource awareness and a dedicated contact person on campus to better serve veteran students in higher education. A recommendation for further research could be to survey other higher education institutions on the type of programs and training programs they use to prepare administrators and faculty to serve veteran students.

All veteran student participants addressed several transitional barriers they faced entering higher education. Further research could be conducted on the correlation between the branch of service, length of service, veteran age, and transitional barriers. This correlation would help higher education institutions to evaluate the programs and supports needed based on the demographic of their veteran student population. More detailed programming could impact retention and graduation rates for veteran students based on the transitional barriers they face.

A recommendation would be to study further the effects of psychological barriers on degree completion for veteran students. Administrator and faculty participants described the difficulty and uncertainty of identifying psychological triggers veteran students face. This research could assist veteran students with support based on their diagnosis from their first day. These mental health supports could help increase the success of degree attainment for veterans.

Implications

This study can lead to positive social change by increasing the number of veteran students who successfully attain a higher educational degree. Retention and graduation rates may increase if higher education institutions understand and initiate processes and procedures that support veteran students through the higher education experience. Understanding barriers and implementing training for administrators, faculty, and other key campus employees can help to create an environment that cultivates positive learning. An increased number of veteran students graduating college may create a better environment for their families and communities, creating positive social change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, veteran students enter higher education with different barriers than other students. Veteran students expressed several transitional barriers that require additional resources from colleges and universities to navigate successfully. Many administrators and faculty members lack the awareness and training to support veteran students successfully. The retention rate for veteran students was 56.5% compared to 68% for nonveterans in 2018 (Northwood, 2019). The participants in this study that additional training and resource awareness could contribute to veteran student success. Additionally, the participants acknowledged that having a dedicated person on campus to field veteran student questions could improve the educational experience and make it more streamlined for veteran students.

The conceptual framework for this study was Tinto's and Bean and Metzner's theories because these two theories relate to the variables that influence a student's

decision to persist and student integration. Veteran students are aware that they come with different barriers that can be difficult to navigate, and the complexity of benefits is difficult to get guidance. The administrators and faculty want to serve veteran students better and identify that they need additional training to serve their needs successfully. Lastly, the results of this study could support other higher education institutions in implementing processes and procedures to help increase the retention and graduation of veteran students.

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Appendix A: Participation Invitation Email

Dear Invitee,

My name is Christie McDonald. I am a doctoral student at Walden University's Education program. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: Administrators, Faculty, and Veterans Perspectives on Barriers Faced by Veterans in Higher Education. The intention is to assess the barriers veteran students face in higher education.

The study involves participating in a one-on-one interview with me either in person or using a video platform. The research questions for this study are:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of veterans, faculty, and administrators regarding the barriers that veteran students face in higher education?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of veterans, faculty, and administrators regarding how barriers that veteran students face can be addressed?

Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

This study has great importance to assist in social change in ensuring that veteran students are receiving adequate and effective transition support at higher education institutions.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Christie McDonald, B.B.A, M.S.A, Doctoral Student, Walden University

Appendix B Interview Protocol

Introductory Statement: Thank you very much for participating in the interviews to help me collect data on veteran students' barriers to entering college. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore the barriers that veteran students face in higher education and how those barriers can be addressed. The unique perspectives gained through this study may help identify opportunities to remove barriers for veteran students in higher education.

This is a voluntary interview and I appreciate you taking the time to address the questions as they are asked. At any point during the interview, you may stop the interview or ask clarifying questions. With your permission, I would like to record the interview for my records. After the interview, I will provide you with a transcript to review. To protect your identity, I will remove any identifying characteristics from the interview. Do you have any questions?

Interview Questions for Veterans

1. When you entered college, what things were hard to navigate on your own?
2. If you sought assistance navigating your educational process, what items did you feel uncertain about? What was your experience when seeking help?
3. Now that you have started college, what barriers do you wish were easier to navigate during your educational path?
4. What services do you believe higher education institutions must provide to assist veteran students transitioning to higher education?

5. What programs or services did you use to help with the barriers you faced in college?
6. If you did not use any resources, what were the factors why you did not use them?

Interview Questions for Administrators and Faculty

1. What barriers have you seen veterans face entering college that other students may not have to face?
2. If you have been contacted by veterans struggling to adapt to the college setting, what issues or questions did they seek assistance for?
3. What would you like to see adopted at the institution to better equip administrators and faculty members to serve veteran students?
4. If you were provided additional training to identify barriers veteran students face during higher education, what should be included?
5. What services are you aware that the institution already provides to help veteran students?

Concluding Statement: Thank you again for your time today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in my study and give your perspective on the barriers veterans face when entering college. Do you have any questions for me? Within ten days, I will provide you with a copy of the interview for you to review the dialogue and submit any changes you feel necessary. Once again, thank you.